Looking forward to the 5 year mission, Kirk is certain that he would never see Khan again. Now the Augment is right in front of him, seeking vengeance. But fate has its own plans. In the middle of the upcoming war between the Federation and the Klingons, both men find themselves captured by a whirl of dangerous passion that can save or destroy them…

Kirk/Khan Slash
Chapter 1 – A Rising Storm

Since the late afternoon, the clouds above San Francisco had become thicker, their darkness like an omen of something sinister that lurked in the shadows. And now, as the day was nearing its end, the clouds blocked out all light from the moon and stars, already changing the evening into night. The air in the city was heavy and sticky, whitecaps on the surface of the Bay danced along with the incoming tide. All this promised one thing: a thunderstorm, a thunderstorm that would last for hours.

But the mood not only applied to the weather. The emotions of the lone figure that surveyed the high-rise apartment on the other side of the street were in as much turmoil as the approaching storm – and were no less dangerous.
The few passers-by who were still out on the streets didn’t pay the man any attention as he leaned against a wall, pale blue-green eyes fixed on the skyscraper and its glassy façade.

He waited patiently, even though his time was limited. Lesser men would have been nervous, would rush things, but he wasn’t a lesser being. He was better – at everything. Some had mused that he wasn’t even human, but this was not true. He looked human – one might call him handsome – and the core of his existence was rooted in the human species. But still, he was more than a simple man from Earth.

His keen eyes pierced the twilight, his sharp hearing analysed every noise in a radius of more than a hundred meters, his nose caught the smell of food and alcohol coming from the nearby restaurants and bars. All this registered in his mind and would stay there as long as he thought the information necessary. After that, he would simply ‘delete’ it.

Somewhere down the street, a church bell rang and called the tenth hour, but the man didn’t need a clock to know how late it was. His sense of time was precise – as though he had his own clock ticking away in his brain.

His gaze wandered once more over the storeys in the upper half of the skyscraper. Several windows were illuminated, some had turned dark by now.

There, on the forty-eighth floor, behind two or three of those windows, was the reason for his coming to this part of the city. In one of those apartments was the man he was eager to meet again – and not for a social call. Far from it. When he was done with this man, there would be more blood on his hands. He had killed before – countless times – and not just in self-defence. He didn’t enjoy killing – he never had – but when it was necessary, he did it; quickly, efficiently, and mercilessly. And the man he was about to visit should expect no mercy! No, this was one of the very few times he really was going to enjoy sending someone to his death. He would revel in pressing the life out of his victim!

His attention was brought to a woman who walked towards the entrance of the skyscraper, and he took a deep breath. He already knew where to find his enemy after he’d checked the board with the names and comm numbers beside the entrance, but he still had to wait before he could take action. It had been too early when he arrived, and the risk of his prey receiving visitors – witnesses – just as he was being made to pay for his deeds, would have been too high.

But now his time had come, and that of his soon-to-be prey was running out. The time of his vengeance was approaching, and the woman who was about to enter the building would unknowingly be his accomplice in his revenge.
From one moment to the next, the features of the silent observer changed from the emotionless mask which had covered his burning hate to a pleasant smile. Then he started to move. With graceful strides, he crossed the street, which was unusually quiet for this time of night. The sedatives which had been forced into his body for weeks had already worn off hours ago, and his long legs carried him easily to the building’s entrance, and to the young brunette woman. She’d just taken her key-card out of her pocket and was about to swipe it through the lock-sensor as he cleared his throat.

“Good evening,” he greeted in a perfectly polite tone. The soft, deep baritone voice instantly suggested trust and kindness – a deceptive fact that couldn’t be further from the truth.

The young woman turned around, startled, but she relaxed immediately as she looked straight into his handsome face with the high cheekbones, bowed lips, and a pair of wide-set pale blue-green eyes. The light of the streetlamp made his almost-white skin shimmer like marble, while the rest of the man was clad in black. Even his smoothed-back hair was ebony, making an attractive, almost alluring contrast to his pale features.

“I am sorry, Miss, it was not my intention to startle you,” the stranger said with a voice other men would probably covet, and lowered his head in an old-fashioned salutation.

“Oh… It’s okay,” the young woman answered, smiling at him. She might be engaged and more-than-happy with her fiancé, but this guy could make her weak. “So… How can I help you?” she asked, trying not to stare at him too much. She didn’t want to give him the wrong idea.

The man glanced quickly at her key card – twelfth floor, he read – and flashed her a brilliant smile. “Oh, only with the usual neighborly help.” He extended his hand to her and the young woman looked pleased with the warm, firm grip of his long, slender fingers. “May I introduce myself? I’m Frank Authborn.”

“Jennie Taylor,” she answered. “Nice to meet you.”

An odd smile hovered on his lips for just a moment, before he continued, “I just moved in on the twenty-ninth level, but I’ve left my key-card in my flat. Would you be able to let me in? Otherwise I’ll have to spend my first night on the street.” He smiled again, this time more widely.

Jennie laughed. “Oh dear, we can’t have that.” She turned and pulled her key through the sensor slit. “How will you get into your apartment if you’ve left the key?” she asked, while she stepped through the sliding doors, the stranger at her heels.
“A friend of mine is up there, helping me unpack my things. Unfortunately, I also left my communicator, so I couldn’t even contact him.”

Mirth danced in Jennie’s large dark eyes. “Bad luck!” She pointed to the board outside of the building. “You could also have tried the buzzer, you know?” she teased, which earned her a low chuckle from the handsome man.

“Yes, if I knew which of all those buttons belongs to my flat, I could have been there with a cold beer and chatting with my friend half an hour ago.”

Another small giggle escaped Jennie’s lips. “Well, I think those buttons are confusing if you’re not used to them. You’re not from around here, are you?”

He shook his head. “No, I’m from the quiet countryside of jolly old England.”

“Ah, that explains the accent.” She winked at him. “Well then, welcome to San Francisco. It isn’t as quiet here as it probably is where you come from, but I’m certain you’ll get used to it. The city has a lot to offer – besides all the people who are usually in a hurry, the noisy cadets from Starfleet Academy, and too much traffic.”

“That’s good to know,” he said kindly, and walked to one of the four elevators. The young woman followed him. Only twenty seconds later and the elevator stopped at the twelfth floor. The stranger bid the nice lady ‘good night’ before the doors closed, and his journey finally ended at the forty-eighth level. The lights in the corridor, which were on sensors, came on as he left the elevator, his feet silent as he walked towards his prey. The open, friendly expression he’d worn earlier had completely vanished from his face. A fire burnt behind his eyes and his whole body buzzed with energy, fuelling his fury and desire for revenge.

He stopped at the door, the last barrier between himself and his target. His eyes found the nameplate beside the doorbell, and a scowl appeared on his features as he read it: James T. Kirk.

Nothing is more soothing than a nice, warm shower with real water. The words of his friend Leonard McCoy echoed in Jim’s head as he braced his hands against the wet wall of his shower cubicle and enjoyed the hot spray that splattered down his back.
The last few days had been full of paper-work and many, many calls and meetings. There had barely been time to have a short lunch with his two friends ‘Bones’ McCoy and his soon-to-be-again first officer, Spock. Somehow he had always managed to slip out of the office to meet them, even if the communication-panel on his desk lit up like a Christmas tree and a yeoman called after him that he still had to… Well, whatever. Jim had needed those breaks – not only to fill his growling stomach with a nice meal, but also to put some distance between himself and the duty he had finally fulfilled today.

It had been an honor to give the speech at the commemoration a year after the brutal attack on Starfleet Headquarters that had cost the lives of several admirals and captains, along with their first officers, but it had taken a lot out of the young man. Not because of the large audience and the media focus from around Earth, and even from other planets; Jim hadn’t worried that he would make mistakes during the speech or that he would miss a gesture during the whole ceremony. No, this event had had a deep emotional connection for him – because one of the dead being commemorated was the only man he’d ever regarded as a father, Christopher Pike, the man who’d pulled him out of his self-destructive early adulthood and who’d given him a new purpose: Starfleet.

For more than for four years, Pike had been a steady presence, had been an adviser, a protector, and a mentor to him. He had shown Jim a way out of the misery he’d constantly felt, leant him a supporting hand whenever it was necessary – which had been often – and had shown sympathy when everyone else had not.

And now this great man was dead. Buried, but not forgotten. The man Jim had looked up to had died because of the mistakes another admiral had made, and because of a super-human relic that same admiral had woken up from a three-hundred-year sleep: Khan Noonien Singh.

Khan…

The name made Kirk shudder even now, after twelve long months.

No one had driven him to his utter limits like Khan had. Hell, he’d even died because of the Augment – and had been brought back, also because of him; well, because of Khan’s blood, to be precise. And, if Jim were willing to admit it, the Augment had saved his life twice before: once on Qo’noS, the Klingon home-world, and again while Jim had been flying blind through space, heading with deadly speed toward the Vengeance, where he would have been squashed against the starship’s surface if Khan hadn’t intervened.

Jim rubbed his forehead as the image of the enhanced man rose in his mind’s eye: strong lean body, slightly taller than him, perfect posture, long limbs which he moved with the grace of a cat, sleeked-back black hair, piercing pale eyes the color of the sea – and just as deep and dangerous as the oceans – impossibly high cheekbones, and a taunting smirk made by a sensitive mouth. The man,
who appeared to be in his early thirties, had been brilliant – his mind even quicker than Spock’s – something, Jim had thought to be impossible, and driven by an inner fire which seemed to burn the world around him. Sometimes cold as ice, sometimes fierce as an erupting volcano, especially when he’d been wronged or when it came to his crew, which he regarded as family, Khan had intrigued everyone but also made them wary, a challenge Kirk would have loved, had the circumstances different.

Nevertheless, in some way, Jim could understand why the Augment had run amok when he thought his crew had been killed – Khan’s reaction couldn’t be described as anything else – but to murder all those innocent people in London and then to attack Starfleet HQ, killing the commanding officers, had simply been too much – not to mention flying a starship into San Francisco Bay, destroying part of the old harbor. It was still a miracle that the town’s landmark – the Golden Gate Bridge that Jim could see from the windows of his living room – had survived the whole mess, but the damage to the skyline was still like an open wound in the city, and it would take years before everything could be rebuilt.

No, what Marcus had done to Khan – and Jim was sure he only knew a fraction of all the Augment had endured at the hands of the admiral and Section 31 – had been utterly wrong, cruel and inhumane. Kirk was compassionate enough to understand the pain Khan had been put through – the sheer agony he’d felt as he’d been led to believe his family had been killed, not once, but twice – but even that didn’t excuse what he had done as a result. If Khan had wanted revenge on those who’d mistreated and threatened him and his crew, Jim would have been able to accept the unleashed fury of the Augment. But to murder those who’d had no hand in the deeds was as wrong as Marcus’s crimes.

Jim sighed and turned off the water and slicked back his thick, blond hair. During the last months, after the nightmare of his death and revival had waned, he hadn’t thought too much about the superhuman. But since Jim had learned he’d be giving the speech at today’s commemoration, the memories flared anew – and this time with unnerving vividness. Sometimes he thought he could even smell the smoke of the burning bridge of the Enterprise, or the not-unpleasant scent of Khan himself, while he walked through the corridors beside Jim on their way to the air-lock. Other times, Jim was back in the warp-core, feeling the radioactivity piercing him in an oddly soft way, making him weaker and weaker with each passing moment, turning his own body against him until all he could feel was the life leaving him. In other nightmares, he faced Marcus at the screen on the bridge, begging for the life of his crew, only to be turned down, leaving Jim helpless and waiting for the Vengeance’s weapons to destroy his ship, and with it his friends and crew – his own family.

The young captain had been relieved when those nightmares became rarer, but for the last four or five weeks now, they had returned – and the reason for this, why Jim remembered every detail from last year’s events with unusual clarity, whispered at the edge of his mind. Also unnerving was that the ability to accurately recall memories wasn’t the only change in him; he was more agile and stronger than before, his mind more focused. There was only one logical reason for all this, one which he wasn’t very happy with: Khan’s blood. It had not only brought him back from the dead, but had also strengthened him in other more subtle ways. All right, so he didn’t hate living with the whole ‘stronger’ thing; sometimes it really was an advantage. But on the other hand, the thought of
Jim stepped out of the shower and dried himself off, before towelling dry his hair and pulling a comb through the blond strands. A glance in the mirror above the wash basin showed the face of a man who’d seen perhaps more than someone should have seen at this young age. But it was also the face of someone full of life and whose sky-blue eyes twinkled with barely-hidden mischief. Several of his superior officers would even go so far as to call him reckless. But, hey! He was only twenty-six, had finished Starfleet Academy one year earlier than any other cadet, had loyal friends – of whom two were like brothers – and, in one week, he would start a five-year mission with the best starship in the fleet. Of course he was alive with anticipation, the shower reviving him somewhat from the malaise he’d felt following that damned commemoration. Yes, it had been a privilege to have been chosen to honor the victims, but he was glad it was over, and he could now concentrate on his soon-to-be travels around the universe.

Eschewing proper clothing, he slipped into a pair of dark blue sweatpants and hung the wet towels over the small drying rack, before leaving the bathroom. The light switched off as he left the room as no further movement was detected. Barefoot, Jim padded into the small kitchen adjacent to the sleeping and living areas, ordered the computer to dim the lights to thirty percent, poured himself a glass of scotch with soda – a gift from Scotty, and was settling in to watch some trash TV, when suddenly he felt with absolutely certainty that he was no longer alone.

Someone was here with him! And his gut told him that this wasn’t a friendly visit.

“Good evening, Captain.”

Jim froze. That voice… That rich deep baritone… He would have recognized it anywhere, just like he’d have recognized the taunting tone in which his rank was pronounced.

Putting the glass on the countertop, he whirled around, and found himself thrown into a nightmare he’d never expected to become real. The figure that had stepped out of the shadows and now watched him with fire in his sea-green eyes sent a chill through Jim, while he took in the marble features of the man he’d been pondering only minutes ago. A man, who had been put back into cryosleep and should have been locked away, together with his crew, and secreted away, secured by Starfleet’s highest protective measures. But here he was, in Jim’s apartment! And very much awake!

And Kirk realized then that he was looking into the face of death – his death!

Jim had no doubt why the Augment had sought him out, and a sinking feeling shot through his stomach.
“You…” was all he could whisper, hoping above all hope that he’d simply fallen asleep on his sofa after he got home and that he was, in fact, dreaming. Okay, it would be the creepiest dream he’d ever had, but still…

A sneer played at Khan’s mouth, while he eyed up his adversary – the adversary he had come to kill. The Augment had heard the shower running as he cracked the code of Kirk’s lock and let himself in, and his nostrils had instantly caught the scent of his opponent. But the thought to use this opportunity to catch his enemy by surprise hadn’t even occurred to him; he wanted to confront Kirk before he made him pay for his betrayal, and everything Khan had suffered after the so-called ‘trial’.

Khan felt his sneer changing into a predatory smile as the intense blue eyes of the younger man grew wider, showing a hint of fear. Good! Very good! At last the man was bright enough to know when was facing an impasse. It would make things more…interesting.

Without his uniform – or that poor excuse for fashion Kirk had worn on Qo’noS masquerading as a ‘dealer’ – the captain looked even younger than usual, more like an oversized boy than a commanding officer, especially in his present state. Clad only in sweatpants, with damp hair and flushed skin after a hot shower, Kirk could easily be mistaken for a simple student attending one of the many academies in San Francisco.

But Khan wasn’t fooled. He knew there was a clever mind behind the boyish appearance, a mind that found extraordinary ways to solve problems. He had seen the fierce fighter that was James Kirk, the recklessness mixed with courage, the loyalty towards his friends, the strong moral compass, and the display of stubbornness – all things Khan could admire, even if these characteristics belonged to an inferior being.

He also could have taken a liking to the looks of his foe; the Augment was not blind. Kirk’s face reflected the perfect combination of soft youth and growing firmness, his shoulders were broad, his belly flat, and years of varied training had gifted Kirk with muscles which didn’t stand out like those of a bodybuilder, but glided beneath tanned skin.

If things had played out differently last year, Khan wouldn’t have minded taking the young man for himself. Whether inferior or not, the super-human recognized beauty when he saw it. During his life back in the 20th century, he’d bedded both men and women, so there would have been no reason not to have claimed Kirk sexually. But after all that had happened during his desperate bid to save his crew, Khan only wanted one thing: to squeeze the life out of Kirk, to beat him to a bloody pulp before breaking his neck.

This damn boy had been responsible for raising his grief to new heights: the loss of his family, the
humiliation during the so-called ‘trial’, being forced back into cryosleep – an unpleasant and painful process – only to be once more revived and find himself again used as a damn lab-rat, kept in a catatonic state, sometimes aware of his surroundings, sometimes not. There was no peace for Khan now, no escape from all the grief and pain the loss of his loved ones had caused. It was now a constant ache in the depths of his soul – if he even had one – to know that he had failed his crew and that he was now utterly alone in this whole universe, the last of his kind. He had failed those he held most dear, after believing he’d finally brought them to safety. Kirk and his damned half-breed Vulcan-friend had tricked him and murdered his family!

All good the looks, all notable attributes that the young man possessed were meaningless; Khan would make Kirk suffer as he had for the last two years. He would have James Kirk begging for mercy before the night was over!

In the meantime, Jim’s mind was racing like a starship in warp drive while he held the Augment’s piercing gaze. This was no dream, this was real! Khan was indeed here, only four or five meters away from him, and even though Kirk didn’t notice any weapon on the super-human, he also knew Khan didn’t need one; the man himself was a weapon. Jim’s gaze shifted for a moment, glided over the figure of his adversary. Clad all in black – well, Khan did have a penchant for the dramatic – and wearing a long coat, the super-human looked similar to when Jim had first seen him back on Qo’noS. But this time, there was no determination in the depth of his pale eyes, only hate, hate and the promise of a very painful death.

Jim’s phaser was on the table in the living area, his communicator… Well, it was somewhere near the replicator, meaning it was reachable. He only had to close the distance, take it, and then run like hell to the door, alerting security. Maybe he could make it. Maybe he could outrun his enemy, but the logical part of him – that part which had grown a little since Spock and he had developed a deeper friendship – told him that there was no chance to escape. Whatever he did, he’d be dead!

Khan had watched the young captain, knowing exactly what was going through his mind. “No snide comments, Kirk? No bravado? Don’t tell me that seeing me again is enough to root you to the spot. Where is your courage?” His voice was laced with soft mockery – and it finally tore Jim out of his state of shock.

“How the hell did you escape?” he gritted out. “Why are you not asleep in your cryotube, sweetly dreaming of tormenting others?” Jim knew it wasn’t wise to provoke the Augment; Khan’s demeanor so far was all calm-before-the-storm, just like the weather outside, but, like so many times before, Jim’s mouth was quicker than his brain.

“How ‘sweetly dreaming’?” echoed Khan, while he took a single step forward, enjoying Kirk’s short flinch. “Sweetly dreaming of what, Captain? How your precious Starfleet used and abused me? How you betrayed me – you, and your damned Vulcan? How you two took everything I was living for away from me?” His voice lowered to a dangerous growl.
The first sheet lightening of the approaching thunderstorm flashed through the darkness outside of the windows, followed by a rumble in the distance. It distracted both men for only a second, then Khan glanced back at Kirk and saw that his opponent had moved slowly to the left, towards the replicator. “Looking for this?” he asked casually, and lifted his right hand.

Jim tried very hard not to give away the rising dread he felt as he recognized what the Augment held in his long, elegant fingers: his communicator! And as Khan showed him what he carried in his left hand, Kirk took a deep breath. It was his phaser. Damn it! Khan had to have been in his apartment for quite awhile to have found the only two things which could – maybe – have helped Jim out of the mess he now found himself in.

The smirk Khan gave him sent another shiver down Jim’s spine, before the enhanced man whispered, “Do you want to know what I have planned for you, dear Captain?” He closed his fist tightly around the communicator. Jim’s eyes went wide as he heard the small device crack beneath the inhuman pressure of the Augment’s fingers. With a smooth gesture, Khan threw the broken communicator at Kirk’s bare feet – and the fighter in Jim awoke.

“Hey, that thing was expensive!” he protested with false indignation. “Didn’t your mother ever teach you not to touch other people’s stuff?”

“I had no mother, Kirk, not in the way you understand it,” came the icy reply, and Jim cocked his head.

“Bad childhood? Well, that explains a lot.” With growing unease, he watched Khan hurl the phaser into the entrance hall while fixing Jim with a glittering stare, before taking another step in Jim’s direction. Every movement of the Augment’s lean body revealed only one thing, he was preparing to strike. Jim gulped. He knew that he stood no chance against the advanced strength of the former dictator who looked at him like a predator would prey. Carefully, so as not to hasten the attack, Jim lifted both hands in a calming manner. “Right, listen, why don’t we discuss this like the adults we are? I mean, come on, how old are you really? Thirty-two, thirty-three? And I’m twenty-six. So, technically, we both count as grown-ups; we can be reasonable and…”

“I don’t remember your being ‘reasonable’ on Qo’noS,” Khan hissed.

“Well, you really pissed me off when you killed the man who’d been like a father to me!” Kirk snapped, knowing exactly what the Augment was referring to. Jim’s control had slipped as he punched Khan over and over again. “And it wasn’t like I even hurt you; you looked fine, while my arm was sore for days after that.”
“Yes, it was quite amusing, watching you tire yourself out by trying to beat me into the ground. But tell me, Kirk, after that... *performance*, would you call yourself ‘reasonable’?” Khan taunted, while he stripped his coat off.

Jim bit his lip. Maybe the chit-chat was calming the rage that seemed to burn within the super-human, so he replied, “Well, to be honest, some of my superior officers would certainly agree that I am not as reasonable as I should be.” He watched Khan drop his coat onto the floor. “But... that’s me, and I...”

“Yes, that is you, Kirk. And now you will pay for what you did to me!” His voice became even deeper – and deadlier. “I hope you enjoyed your last day, because you will not see the sun rise again!”

Realizing that the last few minutes were only a grace period that had now come to an end, Jim was barely able to react as the Augment closed the distance between them with lightning speed. Kirk could feel Khan’s fingers grazing his left shoulder and right arm as he backed away. Acting on pure instinct, Jim rammed his fist into the super-human’s abdomen and ducked beneath the long arms, kicking at Khan’s shin. That proved not to be the best of ideas, as he was still barefoot and only managed to injure himself, while the Augment didn’t even sway. Dammit!

Kirk reached for the glass of scotch and threw it directly at his adversary’s head, but Khan’s reactions were too fast; he simply slapped the glass out of the way before it reached him, sending it against the wall. Scotch with soda rained onto the carpet. But, Jim’s brief attack distracted the super-human long enough to give Jim the chance to move away slightly. Realising that a murderous Augment with lightning-like reflexes stood between himself and his phaser, Kirk decided on another tactic.

He ran for the living area to grab anything that he could use as a weapon. He heard Khan directly behind him, and dove over the sofa, tensing his muscles. The impact with the floor hadn’t been as bad as he’d anticipated, and Jim was on his feet before the Augment could round the sofa. Gripping the side table, Jim lifted the furniture and hurled it at his nemesis. This time, the attack elicited a grunt from Khan, and Jim was able to kick the heavy coffee table – bare feet be damned – in the direction of the Augment, who was about to leap at him, sea-colored eyes wild with rage and a snarl on his lips.

The coffee table stopped Khan – if only for several seconds – then the furniture flew through the room and landed with a loud crash against the far wall, leaving a large dent, before falling to the ground. The noise of the table was accompanied by thunder rolling outside through the sky outside.
“Holy shit…” Jim gasped. The table was made of solid metal and was topped with a marble slab. Two men had carried it into the apartment, sweating like horses when they were done – and this crazy criminal threw it around like a pillow.

Kirk didn’t waste more time considering the unnatural strength of his enemy; he’d already witnessed it before on Qo’noS, and again on the bridge of the Vengeance. In the blink of an eye, Khan was upon him, and Jim did the only thing he could do. He fought back. He would not go down without a fight. He knew that there was no chance to come out of this alive, and that his resistance would only add fuel to the already blazing fury of the Augment. But if Jim had to die, he would not make it easy for Khan.

For several moments they exchanged blows, but as Khan blocked his fists with one arm and head-butted Jim, then swept his legs away with one well-targeted kick, it became clear that the enhanced human was only toying with him. Jim lost his balance but was able to get a good grip on Khan’s shirt, pulling the other man with him as he went down. The weight of the slender, though heavy Augment pressed the air out of Jim’s lungs, and before he could react, Khan had already regained control, straddling him and aiming his fist at Jim’s face. Jim could feel a puff of air whiz past his cheek as he avoided the blow; his enemy hit the carpet where Kirk’s head had been a second ago. But the way he’d moved had shifted Khan’s target to his belly.

It hurt!

It really, really hurt, and for a moment, Jim saw stars, then he blindly hit back – completely aware of the fact that this was all just delaying the inevitable. He saw the blazing eyes above him, felt the deadly rage of his adversary radiating in waves off him, and with growing despair, Jim frantically tried to break free.

All for naught.

Blows found his shoulder and his chest, creating a nasty déjà-vu; Khan had thrashed him like this on the bridge of the Vengeance. However, this time, the super-human avoided Kirk’s head, but only because he wanted him to stay conscious – conscious enough to realize what was happening to him – that he was about to be beaten to death. Fear like he’d never felt before gripped Kirk, a deep, all-consuming fear that reached for his heart with an invisible icy fist and squeezed.

“Khan, stop it!” Kirk gasped and received another punch – directly to his chin. It wasn’t hard enough to break bone, but it made him dizzy, and he tasted blood. “For God’s sake, get a grip!” Kirk shouted with a high edge to his voice that belied his terror.

“As you wish,” the Augment snarled, and grasped Jim’s scalp and aimed with his other hand, this time for his nose. Somehow Kirk managed to catch Khan’s arm with both hands, while the grip in
his hair became unbearably painful. Still, the young Starfleet officer concentrated solely on restraining his nemesis’ fist.

“Do you really think you can stop me, Captain?” his attacker growled, tearing his arm out of Jim’s grasp, ready to lunge at him again.

It wasn’t Kirk who prevented the Augment’s next blow, but a loud knock at the door, followed by an angry, “Young man! What’s all this hellish racket?! Are you having a boxing match in there?”

Jim and Khan stopped mid-fight, Kirk in sudden relief, Khan in irritation. Then, seeing the look in the deep blue eyes of his adversary, Khan clapped a hand firmly over Jim’s mouth. The heated glare he received would have amused him if he hadn’t been so furious.

“Mr. Kirk? Is everything all right?” came the voice of the older man outside of the door again, and the super-human pressed his lips into a thin line before he glanced down. Kirk had started to squirm again, clawing at the hand that gagged him, and Khan couldn’t help but respect the fighting spirit of his adversary.

Bringing his face directly beside Jim’s he whispered, “Tell him everything is all right.”

Kirk stilled and his eyes shot daggers at him.

“One wrong word, the wrong tone of voice, and I’ll be forced to kill him, too,” the enhanced man added quietly.

Jim’s breath left him – damned bastard! – and for a moment he pondered his options, only to realize that there weren’t any.

“Mr. Kirk?” Concern echoed in the question that sounded through the closed door.

“This is the only warning you’re going to get,” Khan murmured, and fixed Jim with a last piercing glance before removing his hand, ignoring the tingling sensation in his palm where it had been sealed over Kirk’s mouth.
Jim knew that Khan was deadly serious; he would kill Mr. Arnheim, his neighbor, without hesitation if Jim didn’t do exactly as he’d been told.

Moistening his lips and ignoring the strangely pleasant taste Khan’s fingers had left, he turned his face towards the entrance hall, cleared his throat, and called, “I’m sorry, Mr. Arnheim, I accidentally knocked over my coffee table.”

For a moment there was only silence, then came the reply, “Your coffee table? Are you okay, m’boy?”

Was he was okay? No, he certainly was not! He was lying helpless beneath his mortal enemy, who was about to finish him off in a no doubt very brutal way.

Swallowing down the impulse to call for help and feeling Khan’s hold on him tightening – as if the Augment had read his mind – Kirk answered breathlessly, “Yeah, I’m okay. I redecorated my apartment, that’s all.” Another rumble of thunder sounded from outside, and Jim asked himself if Mr. Arnheim would complain about that, too. He waited, hoping the old man would get the hint and leave before Khan lost his patience.

“Oh, okay, but keep it down, kid! Some of us have to get our beauty sleep. Good night,” Mr. Arnheim said. With a sinking feeling in his stomach, Jim realized that the old man was leaving, and with him, Jim’s last chance of rescue. But there was no way around that; he wouldn’t risk Arnheim’s life to save his own.

“Good night” Jim answered, desperation rising.

“Well done, Captain.” Khan’s whisper turned Jim’s attention back to the deadly problem at hand, and for just a moment, both men simply looked at each other – and with that came the realization of how close they really were. The Augment still straddled the younger man, and this, Jim had to admit, felt quite suggestive.

All of sudden, Jim became fully aware of Khan’s body heat slipping through his clothes, while his foe’s hot breath washed over his face. It left a tingling sensation that shot straight to a region of his body Jim really didn’t need to respond now! Curse the damned adrenalin! And it wasn’t like he’d never been interested in men before, even if he’d no real experiences with the same sex. And somehow, Jim had to admit, feeling that attraction for an enemy was kind of hot. Though, perceiving this while said enemy was about to kill him was also kind of creepy.
A lock of Khan’s dark hair had fallen over his forehead, but the animalistic fury in his eyes had at least lessened a little bit – exactly like his vice-like grip on Jim’s scalp – and Kirk felt a stirring of hope. Maybe the interruption had helped the super-human regain some control, maybe he had calmed down enough to be reasonable and…

Khan’s next words burst Jim’s hope like a bubble.

“Shall we continue?”

The cruel smile that accompanied this question shot a bolt of terror through Kirk and he reared up. With all his might, he tried to throw the Augment away from him, but the only thing he accomplished was bringing his groin into closer contact with Khan’s. And the fact even enhanced super-humans had normal body functions like any other mortal was proven a second later, as Khan took a sharp breath and his eyes widened.

Using the distraction, Kirk rolled aside and escaped Khan’s hold on his scalp. But he didn’t get far before finding himself trapped again between the floor and Khan’s lean body.

Jim growled in frustration as he fought against his captor. Even if he was weaker than the former dictator, he would fight Khan for as long as he could. He didn’t stop wriggling like an eel, fighting with such fierce determination that he actually managed to elbow his adversary, which earned another grunt from the super-human. Grim satisfaction flared up in Jim. Writhing and squirming with all the strength he could muster, he tried to free himself from the long arms which were wrapped around him like steel, while a strong leg was draped over his calves and immobilized them.

Khan tightened his grip around Jim’s torso, effectively stopping all chance of escape. “Give in, Kirk! It’s over,” he heard the baritone growl near his ear, but Jim didn’t quit. Instead of surrendering, he furiously struggled, not noticing that he was pushing the lower part of his body against that of his nemesis in the process.

Khan took another sharp breath as his body once again reacted; his trousers began to become tight. He knew that the boyish officer didn’t mean to excite him, but while squirming around like they were, contact was unavoidable. And as Kirk once again writhed, and his posterior bumped against Khan’s groin again and again, another hunger besides that for revenge began to spread through the Augment.

Against his will, Khan’s mind turned from being fixed on his opponent with hostility to something else he had successful ignored until now. He could feel the silky skin of the younger man’s chest and arms beneath his hands, a thin sheen of sweat coating it. He sensed the rapid heartbeat, heard the
harsh gasps, felt the strong pulse in Kirk’s neck as he bent down and brought his lips once again near the captain’s ear. The smell of Kirk’s shampoo mixed with the captain’s own scent – a pleasant combination of tangy grooming products and musk – was intoxicating.

Once again, Jim was far too aware of his enemy’s proximity, of Khan’s breath on his neck, and of the super-human’s arms, from which he couldn’t escape, while he felt the rapid beating of his captor’s heart at his back.

And again, for a long moment, both opponents stilled. Then Khan’s voice rumbled in his ear, “Will you surrender now?”

What?

Surrender?

To what? To being beaten to death?

“You must be crazy if you think I’d give in and let you kill me without a fight,” Jim panted, and the low dangerous chuckle he received chilled him to the bone.

“Ah, I didn’t expect anything else from you, Captain!”

Jim turned his head as far as he could and threw a hateful glare over his shoulder. Khan’s face was near – far too near for his liking – and he wanted to punch the Augment, but both hands were still trapped, and he was unable to even move his legs; there was nothing he could do. Khan was like a living force field, wrapped all around his body and making it impossible for Jim to move any of his limbs.

“Go to hell!” Kirk snarled, realizing with growing fear that he couldn’t put up any further resistance. Khan was right, it was over! Jim was utterly and completely at his mercy.

“I have, Kirk, twice, even,” the former dictator sneered, ignoring the feelings the young man beneath him had woken in him. As tempting as it was, Khan would not give in to this unwelcome desire. Kirk deserved the most painful death possible and nothing else. “Your Vulcan broke my arm last time we met – maybe that’s a good place to start with you?” he suggested and the grip of his fingers around Kirk’s left arm tightened.
Jim bit his lip to prevent himself from crying out. He was in the clutches of a man who could literally crush every bone in his body with his bare hands, and – if Jim had correctly understood anything about the way Khan had destroyed his communicator – that was exactly the way the Augment wanted him to die. And it began now. Fear exploded deep inside him, but Jim wouldn’t give his foe the satisfaction of showing it, even if his heart and soul were crying out for help.

Khan sensed the muscular, but slightly smaller body tremble ever-so-softly, but still his captive refused to acknowledge defeat. Kirk was too stubborn for that, too much of a fighter. He watched how the younger man bit his lip, drawing blood, and just for a moment Khan thought of how those lips could be put to better use – and then he smelled it, the familiar scent of an Augment’s blood – not as strong and pure as it was within Khan’s people, but still clear enough to catch the superhuman’s notice.

What had the young woman who spoke Klingon cried out as she materialized on the garbage transporter where the half-breed Vulcan and he had been battling? That he was needed alive to save Kirk? Khan had lost consciousness after she stunned him several times, and the Vulcan had beaten him senseless; he’d only come round in Starfleet Headquarters’ prison several days later. But Khan didn’t need to be a genius to figure out what the woman had meant. They had used Khan’s blood to heal Kirk – from whatever had befallen the captain.

And, as it seemed, a small amount of his blood still flowed in the captain’s veins, giving the young man unnatural strength. New anger flared in the Augment, while something in his mind whispered ‘He is mine’. Khan brushed aside the sudden burst of possessiveness and frowned. ‘Not just betrayal, but also theft! So much for your ‘nobility’, Kirk!”

“You’re one to talk!” Jim snapped, ignoring the inner voice that screamed at him to shut the hell up.

Khan only glared at him before murmuring, “Tell me, Captain, how does it feel to know that you owe your well-being a man you ‘nobly’ sent to a trial that was nothing more than a farce?” Kirk frowned. “How do you feel when you wake? Refreshed, strong, content – even if you’d barely had any sleep? How does it feel to suddenly have heightened senses, knowing perfectly well that all those enhancements are gifts from a ‘criminal’ you loathe?”

“What are you talking about?” Jim demanded, firmly telling himself that the shivers running down his spine were not caused by Khan’s rumbling voice. The voice he not only could hear, but could also feel vibrating along his nerves. No, certainly those tremors were caused by the sheer mortal terror that was eating him alive. The grip on his arm had not loosened, but it hadn’t snapped the bones either. Though it was only a matter of time before the Augment would tire of toying with him, and squash him like he had the communicator.
“I am speaking of the blood your doctor-friend took from me to save you!” Khan snarled, even more annoyed with the innocence displayed by his captive. He watched those sky-blue eyes grow wide. Misinterpreting the younger man’s reaction as denial, he hissed, “Don’t lie to me, Kirk! I can smell it!” His eyes seemed to burn in anger, and with the unwelcome desire that the close proximity had stirred in him, he acted without thinking. “I am sure I even can taste it!”

Giving in to the strong impulse that subdued his usually-controlled mind, Khan bent down and pressed his mouth forcefully over the small cut in Jim’s bottom lip, drawing blood, while his tongue darted out to lick the small drop away the moment Kirk gasped in shock.

The second his captive unintentionally provided even more unwanted stimulation, something that felt like an electric bolt shot through Khan’s body, and he knew he’d made a fundamental mistake. Yes, he could taste his own essence in the drop of the captain’s blood, but that was nothing compared to the taste that lay beneath. His senses were overwhelmed by the flavor of the young man’s mouth, of the soft lips, and the way Kirk’s body tensed up.

The previously-unacknowledged lust began to mix with the anguish and hate Kirk had sparked in him the first time Khan had laid eyes on him – at the Daystrom building, as he’d attacked the meeting of the commanding officers with the stolen ship. At first he had ignored the blasts of the phaser-rifle which were shot at his jumpship from a window; the weapon couldn’t seriously damage his spacecraft, but the sheer courage his attacker showed had demanded respect. And, as he’d thrown a glance at the man who’d been foolish enough to try to bring down the jumpship with nothing more than a phaser-rifle, Khan had seen only a shape – at least at first.

Later, after his opponent had somehow managed to destroy one of the ship’s engines and he had been forced to flee, Khan had taken a closer look at the man who’d come the closest to stopping him. All he had seen was a young handsome face, blond hair and a pair of blazing blue eyes – the same eyes which had stared at him with awe, fascination, and astonishment when Khan had brought down an entire Klingon patrol and revealed himself to the three Starfleet officers who were cowering in the dirt. At first, the fury in which Kirk had lashed out at him a minute later had surprised Khan, then, he had recognized his attacker.

As Kirk stood before the barrier in the Enterprise’s brig and displayed the barely-tamed wrath he’d felt towards him, Khan had revelled in the strong passion this Starfleet officer possessed, a passion he’d, at the time, fervently wanted to direct down a completely different path. But after all that occurred in the wake of their meeting, Khan had dismissed any kind of sexual attraction he may have felt towards Kirk.

Until now…

He had fallen into a trap he’d not anticipated as he bent down to prove to his captive and himself that
his blood was now flowing in Kirk’s veins. The instant Khan’s mouth met that of his young nemesis, the suppressed lust flared again, racing through his being and settling in his stomach. It welled up beneath his skin and rushed heatedly to his groin. Kirk struggled again, which teased Khan’s already hardening flesh even more. His instincts took over. Rolling Jim over, he pushed himself firmly against him, his mouth almost devouring the younger man’s.

The shock that had surged through Jim as the Augment covered his lips with his own was beginning to wear off, when Khan’s tongue entered his mouth.

That…was so not happening!

No!

Not here, not now, and not with Khan, of all people!

The Augment’s hot breath washed over Jim’s face, his arms and legs still holding him close. Then Khan slid over him, forcing Jim’s hands above his head and pressing him down with his weight, while Khan’s lips attacked him mercilessly.

Slowly Kirk realised that their combat had taken a completely different turn as Khan deepened the intimate assault. He tried to push the invader out – and a flash of hot white energy lashed through his whole being the moment his tongue touched the Augment’s. Jim could feel himself hardening even more, and the adrenalin and bottled-up fear searched for a way to escape. The low growl that rose from Khan’s throat was enough to throw Jim into action again. He wouldn’t give in – ever! And even though the violence had changed into something new and completely unexpected, he would fight back as well as he could. At least in this department he might stand a chance against the enhanced man, and could even outdo him!

Khan groaned quietly as he felt Kirk responding to him. Their tongues battled and twined, teeth scratched at the sensitive skin of their lips, gasps were swallowed by each other. Usually Khan would have remained controlled, indeed, controlling his partners completely, but as a certain part of the younger man’s anatomy made itself even more evident, a wave of pure lust rushed through him which cracked his composure.

He would have James Kirk! He would take him again and again, until the captain was out of his system, and only afterwards, would he snap his neck.
Khan tore his mouth from Kirk’s, momentarily relishing the sweet, masculine taste, and stared down at his adversary who lay helpless beneath him. Swollen lips, flushed face, heavy breathing, a soft shimmering layer of sweat covering a well-toned chest… Kirk was everything he’d dreamed during his imprisonment aboard the Enterprise. And Khan’s body responded to this now very real sight with a growing erection, the kind he’d not had in years – neither in his own time, nor since he’d been awakened in the 23rd century.

Oh yes, this night would turn out even better than imagined! The super-human’s natural demand for domination, the too-long suppressed sexual need, and his burning greed for his insolent, lovely foe wouldn’t allow him any other course! Augments were not only stronger in body and mind, their feelings were also more intense than those of normal humans.

Jim was out of breath and more blood had headed south into his shaft, but he didn’t back down as his nemesis’s eyes seemed to pierce his soul. Even if he didn’t loathe the taste in his mouth, even if his attacker was hot as hell with this savage looks, his now-disheveled ebony hair, and the soft blush coloring his sharp cheekbones, Kirk would not surrender to the sudden desire Khan had somehow aroused in him.

“Get. Off,” he all but snarled, but instead of enraging his nemesis, Khan only smirked evilly at him.

“This is exactly my intention, Captain,” Khan drawled huskily. He let go of Jim’s wrists and rose to his knees, still straddling him.

Jim, never one to miss a chance when given it, reared up again and punched the other man, trying to force him down off his lap. All that earned him was a pleased smirk, accompanied by an amused chuckle, while Khan caught his wrists again.

“So stubborn,” he murmured, twisting Kirk’s arms behind his back without actually harming him, and pulling the young captain against his chest in one fluid movement. “So much fire,” he whispered in Jim’s ear, giving it an almost gentle lick, before he left a wet trail down to where Jim’s throat met his shoulder and bit into the soft flesh. Not too hard, not too soft.

“Son of a bitch!” Kirk gasped, as his body had its own idea on how to react to this new erotic assault.

“I will enjoy your hot temper – especially when displayed in a more…pleasurable way,” Khan all but purred.
Jim thought his heart would leap out of his chest as he felt the hard proof of the Augment’s desire against his own groin. Once again he struggled, which made his enemy hiss, not with anger, but in nameless craving.

“Keep this up, Kirk, and we won’t even make it to the bed.”

“Goddamn it, have you lost your bloody mind?” Jim yelled. “I certainly will not…”

Khan didn’t let him finish. In the next second he was on his feet and dragged the captain with him. Instantly Kirk yanked up his knee to hit him where it would hurt the most, but the super-human was too quick and avoided Kirk’s attack. “Tsk-tsk, Captain, I call that bad form,” Khan taunted with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. Then he lifted his captive and simply tossed him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

Jim thrashed around, kicked, landed some sharp blows to the super-human’s back – and received a slap on his butt as though he were a disobedient child. “Fuck you!” he screamed.

“Language, Captain, unless you mean it literally,” Khan scoffed. “If so, I will consider your offer – after I’ve had my turn, of course.”

Anger and fright threatened to overcome Jim again. “Don’t you dare…” Kirk’s outburst was stopped as he was hurled onto his bed, landing between the blankets and the pillows with a huff. Before he could even start to sit up, Khan sat on him again and stripped out of his shirt, ignoring the punches Jim landed on every part of his body that he could reach.

Rain began to pelt against the windows as the skies opened and the thunderstorm finally broke loose, mirroring the turmoil Kirk was going through, as he found himself in a position that was suddenly far more bizarre than it had been before. The flashing lightning made Khan’s sinewy torso shine like alabaster, the muscles of his arms flexed as he caught Jim’s wrists again, and tied them to the headboard with the sleeves of his shirt, leaving the young man nearly helpless.

For several moments Kirk couldn’t conceive of what was happening to him. Here he was, tied to his own bed with his most deadly and – god alone knew why – very horny nemesis upon him, who wasn’t wasting any time in claiming his prey. Jim’s breath caught in his throat as Khan’s long, warm hands spread open on his chest and began to roam almost softly over his upper body. And to Jim’s utter horror, heat began seeping into his skin wherever the Augment touched him, leaving tingling trails which found their way to the pit of his stomach. A further gasp escaped his lips as the super-human ground his groin against Jim’s, eliciting a wave of unwelcome yearning in the depth of his body.
That was just wrong!

That was so completely and entirely wrong!

“Stop it!” he groaned, pleading to all higher beings of the whole universe to save him – not from his enemy, no; but from the flaring, crazy desire that clearly had lurked on the edge of his consciousness for some time.

“I have not even begun – not really,” the former dictator murmured, encircling Jim’s nipples with skilled thumbs, eliciting a low moan from his captive. He saw the fear in the striking blue eyes of the young Starfleet officer, but guessed rightly that it was the fear of his own body’s responses; Kirk was already hard and the enlarged pupils and the soft tremors gave him away. The captain’s mind could fight all it wanted, but his body spoke another language.

Jim gulped as he registered the lustful gleam in the Augment’s gaze and moistened his lips, a gesture that truly tested Khan’s control. “I thought you wanted to kill me,” Kirk whispered, asking himself how it was even possible that their deadly fight had changed into an erotic battle.

A slow, predatory smile curved the succulent lips of the man who was about to ravish him. “And I will,” the super-human replied quietly, his voice lowered to a sinfully deep purr. He bent down and Jim gasped anew as their bare chests finally made contact – warm, tense, and delicious. Bracing his weight on one forearm beside Jim’s head, the Augment’s fingers slipped into the blond strands, no longer brutal but almost gentle. “I will kill you, Captain, over and over again,” Khan stated, brushing his mouth over that of the younger man, while the fingers of his free hand cupped his hip. “Tell me James Kirk, are you familiar with the French phrase ‘petite mort’?”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, even a brilliant super-human can go astray and fall prey to his own suppressed wishes. Maybe this could be a reprieve to our captain, but – on the other hand – Khan is no one you can deal with easily. There remains so much between them, but desire and passion left no room for clear thoughts.
In the next chapter you will learn what happened to Khan in the past year, how it comes that he is even awake and where he escaped from. And – I promise – you are going to need some cold refreshing drinks, because the Augment doesn’t make empty threats. He didn’t mention ‘petite mort’ for nothing and the whole thing will be HOT!!

I so hope you liked the first chapter and I am more than curious what you’re thinking, so please, please give some feedback.

I’ll try to publish the installments on a regular basis.

Have a nice week,

Long life and peace.

Yours, Starflight
Forbidden Passion

Chapter Notes

Hi once again, dear readers!

At first I want to say ‘thank you’ for the feedback and your interest. I was hesitant to publish the story because of English no being my mother-tongue, but seeing your first reaction to the whole thing, I am glad that I dared to go online.

As I warned you in the epilogue of the last chapter this update is going to be very hot – meaning, it contains adult stuff. So if you are under-age, just return back to the main-page!!!

For all you others, I can only give you this one piece of advice, Just fetch a cold beverage and be aware that you need a very cold shower afterwards, because the attraction between such passionate creatures like Jim Kirk and Khan has risen to level both didn’t expect (and you, too, I hope).

BontanyCamoes, The connection between our hero and anti-hero has many roots, which will be revealed during the story (wink).

Cerridwen, Yes, we are on the same page here, I already asked myself, why there weren’t there more victims in London? That wasn’t real. After all, we’re no longer in the 60s or the 80s, when brutal reality simply wasn’t shown on the TV, so why were there ‘only’ 42 victims and the streets were clean? There must have been a warning before. But regarding Khan’s attack at Daystrom and why he didn’t kill Jim, Well, I do think at this point in time he 1) was only interested in shooting the admiralty, 2) Jim was lucky, or 3) Khan didn’t register him as a threat but only as a puppet of those who lead Starfleet Command, until he understood Jim’s true role. Which of these explanations will take root in my story is a secret I just don’t want to reveal (smile).

Mina and Anya, I also want to give you my thanks for reviewing this story. It really helps a new/old author to go on!!!

Enough with the preamble and off you go into the 23rd century.

Live long and prosper,
Chapter 2 – Forbidden Passion

Professor Doctor Matthew Dashwood switched off his PADD, shut down his computer terminal, and rose. Slipping off his white lab coat embellished with the golden Starfleet emblem, he threw it over his desk chair, and left his office. It was quiet in this exclusive part of the Starfleet Laboratory for Science and Healing – shortened to LSH – which was built underground in the southern part of Nevada’s desert, not far from the long-ago abandoned place known back in the 20th century as ‘Area 51’.

The lab specialized in research to find cures for the most dangerous diseases found in the Federation of United Planets, and therefore had been separated from the main center in Starfleet Headquarters. The closest civilized area next to the facility – which happened to be Las Vegas – was more than eighty miles away, and the transporter room at the center’s ground level was authorized for use only in emergencies; otherwise the staff had to travel by cyber-vehicle.

The highest operational standards were essential for survival – not only for the safety of the employees, but also for that of the whole planet. If anything went wrong, if even one organism came into contact with the outer world, the consequences could be disastrous.

So it was no surprise that security was some of the tightest within Starfleet on Earth, and even Dashwood, being the head of this facility, needed more than ten minutes to reach his own office or the laboratories every time he re-entered the facility.

Walking down the corridors and passing another sealed door, Matthew’s dark eyes found the security guard that was deployed in front of the door which, at the moment, led to the most important section of this facility. Greeting the professor, the guard stood at attention, and watched the scientist enter the lab. Only then did he relax.

Dashwood looked around. “Ryan?” he called, but didn’t see his assistant Ryan Brown at his workstation. Frowning, his glance wandered to the barrier made of an especially strong, transparent glass that was additionally secured with an electrical field. He stared at the lonely cryotube that sat in the small cubicle which held Prisoner 3158-17-215.
Everything seemed to be normal. The airlock to the room was closed and the code-lock showed a green light, meaning that everything was in order. But still...something wasn’t right. It had nothing to do with the fact that his assistant had left his station – everyone had to use the restroom from time to time – but a nagging feeling settled in the professor’s mind.

Stepping to the hatchway, Dashwood entered the code, placed his hand on the fingerprint-sensor, let another sensor scan his retina, then unlocked the door by giving a voice-analyzed password.

Carefully, he entered the cubicle and approached the cryotube. Confused, he only recognized now that the transparent port was frozen; proving that the cryogenic process had been driven up to its full capacity.

“What the hell...?” the scientist whispered. Prisoner 3158-17-215 should not be in full cryosleep; they couldn’t use him if he were completely frozen, but his vitals looked to be reflect the lowest level possible to hold him in that special kind of coma. Which idiot had put the subject back into full stasis? You couldn’t safely freeze and unfreeze a person over and over again. At some point the body wouldn’t cooperate with the difficult procedure any longer – even if said body had been genetically engineered to be stronger than a normal human. Unimaginable, if all the work of the last four months would be for naught because the valuable subject wouldn’t survive another awakening.

With a scowl on his face, Dashwood closed the distance and looked down on the occupant whose face could be seen through the observation window – and backed away with a yelp. The man he’d seen was not Prisoner 3158-17-215, but Ryan Brown! His assistant was lying in the cryotube instead of the most dangerous man on the planet – if not in the whole Federation!

With a frantically beating heart, Dashwood left the room, not bothering to close the heavy door. He ran through the lab, tore open the outer door shouted at the guard, “RED ALERT! The prisoner has escaped!”

The security officer stared at him unbelievingly. “Professor, that’s impossible! I haven’t left my post for one minute since I’ve been on this shift and...”

“He. Is. Gone!” Dashwood’s voice became shrill, and it was enough to spur the guard into action. He stormed away to hit the emergency button, drawing his phaser. A second later, the sirens started to blare; the lights in the corridors changed from a comfortable pearl-white to an alarming red.

Another door across the corridor opened and an Andorian looked at Dashwood, his dark eyes large
in the blue face. “Matthew, what happened?” he asked in the typical smooth, gentle voice of his race, while his antennae curved towards his human colleague.

“The worst thing possible!” the professor answered, his round face white as a sheet. “The prisoner’s escaped!” He raced down the corridor, the Andorian at his heels.

“How did he manage that?” the alien asked, concerned. “He was comatose, securely locked away!”

Dashwood shook his head. “I have no clue, Shran. Ryan’s now lying in the cryotube and…” He stopped as the security chief approached. The professor quickly gave him a short report about the situation. When he’d finished, the chief cursed, pulled out his communicator, and gave curt instructions before turning towards the scientists again. “Is he contagious?” The two scientists shook their heads and the officer sighed in relief, then growled, “Don’t worry, gentlemen. He can’t be far away.”

“And for all I know he could have escaped hours ago,” Dashwood interrupted him. “Ryan wanted to run another series of tests and started to work on them in the early evening – before the beta shift finished for today and left for the weekend. Obviously, the prisoner used this opportunity to blend in with the employees and had already left the –”

The officer frowned. “He’s been heavily drugged for more than four months. He must be weak and therefore…”

Hollow laughter erupted form Dashwood’s throat. “The prisoner may be weak, but he regenerates many times faster than even a Vulcan. He may very well be back to full strength by now!”

The security chief took a deep breath and nodded. “Then we should check every corner, every crawlspace, and every supply duct in this facility, as well as the transporter logs before we contact Starfleet Command.”

He set his phaser to ‘kill’.

Dashwood gasped when he saw it. “Are you crazy? We can’t kill him – not before the tests are complete, and the results –”

“Your lab rat is a goddamned super-human who kills without thought and is impervious to any stun
setting,” the chief interrupted impatiently. “If it comes down to either him or me, you can be damned sure which option I’ll choose!”

“Commander, listen…”

The officer fixed him with a hard look. “This is no longer your responsibility, Professor; the prisoner must be re-captured or killed. Otherwise, you can report to Starfleet Command that the terrorist Khan is not secure at the facility on Gama 12 with the other freaks, but has escaped from your lab and is now roaming the planet, certainly seeking revenge on those who brought him to justice!”

ST***ST***ST

The chief was right. Said Augment was burning to get revenge, but his desire for vengeance had taken another turn than originally planned. And no one was more surprised about this turn than the two men in the apartment on the 48th floor of a San Francisco skyscraper.

Jim stared with wide eyes into the striking face above him.

Petite mort…little death…

Of course he knew what that phrase meant. “No,” he whispered. “No, you will not –”

“I certainly will,” Khan interrupted him and nipped at his jaw for a moment, letting his hand slide from his captive’s hip upwards along his side, his nails scratching softly over smooth skin. “I certainly will take you in any way possible.” His mouth traveled to the sensitive spot beneath Jim’s ear. “I will make you scream, Kirk,” Khan growled before he sucked not-too-gently at the smooth skin of the younger man’s neck. “You will scream until you’re hoarse – not in pain, but in pleasure.” His fingers traveled down again, found the waistband of Jim’s sweatpants and ghosted just above them in an alarming manner.

That was the moment Kirk really became scared – very, very scared. It was simply too much! There mere thought that Kahn was going to touch him in the most intimate way woke an unknown anguish in him that broke out of him in a burst of new resistance.

“Take your hands off me!” Jim shouted, bucked up and tried to roll away, ignoring that his arms started to protest due to the angle they were forced into – after all, they were bound to the headboard.
A strong but soft hand on his belly stopped his escape attempt, while one long leg slipped over his calves again, immobilizing him before he could turn fully around.

“Stop this nonsense, Kirk,” Khan’s voice was still quiet, which was even more eerie. “There’ll be no escape for you, no way to deny me what I want – what you want too, even if you’re so eager to deny the pleasure you would experience.”

“I. Don’t. Want. This!” Jim gritted out, his face red with exertion and the contrasting emotions which raced through his entire being: fear, hate, yes, but also unwelcome desire…

“Liar!” Khan’s deep chuckle carried a promise of what would transpire in the next hours, a promise that was sealed with another deep searing kiss that heralded Jim’s fate.

If it had been anyone other than Khan, Kirk certainly would had savored the lust that had started to take hold of his senses as the Augment plundered his mouth with the force of the raging storm outside the apartment. Kirk never denied himself a night of passionate bedroom antics, but this was his nemesis, the man who’d come to kill him! It was completely crazy to become excited because his soon-to-be-murderer was kissing the daylights out of him.

As those long, experienced fingers glided into Jim’s sweatpants, the young captain panicked. His mortal enemy was about to reach for the most vulnerable parts of his body and Jim’s survival instincts kicked in once more. Turning his head away from those succulent lips, he panted, “NO! No, Khan, NO!” Jim tried to wrest himself away; his breath hitched in his throat while his heartbeat galloped even faster, driven by another burst of adrenalin. No, he couldn’t let this happen. He couldn’t allow his captor this kind of assault. He was going to be hurt in a most intimate way – or he would be completely undone; two options he refused to accept.

The elegant hand stilled and Khan’s soft lips brushed Jim’s cheek while he whispered, “Calm down, Kirk, I am not going to hurt you, not now and not like that.” His words fell on deaf ears and he realized that the younger man was beginning to hyperventilate. James Kirk was anything but a coward; the Augment had witnessed the almost-foolish courage that drove the captain, but this particular situation seemed to push the Starfleet officer to his limits.

Sliding his free arm around the Kirk’s slim waist, Khan did the first thing that came to his mind to stop the rising panic Kirk felt. He simply waited while tightening his hold on Jim, knowing that the other man would calm down as soon as he felt more secure, that the danger seemed to have passed. He had told Kirk that he wouldn’t hurt him, and he meant it. Now Kirk looked like he was starting to believe that.
Eventually Khan’s idea proved successful. A part of Jim’s mind was aware of the fact that panicking wouldn’t help, that it did more harm than good, and as time passed, Khan did nothing more than hold him. Jim slowly calmed down.

The super-human felt Kirk’s breath returning to a less dangerous level, cocked his head, and regarded him closely. The sky-blue eyes were wide as saucers and almost black with fear, yet his chin was stubbornly set and the reddened swollen lips were pressed into a line. Ah, still fighting! Good!

“Calmed down at last?” he asked, careful not to taunt Kirk too much; there was the chance the younger man would relapse.

A moment later he learned that James T. Kirk was stronger than that. “I know I can’t escape you or what you have in store for me.” His voice was flat, but also full of defiance. “Come on, Khan, do your worst. Go ahead, rape me. I am aware that I can’t stop y—”

“I will not rape you, Kirk!” The enhanced human’s features were, all of sudden, very serious and indignant. “I’ve done many things others would call a crime, but I’ve never – and will never – rape anyone. Even I have my limits – and I will not lower myself on the level of…” He stopped and took a deep breath, and for a moment his eyes flashed with an inner fire that seemed to burn straight into Jim’s soul. Then his control slipped back into place – as far as was possible in his strongly aroused state.

Kirk shuddered, but not entirely with anxiety. To hear that the Augment still had some morality left in him was almost a relief. Nevertheless, as Khan started to caress his flank and chest again, Jim gulped. “You said you wouldn’t…”

His words died as his mouth was once again re-captured in a short, hot kiss, before his foe murmured, “I will not rape you – but I certainly will ravish you. And you are going to want it.”

His hand moved downwards once again, eliciting another gasp from the young captain, as the clever fingers found their way under the waistband of Jim’s sweatpants. To Jim’s dismay, his cock started to pulse with anticipation, while his loins tensed in an all-too-familiar yearning way.

He had the urge to yell at the super-human, to shout to leave him the hell alone, and how Khan could never make him want this, but the Augment’s mouth was again on his, and therefore he could only made a sound of protestation – a sound that changed into a throaty groan as Khan’s hand began to
stroke the whole area around his painfully hardened shaft without actually touching it.

Khan felt the growing tension in the muscular body beneath him, heard Kirk’s sharpening breaths, and he released the swollen lips of his adversary. For a moment, he locked eyes with him, then he nibbled and licked his way down Jim’s throat, grinning as the blood beneath the silken skin pulsed even quicker. Oh, but he would have Kirk panting and writhing in passion within the next few minutes!

“S-s-s-stop it,” Jim wheezed, horrified as he realized that his fear was fading into a new fire, one that burned through his veins and made him melt into the seductive touch.

“You don’t want me to,” Khan growled into his skin, pressing hot, open-mouthed kisses over the toned chest beneath him, savoring the taste of salt and something that was uniquely Kirk. Not giving his captive a moment to comprehend what he was aiming for, Khan reached his first goal and started the next carnal attack.

Kirk squeezed his eyes shut and moaned as the gentle lips of his opponent brushed over his right nipple at the same moment the hand in his pants closed around his already-throbbing shaft. The next flash of lightning from outside shimmered through his closed lids at the same instant another bolt of erotic heat shot through his whole body. It only intensified as Khan began to stroke his most sensitive flesh.

Goddammit! The bastard knew exactly what he had to do to break down Kirk’s resolve without using violence. Jim gritted his teeth as sensation after sensation racked through his being, back and forth between the sucking and biting on his chest, and the experienced hand around his shaft making him dizzy with desire. Khan’s warm breath whispered across his already oversensitive skin, the soft pressure of the Augment’s body on his made Jim notice the bruises from the early brutal blows, but the uncomfortable feeling was fading away as the increasing pleasure seized him. ‘All higher beings of the universe,’ he prayed, ‘please show me mercy!’ Khan knew that he was losing this fight; he would give in and let Khan has his way with him – and in the end, he would indeed want this.

The Augment concentrated on the object of his needs and listened to every sound, took in every flinch that became more and more frantic with each stroke he gently bestowed on his captive. He heard the gasps, felt the growing tension in the other man’s body, saw the beginning of rapture on the boyish features, and attended to the left nipple. He was determined to throw Kirk over the edge, to make him writhe in ecstasy before he claimed him fully – not just to grant his adversary some pleasure when he deserved only the worst, but to demonstrate his domination.

Jim’s determination wore off and he felt the all-too-familiar heat in his belly and how it unfurled slowly but inexorably. He was panting now, fighting a battle he couldn’t win anymore, as his body betrayed him – not like it had after he entered the warp core, but in the beginnings of ecstasy that
whirled through his whole being.

And then it stopped.

Just before the incredible tension exploded into relief, Khan moved away from him, leaving him to tremble in desperate need to be finished off. Acting on pure instinct, Jim lifted his head and glowered at his captor. “Don’t you dare stop now!” he gasped, inwardly cringing how indignant his voice sounded. God, where was the formidable Starfleet captain when he was needed the most?

“Already begging, Kirk?” Khan mocked, but the hoarse undertone revealed his own condition. The way the younger man responded to his purposeful caresses, their proximity, the delightful sight of his stubborn adversary losing control like this – it all boosted the Augment’s already-burning lust to a new level.

Kneeling beside the Starfleet officer, he pulled Kirk’s sweatpants down with one smooth movement, eliciting a mixture of protests and sounds of relief from his captive. Khan hurled the garment away. The predatory smile returned to his features as he finally saw what he’d already felt before: James Kirk was very well-built – in every way!

Without hesitation, Khan straddled his foe again, encircling Kirk’s hips with long, strong hands which he let roam once more over the soft sweaty torso, never taking his eyes of Kirk’s flushed face. He savored the power he already held over him, knowing very well that the captain had to play along, otherwise his condition would be become unbearable.

“Do you want me to continue?” The taunting tone didn’t go unnoticed by Jim, and he would have loved to punch the smug expression off his tormentor’s handsome face, but his hands were – literary – tied, and there was also a certain more urgent matter in terrible need of attention. He really wished he could yell at this infuriating bastard who was doing this to him, but that would only worsen the situation. Whether he liked it or not, he really needed Khan to ‘help him out.’

“Jesus Christ, just finish what you’ve started,” Jim growled, cursing his demanding body for its weakness.

“Didn’t your mother teach you how to ask nicely?” The super-human threw Kirk’s earlier words back at him. He ground his still-clad groin into the painful hard erection of his nemesis, smirking as the younger man arched against him. “Well?” he pressed, while one of his fingers wandered deliciously slowly over his captive’s most vulnerable part. It shimmered in an angry, demanding red.
Jim yelped as the soft touch drove him closer to the edge, but denied him what he craved the most by now. Pride, defiance, and obstinacy could go to hell – if he didn’t come soon, he would lose his mind. His heartbeat was already too fast, his soul was in turmoil, and his body screamed for release. “Do it,” he whispered, adding a bitter-tasting, “please!”

Ah, there it was, the first sweet victory. What could be more satisfying than making his arrogant young opponent to want him – him, of all people? And this was only the beginning; Khan was determined to force his captive to desire him!

A loud moan tore from Jim’s throat as he was once again caught in a gentle, but firm grip as Khan continued his erotic attack. Kirk didn’t care that he’d admitted surrender as he took anything he could get from his tormentor, and was finally driven towards pure rapture, heightened by the subconscious knowledge of the danger he was still in. He groaned as Khan’s mouth was back on his neck, sucking, licking, biting, leaving a mark that would last for days. The burning knot in Jim’s belly unleashed an inferno of all-consuming ecstasy that washed over him like a tidal wave of pure heat. His cry was devoured by the Augment’s mouth which closed over his, while the long, warm fingers milked him until there was nothing left to spend.

At last, boneless and glowing in the aftermath, Jim tried to catch his breath as he lay there, eyes closed and unable to move. Tremors rippled under his skin; the sheer force of the strong orgasm had numbed his mind into a state of heavenly oblivion, while every nerve was tingling. Sweet Lord, that had been one of the most intense sexual experiences he’d ever had, and all at the hands of his sworn enemy!

That was not bad, that was insane!

But Jim didn’t care. Not at the moment, when reality seemed so far away.

Khan rose up and studied his rather unwilling bedfellow, who now looked utterly undone. There was still a blissful look on Kirk’s soft features, his face and chest were flushed, and a sheen of dampness covered his body, mingling with the body-fluid that had erupted from the younger man’s loins. It was a marvelous sight.

The Augment had known that his adversary was passionate, but the fervor Kirk displayed as he was overwhelmed by ecstasy promised so much more. And he would have this – would have him! Now! Khan had always been proud of his control, but it was fading away in pure greed which didn’t allow for further delay. His trousers were painfully tight as he unbuckled his belt.

Jim tried to regain some of his senses, and above all sanity, as his mind started to work again. Yes, he
just had been seduced into sexual submission, but – what was certainly more important – he was still alive. Yet that didn’t mean his captor was going to spare him.

Rather the opposite.

Kirk had a certain feeling in his gut that this wasn’t over; after all, Khan had said this was ‘only the beginning.’ The soft sound of something being set down on his nightstand brought his attention back to reality, and a towel wiped the milky tracks of his orgasm away. Tiredly, Jim opened his eyes and glanced straight into Khan’s face, which hovered above him. Desire burned in those sea-green and blue depths, and Jim gulped. Yeah, he had been right. This was far from being over!

He turned his head to see what the Augment had placed on the nightstand – and his eyes widened as he recognized a bottle of sunflower oil, the same sunflower oil he used to fry steaks. And the reason why the super-human had collected it from the kitchen was clear – and it made Jim shiver. Even though he hadn’t been intimate with a man before, Jim knew how it worked, and that sent a new bolt of dread through him – the fear of the foreign, laced with random knowledge.

“Don’t worry, I already told you that I will not rape you – not like you understand it,” Khan’s deep voice said calmly. “You will be prepared.”

Jim looked back at him again and became still. Only now did he notice that the genetically engineered man had taken off the rest of his clothes. His pale skin glistened in the semi-darkness, contrasting sharply in the lightning flashes from the raging thunder storm outside. Tall, shimmering like marble, slender with slim hips and long muscular legs, and with an unholy fire in his piercing gaze, Khan Noonien Singh stood beside him, the proof of his burning desire – perfect in shape, like the rest of his body – pointing hard and strong toward the skies.

This was the moment Kirk became gripped by a new fear – one that differed strongly from that he’d already endured when Khan had been about to beat him to death. This was mixed with something else – a taste of anticipation that seemed to come out of nowhere, and settled in his abdomen, and whispered through his soul.

His mouth went dry as the Augment tossed the towel carelessly aside and knelt down on the mattress. Swallowing the sudden lump in his throat, Jim somehow managed to whisper a “Don’t…” before Khan slid over him again.

“You know that I will not stop,” the former dictator stated. “What just happened was only the beginning.” His hands slid beneath Kirk’s back, while his lean body covered that of the younger man completely. A groan was on the tip of Jim’s tongue as their naked bodies pressed together.
He shuddered – but not out of revulsion, as it should have been. No. Wherever Khan touched him, his skin seemed to be on fire. And as the super-human’s lips found his again, Jim felt himself accepting the challenge of the clever tongue that invaded his mouth.

It did him no good, the Augment deepened the kiss instantly, which set Kirk’s nerves ablaze, and he felt the tightness returning to his loins.

‘Now it’s official, Jim, you’ve lost your mind. Craving the touch of your mortal enemy isn’t really the smartest thing... You should let Bones check your head – if you ever survive this!’ he thought, then his mind shut off, as his captor’s sensual assault became more aggressive. But still Khan did not hurt him. The caresses flooded Jim’s senses with incredible delight, the feeling of the Augment’s heat at his groin was a delicious dichotomy; the mortal threat which lurked beneath this erotic torment was like ambrosia, and made Jim helpless with lust.

‘Better at everything…’

Khan’s words during one of their discussions aboard the Enterprise a year ago ghosted through Jim’s memories, then reality started to melt away, as the new irresistible seduction began to unfold…

ST***ST***ST

Dashwood watched Doctor Sino Lai-Heng, as he checked Ryan Brown’s vital signs. Brown still lay in the cryotube, still frozen and asleep. It was silent in the laboratory and the attached security room, in contrast to the bustle in the rest of the Nevada-based department of LSH. Outside of this small oasis, the security personnel had spread through the whole area, checked every room, every corner – every place Prisoner 3158-17-215 could be. Taking into account the man’s abilities, the guards were on high alert. But Matthew Dashwood had a certain feeling that they wouldn’t find the subject. Ryan had been in cryosleep for hours now, which implied that the prisoner had been free for the same amount of time.

“His heartbeat and body functions have been reduced to the lowest level possible,” the Chinese xenobiologist broke into his colleague’s thoughts and he took a deep breath. “As far as I can see, he had been choked and knocked down afterwards.” He pointed to a barely-noticeable shadow around the scientist’s throat, and then to a small bump at his temple. “I daresay he should feel lucky to be alive. As far as I had learned, the prisoner isn’t known for showing mercy and kills without hesitation. Why he spared Ryan is a mystery.”
“I think it was the easiest way to hide his tracks,” Matthew mused. “Think, as soon the cryotube is open for more than half an hour and not functioning, the alert is activated. He knew this and needed more time to escape, so he required a living body to place it into the –”

“You think he knew how we secured his cryotube and how to avoid an alert?” Lai-Heng blinked. “How so? He was revived after we made the changes to the cryotube. And he’d remained in an artificial coma most of the time. The few days he was awake but sedated could be counted on one hand, and –”

“And still he managed to trick us all and escape!” Dashwood interrupted him, turning abruptly away. He knew that Ryan Brown couldn’t be brought back from cryosleep so soon after he had been frozen. There should be at last several days to give his body the opportunity to adjust to the dead-like sleep until they could attempt to wake him again. Not until then could the riddle of how Prisoner 3158-17-215 was able to break free be solved – that is, if he hadn’t been re-captured before that.

And Dashwood really hoped that the Augment would be caught soon, otherwise he would have to face the unpleasant duty of informing Starfleet Command – and the new supreme commander who had now been in charge for five months: Admiral Richard Barnett, former head of the Starfleet-Academy. And the admiral didn’t know that the research of the LSH’s department in Nevada held blood samples of a certain genetically engineered criminal from the 20th century, and who should be locked away at Gamma 12.

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Nothing in the world had ever prepared Jim Kirk to experience such painful pleasure as he did now. Even though his captor had kept his word and had readied him until he was close to the edge of losing sanity, it still hurt like hell when Khan finally claimed him. The soft burning Jim endured at the beginning, as the Augment used his fingers to prepare him, had changed into a strange but nevertheless nice sensation – until the super-human took the last step. Yes, Khan had applied the sunflower oil which replaced the non-existent lubrication – otherwise the whole procedure would have been agony – but Jim wasn’t used to this kind of sexual activity, and his body fought the strange intruder.

“Relax, Kirk.” The Augment’s voice was a gentle whisper at Jim’s ear while he braced himself on his forearms on either side of the younger man’s head and wrists; wrists which were still tied to the headboard. “Relax, don’t fight. It will be easier.”

Why his nemesis even cared was beyond Jim – after all, Khan had shown up on his doorstep only to murder him! But there was something in that deep baritone that made him listen. Blinking away the tears and pressing his lips into a thin line, Kirk decided to do as he had been told. There was nothing
in the world that would keep the Augment from satisfying his own urges now, and if Jim didn’t want to suffer too much, he had to leave the lead to Khan.

Taking a shuddering breath, he forced his body to calm down – to cooperate – and slowly the throbbing pain changed into an uncomfortable pressure he would just have to tolerate. Khan was more than well-built, and even in his fuzzy state, Jim felt a sliver of gratitude that the super-human had given him time to get used to the alien invasion.

Where Khan found the strength to be patient was almost beyond him. Desire blazed in his veins; his primary instincts – increased by the genetic changes – screamed at him to fulfill his needs and to heedlessly take what he wanted…what he craved! But here he was, fighting for control to give the younger man time to adjust to the penetration. It was true, he had never raped anyone before, and he wouldn’t start now, even though his bedfellow was his nemesis. Part of Khan demanded utter revenge for the betrayal and the loss of his family that the captain was responsible for. But that part quieted down more and more, and made room for another harsh whisper that echoed through his mind: ‘He is mine!’

And that was all that mattered as he felt himself engulfed in the incredible heat and tightness that was James Kirk. Khan squeezed his eyes shut as he relished the ultimate closeness and the feeling of the other’s rapid heartbeat against his own. He smiled as he listened to the stilted breathing of his captive, smelled the musky scent in the room, and felt the way their bodies fit so well together, as if they had been made for each other. All this caused the sweat to bead on his forehead, and the moment he felt that the tension leaving the young officer, he started to move; unable to suppress his need any longer.

Jim gasped as the pain returned – but not as strongly as before. Gritting his teeth, he was determined to endure the pain that was inflicted on him in this most personal way. There wasn’t anything else he could do now, and…

…the pain of the penetration began to lesson. As soon as his body became adjusted to the size of the hard cruel intruder, a new sensation spread through him. It was still strange, but not as bad as before. He even became aware of the friction against his own shaft as it was caught between them.

The hot breath of his tormentor washed over Jim’s face, before he was bestowed another searing kiss, which was another nice distraction, but when the Augment changed the angle of his thrusts slightly, a blinding flash shot through Jim’s entire being. He didn’t know what Khan had done – or what exactly he’d brushed against deep inside him – but it re-awakened the forbidden passion. Within seconds the pain was completely forgotten, as was the fact that it was Khan who was ravishing him when that certain spot was stimulated over and over again. Lust like he had never experienced before roared through Jim, flared beneath his skin, made it difficult to simply breathe. With each of Khan’s thrusts the fervor increased until Jim thought he would go mad.
And it was not enough: the feeling of the super-human’s weight on him, their battling mouths, the rapture of their connection – it wasn’t enough! Without thinking, Jim wound his legs around the slim waist of his captor and urged him forward, mutely begging him to take him deeper – and Khan was happy to comply.

Even lost in passion, the Augment’s brilliant brain didn’t stop working, and analyzed the way the younger man responded to him. But the emotion of victory that he’d expected to feel as soon as his nemesis surrendered didn’t manifest. Instead of gloating in the knowledge that he had broken through the captain’s stubborn resolve, Khan felt only the sensation of being sheathed in an all-too-willing body, and of being wanted.

And Kirk wanted more, needed more! As if Khan had read Jim’s mind again, he sped up; his lips found the over-sensitive spot at Kirk’s neck once more and he bit down like he had before, causing Kirk to cry out.

Stars began to sparkle behind the young captain’s eyes. He arched towards his ravisher, struggled to regain some control over his strung-out senses, tried to match every thrust – and the desperate movements made the bindings which tied his wrists to the headboard to come loose. Suddenly, his right hand was free, but instead of attacking Khan, he wrapped his arm around him, which took the Augment by surprise.

He could feel Khan’s inhumanly strong muscles playing beneath the damp, hot skin, and savored the chance to let his fingers wander over the lithe back, while his captor moaned into his neck in delight.

A short twist of his wrist and Jim was able to move his left arm, too. His hands roamed over the velvet skin that covered Khan’s body, found their way into the ebony strands of the Augment’s silken hair, and wandered downwards again, cupping the firm butt, clawing at it without hurting the man who now brought him bliss beyond comprehension.

Meanwhile, Khan was lost. From the moment Kirk embraced him and caressed him with eager hands, everything else vanished. For the first time in what seemed an eternity, he was really feeling! No calculation of advantages, no strategy of manipulation, no pondering of outcomes motivated him. For once, there was no rationale behind his actions, only the plain enjoyment of having his own needs fulfilled, granted with passionate responses. Burying his long fingers in the blond hair of his captive, he gave in to his emotions, to a yearning he thought would be lost to him forever. There was only himself and his young adversary, locked in a fierce embrace, and moving in the oldest dance of the world.

Jim’s sane thoughts had been shut down by the bolts of ecstasy which were overpowering him. Khan was all over him, around him, in him! The Augment filled his senses, his mind, consumed him completely, until they seemed to become one person. Too far gone to do anything else, Jim could
only stammer or scream his ravisher’s name – and then the world exploded in the brightest light he’d ever seen.

His mind was blown away and reality shattered into a thousand pieces; let him fly over chasms and oceans of fire – and still the light pulled him higher and higher. The only hold he had was on the man who’d forced him into this rapture – and to whom he now clung like a lifeline. From far away, he heard the shout of a hoarse, throaty baritone, and then his body was filled with the seed of his dangerous lover, who followed him into that place where all laws of nature lost their meaning…

ST***ST***ST

“He isn’t in LSH anymore!” The captain of security had a grim look on his face while he gave his report to a pale Matthew Dashwood. Still the alert was on, but except for the red light over the door and the gentle beep of the instruments, it was quiet in the laboratory.

The head of LSH stared at him. “Are you sure?”

The officer suppressed the urge to roll his eyes – as if he’d say such a thing when he wasn’t ‘sure’ – and replied, “There is undeniable proof that Prisoner 3158-17-215 took another’s identity, escaped during the shift change and has been out there somewhere for several hours now.”

“Did he use the transporter?” Matthew asked, and the commander shook his head.

“No. He knew that we could follow his tracks if he beamed somewhere else and used the stolen identity to leave LSH.”

“Whose identity?” Dr. Sino Lai-Heng, who was still watching Brown’s vital signs, frowned.

“That of Dr. Hendrik Björnson. My men found him in the changing room, unconscious – drugged, as it seemed – and put in his locker, still wearing his lab gown but nothing else.”

Matthew immediately walked to the cabinet which held the sedatives to control the specimens, while the officer continued.
“Björnson’s security and credit card, as well as the keys of his cyber-bike and helmet are missing. Doctor Björnson is about of the same height as Prisoner 3158-17-215, and his hair is dark, too.” He made a face while the two scientists looked nervously at him. “I already checked Björnson’s last actions. His terminal had been used for the last time several minutes after the beta shift started at work and the cameras filmed him as he stepped into the changing area. A figure in another lab gown followed him, and several minutes later a man left the room, wearing Björnson’s civilian clothes, and carrying the helmet beneath his arm.” He took a deep breath. “Prisoner 3158-17-25 simply walked out of here, straight under our noses!”

“And he took several hyposprays of sedatives with him,” the professor called nervously, closing the cabinet again.

“Well, that explains how he could render Björnson unconscious,” the officer observed grimly. “At least that bastard didn’t kill the doc.”

“Maybe he’s still on the site?” Lai-Heng asked optimistically, and the commander shook his head.

“The guards at the main entrance told me that they saw ‘Björnson’ drive away on his cyber-bike, heading towards Las Vegas after a slightly rough start. Well, regarding the good doctor’s habit to work overly long hours, no one took any notice of the small problems rider had in handling the vehicle before he drove away.” He gritted his teeth. “If you ask me, your guinea pig enjoys his newfound freedom and has certainly gone underground already in Las Vegas, of all places and… Yes?”

One of his subordinates stepped into the room, saluted and reported. “Sir, Starfleet Command contacted Lieutenant Denaux. They want to know why we’re on red alert.”

Dashwood and the commander exchanged a look. Of course the security system of this department was linked to the Starfleet Headquarters, and it had been only a matter of time until it became apparent that something was wrong.

“Well, as it seems we’ll have to let the cat out of the bag,” Matthew sighed.

“Hm-hm,” Sino nodded. “And Admiral Barnett will be so pleased to learn that this ‘cat’ is in truth, a predatorily monster with no conscience, and that the bag it came ‘out’ of is our lab!”

ST***ST***ST
Jim was simply not able to move. Soaring through the most contented afterglow ever, he lay on his bed, trying to figure out what had just happened. To speak plainly, he’d just been driven to an orgasm that had rocked his whole world. He’d never come that hard before, never felt so overwhelmed. And he certainly would never have expected something like this from being ravished by another man.

Jim Kirk was a womanizer, someone who enjoyed female attention and all that came afterwards, but to succumb to maddening ecstasy because some super-human male had seduced him – against his will – had never occurred to him.

But here he was, lying weak like a kitten on his bed, and sexually satisfied like never before.

And he didn’t care that it was Khan – of all people – who’d thrown him into this swirl of incomparable passion. He didn’t even care if the super-human stood true to his word and killed him now. All he could think of was the way he felt a short time ago and that he really, really wouldn’t mind a repeat; bad conscious be dammed!

Khan had rolled away some time after they had assuaged their raging need, had rested for a short time, and had finally risen. Now the young captain could hear the Augment moving around, but he didn’t pay him any attention. He was far too busy trying to find his back to reality and to reclaim some sanity – if he still possessed any.

Suddenly, there was movement on the mattress and he felt strong hands grip his upper arms. “Don’t fall asleep, Kirk,” the deep voice calmly instructed, and Jim cracked open one eye.

“If you want to take a nap as well, be my guest,” Jim all but croaked, closing the eyelid again. He was too wrung out, too tired to deal with the arrogant Augment, who –

He groaned as his nemesis-turned-lover didn’t take ‘no’ for an answer – again – and pulled him up. Kirk realized that his legs were not supporting him, and as Khan caught him, he simply leaned against the other man, hoping the dizziness would quickly go away.

Khan just looked down at the boyish officer he supported in his arms. Swollen red lips, love-bites all over his neck, shoulders, and chest, still-flushed cheeks, and glassy eyes were enough to indicate the captain’s state. Kirk’s heartbeat had returned to a normal pace, but his body temperature was still too high, and the wet mess they’d made during their savage coupling was still clinging to the younger man’s skin and Khan’s own.
“Come on, Kirk, you’re not that weak,” the super-human growled.

“Give me a minute,” Jim mumbled, and made a face as his captor retorted snidely.

“I’ve already given you five, now move!”

“How can a guy resist after such a charming invitation?” Jim groaned as he was simply picked up and was carried. “Let me go!” he squawked, and tried to struggle, which was even less effective than it had been the first time he’d attempted to escape the super-human.

Before Jim even realized what was going on, he was placed on his feet again and blinked, puzzled as he realized that the Augment had brought him to the shower stall. Khan slipped in behind him, closed the door and switched on the water. It was a little too warm but Kirk didn’t protest. Even if his mind was working at the speed of an Andorian water snail, he did know that a nice, hot shower would relax his muscles. Leaning against the wall he simply closed his eyes and enjoyed the water that splashed down on him.

“Skipped the training sessions at your precious Starfleet? Is that why you’re already wrung out?” Khan taunted, reaching for the soap dispenser to wash the mixture of seed and sweat off his body.

“Shut up. A man has a right to be tired after having the best orgasm of his life,” the young captain grumbled nonchalantly, not realizing what he gave away with that statement!

“‘Best orgasm of your life’?” Khan smirked while he soaped himself. “Told you that I’m better at everything.”

“Stop boasting.” The two words were barely understandable, but they made the Augment grin. Insolent, cocky boy! Kirk never knew when to quit or to stay silent, and somehow it amused Khan – if even for just a moment.

Then he turned serious again as the unexpected contentment of the last few minutes was driven away by the memories of the last time he’d had a decent shower. It had been in the cleaning-booth attached to his cell aboard the Enterprise’s brig after he’d surrendered on Qo’noS. For just a moment, he was back in that small, bright room; felt the spray pouring down on him while his mind was fighting the bitter anger he felt. Not only had he grieved deeply for his crew he’d thought had perished, his escape had taken an unexpected twist, and he was a prisoner again while his body healed from the
new bruises he’d been inflicted with.

Khan had and would never admit it, but the furious blows the young captain had inflicted had hurt – and were the very reason why he’d responded in kind on the bridge of the Vengeance after giving up the pretense to have been stunned. It would have been easy for him to have just knocked out the captain of the Enterprise, but wanting revenge after the beating he’d taken on the Klingon’s homeworld and for the betrayal fresh in his mind, he’d reacted like it was second nature.

As it was in his nature to do anything to protect his family!

At the time, those who had been most dear to him still lived. During those events, he’d thought that he could save them, take them away to a place where no one could threaten them or hurt them anymore, but this hope had been for naught. His crew was dead – murdered! And one of the two who were directly responsible for the demise of his loved ones, stood an arm’s length away and…

And had given him one of the most pleasurable experiences within the last years – discounting the three centuries he’d been in cryosleep. For some minutes Khan had been able to forget all the pain, anguish, hate, and fear he’d been through since Marcus awakened him two years ago. As Kirk had given into his lust and had wrapped his limbs around him, the Augment had felt free; free like a bird taking wing and strong like the tigers of his home.

And he yearned for more!

For several hours he wanted to be rid of all the dread and fury – his permanent companions since he’d woken up in the 23rd century. And maybe even before. They would always return to him in the morning, anyway. But for a short stolen time, he was simply being himself, not the leader, but someone who was a part of the great miracle that was called ‘life’. And he would take it from his foe. Kirk had made him feel alive – and Khan wasn’t done with him.

His pale sea-colored eyes roamed over the slim youthful form of the other man, whose current appearance practically screamed ‘tired out’. Khan pursed his own, still swollen lips. If he wanted another passionate round between the sheets, he’d have to make certain that his reckless opponent – now lover – wouldn’t pass out during it.

None-too-gently, he pulled Jim closer, ignored the protest, and soaped him up, too. The effects of the hot, wet skin beneath his hands, the scent of the young officer, and the sight of the marks he’d left on Kirk’s neck and upper body weren’t without consequence. There was another stirring in the pit of Khan’s stomach, and he had to strengthen his control, otherwise he’d ravish his nemesis again, here and now.
Jim tried not to think about the fact that he was being washed by none other than his adversary, that he currently stood with Khan under the shower. He hissed as the Augment took care of a now oversensitive part of his body, and tried to escape the strong but soft hands – again without success. The super-human crowded him against the wall, ordered a firm “Stand still!” and continued his ministrations.

Kirk shook his head. Who ever heard of a murderer who shagged his soon-to-be-victim into blissful oblivion, and then bothered with said victim’s welfare afterwards?

He gritted his teeth as the able fingers of his enemy cleaned him carefully but fully, which evoked a flare of want in Jim once again. Dear God, he had been taken long and hard only a short time ago, and he was really tired. How was it possible that this damned enhanced bastard could stir new lust in him?

“Turn around,” Khan instructed and nudged him when Jim didn’t react immediately. Khan’s gaze took in Jim’s muscular back, the reddened areas of his rump, slim hips and long thighs, and a wave of pure satisfaction blazed in him. There would be more evidence of this satisfaction when the night was over!

Massaging soap into the toned soft skin of his opponent, Khan almost missed the whispered words. “Get the hell away from me.”

A low chuckle escaped the super-human’s throat. “Still in fighting form, then? I’m glad.” For a moment he pressed himself against the slightly smaller man and nipped roughly at his neck, before murmuring, “I love challenges.” With that, he stepped back, rinsed himself off, and left the shower cubical to dry himself.

There was no way for Kirk to contact anyone outside the apartment, or to easily get a hold of a weapon, not with the phaser still near the entrance, and therefore out of reach to the Starfleet officer. And Jim knew this. He was completely and utterly at the super-human’s mercy – a fact that both scared and annoyed him.

Cleaning the lather off himself, Jim finally shut off the water and stepped uneasily out of the shower. Khan was nowhere in sight, but there were voices coming from the living area, telling him that the Augment had switched on the TV.

‘Probably watching the news. If they mention something about his escape – as if Starfleet would be
so stupid to alert the whole planet!’ Jim grabbed a towel, dried himself carefully, wrapped it around his waist, and didn’t even look at his reflection in the mirror before leaving the room.

Khan was indeed in the living area of the apartment and intently watching the news. Outside, the storm was still raging; flashes of lightning and thunder blustered through the night, perfectly reflecting the emotions Jim was experiencing. Than he stopped dead in his tracks as he heard his own voice coming from the large wall screen. Jim swallowed as he saw himself in the courtyard of Starfleet Headquarters during the day’s ceremony – or had it been yesterday? He didn’t know; time had somehow lost its meaning during the last hours.

His eyes found his recorded self on the TV, standing at the lectern with the sun shining down on him and the admiralty sitting to his left and right. His speech was coming to an end, “… words I didn’t appreciate at that time. Now I see them for a call for us to remember who we once were and who we must be – again! And those words are: Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Her five-year mission to explores strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations – to boldly go where no one has gone before!”

Jim could only stare at the screen. It felt like ages ago that he’d uttered those words, not hours. As he’d finished his speech, the applause finally died down after an awkwardly long time. The back-slapping and admirals’ praise came to an end, and Jim finally had a chance to speak with his friends in private, and everything had been okay. He had looked forward to the days to come – to the moment he would finally re-board his ship and take the conn again to explore the galaxy. Now he couldn’t even say if there would be a tomorrow for him. Even though the man who stood only several meters away – clad only in a towel wrapped around his hips – had given him an incredibly passionate experience, Jim knew that the threat of death was still hovering over him like a drawn sword. Khan had not taken him to the heights of bliss for Jim’s pleasure, but to satisfy his own needs.

“Impressive speech, Kirk,” the Augment murmured and switched off the TV with a single voiced command. “Tell me, did you commit it by memory or were these words your own?”

Green-blue eyes met sky-colored ones and the young captain sighed. “Partly a prepared speech, partly my own words.” He padded to the sofa and sat down – only to curse and grimace. Dammit, he wouldn’t be able to sit properly for days – if there were still ‘days’ left for him!

“The last part was the one you came up with yourself.” Khan said and Kirk asked himself how the Augment knew this. “You’re a captain at heart,” the super-human continued, which only served to prove he understood his adversary better than Jim thought. “And you still believe in those foolish ideals Starfleet tries so desperately to show the galaxy.” A hint of bitterness tainted his tone, and Jim frowned.

“You’re wrong if you think that those ideals are only a pretense. Section 31 betrayed everyone –
you, me, my crew, my mentor – and all the others who were victims in this mess! But that’s not what Starfleet truly presents. It –”

“It is a union of soldiers who take what they want – even marching over the dead,” Khan growled, his gaze piercing. “You speak of forgiveness, of seeking no revenge – but what of those who’ve lost everything because of you?”

Kirk stared at him dumbfounded. “Because of me? What do you mean?”

Khan was in front of him in a second. “Don’t play dumb with me, Kirk! You know exactly what I mean.” He bent over the younger man, his whole form suddenly trembling with fury. “You. Murdered. My. Family!” His hand found the nape of Jim’s neck, and for several seconds he was extremely tempted to simply snap the fragile bones.

Even inferior, weakened by the forbidden and very intimate activity, without any hope of defending himself, Kirk was still not someone who gave up. Wrapping his fingers around the strong wrist of his opponent and gripping Khan’s upper arm with his other hand, Jim locked eyes with him. It dawned at him that the super-human still believed his crew was dead.

“Whoa, hold on a minute!” Jim exclaimed, feeling a short pang of panic as he saw the returning hate on his captor’s face and Khan’s tightening grip around his neck. “I think there’s been a big misunderstanding here –” Jim yelped as Khan hauled him off the sofa. He did the first thing that came to mind and let go of the other man’s arms to lay both hands against the firm chest in front of him, trying to calm his nemesis enough to hear him out. “Khan, just wait a sec! Listen!” He took a deep breath as the Augment surprisingly did stop. Jim looked at his opponent, taking in the agonizing pain beneath the rage in Khan’s gaze. That could mean only one thing.

“Did no one tell you?” Jim whispered unbelievingly. Could it be that no one, not one soul on the whole planet had informed the super-human that his crew – his family – wasn’t dead? That was just…too cruel.

“No one told me what, Kirk?” asked the former dictator, his voice barely audible. Of course his brilliant mind had already made the connection between his accusatory statement and Kirk’s reaction to it, but he hadn’t believed there could be the slightest possibility that his crew had survived the torpedo explosion. He didn’t dare to hope that his family was still alive! If it turned out that Kirk didn’t mean what he thought he did, the sorrow Khan would suffer again would utterly shatter him.

Jim’s eyes never left those of his enemy, and as he saw the rising battle of hope and fear in those blue-green pools, it affected him more strongly than expected. Jim forced himself to relax, praying that this gesture would soothe his adversary.
“Khan,” he said softly, “your crew is alive.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, this really must be a shock for Khan. As happy as he should be, until now he grieved terribly for those he loved / loves, and to learn that all his sorrow has been for naught must also be horrible. But, out of this all new roots will be grow which will rock the whole alpha-quadrant.

The next chapter will be named “Turmoil” and I can promise you that the title will stay true to its definition. Jim and Khan will talk, while Starfleet Command will be tracking our Augment, trying to catch him. You are going learn more about backgrounds, and Spock and Bones will appear.

I do hope that this new installment was to your liking, incl. the introduction of the LSH, and I really, really want to know what you’re thinking of the whole thing.

Long life and peace,

Yours, Starflight
Hi, dear Readers,

Now one very important thing: Thank you so very, very much for the feedback, bookmarks, and kudos. We have only begun with the story, and so many of you are already-head-over-heels. I am totally happy.

Whazzup? Thank you for the reviews and yes, I love showing Khan’s different sides – the darker and the lighter one, after all, he is one hell of a fierce warrior, but also capable of deep love, which will become an important part of the story. By the way, thanks for giving me the hint about the mistake between ‘heart’ and ‘heard’; I’ve changed this as I am writing (wink).

Goworm, Anya, Cumbers? Thank you for your comments and I am glad that you love this story.

Cerridwen? Yeah, Khan could have found a way to blow up that part of the headquarters where the meeting was being held, but I don’t think that was his intention. He wanted the heads of those who wronged him, and also he wanted to make them look like fools by showing them how easily he could overcome their safety measures, even around the headquarters, by simply using the airspace. And the height of the meeting room? Hey, that’s so typical for all manager-types around the world. The best locations are reserved for them to demonstrate their power and invulnerability. Well, it did them no good! And, I totally agree with you that Starfleet Security is really in terrible need for development of better standards (as you will read in the new following two chapters in my story, grin).

And I do think the new chapter will be to your and all other readers’ liking. There are lot of things which are in a terrible state between Jim and Khan; misunderstandings, different point of views, unsaid truths. And some of them are going to be laid on the line. You will meet the new Chief in Command of Starfleet for the first time and two admirals, who are still following the ideology of Section 31.

I hope you all have fun, and please excuse the delay (and errors in my writing).

Live long and prosper,

Yours, Starflight
Your crew is alive…

Four words – and the world seemed to come to a halt.

For a long moment Khan could do nothing else than stare at Kirk, shocked. “What?” was all he said, not trusting his own ears or the captain’s statement.

Jim nodded slowly, realizing that indeed, no one had told the Augment that his crew – his family! – hadn’t died in the inferno the exploding torpedoes had caused. Sweet Lord, whether this man was a criminal or not, he had a right to learn of the fate of his loved ones! Why had no one had the decency to inform him? To let him think his family was dead while he had been forced back into cryosleep was as cruel as his seeking revenge through his attack against Starfleet Command. Had it been a kind of primitive payback for his deeds, or had simply no one been mindful – sensible – enough to tell him the truth?

It didn’t matter which one of these reasons was accurate, all Jim knew was that he had to set things straight. No one deserved to grieve in vain!

“You. Are. Lying!” his captor growled with new pain in his eyes, and Jim shook his head as far as it was possible with the strong grip around his neck.

“No, it’s true. Your crew –”

“Were in the torpedoes your Vulcan detonated!” Khan roared. “I scanned them after they were transported to the Vengeance! My family was –”

“– Is safe, and sound asleep in the cryotubes Bones removed from the torpedoes before Spock beamed them aboard the Vengeance,” Kirk interrupted him as calmly as possible. He noticed that Khan was breathing heavily, while an almost pleading expression mingled with one of hope across his handsome features. Jesus Christ, Jim couldn’t help himself, but right now he actually felt compassion for his enemy.
“Listen,” he said calmly. “Bones and his staff removed the tubes and set up a special biomedical program in the torpedoes using the recorded bio-signals of your crew to make you to think they were still in them. He knew you would scan them. In truth, your crew was in the Enterprise’s med bay.” He felt the long fingers still clamped around his neck begin to tremble. “Your family is not dead, Khan,” he repeated almost gently, and he saw tears welling up in the Augment’s eyes. “They are alive.”

“Your Vulcan…” the former dictator whispered hoarsely, his normally quick-witted brain sluggishly processing the information, too afraid to feel any hope only to have it destroyed again.

“I admit, Spock can be a pain in the ass sometimes,” Jim agreed, “but he would never kill seventy-two innocent people in cold blood. He is a Vulcan after all, raised on Surak’s doctrines – Vulcan’s reformer several thousand years ago, who taught them…” Kirk became silent as Khan’s hands fell to his side as if all of his strength had suddenly drained away.

“Is… Are you speaking the truth?” The super-human’s voice was no more than a tight croak, while he fought the growing hope in the twisted denial he’d held on to in order to protect himself.

Jim nodded sincerely. “Yes, I swear! I would not lie to you or anybody else about something like this!”

For a moment the Augment only looked at him, saw the seriousness on the face of the young captain and knew that it was true.

His family…

Alive!

They were not dead! They had not been horribly killed in the merciless detonation of the weapons which had served them as protection.

The realization hit Khan with the force of a starship thrown into warp, and for a moment he began to sway. He tried to regain some control over his rising emotions, but failed miserably as the first tear rolled down his cheek. He sucked in several sorely-needed deep breaths and turned away, seeking a moment of solitude to get a grip on himself.
Jim swept back his short hair, feeling an immense amount of relief – damn, there would be fingerprints on his neck for the next few days – then watched his nemesis.

Khan had stepped over to one of the large windows, balled his fists, and lowered his head; his chest heaved.

They lived…

His family was safe!

Joaquin, Chang, Katie, Otto, Ann, Paolo, Janine, all the others… They hadn’t been taken from him! They were still somewhere in their cryotubes, oblivious of what had almost happened to them. They had – maybe – a future after all.

He was relieved beyond belief, dizzy with joy – and with that, his emotions got the better of him. The sudden cessation of tension tore at the walls he’d built up, bombarded his well-schooled mind, and shattered his self-control.

Despite the gratitude he now felt, another dagger was stabbed into his soul. The grief, the sorrow, the anguish – had all been for naught!

The agony he’d experienced as the torpedoes exploded and he’d once again thought he’d lost everyone who held his heart, had cost him his sanity – if only for several minutes. The blinding pain in his whole being as he ran through the streets of San Francisco trying to escape the furious Vulcan, the cold emptiness after he awoke in prison days later, had been for nothing. He had been trapped in this spiral of despair only to learn now that his sorrow was nothing more than a cruel joke.

The feelings were too much to handle. Even Khan had his limits.

Jim eyed his adversary carefully, looking for any sign that the Augment might descend further into anguish, but Khan’s reaction was quite the opposite. He simply stood there – and then a single throaty heart-wrenching wail echoed through the apartment, followed by a suppressed sob.

Kirk swallowed. He had expected a number of reactions from his opponent, but nothing like that. And, as he realized, he really didn’t know what to do. Yes, he had no trouble soothing a damsel in distress, but he certainly couldn’t call a genetically engineered man who was more dangerous than a
collapsing warp core *that*, and so Kirk had no clue how to go on from here.

His first simply *human* impulse was to comfort the man; his rebellious, but nevertheless good, heart went out to that soul which wailed in equal parts relief and despair. If it had been Bones, Spock, Scotty, or anyone else close to him, he would have wrapped his arms around them and had held them until the pain went away. But in this case, that was out of question. As far as Jim was able to tell, Khan wouldn’t accept any comforting gestures; he was far too proud and too distrusting for something like that.

Still, Jim wanted to offer some consolation. No human with a heart could watch and hear such a display of utter distress and not be moved by it.

And, as the super-human pressed a hand over his mouth while his shoulders began to shake, Jim couldn’t remain unmoved anymore. Whether a criminal or not, it was impossible for the young man to witness such misery without doing something.

Walking quietly on bare feet, he went to the kitchenette, fetched two glasses out of the cupboard, and poured some scotch in them. He didn’t even know if his rather unwelcome ‘guest’ liked whisky or not, though in this case, the golden spirit was more medicinal than anything else. Jim turned around, and in the glow of the next lightning flash, his eye caught something: his phaser.

There it lay beside Khan’s heap of clothes. The Augment must have picked it up when Kirk was still trying to recover from the aftermath of their coupling, and had put it with his own belongings.

Jim glanced back at his enemy. It would be so easy to tiptoe to the weapon, to take it and…

Well, then what? Khan couldn’t be stunned – or, as Uhura once told him – he could, but only after being hit over and over again, and regarding their close quarters, Jim would never be able to render Khan unconscious before the super-human reached him. And then Khan *would* snap his neck. Jim had no doubt about that.

That only left two possibilities: set the phaser to ‘kill’, or to do nothing.

Once again, Jim looked over to his nemesis and saw that Khan’s legs had given out. He kneeled by the window, hands on his thighs, head lowered, back rigid. The shaking breaths were enough to show that the enhanced man was still struggling for control.
Kirk swallowed again. If he’d been the average Starfleet officer to whom duty and regulation were something close to a religion, he wouldn’t have second thoughts about doing what was necessary. Khan was a convicted criminal – a murderer – and furthermore, he had come here to kill him. Jim had every right to shoot the man, hell, he’d be doing the universe a favor by doing so. Still Jim didn’t move.

He wasn’t the kind to take another’s life easily or – even worse – shoot an unarmed opponent, even if Khan himself was a weapon. Moreover, he knew that the Augment had been betrayed and wronged several times, that the whole mess last year wasn’t entirely his fault. Khan had been driven to the breaking point which had set free his fury.

No, it was impossible for Jim to stab the Augment in the back. Not again. His humanity and strong sense of justice didn’t allow for it. Even after he’d lost his mentor due to Khan, Kirk couldn’t bring himself to end the man’s life. He might indeed be a criminal, but he was not evil. Jim was familiar with the old saying that *only the Devil doesn’t know love*, and if there was one thing he could say about Khan, it was that he loved his family with an intensity rarely found.

‘*Driven to misdeeds by love – it’s as old as time.*’ Jim thought as he looked at his nemesis.

The same nemesis that had incidentally driven him to the most supreme ecstasy only half an hour ago. That shouldn’t affect the captain’s decisions, but still it had a part in it. He was only human after all!

With a sigh, and hoping that he wouldn’t regret this completely insane and irresponsible course of action, Jim returned to the shaken Augment and crouched down beside him. One look at the tear-striken face and he knew that he had made the right decision. He never would have been able to live with himself if he had killed this bundle of wretched emotions. Tensing, he watched his adversary, who seemed not know if he should laugh or cry. Jim then understood what was going through the super-human’s head and heart: immense relief mingled with the release of all the grief he had felt.

Thunder rolled across the sky, the wind howled between the skyscrapers, and rain pelted against the windows. But the raging tempest was ignored by the two men, who fought their own storm.

Khan had his eyes firmly closed while he tried desperately to get his feelings back under control. They were safe! His crew was alive! That was all that mattered now. His own anguish didn’t count – not when the outcome was ultimately what he had strived for. He was near-hysterical with glee, but in addition, his soul was bleeding.
Suddenly a sharp and vaguely familiar scent reached his nose, and he opened his eyes to the blurry sight of a glass with honey-colored fluid being offered to him. Raising his head, he looked straight at James Kirk who knelt beside him. The younger man’s gaze was wary but also sympathetic, and for several seconds, both men didn’t move. Then Khan took a deep shaky breath, wiped his face with both hands – Alas, this was humiliating! – and found himself accepting the glass.

He raised his eyebrows at Jim as he held the glass to his nose, again inhaling deeply.


“Fitting,” Khan murmured and sipped at the strong liquor. “An expensive drink for an occasion more priceless to me than anything else in the whole universe.” He took another sip, relishing the sharp warm taste that filled his senses, yet had no influences on their function.

Perceiving that the Augment indeed was calming down, Jim shifted himself to a more comfortable position, and grimaced as certain sore parts of his body came in contact with the floor. He took another sip of his own whisky. “So…no one told you?” he asked after a minute, and the Augment silently shook his head. “Stupid idiots,” Kirk grumbled, then blinked. “Didn’t you see them when you were put back into your cryotube or when you woke up and escaped?”

The blunt question took Khan by surprise. “I’d been sedated before they sent me back to cryosleep,” he growled. “And when I woke up again, there were only four walls and several scientists around me, nothing else.”

Jim stared bewilderingly at him. “Scientists? Which scientists? And why did they wake you up?”

The Augment rolled his reddened eyes. “Come on, Kirk, think! You do have brains, as I have to admit. Why would someone take me to a high-security underground lab and hold me in a semi-coma for months?”

It took several seconds before the captain’s mind was ready to accept the obvious answer. “They… They ran tests on you? For months?” He made an agitated gesture with his free hand, and the enhanced man’s expression darkened.

“Yes, they took my blood. Sometimes they took skin-samples or other cells. They also injected me with several different pathogens in order to harvest any antibodies my body produced, or they tested new serums for existing diseases.” His voice was flat and emotionless. Concentrating too closely on
what he’d been subjected to these last months – of the helplessness, the fear, the pain – would have tested his self-control once again.

Jim stared at him. “They used you as a lab rat?” he finally burst out. “But… But at the trial you were sentenced to be returned to cryosleep! Tests on humans are…”

“Trial?” the super-human scoffed. “What trial?” Before Kirk could reply, Khan sneered. “That trial was nothing but a farce!”

“But…”

“If you’d have bothered to show up during the so-called ‘prosecution’ you were so eager to put me through,” Khan hissed, “maybe you would have realized that your precious Starfleet wasn’t interested in the truth, but rather judge me as quickly as possible and be done with me!”

“Sorry, but I was a little bit indisposed at the time,” Kirk replied almost as sarcastically and still shell-shocked by what he’d just learned of the Augment’s fate.

“Indisposed’? After everything you went through to give me a ‘fair trial’?” Anger crept back into the deep baritone, while the pale blue-green eyes pierced the captain’s blue ones.

“Does ‘radioactive contamination’ count as being ‘indisposed’ in your opinion?” Jim snapped; irritated by his foe’s ignorance.

This time it was Khan who was staggered. “Radioactive contamination?” he repeated, astonished. “However did you end up with that?” Mockery began to creep into his tone. “Did you dance around the Enterprise’s warp core?”

“No, I kicked it,” Kirk responded dryly, making a face.

“You kicked it?” It was clear that the super-human might also be doubting Jim’s sanity. “Why would you do such a crazy thing?”

“Think!” The younger man hurled Khan’s earlier exclamation back at him. “The Enterprise took
several serious hits, and the warp core had been sabotaged by Section 31. What do you think happened to it?"

The former dictator didn’t even need to think about it: “The warp core was compromised and could only be fixed…manually,” he guessed, and Jim nodded.

“Yeah, even worse. It was misaligned, and the ship’s internal power was switched off. The auxiliary power failed, too. The *Enterprises* was completely without any propulsion or navigational control. The Earth’s gravity caught us. The ship and all on board were going to burn up in the Earth’s atmosphere.”

Comprehending, Khan nodded slowly. “And so you had no choice but to enter the chamber and realign the warp core.” His gaze roamed intently over the boyish face of his nemesis, knowing exactly what Kirk had been through while in a room full of radiation. He had read too many reports about nuclear contaminants and their effects back in his own time. Even in the 23rd century, nothing had changed with regards to radiation. “How did you make it out alive?” he asked curiously.

“I didn’t,” Jim said quietly, locking eyes with the Augment.

Khan pursed his lips. “You died – and my blood brought you back,” he stated and watched as the young officer placed his glass down on the floor, pulled his knees towards his chest, and wrapped his arms around them.

“Yeah,” came the soft reply.

Everything made sense now: Kirk not showing up for the trial, the dark-skinned woman’s yelling that he – Khan – was needed to save the captain, the flaring rage of the half-Vulcan… “Commander Spock,” he began slowly. “He didn’t hunt me down to bring me to justice, but to *avenge* you.”


“He chased me through San Francisco and nearly beat me to a pulp after he caught up with me. Only the appearance of your female crew-member who speaks Klingon…”

“Uhura?” Kirk threw in and Khan shrugged. He didn’t know the name of the officer.
He continued, “She stopped him, but that didn’t stop him from nearly knocking me out.” He frowned, clearly offended. “He was the first who’s ever been able to do such a thing.”

Jim had to grin for a moment. “Yes, Spock’s strength really is something.”

“Indeed,” the Augment exclaimed flatly. “I remember very well what he did – not only during our combat, but also that he killed my family; or rather that he tricked me into believing it!” Coldness crept into his voice once more and Kirk took a deep breath.

“Look, they’re alive. That’s all that matters, right?” He saw Khan narrowing his eyes and added softly, “I know that this whole stupid mess has caused you a lot of grief, and I really don’t understand why no one told you that your people weren’t dead. There must have been plenty occasions to inform you, but…”

“But the guards took pleasure in keeping it a secret as they carried out my sentence. They didn’t speak to me anyway.” Bitterness lay in the deep voice, and Jim frowned.

“They didn’t speak to you? Not once?”

Khan shook his head. “Every question passed unheeded. Only requests for food were answered by giving me something to eat and drink.” He lowered his gaze. “I wasn’t even granted a last request – so much for your so-called advanced civility.”

“Last request?” The younger man pursed his lips. “You weren’t sentenced to death, just put back into cryosl…”

“It is like dying, Kirk, believe me!” the super-human interrupted. “Yes, they sedated me, but sedatives don’t have the expected reaction in me. I could still feel my body functions being lowered, while coldness crept through every fiber of my being.” The bad memories from the last minutes he’d been awake returned, and made him speak without realizing that he shared a personal experience with the man he had wanted to take revenge on. “The life slips out of you, everything becomes a blur, and darkness enfolds you. You think you’re turning into ice, but you can’t even shiver. Your mind struggles against it, tries to stay awake, clings to every thought until you’re too tired to fight anymore. And then there is nothing – absolutely nothing.” He shook his head. “It is like dying! As we left Earth three centuries ago, I knew that I would wake up again. This time I was certain I would remain in this state for all eternity – dead but not dead, alive but not alive.” His far-away gaze focused once more and returned to Jim’s face, taking in the uncomfortable expression on the soft
features. “I think you know the feeling.”

Kirk let the words sink in and nodded slowly. “Yeah, you’re right. I do know exactly what you’re talking about.” He moistened his lips, as his own memories resurfaced. “Being contaminated with radiation feels the same – only you don’t freeze, you burn.” He took a deep breath. “I somehow managed to crawl back to the emergency barrier before I collapsed. That’s how Spock found me, but he was unable to get to me.” He sighed. “I admit I was scared – more scared than I’ve ever been in my life. There was so much I wanted to say, but…” He fell silent.

“There wasn’t any time left.” Khan’s voice sounded almost sympathetic. “Tell me, Kirk, if I could grant you a last request, what would it be?”

“Is that an offer?” the Starfleet officer asked bluntly, realizing that his nemesis hadn’t yet let him off the hook. Dammit, maybe he was a little bit rash to dispense with the whole ‘I-cannot-shoot-him’ decision.

“Yes,” was the Augment’s only comment.

Jim didn’t have to think twice. “Spare my friends!” He looked straight into the sea-green-and-blue pools in the attractive face of his enemy. “This is all I want: that my friends – my crew – are safe.”

The enhanced man nodded. “I knew you’d ask for that.” He pulled one long leg closer to his chest and laid a forearm casually on his knee, the glass dangling between his elegant fingers. “So it seems we do share several traits.”

“You asked me once if there was anything I wouldn’t do for my family.” Kirk rubbed his neck, wincing as he touched the bruised skin there. “Well, I think I’ve answered your question.”

One side of Khan’s mouth curled up slightly. “So you do understand me.” He took a deep breath. “Where are my people?” He changed the subject, while his piercing gaze fixed back to the captain.

Well, that question was expected. And Jim had absolutely no answer for it. “I don’t know,” he sighed, returning the sharp glare of his foe with all the composure he could muster. If Khan didn’t believe him, he would try to get the information by using force, and Kirk very much didn’t want to undergo another beating. So he decided to tell the plain truth. “I woke up more than two weeks after the whole incident. It was several more days before the dizziness went away. Only then did I hear about your trial, your sentence, and that you had already been put back into cryosleep – together with
your crew. I asked Admiral Allistor, who was the temporary head of Starfleet Command at the time, for more details, but all I learned was that you and your people were locked away at a high security facility that no one could enter without permission or a direct order from the Admiralty.” He leaned his chin on his knee, his gaze never leaving the super-human.

Khan stared at him intently, pondering the younger man’s words carefully. Of course James Kirk wouldn’t give away the location of the Augments. He would be a fool if he did. The captain may be reckless at times, but he was no fool. So, there was a good chance his adversary had simply lied to him. On the other hand, Khan had a knack at sensing when people didn’t tell the truth, and he couldn’t find any hint that Kirk was lying just now. All he saw was plain sincerity.

“You and your Vulcan-puppy were the ones who, in the end, were responsible for my capture, yet they don’t trust you enough to inform you where they’d put your enemy?”

Jim shrugged. “This whole thing is top-secret. I’m pretty sure not even the President of the Federation knows the location of said facility.”

The Augment cocked his head. “But you have an idea.” It was a shot in the dark, but it paid off.

Kirk snorted quietly. “Not regarding the location, but I have every reason to believe that they’re no longer on Earth.”

“Why?”

“Well…” Kirk scratched his head before he wrapped the arm back around his knees. “It would be logical to choose a place out of reach – not that it helped. After all, if someone was able to take and abuse you… Well…” He grimaced and fell silent, while he waited for the super-human’s reaction, hoping that Khan believed his statement. If not, the next few minutes could be very unpleasant.

For a long time his foe didn’t say anything and just eyed him thoughtfully, then finally he nodded. “You’re telling the truth,” he said simply and emptied his glass, before placing it beside him, once again lost in thought.

His crew was safe but somewhere out there, out of his reach. They could be anywhere. It was like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack – and the galaxy was a big haystack! Still, he would try; he had no other choice. They were his family, his responsibility. He had to find and protect them, had to bring them to true safety, whatever the cost!
“What are you going to do now?” Kirk’s words pulled Khan back, and determination once again settled into his whole being. “I will search for them, even if it lasts a lifetime.”

Jim swallowed. “I knew you’d say that.” The words mirrored Khan’s earlier comment.

Both men fell silent, then the captain cleared his throat. “Those scientists, the ones who took you… Do you know who they are?”

Khan shook his head, damp hair falling across his forehead. “No, but I know the name of the facility in which I was imprisoned, ‘Starfleet Laboratory for Science and Healing’. The head scientist goes by the name of Matthew Dashwood – at least that’s what I heard whenever I was pulled out of the coma.”

This time Kirk frowned. “The LSH had you? Here, in San Francisco?”

“No, in an underground facility near Las Vegas,” the Augment answered coolly and Jim stared bewildered at him.

“In Nevada? I didn’t even know there was a lab there.” He shook his head. “And here I thought Section 31 had been dismantled! But it seems these bastards are still active. Only high-security officers could smuggle you away.”

“You know my opinion about your beloved Starfleet,” Khan stated dryly.

Jim bit his lip. “Nobody is perfect – that applies even to you.”

“Barely,” the Augment replied arrogantly and Kirk shook his head.

“Bastard,” he whispered under his breath, but it still was caught by the super-human’s enhanced hearing.

“For someone standing with one foot in their own grave already, you’re surprisingly reckless,” the
former dictator commented nonchalantly. “But then, ‘reckless’ should be your middle name, shouldn’t it?”

“But it’s not; it’s Tiberius.” Jim’s small smile blossomed into a grin upon seeing the look on Khan’s face, before he turned sober again, remembering the super-human’s earlier threat. Was Jim honestly sitting here on the floor, wearing only a towel and chit-chatting with Khan? Yes, he was! Someone should slap him.

He downed the remainder of his scotch and rose with anything but graceful movements – his back and butt still hurt. “Care for another one? I know I could use it.” Looking at Khan, he lifted his empty glass. He was a little surprised when Khan simply handed him his own glass.

“Go ahead, Kirk. Unlike you, alcohol doesn’t affect me.”

“You can’t get drunk?” Kirk asked, baffled. As the Augment nodded, he snorted, “Where’s the fun in that?”

“If you call suffering an immense headache and upset stomach ‘fun’, then I’m glad that I can’t experience such a thing.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “I’m not talking about the hangover, you know.” He headed towards the kitchenette.

Khan’s gaze followed him. The Augment was slightly amused by the casualness Kirk displayed to cover his unease. The younger man knew that he was still in danger and for good reason. Khan had had every intention to end the captain’s life when he broke into the apartment. Now, after learning that his family was alive, and that Kirk hadn’t intentionally missed his trial but had simply been too ill to attend the event, Khan’s urge to kill the officer had diminished. Not least of all because of the good time they’d shared on Jim’s king-sized bed.

It had been a very good time!

And Khan wanted more. It had been years since he’d experienced such intense sexual satisfaction – if at all – and his hunger wasn’t yet sated. Kirk was incredibly passionate, full of life and vitality. It lured the super-human to him like a moth to a flame, especially now, after the emotional chaos he’d endured a short time ago. Khan’s mind and body yearned for a distraction through which he could once again center himself.
As he watched his nemesis, taking in the broad shoulders and slim waist, lust rose in him once more. Kirk was not only spirited, but he was also terribly handsome, and his stubbornness was a challenge that only heightened the Augment’s desire. Tomorrow he would have a new purpose – not to seek revenge, but to find and to save his family. He knew a very long road lay ahead of him, one that might still lead to his death, so why not use these few hours to indulge his own needs? The night was still young, and it would be the last chance to find pleasure in another’s arms before he’d be on the run again.

Khan knew his escape must have been discovered by now and that Dashwood would inform Starfleet Command as soon as the security discovered that ‘the prisoner’ was no longer at the facility. But Khan had hidden his tracks well – out there, in the still crazy city of Las Vegas – and had laid a false trail that would lead his enemies to believe he was on another continent. Hours would elapse before Starfleet Command realized that they had been duped. Hours Khan planned to spend in the nicest way possible. Eventually he would run out of time, and he really wanted to have another round of hot fierce sex between the messy sheets before he challenged the entire universe again.

Soundlessly, he rose from the floor, his eyes fixed on the attractive shape of his captive. He assumed that Kirk would protest at first, but he was certain that he would soon come round. The younger man was as lustful as he was.

Jim had reached the kitchen counter and could almost feel Khan’s eyes on him. It sent a shiver down his spine and a new knot formed in his belly. Somehow the mood was changing again, and Kirk’s senses caught it easily. “So, alcohol has no effect on you,” he began in order to break the tense silence. “I suppose because of your super-blood. Do you think there is any chance that I will have acquired this side-effect too?”

“Would that be such a bad thing in your opinion?” The rich baritone sounded directly behind him, and Kirk almost jumped, dropping the bottle he’d held in his hand. The Augment’s reflexes saved the expensive whisky from being spilled on the floor.

“Easy, Kirk, a good single malt is a work of art,” Khan taunted, and placed the bottle back on the countertop.

“Jesus, don’t startle me like that!” Jim gasped, glaring at his foe. “You almost gave me a heart attack.”

“What would be a shame,” the super-human teased. “If I make your heart stop, it will be for quite another reason.”
The young captain tensed, misinterpreting the words. “I thought we were done with the whole ‘I-am-going-to-kill-you thing.”

Khan cocked his head and let his gaze roam over the beautiful man in front of him. “Whatever gave you that idea?” As his gaze met the clear blue eyes, he added, “After all, you did stab me in the back.”

Jim stiffened. Of course the Augment would bring that up. Yes, Kirk knew that he’d made a mistake when he ordered Scotty to stun the super-human as soon as they’d entered the bridge of the Vengeance. His act hadn’t differed one bit from the other misdeeds which had been levied at Khan, still Jim was sure that he hadn’t have had any other choice at that time. His nemesis had only agreed to help because he had his own agenda, and therefore the captain’s precaution had been justified.

“Don’t tell me that you didn’t intend to kill Marcus and use Scotty, Carol, and me as pawns as soon as you reached the bridge,” Jim said calmly, but also challengingly. “It was the only reason you joined me on the trip!”

Khan surveyed him thoughtfully. “Yes, I admit that I wanted to kill the man who’d brought all this anguish upon me – who’d blackmailed me by threatening my family’s life, who’d ordered tests run on me until I was nothing more than a barely-breathing mess. Marcus had to die! And I certainly would have used every opportunity to get my crew back.” His gaze became piercing. “But I thought you to be someone who had honor. In a certain way you do, yet on the other hand, you did exactly the same: you used me!” He lifted a hand as Kirk went to protest. “I heard every word you said to that sorry excuse of an officer. You didn’t trust him, but the same went for me – after I twice saved your life.”

‘And his selfless sacrifice later saved not only his crew, but also your family!’ an inner voice reminded Khan less-than-helpfully.

‘He wanted to save his ship and his own crew. He never would have gone through all this if only the lives of your people had been at stake!’ the angry part of Khan’s mind replied, but was silenced again by that damn other inner voice. ‘Still, they are only alive because of him!’

Jim took a deep breath, feeling a pang of guilt, not aware of the inner turmoil his captor was going through. “I haven’t forgotten that you saved me,” he agreed softly. “The Klingon would have shot me if you hadn’t interfered. Or I would have been lost as I flew blindly towards the Vengeance. I don’t even care that you didn’t do it out of kindness, but for your own advantage. Despite that, I also knew your real reasons to ally with me, and nothing was going to stop you.”
“Still, I wouldn’t have threatened you,” the Augment growled and Kirk lifted both brows.

“And how would you have ‘persuaded’ Spock to give you your crew if you hadn’t blackmailed him with Scotty’s, Carol’s, and my lives?” He looked straight into the pale sea-colored eyes. “I admit that I made a mistake by ordering Scotty to stun you, but I saw no other way to prevent you from doing what you were so obviously going to.” He moistened his lips. “And by the way, you did pay me back by beating me into a bloody pulp.”

“That was for Qo’noS,” Khan commented dryly.

Jim had the urge to roll his eyes again. “Oh come on, you’re only annoyed because I was a step ahead of you.”

“No, Kirk. I already told you that you’ve got brains, and when someone tries to outsmart me, I see it for what it is: a challenge. You, on the other hand, betrayed me.” He lifted one hand and cupped Kirk’s neck. “I’ve taken lives for less.”

The young officer felt another flash of fear; nevertheless, he said outright, “Still you won’t kill me now.”

An evil smirk tugged at Khan’s well-shaped lips. “You’re right, Kirk. I am far from done with you.” He lowered his arm and put both hands on the countertop beside Jim’s hips, effectively trapping him. Their bare chests almost touched, the warmth that radiated from their skin traveled straight into their veins, heating up their blood.

Jim’s face flushed as he recognized the desire flashing in the super-human’s eyes. “Don’t tell me you’re up for more…” He waved towards the bed and the Augment chuckled.

“Yes, I am.” Khan nodded, and pressed himself against the slightly smaller body, eliciting a quiet gasp from the captain, before Kirk tried to push him away.

“Stop it! This is –”

“– something you want as badly as I,” his adversary cut in, bent forwards, and whispered into his
ear, “You can’t lie to me, dear Captain.” His hot breath washed over the hypersensitive spot on Jim’s neck where Khan had marked him. “I know you’d like me to take you again.” He nuzzled the delicate skin behind Jim’s ear, reveling in the clean scent of shampoo and Kirk himself, while his hands now wandered over the captain’s broad back. “You would love to be consumed once more – here on the counter, or over there against the wall. Or back on the bed.” His voice was a deep husky purr, and the young officer sensed the all-too-familiar fire lapping beneath his skin, finding its way through his entire being.

“This… is insane,” Jim whispered, realizing that he – indeed – didn’t want Khan to stop. He hated his nemesis for making him feel this way, yet he knew that he couldn’t win against his own desire. Nevertheless, he did protest as the Augment pulled away their towels, but his curses were swallowed by soft lips. Khan simply closed his mouth over Jim’s, and then deepened the kiss instantly.

Only as Khan suddenly lifted him and sat him on the kitchen counter, did a small spark of sanity kick in, and Kirk turned his head away. “We can’t… This is madness!”

“Yes it is,” the enhanced man murmured, while he stepped between Kirk’s legs. “But there’s no reason to not let it happen. There is only us and this night – a night we will not waste with false modesty.” His hands cupped Kirk’s face and gently urged him to look at him. “You were born for living out your passion, James Tiberius Kirk, and I will not allow you to deny us both what we want because of some foolish pretense.” He pulled the younger man into a strong embrace, brought their groins together and began to attack his senses in the most erotic way possible.

And for a long time after, there was nothing to be heard but gasps and lustful moans.

ST***ST***ST

“Why wasn’t I informed sooner?” Admiral Richard Barnett’s voice thundered through the small meeting room on the 10th floor of Starfleet’s headquarters. It was three o’clock in the morning and that he’d left his apartment in a rush was plain to see by the way he was soaked through, having not bothered to grab an umbrella after receiving the message from his secretary.

When he’d been told that the terrorist Khan had somehow escaped, Barnett had thought his secretary was joking, but the man had been deadly serious. Khan Noonien Singh, the leader of the 20th century Augments, who should be in cryosleep and locked away on Gamma 12, was not only free, but also here on Earth! This was a security nightmare and nothing less.

The dark eyes of the African man roamed over those present. The assembled men looked taken aback by this unusual display of temper displayed by the head of Starfleet.
Included in their number was Admiral James Komack, Chief of Starfleet Administration after the death of his predecessor, Maurice Deboix. Before ‘Daystrom’, Komack’s responsibilities had mainly focused on the selection of Starfleet Academy’s teaching staff. Now, he’d moved up the ladder to become one of the Chiefs of Starfleet Command. He was in his mid-forties, with a stout body that spoke of a healthy appetite and little exercise. His dark eyes in a round face often showed a calmness that belied a strong contrast to his words.

To his left sat Admiral José Luengo, Chief of Starfleet’s Bureau of Information –SBI for short – and one of the most important heads of Starfleet Command. He answered only to the Federation Council and the president himself, just like Barnett. He was a Spaniard in his early fifties, with a smattering of silver in his black hair and moustache.

To Komack’s right sat Commander Ethan Stones, one of the highest ranking officers in Starfleet Security, and Admiral Albert Norton, Chief of Starfleet Research and Development. With his silver-blond hair, the light gray eyes and the hard features of the forty-three year-old man reminded others of a sharp blade, ready to slice his way through every problem that arose.

The four men looked straight at Barnett as the doors closed automatically behind him. The light was dimmed to eighty percent, and aside from the soft buzzing of several computer terminals, it was silent in the room. A room that smelled of coffee and stress.

“My secretary told me something I cannot believe,” Barnett said, his voice betraying his rising anger. “The man we have come to know as Khan is not only no longer in cryosleep, he is no longer in the security facility of Gamma 12. He’s actually here on Earth. Is there anyone in this room who’s able to tell me how this happened? And why I wasn’t called immediately after you all learned of this debacle?”

Norton glanced at the annoyed Commander-in-Chief and cleared his throat. “You should know, Richard, that Khan had never left Earth,” he said, not waiting for Barnett’s response. “His cryotube remained in one of the highest security cells in the Science Department, and was only transferred to the LSH about four months ago. It seems one of the scientists miscalculated the sedative being used on him and he woke up fully from the coma he’d been held in. Now he’s on the run.”

Richard Barnett stared speechless at him, then at the others – and took the next free chair. For several seconds, he was unable to muster a clear thought, then he inhaled deeply. “Do I understand you correctly, Albert? Have you just told me that a direct order from the Federation Council to remove the Augments from Earth wasn’t obeyed, and that you let this living weapon remain on our planet to be used…for what exactly?” His voice was dangerously low, but Norton answered him stoically.
“Khan’s blood is extremely valuable, as are the rest of his cells. Professor Matthew Dashwood, head of the LSH, informed me that several tests Marcus ran on the Augment showed encouraging results in the development of serums to fight against the most widespread and deadliest diseases in the Federation. So why waste the opportunity to heal millions by letting this bastard rot in that frozen state? This way, he’s at least useful for something.”

Outside, thunder rolled and perfectly mirrored Barnett’s mood. “There are three reasons why Khan should ‘rot’ in cryosleep, as you called it. First, to send him away with his people was the resolution of the Council, which you have no right to subvert. Second, there are laws which forbid the use of involuntary test subjects, and I highly doubt that you asked him before you handed him to the labs. Third, you broke the fundamental right of every intelligent being: no human should be used as a god-damn lab-rat!”

“He is not human – not in the usual sense,” Albert replied calmly. “He is a genetically enhanced subject, bred in a lab and…”

“Sweet Lord,” Richard cut in, “Are we really still that backwards? Augmented or not, this man is a living and feeling being! Yes, a dangerous criminal, but he is human! Of course he has to serve his sentence, but not by being abused!” He took a deep breath. “Who ordered this insanity? You, Albert? Or you, José?” His dark eyes pierced one man after the other.

“The order had been given by Admiral Allistor – the interim Chief of Command before he died in the terrible ion storm his ship fell prey to eleven months ago when you were nominated as head of Starfleet,” Komack explained.

“And you knew this all along?” Barnett asked sharply. The other man shook his head.

“No, I only learned about it four hours ago because Commander Stones and Admiral Norton were in my office when the duty officer of the Security Department reported that the LSH was on red alert.” His small eyes fixed on Norton and then Luengo. “Only then did I learn of Allistor’s order that the two went along with, despite the fact that the Federation Council had decided differently.”

“With all due respect, gentlemen, before we continue arguing about this special order or the subject’s rights, we should turn our attention towards the present problem.” Stones rose to speak. “Khan has fled the LSH and was headed towards Las Vegas.”

“Wonderful! A homicidal psychopath in a town full of fun-seeking people is exactly what we need!” Barnett groaned. “As if we don’t have enough problems – like the Klingons preparing for war!” He shook his head and gestured the commander to continue.
“The fugitive used the credit card of the LSH employee whose identity he stole exactly three times: once to purchase clothing, once at a people-mover station, and finally at an official transporter station, buying a ticket to be beamed to London. His decision to return to the UK makes sense. After all, that is where he was stationed after Marcus woke him, and he knows the city. Additional reports reached me shortly before you arrived, Admiral, reporting that there was an incident at London’s space port. It seems someone tried to steal a small warp-ship, but Security was called, and the almost-thief is now on the run – after throwing the whole port into chaos.”

“Khan?” Richard asked and Stones shrugged.

“It’s not confirmed, but possible. If he’s learned that his people are no longer on Earth, he certainly will try to find them – as impossible as it is.”

“And there I thought his first act would be to seek revenge,” Kormack sighed, which made Barnett take note.

“Did someone warn Kirk and his senior officers? After all, it was the Enterprise’s crew that defeated Khan!”

“We saw no reason to worry them after Khan’s trail led to London,” the commander said. “And the fewer people who know about this mess, the better. I don’t want to risk panic among the population if news breaks out that the terrorist who attacked Starfleet Command, and who’s responsible for a spaceship crashing into San Francisco Bay is on the run. Until now, he’s only killed when provoked. If he feels threatened, he could react like the animal he is.”

The Chief of Command bit his tongue as he heard the security commander refer to the former agent as an ‘animal’. He’d always hated name-calling in general, but right now they had other problems.

“Is there any proof that Khan is in London?” he demanded. “Or could he have left a false trail?”

“My people are already checking security cameras in the space port and technicians are comparing his DNA with the transporter input in Las Vegas. If he used the transporter, his signal will be recorded as well as the final location he was beamed to,” Ethan Stones stated. “If he didn’t go to London, we’ll know soon.”

Barnett pressed his lips into a thin line, while his gaze wandered to the large windows showing the
dark skyline of San Francisco and the still-raging thunder storm. Not half an hour ago he’d been sleeping peacefully. Now he sat in one of Starfleet Command’s meeting rooms, learning that some of his colleagues thought that the order of a dead admiral carried more weight than a resolution of the Federation Council. And because of that, one of Earth’s most dangerous individuals roamed free on the planet.

“Right,” he finally growled. “Keep me updated, Commander! I want to know every new detail, even if it seems unimportant. What about the unlucky fellow who woke Khan up, or the man he took the identity card from?”

The four other men exchanged looks before José said, “Surprisingly, they are alive. Doctor Ryan Brown was found in Khan’s cryotube, put into cryosleep, and Doctor Hendrikson was sedated and locked away in the changing room.”

“So, he didn’t kill them?” Richard was relieved, but also confused. The Augment hadn’t shown any mercy before, so why now? “You would think that he’d at least want to take revenge on the scientist who was directly involved with his enforced stay in the lab.”

“The cryotube is linked to an alert system. If it is shut down for more than half an hour, the alarm will sound. And the tube doesn’t operate without a living body inside,” Albert explained.

“Well, you could say that this time, the rabbit put the hunter in the oven!” Stones sighed, and ignored the sharp glances of the admirals.

“Only that this ‘rabbit’ is, in truth, fiercer than a le-matya and that the ‘hunter’ – us – could fall prey to his fury,” José grumbled.

Barnett nodded. “Okay, gentlemen, it’s now of the greatest importance that we find and arrest Khan Noonien Singh as soon as possible, before he can do any harm. I don’t want to get a report that he’s slaughtered one of our finest captains and his senior officers – or that he declared vengeance on us all. But afterwards,” his gaze fixed on Luengo and Norton, “You will have to answer to the Council. This I can promise you.” He rose. “I want an emergency meeting with the chiefs of all appropriate departments in one hour – and get Dashwood here. I have many questions for him!”

TBC…
BANG! Poor Barnett! All these injustices were going on right under his nose and he didn’t have a clue. But if you are taking on the duty of a predecessor who was killed, there will always some secrets which had gone to the grave with him and only come to light by accident – like now. And Barnett is one of the chiefs with morals and who follows and the law. Therefore, he will have a lot to do in the near future.

In the next chapter, Khan will have to make a decision regarding his no-longer-so-unwilling captive, Starfleet Command will find his tracks, and Spock and Uhura will show up (sorry for the delay of their appearance, but this chapter was more focused on a special captain and Augment).

I hope the last installment fulfilled your expectations. It wasn’t easy to write the spiral of emotions Kirk and Khan went through, and I hope you liked it (please let me know; I’m really eager to learn of your thoughts).

Till next time,

Yours Starflight
Decisions

Chapter Notes

Hi, dear Readers!

First, I have to thank you once again for the reviews and kudos – and that so many readers are already following my story. It is a lot of fun to write, to add details to the main plot, and to let the whole thing unfold more and more.

The next chapter will contain some surprises and twists concerning the plot and the emotions of Jim and Khan. And, as promised, Spock and Uhura are making their first appearance; the same goes for Bones, if only by communicator (just guess why – laugh). And Starfleet realizes where Khan has to be, which results in only one thing: a manhunt.

I hope you enjoy the next update and I would be very, very happy to get some more reviews. Please tell me what you think about the whole thing.

Have a nice Sunday and a good start into the next week,

Yours, Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4 – Decisions

Breathless and utterly exhausted, Jim Kirk lay in the darkness. Only the lightning from the passing thunderstorm allowed him to so see anything – if he’d bothered to open his eyes, that was. His whole body hurt – mostly in a good way – but there were parts of him still aching which he really didn’t want to think about. He knew that sitting down would probably be painful for the next couple of days, and there were bruises from Khan’s initial violent attack forming on his skin, not to mention the love bites which he’d have to hide for even longer. Hopefully Bones wouldn’t insist on a medical check when they boarded the Enterprise in a few days. Having to explain those might be rather awkward.

Well, he could worry about all of this later. That was, if he survived the encounter with Khan, who currently rested beside him.

One of the super-human’s strong arms and one long leg were wrapped around the young captain, while the Augment spooned against him. Jim could feel the soft heartbeat of his nemesis at his back as it returned to normal. The lean muscular body was warm and sweaty, and hot breath danced over Kirk’s neck as Khan simply held him. Obviously, their last round had finally tired the man out, despite the enhancements.
Jim wasn’t going to complain that his foe was finally satisfied; he wouldn’t have been able to withstand much more anyway. He’d lost count of how many times his insatiable bed-fellow had taken him to the heights; how often those clever hands, talented tongue, and thick cock had drawn Jim into another round of mind-blowing sex. And not only on the bed, but also on the floor, on the damned kitchen counter and even – like the Augment had suggested – against the wall. One thing Jim was certain of, it was unlikely he’d survive another session, despite the associated ecstasy. His head ached, his limbs were trembling with exhaustion, and his ass hurt like hell. As it was, his heart had threatened to burst right out of his chest when Khan had taken him the last time.

Never before had Kirk felt so drained, yet entirely sated. He wanted nothing more than to lie here and sleep until the next evening. But, it seemed his captor had other plans, as the super-human tightened his hold around him. He would never have thought of Khan as being a cuddler – well, he’d never thought to end up in bed with the super-human at all – but he had to admit that he rather liked how the Augment spooned against him. Yet his nemesis was up for something more, and Jim didn’t think he had the energy for whatever the other man had in mind.

“Tired?” The deep baritone sounded slightly hoarse, which made Kirk feel just a little smug. Obviously, he wasn’t the only one whose voice had suffered.

“You could say that,” the young captain mumbled.

“A shame. The morning hasn’t come yet and…”

“Don’t tell me that you still want more!” Jim interrupted him, and then yawned. “Even you should be groggy by now.”

“You think so?” Warm lips brushed over the dark purple love bite on the officer’s neck and Kirk groaned.

“Not again, Khan! I swear, one more time and I’ll meet my maker.”

A soft rumble vibrated at his back, as the Augment chuckled. “Sexed to death.”

“What a way to go,” Jim observed and moistened his lips. He was obviously too weary to think straight.
“If this is how you want to die, I can do that,” the raspy voice murmured in his ear, followed by a gentle nip at his skin.

“Could we change this whole thing to ‘sexed into oblivion’ instead?” Jim asked hopefully, and this time the response was something he’d never heard before: rich, deep laughter that sounded like velvet. It sent a pleasant shiver through him, which was something he really didn’t want to dwell on, especially when they were technically discussing his death.

“I knew you’d say something like that,” Khan smirked. “And, as far as I can sense, you’re already at the point of ‘oblivion’, aren’t you?”

“Just give me a short break and maybe I’ll be up for another round, like in three days or so.” Kirk sounded as if he were almost halfway to dreamland. The super-human felt unusually protective, and he strengthened his embrace. ‘He is mine!' the unwelcome voice from hours ago whispered in his soul again, and irritated, he shook it off. But deep down, he knew that he wouldn’t have any say in this matter. It was Khan’s own blood that was calling to him; the small amount of his blood that circulated through the younger man’s veins. That, and the damned lust he still felt for him.

Khan pursed his lips, while his eyes wandered to the nightstand. Two emptied glasses of water stood where he’d set them earlier to help himself and his unwilling lover to rehydrate. Beside the glasses was the alarm clock, showing it was almost four AM. Khan suppressed a sigh. The moment when he had to decide what to do with his captive was quickly approaching. But there was still a little time left, so he would lie here for a while and rest. Khan would never admit it, but the cocktail of sedatives which had been injected into his system over the last months, combined with all the passionate activity of the last few hours were taking their toll. He was tired, but he knew that it could – and would – be dangerous for him to fall asleep. No, it was better to –

The thought was cut short by soft snoring coming from the man in his arms. Lifting his head, Khan peered down at Jim’s youthful face, taking in how innocent and peaceful it looked. With a sigh, he lay back and relaxed. There wasn’t much he could do right now. Pulling Kirk closer, he decided to use the little time that was left to regain some strength, while his body was busy healing his sore groin and the lust-filled marks Kirk had left on his shoulders and chest during their passionate coupling.

Closing his eyes, he focused on rest and reflection, knowing that these would most likely be the last minutes of peace for a long time…
“Admiral Barnett, sir, my men have a full report from Las Vegas.” Commander Ethan Stones’ voice sounded calm as he watched the Chief of Command, after glancing quickly at the admiral’s guests: Professor Matthew Dashwood and Doctor Nathan Conelly, Dashwood’s deputy, who had come straight from home to the headquarters after being informed of events. Admiral Luengo and Admiral Norton were still present, as well as Stones’ superior, Admiral Michael Parker, Chief of Starfleet Security.

“We talked to the shop owner where the prisoner bought his clothes. If he’s still wearing what he bought, Khan’s in black, with a black coat. My men searched the nearest recyclers, but the garments the prisoner took from Dr. Hendrikson weren’t found.”

“Is the shop owner okay?” Conelly asked with no emotion in his voice. He was a man in his early fifties, with pale blue eyes and salt-and-pepper hair. His accent denoted a British upbringing.

Stones spared him only a short glare, knowing about Conelly’s involvement with Section 31. He’d not been sentenced because his attorneys had proved he’d done nothing more than relay orders. “Yes, the man is okay,” the commander answered the doctor’s question flatly. “He told my men that his client had been very polite. There was a security camera installed in his shop. The film that was taken of Khan is already copied to your terminals, gentlemen.” He gave a curt nod towards the screens in front of the admirals.

“What is even more interesting, are the records of the official transporter units, which showed that the fugitive never used them,” he continued, getting the expected reaction.

“What?” Barnett gasped, while Parker frowned.

“So, he’s still in Las Vegas?”

“We don’t think so,” Stones answered. “The cameras on the streets show him stepping into the official transporter area, and as he left it half an hour later, using a people mover that headed in a westerly direction.” He gestured towards the screens and Barnett obtained the corresponding records. His face was grim as he watched the man in question coming out of a clothing shop. “My men are already checking all the stations, which are also automatically observed anyway. Still, there’s a chance that he got away unnoticed by the cameras,” Stones continued. “But I think he spotted the cameras and avoided them.” He took a deep breath. “He is clever, I’ve to give him that.”

“Clever and brilliant,” Dashwood murmured. “How he tricked us all at the lab, the way he
escaped…”

“I warned you from the beginning, Matthew,” Nathan Conelly remarked, and the professor threw up his hands.

“I know, but we had everything under control – or so we thought. But I agree; we should have been more alert.” He shook his head. “Scans showed that the subject has an IQ of over 300, even higher than Leonardo da Vinci, who was the most brilliant mind on our planet.”

“And here I thought Einstein had been the genius,” Parker commented dryly.

“Oh, Einstein only had an IQ of 126,” Matthew answered, but went silent as Barnett cut in, “As interesting a discussion of the most intelligent minds of Earth is, I do think we have more important things to do!” He looked back at Stones. “If Khan didn’t use the transporter unit in Las Vegas – any of them, if I understand you correctly – there are only two possibilities left: he is still in town, which I doubt, or he used an alternative method, like –”

A signal interrupted him, and a voice called through the intercom, “Lieutenant Olsen to Commander Stones! Please answer!”

Richard opened the channel. “Admiral Barnett speaking. Commander Stones is here with me. Report, Lieutenant.”

The man at the other end of the link didn’t hesitate. “Sir, one of my subordinates reported that there must have been a cyber-attack on several staff members’ files.”

Everyone in the room stiffened. “A cyber-attack?” Parker repeated, alarmed. “Was it successful? Did the hacker get around our security measures?”

“Yes, they were able to overcome every defensive measure our best experts programmed – and they even reactivated the security programs after several files were checked,” the voice sounded through the intercom.

“An insider?” Luengo asked.
“Or a former one,” Barnett growled, assuming the worst. “Whose files have been activated?”

“We are still checking it, sir,” Olsen gritted out. “Whoever the bastards were, they were able to cut through our security like a warm knife through butter, and hid their tracks well!”

“Keep us updated, Lieutenant!” The Chief of Command ordered. “I have a very bad feeling about all of this.”

ST***ST***ST

Something told Khan that he was running out of time, and so he finished his meditation. One look at the clock confirmed what he already knew. He’d rested for half an hour – not long, considering even he needed to recover, but it had to be enough for now. The early dawn turned the skies grey, but he could see soft rose and yellow hues on the horizon, as he lifted his head and glanced out of the windows. Obviously, the weather had calmed down and the sky had cleared. Funny, how nature could mirror fate.

His attention was driven back to his bedfellow, who slept soundly beside him. Kirk hadn’t moved since he’d drifted off, and one would have thought him to be out cold, if it weren’t for the quiet snoring.

Khan moistened his lips. He felt a hint of reluctance to leave the bed and his unwilling lover, still he had no choice. It was only a matter of time until Starfleet tracked him down, and he had to be out of range when the bloodhounds came after him. With a bitter smile, he realized how fitting the term ‘bloodhound’ was; after all, he only was valuable to them because of his blood.

Careful not to wake the young captain, he untangled himself from him, feeling a short pang of loss as he moved away. He suppressed an irritated growl as his body protested while he was rising. Even augmented, he was still human, and he didn’t need to look down to know that a certain part of his anatomy would be sore for several hours. At least he wouldn’t suffer as long as Kirk would, he thought wryly.

Sparing his ‘captive’ a last glance, he walked over to where he’d left his clothes, collected the phaser and, just in case, took it with him into the bathroom, only realizing now that Kirk must have seen it as he poured them the whisky in the kitchen. Still, the captain hadn’t used it. He’d had a chance to overpower Khan then, considering the super-human’s emotional break-down during those several minutes. The Augment asked himself why his nemesis hadn’t used the opportunity.
He remembered the look in the sky blue eyes of the younger man; there had been fear and tension, but above all, a hint of compassion. Khan loathed pity, but he could differentiate between pity and empathy. Kirk had shown understanding for him, something the Augment hadn’t experienced for an eternity – especially not during his forced encounter with Section 31, or the last four months in the lab. The Enterprise’s captain had treated him like a human, and Khan felt a soft wave of gratitude towards the young officer.

Ending his shower soon after he’d cleaned himself of all the sweat and semen, he left the stall, dried himself, and quickly looked into the mirror. Surprised, he pursed his lips as he saw the love bites and slightly pink bruises Kirk’s passion had left on his skin. And he knew there was even more proof of Kirk’s burning lust on his back. His captive had turned from being the prey of an expert seduction into an all-too-willing lover, even if he never stopped protesting whenever Khan insisted on another round. James Kirk was just as lustful and fervent as he; giving back as much as he received. He was all claws, teeth, and tongue when driven to the brink of ecstasy. Still he never hurt his partner, even if he could have, and even shared gentle caresses with Khan in the aftermath, not caring that his bedfellow was, in truth, his enemy.

And it had felt good – incredibly good. At some point during the night, the Augment had realized that he hadn’t had to be on guard; that the younger man wouldn’t try something foolish like attacking him at every opportunity. Usually Khan loved a challenge, but after the last months, he was glad to spend several hours without being forced to be cautious.

Carefully, he touched the bruise on his throat, smiling as he remembered the moment Kirk gave it to him, lost in utter lust. It was a shame that it would fade soon; his genetically enhanced blood would heal it all too quickly. Still, it had left a mark on him – not on his body, but on his soul.

And with that, the crucial question rose in his mind once more. What should he do now about his handsome, passionate foe? Regarding all the given facts, Kirk was in his own way a threat to him. The Augment knew that the officer wouldn’t have any other choice than to alert Starfleet as soon as he was alone – but would it really matter? Starfleet was already on his tail, so one more rumor about his location wouldn’t change Khan’s situation. Yet there was still his wish for revenge; Kirk had used and betrayed him during the encounter with Marcus. But the young man had also risked his career to give Khan a fair trial, a trial that never took place. But Kirk couldn’t have known that. The boyish captain had honor and a conscience – two rare characteristics these days among all those self-aggrandizing commanding officers of Starfleet – and he acted on those no matter what. If he didn’t, Khan wouldn’t now be standing here, pondering Kirk’s fate.

The super-human sighed and smoothed his hair back. He always did what was necessary, still he was torn between his old anger and the possessiveness awoken in him during these last hours. Kirk was his now – not only because of the Augment’s blood in his veins, but also because of their wild coupling that night. They’d even marked each other. To the captain it would be only a severe bruise – a memento of the lusty madness they’d both been caught up in – but in ancient cultures it meant so much more. To mark someone like that was comparable with laying claim on them. And in the eastern world, where Khan had been raised, many customs of those old cultures were still alive,
which now stirred in his subconscious. The Augment sensed a kind of bond towards the younger man; a bond that would grow if given a chance.

A chance that lay solely in his hands and would slip through his fingers if he were to stay true to his word and kill the captain. But that was a promise he’d made in pain and fury, when he’d still thought his family dead. Now, everything had changed. His crew was alive, and aside from his wish for vengeance upon those who’d used him once again as a lab rat, he had now a new purpose. Something he hadn’t dared to hope for – and he had Kirk to thank for it.

And, he suddenly realized, this new opportunity would be lost if he didn’t leave this apartment soon!

Irritated with himself that he simply remained there daydreaming despite the feelings it invoked, he left the bathroom and returned to the living area. His glance found the sleeping form of Kirk, and he noticed that the young captain had shifted, displaying his glorious backside. A very red and painful-looking backside, and for a moment Khan smirked, sympathizing. Kirk would be in no small amount of pain when sitting down for the next few days – if he were even still alive then.

Khan dressed quickly, stuck the phaser into his belt at the back, and searched for his shirt which he’d earlier used to tie Kirk’s hand to the bed. He found it next to the nightstand where it had been thrown during the night. It was rumpled and one sleeve was torn, but the Augment didn’t care. He slipped it on before his eyes took in the sprawled shape between the sheets once more.

He took a deep breath. He couldn’t delay his decision any longer, and with one long step he closed the distance to the bed, his glance fixed on the young Starfleet officer. Kirk lay there, peacefully and uncaring, as though nothing could happen to him. He had wrapped both arms around his pillow, his still-swollen lips slightly apart, a soft smile playing around them. He was the picture of utter innocence, even with all the marks of their carnal pleasures displayed on him. Khan listened to the steady breathing and heartbeat, and his gaze refocused over the red mark on the younger man’s neck – a neck he had vowed to snap. But Khan found himself unable to do so.

And then the sun rose over the horizon, illuminating the apartment in its warm glow; bathing the sleeping figure on the bed in a golden hue. It was the beginning of a new day after a long and stormy night, like a light of hope in the blackness of despair.

In that moment, the Augment knew that he couldn’t end Kirk’s life, the life of the man who had become his lover for a short stolen time. Just as the sun ended the darkest hours, James had brought him new hope. He’d reached out and soothed Khan’s pain as Khan had been driven to the ends of his emotional limits when learning his family still lived and that his grief had been for naught.
The memory of that sheer human gesture was like the last stone in the mosaic-like arrangement of reasons of why he wouldn’t harm the other man. Khan didn’t regret the beating he’d given Kirk earlier – after all, the officer had earned the super-human’s wrath – but he wouldn’t hurt him further. Rather the opposite; Khan knew when he was in someone’s debt, and he always repaid his debts.

Bending down, Khan slid long elegant fingers carefully through Jim’s tousled hair, which gleamed like gold in the sunlight. It was a sentimental gesture, the Augment’s cold rational side would even call it ‘pathetic’, yet it felt right. His future held only adventure, uncertainty, and danger; a long dark road he would walk alone until the bitter end. And so he allowed himself to have a moment of warmth and tenderness.

“Farewell, James,” he whispered, and for several seconds he yearned for the chance to find peace at the younger man’s side for more than one night. Then his determination returned with renewed strength. Relishing one last moment with his unexpected lover, Khan finally turned away to pick-up his cloak. He frowned as he saw the up-turned coffee table nearby.

Even in a million years, Khan wouldn’t be able to explain why he did what he did now. A minute later the piece of heavy furniture was replaced back to where it belonged, and even the end table stood upright where it should be. Looking around him, the Augment spotted Kirk’s desk, and giving in to an all-too-human whim, he stepped to the desk, searching for a piece of paper.

Shortly afterwards, the front door of the apartment closed softly behind him. His feet barely made any noises as he headed towards the lift, his brilliant mind already plotting the next step he would need to take in order to find his crew. His revenge on the LSH and those members of Starfleet Command who’d decided to return him to the scientists could wait. First, he had to bring his family to safety so that no one would ever be able again to use them as leverage against him. It was a shame that he hadn’t know about their survival yesterday when he’d hacked into Starfleet’s files. Perhaps then he could have been able to find out something about their location. But that chance was now gone; Starfleet would certainly change its security protocols as soon as they realized that they’d had a ‘visitor’.

He left the building without incident and breathed deeply in the clear, cool morning air. He crossed the street, before looking back one last time. Up there, asleep on the 48th level, was the man he had come to kill. But James Kirk had proved to be more valuable than Khan might have ever thought. And furthermore, he wasn’t out of his system. Even after hours of wild and passionate sex, the Augment still longed for him, desired him beyond all reason.

But there was now no possibility for Khan to claim the other man, even as his instincts told him to do so; they had to go their separate ways. Yet a certain feeling in his gut told Khan that they would meet again – somewhere out there between the stars.
At the same time, the tension in the roomful of chief officers was almost unbearable. Lieutenant Olsen from Security contacted the admirals and his commander once again, sounding highly agitated. “Sir, we were finally able to discover whose files had been activated by the hacker. They’re those of Captain Kirk, Commander Spock and –”

“GOD DAMMIT!” It was one of the rare times Barnett’s temper got away from him. “I knew it! It was him – and he’s after Kirk and his crew, just as I feared! And here you thought it wouldn’t be necessary to warn them!” he all but snapped at Luengo and Stones.

Parker once more demonstrated the strict discipline for which he was famous. “When was the cyber-attack, and are we able to glean the location of the blackhat from it?”

“We’re working on it, but as it seems, the attack was hours ago. It was made from a terminal in Las Vegas – a terminal we located in the lobby of the Ambassador Hotel.”

“He went to a hotel to hack into our systems?” Luengo whispered, thunderstruck. “Simply like that?”

“An old agent-trick: if you can’t hide then walk in plain sight. No one will guess you’d do such a thing,” Conelly commented under his breath. He caught Barnett’s gaze and added, “He was trained by Section 31, after all. They trained him too well, it seems.”

“There’s more, sir!” Olsen’s growling voice sounded through the intercom. “Two of my superiors are already at the hotel. It has a private transporter and –”

“And Khan used it to leave town without us noticing!” Parker ended the sentence. “Shit, he’s even better than we thought.”

“Which parts of the crew files were opened?” Stones demanded. The answer gave Barnett and the others a sinking feeling. “Their addresses on Earth!”

For a long moment, the four admirals and the commander only stared at each other, then they moved into action.
“He’s here in San Francisco,” José muttered and rose, while Stones sped to another terminal, opening a channel. “Lieutenant Favelli, hail Captain Kirk and Commander Spock immediately, priority one. Warn them that the terrorist Khan Noonien Singh has escaped and knows where they live. He’s most certainly on his way to exact revenge on them. Send security to accompany them to headquarters! I want them off the street and brought to safety!”

In the meantime, Barnett had bent forward, as if wanting to jump into the intercom terminal on the desk, and called his secretary. “Muster the entire crew of the Enterprise, including all senior officers. Make certain they are transported to their ship as soon as possible, security level one!”

Parker, who was about to leave the room, turned around at these words. “What for, Richard?”

“The Enterprise is in space, and therefore out of Khan’s reach – hopefully!”

The Chief of Starfleet Security nodded. “A wise move. If you’ll excuse me, I have to launch a dragnet operation. Thank the lord that it’s early morning; a manhunt in the middle of rush-hour could lead to disaster.”

Barnett turned towards the two scientists. “Pray that we catch this bastard before the streets are full of people heading for work! Any bloodshed will be on your hands – as it will be on yours, Albert,” he added, glaring at Norton.

Then he took a deep breath in order to calm himself. His staff was acting as expected, quick, cool, logical. Still, there was nagging unease in his mind, and he sent a hurried prayer to the heavens that the warnings hadn’t come too late. It would be a hard loss for Starfleet to lose one of its best – and most unique – captains, and certainly its best science officer. Besides, they both had once been his students, students who’d given him his first grey hair, to be sure. But it would still sadden Barnett to have to stand at their graves.

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He didn’t want to wake up. He knew that he really should let sleep claim him once more, but still, he had this damn gut feeling that something was wrong. Only slowly, he realized the light that shone dimly through his closed lids meant that it was morning. Well, morning was good – as long as he could sleep late, but somehow his subconscious was of the opinion he shouldn’t listen to the seductive whispers of his bed. And – of course – once his subconscious started to complain, it only got stronger until he had to give in.
Slowly, hesitantly, an unwilling Jim Kirk opened his eyes. And then closed them promptly as the golden sunlight blinded him. This indeed meant that it was early morning, or otherwise, the sun would already be higher without blazing at that angle through the window. In other words, he had plenty of time before he had to check in at headquarters and –

Shifting only slightly, he realized his whole body hurt! He felt an uncomfortable pressure in his chest, every muscle ached, and… And his butt felt as though someone had stuck a burning torch into it!

Not a torch, but…

Within seconds, Jim was wide awake as the memories flooded his foggy mind. He’d been thoroughly fucked by none other than KHAN!

In his mind’s eye, high cheekbones, sea-green eyes, and well-shaped lips appeared, while damp, almost black hair fell over a high forehead. Not only that, but imagines of them together whirled through him; of the Augment’s face, flushed in ecstasy as he drove into Jim over and over again, making him mad with desire and giving him the most intense orgasms he’d ever experienced. Their kisses – the hot, and the almost-soft ones – the caresses, the bites, their clinging to each other that had been more clawing than anything else… They both had been like animals, driven wild with lust, unable to keep their hands off each other.

“Holy shit!” Jim let out a loud groan and lifted his head, expecting to face his enemy-turned-to-lover right in front of him. But his gaze fell only on the gouge in the wall that his flying coffee table had left. The furniture itself was missing.

Okay, there were certainly bigger problems now than that. Like, for example, was the super-human still here to keep his deadly promise – even after they’d been a close as any two people could get? Khan wasn’t known for easily dropping a grudge.

Gulping, Jim listened out for anyone moving about, but the apartment was absolutely silent. Although exhausted, Kirk’s heart began to pound as he moistened his lips and cleared his throat. “Khan?” he asked quietly, preparing himself to hear the deep baritone at his back, but no sound came.

After the third try, he managed to brace himself on his forearms, though his whole body protested the slightest movement. He felt like he had been run over by a hyper-truck! Rolling onto his aching back, he sat up, and moaned “Ouch!” as his sore butt came into contact with the mattress. He looked around warily.
The flat was empty! The pile of black clothes was gone, as was its owner.

The young man blinked several times, barely daring to believe his luck. Jim hadn’t forgotten that Khan had promised he wouldn’t see the rising of the sun again. Yet, here he was, bathed in the bright beams that shone from clear blue skies as though the thunder-storm of last night had never happened. Well, both storms had been real – the one outside and the one inside the apartment.

‘I’m alive!’ Jim realized, bewildered. ‘He’s left, without killing me!’

He had just pulled the messy blanket over his legs when he saw it – a note. A good old fashioned paper note lay atop the mattress. Curious, Jim picked it up and his gaze wandered over the message which was written in simple yet elegant script. ‘Enjoy the given sunrise. Until next time – K.’

Jim stared uncomprehending at the note. ‘He… He let me live!’ He ran his fingers through his tousled hair and let out shaky laughter. ‘He spared me!’

For a long moment, he could only sit there and stare into nothingness while relief washed over him, then the rational part of his mind returned. Khan had spared him, yes, but he was still a criminal. And he was somewhere out there on the run, already plotting how to get his crew back. Not that Jim could blame him for it; Jim’s all-too-human heart thought that the man had a right to see his family again. But the Augment had a tendency to leave a tail of chaos and bloodshed in his wake. Kirk’s first duty should be to contact Starfleet Command and inform his superiors that the super-human had escaped – if they didn’t know already – and that Khan was actually here in San Francisco, now certainly planning to steal a spacecraft.

Still, Jim didn’t move.

He couldn’t – and not just because of his sore limbs.

Firmly, he told himself that his lack of action had nothing to do with the mind-blowing pleasure he’d savored in his enemy’s arms, but was actually rooted in reasonable thought. Khan could have been away for hours, and therefore the captain had no clue where the Augment was now. He’d also have to explain how he’d known of Khan’s escape in the first place and that would lead to more questions – like why Jim hadn’t reported the super-human’s appearance immediately. Jim’s communicator was nothing more than a piece of metal with wires and electronics, and its failure to function could be explained away, but that Khan hadn’t killed him, when everyone knew that the Augment always had a strong desire for vengeance, would require a lot more clarification.
Clarification Jim couldn’t give without saying too much. After all, one look at him and anyone could guess about the night he’d had. Of this Kirk was certain. Also, he wasn’t ready to think about the whole thing – let alone speak of it in front of others. Bedding a convicted terrorist who was on the run really wouldn’t look good on his record!

Sighing, he rubbed his face and took a deep breath. Only now did he recognize that the air was cleaner than it should have been after hours of sweaty, messy sex. He heard a soft buzzing and glanced over to the controls of the air conditioning system. They were turned to the highest level, which he didn’t remember doing. Well, that was a surprise and…

And there stood his coffee table as if it had never been hurled through the room by a furious Augment with the strength matching that of a Vulcan. Even the end table was back in its place. ‘This is the first time he cleaned up a mess he’s made!’ Jim thought and rolled his eyes at the bad joke. This attention to tidiness was unimportant, yet he was grateful for the unexpected thoughtfulness. The furniture was extremely heavy and Jim would have needed a second and possibly third person to replace it back where it belonged. And that, as well as the hole the table had left in the wall, would have taken some explaining, too.

Jim sighed again and started to move to the bed’s edge, but that was even more uncomfortable than sitting. His back gave him hell, his thighs were screaming, and his arms felt far too heavy. He’d had other epic sex sessions before, but never had he felt like this. He was drained of all strength, yet he felt more alive than ever.

He placed his feet on the carpeted floor, put the note on the nightstand, braced himself, and slowly rose. The moan that was torn from his throat was born of pure discomfort and growing irritation. He practically had to order his legs not to buckle and his back felt like it might snap any moment. Gritting his teeth, he steadied himself on the nightstand and allowed his body to adjust to gravity before finally standing up straight.

“Jesus! I hope you’re going to be feeling as bad as I will for the next few days!” Closing his eyes to stop the room spinning around him, he promptly saw Khan’s handsome face with that cursed, smug expression popping back in his mind. “Yeah, I know. Super-blood and super-stamina! You’re probably fine already, you son of a bitch!”

Jim rubbed his forehead and sighed. Cursing wouldn’t help now; after all he’d allowed the whole thing to happen – more or less! No, what he needed was a nice warm shower.

Shower…
Khan and him in the shower…

Khan taking care of him, washing him, rubbing lather along his skin…

‘Stop it, Jim!’ he ordered himself sternly. ‘Yes, he’s a fiendishly good lover and… No! No, no and once again no! I’m so not going down that road right now!’ Grimacing, he walked slowly to the bathroom with uneasy steps – and was confronted with new memories the moment he stepped in. A wet towel lay on the floor, the shower stall wasn’t dry like it should be after hours of not being used, and the soft scent of the Augment was still in the air. In other words, Khan had showered before he left. Kirk realized that the Augment must have been here only a short while ago.

‘Maybe he’s still in the area – Starfleet might even catch him if I inform them now…’

Jim hesitated; his sense of duty screamed at him to act as he was expected to. He could throw on some clothes and go to his neighbor and use his communication device. He could report anything to the admiralty, saying Khan broke into his apartment and attacked him. The bruises on his body spoke volumes. Heck, even the love bites could be taken for signs of rape – still Kirk didn’t move. He couldn’t do it – no more than he’d been able to use the phaser to kill his captor all those hours ago. He couldn’t bring himself to call Starfleet Command, and betray the super-human again by lying and starting a manhunt. Jim had betrayed him once and he felt bad about it – especially after Khan pointed out what Kirk’s conscience had already reminded him of countless times before: the Augment had saved him, and Jim had paid him back by double-crossing him. Okay, so that didn’t change the fact that Khan had been up to no good himself, still Jim felt shitty about it.

“You’ve really lost it, Jim!” he admonished himself as he stepped into the shower, turning on the hot water. He moaned in relief as the warm water washed away the sticky mess he was covered in and soothed his aching muscles. Stepping out of the shower, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and went rigid.

There were dark circles under his eyes, his chest and upper arms were covered in bruises and red bite-marks, and… And on the left side of his neck was a hickey large enough to be seen even over the top of his uniform collar. And it would become even more noticeable within the next few days. Now it was purple, but soon it would shimmer in blue and lilac.

‘He marked me!’ The thought shot through his mind, and even though Jim didn’t understand the historic significance of such a deed, he still felt it was pretty extreme. ‘That damned asshole...
MARKED me!’ He moved closer to the mirror and took a better look, groaning as he touched the sore skin. ‘Thank you so much, you bastard! That will be more than awkward to explain! Running around with a love bite like that during the first days of your five-years-mission will be so good for your reputation, Jim!’ Sweet Lord, he already pictured Uhura’s face as soon as she saw it. She was an expert at making snide remarks without even actually saying anything.

Cursing the Augment, Jim picked up his razor and tried to shave off the new stubble on his jaw, wincing as the oversensitive skin smarted in protest.

The curtains were closed in the two-room flat on the other side of San Francisco Bay, near Starfleet Academy. Nevertheless the sun shone through the material and diffused the room with a soft, red-orange glow. The two slender figures on the large bed didn’t move, and their calm deep breaths indicated they were deeply asleep.

Still, the taller of the two sleepers was wide awake within a blink of an eye, as the beeping of a communicator sounded from the nightstand, followed by a computer voice, “Priority one call from Starfleet Command.” A slender pale hand reached for the little device and flipped it open. “Spock here.”

Beside the Enterprise’s science officer the blankets began to move and fine-shaped, dark-skinned fingers peeled the material away. Blinking and suppressing a yawn, a still-sleepily Nyota Uhura looked at her lover and saw him tense up.

“What?” Spock’s deep clear voice betrayed something close to shock while he sat up, hastily pulled his blanket away, and swung his long legs over the bed’s edge. Uhura now knew that something was terribly wrong. Sitting up too, the communications officer brushed one of the slipped straps of her silken nightgown back onto her shoulder, while watching the Vulcan as he nodded once before he answered, “Understood, sir. Have you informed Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy, and the others?”

The answer caused him to tense up even more. “No, sir, I have not heard from the captain since yesterday evening, when we separated.” He listened closely, before he replied, “I will prepare immediately, and do not bother to call Dr. McCoy. I will do it.” Again he went silent for several seconds. “Yes, sir, Lieutenant Uhura is with me. We will both wait for the escort. Thank you.” He closed the communicator and stood up.

“Spock, what’s wrong?” Nyota asked, alarmed. She had rarely seen such a tight expression on the usually emotionless face of her lover.
The dark, almost black eyes looked straight at her. “Please get dressed and pack your luggage, Nyota. We will return to the Enterprise within the next hour.”

“Within the next…?” Without hesitation, she got out of bed, yet she wanted answers. “What happened? Is Starfleet at red alert? Have the Klingons declared war?”

Spock was already walking to the bathroom. He activated his communicator again, but stopped first to answer Nyota’s question. “No, it has nothing to do with the Klingons.” His onyx-black eyes almost glistened while he revealed, “Khan has escaped.”

For a moment Uhura could only stare at him, then she whispered, “What? How?”

“That is irrelevant at the moment. It is far more important that he is now apparently after us, and seems to be in San Francisco already.” His lips formed a thin line for a moment, and his next words sent ice through Nyota’s veins. “Jim hasn’t answered Starfleet’s calls.”

With a gasp, Uhura pressed a hand over her mouth. Every Starfleet officer had to be within reach at all times by communicator. Therefore, there was only one logical reason for Kirk’s silence when combined with the mortal threat the escaped Augment presented: the super-human had already found his first victim. The thought made Nyota sick.

Her relationship with Kirk hadn’t had the best of starts as cadets, and there had been a time while they attended the academy that she couldn’t stand him. But since then, not only had she come to respect him – after all, he was her commanding officer now – but she also liked him a lot. He had changed for the better; he wasn’t that bragging hot-head anymore, he took his responsibilities very seriously, and he was, above all, a damn good starship captain. And, besides, he was Spock’s best friend. The mere thought that Kirk could have been murdered – slaughtered, given the Augment’s tendency of furious violence – put a lump in the throat.

The Vulcan took a deep breath, which was a rather unusual thing for him to do, and indicated that he was indeed stressed. “Doctor Leonard McCoy, priority one call, authorization Spock, first officer, USS Enterprise,” he said into his communicator, which instantly activated a link to the requested person. Trusting Uhura to get everything ready for their hurried departure, Spock stepped into the bathroom.

Moments later, a tired voice sounded through the communicator. “Yeah?”
At any other time, Spock would have given the doctor a lecture about the correct way to answer a call inside of Starfleet, but just now there was only one thing on his mind – checking on Jim Kirk and making certain that he was safe!

“Doctor, Spock here. As I know you live near Jim –”

“Spock?” McCoy sounded annoyed. “Dear god, man, do you have a clue how early it is?”

“I am able to read the clock, Doctor, but that is beside the point,” the Vulcan interrupted the opening tirade sternly, telling himself that the odd feeling in his belly was not rooted in emotion. “Please listen. Khan has escaped cryosleep and the –”

“WHAAAAAT?!?”

Spock flinched. His hearing was sharper than that of a full human’s, and therefore McCoy’s shout made his ears ring. “Calm yourself, Doctor, and listen.” With patience he barely felt, Spock tried to reason with the hot-tempered human. “Starfleet Command has just contacted me with a priority one message to inform me about this unexpected event. Obviously, Khan is already in San Francisco and is most likely out for revenge. He evidently broke into Captain Kirk’s and my files, and now knows where we live.”

From the corner of his eye, he saw Uhura at the door, unease on her beautiful features, while she sleeked back a strand of her long black hair. He gestured for her to hurry, and opened one of the lockers to take out his personal items.

“The captain doesn’t answer any calls, which is highly unusual. Your residence –”

“Sweet lord,” ‘Bones murmured, sounding both shocked and appalled.

“Your residence,” the Vulcan repeated firmly, “is near that of Jim’s. I would suggest that you check on him. It could be that his silence…” Spock hesitated, but he didn’t need to say anything more.

“I’m on my way,” Leonard all but growled.
“Take your phaser with you and be careful, Doctor. If Khan should be in the area, I am certain your life is also in danger. And set your phaser to ‘kill’; Khan can’t be stunned,” the science officer ordered. His sensitive ears heard soft noises in the background, indicating that McCoy was up and moving around in his flat.

“Why doesn’t Starfleet send the cavalry? Jim is one of their best commanding officers, for god’s sake!” the ship’s doctor ranted angrily.

Spock replied tensely, “They are. Still, it could be too late.”

“Like it is always with the damn cavalry!” Bones groused. “I will update you as soon as I reach Jim’s. Hopefully the kid stayed out of trouble this time!” The connection was cut as Bones closed his communicator, and Spock allowed himself another deep breath.

‘Please be safe, Jim. I do not want to lose you again, T’hy’la.’

ST***ST***ST

Dashwood stood at the window of the meeting room and watched hell break lose several levels below him in front of headquarters. Security officials were running to the building, armed units hastened to several shuttles, officers gave commands. In the background, he could hear Barnett’s tight voice as he received the message that James Kirk hadn’t answered the calls.

“Have you tried his private channel, Ensign?” Richard asked, feeling a cold shiver running down his spine. ‘He got him! That damn bastard has already gotten Jim Kirk – and I had second thoughts about ending that terrorist’s life!’

“We tried every known connection, sir,” the ensign reported. “He doesn’t answer. But I contacted Commander Spock successfully. He and Lieutenant Uhura will be picked up by our escort in an hour, and Dr. McCoy will be informed by Commander Spock. The other senior officers are being updated, too, but –”

“Send security to Kirk’s apartment – now!” Barnett ordered, his expression grim. “Use the transporters but make sure our people materialize out of sight of the building. If Khan should be there, he’d be alerted by the transporter beams. And Ensign? Set phasers to ‘kill’.”
“What? No!” Dashwood turned around, but the reflexes of the other scientist were sharper, and he answered first.

“Admiral Barnett, if the subject is terminated before the last tests can be run, all our efforts will be in vain!”

Norton’s voice was far calmer than that of Conelly, but not less intense. “Richard, think of all the lives we can save if we are successful in creating antidotes and serum from the Augment’s blood! But for this we need him alive, so cancel that order and do everything possible to apprehend him.”

He fell silent as the dark eyes of the Chief of Command glared icily at him. “We are taking no risks with this man. We know his strength and his fighting skills too well to let it come to a showdown in the middle of a city full of innocent citizens.” He turned back to the intercom. “Ensign, tell everyone on the task force to shoot Khan on sight!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” The connection shut off and Barnett looked back at Norton.

“I understand why you thought Khan’s blood could be used to create cures for many known diseases, still it is immoral and illegal to use him for such. And your carelessness has now put one of our best captains and his crew in mortal danger. I will personally ensure that you answer to the Federation Council for this. And if you don’t want me to place you under arrest here and now, you should not interfere in my efforts of damage control again. Do you understand?”

Albert simply looked at him and leaned back in his chair, before giving a curt nod.

The doors opened and Stones returned from his office. “Part of the Enterprise’s crew is already aboard, sir. As I heard Captain Kirk can’t be contacted, I ordered Olsen to accompany our men to his place and…”

“Very good, Commander. What’s about the dragnet operation?”

“The San Francisco police department has been told that we’re conducting a security exercise in the area around the Financial District.” Stones made a face. “You can imagine what kind of reaction I got!”

“Yes,” Barnett sighed. Why the heck had Kirk rented an apartment at the edge of one of the most
densely populated quarters of the whole town? The answer was clear though – because of the night life and the great view.

“We will stick to the story that these exercises had been arranged several weeks ago, but somehow our press office failed to inform the public,” Stones continued. “That will be the best explanation for why suddenly one of the most important districts is flooded with security officials. I think it would be fatal for our reputation and the public’s safety if the real reason came out.”

Barnett took a deep breath. “Very good, Commander. Thank you. How will your men proceed?”

While the admiral and Stones talked about the details, Conelly bent towards Norton.

“We had a deal, Albert. I wouldn’t testify about your role in Section 31 and you’d give me back my research subject.

Conelly only glared at him. “If you and Dashwood had been more careful, the Augment would still be in your possession and we wouldn’t have this enormous problem.” He cocked his head. “But something else has just crossed my mind. Does Khan know about your involvement with the work in the lab?”

Nathan Conelly stiffened. “No, I don’t think so.”

For a moment, Norton smirked. “Just as well – otherwise you would have to choose between your continued silence or disclose your involvement with Marcus and Section 31. And also request personal protection.”

The subsidiary head of the LSH only stared at the admiral, then leaned back in his chair. “Be careful, Albert. If I go down, you’re going down with me.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Yes, if any of you guessed that Norton and Conelly were a part of Section 31, you were right! And Luengo has his own agenda, which matches that of Norton and the two scientists. They are going to be a lot of trouble, even if they are in custody. And Khan is on the run, trying to escape a manhunt that has only one aim: to kill him. And Jim’s friends think Kirk is in mortal danger and are acting on it, while said captain hasn’t a clue about the whole mess.

In the next chapter, Bones arrives at Jim’s flat and – of course – the good doctor connects several hints to the big picture (even if he doesn’t know the most important detail), Khan tries to escape Starfleet Security, and the three friends face Barnett and the two scientists.

I really, really hope you enjoyed the new installment – especially how both men came to their decisions – and I am anxious for your reactions and comments.

Long life and peace,

Yours Starflight
Hi, dear Readers!

Just back from my vacation. I hope you’re up for the next chapter (smile). As promised, this time Bones will arrive – in all his doctor-like glory – and you will see him, Jim and Spock in ‘action’. In the meantime, Khan tries a very odd way to escape the deep water that is threatening to drown him (and this idiom has a double-meaning, laugh), and Jim learns first-hand of the fate Khan went through in the clutches of the scientists.

Thank you so very much for your feedback.

Live long and prosper,

Yours Starflight

Chapter 5 – Hideaway

Jim had no idea about the turmoil his late-night visitor and the destruction of his communicator had created. After finishing his morning routine, he finally left the bathroom and was able to survey his flat properly for the first time after…everything. The furnishings were all back where they should be, but there were still a lot of things to do to get rid of the chaos he and Khan had left in their wake. First of all, the squashed communicator and the really, really messy blankets had to be dealt with, then the carpets needed a good clean, just like his kitchen-counter – and all this had to be done with really sore muscles!

Kirk cursed for the third time and moved into action. First he went to his wardrobe, pulled out a new pair of sweat-pants and a shirt with long sleeves and slipped into them, groaning as the soft material made his groin and butt burn once more. He was just glad that the long-sleeved shirt was a large one, allowing his skin more room. Still, every move was very uncomfortable as he stripped the bed and found the emptied bottle of sunflower oil in the process, like an accusation of the things he had done. Sighing he rolled up the sheets, pillowcases and blankets and carried them together with the note and the bottle to the garbage recycling unit in the kitchen, which wasn’t actually constructed for such large-sized amounts of trash.

A lot of painful effort and an annoyed jab on the ‘start’ button later, the device did its duty and everything was shredded into pieces, leaving the apartment through a pipe that led straight to the large recycler in the basement level, which produced energy for the heating system of the whole building. Shortly afterwards, the remains of the communicator went the same way (the unit made
some really odd noises, but was still working). Armed with a bucketful of soapy water, a cloth, and a
towel, Jim wiped down the kitchen counter and then the carpet near the windows in the living area.
For a moment he reminisced on how the Augment had taken him from behind in the glow of the
lightning flashes; those long strong arms around him, one of those clever hands working his dick, the
hot breath on his neck…

Firmly, Jim pushed the images out of his head and was almost done with cleaning, when his door-
chime sounded, followed by frantic knocking and a loud,

“JIM! ARE YOU IN THERE? JIM, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, OPEN THE DOOR!”

Startled, Kirk stared towards his apartment door, asking himself what had gotten into Bones, whose
voice he recognized instantly.

“JIM! FOR GOD’S SAKE, ANSWER ME!” There was a hint of panic in the doctor’s tone now.

Rising from his kneeling position – Jesus Christ, his back and legs really hurt – and shaking his head,
he walked stiffly towards the door, noticed that it was unlocked and tore it open just moments before
McCoy knocked at it again – almost hitting Jim square on his forehead in the process.

“Bones! What the hell is the matter with you?” he exclaimed irritated, already expecting Mr.
Arnheim to be peeking out of his flat, complaining about the racket so early in the morning. Then,
somewhat baffled, he realized that McCoy had a phaser in his hand, set on ‘kill’. It was a rare thing
when the Enterprise’s CMO even touched a weapon, let alone being ready to use it.

Leonard was panting heavily like he’d run miles, but now he sighed deeply in relief and briefly
closed his eyes. “Thank the Lord you’re okay!” Without giving an explanation, he stuck his phaser
in his belt under his jacket, took out his communicator, flipped it open, and lifted the device to his
ear; all while eying Jim carefully from head to toe and back up again. “Spock? I’m at Jim’s. He is all
right,” he reported, still mostly out of breath.

Kirk frowned. What was that all about? Questioningly, he glared at one of his two best friends.

“Yeah, he’s okay and in one piece,” Bones said, pursing his lips as he took in Jim’s appearance,
recognizing certain signs immediately. “What? Why he didn’t answer the calls? I have no idea!” He
put down his communicator. “Why didn’t you answer Starfleet’s priority one calls and…”
Two doors down the corridor, a lock was activated and Jim reacted without a second thought. Not bothering with a warning, he grabbed McCoy by his lapels, all but hurled him in, and closed the door, not ready to face Mr. Arnheim. “Ungh…” was Bones’ only comment, while he tried to find his feet, glaring daggers at Kirk, who heard the deep voice of his first officer demanding answers through the open channel of the doctor’s communicator.

“Care to tell me what you’re doing at this ungodly time on my doorstep, sweating and gasping for air like you’ve run a marathon, and waking half neighborhood with your shouting and –” Jim was interrupted by a brusque wave of Bones’ free hand before the CMO continued his conversation with the Vulcan.

“Look, I just arrived at his apartment, and all I know that he’s fine and obviously just out of bed. I’ll contact you again as soon as… What? Yes, we’ll wait for the escort and…” For several seconds McCoy went silent and listened, then – suddenly – his eyes widened and he all but yelled, “We were summoned to board the Enterprise THIS MORNING? And you couldn’t tell me this sooner? I haven’t even started to pack my things and… What, it slipped your mind when you called me earlier? Will you look at that, there are still miracles in the world. You forgot something! I have to mark that in red in my calendar!” An angry flush had crept in McCoy’s already red cheeks, while he listened again. “Yeah, yeah, I know checking on Jim was more important, still you could have said something. I will never be able to make it aboard on time. After all, I’ve got to go back now and… What? I could leave without my belongings? Have you lost your Vulcan mind? I’m going nowhere without my own stuff – and certainly not on a five year mission! Yeah, whatever.” He closed the communicator. “Can you believe this? Spock forgot to tell me that Starfleet Command has changed our departure time. Damned hobgoblin!” Muttering further unkind things about a certain Vulcan science officer under his breath, he pocketed his communicator and swept the sweat from his forehead.

Jim had crossed his arms in front of his chest – Jesus Christ, even that hurt! – and stared at McCoy. “Are you now going to explain what this is all about?” he asked once again, his voice betraying his exasperation.

Bones had the good grace to smile sheepishly before he rubbed his neck, avoiding Jim’s gaze. “Well, Spock got some very worrying news from Starfleet Command concerning you and him, and…” He hesitated as he took another close look at his friend. “Rough night?” he asked and Kirk rolled his eyes.

“You have no idea,” he mumbled. ‘Rough is an understatement. First, I was nearly beaten to death and then I was ravished by a certain greedy Augment who couldn’t seem to get enough. Well, I have to admit that feeling was a bit mutual…’

Grimacing and finally calmer, McCoy observed Jim, glaring at the large hickey, the still-swollen lips and the tense way the younger man stood, and sighed deeply. ‘Don’t tell me you didn’t answer a
priority one call because you were too busy having sex.”

“What? No – of course not!” Jim stated, feeling heat flooding his face to his horror.

Bones cocked his head. “Uh-huh, I see! Caught you red-handed, didn’t I?” For a moment he grinned, before he rubbed his forehead again, this time with his sleeve. He looked around the apartment, clearly expecting to see or hear the other occupant. Or occupants – this was Jim, after all.

“No, I didn’t answer the calls, because…” Kirk swallowed. An excuse, his starship for an excuse! His gaze found the garbage recycling unit and he decided to stick close to the truth as possible. “Well, I started to tidy up this morning… You know, a little spring-cleaning before we leave and… somehow my communicator went the same way as the trash I threw out.”

McCoy lifted both brows. “Did I just hear you correctly? You threw out your communicator?”

“Accidentally, Bones, accidentally!” Kirk smiled bashfully, apologizing inwardly for the lie.

A small laugh escaped Leonard. “Not that I blame you. I’ve thought about doing the same thing from time to time. Still, I can’t wait to see Komack’s face when you tell him you need a new communicator because the old one found its way into your building’s heating system.”

Jim chuckled, but it was forced. Komack… The admiralty… That all reminded him very clearly of what he should have done but didn’t.

“So, what message did Spock have that warranted you waking my neighbors and nearly knock down my door? You could have used the buzzer at the entrance, you know,” he changed the dangerous topic, just to have it flicked back at him like a boomerang.

“I didn’t come to give you a message from Spock or Starfleet Command. I’m a doctor, not a go-fer! And, by the way, a nice little old lady and her dog let me in.” He became serious again and gulped. “Jim, I have some really bad news.” He lowered his voice. “Somehow… Khan escaped cryosleep and is out for revenge.” Leonard watched his friend closely, and Jim’s expression became tight. “They’ve tracked him down, more-or-less. He’s somewhere here in San Francisco and… And he hacked into Starfleet’s files, yours and Spock’s to be precise – and maybe those of others, too.” He took a deep breath. “He’s most certainly after you first, and our pointy-eared friend, now knowing where you two live.” He watched his friend turn away, clearly shocked. “Starfleet is sending an escort to bring you safely into the headquarters and another escort will guard Spock to make certain
Mr. Superman won’t get to him or Uhura, ‘cause I’m sure she’s with our walking computer.”

Jim’s gaze was lost in nothingness. So Starfleet indeed already knew about Khan’s flight. They’d even discovered that the Augment was in the city, targeting those who’d brought him to justice. Or not. What they couldn’t know was the fact that Khan already had a kind of vengeance – one of a type Jim really hadn’t minded – and that the senior officers of the Enterprise were no longer in danger from the super-human. Kirk was sure that Khan wouldn’t hunt down Spock; after all, the Vulcan hadn’t killed the Augment’s family and Khan had no time to go after the science officer anyway. He’d be lucky if he even made it out of the area without being caught, and…

“Jim, are you all right?” Concern softened Bones’ normal abrasive tone and the young captain nodded slowly, even though he wasn’t really ‘all right’. “Look, they’ll get him soon and lock him away – hopefully this time behind bars he can’t break through. I don’t think he’ll have a chance to get near you or Spock,” McCoy continued softly, and Kirk snorted.

‘He’s already been ‘near’ me – nearer than any other man ever has been before!’ he thought and rubbed his neck, wincing as he accidently touched the large love bite. He pressed his lips into a thin line. He doubted Starfleet would get Khan anytime soon. The Augment was far too clever for that. And it was a foregone conclusion that if caught, Jim was certain they wouldn’t put him back to cryosleep, but rather send him back to the lab again – a thought that made Kirk sick. For a moment, he caught himself hoping that Khan did indeed get away.

“So, Starfleet Command decided to send us to the Enterprise earlier than scheduled for our own safety,” Jim stated and Leonard sighed, misinterpreting his friend’s reaction.

“Jim, for a start, I don’t know how this bastard escaped and I can understand that the whole thing is a shock for you, but as soon as we’re aboard, Mr. Superman can’t reach us anymore. You know I’m not the type who runs away easily, but in this case, I do think we should let Starfleet deal with this mess. Anyway, it’s their damned fault that this guy is running through the streets of San Francisco plotting the next disaster. But if the targets aren’t around, maybe it won’t happen.”

Jim closed his eyes. Of course Bones was worried about Spock and him, and of course everyone thought that Khan would use this chance to finally burn down the world, but only the young officer knew that the Augment had other plans; that he would leave Earth and begin the search for his crew. Kirk doubted that Khan would be successful in finding his family. And that could no doubt easily lead to another act of desperation from the super-human, still Jim hoped that Khan had learned from his last mistakes. To begin a one-man-war against the whole galaxy would be more than stupid, and the enhanced man was anything but that.

He felt Bones step to his side and lay a hand on his shoulder. “Please, Jim, don’t go after him,” the CMO pleaded. “I know you, you’re already thinking of a way to catch him again, but…”
“I can assure you, Bones, I will not go after him,” Kirk interrupted him, telling the plain truth. He wouldn’t follow the former dictator. He didn’t want to have any part in Khan’s eventually re-capture – and the reason for this decision was, he had to admit, purely emotional. It made him feel guilty; not only because he’d ignored his official duty, but also because of his mentor Christopher Pike. Jim knew that he shouldn’t let the one who’d killed the man who’d been like a father to Kirk escape, but on the other hand, hadn’t Khan suffered more than any other sentenced criminal should? Had he not been wronged first? What would Starfleet do if they got their hands on the Augment again? Would they really put him back into cryosleep – how many times could a body be put into stasis anyway? Or would he serve as lab-rat again? Jim trusted men like Barnett, still there had to be more Section 31 agents. That was the only explanation of how Khan could have ended in up in LSH, and Jim had a feeling that upon capture, the super-human would end up back at their mercy in a wink of an eye.

He sighed before he looked back at McCoy, who glanced at him warily. “We have our orders, haven’t we?”

“Yeah,” Bones answered hesitantly, surprised that his friend gave in so easily. “I’m sure that the escort assigned to pick you up will be here soon and –”

“And you’re telling me this now?”

“Hey, I told you that Starfleet Command was sending an escort and –”

He didn’t get further as suddenly heavy steps ran down the corridor outside the flat. A second later a lieutenant from headquarters and several security officials swarmed into Jim’s apartment, phasers drawn. Outside, voices were raised indicating that several neighbors had definitely had enough of all the noise, but they were told to return to their apartments immediately ‘for their own safety’.

One of the men aimed directly at McCoy, ordering sharply: “Identify yourself!”

Jim frowned while Bones lifted both hands, directing his words at the young captain. “Jim, care to explain to these gorillas who I am?”

For a moment, Kirk was very tempted to keep silent, but then barked, “Lower your weapon, Lieutenant, that’s an order. This is my CMO, Doctor Leonard McCoy. And for the record, he got here faster than you.”
The lieutenant saluted and stood up straight. “Captain Kirk? Lieutenant Olsen from Starfleet Security. We are here to guarantee your safety, there’s –”

“I already know about the whole mess, thanks to Dr. McCoy,” Kirk interrupted him, and Olsen frowned at Bones skeptically.

“How do you know about the escape of –”

“Commander Spock told me, and he was informed by Starfleet Command,” Bones grumbled. “As you see, the grapevine still moves faster than the cavalry.”

Jim went rigged, as several men started to search his apartment. Oh no, not good! There were still certain traces left of Jim’s recent activity… “Gentlemen, I would highly appreciate it if you would stop rifling through my private belongings! As far as I can tell the escaped prisoner is your target, not my underwear!”

McCoy hid a snicker as he saw the abashed and reddening faces of the four men who had started to move through the place.

“Captain, this is for your own…” Olsen fell silent as he received a sharp glare from the superior officer.

“I can assure you, Lieutenant that the criminal Khan isn’t here! I don’t think I would be still alive if he were.” Another lie, God has mercy on him!

The lieutenant took a deep breath and nodded towards one of his men, who stopped the others. “Captain, I’ll ask you to get dressed and come with us. Leave your belongings here, my men will take care that they are packed and brought to the Enterprise, to –”

“I certainly don’t need anyone to pack my stuff, Lieutenant. I know you have your orders, but I don’t think they include flouting anyone’s privacy. So please wait outside until I’m done here.”

“But –”
“I trust your abilities to secure the building until I leave. But maybe some of your men could accompany Dr. McCoy back to his place because I’m sure he also hasn’t packed. If I know Khan, he’ll certainly be after Dr. McCoy too, so please include him in your personal protection!”

Olsen sighed. “As you wish, Captain.” He pulled out his communicator and informed Stones about the status of the operation. In the meantime Jim watched the other officials leaving his apartment and stepped to the window, looking down. It was as he’d assumed. The streets were full of Starfleet security, passersby were arguing, hyper-cars were stopped, policemen stood around, clearly at loss. The whole area was in turmoil.

“And they think Khan won’t realize the manhunt for him has already begun?” McCoy murmured beside him, but before Jim could answer, Olsen called,

“Captain, Doctor, please step away from the windows. The criminal could be anywhere and already taking aim at you!”

Rolling his eyes, Jim obeyed and Bones did the same before he slapped Kirk on the shoulder and said, “See you in the headquarters.”

“Yeah,” the young captain nodded, smiling at his friend. “Thanks for coming.”

“Any time,” Leonard replied warmly, then he stepped out into the corridor, leaving a very guilty feeling Jim Kirk.

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The early sun shone down at the piers along Embarcadero Street in the east of the Financial District. Here, casual fishermen could be found alongside those who fished for a living. Even if this profession no longer held the importance that it had three centuries ago, it still was a trade, and the few fishermen who loved this traditional job were very proud of it.

Capitan Alessio Mazzini came from one of the oldest Italian families in San Francisco, and every male descendant had been a fisherman, owning a boat while another part of the family ran a store, where the seafood was sold. Business was good and because of a tax break given to fishermen, earnings had increased.
Mazzini should be happy, but anyone looking at the capitano at the moment, would see that wasn’t the case. Alessio stood at the railing of his boat with a communicator at his ear, while he listened with an angry reddened face.

“So, you’re stuck blocks away because there’s some stupid Starfleet exercise going on? What was it yesterday, eh? Your friend! An’ the day before it was your mother who was ill. Stop giving me lame excuses; you’re always late! If you don’t get your ass down here in the next cinque minuti, you can get a new job, compreso?” He listened a moment and shouted, “Then we’ll leave without you! An’ don’t bother to show up again!” He snapped his communicator closed and let out a tirade of Italian curses.

“What about Joe? Isn’t he coming?” One of his crewmembers headed from the aft of the boat towards him and Mazzini threw his hands up, while above him several gulls screeched into the early morning skies.

“There’s some Starfleet maneuver going on downtown and he’s says he stuck! Can you believe it? It’s the sixth time in two weeks he’s been late. I fired him!”

The other fisherman rolled his eyes. “And who will replace him? You know that we’re already understaffed and…” He stopped as a shadow fell on him and his captain, and startled, both men looked up at the pier above.

“You need an extra hand, gentlemen? Maybe I can be of help,” a deep rich baritone asked and the two fishermen had to blink because the sun was directly at the stranger’s back and blinded them. His face lay in the dark; all they could see were his black clothes and that he wore a long coat.

Mazzini frowned. “Do I know you, signore?”

“No, Captain, certainly not,” the stranger replied politely. “I was just passing, but am looking for work and heard that one of your crewmen seems not to be available. Is there a chance I might step in for him?”

Doubt rose in Mazzini as he considered the cultivated voice and the posture of the newcomer. This guy was anything but a fisherman! Someone who talked like that was to be found on management floors, not on the docks. “You’re not from around here,” he stated and crossed his arms in front of his broad chest.
The stranger stepped forwards so that his face could be seen and he smiled just the tiniest bit, while his pale sea-colored eyes looked directly at the elder man. “No, I am from England. The job I came for was passed on to someone else and now I’m in terrible need of Credits, and happy to work at anything.”

“Aw shit,” the other crewmen nodded in sympathy. “They got you bad, laddie!”

“You can say that again,” the stranger agreed.

Alessio cocked his head and surveyed the man on the pier. “Have you ever fished before? It’s not as easy as you may think an’ –”

“My grandfather was a fisherman back in Cornwall. I often accompanied him and helped out until he died two years ago. So, yes, I am familiar with a fisherman’s duties.”

Mazzani and his crewmen exchanged a glance, then the capitano locked eyes with the other members of his crew. The eldest of them, George, shrugged. “We’ve nothing to lose, Alessio. Give the guy a chance.”

The elder Italian pursed his lips and pondered this turn of events for a moment. “We’ll be at sea for three days, giovanotto, going for deep-sea catch. If that’s okay with you…”

“It’s perfect. I have nowhere to stay because I couldn’t rent anywhere with no regular income.”

Mazzani’s looked thoughtful again for a moment, then stepped back from the rail. “Welcome aboard, giovanotto,” he said, offering his hand to the tall slender man, who jumped to the deck with one deft move. “I’m Alassio Mazzani.”

“Evan Brendon,” the stranger replied, returning the handshake firmly.

“Any gear?” Alassio asked and ‘Evan’ shook his head.

“No, sir, I stored it at one of the people-mover stations in a locker.” The lie came easily from Khan’s lips.
“No problem,” one of the other men called, while he strolled towards the new crew-member. “We’re the same size, I’ll loan you a shirt and trousers.” He struck out a hand. “I’m Nando, welcome aboard!”

“Evan,” the Augment introduced himself with the false name again, accepting the other one’s hand.

“Right!” Mazzani grinned and slapped him on the shoulder, surprised that the younger man didn’t even flinch. ‘Stronger than I thought!’ he thought to himself before he raised his voice, “All hands on deck, clear the ship. The sea’s calling us!”

The others cheered, and while two jumped back on land to clear the lines, Nando waved towards the companionway. “Come on, I’ll show you your bunk, Evan.”

The super-human nodded but looked one last time back towards the Golden Gate Bridge they would have to pass by to reach the open Pacific. A small smile played around his lips as he saw the heightened activity around Starfleet Headquarters and the shuttles buzzing above downtown. He took a deep breath of the clear, salty air he’d always liked.

Feeling the wind playing at his hair, Khan ignored the fact that he would be stuck on a stinking fishing boat for three days doing a layman’s job. He hadn’t lied to Mazzani – not really. An ancestor of his had owned boat, and he had stayed on ships several times when he’d been nothing more than a kid, enjoying time away from the labs, even if it had always been under observation.

He paused, thinking back on those years from the 20th century, then pushed the memories into his subconscious once more. This was his present now, and that was all that mattered. Travelling with the fishermen would take him away from San Francisco where Starfleet was not going to leave any stone unturned in order to find him. They would assume he’d be anywhere but on a small ship on the sea – a hideout even he hadn’t considered before he’d spoken to the Italian captain.

As he had fled the area where Kirk lived, he had already noticed the increased transporter activity and had been able to avoid some of the security officials with nothing but pure luck. He doubted that they had been called to the area by the young captain, who certainly was still asleep. If Kirk had wanted to see him dead, he would have shot him during the night when he had the chance. No, the appearance of the approaching ‘cavalry’ was for another reason. It had only been a question of time until Starfleet Command tracked him down, so he was pleased to already be on the run again as the guards flooded that part of the city. They’d certainly be heading towards Kirk to make sure he was all right.
There hadn’t been much of an option as to where Khan could turn and so he’d found himself down at the pier an hour later, realizing, amazingly that there were still fishermen left in the 23rd century. Knowing that he had to lie low for the next few days, he hoped to find a hideout somewhere near the harbor – but everything had turned out far better than he’d anticipated as he heard the Italian captain complaining about an untrustworthy crew member. Khan needed a place to stay, and equally important, even genetically enhanced, he needed to eat, which was not an easy thing without any credits in his pocket. The under-manned fishing boat had come to him like a gift from the higher beings which he didn’t believe in.

Now he was about to leave San Francisco behind, had shelter and food, and – what was more – he was out of Starfleet’s reach. He just would have to wait until the security storm blew over before searching for a way to steal a spacecraft and follow the only thing that mattered now: finding his family.

He knew it might take a while and that it could eventually lead to his own death, but he had to try!

He watched another shuttle fly from the Financial District directly towards Headquarters, and with the instincts of the predator he was, he knew that James Kirk was aboard. He was surprised to feel a soft stab in the pit of his stomach. ‘Take care of yourself, James,’ he thought, then turned to follow the slightly impatient-looking Nando.

ST***ST***ST

Spock waited for Jim and Bones behind the safety interlock in the SF headquarters’ foyer. Olsen had informed Kirk and McCoy before they were flown over that Admiral Barnett wanted to speak with them and therefore they immediately went to the office of the Chief of Command, while two cadets took their belongings for transport to the Enterprise.

The Vulcan bent his head briefly in greetings. “Captain, Doctor, I’m relieved to see you well.”

“Isn’t relief an emotion?” Bones taunted under his breath, while Kirk simply put a hand on his first officer’s shoulder and squeezed it gently, realizing that his friend must have been worried about his safety. Just for a moment he thought back to what Khan had told him; Spock had wanted to avenge his captain and friend when he attacked the Augment, and warmth spread through Jim’s soul.

“Thank you for everything, Spock.” He cleared his throat as he saw a flicker of surprise in the onyx eyes of the Vulcan. Saying that was a risk; he couldn’t admit to know about Spock’s intention one year ago without giving himself away, so he added, “I mean your quick decision to send Bones over – even if it put our morning grouch into an even worse mood.”
‘Morning grouch’?” Leonard repeated. “I’m not a grouch!”

“Yes, you are!” Jim retorted and walked with stiff steps to the turbolift, his two friends at his heels.

“Hey, to be woken up in the middle of the night to learn that a homicidal maniac has escaped cryosleep and is after your best friend and that said friend doesn’t answer any calls can lower your mood considerably!” McCoy protested while the doors of the lift closed behind them.

Kirk rolled his eyes, glad that he didn’t blush this time. Well, not immediately, but after Spock’s gaze suddenly fixed on the left side of his throat and the Vulcan lifted one brow, blood warmed Jim’s face again. “Uh…it’s not what you think,” he said lamely. The second brow followed the first. “No, really not. I…my communicator accidently fell into my recycler –” Both brows vanished under Spock’s hairline. “– so, you know, I couldn’t answer the calls.”

“You threw your communicator away? That was foolish,” the Enterprise’s first officer commented dryly and Jim was glad when they reached the level on which Barnett’s office was located. Leaving the lift, they walked down the corridor that was more crowded than usual.

“Well, I was doing some last-minute packing and quite a bit of cleaning up, and…”

“Cleaning up after a heavy night, you mean,” Bones chuckled. “Boy, that must have been one hell of a lover if you needed to clean up that much afterwards!”

An ensign, who just happened to pass by at the same time as Bones’ ill-timed comment stared at Jim, who luckily, didn’t notice. He was far too lost in thought, as McCoy’s teasing awoke the guilt he’d been feeling earlier. ‘Hell of a lover… If you only knew how right you are! Khan certainly is a demon – a handsome demon of seduction you can’t resist. Not with this hot mouth, this wicked tongue, those clever fingers and… God, Jim, get a grip!’

Spock’s face remained expressionless and after giving the ensign one of the hard stares he was famous for, he stated, “Doctor, I would think that the captain’s love life was not something he’d want to discuss in public.”

“Rrrright – after all, his reputation of being a fair virgin might be at stake.”
“Shut up, Bones!” Kirk snapped as a female cadet behind them promptly started to giggle, and Jim sped up. Well, he wanted to but somehow his legs didn’t obey him like they should have, and he groaned while standing up a little straighter.

McCoy started to grin again, while the Vulcan scrutinized his friend and commanding officer. “Are you all right, Captain? It appears you’re having difficulty moving.”

“You should have seen him sitting down in the shuttle,” Leonard snickered. “It should be quite amusing to watch you sit down in front of Barnett with that love bite on your neck and –”

“Spock, do you know how many crewmen are already aboard?” Kirk firmly changed the subject, silently cursing Bones’ big mouth. Wasn’t there something was called ‘medical confidentiality’?

Thank god the Vulcan decided to let go of the topic. “Lieutenant Sulu and Ensign Chekov have been contacted, and I’ve been informed that they were beamed safely to the Enterprise,” he reported. “Dr. Marcus and Mr. Scott were already aboard, as well as Mr. Keenser, and –”

“Why I’m not surprised that Scotty decided to spend his last vacation before we’re in space for five years in Engineering instead of on Earth?” Kirk sighed with a chuckle, glad for the distraction from his chaotic thoughts concerning a certain Augment.

“Because you know our Scotsman by now?” Bones threw in and Jim grimaced.

“Yes, I do.” He glanced to his right where Spock was walking. “What about Uhura?”

“She is aboard, too, and –”

“Let me guess, you personally saw that she was beamed up before you came here,” McCoy commented, which got him a mild “Of course, Doctor,” as an answer.

They neared Barnett’s office and Kirk used the last of the semi-privacy to say, “I don’t know what they put in your coffee this morning, Bones, but you’re certainly hilarious. Is this because of your eager anticipation to begin this five-years-mission, or –”
“Are you mad? I don’t even know why I signed up for this insanity!”

“We all make mistakes,” Jim smirked, but turned serious in the next moment – after all, that saying reminded him very clearly of his own ‘mistake’ and that he had as well, said the same thing to Khan last year when he’d spoken to him in the brig. Damn it, no matter the subject, the son-of-a-bitch continued to pop into his head over and over again!

They reached the office which was guarded by a member of security personnel. “Captain James Kirk of –” Jim wanted to report himself, but was cut off by one of the guards.

“I know, sir, you and your officers are expected.” He saluted and rang the door chime, reporting the arrival of Kirk and his companions via intercom. Only then did the door slide open. “Please, sir,” the young man said and stepped away to let the three officers pass by.

Barnett sat at his desk and looked up as the captain and his senior officers entered the room. “Kirk!” Richard allowed himself a small smile of relief. “I’m glad you and your friends made it safely to headquarters!” He nodded towards the Vulcan and the medical officer. “Mr. Spock, Doctor McCoy, it’s good to see you both in one piece.”

“Somehow everyone seems to believe Khan would like to literary blow us up,” Jim mumbled, actively forcing himself to consider any double entendre that thought conjured up.

“Well, he is known for violence.” Barnett gestured towards a small table surrounded by chairs and followed the three officers, sitting down. The admiral’s gaze found Jim as the younger man lowered himself down very, very carefully, and his glance flickered briefly to the large hickey that could be plainly seen, even under the high collar of the grey Starfleet uniform worn by members while on Earth. Remembering his former student’s reputation all too well, he allowed himself a quick smirk, but decided not to comment; it was up to Kirk how he chose to spend his last few days – or nights – on Earth before the Enterprise’s long mission. “We were concerned when you didn’t answer our calls, Captain,” he began. “Care to explain why we couldn’t reach you?”

For several seconds Jim found himself transported back to when Barnett had been the head of Starfleet Academy when Jim had had to answer to him for countless small and not-so-small misdeeds. Then he took a deep breath and lied through his teeth, sticking to the story of how he’d lost his communicator, which seemed to amuse Richard no end.

“I’ve heard of officers who’d tried very hard to lose their communicators, but this is certainly a new one.” He shook his head, amused. “Thank the lord and the quick action of your officers that you were warned before Khan could reach you. Don’t get me wrong, Jim, but capturing this living
“fighting-machine is a job for dozens of security officials, not you.”

“Yeah, we’ve already enough of him,” Bones grumbled.

“Admiral,” Spock addressed Barnett. “As I understood Commander Stones, the Enterprise is to depart several days earlier than scheduled…”

“Yes, Commander, I thought it would be the best option. Khan is out for revenge – on us all, but especially upon you, Captain Kirk, and the other senior officers – and if you’re in space it’ll be more difficult for him to reach and harm you. I won’t make the same mistake as Marcus and underestimate this man. I gave the order to shoot him on sight…” Jim was surprised to feel a sharp stab of worry as he heard those words. “…and seeing more than six security details are out to find him, I hope to receive the message of success soon. Still, I won’t risk your lives or those of your crew. Aboard the Enterprise –”

“Excuse me, Admiral, but how did Kahn escape to begin with? I was informed after his trial that he was returned to cryosleep, locked away in one of our most secure facilities. How was it possible that he woke up, returned to Earth, and started a vendetta?” Spock asked.

Richard grimaced. “That’s a good question and you certainly will not like the answer. There were –” He stopped himself as the door-chime buzzed. “Yes?”

“Admiral, Professor Dashwood and Doctor Conelly are here,” the young ensign reported and Barnett’s face darkened while he and the others rose. “Very well, send them in.” He looked at Kirk. “Get ready to meet two of the many idiots responsible for the criminal’s escape. They’ve already been interviewed by Commander Stones, yet I just need to ask them a few more questions for the record. But that can wait until you three are on your way to the Enterprise.”

The ensign let in two men. Jim and his friends had never seen them before. Two guards followed them and took up positions beside the closing doors.

The young captain pursed his lips. He already knew from Khan what had happened – mostly – still, he wanted to hear the whole truth from both sides.

Barnett cleared his throat. “This is Professor Matthew Dashwood and Doctor Nathan Conelly, the heads of one of our departments in the Starfleet Laboratory for Science and Healing. Professor, Doctor, this is Captain Kirk, his first- and science officer, Commander Spock, and Doctor Leonard
McCoy, chief medical officer of the *USS Enterprise.*

While Bones and Spock simply nodded at the two scientists, Kirk felt himself stiffen even more. So, these two belonged to the group of men and women who had had no problem abusing a human being for their experiments and denying the Augment any human rights! His gaze washed over the elder scientist before it fixed on the younger one. Somehow the name Connelly seemed to be familiar to him, but he couldn’t put a finger on where he’d heard or read the name before. But one thing Jim saw instantly, this man was as cold as ice.

“Heads of the LSH?” McCoy asked, alarmed. “Is there a new epidemic of some kind? Why would two chiefs of our primary research lab be here?”

“No, there’s no new epidemic – only an escaped subject,” Dashwood answered, and Kirk went rigid. ‘Subject’? Even McCoy, who held a deep loathing for the Augment, glared at the man.

“As I learned only *last night,* Khan Noonien Singh hasn’t been transported to the same security facility as the cryotubes of his crew but remained for eight months hidden somewhere at headquarters, and for the last four months was placed under the ‘responsibility’ of the LSH. Barnett explained angrily, “Somehow yesterday evening –”

“Hold on a minute!” Leonard cut in. “Sir, are you saying that Starfleet’s laboratories held Khan for… For what exactly?” The admiral’s expression was enough for McCoy to understand the answer, and realization hit him fully. “You… You used him for *experiments*?” He stared wide-eyed at the two scientists while Spock lifted a brow.

“I can’t imagine that he agreed to this,” the Vulcan mused.

“He wasn’t exactly in a condition to be asked –” Dashwood began, but was interrupted by Spock.

“By the Common Laws of the United Federation of Planets, it is forbidden to use…” the first officer started, and Connelly lifted a hand.

“Please, Commander, we know the laws. They were made for citizens of the Federation. Prisoner 3158-17-215 isn’t even human, but –”

“‘Prisoner 3158-17-215’?” For the first time Jim raised his voice. Until now he had pretended that
this was the first time he’d learned of the Augment’s fate and didn’t care at all. But he couldn’t stay silent any longer as he listened to these men referring to the super-human as a ‘subject,’ or as a prisoner who was nothing more than a registration number. His blood began to boil, and this time his empathy had nothing to do with last night. There were several things Jim Kirk couldn’t tolerate, and stripping a man off his honor, even of his name and humanity were among them.

“That’s the number the subject is recorded as in our files,” Conelly answered flatly. “However, yesterday evening –”

“What do you mean by ‘He was in no condition to be asked’?" Bones wanted to know, back in full doctor-mode. “Did you keep him in coma the whole time? How else should I interpret your statement?”

“For most of the time Doctor, yes. That was the only way to lower the risk to the researchers to a minimum and –”

Again Conelly was cut off, this time by a consternated Spock, “Your actions breached more than nine Federation laws and seven of Starfleet Command. You –”

“Commander, I understand that it sounds harsh, but the needs of the one were outweighed by the needs of many. This is simple logic which I am certain you, as a Vulcan, understand.” Nathan locked eyes with the first officer. “The subject’s blood and genes are the key to antidotes and vaccines against most known maladies.”

Spock lifted a brow. “This has been attempted before, as you certainly know. It ended in disaster, with experiments such as these changing the appearance of half the Klingon population, after they –”

“We’ve learned from those mistakes! Marcus was very familiar with the whole episode involving another captain of the Enterprise, too,” Dashwood cut in.

“We are a step away from the first successful results!” Conelly informed all assembled. “If the subject could be returned to us –”

“STOP calling him a ‘subject’!” Kirk’s sudden snarl turned everybody’s attention towards the young captain, whose face had turned red. “He is not a goddamned thing, he’s a person!”
McCoy’s nodded angrily. “Yeah! I mean, I would gladly punch the bastard in the face, but he is human, after all! A sentenced criminal, yes, but human! How could you –”

“If your CMO had looked at his bio-scans closely enough, Captain, he’d have confirmed to you that –” Again Conelly couldn’t finish his sentence, as Leonard growled,

“I’ve studied him too, and he is extraordinary I admit, but I swear that he is nevertheless a homo sapiens and should be treated as such!”

“So, it seems this is a difference of interpretation,” Richard Barnett said in a low voice. “You see, Dr. McCoy, these two gentlemen are of the opinion that Khan couldn’t be considered a person and has therefore no human rights.”

“And you’re okay with that?” Jim asked sharply; his expression was grim and a fire started to burn in his eyes that made the admiral mindful.

“No, I’m not ‘okay’ with this, Jim,” he answered sternly. “But obviously some of my colleagues share the same opinion as Professor Dashwood and Dr. Conelly.”

“Bullshit!” This statement came from Bones. “I had Khan in my med bay and I can assure you that the man may be strange, but his genes are rooted in our species!”

Conelly sounded almost bored, as if talking to a child. “You are a doctor, therefore it should be in your best interests to heal people. Research into cures for the most serious illnesses has often demanded unpleasant tests, still –”

“You are a doctor of medicine, too?” Bones asked with narrowed eyes. When Nathan simply nodded, he hissed, “Then you broke your oath, Mister! Or haven’t you taken it?”

A snort escaped the scientist. “Oh please, Dr. McCoy, spare me the nonsense of some archaic sentiment no-one believes in anymore.”

“Archaic sentiment? You’re calling an oath of honor an ‘archaic sentiment’? My god man, do you even have a moral code?” Bones was outraged now.
“No, I am a realist and –”

“Being a realist doesn’t mean that you have to ignore one of the most important traditions in our professional history!”

The left corner of Nathan’s mouth moved slightly. “There, you said it yourself, Dr. McCoy. Traditions! History! The future lies ahead, not in the past!”

“And those trees, whose roots are dying, are sentenced to dry and to fall in the next storm!” Jim cut into the heated discussion between the two medics. “It’s an old Native American saying and it speaks of something very realistic!”

“‘I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone’,” Bones quoted. “Does that ring a bell at all?”

“‘According to judgment’, Dr. McCoy,” Nathan replied icily. “We are speaking here of an individual who brought death and pain to many innocent people. And by the way, he is a genetically enhanced creation of a lab that existed three hundred years ago – an intelligent animal at best – but at last useful for something.” Conelly sounded as though he were talking about the weather, and Jim felt a burning fury stirring in his gut that took him – again – by surprise.

This need to step in for his nemesis’ fundamental rights had started as he’d headed for Qo’noS and now, after all that had happened last night – and Jim didn’t just consider the carnal madness that had befallen them – this urge was even stronger. “So, this is your kind future? If someone is a criminal you just strip him of human status so that you can use him as a lab-rat?” he spat.

“I’m surprised that you’re so eager to defend the subject – after all you, your crew, Starfleet and a lot of innocent people suffered because of him. Shouldn’t you be more concerned about the next victims he’ll certainly leave in his wake?” Conelly’s gaze fixed on Kirk’s, who straightened his shoulders.

“He ‘will’? So he hasn’t until now? He didn’t kill anyone when he escaped your clutches?” the young captain pressed.

“He rendered Dr. Brown, Professor Dashwood’s assistant, unconscious and put him in the cryotube, and he knocked out another member of staff to steal his clothes, ID and hyper-bike,” Barnett said.
“So, he could have killed them, but didn’t!” It was more a statement than a question, while relief flooded Jim. Khan had shown unexpected mercy again – not only towards him, but also during his escape. As it seemed, the Augment might be changing his ways.

“So, he could have killed them, but didn’t!” It was more a statement than a question, while relief flooded Jim. Khan had shown unexpected mercy again – not only towards him, but also during his escape. As it seemed, the Augment might be changing his ways.

“He’s already brought death upon many people, now he repays his crimes by saving others through his blood. It’s simple,” Conelly added and McCoy stepped forwards.

“So, in other words, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. You’re calling the Hippocratic Oath archaic, but act on principles from the Old Testament! This hypocrisy is sickening! I may be a little old-fashioned, but at least I still have morals!” He all but shouted the last words.

“Morals will not heal the sick,” Nathan countered infuriating calmly. “We are speaking here of one life for thousands.”

“This is not the way of the Federation. You are trampling on everything humankind has redressed within the last centuries,” Barnett commented flatly. “And there will be consequences for you. I’ll see to that!”

“What did you mean with ‘one life for thousands’? Was he about to ‘give’ his life?” Jim asked tensely, recalling his own thoughts from earlier in the morning concerning the process of stasis from three centuries ago. “What would you have done with him after you’d finished all the tests? Would you have put him back into cryosleep?”

“We would have tried,” Dashwood nodded, and Kirk narrowed his eyes.

“You would have tried?”

“That’s the whole problem with cryosleep,” McCoy said with a hint of bitterness in his voice, shocked beyond belief that a colleague misused his status and thought to stand above any law because of his ‘good intentions’. “You can’t freeze and unfreeze a body several times,” he explained to Jim. “Khan was put into stasis back in the 20th century, was woken up by Marcus and then sentenced to be put back into his cryotube. Even enhanced as he is, I doubt he’d survive a third ‘sleep’.” He glared heatedly at Dashwood and Conelly. “And you wouldn’t have minded if he died during the procedure. You’d be rid of him for good then, wouldn’t you?”

All the blood left Jim’s face while Barnett fixed the two scientists with another hard glare after hearing of this risk about the antiquated procedure for the first time. “Is this true?”
“Dr. McCoy’s assumptions regarding cryosleep are correct. There is indeed a good chance that the subject wouldn’t cope with further stasis. But taking into account his genetically enhanced body, the chances of success rise to fifty-fifty.”

For the third time within a few hours Jim felt sick to the core. “It was never intended that he’d leave the LSH alive, was it?” he whispered. The silence was answer enough, and the young captain had to fight the urge to punch Conelly and Dashwood. Taking several calming breaths he turned towards Barnett. “May I ask a favor of you, sir?”

The Chief of Command nodded, already anticipating what his former student wanted. He wasn’t mistaken.

“Remove these ‘subjects’ from our research department!” He pointed nonchalantly at the two scientists, before he continued. “And those who ordered this inhumanity shouldn’t be part of our service, whether admirals or not! They have nothing in common with what Starfleet represents!” A demand, rather than a request lay beneath the angry fire in his eyes as he added, “And if you ever catch Khan, then make certain that his human rights are observed! Despite his actions, he is a living, breathing, feeling being, for God’s sake and not a lifeless piece of meat you can put in and take out of a freezer!”

Richard nodded. “I will – if we catch him alive.”

“If you rescind the order to shoot him on sight, sir, you hopefully won’t have to deal with his death.” Kirk took another deep breath – ‘He HAS to live!’ his mind shouted to him out of nowhere – and he said sternly, “I once risked a lot to bring him in for a fair trial, a trial I never heard details about, and from which the sentence had never been completely carried out. Starfleet had wronged him again – even against its own judgment. This we owe him and ourselves in keeping with our code of morality.” Jim’s voice had become strong enough to elicit even a swift impressed expression from Spock.

Barnett sighed, knowing that nothing could change Kirk’s mind if it was set to something. “I don’t know if we’ll be able to capture him alive, but if so, I will personally see that he gets fair treatment. I’ll keep you updated, Jim. After all, you and your crew have the right to know what happens to the man you found first and went to such lengths to bring in.” He offered the younger man his hand. “Good luck to you and your crew, Captain. May the stars show you the right path. You’ll be our representative in any first contact situations with perhaps many new cultures. So Jim?” He winked quickly, “keep the Prime Directive in mind.”

“Yeah, promise,” Kirk mumbled, rolling his eyes, while Spock and McCoy bid their farewells. Then the three officers walked to the door, where Jim looked back once more. “And sir, may I give you some personal advice?” At the asking glance of his superior he growled, “Fire them!” He pointed to
the two scientists.

Ignoring the indignant glares of the other men, Barnett saluted casually. “Captain.”

“Admiral.” With that, Jim and his crewmates left and walked down the corridor towards the turbolift.

McCoy pressed his lips into a thin line, before he gritted out, “One life for thousands, the Hippocratic Oath is archaic, at least his blood is useful… My ass! If this is the real face of Starfleet I signed up to the wrong club!”

“This isn’t the ‘real’ Starfleet, as you put it, Doctor,” the Vulcan was compelled to answer. “We all knew that several sympathizers of Section 31 successfully avoided charges and not all of them were even found. Luckily more of them have been exposed now and this can only lead to a full recovery of Starfleet’s honor and real intentions.”

“I only know one thing, the body cannot heal properly as long as there’s still disease,” Leonard grumbled. “And there are many wounds left in this body!”

Jim kept silent while his two friends talked to each other, actually getting along for once. His thoughts wandered towards downtown or wherever the Augment was hidden at the moment. Though he’d earlier had a guilty conscience about his decision to stay silent about Khan’s ‘visit’, he was now glad that he followed his gut and had said nothing. Even though Kirk still believed that the super-human should be punished for his crimes, he knew that he couldn’t just stand by while the man was killed or – even worse – fell back into the hands of some insane scientist. Yes, Barnett promised to give Khan a fair chance to be heard, still there was a good possibility that further hidden operatives of the former Section 31 could get a hold of him again.

‘Almost two hours ago I felt bad because I hoped that he wouldn’t get caught. Now I really wish he’d escape,’ Kirk’s too-big heart whispered, while he stepped into the turbolift which would bring his friends and him to the floor where the transporters were located. ‘Barnett may have promised to treat him fairly, but there are too many of the old guard in Section 31 who want to use Khan for their own proposes. Even a resolution of the Council didn’t stop them, otherwise he wouldn’t have been forced to serve as a guinea pig for damned medical experiments for the last four months!’ The turbolift neared its destination. ‘Khan told me but only now do I realize what it meant. Four months in the clutches of scientists who didn’t even see him as a human being – and above all, he couldn’t even move or speak to his tormentors; damned to helplessly endure whatever was done to him. No one should suffer like that!’

“Jim, is everything all right?” Spock asked quietly, bringing Kirk out of his reverie.
“Only time will tell,” the young captain murmured, ignoring the confused looks from his two friends. Sure, both were engaged in their own musings of what they’d just learned in Barnett’s office, though perhaps not about Khan’s fate, but rather about how there were still members of Starfleet willing to carry on Marcus’ legacy.

As they left the turbolift and headed towards the transporter room, they passed several windows and Jim looked one last time out into the bright sun and its dancing rays on the Pacific waves before glancing up at the Golden Gate Bridge – a monument to human achievement even before Khan’s time.

‘Wherever you are, Khan, be careful. Don’t get into trouble and don’t CAUSE any trouble! I gave you a second chance today in not giving you away, so please don’t waste it.’

Half an hour later, James T. Kirk walked onto the bridge of the USS Enterprise wearing the gold shirt of command. Uhura glanced at him from her station and lifted a brow as she spied the unmistakable ‘bruise’ on his neck and gave him one of her patented glares, before simply shaking her head. Smiling, she turned her attention back on her duty. Some habits would never change!

Jim pursed his lips – that went better than he thought it would – and looked at the figure in the command chair. “Hard to get it out of your system once you’ve had a taste, isn’t that right, Mr. Sulu?”

The Japanese helmsman had been lost in thought and grinned, startled by his commanding officer. He jumped out of the chair and said, “‘Captain’ does have a nice ring to it. Chair’s all yours, sir!”

The tension finally began to leave Kirk as he – carefully – took his rightful place in the middle of the Enterprise’s command center. His gaze fell on the large screen that showed the Earth. Somewhere down there a lonely man was still running for his life and just for a moment, Jim felt the uncalled need to help the Augment. But there was nothing he could do for him now; after all he didn’t even know Khan’s location. He’d already done more than the law allowed. ‘Maybe he really can escape. Maybe we’ll meet again, just like his note promised.’

Around him, the senior officers were preparing for the mission, Uhura reported that all crew members were aboard despite the earlier departure time, and Bones once again complained about his own foolishness at signing up for a mission that would keep him in space for five years, which made Carol giggle. Jim hadn’t seen Carol in quite a while and he had looked forward to meeting her again. But as she gave him a warm smile, he realized that the usual fluttering feelings in his belly at seeing her were gone. Well, maybe there had been too many things happening during the last hours and he simply needed a break.
But not now – not when the whole galaxy was waiting for him.

“So, where should we go, Mr. Spock?” He turned towards his Vulcan friend.

From his station on the upper deck of the bridge, Spock said, “As a mission of this duration has never before been attempted, I defer to you judgment, Captain.” There was a hint of kindness in his onyx eyes.

‘Good judgment? Well, we’ll have to wait and see if that turns out!’ Kirk thought and took a deep breath. “Mr. Sulu, take us out!”

The helmsman smiled. “Aye, Captain!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, Spock and Bones may not be exactly as sympathetic to Khan’s fate at the hands of the LSH scientists, but they are still outraged (in Spock’s case as far as a Vulcan can be ‘outraged’, grin). And this will become very important when they learn about their friend’s encounter with the super-human (don’t worry, this one night will not remain the only one the two will share with each other, smirk).

In the next chapter the Klingons will show up and you will learn why they’ve declared war against the Federation. You will meet an old acquaintance from TOS and later from TNG, and another well-known Klingon will be mentioned. In the meantime, Khan hides among the fishermen and learns that simple-minded inferiors are not that bad – especially when he can use them to leave Earth – and Jim learns that the Klingons do know who ‘visited’ their home-world a year ago. And Barnett will confront Norton.

I hope you liked the new installment – the bickering of the friends, Khan’s plan to avoid Starfleet, and the whole confrontation in Barnett’s office. I would really appreciate receiving more reviews and other feedback.

Have a nice week,
Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear Readers,

Thank you once again for the reviews and the kudos. I am so happy about every reaction I’m getting about my writing, even if my English is sometimes rough.

In the new chapter you will meet someone who is well-known from TOS and TNG, as I promised, and I am glad (how evil of me) that no-one guessed who it could be. I hope the surprise will be to your liking.

You will also learn what happens to Khan and how his plot is beginning to work, while Norton becomes even more the bad-ass. And there are two nice Jim-Bone scenes, which will show how deep their friendship runs.

I hope you enjoy the update,

Yours, Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 6 – There will be war

Like a silver-white spark in the endless depths of space, the Enterprise sped through the sea of darkness, twinkling stars, and colorful stardust. Only three days ago she had left everything familiar behind her, following the purpose James T. Kirk had spoken of during the ceremony in San Francisco: to boldly go where no one had gone before.

But just at the moment, the orator of said speech was everything but bold. Holding his best innocent smile tightly in place, he watched McCoy as the CMO lowered his bio-scanner, eyed the exposed torso of his friend up and down, and then frowned at him. “What the heck did you do that night before we left? Were you in a bar-fight again?”

Jim lifted both hands in defiance. “No, I wasn’t, Bones! Cross my heart and –”

“Don’t play dumb with me, Jim! There are serious bruises on your chest, shoulders, and upper arms. Your neck is not only decorated with a hickey that’s been the subject of rumors for days now, but also with fingerprints looking as though someone had planned on snapping your neck. And, you have several…love bites on you which almost broke the skin!” He crossed his arms in front of his
“Who did you bed, you idiot? A Klingon woman?”

“A _Klingon_ woman?” Kirk stared at Leonard as if he’d grown two heads. “Are you nuts?”

“No more nuts than you, considering the fact that you’re withholding some important information, such as you were beaten badly just before you left for a five-year mission in space!”

Kirk rolled his eyes. “Is that any way to speak to your captain?” he retorted, slipping back into his black undershirt before reaching for his gold top. He was glad that it was already evening when he’d finally complied with the fourth or fifth demand of his CMO and friend to attend the required medical check every crewmember had to undergo at the beginning of a long mission. Of course, the same check had already been done a few days before boarding the ship, still, every CMO of a starship had to run a second check to complete the files of the whole crew – something Jim Kirk was anything but fond of. And knowing that the whole encounter with Khan had left marks on him even a blind man could recognize, he successfully had delayed this check. Until now. Bones had threatened to put a note in Kirk’s file if Jim didn’t show up at med-bay before tomorrow.

“I can speak like a CMO to his captain, if you really want me to,” McCoy growled. “But then I would have to file a full report about how the commanding officer of the _USS Enterprise_ has some serious bruises he could only have gotten during a fist-fight he conveniently ‘forgot’ to mention.” He returned Kirk’s dark glare and sighed, then his expression softened. “Jim, this all looks to me as if someone tried to beat the shit out of you. And worse, there are several more red and blue marks on your butt and inner thighs that don’t necessarily indicate rape, but do indicate either a very rough coupling, or maybe a first-time in that department?” Astonished, he saw a blush rising up his friend’s face. “Hey, I certainly will never judge relationships or one-night-stands between people of the same gender, but still, I never took you for…for bi.”

“Me too,” Jim mumbled, scratching his head. _Of course_ Bones would have to discover the real nature of his carnal activities with a man whose name Jim had to keep a secret. He hadn’t feared disapproval from his friend – the good doctor was far too broad-minded for anything like that – but he was going to ask questions the captain couldn’t answer.

However, Leonard was sensible and tactful enough to stop himself from asking for details while he lay the bio-scanner aside and surveyed the younger man who sat on the diagnostic bed like the incarnate bad conscious. “Calm down, Jim. There is nothing to be ashamed of. You’re not the first guy who’s given in to his curiosity of how it might feel to have sex with another man. But those bruises you have…”

“It wasn’t a bar fight, or a street-fight – rather…a kind of misunderstanding that was…resolved. And later…” He made a jittery gesture and Bones began to chuckle.
“I never thought I would see the day that you become shy!” Smirking he shook his head. “Do you need a painkiller for your butt, or –”

“I could have done with one of those three days ago,” Kirk groused and hopped of the diagnostic bed.

“Then you should have come sooner, kid, instead of delaying the whole thing.” Bones spoke like an old country doctor lecturing a teen about foolish behavior. Then he sighed, turned away and took up his PADD. “Did you really think I would judge you, Jim? Do you have so little faith in me?” He sounded almost hurt and Jim shook his head.

“No! No, of course not. Still…” He shrugged and Leonard grimaced before he went to one of the cupboards and returned a moment later with a tube of ointment. “Here, use this and tomorrow you don’t have to sit down in the captain’s chair as if you are about to recline on a fakir’s bed.”

Kirk grinned and accepted the medicine. “Thanks, Bones.”

“You’re welcome. And I’ll give you something for those bruises – and this hickey. Sweet lord, your lover really must have been a wild one.”

Jim gulped as the image of a marble-white face with those high cheekbones and captivating pale blue-green eyes filled his mind, while well-shaped lips moved in a controlled, impressive way before they captured his...

“He was,” he whispered, baffled by the sudden longing that rose in him. Then he caught McCoy’s broad smirk and made for the doors quickly, thanking god and every higher being that the med-bay was empty save for Bones and him.

“Jim, don’t forget the cream to get rid of that love bite!” Leonard tried to hold him back with a small smirk, lifting another tube, but Kirk shook his head. Something in him didn’t want to quickly heal this ‘mark’. It was the last connection to the man who was his nemesis and seducer, all in one person – a man of whom he didn’t know still lived freely or had been re-captured or killed during his flight.

“It will fade in time,” he reassured the CMO and left the med-bay, feeling uneasy once again when he thought of Khan, who had the whole Federation against him, and hoping against his better judgment that the enhanced man had escaped.
“Hey, that was a really good haul!” Nando slapped the new crewmember on the shoulder. “And how you pulled Georg out of the water was something we will all remember forever, right Georg?”

The fisherman in question grinned broadly. “Yeah! Without you, m’boy, I would have drowned.” He wrapped one weathered arm around ‘Evan’s’ shoulders, who went rigid, and laughed. “Calm down, laddie! We told you that we won’t let you off the hook. Not after the stunt you pulled. And you even saved a whole day’s haul and, by the way, my life.”

Capitano Alassio Mazzani nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, Neptune himself must have led ya to us, Evan! So, let’s give th’ sea god a sacrifice in th’ next bar. I pay the second roun’ after Georg!”

Most of the crew cheered and followed their captain towards town; only the youngest had to stay back to ensure the catch made it safely to market. They strolled across the pier and while Khan was pondering how to escape this spree without snubbing his fellows – after all, he still needed to hide among them – Nando called out, “What the hell is going on? Don’t tell me this damn Starfleet maneuver is still going on!”

“Maybe this thing is more serious than we thought. I heard the Klingons are making real trouble these days. We shouldn’t be surprised if they start a war,” Georg grumbled.

The super-human had looked up and just for a moment his heart sank as he saw several Starfleet security officials watching the docks, then he called on all his skills as an actor, bent his head down and returned Georg’s far-too intimate gesture. “Thanks for the invitation, my friend. I could use a drink or two.” He grinned and pretended to have sea-legs – something he hadn’t to bother with in reality.

“Yes, I can see that,” the older fisherman laughed. “Not used to the sea anymore, are you, laddie?”

Laughing, chattering, and joking, the crew walked to the end of the pier and left under the careful watch of the guards, who only saw several fishermen returning home, eager to slake their thirst in the closest bar. No one recognized the younger man with the tousled dark hair, the three-day’s growth of beard, the weathered, faded clothes, and the staggering steps as the criminal they were searching for, and Khan let out the breath he’d been holding as they crossed the street and headed towards a favored bar.
That had been far too close for his liking, still luck seemed to be with him. Once he’d realized that his crewmates were simple honest souls, he’d had a chance to prove himself worthy by dragging Georg out of the Pacific after the older man had tumbled overboard. After all, if they’d have lost a crewmate on the high seas then there would have been questions from the police and with them the risk that he could have been recognized. At least his superior reactions saved a day’s haul as he’d activated the break of the automatic cable control that secured the net at the last moment. His comrades had celebrated his quick thinking and Mazzani had promised him extra pay, something he needed in order to cement his own plans.

If someone had told him earlier that he would work as an ordinary fisherman for three days, reel in nets, jump overboard to prevent an inferior from drowning, and sit with his fellow fishermen in a pub drinking ale and rum, he’d have thought them insane; maybe would even have become angry to have been thought of like that. But here he was, sitting on an old wooden bench in a crowded bar, drinking ale he was certain was alien, and had earned his first credits and listened to some funny stories (which couldn’t be anything but fish tales), while from the speakers old shanties blared. A more stereotypical scene wasn’t possible! And no one around him would ever assume that in their midst sat a man who was able to instantly kill them all with his bare hands.

But he had no intention of doing such a thing. They weren’t threatening him, they weren’t enemies, nor did they intentionally hinder his plans. They were simply here at the same place like he was, enjoying “beer o’clock”. And, as he realized surprisingly, he didn’t mind at all. Not really. Even though everything in him screamed to act with more alacrity to find his family, he knew that he had to stay calm. After all, there was nothing he could do as long as Starfleet’s blood hounds were after him. And furthermore, the time at sea had been good for him; the last vestiges of his captivity had been blown away, his mind had found some rest, and his body had fully recovered.

“… eh, Evan?” Nando’s voice brought him back to reality and he lifted a brow.

“Pardon me, I didn’t hear. What did you say?” Khan asked, ever charming.

The young Italian rolled his eyes. “You’re often drifting away, uh?” He grinned. “I asked if you had a place to stay.”

Khan sipped at his ale or whatever it was – and looked at Nando. “No, I’ve nowhere to stay.”

The other man grinned. “Hey, no problem, you can stay with me. I’ve an apartment several streets away from here. I can only offer you a cot, but if you don’t mind…”
“I do not mind, Nando, thank you,” the Augment answered, forcing a smile on his face. ‘Not only doing a henchman’s job on a fishing boat, now I’m reduced to spending my night on a cot!’ he sighed inwardly, but he shouldn’t complain. It was better than nothing and it would be only for a short time until Starfleet became careless again, and he could start to make his plans more intricately, collecting information before he struck.

Still, the prospect of finding shelter in some small room with a lesser human – even if Nando was not so bad in his own way – and to be forced to simply wait didn’t appeal. If he could get back to Kirk’s flat and…

Khan frowned. Kirk was away with his ship; starting his five-years-mission earlier than scheduled, as the news reported. ‘Certainly an order from Starfleet Command to keep him out of ‘the terrorist’s way for revenge’,’ he sneered inwardly, and sighed. Even if James were still in San Francisco, Khan didn’t know if the younger man would again accommodate him, or instead inform Starfleet. Yet Khan believed that Kirk wouldn’t turn him in. Not after that night, and after James had learned about what had happened to him at LSH. The young officer’s heart was far too good – something that would be his death someday.

Unconsciously, the super-human’s fingers reached for the hickey Kirk had given him during their passionate shared hours. It had faded away sometime during the afternoon of his first day at sea; still Khan thought he could sense it. Even if physically healed, it seemed to remain – deep in him, branded on his mind and soul.

Without his doing, the Augment’s gaze wandered to the ceiling. Somewhere out there was the Enterprise, and with her the only living soul he had left at the moment. ‘Stay out of trouble, James, or you will have to deal with me!’

ST***ST***ST

Far away from Earth, almost in the middle of the Beta Quadrant on another planet altogether, evening also approached. Most citizens were either at home or lingered in pubs, fighting arenas, or sport centers, but regardless of the status of their families and heritage, there was only one thing that held their interest these days: the session and resolution of the High Council.

In the Great Hall that was located in the capital’s First City on Qo’onS, the heart of the Klingon Empire, the atmosphere was heated. Deep voices filled the air, fists were balled, younger Council members tried to drown the statements of the elders in outrage. Wiser members had already turned their attention to prior matters, but in the end, they all wanted one and the same thing - the beginning of war! War against a union that had changed from a troublesome neighbor into an enemy: the United Federation of Planets.
For a century there had been quarrels, incidents, and disputes which had led to a tense co-existence, culminating in something the Earthlings called a ‘cold war’.

A Klingon adage espoused that ‘Revenge is a dish best served cold’, but by now this ‘coldness’ had faded away, to be replaced by burning wrath. The Federation was expanding more and more, settlements arose first near the Neutral Zone, and now within it. Yes, the articles of the Organian Peace Treaty allowed both sides to contact the inhabited planets in the Neutral Zone, and could offer them membership to one of the two realms, but any kind of violence was out of question. And there was another article in the treaty that forbade entering the other one’s realm with warlike intentions.

The enmities had stopped and both sides had withdrawn after the treaty had been forced upon them, still the hostile feelings remained. They were too different, the Klingons and the humans – or the Vulcans, Andorians, and other peoples which were a part of the Federation. But at heart, the real issue was between the Klingons and the Earthlings.

Whenever both sides met there would be disputes, provoked perhaps once by the humans, the next time by the Klingons, who had a long memory for insults to their honor. And there had been many – too many, especially within the last two years.

The incident on the Federation Outpost K7 near the border to the Beta Quadrant, concerning ball-like, small furred animals which gave even the most courageous warrior shivers, still burned deeply in the fierce hearts of many Klingon soldiers. It burned particularly brightly in the heart of one of their commanders – Koloth, a warrior of a high-ranking family who had powerful friends in the leadership of the Fleet and in the Council.

One of these friends sat among the older members of the Council, taking his rightful place like his father and father’s father had done before him: Kor, son of Ryan, the last descendant of the Klingon Imperial Family.

Like many other Klingons who came from the families of the chosen ones involved in the experiment with Terran Augment DNA a century ago – and which had ended in disaster – a part of the characteristic appearance of this people had changed into almost human appearance. The ridge on Kor’s forehead had morphed into a smooth one like Terran humans had, his skin was paler and his teeth didn’t sport the sharp edges like those of the ‘regular’ Klingons. But he and Koloth, like most of the genetically altered Klingons, were accepted among the others because of their heritage and acknowledgement of their merits.

Kor hadn’t faced any mockery or loathing after he’d been born with a mere human’s appearance. And the status of his family wasn’t the whole reason for the tolerance. He was a fighter through and
through – brilliant, courageous beyond even Klingon standards, and he was successful, especially when forced to adjust to changing circumstances.

It had been he who had led the peace negotiations on Organia, together with his counterparts in the Federation and Starfleet, the latter represented by Commodore Robert Wesley, captain of the *USS Lexington*. Wesley had been ordered to the planet to offer the Organians Federation protection against the approaching Klingons.

Only later, Kor learned that the new flagship of Starfleet, the *USS Enterprise*, had been originally ordered to Organia, but had been diverted to fly a rescue mission, and the *Lexington* took her place. He didn’t regret this because he found in Wesley an experienced, intelligent, honest negotiating partner who knew what it meant to have *honor* – something that was like a religion to Klingons. And, he preferred dialogue between two warriors instead of negotiations with politicians who spoke too much and said too little. The treaty had been brokered after many long days, having been observed by the Organians, and finally, each party had gone its own way. Still, the animosity and loathing remained – after all, old habits die hard.

Several months later, Kor had met Koloth again and learned of the incident on K7 along with the repellent creatures the humans called ‘tribbles’. He’d also learned of the clashes between Koloth, his crew, and the captain of the *Enterprise*. He was a young human – barely grown into a man – who went by the name of James T. Kirk. Kor had become enraged as he heard about what this Kirk-boy had done; that he had dared to fill Koloth’s ship with these infuriating, cooing fur-balls that the entire ship’s crew couldn’t remove completely. And despite all efforts, there were tribbles found all over Qo’noS and the Klingon colonies, where they stuffed themselves and continued breeding. There were many members of the High Council who saw in this event an attack against the empire.

But that was not all. Last year there had also been the incident on Qo’noS in the abandoned Kheta area where a patrol caught a small K’nornian trading craft crewed by ‘dealers’ who’d posed as bounty hunters; chasing a criminal from the Federation. The results were dozens of dead Klingons, two destroyed scout ships, an escaped landing party of Federation members, and a long list of vendettas from the involved families.

It was Koloth, who’d returned from a patrol along the Neutral Zone five months after this incident, who’d discovered the identity of the ‘bounty hunters’. The leader of this bunch of invaders and murderers was none other than that same James T. Kirk, captain of Starfleet’s flagship. But Kirk, a Vulcan, and a dark-skinned woman, hadn’t been alone as the video records of the space craft had shown. They had been seized days later by a second patrol which had been searching for their missing comrades. Those weaklings from the Federation wouldn’t have stood a chance against the Klingon warriors not for their back-up; a man, whose face had remained in the shadows, and who’d slaughtered dozens of the patrol while Kirk and his fellows joined in the fracas.

A cry of outrage and vengeance had risen through the Imperial Fleet and the High Council as Koloth saw the records and had recognized the ‘terrorist’ straightaway. Within a few days, the High Council sentenced Kirk and the others to death by torture – a verdict that was only handed down for high
treason or grave crimes against the Empire.

And the wrath increased even more.

So, this was the so-called peace the Federation stood for: they talked about peace with everyone, but in the background, they secretly attacked every chance they got. The presence of a disguised Starfleet captain on Qo’nos who’d left a trail of spilled Klingon blood showed everyone that those who had always demanded war against the Federation were right.

The preparation for war had already started weeks before Koloth revealed the intruders’ identity. Klingon spies among the Federation had reported a mighty Starfleet ship – three times the size a Constitution class – that had nothing to do with the so-called ‘peaceful mission of exploration’ the Federation wanted to represent with its Starfleet. This ship had been a bulwark of power; built only for battle. There was talk of the Enterprise having been involved in some operation with it and that this ship had been destroyed near Earth. Still, the whole event proved one thing: the Federation was gearing up for war, and many members of the High Council saw in the young captain’s attack on Qo’nos nothing less than a foray into enemy territory to test the Empire’s stronghold.

Afterwards, the Imperial Fleet had started to extend its forces. Thousands of workers toiled day and night in the shipyards to build more battle cruisers – the mighty D7 classes, the smaller but more maneuverable D12 classes – better known under the name ‘Bird-of-Prey’ – and the quick scout-ships. Engineers developed more advanced weapons, old ones were modified and mass-produced; new shields to protect ships and conquered areas on planets were tested. Even the prototypes of cloaking-devices, whose concept had been seized from the Romulans, were installed in several cruisers, hoping they would deliver what the technicians promised. More recruits than ever signed up for the fleet, officers were trained more intensively, more spies were sent into the realm of the declared enemy.

And this evening the Chancellor of the High Council of the Klingon Empire would decide if the time for war had finally come. Generals, Admirals, Commodores, and commanding officers had reported on the status of their battalions and ships, and now it was up to the leader of the Klingon Empire whether or not they would invade the Federation.

The discussions ended abruptly as a large ceremonial hammer crashed against a large gong near the Chancellor’s dais, and all eyes turned towards the old Klingon who’d held this office for more than a century. M’Rek had had his own encounters with another captain of a former Enterprise a hundred years ago.

His dark-skinned face was wrinkled and time had dug deep furrows around his eyes. The ice-white mane reached past his broad shoulders, and a scar marred his left cheek – a mark of battle he’d received several decades ago, which he wore with pride. But despite his many years, his posture was
proud and body still powerful as he rose from his seat and fixed every member of the Council with a hard stare. “All reports have been given, everything has been said!”

The assembled dignitaries and warriors nodded, before he continued, “Long enough have we endured the impudence and effrontery of the Federation; held back when they tried to increase their realm and aligned with others against our rightful claims! We will not tolerate this any longer!” Cheers erupted. “We will not stand back, watching them build mighty battleships in secret, and sending their officers to kill our patrols to test our limits. We are done with listening to their lies of peace!” Again the Council and the guards shouted their agreement. “We will allow them four days after receipt of our demands to withdraw from the Neutral Zone and to evacuate their unrightfully-obtained colonies at our borders. Those who remain afterwards will serve us as slaves or will be eliminated. The weaklings of the Federation will learn to tremble when our battle cries are heard and there is no one to stand between us!”

‘Finally!’ Kor thought. Even if he still thought that Robert Wesley might be a man of honor, the Commodore’s colleagues weren’t – especially true of this boy-captain he was eager to meet and on whom to deliver justice. And if he was not granted this satisfaction, there were also two commanders of his squadron who’d lost brothers in the cowardly assault by Kirk and his companions, who’d gladly execute the renegade.

M’rek let the approving cheers of the High Council wash over him like a mighty wave before raising a fist to the ceiling high above him, and thundered, “This is the day the Klingon Empire will show its true strength. This is the day we will answer to the deliberate provocation of the Federation. DEATH TO OUR ENEMIES!”

The battle cry was picked up and echoed through the air.

The day of war had come!

ST***ST***ST

“You are in a lot of trouble, Albert.” Admiral Barnett glanced calmly at Norton, who was in custody since Richard had given order to arrest him. “I’ve brought charges against you and the persons in authority in the LSH in Nevada for –”

“For what, Richard?” Norton’s voice was flat. “For following an order given by the former Chief of Command, who was killed in a natural disaster in space?”
“No, for breaking a dozen laws and rules.”

Albert smiled mildly. “Such as?”

Barnett frowned. “Do I really have to repeat the indictments? Infringement of human rights, reckless endangerment of the population, violation of a Council sanction, conspiracy, insubordination...”

“Conspiracy and insubordination?” Norton cocked his head. “I don’t know how you got the idea that I would subvert your authority – or that of the whole Corps. I obeyed an earlier given order and...”

“Nonsense! Allistor was, as I just learned, Marcus’s tool, and continued where Alexander stopped. Marcus was a dead-ender, who used his authority to prepare for his own private war to increase his power. If he hadn’t died out there in space, he certainly would have been brought to trial – just like Allistor, if his connection to Section 31 had been revealed before he died. You knew this, nevertheless you executed an order that was –”


“I beg your pardon?”

This time Albert really smiled. “You heard me. You took Allistor’s place only two or three days after his death. At the time the subject known as ‘Khan’ had still been in his cryotube, along with the others here on Earth. Only later were they all transported to Gamma 12, aside from him, yet you didn’t interfere.”

Barnett’s brown skin became even darker as his face flushed in anger. “I had absolutely no knowledge about...”

“You should have – after all, you’re Chief of Command and it’s your duty to know about the orders and projects of your predecessor.”

This got Richard’s hackles up. He realized immediately what Norton was doing. “There were no files, no notes, nothing that suggested –”
“Records which are marked as ‘top secret’ are rarely to be found in a desk-drawer, Richard! You should have done your homework better; then you wouldn’t be in this position now.” Albert leaned back in his chair in the visitor area of the brig. “The Chief of Command is responsible for everything, my friend, especially for ‘delicate’ orders.”

“The Chief of Command also relies on accurate data from his cadre. You and José Luengo have withheld this piece of information on purpose!”

“You can’t prove that, Richard.” Albert retorted. “And regarding Luengo’s part in all of this…”

“He’ll have to answer to the Federation Council, too. He’s already in custody one cell block away from here!” Barnett stated sternly and felt a rush of irritation as Norton started to laugh.

“He is the Chief of the SBI. It’s his duty to know everything. There are secret files in his desk whose contents would make even you frightened – starting with the not-so-accidental disasters of the ruling parties, politicians, and corporations of every planet in the Federation. And ending with secret records from Qo’noS, Romulus, and New Vulcan. Starfleet is –”

“Starfleet is a semi-military organization which was established to research the galaxy and to protect the population of the Federation – and not a strategic agency that spies on the own members, disregards tradition and law, and quietly builds warships, regardless of anyone’s ‘perceived threat’!” He rose from his chair. “Your shadow organization, Albert, that very same one Marcus set up, will be disbanded – once and for all!”

He turned to leave, but Norton’s words made him stop. “Marcus was our best – but not the one who came up with the idea or Section 31 and fathered it. He was chosen to command it, not least of all because he was already Chief of Command, but because there were and are those who felt the same. They made the whole thing possible from the beginning.”

“They have been removed and –”

“Not all of them have, as my presence here now proves, or that of Josés.” All of sudden Albert gave up his casual posture and bent forwards, his hands resting on the table in front of him. “We are everywhere, Richard, don’t ever mistake that. You can go through with this whole ‘cleansing process’ of yours and make José, the scientists of LSH, and me face trial and the Council, but be assured that it will do you no good.”
Barnett stared at him “Are you threatening me?”

“No, my friend, I’m warning you. You’re the Chief of Command. By accusing us of crimes while you hold that post, you’re effectively accusing yourself, too.”

“I had none of these reports.”

“That’s irrelevant. You hold responsibility for everything going on within Starfleet and its facilities. If we’re going to face trial you’ll also have to answer some very uncomfortable questions. The whole cadre could break apart – and for what, Richard? For a genetically bred subject in a human’s shape that only –”

“Khan is not the reason you and the others are in custody, Albert. You simply don’t get it, do you? You are breaking laws! Khan is a murderer, yes, but you and your fellows are not any better than him. After all, it was your actions that were the very reason for all of last year’s bloodshed. And I don’t just mean those in London and San Francisco. Many of the Enterprise’s crew were killed in the Vengeance’s attack Marcus ordered. Not Khan, but Marcus shot on one of our own ships – because James Kirk discovered Alexander’s true motive: war!”

Albert sighed. “Richard, you may be a man of honor and you certainly were the best Chief of Starfleet Academy in recent history, but you are no soldier! You have no killing instinct, but our enemies do. For years the Klingons have been spoiling for a fight. Last February – on the Eve of Foundation no less – they tried to size Sherman’s Planet and were only stopped because several Starfleet ships were nearby to chase them away. And there’ve been further incidents all along the Neutral Zone. The whole Alpha and Beta quadrants are giant tinder boxes that will explode with the tiniest spark.”

“A spark that Marcus, you, and the others wanted to change into an inferno,” Richard all but spat, and Albert groaned as if speaking to a child.

“Don’t you get it? The Klingons will attack! They will start a major offensive soon, certainly without even a declaration of war against us. It isn’t a question of ‘if’ but ‘when’; all signs point to it. And those who strike first are always in the better position. As you said, Starfleet was founded to protect the citizens of the Federation of Planets. Therefore Section 31…”

“… may have had good intentions at the beginning, but Starfleet is no two-faced institution that speaks of peace and then starts a war, regardless of how covertly! If the Klingons are really going to attack, then it’s because you and your fellows gave them the very reason to declare war!” He walked towards the door.
“And what about the Augment? He –"

“Mr. Singh is still on the run – and even if we catch him, I certainly will not send him back to the labs! This man isn’t going to be sentenced like that again after you and your ‘friends’ made certain he couldn’t be put back into cryosleep without killing him. What will happen to him depends on the Council, but –”

“You are a fool, Richard!” Norton spat, as his mask of control slipped. “That the Klingons not only fight with common weapons but also biological warfare agents is well known, and the subject’s blood could be the answer to those inhuman attacks.” He met Barnett’s dark eyes and added: “He was constructed ‘to bring peace during a time of war’, as he himself had said several times when under Marcus’s care. Well, now he can serve the original purpose his creators made him for.”

Richard Barnett surveyed the other admiral and loathing rose in him. To speak of another person – even a criminal – like that went against everything he stood for. “I have nothing more to say to you, Albert. I thought I knew you and that I could trust you – that you were a friend – but I see now you are nothing more than a sick man, lacking in any morality, honor, compassion, or humanity. I’ll see you at the trial!”

Norton gritted his teeth for a moment before he called after the departing Chief of Command. “The Klingons will attack – very soon – and there will be thousands of victims. Mark my words! There will be a day you will curse your own stupidity and wish you’d listened to me!”

But Barnett was already out of the room and didn’t hear him.

Five days later, a message from Qo’noS reached the Council of the Federation of Planets. The Klingons did not request, but demanded that the Federation withdraw form their border in the Alpha quadrant within the next four days after receipt of the transmission, otherwise there would be war.

If the Federation gave into this demand, it would not only leave Sherman’s Planet, Donatu V, and Station Deep Space 7 exposed, but also dozens of others colonies; shifting the ownership to the Klingons – a preposterous imposition.

The ultimatum so provoked a storm within the Council and Starfleet, that every other topic was tabled in favor of it. Even Barnett’s loudest protests didn’t stop the Council from releasing José Luengo from custody; his knowledge and alliance with the varying secret service organizations were too valuable in these times. The same went for Norton, even though he was only able to work under
close observation. The internal turmoil caused by Khan’s escape faded into the background as the threat of war with the Klingons transcended a hundredfold the danger posed by a single terrorist.

The security forces still deployed to track down the fleeing Augment were withdrawn. Their mission was about to shift dramatically as they would be needed to aid in the evacuation of the colonies in the disputed area near the Neutral Zone and to maintain public order on the other planets.

At first, leading politicians and Starfleet officers tried to hide the worsening situation from civilians, but eventually information leaked through the tightest of security, and the media was full of nothing else. Until now. There had only been a tenuous stalemate and constant cold war between the two realms, which had threatened to escalate before, but had been mutually settled (however unhappily) by the Treaty of Organia. Now, for whatever reason, the Klingons no longer felt bound by this treaty and the sinister shadow of a full-blown war spread through the entire Federation. Even as the bureaucrats assured everyone that it wouldn’t come to open battle, no one believed them. Not enough was known about Klingons among the civilian population, aside from that they were belligerent.

There would be war; everyone knew this, even those who preferred to live in denial must have realized deep down in their hearts that their universe was about to change.

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“Blasted Klingons!” Capitano Alessio Mazzini set his glass back on the table and stared at the large screen beside the bar. It currently displayed a talk show hosting several self-named ‘specialists’ discussing the Federation’s options, the usual behavior of Klingons, and their chances of preventing war – or not. Actual news was reported by scrolling updates, which grew more pessimistic from hour to hour. “We’ve such good hauls th’ last days and th’ season promised to be one of th’ best ever. And now they’re coming, these dragon-heads an’ screwing everything up! Santa Maria, th’ pest should come over them.”

“I doubt that the Klingons are susceptible,” Khan drawled, sipping at the red wine that was far more to his taste than the horrible ale that was served in the pub. He had accompanied the fishermen for the whole of the last week, and they had returned only yesterday, facing the calm before the storm on the shore and in the streets of San Francisco. They had learned about the Klingon’s ultimatum while at sea, but to be caught in the tense atmosphere that lay like the usual fog over the city – and the whole planet – was upsetting to their simple lifestyle. Even Khan was uneasy.

“That was meant to be rhetorical!” Alessio groused, ordering a brandy. “Can ya imagine th’ hell tha’ will break loose, if th’ Klingons stay true to their threat? It wouldn’t stop at th’ planets near th’ Neutral Zone. There will be chaos everywhere, even her’ on Earth.”
Beside Khan, Nando sighed and rubbed his neck. “My sister and her family live on Rigel II. The Rigel system is…damned close to the Neutral Zone.” He stared into his glass. “I fear for their safety.”

“What about you? How do you feel about the situation?”

“Just contact them and ask them to come back to Earth,” Georg suggested, taking a sip of his whisky. “Deep-space transmissions are still getting through, so they say on the news, but if war breaks out, I don’t think private messages will be easy to send. And certainly not un-coded ones.”

A snort escaped the young Italian. “You don’t know my sister. She wouldn’t give up her new life on that damned planet for a simple transmission. My cousin Pedro is different and far more reasonable, but my sister…” He shook his head.

The plan just came to Khan like the wind on the sea – simple yet promising. He turned fully towards Nando and made sure that his voice was soft and kind. “Why don’t you travel to your sister and speak with her in person? If you’re travelling all that way just to bring her and her family back to Earth, she might listen to you.”

“You think so?” Nando looked at him with large eyes.

“Yes. Family ties are the strongest bonds which exist, held together by love, honor, and duty,” the Augment answered, in this moment speaking nothing but the plain truth. Oh yes, he knew best how deep the love for the family ran. If only his crew were safe and could live somewhere where no one could ever harm them again…

He cleared his throat as he caught Nando’s questioning glance, patiently waiting for him to continue. “Your sister will glad that you came,” he continued convincingly. “You’ll risk a lot to get to her, because the war will certainly have started by the time you arrive, which will her make think twice before she rejects your offer.”

Of course there was no guarantee the woman would decide such, still Khan knew how simple minds worked, and early on had recognized that Nando was no exception. It stood to reason it would be the same for his sister. This, and the upcoming war, would give him just the excuse he needed to get him away from Earth. He just had to make the right moves in this chess game.

Nando pondered his new crewmate’s words, sipped some more at his whisky, and nodded towards Alessio, who grumbled under his breath. “As long as there is still a chance that business keeps up, he’d never let me go away for so long.”
Khan lifted a brow. “I don’t think so,” he replied calmly. “Alessio is a family man, too, and with the chaos already beginning in town, it’s only a matter of one or two days before he makes sure that his ship is safe and stays on shore. The people are buying tinned food and filling their replicators. The demand for fresh drinking water will rise – not for fish and seafood.”

Frowning, the young Italian moistened his lips. “I would have to buy passage on one of the liners, but…” He gulped and looked suddenly uneasy.

“What is it?” the Augment asked, sounding for all the world, like a caring friend.

“I… I’ve never been in space before, you know.” Nando stared awkwardly into the depths of the golden liquor. “I… I am afraid of flying.”

Khan pursed his lips. ‘That’s even better!’ he thought, delightedly, and replied soothingly, “That’s nothing to be ashamed of. I know several people who’re exactly the same. But I like space. It’s… pure freedom.”

Nando’s glance wandered back to him. “Really? You’ve been in space?”

“Yes, several times,” the super-human affirmed, again meaning every word. “It’s like nothing else you’ve experienced before. There are no borders, no barriers, no horizons; only the endless depths and velvet darkness, illuminated with thousands of shimmering sparkles in all the colors you can think of.” He hadn’t needed to pretend to like being in space or to have seen the universe as more than only an icy vacuum filled with star systems, comets, and elementary particles.

After he’d been woken by Marcus and had looked out of an observation window for the first time – the _Botany Bay_ in the hangar of Marcus’ ship –Khan had been overwhelmed by the sheer unadulterated beauty of the galaxy in which his home planet was located. Then he’d been awakened the second time – not from sleep but from his dreams as he was thrown into the brutal reality the admiral confronted him with. Still, he’d felt a kind of wonder seeing space for the first time with his own eyes.

Rubbing his neck, Nando cleared his throat, hesitated, opened his mouth, shut it again, and finally made up his mind. His question was anything but a surprise to Khan, as the Augment had manipulated the young Italian into this course of action.
“I… I realize that we’ve only known each other for a few days, but…you have seen more of the world than I have, and you’ve been out there.” Nando made a gesture towards the ceiling. “If Alessio stops fishing, would… Would you accompany me?” He smiled sheepishly. “I know I sound like I need a babysitter, but…all my other friends have family here on Earth and they won’t leave them now, not with war on the doorstep. But you’ve told me you have no family and… Well, I’m certain Maria, my sister, and Adriana my brother-in-law would gladly welcome you. So…?” Hope shimmered in his dark eyes as he saw the growing smile on the ascetic face of the other man.

Inwardly Khan was smiling too. Yes, this was exactly what he had angled for. Nando just handed him a ticket off Earth on a silver platter, a gift that would bring him one step nearer to his family. He only had to make certain that they left after real chaos had broken out – when the time allowed in the Klingon’s ultimatum had passed and war had begun. Only then would security in the spaceport lose track of a lot of civilian travelers and he could pass by without worry. There was only one final obstacle he had to break through.

“I would come with you,” he said quietly, “but as I told you after my first trip to sea, the locker containing my stuff was forced open and all belongings are gone. And with them my ID. I’ve applied for a new one, but you know the government agencies. Nothing works as slowly!”

A determined expression appeared on Nando’s features. “I think I can help you. I…know people, who… Well, let me put it this way – they can provide you with any papers you need.” He gestured to the bartender to bring another round for Khan and himself. “I only need a holo-photo.” He looked at Khan’s – at ‘Evan’s’ face. “Do you intend to keep the beard?”

‘Alas, no!’ was Khan’s first thought. Despite his heritage, he’d never liked beards – but casually answered, “Yes. I think it makes me look less of an Englishman.”

Promptly Nando started to laugh. “Mate, then you have to work on your accent. It gives you away four miles against the wind.”

Chuckling, the Augment nodded before he whispered, “How long would it take to…supply me with the necessary papers?”

The Italian only smirked at him. “Get ready for our trip into space by the day after tomorrow.”

That meant one day after the ultimatum of the Klingon Empire had elapsed – perfect!
“War!” McCoy put his glass of Saurian brandy back on his desk and crossed his arms in front of his chest. Jim sat on one of the visitor’s chairs in Bones’ small office in medbay, and took a deep breath as his friend continued, “You’d think that we’d finally progressed beyond such insanity – especially after all our planet went through, and after the first quarrel with the Klingons which, by the way, was only stopped because of some super-powerful-ghost-guys who can switch off a phaser just by blinking an eye.” He frowned. “Has there been anything from the Organians at all about this latest development?”

Kirk sighed. “As far as I know, nothing. Maybe they haven’t heard about it or they don’t care, for whatever reason.”

“Yeah, or they let us bloody our noses to teach us a lesson and interfere afterwards,” Leonard sighed. “After all, we’re nothing but infants in their eyes.”

A snort escaped Jim. “But with the big difference being that the galaxy is no playground, and phasers and photon torpedoes are not toys to squabble over. Still, I hope…” The call signal on the intercom interrupted him, followed by Uhura’s voice:

“Bridge to captain!”

Rolling his eyes, Kirk bent forward and pressed the button to activate the link. “Kirk here,” he answered and the melodious tones of the communications officer replied, “Captain, I’ve Admiral Komack for you. It’s Priority One.”

“Please transfer the transmission to Dr. McCoy’s office, Lieutenant,” he ordered. A moment later the prism screen on Bone’s office sprang to life, and the round face of Komack appeared on it.

“Captain Kirk, Doctor McCoy,” he greeted, waiting until the both men saluted quickly and continued, “I really hoped I could contact you with good news, but as you’ve probably anticipated, the whole situation with the Klingon’s ultimatum is too messy to be straightened out. An hour ago the Chancellor and the High Council of the Federation decided that we will not obey the Klingons’ demands.” His dark eyes locked with the blue ones of the young captain. “You know what this means.”
“Yes, sir,” Jim replied quietly. “War.”

Komack nodded. “Indeed, war.” He took a deep breath. “All starships fit for active duty are ordered to the Neutral Zone. Of course that goes for the Enterprise.” Kirk pressed his lips into a thin line before making a curt affirming gesture. “Maximum speed to K7 and rendezvous with the Lexington and the Hood II. We have to assume that our colonies have to be evacuated; still we will not withdraw one parsec. The Klingons will have to fight for this area if they want it.”

“Is this a rescue mission or a battle mission, sir?” Jim asked, and the admiral snorted irritably. “Oh, that’s – like the Council declared – up to you and the other commanders. Bob Wesley has the conn aboard the Lexington and you will observe his command. Still the Enterprise is our flagship, so if you haven’t already, make friends with Commodore Wesley ASAP.”

“No problem, sir, I know Bob and we get along pretty well,” Kirk sighed, forcing the hint of a smile onto his face. He liked Bob Wesley, knew he had a lot of field experience, and that he was an honest and honorable man. Working with the commodore wouldn’t be so bad, but the whole scenario concerning the upcoming war gave Jim a nervous headache.

“Right.” Komack hesitated a moment, then his voice became quieter and almost apologizing. “I’m sorry that your five-year mission starts with this shitty mess, son.” Jim couldn’t remember a single instance when the admiral had cursed before or had taken such a familiar tone with him. “It will be hard for you, your crew, and all the other ships, but men and women in this area of the Alpha quadrant are depending on us. Keep that in mind when battle is forced on you, as is going to probably be the case.”

“I know, sir, and we’ll all do our best to protect not only our borders, but also the people who need our help.” He moistened his lips; a question that had nothing to do with the upcoming war burned deep in him. “Sir, is there any news of Khan?” He waited, tensing more and more with every second, almost afraid of the answer – and heaven only knew why he feared that the Augment had been captured!

“We’ve not been able to apprehend him,” Komack replied, grimacing; neither the admiral nor Bones was able to recognize the hidden relief that flooded Jim like a warm wave. “Wherever the bastard is hiding must be well-concealed, because even after all this time no one has found him.”

“Have you informed the public?” Kirk wanted to know, hoping for a negative response. He almost exhaled aloud as the admiral shook his head.

“No. The public doesn’t know about Khan or ‘John Harrison’ – only about the crimes of Section 31
– and it should remain that way. There would have been too many questions we can’t answer. That was decided for reasons of safety should his face and name, combined with his heritage and his deeds been in the news.” He sighed. “That’s probably how he can walk in the open right under our noses without being recognized.” He leaned back. “Barnett called the manhunt off. Security will be needed elsewhere from now on.”

“You let him go?” McCoy gasped and Komack shrugged.

“The Klingons are the greater threat than one man, terrorist or not,” the admiral deadpanned. “Of course we’ll still be on guard and spaceports will be watched, but he’s the least of our problems now. And who knows? Maybe the problem will just disappear. After all, we’re at war now and if he manages to leave Earth, his life might end quicker than we hoped.”

‘And that is exactly what you are gambling on!’ shot through Jim’s mind. He was glad that Khan hadn’t been found and that the manhunt for him had been discontinued, even if those thoughts confused him, and he asked himself for the hundredth time why on earth he cared so much for the smug son-of-a-bitch. The Augment was responsible for Pike’s death, something Jim would – maybe – never forgive. Still, there was this completely insane desire to know that the super-human would be safe. Yet there was no guarantee that Khan would escape at all. Komack was right; if the former dictator left Earth in search of his family, he could easily be caught and die in the middle of the madness that was shortly going to overtake the quadrant.

‘Do nothing rash or reckless, Khan you twit, or you’ll get an ear full from me, should we ever meet again!’ And where the hell had that thought come from?

Jim’s attention was driven back to Komack, who straightened his posture again. “As soon as there’s any new information about Khan I’ll inform you, Captain. But the first and most important issue is now the forthcoming war with the Klingons. Be careful, Jim! Our spies heard rumors that the Klingons identified you as the one who “invaded” Qo’noS last year, and knowing how resentful they can be for the slightest reason, they certainly would love to get their hands on you.”

“Just my luck,” Kirk groaned. What had he done to deserve the deep water he seemed to be permanently swimming in? “Don’t tell me there’s a bounty on my head.”

“That I don’t know,” the admiral answered with a tight expression. “You pulled quite a stunt on Qo’noS.”

“Not forgetting Khan,” McCoy interposed irritated. “After all, he was the one who killed most of the Klingons!”
“And saved our lives by doing so,” Jim murmured before he could stop himself, then waved his hand. “I don’t think it would make any difference if the Klingons really want my head or if I’m meeting them in the next battle. Either way, they’ll try to finish us all off.”

“I agree,” Komack grumbled, then looked at Kirk and said almost softly. “Keep an eye out, Jim. You were one of my best students at the academy – and the most troublesome, to say the least. But looking at you now, I’m damn proud as any teacher could be.”

“Thanks, Admiral,” the young captain replied, feeling his ears heating up. “I’ll send a report as soon as we rendezvous with the Lexington and the Hood II.”

“Right! Komack out.”

The screen went dark and the two friends sat for several moments, unable to speak. So there really would be war – and if they were to survive, no one could tell. Finally McCoy whispered, “I knew it was a bad idea to sign up for that five-year mission, but the prospect of exploring new worlds and developing new medical techniques drew me into the whole thing. And now we’re out here facing war with the Klingons. This is…some serious shit!”

“Yeah, I totally agree,” Jim growled and rose. “First we had to start several days early and now I have to inform the crew of what we all assumed was coming but had hoped to avoid: war. We were sent to explore, not to do battle, for crying out loud. But here we are, heading straight into mortal danger. I hate it!”

He started toward the door, but Bones held him back one last time. “Jim? What about the rumors that the Klingons identified you? If there is really a bounty on your head…”

“I don’t care,” Kirk shrugged it off. “They’ll attack any Starfleet ship anyway, so there’s no reason for them to hunt me down specifically. And after all, I still have you, Spock, and the others watching my back. The Klingons will have a tough time succeeding in getting to any of us.” He winked at Bones and left, failing to anticipate just how wrong he was, and the dread lay ahead of him.

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As the ultimatum elapsed the attacks began, even without any declaration of war.
This war would make the galaxy burn. Priorities were changed, civilizations would fight for survival, cowards would run, men and women would turn into heroes…

And neither Jim Kirk – who had informed his crew that they weren’t explorers any longer, but soldiers – nor Khan – who’d left Earth unrecognized, together with Nando in the rising chaos – could suspect that their fates would be entwined once more.

There would come a time when both men would meet again in the midst of terror and despair, and then in the backdrop of the upcoming war, again meld together with the passion that had already enflamed their souls. After all, they were two sides of the same coin…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, my dear Readers, I really hope you liked the new chapter. I thought it would be important to explain why the Klingons declared war one year after the events on their homeworld, and to introduce one of the main characters, who will be an enemy, but also someone most will respect (or so I think).

Khan had to find a way to leave Earth, and considering how clever he is – besides his incredible intelligence – he seizes a chance if it is given. And believe me, he will find his own way during his time in space.

Not so nice is the way Norton tries to wriggle off the hook – and, unintentionally – the Klingons ‘helped’ him. There will be several upcoming twists because Norton and his fellows will use any opportunity.

In the next chapter you will meet Bob Wesley and you learn about the first weeks of the war. But the Klingons aren’t the only enemies, and not only Jim & co. will face the ‘copycats’, but Khan will also – which will open up new possibilities for him like never before. And you will also read something about his past while he and Jim realize just how much they yearn for each other.

As I said, I hope you liked the new update (including Bones’ reaction to Jim’s bio-check, grin) and please, please leave some reviews.

Until next weekend,

Live long and prosper,

Yours, Starflight
Hi, dear Readers,

Sorry for the delay, but one of you were so nice to offer her service as a beta-reader and did a very good job in smoothing my sometime rough choice of words and to correct errors. Thank you so much, Rhiannon, I owe you.

The next thank-you is for you, dear readers and those, who leave comments and kudos. I am really happy that you are so taken with the story, and who wants to see Khan in action is going to love the new chapter. Jeep, the tiger shows his claws, so to say, and some guys have to learn that you shouldn’t mess with him. You are also going to learn more about his earlier life back in the 20th century. And adding to this you will meet another high-ranking Starfleet officer, who had his several appearances in TOS and can be count to Jim’s friends.

By the way I got help from the AO3-team and know now how to publish the chapters with all the formatting I put in the work, like italic for the ship-names, ‘spoken’ thoughts or to emphasize something. I uploaded the former chapters, too, for the case you want to read them with the formatting.

Enjoy,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three weeks later...

“Captain’s Log, Stardate 2060.242 (Note of the author: “242” = 242nd day of the year), 20th day of the war. After the Lexington, the Hood II and the Enterprise reached the Japori System, we found several Klingon vessels ready to attack the colony on Japori II. The battle was short but fierce, and if the Klingons had sent D7-battlecruisers instead of four Birds-of-Prey, the outcome of the fight could have been quite the opposite in favor of the Klingons. We destroyed three enemy ships, and the fourth escaped in the direction of the former Neutral Zone, but the price was high. We lost twelve crew members and, as Doctor McCoy told me, our med bay is overcrowded. The Lexington and the Hood II suffered even greater loss, and the Hood II was severely damaged. I already offered to transport some of our engineers to Captain Dodge to help with the repairs. Captain’s Log out.”

Jim Kirk leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath. The air didn’t smell so bad anymore; the climatic systems cleaned it of smoke from the burned up science-station. The young captain thanked the Lord that Spock had been next to Pavel Chekov’s navigation station as one of the Klingon torpedoes’ hits overloaded an energy-circle of the long distance sensors, which backfired into the science station. If the Vulcan had sat at his usual place, he would have been badly injured.
Around him, his officers were busy checking their stations, repairing small damages or reviewing the reports coming from other departments. Lt. Uhura had a small cut at her temple that made her more angry than hurt, Hikaru Sulu grumbled under his breath while running tests on his console and Spock lay beneath his station, cataloguing the damage. Jim could have sworn the Vulcan word that suddenly escaped his friend was a curse. And as he heard a suppressed amused snort from Uhura – who spoke the complicated language of her boyfriend very well – he was certain that his first officer had given into his human side one time more.

“Scott ter bridge!” The exaggerated Scottish accent of the chief engineer told Kirk enough; Montgomery Scott was under much stress.

Activating the intercom at the right armrest of his chair he replied: “Kirk here. Report, Scotty!”

“That is the most blasted shit in a long time, Cap’n! Two of the warp-inductors are a complete mess, section 1 till 3 are lookin’ like Nessie tumbled through them, and the batteries of the auxiliary energy are as good as done for. Keenser is in the med bay because this oyster on two legs was determined to shove me out of the way as an overload valve went up!” His voice during the last statement showed how he worried about his little friend from the planet Royla, who was always the well-known bastion of calm for the short-tempered Scottish engineer.

“Is he stable?” Kirk asked, hoping that Keenser would make it. He liked the short, silent alien crew-member, who seemed to read anyone around him and had a warm, kind heart.

“Aye, McCoy says so, but I’m still worried.” The Scottish man grumbled something before he continued, “But I canna say the same for the engines! They’re in no good condition!”

Jim groaned quietly. “So we should avoid another battle for several days, Mr. Scott?”

“Days?” Scotty’s high-pitched outburst made the captain wince. “Weeks, Jim! Weeks! Mark my words!”

Kirk saw Chekov rolling his eyes and winked at the Russian before he answered: “Scotty, I know you. You are the only engineer in whole Starfleet who can work magic. I am certain that the Enterprise’s engines will be up to snuff within two or three days.”

A loud moan sounded through the intercom, followed by a “Give me three or four days, Jim, then
we can speak of a miracle again.”

“There is my Scottish Merlin!” Jim all but grinned. “From ‘weeks’ to ‘three or four days’ within a minute! I knew I could count on you!”

A tirade of Gaelic rushed through the intercom, ending with a “… and donna trick me again, Cap’n! Scotty out!”, then the intern link went silent. From here and there Jim heard several chuckles and caught amused glances before his officers turned their attentions back to work. Kirk pursed satisfied his lips. He had killed two birds with one stone; he knew that Scott would put all his Scottish honor in abiding by those ‘three or four days’ and he had lightened up the mood a little bit – something they all need after the battle.

His gaze found the large screen that showed Japori II and its sun. He grimaced as he saw the remains of the three bird-of-preys drifting through the space.

What madness!

No one had wanted this war – no one except for several diehard men on both sides, whose greed for power and might had overpowered any sanity they may have had. The tension between the Federation and the Klingon Empire had always been thick, but besides a few quarrels, peace had remained; no thanks to the Organians. But now the ghost-like species was quiet. Jim had a bad feeling that the Organians would show up at the least opportune moment.

‘And in the meantime thousands will die. War – it is and will ever be the biggest crime of all!’

The young captain rubbed his neck and the mixed cold and heat of adrenaline that still travelled through his veins was chased away by a warm sensation. Gently he touched the spot where a certain, singular mark had been. He had no clue why he still could feel this ‘mark’; he assumed his imagination exaggerated the tryst, but an inner voice insisted that this wasn’t the case. The real reason was bigger and far more complicated.

Hell, it wasn’t the first mark he had gotten. Honestly, he’d received several of them by his female bed-fellows. But this was the first one that didn’t go away, even if it was invisible for the eye now. This bite was a mark of claim he felt beneath the healed skin. Whatever Khan had done, he had made certain that Jim would have a reminder of him – as if this was necessary.

If any of his friends knew how often his dreams were infiltrated by the super-human, displaying them
both in passionate games rolling through the sheets as if replaying a film in his head, he certainly would be deemed ‘insane’. Sweet Lord, Bones would examine his mental condition that Jim now doubted from time to time. And this not only because he had erotic dreams of his—nemesis? Lover? He caught himself over and over again worrying about the Augment; he often asked himself where Khan was and how he was doing. Right, his only concern should be what Khan was doing. But an inner voice told Kirk that the universe needn’t fear another outburst of violence from the enhanced man. The Klingons were doing a far better job in this department.

Jim sighed as once again the marble-white face and jade-colored eyes, shadowed by tousled mahogany hair popped into his head. But before his thoughts could wander further to the cause of this invisible but undeniable ‘mark’ on his neck and new forbidden longing in his being… Uhura’s voice jolted him from his reverie. “Captain? A transmission from the Lexington. Commodore Wesley wants to speak with you.”

“On screen, Lieutenant!” Jim ordered, glad for the distraction, and watched as the face and upper body of Commodore Robert Wesley replaced the backdrop of stars. He was a man in his mid-fifties with clear, straight features, dark, honest eyes, and silver-grey hair. Like all Starfleet members in space he wore the black uniform with the colored shirt, Command Gold. Instead of three gold stripes his sleeves displayed the thick gold band and the Starfleet-emblem enveloped by the sun.

His voice was a pleasant deeper tenor, but just right now it sounded tight; betraying the commodore’s tension. “Hello Jim!” he greeted casually, a quick smile tugged at his lips. Robert – or Bob, as his friends called him – quickly grew fond of the young, promising captain of the Enterprise, who made a name for himself among the rank and file of Starfleet Admiralty based on his daring do’s including the rescue of the Earth and Captain Christopher Pike during the battles with the Romulan Nero as well as the exposure of the shadow department Section 31 had become – and many more adventures that will fill books and training manuals for years to come.

They first met shortly after Kirk had taken the command of the Enterprise. He was impressed by the quick mind, the bright intelligence, and his fierce loyalty towards Starfleet and his crew. Jim’s methods to problem-solve often took him by surprise. It was no miracle that the admiralty went grey at the one or other occasions, and Wesley had to admit, he inwardly had applauded Jim. Bob was a man of action, and his understanding of the desk jockeys in the headquarters was limited.

Soon the men were on a first name basis, despite their rank and age. Each fell comfortably into their respective roles as leaders – Bob of the squadron and Jim of the Enterprise...

Mirroring the quick smile, Kirk nodded towards the commodore. “Hi Bob! How can I help you?”

Wesley took a deep breath. “I contacted the leader of the colony on Japori II, Consul Alan Gordon. He requested that I extend his gratitude to you and Kenneth Dodge. But, as it seems, the Klingons
aren’t their only problem. There have been several assaults by the Orion Syndicate within the last week. The Orions captured two vessels with colonists who wanted to return to Earth and brought them to the Borderland-area – without a doubt for the slave trade, maybe straight to the Klingons. Our ‘dear’ neighbors are in need of workers in their delicium mines and steelworks and the fate of the kidnapped colonists is quite clear, a life of slavery until death.”

Jim pressed his lips shut. Damn Orions!

Their region was adjoined to the Klingon Empire and reached almost to the Regula system in Federation space. It comprised of pirates, smugglers, slavers, drug-dealers and any other criminal elements imaginable, the whole ‘realm’ was a crucible of the scum of the Alpha and Beta Quadrants dominated by the green-skinned Orions. Neither Jim Kirk nor his officers were surprised that the Orions used the war to expand their ‘businesses’. Their attacks at the Japori System were almost logical. Together with the already seized Starbase 234, the Federation property operating Starbase 84, and between the stars Veytan and Acmar, the Orions were slowly building a kind of enclave between Borderland and the Klingon and Romulan Empires. Jim knew that Starfleet Command refused to believe that it was only a matter of time before this part of the Federation would be seized by the enemy, but Kirk was far too realistic to deny this possibility.

“Did Consul Gordon ask for help?”

Wesley nodded. “Yes. But the pirates, who captured the ships were heading towards the Klingons. Unfortunately, the kidnapping happened five days ago there is no hope to rescue the poor devils now. I already contacted Starfleet Command, and I got the order to stay here with you and Kenneth for the next few days to intercept the Orions as soon as they return. Consul Gordon told me that the same three ships were responsible for the assaults and, as Barnett made it clear, it is now up to us to stop them. Their brand of terror ends in this quadrant.”

Jim heard a low noise from the science station and exchanged a glance with Spock, who rose from the floor – looking like he had dug in charcoal. “So, we not only have to fight off Klingons, but also pirates and slavers?” Kirk asked and shook his head, as Bob replied:

“You know how the whole thing works, Jim. Wherever a war breaks out, the unscrupulous profit from blood of innocent people. I suggest that we split off and form a triangle within the Jarobi System. Regardless of the Orions direction, we can stop them, and the others will be there in no time.”

“Good idea, Bob – but please don’t tell my engineer about it. If he hears that we could get into a fight within the next few days, I will need a scraper to get him off of the ceiling. He’s going to go off like a rocket.”
Wesley laughed quietly. “Well, that makes two ‘rockets’ we have to bring down then. My engineer is no better than yours.” He turned serious again. “As soon as the Hood can maneuver properly I’ll inform you so that we can split off.”

Jim made an affirming gesture. “Right. Keep me updated!”

“No problem. Lexington out!” The picture on the screen switched back to the view of the planet and the stars; Kirk sighed loudly. “First these damn Klingons and now Orions. I hate it.” he grumbled and caught the understanding glance of Sulu.

“What do you think, sir? Will we face them again?” he asked. Jim shrugged.

“We certainly will. I already assumed that they would show up sooner or later. Benefitting from the opportunity the war gives them to make more profit with their criminal deals.” He grimaced.

“As if the whole situation isn’t unbearable for the civilians enough, now they have to fear the Klingons and Orion pirates. Someone should stop the slavers!” Uhura cut in. Kirk nodded.

“Yeah – and this ‘someone’ is Starfleet.” He pinched his nose. “There is simply no one else able to combat them.”

Pavel glanced over his shoulders. “Ze news are telling that there are several groups along ze Neutral Zone and Borderland fighting off the Orions, too, Keptin,” he said with his thick Russian accent and Jim snorted.

“Yeah, I heard of them, but they are unorganized and acting without any strategy. It is only a matter of time before they fall prey to the Orions and become slaves themselves, or end up dead somewhere in Borderland.” His lips had pinched in a thin line for a moment before he added: “And credits to doughnuts that the Klingons are behind the increased activities of the Orion Syndicate. They get slaves for their mines and Starfleet has not one, but two opponents to fight.” He grimaced. “I really, really hate it!”
The small outpost near the Risa System was little more than a grid square of the Official Interstellar Chart (OIC) away near Borderland and a way station filled with the species of the universe. Humans, Deltans, Caitians and even two Vulcans and several Andorians were present, as well as non-humanoid species. The air was filled with their voices and languages, heavy with the smell of food and drinks, and the atmosphere was tense. They all were here for only one reason. Each waited for departing space-crafts to take them home – or far away from home as the case may be.

The civil outpost 18-243 was nothing more than a small space-dock in the orbit of an inhospitable little planet, but now – during the war – it had become a place for those who missed the liners that could take them home or at the very least away from the dangers at home. The prices were cheap, and the rides were unreported if discreet or hidden were a requirement for the passengers. Many here had their reasons to avoid an official spaceport or the security officials. Some were illegal refugees and others smugglers of some or no repute at all.

At the edge of the far too crowded waiting and departure area, a lonely figure sat at a table and sipped at a cup of tea – if the dark fluid that swam in the mug could be called ‘tea’ at all. But he kept his complaints to himself. It was better than the most of the other drinks he’d forced down recently, but alien to his palate nonetheless.

From within the shadow of his hood, Khan eyed his surroundings aware of every move the others made. Ten days ago he had reached with Nando Rigel II with little trouble and visited the young Italian’s sister. She was more than glad that her brother showed up. Within a few hours Nando, with Khan’s help, persuaded her and her husband to accompany them back to Earth.

That had been the right time for the super-human to extract himself from the happy little family, who reminded him painfully of his own dear ones. Their whereabouts could be anywhere in this endless galaxy. Pretending that he received a transmission from an old friend in the Risa system, ‘Evan’ bid his farewell and left Nando and the others, taking a cargo-ship in the direction of Risa.

Why Risa? During his travels with Nando to the Rigel system, he carefully followed the news that ran on every official screen in the craft. And so he learned that Starfleet was highly active around this system – to prevent the Klingons and Orion pirates from attacking and enslaving helpless populations, but Khan knew better than to believe the public voice of Starfleet. He learned how Starfleet worked, and even if Section 31 was officially ‘dead’ he didn’t doubt of the practices secrecy and cover-up remained.

Starfleet wanted to hide something within the Risa system and maybe – maybe – it had to do with his crew. It was a long shot, but he must start the search somewhere.
After an awful voyage on the cargo-ship where he had to fight for his self-control on several occasions, he was more or less stranded on this outpost, waiting for one of not official space crafts to take him to Risa. To his dismay his Credits were running out because the hosts of the space-dock charged excessive prices and the ticket he would have to buy nearly extortion.

He sipped at his tea again. This was an Assam? Never in million years! His gaze wandered over the humans and aliens once again amazed at their incredible differences. During his ‘encounter’ with Section 31 he had met Andorians and twice a Vulcan admiral in dealings with Marcus. Khan was certain that the man hadn’t known Marcus’ true face, but otherwise he had only worked with humans or people with earthly heritage. Still he learned a lot about the extraterrestrial life forms inhabiting the Federation.

But it was altogether a different thing to read something and peruse pictures, than to meet the real people, aliens, not even humanoid that reminded him of insects or creatures from the old science-fiction-movies back in the 20th century. The difference was that these were real. Khan’s incredible mind and intelligence were quite capable of coping with the situation, still a part of him – his instincts – made him wary and ate at him. He gathered as much knowledge about this century as possible in the one year he spent as a tool of Marcus, but he still was not raised in this time, and that made it difficult to live here in this now.

His attention fixed on a couple with two children who bypassed his table. His keen hearing caught the long unheard, but still well-known words of Hindi. He looked up and took a sharp breath when his eyes found the young woman who lifted a small boy into her arms. She wore a simple top and trousers with a knee-long jacket and long boots. Her black hair was pinned-up as is now the fashion, and still she seemed to be familiar. She turned around towards the young man at her side, and Khan could see her face clearly now; his jaw nearly dropped.

She was the mirror image of a service-maid from his palace back in New Delhi in the 20th century. Her name was Sushila, and she had served in his close entourage. Being an inferior, simple human he overlooked her before recognizing that she could be trusted – like many other attendants. The times in India had been hard, and the gap between rich and poor, superior and inferior had been like an abyss; therefore, many people were glad to escape poverty and misery by working for him and the other Augments.

Khan Noonien Singh had never abused the hardship of the people within his realm. There had been several Augments who wanted to subdue Earth to their liking, but his intentions were different. Still it didn’t save him or those who thought like him from their ultimate exile.

As the Eugenics Wars broke out in the late 20th century, it didn’t matter that he worked to improve the conditions of his famine ravaged territory of Asia. In the eyes of those who ‘constructed’ him and his kind - those who feared them now - the Augments were cold, unfeeling, inhuman monsters. Yes, he had shown strict leadership principles, steering his realm with a firm hand. But he abstained from
cruelty for the sake of it, knowing perfectly well that people were far more trustworthy living in order rather than fear. Yet he had not hesitated to take brutal measures against those who meant him and the others ill – enemies that had finally overtaken the Augments.

Khan would never forget the day war finally reached his home. They came at night. At first, everything seemed to have calmed down for several days. Then the fires of war struck with intangible ferocity against him and his household. The soldiers all but slaughtered the most servants, calling them traitors of the human race. They massacred everyone perceived as loyal to his rule. The actions taken by the opposition during the coup was a war crime. Still no histories spoke of it. As always the winner writes the histories, and the readers read only half-truths.

Sushila had been one of the last victims trying to protect him and Tarun – another Indic Augment who didn’t make it aboard the *Botany Bay*. He had wanted to show her a secret passage out of the palace so that she and the other servants could flee. He always stood true to those loyal to him, but even his brilliant mind couldn’t foresee the strong determination the girl possessed to serve ‘her’ Khan till the last breath. The moment a dozen soldiers stormed the backyard where he and the others fought on, she threw herself in front of him and the bullets meant for him hit her in the chest. She was dead before he could catch her, and while he was pulled away by Tarun – who realized that they didn’t stand a chance anymore – he watched, horrified how several so-called soldiers all but butchered the dead body of the young woman.

So much hate, so much blood, so much cruelty – and all this only because they feared their creations.

Khan had never been able to understand it.

True, there had been Augments who used their superior strengths and minds to rule their continents with an iron fist, but the most of them had taken their purposes very seriously: To bring peace in a time where there was none to be had. In the end, it didn’t make any difference and only Khan and those he had come to call his family survived by fleeing Earth aboard a spaceship he and his own built in a matter of prudence. They had fought with all their might and abilities, even displaying mercy at first. Only to be thanked with manhunts and death. The cryotube was the last ditch effort made to remain alive and escape the planet – only to wake up in a new world full of aliens. But some human evils never change. Those hungry for power and harboring fear and hatred for anything different, like Marcus and Section 31 proved.

Laughter brought him back to present and his gaze wandered one more time to the strange young woman whose features resembled that of Sushila. The same nose, the same eyes, the same cock to her head… Khan was sure that this strange woman was a descendant of his former service-maid, maybe a granddaughter of Sushila’s sister with many, many ‘great’ in front of the word granddaughter.
Odd that here, on this forlorn outpost several hundred light-years away from Earth and three hundred years after this fateful night, he met an offspring of a member of his former household. He didn’t believe in Kismet – he never had – still a small part of him felt a breeze of fate breathing upon him.

“That is an offence, chipmunk, do you hear me!”

The voice drowned out even the other noises and sounded strangely high-pitched with a hint of… squealing. Not the squeal of a boy in puberty, rather like that of a…

“Dare to compare me to a Terran pig again and I’ll beat you into the next week!”

Khan pursed his lips. Well, if the appearance of the guy was only a little bit akin to his squealing, then it had to be a pig.

“You oink; you have hooves and a snout and you like to bath in mud, Galven, so yes, I do compare you to a…” The other man was interrupted when ‘Galven’ attacked him.

In seconds, the quarrel began. People darted left and right to get out of the way of the two fighters; chairs tumbled, and shouts rang through the air.

Khan rose and his eyes searched for the small Indic family. He found them near a wall where the young man had placed himself in front of his wife and his children.

“I’ll have your sorry excuse for a nose that makes your face even uglier than it already is, Ritek!” This outburst accompanied oinking sounds that took away any threat.

“Do you have a corkscrew tail? Just let me have a look and… Ouch, that was unfair!”

As much as the turmoil belied, Khan realized quickly that this ‘fight’ wasn’t serious. It seemed to be more belligerent bickering with a tendency toward violence, but it wasn’t completely hostile.

Curious, the Augment headed towards the scuffle. And then his eyes widened. Sure, he had heard of Tellarits and had even read about their ‘pig-like appearance’, but somehow he had never seen one – not even on a holophoto – and for a moment he didn’t trust his eyes. His thoughts from several
moments ago concerning the squealing voice compared with the presumable looks of the alien the other man offended was plain. There was a pig on two hooved legs clad in overalls. He threatened a man – whose very pale face showed streak of dark and yellow lines and whose nose was plain and straight – with a hand that had three hoof-like fingers. The Tellarit’s snout above the thick beard moved slightly while the small eyes glistened before he ran straight to his opponent and knocked him down with his stout, strong body then sat down on him like a jockey on his horse.

“Get off me, you hog!” the man – a Rigelian – gasped. “Hell, you’re heavy like…”

“Don’t say it, Ritek, or…”

“Oh no – not again!” an outraged snarl cut the Tellarit off. “By the lights of Rea and Sura, can you two not be in one room without fighting?” A young woman in tight dark overalls with a long bag on her back shoved herself through the crowd, stemming her fists into her slender waist and clearly indignant. Her wild dark-red hair hung loose around her shoulders. Her eyes were an unholy green-gold with the elongated pupils of a cat. Her teeth were pointed. A long elegant tail whipped around her hips – giving her away as a female Caitian; catlike humanoids whose males were furred while the females sometimes lacked it or shaved it.

Galven looked up to her. “He can’t stop calling me a pig!” he oinked angrily, while Ritek moaned, “Just look at the next mirror and you can’t deny the similarities. And now get. Off. Me!”

Khan couldn’t help himself. He had to chuckle. ‘I don’t believe it. A speaking pussy-cat tries to step between a walking, talking pig and a colored man who looks like he was in the way of some dropped paint buckets. In which world have I woken up?’

‘In a very interesting one!’ he thought he heard Joaquin’s cheerful answer and felt a soft stab of nostalgia as the olive-skinned face and the sparkling dark eyes of the young Israeli popped into his mind. Joaquin was like a little brother to him and to know that he was somewhere caught in frozen sleep in his cryotube made Khan cringe inwardly. He missed the twenty-year-old oversized boy with his sunny smiles and high-spirits the most. Nando had reminded him of Joaquin from time to time – certainly the reason he bothered at all to persuade Maria and her husband to return with Nando to Earth.

He sighed inwardly. Sentiments were for the weak; still he wasn’t free of those emotions, even if he wished it so. It would make things easier. ‘But certainly less interesting, big bro!’ Joaquin’s voice teased him in his mind.

In the meantime, the Caitian-woman had offered the Tellarit her hand – with alarming long and
sharp-looking nails – and pulled him on his short, strong legs before she addressed the man: “Stop calling him names, Ritek! And you, Galven, should remember that we have the same…”

She didn’t get any further. Screams sounded from another part of the waiting-area and then phasers buzzed while the alert-sirens started to dim. In only a moment, all hell broke loose and the shouts of “Orions!” echoed through the air.

In the blink of an eye, the two stood side-by-side and withdrew their hidden phasers while the Caitian conjured a rifle from her luggage. “Now count the costs!” she hissed. “Because you two have nothing better to do than to argue, we missed our chance!” Without waiting for the men, she tensed her muscles and sprang over the heads of the fleeing people as if thrown by a catapult. She opened the fire on the approaching pirates. Galven and Ritek followed her quickly - and the departure area erupted into chaos.

Khan’s hand quickly found the phaser he took from Kirk’s flat and set it to ‘stun’, knowing perfectly well that he couldn’t risk the attention of the officials if he killed someone – even if his instincts told him to take no risks with the intruders. He heard enough about the Orions and their so-called ‘syndicate’ during the last two weeks and realized the danger all were in, including himself.

And then he saw them, Orions, together with species unfamiliar to him. Orions, taller than humans, with green skin and strong limbs swarmed over the voyagers like an affliction, overpowering the few security officials little effort. He hadn’t thought that he would end up in an assault of those pirates and slavers who spread terror through the inhabited planets near the Klingon Empire as the Klingons did. But here he was facing a raid of this scum.

And if he were killed or taken captive – as a slave! – he wouldn’t have any chance to save his family at all.

No. Defeat was unacceptable!

Looking for the next emergency exit his glance graced the Indic family, who tried to flee – and ran straight into the path of the Orions and their allies.

A strong feeling of déjà-vu rose up in Khan like bile in his throat. He saw the terrified expression on the young woman’s face when she shoved her children behind herself, protecting them with her body – just like Sushila had shielded him all those hundreds of years ago. Her eyes found his only in the fraction of a second before an Orion grabbed her brutally and tried to tear her away from her husband and her children.
And hot, white fury awoke in the Augment.

He had failed Sushila back in those days – her and the other servants and attendants of his household; they didn’t make it to safety and paid dearly for their loyalty to Khan.

He had failed the citizenry of his palace, in the villages under his protection, and his land begging for his help when the so-called ‘normal humans’ usurped his throne and the other thrones of the other Augments, forcing their exile or certain death.

He had failed his family to rescue from Section 31.

He would not allow himself another failure.

In a split of a moment he switched into fighting-modus. Adrenalin pumped through his veins. His instincts took over and his mind analyzed the whole situation a second. He acted.

Shoving some people out of his way he reached the Indic family, pulled the Orion around who had seized the horrified young woman, and his fist – that still held the phaser – crushed the man’s jaw. With a howl and spitting blood, the Orion let go off her when three other Orions descended upon the Augment.

They didn’t stand a chance. Kicking, punching and using at last his weapon he took them down in no time, he then stunned two other pirates closing in on a group of older folks. Only then did he turn his attention back to the couple and two children, who looked on with large eyes.

“Chaal!” he shouted, using the Hindi-word for ‘run’ and adding a “Sheeghra!” which meant ‘quick’.

The young man overcame his surprise at the stranger who spoke the old native-tongue of his home-country. He responded with a shocked “Nam!” (thank-you) and shooed his wife and children toward the emergency exit where a cluster of people already tried to escape – just what the Orions were waiting for. A dozen of them headed towards the fleeing people, readying their weapons to stun them and take them hostage.

Khan let his instincts drive his actions. With the wild drive of the warrior he was, he ran to shield
those who ran through the emergency exit. He saw despite the red haze before his eyes that the Indic family made it to safety, catching a grateful glance of the young woman before she, her husband and her children were flooded away by the crowd towards the docked freighters and smaller space crafts.

He felt a breeze beside his cheek and ducked at the very last moment as a Klingon *Ba'leth* speeded above his head. Had he moved a split second later, he would have been dead where he stood.

Growling angrily at his distraction, he hit the attacker in the belly with his left hand, while his leg shot out and broke the man’s knee. The aggressor screamed in pain, but it was short-lived as the next blow – aimed for his opponent’s neck – sealed the man’s fate. Three other attackers – one Orion, one human, and a being he couldn’t place – surrounded him and leapt at him, realizing that he was the greatest threat of all. Reacting with the speed and the savagery of a tiger, the Augment lashed out and stunned one of them then killed the other two without hesitation. Even his wish to divert attention away from himself disappeared; he ignored the fact that his hood had slipped down and revealed his fresh shaved face after he had gotten rid of the loathed beard only hours ago.

He heard the cries for help from several young people to his right, picked up the *Ba’leth* and acted again without hesitation. It only lasted a minute and the teenagers made their escape while the attacker suffered further loss.

And Khan wasn’t the only one who fought against the pirates with all his might.

The Tellarit, who went by the name Galven, summoned a handful of allies around him as the Regulian Ritek and the catlike-woman did, and they all threw themselves against the attackers along with members of the space-dock’s staff. But the fleeing people made it almost impossible to fight the pirates properly who began to overtake them. Additionally, those who put up a resistance didn’t act as a united front as individuals, a weakness in their armor and a tact that would lead to catastrophe if left unchecked.

“Move your ass, chipmunk, or the Orions will bring you down!” the Tellarit yelled. Ritek answered, “Be careful, hognose, or you became their escalope!”

Khan rolled his eyes. This rivalry wasn’t helping to gain the upper hand over the attackers. The two groups didn’t work together but tried to outdo one another. It was only a question of time before the Orions would overrun them – and then, this was clear, Khan would be captured as well; losing any possibility to see his family ever again – or James. He cringed at the thought.

Gritting his teeth – ‘*Cretins!*’ – He jumped in the middle of the two groups. Swinging the *Ba’leth* with his left hand and firing with the phaser in his right hand he roared, “Build a line! Drive them
back to the main entrance! Shield the others!" Shooting two more Orions he realized that the Tellarit
and the Regulian stared at him with big eyes frozen in their places. His dominant nature asserted
itself. “NOW! Or you will all die!”

“DO WHAT HE SAYS!” the female Caitian snarled, fighting off another opponent. “This man at
least has brains!”

“All hands beside me!” Galven squealed; referring to his allies. “Line up!”

“The others to me!” Ritek shouted at the members of his own group.

As soon as they operated collectively the situation began to change. The Orions weren’t used to
facing organized resistance; nevertheless they battled even as they lost their booty of captives.

Giving free rein to his wrath and instincts, Khan took down one enemy after the other, not cognizant
of a deep gash on his left arm. It would heal within a day. He threw the *Ba’leth* at another pirate,
bringing him down. Beside him, the others fought bravely, but not all made it out alive. Three of
them lay dead on the floor and more were injured. And the fight wasn’t over.

The super-human heard the shocked outcry of the Tellarit and saw that an Orion and a man with
small eyes and the traditional Klingon beard had Galven on his back; the green-skinned pirate lifted a
blade to kill him.

Like his previous actions over the last four weeks, Khan couldn’t tell why he did what he did now.
Maybe it was because this pig-like creature was his comrade-in-arms at the moment, maybe his quick
mind already had acknowledged the need to ally with these people and to go underground with
them. He shot down the Mongolian-looking man and tore the Orion away from the Tellarit before a
deadly knife thrust could end Galven’s life. He hurled the pirate through the room and knocked two
more Orions off their feet with the living projectile then pulled Galven to his feet and placed himself
in front of the stout alien.

Beside him, a furious hiss sounded, and another Orion lost his life; brought down by the Caitian
woman who grinned at the Augment before she showed another attacker how sharp her nails really
were.

Someone shouted orders and the pirates began their retreat. The two groups around Galven and
Ritek pursued them, but eventually they had to let the remaining Orions go.
Khan took a deep breath and glanced around him. The large waiting room and departure area looked like a typhoon raged through them; it smelled of burning furniture, blood, and sweat and spilled drinks. The food stands were abandoned and ravaged; the fight destroyed the ticket-counters and the red lights of the alert-system flickered over the walls. Tracks of phaser blasts and blood were everywhere, but none of it counted.

Galven and Ritek breathed heavily and glanced at each other.

They had won!

They subdued a whole gang of Orion pirates and had forced the rest to flee!

What a victory – albeit an expensive one.

The few civil security officials were dead as well as a few of the staff-members and three of the resistance. Many were injured. Other travelers crowded together, tended each other, or waited for orders. Some of the staff came to the Tellarit and the Rigelian, thanking them for their help. A few people voiced their gratitude also to Khan, who brushed them off with short but not unkind words. Only after the remaining passengers and employees left they alone did the group of fighters turn their attention toward the stranger who came to their aid.

Galven glanced with big eyes at the pale Terran in the black and grey clothes, who stood among the group of insurgents he commanded. He watched as the Terran flicked off his phaser and hid it in his coat – a phaser that was clearly Starfleet standard.

Ritek stepped to Galven and the unknown human darting his eyes between them. “That was quite a fight you put up here, mate.” he said slowly eying the stranger curiously. “You took half of them down by yourself.”

Khan locked eyes with the Rigelian. That the people of the Rigel System were related to the Vulcans, as he had read, wasn’t exactly obvious. They both had pointed ears that that is where the similarities ended. Ritek displayed behavior and emotions that are incompatible with Vulcan behavior. “They shouldn’t have attacked; they would still be alive if they had not,” the super-human stated coolly while warily watching the two aliens in front of him.

“Who is this?” another man asked.
“Where did you learn to fight like that? You are trained, that’s clear.” a Deltan mused.

“Hells bells, this guy can’t be a simple human.” another one grumbled, but before the Augment could answer to this, Galven cut in, “Shut up, everyone!” He looked up at Khan, who stood head and shoulders above him. “This man saved my life!” the Tellarit declared. Then he offered one hand with the three ‘fingers’; knowing that this was a polite gesture among humans.

The former dictator hesitated a moment then he shook the mitt. “You are welcome,” was all he said and Galven frowned. “You’re hurt,” he oinked and pointed at the bloody and torn sleeve at Khan’s left arm, but the super-human shook his head.

“It looks nastier than it is. A small cut, nothing to worry about.” He began to turn away, but Galven stopped him, “We could use someone like you, buddy!”

Khan halted with his movement. “I beg your pardon?” he replied.

The Tellarit fixed him with his light, little eyes. “You heard me,” he answered casually. “You fight like you were born for it; you’ve a strong sense of justice, and you’ve no problems breaking bone – something the Orions deserve. And you led us to victory.”

The last statement puzzled the Augment, before he turned his attention to the Caitian woman, who closed the distance between them.

“What Galven means is that you managed to unite those bunches of anarchists into a successful fighting group.” She scowled at the Tellarit and the Rigelian, exposing her pointy teeth, before she continued: “If it weren’t be for you, the Orions would have overpowered us and those of us who survived would face slavery now. Thanks to you. How do you say on Earth – the tables will be turned.”

“Yeah, my thoughts exactly!” a dark-skinned man spoke up, who was tending the wounds of some travelers. “We could use you, lad!”

Khan lifted a brow, his mind already pondering the possible outcomes of the anticipated offer. “Who do you mean ‘we’? Who are you exactly?” He needed to know what he was getting himself into if he was to join this band of renegades.
“We are a group of men and women, who’ve decided to no longer stand by while those slavers attack small colonies, space-docks and vessels that cannot defend themselves,” Galven explained.

“Yes, Starfleet is too busy battling the damn Klingons, so we take the whole mess into our hands. The Orion Syndicate is getting bolder as time goes on, using the war for their own gain. If someone doesn’t stop them, they will expand their realm, which means more collateral damage.” Ritek was deadly serious now.

“So you’ve gathered together to fight the pirates on your own,” Khan summarized the statements, and the others nodded. “How?”

Galven scratched his snout. “What do you mean?”

“How will you proceed? Do you have plans, a strategy, weapons, space crafts?” The latter was important should he decide to accept the offer. Maybe there was a chance to ‘borrow’ a space craft later.

The members of each group looked at each other; it was the Tellarit who informed him: “We have two vessels – the Shadow and the Flash.” Galven caught the baffled gaze of the stranger as the names of the two space crafts were mentioned, and he shrugged. “Jeff,” he pointed over his shoulder to a young man, “came up with these names and because we have to use pseudonyms I thought it was a good idea.” Some of the others chuckled, before he continued. “Plus, our weapons are pretty good.”

“And we have a very well-working communication-system – especially for ‘listening’ to messages!” one man threw in; grinning broadly. “We can even intercept Starfleet-transmissions.” Several others snickered, and Khan was suddenly very keen-eared; the odd names of the two vessels quickly forgotten.

The knowledge that Starfleet Command’s orders could eventually lead him to the facility where his crew was being held as well as following James’ voyages was a heady and dizzying realization.

He groaned inwardly. Kirk shouldn’t be one of his most important interests still the young captain managed to occupy many of his thoughts. His sky-blue eyes, his soft manly features and his gentle voice haunted Khan in the long and dark nights since he left the officer’s apartment more than four weeks ago. The things loneliness could do to a man.
“You are eavesdropping on Starfleet and the Orions so you know where the pirates will attack next.” he continued, “And because your militia is anything but an official unit you want to avoid Starfleet.”

Galven grunted, amused. “You got it, buddy.” Khan suppressed the urge to roll his eyes; a talking pig alien using Terran slang – what a crazy universe! “We are doing those uniform-wearers job, still they are ungrateful. Complaining about some shitty laws no one out here in deep space feels obliged to follow.” His clever eyes roamed the face of the stranger. “You have your own problems with them, haven’t you?”

The super-human tensed. “Pray tell where this assumption comes from?”

Again the Tellarit oinked in laughter. “Boy, you’re a trained fighter and have a Starfleet standard issue phaser, but you’re not a member of the fleet. You hid, but helped to stop this raid and now you know we can tap Starfleet’s transmissions you are interested.” He cocked his head. “Are you on the run?”

“No,” Khan lied, “I had… personal reasons to leave Starfleet, so to speak.”

“Deserted?” Ritek asked and chuckled, as he caught the hard glare of the human warrior. “Hey, I have no problem with that, lad!”

“Men like you are needed outside of the fleet, too,” the Caitian woman rose to speak again and returned the stern stare of the stranger’s eyes.

“Men like me?” he repeated and only her extreme sensible hearing caught the quiet but nevertheless dangerous growl in his voice. Unafraid she stepped beside him and fixed her gaze on him then reached out her hand only to find her wrist held in a steel-like grip. Instantly her tail wrapped around his arm and Khan gasped in surprised as she squeezed his muscles with astonishing strength.

She bent forward and almost purred, “I do recognize a predator when I see one. You are one with every fiber of your being, Pretty!” Her cat-like eyes blinked twice then she flashed a toothy grin at him and retreated. “Galven, make him a good offer!” she addressed the Tellarit. “With him we stand a chance against the whole Syndicate, believe me!”

Galven and Ritek, obviously sharing a moment of agreement, exchanged a look. Then the Tellarit spoke up, “Well, to say it plain, the pay is lousy; we are not fighting those bastards for profit. We’re
living on what the people give us…”

“Shall I ask the guys over there for a little donation?” the Regulian cut in, but closed his mouth as he received the glares and scowls of his companions.

“Never mind that git” Galven grumbled towards Khan, and continued, “What we can offer you is shelter, food, some ass kicking, travelling around in Federation space, and outwitting Starfleet. We’re pulling our team together and…”

“By insulting each other?” Khan sneered, already pondering the advantages of taking the given offer and making sure that he and the others avoided capture by either Starfleet or the Orions. “Friends do not berate another one. You need to build trust if you want to survive your… adventures.”

“My word!” the Caitian-woman cut in before she smirked, “I think you are the only one, who is capable of whipping up this lot of idiots into a team! It’s a miracle that we haven’t already been killed.”

Some of the others muttered quietly but didn’t dare to object. As it stood, the female Caitian was highly respected notwithstanding her fighting skills and claws.

Khan pondered the words carefully. Of course he was ‘capable’ of marshalling and leading a militia – after all he had been the leader of nations in the 20th century. Still he knew that the older members of the ‘resistance’ may be intimidated by his presence so he had to make sure at first that no one felt so inadequate that they would be insubordinate later.

“What can you offer?” he addressed the Tellarit. Galven grunted before he replied, “I came up with the idea to shove some fists down the slavers greedy throats. Oh, and I am also the technician here.” He grinned wryly at that then pointed at Ritek. “He’s a big mouth but is skilled in communication and fluent in several languages, an advantage if you depend on information gained by eavesdropping. And Caviw,” he nodded towards the Caitian, “is one of the best hackers in the universe!”

The cat-like woman smiled at the Augment. “If you want to know, if you’re still pursued by the uniform-wearers,” she wrinkled her nose in distaste at the thought of Starfleet, “I could check. It wouldn’t be the first time I made a trip through their data.”

Well, that was interesting! He was in desperate need for any access to Starfleet’s database and here
was his chance! The possibility of learning the whereabouts of his crew would increase drastically if he could view Starfleet’s top secret files. But he had to be careful, very careful if he is to hide his true intentions from this group of wanna-be-heroes. They better never find out who and what he was. They must learn to trust him so that there wouldn’t be any questions when he begins his own private expedition. This plan worked out very well with the fishermen and Nando and should again.

His gaze held the Caitian woman, and he lifted both brows. “Really? You’re that good in hacking into systems? Starfleet has the highest security-standards and…”

Her claw-like nails touched his arm, and Caviw purred, “I am not ‘that good’ – I am better. Maybe you want to test me?”

Was this pussy cat flirting with him? He saw her tail twitching, caught the amused expressions of the others and felt for the first time the urge to send a prayer a higher power (not that he believed in such things), because this was certainly something he needed least of all. She was beautiful in her own way, but she was an alien and he couldn’t… Well, he couldn’t think of anyone else sharing his bed other than a certain boyish Starfleet captain.

Clearing his throat, he replied firmly, “I would like to test your computer abilities, Ma’am, so thank you for the offer.”

Ritek chuckled then he stiffened and stared at one of the staff-members bent over a small console. “Why do I have the feeling that the guy over there is going to make trouble?”

The others followed his pointed finger and both Khan’s and Cawiv’s excellent hearing caught the words exchanged. “A Starfleet-patrol called. It seems they’ve received several SOS-signals from the departing space crafts with the fled travelers, and now they want to know what happened,” the Caitian explained quickly, causing Galven to curse under his breath.

“Time to go!” the Tellarit grunted. “These fans of rules and regs will come to check on the outpost.” He looked at Khan. “What’s about you, buddy, are you in or out?”

There wasn’t any option left for the Augment. If a Starfleet vessel arrived and the remaining people pointed out the fierceness and success with which he fought, he would certainly be recognized, earning him a sure death – though this would be a more merciful outcome rather than being handed back to the LSH.
His decision made he turned toward Galven and Ritek. “I’m in,” he said. “Everything else can be talked over later when there is enough distance between us and Starfleet.” He walked with long, elegant steps toward the exit. “We should hurry!”

Galven blinked. “He already gives orders.” he snorted in amusement, as the others followed the new member as a unit would. “And they are obeying! Just have a look!” He waved at the rescued people “Until next time! Give the Starfleet boys my regards!” With that, he trotted away, sticking to the heels of his comrades.

Only as they beamed aboard their two vessels and Galven saw the stranger sitting at the helm of the ship, Shadow, the Tellarit realized that he even didn’t know the mysterious Terran’s name. Watching the new member of their group steering the space craft away from the outpost, checking the sensors for the approaching Starfleet ship, and handling the engines and the helm as if he were born to it, Galven walked to him and addressed him curtly, “Right, buddy, you’re obviously a benefit to us. Care to share your name?”

Caviw, who was sitting at her station, and several others glanced curiously at the stranger, who set a course away from the outpost and followed the second spacecraft commanded by Ritek. After a minute Khan looked up and locked eyes with the Tellarit and translated his real name in another language that conformed to his pretended origin.

“My name is Hádgere Léo Drythen,” he said. And as he caught the baffled faces of the little bridge crew, he explained: “It’s an old English name. The first one means ‘the year of the strong family or heritage’. Léo means lion – a mighty predatory cat on Earth. The family-name is simple; it means ‘king’.”

The Caitian woman snickered. “Well, with regard to your fighting abilities and your ability to unite the forces of these renegades, you are a predator and king in one.” She tried to say his name, except for the middle one she failed miserably. What came out of her mouth made the Augment almost chuckled. She finally sighed, “May I call you Léo? At least this I can get over my tongue without cutting it on my teeth.”

The super-human lifted a brow. “It’s easier for you; it reminds you of yourself, doesn’t it?”

She grinned. “Yes!”

Galven grimaced and snorted before he said: “First names are used only among the most intimate of relationships in my culture – and in this of Ritek and the most others, too – I would prefer to call you Drythen if you don’t mind.”
Of course Khan didn’t mind!

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

I think that was a surprise, wasn’t it? I hope you liked the details from Khan’s past, which made him interference in the Orions’ assault, which in turn leads to his decision to join the group of resistance. Of course he will going to use this ‘alliance’ for his own proposals (*grin*). Those of you who are wondering about the ‘translation’ of his name… Well, I did a lot of research to learn about the meaning of his Indic name that isn’t an official name at all, but is composed of several names and meanings. Here is the riddle’s solution:

Noon = an old Punjab-clan in the north of Pakistan and India; the clan’s importance peeked in the 17th century, as it became involved in the foundation of the Sikh-Empire (Khan was a Sikh). The ruler of this new caste went by the name Ranjit Singh!

Nien = a component within names, meaning a much as ‘year’, but can also be understand as a description of ‘sun’, because in ancient time Indic people counted the years in sun-circles (this will become important for the story, concerning something in Jim’s and Khan’s relationship).

Therefore Khan’s given name Noonien (combined) refers to this old, still important clan and its heritage at the 17th century, but can also be understood that the year, he was ‘born’ was the year of the strong-ones (maybe the name was given to him by the scientists, who were responsible for his life).

Singh = Name of the royal family of the Sikh-Empire. Until today only members of this clan and its relatives are bearing this name; Singh also means ‘lion’.

Khan = well, we all know that it is an Indic / Asian title of a king / emperor and I simply used the old-English word for ‘king’: Drythen.

His two given names I came up with in old-English:

Hadgere = hád (family, I chose this short-vision because Noon refers to said family in and family is also the most important thing for Khan), gere (year)

Léo = lion

Drythen = king.

I hope the explanation is understandable. I did, as I wrote above, a lot of research and hopefully it is satisfying. I know that Roddenberry named Khan after an Asia friend he lost sight of during WW II and who went by the name Noonian, what isn’t a ‘real’ name
at all. Maybe Gene simply misunderstood his comrade because of the accent, maybe the name of this gentleman is spelled different. But regarding Khan his combined name really makes sense, given his roots and his whole character. After all, he is a kind of warrior-king, who ruled the Asia-part of Earth.

Enough with this epilogue (*laugh*). I hope you liked the new chapter – Bob Wesley, the glimpses of Khan’s past, the fight and the outcome. And I can promise that there will be even more action in the next chapter, together with a ‘satchel charge’ Khan-cleverness, before our Augment realizes that it is necessary to break the silence and to send a message to no-one other than Jim.

Until the weekend,

Please leave some reviews / comments,

Yours Starflight
Hi, dear readers!

Thank you so much for all the kudos, bookmarks and comments. I am very, very happy that you are that smitten with the story and I can promise that you are going to love the next chapters. Like announced there will be a lot of action now, interactions of Jim and his friends / crew, Khan will show once again that he is a master of pulling all the right strings and he and Jim will get in contact again.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

Chapter 8 – Good and bad surprises

“Which part of me words’ ‘they’re in no good condition’ does the cap’n not understand?”
Montgomery Scott looked half despaired and half enraged. His eyes raked over Engineering and the crew. His workers were scurrying from terminal to terminal, from valve to valve, from cooling-system to main-energy-supply, racing up steps and down. Frankly, it looked as though everyone was running around like rats in a maze, and he was a scientist. To the untrained eye, it was chaos. But to Montgomery Scott, it was a most precise choreographed dance; every movement executed with purpose.

The Enterprise was locked in battle – again – and it was up to Scotty and the Engineering department to keep his lady fully functional.

He was referring to his talk with Captain Kirk four days ago, and the repairs since were nearly complete. The good captain threw a wrench in the works, so to speak, when ‘Red Alert’ sounded through the ship. A moment later the hull shook, and so began the clash with three Orion vessels. And as much as Scotty admired his young captain’s resolve, sometimes he cursed the stubborn Iowa-kid into the next week. He wondered if the captain would ever let his lady heal.

The Orions appeared near the Japori system as expected. The Lexington was on her way to aid them, and Kirk was determined to solve the problem before Commodore Wesley’s arrival.

“Starboard Overload-valve’s going up!” one of the technicians screamed and the Scottish engineer
moaned, “No, not again! “What the devil is the cap’n doin’ up there? He’ll be the end of us!”

Several decks above him, on the main-bridge, Jim Kirk stared, eyes blazing, at the two remaining but all too functional Orion-vessels; the third lost power and navigation. Those all-to-functional ships were giving the Enterprise a run for her money. She received several major hits in the last few minutes. The Orions maybe slavers and pirates, but they knew how to battle.

“Evasive maneuvers, Mr. Sulu!” Kirk ordered, “Keep those shields up!”

“Zey’re down to twenty percent, Keptin,” Chekov called over his shoulder, his large eyes fixed on the data his navigation-console delivered. “Two more hits and zey will fail!”

Phaser-light flickered over the screen, and the Enterprise rocked as the shields absorbed the brunt of the shot. Still, more damage reports flooded Uhura’s station.

“Med bay to bridge! Jim, what the hell are you doing up there?” McCoy’s angry voice cracked with stress. “We’re running on auxiliary power here and we have several patients who depend on the life support systems. M’Benga is busy in the surgery; he needs more energy. If we don’t get full power within in the next few minutes, I can’t guarantee that…”

“Tell the damn Orions, Bones! They are using our ship for target practice!” Kirk snapped.

The CMO groaned. “Couldn’t you just avoid a fight for once? What good are evasive maneuvers if you can’t evade!” Mr. Sulu shot an incredulous look to the speaker overhead.

“I didn’t invite them, Bones, and now – please – get off the line!”

“Captain, the Lexington approaches!” Spock reported, as calm as he would talk last night’s dinner. Jim couldn’t suppress a sigh of relief, and a moment later the attacking Orion-vessels suffered direct hits from the phaser-blasts of the Enterprise’s sister-ship. The tables finally turned; the battle ended quickly with the Lexington’s arrival. The remaining Orion-vessels retreated, ushering the damaged ship with them. Instantly, the Lexington took up the chase making certain the Orion vessels would not return to the area.

Jim leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath. “Damage report, Uhura.” he murmured. She hesitated before replying, “The report will be long like the Christmas gift list of a spoiled child,
Captain. How about the worst of the damage?”

Kirk groaned – why wasn’t he surprised – and sent his communications officer a short smile, accompanied by the words, “Yes please.”

When Uhura finally finished, Jim wasn’t the only with his mouth hung open. Sulu und Chekov exchanged uncomfortable looks and even Spock, as far as a half-Vulcan could, looked surprised. “Um… didn’t you say you wanted to report only the most important damages?” Kirk asked almost cautiously. Nyota sighed, “I did, Captain.”

“Med bay to bridge! Are you done rockin’ the ship, Captain?” McCoy sounded more than irritated but due to the situation Jim kept quiet at the snark in the doctor’s voice.

“Engineering’ ter bridge! Cap’n, one more fight in the next two weeks – and I mean weeks! – and we can say farewell to our engines!”

“Wardroom to bridge. Captain, the last hit destroyed the main-power supply for the food-replicators. We only have a week’s worth of provisions.”

Kirk sighed and closed his eyes. “Has anyone got another shoe to drop?”

“A shoe, Captain? Why should someone drop a shoe?” Spock cocked an eyebrow. He was familiar with many Terran idioms, but this one was lost on him.

Uhura chuckled while Jim rolled his eyes, “I mean if anyone else has bad news, Spock. It’s a figure of speech.”

The Vulcan lifted a brow. “Some of these, uh figures, are highly illogical and impossible to understand, Captain. But regarding your question, Yes, I have more bad information to report.”

Jim pressed his lips shut, “Out with it then, Spock!”

“The torpedoes the Orions used are of Klingon construction.”
Silence filled the bridge.

“Come again?” the captain whispered and the science officer nodded slowly.

“You heard correct, sir,” he interpreted the reaction of his friend correctly. “The Orions fire torpedoes outfitted with what appears to be a Klingon photon-torpedo warhead. The signature of the weapon and its emissions are identical to the Klingon weapons used during our fight near Starbase K7 at Sherman’s Planet.”

“But…” Jim gestured towards the screen. “We saw the torpedoes they shot at us. They looked nothing like the torpedoes the Klingons are using!”

“Correct, Captain,” Spock nodded while he crossed his arms at his back. “It appears they’ve fitted the Klingon’s photon torpedo warhead into their own torpedo casing. This allows the Orions to disguise the Klingon technology as there need not be any external modifications to the Orion ship to accommodate the weapons; in essence hiding the new weaponry until it is fired.”

“So… the Klingons are supporting the Orion Syndicate?” Sulu concluded.

Jim cursed. “I anticipated something like this, still…” He had waved before he collected himself. “Uhura, transmit to Starfleet Command, Priority One. Tell them the Lexington and Enterprise successfully defended the Japori-System against Orions, and will head to Starbase 84 for repairs as soon as the Lexington returns. Oh, and tell them that we exposed the Klingon alliance with the Orion Syndicate. I’m sure this’ll make a few admirals very nervous!”

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‘Very nervous’ was an understatement. Admiral Richard Barnett’s blood boiled as the Enterprise’s transmission reached Earth. Finally, some proof to the SBI rumors of the Klingon-Orion partnership! To crown it all, reports of Orion and Klingon assaults were increasing. Several captains announced that they confronted Klingon vessels the sensors hadn’t detected until the battle-cruisers and the Birds-of-Prey had attacked.

“As if they are invisible!” one captain reported. Which led to one conclusion: the Klingons perfected their cloaking devices – a technique previously used exclusively by the Romulans.
Admiral José Luengo massaged his temples; an intense headache beginning behind his eyes and wrapping around his skull. “We didn’t foresee these singular battles becoming an all-out war.” he said slowly. He was still under scrutiny following Khan’s escape from Section 31, but his experience, contacts, and knowledge were too valuable to court-martial him right away. His big moustache twitched as he continued, “We have to redeploy the battlegroup squadrons between the Romulan and the Klingon Empire, the Klingons and Borderland, as well as along the Orion’s territory. If the Klingons want to start a major offensive, they will attack from there.”

“Or they’ll use more Orion territory which would allow them to encircle the fleet – on one side the former Neutral Zone, on the other side the Orions and vis-à-vis more Klingons,” Komack cut in. “No, we should evacuate the colonies and planets along the Neutral Zone and build a defensive line.”

“And how many people do you think, you can evacuate? There are billions! It would take years before we got them all to safety. We have weeks at best!” Luengo shook his head. “No. Intelligence reports that the Klingons are not interested in destroying the inhabited planets, but to seize them – a disagreeable situation for the involved populations, but their lives are not in danger. We should vacate the outposts and the space-stations in the neighborhood of the Klingons, and…”

“And deliver our technology to the Klingons?” Barnett frowned. “No, certainly not. We could destroy the stations as a last resort, but only if we are left with no other option. Till now we’ve only lost K7 and Starbase 133; Starbase 234 and 84 are still in our control and we must keep it that way, gentlemen!” He glanced at Komack. “What’s the status of the civil outposts?”

“Most of them are still intact, but several days ago, Orions assaulted outpost 18–243 – a small space-dock with a dubious reputation. If you don’t want the Security and police to know about your travel-habits; refugees. It’s a popular dock for smugglers too.” Komack sighed. “The Orions knew about it and thought that have an easy capture for their slave trade, but something went wrong. Instead of taking captives they got their butts kicked and had to retreat.”

The other admirals in the conference room frowned, and Barnett stated more than asked, “Insurgents again?”

Komack smiled for the briefest moment. “It seems so.” He glanced at Luengo. “José?”

The Chief of the SBI grimaced. “According to several reports this bunch of wackos ambushed the pirates and fought them off before they could cause too much damage. Several records were made that I hadn't got until now, but as it seems this was a more organized strike against the pirates, otherwise the outcome could have been quite the opposite. Several witnesses told the crew of the
Bonaventure, who reached the outpost first after they caught their emergency signals, that they owe these people their lives.”

“Well, we need any support we can get.” Suzan Heatherd sighed and added quickly, “Of course I know these vigilante style antics are illegal, but if they render the Orions inoperable, even for a while, so much the better for us.”

Barnett nodded. “I understand what you mean – still the acting commanders out there near the Neutral Zone are not too happy with vigilante-style justice. Playing the hero is a dangerous game. One we will eventually have to clean up.”

Suzan smiled. “Well, that goes for all of them – the so-called ‘militia’ and our commanders!”

Luengo listened quietly; he intentionally withheld records he received from the security-cameras of the outpost 18-243 shortly before the meeting began. Specifically, he withheld the video from the cameras of the waiting-and-departure area of the outpost. He thought he saw a fighter in dark clothes, aiding other passengers, as well as the Robin Hood band. If the evaluations of these records confirmed what he anticipated they would, he would have to tell Norton that his run-away Augment was somewhere near the Neutral Zone.

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“Argh! Where did these muck-ups come from?” Galven was ready to explode like a tiny volcano; his weak eyes squinted at the screen as a Klingon scout-ship seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Khan didn’t listen to the complaints of the Tellarit. Complaining was a sport for Galven, and he excelled. The Augment, in the time he spent with the group of do-gooder mercenaries, learned to quit asking what Galven’s guttural articulations meant in Federation-Standard. His muttered (shouted, grunted) words were obviously insults. Caviw explained him two days ago that Tellarits knew more than fifty words only for ‘dirt’ – some of them were positive as the one describing the healing-mud used on his home planet. But, some of them clearly meant that the addressed individual would do better to ingest, roll-in, or never come out of a ‘non-medicinal’ mud-bath; others simply meant the addressed was dirty at, well, ‘everything’.

So the super-human employed some selective hearing when it came to the Galven’s native tongue; he didn’t need any distractions. Khan’s gaze wandered over the place the Klingon ship appeared, ‘Klingon scout, fast and easy maneuverable, manned with one-seven crewmembers’ he reminded himself of the scout ship’s specs during his ‘cooperation’ with Section 31.
But Khan noticed something else strange when the scout ship came into view, aside from the spontaneous appearance. Something within the scout ship required a lot of power. The ship’s energy signature dropped, signaling a drop in energy supply as evidenced by the Klingon shields’ loss of power. ‘Interesting!’ he thought. ‘A ship that can disappear and reappear; yet whatever causes it seems to leach the ship’s power. I’ve heard of something like this before – but where?’

His attention was driven back to the problem at hand. The enemy’s ship may be small, but it had an array of armament – and right now the torpedoes were aimed their way.

“Galven, we are being hailed!” Caviw called, and the Tellarit gave her a signal to open a channel.

Instantly the dark voice of a Klingon boomed through the speakers.

“Unknown ship, this is Captain Kardan from the B’rel-ship D’Ghor of the Klingon Imperial Fleet. You have entered Klingon space! Prepare to be boarded. If you refuse surrender, you will be destroyed!”

The audio transmission precluded view of the Klingon’s face, but his voice betrayed a deadly seriousness.

Galven gasped. “Klingon space?” he repeated. “Klingon space? Is your navigator drunk or was he reading star-charts upside-down? You are in Federation space, Kardan, so haul your ass and get lost!”

Khan glared over his shoulder at the outraged Tellarit. That wasn’t the cleverest move to dissuade the enemy from blowing them out of space.

As it seems, the Klingon commander didn’t recognize the Terran phrases but the word ‘ass’ rang a bell, because the answer came like a low growl over the still open link. “Federation-vessel, no more warnings! Lower your shields and surrender, or we will pulverize your ‘asses’!”

“A Klingon with humor – you never too old to learn!” Galven grunted, and Khan realized that, if he didn’t intervene, he and the crew were dead!
“D’Ghor, this is Drythen speaking, captain of the Shadow!” he rose to speak and prohibited any protest by hastily pressing one finger against his lips and glaring at his shipmates with one of his most imposing stares. He had to take the matter in his own hands.

“Captain Drythen?” The Klingon stumbled over the unusual name what seemed to make him even angrier, before he snarled, “Am I speaking at last with the commander of this sorry excuse for a space craft?”

“You are, sir. Captain Dythen at your service!” It rankled him to act as an inferior being, but he had to buy time to collect facts and plan an escape. “Sir, my instruments show that we are near the Betreka Nebula which belongs to the Federation. Could you be so polite as to explain, how…”

“This whole area is seized by the glorious Klingon Imperial Fleet, Shadow, and belongs now to our territory!” the Klingon commander growled. “Who was this insolent petaQ who dared to insult me earlier?”

“My technician – a short-tempered man, that’s all!” the super-human replied nonchalantly, ignoring Galven’s sputtering gasps. “We have several technical problems, and his mood isn’t the best at the moment.”

“Shoot him, if he is such a waste!” came the curt comment, followed by the next demand: “Lower your shields and switch to full-transmission, Captain!”

“Ah, there is one of our problems, Commander!” Khan’s voice sounded almost apologetic in contrast to his flashing eyes. His plot formed. He had to coax the Klingon to lower the shields completely – and he knew exactly how to persuade him. “You see, we had a short circuit in the con-terminal and most of the main-functions are disabled. The life-support-systems are only functioning at twelve percent; we have no warp capability; our weapons are inoperable and our engine…”

He heard roaring laughter coming through the speakers from the Klingons, accompanied by Kardan’s voice, “Captain, thank you for the status report of your ship. You must have mistaken us for the breakdown service. I must disappoint you.” – More laughter. – “But we are in deep space and of course I’ll help you out of your misery - forever.”

Galven, Caviw and three other crew-members – who hadn’t the slightest clue to what their new shipmate was up to – displayed more than a hint of panic on their faces; still, Khan remained perfectly calm. “That sounds like a good offer, Commander Kardan. Thank you. I am certain that your ship will be able to tow us along and that your fleet admiral will be delighted to receive a full shipment of dilithium.”
Silence descended like a shroud.

Galven and the others, thunderstruck, watched the super-human. Kardan replied after several seconds: “Shadow, repeat the nature of your shipment!”

“Our cargo bay is full of dilithium,” the Augment lied. He knew that Kardan had no way of checking their hold properly as long as their shields were up.

“How did you gain a whole shipment of…?” The hostile commander was again interrupted, as Khan answered casually:

“That doesn’t matter. We are dealers with no loyalty to the Federation. We’ll sell to anyone at the right price. As far as I can assume, your fleet is in need of these particular crystals, being away from home and at war. Maybe we can come to an agreement. You hustle us to your fleet admiral, help us with the repairs, and I’ll make you a fair deal in repayment for your service.” He paused for effect, knowing that everything depended on the Klingon’s decision to activate the tractor-beam, which would cause D’Ghor to lower her shields. “Eventually, we can strike a pact for more deliveries, because you will not get dilithium-crystals cheaper in the whole quadrant,” Khan added, tempting Kardan even more with the prospect of a good deal.

There was no answer from the Klingon commander; it was obvious that he was pondering the possibilities – Khan pressed.

“See it as a two-side-advantage or, even better, a three-sided one.” His voice was even and steady, while his fingers darted over the controls of the con-terminal, sending data to the private PADD Ritek left with him before he departed two days ago to meet ‘a very good friend’.

“How so?” The Klingon sounded bewildered, and a cold smirk played around the usual soft lips of the super-human, his gaze never wavering from the terminal. “Well, we will be rid of our technical problems; your fleet will have a larger storage of dilithium for a knocked-down price and you will get commendations from your fleet-commander. A man who takes responsibilities and makes decisions—gaining needed equipment for his fleet—certainly will be trusted with greater duties than those of scouting.”

The reply came hesitantly. “Have I understood you correctly? You will leave your shipment to us for a very low price if we save you neck?” Someone in the background had grumbled before Kardan continued, “There is always the possibility to strafe your ship and beam the contents of your hold
Galven and Jeff Tyler gulped nervously and watched ‘Drythen’, who appeared relaxed, bored even, as if he were discussing the weather on far-away Vega.

“It would be unwise. I am sure I do not have to point out to you the risk - that you would destroy this ship before you could seize our shipment is high, and your fleet-commander would miss the opportunity to obtain his fleet’s needed Dilithium supply for the foreseeable future. And you would neglect your own opportunity showing your superiors your real value as a commander. But perhaps you enjoy scouting duties.” He made the last statement with more than a hint of distaste and leaned back in his chair. “The decision is up to you.”

Once again the enemy captain took his time consider the matter; then he answered slowly, “I have no guarantee that you’re speaking the truth.”

This objection wasn’t unexpected, and Khan was ready for it.

“If you like I can send you part of our technical log disclosing our problems. As you know the computer cannot manipulate the technical logs, so it should be enough proof for you to…”

“Send it! I’ll give you the frequency!”

Khan waited patiently, while he linked the PADD to the con-terminal. Then he activated the sensors again, modifying them in a way the others hadn’t seen before. Curious, Caviw left her station to stand behind him, scrutinizing his actions. She frowned deeply, trying to figure out just what he was planning.

A moment later the frequency was given, and a triumphant smile spread across the Augment’s features, before he said, “Give me a moment, Commander, I have to adjust the transmission of data to your frequency.”

“No tricks, Captain, or I’ll blow you into space!”

Khan rolled his eyes. And there were people, who called him dramatic!
“Here it comes!” he reported and sent the altered data from his PADD to the Klingon ship. But the log wasn’t the only bit of data sent in Khan’s transmission. Covered by the transmission, the sensors of the Shadow scanned the D’Ghor’s energy signatures; a few seconds later Khan had the information he needed. He now knew how the Klingons had been able to sneak up on them without alerting the sensors. This nice little device had made it possible and would serve him very, very well!

“Commander Kardan, does everything appear satisfactory?” he asked as if he was a student addressing his teacher; he smiled inwardly.

“I’ll repeat my earlier advice again, Captain, shoot your technician!”

Khan and the others took that as a ‘yes’, and a moment later they learned Khan correctly determined the Klingon’s decision as Kardan added, “We will activate our tractor-beam and tow you along with us. But make no mistake! At the first hint of your treachery, we will blow your ship to pieces!”

Another threat meant seriously by the Klingon, but for Khan it was almost a joke. Still he kept the charade up and replied, “You have seen our technical status, Commander. We are truly in need for your help.”

The crew heard hushed comments and snickering over the transmission; it was not necessary to speak Klingon to understand that the crew of the D’Ghor was mocking the ‘dealers’.

“Yes, I know,” Kardan sneered. “How it is possible that you’re still able to move, is beyond me!”

Khan’s gaze lay on the sensors while an icy, predatory smile spread slowly over his face. His voice was almost soft, as he said darkly:

“Because…”

The sensors showed that the shields of the D’Ghor began to lower.

“… injured tigers…”

The long, slender fingers of the Augment rested on the controls of the single phaser-bank that
complemented the Shadow’s weaponry.

“… are most dangerous!”

The next moment the phasers sent their destructive load at the now unshielded \textit{D’Ghor}, hitting her directly over the point where the foreign device was installed. Khan followed the phaser hit with a torpedo aimed for the section of her main-power.

The roars of surprise and fury from the Klingon crew boomed over the speakers, then the connection was broken.

“Man your stations! Ready for battle!” Khan yelled and set a course that would bring them under the Klingon scout ship.

Not a second too soon, because the \textit{D’Ghor} shot one of her own torpedoes missing them by a hair’s breadth.

“Computer, switch automatic weaponry-control to manual!” the super-human ordered and a hairline cross appeared in the center of the screen. He did not trust the computer to execute the job he intended to do.

“Are you crazy?” Galven squeaked, clearly in panic now, but – again – the Augment stayed calm.

The \textit{D’Ghor} moved and fired a second torpedo at them – Khan was waiting for it – aiming with perfect precision and steady hand, he let loose his own that sped into the path of the enemy’s shot.

“Hold on!” he shouted, tightening his own hands around the armrests of his chair.

The clash was cataclysmic, as both torpedoes met and exploded in a cloud of released, deadly energy, sending a shock-wave towards the two ships. But because the \textit{Shadow’s} shields were still up damage to her hull was mitigated in contrast to the \textit{D’Ghor}. The scout ship reeled back and tumbled through space, no longer maneuverable.

Checking the sensors Khan reported, “Their energy-supplies are down, warp-engine is still intact but
without power, shields are down. They are no longer firing so it seems their weapons are inoperable for the moment, but I cannot be sure for how long. Life-support-system is down to thirty-five percent!” He turned towards the others. “We should seize the ship here and now, before Kardan activates the self-destruct.”

Galven grunted something Khan didn’t understand, before the Tellarit oinked, “And why should we take that ship for ourselves?”

The Augment was already out of his seat, heading for the small transporter room located at the back of the bridge. “Because they have something aboard that is of use to us!” He slipped into a safety waistcoat and checked his phaser.

“And what is that?” One of the crew asked.

Khan smirked, “A cloaking-device!”

Two minutes later the Augment and the most of the Shadow’s crew materialized on the bridge of the D’Ghor. They were met with stinging smoke, heat from a fire, and four angry Klingons who survived the attack. With a roar of pure wrath the surviving Klingons hurled themselves at the intruders. Galven, Jeff Tyler, and the others struggled to defend themselves against the fury and strength of the Klingons – but Khan did not.

With ease he blocked the blows of his opponent and, despite the ridged forehead, he head-butted his enemy throwing him backwards.

Dark eyes glared first with surprise then with hate. “Who are you?” the Klingon snarled.

Recognizing the voice, Khan answered plainly, “I am your ticket to hell, Kardan!”

“YOU are the double-tongued bIHnuch (coward), who lied to me!” The Klingon commander tore a dagger out of his belt and snapped the blade open, revealing two more blades - a D’k thag – the traditional knife of a warrior.

“You should have stayed out of our way, Kardan!” the super-human growled, his pale eyes glistening with the fire of battle. “Now you have to face the consequences of challenging me!”
“I don’t know who you are, but one thing I can promise: nothing you and your friends will do can stop us from conquering this part of your beloved Federation! Tammeron will be seized and destroyed, the Federation will lose an important trading partner, and we are coming one step closer to your precious Earth!” He spat the last word, and Khan’s instincts flared up. Earth was, after all, his home-planet and even if he hadn’t been on best terms with his home in history, he couldn’t deny his roots.

And there was more. As far as he understood Kardan the Klingons were about to destroy an inhabited planet - millions of lives – something that was utterly and completely unacceptable for the enhanced man. Other Augments had let themselves be carried away by their own power, had committed genocide even – the start of the Eugenics Wars – but Khan Noonien Singh had never been tempted to such inhumanity. And he wouldn’t stand idly by when another force threatened to wipe out an entire population.

“Don’t underestimate us, Klingon!” he growled. “There are enough capable people who are going to kick your fleet straight to hell – I’m just ensuring you follow them there!”

With those words he was upon Kardan. He slapped the hand with the D’k thag aside and delivered a hard blow to the Klingon’s chest, breaking several ribs. The enemy commander went to his knees. The next instant Khan had him in a deadly grip around neck and head; he ignored his opponent clawing at his arms. Bending down he hissed near Kardan’s ear, delivering words for his ears only, “You want to know, who I am? Have you heard the story of Qo’noS and the three patrol units? It was one year ago, wasn’t it?” He saw Kardan’s eyes widening and lowered his voice to a whisper. “Yes. It was me who took them out, all of them, one by one.”

“You…” The Klingon coughed pink-colored blood, while his eyes burnt with hate. “You were the backup for that cowardly man-boy!”

“So I have already a reputation on your planet? Excellent!” Khan tightened his grip; deep inside him a new anger kindled when heard the Klingon call James a coward. “How many ships are on their way to Tammeron and when will they strike?”

Kardan only spit at him – and screamed, as Khan mercilessly broke his arm. “How many and when is the attack?” he demanded again, his face wild with rage.

“Too many, even for you! Two little space-crafts against ten battle-cruisers… Enter Tammerion-territory and my comrades will disperse your molecules all over space!”
“And when will that be in your opinion?” the super-human sneered, but received only a barking laughter.

“Soon – very soon, scum!”

These were the last words Kardan ever said. One hard jerk and a twist of his head, and the Klingon commander slumped to the floor.

Rising, the Augment looked around him. The fight was over; the three other Klingons had taken their last voyage to the Black Fleet. Khan met Caviw’s large eyes; she had watched him breaking Klingon bones with his bare hands. “You shouldn’t be angered,” she deadpanned; then she sighed, gesturing towards Kardan. “He could have given us information!”

Khan shook his head. “He already did. He wouldn’t have given anymore.” He walked to one of the stations and looked over the symbols. “Does anyone read Klingon?” he asked and Galven, who had problems with setting the fire drencher on work, oinked:

“Ritek does – but this chipmunk will only come tomorrow after he has visited his girl.”

“Contact him. He must come immediately. Tell him that we’ve seized a Klingon scout ship with a cloaking device and that we need his help to learn more about it and we need to know how to steer the ship. With it, the Shadow and the Flash we may be able to prevent the Klingons from murdering the population of a whole planet.”

That gave him everyone’s attention. “WHAT?” Galven squealed, in shock, before coughing and cursing the smoke.

“The Tammeron-planet – what do you know about it?” Khan asked sternly. It was Jeff who answered him.

“It’s a smaller planet in the Tammeron system on the other side of the Betrenka Nebula. Tammeron is neutral but has been trading with the Federation for several decades now. Their whiskey is famous as well as their fruits. They are humanoid and very peaceful.”

Khan nodded. “And an entire Klingon strike group is on its way to destroy their planet and erase this important trading partner of the Federation.” He heard startled gasps and pressed his lips tightly
before continuing. “I think we should reconsider our original proposal and adapt our plans!”

Caviw cocked her head. “Even with the *Flash*, the *Shadow*, and this nice little ship with its special gift – we cannot fight a fully outfitted Klingon strike group, and you know this.”

Again, the enhanced man made an affirming gesture. “That we do not have to do at all. We only have to hold them until real help arrives.”

Jeff looked up his ashen hair clung to his sweaty forehead. “You are talking about Starfleet?”

“Yes. If several Federation ships arrive, the Klingons will get a nasty surprise when they reach Tammeron.”

“I thought you parted with Starfleet on, uh, less than amicable terms, shall we say,” the Caitian woman mused, while Galven grumbled, “We don’t even have the hours to spare in order to come up with a plan to bring Starfleet to Tammeron.”

“Still, it is the only way to save the inhabitants of that planet,” the Augment answered sharply. “I will beam back to the *Shadow* and send Starfleet a message. We have to alert them before we can plot how to outmaneuver the Klingons.”

Caviw stepped in front of him. “Do you think they will listen to you? You are a wanted man after you deserted those uniform-wearers. They will…”

“I know someone who will listen,” Khan cut in, taking out his communicator to order the remaining crew-member aboard the *Shadow* to beam him back. Then he hesitated. “Caviw, you said you can hack into Starfleet’s database.”

A soft purr was the answer, and so he continued, “You could play a large part in saving the Tammeronians.”

This time she chuckled. “What do I have to do?”

“I need the whereabouts and the specific transmission frequency of a certain starship.”
Jim Kirk stretched his back and groaned; screaming protests of tense muscles and tight tendons answered the procedure. God, he needed a bath – or a shower… A real shower with water, unfortunately, the loss of the main device for the replicators also powered ship’s plumbing, and that meant there were only a few tanks left with fresh water; a shower was out of the question. Well, a sonic shower wasn’t that bad; still Jim loved the good old-fashioned way of getting clean and relaxed.

Relaxing was something he couldn’t afford just now. Not when his ship was in this condition! Only two hours ago they had parted from the Lexington. After Bob Wesley had provided them with needed medical supplies, replacement equipment for the damaged computer systems, and some food enough to last the trip to Starbase 84, the Enterprise headed toward the next Starfleet outpost to undergo the necessary repairs.

After Kirk’s visit to the med bay, he went to Engineering and saw the whole disaster with his own eyes. He grasped that Scotty’s earlier outburst was no exaggeration. The mechanical heart of the Enterprise looked as if not one, but a dozen ‘Nessies’ had raced through it. ‘Or dragons,’ the young captain thought with a twinge of black humor, as he waited for the turbo lift to reach the bridge again. ‘Fire-breathing dragons, who left their traces all over the walls and floors. Hell, no wonder Scotty was near tears. That is no engineering space, but a cargo hold full of chaos!’

The turbo lift doors opened, and he stepped into the next ‘center of chaos’. There seemed to be no station whose cover panel wasn’t open. Most senior officers and enlisted technicians were stooped beneath or leaning over some piece of equipment or another; all the lights in the space were flickering.

What a mess!

The first hits by the Orions hadn’t done much damage. Then, two of the vessels caught the Enterprise in their crossfire; only a clever move initiated by Jim – one of those tactics that wouldn’t be found in any textbook – saved the ship and its crew, rendering one of the two enemies helpless.

Kirk’s attention was brought to the navigation station, where a tirade of Russian sounded; Jim had no desire to learn what all those words meant. Glancing around he walked over to his Vulcan friend, who closed the cover panel of his station and still looked like a chimney sweeper of earlier centuries.
“Everything all right, Spock?” he asked quietly; his first officer lifted one shoulder in a half-shrug – a human gesture he had adopted from his shipmates.

“Depending on how you look at it, Captain,” he answered. “Is the station completely in order and working properly? No. Is the reduced capacity sufficient until we reach Starbase 84? Yes.”

Jim nodded slowly. “I was in the engineering and the med bay. We lost 18 crewmembers today; more than 40 need medical care and 3 are still critical even after the emergency surgery.” He lowered his head. “So much suffering, so many lives wasted… And for what?” He snorted. “For something that could have been prevented, if both sides had shown more caution, tolerance and respect.” His eyes wandered to the main-screen that was completely intact. “I signed up for Starfleet to explore the galaxy, not to fight wars. Yeah, part of Starfleet’s responsibility is to keep the Federation’s people safe, still…” He sighed.

The night-dark eyes of the Vulcan shimmered softly as he spoke “History shows, behind any war, there are those who remove themselves from the violence and the insanity of battles, and therefore don’t know first-hand what they have done. Others selflessly volunteer to follow those orders to battle because, at some point, there is no going back. We crossed that point last year because of the deeds of Section 31; the Klingons crossed this point even earlier, waiting for an opportunity to that which is their nature – to conquer, to destroy. And so we have no other choice than to do what is expected of us. We will use all our strengths to protect those, who are unable to defend themselves. So long as we do not lose ourselves, so long as we do not let hatred and the desire for revenge dictate our actions – we can aspire toward peace; we will end this war.”

Jim cocked his head and surveyed his friend. He knew that Vulcans didn’t often speak to illicit emotion – most of them even denied having them – but not for the first time Spock surprised him with the sensible part – the human part that was deep hidden in his soul, and Kirk was grateful for the comforting words his T’hy’la found. But before he could reply, Uhura’s voice called, “Captain, I’ve received a transmission on the specific frequency allocated to us by Starfleet Command.”

“A message from headquarters?” Kirk asked, already walking towards the young Bantu, who listened closely. She frowned and shook her head in bewilderment.

“No, Captain. The source is… somewhere…” For a moment, she was busy at her station; her eyes never wavered from the small screen above her. Then she frowned, “From somewhere near the Betreka Nebula.”

Jim blinked in surprise while several other bridge-crewmembers stared at the communication officer and their captain with questioning looks. “Near the Betreka Nebula? And they are using the Enterprise’s specific communication-frequency?” As the young woman nodded, he exchanged a look with a slightly confused Spock and ordered, “On screen, Lieutenant.”
“Sorry, sir, it is only an audio transmission.”

Jim gestured towards her when a moment later a female voice sounded through the speakers; the slightly hoarse and hissing accent gave her away as a Caitian. “This is… the… Shadow… We have reliable information that… Klingons are going to attack Tammeron and… destroy… whole planet. Ten battle-cruisers are on their w… Send help or millions will d…”

Kirk took a deep breath. The transmission was not coming in as clearly as it should; the Betreka Nebula was still within reach for direct contact. He looked at Spock – whose brows vanished beneath his tousled black hair – and answered, “This is Captain James T. Kirk from the USS Enterprise. Identify yourself, Shadow. And how do you know about this frequency?”

He had to wait for an answer and Spock bent forwards; whispering: “Jim, this could be a trap.”

“I know, Spock, still I’m curious, who this woman is and how she got our frequ…”

“We are those, who fight agai… Orion pirates where Starfleet is too… the rescue,” the Caitian-woman replied, taking Jim by surprise. This group of people, who created their own militia to fight against the Orion-pirates was contacting him? Why did they choose him of all people?

He listened to the static noises, which overloaded the transmission again and glanced at Uhura. “Can you adjust the signal to make it clearer, Lieutenant?”

Uhura shook her head. “No, Captain. There seems to be a…” She hesitated, and her eyes widened. “Sir, there is a second signal along with the main transmission.”

“You mean a piggy-backed signal?” Jim ignored Spock’s confused look since he used a very old Terran term, but Nyota understood him. “Yes, sir; indeed.”

“What is the source? Klingon territory or…”

“Cap… the second signa… for you in perso… to believe us! Open i…!” ‘Shadow’ – he didn’t know if this was a pseudonym of the Caitian or the name of the ‘militia’ – sounded more urgent now, and the young captain pressed his lips tightly.
“I have to advise against such a step, Captain. This signal could be anything, maybe a trick to acquire our ship-codes and…”

“Sir, it’s a… a picture!” Uhura interrupted her lover and turned towards Kirk. “To be precise, there are two pictures, scanned in and sent together with the transmission.”

“Open the first, Lieutenant” Kirk murmured, and gestured to the Vulcan to stay silent. He bent over the communication station, watching the small screen. Thunderstruck, he realized that the opened data showed a simple piece of paper with a single handwritten line: ‘To James – For your eyes only!’

Jim knew this handwriting. He would have recognized it anywhere! He had seen these elegant, bold letters only once, but the memory was etched in his mind. His heart began to pound, and several feelings arose in him simultaneously: relief, joy, caution, bewilderment… But, above all, an exciting thrill that went straight to his core, made his mouth dry, and filled him with anticipation.

“Excuse me, Lieutenant,” he said, and waited until Uhura rose and made room for him. Then he opened the second picture. It was again a holophoto of a sheet of paper, this time with the real message: ‘J., Miss Caviw’s information is credible. I coaxed it out of a Klingon commander. There are millions of lives at stake; the assault is soon. Convince SC and contact me in private as soon as you receive SC’s decision. Use HF 25.361.59. – K.’

Jim’s heart seemed to burst out of his chest. This message was the first sign of life he got from Khan after the Augment had left his apartment. The captain was almost ashamed of the amount of relief that washed through him. The super-human had managed to leave Earth and escape Starfleet – or rather had fled LSH and the remaining members of Section 31. Jim was tempted to sigh out loud, but his conscience pricked at him – after all Khan was a criminal! But he couldn’t help himself. He had worried over his one-time lover since that fateful night.

Then it hit him. Khan was somewhere near the Neutral Zone, together – it seemed – with the people who fought against the Orion-pirates. Jim didn’t know how the Augment ended up with them. Perhaps he simply used them for shelter and helped them, while he searched in secret for his family. But foremost on Jim’s mind was the knowledge that Khan was safe – as safe as one could be in the middle of a war.

Quickly, he read the transmission once more before deleting the private message. Then he rose to speak again, “Shadow, I received your second transmission.” For a moment, he pictured Khan at the other end of the transmission link beside the Caitian, listening to his words – and his pulse quickened even more. ‘Dammit, Jim, get a grip!’ He cleared his throat and continued, “Thank you for the warning. I will inform Starfleet Command immediately so they can take countermeasures. Do you
Again there was a pause before the reply reached the Enterprise. “We’ve intercepted information that ten battle-cruisers will attack Tammeron, but there could be more.” The transmission was coming in clearer now but for the pause. The Caitian-woman added, “I shall tell you from ‘Sunrise’ that the Klingons are using cloaking-devices rendering their ships completely invisible, however, we’ve detected a weakness. The cloaking effect appears to require a significant amount of energy; it seems to decrease the power of the deflector shields, rendering them nearly useless.”

Hushed voices and gasps sounded around the bridge at the confirmation of the rumors; the Klingons had stolen Romulan cloaking technology and were now using it to gain further advantage.

“Understood, Shadow. Please pass my sincerest thanks to Sunrise,” Jim answered; knowing perfectly well that this code name was another proof that Khan was – indeed – on the other end of the transmission. Only the two knew the significance of Sunrise. The Augment threatened that he would never see the sun rise again. By sparing Kirk's life, the Augment gave him another sunrise. 'A gift', Kirk thought to himself – one he hoped to share with the giver.

Kirk took a deep breath. “You need to know that the Klingons are supporting the Orion Syndicate, providing weapons and technical equipment. So please be careful when you rush to the aid of potential victims of those pirates the next time.”

Caviw sounded surprised at the captain’s words and cast a quick look in Khan’s direction. “Thank you for the warning, Captain. I’ll relay the information, and… I understand now, why ‘Sunrise’ trusts you. Shadow out!”

The link went dead and for several moments Jim was lost in thought before he realized that Sulu and Chekov were speaking in hushed tones. Uhura manned her station again and cast him a sidelong glance. And as par for the course, Spock had his special kind of non-existent, but nonetheless clear expression of ‘that was a mistake’ look on his face. Kirk shook his head, ignored the gentle tingle at his neck where the mark had been, and absentlly smoothed his shirt while attempting to slow his pounding pulse.

“Lieutenant, contact Starfleet Command, Admiral Barnett. Inform him that the Klingons are using cloaking devices on their ships. They likely stole the technology from the Romulans. Also, tell him we have reliable information that ten Klingon battlecruisers – maybe more – are on their way to Tammeron to destroy the planet. Tell him I’ll contact Bob Wesley since he is the highest ranking commanding officer in this sector, and he has to organize the defense for Tammeron. Afterwards, please hail the Lexington. I have to speak with Bob as soon as possible.”
The Bantu nodded, and Kirk left the upper part of the bridge, returning to his seat. Spock was on his heels and quietly spoke up. “Captain, we cannot determine the veracity of the warning given by this ‘Shadow’ organization.

“I got the proof that the Caitian-woman told the truth, Spock, trust me!” Jim replied, eying his friend.

The Vulcan lifted his brow before continuing, “You are referring to the separate message you received, but still it could be a fake and…”

“No, it’s not a fake!” Kirk interrupted him; his voice was firm. “I recognize this handwriting and the code name says everything I need to know. We can trust this information.”

Spock didn’t even try to get the bottom of this statement. He knew Jim well enough to realize that nothing would change the younger man’s opinion – and he wouldn’t give away, who this ‘Sunrise’ was; still the Vulcan had his own thoughts about it. His friend’s cheeks quickly flushed, and there was a certain bright light in his eyes. That light and that flush never fail to tell Spock more than Jim wants to give away; even if Spock couldn’t even glean the whole truth. “Nevertheless it was against the regulations to give this ‘militia’ military information,” he added. Kirk frowned before he retorted, “And leave them hanging out to dry next time they confront Orion pirates to do what we can’t? Are you serious?” he asked unbelievingly.

“I do understand that their interventions are an additional help against the crimes of the Syndicate, but they are outlaws, Jim, and therefore…”

“Spock, all is fair in love and war, and in my eyes this group The Shadow is doing our job. They are actually supporting the Federation in their own way by picking up the slack. We already had problems keeping the Orions at bay during peacetime; now, during the war it’s nearly impossible to fight the Klingons and to kick the Orions’ asses. So as I see it, The Shadow is more like unconventional support rather than a bunch of outlaws. After all, they are saving lives, not robbing people blind!”

Jim’s thoughts drifted. ‘And there is also this bastard among them, who has somehow wrapped himself around my mind and haunts my dreams. His death would hurt more than I am ready to admit. God, I even LIED to my friends and Barnett to protect him. Now, I should withhold information that keeps him safe, because of some silly regulations I’ve already broken for him once? No!’ He sighed inwardly. ‘He wrote that I should contact him as soon as I got Starfleet Command’s decision, but I think the same goes for Bob’s action. Soon I can talk to Khan again, and… Ugh, Jim, there are more important matters at hand just right now!’ he scolded himself, as his thoughts attempted wander again without his say so.
“Captain, Commodore Wesley for you!” Uhura’s voice brought him back to the present just in time; the screen displayed the silver-haired figure of a tired-looking Bob Wesley.

“Jim, care to explain why I was dragged from a briefing with my senior officers by your Priority One ‘large as the whole galaxy and concerning a red alert redder than red poppy’?” he asked wryly.

Baffled Kirk glanced over his shoulder at Uhura, who only shrugged innocently, which meant, ‘You wanted to speak with him, here he is!’ , and turned his attention back to Wesley.

“I have no good news …”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, The Shadow – means Khan – is now in the possession of a scout ship with a cloaking device, what will be very handy in the near future; not only to battle the Klingons, but also to support a certain trouble-maker who commands Starfleet’s flagship.

In the next chapter Jim and Khan have a personal contact via transmission and I think you are going to love it, how both men will react to speak with each other again – finally! At the same time Luengo checks the records only to find his assumptions confirmed and you are going to ‘meet’ Kor again

I hope you liked the last chapter and I am really curious what you are thinking of it, so please, please leave some comments.

The next chapter is going to be published next weekend (it depends on the amount of work my dear beta-reader has to do to edit my writing).

Until then have a nice week,

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi dear Readers!

I have to apologize that it lasted so long until the next update finally comes now, but my dear beta-reader ‘studied’ several information to be better prepared for all the Star Trek technics, background-issues and so on, and then she had to edit the new chapter several times. But I do think the result is worth the waiting.

Jim and Khan will have their talk in private, you learn more about a certain Klingon-Lord and there will be a nasty surprise at the end (*evil grin*)

And to not spoil anything by giving away too much I just release you now to the next update.

Thank you very much once again for all the feedbacks and that you stay so loyal to the story.

Enjoy,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 9 – Talks

As the Enterprise’s message to headquarters travelled to Earth, Jim Kirk walked to his private quarters, leaving the con to Spock.

‘As soon as you have a decision…’ Khan told him - and a decision Jim got. Bob didn’t doubt Kirk’s words and alerted the starships closest to Tammeron; Commodore Wesley leading the strike group. Hood II remained in the Japori system in case the Orions or Klingons showed. Kirk wanted to accompany Wesley as part of the strike group, but the Enterprise was in no condition for another battle – not until they completed the needed repairs, and the replication-computer worked properly again. A starving crew was not optimal.

Jim exited the turbolift and headed down the corridor, mentally repeating the frequency Khan had given him. He frowned, dismayed that his heart pounded in anticipation, and his hands were clammy; he felt like a teen with a crush on some school-mate. But Khan wasn’t a ‘school-mate’ or a friend. He was a convicted criminal, responsible for the deaths of innocent people and the loss of his beloved mentor. He shouldn’t feel a thrill at the thought of hearing Augment’s voice again; still his body betrayed him.
‘God, Jim, calm down! Khan was an extraordinary lover – he was just what you needed, but he is also a damn terrorist! And you don’t even know why he hooked up with this Shadow-gang – what’s in it for him? He’s certainly not working for some altruistic ends.’

Nevertheless, Khan warned them about the upcoming Klingon attack and had established a pattern of events that would save millions of lives. He took a great risk making contact; a Federation starship could feasibly intercept his message – someone could put two and two together. Starfleet would be on his trail again in no time. Still, Khan chose the perilous path and let him – Jim Kirk – know about the upcoming attack and the Klingon cloaking-device. The Federation owed the Augment now, as did Tammeron.

‘Maybe he wants something in return; that’s why he wants to talk to me alone. He couldn’t make himself known because he assumed that I would be on the bridge when The Shadow contacted us. No one would have believed the Caitian if she revealed that Khan was a part of the militia. Perhaps he needs the private discussion so that he can make his demands.’

Kirk was nearing his quarters; he took a deep breath. ‘On the other hand maybe he contacted us – me – because he knew that I would listen; listen to the Caitian woman and to him. He trusts me enough to reveal his whereabouts, hoping – no, knowing – that I won’t betray him to Starfleet Command! That’s why he warned me of the upcoming assault on Tammeron.’ He shook his head as another thought hit him. ‘God dammit, he did it again. He manipulated me – this time by placing his freedom, his well-being and even his life in my hands, knowing that I would be bound to keep his secret. He said it; I have a conscience. He trusts me to make this step. What does it tell me about us? I don’t think he’s ever trusted someone in this century–only me. But why would one night affect either of us?’

The warnings of his mind continued unheeded by his body and his heart. For all that Pike’s name remained on his mind - his ridiculous emotions regarding his former nemesis ran deeper and stronger. The distance and time between the men have not tamped Kirk’s feelings since he last saw Khan – felt him under his fingers and in his body.

He stepped into his cabin, sealed the door behind him and walked to his desk. “Lights, 50%,” he ordered. Sitting down he rubbed his face, almost irritated as his pulse raced even faster. God, the anticipation of hearing this deep, purring voice was driving him mad. But there it was, the expectancy of seeing the Augment again made him lightheaded. Nothing else mattered at the moment, though the responsible Starfleet-captain in him protested the thought. But, his desire and his sentiment regarding the Augment since he last faced him had intensified; it spread through him as his anticipation did now.

Opening a private channel, he adjusted the transmitter to the frequency Khan had given him and used
the newest high-security-codes to scramble the transmission. He had attempted to steel himself with a deep breath before he said quietly, “Sunrise, J here. Can you hear me?”

Several moments later the screen on his desk came alive – and a warm hand seemed to caress his insides, as he looked once more into those jade-pale and ocean-deep pools.

“Hello, James.”

Khan retreated to his small private quarters. He left the bridge to Caviw with instructions to inform Galven of the successful transmission to Starfleet’s flagship. The Caitian proved to be very capable of hacking into the most secured systems; they otherwise would not have gotten the secret information about the Enterprise’s whereabouts and her codes. The Augment knew that he needed Caviw’s abilities – at least until he learned enough from her to hack into the most secure parts of Starfleet’s database on his own. He must continue the research into the fate of his crew – his family.

Sighing, the super-human gazed down at the dark screen on the table, waiting for James to hail him.

He had known that the young woman, Kirk’s communication officer, would discover the second signal he sent with the audio-transmission. He also knew that James would recognize his handwriting and grasp that it was Khan who contacted him. The captain reacted as the former dictator had hoped – given the vital information Khan provided. Kirk listened and received the information with absolute seriousness. Khan knew the risk he took in revealing his identity, but had to place some amount of trust in the younger man in order to receive it in kind – just as each did that particular night.

It worked. Kirk believed him and would inform Starfleet Command about the Klingons planned attack on Tammeron. The admiralty would send ships to protect the planet and its inhabitants – humans and non-humans alike. The ruler in him, the leader who shoulders the responsibility and needs of others, got the better of him. Countless families had a chance of survival now; the planet would hopefully flourish for centuries to come. Everything had gone the way the super-human expected.

Except himself. His reaction to James’ voice was - unexpected.

Kirk’s gentle tenor was a soft blow that stole Khan’s breath and replaced it with a warmth that
washed through him. When the Enterprise answered Caviw’s transmission, a yearning, a physical want woke in the Augment, an unfamiliar feeling buried for over 300 years. He could see James in his mind’s eye, sitting casually in his captain’s chair and listening to the Caitian’s words. He imagined his ever-so blue eyes light with curiosity – saw his one-time lover walk with determined steps to the communications station to view the secret message. Did he smile when he realized who penned those words?

Giving James the intelligence regarding the Klingon cloaking-device had been an impulse initiated by his instincts to protect the younger man. Promptly, important information was returned; revealing – maybe – that Kirk regarded him as something other than an enemy.

Of course, James recognized ‘Sunrise’s’ identity. To hear the gratitude and the hidden smile in the captain’s voice had been strangely soothing – especially after the battle Khan and his comrades fought; the adrenalin was still circulating through his body. James Kirk had an influence on him that was unnerving; his enhanced mind wanted to reject it. It warred with the savagery encoded in his DNA. Still, there was a part in him that wanted to drink in the comfort James provided – even if this ‘nearness’ was only a one-sided audio-transmission over a distance of hundreds of light years. The familiar voice made him aware that he wasn’t utterly alone in this strange world. There was at least one soul in the dark and cold depths of endless space that was connected to him. For the first time since he woke, Khan realized he had an ally.

Caviw tried to coax Khan into revealing to her how he knew the captain of Starfleet’s flagship, and how it came that they both know each other well enough to communicate in code-words, but Khan evaded her questions. She pestered him until he had snapped at her. “We have a job to do!” He didn’t want to be impolite; he recognized that he required her help, but he couldn’t allow Caviw’s prying to continue. The less the others knew about him, the better for all of them.

He returned to his quarters shortly after contact with the Enterprise and caught himself stealing sidelong glances at the clock, unsuccessfully willing time pass quicker. He found his behavior contemptible – inferior humans reacted this way, certainly not someone like him, someone better. But he couldn’t help himself. The part of him that longed for a true ally, sought the tenderness Kirk displayed during their night of fierce passion. It won out over his cold, calculating logic. He could hardly wait for the moment when he would speak with James again.

Khan knew that he couldn’t contact the officer privately; the captain must take the first step.

A signal buzzed and was accompanied by a voice so anticipated. “Sunrise, J here. Do you hear me?”

It wasn’t physically possible that his heart pounded like the galloping hooves of a race horse. This autonomic response was unacceptable – laughable even! But he couldn’t deny the hard beating of his heart against his ribcage and the warmth that spread through his body. Reminding himself that he
was an enhanced superior – the former ruler of a continent – he steeled his features and activated the transmitter.

Then all good intentions to stay calm and collected were defeated when those sky-blue eyes appeared on screen, and he saw the soft masculine features and cautiously smiling lips again. “Hello James,” he answered, grateful that at least his voice didn’t falter as he feared it might.

Light years away Jim’s pulse quickened too, and a rush of heat washed through him when he finally heard Khan’s velvet baritone again. He took in his features - the impossibly high cheekbones, his impeccable mahogany hair, and the bowed, soft mouth that had imparted him so much pleasure. The tingling in his neck made itself known again and sent a shiver down his spine. “Hello Khan,” he replied quietly, feeling a smile tugging at his lips that found its reflection on the Augment’s face. “It’s good to see you. How are you?”

It wasn’t a polite phrase, but the real question; this much Khan could tell and another warm breeze passed through him. “Given the circumstances I’m - comfortable.” He cocked his head; his glance roamed over the tousled and wrung-out appearance of the younger man. Kirk’s command gold was sullied - grease perhaps. The material was torn at the left shoulder, and a line of soot or grease marred the Kirk’s forehead and streaked down to his temple. He looked like he just came from…

“You were in a battle,” he stated, feeling unease rising in him like bile. James had been in acute danger – expected of a commanding officer, still, Khan’s protective instincts flared.

Jim sighed and nodded. “Yeah, too often these days.” He pressed his lips shut, and then continued, “But it wasn’t for nothing. We defended the Japori system against a Klingon squadron and Orion pirates.” He tilted his head forward. “And it seems, we’re fighting the same fight – again if we add Marcus to our list!” He saw the left side of Khan’s mouth edge up into a half smile. He sighed, “Thank you for your warnings. You helped us – telling us about the cloaking-device the Klingons are using. It will save lives – maybe ours included the next time they confront us.” James smiled and continued, “And you alerted the cavalry. I don’t think either the admiralty or the Council ever assumed the Klingons would attack a neutral planet because its habitants maintain trade agreements with us.”

Khan shrugged. “Often I’ve been called a super-human, James, but I am still human. Genocide was never something I tolerated, and I will not start now.”

Jim pursed his lips. “Is that the reason you partnered with The Shadow?”

Khan’s sea-colored eyes blinked in confusion. “With whom?”
“The Shadow – isn’t that the name of the group fighting the Orion Syndicate?”

To his astonishment Khan started to laugh – a deep, rich, warm sound reaching straight into Kirk’s core. He saw something akin to mirth dancing in Khan’s eyes. His pulse raced. The Augment shook his head, still amused. “I think you misunderstand, James. ‘Shadow’ is the name of one of our ships, not the name of this ‘organization’.”

“Oh!” was all Jim could say, then he teased, “Well, the piggy-back signal a certain genius sent to us was a bit garbled. Sorry for the misunderstanding.”

Khan grinned that smug smirk Jim had wanted to wipe from his face in his apartment now roused in him a different feeling – fondness, perhaps. “So, can I tell the others that we have a name now?” the former dictator asked almost innocently; laughter unexpectedly escaped from his lips again. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d indulged, but it felt good. Really, really good! And he had to thank James for it.

Kirk groaned at the super-human’s question and nodded. “Yes, you can – because I mentioned to Commodore Wesley, the Chief of our squadron, that The Shadow is the name of the militia that warned us.”

Again Khan chuckled. “Well, it fits. After all the Orions don’t know what hit them. We strike out of nowhere.”

“So, how is it that you’re a part of this gang now? How did you escape Earth?” Curiosity shimmered in Jim’s eyes.

“Well, it wasn’t as spectacular as your first ‘jump out of a moving car, off a bridge and into a shot glass’, but I will tell you the story if we meet again.”

Now Kirk had to laugh. “You remember that?”

“Of course,” the super-human nodded. “It was a colorful description of one of your typical escapades.” He cocked an eyebrow at typical.
“Hey!”

“…and I wonder what really happened.”

“Oh, I had to space-jump using a parachute onto a platform on a Romulan drilling rig to stop it from putting a hole in Earth’s core, that’s all.”

Khan stared at him. During his forced encounter with Section 31 he had heard about the incident with the Romulan, Nero, and ran across Kirk’s name in Starfleet records. He knew that the young officer, still attending Starfleet Academy when Nero attacked, played a major role in the defeat of the Romulan. Learning what James did to stop the madman almost made him groan. That was so typical for this reckless, bold churl! But that boldness and willingness to put life and limb on the line was also worthy of admiration.

“That sounds like you,” he stated and shook his head. “And I am certain that isn’t even the most bizarre story you could tell.”

“No, there are quite a few others that gave my instructors gray hair, or sent Bones into another fit of ‘I-so-gonna-to-kill-you-if-you-don’t-survive-this’!”

Khan laughed quietly to himself, certain of every word. The young captain seemed to attract trouble like moth to a flame.

Jim watched the now calm demeanor of the super-human; even Khan’s stiff posture had relaxed. And then Kirk realized; they were chit-chatting again, even laughing with each other. It shouldn’t be like this. He should be upset and demanding answers from the Augment, rather than sharing genialities, but latter simply felt right! He sighed again.

“Don’t tell anyone, but I am glad you escaped,” he said before he could stop himself; his heart spoke up faster than his mind.

The Augment’s eyes had lighted up before he assured quietly, “Your secret is safe with me, James.”

“Thanks – otherwise I would be really fucked. I lied to Barnett and my crew to cover you,” Kirk confessed, asking himself in the same second why he trusted Khan. It was foolish to let his guard down like this – knowing who the other man was – still his instincts told him than Khan wouldn’t
misuse what he had learned. The Augment’s next words proved it, “So, you safeguarded my identity and didn’t send Starfleet’s bloodhounds after me.” It was a statement, not a question; still Jim felt the need to answer.

“No, I didn’t alert them!” He retorted before he added softly, “I couldn’t. Not after you spared me - that night.”

The Augment lifted a brow. He didn’t mention that Kirk had done the same for him. How similar they were.

For a long moment, they stared at one another, each trying to parse out why this seemed easy, comfortable even, just talking. Then an incoming signal on Jim’s desk cut into the warm atmosphere like a sharp knife, “Bridge to Captain!”

The officer groaned. “Hold the line a moment,” he said to the other man, while he bent forward and activated the intercom. “Kirk here.”

“Captain, I have Commodore Wesley on the line for you,” Uhura reported.

Over the distance of light-years, Jim and Khan exchanged another look, before the younger man answered, “Put him on speaker, Lieutenant. I was on my way to the shower, and I really don’t want Bob to see me in my birthday suit.”

“That would be my privilege, James.” Jim startled at the Augment’s innuendo when he read those words from Khan’s lips. He mouthed back a ‘Shut up!’ then Wesley’s voice sounded through the captain’s quarters.

“Jim, is there a reason you don’t want to see me? Why am I only receiving you on audio?”

The casual tone of the commodore showed Kirk that this was not an official call and therefore his answer was just as light. “Bob, as much as I would love to see your face, I have to deny myself the pleasure just now. I was about to hop under the shower, and even I have my limits.” He told the half-truth, while Khan’s lips curled into a knowing smirk.

“We both know that you haven’t,” he commented inaudibly and Kirk was tempted to stick his tongue out to him.
Wesley grumbled something slightly amused, then he stated, “I want to inform you that several missions are on their way to Tammeron. They will reach the planet in twenty hours. Starfleet sent warning to their government alerting them to the situation and our ETA.”

“That’s good to hear, Bob,” Jim replied while Khan, now serious again, nodded approvingly.

“Yes, but I do hope your ‘source’ is trustworthy,” the commodore continued. “I withdrew several ships from key areas the Klingons have their sights on. It would be fatal for us to fall into a trap. Our resources are spread too thin.”

“The source is trustworthy, Bob, as I already told you,” Kirk replied firmly; staring into Khan’s eyes – willing him to see that he indeed trusted him.

“That you did, my friend! I didn’t ask during our last transmission, but I need to know now, Jim. What do you know about the organization that calls itself ‘The Shadow’? I am certain headquarters is going to ask me some questions as soon as they get your message and my report.”

Jim watched amusement play on Khan’s face at the mention of the group’s name, and rolled his eyes before he answered. “Not much, but those I spoke with, are serious. I have no reason to doubt them.”

“Do you have any more information?” Wesley wanted to know; Kirk sighed.

“No, not really. They have – as far as I could detect from our contact – at least two vessels and an experienced communications officer. They must be eavesdropping on the Orions and the Klingons; that would explain their ability to anticipate their movements. The intelligence they’ve acquired has saved lives; we all know that by now.”

Bob hesitated. “So, you don’t know the identity of any of them?”

Kirk closed his eyes and reluctantly lied, “No, not I am aware.” He opened his eyes and met Khan’s gaze. “Still their message sounded very serious. They are, in their own way, professionals. They are making sure that we are working toward the same goal, and informed us of the cloaking-devices the Klingons seemed to have improved.”
Again Wesley was quiet, if only for a moment, before he answered, “That eases my mind a bit. The whole operation is on my head, you know, and I’m not looking forward to facing Barnett and the Council if something goes wrong because a rag-tag militia gave false intelligence to Starfleet as a joke.”

“No joke, Bob, I’m sure,” Jim said firmly. “The Shadow does a good job out there, as the reports from rescued civilians confirm. Their members are on our side, so far, otherwise they would never have contacted us.” His glance wandered over Khan’s face, and he groaned inwardly. God, the Augment’s expression was far too smug.

Kirk couldn’t tell if Bob suspected that he knew more than he was ready to share. If so the commodore hid it well – or he simply trusted him to act only in the best interests of the Federation and Starfleet. Jim had already removed any doubts of The Shadow’s sincerity during their first talk. Kirk assumed that the militia had contacted the Enterprise because she was Starfleet’s flagship. How the militia knew about the whereabouts of Starfleet’s pride was a riddle but, on the other hand, The Shadow had ‘big ears’ so to speak, and the capability to intercept transmissions that would inform them the Enterprise’s in-range.

To Jim’s relief, Wesley didn’t press him further, openly displaying the trust Jim had earned over the years. Kirk only hoped he didn’t betray that trust. His conscience niggled at him over the lies necessary to protect Khan’s identity and allow The Shadow freedom of movement. With any luck, Jim made the right decision.

Bob snorted. “Well, in their own way it seems they are on our side, for now. Even if some of the desk-jockeys at home are losing sleep over the group’s anything but legal methods. Still, I agree with you. We should applaud them after they tricked the Orions and collected that intelligence. We need all the help we can get.” He paused. “I will keep you updated on the Tammeron operation. Bye, Jim!”

“Bye, Bob, and be careful!”

“I will – and stay out of trouble, son. You manage to get into hot water everywhere you go, even in a Starbase. Wesley out.”

The connection broke before Kirk could reply to that last jibe. For a long moment, Jim and Khan remained quiet; then the super-human took a deep breath. “So, this commodore is on his way to Tammeron and summoned increased resources for aid.” He cocked his head. “He seems to accept responsibility at risk to himself.”
Jim smiled slightly. “Bob is a little bit like me. If there’s a job to be done - just do it.” He shrugged. “The message I sent to the headquarters will take hours before it arrives and knowing the admiralty’s love for conferences, their decision may come too late for the people of Tammeron. Bob knows that; he’ll take matters into his own hands as necessary.” A satisfied grin appeared on Kirk’s face, and Khan chuckled.

‘James manipulates others as I do,’ he thought, amazed they shared another characteristic. “Your admirals will not be happy the decisions were taken out of their hands.”

Jim shrugged again. “Difficult situations need a quick solution. I don’t have a problem doing what is necessary…”

“…and you’ve painted yourself into a corner on several occasions,” Khan stated with a whiff of humor. “I never met Commodore Wesley, but I have to agree with him: You have a tendency to get into trouble.”

Jim made a face. “Bob is concerned about my well-being, that’s all. You should’ve heard Admiral Komack when he was still chief of the academy’s administration. He only understands rules and regulations. You cannot imagine how often I had to listen to them while I was still a student - whenever he thought I needed a lecture.”

The super-human’s mouth twitched. “Oh, I can indeed imagine something like that, James – regarding your ability to bend the rules to your will or disregard them altogether!” Soft mockery sounded in his voice.

“Hey, if I followed every rule and ignored my instincts, you wouldn’t be teasing me now.”

Khan turned serious again. “I know, James. I am aware you had a chance to shoot me at your apartment, but didn’t. And you could have obeyed Marcus’ order and killed me and my people on Qo’noS.”

Jim suddenly looked stricken. “No, I couldn’t,” he said quietly, and the older man nodded gently.

“I realized that. As I said, you have a conscience. That reveals much about you.”

For another moment they fell silent, then something else popped into Kirk’s mind concerning Khan.
Intelligence perhaps he should not share due to its sensitive nature, but he knew he couldn’t withhold it if it meant Khan’s safety.

“Speaking of Qo’noS - The Klingons figured out who landed on their planet uninvited last year.” He saw Khan stiffening and continued, “Patrols found the scout-ship’s camera recordings, the ones that ambushed us. The cameras filmed Uhura and then your attack as well as the fire fight afterward.” He heard the Augment swearing softly, and added, “Barnett, the Chief in Command, told me about it. As far as I know, the Klingon law states Spock, Uhura and I may be sentenced to death in absentia. The High Council of the Klingons can impose sentences without a trial. I don’t know if the cameras caught your face too. Either way, you are likely one of the most wanted men in the Klingon Empire.”

The super-human was lost in thought for a moment, before he started, “Today, I met a Klingon commander in person. He was so kind as to share the information about the planned attack against Tammeron.”

“Do I want to know how you coaxed it out of him?”

“No,” Khan replied dryly, “but don’t worry. He boasted that the attack would show us that we are fighting a losing battle. I demanded details he was unwilling to give. Even I know a thing or two about Klingons; I killed him so that he would die with his so-called honor rather than break him further.”

He thought he saw a hint of relief on Kirk’s face and suppressed a sigh. James was far too compassionate. He cleared his throat. “Well, concerning those recordings, the Klingon commander didn’t know my identity until I revealed it to him – without saying my name, of course. As far as I know the Klingons are unaware it was I on Qo’noS with you. I don’t think I have to fear a second hunting party on my heels.” His features softened, and his eyes locked with Jim’s. “But thank you for the warning, James.”

“You’re welcome,” Kirk replied, feeling a blush rise up the back of his neck, heat prickling at the place Khan marked weeks ago. Dear God, what was happening to him? He wanted to ask Khan, what he had done to him. Should an Augment’s bite feel like this still?

The super-human frowned and stated sternly, “James, if the Klingons want you and your two crewmembers, there may be a bounty on your heads. This part of the galaxy is full of outlaws who would be delighted to earn credits by bringing you in. The Orions are working together with the Klingons as you told me. They might try to hunt you down to collect the bounty.”
Kirk grimaced. “Barnett couldn’t tell me if the Klingons put a bounty on my head, but it would make sense.” He sighed, “To tell you the truth, I hadn’t considered the Orions would try to collect a bounty on us.” He leaned back in his chair. “Maybe that’s why they fought so hard, even after we damaged their ships.”

The sea-colored eyes roamed once again over the tousled appearance of the younger man; Jim saw a flicker of concern. “Are you all right?” The apprehension in the deep baritone betrayed the Augment; Khan did care for his well-being, and it touched Jim - more than it should.

“I am okay, but…” He shook his head and lowered his gaze. “I lost more than fifty crew-members since this damn war started, and the med bay is overcrowded. Bones and his cadre are stretched to the limit, and the engines are a mess.” He sniffed and glanced up again. “I fucking hate it.”

Khan’s eyes had widened as he listened to Jim count his losses. He knew that pain many times over. He saw Kirk pale as he spoke of those who fell in the battle, and something else occurred to him. “Your friends? Are they all right?” They weren’t his concern, but he didn’t wish any more suffering on the young captain.

A small smile played around Jim’s lips. “They are – thank God. Emotionally, we’re all a bit wrung out, but otherwise they’re okay.”

“That is good for you,” the super-human answered. “But you are obviously not ‘okay’ – and do not lie to me. You know I can see straight through it – your eyes and your voice belie your words.”

Kirk had rolled his eyes before he shrugged. “Some bruises, too little sleep and too much worry, that’s all.”

That was all too true. James looked like hell, even without visible injuries; the Augment’s heart went out to the bold, brave and far too good-hearted captain - who had somehow managed to wriggle under his skin. For a moment he wished he could be there, on the Enterprise, to offer James his assistance, his support – perhaps comfort – but even with the speed of the 23rd century, it would take some time to reach the starship. The next question had come over his lips before he realized it. “Is there anything I can do?”

The offer took Jim by surprise, if even for a second, but he saw Khan’s serious expression and realized the older man meant it. Somehow the former ruler had softened around the edges, opened up to him – like he did after their night of fiery passion turned to a smolder, and he gathered Jim in his arms when he slept. Gratitude swept through him. Yes, his friends and Bob Wesley supported him, yet Khan’s offer meant almost more – both were captains with a crew they loved like family, and
both knew loss of those they were responsible for. Still, the super-human had no reason to offer him anything, but Jim knew his former nemesis would grant him help if he required it.

“Thank you,” he said, his voice more full of emotion than intended. “There is nothing you can do just now. We are on our way to Starbase 84 for repairs and supplies. But maybe you could keep your ears open - if you hear something about the potential bounty?”

The older man nodded. “This I will do. And should I find something on the matter, I will send you another message like the last time.”

Somehow this prospect calmed Jim. “Can I reach you on this frequency again?” he wanted to know, assuming that he would need to speak to the Augment once more. ‘But only if duty makes it necessary!’ he reminded himself. His heart, however, told him different.

“I can adjust my communicator to this frequency so that you are able to call me whenever you like, but we have to be careful and should change the frequency after one or two uses,” Khan answered, pleased that Kirk wished to continue their contact – not to keep track of the man, but to talk to him. He was surprised at how much this pleased him. What was happening with him? Affection – sentiment should not come so easy.

“That’s good,” Kirk nodded, but before he could say something more, he heard a buzzing and saw the Augment’s attention diverted to something beside him. “One moment!” Khan called; his gaze returned to the screen. “It seems our time is up.” Regret tinged his words and mirrored his expression. Jim was surprised to find his emotions echoed the lament that marred Khan’s lovely voice. “Be careful, James,” Khan said quietly. “I know how hard it is to fight two fronts. One misstep, one second of negligence and all is lost.”

Oh yes, Jim understood the extent to which the Augment knew the danger of a two-front battle. The Eugenics Wars taught Khan as much.

“I’ll be careful – as much as any captain can be in the middle of a war,” he promised, but both men knew that the other would sacrifice all for his crew. Jim still felt the need to ease the obvious solicitude of the super-human. The former dictator had been through much and was anything but safe as a fugitive. He didn’t want Khan to worry over him; he had his own problems!

He winced inwardly. Khan’s personal problems weren’t his concern, but he wanted them. The super-human’s welfare – psychological and physical – were slowly becoming important to Jim, and he was helpless to the emotions that could be his downfall, should others learn of his burgeoning relationship with the Augment.
“You try to stay out of trouble,” Kirk’s voice gentled with concern. “You and the others are playing a dangerous game – especially now, in light of the Klingon-Orion alliance. The Orions may be a bunch of pirates, but don’t underestimate them now that we know they have Klingon technology.”

Khan cocked his head; his heart raced. ‘He cares for me!’ This thought came out of nowhere and filled him with delight – even if the enhanced, rational part of his mind knew these feelings could prove dangerous for both of them. “I will try, James,” he replied then added, “Be safe. If you need me, you know how to reach me.” One last look, one last small smile. Khan cut the transmission and broke their link.

Jim stared at the empty screen for nearly a minute. Since he woke in his apartment and realized that Khan had spared him, Kirk had imagined how it would be, if he got the possibility to speak with the Augment again. He caught himself hoping that the super-human would somehow find freedom. His conscience warred with itself; any responsible-minded man should be ashamed to wish a killer free.

But now the enemies spoke as brothers-in-arms. Khan let his perfect mask slip, showing a side of himself Jim had never seen. Yes, during their night together Kirk had caught glimpses of the man beneath all that rigid control, but this time Khan had opened to him. One thing was clear; there was something between them like the force of opposite poles of a magnet drawing them toward one another.

But that wasn’t the whole of it.

Jim’s gaze roamed through his quarters, and he suddenly realized how empty and cold the room seemed – how it lacked the warmth he felt as he talked with Khan. For a moment he wished the older man were here, near him. He wanted to be wrapped up in him. To be with someone who knew loss as he did – the loss men and woman who willingly put their lives in his hands. The weight coupled with the coldness of his room suffocated him. He longed for Khan to help him forget, if only for a short time. Kirk had always been proud of his independence; it had never occurred to him what it could be like to share himself with someone who truly knew him – who had walked a mile in his shoes. He knew his friends were there for him. Hell, he knew they’d risk their lives for him. But he was their captain, their lives were his to protect. With Khan, there was something he couldn’t put a name to – something that lingered around the edges ready to make itself known. Whether Jim was ready for it or not.

With a sigh, Kirk rose. He had to shower and to change before he could return to the bridge; otherwise anyone would see that he couldn’t have been, well, in the current state of undress that he claimed when Wesley hailed. Besides, he was still a bit of a mess from the day’s events. Rubbing his face, he finally slipped out of his torn and soiled uniform and into his shower-cabin. While the sonic-rays did their work Jim lost himself in the memory of the time he shared a real shower with a certain
Augment. Behind closed eyes, he saw the rivulets of water trailing over the planes of the strong, lean, and marble-white body that had taken and given so much pleasure.

Tired as Kirk was, the heat that had filled him during his talk with Khan returned and flowed through his veins and down to his groin. The memories of the deep, purring baritone, the sea-colored and ocean-deep eyes, and that smug smile climbed from the depths of his conscious and within seconds Jim felt his cock harden. He groaned and banged his head against the wall, cursing the pained stiffness. Still, the desire remained - unwanted and forbidden, but also so deliciously tempting.

Ugh! He had to return to the bridge. The ship was in a terrible shape; his crew worked, pushing their physical limits; they had to reach the next starbase as soon as possible. And here he was beneath the sonic-shower imagining the stunning and beautiful criminal; he remembered how the Augment wrapped him in his arms and took him over and over, deliciously deep and hard. Driving out the pain and loss of his loved ones - Admiral Pike, his crew - with every plunge. His thoughts meandered back to the tenderness Khan showed as he washed him, his teeth almost playfully nipping his neck.

His hand traced down his chest to his cock almost without realizing; he knew himself well enough that he needed to ease the tension – needed the flood of stress-relieving hormones to continue his work, even if the sonic-rays were a poor substitute for his memories. He dragged his fingers up and down his member a couple of times before grasping the base and dragging the foreskin over the sensitive head. He kept his eyes closed in order to more clearly picture Khan’s face, all high cheekbones and sinful smirk playing over plush lips. He thought of those lovely hands with the fingers of a musician playing him, wringing pleasure out of him in thick stripes.

Only after he rested for several minutes, redressed and made his way back to the bridge did the realization hit him; Khan demanded nothing in return for his warnings. In fact, he’d offered help and showed concern. His actions; his words told Jim that given a chance, Khan could be a good man.

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“I haven’t figured out exactly how this damn thing works, but I think I can repair the damage. It looks like the blasts only damaged the wiring, and the Klingons have spare parts aboard. I should have it fixed in two to three hours.” Galven looked from the strange device up to Khan, who stood beside him and observed the machine closely.

In the background, several members of their group were busy repairing or removing the vestiges of battle.
“We will need the cloaking device sooner or later,” the Augment said slowly; pursing his lips. “Starfleet requires twenty hours to withdraw their ships from their current position and resume formation for Tammeron’s defense. Kardan said that the assault would be ‘soon’; that could mean anything from hours to days.” He stepped nearer the machine, and his gaze wandered over the wires, links and displays. “We should not take any risk of missing the Klingon attack and fly to Tammeron to intervene should the Klingons show up before Starfleet.

“It’ll impossible for us to stop the Klingons alone. We only have two small ships – three, as soon as Ritek arrives – and the Klingons are sending an entire strike group. They will blast our molecules over the entire area before we get off the first shot.” Galven retorted.

The super-human’s pale eyes fixed on the Tellarit. “There is an old saying on Terra; a flea maybe tiny, but it can drive even a wolf crazy.” His attention turned back to the cloaking-device. “The Klingon fleet-commander doesn’t know the lost the D’Ghor and that we have her. We can advance on the enemy, open fire and cloak again, then change position. It will not stop them, but it will cause confusion, hopefully rattle them enough to make a mistake allowing Starfleet the advantage.”

Galven grunted quietly. “Yes – while we broil in their phaser-fire!”

“Only if we allow them to do so.” Khan narrowed his eyes. The Augment knew he was cleverer, more savage than them all. He looked again at the seized equipment. “The deception of the D’Ghor will work if we operate in a manner the Klingons cannot anticipate. We only have to prompt chaos that will buy time – time for the Starfleet to arrive. The rest is up to them.”

Galven pondered this. “And Starfleet will send ships in the next twenty hours? Caviw told me that you contacted the flagship of the fleet and spoke with its captain, but she didn’t mention anything about the timeframe.” His little eyes fixed the pale face of the super-human.

Khan replied, “I spoke with the Enterprise’s captain in private when Jeff showed up at my quarters and asked me to beam back to the D’Ghor. During our conversation, the captain received a transmission from the leader of the operation at Tammeron, the commodore. Tammeron must weather the next twenty hours, and then the inhabitants will be fine.

“You and the captain know each other well, eh?” the Tellarit spoke aloud. “He didn’t even ask for proof of Caviw’s warnings after he received your message, and then he talked to you in private – you, a deserter. And you offered up this information with no strings. We could have gotten something for the information!”
“We’ve had our shares of... adventures,” Khan avoided answering the unspoken question in Galven’s statement and continued staring at the cloaking-device. “We have to learn how this technology operates and translate the Klingon symbols at the different stations. Only then we can use Kardan’s gift to us.”

“Hmm, Ritek could help; he more or less speaks that vocal disaster the Klingons call a language – but our chipmunk will not reach us for another ten hours and...”

“Too late. We will translate the signs with the help of the Shadow’s computer.” Khan turned to leave the small room, but stopped again. “Oh, by the way, Galven, our group now has an official name.”

Giving a questioning grunt, the Tellarit waited for the Terran to continue. Khan smirked at him, clearly amused at Galven’s confusion. “We are known by Starfleet Command and the members of the Federation-Council as ‘The Shadow’.” Galven oinked in surprise. “And I am certain that name will go public.”

Jeff came around the corner and called, “The Klingons bodies are all in the little cargohold back there, and I took care that their eyes were open as you ordered, Galven.” He pointed backwards over his shoulder. “Shall we open the hatchway now or...?”

“One moment!” Galven squeaked. “It’s not much they do when one of their own dies, still I think we should respect their tradition.”

The Augment lifted a brow. “You want to perform a kind of ceremony for them?” He met the little eyes of the Tellarit. “They would not spare us if the roles were reversed.”

Galven’s snout twitched. “Well, that’s the difference between them and us. They do not care, but I am of the opinion that even an enemy has the right to respectful handling after death.” He trotted towards the cargo hold and Khan – out of sheer curiosity – followed him. Caviw joined them on the way to the cargo hold along with two other crewmembers of The Shadow.

The dead Klingons lay side-by-side on the floor; their lifeless eyes open, fixed toward the ceiling. Galven observed them for a moment; then he gestured for the others to step closer. “All right,” he said; he took a deep breath, put his head back and howled as loud as he could.

Khan wasn’t the only one who looked at Galven as if the Tellarit had lost his mind; the others’ faces were just as thunderstruck.
After a long while, when Galven had no more breath to spend, he stopped, cleared his throat and declared, “Right, we can dispose of them now.” He turned around and saw the baffled expressions of his friends and their new group member, “What?” he exclaimed, and blinked several times.

“Care to explain what… what that scream was about?” the super-human asked bewildered.

“Well, that’s their way of seeing to their dead,” Galven replied. “You see, they think that the dead body is nothing more than an empty shell that doesn’t hold the soul any longer. The soul goes straight to their version of heaven or hell. The loved ones of the deceased gather around and holler one time as loud as they can as a kind of warning ‘Caution, dead Klingons, replenishment is on its way to you’ – and then they get rid of the body.”

The glances around him looked even more confused, and so he shrugged, “Other people, other traditions!” He slapped in his hands. “All right, all men – and the lady – out of here,” he oinked. “Jeff, seal the door and open the hatch. Not the other way around or we join these brave warriors here, and I am not ready to go out just yet!” With those words, he shooed the others out of the hold; even the Augment obeyed.

Khan didn’t know what to think. There stood a walking, talking pig on two legs in the middle of the cargo hold of a spacecraft, who screamed like a banshee and explained that this was the funeral-ceremony of another species. And he twisted Terran phrases quite colorfully. And then Khan was aware of the meaningful glances the humanoid pussy-cat Caviw bestowed upon him while her long tail wrapped around his right arm in shameless flirtation.

Maybe cryosleep hadn’t been so bad after all!

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Kor, son of Ryan, the last descendant of the Klingon royal family pitched a stare full of loathing at the screen that showed the green-skinned face of one of the ‘High Honors’ of the Orion Syndicate. Why had the High Council agreed to General KothKe’s suggestion and struck a bargain with this scum? The Klingons didn’t need vagabonds, pirates and cutthroats to gain an advantage in this war. It went against Klingon honor, as well as this damn order, to destroy a planet full of unarmed inhabitants who weren’t even a part of the Federation.

Lord Kor was outraged when he heard of the agreement with the Orions and of the plan to target Tammeron for annihilation. That wasn’t the Klingon way! Their ancestors, who served in the Black
Fleet, would raise their Ba’leths in protest if they knew about this. Still, Kor had no other choice but to obey the decision of the High Chancellor, the Council, and the admiralty. He was only glad that he wasn’t a part of the strike group deploying Tammeron – set on its destruction and the murder millions of noncombatants. It was beneath his honor and pride to commit this war crime.

And besides this deplorable order, those green-skins aliens reported that the Japori system was successfully secured by Starfleet. None other than the starship Enterprise had tanned the Orions’ hide – even after the Orions had been equipped with Klingon technology. This boy-captain – Kirk – was better than he thought!

“So, some rag-tag soldiers-of-fortune destroy one of your vessels, three others are severely damaged, and your people weren’t able to seize the outpost near the Risa system,” he drawled, leaning back in his commander chair. “Any more failures you want to tell me about?”

The Orion, who called himself a ‘Commodore’, scowled at the Klingon. “We couldn’t know about the formidable defense at the outpost.”

“‘Formidable defense’?” Kor repeated with a sneer; his dark eyes mocked the Orion. “A bunch of shambolic, mock pirates stopped you. That tells me much of your real abilities!”

The face of the Orion commodore turned even darker. “They were organized – at least at the end. As one of my captains explained, they were united by a Terran, who fought as if possessed, with a strength Terrans should not have.”

“Really?” Kor sounded almost bored. He was familiar with every excuse tone could make to cover a failure, and the Orion’s put-off was lousy.

The pirate had growled, irritated, before he snapped, “He killed more than two-thirds of our crew – singlehanded – and took command over the others; uniting them. My men stood no chance and had to withdraw.”

These words made Kor sit up. Frowning, the Klingon Lord bared his teeth, thinking. A mere human was able to kill more than two dozen Orions and other pirates within several minutes? That rang a bell. “What did he look like?” he asked the ‘commodore’, who shrugged.

“My men only said he was in his younger years, slender, dark hair, and clad in black.” He shook his head. “And he fought like a le-matya, using with ease every weapon that fell into his hands. Without
him, we would have seized the outpost, but with his interference…” He snorted outraged; not realizing how Kor stared at him.

The Klingon Lord took a deep breath. The description fit. There was not much to see on the records the DS4-scout made of the man who was Kirk’s backup on Qo’noS, but the way to battle and – as it seems – the inhuman speed and strengths spoke loudly enough. The man on the outpost and Qo’noS was one and the same. And whoever he was, he must be stopped before he struck again.

There was only the question, where this human weapon was now – and if he was a member of Starfleet or worked on his own. But if latter was the case, why had he come to Kirk’s aid on the Klingon home-world? What was the connection between Starfleet’s youngest captain and this… super-human? What was he? Had the Federation experimented with augmented DNA again? Was he a descendant of the Augments that caused trouble a century ago? And were there more like him?

Well, those were not one but eight questions. And they all demanded answers to prevent this Terran from getting in the Klingon’s way again – and to halt the advantage of the Federation.

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José Luengo’s eyes fixed on at the screen at his desk; his fingers touched the pictures displayed. Pursing his lips he zoomed in on a section of a still shot and nodded. He anticipated the identity of the man he read about in the reports. If the reports of the saved people on Outpost 18-243 were true, one of their human rescuers fought with inhuman speed and strength, more like a Vulcan or Klingon - able to anticipate his attacker’s next move. The descriptions sounded like a superman had shown up to bring the Orions down. Luengo checked the records again, but he had his proof.

Maybe the most recent computer hack on Starfleet records reported to him was connected to the individual he saw on the screen. But then again, there wasn’t a single day that passed without several of these minor attacks; people who tried to gain access to Starfleet’s database. After all, they were at war.

He activated the intercom and contacted his secretary: “Lieutenant, call Admiral Norton and tell him I have questions about a biological report he sent. Have him come to my office immediately!”

It was a lie of course, but he had no other choice than to contact Norton personally. They both were still under observation; every movement, every step, every word was controlled. For that reason, he had to find an excuse to meet Albert to show him what the cameras hundreds of light years away had filmed. There was no possible way of passing the records to Norton without being noticed, so Albert had to see them in José’s office.
Leaning back in his chair, he crossed his arms in front of his chest and waited. Several minutes had passed before Albert Norton arrived accompanied by two Security-officials who nodded at José and left.

“You wanted to speak to me, José?” Albert asked. Luengo nodded and made a quick gesture with three fingers; signal between them not to speak openly. José knew that his office was bugged with concealed microphones, transmitting every word to the hidden ears of the Security. He could have found and removed the little devices, but that would do more harm than good. The Council had to regain some trust in him if he wanted to remain free, and that meant that he had to make them believe that he was reliable. With the deception of pretending he didn’t know about the devices, they believed every word he said. This strategy allowed him to confirm how much Barnett and the others knew.

“Yes, I got a report of rumors concerning a biological weapon. Maybe you can have a look at it and tell me if the report is nonsense or a real threat.”

Norton rounded the desk of his colleague while Luengo pointed at the source of the recording and re-started it; Albert’s cold eyes widened. The screen showed a waiting-and-departing area of a small space-dock crowded with people. Suddenly two males started quarrelling – a Tellarit and a Rigelian. The scene erupted. The argument was interrupted by approaching Orions, who immediately opened fire on the staff-members. Then all hell broke loose.

Luengo pointed at a dark, hooded figure that had watched the combat between the Tellarit and Rigelian. The figure sprang into action to protect a young woman from one of the pirates; he crushed the Orion’s jaw with one well-aimed blow. Then he fought as if an animal was unleashed while the young woman, her children and another Terran male escaped with several others through the emergency-exits. There were others, Luengo noticed, along with the dark-clad figure that brought a good fight to the Orions.

Then, during a quarrel with three pirates that the stranger quickly took down, the hood slipped away and revealed the man’s identity.

Norton gasped quietly. “There you are!” he hissed through his teeth; his piercing gaze never leaving the face onscreen, a pale-featured man with high cheekbones and dark hair.

Astonished, the admiral watched as the Augment took down more than two dozen Orion pirates, saving some older children. Suddenly, a flash lit up the screen; it glimmered then went dark.

“The recording stopped because a phaser blast hit the camera,” José explained in a neutral tone;
looking up at Albert, who took a deep breath. “So, is this an important report? What do you mean?”

Norton’s thoughts raced. “I don’t know,” he lied, while he nodded at Luengo. “I have to check several things before I can tell you more,” Albert replied before he stared again at the black screen. ‘Even the depths of the whole Alpha-quadrant is not large enough for you to escape us!’

“Barnett to Luengo!” The Chief in Command sounded tense as he called through the intercom. “Chiefs meeting in ten minutes. Emergency, Prior One. Confirm, please!”

José activated the link at his desk again. “Understood, Richard. Out!” was all he said, then he rose and glared at Norton, who pursed his lips. It was about time to do something concerning their ‘Barnett’ problem, and then they could take care of the Augment…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I warned you that there will be a cliff-hanger. And this will not be the last one, this much I can promise.

Well, of course Starfleet – better to say Section 31 – had to learn eventually about the whereabouts of Khan, or caught his tracks at least. And believe me, Luengo and Norton are up to very much more, while our heroes are fighting at the front (and with their feelings)!

In the next chapter there will be action again, because The Shadow and our Augment will face the battle for Tammeron. And this time it will not go easy for the enhanced genius, because even he can be injured. Then Caviw learns more about him (as he certainly wouldn’t like her to do) and there will be also another sweet scene between him and Jim.

I hope you liked the new chapter and that the talk between the two – and how it affected Jim (*grin*). Please, please leave again some feedbacks (you know, I l-o-v-e them).

Probably at the next weekend or Monday comes the new update.

Until then

Yours Starflight
To make things right

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

At last you hadn’t to wait two full weeks until you can enjoy the next update, but my dear beta-reader – whom I have to thank for all the work – had a lot to do with my writing (*laugh*).

Thank you so much for your feedbacks and the Kudos; I am still mega-happy that you so attached to the story. And, as promised, in the new chapter there will be action but also something that comes close to romance regarding the two going-to-be-lovebirds.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

Chapter 10 – To make things right

“You did it again!” Galven grinned at ‘Drythen’, and clapped him on the shoulder; the hit would’ve made a lesser man sway, but Khan was not a lesser man. Still he closed his eyes and counted to five to stay in control. He would never get used to the Tellarit’s ebullient behavior, this was certain, but now he had to ‘howl with the wolves’ – or with the ‘pigs’, he supposed; he thought of the so-called Klingon ‘funeral-ritual’ Galven performed.

Taking a deep breath, he returned his attention to the screen that displayed more than twelve Starfleet cruisers and starships attacking the Klingon fleet, forcing them to withdraw. Khan’s gaze found the Lexington. The Nebula-class starship resembled the Enterprise though a bit more squat in appearance. For just a moment, there unease fluttered in his gut as he imagined it James’ ship fighting out there. Then his rational mind berated him for such nonsense. Kirk and the Enterprise were docked at Starbase 84 by now, safe and secure and far away from the throes of battle. He needed to calm himself.

He was tempted to thank the Fates he never believed in – that James wasn’t the one kicking Klingon ass out there. The battle was fierce, and both sides sustained massive casualties.

But if Khan ignored his instincts, Commodore Wesley wouldn’t have found anything to defend when he and the others arrived at Tammeron. The battle was necessary.
As the Augment had anticipated, the Klingon strike group were ready to attack before the cavalry arrived on the scene, and he did exactly as he told Galven he would. He made sure the Klingons got a nasty surprise which bought time for Starfleet to arrive.

The plot the super-human hatched was risky, approaching the brink of a suicidal tendency, still the plan was successful.

Ritek, who spoke Klingon language well enough, had beamed to the D’Ghor to aid in the translation of the Klingon symbols while the three ships, Shadow, Flash, and D’Ghor, sped towards Tammeron. The three ships waited at the edge of the planet system among a small asteroid belt, reduced power and locked down all communications to reduce their chances of discovery. The Tammeronians few armed spacecraft orbited the planet - ready to protect their homeworld, even if those few vessels stood no chance against the Klingon squadron. Khan and the members of The Shadow hoped Starfleet would arrive in time.

While cloaked, D’Ghor’s passive sensors picked up eleven cruisers dropping out of warp heralding the Klingon’s arrival. Wesley and his fleet weren’t expected to arrive for another thirty minutes. But even without the aid of Starfleet, Khan would soon illustrate the Klingon’s dire mistake in underestimating him.

He let the Klingon squadron pass their commandeered scout ship decloaked. Ritek demonstrated his Klingon skill; he pretended to be Sergeant LargH, one of D’Ghor’s original crewmembers. He told the Klingon flagship that they battled civilian pirates. The Klingons bought the tale because of the damage D’Ghor’s hull and they neared the Klingon flagship purporting problems with the communication system.

Their deception worked; the enemy-vessels didn’t raise the deflector-shields until it was too late. The scout ship D’Ghor approached the Klingon squadron as one of their own, so no-one aboard the flagship saw a reason to waste energy by raising the deflector-shields.

Activating the phaser banks at the last second, Khan had fired at the flagship, steering the scout along the throat of the mighty Klingon battlecruiser. Disguising the D’Ghor again the Augment had brought the scout beneath the flag-ship and sent another blast of deadly energy against the vessel, before he took flight; using the again engaging the cloaking device to disappear from sight.

The chaos that ensued following D’Ghor’s attack was enormous. The Klingons expected a short battle with the few Tammeron vessels the planet had for its defense. But they also had to spare energy for the upcoming fight, because the cloaking-devices required so much power to hide the ships during the flight. Four Birds-of-Prey had left the formation to hunt for the D’Ghor while the
other ships formed up around the flagship taking defensive positions. Khan used the formation to fire on two of them. He did a quick hit-and-run before making his escape. To his surprise, the vessels that left the formation to give chase seemed to know D’Ghor’s position. But two Tammeron ships broke from their defensive positions around the planet to confront the Klingons, distracting them just long enough for the D’Ghor to get away and resume their hit-and-run tactics.

The Shadow and the Flash finally joined the fray, creating further distraction for the D’Ghor allowing them to place well-aimed phaser-fire at the Klingon ships using Khan’s advanced military mind. He tickled the tail of the dragon, but the pay-off would be well worth the strife for Tammeron and Starfleet.

Even with the additional firepower provided by the Shadow and Flash, and Khan’s superior knowledge of tactics, the battle remained unbalanced in favor of the Klingons, who retained superior firepower. Suddenly the Lexington fell out of warp accompanied by several other heavy battle-cruisers and smaller vessels. Cheers erupted from the Tammeronian ships and even Caviw sighed in relief, “I never thought I would be glad to see Starfleet approaching!”

Khan had to agree. They wouldn’t have lasted much longer; even now their survival would be a near-miracle.

The battle shifted from Tammeron’s orbit to deep space. The crews of The Shadow’s three ships watched Khan in awe. He saw the battle as if he were gazing on it from above – discerning moves as a chess master might. But even he wasn’t immune to the violence around him, both from the Klingons and Starfleet – every strategically placed phaser or torpedo meant death. Every hull breach meant bodies sucked into the vacuum of space. Though well acquainted with the cruelty of war, he didn’t embrace violence; he merely regarded it as necessary. He was glad that James stayed out of this bloody encounter – even though he knew, as a captain, James would want to be there.

Caviw and Ritek listened to the transmissions of both sides. The three ships of the Shadow removed themselves from the fray – content to let Starfleet take over, and the Tammeronians resumed their defensive positions in the planet’s orbit.

And then it happened. To provide cover for a smaller starship, the Lexington was forced to leave the formation, but three Klingon heavy cruisers instantly surrounded them, trapping the Lexington in their crossfire. The other starships were too involved in the battle to run interference properly.

Caviw listened closely to the transmissions between the Starfleet-ships and frowned, “It seems the Lexington has real problems.”
Khan viewed the flagship through the screen and pursed his lips. The Lexington’s hull sustained heavy damage and her erratic movements belied damage to her navigation. The Augment knew that the Lexington was as good as lost. The Klingons continued laying down sustained fire at the starship. It didn’t take a genius to realize the Klingons would not let up until the ship was completely obliterated.

‘Bob is simply concerned about my well-being that’s all…’ Jim’s words echoed in his mind, followed by the commodore’s voice, ‘…stay out of trouble, son…’ There was fondness in the tone of the elder officer; the kind of affection shared between mentor and protégée.

The super-human watched the sensors again – active sensors now turned on since they removed themselves from battle. They testified to the precarious state of the Lexington. A smaller Starfleet vessel had finally come to the larger space craft’s aid, but it could only engage one ship, leaving the other two to continue their brutal assault on the Lexington. They needed a miracle, or they would be destroyed…along with the man who had taken James under his wing.

‘…you really pissed me off by killing my mentor – the man who was like a father to me…’” Kirk’s accusation when Khan had broken into the younger man’s apartment and confronted him, whispered in his memories. He remembered that James had accepted his surrender on Qo’noS ‘on the behalf of Christopher Pike’ before he gave into his fit of rage and fiercely attacked – fists driven into his face in sorrow.

Khan didn’t need any more hints to understand that one of the admirals, who had fallen prey to his revenge at ‘Daystrom’, had been close to James. Very close. The Augment knew that Kirk’s father had sacrificed himself to make it possible for his pregnant wife and the other crew-members of the starship, he served on, to escape. James had been raised without his father but found someone, who filled this empty place, Christopher Pike – a man, who died because of Khan.

Noonien Singh never had parents – not in the commons sense – but he knew the unbearable pain to lose a family member. He was responsible for the loss that the young captain now had to bear.

Now it looked as though James Kirk would lose another mentor; someone he could rely on; someone who took up the mantle to guide and protect the stubborn, spirited, and warm-hearted young officer.

No! Not, if he could prevent it.

He didn’t regret his actions that day at Starfleet headquarters, but he was sorry for the grief he caused James. James, who had lied to his friends and the admiralty to grant him, Khan, a head start - and who gave him something no one else had in this century: trust.
The long, elegant fingers of the Augment darted over the instruments of his station. The energy-level of the *D’Ghor* was down to sixty-two percent; they had still four torpedoes left and enough power in the phaser-bank for a dozen shots. It was not much, but it had to be enough.

“Caviw, hail the Tammeron ships and our vessels!” he ordered, unconcerned by the fact that he was not in command. But Galven waited – interested in what the Terran had in mind.

The Caitian looked over at Galven who nodded at her; she obeyed and purred, “You are on air, Léo!”

“Tammeron fleet, *Shadow, Flash*, this is Drythen. It seems the leader of the cavalry needs a little help. Fall in behind the *D’Ghor* in wedge formation. Give a wide enough berth that each ship can fire their photons without hitting one of our own. We are breaking through the Klingon lines to give the *Lexington* cover to return to the safety of Starfleet’s formation. *D’Ghor* out!” He nodded at Caviw, who cut the line.

“What… what are you doing?” Galven squealed in shock. That was not what he had in mind!

Ritek stared at ‘Dythen’ as if the Terran had gone insane. “We have no chance to…”

“The success of an attack lays in the element of surprise,” the Augment answered casually recalling one of his earliest lessons in military tactics. He pushed the regulator forward and set a bearing straight towards the *Lexington*. He did not bother checking the sensors to see if the other ships would, indeed, follow him. He knew that the two vessels of the resistance would not let him, or better yet, Galven, down, and he speculated that the Tammeron commanders were bound by honor to come to Starfleet’s aid.

A new rush of adrenalin circulated through his body, sharpening his already enhanced senses; the warrior awoke in him once more. His actions had nothing to do with a guilty conscience; rather it was rooted in compassion and the wish to make things right. He couldn’t undo what he had done at ‘Daystrom’, but he could spare James Kirk, maybe the only living soul in the whole universe who cared about him, the grief of another personal loss.

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The situation aboard the *Lexington* was devastating. The main-power failed several minutes ago, the
auxiliary power was iffy at best, and only one engine-booster remained viable. They had no torpedoes and because of the power failure, the phaser-banks were useless. Fires raged on each of the ship’s decks as well as the bridge.

Wesley’s left hand clung to the armrest of the captain’s chair; the automatic safety-belts didn’t work. He bled from an injury at his right temple, and he knew his right arm was broken as he had been hurled across the bridge against the helm-console and heard the terrific crack. The air was full of smoke and heat. Three red shirts tried to put out the fire. The ship diverted power from the climate system in favor of the life support systems which were only as good as the *Lexington* itself – not very.

Bob Wesley had been involved in several battles since the war started, and faced even more dangerous situations during his career, but this time he wouldn’t make it – neither he nor is crew. He knew that they were fighting a hopeless fight. Even the addition of *Revere* – a Hermes class scout – it was too late to turn the tables. In minutes, the *Lexington* would surrender to the onslaught and be destroyed.

Service in Starfleet went hand-in-hand with risk – especially when the duty station was outer space during wartime. So Wesley, naturally, had faced death on more than one occasion. But no one gets used to it - not really. Bob felt dread and sorrow rising in him as his navigator told him that the shields would fail within seconds, leaving the *Lexington* completely vulnerable. He would have accepted his fate – dying alone, but knowing his entire crew would be killed along with him pained him deeply – and that he wouldn’t see his daughter Katie again. He left for deployment aboard the *Lexington* two months ago, before the Klingons declared war, and he had promised to spend the next shore leave with her. Now she would be left behind.

The main screen flickered then stabilized clearly showing a Bird-of-Prey in front of them. Its torpedo shafts started to glow, ready to spit the last of its deadly fire at them. Taking a deep breath and trying to hide the fear that chilled his blood, Bob steeled himself against what was to come and said, “I am sorry that it has to end like this. I am very proud of every one of you, and I want to thank you all for your trust and your service that has gone above and beyond the call of duty. We…”

“Commodore!” The outburst of his helmsman interrupted Wesley. He looked at the scene pointed out to him, and his eyes became wide as saucers. “What the hell…” he whispered. Out of nowhere a Klingon scout materialized in front of the Bird-of-Prey – but not in a position to fire at the *Lexington*; instead it faced the larger enemy vessel and shot two torpedoes directly into its weapon shaft. Following the shots, it rose and banked left to shoot a line of quick-fire phaser blasts at the battlecruiser’s aft section. This maneuver was not in any Starfleet manual ‘Standard Operating Procedure’.

The result was incredible. The two torpedoes shot from the Klingon scout had intercepted the Bird-of-Prey missiles before they were even deployed! The phaser shots hit the hull section where the
weakened deflectors and the cloaking device were installed. Instantly, the shields folded. The enemy ship returned the fire but missed the small scout by a hand’s breadth. D’Ghor then rolled right to slip beneath the Bird-of-Prey and fire another round along the unprotected hull, slicing it open. One single, small spacecraft defeated the Klingon ship!

Wesley and his officers watched the gambit unfold with mouths agape. “That helmsman is nuts - unbelievable!” Lexington’s communication officer Palmers blurted out - awed. He was the voice of the crew at that moment.

“Yeah, damn good shooting!” one of the Red Shirts agreed. “That was simply… brilliant!”

The commodore nodded; he suddenly realized the danger they were in and jumped into action. “Lieutenant Ericson, get us away from them; maximum speed! If the Klingon explodes, we’ll…”

“Sir, the engines aren’t responding!” his navigator shouted. “We have no power left for them!”

As if on cue, the communication officer caught a transmission from the Klingon scout meant for the allies and put it on speaker. “D’Ghor to the Tammeron ships! Activate tractor beams and pull the Lexington out of the blast zone! My sensors show that her engines have shut down!”

Wesley took a deep breath; the baritone barking orders over the comm was unfamiliar. “Not only a son-of-gun, but as a logical man with command. That guy is a natural talent,” he murmured to himself, deep respect burgeoning for the other man.

“Sir, four Tammeron ships have taken us into their tractor beam,” his science officer called.

Bob nodded in relief while he watched the scene on the flickering screen. The Klingon ship grew smaller as the four Tammeron vessels dragged the Lexington out of danger. Then, as Khan and Wesley anticipated, the enemy ship exploded into a fierce blaze of fire and flying parts ’til nothing remained other than the detritus left behind to drift through space.

Now that the Lexington was out of immediate danger, Wesley could see another Bird-of-Prey clashing with two smaller Federation ships and cadre of Tammerons. Another Klingon cruiser battled with the Revere.

A blinding light at the right edge of the screen saw another spacecraft destroyed. Wesley shot his
science officer an asking look; the Deltan replied, “It was the Klingon flagship sir. It was already badly damaged when we reached Tammeron; those final blasts ended her.”

“Commodore, the Klingon scout D’Ghor – the one that came to our aid – is in trouble!” The helmsman turned around in his chair. “A D4-cruiser is attacking it!”

Bob frowned; he saw a smaller but quicker Klingon ship firing at the scout. Even after the D’Ghor cloaked, the enemy seemed to know its location and attacked mercilessly. Then the cloaking-device failed, and the scout became visible once more.

“Transmit to the Revere and the Columbia! They have to protect our rescuers and…” He didn’t need to complete the order. The Revere was already on her way to shield the allied scout ship and shot full-on at the enemy cruiser, distracting the Klingons from their victim.

It was the last action of the battle. Robbed of their fleet commander and having lost seven ships, the Klingons withdrew to make an escape. Four Starfleet vessels gave chase to make certain the enemy didn’t return while the rest remained render aid where necessary.

Bob leaned back in his chair; ignoring the throbbing pain in his arm. “Hail the D’Ghor, Lieutenant!” he told Palmers. “I want to thank our rescuers.”

The man nodded; a moment later a disheveled Tellarit emerged on the screen. Wesley couldn’t hide the grateful smile that spread over his sweaty and dirty face. “I am Commodore Robert Wesley from the starship Lexington,” he introduced himself. “I want to give you my deepest thanks for your help, sir! Without your intervention, my crew and I would be dead.”

The Tellarit’s snout had twitched before he oinked with a certain degree of pride, “I am Galven from the organization The Shadow. I must return the gratitude; you kept the damn Klingons from turning us into molecules.”

Bob cocked his head. “The Shadow? So it was you who gave us the warning about the Klingons’ planned assault on Tammeron.” It was not a question, but a statement.

The Tellarit shrugged. “One of our members coaxed it out of the former commander of this nice little vessel. We try to give the damn Orions a hard time, seeing that you boys are too busy battling with the Klingons, but when we learned to what those warmongers were up to, we thought we should
change our mission for the sake of the nice Tammeron people.”

This time Wesley had to smile. “I understand Commander Galven – not only are the Tammeronians, but we too are in your debt.” He pursed his lips. “That maneuver you flew was – it was extraordinary!”

“I don’t want to adorn myself with borrowed plumes, Commodore. My helmsman was the hero of the hour. He raced to your aid without even asking me,” he added with a grunt, yet his grinning face showed that he wasn’t angry with the man.

Bob chuckled. It seems The Shadow has several ‘commanders’ – how typical for civilians playing soldiers. “May I speak with him?”

The Tellarit’s expression changed. It showed a hint of dismay, while Galven looked sideward to the floor. “I am sorry, Commodore, but that is a bit difficult just now.”

On the D’Ghor, Galven’s glance rested on the unconscious form of ‘Drythen’, who lay on the deck as Caviw treated him. Galven only remembered Drythen hurling himself out of his chair following a photon blast. While jerking both arms up in an attempt to protect himself, one of the overhead support struts crashed down, missing the helm by inches and sending parts throughout bridge. A large bit of debris stuck the Terran in the temple, knocking him out. If Drythen hadn’t already launched himself from his station and seen it coming, the falling strut would have injured him badly – maybe even killed him.

Now the slender figure lay motionless on the ground bleeding from his head wound. Caviw knelt down beside him and cradled his head in her lap, trying to stop the bleeding with a sleeve torn from her overall. Much to her relief, Drythen breathed calm and steady, though his pulse was slightly elevated.

“He was injured during the last Klingon assault,” Galven grumbled and saw the concerned face of the elder Commodore on screen.

“Is there anything we can do for him? Can we beam him aboard on one of our ships to be tended properly in one of our med bays?”

The Tellarit hesitated before he answered, “That’s nice, Commodore, but…you see…um… He isn’t on the best terms with Starfleet or the authorities. I don’t think…”
“Whatever he’s done, I think his actions speak for themselves. I guarantee his freedom during his stay. He can return to you whenever he wants,” Bob cut in.

Reluctantly, Galven looked down at the wounded man, whose lashes began to flutter. Astonished, the crew of the D’Ghor watched as Drythen opened his glassy blue-green eyes, glanced straight at the Tellarit and croaked a hoarsely, “No!”

Caviw’s tail twitched. “Léo, be reasonable. We don’t have many medical supplies to…”

“It is a bruise, nothing more. I will be fine!” The tone along stated clearly enough that he was anything but ‘fine’, yet his ashen face showed no pain, only desperate determination.

The last thing Khan remembered was the Crack of the metal above; he tried to get himself to safety, only to be hit by hard by a falling girder. For a long moment, only blackness surrounded him; he thought he could hear voices beyond the black. Concentrating on them and the gentle strokes of clawed fingers, he had regained consciousness, listening to the conversation between Galven and Commodore Wesley. He was reassured the commodore was still alive, but when the officer offered to beam him aboard a Starfleet vessel to give him medical support, his survival instincts flared. Though convinced Wesley was an honest man and would guarantee his freedom, Khan knew that the commodore wouldn’t have any other choice but to turn him in as soon as he learned who he was. And this was a risk the Augment would not take.

Gathering all his strengths and ignoring the stabbing pain in his head, he opened his mouth and forced the words out which would decide his fate and that of his family.

Galven grunted in surprise. “Are you sure, buddy? You don’t look so good.”

Khan moistened his lips and whispered, “I will heal shortly, Galven, believe me. Do not… I do not want…” He made a tired gesture towards the screen and the Tellarit sighed before he addressed Wesley again. “Sorry, Commodore, but he wants to stay here.”

Bob grimaced slightly. Well dammit! What had this guy done that he wouldn’t accept an offer to be tended to in a Starfleet med bay? “Very well,” he agreed after a short pause. “Then please accept my bid to beam some medical supplies to you and your ships. They are part of your - organization, aren’t they?”
The Tellarit nodded proudly. “Yes, they are. And this nice ship was booty we got only a short time ago – thanks to this foolhardy daredevil!” He nodded fondly toward the injured man on the floor before adding softly, “It was he who got the information out of the former commander of this vessel regarding the Klingon’s planned assault and contacted you uniform-wearers.”

This revelation took Wesley by surprise – but then, on the other hand, it didn’t. It seems this man, whoever he was, had a good heart. Otherwise, the Lexington’s crew and the 17 million inhabitants of Tammeron would be dead by now. “I will make certain that he’s mentioned in my report in the most positive light,” he promised. “Is there something else that I can do to support you and your organization?”

“It would be nice if you could tell your comrades that we are not Klingons and that they should keep their torpedoes to themselves when they see us,” the Tellarit grinned.

At this Wesley had to smile. “No problem, Commander Galven. Anything else?”

Galven shook his head. “No, thank you, sir.”

Bob bent forward at his terminal. “All right. Thank you once again for your intervention – detaining the Klingons until we came and then for your aid in battle.” Warmth shimmered in his brown eyes. “And please pass my sincerest thanks to your helmsman. That was like nothing I’d ever seen before. His quick reactions made my dizzy just watching them. Can I at least learn the name of the man who saved our lives? If he ever runs into Starfleet authorities, my report could go a long way in helping him.”

He saw the Tellarit look to the floor again and heard a hoarse and deep voice answering, a voice so quiet Wesley could make out the words. Then Galven rolled his eyes and squealed, “He doesn’t want you to know his name, but he gives his thanks for the offer.” He rubbed his snout. “Well, Commodore, go and patch up your nice ship and get some rest. You look like hell – just like your bridge. See ya!” With that, he cut the comm link. The screen returned to its usual state - space.

For a long moment Wesley stared at the small Klingon scout. Then he ordered his science officer to transmit images of the vessel with close-ups of the damage for identification purposes along with its name and hull designation to all Federation and Starfleet starships in the sector, informing them that this was not an enemy, but a valuable ally. Now to take care of his crew, the Lexington and the other ships…
“You are the most stubborn being in the whole universe! You could have it far more comfortable now if you had taken Wesley’s offer. But no, you had to refuse!”

Caviw watched ‘Léo’ as he slept in his bunk. Ritek and she had brought him to one of the small quarters in the aft of the D’Ghor. Ignoring his slurred protests, the Caitian cared for him with the medical supplies received from Wesley: several medical kits containing wound dressings and splints, a variety of hypo sprays, disinfection agents as well as a bio-scanner, medical tricorder, and a dermal regenerator. Caviw used the dermal regenerator to treat the man’s head injury before he fell asleep.

Caviw was glad that the CMO of the starship that delivered them; as far as she heard of the Shadow and Flash received the same equipment. Commodore Wesley seemed to be one of the old school – honorable and trustworthy. She didn’t understand why ‘Léo’ had not accepted Wesley’s offer. The commodore would have set him free after he had been treated at a med bay; Caviw was sure of it.

Her gaze wandered over the dark-haired Terran, whose handsomeness and fierce spirit attracted her like no other male had before. There had been Caitian men who had peaked her interest, and she enjoyed affairs with men of other races – especially humans – but ‘Léo’ beckoned her like the Veganian bees to light.

She listened to his breath, and her glance rested on his face. He slept deeply, and she couldn’t help but wonder if it was a kind of healing-sleep – like Vulcans did following a grave injury. The bio-scan displayed his depressed bio functions.

‘Who are you?’ she thought and pursed her lips. ‘You fight with the speed of a Vulcan, the strength of a Klingon, and the reflexes of a Caitian. And a prescience in battle no Terran possesses. You are merciless toward the enemy, but you are ready to throw yourself into harm’s way to save others. You are not the usual sort of man.’

She sighed and reached for him. Since she met him, she longed to touch his hair. It seemed so very soft and far too perfect for an outlaw on the run. She knew that he wouldn’t have allowed it if he had been awake, so she took her chance now. It was only a gesture of fondness she told herself; maybe it soothed him now in his slumber. It was more than soft, almost feathery – dirty as it was after all the smoke and grime that had rained down on them during the battle. She stroked it gently, down to his neck and…

Her movements stilled; her fingers touched the warm, smooth velvet skin at the back of his neck. There was something – something no eye would recognize. But she could sense it. It was a mark; the mark of a mate.
Among her people, claiming a mate in this fashion was normal, and not unheard of in other races either. Even the Vulcans ‘claimed’ their partners by binding their soul together with their mate, but she never thought the Terrans partook in a similar binding-ritual.

With care she let her fingertips run over the sensitive spot, cautious not to scratch him with her claw-like nails. The mark – invisible, soft and intangible to those who weren’t sensitive to such a thing.

‘Léo’ was taken, claimed by another she realized unhappily. Still it roused her curiosity. Who was his mate and where was she? Why wasn’t she with h…? Caviw frowned as her cat-like instincts sensed something even the telepathy of a Vulcan would not have caught. A female had not given the mark on ‘Léo’s’ neck but by a male. She was certain of it. His partner in body and soul was another man.

Well, it was not uncommon that partners of the same gender would bind themselves to one another. Among her people, there were partnerships like this, and they were highly regarded because the couples were not only mates but also brothers or sisters in blood and soul. Caviw asked herself how ‘Léo’ and his partner found one another and how strong was their bond. Who was this man, able to win such a beautiful and incredible feral creature such as ‘Léo’?

For a moment, she remembered ‘Léo’s’ determination in contacting Starfleet’s flagship Enterprise to give warning about the planned Klingon attack – how he sent the hidden message to the starship’s captain. The commanding officer didn’t doubt ‘Léo’s’ words for a second after he got the message from ‘Sunrise’. Caviw’s heightened senses heard the smile behind the warmth in his voice as he addressed ‘Sunrise’ to thank him for the warnings. Later she learned from Galven that ‘Léo’ had contacted the captain again, this time in private, and talked for several minutes.

Was this captain ‘Léo’s’ mate? Was this relationship the reason ‘Léo’ had been forced to desert Starfleet? Yes, he spoke about his family – told them that he had to leave the fleet for them. She was ready to believe that the truth was a mixture of both. Perhaps – no most certainly there were many other secrets he kept from them.

‘What else are you hiding?’ she thought as she took the bio-scanner and examined his head injury again. The result made her gasp. The wound was already healing. If it continued at this speed, he would be completely well in a day.

Just in case she missed something, Caviw scanned the gash one more time, but the display showed the same result as before. The injury was closing, sped up by a healing ability in his cells she had never seen.
Putting the scanner aside, she pursed her lips thoughtfully. This man was no normal Terran. He was somehow enhanced – and avoided Starfleet so that he turned down an offer to be tended. Very curious. Still he felt loyalty so some of the fleet’s members. ‘Who are you?’ she had thought for the second time before she nodded to herself. It was about time to find something out about him!

She looked up as Galven stepped into the small quarters, still disheveled and dirty. “How is he doing?” he asked quietly. The Caitian sighed, “He sleeps, and the scans show – well, he is healing,” she avoided a direct answer. ‘Léo’ had his reasons for the secrets he kept and she accepted this so long as he wasn’t a danger to them. But she wanted to find out the whole truth before she considered informing the others out of the things she found.

Galven sighed in relief. “That’s good to hear. The boy took a very hard blow to his bullhead – maybe he will think next time he decides to hurl himself into danger.” His little eyes betrayed a bit of fondness as he looked at the Terran male. “I think shore leave will do him good. It will do us all good after this mess we went through!”

Caviw cocked her head. “Where are we heading to?”

“Aldebaran,” Galven answered. “I have a friend there who runs a dockyard and doesn’t ask questions. And the weather on this planet is nice. There are bars and restaurants, and… Well, we have earned ourselves a little vacation, don’t you think so?”

The Caitian smiled at him. “Yes, we have!”

She rose and left with Galven, looking one last time at the sleeping man, before she let the doors slipping close.

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Jim received Bob’s message regarding the successful defense of Tammeron several hours later. It was unusual that a commodore gave a report to a subordinate officer previous to the official events release, but Jim was his friend, and he didn’t want to hold him in suspense any longer than necessary. He knew that the young captain worried about him and his crew – made worse by his forced distance from the fight due to the Enterprise’s condition.

Starfleet’s flagship had been at Starbase 84 for ten hours now and was already undergoing the massive repairs necessary to get her back underway. It would be another two weeks minimum at
space dock. There was scarcely a station, a panel, a shaft or a console that wasn’t open and swarmed with technicians. Workers removed overhead and bulkhead claddings; cables hung free, and there wasn’t a level or deck where no work had to be done. Noises boomed from Engineering and could be heard up to the quarterdeck. The air buzzed with voices and the sounds of tools and machinery.

Wesley’s dispatch was a pleasant distraction for Jim, and he had to grin as he listened to the audio transmission of the abbreviated report of the events.

Then Kirk’s mood soon fell though, when he learned that The Shadow ran interference, keeping the enemy at bay until the Lexington and the rest of the fleet dedicated to the battle reached the theater. He heard about how The Shadow even saved Wesley and his crew, employing ‘some incredible tactics’, as well as The Shadow’s damage, sustained at the hands of the Klingons in the process.

“I’d bet my paycheck that this plan goes back to this crazy plot traces right to that daredevil – Drythen – or whatever his real name is. Without him, the Tammeronians would have been helpless. They’re not equipped for battle. The Klingon flagship was nearly beaten by the time we arrived and even then they backed us up when they could have run. If I ever get the chance to shake this man’s hand, I will do it, mark my words! I do not care for what this guy has to answer for. He’s responsible for saving the entire planet as well as hundreds of Starfleet lives – my life,” Wesley concluded – his final words spoken almost reverently.

Jim knew exactly who was responsible for said ‘incredible tactics’. The whole operation bore Khan’s stamp – starting from the warnings sent (care of some questionable interrogation methods) right through to the suicide mission to save the Lexington. The man was a predator – once the scent of blood in battle found him, nothing could stop him. But why did he risk his life to save Wesley and the others? According to Bob’s recounting, the Klingon scout that the militia seized had taken heavy fire; only the aid of another Starfleet ship prevented its destruction and the death of its crew.

Standing at Uhura’s station – which was one of the few areas that didn’t need any repair – Jim waited with a sinking feeling in his stomach until Bob was finished before he asked, “What about the members of The Shadow. Did they suffer losses?”

The seconds until Wesley’s answer came seemed to stretch endlessly as the wave of fear coiled in his belly.

“I don’t know. I only learned from their commander – an older Tellarit named Galven – that his helmsman was injured. I offered to beam him onto one of our ships for medical treatment, but he refused.”
Jim felt his mouth go dry. The helmsman. There was no doubt who this man was. And of course Khan refused Bob’s offer. Accepting it would have led to his arrest and inevitably a return to cryostasis, or fates worse – a return to the hands of Section 31, or even the death penalty. “Did you speak with him, Bob?” Kirk inquired. He needed to know if Wesley recognized his rescuer.

“No, he was barely conscious and only talked to Mr. Galven from down on the deck. I never saw him. Hell, I didn’t even know his name until the Tammeron fleet commander told me an hour ago that the man is Drythen. He took the command of The Shadow’s little fleet in order to stop the Klingons from reaching Tammeron before we arrived and then managed to render the Klingon flagship nearly defenseless with another maneuver.” The commodore laughed. “Dammit, I’d love this guy in our fleet! Some more of him and the Klingons would trip over themselves running away. I checked his name but found no entry in any of our databases. Maybe the name is a pseudonym.”

‘It is!’ Kirk thought as a heavy dread spread through him. Khan was injured – perhaps badly. He had feared this, but the foreknowledge didn’t stop the icy chill racing down his spine now. Perhaps his injury avoided visual contact with Wesley, keeping the risk of recognition to a minimum. He pulled that with Jim on the Vengeance to gain an advantage. Which one of the two possibilities was the truth, Jim didn’t know – it made him uneasy. Of course the Augments were genetically constructed to overcome wounds normal humans could not. Still Khan Noonien Singh wasn’t immortal. The thought that death could take the man he once regarded as his nemesis, but was now his lover, was like a knife slicing him in two.

“I’ll tell you more when we arrive at Risa, and I find some time off,” Bob continued, ignorant of Jim’s distress.

“You travelling to Risa?” Jim asked, forcing himself to be sidetracked for a few moments. He heard the commodore snort.

“As soon as we have our warp drive back, we’ll head to the next dockyard. K7 has fallen to the Klingons and Starbase 133 or 84, where you are, is twice as far as Starbase 12 at Risa. Given the status of the Lexington and her engines, we’ll be lucky to get there in the next three or four days. Anything faster than Warp 2 is off the table.”

They exchanged a few more words of encouragement and good-byes, then Wesley ended the transmission. The short exchange was barely over when Jim excused himself to his quarters; he gave the conn to Sulu, who discussed the status of his console with a technician of Starbase 84.

Walking toward the stateroom, Jim reminded himself of his promise not to contact Khan for personal reasons – after all he couldn’t deny the risk that a transmission could be intercepted, even when using an encrypted frequency – but this was urgent. The super-human was injured, and Kirk’s agitation would only grow until he knew the other man’s condition.
He knew he shouldn’t be so emotionally invested in Khan’s welfare, but that only made his agitation worse. He couldn’t help himself. It was as if his heart and soul abandoned his logic and set out on their own path.

Locking his door, he went to his desk, activated the communication terminal, typed the required frequency and encryption code and tried to hail the Augment. There was no answer. With a sinking feeling Jim tried several more times, waiting some minutes between attempts. Still there was no reply from Khan. Either Khan was out of range, but the shipboard computer didn’t tell him that, or the former dictator was unable to answer. Jim didn’t want to ponder that sickening possibility.

He didn’t give up. It was not in his nature to do so – and his stubbornness paid off as his attempts finally came to fruition.

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The annoying pinging sound seemed to come out of nowhere, penetrating the silent darkness that surrounded him. He recognized this noise, but he couldn’t put a finger on it. His usually quick mind was in a haze as it grasped for data just out of reach. The ping seemed to be a kind of calling signal, like that of the first mobile phones of his era. But this ringing was different.

As these first hints of neurons firing made themselves known, he was rewarded with an intense headache that tore him out of the comfortable warmth he was enjoying. Slowly he became aware of several things – he lay beneath blankets, his head hurt like someone had taken a hammer to his skull, and he was nauseous and chilled despite the covers. Next, he noticed the hum of technology – some devices, no doubt – and an alien scent in the air that wasn’t very pleasant.

And still this recurrent ping.

Forcing his eyes open, Khan blinked into the dim, small, and very foreign looking room around him. He needed a moment to recall the events that led him here – the battle with the Klingons, his decision to come to the aid of the Lexington – to the rescue of Kirk’s mentor – the enemy’s counterattack, the falling strut...Oh, that explains the pain in his head. He remembered Caviw and Ritek tending his injuries.

With a groan, the super-human closed his eyes again. He had been hit and suffered a concussion which explained the sickness, the dizziness, and the chills which racked his body. He knew that he would heal within hours, still the process procedure was more than disagreeable. How he hated it to
be weak like this! He didn’t take well to leaving others to command as he was forced to do while wounded. And he didn't like lying about waiting for his body to function properly again. Furthermore, he despised being alone in the middle of a far too strange world!

Again the pining signal sounded. Growling like a caged tiger, he reached for the small device on the nightstand beside his bunk. One look at the incoming frequency and his irritation vanished.

Flipping the communicator open, he moistened his dry lips. “Yes?”

For a moment there was silence, then he heard the soft and familiar tenor tinged with concern, “Sunrise? Is that you?”

If Khan could see himself in a mirror. He knew his expression was doleful – just pathetic. But he couldn't help the genuine smile spread across his ashen face and reached his eyes. “Yes, it is me, James.” His voice was hoarse and quiet, betraying his condition. “You may speak openly. I am alone here.”

Light years away Jim let out a sigh of relief. For nearly half an hour he tried to reach the Augment. The dread in Jim’s gut eased just a bit at Khan’s voice. “Thank God, there you are,” he said gently. “I heard from Bob Wesley what the ‘helmsman’ of The Shadow did – and that he was injured. I figured it had to be you.” He gulped, realizing how weak the super-human sounded. “How bad is it?”

Aboard the D’Ghor Khan blinked several times; he was surprised, but pleased at Kirk’s concern. Clearing his throat, he retorted, “Nothing serious. Nothing that will not heal shortly.”

In his quarters, Kirk rolled his eyes. “Khan” he warned, showing that he didn’t believe Khan’s description of the seriousness of his injuries. “Bob said you were on the floor out cold when he contacted The Shadow. By the tone of your voice, you are barely awake even though you go from zero to warp speed in no time. So, come on, tell me what happened to you.” He swallowed. “Please.”

The soft plea made the former dictator give in. James’ concern felt far too good – so with a sigh he replied truthfully, “I was hit in the head by debris. I have a concussion, nothing more.”

“Uh-huh, and you certainly have a gash large enough to give Bones the chills,” Jim added, clearly upset.
“As your doctor friend pointed out, my cells regenerate faster than a human’s. I will be healed by tomorrow, James.”

For a moment, Kirk stayed silent then he answered. “Even with your enhanced healing abilities you still feel pain.” Gentle compassion accompanied those words and Khan dipped his head in reticence at his words.

“Pain is a signal that the body is out of homeostasis. If you know what caused the pain, you can accept it. Acceptance makes the pain easier to bear.” He took a deep breath and a wave of nausea swept over him. The Klingon smell lingered in his quarters, and their smell was as bad as their manners!

“Still…,” Jim sighed. “You threw yourself and your seized ship in the middle of a war that is not yours to fight.”

“It wasn’t that bad, James.”

“According to Bob you saved him and his crew. He was impressed with your tactics. Starfleet’s going to talk about it for years.” The young captain hesitated a moment, then he asked, “Why did you do it?”

“What do you mean – why did I do it?”

“Risking your life to save the Lexington,” Jim specified. There was nothing but the soft hum of the transmission. Then he heard the Augment take another deep breath; he continued – quieter this time.

“I had my reasons.”

Jim rolled his eyes. That wasn’t the answer he wanted, but he knew Khan well enough by now to let the topic alone – for now. The Augment would tell him when in his own time. And Jim would wait for him. In the end, it didn’t matter why the super-human saved Bob and the crew of the Lexington. He did it, and Kirk was more than grateful for it. He didn’t want to cope with another loss of so treasured a comrade as Bob Wesley – another man so like a father to him.

“Thank you, Noonien. Thank you so much,” was all Jim could manage, his voice fraught with emotion. It seemed such as small offering for such a great act.
On the other side of Borderland, Khan’s heart raced when he heard his given name roll off from James’ tongue. He could scarcely remember the last time he heard his given name; it filled him with a swirl of sentiment he would have denied feeling, if he had been his more rational self. “You are welcome… Jim,” he murmured, remembering the CMO of the Enterprise used this nickname for ‘James’.

A wave of heat flushed young captain to the tips of his ears as that deep, battle-rough voice of the Augment gave this term of endearment. He felt a tingle on the back of his neck as he flushed. Good God, what was happening to him? What was happening to them? Why were they all of suddenly ready to protect each other – break their own set of codes and those they swore to uphold for one another?

He cleared his throat and wished he could do the same with his mind; he seemed to have lost it somewhere back in San Francisco when the super-human seduced him. Because right now he wanted nothing more than to hold his former nemesis close – wherever they were.

“You… you got injured fighting a battle that is not yours to fight, saving a planet you know nothing of – and Starfleet who’d want to see you…dead.” He gulped at these words. “I… I don’t know what to say,” he mumbled, rubbing his face with one hand. He was at a loss for words – a rare thing.

Khan moistened his lips again and closed his eyes. “I’ve endured far worse than a blow to the head, so do not worry so much. I will be well soon.”

Back on the Enterprise, Jim searched for something to say. “That’s not what I meant and you know it.” He sighed. “This is crazy. I contacted you to offer some comfort, and now you are trying to calm me down.” He shook his head, still overwhelmed with his newfound knowledge and at a loss for words.

“Comfort?” Khan frowned at that; Kirk could hear it in his voice

“Yeah, comfort. Everyone needs some comfort from time to time – even you!”

“You think so?” the Augment asked, a bit bewildered and amused.

“Yeah, you do!” There was a short pause, before Jim continued, more his old self again, “I bet you hate having to stay in bed giving in to your body’s needs. Believe me, I understand that. Bones calls me ‘the most unreasonable patient of whole Starfleet’. I get so frustrated when I have to lay still with
nothing to do but heal. It makes me feel useless and weak, especially when he tells me over and over again that I’ll be fine soon.” He mimicked McCoy’s voice perfectly which made Khan smirk. Kirk continued, ‘Luckily my crew keeps me updated I still get my daily reports and read the ships’ logs to keep me in the loop. Somehow it helps, even if depending on my reports, and visits for my state of mind is ‘completely illogical’, as Spock would say. Still, he shows up the most at my bedside. Well, Bones tops those visits, but he is a doctor after all. And I swear he loves to pester me just to remind me he has to treat me at all.”

Aboard the Klingon scout, the Augment listened to Jim’s torrent of speech. ‘Well, his loss for words is over!’ he thought with some amusement, but he didn’t mind. He liked to hear the younger man’s voice. And he learned more about Kirk than ever before. They shared some similarities; James’ description of being forced to the sickbed was exactly what Khan was going through now as he waited for his damaged body to repair itself.

And the comfort James – ‘Jim’ he corrected himself – took from the presence of his friends equaled his experienced back in the 20th century with those who were dearest to him. During the rare occasions when he needed time to heal, Joaquin, Chan, Ann or Paolo came to his bedside to provide comfort – even attempted to cheer him up. He insisted that he didn’t need such ‘pathetic nonsense’, but it had felt good – especially when Joaquin’s sunny disposition chased away his dark moods.

He now understood the close friendship between Kirk and his crew – how much James appreciated the powerful bond with the doctor and the damn half-Vulcan. Hearing Jim talk about them like this reminded him of his family – of Joaquin and Kati. They each shared their own little idiosyncrasies – genetically enhance or not – but he had loved all of them all fiercely; he still did. Khan and Jim shared this trait – the ability to love without compromise or boundaries. Khan managed to love his own beyond the human lifespan, and Jim loved his people through death and beyond.

Did Jim call to comfort a friend before he learned of Khan’s injury? Was there a vestige of affection from Kirk that made him want to cheer him up? They shared something – he wasn’t sure what it was exactly (aside from the blood and their night together). Knowing the young captain was concerned about him gave him solace. But he needed to know why – not now though. His head hurt too much, and his body needed all his energy to heal, so he deferred the needed contemplation until later.

“So, you’re convinced I could use a little distraction?” he asked. He heard the smile behind Kirk’s reply.

“If you are more comfortable calling it a distraction, I am okay with it. Either way my answer is ‘yes’.”

Khan lifted his brow. Yes, he had difficulties accepting comfort, but a distraction was fine with him. James – Jim – seemed to know him all too well, but he didn’t mind. Not this time. “So, by all my
means, do it,” he mumbled, imagining Kirk’s confused expression.

The captain retorted, “What?”

“Distract me,” the Augment grumbled and felt a smile tugging at his mouth, as he listened to Jim’s chuckle; the sound was sunlight to him after a dark and cold night. Again his thoughts betrayed him – he must sort out this thing between them!

“And what could distract you?” Kirk’s voice teased. “I think you’re too old for bedtime stories.”

A low chuckle escaped the super-human – the thought was indeed silly. He sighed, “No, you are right. Bedtime stories were never for me.” He pulled the covers higher. “You grew up in Iowa, didn’t you?” As Jim affirmed with a soft “uh-huh”, he required, “Tell me about it.”

“You want me to tell you about Iowa?”

“Yes, I have never been there. I only heard that it is a part of a vast and sunny area in United States.”

Jim smiled as he heard the description of the country he once called ‘home’. “If you’d like to hear about it, I’ll talk. But don’t complain later that I’ve bored you. Iowa isn’t that thrilling you may think.”

“Even the most barren desert holds beauty and secrets of its own, Jim,” Khan reminded him. Kirk felt another warm shiver licking beneath his skin as the Augment used his nickname again.

“Well, it is still the breadbasket of the United States; large areas are used for the agrarian economy,” Kirk began, but soon skipped the facts, as his memories turned back in time to his childhood. Not everything had been bad then, before his mother married Frank, her second husband, and Sam and he were still boys playing in Iowa’s wilderness.

He spoke of the large corn fields, swaying in the wind like waves in the ocean – the warm sun, the small forests, the clean air and the endless tracts of land as far as you could see. Jim told him about little village near their farm and of the old John Deere tractor their neighbors had, how he and his brother Sam cared for the ancient machinery. He told him about the yearly tornadoes that were terrifying as they were breathtaking and beautiful – a display of the nature’s might. He spoke of the red sunsets and the clear night skies. How when he looked up at the stars in the direction where his
father died – he still was fascinated by them – beautiful and dangerous. He voiced his awe when he first saw the Enterprise being built in the Riverside Shipyard; it changed everything for him.

Far away on the D’Ghor, the super-human smiled ever so gently. He was becoming sleepy; lulled by the soft tones of Jim’s voice that enfolded him like a warm blanket, until they were nothing more than a soft whirl of sound.

“Khan, are you still with me?” The almost whispered question tore the Augment away from sleep’s threshold and tiredly he opened his eyes once more. The speed with which his enhanced body was healing was taking its toll.

“Yesh, I’m,” he slurred – Khan’s slow and quiet tone told Jim that the former dictator was drifting into sleep.

Something tugged at Kirk’s heart – he wasn’t sure what it was. It felt warm, protective and gentle all rolled into one. He imagined reaching out to the super-human lying on a bunk, covered in blankets and with a bandage around his head.

“Go to sleep,” he suggested softly, “You need it.” The answer was a confirming mixture of a growl and a sigh. Jim smiled. “Good night… Nien!”

A faint “night” was the only reply; then the link was broken – leaving behind a deeply affected Jim Kirk…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, my dear readers, I do hope the chapter was to your liking – beginning with the action, Khan’s reason why he came to Wesley’s aid, then Caviw finding out more about him than he certainly is going to like and then ending with the comfort-call of Jim. The relationship between the two men is growing ever so softly, despite the distance of space, and their feelings begin to bloom.
And soon the two will be re-united again, this much I can promise.

For those, who are wondering, why Khan referred to ‘tickling a dragon’s tail’ in his thoughts during the battle, here a little description of the phrase:

*Tickling the dragon’s tail was based on Physics Richard Feynman’s (c. 1945) remarks concerning experiments testing uranium and plutonium, bringing masses of fissile materials to near-critical levels to establish their critical mass values which ran the risk of causing a nuclear chain reaction. This and the fact that he comes from the Asia area where the dragon holds a very special status made me chose this phrase – just for your information.

In the next chapter you will learn more about the plan Admiral Norton and Luengo are initiating to take hold of Starfleet Command. Khan thinks about his relationship to Jim and – by the way – develops some technics which are going to be very helpful soon. Then he learns that Caviw knows more of him than thought and Jim and his crew are getting a new order that will put them in great danger – a danger that is going to bring Khan in the arena, so to say.

I hope you liked the new chapter and I am really, really curious what you think of the characters’ progresses.

Maybe I can publish the next chapter around the 20th but seeing how much work my dear beta-reader has to do with the chapters, I can’t promise that.

Have a nice weekend,

Yours Starflight.
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Jup, this time the update comes quicker, thanks to the hard work of my dear beta-reader. I am still happy that you are to taken with the story and once again a big thank you to all, who are reading it (and are leaving feedbacks).

As promised in the new chapter you will learn more about Norton’s and Luengo’s plan, Khan realizes how much this one night in San Francisco has changed his life and his heart, and Jim gets a new mission that will turn out very nasty for him.

Enjoy the new ‘chapi’,

Love,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 11 – The darkness rises

When Khan woke, he felt better – far better. The headache reduced itself to a dull throb that he managed to ignore; the nausea vanished, and he wasn’t cold anymore. Slowly he sat up and slid a finger under the bandages to feel the wound he expected was as good as healed. He still held his communicator in the other hand. The channel was closed and the little device on standby. At least he ended the transmission before he fell asleep.

With some regret, he changed the frequency. Kirk and he had used it twice now, and he didn’t want to push their luck; an intercepted transmission would ruin the both of them. He would send the young captain another frequency as soon as necessary, and…

‘Necessary? There is no necessity – I do not need James’, he thought rationally. But he wanted the contact. James lit his dark world – filled it with color. He had ever since that night in San Francisco. Jim personified hope when he delivered the news of his people.

Pursing his lips, he eyed the communicator and replayed the conversation with James… Jim! The
soft timbre of the younger man’s voice sounded tinged with worry for him. His comforting words, the way he seemed to know him... It filled him with a kind of contentment he hadn’t experienced in a very long time. Even now, hours later, he was calm - almost peaceful. What did it tell him about himself?

‘That it feels good to at last have someone care for you enough to show it. And you take pleasure in in the conversation. Don’t deny it.’ Joaquin’s voice playfully teased.

‘That is no reason to get all... all...!’ he began to exhort himself, but was lost for words. Superb! Now he didn’t even know what to think! What good was enhancement if he couldn’t keep his thoughts under control!

‘You know, big bro, when the feelings affect your head, your sense becomes dead!’ it sounded cheerful in his mind, the grinning face of the young Israeli Augment came to the forefront of his mind. Joaquin and his proclivity for impromptu rhyme! Khan knew the boy would love to tease him right now.

‘I cannot allow myself to be emotionally involved! Not when so much is at stake!’ he told himself sternly, wincing as he realized what he had just confessed to himself. ‘Emotionally involved…’ That never happened.

‘Maybe this thing between you and Jim is exactly what you need to hold yourself together, big bro.’ Joaquin’s imagined voice murmured deep in him. We both know that you are lonely, and even an Augment is human enough to need someone at his side. You finally found an equal, even if he is a mere human – but he has our blood, doesn’t he. Maybe this tempts you – a human with your blood in his veins? He challenges you. He has your mind and your heart, doesn’t he? You can’t lie to yourself, Noonien. He is a lifeline in this strange world you are in. Do not spoil it!’

Khan sighed as those words swirled in his mind. Then the image of his kindred brother of soul vanished, and silence greeted him once again. Of course he knew that Joaquin’s voice was only in his imagination. Even with the bond he shared with his people he would never be able to hear their thoughts like that.

He analyzed why he thought he would listen to the younger Augment’s teasing. He loved Joaquin deeply, and lonely as he was, his subconscious yearned for someone familiar. And Joaquin never failed to call a spade a spade. Hearing the young man’s voice in his mind told him quite plainly what was happening to him. He felt emotionally pulled towards Jim Kirk; his voice meant warmth and protectiveness, but those feelings mingled with the still-burning desire in his core that hadn’t cooled since the encounter in Kirk’s apartment.
A low growl escaped Khan as Jim’s face popped up in his mind, sky-blue eyes sparkling with mirth. ‘You’re really fucked up, Noonien!’

Instantly, heat spread through his body as he remembered the moment Kirk called him by his given name. His name on Jim’s dirty mouth woke the long suppressed want in him again, licked flames beneath his skin and coiled in a demanding longing in his loins. Not only to satisfy his carnal needs, but to be close to him again; close to the man whose passionate fire burnt as his own did. Khan knew he would ravish the young captain now – if he were only here.

But Jim wasn’t here. He was…

A loud bang sounded from somewhere within the scout ship and startled the former dictator from his thoughts. What the hell!

Again the noise sounded through the vessel. Then Khan heard strange voices. He realized that the ship was not moving; the endless drone of the engines was silenced.

On alert, he quickly rose and grabbed the phaser (Jim’s phaser - the one Jim pointedly did not use on him) from the small table at the other side of the little room and crept to the door. He opened it and silently listened for any sign that the scout had been seized by Klingons or Orions while he had been in his healing-sleep. Then he heard the oinking voice of Galven. The Tellarit was laughing with a stranger; it sounded more like squealing than laughter. The super-human relaxed. It seemed the visitor aboard was friendly!

All the better! He had to wash, and he had to eat something. He was hungry; that wasn’t a surprise. The speed of his healing process increased his metabolism, and his body demanded food to ‘recharge the battery’, as Joaquin liked to put it. He was always famished after an injury, or when his body functions had been pushed to its limits.

Withdrawing, he searched for a hygiene cell in the small room and found an automatic wash-set. One look in the mirror showed him that he looked like hell. He had shadows beneath his eyes; he was hollow-cheeked and had a bloodied bandage around his head. There was dirt in his hair, and his face marred by grit and soot. Scowling at himself, he tried to get the wash-set to work, but it took several attempts. Glaring at the Klingon signs and letters, and fed up with guessing what each and every button and switch was for on this damn vessel, he became determined to learn some of them.

Removing the bandage and examining his injury, he found out that it had healed – at least one thing met his satisfaction. Then he began to clean himself; he washed his hair and scrubbed his skin until it was pink. Then he re-dressed. He was glad that Caviw and Ritek left some of the medical supplies
on the table and he quickly applied a new bandage. He didn’t need it anymore, but how would he explain his ability to his shipmates without giving his abilities away? He had to continue feigning the injury for just a little while. The ruse lent him some advantage; the crew would leave him in peace for a few days.

He had a lot to think about. Not only of that thing obviously growing between him and Jim Kirk, but also how to continue his search for his people, and how to proceed once he discovers their location. As long as the war continued, Starfleet’s security measurements would be at the highest level possible, not only at the facility storing his family, but also the entire Federation territory. It would be difficult to free them as long as Federation security guarded the quadrant as if it were Fort Knox.

Finding nothing that looked like a replicator in his quarters meant he would have to find some food in the mess or the galley. So Khan left his tiny room and walked down the short corridor straight to Engineering, following the noises. He stepped into the large space; his gaze found Galven, who stood beside a man a head taller than the Augment and twice his weight. The sight of the contrasting pair was a bit funny and Khan hid his amusement as he neared them.

Galven saw him first and threw both hands up. “Hey, Buddy!” he oinked cheerfully. “There you are! How are you doing?” It was always surprising, how fast the Tellarit could move on his short, stout legs because seconds later Khan found himself enveloped in a tight embrace that pressed the air from his lungs. Galven looked up at him, a grin plastered over his pig-like face. “Hell and bells, boy, you really had me worried.” He retreated two steps and observed him intently. “How are you feeling?”

The Augment cleared his throat, a bit astonished at the welcome. He wasn’t used to it. “I am feeling better, thank you, Galven,” he answered politely. Then his attention moved to the other man who came closer to the pair. He seemed to be a Terran human – as far as Khan could tell. But there were extraterrestrials that looked like Earth’s homo sapiens.

The stranger was a giant with a tanned plain and rough, but kind face, wild dark hair pulled back in a low ponytail, and eyes so dark they were nearly black. His movements revealed strength; his stance was relaxed, and his clothes gave him away as an engineer. He looked as though he’d been spit out of a grease-laden turbine. The color of his overalls might have been blue once; now it was covered with oil stains, grease, plasma-spots. The state of them quite betrayed his sense of hygiene – or the lack of it!

“This is Diego Carlos Franco Esteban Juan Soto de… What were the last names again?” Galven managed to ruin the impressive introduction, and the other man rolled his eyes, while he offered a paw-sized hand to Khan.

“Soto de la Vega-Martinez,” he added and flashed the baffled Augment a grin. “But to my friends I’m simply Diego!”
Khan lifted a brow (how did all those names fit on an ID-card?) and accepted the offered hand.
“Peru?”

“No, but close. My parents were from Chile,” Diego replied with a slight accent, before he shook the super-human’s hand like an old-fashioned pump handle. “And you are the hotshot who made the Klingons quake in their boots! Galven told me what you did. Stirred them right up – and stole a ship – congratulations! Starfleet could learn from you.”

Finally able to withdraw his hand, Khan cocked his head and smiled faintly. This guy was strong for a mere human! “It was nothing. The Kli…” He didn’t get further because Diego clapped him hard on the shoulder and laughed loudly. Luckily the super-human remained firmly on his feet; he didn’t even sway.

“Just listen. This man held off a whole Klingon squadron, saved a Starfleet commodore’s ass, eliminated a Bird-of-Prey single-handedly, and says: ‘It was nothing’. Lad, by now the whole quadrant is talking about the ‘mysterious helmsman of The Shadow’.”

Khan’s eyes widened. “The whole quadrant?”

The Tellarit snickered. “What is faster than light? The media!”

“The media?” The former dictator’s voice took a higher tone.

“Yeah, the quadrant news is buzzing with stories of ‘The Shadow’, about its role in the whole Tammeron-incident and its hero-helmsman, who saved one of Starfleet’s most important ships.” Galven rubbed his hands. “We are famous now, and the uniform-wearers are slack-jawed because of it!”

Khan stared at him. For the first time since he woke, he realized his trouble processing given information. The media knew about The Shadow and spread their nonsense. He was missing something – wait!

“How long have I been sleeping?” he asked – and got a shock. The Tellarit replied, “Three days.”
“Three days?” He yelled; his voice echoed from the metal walls while he gaped at the small alien. His stoic mask fell completely.

Diego started to chuckle, and Galven sighed, “Ah, come on, Buddy, it isn’t a surprise. That was a nasty bump you got on your brilliant head; you bled all over the corridor and Caviw’s lap – not that she minds so long as it you bleeding on her.” He winked at the Augment, who still couldn’t believe his ears (he ignored the comment about the cat woman).

Three days! ‘I’ve been out cold for three days!’ He’d been injured worse; he survived multiple bullet wounds sustained in battles fought in his own country back in the 20th century. Even then, he hadn’t slept so long. The enormous stress his body had endured during the last two years - the experiments inflicted on him, the three centuries spent in a cryotube – all had taken its toll on his body.

Stealing control back from his wandering mind, he rubbed his face, took a deep breath, and collected himself. Right, what happened couldn’t be changed. It was time to get a Sitrep. “Where are we?”

“Aldebaran,” the Tellarit answered. “Aldebaran III to be precise. Earth has had a colony here for about sixty years. It’s popular for its…Well, you might say its government here isn’t as strict as the other settlements. Aldebaran III is too far away to be worth the worry.” He grinned. “Otherwise my dear friend here would have a tax investigation bunking permanently in his shipyard.” He nodded upwards to Diego, who smirked.

“Not only that. I think Security would be quite upset if they knew about my collection.” He looked straight ahead at the cloaking-device. “It’s a wonderful gift you’ve brought here, Lad. I never thought I would get a chance to see one of them, let alone study it.”

Khan followed the Chilean’s gaze and frowned. “Yes, this device gave us an advantage – still the Klingons knew our movements. And I want to know why!”

“Uh-huh,” Galven affirmed. “This game of cat-and-mouse was not to my taste. If Starfleet hadn’t come to our aid, we would be nothing more than atoms now.”

“They were able to hunt you – cloaked?” Diego asked baffled. The Tellarit nodded with a grunt.

“How?”
“That’s the riddle I want solved,” Khan murmured, gazing at the device. He knew he should be able to come up with the answer – it was there, licked at the edge of his mind. But he was still recovering from the concussion and his thought process was not as quick as it should be. His lips pursed in concentration as his mind considered every possible and impossible explanation. The cloaking device rendered them invisible to the eye and to scanners – unless the Klingon scanners were able to pick up the tracks of their own cloaked ship? That made sense – but how? Crew bio-data? That couldn’t be right! A cloaked ship shielded by deflectors blocked any active life form scanners. There had to be another kind of trail the Klingons could… see, read, hear, smell… Well, the latter certainly not. After all a spacecraft wasn’t a car with a good old-fashioned combustion engine – fumes and all. Therefore…

The super-human went rigid. ‘Fumes… Emissions… Of course! The D’Ghor’s emissions weren’t cloaked, just the ship! Argh! My mind is working at the speed of a mere human. Is this what they were like all time? It’s intolerable!’

“Galven, the D’Ghor was cloaked, but not her emissions – not her signature! That’s how they tracked us!” He practically shouted at them now with his realization and received the full attention of the two other men.

“Yes, of course,” Galven replied beginning to match Khan’s excitement. “There is the wave of the static warp field, and there is the heated plasma in the warp nacelles that leaves a kind of neutron emission, but…”

“That’s it!” The Augment felt a rush of thrill going through him while he looked at Galven and Diego. “They followed our emissions signature – the emissions signature of our drive.” He stepped towards the cloaking device. “Every ship class has an engine with a unique emissions signature. The Klingon sensors can track the position of their ships based on the signatures and therefore can identify the exact position and orientation of cloaked vessel.” Fire burnt in his pale eyes. “Cunning!”

The Chilean scratched his head. “In other words this pretty technical toy is for the birds!”

A slow smile widened on the austere face of the former dictator. “Not if we feed their sensors false data.” He turned his head to look at the two tech-whizzes. “If the Klingons can’t read the false signature we will emit, they will not realize that they’ve, in fact, scanned a cloaked vessel.”

Diego’s eyes and mouth opened wide. “And how do you propose we do this?”

“There are two possibilities. We can alter either the spectral or the RF trail of the D’Ghor. But if we do this, the Klingons would know a cloaked ship was nearby. The other option would be to send a
mix of RF and electronic impulses to confuse their sensors, so that they read nothing at all. Essentially, making us truly invisible to them. The second option would be easier than trying to alter our signature completely.”

Tellari and Chilean glanced at each other, then at Khan, and back at each other. Galven’s mitt landed excitedly on the super-human’s shoulder.

“Buddy, you are a genius!” Galven oinked. “Just let us feed the Klingons a taste of their own medicine!”

Khan smirked; his brain was already busy considering the technicalities required to pull this off. After all, the solution for their problem will be essential to their survival when they next meet the Klingons.

He didn’t yet know that the life of the young captain he was growing so fond of, and his own existence depended on the successful

The screen in the meeting room showed an attractive young blond woman standing in front of the main building of Starfleet headquarters and bathed in sunlight. The wind coming off the bay gently blew through her hair obscuring the small device at her ear and along her. Her dark eyes looked into the camera her co-worker was holding as she concluded her report.

“… According to an official statement released to the media by Public Affairs Officer, Commander Williams, the forces commanded by Commodore Wesley, the Tammeronian Force of Defense, and the militia The Shadow routed a Klingon strike group. Earth Channel 1 military expert, Retired Commander Jason Smith, states that the outcome of the battle in favor planet Tammeron and the Federation will weaken the Klingon fleet. He recommends Starfleet rethink its standard operating procedure and show more flexibility in battle planning.”

The news anchor looked off camera toward an inset onscreen of the retired commander who continued, “Yes, Alice. The Shadow’s small militia illustrates what flexibility and unconventional, out-of-the box leadership can do in the face of superior forces.”

“Thank you, Commander.” The news anchor turned back to her audience. “Still the questions remain: How will the Klingons react to this defeat? How is it that a civilian militia has better
intelligence than the official Secret Services - intelligence that prevented a planetary catastrophe on Tammeron? Are they really civilians, or could they be rogue Starfleet officers? And who is the head of this organization? Our source reported that only the courageous interference of the militia saved the Lexington and her crew, as well as the 17 million lives on Tammeron. This is Alice Shelldon from Earth Channel 1, live from the Starfleet headquarters.”

Barnett pushed a button on the terminal placed on the table in front of him; the news report switched off. He glared at the roomful of admirals. “Well, this militia made us look like utter fools! Still, I have to agree with Mrs. Shelldon’s point of view; The Shadow was impressive in their use of unconventional tactics. Apparently, against this enemy, unconventional warfare proves more successful than our conventional tactics.” His eyes found Rosé Luengo. “But there is the question of Mrs. Shelldon. I asked you four days ago, Rosé!” Barnett’s voice was getting louder and more irritated now “How is it that a small private militia has better intelligence regarding Klingon activities than the SBI? Have you found out something more about The Shadow?”

The Mexican man pursed his lips. “There is not much information to work with, Richard. As Commodore Wesley reported, their commander is a Tellarit named Galven. I did some research and found an engineer on Tellar, who goes by this name. He worked in a private shipyard and got some awards due to technological innovations that saved the shipyard money. Five months ago, before the war started, he disappeared with a Caitian woman - a co-worker. That was several days after his brother and his cousin vanished together with a cargo ship later found by one of our patrols – unmanned and emptied of its cargo.”

“Did they steal the cargo?” Komack asked. Luengo shook his head.

“No. The evidence indicated they had fallen prey to an assault - Orion pirates. We think Mr. Galven harbors a private vendetta against the Syndicate to avenge his family. Tellarites are very protective of their family. The Caitian woman, who went missing together with him, is named Caviw and is a computer programmer.” He leaned back in his seat. “That's all we found on them. Friends and family-members seem to be respectable citizens. We’ve vetted them already.”

“Right!” Barnett nodded. “What about the helmsman? Bob’s report makes it sound like this guy is a pilot, fighter and strategist all in one.”

Luengo shrugged. “We don’t even have a name – not a real one anyway. ‘Drythen’ must be a pseudonym because records indicate there is no one in all of Federation with that name. Has to be a cover. I can’t even deduce the origin of from the name. We know he has a military education. That’s it.”

“Was he one of us?” Komack asked; Rosé lifted a shoulder.
“It’s possible but there hadn’t been any discharges, honorable or otherwise, of Starfleet members with his ability recently.” He glanced calmly at the two other admirals. “I hate to say it, but we have absolutely no clue who this man is.” He ignored Barnett’s intense stare and continued, “The real reason for this meeting is of far more importance. Ladies and Gentlemen, we must address the rumors regarding a biological weapon the Klingons may have developed.”

“And how much of the rumor is based on fact?” Barnett wanted to know. Albert Norton bent forwards, carefully avoiding Luengo’s eyes. The moment had finally arrived to set his plan in motion – a plan to strengthen Starfleet and wipe out the Federation’s enemies once and for all - both inside and outside of her borders, including those too weak to envision Starfleet’s potential – Barnett.

“Rosé received a data-transmission from one of our agents in the Klingon Empire,” Norton spoke up for the first time since the meeting begun. “Five days ago. I checked and rechecked the data myself.” He used the excuse for his visit at the SBI chief’s office where Luengo had shown him the records about the militia and Khan. He prepared himself for what was to come. “The facts are alarming. The Klingon scientists are working on a virus based on the Rigelian Fever, but it is mutated - enhanced. I reached out to Federation microbiologists, but they are completely baffled. The structure is a-typical for the Rigelian Fever, but they are definitely related. The speed at which the cells reproduce is stunning; the cell membrane, and cell's defenses are resistant to our attempts to stall its reproduction. I’ve only seen a bacteria this virulent once before.”

“Where and when?” Komack wanted to know. Albert sighed, “Khan’s cells share the same reproductive and protective attributes as the bacteria that causes Rigelian Fever...”

“What exactly does this mean, Albert?”

“It means scientists were able to reproduce the material that gives an Augment his or her strength and enhanced healing capabilities. I think the Klingons mean to create an incurable strain of Rigelian Fever.”

“WHAT?” Barnett went rigid. “You mean Khan’s cells are the base for this biological weapon?”

“No, Richard, you misunderstood me,” Albert objected with a neutral, almost kind tone. “To create such a bacteria you need months, if not years. The Klingons started long before we found Botany Bay. No, the subject known as ‘Khan’ had no hand in the creation of this new disease. They have their own source. We all know that the Klingons had an encounter with Terran Augment-DNA a century ago; we can see the results of that encounter. Take Lord Kor, for example, who signed the peace treaty of Organia. The images show a Klingon with an almost human appearance and our files are full of such Klingons like him. I think that the bacteria contains extracted Augment-DNA of
those Klingons and their offspring.”

Richard, James Komack and the others exchanged a glance. “What does this bacterium do – in laymen’s terms, please!”

Norton took a deep breath. He steeled himself and continued. “It is a new strain of Rigelian Fever with no chance to defeat it that we know of. Whoever gets infected with it will not survive. Ryetalin is the only known cure for the previous strains of the disease, but tests show that it is ineffective against this strain. The enhanced disease reproduces at an accelerated rate and then cause the body’s own cells to reproduce uncontrollably. But the cells are abnormal and die as quickly as they reproduce, causing the infected patient to bleed to death inwardly; the patient’s flesh and bone actually begin to rot – even before death.” He looked at the horrified expressions and pressed his lips in a thin line; satisfied with the reaction he received.

“What is your suggestion, then?” Rear Admiral Cartwright wanted to know. “What do our scientists say? How long do they estimate before they find a cure?”

With a worried façade, Albert answered slowly, “They say the chances to isolate the mutative properties of the bacteria are about ten percent. If they can’t isolate the properties, an antidote cannot be created.” He waited until the murmurs and comments died away, before adding, “We simply haven’t enough experience with augmented cells. The only people who worked with the subject, Khan, were arrested and are now in custody. Professor Dashwood and his team at LSH in Nevada learned a lot about his cell function and were on the verge of developing counteragents for several plagues including some strains of Rigelian Fever.”

Barnett looked straight at him; his expression revealed nothing of his thoughts. “Then I suggest that their files be handed to our scientists,” he stated. Norton grimaced.

“Richard, our scientists are the best in the quadrant; still they have no experience with augmented cells. It would take weeks before they come to grips with the whole issue, and they’d still have trouble comprehending the scope of our problem. I am a xenobiologist but this exceeds even my knowledge.” He bent forward, and his fingers touched the screen several times. “Please, have a closer look at the data our agent sent and tell me - how should we find an antidote in time if we don’t even understand how this beast works?”

He transferred several computer diagrams and holo-pictures of a cell structure to the terminals of the other admirals, glad that he had enough knowledge about science programs and cell-building to create something based on the Rigelian Fever and held some of the properties of the Augment’s chromosomes. Still, scientists with enough experience would expose the image for what it was, a fake - something that wasn’t and couldn’t be. But he knew they believed him. The admiralty would accept that a real biological threat had been developed by the Klingons. The Federation Council and
Barnett wouldn’t have another option than to release Dashwood, Conelly, and their staff from custody to let them do the necessary research for an antidote against a malady that doesn’t exist. He would need the professor and his team to re-build Section 31, together with other officers and those men and women, who had realized how important a strong Starfleet was.

Barnett stared at the screen; his mind was in turmoil. If this was really enhanced bacteria, then the threat of facing the Klingon fleet in war paled in comparison. They would need all the help they could get; still, he hesitated to give the Council his recommendation to release the staff of the LSH-facility in Nevada from custody. Even if they worked under observation, they couldn’t be trusted. He would have to ponder the options very, very carefully before coming to a decision.

His attention focused on James Komack, who addressed Luengo once again.

“Have you gotten any information concerning the activities on the Klingon side near Borderland? Are they connected to the biological weapon?”

Rosé grimaced; his large mustache twitched. “Not as such, no, but intelligence indicates that they are marshalling new forces for another strike. I have several very interesting reports from our agents which…”

The meeting continued for another half hour, and then the admirals went their separate ways, unease written plainly on their faces. Ten minutes later, Luengo stepped into his office, nodded politely at the Security guard, and sat down at his desk. The rumors of a planned attack by the Klingons were correct. More certain at least than the new Rigelian Fever. Rosé suspected that one of the colonies was the next target of the of the Klingon’s upcoming assault. Still, there was no concrete evidence, but then again, that’s the nature of intelligence.

The militia’s superior intelligence regarding enemy plans cast a poor light on SBI, his department and his staff. The Shadow had showed him up, and he felt humiliated. Yes, of course he was glad their combined efforts saved the lives of the Tammeronians, but it was outrageous that Starfleet needed the help of these outlaws at all. Not only did they know more than the SBI; no, they even deterred the Klingon fleet from its destructive attack. Above all, they saved one of Starfleet’s finest ships – and all due to the actions of a single man.

Luengo’s squinted as he stared at the dark screen on his desk. Oh, he was sure of ‘Drythen’s’ identity. The pictures of the Tellarit, Galven, he received from the Tellarite government were identical to the records of the Tellarite, who fought on outpost 18-243. The images of the Caitian woman, Caviw, matched his reports as well. He had reasons why he hadn’t confirmed the assumptions about the two Shadow members to the other admirals; he would have been forced to tell them how he came to the conclusion - he possessed very clear records of The Shadow’s fight on the outpost. They would have wanted to see those records and would have recognized the single fighter,
who single-handedly rescued the passengers and the militia. Khan Noonien Singh. Luengo was certain that the Augment and the ‘daredevil helmsman’ were one and the same. It would do no good if the sentenced terrorist suddenly became a hero.

Until now the helmsman of The Shadow was nothing more than a phantom that went by an unusual name – unconnected to the real person. But…

Luengo stopped short in his thoughts as an idea hit him. He quickly bent forward and activated the terminal. Not daring to voice his search request because of the wiretaps, he sent the question manual, “Search Earthen languages for the word ‘drythen’. Give source and translation!”

He had to wait several minutes until the answer appeared on the screen. “Drythen, old English, used until the 10th century, translation: King, mentioned in documents of…” He shut off the terminal. He had learned enough. Drythen – King – Khan. How easy it was if you know for what and where you have to look.

He put his elbows on the armrests of his chair, laced his fingers and rested his chin on them. He stared blankly ahead at the opposite wall where several holo-photos showed the old-fashion automobiles of Carl Benz and Adam Opel, ‘You couldn’t resist, could you? Giving us hints as if you were throwing a bone at a dog. Pride comes for the fall. You think you are safe out there in deep space, playing ‘hide and seek’ with us? Wrong! Even you make mistakes; even you have weaknesses. One of them is your arrogance; it will be your downfall again. We only have to wait and observe.’

He took a deep breath. He would watch The Shadow very, very closely. Just now though, they seemed to sink back into obscurity, but it was only a matter of time before they would re-surface. He knew the Augment to be arrogant, and arrogance does not hide; arrogance craves an audience. And where the militia was, so was the Augment. Sooner or later he would be in their hands again.

Dashwood needed to complete his research and experiments; they were just the tip of the iceberg though – a portent of something greater. Khan was needed alive. But if the enhanced man used his intelligence and strength to fight off the Klingons and Orions, Luengo wouldn’t complain about it.

‘Let him roam free to satisfy his need for release – to show-off. In the end at least he would be useful for more than his Augment-DNA and healing blood!’ His gaze wandered to the window beside his desk and up to the clear blue skies. ‘Enjoy your last taste of freedom. We are right behind you. You will be back in detention faster than you think – as soon as I am head of Starfleet.’

ST***ST***ST
The next ten days flew by. “I don’t know whether I’m coming or going!” Kirk said to the group. Dr. McCoy suggested they all go out for dinner – just to get away from the ship and the melee involved for a bit. Carol Marcus showed up at the request of the doctor. Spock and Uhura arrived a bit later. Everyone enjoyed a fantastic and well-earned meal. The large windows revealed the view of the Enterprise, still connected to one of the three ship-docks. She looked far better than she had when they arrived. The evidence of her hull damage couldn’t be removed completely with the equipment available at this outpost. Areas around the hull damage were covered in scorch marks. But the leaks and holes in the hull had been closed up. The warp and impulse drives were back to full power and the most detrimental damages to the stations aboard were remedied.

The Enterprise was almost ready to leave Starbase 84 and return to her duties – that meant she would be part of the next battle this war had in store for them.

Jim didn’t look forward to it. Not one bit! He was glad that the repairs had been successful and that his ‘Gray Lady’ was in better shape now. He didn’t want to have her vandalized again.

“At least they finally stopped upending my med bay,” Bones said, and put more of the sweet-spicy Risian fruit-sauce on his Rigeluan-cow steak served with dinner. “I swear, I thought I would have to fight tooth and nail for my ICU, the damn techni-freaks would have kicked out my patients to ‘have a closer look at the bio-scanners’.” He shook his head, grumbling to himself.

“Doctor Headen simply wanted to offer you another update for your instruments, Doctor. There was no need to shout at him like that,” Spock commented as he shook some blue pepper and Terran sea-salt onto his salad.

“Update?” McCoy stared unbelievingly at him. “While the LSS were busy helping crewman Andrews and Yeoman T’haran to breathe? Shouldn’t you be familiar with the biological needs of life forms? You are a science officer!”

One Vulcan brow shot up. “I do not think that is necessary to give me a first form physiology lesson, Doctor. I rather meant that…”

Jim didn’t hear the endless banter of his two closest friends or watch the amused smiles of the two women. His mind wandered to his last conversation with Bob Wesley. He contacted Kirk after the Lexington and two ships of his squadron reached Risa’s Starbase 12. During their private discussion, Bob told him about the maneuver the D’Ghor employed and what the Tammeronian fleet-commander told him about the reckless trick The Shadow used to weaken the Klingon strike group before reinforcements arrived.
Kirk found keeping calm and pretending he didn’t know anything about this ‘daredevil’ difficult to say the least. He was glad that Bob’s opinion hadn’t changed regarding Khan, who rescued him and the others. It made him more objective. Nevertheless Jim didn’t dare reveal the true identity of ‘Drythen’. Yes, he trusted that Wesley wouldn’t inform Starfleet Command immediately if he learned ‘Drythen’s’ identity, but an inner voice told Jim to stay silent. That Bob was so keen to meet the mysterious member of The Shadow could be an advantage one day. Jim had a gut feeling that Khan was going to need all the help he could get; a strategic position under the wing of a commodore of outstanding merit would serve him well.

So Jim kept his secret to himself while he listened – not without a bit of glee – as Bob praised the unknown warrior; determined to tell Khan about it during their next contact.

That contact never came.

The ten days in space dock brought no sign from the Augment, no secret message, no transmission via their ‘private’ frequency, nothing! Jim tried it over and over again, but every time the computer informed him that there was no receiver in this frequency’s range. That only could mean two things - either Khan had changed the frequency of his communicator for security (Kirk convinced himself this was true) or the super-human was out of reach. He didn’t dare to think of the third option. It would have been too painful.

“Captain?”

The familiar voice tore Jim out of his musings and startled he glanced up to see Nyota’s beautiful face while Carol, Spock and McCoy were staring at him. It seemed the communications officer had been trying to chase him from his reverie.

“I’m sorry, Uhura, I was lost in thought,” he apologized. Bones rolled his eyes. “Boy, you were galaxies away!”

Jim grinned sheepishly, realizing that his dinner had gone cold – and mostly untouched. Spock wore his special expression, one which showed that the half Vulcan had become wary. His words confirmed Kirk’s assumption. “Is everything all right, Jim?”

The young captain’s sunny smile made the alarm bells in McCoy’s head go off. “Well, you know, the next deployment, the war, the Enterprise’s repairs. My mind just wandered a bit.” Jim’s face was pure innocence and it made Bones even more leery.
“Yeah? It wandered far enough away that you forgot to eat,” Carol said, and pointed at his plate. They reunited five weeks ago, but something between them had changed. They used to flirt quite a bit after his recovery from the radioactive contamination. He even invited her to dinner several times and she had been certain that Jim Kirk was interested in her. But since his speech at the Memorial Day in front of the headquarters and their antedated start for the five-years-mission the next day, he’d been acting strange. He was still charming and incredibly polite, yet he looked at her differently now. Whatever happened after the memorial speech had made him turn away from what they almost had together, and she regretted it. She was fond of the young captain, but her female instincts told her that the chance to win him had passed.

But that didn’t negate her concern for his well-being as well as for McCoy’s. She smiled to herself – Dr. McCoy - ever the charming knight of the southern states – a gentleman through and through. She enjoyed his attention. He was different, and his sometimes grouchy demeanor amused her. Still she wasn’t sure what to think of his obvious efforts to get close to her. The wound of Jim’s premature loss was still fresh, but she was too much a professional to let her private feelings get in the way of her friendships or her professionalism. Kirk was not only the man she had begun to fall for; he was also her captain, and as such, he had her respect.

Jim recognized her worried tone and saw Uhura nodding approvingly. As Bones and Spock did the same, he rolled his eyes. “Aww, come on, guys, it’s not the end of the world when I don’t eat. I’m just not hungry.”

“You’ve been ‘not hungry’ for several days now, Jim,” McCoy stated and looked straight at him. “Medical checkup tomorrow, at 0900 and…”

Jim’s communicator beeped – saved by the proverbial bell. Glad for the interruption, the captain flipped the small device open. “Kirk here!”

“Captain Kirk, Lieutenant Alden here,” the calm voice of the communication officer of the beta-shift answered. “One moment, sir, I will pass you on to the Lexington and Commodore Wesley.”

Jim frowned; that sounded official. He wasn’t mistaken. Several seconds later Bob greeted him, and his tone made it clear that this wasn’t a social call. “Jim, how far have the Enterprise’s repairs progressed?”

“I have been told that will be ninety-five percent complete tomorrow and…”
“So you are, theoretically, ready for a deployment?”

The five officers exchanged a quick glance. “More or less,” Kirk confirmed. “Still there are several…”

“I’m certain your crew can complete the repairs during your flight.”

Jim became keen-eared. “Flight to where?”

“To Turkana.”

That information took the group by surprise. “Turkana?” Kirk frowned. “That’s in Borderland, near the former Neutral Zone!”

“Yes, I know.” Bob sounded tense. “The SBI observed increased activities on the other side of the former Neutral Zone near Turkana. There’s truth the rumors that have been circulating. The Klingons are about to expand their empire by seizing this part of Borderland – among it Turkana, where we have a colony.”

“What about the Orions? Aren’t they going to interfere?”

Jim listened closely to Wesley’s reply. “The Syndicate and the Klingons are allies and there are hints that the Orions have no objection to the partnership. Rather the opposite. The inhabitants of the colony on Turkana are mostly sympathizers of the Syndicate now, but there are still enough people who haven’t turned their backs on the Federation. The settlement is about to fall into anarchy, and those, whose loyalties have changed would like to get rid of the Federation-stalwarts. So it’s in the Syndicate’s interest that these people leave the planet – certainly the only reason they are ‘officially allowing’ a vessel of Starfleet to cross into their area to evacuate these settlers.”

“Did the Federation get a message from those people? How do we know the settlers want us to evacuate them?” Jim asked, and Wesley sighed.

“Yes, the Federation Council received an emergency signal and several transmissions from the settlers; the senators decided to send help to Turkana.”
“Meaning send Starfleet!” Kirk groaned. “And your call tells me that I am the lucky guy who gets the order to fly in the middle of a hostile area, evacuate the willing settlers and be on my way back before the Klingons show up. Am I right?”

For a moment, there was a pause, before Bob answered, “Yes – I am sorry, Jim. Headquarters laid the responsibility for this emergency deployment in my lap because I am the highest ranked officer in this sector of the quadrant, but the Lexington is in not even in the condition for a Sunday trip, let alone a rescue voyage. To evacuate those people we need a ship that can host approximately four hundred people and is quick enough to leave the planet before we have to confront the Klingons. Harassing evacuation vessels used to be taboo in a war, now no one knows how the Klingons will react. Their planned destruction of Tammeron shows that they have changed the rules and no longer recoil from attacking innocent civilians. The risk that they would simply fire at the evacuation ship is high, therefore, we have to get the people out before the Klingons are in the field.”

“They would fire on an evacuation ship?” McCoy couldn’t keep quiet anymore. “Isn’t that against their so-called codex of honor? I thought Klingons got their panties all in a twist if something went against their warrior-honor.”

For a moment Wesley paused, so Jim explained, “I am out with some of the senior officers at the moment, Bob, so don’t worry that…”

“It’s fine. So they already know what their next duty will be. And to answer Doctor McCoy’s question – it is you Doctor, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s me, sir. Good evening!”

“Good evening to you and the other ladies and gentlemen. Well, until now we could count on the Klingons’ sense of pride and honor, but the attack on Tammeron speaks to something different. There’s even rumors that they’ve developed a biological weapon, but I’m of the rumors. We should assume the worst. The outcome can only be better.” The commodore took a deep breath. “Jim, set out as soon as possible. The SBI believe that the Klingons are going to strike within the next twenty hours – possibly less. You will need…”

“Thirteen hours and twelve minutes by Warp 9 after the start, Commodore!” Spock cut in, who had already calculated the traveling time, and McCoy grimaced.

“You forgot to tell the seconds, Spock!”
“This depends on the acceleration the *Enterprise* can make after the repairs. I lack the actual engine data to give a more precise statement.”

“Spock, that was a joke!”

“A joke is a short story with a humorous end, but there was nothing like this in your statement, Doctor.”

A brief moment of laughter sounded from Kirk’s communicator. “Sweet Lord, Jim, how to you put up with these two?”

“I love challenges,” Kirk retorted dryly, shooting a warning glance at his two friends before he continued. “So, we should depart as quickly as possible?”

“Every minute counts. Don’t forget, Jim, the Klingons would be delighted to get their hands on our flagship – and you.”

Jim groaned. “Thank you so much for reminding me.” He rose and waved to the waitress. “I’ll contact you when we are in Borderland. Kirk out!” He changed the frequency of his communicator, and offered the waitress his credit card, paying for them all. “Kirk to *Enterprise*. Mr. Scott? Red alert! We are on a rescue mission.”

For a short moment there was no response, then the chief engineer shrieked through the communicator, “Rescue-mission? Cap’n, we’re almost done with the repai…”

“I know – that’s the reason we are off to our next destination. We have to evacuate four hundred people. Beam us up. There is a lot to do before we can host so many men, women and children! Kirk out!” He glanced at his friends. “It seems our vacation is over.”

**ST***ST***ST**

The ocean-blue-green eyes stared intensely at the screen while the computer terminal whirred. Still Khan didn’t get the results he wanted.
Within the last few days he not only developed a theoretical method to disturb the Klingon sensors, he built a proto-type that would make it impossible for sensors to receive precise data – if the device worked, that is. To resolve the problem with the amount of power the cloaking device and the proto-type of the sensor-disturbing equipment, Khan had also suggested storing energy in additional batteries, which could be easily linked to the ship’s power-circles, and charged while traveling uncloaked.

He didn’t know how the Chilean with the incredible list of names had been able to collect so many spare-parts. The components and basic modules you could find in his ‘private’ storage for any spacecraft, sensors, computers and engines rivalled the best that a Federation bazaar had to offer. But the Augment didn’t look this gift horse in the mouth. Without Diego’s collection, they never would have been able to build the needed proto-type.

During the endless days and nights, Khan barely found time to do what his mind was screaming for – finding his people. Going back on his first assumptions regarding the Risa-System that was highly protected by Starfleet, he learned from Ritek and Caviw the reason for the fleet’s presence there. Because of the unstable weather and the earthquakes, the Risians had developed a weather control network that was unique in the Alpha-Quadrant; it had changed the planet into a tropical paradise, and it was now one of the most visited tourist centers. Millions of people from the different planets spent their holiday there. Others went to disappear – find a new life or identity for themselves. Starbase 12 was located there, and where there was a starbase, there were spies attempting to gain information on ship movements – some planetary government spies, others just trying to make a living. It was no small wonder that Federation authorities and Starfleet observed Risa very closely – and it would be damn foolish to hide 72 cryotubes with Augments somewhere there.

In other words, Risa was out of the question for the search – a search that maybe Khan could bring to a successful end if he found his people, but what comes afterwards? He knew he didn’t stand even the smallest chance to rescue them as long as war rocked the Alpha-Quadrant. So long as the Federation was forced to watch any movement within her range, he had no hope of finding a safe haven for his family.

Therefore, it was in his interest that the war come to an end. He never had been a man who saw war as the only solution political and territorial problems. When forced to fight, it was with everything he was and knew, but to reach for a weapon when words could cut far deeper and left impressions without physical injury - he preferred latter. Regrettably there were still men – and women – who thought otherwise.

The scientists of the 20th century had bred him and his fellow Augments to help to solve political problems and to bring peace to the word – a noble intention. Then Khan learned that his creators were afraid of their own conceptions and fought against him and the others, which led to a bloodbath unlike any other in history.
He knew the tendency to answer challenges and problems with war, wasn’t exclusive to humans. It could be found everywhere – even thousands of light years away. The instinct to answer an offense with the fist wasn’t rooted in the individual alone but also in all of creation - everywhere. However, compared to the people who hunted even the moderate Augments, the Klingons were true barbarians. Still Khan couldn’t condemn them completely. He had seen first-hand that Starfleet and the Federation weren’t the saints and saviors of the galaxy as they liked to portray themselves. On the other hand, he could not and would not tolerate the alien race that threatened his home-planet, his family, and the young captain, who had saved his life – in so many ways. He would use all of his knowledge, every bit of his intelligence, every fiber of his being, to fight the enemies off - to make sure that those close to him, would be safe again.

The sensor disturbing device he developed was a step in this direction. He was curious how it would work, but to beta-test the device, he had to install it. While Galven and Diego did this job, he retreated to his small stateroom aboard the Shadow. He wanted to access his terminal to make a new attempt to learn about the location of his people. He knew that he could have used the computers down at the colony, where Ritek and the others spent their time – in some bar or wherever they called ‘a nice place to relax’. But the super-human didn’t care for this kind of leisure. He made another use of his time – more productive use. Or so he thought.

He hadn’t made any progress, and it frustrated him more than he was willing to admit.

The door to his quarters opened; he didn’t have to look up to see who entered. Soundless as Caviw was, he could hear and sense her.

“Galven and Diego have installed the nice little ancillary-device you engineered!” Caviw said to him as she entered his quarters. The Caitian cocked her head; she found him at his computer-terminal exactly as she left him two hours ago – after she hacked into Starfleet Command’s database.

Four days ago she used her talent to do some research of her own in an attempt to discover the identity of this mysterious man. He claimed to be a deserter from Starfleet but was a living fighting-machine with healing abilities that would make a doctor jobless. She hadn’t found anything, which only spurred her curiosity. Still she knew that she could trust him – so she kept her silence and continued to help him. “Any luck?”

The Augment took a deep breath and leaned back, crossing his arms in front of his chest. “Not exactly,” he answered after a pause. “The files I am searching for are nowhere to be found. There are hyperlinks though. Still I am unable to locate the sources or the documents they reach back to.” A deep frown creased his forehead and anger flashed in his eyes.

The Caitian closed the distance between them and looked over his shoulder at the screen. A moment later she whistled. “Holy claw, you are… You are in the security files of Starfleet and the Council!”
Her tail twitched. “Haven’t they realized that they’ve been hacked?”

Khan pointed to a signature he put on the connection and Caviw started to laugh. “Admiral Fitzgerald…” She shook her head. “Well, Admiral Fitzgerald, why are you rummaging around in Federation ‘top secret’ information? I thought he had people to brief him on anything he wanted to know.” She looked down at ‘Drythen’ inquisitively. “Is he trying to hide the fact that he is looking for something?” He didn’t answer. She clapped him gently on the shoulder. “Care to tell, what you are searching for?” Her cat-eyes met his sea-colored ones, as he glanced up at her.

“Every man has his secrets, Caviw. This is mine.” He looked back at the screen. “Still it is frustrating that the information I need isn’t there!”

She pulled up a chair near to him and sat down. “Maybe you are searching on the wrong place. Maybe they have…” Her eyes widened, before she pointed at the screen and yelled, “Damn, they recognized that they have an unwelcome visitor. You have to…”

There was no need to get worried. Khan cut the line and quickly deleted the tracks his search left in the database. Still, that was close – too close! A few seconds more and Starfleet would have located him. Cursing in frustration he squeezed his eyes shut, his right fist landed on the desk beside the computer.

There had been no hints, no entries, nothing about his people, their location, or even himself. Someone removed all traces of John Harrison from the database – understandable – but there was also nothing about ‘Khan’. As if he had never existed, but there ought to be hundreds of files concerning him and his family. All the test results, the experiments, hell, even his so-called trial and sentence had to be stored somewhere. Maybe Caviw was right; he was searching in all the wrong places. But if the information wasn’t saved in the highest security database of Starfleet or the Federation Council, where was it?

The Caitian watched him. She sensed his tension and his anger, mingled with a whiff of despair. Whatever he searched for, whoever he was – she didn’t want him to suffer, even if he was taken by another. “You know, if you would tell me what you are seeking, we maybe could find the solution together.”

The Augment sighed. “Thank you, Caviw, but I have to do this alone.” He straightened again and looked at her. “So, the sensor-disturber is installed?” he changed the topic, and the cat-like woman nodded.

“Yes, Galven and Diego have run the first tests. I came to fetch you. After all, this little technical
wonder is your baby.” She bent forward and fixed him with an unnerving gaze. “You found a solution for something all of Starfleet’s engineers would have taken months to discover and then you built the device to disturb sensors in just days. You are a wonder, Léo.” Her hand touched his arm, and instinctively Khan drew back. He needed her help from time to time, but he wanted to clear things up – preferably without offending or angering her.

“Caviw,” he began unusually gentle, “as much as I appreciate your help as a hacker and much as I am… honored to be you primary interest, I…”

“Don’t fret!” Caviw purred and laid her tail around his waist – the touch made him quite uncomfortable. He sent her a defiant, fierce glare that made even Marcus flinch two years ago. The Caitian only chuckled and bent nearer to him. Her next words rendered him speechless, “I know that you are taken, Pretty.”

Khan needed a moment or two before he came up with an intelligible reply; the hesitation was quite rare. All that came finally over his lips was an almost dumbfounded “What?”

The cat-like woman laughed her mewing laughter. “You are claimed,” she stated bluntly and to his shock sniffed his throat. “I can smell him.”

Seldom could someone baffle the super-human, but right now he could only look with widened eyes at the predatory female.

“He marked you properly,” Caviw continued, winking at him, and instinctively the Augment fingered the ‘mark’ now invisible, he got weeks ago. “It isn’t visible anymore but it’s still there. We Caitians are doing the same.” She cocked her head again. “Where is your mate? You are missing him; that much is obvious.”

Khan could only swallow before he replied coolly: “I have no ma…”

“It’s a male, and his claim on you is strong as yours is certainly on him. You are taken – regrettably – and I have to accept this. Still to… flirt with you is fun.” She backed off with a wide smirk. “After all, it’s cute to see you all worked up for a change. You are far too controlled and stoic sometimes.” She laughed at his speechlessness and rose. “Come on, Pretty, don’t miss the birth of your baby!”

Grinning like a Cheshire cat, hips swinging, tail twitching, she walked to the door and waited for him. “Are you coming or not?”
Finally, the Augment overcame his astonishment, and an irritated growl vibrated in his throat – insolent pussy-cat! He rose and followed Caviw, asking himself for the uncounted time what he had gotten himself into.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, the cat is out the bag – and this in connection with Caviw (*laugh*). She voiced something, Khan hasn’t admitted to himself until now. His connection to Jim is far more intense than thought.

And this will become very important within the next chapters.

While Luengo and Norton are plotting to accede Starfleet Command – and their plan will be very evil and good in one – Jim is going to be in deep, deep water.

In the next chapter the Enterprise will reach Turkana and with it the trouble begins, because the Klingons are on their way to the colony, too. You will meet Kor again, Khan shows one time more his fine instinct and ability to foresee things, and Jim will act in his typical way that makes him the hero, but also hurls him in danger.

I do you liked the new chapter and I am – as always – very curious what you think of it.

Have a nice Sunday and start into the next week,

Yours Starflight
The trouble begins

Chapter Notes

Hallo, my dear readers!

Once again I have to thank you for all the kudos, comments and feedbacks I got for the last chapter. And I’m really happy that I can update so soon, after all I know how curious you are.

As promised in the new ‘chapi’ the trouble begins – just like the headline tells. And because I don’t want to give away too much, I only can say: Have fun – and don’t kill the author, if she leaves you with a mean cliffhanger (*laugh*).

Have a nice weekend

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 12 – The trouble begins

Commodore Bob Wesley stared wide-eyed and dumbfounded at the screen on the communication station of the Lexington. It was one of the few places on the bridge that wasn’t a chaos of wires, buttons, circuits and open covers. But compared to the chaos that threatened to break loose due to the news report he watched, well, the condition of his ship paled in comparison. He blamed the man on the screen; he blamed the anonymous source. Fuck! He blamed Starfleet for the leak! The world – No! World now knew that the flagship of Starfleet had been repaired and was off on a rescue mission.

“…our source reports that the USS Enterprise, under the command of Starfleet’s youngest and most famous captain, James T. Kirk, has been sent on a rescue-mission. Several emergency calls, and an official statement from Turkana have reached the Federation Council, asking for help in an effort to evacuate settlers loyal to the Federation. It is highly probable that the Enterprise is en route to Turkana now, in order to bring those families to safety. The USS Enterprise previously docked at Starbase 234 for repairs. The starbase is the closest in proximity to Turkana making the Enterprise the most likely candidate for the mission.

“We ask: Why the sudden call for help from Turkana? Why is Starfleet’s flagship sent to the rescue? Turkana is near the former Neutral Zone in the middle of an area called ‘Borderland’. The Borderland is controlled by Orion pirates and slavers. Rumors state that the Orion Syndicate has concluded a deal with the Klingons. Political experts concur that Klingons in the Borderland are just around the corner. So what does it mean? Is this the beginning of a Klingon expansion of their
sphere of influence as they continue to annex worlds closer and closer to Federation Territory?

It could be. This is Alec Amstrong, reporting live from Risa III!”

Wesley’s face progressed through several shades of red. “How is it possible that this...ahhh!” There were no words to express the depth of Wesley’s frustration. "Irresponsible jack-ass got top secret information on our ship movements and our mission?!”

Lieutenant Palmer sighed. “I have no clue, sir. The media have been reporting on Turkana colonists, and Federation settlers wishing to leave. We don’t know who could’ve leaked the Enterprise’s evacuation mission. We all know that the Klingons would be delighted to destroy our flagship, and…”

“He’s reporting ‘live’ from Risa?” Wesley interrupted his communication officer, and as the man nodded, the commodore gritted his teeth. “Call his station and get him on board any way you can!” he growled. “I want to know exactly which inane, thoughtless, stupid, about to be court-martialed, asshole has been spilling military secrets to the fucking media!”

Palmer and several other officers looked with large eyes at their commander. It was a rare thing that Bob Wesley cursed, let alone gave in to his temper. The commodore caught the surprised glances and sat up even taller. Yes, he was angry – oh God he was livid, and he was going to give in to it now. The safety of the settlers, Starfleet’s flagship and the life of his young friend Kirk and his crew were all at stake! Someone was going to hang for this.

A deep frown creased his forehead as he continued, “And then hail the Enterprise. I have to tell Jim that he only has a few hours to complete his mission before all hell breaks loose down there!”

ST***ST***ST

Jim glanced around the large shuttle-hanger in the aft section of the Enterprise. The changes to the hanger due to the evacuation still surprised him. The shuttles lay at their stations above the main deck of the hangar, but that was all that remained recognizable of the space. There were more than three hundred makeshift beds, cots, and mattresses placed in long lines as well as chairs, tables and indicator arrows pointing the way to the restrooms. The replicators and the large galley in the mess decks were already producing food easy to distribute. Dr. McCoy made room in the med bay for those in need of medical care.
After their departure from Starbase 234, Wesley informed Kirk that the government of Kenda II, the second planet of a star-system near Borderland, would accommodate the settlers until they could continue on to their home planets. It was eight hours between Turkana and Kenda II; the Enterprise wouldn’t need to host her guests for long. Still the people had to rest, eat, and store their belongings for a while. There was also the need for physical assistance – the elderly, the infirm, and disabled were part of the evacuation as well. All were in need of some support; all were leaving their homes behind to walk headlong into an uncertain future - of a new beginning somewhere else.

“I’ve tagged the way to the refreshing cells in the sports center, Cap’n,” Scotty explained while he pointed at two of the exits at the other side of the hangar. “The women may want to take a sonic shower and I think the children and teens will be distracted if they can play. Several members of the crew, who are off duty, have agreed to keep an eye on them.”

Kirk smiled and clapped the engineer on the shoulder. “Well done, Scotty. I only hope that we will be on our way outta there when the Klingons arrive – if they arrive.” His expression changed. “I don’t like going that deep into a hostile area.”

Two hours ago, they had passed the unofficial border into the Orions’ territory. The Enterprise was being observed; it set Kirk on edge, and he didn’t like that one bit!

“Has the Syndicate answered your transmission, Cap’n?”

Nodding Jim sighed, “Yes, and we have permission to continue, still I don’t trust them. Oh, and why do we need permission from criminals to pass through a territory that still belongs officially to the Federation? It’s just odd. And then their alliance with the Klingons…” He shook his head. He had a bad feeling about this.

“Well, if the Orions are set on double-crossing us, we shoot our way through and run like hell,” Scotty winked; he straightened his frame and bristled with Scottish pride.

Kirk snorted. “If the Orions are leading us into a trap, it would mean that the Klingons are already set to ambush us. Even we can’t fight a strike group on our own. Spock is watching the long distance sensors. So far, we haven’t registered anything out of the ordinary, but we’re too far away from Turkana right now to get precise data. Getting near enough to get the data – well – it could be too late then. Especially if they come in cloaked. We need to be ready in case they are set on springing a surprise on us.” He shook his head. “Bob was right, you know. They would love to destroy Starfleet’s flagship and capture me.”

Scott cocked his head. “Because of your, Spock’s and Uhura’s visit on Qo’noS?”
“Yeah,” Jim mumbled and wanted to add something, but the engineer went rigid and yelled, “What are ya doin’ up there? Haven’t ya been sick enough lately? Do ya think ya can get off duty back by falling on purpose? Get down here, pronto! Med bay is not your personal holiday spot!”

Kirk followed the gaze of the Scottish man and grinned when he recognized Keenser, who had climbed up to one of the upper parking decks and installed another indicator arrow. The little alien glanced with his pitch-black eyes down at Scotty and, as always, there was no expression on his grey-green oyster-like face; he simply continued what he was doing.

“He drives me nuts! Mark me words, Jim, this never hungry, walkin’ oyster will bring me to an early grave one day!”

Amused, the young captain laid a hand on Montgomery’s shoulder. “Let him be, Scotty. We all know that you don’t mean anything by it, so stop pretending that you’re angry. You love him far too much for that.”

The round face of the engineer had flushed for a moment before he grumbled, “Ach, he wears on my nerves! Still…” He sighed. “Aye, he’s my friend. Knows when he has to keep silent and…”

“Maybe he simply can’t get a word in edgewise, with you complaining all day,” Kirk teased. He wanted to add something, but the intercom-signal sounded, followed by Uhura’s voice, “Bridge to Captain Kirk!”

Nodding at Scotty, Jim walked to the next intercom-terminal to answer. “Kirk here!”

“Captain, I’ve got Commodore Wesley for you. It… is urgent!”

Frowning at her hesitation, Kirk blinked before he ordered, “Put him through, Lieutenant.”

Scott watched his young commanding officer from afar, saw his body suddenly tense and his face pale. ‘Bad news,’ he thought, glad that he never chose the career of a line officer. He wouldn’t trade places with Kirk for all the…

When Jim terminated the communication, he pursed his lips, turned around and looked at Scotty with
a grim expression. Scotty knew the other man hadn’t gotten ‘bad news’, but far worse news. Scotty loved his Engineering – the technology, and the crew under him – but when one of his friends was in trouble, he was always there for them. Closing the distance to Kirk, he realized that the captain was taking several deep breathes – obviously to calm himself. He asked tentatively, “What’s wrong, Jim?”

Kirk pressed his lips shut; a bitter taste was in his mouth. Then he looked straight at the concerned engineer. “Scotty, I know that we are travelling without full power to our warp drives and that there are still several needed repairs left in the engineering, but do you think it is possible get up to Warp 8?”

Scotty’s jaw headed towards the floor. “Warp 8?”

“Yes! We have… a situation – or, we’re going to have a situation if we are not fast enough.” His blue eyes flashed. “Some jackass from the media blabbed that the Enterprise is on her way to Turkana. The colony is only two hours away from the Klingon border. As soon as they hear we’re coming…”

“We’re in deep trouble!” Scott nodded. “Especially you, Mr. Computer and Nyota. I’m on my way!” He trotted backwards, lifting both hands in a placating gesture. “Don’t worry, Captain, I’ll tease every last bit of power from my baby and then some more!” He turned and ran towards the next exit. “KEEEEENSSSEEER, you’re needed in the engineering!” he shouted and rushed through the door. He didn’t wait for the baffled Roylan, who glanced with big black eyes in the direction of his human friend. Keenser wondered to himself if it was possible that there was anyone crazier than Montgomery Scott in the whole universe.

Kirk took another breath and tried to stay calm. They would need four hours to reach Turkana and then another hour or two to evacuate those who wanted to leave the colony. They could be on their way back in five or six hours at best. How long would the Klingons need to analyze the intelligence so freely given to them by the media, and then marshal forces to seize not only Turkana but also the Enterprise? How long before the enemy arrived? Everything depended on the present position of Klingon forces and how fast their Secret Service – the Klingon Intelligence – worked. Was the Enterprise fast enough?

He mentally calculated the chances of getting out of the area in time; the odds gave him a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Still, he knew that he couldn’t let those families down. Their survival depended on his ship and him.

ST***ST***ST

Patrons crowded the bar in the early afternoon. Humanoids from different planets all in one place; no
two exactly alike. Khan had never seen anything like this before, and he had caught himself staring at them all for just a moment before his self-control kicked in once more. It was not only rude to do so; it was a waste of time. The galaxy was full non-carbon based life forms. Acceptance of this was one of the first lessons he learned after Marcus woke him. He had come to know much from this new age, but he had to admit, there was still a lot that was strange to him. At least some things hadn’t changed – like gossip and the tendency of the news media to wrap up rumors in half-truths thereby affecting the opinions of millions by asking questions to which there was no answer.

The Augment stopped to follow the news though he didn’t care about anything the reporters said. And he equally didn’t care for the little party Diego, Galven, Caviw and the others were celebrating in that bar – or club. The establishment was sure making money today, what with how much time members of The Shadow spent here. Khan had no interest in accompanying the group, but after the many successful tests of the sensor-disturbing device, and the additional batteries, well, everyone wanted to raise a glass to the accomplishments of the hour. However, the reason for this ‘party’ had to be kept a secret; otherwise he and the two technicians would have found themselves the center of attention – and they didn’t need that.

Sitting at the bar and sipping blue liquid – ‘Romulan Ale’ they said, it tasted as sharp like chili and sweet like pomegranate – he watched his shipmates and the other guests. He’d been here for an hour, and he already yearned for an end to the nonsense. Of course, there had been festivities during his time back in the 20th century; he was not averse to entertainment, but he could not tolerate getting hammered during wartime. The group could not risk discovery by those they were tracking; there was also the risk that some eager authority – or Starfleet – would find them. They could not afford dulled senses.

Taking another sip of the drink containing far too much alcohol, his attention shifted to one of the screens above the counter and his heart skipped a beat. There he saw the swan-white shape of a Constitution-class starship emblazoned with the register-number NCC-1701… The Enterprise.

Letting his glass sink back down to the bar, he stared at the image now showing well-known face of a smiling Jim Kirk in his grey dress uniform, head slightly cocked, blue eyes clear and shining, posture smart and upright. Warmth, curiosity and caution woke in the Augment; nearby, the silken voice of an Andorian visitor gasped, “That is Captain Kirk? That… that boy is the captain of Starfleet’s flagship?” Another humanoid with fire-red skin replied, “Well, that ‘boy’ has saved his planet, defeated a Romulan madman, revealed a conspiracy, and defended the Japoirians against the Klingons, and then against those damn Orion-pirates. He may be young, but he is a hero!”

Khan stopped listening. His sharp hearing had caught the reporter’s account, telling the world of the Enterprise’s next mission. The super-human frowned. Who would be so stupid as to leak military deployment information to the public during a war?

“What? Turkana?” Galven stopped beside the former dictator and sipped at something that looked
like liquid mud mixed with Campari; he watched the screen, too. “They sent their flagship to Turkana? Are they mad?”

Now on alert, Khan looked questioningly down at the Tellarit. “What do you mean?”

Galven snorted. “Turkana lies near the Klingon border in the middle of the Orion’s territory. It is mostly inhabited by people not much better than those green-skins! There may be several people who are still prefer an orderly life under the Federation’s protection, but the others are sympathizers of the Syndicate.” He read the ticker below the news anchor and oinked, “And the Enterprise of all ships is about to evacuate Federation loyalists – two or three hours away from the Klingons. Holy Mud, if Klingon intelligence gets a wind of it then I don’t want to be in that boy’s shoes. The Klingons will jump at the chance to eliminate the Federation’s flagsh-… Drythen?”

The addressed man didn’t reply as he put his glass firmly back on the counter, turned around with a hard, determined expression and headed with long steps towards the exit, communicator in hand. The Tellarit frowned and followed him outside, but the dark-haired Terran disappeared. The empty golden light of the transporter was the only evidence left that ‘Drythen’ beamed away.

Khan materialized aboard the Flash, Ritek’s ship, docked beside the Shadow and the D’Ghor in the shipyard. The Regulian stayed aboard to monitor nearby transmissions – listening for something to alert them of danger. He frowned as ‘Drythen’ left the small transporter platform wearing an expression somewhere between fury and worry.

“Are the drinks so bad down there? Why did you return? What’s wrong?”

“Not now, Ritek!” the Augment interrupted him sternly. “You’ve stayed to monitor the Orions and the Klingons. I need you to watch out for a certain transmission that I suspect the Klingons will send in the next few hours.”

Crossing his arms in front of his chest, Ritek cocked his head. “What kind of message? What’s this about?”

Taking a deep breath, Khan replied as calm as possible, “The Enterprise!” When he caught the bewildered gaze of the Regulian he quickly explained what happened. Ritek promptly rolled his eyes.

“Bloody media! They do more harm than good.” He pursed his lips. “Galven said you only wanted
to contact the *Enterprise* and her captain when you sent Starfleet the warning about the planned attack on Tammeron, and then you spoke with the captain in private. Now you are concerned with the fate of this ship. Is the captain your friend?”

“Friend?” Khan didn’t know if he should smile or scoff. He answered thoughtfully, “I don’t want to call him a friend.” He said those last words as though they were an insult to his intelligence. “I don’t know that he is a friend. He is…” Khan thought a moment, “He is something more – something… different.”

Ritek thought it wise not to ask further questions. Something in him warned him not to press the Terran further. Sometimes it was better to know less than more. He waved at his comrade. “Come on, let us eavesdrop on those damn Klingons! There, I remember now. I caught a transmission from one of the Orion patrols stating that the awaited Starfleet ship crossed their border more than two hours ago.”

Khan went rigid. “So we can ascertain the approximate location of the *Enterprise* and how long before she reaches Turkana?”

“Sure!” Ritek nodded. He hurried as ‘Drythen’ stormed towards the small bridge.

ST***ST***ST

Across the border, in the Klingon territory, fourteen vessels had been summoned to form a strike group to be made ready for the departure. Aboard the flagship *J’Ethl*, a mighty D7-Battle-Cruiser whose name meant ‘Sharpened Sword’, Lord Kor sat at his desk in his Spartan quarters and listened to the reports of the strike group captains. Soon they would be ready to set out to Borderland to support their allies by securing the area of Klingon territory near the former Neutral Zone.

“Men, you have your deployment orders regarding our… allies, the Orions.” He said after the last commander finished. He made no secret of his distaste for the members of the Syndicate and their ‘contract’ with the Klingon Empire. He knew that the most warriors of the old codex shared his point of view – they did not need pirates, smuggler and slavers for support. Still, the chancellor decided otherwise – likely influenced by the twelve Orion beauties sent to Qo’noS three weeks ago. Either way, obedience to the order was mandatory. “We will depart in three hours and head towards Obruli, Turkana and Verix, which lay across the former Neutral Zone in Borderland. The Orions have invited us to secure their territory against the Federation. Very ‘kind’ of them.”

He saw his fellow officers exchange glances. He knew they were as disgusted by the alliance as he was.
“We have been informed by the Orions that the Federation will send a Starfleet ship to evacuate those settlers on Turkana, not loyal to the Syndicate. This evacuation takes place with my assent and that of the Syndicate. Our intelligence reports that Starfleet has delegated responsibility for the evacuation to the Lexington and Commodore Wesley. We will respect the Rules of Engagement; rescue vessels will traverse the designated route unmolested.”

He glanced firmly from one commander to the next. He knew that some of them hated the Federation with every fiber of their being, still they valued the codex of honor. Kor was certain none would disobey him as a matter of honor; even those harboring personal vendetta. Still, he was wary of Commander Koval and Commander Noy. Each had lost loved ones at a Federation captain’s hands.

Koval, son of Torka of the house Gordeck, commander of the Bird-of-Prey BortaS meaning ‘Revenge’. And Noy, son of Kaden of the house Gordeck, the commander of the MeQ’lw – ‘Burning Blood’, each harbored such a vendetta. Koval lost two brothers and Noy his brother-in-law, during the incident with James Kirk and his crew on Qo’nos. The two warriors had sworn revenge on the captain. Kor knew that the fate of the Starfleet captain was sealed should he ever cross their path.

“Captain Koval, Captain Noy, you will secure Obruli together with some of our scout ships. It has a small colony of dealers loyal to the Syndicate, so you shouldn’t face any problems.”

The addressed commanders pressed their fists against their chests, and Kor continued in his instructions to the rest of the commanders. Finally, he rose from his chair. “Man your ships and be ready to depart on my signal. Let us increase our empire!”

A simultaneous battle cry from a dozen Klingon throats echoed through the room; then the commanders left, none looking back. Kor watched them go. After the door had closed behind them, he snorted quietly. “What a ‘victory’ – annexing three small planets full of rotting outlaws! The Chancellor has lost his mind to senility!”

ST***ST***ST

“Reaching Turkana in eight minutes,” Hikaru Sulu reported to his captain, who sat tense in his chair. They had closed the distance to the colony quicker than the four hours estimated, thanks to Mr. Scott’s newest miracle wringing power from the engines to reach Warp 8. They had spared only 9.5249 minutes as Spock had pointed out, still, nearly ten minutes could mean their survival.

All stations signaled their readiness to receive the evacuated settlers. Lt Uhura established contact with the leader of the colony, a humanoid in his early fifties, named Simon Brooks, whose heavy
wrinkles at his temples showed that he had some extraterrestrial roots. Within the colonies in the Borderland, the population’s humanoid species intermixed in the last decades.

Most of Turkana’s evacuees gathered at the market place of the colony’s only town. Several families were still on their way to Turkana City but would arrive before too long.

“Reducing impulse speed in four minutes, sir,” Sulu said. Jim took a deep breath. He glanced up at Dr. McCoy, who had left the med bay to visit the bridge. He was grumpy the whole journey, no doubt in anticipation of the settlers that would be flooding his space soon. “And so begins the trek to the gallows,” he groused.

Jim ignored him. He may have understood the sentiment, but he had his duties to the mission to think about – and to the crew who trusted him to keep them safe; they came first. He looked to the upper deck of the bridge to the science station, where his Vulcan friend was still busy observing space within sensor range. “Something new, Spock?” he asked. The first officer turned around to him.

“Nothing, Captain, but I would point out that our sensors are only able to detect signatures after a ship has dropped from warp. This may indicate…”

“… Ten minutes to ETA. I know!” Jim groaned, gaining a sympathetic glance from the Vulcan. Spock, by nature, showed very little emotion, but Jim knew him well enough to recognize the small hints of anger and worry that his stoic expression displayed. But Kirk and Spock were not alone in their angst. For all of them, it was only too clear the danger that lay ahead.

“Captain, I have Mr. Brooks on the line again. He transmitted the precise data for the evacuation”, Uhura called, and Kirk rubbed his neck.

“Right! Mr. Chekov and Mr. Scott are manning the transporter room. Bones, you and Spock accompany me!” He activated the intercom at his right armrest. “Security! Lieutenant Commander Giotto? Are you and your crew ready?”

The answer came instantly. “Yes, Captain, we are already in the transporter room, waiting for you.”

“Roger that. Kirk out!” Jim turned his attention to the screen as the Enterprise dropped out of warp. A moment later Turkana emerged on the screen – a small planet with a blue, shimmering atmosphere. Jim sighed at the false peace the planet presented to space travelers. “Mr. Sulu, standard-orbit, adjust our speed to Turkana.”
“Aye, sir!” The Japanese helmsman retorted and set heading and speed.

“And when you finish, you have the honor watching sensors and you have the con.” Jim forced himself to smile, as Sulu glanced questioningly over his shoulder at him. “I know, you’d love the chair, Sulu, but blame the damn Klingons for keeping you from it – you have to look out for them.”

Hikaru smiled back. “No problem, Captain. As soon as something moves out there you’ll have me shouting loud enough to scare the little old ladies to death.”


“Well, at least you would have something to do besides complaining,” Kirk commented wryly and rose, waving off the indignant reply. “Mr. Sulu, if the Klingons approach before we complete the evacuation, be ready to haul our asses! We will evacuate as many people as we can, but I will not risk the Enterprise and her crew, or the evacuees aboard.”

Hikaru nodded. “Understood, sir.” He watched Kirk and the others heading towards the turbo lift, and he grinned as he saw Uhura reaching out for Spock and squeezing his hand before the Vulcan followed the others. “Good luck, Captain!” Sulu called. Jim simply nodded in return.

The young Japanese man couldn’t know that he wouldn’t see his captain soon again.

ST***ST***ST

Kor sat in the raised chair on the bridge of the J’Ethl and let his gaze wash over his chief officers, manning their stations. Only two hours until they reached Turkana. It was not the first time the Klingon Lord asked himself whether the Lexington would be there when they arrived. He almost looked forward to having words with Wesley – war or no war.

An incoming signal interrupted his thoughts and a moment later Lieutenant Keroth, the communication officer, turned around. “My Lord, a transmission from the admiralty for you.”

With a frown a bit less fierce (but no less dangerous) due to his more human-like appearance, Kor gestured towards the younger Klingon. He grabbed an earpiece from a small box that was installed at
his left armrest to listen to the message in private. His dark eyes widened ever so slightly, while a grim expression spread over his face. He turned around. “Confirm reception of the message and affirm that I have understood!” he barked and glared back at the screen.

The transmission he received concerned information the Klingon Intelligence had intercepted just hours ago – an official report from Federation media stating that in place of the Lexington, the Enterprise would serve as the evacuation vessel. Normally it would be out of the question to engage a Starship in a rescue-mission, but right now even he was tempted to break those rules. Orders, or no orders – he would not pass up the opportunity to get his hands on Captain Kirk and his first officer. Their value to the Klingon government was too great – as would be his praises were he to capture them.

James T. Kirk and his first officer Spock, now identified as the Vulcan, the interlopers of Qo’noS – what a gift! The identity of the woman and the other man Kor assumed to be the Augment was still a riddle for the Klingon secret service. They rightly assumed that Kirk and Spock were the commanding officers during the small but nonetheless deadly invasion of the Kheta Province – responsible for the murder of the three patrols.

The boy-captain, who trespassed onto the Klingon’s home world, defeated a Klingon squad in the Japori-system, and then gained victory over a strike group of Orion-vessels, would be soon in range. Kor knew every commander in the Klingon fleet would be delighted and jealous, if only he could capture the captain of the Enterprise and his first officer. It would be a great satisfaction and would also deliver a blow to Starfleet if she were to lose her ‘heroes’. There were plenty Klingon families who had a personal vendetta against these two officers.

Still the Klingon Lord was torn between his own codex of honor and the wish to get his hands on that young man. He had to take the two war criminals captive at any cost – even if it meant the destruction of the Enterprise, a bonus in the admirals’ opinion. Kor took issue with the order to destroy a Starfleet ship.

Perhaps he could capture Kirk without irreparable damage to the Enterprise. Oh, the annihilation of Starfleet’s flagship would only sweeten the victory, but he hated the thought of needless collateral damage. He would do what he could to preserve the lives of the evacuees. He didn’t revel in blood of innocents as Admiral Kommora did; he, who led the attack against the planet Tammeron with the intent to kill millions.

But, Kommora got what he deserved. And Kommora not only had been too cowardly to speak his mind, he also had allowed himself to be defeated by a civilian militia and some defense vessels of Tammeron before Starfleet arrived. What a weakling! What surprised Kor the most was the fact that one of their own scout ships had turned against them. He didn’t know the D’Ghor’s commander Karan personally, but his personnel file had been flawless as well as had his crew. Kor could not believe that one of their own people had turned against them and had defected to the enemy. Maybe
the answer to this mystery lay somewhere else.

It wasn’t the time to think about these past events right now. He had to come up with a plan to get Kirk and Spock into his hands without killing the evacuees in order to satisfy the admiralty.

He had an hour left to plot before he would inform the other commanders accompanying him – he would use the time wisely.

ST***ST***ST

“The fat is in the fire, as you Terrans say!” Ritek looked up from his station, where he sat to eavesdrop on the Klingon and Orion transmissions. Khan wondered what Terrans had ever said that. Ritek had been at it for nearly four hours now. “The Klingon spies got wind of the Enterprise’s mission and the Empire’s admiralty sent a message to the fleet, which is on its way to Turkana – just like the rumors said.” He met the piercing gaze of ‘Drythen’ and informed him softly, “They ordered the fleet commander to capture Kirk and his first officer at any cost.”

For a moment, Khan closed his eyes, while a cold fist seized in his chest. He knew it! He knew that it would come to this; James would get in deep trouble someday. Damn, why did Starfleet send the Enterprise – of all ships – so near to the Klingon border, putting one of their best men in danger? He cursed inwardly, then he pushed the rising fear away and switched into the role of military leader. His instincts told him that the Enterprise was not in danger – yet. It fell on his shoulders that it should not come to the worst.

He bent over the communications station. “Is it possible from this position to reach the Enterprise?”

The Regulian cocked his head. “Yes, she should be in range. But if you’re going to warn them, you should scramble the transmission. The Klingons have the same ability to hear as we have.”

“I will do even more,” Khan said. He motioned to Ritek to make room for him. The other man obeyed and let the Terran sit down at his station. “Do you have a voice changer?” the Augment asked. The Regulian pointed with a grin to several buttons; the super-human took a deep breath. “Right. Let me talk to them alone!”

Ritek hesitated a moment, then he shrugged and left the bridge without a comment.
Light years away, a nervous Hikaru Sulu watched the long distance sensors. They beamed aboard the first three hundred people, but there were still many waiting; more than the four hundred evacuees estimated by Commodore Wesley, more like six or seven hundred. It seemed many had changed their minds in the last minutes and wanted to leave Turkana, too. Kirk couldn’t reject them. He had ordered his crew to share their quarters with other shipmates, and all spare bedding was sent to the hanger bay to make room for their guests.

Doctor M’Benga, the specialist for xeno-medicine and Vulcanoids, showed his nitty-gritty side and ordered the senior citizens should stay in the cleared quarters for their comfort; the younger ones moved to the racks in the shuttle-hangar. Already the first vestiges of chaos began. How Giotto kept track with the melee was beyond Hikaru.

“The next ten people have beamed up,” Uhura reported and looked at him.

“If they hurry up then…” Sulu interrupted himself when Nyota suddenly lifted her hand to silence him. She listened to a voice in her receiver. Sulu watched her eyes widen in surprise.

“Sulu, I… I have The Shadow in the line. They… they are using Code 9 to scramble the transmission.”

The Japanese man stared at her, eyes wide. “What? Code 9? That is the newest one – only two weeks old! How did they…” He shook his head. “Never mind. Open the link.”

Quickly the Bantu-woman switched on the speakers and then they heard a male voice heavily altered by a voice changer. “Enterprise, this is The Shadow. Do you hear me?”

Sulu lifted both brows, nodded towards Uhura and cleared his throat. “Shadow, this is acting-captain Sulu of the USS Enterprise. How do you know the newest Starfleet-code to…?”

“No time for that, Mr. Sulu. Seeing that you are in command, I assume Captain Kirk and his first officer are still on Turkana?”

The two officers exchanged a questioning look; their hesitation seemed to make the stranger impatient. “Is Kirk still on Turkana?”
“I cannot say,” Sulu answered, stunned that the strange man knew *Enterprise*’s location. Ship movements were confidential and should not even be shared with family members. The next words took him aback at their brazenness.

“Fine, put me on his frequency and patch me through.”

Uhura frowned, and Hikaru straightened his back. “Shadow, we are very grateful for your help at Tammeron and the intelligence regarding Klingon cloaking devices, but the captain is unavailable at the moment. We are on a tight schedule so, with all due respect, leave me a message for him and I will pass it to him as soon as he…”

“Mr. Sulu, if you do not put me through, your captain’s life and that of your friends on the surface will be forfeit! I have information that a Klingon strike group is heading for Turkana; ETA one hour.”

Shocked the two officers stared at each other, then Sulu cursed before he ordered, “Lieutenant, call the captain and…”

“And pass me through, Lieutenant Uhura! I must speak with Kirk immediately!” The synthesized voice was sharp now.

Nyota opened her mouth in surprise. “What… How do you know my name?”

“We met before, Lieutenant. And if you do not want to lose the captain you consider a friend, or your Vulcan boyfriend, then inform Kirk that Sunrise wants to speak with him! *Now!*” It was an order, nothing less – a command from a man used to commanding.

Sulu stared at the large screen. Sunrise… Wasn’t that the name of the guy, who warned them about the cloaking device and the planned assault of Tammeron? *And now this Sunrise knows about Uhura and Spock? What the hell is going on here? Who is this?* He wanted answers, but now wasn’t the time for looking.

“Nyota, pass him through. I do believe it’s for the best.”
“Never one to hesitate, are you, Mr. Sulu?” Sunrise’s voice took a mocking tone, and Hikaru frowned, but before he could reply, Uhura reached Kirk and informed him of the call. Then she turned her attention back to Sunrise, “Sunrise, I have the captain. I’ll put you through now!”

The sun warmed the slightly damp air of Turkana city in the early midday. The houses were practical in form, but attractive – or they were. Now they were decaying – showing exactly which inhabitants lived hand-to-mouth and which were in the most need of loans from ‘business-friends’, though friends in this case was quite the misnomer.

The city wasn’t that big and offered room for only about two thousand colonists. The town was situated on a small, high plateau that extended like a promontory from the jungles and was reachable via a broad street or the official transporter that was located near the market. Those who lived at the edge of the city enjoyed a fantastic view of the small stripe of jungle situated between the town’s edge and the abyss. The lower lands beside and behind Turkana City displayed a lush canvas of wide fields and jungles sprawled 550 yards beneath the town.

No one took pleasure in the beautiful landscape – not now. The air reeked of fear and apprehension; it lay heavy over the town. Most of the inhabitants had come to the market to watch them go, ‘those who had never belonged here – deserters’. The people leaving Turkana seemed to understand the need to hurry; still they were far too slow for Kirk’s taste. The Security chief and his men received reinforcements from the Enterprise, and more some fifty security personnel were now lining the people up in an attempt at order.

In the meantime McCoy and his staff tried to triage the ill as best they could, while Spock, Carol Marcus, and a young yeoman collected the personal data of the people, and counted the pets. Neither Kirk, nor the others had thought about the fact that several families would have four-legged or feathered friends they wanted to take with them. Spock, who revealed himself to be an animal lover, had agreed to take the animals aboard even before Jim could make up his mind, earning a pointed look from his captain.

Now, after an hour, the evacuation had gained a rhythm, Jim took the opportunity to engage in a highly unpleasant talk with Mr. Brooks, who watched the departing groups with scorn. “Cowards!” the man murmured with loathing. “They never belonged to us.”

Kirk’s nerves were already on edge. He narrowed is eyes and glared at the man. “Everyone can live his life as he pleases – that is the advantage of the Federation. No one will…”
“The Federation is wrapped up in its own canted savior complex. It can’t tell where one lie ends and another begins!” Simon Brooks spat. “Rules, inane laws, taxes until they empty our pockets – until we’re bled dry with nothing left to give. Look around you, Kirk!” His hand gestured to the dilapidated town.

“Don’t tell me the Orions don’t demand payment for their ‘protection’. You can’t pin this on the Federation.” Jim growled. “And for what? They’ll deliver you to the Klingons, who…”

“Who are the Orions allies and therefore ours, too! They will…”

“They will imprison you here, demand ‘payment’ in the form of workers for their dilithium mines and quash the slightest bit of free will you had to begin with! Do you really think you’ll be able to speak your mind – retain any sort of freedom once Turkana falls to the Klingons? Anyone, who doesn’t obey their orders, is going to pay dearly for it – in blood, mark my words!” Jim’s eyes flashed with anger; it didn’t impress Brooks at all.

“Propaganda nonsense, Kirk!” he snorted. “Listening to you is like listening to Starfleet and the whole damn Federation council. You call this ‘speaking your mind’?”

“Well, maybe it is propaganda in your eyes, but maybe I’m right!” the young captain snapped, then his communicator beeped. Glad for the interruption he excused himself. He tried to be polite – he really had – but this guy was blind and glaringly stupid!

“Kirk here!” He answered, hoping that Sulu hadn’t already spotted the Klingons.

“Captain, I have Sunrise on the line for you,” Uhura told him and Jim went rigid with shock.

“What?” he gasped. Had Khan lost his brilliant mind? To contact him on an unsecured frequency via the Enterprise was simply insane!

“He hailed us a minute ago. He says the Klingon fleet will arrive in Turkana’s orbit in one hour. Says his information is solid.” He could hear the fear in Uhura’s voice. One hour – Jim felt himself paling. That was too soon! “Sir, he insists on speaking to you and…”

“Yeah, put him through. And then tell Sulu that we are on red alert.” He walked with long, determined strides towards Giotto and Spock. Just then, an altered, synthesized voice coming from his communicator, “James?”
“Yes, it’s me!” Jim replied. “Hold the line a sec.” He let his communicator sink to his side. “Spock!” he shouted over the heads of the lined up people. “Over here! Quick!” He lifted his communicator to his ear again and whispered, “Nien, have you lost your mind – contacting me like this?!”

Aboard the Flash Khan lifted both brows as he heard the shortened form of his given name – Americans and their nick-names! He decided to ignore it for now. There were more important matters to attend to. Shutting off the voice changer, he said urgently, “Jim, listen to me! We intercepted a message from one of the Klingon outposts meant for the chief of the Klingon fleet. They are on their way to Turkana. Federation news stations gave them everything they needed to know to get to you and your ship. The Klingon admiralty ordered the fleet chief to capture you and your Vulcan ‘at any cost’.”

If Jim’s face was pale before, now it was devoid all color. “So, they already know...” he murmured, feeling his heartbeat accelerate. “And they’re on their way to Turkana!” He looked at Spock, who stepped closer to him, hearing the last words. Alarmed the Vulcan’s eyes widened ever so slightly; Kirk nodded before he said into his communicator, “Stay on the line; my first officer is here.” He took a deep breath of the warm, damp air and turned to the Vulcan. “Spock, The Shadow’s telling me that the Klingons are only an hour away, heading towards us. I already ordered the red alert. We have to speed up the evacuation or we’ll all be dead as soon as the Klingons arrive.” He hesitated a moment. “They say the Klingon admiralty knows about us – the Enterprise – and that their fleet-commander has instructions to take you and me captive. We have to finish the evacuation now…”

“I am on my way, Captain!” That was all the Vulcan said, then he turned and jogged towards Giotto, and called for McCoy.

Jim spoke quietly in his communicator again. “Thank you for the warning.”

“Take the hint, Kirk, and leave! Now – while you still have time!” Khan’s voice sounded firm, but Kirk thought he heard concern in it, too. And it warmed him despite the fear festering in his subconscious.

“I can’t. We are in the middle of…”

“James, you know what happens if the Klingons catch you!”

“Yes, he is definitely concerned for me!” the young captain was pleased by the thought. But he continued, “There are more than six hundred men, woman, and children whose lives and freedom
“The rats are leaving the sinking ship – a ship that was good enough for them until now!” The Augment nearly shouted in his frustration. “They never would have turned their backs on this colony of outlaws, dealers and Orion-allies if it were not for the approaching Klingons. Do not risk your ship and your life for them.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose Kirk took another deep breath. Khan was right, but anyone with half a brain would run from the Klingons. And it was his duty to ensure the safety of those citizens of the Federation. The consequences of letting the Klingons have this planet were too great; the Klingons would never stop their march through Federation territory. They had to be stopped. Jim knew that he couldn’t give in the temptation to run that the super-human required from him. “Nonetheless they are innocent people, Nien. Families! I can’t let them down. You know as well as I do, if we let the Klingons have this – they’ll never stop.” Jim continued, “And you’d do the same thing – you did the same thing, or have you forgotten.”

“No! You’re not, Noonien, and you know that – we’re not. That’s what this is, isn’t it? That’s what we are – and that’s why you are warning me now.” That was as close as either man had come to naming this thing between them – the intangibles tangled in their DNA. Khan knew Jim wasn’t talking about his physical enhancements now. He meant their courage, their resolve…and he couldn’t bring himself to even give a name to other emotions. But these things that made them the men they were and engendered them to one another.

Again, Kirk surprised the Augment, but he admired the captain’s bravery – he needed James’ bravery, because for the first time he was afraid; not for himself, but for Jim. There was a short silence, before Khan growled, “You and your damn compassion and loyalty to Starfleet! Do you know what Starfleet will do if the Klingons get you? They will give a nice memorial speech, a condolence to your mother and brother, and that’s all!” But the super-human feigned the anger in his voice, and Kirk knew it.

Jim heard Khan sigh. “I know that I cannot change your mind once you’ve made it up. You are stubborn as a mule! So hurry – and do not dare get captured. Do you understand, Captain?” Khan’s voice held none of the mocking tone he used to take when calling Jim by his rank. Now, the voice held affection and admiration for the young, valiant commanding officer.

Kirk rolled his eyes. “Yes, sir.” He caught Spock waving at him with McCoy beside him. The doctor talked insistently to the Vulcan. Kirk turned his attention back to his communicator, “Nien, I have to go – tie up loose ends, you know. Thank you for your warning… and your worry. I’m…”
“I am not worried, Kirk, I am simply…”

“Liar!” Jim felt a smile tugging at his mouth that found an echo in his now gentle voice. “You are worried, otherwise you wouldn’t have called.” He had hesitated a moment, before he murmured, “Thank you. I’ll contact you as soon as we leave Turkana.”

“Use this frequency and…” Aboard the Flash Khan closed his eyes for just a moment, “be careful, James!” Khan broke the contact.

Back on Turkana Jim felt an odd mixture of gratefulness, warmth and something he couldn’t put a finger on. Then he closed his communicator, pocketed it and jogged towards his two friends.

ST***ST

They hurried. They beamed the refugees to the Enterprise in groups of ten. Kirk spoke with Brooks again, insisting the man to allow them to use the official transporter of the small city. It could only beam five people at a time, but at least it was some help. The families able to use the official transporter were beamed by Spock to the Enterprise’s cargo-hold. Security personnel waited for them and brought them to the hangar or the med bay – any place that could hold a cot and a body.

The line of those waiting shortened, still Jim was tense and repeatedly looked at the clock in his communicator. The minutes ticked mercilessly by, the clock became more a countdown than anything else.

They had only four groups to go. And then the jeremiad came. “Captain, the long distance sensors show six Klingon vessels just dropped out of warp,” Sulu reported. “A D7-cruiser, three Birds-of-Prey and two D4-cruisers. They will be here in nine minutes.”

Jim had cursed to himself before he replied, “Understood, Mr. Sulu. Make ready to leave on my command.” He changed the frequency. “Spock?”

The Vulcan answered immediately. “Yes, Captain?”

“The Klingons are coming. How many more left to transport?”
“Twelve people to go and…”

“All right, beam with them up and take the con. Sulu’s readying the Enterprise for the jump. I’ll come with the last group.”

The first officer hesitated a moment. “Jim, you should return to the ship immediately and…”

“Take the con ‘til I’m aboard. That’s an order, Spock!” He didn’t wait for a reply and closed the communicator.

McCoy ran towards him. “Are they coming?”

“Yes, you, Carol and your staff-members beam up with the next group.” He waved any protest away. “I’ll follow you soon. Mr. Giotto!” he shouted and the Security Chief, a man in his late forties, turned around and looked questioningly at his captain. “Take your men and beam back to the Enterprise as soon as we complete the evacuation. We are getting visitors!”

Giotto saluted quickly and called for his men to line up. Jim turned towards Brooks, who had crossed the arms in front of his chest and smiled mockingly. God, he wanted to slap this man. “Right, we are about to leave. Are there still people who want…?”

“Those rats deserting the ship over there are all who wanted to go,” Brooks interrupted him. “You can run, Captain.”

Jim felt angry heat rising in his cheeks, still he remained in control. “Pray that it won’t be you and your friends, who have to ‘run’ next!”

“Jim, come on!” McCoy urged him and pointed towards the others. “The people are safely aboard the ship; the Red Shirts will be the next and…”

“And you’ll go with them!” Kirk said firmly, clapping Bones on the shoulder; he turned him around and shoved him gently in the right direction. “There you go – and make some coffee for later.”
He didn’t give Leonard a chance to answer, but walked quickly to the middle of the market, raising his voice. “Is there someone else who wants to accompany us? This is your last chance!”

He looked around and saw only despairing faces. Behind him, the last group was beamed aboard, followed by an apprehensive McCoy and Carol Marcus; several Red Shirts accompanied the team. Then Kirk’s gaze came across a woman who carried a small girl. A boy – maybe five or six – clung to her; his hands tugged at her dress, and Jim saw that the lady was pregnant. Pregnant – and terribly afraid. She glanced at him and then to a man at her side. Whatever she said to him just then got her an angry reply. Kirk didn’t understand her words, but he didn’t miss the man’s loud, angry voice.

Frowning, the captain stepped nearer to the raging man, “I told already, we are staying! End of DISCUSSION!”

“Matt, think of our children. We all know that the Klingons may be…”

“I said, END OF DISCUSSION!” the man roared. “You’re my wife, so shut up!”

To say that Kirk was shocked was an understatement. He was outraged. This woman had two children to care for and a third on the way. How dare her husband put her in danger! “Ma’am!” he called, heading towards her. “Do you want to come with us?”

Her husband whirled around, pointing straight at Kirk. “You stay out of it, boot-licker, or I’ll make you!”

“Try it!” Kirk growled. “I’ve taken loudmouths like you to down while I was still at Academy!” He turned his attention back to the woman. “Ma’am, if you…”

“I said, STAY OUT OF IT!” Matt yelled, stepping forwards as did several other men. The atmosphere was hostile by now, and Jim knew that he was treading on thin ice.

One of the others said, “Mr. Allistor, just calm down. Your wife simply wants…”

“Shut up!” Matt Allistor hissed, glaring daggers at the other man.
“Captain!” Giotto’s voice called from behind Kirk. “We are the last now!”

“Beam back and tell Scotty to be ready to transport me, too!” he shouted without turning his eyes away from Matt and his wife; her eyes were glistening now. As he heard the buzzing sound of the transporter behind him, he spoke again. “Listen, your wife is pregnant. You have small children. Do you really want them to grow up under Klingon rule – if they are allowed to grow up at all?”

“Klingon rule! You Federation guys wet your pants as soon as someone mentions the word ‘Klingon’.”

“You better be ready to ‘wet your own pants’. I’ve have seen what Klingons do. They are savage, and when they get here, they will show no mercy. Believe me, you don’t want your wife in that danger!”


“There’s still one civilian who wants to accompany us, Mister and…”

“My wife goes nowhere without my permission…” Matt started, and Jim felt his anger boiling up once more.

“Your wife is an adult and not…” The communicator-signal cut in, irritated he activated it. “Yes?”

“Sulu here, Sir. Captain, only two minutes and the Klingons will be here. Please, hurry up!”

“Just listen to your friend, Kirk, and go!” Brooks had sneered before he stepped back, making room for Jim to be beamed away without getting himself caught in the transporter sensors.

Kirk’s gaze once again found the now silent weeping woman; her eyes pleaded with him to help her – he did. “Kirk to Enterprise. Scotty?”

“Aye, sir!” sounded the Scottish accented voice.
“Have you located my communicator signal?”

“Yes, sir, I’m ready to beam you up on your command!”

“Fine. Energize!” In the same moment he flung the communicator towards the young woman, who caught it out of reflex. The golden light of the transporter-beam enveloped her and the two children, taking her straight to the Enterprise.

ST***ST

Scotty adjusted the controller of the transporter, while Spock asked through the intercom, “Mr. Scott, do you have the captain?”

“Aye, sir. He just materiali…” Montgomery’s eyes went wide as saucers as he looked to the transporter platform where a young woman and two children appeared. She held a Starfleet communicator in one outstretched hand, her eyes glazed in bewilderment.

“Attention, crew, Klingon fleet approaches, ETA one minute. Prepare for warp!” the first officer’s voice sounded through the intercom. “Mr. Scott, go to…”

Montgomery overcame his shock and pushed the button for the direct-link to the bridge. “Commander, we donna have the captain, only his communicator and a young woman with her children!”

For a moment, there was no reaction; then the Vulcan tightly responded, “Say again, Mr. Scott.”

Gulping, Scotty looked at the young woman; Giotto helped her down the platform. “You heard me, Mr. Spock. The captain sent her instead…”

“Mr. Spock, the Klingons are in sight!” Sulu’s voice interrupted them. The engineer felt his stomach drop at the first officer’s order, “Deflector-shields full power! Lieutenant Uhura, try to reach the captain.”

Scotty balled his fists. As long as the shields remained up, they couldn’t beam the captain aboard.
And the Klingons wouldn’t waste a second before they launched an attack. He groaned. “Dammit, Jim, how do we get you now!?”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

I waaaarned you, didn’t I? Yes, this is a cruel cliffhanger, and believe me, the next ones will be even more mean (*grin*). Yes, Jim and his damn heroism, but this is one of the reasons we all love him so much. Right, his impulses sometimes more than emotional, but that’s simply him.

And, as you can assume, Khan won’t be too pleased when he learns of the big, big trouble Jim has gotten himself into.

In the next chapter it will be our Augment, who listens to his heart and his guts, instead of his brilliant mind, Sulu will prove one again that you shouldn’t underestimate him and you will learn that there are still people on Turkana, who aren’t that bad – on the other hand, there are those, who are worse!

I hope you liked the new chapter, incl. Keenser, Wesley’s outburst (everyone can lose control), Khan’s worry and Jim’s damn bravery. Curious, as ever, I’m looking forward to your feedbacks.

Once again: Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so very much for all your lovely feedbacks and comments. Just a little warning: Who has weak nerves should be prepared for the next three chapters, because they will be hard (yeah, I’m evil).

So, no more prologue, but we’re travelling straight to the 23rd century, where a certain captain faces a lot of trouble his friends finding their hands bound and a special Augment loos it completely, before he changes into the fierce fighter and clever leader we have come to love.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

Chapter 13 – In deep water

Shouts of surprise, anger and disbelief sounded, as the young woman and her children disappeared in the golden light of the transporter. Brooks was furious. He snarled, “Kirk, that was kidnapping and…”

Jim finally had enough. “That was ‘saving four innocent lives’, you moron! Adults can make their own decisions without requiring permission. Is that your idea of ‘freedom’ here? To crush those who don’t share your opinion?”

An older man with white hair stepped up to them. “Captain, I’ve got your ship for you!” he said calmly, offering Kirk an old-fashioned communicator. “They are hailing on all frequencies to reach you.”

Kirk nodded his thanks and lifted the small device. “Enterprise this is Kirk.”

“Captain! Spock here! The Klingon fleet arrived. I was forced to raise the deflector shield, but…”
“Take the ship and leave!” Jim commanded, feeling ice creeping through his veins. He knew exactly what the order meant for him.

For a moment there was no answer. Then the Vulcan murmured, “Jim, if we leave we will not be able to return for you. We…”

“The Klingons are readying their weapons!” Jim heard Sulu’s shout and there was only one thing for him to do to save his ship and his friends – and it just might cost him his life. Again!

“Leave – now! Maximum Warp and take the civilians to safety. That’s an order!”

“Jim, we can’t leave you!”

Kirk hadn’t heard Uhura use his given name, ever, and it made even clearer that his fate was sealed. He gulped. “I’ll try to reach Federation space later and contact you as soon as I can,” he tried to reassure his friends, knowing perfectly well that this must’ve been his father’s last words to his crew. “Now LEAVE!”

He heard Uhura’s voice again, this time addressing Spock. “Commander, the Klingons are hailing us.”

“Audio, Lieutenant,” the Vulcan ordered and Jim walked several steps away; damned and able to do nothing else but listen.

ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise the tension was almost unbearable as the dark, hard accented voice of a Klingon sounded through the speakers, “Enterprise, this is Lord Kor of the Empire Fleet. We know that you are on a rescue mission. We let pass you through under one condition: deliver the criminals Kirk and Spock to us!”

Spock, who stood near the captain’s chair, lifted one brow; Uhura gasped. The room was full of shocked faces. Sarek’s son took a deep breath and ignored the stabbing pain in his stomach. Contrary to common belief Vulcans experience powerful emotions; using Arie’mnu, Vulcan’s learn to master their passions. Surak’s code enables them to confront mortal danger with control. But it didn’t prevent Spock’s survival instincts from flaring up; dread coiled in him now.
The first officer knew this situation would give him no choice. Not really. He had to surrender to the enemy to save the crew aboard the Enterprise – to save the young woman who made his heart beat faster and woke feelings in him he thought long buried. But what about Jim? Spock couldn’t decide his fate for him. His T’hy’la gave his life for him and his crew once, he couldn’t require it from him again. Though he knew Jim wouldn’t hesitate to sacrifice himself again to keep those he loved safe, but...

All of sudden Sulu stood in front of him, gripped his arms and forced him backwards, taking him completely by surprise; it was the only reason the Japanese man could move him at all. “Please, stay quiet, sir!” he whispered under his breath and nodded towards Uhura to open the channel.

Nyota, horrified at the Klingons’ demand and fearing for the life of the man she loved, realized what Sulu doing and obeyed without waiting for Spock’s confirmation. If he wanted to discipline her afterwards, so be it, but right now she would do anything to keep him safe; him and Jim Kirk!

Sulu threw an imploring glance at the confused first officer and said clearly, “Lord Kor, this is acting-captain Sulu of the U.S.S. Enterprise. As you stated, we are on a rescue mission and have more than 600 civilians aboard. Let us pass through and…”

“Enterprise, the condition stands! Hand your captain and your first officer over and we let you alone – this time!”

At that moment, Scotty reached the bridge and heard the last words, paling at them. His eyes found Spock, who gently but firmly freed himself from Sulu’s grip. The Vulcan opened his mouth to answer, but Uhura was already at his side and clapped one hand over his mouth, pressing the index-finger of her free hand against her own lips to signal him to stay – for God’s sake – silent!

Sulu raised his voice again. “Lord Kor, I am afraid that you are too late. Your Secret Service has wrong information! Captain Kirk and Commander Spock were killed during the battle with a Klingon strike group in the Japori System!” He sneered, before he fixed the astonished Vulcan with an intense glare. Hikaru knew Klingons weren’t familiar with the concept of bluffing – and that was the only chance they had to save Spock.

Scotty realized what Sulu had in mind and hastened with large steps to the astonished first officer and pulled him with Uhura’s and Chekov’s help to the upper deck of the bridge, out of the camera’s range, while a technician, switched them on and nodded at Sulu.
Straightening his body and crossing his arms on the back to hide his lieutenant stripes, Hikaru glared sternly at the large screen, where the face of the Klingon Lord would see him. At first glance it was clear that the hostile commander was a descendant of the Klingon experiments with Terran augmented DNA a century ago. His face was almost human-like, only the darker skin, the smaller dark eyes and his shape gave him away as a Klingon – a confused and angry Klingon!

Kor stared at the young man whose feature were slightly different from the other Terrans he had seen until now, but the officer was a human – and doubtlessly NOT Kirk! He had seen enough images of the Enterprise’s captain to recognize him, and this officer on the screen looked nothing like Kirk. Staring straight at the other man’s eyes he growled, “You are telling me that your captain and his first officer are dead?”

Sulu didn’t need to pretend to be angry; he was outraged by the enemy’s demand. It was an unwritten law that rescue vessels were not to be touched, still the Klingon Lord would only follow this rule of honor if he take Kirk and Spock captive. That was… insolent!

“They and several other officers, who were my friends!” The Japanese snarled. “Thanks to you!”

It was a rare thing to see a Klingon baffled – like Kor was now. “Thanks to me?” he asked, doubting the Terran’s mind. It was the first time that he met the Enterprise and her crew, so how could he be responsible for Kirk’s and the Vulcan’s demise?

“Thanks to your admiralty and Council for this war!”

Kor’s face darkened in anger. “Be careful what you say, human! It was you and the Federation who insulted us, provoked us with the attack against our home world!”

“Attack against your home world?” Sulu snorted. “Captain Kirk caught a criminal, who could endangered you, too, and how did your soldiers thank him? By trying to kill him!”

“Kirk has…”

“It doesn’t matter anymore. He and our first officer are dead! Therefore we can’t agree to your demands. Will you still let us pass through or do I have to inform hundreds of families that they are going to die here and now?”
For a long moment Kor was silent, then he answered simply, “This is up to you!” But something in the Klingon’s eyes had changed. There was a hint of outrage in Kor’s gaze and it told Hikaru that the commander held his honor above nearly all else; it was beneath him to murder innocents. Instantly Sulu used it to his advantage.

“On the behalf of the civilians we have evacuated, I request you to let us go,” he said cold. “If it weren’t for them I would gladly stay and exact my own recompense for their deaths, but I have to think of the men, women and children aboard, whose lives depend on me!”

“You are in no position to exact anything.” Kor’s eyes widened. “You have one ship and we are…”

“I would die with honor avenging my captain’s death!” Sulu interrupted him loudly. “And I would take as many of your people as I could with me. But I will have to wait until we meet again – we, two or any other Klingon commander, who crosses my path!” He couldn’t read Kor’s expression clearly, but the Klingon seemed to be impressed. He didn’t know, but the Japanese concept of honor rivalled their own. “And now let us pass through!” he demanded, not giving an inch.

For a long moment the Klingon only looked at him, then he snapped an order to a nearby junior officer, before addressing Sulu one last time. “You are a warrior and your loyalty to your dead captain speaks of honor. You may go – but I look forward to meeting you again.”

“Count on it!” Sulu replied, before he gave him a curt nod. “Lord Kor!”

“Captain Sulu!”

The technician closed the channel and the screen went dark before flickering to the image of deep space and seven Klingon battle.

Sulu let out a deep breath, wiping his forehead. God, that had been close!

He turned around and watched Spock stepping away from Uhura, Chekov and Scott, who held onto the Vulcan the whole time. Hikaru moistened his lips, knowing perfectly well that he would face disciplinary procedures for his unauthorized action. “Sir…” he began, but the Vulcan lifted a hand to silence him.

“Not now, Mr. Sulu. There are more important things to do just now.” He glanced sternly at the
young Russian. “Mr. Chekov, can you locate the captain?”

The ensign ran to his station and quickly scanned the market place of Turkana City. “Zere are too many humans, zir, and…”

“The captain used a communicator someone handed him. You should be able to locate him through the open channel and…”

“Zir, zere isn’t an open channel anymore.” The bright eyes of Pavel looked helplessly at him. “And… and zere are already dozens of Klingons encircling the market place.”

Uhura had rushed to her own seat and checked the frequencies her chocolate skin paling. “Mr. Chekov is right,” she called over her shoulder, despair in her voice. “The communicator the captain used is switched off. We have no chance of finding him now. He could be anywhere.”

Sulu and Scott moaned, while Spock closed his eyes. They all knew what that meant; they had to leave without Jim Kirk. They couldn’t stay here any longer without alerting the Klingons’ and endangering the ship and all people aboard.

For just a moment Spock felt the urge to curse – something that was highly illogical and unacceptable for a Vulcan – but his human side raged inside him. The order he had to give now was the hardest command ever had to give – and ever would have to give. “Mr. Sulu, set course to Kenda II, Warp 8 as soon as we are out of Turkana’s orbit.”

Uhura swallowed around the lump in her throat. “What… What about Kirk?” she whispered and as she met Spock’s eyes, she saw something no one would see who didn’t know him as she did. There was pain in the dark depths; pain, sorrow and wrath.

“You heard him. He will try to reach Federation space and contact us as soon as he can.”

“And what if he can’t reach Federation space? What if he can’t leave Turkana?” Scott’s voice sounded pressed and Spock took a deep breath.

“Then let us hope that he stays hidden until we can come back for him.” Spock sat down in the captain’s chair – it felt utterly wrong. “Mr. Sulu, take us out of here!”
He felt the shocked and angry glares of the officers on the deck, but he couldn’t blame them. His hands were tied though. He had to get the evacuees to safety – and then he would get Jim back. It wasn’t the first time he understood the all-to-human drive to hope. Right now this was the only thing he could do.

Kirk listened to Sulu’s glorious bluff that saved Spock. Uhura once told him that Klingons didn’t understand feints like the one the Japanese used, and as it seems she had shared her knowledge with Sulu, too. The helmsman’s action spoke of it and Jim was grateful for Hikaru’s meddling, before he switched off the communicator to prevent that the Klingons would scan the open frequency and made the correct conclusions; realizing that they had been tricked. It was quick thinking and the man deserved his own ship one day. It was bad enough that he would be arrested as soon as the first Klingons beamed down and recognized him; at least his Vulcan friend, Bones, and his crew aboard the Enterprise would be safe. He couldn’t require anymore from fate; a fate that had a horror he couldn’t imagine.

When he heard the first sounds of the transporter, a sickening feeling bloomed in his stomach; he straightened his shoulders and readied himself to meet his doom with a stoic grace befitting his station. His thoughts drifted back to Khan, ‘Don’t you dare to get caught…’ Dread and grief filled him. Nien had risked his freedom by warning him, but it seemed the Augment’s selfless act was for naught. Jim knew that he would be taken captive. The prospect of his immediate future made him shiver. He wanted one last look, one last touch, one last word with those he loved most – his crew, Spock. He got that with Spock and he wouldn’t ever take last words for granted. But now he wanted those last touches and last words with Khan too. If only…

“Captain?” The old man who lent him the communicator laid a hand on his arm. “Come with me.”

Bewildered, Jim looked at him. “Pardon?”

The other man took the communicator from him and pulled at his arm when the first heavy steps sounded through the streets. The next transporter beams sounded near the market. “Come quick m’boy. If the Klingons see you in your uniform they will kill you.”

Kirk realized that the old man wanted to help him. Relief breezed through him, and he followed the man; passing through the murmuring crowds.
“Quick, lad, they’ll see you!” The old man continued to pull and Jim came willingly; hoping they could get to safety before the Klingons saw him.

They were nearly running as they moved from the market center to the town. They dismissed the furious glare from the man whose wife and children were now secure aboard the Enterprise. They continued down a small street, around a corner and just as four golden lights announced the arrival of more enemies, the stranger opened a front door and shoved Kirk inside, before he stepped in and locked the door behind them.

Jim found himself in a small foyer from which a staircase led to the second level that contained and several doors led to other rooms.

“This way!” the old man said and pushed Kirk towards a door. “Hurry, we have no time to waste!” He guided him into a room with an open fire-place. “Strip!” he ordered, while he hastened to the fireplace, knelt down and put some wood and paper on the grate. He threw a glance over his shoulder and frowned when he saw the young officer eyeing him warily. “We have to burn your clothes, so the Klingons don’t recognize you immediately.”

Jim nodded quickly – of course, that was the best solution – and stripped off his boots, trousers and shirt; giving everything except his boots the old man, who put them in the fire. Only clad in his underwear, Kirk stood and watched his uniform succumb to the flames.

“Right!” The old man rose. “I’m Patrick O’Farrell,” introduced himself. “And you, m’boy, need new clothes.” He left the living room and Jim had no other choice than to stick to Patrick’s heels, boots in hand. The old man – Kirk assumed an Irish lineage – went into bedroom and pulled a pair of trousers, a shirt, and a sweater. “If someone asks, you are a childhood friend of my son, your family and ours new each other on earth and you are visiting.” He watched, while Jim slipped into the clothes; they didn’t fit well but they was better than nothing.

Kirk looked shortly up. “Where is your son?”

“Not among the living anymore,” came the soft reply. “He died four years ago in a traffic accident.”

Jim was taken aback, before he murmured, “I’m sorry, Mr. O’Farrell. I didn’t mean to open fresh wounds.”

Patrick smiled sadly. “It’s all right. You remind me of him, a bit. He was like you, strong-willed,
brave, ready to help those in need. He spoke his mind without hesitation…” He sighed. “You would’ve like him.”

The captain had dressed by now and pulling the pant legs over the boots. “Do you live here alone?” he asked and Patrick nodded. “Yes. My wife died ten years ago. My son, Brady, was about to get married. I maintained contact with his fiancé for a little while, but eventually she met another young man and we barely see each other now. She moved to one of the farms in the countryside and only comes to town for shopping.”

Jim realized why Patrick O’Farrell hadn’t left Turkana. He had nothing to live for anymore and wanted to stay where those dear to him were buried.

It was getting rowdier outside now. He heard angry voices and the dark rumbling of the Klingons. “It looks like the Klingons aren’t exactly the benevolent guests Brooks and the others imagined them to be.”

Patrick waved it off. “Fools – all of them! But let them be. They will have their eyes opened soon enough.” Havoc erupted outside and the two men exchanged a look. O’Farrell murmured, “What do you want to do now? Your ship had to leave and you are stranded here.

Jim rubbed his neck. “Well, I hope on the situation here Turkana will normalize and your everyday life comes back. Turkana trades with the other planets within Borderland. Maybe I can leave this colony with one of the merchant vessels and return to the Federation.” He pressed his lips shut then quietly said, “Otherwise I’m fucked.”

Patrick closed the distance to him and clapped him gently on the shoulder. “Chin up, m’boy. Your crew won’t let you down. As far as I can tell, that Vulcan is your friend and there is one thing about those pointy-eared aliens – they will move heaven and hell to do what is right for a friend.”

A melancholy smile played at Jim’s mouth. “My crew would fight the devil to save me. But coming back is not an option right now. As soon as the Enterprise nears Borderland or the Klingons see her, they’ll attack. I’d rather hand myself over to the enemy than have them capture my ship and murder my crew. I am on my own for now, and I don’t want to put you at risk – I am a wanted in the Empire. If the Klingons find me in your house …”

“Rubbish!” the old Irish man interrupted him. “I had my life – if I can help to keep yours the rest will be worth it. I’m just glad to be in the right place.” He clapped him once again on the shoulder and headed to the door. “Come on. I think it’s time for a late lunch!”
Jim watched him leave the room and took a deep breath. He was grateful for Patrick’s help, but he knew that he was a danger for O’Farrell. He would leave as soon as possible and attempt to get out of town and to an area not flooded with Klingons; easier said than done. But he had to try. He had to stay alive and to return to the Federation. His crew, his ship, and the war he wanted to win were waiting for him. And so was the man who had gone from nemesis to lover in the space of a night; he was waiting. And Jim wanted him again, it again – whatever it was they had – he wasn’t ready for it to end. It was the first time he admitted to himself what he wanted. He wanted Khan. He wanted to be wrapped in him again, engulfed in the fiery passion that once burned between them.

Khan stared at the communications station aboard the Flash; wishing he could will the device to bring him Kirk’s voice telling him that everything was fine, but the station stayed silent. How long ago had he spoken with James? The chronometer told him that 115 standard minutes had passed since he cut the link. The Klingons must have arrived by now and the Enterprise should be leaving Borderland area. Why hadn’t Jim called yet? Certainly he was busy with the evacuated civilians and in a dangerous area, but a quick message to tell him that all was well didn’t require much time. Kirk could have spared a minute to hail him.

The Augment scowled and groaned to himself. He sounded like an overbearing parent waiting their child to make the ‘I-am-all-right-call’, but he couldn’t help himself. Dread was bubbling up, threatening to spill over now; a feeling of foreboding overtook him.

He simply knew that something had gone terribly wrong. Presentiment, like an injured animal left vulnerable, rolled in his gut and spread through every fiber of his being. It forced the savage side of his character to the surface that screamed at him rail against the vulnerability. If James was okay he would have contacted him by now. Something was wrong.

Ritek sat beside him and rested his feet on the station’s panel listening to the intercepted transmissions. He caught Khan’s asking glance and shook his head. No, he hadn’t heard anything regarding or from the Enterprise.

That’s it! Khan had enough! He borne patience if necessary, but in this case his endurance was at an end. Activating the voice changer and scrambling the transmission with Code 9 again, he hailed the Enterprise. If Kirk was fine and merely frantically busy he would learn about it from Lieutenant Uhura. If Jim was injured or in danger (and the thought chilled him) perhaps he could act in time.

He cleared his throat, adjusted to the right frequency and spoke, “Enterprise, this is Sunrise. Come in, Enterprise!”
“Mr. Sulu, you are certainly familiar with the ‘General Orders and Regulation of Starfleet’!” Spock looked straight at the helmsman, who had turned around in his chair and faced the expected rebuke – if only it stopped there. He could be put to trial for insubordination, assumption of authority and manhandling (a little bit) a superior officer.

“Yes, sir,” he said calmly, looking directly in the Vulcan’s dark eyes.

“And do you know how many regulations you disregarded?”

Hikaru knew that Spock wasn’t angry by the tone of his voice and his face. They knew each other well enough for that. The science officer may be a Vulcan, but even they were not immune to irritation. “Many, sir,” he answered. Spock nodded.

“Yes, ‘many’. You took the con unauthorized, unilaterally negotiated with an enemy during war, pronounced your superior officers dead, silenced the commanding officer” – he glared shortly at Uhura, who simply lifted her chin – “and incited crew members to remove the commanding officer from the scene; that’s mutiny.” He cocked his head. “If followed the rules I would have you arrested immediately to face court martial.”

“He did it to zave you, zir,” Pavel hesitantly cut in and found himself in the Vulcan’s focus.

“I am aware of it, Mr. Chekov. And he not only saved my life by… acting in spite of the regulations, but also the captain’s so long as he stays hidden on Turkana. Therefore, Mr. Sulu, your behavior in this extraordinary situation was curious but welco…”

“Jim is WHERE?” The outburst came from the open turbo lift, where a shocked McCoy had stepped on the bridge just a moment earlier. He came to report the medical status of newest passengers, but all thoughts fled his mind when he heard the news.

Spock turned around and calmly met the horrified gaze of the ship’s doctor. “The captain is still on Turkana. He sent a young woman with her children up before we had to raise the deflectors and…”
Leonard pointed to the screen. “We are MOVING, Spock! We are at warp speed, which means that we are moving away from Turkana – where Jim is!”

The dejected atmosphere on the bridge became even gloomier; everyone looked at the enraged CMO.

“I am aware of it, Doctor,” the Vulcan replied – emotionless to untrained ears. “He ordered us to leave as the Klingons arrived and…”

“And of course you obeyed – leaving him to die!” McCoy was furious - appalled! He had lost his best friend once; he didn’t want to experience the same grief again. And he was sure Spock didn’t either. They both loved the Iowa-kid like a brother. McCoy would die for him and he was sure Spock would too. How could he let Jim down!

“If we hadn’t left Turkana speaking with Lord Kor, we all would be dead now,” the first officer replied almost gently; seeing the same grief on McCoy’s face that burnt deep in him. “If we had stayed, the Klingons would know something isn’t right. They would discover our bluff…”

“There is something not right!” Leonard groused; he pointed at the Vulcan. “Jim should be sitting there, not you!”

“I know, Doctor, and I would rather have the captain here. But…”

“No ‘buts’!” McCoy’s face reddened with raging anger. “Turn the ship around and…”

“That would mean…”

“Commander, I have The Shadow on the line. ‘Sunrise’ wants to speak with the captain,” Nyota interrupted. She exchanged an uneasy glance with her boyfriend and then with the furious CMO, who stared at the Vulcan. Leonard snapped, “Well, tell our secret supporter what has become of Jim!”

Spock didn’t bother with a reply. He understood McCoy’s searing anger. If he were truthful with himself (and Vulcan’s cannot lie, even to themselves), he would admit that he too, was frustrated with the situation.
“Put him on audio, Lieutenant. As far as I can calculate he avoids visual transmission on principle.”

Nyota nodded and answered the hail, “Sunrise, this is the starship Enterprise. I will link you to Commander Spock.”

At the space dock Khan’s brow shot up. Spock… He didn’t want to talk to this man ever again, but it seemed he had no other option. Jim wasn’t on the bridge to answer the call. He couldn’t deny it now. He knew that the Vulcan had the con because Kirk couldn’t fulfill his duty aboard. His unease grew.

A moment later he heard the deep, calm voice of the Enterprise’s first officer and the old wrath flared up. “Sunrise, this is Commander Spock, first offi…”

“I know who you are, Vulcan!” Khan interrupted him sharply. He needed all of his concentration to remain in control of his emotions. Because of this man he had grieved; he mourned and he killed – for nothing. All the despair and unbearable pain he had endured at the thought of his family, murdered, was because of this one Starfleet officer. Spock, who had mercilessly played with his love for his crew. The desire to throttle this man was almost overwhelming. Only his concern for James quelled his anger enough to act civil toward the Vulcan. Fury would get him nowhere. “Where is Kirk!” he demanded. The silence stretched on and his stomach clenched for fear of the news he knew would come.

“I am sorry to tell you that Captain Kirk isn’t aboard, Sunrise. He is still on Turkana.”

Khan went rigid. “Have the Klingons arrived?”

“Yes, over an hour ago.” There was another pause, before Spock continued, “The captain stayed behind to help a woman and her children flee. He ordered us to leave.”

The answer delivered sharp blow to the Augment. Even though he expected bad news, the intensity of his feelings, which rose in him put him off balance. “You… left him?” His voice came out in a hiss at the Vulcan’s reply and Khan saw red.

“We had to activate the deflector shields and leave immediately. The Klingon fleet commander gave us an ultimatum and Captain Kirk gave us an order …”
“YOU LET HIM DOWN?”

This time it was Spock, who lifted his brows and several members of the alpha-shift flinched, as the roar sounded through the speaker. For a moment he thought he heard a predatory animal, ready to strike.

“You call yourself ‘his friend’ AND YOU LEFT HIM TO DIE?” ‘Sunrise’ snarled with fierce wildness and the Vulcán realized that the other man was a warrior through and through. He had an urge to explain his decision – not only to the mysterious stranger, but also to McCoy, who still glared daggers at him.

“I followed the captain’s order and had to think of more than thousand peo…”

“HE DIED FOR YOU, VULCAN!” Khan shouted aboard the Flash; his handsome face a mask of fury and hate; his fist landed on the panel of the communications station. “He DIED once – and has now to face TORTURE AND DEATH AGAIN! HOW COULD YOU!? How DARE you to leave him to that fate after what he has done for you and his crew! I’ve been called a monster over and over again, BUT I WOULD NEVER LEAVE ONE OF MY OWN, NO MATTER THE COST!”

Ritek stared at him – shocked – not knowing how to react as he saw and felt the hot wrath of his shipmate. Then his eyes found where ‘Drythen’s’ fist had landed and he gasped. There was a dent in the metal. Who was this man? He couldn’t be a common Terran. Not in a million years!

“Don’t call me a traitor, but I agree with this guy! You should have done something, Spock!” Another angry voice sounded from the background of the Enterprise’s bridge; a voice Khan knew well.

“Doctor!” he growled, bile rising in his throat. “I thought James was your friend, too.”

Leonard stared dumbfounded at the source of the voice. The voice was heavily altered, but it didn’t matter. Whoever this man was, he knew them. He knew them well enough to identify them by their voices and he knew about their relationships to each other. “Don’t blame me,” he snapped. “I learned about this disaster only a minute earlier than you! And I approve your accusations.” He glared at the Vulcán. “Jim broke the Prime Directive to save your butt back on Nibiru, Spock. He lost his command to save your ass. And what did you do? You stuck to your beloved regulations – just like I told Jim you would if you were in his place.”
“This has nothing to do with regulations, Doctor,” Spock answered with a stony expression. “There were two possibilities: To leave without revealing the captain’s presence on Turkana and hoping he could hide. Or stay, to give the Klingons the indication that they have been tricked – and us killed with 600 civilians! What would you have done?”

“I wouldn’t have left Jim!” Bones hissed.

“And that would have kill us all – and him,” Spock stated as a matter of fact. “The captain will try to reach the Federation space and…”

“And how will he do this?” ‘Sunrise’ s’ voice boomed again through the speaker. “Tell me, what are the chances that the captain gets out of there alive and well?”

“If the captain is not discovered, the chance 9.8263 percent, still James Kirk is famous for his ingenuity and…”

“SHUT UP!” the other man snarled. “You abandoned him and exculpate yourself with your hope of Kirk’s cleverness, excusing everything with your regulations and an order he had to give because he loves nothing more than his crew and his ship.”

McCoy grimaced. “He is right, you know!” he harrumphed toward Spock, who pointedly lifted brow.

“I am certain that Starfleet Command will take proper action as soon as they…”

“Your damn Starfleet will do NOTHING!” ‘Sunrise’ interrupted him, enraged, before he audibly took a deep breath to calm himself. “Pray that our paths never cross, Vulcan, or I will make you pay!” His voice was quieter now, but deadly cold. Then the connection was cut.

For a long moment everyone on the bridge stayed silent. Uhura looked at Spock with large eyes. Had this stranger threatened him? Yes, he had! And the Vulcan stayed perfectly calm, as if nothing happened.

The truth was that the first officer took the threat very seriously, though he knew that ‘Sunrise’,
whoever this man was, had little chance of getting to him. And even if they met someday, the Vulcan 
highly doubted that it would come to a fight. It seemed, ‘Sunrise’ was quite ardent in his perceived 
friendship with Jim Kirk. The man’s nerves were raw, a true statement for all present, humans had a 
tendency to overreact in such situations.

Here and there murmurs had erupted, while McCoy stepped to Spock. “Have you informed Starfleet 
Command?” he asked with a low, irritated voice.

“Not yet,” the first officer admitted. “I wanted to gain some distance from Turkana, before…”

“Contact Commodore Wesley first. Maybe he can help Jim.” He fixed him with a fierce stare. “You 
owe Jim. Fix this!”

Spock nodded wordlessly and turned away; only his eyes betrayed the emotional turmoil raging 
through him.

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the Flash Khan needed a moment to gather his self-control and to stifle his emotions as 
Spock was doing light years away. He knew it would eventually lead to disaster, trying to cork a 
vulcano. But the fear and dread bubbled and leaked out of him. After a bit, he was able to quell the 
torrent and calm down enough to think straight again. James had been left behind on Turkana – a 
planet that was annexed now by the Klingons. This race sought revenge on the young captain and 
would show him no mercy.

Khan had to act now!

Turning around to the darkened main screen on the bridge he raised his icy voice. “Computer, show 
tactical location of Turkana and the adjacent borders of the former Neutral Zone. Identify areas under 
Federation control!”

A moment later a star chart emerged on the screen displaying the requested information. Sitting down 
at the navigation station, he quickly programmed the direct course from Aldebaran to Turkana. He 
bit back a growl as he read the data; he would need nearly nine hours to reach the colony and Jim. 
Even if he set off this minute he would be too late. The super-human didn’t fool himself for one 
second. The Klingons wouldn’t spare the young captain when they found him. And they would 
make his death slow and painful.
Perhaps ‘slow’ was his chance at a successful rescue. If the Klingons seized Jim, the young captain would be put through a very personal hell, but every minute he lived was a chance at survival; every minute brought Khan that much closer. He had to do it – and he was the only one who could. James was his family now; Khan’s own blood coursed through the captain’s veins. He wouldn’t abandon him, just as he wouldn’t abandon the other members of his family – no matter the risk. Though that risk meant he could lose his own life and as a result his crew would be left in their cold sleep indefinitely. But he had to rescue the only living being in this damn universe who cared for him – and who had touched his soul. His heart left him no choice in the matter.

His decision made, he cursed Starfleet for sending Kirk out there and he cursed Kirk for…for what? Jim was right about everything – about who they were as men of honor and duty. And he was right about them and what they were together. James had to follow his own sense of duty and his nature that made him the leader he was. Khan couldn’t blame Kirk for being first and at all a captain.

The Augment deleted the chart and rose. The Flash would be of no use to him. “Where is Galven?” he asked. Ritek, still shaken by the Terran shrugged hesitantly.

“As far as I know he is still down at the bar getting drunk – if he isn’t already.”

“Right. I have to speak with him,” Khan said. He had no intention of doing so. Timing was everything and he wouldn’t waste any asking Galven for permission to use something, The Shadow would never have gotten without him. What was the saying of the old pirate-days, ‘Who seized the booty, will keep it’. And he wasn’t above doing just that!

“What should I do while you’re down there?” Ritek asked. The Augment flashed a predatory look that made the Regulian warily. This man was dangerous – very dangerous – just a step away from being driven over the edge.

“Keep eavesdropping our enemies and listen for Starfleet transmissions concerning Turkana. I’ll be back as soon as I can!” He was about to leave the bridge, but glanced back one more time, feeling real gratitude for the comradeship of the alien man. “Ritek?” The Regulian looked at him with some unease. Khan took a deep breath. “Thank you!” he said with honesty. Ritek returned the sentiment with surprise, “You’re welcome.” But Khan had already activated the transporter and was beamed away – straight to the D’Ghor.

A minute later he powered up the onboard systems and started the engines. After the moorings detached, the D’Ghor began to move. The Augment almost wished he could see the perplexed face of Ritek, and maybe just for a moment, his conscience pricked at him. Perhaps he should have left a message with his intentions. After all the members of The Shadow were his comrades in arms. But
he brushed the sentiment off as quickly as it had come. James’ life was on stake. Nothing else mattered now.

Without effort, Khan steered the Klingon scout away from the shipyard. An incoming signal sounded, followed by Ritek’s voice, “Drythen? Is this you aboard?”

For a second Khan hesitated, then he answered the call. “Yes, it is me.” Before the Regulian could reply, Khan continued, “I have something to do and I will be back as soon as possible. Give my regards to Galven and…”

“You’re going to fly to Turkana to fetch Kirk, aren’t you?” Ritek’s voice sounded shocked. “Lad, that is suicide. If the Klingons or the Orions find you, then you…”

“The D’Ghor can be cloaked, as you well know, the added batteries are fully charged and the sensor-disturbing system works flawlessly! They will not know that I am coming and by the time they do, it will be too late.”

The scout was already at the exit, as Ritek groaned, “Lad, listen, I know that I can’t stop you but just wait until the others are here. Together we can…”

“I will not place you in danger because of my personal business. Stay safe, Ritek. I’ll be back!” With those words he closed the line and set the course to Turkana. The D’Ghor had barely left the shipyard when Khan pushed her to warp speed, leaving Aldebaran and his comrades behind.

ST***ST***ST

Commodore Robert Wesley stared at the small monitor in his quarters that showed the expressionless face of the Enterprise’s first officer, who had reported what happened. Shock was painted across his features. For nearly a full minute Bob stayed silent, attempting to process the young captain’s likely fate.

Damn! This was so typical for George Kirk’s son. He was like his father in so many ways – only more reckless. To stay behind, giving others a fighting chance at survival then ordering his ship to leave before it could fall into the enemy’s hand was one of the bravest things any Starfleet officer had done. And Jim had done this so many times now, it was beginning to get old. But even the thickest idiot could count on one finger what lay ahead. Kirk had to be aware of the fate he would have to face, still he sacrificed himself. Well, it ran in the family.
Bob had heard of the rumors that Kirk had died in the warp-core of his ship last year, during the encounter with the Augment retained by Section 31. But he still took the story for what it was, an incredible exaggeration. No one could return from death, so it had to be sheer luck that the radioactive radiation hadn’t damaged Jim enough to kill him. ‘Oh, but if anyone could cheat death, it would be that boy,’ Wesley thought to himself. But the commodore didn’t know the truth. The events in the med bay that day were secret. Only the most senior admiralty and the bridge officers of the Enterprise along with the doctor, knew how Jim survived.

Taking a deep breath Wesley looked at the Vulcan, who was one of Jim’s closest friends; he thought to see some emotions stirring deep beneath the cool glance. “You did the only right thing, Commander,” he said; his voice tight even as he tried to reassure the other officer. “There was no option left – still I wished there had been something you could have done.”

Spock nodded ever so slowly. “I agree, sir. Captain Kirk is not only one of the finest officers Starfleet has, but he is also very important to the crew.”

Of course Bob recognized what the Vulcan told him in a roundabout way. Jim Kirk was important to his friends and Spock blamed himself for the outcome of the mission. He bit shortly his lips. “Is there still the chance that Kirk could hide somewhere?”

“He was in the middle of Turkana City, sir, and only those who don’t feel any loyalty to the Federation remain on the colony. He may have found shelter, but his odds of staying hidden long enough for personnel recovery are 327 to 1.” Depression tinged his voice and Wesley sighed quietly, damming the reporter to hell and back who had simply tried to boost his career at the expense of the captain’s life.

“Maybe Jim’s uncanny luck can contribute to better odds. Still we have to do something. We both know what Klingons do to their enemies.”

Spock cocked slightly his head and watched the other man frown in frustration. “I will send you my full report in just a few minutes, Commodore, including the details regarding our communication with the Klingon commander, Lord Kor.”

“Kor?” Wesley’s eyes widened slightly. “Commander Kor – plane human forehead, small trimmed beard, shorter hair than the usual Klingon style?”

One brow of Spock rose. “Yes, you describe him correctly, Commodore. I think it’s the same
Klingon you concluded the Treaty of Organia with.”

Bob leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I am almost relieved that’s him we have to deal with. He may be a fierce fighter but he isn’t cruel and is open to reasonable arguments. Should our troublemaker be caught, I maybe can offer Kor something in exchange for Kirk’s release.”

The Vulcan didn’t want to object. He knew how important hope was for humans. Still he doubted that there was something in the world that would change Kor’s mind, if he should capture Jim.

ST***ST***ST

Four hours had passed by since the Klingons had annexed Turkana. The afternoon was about to melt into the dawn of the evening, as Kor, son of Ryan, sat down behind the desk that was in the office of Turkana’s leader. The man had been removed from his position immediately after the Klingons had taken hold of the colony, and only would get back his responsibilities if he proved himself trustworthy. Kor didn’t take any risks. The colonists had welcomed his warriors, but it lasted only minutes before the first of the turmoil started.

Humans!

It was always the same with them. One word against their opinion and they screamed bloody murder.

Still the most of the inhabitants had stayed calm and almost tolerant – something that was new for Kor – and he didn’t trust the peace. Therefore he had given orders to keep everything in order. There was now a curfew until the next morning, and after several unpleasant encounters with some stubborn people, the streets of the city were cleaned and the citizens were in their houses. The countryside was secured too, and the few farms weren’t a threat for the Klingons.

The next step had been to install a protective energy shield over the whole city to hinder the citizens from beaming to Kahless-knows-where and to prevent other inhabitants of the planet coming to the town. Kor wanted to take a census and gather personal data of the people who lived here before he would allow them to return to their daily routine. For that purpose several Klingon technicians had established some devices at the edges of the city which produced the shield that ended at the abysses of the promontory Turkana City was built on. The street that lead into the town was heavily guarded.
Kor looked out of the window that had been opened to let fresh air into the office. Klingons weren’t immune to beauty – far from it. He liked the almost tropical planet with its lush forests and wide fields. It reminded him of a certain area on Q’o’noS where he had stayed as child, back in a time before the war.

A war that held several surprises – even for him.

He wasn’t pleased that two of the most wanted enemies of the Empire were dead. He wanted to arrest Kirk and his first officer – to hand them over to the High Council. It wasn’t because of some vanity or to make another step up the career ladder. No. His wish to present the council Kirk’s and Spock’s heads on a silver platter lay in his pride of his heritage. He was the last descendant of the Emperor’s family, and to catch a declared enemy of the empire would reinforce his own status and that of his clan.

It was a shame that the boy-captain and his first officer had fallen prey to the war so soon. The only satisfaction Kor could find was the fact that the two men had died battling the Klingons. At least there had been a kind of revenge in the end!

Suddenly Kor heard steps nearing the office. One of his security-officers stepped in and saluted. Kor casually answered the greeting before instructing the Lieutenant to speak up.

“Milord, two guards of our patrols were addressed by a Terran male who claims to have knowledge of a Starfleet officer hiding here in the town.”

The Klingon’s bushy eyebrow narrowed and a mixture of curiosity and loathing awoke in him. Yes, he knew that the inhabitants of this colony didn’t feel any loyalty to the Federation, still to give a man or a woman of the UFP away was low. Nonetheless, Kor had to follow every hint of the presence of an enemy within his reach.

“Where is this man?”

“Ensign Tagre brought him to this new headquarters here. He is in the anteroom.”

Kor leaned back in the chair. “Show him in!” he said; waiting patiently until the man was brought before his desk. It was a younger human male, maybe a Terran, who masked his unease with anger, as far as the Klingon Lord was able to read his ‘guest’s’ expression and look.
“I heard you have important information for me?” he asked coldly; the man nodded.

“Yes, sir. The Enterprise’s captain, James Kirk, is hiding in Turkana City.”

If a bomb exploded right next to him the effect couldn’t have been different. Kor shot out his chair and stared at him; his almond-shaped eyes widened. “Kirk is here? Are you sure?” he asked after several seconds, and the man nodded.

“Yes, sir. He was left behind because his ship had to raise the deflector shields as you and your fleet arrived. He ordered the Enterprise to leave.” Something flashed in his eyes, and the fleet-commander cocked his head; he didn’t believe the luck the fates handed him.

“Kirk is dead,” he stated flatly; he sat down again. “He and his first officer were killed weeks ago and…”

“I assure you, sir, that Kirk is very much alive as is his Vulcan officer!” The man spat the young captain’s name and Kor bent forward. If this really was true, if Kirk really wasn’t killed at the Japori System, then…

Then he, Kor, son of Ryan, had been tricked by the young officer, Sulu, and he let the Enterprise pass through without getting what he wanted. The human had… What did Terrans call it? Bluffing? Yes, that was the word. Bluffing. This Sulu had used this twisted kind of lie to get away with the ship and with the Vulcan aboard. It was like this, Kor had been fooled. In Kahless’ name, if he could get his hands on this Sulu, he would squeeze the life out of him.

Still the prospect of having Kirk at his mercy was something that almost made the humiliation worthwhile. And Kirk would pay for the disgrace that had been bestowed by one of his crew members on the Klingon Lord. Kor would make certain of it!

“Who are you?” he asked and the man took a deep breath. “Matthew Allistor, sir.”

The obedient intonation was abhorrent to Kor. He hated boot-lickers and traitors even more! “Well, Mr. Allistor, why do you tell me all of this? Kirk is of the human race, just like you.” His nostrils twitched. To give away one of the own race in a war… It was unthinkable to a Klingon.

Matt snorted. “Because of this scumbag, I lost my wife and my children.”
Kor pursed his lips. The reason for this kind of betrayal was revenge. He could accept that. However, revenge was personal and you don’t share it with others. Not if one’s own family was the reason for the vengeance. “Explain!” he ordered.

“My wife wanted to accompany those who left Turkana, I forbid it. She dared argue with me. The argument must have gotten Kirk’s attention. He tricked me and let her beam aboard his ship with my children.” Fury lay on his face. “Because of this bastard my wife is now out of reach for who knows how long. He has to pay for it!”

Kor frowned again. Did he understand this right? This man subdued his wife and because she found another way out, he wanted to exact revenge on the man who helped her? The whole thing was strange for him. Females were equal to males in his culture. And he was sure the same was true for the majority of Terrans. “You demand complete obedience of your wife?” he probed the topic.

“Of course!” Matt growled and the two Klingon guards behind him exchanged a glance.

The Klingon Lord’s expression changed ever so slightly. “Be glad that your wife wasn’t one of our people, human, because she would have answered you with a dagger instead with words!” he stated dryly, then he took a deep breath. “So, you reveal Kirk’s presence to us to take revenge. Do I understand you correctly?”

Something in the Klingon’s voice was strange, but Allistor wasn’t one of the most intelligent people and ignored the tingling warning in his gut. “Yes – and I think he is going to give you trouble, so…”

“Where is he?” Kor interrupted him. He was glad for the information, but he also felt deep scorn for the man. This human was too cowardly to fulfill his wanted revenge on his own, and instead betrayed his personal nemesis to the enemy. This Allistor had no courage, no honor! The Klingon Lord’s distaste for the human grew.

“An old man, Patrick O’Farrell, took him in. I followed them a little bit and saw them vanish into O’Farrell’s house. With the curfew in place, Kirk couldn’t have left the house without being caught. He must still be there!”

Kor nodded and rose. Even if he spurned the man, there was only one thing to do. “Show us the way!”
Jim put the dried dishes in the cupboard and smiled as he watched Patrick polishing the old-fashioned sink. It was almost a little bit like his childhood, before Frank came and ruined everything. The farm house in Iowa, his and Sam’s mother had rented, had been more than three hundred years old and it had been cozy with its mixture of historic building-style and modern comforts. He had loved this house and…

A loud crashing sound from the front door, that took both men by surprise. A moment later several Klingons stormed the house and went straight to the kitchen; it was the only lit room. Jim didn’t have time to react as the guards pointed their disruptors at him. Patrick O’Farrell yelped, while Kirk felt dread flooding him. The Klingons arrival could only mean one thing. They knew who he was; it meant torture and death for him.

Another middle-aged Klingon stepped into the small room; his ensigns and his proud stance gave him away as a high-ranking officer. The dark eyes roamed over Kirk’s face and for a split of second something like a smile tugged at his mouth – the smile of a wolf that caught the lamb.

“James Kirk, I assume,” the Klingon said with a deep, growling voice that held barely any accent. “I was told that you were dead. It seems your ‘acting captain’ lied to me.”

So this was Kor, the fleet commander of the strike group that had annexed Turkana. He had heard the beginning of the transmission between the Enterprise and the Klingon flag ship, and therefore aware the enemy fleet commander’s name was no secret for him. Jim knew that he would pay for Hikaru’s little stunt, too. He was also aware of the fact that any denial of his identity would do more harm than good. His cover had been blown and he now had to face the consequences. Consequences he would meet with dignity becoming an officer of Starfleet. Klingons loathed cowardice and he would not give them the satisfaction.

He saw Kor’s gaze fall on Patrick and out of impulse Kirk placed himself in front of the old man, shielding him. Instantly, he was again in the focus of the Klingon Lord and he squared his shoulders. “You are right, Commander. I am James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise.”

The hostile officer looked him up and down, and nodded slowly, almost pleased. “At least you are no coward.” He lifted both brows. “Lord Kor of the Imperial Fleet,” he introduced himself – a polite gesture from captain to captain. Then he turned slightly. “Lieutenant, arrest Captain Kirk and bring him to headquarters!”

Two Klingons stepped forward and encircled Jim’s upper arms in a steel-like grip; it made Kirk’s
stomach clench. He knew exactly what would happen to him.

Just then Patrick recognized Matthew Allistor and his eyes widened. “Matt! Don’t tell me that you are behind this!” he gasped.

“You’re hiding a wanted man, Paddy,” Matt drawled. “You should have thought twice before you did something as foolish as this.”

The old man took a deep breath and stepped towards him; his face reddened in anger. “You slimy little cowardly bastard! This is nothing more than primitive revenge because Sarah finally had enough of you and wanted to leave before it became too late for her. You haven’t even the guts to confront the captain alone; you needed Klingon help for it.” He spit at Matt’s feet. “I’m glad that Sarah made finally up her mind! She was always too good for y…”

Allistor seized him brutally by the collar. “Be careful what you say old man! You are a criminal now and…”

He stopped as a strong hand gripped his left wrist and pulled him harshly away. Kor looked with contempt at him before he glanced at Patrick, addressing him. “You hid Kirk here!” he stated – and Jim interrupted,

“He didn’t know that I was a wanted man in the Klingon Empire. He only wanted to help me because he knew what you and the likes of you would do with a Starfleet captain, that’s all.”

The piercing gaze of the fleet commander was directed at him again; then Kor turned his attention back at Patrick, “Is this true?”

“Yes,” O’Farrell said. “But I would have given him shelter either way.” He nodded towards Jim, who nearly groaned. Patrick had destroyed the bridge had tried to build for him to save him from the Klingons’ wrath. “The boy reminds me of my own son I lost four years ago and I see now good in denying a young man a helping hand because he was ready to sacrifice himself on the behalf of an unknown pregnant woman and her children to grant them a new life.”

Kor surveyed him thoughtfully. “You have backbone as you humans say.” He glared at Matt. “Something many of you lack, rejmor (coward).” He waved at the guards. “Bring Kirk along, we are leaving.” He walked towards the splintered front door as the Lieutenant called, “Milord, what’s about the old man?”
Ryan’s son looked back, straight at Patrick, who lifted proudly his chin. “He is under observation, until he proves to be no more trouble. I don’t want to give order to kill the only courageous and spirited being in this town full of scum!”

Then he left the house. The guards pulled their captive roughly with them, and Jim knew that he was walking the way to gallows…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeesssss, I warned you, didn’t I? I told you that are coming a lot of cliffhangers and that you will need something to calm down (*grin*). Yeah, Khan is on his way but he will need time – especially after the Klingons raised an energy-shield over the whole town. There is no way to beam someone in or out. And, above all, Khan has to cross a large distance to Turkana, while Jim’s time is running out. In other words: Our dear captain his in deep, deep water.

In the next chapter you will learn, how ‘deep’ this water really is, but of course Jim doesn’t give in this quickly. And Kor’s questioning will give the Klingon the greys, so to say. And in the meantime Spock tries also to find a way to save his friend, as Wesley is doing, while Khan prepares his strike.

I hope you liked the new chapter; including Sulu’s bluff, Khan’s raging fit, Matt’s betrayal and Kor’s way to handle everything less aggressively like his colleagues would do it.

The next chapter will come at the 12th or 13th October, and until then I’m dying to know what you think of the new twists.

Have a nice weekend,

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I am so, so sorry that it took longer than thought to publish the next chapter, but first I was on a vacation and then my dear beta-reader had a small trip of her own out of town and, above all, a little ‘fight’ with the charge of her laptop. Therefore it lasted longer, before you are now able to read the next update – but I am sure it worth the waiting.

As you know, Jim has been caught by the Klingons, Khan is on his way to come to the rescue and Spock and the others have to deliver the evacuees first, before the Enterprise can interfere (or can try to help Kirk). And if you think the last chapter was nerve-killing then don’t fret during the new one. You certainly will get a bad gut-feeling (to use Jim’s words).

And at last a little warning: There will be a nasty cliffhanger at the end (*evil grin*).

Thank you so much for all the Kudos and comments,

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14 – Through hell, part 1

They took Kirk straight to a heavily guarded town hall that served as headquarters to Lord Kor – now facing the captain from his confiscated desk; his dark eyes pierced him. Two Klingon security guards stood at the door. It didn’t matter to Kirk. Even if Jim didn’t wear the manacles, binding his hands in front of him, and even if he could escape the room and could leave the house alive, and then where would he flee? The official transporters were watched; there was no spaceport nearby, and he had seen the flickering in the air that seemed to enfold the whole city, instantly recognizing the force field of pure energy that turned the city in a one big cage. As much as he didn’t believe in no-win-situations, he knew he had to face up to this one. He knew that he wouldn’t make it out of here without help.

Kor surveyed the Starfleet officer in front of him. He seemed to be even younger than he first thought and the name ‘boy-captain’ fit. Kirk couldn’t have been called an adult for much more than a few years. His boyish features and bright blue eyes made him look rather like a student than a Starfleet officer who commanded the flagship. Despite his youth and the position he found himself in, Kirk held the calm demeanor that only wisdom and experience afforded, still Kor wasn’t fooled. Beneath the collected expression this captive wore, the Klingon sensed fear.
And he would use Kirk’s fear! There was a lot he wanted to know, and he would get it!

He fixed the young officer with a stare that made Klingon cadets flinch. He folded his strong hands on the desk surface and cleared his throat. “I am certain you realize the situation you are in, Captain. Not only did your crew abandon you…”

“My crew didn’t abandon me; I gave the order to flee when your fleet showed up,” Jim interrupted him firmly.

“While you were still on the planet?” Kor lifted his bushy brows.

“We had to raise the deflector shields to protect the civilians aboard from you. It made it impossible to beam me up. I’d rather they left me behind than to give you a chance at getting to my crew and the evacuees!” Kirk’s voice was flat; it made the Klingon lord frown.

“I wouldn’t have shot at an evacuee ship with innocent civilians. I am a warrior, not a monster!”

“Oh yes, of course!” Kirk sneered. “So, to demand the surrender of two commanding officers in exchange for the lives of six hundred civilians is a Klingon way of saying, “Hello”, or did I misunderstand something when you talked to my helmsman? Sorry, my mistake. I’m not familiar with Klingon tradition! Maybe we should start a cultural exchange; eventually we could end this damn war, and prevent further misunderstandings.”

Kor blinked several times; then something like a grin tugged at his mouth. “You are a captive of the Klingon Empire, facing consequences for your deeds – and you can make jokes? Either you are a fool or you are far braver than I thought.” He cocked his head. “The question is, which one of the two options is true?”

“Find out,” Kirk challenged, ignoring his mind that screamed at him to shut the hell up!

“I will!” Kor nodded slowly, regarding the Starfleet captain with a hue of curiosity. Was this renegade really so strong in will and mind, or was it all a mask? Certainly Kirk had to know what lay ahead for him, yet he talked like he was on a hunting party with friends. There was only one way to reveal the real James Kirk. “We shall see how much your displayed bravery is worth. Only then I will decide when you die.”

Again, Kirk’s inner voice told him to ignore the challenge, but his fierce heart spoke another language. “Whatever, the outcome will be the same. Your words tell me that you’re no different from
the any other Klingon. You tried to blackmail my crew into handing over Spock and me in order to let the civilians go. What kind of ‘honorable man’ are you to threaten an evacuation vessel like that?”

“We are at war, and everything has its price! It was never my intention to kill innocent families!”

Jim snorted. “Right! Tell that the Tammeron people your ‘glorious fleet’ wanted to murder in cold blood! Your Empire was about to kill 17 million men, women and children, who don’t even belong to the Federation – over trade agreements! Sorry, if I don’t believe a thing you say when it comes to my ship!”

Kor’s eyes narrowed. “I had nothing to do with it – the order to attack Tammeron. Certainly there are staff officers in Starfleet, too, whose honor is less than the others.”

Jim understood what the Klingon tried to tell him, but didn’t dare voice it. There were always men who were blinded by hate. Kirk had learned that lesson in his encounter with Marcus, with Section 31, and even with Khan. Whatever Khan was now, didn’t change what Khan had been – driven by pain and hate.

For a moment, both commanders looked at each other and shared a moment of understanding. Then the Klingon lord took a deep breath. “Tell me about Qo’noS!”

Kirk cocked his head. “You want me to tell you about your home planet? What’s wrong? Aren’t you allowed there anymore, or…?” He gasped as a blow to his back made him stumble forwards where he was unpleasantly stopped by the desk. Kor’s hands steadied him with an iron grip around his upper arm.

“Be careful what you say, human! You are speaking to the descendant of the last emperor’s family!” one of the guards snarled, but Kor waved it off.

Kirk took a deep breath. So this was the reason the fleet commander referred to himself as ‘lord’. He was a man who would be the Klingon emperor if the Empire hadn’t altered its political system.

The Klingon aristocrat looked him in the eye. “Once again Kirk! Tell me about your ‘visit’ on Qo’noS!”

Jim straightened himself again and hesitated. He couldn’t tell Kor the whole truth. Not only must
Starfleet’s…No. Not Starfleet’s, Marcus’s mission had to be kept secret, but Khan must be protected too. The Klingons would move heaven and hell to get the super-human, to capture him, torture him, and kill him. No, Jim wouldn’t give Nien up! Not to Starfleet Command and certainly not to the Klingons!

So Kirk wove a tale based on the truth. “I was sent to capture a wanted criminal who, we believe, attacked Starfleet headquarters. His trail led us to Qo’noS. We feared he would attack your people too.”

“Well didn’t you contact us through official channels? You infringed on our territory. Once he left your jurisdiction, he became our problem. We are capable of arresting a single man as you certainly can attest to!” The last words were mocking, and Kirk had to control his temper. The Klingon lord waited for the young officer to continue, but Kirk remained silent, so Kor spoke up again. “You came to our planet to arrest this criminal – why in secret when you were so concerned for our well-being? Why the masquerade of being dealers, if your visit was of a friendly nature? Why did you try to flee when you met our patrol? If only you were truthful with us, we…”

“Truthful? The woman, you mentioned, met with your patrol commander. She was unarmed and tried to tell him why we were there. She addressed him in your language, respectfully, and your commander tried to kill her! Another ‘honorable’ Klingon seized a smaller, defenseless woman in order to plunge a dagger into her! Why the hell would we be truthful?”

Kor leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms in front of his chest. He had seen the records. The reaction of the Lieutenant who commanded the patrol entity surprised him. The human female was as Kirk described, petite and without aggression. Still he would not acquiesce to Kirk’s rendition of the story. “Neither you nor I know what she said to provoke the patrol,” he said almost diplomatically. “Perhaps he realized her lie and…”

“She didn’t lie! She told him what I’m telling you now. We came to Qo’noS to arrest a criminal!” Jim’s voice was sharp now. “And we didn’t contact your government because we knew that your council would read something else in it. So we went down on the planet…”

“Gave an impressing show of your flying abilities on my planet before the patrols surrounded you. Your female officer was sent to pacify us, and when our patrol exposed you as spies, you killed them.”

“We weren’t there to spy on you!” Kirk snapped. “What the hell could we possibly hope to find in an abandoned city? Construction plans for a restaurant?”
An odd noise escaped one of the Klingon guards, and Jim was almost certain it was a suppressed chuckle. When Kor’s face darkened, he was certain of it.

The fleet commander leaned forwards again. “Even if your statement is the truth there is still the bloody trail of three dead Klingon patrols and one destroyed scout ship you left! More than forty Klingons, Kirk, killed by you and your back-up!”

“Back-up?” For just a moment Jim puzzled over Kor’s words, then the scales fell from his eyes, as the fleet commander growled, “The man, who came to your aid, swung a rifle-canon like a puny hand-phaser and fought with the savagery and the brilliance of an ancient warrigul!”

Ice flooded the young captain’s system as he realized that his captor referred to Khan. Jim knew that Kor would draw the right conclusions; the Klingons had their own experiences with Augments and enhanced DNA. An old phrase came to mind; the best defense is a good offense. “Maybe it was one or your people?”

Kor looked thunderstruck at him, offended by the mere suggestion. “You do not really think that one of our own turned against us and killed so many of the own race, do you?”

“Why not? Maybe he is insane, a rebel or…”

“A rebel?” The Klingon lord shook his head and then he took a deep breath. “Shall I tell you what really happened on Qo’noS? This man was the criminal you came to ‘arrest’. Maybe he attacked Starfleet’s headquarters; maybe you were sent to get him because Starfleet wanted to use him for its own purpose. His strengths lay not only in his body, but in his mind too, because he is enhanced… an Augment!”

Jim wanted to curse. He really did, but it would give him away, and Khan. He controlled his expression as well as he could and replied, “The man you saw was a stranger; I’ve never met him before.” He did his best to stick to his story for consistencies sake. “Whoever it was, he came to our aid, killed the most of our attackers – your people might I remind you – and then vanished. I didn’t even get a chance to thank him. I should’ve. He saved our lives. Well, the most of them. Two of my security officers and he criminal, we came to arrest, didn’t make it. I tried to find the man afterwards, but he was nowhere to be found and…”

“Ever heard of a ‘scanner’?” Kor taunted, and Kirk rolled his eyes.
“If your patrol hadn’t shot at our ship, we could’ve used the scanners. Thanks to your attack, they were damaged.”

“How convenient!” the Klingon snorted. He leaned in and eyed Kirk closely. “So, you say you didn’t know this man, your back-up, and that he disappeared, while the criminal, you chased, died in the combat?”

“Yes.” The young captain’s voice sounded clear and placid.

“And you deny that your back-up is an Augment?”

Jim sighed. “I don’t know him, so I can’t confirm nor deny your assumption. But it is impossible that this man is an Augment. The Augment program was something that happened three centuries ago on Earth, decades before humans developed warp capability. The whole thing ended in a horrible war that killed almost a third of Earth’s population and all of the Augments. So we’ve had more than enough Eugenics bullshit, really. The incident you are obviously alluding to was not a ‘program’ but the attempt of some crazy scientist who wanted to give it another go nearly a century ago. Neither the Federation nor Starfleet has authorized any further experimentation as far as I know. There are no more Augments. But I’m sure you already know this, after all it was us who came to your aid, when you tried something equally idiotic, and it backfired.”

“You know a lot about this special ‘incident’,“ Kor commented thoughtfully and Kirk shrugged.

“Academy stuff. To pretend something never happened doesn’t undo the damage, and it’s better to remember our mistakes in order to prevent them from happening again.”

“A wise attitude, I am almost ready to believe you. But it doesn’t give me an answer to the question, Kirk. Who was your mysterious comrade-in-arms?”

Kirk sighed. “And I told you twice, I don’t know! He vanished and…”

“He wasn’t a common human, Kirk! Don’t tell me otherwise!” The tone became harder. “There are two possibilities. One, he is a Vulcanoid – that seems unlikely since Vulcans are too peaceful, Rigulians are too weak, and Romulans wouldn’t help Starfleet officers. Two, he is an enhanced Terran.”
“You’re wrong.” The lie left Kirk’s lips easily. He was determined to protect Khan with everything he had. His desire to do so had been growing these weeks. Kirk didn’t know why, but he wasn’t one to ignore his instincts – or desires.

“How can you be so sure if you don’t know his identity?”

“Because there are no Augments anymore – not from Earth or anywhere else in the Federation!” Jim replied, sangfroid and with a dignity that belied his position as a captive.

Again Kor’s impassive eyes roamed over his face, revealing nothing of his thoughts. The Klingon slowly answered, “You said, this man simply vanished in the ruins. Our scanners worked very well then. We came to look for our patrols. There was no living being within 150 kilometers of the town. No one could walk that distance in such a short time. This man fled with you. And I am certain that it was him who fought off the Orions on one of your outposts several weeks ago. Our allies described him as a young, slender, male Terran clad in black, who fought with the quickness and mercilessness of a le-matya, portraying inhuman strengths and reflexes. And this is exactly what I saw on our recordings, even with his face masked.” His voice grew louder. “This man on Qo’noS and the man in the outpost are one and the same! He fights like our ancient warriors, with strength to a Klingon or Romulan.” His eyes glittered. “Do you still insist that he isn’t an Augment – that you don’t know who he is?”

“Yes, because if there were something like a new Augment program, Starfleet would know about it. I never met this man before!”

“The latter, I believe,” Kor stated, “but that doesn’t mean you don’t know who he is. And it doesn’t mean that he didn’t leave Qo’noS with you.” He stared at Jim then continued, “I want to explain your situation once more, Captain. You are a captured officer of the Federation, and we are at war! Normally, I would have ordered you shot on sight, but…”

“But you needed me alive to gather intel. You want to know about the fleet, our ships, our weapons, our capabilities. You know I can’t and won’t answer them! I’ve told you more than I am obligated to as it is.”

Kor was tempted to smirk as he watched the fire flare in the blue eyes in front of him. Kirk was a warrior through and through. This fact and the captain’s fearlessness in the face of the Klingon threat in front of him impressed the Klingon lord. The young man had guts; he had to give him that.

“I understand that you cannot divulge the information that I request, still I do believe that you will.” The fleet commander cocked his head. “You will not have a choice and it would be best for you if
Jim was very aware of what Kor alluded to – torture – but he would be damned if he would give this Klingon bastard any satisfaction by revealing the dread that filled him. “Fleet Commander Kor, spare us both the pretense! I know that your High Council has already sentenced me to death and that you ‘don’t have any choice’ other than to execute me. Come on; show your hand. Don’t try to ply me with promises that you can’t deliver on.”

This time it was Kor who was surprised, even as he felt some respect rising in him. The Terran captain had a reputation in the Empire after the incident with the Tribbles and on the battle on Qo’noS, but the Klingon lord was not one for rumors. He needed to make a determination on something, or in this case, of someone, on his own. James Kirk was nothing like the propaganda spewed throughout the empire. Any other time he could have had the luxury of admiring the young man’s fortitude. But here there was no room for it.

“Show my hand, eh? An interesting phrase, Captain – especially, when you are the one with something to lose.”

“You’re this close to killing me,” Jim deadpanned, trying not to think too much on the matter. He felt sick enough over it, and he didn’t want to die again. “What more could I lose besides my ship and my crew? But they’re out of reach for you now, aren’t they?”

Pursing his lips Kor replied sternly, “Yes, the High Council decided the death penalty, but I’d think you’d want to know the method of execution, wouldn’t you, Kirk?” His intense gaze held the Jim’s. “You are sentenced to death by torture.” He saw the younger man pale. “And it is up to me to decide when you’ve suffered enough to grant you your last breath.”

Even with his firm determination to mask his emotions, Jim couldn’t prevent the icy fist from squeezing his heart. Nausea clenched in his belly. Tortured to death by a Klingon's hand. There wasn’t a crueler or more brutal way to die.

Kor watched him carefully and nodded. “I see you realize what lies ahead, and because of your courage I want to offer you a chance to decide for yourself which way you want to go. I’ll give you three of your standard hours to think on the matter. Either you answer my questions truthfully – and believe me, we have ways of finding out if you are lying or not – and I will grant you a quick death. Or you remain silent, and I order the execution exactly as the High Council intends, performed by two men who lost family due to your ‘visit’ to Qo’noS. Believe me, they will let you suffer for days, perhaps weeks. They can make you feel as if you are burning alive from the inside out, without lighting a flame. You are going to talk, Kirk; it is up to you how long you have to endure this harsh way. So think very carefully about your choice before you give me your answer.”
He waved towards the guards. “Take him to the cellars. There are secure rooms for holding criminals in custody. Chain him up and prepare a soundproof room for his questioning.” His gaze found the young captain again who still attempted an expression of bravado, but his face was snow white. “Think about it, Kirk. Three hours – and what follows is up to you.

ST***ST***ST

More than four hours away from Turkana, the D’Ghor speeded through the space. She passed the disputed boundary to the Borderland an hour ago and so far no one knew she was there; the cloaking device and sensor-disturber worked superbly.

Khan’s eyes never left the scanner and navigation displays. He had passed by Son’A and was heading straight for Turkana, which would bring him near Obruli, another colony inhabited by outlaws. The Klingon fleet was camped there too according to the long-distance sensor. Still the Augment was confident that they would not discover him. The Klingons here didn’t have a clue that their cloaking technology had been turned against them. Everything would be fine as long as James stayed hidden.

Khan couldn’t be certain. Kirk might have been in the enemy’s hand for hours now, or he may be free and hidden. Finding him would be difficult. Khan wasn’t one to indulge in false hope, but he applied the same focus and determination to Kirk’s rescue as he did his own Augment family. He would get Jim off this planet and bring him to safety, no matter what; and then he would give him an earful. Well, if James were physically well enough for the lecture. The former dictator was painfully aware of what his one-time-lover would endure should he be a prisoner. He’d find Jim; he’d find them all.

The observation system for interstellar transmissions buzzed and showed Khan a Klingon communique from Turkana to Obruli. The super-human frowned. The reason for the contact between the two strike groups must be important. Surely immediately after an annexation there were more urgent things to do than chat. Perhaps the communique relayed information on further attacks against the Federation. But his instincts told him they concerned a certain Starfleet captain!

Quickly, he recorded the transmission and activated the universal translator.

“Lord, Headquarters to BortaS and MeQ’lw. Your presence on Turkana is demanded. Confirm!”

A moment later another voice answered. “Turkana Headquarters, this is Commander Koval of the
BortaS speaking. Do I understand correctly that Lord Kor requires Commander Noy’s and my presence on Turkana? Are there any problems with the colonists?”

Again was a short pause, before the dark, strong voice replied, “This is Kor. Do you have everything under control, Koval?”

“Yes Milord! Obruli is ours. There wasn’t any resistance. The inhabitants are only interested keeping about their ‘businesses’. I hold out this prospect for them, if they cooperate. I the affirmation of the colony’s leader.”

“Well done, Koval. I have a reward for you and your cousin. The murderer of your brother and Noy’s brother in-law fell into our hands and…”

“You have KIRK, Milord?” Koval interrupted him; his voice trembled with excited wrath.

“Yes – and as far as I have come to understand his character, he going to need some persuasion to tell us what we want to know. I would like to give you and Noy the responsibility of extracting that information. We must get all the required information about Starfleet and the mysterious stranger on Qo’noS. You may have your revenge. How quick can you be here?”

The answer came a moment later. “My navigator told me in 2.8 hours.”

“Right, I’ll await your arrival. Kor out!”

The recorded transmission ended and Khan stared at the device as if it was to blame for what the conversation that transpired. Then he closed his eyes. Dammit! He feared something like this. He feared that those blasted aliens would get their hands on James and James would be subject to torture fueled by vengeance that Khan caused.

Then it hit him. The Klingon fleet commander wanted information from Jim about Starfleet and of course him, Khan! And Kirk had refused to tell the enemy anything.

James – his James would submit to torture to protect him!
Khan Noonien Singh never cursed at a higher being – not of his own people or any other. Right now though he was ready to break with precedent and call to Bramah, the God of creation and Shiva, the God of destruction – two of the Indian Trinity. If there were some higher power in the universe who led the fates then they had to do something. Many times over the centuries, Khan watched doom unfold around him. So many people loyal to him; so many who cared for him died because of him. Humans and Augments alike gave their lives to protect him during the Eugenics Wars. Kirk was different. He hurt Jim – Jim had no reason for loyalty or friendship with him, but there it was. He lied to his superiors and his friends to give Khan a head-start; he covered for him, and now he was ready to endure torture to protect him.

A wordless sound of anger erupted from the super-human’s throat; his right fist slammed into a panel on the navigation panel in an outburst of denial, fury and determination.

No! He wouldn’t allow this! Never!

“Computer, calculate time of arrival to Turkana!”

The device took a moment to translate the English words in Klingon, “4 hours and 48 standard-minutes.”

Khan jaw tightened. The two Klingon commanders so obviously bent on revenge would arrive two hours sooner than the D’Ghor! And even then, he still had to find James before he could take him to safety.

The Klingon – Kor – had called his location his ‘headquarters’. Therefore, it had to be a building that satisfies certain prerequisites, like safety, size, a central location, logistics, and it had to contain the database containing planetary and colony information. That narrowed down the candidates considerably.

Khan wasn’t sure what he would find on Turkana. On one hand, the Klingons should have done intelligence gathering before the invasion. On the other, he wasn’t sure what was available in the database. Lucky for him, where the Klingons were brilliant warriors, they were lax in database security. He barely finished relaying his questions to the ship’s computer when it spit the data on the planet back at him. Data about the geology of the planet and its atmosphere, fauna, climate and details about the colony itself came at him as fast as his Augment brain could comprehend. It was clear that the Klingons took time preparing for the annexation.

Khan listened closely and studied the few charts available on the computer. He learned there was only one town of significance on the planet, Turkana-City. Another ten miles away there was a space
port and on the outskirts of the town were several family farms. The Augment concentrated on the
town and pressed his lips in concentration. He saw that it was placed on a promontory, reachable
only by transporter or a single, broad street. It reminded him briefly of a castle – not from the
architecture but the choice of location. It granted the inhabitants a certain degree of natural safety, but
with a Klingon invasion from above, this advantage meant nothing. Rather, Khan was sure that Kor
chose, subdued, and controlled the area due to the town’s concentrated population.

The latter made no difference to the super-human. Those people had chosen their way, and they had
to live with the consequences. But the layout was important when planning a rescue. The former
dictator had an idea where to find Jim, but he needed certainty. There would be only one opportunity
to free the young captain so the risks must be mitigated and all available knowledge exploited.

Activating the diagram of the Turkana in the ship’s database, Khan discovered the origin of the
intelligence. There was Orion script on many of the documents, charts, and diagrams. The super-
human quickly found the market place and the town hall nearby. Assuming personnel recovery
operating procedures had not undergone major changes, the most logical place to conduct an
evacuation on a large scale was from the market center. And Jim had been there. Perhaps he fled
when his ship left, and was discovered somewhere within the city before being taken to…

His gaze found the town hall and he nodded. It would make sense. It was the largest building,
equipped with everything a leader needed, was central, and a part of it belonged to the town ward,
Khan assumed that served as Turkana’s police. If Kirk weren’t aboard a Klingon ship, then he would
be at the town hall.

He memorized the maps and de-activated the files, checked the ship’s course once more and set the
helm on auto-pilot. Once he adjusted the scanner’s warning system he left the bridge. Jim was going
to bear a few hours of the Klingon ‘questioning’ and Khan knew that the younger man wouldn’t be
in his best shape afterwards. Even if the super-human could locate him and beam him up, Kirk
would need medical attention quickly to stop his pain and heal the wounds. There was only one
thing that would help him, before Khan could treat him properly.

Khan was glad that Commodore Wesley had accommodated The Shadow and sent the medical
supplies. He stepped into the small room between two crew quarters that served as a poor excuse for
a med bay. Quickly and thoroughly, he looked over the medical supplies; he found some laboratory
instruments, analgesics, blood circulation stabilizing agents and antifebriles. Quickly he prepared
everything for his task, rolled his left sleeve up, took a hypodermic needle and watched it disappear
into his brachial artery to draw blood.

He knew exactly what to do…
“For God’s sake, we’ve to help him!” Scotty stood at the Engineering station with his arms crossed. “If they’re catchin’ ’im, he’s dead!”

The Enterprise was barely an hour away from Kenda and the atmosphere aboard was gloomy. Every one of the alpha-shift nodded; even Spock had his head bowed in acquiescence.

“You are right, Mr. Scott,” Sarek’s son said calmly, surprising even himself with this statement. “As soon as the colonists are safely on Kenda, we will return to Turkana to get the captain. I hope as well that we are not too late, but we will get him and we will bring him home.” Spock paused in order that the crew understood the implications of his words – Kirk, dead or alive would not be left behind. “You must understand that we may die as a result.” They crew nodded; he took a slow, deep breath and lifted a brow. “Very well then. We haven’t received any orders from Starfleet Command. By the time they get around to it, we will already be back in Borderland.” His gaze landed on Uhura. “However, we will likely be challenging the admiralty by undertaking this mission, and it may be a– what do you call it – a one-way ticket?

Nyota smiled at him. “Yes, that’s what we call it, but I think we are ready for it.” Her attention was tracked to Sulu and Chekov, who both nodded sternly, while Scotty grinned.

“Look at that, Commander. And here I thought you’d decline a challenge with such a low chance of success.”

Spock lifted a brow. “The captain does not believe in a ‘no win situation’. I think, he would likely say, No risk, no fun.” Laughs sounded, but Spock interrupted, “It will be anything but fun, but Mr. Scott is right. We have to do something, and we will. We owe that Jim.”

It was unbelievable how quickly the atmosphere lightened; the faces of the bridge crew showed relief, but each was also pleased and surprised at the decision of the first officer. Who had thought that the Vulcan would decide such a thing?

But this Spock, is the Spock who lost his friend once, his T’hy’la, his brother in soul. This Spock was tired of losing – his planet, his friend. His human side was determined to fight back for what he loved despite the logic.

Spock sat back in the captain’s chair and closed his eyes, losing himself in thought. Even if they reached Turkana without being confronted by the Orions, they still had to get through the seven Klingon battle cruisers and a very experienced fleet commander who stood between the Enterprise
and her captain. Perhaps they could pretend to be on the rescue mission, returning for colonists who wanted to leave but had not reached the rendezvous point in time. But Kor was anything but stupid. He would anticipate a deception if the Enterprise returned – most assuredly if Jim were already captured. Kor would attack the Enterprise without wasting a moment.

The plan was crazy at best and suicide at worst. It violated so many regulations that Spock didn’t even want to count them; still he would try – he was a Vulcan who ought only to listen to logic and reason! This mission was anything but! And this crew was ready to hurl themselves into danger to save its captain – so was he. Jim had done the same for them, and he knew it was in Kirk’s nature to continue doing so to his last breath – he’s already given that. What had Jim told him, before he turned to Khan for help? He said his decision didn’t make sense, that it wasn’t logical. He heard Jim’s voice, ‘I have no idea what I’m supposed do, I only know what I can do…’

Spock was coming to the realization that the gut instinct, especially Kirk’s, wasn’t a weakness, but a strength when acted upon came with unpredictable risks. Perhaps it is a wisdom whose origin cannot be identified. Jim fed and exercised his so that Spock and the crew trusted it – trusted him with their lives. Still, operating on feeling or intuition without data went against the Vulcan way. But his affection and newly blossomed admiration for this stubborn, proud, brave and bright young man ran too deeply to discount his abilities. The thought Jim could be taken away from him again was untenable; the Enterprise needed her captain. Starfleet might be able to substitute Kirk, but they could never replace him. The ship, even full of people, seemed empty without the golden presence of Jim Kirk; the despondence the crew displayed in Jim’s absence could lead to a terrible outcome in their next battle. Maybe Spock should introduce a new variable to the burgeoning rescue. ‘Sunrise’ obviously cared about Kirk’s outcome; perhaps he should contact The Shadow to ask for some help. Sometimes hunting with the wild Sehlats led to a le-matya’s defeat.

Jim sat on a small cot in the security cell. He still wore the manacles, now secured to the wall, and the position he was forced into was quite uncomfortable.

But that was the least of his problems. The discomfort of his bound hands would be nothing compared to his next encounter with Kor.

Jim wasn’t a fool. Klingon torture technique was legendary. In the Academy, the young captain read reports of victims who fell into Klingon’s hands. Those unfortunate enough to be in possession of information deemed useful by the Klingons were subject to all manner of torment. Each method more brutal and cruel than the one before, and each more painful that the mind was willing to comprehend. The thought made the young man shudder, not to mention the terrible imaginations of his mind. He had heard of Klingon pain sticks – something mostly used in some rituals, but
sometimes also as a torture instrument – and of electrical whips. He also knew that Klingons liked to use their traditional daggers – the D’k tahg – on their victims, and there were certainly hundred more possibilities to make him suffer.

Kor was right. Sooner or later Kirk would give in. There was only a certain amount of pain someone could bear and before he or she reached their breaking point. Then everything Jim would endure would be for naught – Spock, his crew, Khan. Another vicious accompaniment to destroy his heart and soul.

Jim closed his eyes. He had always anticipated that one of his adventures would lead to his death. Work in space was risky and commanding a Starfleet vessel, especially during a time of war, well, the Grim Reaper always shadowed you. But to end like this…

New fear clenched his belly; Kirk took a deep breath of the stale, cool air. The minutes ticked mercilessly away; every one that ticked by brought his end nearer. He heard Spock’s voice telling him to calculate every risk in advance. He did that. He had calculated the risk to others, as a good captain should before he considered the risk to himself. But he knew he was playing a dangerous game when he helped the young woman to flee in his place, still he had hoped that everything would turn out alright.

A miscalculation, albeit a big one – he would not only die, he would die by torture at the hands of the enemy. Even the bravest man would shrink in horror at the prospect. His gaze landed on the manacles fixed above his head, and then the energy-field that locked him into the small cell. There was no way out for him, no possibility of escape, and Jim felt new desperation rising.

‘Don’t you dare to get caught…’

The deep, rich baritone echoed in his mind, and a wave of sorrow enfolded him; his neck tingled and he couldn’t reach back to scratch that ever-present…not an itch, but…something.

Khan…

How he wanted to meet him again. To see the man face-to-face as no longer an enemy, but a comrade-in-arms. He let his mind wander, indulging in memory. He wouldn’t rob himself of them any longer – not so close to death. Olfactory memory is the strongest, and Jim could still to smell his fresh exotic scent. He closed his own eyes to see Khan’s bottomless sea-colored ones more clearly. His body warmed in the cool cell when he imagined long, powerful arms around him and hot lips against his mouth. In his quarters, as now, he dreamed of this man, who as an enemy, seduced him against his will, but as a lover had given him the most pleasurable hours of his life. He had imagined
being joined with Nien again as the Augment did unspeakable, blissful things to him while purring naughty things into his ear. They soared in ecstasy together and came down to rest tangled in one another until sunrise came. Kirk knew their feelings had both changed, and he was sorry he wouldn’t get to see what might have been.

He had imagined Nien at his side – how it would be. A future together side-by-side, even serving on the same ship exploring uncharted space. Wishful thinking – undoubtedly – but even if there had been the slightest chance it was now taken from them both. Khan was somewhere with The Shadow, wondering why Jim hadn’t contacted him. And Kirk was mere hours from meeting his maker.

For just a moment, he damned Starfleet. He had already died once in the line of duty, now he would lose it again at the hands of the enemy – and if they got what they wanted from him, so would many others. How much was one man expected to give! Then Kirk steeled himself. If not for Starfleet he wouldn’t have Bones, Spock and the others, would never have commanded a starship – and he would never have met Khan. Hell, maybe he was the only one who could’ve stopped Nero. Earth would be destroyed if it wasn’t for Spock and him. And the Vulcan only got the idea to defeat Nero because of Jim. Botany Bay would still be drifting in space, and Nien and his family would remain in cryosleep. Or perhaps Marcus and Section 31 would still exist and would have located the sleeper-ship, and Khan would be still a hostage of the insane admiral.

No, the fleet gave him the best years of his life and gave to him the people he loved most in this world – or any other for that matter. But he longed for more of them. And the one passionate night in San Francisco seemed all the time fate would grant him with the Augment. It had to be enough; Jim knew he would feed on those memories of love and adventure, of Khan and his care, when the Klingons came to exact their vengeance.

He was torn from his musings when heavy steps echoed from the walls outside the security cell; he knew that the grace period was over. Ice once again settled in the pit of his stomach, crept through his veins and filled his heart and soul with dread. They were coming for him!

There was no doubt that Kor would stay true to his word; he would order Jim’s execution! As soon as the energy field was switched off, the Klingon guards would take him to Kor, and Jim’s fate would be sealed – finally and inevitably. When the four heavy armored guards were in sight Kirk felt deeply sick. Still he managed to hold his face expressionless; still he remained calm – at least on the outside.

One of the Klingons deactivated the barrier, and the remaining three pointed their disruptors at the Starfleet officer. For a moment, Jim was tempted to lunge at them as soon as they freed him, simply to provoke them enough to shoot him; it would be a far more merciful death than what awaited him. But even then his mind warred with itself. He didn’t want to admit defeat. He couldn’t accept that this would be the end of his road. As long as he lived there was hope! The Enterprise would come – Spock and Bones would come to save him; he knew it! As soon as they had delivered the evacuees
to Kenda they would return.

Still it would take the *Enterprise* more than nine hours to make the trip – not to mention breaking through the Klingon battleships in the orbit. It would be suicide if they tried to rescue him – or what would remain of him. Nonetheless his friends would stop at nothing to get him; something he hoped for and feared for, wrapped in one.

Pressing his lips together, Jim didn’t offer any resistance. When they loosed him from the wall, two of the Klingon guards gripped his arms and dragged him with them. The fright deep in him increased the closer they drew Kor’s office. Jim’s legs were heavy, his mouth went dry and his heartbeat was painful slow. The only things that enabled him to walk straight were his pride and his stubbornness. If he were going to die then he would do so with his head held high. He wouldn’t falter in front of his enemies; never!

Finally they reached the office area and stepped into the room that belonged to Kor now. The fleet commander wasn’t alone. Two Klingon captains and two lieutenants stood there and glared with utter hatred at him. Jim became aware of the fact that he was facing his hangmen.

“Kirk!” Kor greeted him with the cool respect that was usual between two higher-ranking hostile officers, before he came outright to the topic. “Your time is up. What is your answer?”

Plain, straight, without wasting time… Jim had anticipated something like that. This Klingon did indeed differ from the other Klingon commanders he met over the last two years.

“As I already told you, there is only one answer for me. And that is ‘no’!” He was surprised, how stern and unwavering his voice sounded.

For a long moment the Klingon aristocrat looked at him; then he nodded. “I knew that you would say this. I wouldn’t respect you as I do now if you had chosen the easier way.” He made a gesture towards the four other officers. “These are Commander Koval from the *BortaS* and Commander Noy from the *MeQ’hw*, with their first officers Khret and Karum. The two captains suffered personal loss because of your ‘visit’ to Qo’noS and to honor our traditions, they will be your executors.”

Jim didn’t say anything; he doubted that his tone would be as firm as it was before. He felt nauseous now, and the skin on his back contracted. At least he managed to control his expression, but he couldn’t hide that the blood left his face – again.
Kor had observed him for several seconds before he addressed his subordinates. “You know what information we require. Start with the questioning and update me on a regular basis. Don’t kill him before we have all the answers we need!” He rose from his chair and turned his attention back to the young captain, who tried to mask his fear despite his pale countenance. Not well enough for the trained eyes of the Klingon lord.

“I gave you a choice, Kirk. More I couldn’t do. I doubt that we will speak with each other again. Is there a message you want to leave for your relatives or your friends?”

This time Jim needed all his control not to gulp. Kor’s offer showed him once again the finality he was facing now. “You would send my last words to the Federation?” he asked, a little bit surprised.

A wisp of a smile appeared on the Klingon’s face. “I have come to know that you Terrans bury their dead and I intend to send your body to Starfleet as a sign of respect. So, if you want to leave a message, then I will pass it to the Federation, too.”

Another wave of dread filled him; they were speaking of his mortal remains after his execution, for God’s sake. He was scared, but he managed carefully, “Just let them know that I regret nothing.”

Kor nodded. “As you wish!” He waved towards the guards then knocked his fist against his chest and opened his hand – the traditional Klingon salute. “Captain!”

“Fleet Commander!” Jim replied, then strong fingers clasped around his upper arms, and they led him away; his two executors and their first officers followed him.

They brought him back into the cellars but turned another way, heading towards a larger room that was farther away from the main-part of the office area and had a heavy door. They passed a metal tube and Jim realized that it was a coffin – his coffin!

And with this sight came the horror – strong, icy cold and overwhelming. His mind hissed that the Klingons let see him his own coffin on purpose to increase his fear. His soul cried out. Only his obstinacy was stronger as they dragged him into the room that held only a table, two chairs and a manacle-device that had been quickly installed at the ceiling. At the table laid two stick-like instruments and several other items. Jim didn’t want to learn what their use, still he knew he would.

Khret and Karum tore the shirt from his body and forced his hands over his head; only one desperate thought rose in him. ‘Sweet Lord, HELP ME!’
“Mr. Kyle says that the transport of our guests is going very well. We can leave Kenda in less than half an hour,” Uhura reported after contacting the transporter room.

Most of the guests had beamed down to the planet into the visitor center the Kendanian government had prepared for them. Word had gotten around that the captain of the starship had stayed behind to help a young woman and her children evacuate, but the Klingons had arrived. The crew would return to Turkana to try to save their captain and friend. So the people hurried as much as they could, because all – aside from the smallest of children – knew what the fate of the commanding officer would be if he were caught.

The young woman Jim helped was shocked. She plagued and blamed herself; if she had obeyed her husband, the young, nice captain wouldn’t be in mortal danger now. Still she was glad to have escaped an unhappy marriage and life under the Klingons’ pressure.

Spock sat in the captain’s chair and nodded at Uhura’s words. “Very well! As soon as the last group has departs, contact the government official, confirm that all people are on Kenda and then we will leave for the recovery mission.”

“Hopefully with a better outcome than last time. Finally, we’re doing something!” The grumbling voice belonged to McCoy, who stepped on the bridge and looked at the Vulcan. “I came to report that all people in need of medical care are safely on the planet and that my colleagues down there have responsibility for them!”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Spock lifted a brow.

“Right,” Bones nodded. “I’ll be glad when we finally get to Turkana. Jim needs us! And if the Klingons want to give us trouble, we take them out!”

“Hopefully we don’t have to do something like that. Their fleet is situated such that it would be the Klingons who would take us out!” The way the Vulcan used this phrase made the most senior officers chuckle, including Leonard.

All of sudden, Uhura tensed, adjusted the receiver on her station and listened very carefully. She paled beneath her chocolate skin. “Spock,” she whispered, forgetting to address him correctly on
duty. “A message from Turkana. It’s on the official frequency.”

“What is it?” the Vulcan asked; something Jim would call ‘a bad feeling’ spread in his gut.

Nyota turned around, her large eyes showed dismay. “It’s from the Klingon fleet commander, Kor. He says that they have Kirk and… and that he ordered… his execution.” The bridge fell deadly silent. There were tears in Uhura’s eyes now as she added beneath her breath. “Jim is sentenced to death by torture.”

You could have heard a pin drop as everyone on the bridge froze in horror.

“No…” was all McCoy could muster to say, before he lowered his head and pressed a suddenly shaking hand against his mouth, feeling nausea washing over him. Not Jim… Not this cheerful, life-hungry and bright Iowa-kid! It couldn’t be that something this terrible should happen to Jim!

Sulu and Chekov stared at each other in shock while Spock sat motionless in the captain’s chair and felt the same sharp stab of pain – the one he felt as he watched the light go out in Jim’s eyes on the other side of the contamination barrier in the Engineering. A tremor went through him, intense with coldness and dread that even his Vulcan control couldn’t stop.

Jim… His T’hy’la…

Not only was he going to lose him a second time; now Jim faced an even worse death than before. And there was nothing he could do about it – not soon enough anyway. And he didn’t dare to imagine what then would be left of his best friend. Spock knew enough about Klingon methods of torment to shudder inwardly at the mere thought. Suddenly, the wrath of the ancient warrior that lived in every Vulcan despite their chosen way of peace, flared angrily within him.

“Mr. Sulu,” he said with a dangerous, low voice. “Set course to Turkana, maximum warp. Lieutenant Uhura, contact the transporter room and tell Mr. Kyle that the last people should be beamed down within the next ten minutes. He must finish quickly.” His gaze found the young Russian. “Mr. Chekov, during our flight to Turkana you will work with Mr. Scott and Mr. Keenser to increase the distance our torpedoes can travel. I know that Starfleet Command has recalled the weapons Section 31 created, but in this case I see no other option than this technology if we want to bring the mission to a successful end. Dr. Marcus will assist you. She is familiar with this technology.”
McCoy looked tensely at the Vulcan. “We are still going to get Jim?”

“Of course, Doctor. Though the Klingons have sentenced him to die by torture, it lengthens are timetable for rescue.” He looked up at Leonard and added softly. “He will need all the help you can give as soon as we have him onboard, and I will offer to share my mental strengths with him to stabilize his mind and soul. He may be in a terrible condition, but he will be alive. His mental and physical care is up to us.”

He looked at Uhura and for a moment he wanted to go to comfort her; there were tears on her cheeks. As much as a good and composed officer she was, right now she was only a friend of Kirk, and she suffered vicariously with him. “We will get him,” he said softly. “Please try to reach The Shadow. They have ways and means that we are going to need. Sunrise was apprehensive over Jim’s safety. Maybe we can persuade him to help us rescue the captain. Use Code 9. And inform Commodore Wesley about our intentions, when…” He had hesitated a moment, before he said firmly, “After we are back in Borderland.” He caught several surprised glances and added, “I think Mr. Sulu’s unconventional methods are contagious.”

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Commodore Wesley stared with wide eyes at the computer terminal in his quarters as he listened to the Klingon transmission given in Federation Standard. He recognized Kor’s deep voice instantly. He and the fleet commander had negotiated on Organia for days and even had a few whiskies together – something Bob never mentioned in his report and he was certain that Kor had swept this private encounter under the rug, too.

So, the Klingons did find Jim Kirk and of course the Klingon lord went with the given sentence of the High Council. And, as Wesley knew the way of thinking of this race, they would try to coax information out of the young captain in the process – a process that made Bob sick. Good Lord, why must Kirk always play the hero? Why did he value his life so little that he continually got himself in the most impossible situations? Yes, of course, every honorable man would have tried to help the poor woman and her children. Bob would’ve done the same in Jim’s place – still the commodore railed against the fate that was about to send the young man to an early grave.

He worried at his bottom lip in thought then hailed the bridge. “Lieutenant Palmers, open one of the frequencies Lord Kor used and try to contact him. I want to speak with him in private.”

“Aye, sir!” the answer came instantly, as if the communication officer had expected this order. Maybe he had.
Wesley knew that he was taking great risk. He was about to speak with a high ranking staff officer of the enemy without the admiralty’s order or even allowance. If one of the admiralty learned of it, he could face trial; still he saw no other way. What was one of Kirk’s favorite phrases? ‘Desperate situations call for despite measures.’ Well, you certainly could call Bob’s action a ‘desperate measure’, but he would try anything to save his young friend.

He had to wait only a few minutes until the screen of his terminal brightened and showed the familiar face of the last descendant of the Klingon emperor’s family. The almond-shaped dark eyes looked calmly at Bob, while the deep grumbling voice of Kor sounded through the speakers.

“Commodore Wesley! This is a surprise – or perhaps not.”

“Lord Kor!” Bob greeted and lowered for a moment his head as a sign of respect, before he said, “As we parted on Organia I hoped we would meet again someday, but under better circumstances than those we are facing now.”

“I agree,” Kor replied. “But fate held another path for us. We are at war now, and I don’t think your admiralty would welcome your decision to contact me directly.”

Bob shrugged casually. “Sometimes it is better to let two warriors talk with each other alone, rather than a dozen chiefs.”

A hint of a smile was on the Klingon’s face before he retorted, “This opinion we shared before and do still.” Then he became serious. “I know why you want to speak with me – and whatever you want to say on the behalf of James Kirk I have to state that there is nothing you or I could do.”

Taking a deep breath Wesley fixed Ryan’s son. “I know that Kirk’s ‘visit’ on Qo’noS was anything but satisfying. But just for the record, it wasn’t Kirk’s fault what happened there.”

“Still his appearance initiated a row of events that led to the death of three Klingon patrols and a destroyed D4-scout. The High Council regards this and his action concerning the tribble event as acts of terrorism against the Empire and handed down the sentence that I must execute.”

Bob bent slightly forward. “But it wouldn’t be the first time that prisoners were set free in exchange for someone else, or…”
“The Federation has no Klingon prisoners, Commodore – unless this has changed within the last hours. And even if so, I would have to consult my superiors to put your request forward. There aren’t many people important enough to exchange them for a criminal like Kirk.”

“A criminal?” Wesley felt the irrational impulse to laugh. “For God’s sake, Kor, this boy is barely an adult and risked his life to protect your home planet.”

“He did what?” The bushy brows of the Klingon shot up.

“He did – but I can’t give you details. You just have to trust my word.” He sighed. “Still, I admit that the whole thing turned into a disaster, but believe me – Kirk is neither a terrorist nor a murderer.”

“This depends on the point of view,” Kor replied dryly, before he cocked his head. “Why is he so important to you? Why are you risking your career by contacting me in private – me, a military leader of the Federation’s enemy?”

Wesley knew that he was treading on very thin ice, still he trusted his gut. Kor was a Klingon warrior through and through and as a result, very dangerous. But he was also honorable and sincere – two characteristics Bob appreciated. “Because Jim Kirk is like a son to me,” he admitted and saw his counterpart pursing his lips; something akin to understanding flashed in his dark eyes.

“Then I am sorry for the personal loss you will have to face, Commodore. You are one of the few Terrans I have come to respect. Perhaps it will make you proud to know that Kirk met his fate with his head held up high as you Earthlings say. He could have gotten a quick death by giving us information we require, but he refused. And he showed bravado the whole time in my presence. I almost regret that I had to order his execution, because I regard courage highly, but I have no other choice.”

“There must be something you would accept in exchange for his life!” Bob threw in, careful not to reveal the despair slowly overwhelming him.

“If there were something important enough that the council would accept, I would tell you.” Kor’s face softened – something rarely seen. “Maybe it comforts you that I’ve already ordered Kirk’s mortal remains sent to the Federation when the sentence is fulfilled. He also wanted to let you – his friends – and his family know that he ‘regrets nothing’.”

Bob lowered his head. He knew that there was nothing more he could do to save his young friend’s
life. Kor’s next words confirmed it.

“I am sorry, Wesley, but my hands are tied. Farewell!” He bent forward and killed the connection, leaving a grief-stricken Bob Wesley alone.

For several moments the commodore sat only there, looking into emptiness, then he balled his hands into fists trying to keep his anger at bay. He hailed the bridge. “Lieutenant, connect me with the Enterprise!” he barked and waited for longer than seemed necessary. Palmer’s voice sounded, “I am sorry, Commodore, but the Enterprise doesn’t answer.”

“I beg your pardon?” Bob asked, baffled.

“There is no answer, sir. Shall I try to contact the officials of Kenda to ask if she is still there?”

Wesley’s mind was steeped in turmoil. It didn’t take a genius to understand what was happening. He would bet money that the Enterprise was about to set off on a completely idiotic, suicidal rescue mission in an attempt to save their captain. And if it weren’t for the Lexington’s state, he would gladly accompany them, even if it meant breaking a handful or two of Starfleet rules. But he could do something else. He could feign ignorance of the crew’s intention.

“No, Lieutenant, I am certain that she is still at Kenda. Maybe they have another problem with their communication systems. The repairs weren’t when Kirk left Starbase 84. I’ll try it later again.”

He leaned back and rubbed his face, asking himself if his decision would lead to more deaths and the loss of the flagship, or to the rescue of Jim Kirk. Then something hit him. Spock had reported the short contact with The Shadow; he told of the outraged reaction of one of the militia’s members when he learned of Kirk’s fate. ‘Sunrise’; it must be a code name. He altered his voice during any contact in order that all attempts at voice analysis failed. Wesley had a feeling this man and ‘Drythen’ were the same person. Maybe this outlaw, whoever he was, could help. The Shadow operated on the outskirts of the law, and Bob didn’t want to think of this detail too much. But they could support the Enterprise and, above all, Jim, well hell! He’d take them.

One look at his terminal told him that the eavesdropping shield was still active. He also knew from Spock’s report that ‘Sunrise’ used Code 9 to contact the Enterprise only hours ago, warning them of the approaching Klingon fleet. ‘If only Jim would have listened to his mysterious friend!’ Wesley thought and activated a line of some main frequencies. It was about time to use some unconventional methods.
Aaaand the next cliffhanger. I have to repeat myself: I warned you (*laugh*). I know this is really a mean moment to end the chapter, after all it is even part 1 of 2 parts. So, our Jim is in dreading trouble and the rescuer haven’t even reached Turkana, whereby the Enterprise is even more far away than Khan.

In the next chapter – as you certainly assume – comes the ‘high noon’, so to say. Of course Khan will stop at nothing to get to Jim, but between the two men stand a whole Klingon squadron and natural as well as technical barriers. Right, Khan is driven by his fierce determination, basing of feelings he hasn’t recognized until now, still even an Augment can be defeated, if he is too outnumbered – or not?

As you see, the whole thing remains gripping.

I hope you liked the new chapter, even if you certainly feel sorry for Jim. Well, nonetheless he can call himself lucky to have such loyal friends and a brilliant and savagely lover, who is hell-bent to rescue him. I’m also curious what you think of Kor’s and Kirk’s talk, Spock’s willingness to disobey rules to help his T’hy’la and Wesley’s risky contact with Kor.

The next chapter comes sometime next week.

Have a nice weekend,

Yours Starflight
Hallo, my dear Readers!

Thank you so much for all the comments and Kudos. I’m happy that the last chapter touched you so deeply and that you suffered with Jim (and his friends).

I know that you are all eager to learn what will become of Jim, if Khan can get to him in time and if the two men will be able to escape. Well, and if everything runs smoothly – more or less – this will be the re-union you are all waiting for so eagerly.

At this point I want to give my special thanks to my dear beta-reader Rhiannon. It is incredible what she makes of my partly horrible writing, but also keeps my style completely. And she gave me several ideas or suggested several details, which made the story even better. Thank you so much, dear Rhiannon, I owe you!

And now – off into the 23rd century. There is a captain to save and to lovers to be re-united.

Those, who have weak nerves, please be warned!!!

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 15 – Through hell, part 2

Khan stared with horrified eyes at the scanners. This. Could. Not. Be! He had calculated every risk, every twist, any ‘ifs’ or ‘when’s’. But the fact that the energy barrier shielded the whole city didn’t occur to him. And scanners don’t lie. Because of this shield, he couldn’t scan the area; therefore, he couldn’t find James and, above all, he couldn’t use the transporter to beam him up. Time was precious now!

As he had heard the official transmission of the Klingon Lord and the words ‘I’ve ordered the execution of Captain Kirk…’ desperate denial caught him and mingled with pain and fury. Then his rational side took control once again. It was exactly as he had anticipated; Jim would have to bear brutal assaults, but it would buy him time for rescue. And Khan was hell-bent on getting the young captain out of trouble.
He just hadn’t foreseen the obstacle that blocked his way to James now. The snarl that escaped the Augment would have made a tiger tremble; then Khan forced himself to calm again. Rage would get him nowhere. A quick look at the displays showed him that the sensor-disturbing-system still ran smoothly and that the cloaking-device worked flawlessly. The mighty battle cruisers on the main screen hadn’t and wouldn’t locate him. At least this part of his plan was successful.

Well, another scheme had to be hatched as soon as possible. Pursing his lips, Khan observed the atmosphere of the now night-dark side of Turkana.

Night…

Dark.

Maybe this could work to his advantage. Back, in the 20th century, there hadn’t been technical devices like transporters, high functional scanners, and spacecraft with superluminals. Still, there had been secret missions fulfilled, prisoners broken out from high-security prisons, and well-secured areas infiltrated. Not for the first time since Khan had woken up in the 23rd century, he remembered old strategies from his time and used them.

‘Even the best secured house has its mouse holes – and I will find this one!’

Making his decision, he steered the D’Ghor through the atmosphere and let her glide down to the planet’s surface. Using the main screen’s infrared sensor, he watched the landscape beneath the scout as he flew towards Turkana-City.

The communications station display blinked again, and Khan suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. He had programmed the station to report transmissions sent within a radius of three dozen parsecs. For nearly three hours the radio traffic was very busy; the Enterprise as well as Commodore Wesley were trying desperately to contact The Shadow. Their reasons were clear. Still, neither Galven nor any other of the militia had answered those hails until now and Khan would have been a fool to pick up the transmission. As far as he knew the Klingons hadn’t cracked Code 9, but they were eavesdropping, too. And they could get the right idea about the spacecraft nearing Turkana if he answered those calls. So he kept silent.

“Running out of ideas, Vulcan, aren’t you!” he sneered. “First, you let James down and now you hope that we can pull him out of the fire for you!” He hesitated. Had he referred to The Shadow and himself as ‘we’? Yes, he had. Alas, he had to be more careful. He was becoming too attached to others outside of his family. Jim was an exception—the young man belonged to him by blood – but others… ‘Alone is what I have; alone protects me.’
Khan shook his head and concentrated once again on the planet surface beneath him, waiting for Turkana City to emerge onscreen. Five minutes later he could see the town on its high plateau and recognized the flickering, glistening air around the settlement. Scanning the barrier he realized that the energy would be highly uncomfortable if he touched it, but it wasn’t deadly. He could overcome this barrier; it was one of many he would have to overcome to reach Jim.

Pursing his lips, the super-human took in the picture onscreen. The wall of the promontory was high, but not too high. A well-trained climber could make it in less than a half hour, and the Augment counted himself among those. ‘What would Joaquin say now? Just let us find a parking space and then we are off!’ Well, he had to land the scout somewhere, but that was not the only challenge. He had to bring supplies with him for the climb up to the city, then move silently and invisibly through the city in order to break out Jim and to return to the D’Ghor – preferably with them both in one piece!

He thanked his foresight in preparing a serum for Kirk. Originally, he had mixed it to help ease the inflicted pain as soon as possible; now it would provide the basis for their flight. Kirk would be injured and weak; he needed strength to follow Khan to safety. The serum would support his body functions adding needed adrenaline and cueing his heart into maximum efficiency – hopefully. Khan knew that Kirk’s body was accustomed to the DNA of the Augment’s blood; still the serum could be useless. There was simply not enough data to gauge its efficacy.

And added to the problem of treating Kirk remained, how to reach the captain. How was he to reach the townhall unseen? He would need several items for this covert expedition. The equipment aboard the scout might do, but Khan doubted the needed equipment was available. So he had to improvise. If an Augment, a ruler, or a soldier learned anything, it was how to make due with what you have. It may not be ideal, but it is possible.

Bringing the scout nearer to the ground, he noticed the large moon of Turkana bathing the landscape in a bright, silver light; that would make it easier for him to move through the night. That at least was something; his enhanced vision and the moon would do well enough that he wouldn’t need to carry an artificial light then. He scanned the area for a fitting place to land and hide the vessel. He couldn’t get too near to the city. He was invisible, but not quiet, and there were likely Klingon patrols in the streets enforcing a curfew. But he couldn’t land too far away either. The captive’s escape would most certainly be found out and even with a head start, he wanted as short a trip as possible since Kirk’s condition was unknown. Every meter could be one meter too many during their flight.

Khan placed the scout ship down in a small clearing not far from the wood’s edge, close to the promontory. As quickly as possible, he programmed the replicator for tight, black overalls and footwear that would be fairly quiet; then he changed his clothes. He toyed with the idea of using Klingon armor as a disguise, but scrapped it. The armor was too stiff and too heavy; it would impede him during the necessary climb.
Sighing quietly, he strapped a supporting pack on his back, pocketed a knife and the injectors he had filled with the serum for James, girded his holster with the phaser, and made for the climb with long, determined steps.

He wished for the portable transwarp beaming-device now. The transwarp addition was useless, but a portable transporter would shorten their escape as soon as they were outside of the energy barrier. To Khan’s regret this item wasn’t in The Shadow’s inventory. It would only impede his travel anyhow. He would have to end the personnel recover mission the good old-fashioned way, by running for dear life – his and James’.

The crag rose like a wall of darkness in front of him. He turned back to the D’Ghor, closed her steel door and killed her lights with a small tricorder he had programmed to work as a communication device and remote for the scout’s main functions. He wanted to be sure she was as invisible as possible in the dark – no use the ship giving him away.

After several steps, the Augment glanced back one more back. There was nothing to see. The cloaking device was still running, and the added batteries would keep it functioning for several weeks, if necessary. Khan hoped that he didn’t have to test its longevity though. If everything worked out, James and he would be back within hours. If not, he wouldn’t need to worry about anything in the world anymore. He was well aware of the fact that this was a suicide mission if unsuccessful. He took a deep breath of the damp, cool and fresh air, then inwardly bid his family’s forgiveness. Should he fail and die in the attempt to free the young man then Joaquin and all the others would likely sleep for all eternity – or until the cryotubes finally failed.

Bending down he scratched some earth from the ground and rubbed it on his face and his fingers to darken his marble-white skin; it was an ancient trick, but it still worked. Then he began to walk. Once he left the jungle, he jogged towards the cliff. The upward climb would be risky, but the trek through the city was even more dangerous. He would need all his enhanced senses and instincts to reach the town hall undiscovered, invade the building, find James, and to get him out of the hellhole that the reckless boy had maneuvered himself into…

“Commodore, I have a report of the Enterprise for you.” Lieutenant Palmers’ voice cut through Bob Wesley thoughts. He was still in his quarters trying for what seemed an eternity to reach The Shadow – without any success.

He took a breath and replied calmly, “Put them through, Lieutenant.”
A moment later the ascetically pale face of the Enterprise’s first officer appeared on the screen.
“Commodore Wesley!”

“Commander Spock,” Bob greeted. “It appears you solved your comms problem.” For a moment the Vulcan looked confused; then something akin to surprised realization appeared on his expression and he replied carefully, “Obviously, sir.”

“Well, status, Mr. Spock?”

“The colonists are all safely on Kenda.”

Wesley nodded. “But there are some colonists left on Turkana that require evacuation now, yes?” His look turned serious as he caught expression of surprise on the Vulcan’s face a second time.
Wesley sensed the commander’s omission. “Spock, I know what you and the Enterprise’s crew are up to, and I think that you’re back in Borderland again, aren’t you?” He took the first officer’s silence as an affirmation. “Listen very closely, Commander, because I will only tell you this one time. If you can possibly drag your hero’s ass out of the hot water he is in, then, by all means do it. But do not risk the ship and the lives aboard! The Orions will figure out that you are back and this time you haven’t their allowance to pass through their territory, as illegal their claim of ownership is. And the Klingons will not hesitate to attack you, too. Be careful – and if there is no way to save Jim, leave!”

One Vulcan brow curved slightly. “Do I understand you correctly, sir? You give us your permission to…”

“For God’s sake, NO, Mr. Spock! I got word from Starfleet Command an hour ago that they deeply regret Kirk’s capture, but they can’t do anything – and that you should be ready to receive new orders. So keep quiet and don’t mention that I ever spoke with you directly, or we both end up on trial.”

Another face appeared beside the Vulcan, Doctor McCoy.

“Starfleet Command will do nothing to rescue Jim? After he saved Earth, revealed Section 31 for what they really were and…”

“It seems out of Admiral Barnett’s character to decide something like this,” Spock cut in before Leonard could reveal too much of his irritated state. Well, the good doctor was perpetually in an
irritated state, but best not to exacerbate it.

“Barnett and the admiralty are in an important meeting with several members of the Federation Council, counselors, ambassadors, and the president. They are conferring about a way to find a political and diplomatic way to end this war. I got the message concerning Jim from Admiral Luengo’s office, the chief of the SBI.”

McCoy frowned. “The SBI? Since when do they have a say in…”

“It doesn’t matter. When Barnett learns of this disaster, it will be too late for Jim,” Wesley interrupted him and rubbed his chin. “Just try to get him out of there and return in one piece. I’ve tried to contact The Shadow to see if they can offer you support, but so far I’ve had no luck.” He shook his head. “This isn’t my day. I also hailed Lord Kor. Even though he genuinely seems apologetic, he has to obey the Klingon’s Council command and means to execute Jim.”

Spock nodded slowly. “We will try our best, sir, and, on behalf of the crew, thank you – for your… support.”

Bob smiled grimly. “It’s the least I can do. I ask that you don’t reveal our discussions. It would likely stall any hopes of Starfleet involving themselves in Kirk’s rescue and perhaps even endanger talks to end this war.”

“Understood, sir!” the first officer murmured. “Thank you.”

“Wesley out!” Bob leaned back in his chair and shook his head. “God dammit, boy, you are going to get an earful from me – if you survive this mess.”

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Jim had never thought that it was possible to be in so much pain. His whole body was on fire; his shoulders, which carried his weight, burnt no less than his back and chest, wherever the pain-sticks were pressed against his bruised skin. Blood buzzed in his ears; his heart rate was dangerously high, and he had trouble catching his breath. Sweat blazed in the cuts left by the Klingon daggers on his upper body and in the tracks of the laser whip.

And there was no end to any of it; no end to the questions, no end to the brutal assaults, no end to
incredible hate Koval and Noy inflicted on him. He sighed in relief when the two captains left the ‘interrogation room’ to update Kor about their lack of success in gaining the desired information from their victim. But Jim’s relief was short-lived as two the Klingon lieutenants returned and undertook their questioning again. They weren’t any less cruel than their commanders.

When Khret delivered a sharp blow to his belly, Jim couldn’t prevent himself from vomiting – though only blood and bile came out of his mouth. His breath was hollow and harsh, and he fought against the tears threatening to spill in reaction to the brutal treatment he endured.

He heard the rough Klingon voices laugh and someone slapped him hard enough to make his ears ring. Then Khret gripped his scalp, forced his head up and stared at him with dark, wrathful eyes. His breath reeked of the raw meat he must have had as dinner. “Once again, human, the security-codes and the positions of StarFleet’s strike groups!” he demanded, increasing his brutal grip. “And who is this dark fighter; who killed our warriors?”

Jim looked defiantly at him and set his jaw. The Klingon took this as a negative answer. “You’re stronger than we thought, Ha’Dlbah (animal), but it will not help you! Khret growled. “This is your last chance before I get unpleasant,” he almost whispered. “Where is he?”

“Where you cannot get him!” the young captain gasped, imagining the super-human in the safe shelter of his quarters.

“What’s his name?”

“He has many names; all a great as he is,” the Jim murmured. His mind only acknowledged one though - Nien

“HIS NAME! Say it, human!”

New resolve flared up in Kirk. “Rumpelstiltskin! You don’t know Rumpelstitskin? The little gnome, who taught the miller’s daughter how to spin gold, so that…” The pain the Klingon inflicted this time was exponentially worse than the one before.

Khret reached for his D’k tahg, the Klingon dagger augmented with two smaller twin blades, and pressed it with the blunt side against the young captain’s chest. He bent forward and whispered, “I will skin you alive, Kirk! I will cut this sorry excuse of a biological coat from your body while Karum will carve pictures of your eviscerated organs on your back with his knife. Just think about
Kirk shuddered inwardly. He couldn’t remember whenever he had been so full of fear and despair. Not when he entered the warp core chamber without any protection to save his friends and his ship, and not when he found Khan in his apartment, ready to kill him. He had felt so much terror now though; his soul, his heart, every fiber of his being was crying for help – for mercy! But there was none to be had. Not this time. He would have to bear whatever the Klingons had in store for him until he died of shock and exhaustion. Or he could betray his friends, Nien, Starfleet and every free man and woman of the Federation by giving the enemy the demanded information to receive a quick death in return.

Not an option – not today and not ever. Despite his dry mouth, he spit straight into the face of Khret and rasped, “Fuck yourself, bastard!”

The Klingon backhanded him hard and snarled, “Karum, step five!”

Jim barely had time to understand what the Klingon meant; then the pain stick was pressed against his back again. There was no pain comparable to the pain that shot through his nervous system now. The proudest being wouldn’t be able to control their scream – neither could Kirk. He screamed. His peripheral nervous system was on fire – stimulated into overdrive by the pain stick. His whole body convulsed and his eyes rolled back. He wanted to plead, to beg, but he was incapable of voicing a coherent word. Everything melted into a red, fiery haze of sheer agony; darkness crept towards him to his conscious. And then the pain stopped.

His screams still echoed in his ears, almost loud enough to drown out the roar of animal fury – almost! The sounds around him changed. He heard angry shouts, grunts and tumult; then something hot and sticky splashed against his bare chest. Forcing his head up and his eyes open, Jim struggled to focus.

One Klingon guard lay a few feet away from him on the floor; his throat was slit. Khret fell next; his own D’k tahg was buried in his chest, penetrating one of his three hearts. Karum and three other guards were still fighting, but not one could overpower the slender figure clad in black who whirled between them like a dark lion – just as graceful and deadly.

The figure hurled a knife at one guard who lifted his disruptor – but it was too late. The Klingon’s life ended in a blink of an eye, cutting through the armor with the sheer force of the throw. Slender and inhumanly strong hands tore a Ba’leth out of the grip of another Klingon and beheaded him a moment later. Then the attacker threw the Ba’leth at a fourth guard who died before he could make to the door to call for help. Pink blood covered the walls and floor.
Karum reached for the stranger but grunted in pain as a fist shot forward and broke his breast bone, sending him to his knees. He wheezed and looked up at the stranger. His face twisted when he recognized the male humanoid beneath the dirt masking his face. It was a Terran, he assumed, not even out of breath. A second later the man grabbed his throat and pulled him up. Pale blue-green eyes glittered with frenzied rage; a deep voice snarled, “No-one. Hurts. One. Of. Mine!”

The grip around his throat tightened. The last thought that whirled through Karum’s mind was, ‘The Federation still has her Augment-program!’ Then he began his voyage to Khaseless and the Black Fleet. Khan watched the life slip out of the Klingon eyes as he crushed his trachea; blood dripped from the Klingon’s mouth. The Augment let go of his neck, and he slumped to the floor.

Khan warily looked around him one last time, only then did he allow himself to come out the battle reverie that had befallen him the moment he heard Jim’s agonized screams. He heard them through the ventilator shafts he had used to invade the building; then he saw what was done to him. Khan wiped his bloody hand clean on Karum’s sleeve and turned around. His gaze landed on Kirk’s pale and swollen face, roamed over the bruises and cuts – all the blood – some Jim’s, and some from the dead guard nearby. Then he met the glassy eyes of the younger man who looked at him in awe. Unbearable anguish mixed with disbelief and impossible hope shone in his eyes.

“James!” Khan whispered, shocked. His charge was in an even more distressing condition he imaged Jim would be; not just physically but also mentally. Kirk’s haunted gaze spoke volumes, and the tremors of shock began to rock his bruised frame.

Khan didn’t waste another second. Hastily, his keen eyes searched for the remote that would open the manacles. He found it on the belt of a guard. He hurried to the dead warrior, took the remote and dashed to Jim. He wrapped one arm around the slim waist of the young captain to steady him; almost instantly Kirk’s head sank to Khan’s shoulder, and a stifled sob rocked the strong but beaten body of the officer. Khan pressed his lips shut, and wrath flashed in his eyes at the realization of what had been done to his James. Then he eyed the symbols on the remote and recognized the Klingon symbol denoting ‘off’. Quite useful he learned a view symbols thanks to Ritek and the D’Ghor. He pressed it, the manacles snapped open and the super-human caught Jim as his knees buckled, and his arms dropped.

Careful not to injure him further, the Augment eased the captain to the floor. The pained groan and whimper that rose in Kirk’s throat sent a stabbing sensation through Khan’s heart as he supported the younger man with an embrace, cradling him gently to his chest. Khan thought he could feel Jim’s pain as if it were his own; sorrow rose in him like a dark phantom. Alas, why hadn’t he been quicker? Why had it taken so much time to reach James? Yes, the ascent up the crag, then a trek through the small wood to the town and finally through the streets of Turkana City had been anything but easy. At the very last moment, before he reached the town hall, he had to avoid four Klingon patrols. Still, he damned the circumstances that slowed him down. The young officer had been through hell – a hell he maybe could have prevented if he had been faster. But at least he made it in time. James was alive – that was all that counted in this moment.
He felt the slightly smaller body tremble, heard the raspy gasps, and listened to the quiet sobs that escaped Jim’s lips. Another stab of anguish pierced his heart. James Kirk belonged to him and to see one of his own suffer like this caused him deep grief.

“Shh, I have you,” he murmured soothingly, brushing his lips over Jim’s sweat soaked temple. “Calm down. I have you, mērē pagalā sāhasi. * Hindi for ‘my crazy daredevil’

For a few more moments he allowed James and himself to rest, holding the Starfleet officer as if he was made of glass. Gently, he laid his cheek against the tousled golden shock of hair and tenderly stroked a hand through it. Jim reeked of sweat, blood and bile, but Khan didn’t care. All that mattered was the man in his arms who had endured Klingon torture and was shaken to the core.

The fury that had engulfed the super-human the moment he heard Kirk’s screams was no less intense now as he held the other man close and to comfort him. The condition of the boyish officer filled him with helpless rage. James had been through more than any living being should be – and it wasn’t over. As much as Khan wanted to grant him more rest, he knew that they were running out of time; he had to act now!

His right hand searched the pocket of his trousers, hoping he hadn’t lost the injectors with the serum during the crawling-tour through the shafts; with relief he found them. Pulling one of the hypo-sprays out, he brought his mouth near Kirk’s ear and whispered, “I’ll give you something for the pain, James, all right?”

Jim didn’t answer; he simply leaned against the strong chest and tried to quell the tremors and echoes of the agony that had wracked his body for what seemed an eternity. Something pressed against his throat; a short sting shot through him and a chill seeped through his veins and glided gently along the hyper-stimulated nerves. It soothed his aching muscles, cooled the burning skin and brought his pulse back to normal. The absence of pain cleared his mind and allowed him to focus.

Within a minute, he became aware of his surroundings. He noticed the cold air of the room, metallic and sticky with the stench of alien blood. Then he felt the long, strong arms around him and a soft heartbeat beneath his cheek accompanied by the familiar scent of the man who had touched his very being; it was someone Kirk could rely on – a rock in the middle of a raging ocean. The warmth of Khan’s body seeped slowly into his aching limbs. He allowed the warmth to envelop him, make him feel safe even though they were not yet out of danger. For several seconds, Jim lay simply there and clung to the super-human – grateful but beyond exhaustion – then he felt Khan cupping his face and lifting it gently.

Instinctively Jim leaned in this soft touch, too overwhelmed to attempt to hide his surprise or
discomfort. He almost didn’t dare to trust his eyes and ears – oh, but that delightful scent could only be one man. Not only did help arrive out of nowhere, no! It came in the form of the man he had yearned to see one last time before he died. His dark, avenging angel. Kirk saw the dirt-covered face hovering above him, the sea-colored eyes so full of worry and suppressed anger. And he heard that rich baritone that soothed his hyperactive senses like a balm; that voice was nearly as good as the hyposprays. But then the realization sank finally in as his mind start to work properly again.

The only living being in the whole universe able to creep secretly into a building full of Klingons and kill six warriors in less than a minute held him in his arms. Khan risked his own life to come to his rescue.

“Nien…” he breathed and his sight blurred again with rising tears of relief. Khan was here! He was here to save him! Everything was going to be fine now. A wave of gratitude washed over him, combined with wonder. “You… you came,” he choked out; his voice not more than a hoarse whisper after all the screams the Klingons had torn from him.

“Yes,” was all the Augment murmured; he laid his forehead against the feverish one of the younger man. Then he reminded himself that they had to flee; now – before it was too late. “We have to go or they will catch us both. Can you walk?”

Could he walk? No, not really. On the other hand, if moving his legs meant he could escape this hell-hole, he would walk anywhere! It took him a moment and even more effort to nod, but somehow he managed.

Khan pursed his lips. It was more than obvious that Kirk was anything but ready for the flight that lay ahead, still they had no other choice. And so the Augment hoped the serum he injected into the captain’s body would help him to recover soon enough to do what was necessary to escape. He had enough for a second dose if it came to that.

“All right,” the super-human muttered. He helped Jim to sit up, rose and pulled the younger man carefully to his feet. Kirk swayed and instantly Khan wound one arm around him. Then the dizziness began to ebb away. Jim was still hurting, his legs seemed filled with lead, and his mouth was dry and tasted bitterly of bile. Nonetheless, the captain fought for control over his body. After several moments, the trembling stopped, and his legs supported him once again.

For the first time, he took a look at his surroundings, and he gulped when he saw the mess the Augment had made. Khan had seen red, and painted the room with Klingon blood. The four guards, Karum and Khret, were dead – slaughtered. A head lay just about a meter away from its Klingon owner.

“They tortured you; exposed you to inhuman pain. They didn’t deserve anything else!” Khan stated flatly; his eyes blazed for another moment like an inferno, then he calmed down again. Brushing damp hair from Jim’s forehead, he murmured, “I don’t take it well if someone, who is mine, is threatened or tormented.”

Kirk knew that he should protest. He wasn’t Khan’s property, yet the Augment’s words had a nice sound and offered him something he hadn’t in a very long time: protection, safety and even comfort. It also meant they no longer danced around the feelings they shared. So he simply said “Thank you!” and thought he saw the pale eyes of his rescuer light up; then the super-human frowned. “Can you stand alone?”

If Jim nodded, it meant that the serum was working well. The younger man made an affirming gesture and new relief touched the former dictator. Warily he let go of him, mustered himself and, a bit reluctantly, stepped away though ready to rush back to Jim’s side should he fall again, but the officer stood straight. Quickly Khan took the torn shirt that hung over one of the chairs, and helped Kirk carefully but hurriedly to slip into it. Even in its sorry state, the shredded material offered little protection against the outside temperatures, but the Augment knew that even small bit of cover allowed one to feel less exposed – not just to the temperature. Then he collected his knife, two Klingon daggers, and took two disruptors from the fallen Klingons and returned to Kirk.

Handing Jim a knife and a disruptor he asked, “Do you think you can crawl through the ventilation shaft?” He pointed towards the ceiling and as Jim followed the gesture, his eyes widened when he saw the open hatch.

“You came through the shafts?” he whispered; he fastened the weapons on the belt of his torn trousers. Khan simply nodded. “I’ll try,” the young man said.

“Good!” Tucking his disruptors in his own belt, the super-human grasped Jim’s hips with both hands and asked a quietly “Ready?” He lifted Kirk up as soon as he heard the hoarse “Yeah.”

Lifting his arms holding himself for a few seconds on the edge of the open shaft was hellish. Jim’s muscles were on fire again and tears of pain spilled over, but with the stubbornness of a mule he clung to ceiling’s metal then groaned in relief, as Khan’s fingers gripped his legs and pushed him upwards through the opening. Biting back another moan of distress, Kirk crawled a few yards through the small duct, making room for the Augment.

Khan tensed his muscles and shot up like an arrow from a bow; his fingers found purchase on the opening, and he pulled himself into the shaft with the grace of a panther. In the dim light of twilight that fell through the opening he saw James and whispered, “Several yards away I stocked a
flashlight. Take it and keep going. I am right behind you.” He didn’t wait to see if Jim obeyed. He rolled himself in a ball, turned around and closed the hatch; he hoped to gain a head-start. God-willing the Klingons would be slow to discover how their captive escaped. But it was only a question of time before they discovered the dead guards and officers and James’ absence. When it came to this, he wanted to be as far away from this building as possible.

Guiding Jim with murmured orders through the shafts quiet as mice, they reached the access hatch connected to the outside through which Khan had come in just a short time ago. Slipping beside the young captain and pressing against him, the super-human peeked through the grate to the outside. If it weren’t for the injuries, Jim would be pleased with the proximity of his rescuer, but right now it hurt like hell to be pushed against the metal sides of the shaft. Still he didn’t complain. The fresh night air that was sweet with the promise of freedom, and there was Khan – like a sword-wielding guardian angel, who broke him out of his cruel hell. Enduring a bit more pain was nothing compared to the prospect of escape.

The Augment listened carefully then nodded. “All clear,” he whispered before he loosened the grate from its mounting. “I’ll go first and help you down. We are about a meter above the ground,” he murmured. He slid past Kirk and slipped out of the shaft holding the grate securely with one hand. His feet touched solid ground and quickly he rose, laid the grate beside him against the building and supported the younger man as he followed him down to the ground.

Jim became dizzy again as he stood on unsteady feet in the cool, clear air and leaned against Khan trying to dispel the sudden vertigo and regain his legs. Almost instantly something was pressed again his throat, and another dose of the serum entered his system. “What… are you giving me?” he mumbled. Seconds later a rush of warmth and power rushed through his veins.

The super-human put the hypo-spray back in his trousers as he looked with piercing eyes watchful of the sights and sounds around him and poised to react at the slightest disturbance. “Later,” he answered quietly, harkening still to every noise. But there was none besides the sounds of the night. “Quick now,” he whispered and pulled Jim with him – only to nearly run headlong into a group of three Klingon guards on patrol, joining with other warriors in the area surrounding the town hall. Ducking into the shadows, both men waited until the Klingons passed by before continuing on their way.

Khan headed straight towards the next street, using every dark area and every shadow afforded them by the surrounding buildings cast in moonlight and streetlamps. The Augment checked his tricorder to avoid Klingon patrols, while he supported the slightly swaying Jim as much as he could.

It went smooth – almost too smooth as the always cautious super-human thought. He turned onto a street near the town’s edge, where small gardens decorated the houses. He stopped at one low garden fence and bent over it to pull something out of the bushes. Jim frowned when he saw Khan strap on a backpack; he met his gaze. “We will need this, trust me,” the Augment murmured. He had stored
the supporting bag here before he hurried to the town hall and to Jim only half an hour ago.

“What do you have planned?” Kirk asked beneath his breath as he tried to ignore the pain of the injuries and slight twitches beyond his control; he still suffered nerve hyper-stimulation due to the pain sticks.

“We will…” Khan didn’t get further. Suddenly shouts echoed through the streets and the town’s alarm started to howl. There was no doubt they were the reason for the turmoil.

“They know,” Jim gasped, feeling an unwelcome rush of new fear tingling throughout his body.

“Obviously,” the former dictator growled before he turned and dragged Kirk with him. “RUN!”

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Kor listened closely to Koval’s report, while Noy stood beside his cousin with a dark expression. Not one of them had thought that Kirk would put up much resistance to their torture. In any event, the Klingon Lord again felt respect for the young human. There had been other men, strong in body and soul, who had given in within a short time after their first encounters with Klingon interrogation methods. But strength does not wholly correlate to age and life-experience. Kirk was young – ‘…barely an adult…’ as Wesley had pointed out – but he showed a fortitude that impressed Kor.

Of course, Koval and Noy saw Kirk’s silence differently, as a personal affront. That Kirk did not respond to their interrogation methods was an insult to their abilities.

While Koval explained in detail how he and his cousin made the captive suffer in order to gain the answers demanded of him, Kor heard Wesley’s voice in his mind speaking fondly of the young officer. ‘…risked his life to protect your home planet…’ the commodore had said; that comment gave the Klingon Lord pause as did Wesley’s confession ‘…Jim Kirk is like a son to me…’ Wesley loved Captain Kirk with his…heart, as the human metaphor went. Or as in the Klingon case, with his three hearts. Kor had taken a liking to the commodore and to hear the man beg for some mercy on behalf of the young captain, had moved something in the aristocrat. Perhaps it was due to the war or sharing a drink with Wesley so long ago, but he earned the respect of the Klingon – out of respect that person’s burdens were worth commiseration. That Wesley tried to appeal to the bond of respect shared with Kor was bold though, considering the war, but the fleet-commander was not immune to compassion.
'If Kirk only answers two or three questions, I may indulge the whole matter and give the boy a quick death. After all, it’s up to me to decide, when he has suffered enough.'

He lifted a hand and stopped Koval’s irritated tirade. Quite the opposite of other Klingons, Kor took no pleasure in torturing other beings and accordingly, he didn’t like to hear in detail about such measurements.

“It seems the captive is stronger than we thought,” he said firmly. “Maybe it’s for the best, if I speak with him again.”

Koval rose to protest, but shut his mouth as the Klingon Lord glared sternly at him. “I’ve learned that most Terrans are more receptive to reason after they learn that their stubbornness gets them nowhere. I’ll go with you!” He rose, took his disruptor and set it to ‘kill’, before he headed out of his office; the two angry captains followed him.

They walked swiftly through the corridor and down the stairs to the cellar until they reached the interrogation room. The three Klingons didn’t take notice of the quiet. The rooms were soundproofed, and likely the Terran had finally lost conscious after his interrogation with Koval’s and Noy’s first officers. When they were a few steps away from the door, a bad feeling came over Kor. It was deathly quiet.

Drawing his disruptor, the Klingon Lord pulled the door open. He froze at sight that lay before him; Karum and Khret lay among the four guards on the floor dead – slaughtered. The floor and walls were painted with Klingon blood. And there was no trace of the captive; the manacles that once held Kirk were empty.

Koval let out a furious shout that alerted other guards who came running – ready to fight.

Kor overcame his shock. Wrath woke hard in him. Kirk had help. Who could kill six well-trained Klingon soldiers and leave with the young captain in such a short time?

Trembling with rage, Kor whirled around roaring, “FIND THEM! BRING ME KIRK AND THE COLLABORATORS – ALIVE! NOW!”

The two captains and the guards obeyed instantly rather than getting shot where they stood for losing the captor. Kor stared one last time at the massacre at his feet. “They can’t be far. The energy shield prevents them from beaming away, and Kirk is too weak by now to move quickly. I’ll find you –
and then may your gods have mercy on you!"

Kor would have been astonished if he saw Jim now. But for his bruised and torn appearance, you couldn’t tell what he’d been through. He stormed through the jungle at Khan’s side, through the moonlit night. He forced his legs to move faster. His whole body was bathed in sweat, serum pulsing through his veins. But it couldn’t prevent the burning sensation when salty sweat poured over his injuries. Still, he didn’t slow down no matter how he ached or how his limbs demanded.

Behind them, hell broke loose. Shouts and heavy steps echoed through the streets, tracing the path of the Augment and the captain. Not far ahead they dived into the bushes and undergrowth of the small between the town and the abyss below. Branches whipped at their faces and bodies as they raced through the woods; jumped over roots and broke through brushes and mighty ferns, never stopping, not for a moment. But the speed wasn’t enough; they heard their pursuers behind them, led by their tricorders that showed them the two Terran bio-signals.

Barks added to the chorus of shouts and Jim cursed. He knew exactly what was behind them.

Beside him, Khan sprinted with no signs of tiredness and a grim expression on his face. He pulled Jim along whenever the young captain fell behind. Kirk’s heart hammered against his ribcage; his breath came in short, sharp gasps and his body protested the inhuman efforts asked of it. His nervous system started firing again, burning, still he kept running. Mortal fear and despair urged him forward, pushed him to his limits and beyond.

Arms raised, he tried to protect his face against the harsh branches in his way. Jim even increased his speed when he heard Klingon voices coming at them from the right. He didn’t know how he was able to gather so much strength after the hours of torture, but the prospect of being caught again made his feet fly despite his screaming muscles. The Klingons were trying to surround them, flank them on either side. But what would come next was too horrible to think of, so Jim did the only thing he could; he ran. He and Khan ran like the devil was on their heels. And in a way, he was.

All of sudden something broke through the undergrowth to their left and Khan whirled around, phaser in his hand. His eyes widened. The creature that sprang on Jim and him was a living nightmare; it was a scaled wolf-like animal with the head of a crocodile and paws sharp enough to kill a tiger.

“A warrigul!” Jim wheezed hoarsely. “Shoot!”
You didn’t need to tell Khan twice. The phaser blast hit the beast directly in its ugly head snarling at them with finger-long sharp teeth. It came at them just a few more steps before it fell dead to the ground.

But it wasn’t alone. Three more of those creatures appeared and ran snarling and growling towards the two men, followed close behind by two Klingons who aimed their disruptors at the fleeing Terrans.

Jim didn’t think, he simply reacted. Hurling himself against Khan, he shoved the Augment out of the way only a second before the blast could hit him – a deadly blast. These Klingons ignored the order to catch the fleeing men alive. As the two allies fell together, Kirk wrenched one of the obtained disruptors of his belt and fired – not caring if it was set on ‘stun’ or ‘kill’. One of the Klingons dropped dead against his comrade throwing off his aim. Khan’s shot sent the second warrior to Khaless. Then the three warriguls were on them, and both men fired without hesitation. Still one warrigul was able to dig its teeth into the Augments left arm.

Khan yelped in pain and fury and his right fist, the one that held the phaser, came down on the beast’s skull hard enough to break its bones. Howling, the warrigul let go of him and the super-human shot the creature. He pulled Jim along with him once more.

Behind them roars of anger sounded and orders were shouted.

And again they were running, determined but with the sinking feeling of dread in their hearts. In front of them, the woods opened to the fields as they passed the energy-shield. It felt as though they ran through a permeable hot wall. Jim moaned as his over-driven nervous system reacted awfully to the new stimulus; he stumbled, glad, as Khan once more steadied him and pulled him along.

The Augment had slowed his tempo in the very last moment before they reached the promontory’s end. He wrapped his good arm strongly around Jim’s waist to prevent him from plunging off the high cliff. Small stones and pebble kicked loose from under the men’s boots and fell into the precipice.

“What now?” Kirk gasped, not ready to admit defeat, even when facing a no-win situation. Behind them, the heavy steps of their hunters drew closer.

Quick as he could, Khan holstered his weapon. And he was finally out of breath. “Hold tight!” he panted. Not waiting for Kirk to understand, the Augment pulled the younger man close and gripped
his belt with the hand of his good arm. “Hold tight!” he repeated. Jim was ever aware at the trust he now placed in the super-human. The Enterprise’s captain wrapped both arms around the former dictator. A shocked outcry escaped him as Khan threw them both over the edge, straight into the abyss. Beyond them was nothing more than cool air, wide fields, and the jungle rushing toward them.

Jim closed his eyes wondering for several seconds if the Augment would rather die than be captured – a decision Kirk would’ve rather made for himself. Then Khan made a sharp movement with his free arm. Opening his eyes, Kirk clung to the super-human for dear life, but his disruptor was wrenched from his grasp when the parachute shot out of Khan’s supply-backpack to slow their fall. Thankfully, superior intellect was on his side, Khan had thought of everything they would need for the rescue.

But this rescue was about to be cut short.

Above them, the clamor grew louder, and both men realized that the Klingon Lord had called for reinforcements. Three Birds-of-Prey broke through the atmosphere and headed downwards, the descent of the ships eerie as their shape looked like winged evil in the silver moonlight.

Khan glanced down and saw only a few meters between Jim, him and the ground. “Pull your feet up!” he called, knowing that the impact would be too strong for Kirk’s weakened state. To his relief, Jim obeyed without protest. Khan landed harshly, hopped several steps to regain his balance due to the added weight. The younger man wrapped himself around Khan like a koala, and put his feet down the moment the super-human came to stand.

A push of a button on the strap and the parachute retracted automatically. Both men began to run again.

Khan’s eyes scanned the jungle; the edge was so far away. The sound of the approaching ships became louder, turning to a thunderous roar while the noise of the break nozzles swirled up the air. Strong searchlights bathed the fields, the crag and the near jungle in bright lights and caught the two men.

Throwing a glare over his shoulder, the Augment observed dozens of Klingons descending from a Bird-of-Prey, using strong lines to bridge the distance between the vessels and the ground. He asked himself why they didn’t simply beam Jim and him up. But Klingons were first and foremost warriors not scientists; he doubted that there was among them a Klingon well-skilled enough to use a transporter-device outside of normal protocol.
He heard the eruption of disruptor-shots. They smacked into the ground from above. Soil, grass and stones flew in every direction. Their pursuers reached the edge of the promontory and aimed their heavy phasers down at the pair. Behind the two men, the first of the Klingons reached the ground and bolted towards them! One Bird-of-Prey soared past them to block their last escape route. The ship’s search light blinded them, and they were forced to stop.

Khan whirled around, phaser drawn once more, but the sight of more than three dozen heavily armed Klingons storming towards him and Jim made him rethink its use. There was no doubt that the riflemen would fire given the slightest provocation; endangering Jim and condemning his crew, his family.

“They are hunting us like animals,” Jim wheezed, blue eyes wild with desperation.

“Welcome to my world,” Khan growled bitterly, remembering all too well his escapes with captors on his heels. Though it seemed this time it would not only end with is capture, but also with his death. They were surrounded.

“Here speaks Fleet Commander Kor!” The dark voice of the Klingon Lord sounded from the speakers of the hovering spacecraft. “Surrender this moment or my men will cut you down!”

Khan glanced back over his shoulder while Jim beside him turned around, shielding his eyes against the light with one hand. An escape route! They needed an escape route, or…

“LAST WARNING! SURRENDER!”

“He wants us alive,” the Augment bit out, knowing perfectly well the reason for Kor’s decision.

“Not again!” Jim whispered, and something in his tone made Khan look at him. The hopelessness in the younger man’s voice – the one who never believed in the no-win-scenario – gave the super-human a ripple of chills.

Thick ropes dropped down around them from ships above, and several Klingon warriors glided down towards them.

It was over.
There was no escape anymore.

He saw Jim gulp and laid the free hand on his shoulder, realizing that this was their very last moment together before inevitable capture. The prospect of what would be their short future made even the former dictator sick. He fixed his eyes on the exhausted man, so dear to him now – so full of defeat – and pulled him in an embrace full of overwhelming sentiment.

He had failed… again! He had failed the only living soul in this universe that was on his side, who cared for him and saved him despite his own suffering.

“I’m sorry!” he whispered, feeling the young captain trembling in his continued pain and new dread while the Klingons closed up on them. Frustration, anger and fear filled him, mingled with sorrow; his family would be doomed along with him – he knew that much. And it pained him to think of what James would have to face now again; together with him.

“Don’t be sorry,” Jim murmured. “You did all you could.”

“It wasn’t enough,” Khan’s deep baritone rumpled, and Kirk felt the urge to comfort the Augment despite his own fear. Not hiding his affection for the other man any longer, he ignored his burning muscles and his pride in his need to be close to the Augment, he encircled the Khan’s waist with both arms and hugged him for a several seconds – the last fleeting moment of intimacy, such as they were allowed.

“End it,” Kirk breathed and the super-human understood instantly what the younger man was expressing. It was better to die by the hand of a trusted friend than be delivered into the hands of the Klingons. The monsters didn’t have the right to choose their fate! But he found himself unable to do so. The mere thought of feeling Jim’s life slip from him in his arms, of killing him, was unbearable – unthinkable. His throat tightened; his mind raged and his heart clenched in his breast. He couldn’t do it! He could not end the life of the only human being in this time who touched him in the way only his family ever had. He couldn’t even imagine to…

“Hi, Buddy! Need a hand down there?”

Galven’s unmistakable squeaking voice came through the reprogrammed tricorder Khan had strapped on; it sounded like heaven.
“Galven?” the Augment whispered, unbelieving. Then his eyes found the approaching Klingons and his fighting instincts flared up again. “GALVEN!” he yelled while Jim lifted his head and stared wide eyes at the super-human. “GALVEN, BEAM US UP! NOW!” Khan’s voice boomed, unusually high with new hope.

He noticed the tilt of the Klingons’ heads as they received new orders over their headsets. Obviously they were informed of the sudden appearance of the spacecraft in Turkana’s orbit. They slowed down and gripped their ears with free hands, before aiming at them…

And then the two men felt the tingling sensation as the transporter seized them, and their bodies melted into golden light with the sounds of distributor blasts ringing in their ears.

They rematerialized in a small transporter room that Khan hadn’t seen before. At the controls stood Galven; he bent forwards and called in the intercom, “I got them. Shields up and get us out of here, Diego!” The drives howled as they were forced to spring from half impulse to warp.

The Tellarit frowned and stared at the two men on the transporter platform. His little eyes found the baffled ones of ‘Drythen’ and he squealed, “There, you have gotten yourself into a nice bloody crap, Buddy! It was pure luck that we were even in the area.” Then he frowned as the other man disentangled himself from the long arms of ‘Drythen’ and turned carefully around. Galven made a sound of compassion as he took in the torn, bleeding and bruised appearance of his guest. “Holy mud, m’boy, they really gave you a grilling, didn’t they?”

Jim needed a moment to find his bearings; a part of him had trouble comprehending that he and Khan were not any longer on Turkana’s surface, surrounded by Klingons. They were in a space craft. He felt numb all of sudden and Khan had to help him down from the transporter platform. The last efforts and encounters had sapped most of the strength from the captain’s mistreated body, and even the serum couldn’t dope him up enough to function properly. Only the adrenalin that still circulated through his system kept him on his feet.

The next moment the space craft shook violently; if it hadn’t been for Khan’s super-human reflexes, Kirk would have been hurled right through the room. So the Augment caught him and held him tight. Galven was not so lucky and found himself ass over kettle and on his butt across the room.

The vessel rocked again while the alert sirens blared through the corridors. Then a male voice shouted from somewhere behind the open door, “DRYTHEN! GET YOUR ASS OVER HERE! THIS DAMN SENSOR-DISTURBING-THING DOESN’T WORK ANYMORE!”

Though one would never address the former dictator who’s crushed lesser men’s’ skulls in this
manner, Khan didn’t give it a second thought. They were under attack. A Tribble could figure out who their pursuer was. Half dragging, half carrying Jim, he hastened out of the transporter room and followed Galven’s advice, “The bridge is on the starboard side!”

A few seconds later he reached the control room; the spacecraft bucked like a fierce stallion. His gaze instantly found the main screen that showed four Klingon battlecruisers in pursuit. Ritek stood at the sensor station and yelled, “Four bogies coming up at six o’clock, two coming in from our nine o’clock!” He looked up. “Dammit, we are at warp now and they’re still after us!”

At the helm, a tense Diego watched the display and maneuvered the ship manually, cursing all the while. “We are at Warp 5 and they shouldn’t be able to follow us, if this blasted device would work correctly! Hell, where is Drythen?”

“I’m here!” Khan moved into action and made Jim sit down on the floor. He called a “Caviw, take care of him!” and with several long steps, he was beside the Chilean. “What did you do?” he demanded; the technical genius looked up. Stress was written across his face.

“During our flight to Turkana, Galven and I built a second sensor-disturbing device and installed it. But I think we made some mistakes because all of sudden we’re getting errors, even before we were hit and…”

“They are closing in!” Ritek shouted, watching the sensors. “If they catch up with us they can open fire at us, even in Warp.”

“Oh, holy crap!” Galven groaned, glaring at Kirk and ‘Drythen’. “What have you two done to upset the Klingons like that?”

Khan didn’t answer while he steadied himself at the helm-station; watching the display. Yes, Diego and the others installed a ‘twin’ of his invention, but there was something wrong. He would have to check it firsthand. “Right, you and Galven are coming with me to the Engineering. Ritek, take the helm,” he ordered, taking one time more the command without even realizing it.

“I have to watch the sensors to see, where the bastards are!” the Rigelian answered with a grim face.

“I take the helm!” Somehow Jim managed to push himself up from the floor and staggered toward the station; the Caitian woman helped him to remain on his feet. A worried glance from sea-green and blue eyes met his and he managed a smile that was more a grimace than grin. “Just go, Nien. I’ll
hang on so don’t get your panties in twist.”

Khan growled wordlessly. This reckless, loveable idiot would give him grey hairs one day – if he’d ever get them; he wasn’t sure yet. He nodded. “Try some of your maneuvers then, but no stunts like you pulled on Qo’noS!”

“You saw me flying and…?”

“I was not even five hundred meters away when you used the abandoned skyscrapers to trick the Klingons!” He turned to go, and Jim let himself fall in the seat that Diego had just vacated.

“It worked, didn’t it?” Kirk murmured, cursing his hurting limbs.

“Yes – and it made me dizzy just watching your airshow!” With those words the Augment left the bridge and followed Diego and a tense Galven to Engineering. Again the vessel was hit and the Chilean snarled, frustrated. “Shoot holes in my ship, and I will make your life very uncomfortable!”

Khan ignored the insulting expression. The information that this space craft belonged to Diego was far more interesting. It seemed The Shadow and the tech genius had left Aldebaran and had followed him shortly after he had taken the D’Ghor to go on his rescue-mission. And they didn’t use the Shadow or the Flash to enter Borderland, but the Chilean’s vessel – a clever decision; the other space crafts were well known by the most Orions and Klingons now.

He entered the engine room where two members of The Shadow stood duty. He didn’t need the Tellarit to point out, “Over there!” to find the added device. Quickly, he closed the distance and checked it. Diego and Galven had done a good job rebuilding it without his help, but something wasn’t right. “Try to coax more speed from the engines!” he called over his shoulder. “I need a moment!”

“You need a moment, you get one!” the Tellarit nodded and hobbled to the engines; Diego was on his heels.

On the bridge, Jim sat with determination at the helm; he quickly familiarized himself with the controls; his full lips pressed to a thin line in concentration. Ritek, or whatever that Rigelian’s name was, did his best to issue a warning whenever the sensors alerted him that the Klingons had taken another shot so that Jim could avoid it. Phasers and torpedoes used during warp was a dangerous game and it really made your aim quite lousy; still Kor didn’t give up. Kirk was certain that the
Klingon Lord was aboard one of the battle cruisers in pursuit and he would bet a paycheck that Koval and Noy were with him.

Suddenly, a tremble ran through the spacecraft and a voice came over the intercom. “Kirk, rev up! I coached a bit more speed out of the engines!” The pig-like snorts peppered in the words told Jim that it was Galven who spoke.

“Okay!” he called back, pushing the vessel to its limits.

Several seconds later, the familiar baritone sounded through the comms system. “Jim, reload the deflector-control. It’s linked to the sensor-disturbing-device. It will work properly after a re-start.”

“A RESTART?” Galven squeaked in the background, shocked. “We are going to be unprotected for several seconds and…”

“It’s the only way to reboot the system and…”

“And the Klingons can’t aim properly at this speed!” Jim finished Khan’s impatient reply. “Right, I’ll restart the deflectors!”

Despite the dangerous situation, the Augment felt a surge of warmth as he realized the amount of trust the young captain put into him again. Then he took a deep breath and watched the device beside him. He had found the error quickly. A wire had been connected wrong to the cooling-system of the device’s battery and overheated, a small mistake with big implications, but he corrected it.

His gaze turned to the display of the deflector device that was switched off and then re-booted. The seconds they remained unshielded felt like an eternity; then the shields and the sensor-disturbing system functioned fully. A broad grin tugged at Khan’s mouth and he called through the still open link to the bridge, “Jim, it worked! Evasive maneuvers; try to lose them. They will not be able to follow us if they can’t see us!”

“What do you think I’m doing here?” came the reply and Khan chuckled. Even beaten, injured, weakened by torture and mentally at his limits, Jim Kirk didn’t quit; he kept his wit and his sarcasm. It was no wonder that he felt so attached to the younger man.

“Don’t expect an honest answer from me!” he smirked; even his enhanced mind became dizzy with
the prospect of fleeing successfully from mortal danger. Then he turned around and looked at his two companions. “Gentlemen, congratulations! You re-built something for which there is no precedent – no plan. And except for a bit of a mistake, you did well.”

They made it!

They cheated death once more and tricked a whole squadron of Klingons. They got out of that living hell!

Again the vessel shook and he heard Jim and Ritek cursing through the activated intercom. Quickly Khan, Galven and Diego left the engineering and returned to the bridge the moment the Rigelian cheered, “You did it, Kirk! They lost track of us!” Triumphant, he lifted a fist into the air and grinned at ‘Drythen’. “And you did it, too, by getting that baby to work! I don’t want to hear the Klingons now. Their roaring must be through the delta-quadrant by now!”

Jim snickered and wiped his forehead. His whole body was bathed in sweat; every muscle and nerve trembled and his mouth was dry as a desert, but the immense feeling of relief that flooded him the moment he realized that they had escaped, made up for it all. Looking over his shoulder, his eyes found Khan’s who stood tousled and dirty between the Galven and the giant human. He smiled at the Augment – his savior.

Khan dipped his head in acknowledgement and returned Kirk’s smile.

Their smiles said, what each man could not.

They said, “thank you for saving me.”

“I couldn’t leave you.”

And it also meant one thing that went for both,

“I didn’t know I needed you.”

All those on the bridge sensed the unique bond between the two men. It was tangible and electric.
And theirs.

TBC…

Notes:

Dear Readers, for the case that you’re a little bit confused about the Klingon’s ability to chase and to fire at Diego’s ship in warp, here a short explanation:

The Enterprise is one of the newest ships of Starfleet and therefore the one with the most developed drives – Warp 8. The Vengeance used transwarp-drive. This was originally created at the time of Star Trek III and was installed on the Excelsior. Khan’s introduction sped its development in the alternate timeline. Transwarp capability allowed the ship to outrun even the Enterprise. Galven’s ship (or Diego’s in this case) only reached Warp 5, so a Klingon ship with Warp 5 or better can chase it and attack though accuracy is severely diminished.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I think you all have to calm down now (*laugh*). Maybe a cup of tea will help? Or try a Vulcan method: Meditation (*snicker*). I promised you a hell of action and feelings, and I think I kept my given word. I hope you enjoyed to read the whole ‘ride on the roller coaster’ like I had fun to write it, and I am curious like hell to learn of your reactions and thoughts.

At last Jim and Khan are safe – for now. And to grant you and my characters a time of rest, the next two chapters will be calmer. There will be time for comfort, healing and ‘candies’ now, because Khan will show his caring side and how tender he can be. And Jim is going to need it.

Well, and then there is still the Enterprise, who is on her way to Turkana and I can already promise another special contact between Spock and The Shadow – and, of course, with Jim.

Have a nice weekend,

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

And once again a big, big thank-you for all your reactions to the last update. I cannot tell you often enough how happy I am that you like this story so much.

As I promised the next chapter will be calmer. After all the stress our heroes had to face they earn a moment of peace – especially Jim and Khan. So, a nice warning: Time for caaaaandies.

Have fun

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 16 – Safe again

“How were they able to escape? Where did that damn ship come from and why the hell didn’t you see it!? Why didn’t you see them sooner? Why are these scanners USELESS! Who are they!?” Kor looked from one officer to the next. “ANSWER ME!” he roared; only his first officer dared to speak.

“Milord, our scanners are operating correctly. I ran a systems check. The problem is the signals they are receiving; they are – confusing – wrong.”

“What the HELL does ‘wrong signals’ mean?” Kor didn’t believe his ears. “If our systems are working and you saw any signal, why didn’t you investigate?” No one spoke. “If it is not our system, then it must be their ship, you imbecile!” His strong index-finger pointed to the screen that showed nothing more than the blurred stars. He whirled around to his helmsman. “AND WHY DID YOU NOT FOLLOW THEM? Where did you learn to fly, at the simulator in a space bar?”

The officer dipped his head in reticence, and the fleet commander bared his teeth. “Find them!” His voice had gone quieter, but his crew knew better than to think they were in the clear. They all recognized that he was most dangerous like this – quiet – a brewing storm.

“I’m sorry, Milord, we cannot,” the first officer told him. “We lost track of whatever signal we were
Kor gritted his teeth. The lieutenant was right. Ahhh, these people were clever. Of course, they fled Turkana’s orbit while the Klingon ships were unable to get a read on them. He thought back to the sensor problem – or signal problem, since his crew believed the sensors were operating properly. The aristocrat had never heard of something like this. Intelligence had never reported this type of technology on any of the Starfleet ships, nor had intelligence reported on Starfleet activity in the area other than the planned evacuation. But the Klingons let that slide – the evacuation. Better to let Starfleet have their little evacuation than give away the Klingons’ plans. Besides, an evacuation meant fewer citizens to be a bother. In any event, the vessel that took Kirk and his rescuer aboard did not have any Starfleet identification. If Kirk only had one rescuer on the ground, this must be a civilian spacecraft. Interesting.

Balling his fists he took a deep breath. Kirk had tricked him – or the man with him. The man…How was it that only one human was sent to recover the young captain? And how was it possible he left six dead Klingons in his wake; Kirk was incapable – too wounded to do the damage inflicted on the guards and officers.

His anger rose, and he roared in frustration. One single man!

Again!

Just like…

“Did someone record the Terrans’ flight?” he barked; the communication officer nodded hastily.

“Yes, Milord.”

“Good – at last one of my officers uses his brain for something other than handling a disruptor.” He rose. “Hail the others; we are returning to Turkana. And then send the records to my quarters.” He looked at the screen one last time. ‘You escaped, Kirk – this time! But you will see us again. You and this…phantom, who always shows himself when you are in trouble. I will get you both and then we will see, which of us is the better warrior!’

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“…then Ritek beamed to Aldebaran, informed us of your planned solo act and Diego was kind enough to lend us his vessel to save your butt – and that of the boy over there.” Galven looked at Jim
Kirk, who had left the helm and sat on one of the smaller chairs near the communications station, pale and exhausted – a sheen of perspiration coating his face and neck.

“How did you get close enough to beam us up?” Kirk asked quietly; the last of his strength and adrenaline were sapped from him now that they were out of mortal danger. “The Klingons must have recognized you and…”

Ritek started to grin. “Easy. At first, the sensor-disturbing device worked; we knew we could draw close to Turkana without being recognized on the scanners by the Orions or the Klingons. Our long-distance scanners showed the location of the Klingon's battle-cruisers in Turkana’s orbit, so we figured the fleet commander had to be there. We caught the transmission from the bastard, and it was clear that he used the sentence of the High Council interrogate you, Captain. Logical conclusion – we would find you there, where the Klingon squadron was lurking. So we dropped out of Warp at the last moment; Diego, over there, decelerated so quickly Starfleet would be jealous. When we arrived, we scanned and found two Terran bio-signals surrounded by dozens of those dragon-heads. Galven contacted you, lowered the shields, beamed you up, and we made our getaway before the Klingons realized what happened. You know the rest.” He frowned at Khan, pointing a finger at him. “And if you want to pull another stunt like that, then let us know about it. You are one of us now, and we stick together.”

Jim had to smile when he saw the baffled expression on the Augment’s face. Of course, Khan wasn’t used to being lectured. That little speech was also proof of Galven’s comradeship; the young captain would know.

“As I told when I departed,” the super-human replied stiffly, “I did not want to put you in danger because of some private…”

“Bullshit!” Galven cut in, ignoring the piercing gaze of ‘Drythen’ at his outburst. “You belong with us and we are with you. You saved my life. I owed you – I still do.” He glanced at Kirk. “And before we discuss this any further, someone should take care of the lad.” He addressed Kirk now, “Don’t get me wrong, m’boy, but you look like hell!”

The former dictator directed his attention back to the younger man and felt a pang of guilt. Of course, it was far more important to treat Kirk’s injuries rather than argue with Galven and Ritek.

Khan extended his hand and helped him to his feet. “Thanks,” Jim murmured. He didn’t want to appear weak, but after a few steps he staggered; the super-human caught him before fell.

“Easy, James,” he said soothingly as he steadied the captain, ignoring the pain in his left arm where
the Klingon creature bit him. Kirk groaned when Khan’s hand brushed the cuts on his back, but forced a small smile when the Augment apologized for the accident.

Caviw watched them. For many minutes, she could not take her eyes from the pair. There was no doubt regarding their relationship. They were mates! Her enhanced cat senses felt the bond between the two men like a cord of singing energy. But she also felt the turmoil in the young Starfleet captain. “What did they do to you?” she asked. “Did they use pain sticks?” Jim nodded with a grimace. She addressed Khan firmly. “He needs something to calm his nerves. And if you help him wash, then use no sonic-shower! His nervous system is overstimulated enough, and the sonic rays would exacerbate the effect.”

Khan nodded. “Thank you for the advice,” he answered seriously, and the Caitian smiled at him.

“Go down the corridor. The last door to the right leads to your quarters. I’ll bring the medical supplies.” The Augment nodded.

He supported Jim as they left the bridge and walked down the narrow hallway. Even though the ship was small, they took a while to reach the cabin due to the slow pace. The quarters were spartan but comfortable; it held a bed, a wall closet, a desk, a chair and a small, attached hygiene-area. The air smelled fresh and clean, and the temperature regulator spread comfortable warmth through the room.

Carefully, Khan helped Kirk to the bed. He sat him down gently and removed the torn shirt to have a closer look at the younger man’s injuries. New anger flared up in him as he saw the deep, long cuts made by Klingon daggers. The bruises and angry red splotches littered Jim’s chest and back; muscles rippled beneath the marks. The Augment realized that these were the tracks of the pain sticks – the rippling muscles a result of overstimulated nerves.

‘I killed those animals too quick!’ he thought furiously. ‘After what they did to him, they deserved worse!’

“If Galven took the medical equipment from the Shadow or the Flash, I can treat the cuts with a dermal regenerator. That combined with the serum I gave you, will heal these wounds quickly.” He tried to sound calm, still, his eyes betrayed the wrath that remained.

“What did you give me?” Jim asked hoarsely, repeating his question from their flight on Turkana. The super-human sighed.

“A mixture of my blood plasma and pain killers mingled with synthesized adrenaline and vitamins. Your body is used to my cells now, and so rejection is not a problem; rather just the opposite.” He
caught Kirk’s wide-eyed stare and chuckled, “Why, do you think you were able to run like that when they chased us through the town and woods?”

“You… mixed a serum from your plasma, just like that?” Kirk saw the Augment’s smug grin; he shook his head. “You’re unbelievable.”

“Thank you,” Khan replied with a hue of his former arrogance; then his expression softened again. Without thinking, he reached out and cupped the younger man’s cheek with one hand, moving his thumb gently along the dirty skin. The blue orbs, still troubled, looked up; grateful but tired. “Didn’t I tell you, not to get caught?” the former dictator whispered.

Jim took a deep breath; the super-human’s scent soothed him. At one time, it would have alarmed him, but not anymore. He couldn’t tell if that should bother him or not as just now he couldn’t be assed to care.

“If only they had come a minute later, then…”

The doorbell buzzed; Khan pulled his hand away the moment the door slid open to reveal Caviw, who carried a miscellany of items in her arms. Her wide, knowing grin told the Augment that his gesture was not missed. “Sorry to interrupt you gentlemen, but I brought a gift for the Federation’s hero.” She didn’t wait for a response and simply dumped everything on the table. Disinfecting agents, medical dressings, hyposprays, a dermal regenerator, and more landed with a clatter. “Diego has reprogrammed the replicator over there.” She pointed towards the device. “It will produce new clothes for you two; just choose what you want.” She grinned broadly. “If you want anything to wear. After all, you both haven’t seen each other in quite a time.”

Kirk stared, mouth agape at her; his face flushed. ‘How does she know…?’ Khan’s dangerous growl interrupted his thoughts, and he looked up flabbergasted. He saw the fierce stare the Augment gave the Caitian. Yet the cat woman simply ignored them both!

Caviw turned and left, but not without teasing Khan by tousling his hair with the tip of her tail.

The super-human moved aside and scowled at her again, but she gave him a toothy grin, threw him a kiss, winked at Jim and left with a purring, “Behave, boys! You both need rest!” The door closed behind her, and Khan couldn’t suppress the low moan in his throat, only to hear Kirk snicker.

“She’s flirting with you,” Jim said amused and Khan rolled his eyes.
“Tell me something I don’t know,” he grumbled, mentally cataloguing the items on the table. “This… pussy-cat tries my nerves.”

Jim had almost laughed out as the word ‘pussy-cat’. Caitians were anything but. “And I thought getting on your nerves was my privilege?”

“It is!” Khan nodded. “She gets on my nerves; you have tried my very last one!” He glared over his shoulder and saw Kirk smile knowingly at him. He groaned again; it was becoming a habit. Shaking his head, he returned to the bed, pulled Jim to his feet and led him to the hygiene room. The young captain sat down on the toilet while Khan quickly washed his hands and face – necessary if he was going to treat Jim’s injuries.

Reaching down to remove his boots was difficult for Kirk; the movements were painful, and his fingers didn’t obey him as they should. Suddenly two pale, strong hands gently stilled his attempts. Khan crouched down in front of him, gripped the boots and pulled them off, ignoring the throbbing pain in his left arm. Jim flushed with embarrassment – he hated weakness like this. “I… I can do this alone.”

Khan scoffed. “Sure!” He placed the boots beside the toilet, then he looked up through dark lashes at Kirk’s flushed cheeks. He recognized how awkward Kirk felt and added softly, “But you don’t have to do it alone.” Then, to lighten the mood he added, “It’s not often that I offer my services. I’ve done this only twice before.” He continued his story to distract them both now. “Joaquin, and then later Katie had been injured. When I ruled, I was responsible for…whole countries. I am not above the – personal touch if it is required – especially if it is for one of my own. Let me help you now, James.” He pushed Jim’s shoulders carefully back and opened his belt to pull off the captain’s trousers.

“That… that is really not necessary…” Jim began, and Khan shook his head, rebuking.

“Don’t be shy! I’ve undressed you once before, Kirk, haven’t I?”

Jim’s eyes locked with Khan’s – sky over ocean. Both men remembered the last, the only time they were intimate like this. But it was different then. It began violently before a denouement of burning passion. Now, tender care was added to the experience. Then a teasing smirk tugged at the Augment’s mouth; it made him appear younger.

“I dreamed of doing this again, so do not rob me of this little pleasure!” Khan’s expression was the perfect mix of innocence and mischief as he divested Jim of trousers and pants. He allowed himself a
moment to gaze at the body of the younger man. Even bruised, dirtied and with tracks reminiscent of torment, James Kirk was perfect in his eyes. Deep within him suppressed desire licked his insides, flickering like an ember just starting to flame. But Khan tamped it, not allowing it to fire. He was an Augment, not ruled by bodily demands like a mere human. Jim needed medical treatment; nothing else mattered – at the moment.

He rolled his eyes inwardly, then said softly, “Just let me do this.” He filled the basin with warm water, took a cloth, dunked it, added soap and showed James exactly how well-trained he was even in medical care. Gently, he washed the filth and dried blood from Jim’s skin. Carefully, so as not to hurt him, he ran the cloth over the injuries.

At first Kirk tensed. He wasn’t used to this kind of care, not since he had been old enough to tie his shoes. He hadn’t even had a relationship long enough to…to feel this. He didn’t know how to react, as one of the most powerful men in Earth’s whole history – one of the most dangerous – kneeled before him, and cared for him. If he were his more casual self, if things had been different, he would have made some wry remarks. But this was something different, and just now he was only grateful. Grateful for the touch that chased away the waking nightmares he lived – they lurked at the edge of his conscious.

Khan worked quickly, but tenderly. He changed the water four times until he was satisfied that Jim was clean as possible then he ordered the young officer to stay where he was and returned to the main room of the small quarters. He went to the replicator for a kurta, a casual, collarless leisure shirt worn by the men of his home country. The kurta reached past the knee, so Khan programmed the replicator to shorten it a bit; he also arranged for shalwar pants. Both garments were made of soft cotton and a size larger than needed for James’ comfort.

He found Kirk standing at the basin brushing his teeth with one of the spare toothbrushes he found in the cabinet – ridding himself of the taste of bile and blood. He steadied himself with one hand and bent to rinse out his mouth before disposing of the brush. He turned slowly around; exhaustion enveloped him like an invisible blanket and Khan helped him slip into the pants – the kurta left draped over the chair – and guided the younger man back to bed, turning the blankets.

Jim wanted nothing more than to lie down and sleep, but he knew his wounds needed attention. He grimaced as Khan disinfected and treated them with the dermal regenerator. It wouldn’t close the cuts completely, but it hastened the healing. Unfortunately, it also made the raw nerve endings scream. Afterwards, the Augment applied an antiseptic salve to the lacerations and bandaged the younger man’s torso. Should the one or another injury re-open, the damage would be mitigated and was unlikely to become infected.

“Almost done,” he murmured softly, as Jim’s eyes drifted closed. Kirk swayed where he sat – so tired. “Sorry, only time and rest will do for your nervous system,” Khan added. “I can give you something to help you sleep.” He helped his charge slip into the kurta.
Jim smiled. “No problem. My nerves will be alright, when I wake up.” He yawned, apologized for it, and took a deep breath. “I think I could sleep for days.”

“It would be the best if you did. Sleep cures – it’s an old saying, but it’s still true.”

“You sound like Bones…” Kirk mumbled. Then all of sudden, he straightened upright. “Bones… MY CREW!” He glanced up at the frowning super-human. “I have to tell them that I’m still alive!”

“They let you down!” Khan hissed, and Jim threw his hands up. The gesture was met with punishing pain and stinging in his shoulders. He grimaced.

“I ordered them to leave Turkana as the Klingons arrived. We had more than six hundred evacuated civilians aboard and my crew. Of course, they fled. It was the…” he made a face as he said the next word, “only logical thing to do.”

Kirk couldn’t help himself. He had to smile at that. He understood the words the super-human didn’t say as well as those he did. He wanted to have Jim to himself for a while – to be close to him again – maybe test the waters of this new dynamic. In any event, even if Jim had wished it – he was in no condition to fulfil his duties as captain during the war. Khan was right. Not only his body, but also his spirit required time to heal. Both received a beating over the last 24 hours. An inner voice told him where he could find peace best – in the arms of his former nemesis, his savior.

Still he had to inform Spock, Bones and the others that he was safe before they did something idiotic, like embark rescue mission with no one to rescue.

Lacing his fingers with Khan’s long ones, he said gently, “My crew is my family, Nien. You told me that, remember?” Jim saw the blue-green eyes widening as the super-human recognized his own words echoed back to him. He added, “Knowing them, they will move heaven and hell to save me and will put themselves in danger. I don’t want that for them. You’d do the same in my place – you
Khan growled quietly, deep in his throat, but saw the pleading look of the younger man. Dammit! That look mirrored his own when Jim had told him that his crew was alive. He would bow to Jim’s request. And besides how could he resist those eyes! Abruptly, he turned around and in two strides he stood at the desk and activated the intercom. “Drythen to bridge. Ritek, is it possible to reach the Enterprise from this position?”

The Rigelian’s face appeared on the screen. “They’ve been trying to reach us for about five hours now,” he reported. “And that nice Starfleet commodore has been making the same attempt.”

“Bob Wesley?” Jim asked, and Ritek looked into his direction.

“Yes. Galven already said we should tell them that you are… Oh, there they are again! Just listen.” He put the hail on the speakers. They heard Galven in the background; he oinked something in his own language.

Warmth and relief washed over the young captain as he heard the familiar melodious voice of Uhura. She sounded tired. “Shadow, this is the Enterprise. Come in, Shadow!” A moment later the Bantu woman added, “Sunrise if you hear us, please answer! This is an emergency.”

“Never thought I would live to see the day your crew would ask me for help,” Khan grumbled; Kirk sighed heavily.

“They don’t know that it’s you they are trying to contact – as I’m sure you know.” He looked at the Rigelian. “Mr. Ritek, I have to talk to them before they do something rash. I won’t tell them where you’re headed…”

“Aldebaran,” the Tellarit grumbled from somewhere off camera.

“… and I will not give anyone’s identity to Starfleet Command. But knowing my first officer, my CMO and the others, they will break every rule to…”

“Mmmm,” Khan hummed in agreement. “You are probably right. After all your Vulcan has learned to break bones, the rest will be easier,” the super-human commented under his breath sarcastically, and Jim groaned.
“I so don’t want to discuss that right now.” He looked from the Augment to Ritek and back. “I have to speak with them.”

“Just let the boy chat with his friends before they try something foolish and the Federation loses her flagship,” Galven said in the background.

Ritek nodded and opened a shielded channel. “Enterprise, this is The Shadow. Hold on, I have someone who wishes to speak with you.” He put the transmission on audio and gave Jim a wave. “You’re up.”

The officer smiled; new strength flowed through him as he carefully rose and padded barefoot to the desk where Khan stood. Jim sat down and took a deep breath. “Uhura? It’s me, Kirk.”

ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise Nyota had tried over and again to reach the militia. She stayed at her post for over 24 hours by now and the tension never left her, since they all were forced to leave their captain. But the accompanying adrenaline was gone now, and she was tired. Still, she refused relief. Always careful to shield the frequencies, she used Code 9 to hail ‘Sunrise’, this mysterious man; he must be a good friend of Kirk’s if his rage was anything to go by. But, why didn’t she, McCoy, and Spock know about him? Either way, her calls went unanswered – until now.

All of sudden a clear, male voice replied to her calls and Uhura sighed in relief – finally! – but before she could report the success to Spock she heard another voice. One that sounded as exhausted as she felt; it was like heaven to her. She started up from her chair as if stung by an adder and caught the attention of the others. She whirled around to meet the asking gaze of her lover.

“I… I HAVE THE CAPTAIN!” she burst out and in less than a second Spock was on his feet, while a very pale McCoy, who had remained on the bridge, gasped.

Quickly, the communications officer switched on the speakers and the tired but very much alive tenor of James T. Kirk sounded through the bridge. “Uhura, you don’t have to shout. We’ve had these electronic devices for more than 350 years that transport your voice over long distances without you needing to yell, you know.”

Nyota pressed a hand against her mouth, the impulse born out of pure joy as she suppressed a laugh.
“Jim!” Spock didn’t care about a formal address at this moment or the rush of emotions threatening to spill – his human side on display. His relief plain in his voice and on his face.

McCoy was far less controlled. He stepped toward the comms station as if it brought him nearer to his friend. “JIM! Sweet Lord, how are you? Where are you? Are you all right?”

The answer came after a short hesitation. “I’m aboard a vessel of The Shadow. They rescued us… me.”

For a moment Spock, son of Sarek, stilled himself, only able to close his eyes in relief – his T’hy’la was alive and safe! Then he calmly replied, “We have tried to reach them for quite some time now, but…”

“We couldn’t answer in case the Klingons or Orions were listening. They have a bit more in their head than just swinging a dagger.” The squealing comment told the first officer that a Tellarit was on the line.

“Commander Galven, I assume. As the captain said, you came to his rescue. Thank you for your help, and…”

“Oh, no problem, Lad. We had to pull two asses out of the fire, after all – your young Starfleet hero and that of our daredevil. No one could stop him once he learned of the trouble the boy was in. So, no problem at all.”

Spock and McCoy had exchanged a look with each other before the first officer lifted a brow. “Do I presume correctly that said ‘daredevil’ and ‘Sunrise’ are one and the same?”

“Yeah, you’re right, Spock, but don’t expect to get an answer from him right now,” Jim confirmed the Vulcan’s assumption.

“Jim?” McCoy rose to speak again. He heard the pain in his young friend’s voice, and he frowned in anger. “What did those damn Klingon bastards do to you?” Hope and fear finally overwhelmed his tensed nerves. Kirk was alive, but he sounded terrible. Bones’ demeanor slid from friend to full doctor mode as he joined the talk.
Aboard Diego’s spacecraft, Jim sighed as he heard the worry in McCoy’s voice, and answered evasively, “Well, it was a shore leave I wouldn’t like to repeat any time soon, but aside from some bruising, I am all right.”

Khan, who stood still beside him, snorted in wordless protest – a sound that wasn’t missed by the transmission. Or Leonard McCoy.

“Kid, when you say ‘some bruising’, other people would be carrying their head under the arm. So don’t give me that nonsense. What. Did. They. Do. To. You?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Some cuts, Klingon pain sticks and…”

“What?”

Kirk asked himself seriously why the CMO needed a communicator at all. He had to be heard parsecs away.

“Jim, you have to be treated immediately!” Leonard almost yelled. “Those pain sticks…”

“I’ve already received medical care, Bones,” Kirk interrupted him, trying to calm him down. “‘Sunrise’ has many talents, and they have adequate medical supplies.”

On the Enterprise’s bridge, McCoy frowned. “Rrrright, why I’m not surprised? This guy is the 23rd century’s superman, tell me he doesn’t fly like Peter Pan, too.” He sighed. “Jim, is Sunrise with you now?”

“Yeah, he’s here.”

Dr. McCoy continued, “Sunrise, there is no chance the captain will follow my instructions, so I ask that you do – for Jim please.”

“Ugh, just get on with it, Bones.”
McCoy growled in response. “Sunrise, the Klingon pain sticks send neural impulses to whip up the nervous system. They trick the nerves into believing they are being burned and depending on the length of time they were used on Jim, he will be haunted by phantom pain – especially during sleep. So you should administer a strong sedative for sleep …”

“Hey, I’m tired enough, so there is really no need…”

“… but he also needs the 88-mood,” McCoy finished his speaking, ignoring Jim.

Khan frowned. The what?

Jim saw the Augment’s confused expression and said, “Bones, could you please explain. What is the ‘88-mood’?”

“I thought your special friend is a wonder-boy?” McCoy retorted snidely, then he sighed, “You can read the number 88 right side up or upside down; it will always be 88. 88-mood means you’re in the ‘I-don’t-mind-anything-anymore-mood’. Do you have anything aboard with midazolam in it?”

Jim read Khan’s curt nod. “Yeah, they have some.”

Leonard continued, “Right, give him a dose!” The CMO explained quickly what ‘Sunrise’ had to do, and the super-human signaled Kirk with a grimace that he understood. The young captain wasn’t too thrilled.

“Are you two trying to knock me out for a week, or what?”

“If the midazolam doesn’t work, maybe your friend should do just that,” Bones grumbled, before Caviw’s voice interrupted,

“And how does such advice meet with the doctor’s oath?”

“Sleep, no matter how he gets it, is good for him. And that…”
“Boys,” Ritek suddenly cut in. “I really hate to interrupt this heart-touching reunion full of happy tears, but I caught a transmission from the green-skins. They have spotted you, Enterprise.”

Jim went rigid. “Spock, where are you guys exactly?”

“2.8943 standard-hours away from Turkana and…”

“What?” Kirk almost leaped on his feet. “Are you crazy? What are you doing in the middle of enemy territory? Get the hell out of there! Leave the Borderland – this instant!”

“And don’t take the shorter way between Suliban and Obruli,” Galven squealed. “The Klingons have control of that area! They would love to shred you to pieces.”

“Mr. Sulu, set course back to Kenda, Warp 8,” the Vulcan told the helmsman as calm as if he were talking about the weather. “We must avoid a confrontation with the Orions and the Klingons. Nyota, contact Commodore Wesley. We may need some reinforcements.”

“Spock, if you smash my ship, you’ll get a pointy earful,” Jim threatened.

“And his ears are pointy enough!” Bones snickered beside the Vulcan before he added, “Jim? You lie down now and get some rest. Don’t fret, Spock will work it out.”

“Any other time I’d mark this day on my calendar as a holiday with a comment like that, Bones, but right now I…”

“Calm down, boys!” Ritek drove the attention of the others once more to himself. “As far as I understood them, the Orions do not know who is crossing their territory. That’s an advantage and…”

“They received Kor’s message concerning Captain Kirk’s fate as we did, Mr. Ritek. Therefore, even the Orions can conclude which ship has invaded their territory,” Spock cut in. “And as soon as they know our movements, they can plan for an attack.”

Kirk groaned. “Jesus, Spock, why did you come back?”
“That’s not a serious question, Jim, is it?” McCoy grumbled. “Of course we had to try to haul your…”

Jim’s eyes widened suddenly, and he gasped, “Spock, hold the line a moment. I think I know a solution!” He switched off the microphone and the speakers and glanced up at Khan, who lifted a brow.

“Yes?” he asked, and the young officer took a deep breath.

“If I understood Ritek and Galven correctly, you constructed a device that messes with the information sensors receive from us,” he began slowly and Khan narrowed his eyes.

“Don’t ask me to…”

“It may be the only chance they have to escape,” Jim interrupted him urgently. “The Orions know that there is a ship in the area that doesn’t belong there. It will be easy for them to track the Enterprise down and to attack her. More than five hours lay between my crew and Federation territory – enough time for the slavers and pirates to assault them. But if my ship becomes invisible to their sensors, my crew – my ship can escape.” He rubbed tiredly at his neck. “I know it’s asking a lot of you, given your history with my crew, but – if we particular about it – you only have differences with Spock, not with the others. Hell, there are even new members who weren’t part of the crew during the whole mess last year. They had nothing to do with it and…It’s my crew, my family, my ship – you understand that, I know you do.”

“Kirk, I do understand that you want to protect them, but it isn’t that easy. There are no schematics for the device, only some computations and the final result,” the Augment cut in reasonably. “And I cannot instruct your technicians on its construction. I’ve already risked my identity and this crew contacting your ship. The voice-scrambler will not trick your officers forever. Therefore…”

“Galven and Ritek re-built it, so they can guide Scotty in its construction!” Kirk quickly explained. “If there is anyone who could build a device with minimal direction, it’s Scotty. Just let your friends tell him what to do, and he can start.” Jim had taken another deep breath, before he continued gently, “Nien, this invention is your intellectual property, and I have no right to demand anything from you. I can only ask you to help them. Their lives could depend on your decision. Please!”

Khan knew how James felt. He had been in this place more times than he wanted to admit – pleading for the life of his family. He had done the same – even on his knees in front of Marcus.
His family… The Enterprise’s CMO had kept them safe. He had removed them from the torpedoes and had stored them securely and well-observed in his med bay. McCoy could have refused, and it would have meant the death of the last of his people. But he didn’t, the doctor protected each and every one of them, despite all Khan had done.

Khan owed him.

He owed him not only for his family, but also for the doctor’s hell-bent stubbornness and genius ensuring James’ survival following radioactive contamination. Jim came back from death because of his – Khan’s – blood, but it had been McCoy who had the idea to use the blood, McCoy’s intellect alone healed him. The life that was returned to Kirk was the prerequisite for what was growing between Khan and the younger man. The super-human didn’t want to think of what would have become of him, if he hadn’t met Jim Kirk again – hadn’t fallen for him. He would have…

Noonien Singh went rigid. There it was; he thought it. He had fallen for James Kirk – hard! And it was only the beginning. He knew he could deny it any longer. ‘I don’t take it well if someone, who is mine, is threatened or tormented.’ When he said it, he meant it, but he didn’t connect it with…love? The fear that drove him when Kirk’s life was at stake – it told him more than anything else. And this look in those clear blue eyes – they were full of hope, trust and something more now for Khan. So different than before where there was only fury and something akin to hate. All rational thoughts went out of the window followed closely by his enhanced mind when it involved James.

A growl escaped Khan. He couldn’t deny his lover, his beloved, his support – not if he was the only one who could prevent him from personal loss – again.

He lowered his head; there was only one thing to do. He sighed and grimaced. “For you, James,” he murmured, and as he looked up again, he met the wide, beaming smile of the younger man. He was certain that Kirk would have embraced him had he been strong enough to do so. Activating the intercom, he grumbled, “Galven, connect to the Enterprise’s chief engineer, Mr. Scott is his name, and instruct him on the design of the sensor-disturbing device. With it, they will have a chance to escape without being caught.”

For a long moment there was silence, then the Tellarit oinked, “You want to give them your ‘baby’?”

Jim had to grin at that description – where had he heard something similar? Ah yes, from his crazy Scotsman he called his friend, too.
Khan rolled his eyes. “As you said once, we are all pulling at the same string here. Give the Enterprise the information.” He stopped as he felt Kirk’s hand slip into his. He read the gratefulness in his lover’s gaze and felt Jim’s grip tighten in his; the super-human made a face. ‘The things I’m doing for you, Jim!’

Quickly, the captain opened the frequency again. “Spock, is Scotty there with you?”

“Negative, Captain, Mr. Scott is still in the engineering ‘holding his baby together before she can blow up in our faces’ as he put it.”

Kirk had to chuckle at that while Khan only shook his head, amused. It seems all engineers were the same. “Right,” Jim smiled. “Put the transmission through to Engineering, when we finish. Here’s the plan, Spock. Commander Galven and Mr. Ritek are going to give Scotty instructions for a sensor-disturbing device.”

“A sensor-disturbing device?” It was a rare thing that the Vulcan voiced any surprise. “You don’t just mean signal jamming, do you Jim? There aren’t any devices that can…”

“Wrong, Spock! Sunrise constructed one – that’s how he and the others were able to reach Turkana without getting caught. Galven and Ritek will give you all information you need. As far as I know, it’s quick to build but must be done to exact specifications.” He remembered Galven’s and Ritek’s mistake on their first solo build, “so the Enterprise will be safe from scanners soon.” He looked up at Khan again; his face betrayed his happiness, and he didn’t let go of the strong, pale hand entwined in his.

Aboard the Enterprise, Spock lifted both brows. This ‘Sunrise’ had to be a genius in many facets. He answered, “Please pass our thanks to Sunrise, Jim. We owe him.”

McCoy had nodded in earnest before he spoke up once again. “And now that Spock has assured you of our safety, Jim, you will lie down and do anything your special friend tells you! Do you understand me?”

Kirk glanced up and almost choked as he saw the widening smirk on the Augment’s face. Khan looked just like a Cheshire cat, a wicked smile full of promises.

“You really shouldn’t have said that, Bones!” the captain gulped; feeling, despite his condition, a certain stirring in his gut.
Of course, Bones couldn’t know the feelings elicited by his well-meant advice. “Oh, I am sure that this was the wisest decision I’ve made in a long time…”

Khan nodded at those words, looking to the entire world like the cat that got the cream.

“Your friend is very concerned for your well-being,” Leonard continued, “and he is as determined as Spock is with a calculation.”

“This comparison is beyond logic, Doctor,” the Vulcan’s voice cut in but was ignored by the CMO.

“Therefore I can be certain that Sunrise will do anything in his power to make you lie down and rest for a while, Jim! Sunrise, you also have my permission to tie him down if he doesn’t obey.”

Khan would have loved to give a fitting response, but he kept quiet, grinning mischievously at Jim and wriggled his brows. They both knew that he had far better methods of keeping the captain in bed.

Kirk cleared his throat. “I will behave, Bones,” he said – a bit throaty. The fire in the eyes of his lover rendered him weak.

“We will see. I’ll check you thoroughly when you’re back!”

“Captain,” Spock joined the talk again. “Where can we pick you up?”

Jim and Nien had looked at each other before the younger man answered calmly, “I don’t know where The Shadow is going, Spock.” A lie, but he had given his word to not reveal the militia’s next destination. “And to tell you the truth, I don’t care. I’m not trapped; I’m not kidnapped. I’ll contact you again as soon as possible, but right now you need to get my ship and crew out of there. That is your priority! I’m safe, but I need to recover.” His glance still rested on the attractive face of the Augment and even if Jim didn’t say it aloud, Khan could hear the ‘… with you…’ deep in his soul. And only as the Augment watched his fingers running through the golden hair of the rebellious captain did Khan realize what he was doing – and he was quite happy to continue!

“Jim is right, Spock. He needs sleep to recover properly, and we need you to get us out of here and
back to Federation space as fast as our engines can take us. We can arrange a rendezvous later,” McCoy grumbled.

“And if we get another mission from Command, then we have the dilemma of recovering the captain or to following the…”

“You WILL fulfill the mission and come for me later,” Jim said firmly. “Understand, Spock? I don’t think Command knows of your little trip into Borderland, and I don’t want to see you, Bones or anyone else risking your careers, because of your unauthorized excursion and insubordination. If you get an order for a mission, you will go along with it and pick me up later. I am safe – you take care of my ship and crew. The Enterprise needs you in that chair.”

“Aye, Captain,” Spock confirmed, and only because he knew his Vulcan friend so well could he hear the confusion in the science-officer’s voice, between love and duty.

“Thanks, Spock. Contact us again when you are out of the Borderland. And please inform Commodore Wesley that I’m far more alive than the Klingons want me to be.” He rubbed his head with both hands; out of nowhere a headache worked its way into his temples and behind his eyes. “And to prove Bones that I’m a good boy, I’ll go to bed now. Commander Galven and Mr. Ritek will tell Scotty, how to build the device. It’ll drive the Orions crazy; you’ll see. I’ll put you through the bridge. Kirk out.”

“Recover, Jim,” the first officer replied while Bones called from the background, “Sleep well!”

Then Kirk disconnected his coms; knowing that the two members of The Shadow and Scotty would have much to talk about. He sighed and leaned back in the chair feeling dizzy and exhausted as the tension finally left him. He didn’t even realize that his lids dropped until a warm hand squeezed his shoulder, and he heard the deep baritone grumbling, “Keep your word to your doctor friend and go to bed, James. You must rest.”

“Yeah,” was all Jim mumbled before he forced his eyes open and padded to the bed with uneasy steps. He groaned as he sank on the mattress – both in relief and pain – and didn’t protest as Khan urged him gently to lie down and spread a blanket over him.

Quickly, the Augment mixed a sedative with midazolam, complying McCoy’s advice regarding the dose, and gave Kirk the hypospray. He got a protesting grumble for his efforts that made him chuckle.
Once Kirk was settled, Khan opened his overalls and pushed them down to his hips. He wanted to get rid of all the dirt and sweat before treating the bite wound from the scaled monster the Klingons set on him and James.

Jim watched him and even exhausted, hurting and numb, he reacted to the view almost immediately especially after all that teasing just minutes ago. How many nights had he dreamed of that well-toned, alabaster body? How often had he imagined those muscles wriggling beneath the skin, bright like finest marble? Back and chest melted into slender hips and ebony hair contrasted beautifully with the snow-colored skin. In his dreams he had traced this delicious body with his lips, teased the pale nipples and nipped at the strong, slender throat so often.

Kirk bit back a moan. Dammit, even beaten and bruised as he was, he felt heat raising in him that hadn’t anything to do with the fever his immune system produced in response to anything he had gone through. His mouth dried; he looked up and met piercing sea-colored, ocean-deep eyes. It was like looking into a mirror reflecting the fire that burned in him, too.

A smile tugged at the bowed, sinful lips of the Augment as he sensed the other man’s hunger and murmured, “Not yet, James. I’ve longed for ages to touch you again, but you need to heal first.” He visibly shook himself of the desire flaring in him.

He turned around again, and Jim’s gaze fell to the super-human’s arm. “The warrigul bite…” he said as he saw the angry red bite-marks and dried blood. He reached out, “Let me see it, please.”

Khan frowned but returned to the bed and offered the young captain his arm. Gently, Jim took the wrist in his fingers, while he worryingly observed the injury. “There isn’t much we know about these…beasts, but there is the possibility that their teeth emit poison. You should disinfect it immediately and…”

“There is no poison. I would feel it if my immune system were fighting it,” Khan replied, voice soft in response to the tender moment. Then he lifted his brows. “What are these…warriguls?”

Jim sighed. “As far as I learned at the academy, they originally come from ch’Rhian, Romulus. The Klingons imported them decades, if not a century ago. They have the lifespan of a human, eighty years or so, and are domesticated. They are wolf-like but also have lizard ancestry. Klingons keep them as pets, well, working dogs really as you saw today.” His thumb drew circles on Khan’s skin. “Just clean it and use an anti-inflammatory ointment before you bandage it. Your DNA may be enhanced, but it isn’t used to the saliva of extraterrestrial animals.”

Khan smiled at the open show of concern from his lover and nodded. “This I will do. Don’t worry,
James. You have enough with your own injuries.”

“They will heal. They have nothing else to do all day.” He yawned, and his lids slipped closed again. He was beyond fatigued now and didn’t even notice that the Augment pulled the blanket higher over him. He managed a last, “Thank you, Nien, for everything.” Then sleep claimed him …

Khan treated the warrigul bite then took a sonic-shower and changed into comfortable clothes, similar to those produced for James. He returned to the young captain, content to remain with him.

He knew that the transmission between Galven, Ritek and the Enterprise’s chief engineer would take some time, and he didn’t want the Scottish man to hear his voice. And he didn’t want to face the others just yet. He had much to think over concerning them.

He wasn’t used to receiving such loyalty outside of the fidelity of his family and those who served him of their own free will under his reign back in the 20th century. They were long gone now and his family asleep. These aliens didn’t know him – not really – still they risked their lives to come to James’ and his aid and treated him as one of their own. Not that he it was complaining. He preferred allies to isolation. Before Marcus, before the long sleep, his family was with him every waking moment. Still it confused him; the humans of the 20th century had been loyal to them because he ruled them, not because of sentiment or friendship. Jim Kirk had proved to be the exception – just like the members of The Shadow, even alien as they were.

The most important reason, though, to stay by James’ side was the threat of the nightmares that would come sooner or later. Even the sedative wouldn’t stop the terrors that threatened Kirk’s subconscious. The younger man had been through hell and not for the first time. Back in San Francisco they talked about James’ death experience much like cryosleep, but with the major difference that Khan could hope that he’d be brought back, while Kirk knew that his life was over. The Augment understood the fear James must have felt as the radioactive rays destroyed his body, realizing that these were the last minutes of his life despite his young age. He had been brought back though, but only to face death again, this time by torture, made to endure the torment of his Klingon captors.

Khan wouldn’t leave Jim’s side as long as the officer slept, anticipating that he would need Khan to wake him eventually.

Looking down at his one-time lover, he saw how the bruises darkened, changing from purple to blue and black and how pale James appeared beneath them. He remembered meeting the boyish officer all those weeks ago, and how he intended to beat him to death – before everything changed. After that night, Kirk had been bruised, too, but Khan hadn’t regretted it initially. Later, he doubted his behavior because Jim hadn’t betrayed him – except for his overcautious order to stun the super-human, but Khan had forgiven him this incident by now. Kirk had only tried to stop him from doing
something rash and the Augment understood the worries of the Enterprise’s captain.

Now as he watched James sleep, the evidence of the Klingon torture became more and more visible; he winced inwardly. Jim was young and strong – even without the minute changes to his physiology. But receiving such brutal treatment twice in a few weeks was difficult for anyone to overcome. He may had overcome the first time, that night in San Francisco, especially after it turned out in something very much more pleasurable. But those memories would combine with the new ones to haunt him.

Khan would be there for James when the nightmares began. He would offer him all the comfort he needed – and more. He found himself cupping the swollen cheek of his lover again before he tenderly stroke through the tousled golden shock of hair. His gaze wandered over the long, dark lashes, the luscious lips and the relaxed features. Jim appeared so innocent and vulnerable; it squeezed the Augment’s heart. He bent down and brushed his mouth over that of his beloved, surprising even himself at the act of tenderness, relishing in the familiar taste that was so uniquely Jim Kirk.

‘I’ll protect you, James, against the whole universe if needs to be. Our enemies will have to take down me first before they will ever get near you again!’

In his quarters aboard the J’Ethl, Lord Kor stared at the screen of his terminal; the picture paused on a frame that warred with the Klingon’s mind.

It was not possible for a Terran to show such strength as Kirk did during his escape – beaten and injured as he was. Klingons have studied human physiology and weaknesses for a century. His race knew how to break a human. And what of the other man on the screen that held the Starfleet captain in a tight, protective embrace? Kor only needed a few enhanced imaged to recognize the Terran, who had dared invade the Klingons’ headquarters in Turkana City. This Terran killed two officers and four guards before freeing the captive. Even with the dirt obscuring his features, Ryan’s son quickly realized with whom he dealt – the very same Terran who single-handedly brought down three Klingon patrols, and brought an end to the Orion’s assault on the Federation’s outpost a few weeks ago.

The recordings recovered from the extraction on Turkana displayed the speed and strength of the Terran as he caught himself and Kirk following a far too quick parachute descent. It could only be an Augment; there was no other explanation for his abilities displayed in the captain’s extraction. No normal Terran could have been able to retrieve Kirk from the well-guarded prison and kill six trained Klingon warriors in seconds – so quickly, in fact, that they did not alert anyone. The stranger must have come over them like a silent, invisible demon of the ancient times – fast and deadly.
Kirk lied to him! He told him that he didn’t know the stranger and… Kor’s eyes widened as he recalled the words of the Starfleet captain: ‘And I swear that I never met this man before…’

He spoke in the past tense concerning Qo’noS. Right, Kirk hadn’t met the man, his back-up, until that incident. But that didn’t mean he had not seen him since. And then Kirk’s speech about the non-existent Augment-program… He swore that there wasn’t one and that Starfleet would prevent another from ever happening again.

“Clever, Kirk,” Kor whispered. “This man is an Augment, but he wasn’t created by Starfleet or some official Federation program. You know him far better than you let on and told half-truths. But why protect him, Kirk?”

Pursing his lips, the commander stroked his beard. He pondered over the portion of video recorded shortly before Kirk, and the stranger were beamed to the spacecraft that escaped the six Klingon battlecruisers.

Kor cocked his head as his eyes trained on the image of the two men locked in an embrace. The first time he reviewed the record he thought Kirk had stumbled or had lost his balance after his incredible escape, but now the Klingon wasn’t so certain about that first assumption. Perhaps there was more to this gesture than meets the eye. Quickly, he replayed the record and slowed down the video, paying close attention to the men onscreen taking in their surroundings. He saw that the young officer hadn’t tripped. The reason the stranger pulled Kirk close was different – the embrace was both protective and sentimental.

Kor observed how Kirk’s expression changed from determined to fear and defeat. Then the Augment laid a hand on the young man’s shoulder and wrapped him in his arms, only to receive an embrace from the captain in return. He saw pain flicker on the stranger’s face, but not because of some injury. As far as the Klingon lord could determine, the Terran was completely unscathed. The anguish on the human’s face came from somewhere else.

‘He doesn’t fear for himself, but for Kirk!’ Kor comprehended, surprised as he parsed the meaning of his new-found knowledge. Were these men soul mates? Lovers? Both?

Relationships of the same gender weren’t unheard of in the Klingon culture. It was neither common nor forbidden. Sometimes, strong men sought the company of men equally as strong and the requirement or wish for strength in comfort overpowered the desire for the softer sex or procreation. Kor didn’t know how the Federation or Earth people regarded such bonds, but he understood that there were feelings between the two men far beyond simple friendship.
Bending forwards his gaze roamed over the face of the Augment. He could only see half as the other was obscured, buried in Kirk’s tousled, short hair; a gesture so affectionate, even a blind man would have recognized it for what it was – a final good-bye between lovers.

‘Who are you really, Augment? You’re loyal towards Kirk – your mate, perhaps? You wouldn’t have faced death to save him otherwise, and would not have reacted with such – sentiment. But you don’t belong to Starfleet. The people who beamed you and Kirk away are militia; the militia giving such trouble to the Orions. I recognize a Tellarit when I hear one. Exactly like the rebel on the outpost. You belong to them, Augment, not to Starfleet. Why? Why aren’t you one of their soldiers? We are at war and you one of the fiercest warriors I have ever laid eyes on. You could afford the Federation so many advantages. But you choose to work in secret and lurk in the shadows – ready to attack at any moment and vanish back into the darkness. What are you up to?’

He crossed his long arms in front of his chest. ‘Hmmm, I wonder, does Starfleet know about your liaisons? I don’t think so. If you were an agent or a mercenary, Starfleet would be providing support. So, Starfleet has no clue about you. Wesley wouldn’t have risked a trial when he called me to beg for Kirk’s life if he’d known about your plans for rescue.’

He took a deep breath. ‘I will reveal your secret, Augment, and I will catch you. You and Kirk! And then I will get all the answers I need. Neither of you will allow the other to face the pain I will inflict, and there I will exploit you both, honor be damned! You are too dangerous, Augment, to be spared. And concerning Kirk, there is still a sentence to execute…’

Bob Wesley sat at his desk in his quarters. Since he learned of the media-incident with the big-mouthed reporter he hadn’t slept at all – first out of concern of the Enterprise’s safety and now because of the fate of his young friend, Jim Kirk. If he were honest with himself, he was sick with worry. The Enterprise was approximately three hours away from Turkana and deep in the enemy territory, now even more dangerous with the presence of the Klingons. Should he have tried to stop Spock from returning to the colony? Should he have been more forceful with Kor? Should he do something other than these futile attempts as reaching The Shadow?

And why, for God’s sake, did the militia not reply? They had to hear him, he was certain of it, and…

“Commodore? I have the Enterprise for you,” the voice of his communications officer from beta-shift interrupted his musings.
“Put them through!” he said, not bothering to hide his nervousness. Spock couldn’t be at Turkana yet, so there had to be another urgent reason for the contact. ‘Dear God, please don’t let them be in trouble. Please, no Orion or Klingon attacks or...’

“Commodore Wesley, this is Commander Spock.” The Enterprise’s first officer’s deep voice coupled with his ascetic face appeared on Wesley’s screen. “Sir, it’s my pleasure to inform you that Captain Kirk was recovered by The Shadow.”

Bob gasped; not caring that a man in his position should be more in control. “You are sure?” he asked. New hope for the captain flared up in him like the first rays of the sun after a very long and cold night.

“Yes, sir. I spoke with the captain of the vessel Captain Kirk is aboard. He is injured but being treated now by members of The Shadow. Doctor McCoy gave orders to Sunrise regarding his treatment.” The Vulcan looked visibly shaken. “The captain underwent torture at the hands of the Klingons. Pain sticks among other things…”

“Blasted Klingon bastards!” Bob growled balling his hands into fists.

“...but he was well enough to talk with the doctor and me for a while,” Spock ended his report ignoring the furious interjection of the commodore.

“Have you arranged a rendezvous with The Shadow to take Kirk aboard?” Bob wanted to know, and if he weren’t so tired and glad with relief, he would have smiled at Spock’s audible sigh.

“They are already half away from the Borderland border. One of their members, a man named Ritek, intercepted a transmission from the Orions concerning our presence in their territory. There was no time to meet with The Shadow to…”

“Shit!” Bob took a deep breath. “Get out of there, Commander. Now!”

“We have already altered our course back to Kenda, sir, but I... think it is possible to avoid any contact with the pirates. Sunrise, who, by the way, was the one who rescued the captain in a single-man mission, developed a sensor-disturbing device. The Shadow has tested it successfully. He agreed to give us the technical specifications and Mr. Scott is building it now. We will use it to avoid the Orion’s sensors. Our odds of escape are 1 in 59.6784 based on the simple concept of the device
and its previous success. We are only concerned over the time in build and readiness. So long as we remain undiscovered before its use, we will be alright. It should be ready for operation within the next hour according to Mr. Scott.”

Wesley stared at the Vulcan. “This ‘Sunrise’ seems to have more talent than the whole Command staff together. He flies and shoots, single-handedly saves a Starfleet captain from an invading Klingon battalion, tends his injuries as if he is a doctor, and then builds a sensor-disturbing device within a few days, a project our scientists have been working on for months.” He shook his head. “Hell bells, this guy is ready for the next New Nobel Prize. So now for the question of the day.” He cocked his head. “This Sunrise… He is Drythen, isn’t he?”

“Sir, Captain Kirk’s exact words at my presumption of Sunrise and the ‘daredevil’s’ identity were: ‘You are right, but don’t expect to get an answer from him right now.’” The science officer lifted a brow. “This man is hiding his true identity very carefully, but regarding his support to Starfleet these last weeks, I see no priority in finding out more about him so long as he remains on our side.”

An amused snort escaped Bob. “You almost sound like Jim. You two have spent too much time together,” he teased before he remembered that Vulcans haven’t a sense for humor. He sighed. “Right, I’ll expect your report soon, Commander. Where are you going to pick up our troublemaker?”

Spock knew of whom the commodore referred and replied, “The captain is in need of rest and healing. I accepted his request to arrange a meeting point later when he has recovered. He also ordered me not to wait for him should Starfleet have a mission and to let him know when we leave Borderland.”

“Right, in other words, he needs a break. I can sure as hell grant him that much. Let him deal with the terrors he endured in his own way. Maybe it’s good for him to be with his mysterious friend and out of this damn war’s cross-fire for a while. But knowing him he will be back at the con in a few days, so… give him a break. He can’t stand tobe away from his ship and crew for that long anyways.”

And Spock’s soft nod told him that the Vulcan saw it the same way…

TBC…
So, my dear readers, now Jim is finally ‘out of the fire’ so to say, but another fire lies ahead for him and Khan – a far better ‘fire’.

In the next chapter the phantoms of the past will haunt our captain, Barnett learns of Kirk’s fate (after all there is damn time offset until a message reaches Starfleet Command and Barnett can’t know of Jim’s rescue) and Khan’s get another proof, how much he belongs to The Shadow now.

I hope you enjoyed the new chapter and I’m curious like hell, what you think of it.

Have a nice week

Yours Starflight
Chapter 17 – Hours of comfort

Khan sat at the small desk in his quarters. He hacked into Starfleet’s database again, a difficult and time-killing procedure because of the great distance between the spacecraft’s position and the headquarters as well as the changing cryptography protecting the most sensitive information. He checked Starfleet’s deep-space facilities. Could they securely hold and maintain 72 cryotubes? He remembered Caviw’s suggestion to start his search in a different place each time and look at a problem from a different point of view. The Caitian could be right. The location of his crew was top secret and therefore well hidden with few who knew of their existence and fewer still who knew where they were.

Khan looked for a fitting outpost of Starfleet or civil departments under Starfleet jurisdiction. But after he found four facilities, he had to withdraw because the SBI discovered the unauthorized access and were attempting triangulation of the server, though without success. He was too quick and careful; still he didn’t want to reveal his venture. He switched off the terminal and disconnected from the vessel’s main-computer. It was out of the question to risk his comrades’ safety because of his search.

Cursing under his breath, he leaned back in his chair. A gentle rap on the door got his attention, too quiet to disturb Kirk’s slumber. Pleased by such sensibility, the super-human rose and let his visitors in, Ritek and Galven. They gaped at him for just a moment. None of them had ever seen him with
bare feet, clad so casually in kurta and shalwar. Only his hair was sleeked back in his usual fashion.

The Rigelian quietly reported, mindful of their sleeping guest that the Enterprise’s chief engineer had built the device and that it had been successfully linked to the starship’s deflector-shields. Khan lifted a brow. They were quick, but after checking the chronometer at the bed stand he realized that more than three hours had passed since Jim spoke to his crew and rested. Indeed, time does fly when you’re busy.

Galven glanced at the young captain, and compassion shimmered in his little eyes. “The boy really looks bad,” he whispered. “And the Klingons only ‘questioned’ him for a few hours.”

Khan nodded grimly. “I don’t want to imagine, what would have happened to him, if I had come later.”

“How did you break into their headquarters and find him?” The Augment sighed.

“I didn’t have to search for him. His screams led me through the supply-shafts.” He shuddered inwardly and felt an impulse to go to the bed and take the younger man in his arms. He was always there for his people if they needed him, when they needed him, but it was different with Jim Kirk. Not only because of the super-human’s blood in Kirk’s veins. No! The reason went deeper – deeper than his veins, deeper still than his heart. With Kirk, Khan knew that despite his unconventional creation, he had a soul. He knew because it was entwined in Jim Kirk’s. It warmed him, and it grew stronger with each passing hour.

“What became of his tormentors?” Galven asked quietly, and as he caught the piercing gaze, he gulped. “Let me guess, they aren’t among us anymore.”

“Yes,” was the only reply. Then Khan took a deep breath, “I want to thank you, Galven. And you, too, Ritek.” His attentions rested fully on his two comrades. “You risked your lives to come to James’ and my aid. Without you, Caviw, Diego and the others we both would be in the enemy’s hands and…” He grimaced before Galven clapped him on the shoulder.

“You’re welcome, Buddy. As I said, you are one of us now, and we stick together, no matter what. If we can’t rely on each other, then we should quit now. We are but a few in number, but our strength is reliance upon one another – the bond we share through common experience and purpose.” He rubbed his snout. “You could have asked, you know. You could have told us what you were up to, and we would have been with you from the beginning.”
“Yeah, telling me that you want to speak with Galven only to see you seize the D’Ghor and speed away wasn’t the ideal way to go about it.” Ritek nodded and lifted a hand to ‘Drythen’s’ objection. “I know, the boy was running out of time and you had to get to him as soon as possible. Still the whole thing could have gone wrong. In fact, it did, and you only got out of there because we showed up.”

Khan felt his cheeks heating. They were right. He would have failed Jim, and by his death, his family, too. If it hadn’t been for his comrades of The Shadow, he and James both would face death by torture now – or he certainly would be back in some labs, this time in a Klingon one.

This was strange. He wasn’t used to such a close comradeship other than his crew, but there they stood – two alien men who didn’t know his true identity, but showed him loyalty nonetheless. It was a new experience, and he realized that he had begun to value this relationship.

Ritek watched his shipmate and recognized the other man’s embarrassment – a rare thing given ‘Drythen’s’ pride – and smiled. “Think of it the next time you want to save the day again. We are with you. And whatever the problem that is weighing on you, even now, it will be easier if you share it. Whenever you want to talk about it, just come to Galven, Caviw or me. Or Jeffry – when he is sober again. We had to leave him on Aldebaran because he was drunk as a sailor when we departed. Anyhow, we all have an open ear and a sealed mouth; you can talk to us whenever you want, okay?” He saw the wary gaze of the Terran man and added firmly, “Whatever you’ve done that you have to avoid Starfleet and the authorities doesn’t matter, because here,” he tapped against the Augment’s chest, “you are a good guy. That’s all that counts.”

To his surprise Khan felt a lump in his throat. If Joaquin and the others heard this, they would think that times really had changed; then he nodded. “Thank you,” and he meant it.

Ritek grinned at him. “And you have to tell me, how did you punch a dent into the Flash’s comms station? I know that you are strong after seeing you take on the Orions and the D’Ghor’s captain, but whatever feed pellets you’re eating, must be damn good.” He winked at him and left.

Galven stayed a moment longer. “We will reach Aldebaran in approximately 5 hours and Diego will arrange a shore leave for you and the captain so that the boy can heal. He said something about a small cottage somewhere at the Silver Bayou, or whatever that lake is called, and that you two can stay there for a few days. A break will be good for the lad – and for you, too!”

Perplexed, Khan stared at him. “Diego is going to rent his cottage to us?”

“No, he will not rent it but will give you a free stay.” He grinned as he caught the utterly baffled gaze
of ‘Drythen’. “You’ve impressed him with your technical genius and the stunt you pulled to save your friend. Someone who dares to fly deep into enemy’s territory and risks his neck to haul someone else’s ass out of trouble should have songs written about him – and Diego is a hopeless romantic.” He turned to leave, but hesitated. “Is it true? Is the boy your mate?”

Khan’s eyes widened even more, while his jaw made the downward plunge toward the floor. “What…? How…? I beg your pardon?” No, his voice didn’t hitch, did it? Alas, so much for being an enhanced super-human.

The Tellarit chuckled. “There’s no denying it, Drythen. Caitians have a very fine sense for such things and even if Caviw hadn’t explained to us, we would have realized it on our own, certainly after we got you and the boy back. You’re far too fond of the lad to see in him ‘only’ a friend.”

“Caviw explained…?” The former dictator felt completely taken by surprise. “What did she explain?” he demanded thunderstruck.

“Well,” Galven smirked, “when Ritek alerted us that you took the D’Ghor and were off to Turkana to save the boy’s neck, I wasn’t too happy about it. Then Caviw told us that you were claimed, most likely by the Enterprise’s captain since you obviously trust no one to save him and that our young hero here is your mate.” He smiled. “I can understand your determination to save him no matter the cost. We Tellarits have very strong family ties, and nothing means more to us than our clans. With the Caitians it is the same and the Regulians are Vulcanoid, which means that they bind themselves mentally to their mates, too. You and Kirk share a bond, a bond that drives you both to each other beyond logic and reason. So I understand your decision to fly to the rescue – even if I wanted to put you over my knee making me worry like that.” He scratched his snout again to hide his grin as he took in the shocked expression of the Terran. “What has become of the D’Ghor?” He changed the topic. ‘Drythen’ avoided his gaze, quite uncharacteristic of the Terran so the Tellarit left it with a grumble.

Why – oh why – did Khan feel like a small boy again just now? He was in the ascendancy over the others, even over Galven and Ritek, and never had to answer to anyone; still there was something festering at the edge of his conscious. Those people cared for him. Not because of his enhanced abilities, his status or title, but because of himself. They saw a brother in him, and that was more than he ever had since his awakening from cryosleep. Moistening his lips, he replied, “I had to give her up. She’s on Turkana somewhere in the wilderness. Still cloaked, but…” He rubbed his neck in an uncommon wave of shyness and Galven rolled his eyes.

“Shit! She was of use to us, you know.” Then he shrugged. “Well, the boy’s and your lives are of more value. I’m glad that we have you back and that the crew of the Enterprise hasn’t lost its friend and captain. They seem to love him, given the Vulcan’s outburst when he heard Kirk’s voice.”
“'Outburst’?” Khan blinked. That had been an outburst?

“By Vulcan standards that was an outburst of delirium, rather rare for Vulcans, but if they like someone… Not that they would admit to ‘liking’ someone at all.” He sighed. “Right, it’s late and I think you have better things to do than to chat with an old guy like me.” He turned. “Night, Drythen. We will not wake you when we arrive at Aldebaran. Take all the time you need. And don’t forget to eat something. You’re far too thin!”

With those words, he left. Khan stared at the closed door for more than a minute speechless, half irritated, half bemused. And, above all, deeply touched, as a certain fact hit him with force: He wasn’t alone anymore! He had friends, friends he could rely on without fear of being let down. These people were more like James Kirk, rather than Marcus. Perhaps there was a place for him in this world after all – a place for friendships, relationships, although his relationship with Jim was… far more intense.

His gaze drifted down to the sleeping man, and Galven’s words echoed in his mind, ‘your mate’. Hell, it was too early to call them mates. They weren’t even lovers, just… Well, he couldn’t name what they were. Only one thing was for sure, there was indeed a bond between them and, as Galven put it, it was beyond logic and reason. Under normal circumstances, they would be still enemies; nature had positioned them on opposing sides. Yet they had too much in common to not realize the spiritual kinship. And there was the hunger and the instinct that drove them to protect each other from harm. From the beginning, Jim shielded him and his people from annihilation using weapons of his design. Jim had even been willing to endure torture to keep Khan’s identity a secret now, to keep him from injustice as he did before. They were close, bonded even, and fate kept throwing them together, using each to preserve the other; as if they were meant to be.

Even in San Francisco, after he had left Kirk’s apartment, he had felt the urge to claim the young captain utterly; to make him his and his alone. And now this longing burnt even stronger – not only with the flames of desire, but also with the warm glow of protectiveness and the beginnings of tenderness. Maybe they could be more than lovers – far more. If only circumstances were different. If he wasn’t a wanted criminal feared by the world because of his past acts and breeding. If Jim wasn’t a Starfleet captain, who should arrest or even kill him on sight. Only then might the future look brighter.

But all these ‘perhaps’ and ‘maybe’s’ didn’t count. Not in this moment. Just right now all that mattered was their stolen time together and the health of the younger man – the opportunity for this time was nearly lost to them. Khan shuddered as he thought back at the moment Kirk asked him to kill him as the Klingons closed in on them blocking their egress. Of course, the former dictator could understand Jim’s decision. Sometimes death was the easier and more merciful way than bearing what lay ahead; still the plea shocked him. A year ago he wouldn’t have hesitated at the request, but now…
The mere thought of feeling James’ neck snapping beneath his fingers, listening to the captain’s last breath, feeling the cessation of his pulse sent a stab of intense pain through the Augment’s being, making him almost dizzy with sorrow, even if it never happened.

For a moment he imagined the chest stilling, those cheeks turning grey and this handsome face turning waxy. An icy chill ran down his spine. He wouldn’t have obliged Jim, even if Galven hadn’t shown up at the very last second. He couldn’t have done it despite his rational mind agreeing with the captain’s decision. He would have lost more than James – he would have destroyed a part of his soul! He couldn’t have killed James just as he couldn’t kill Joaquin, Katie, Otto, Paolo or any of his family. Jim and he had marked each other; the link between them was already strong and he would fight the whole universe to keep Kirk out of harm’s way. It was in an Augment’s nature to protect their dear ones.

There – he had thought it again – a dear one.

He groaned. He had no time to get emotionally involved like this, but he knew that there was no going back now. James Kirk had become a part of his life – of his heart – and he would stay true to it no matter what. He had no other choice. He could fight against an enemy, but never against himself.

Closing the distance between himself and the bed, he bent down and softly kissed the dry and swollen lips of his former adversary. He couldn’t give voice to the truth of his feelings that his ever-working mind and his soul were whispering to him – not yet. It would be foolish – insane – given their predicament.

Sighing, Khan rose and rubbed his forehead. No, a headache was something an Augment didn’t suffer – well, not often. But now seemed to be one of the few occasions, and even the enhanced human had to bend to this unpleasant experience. The whole Turkana disaster had tired even him out, not physically necessarily but mentally. He knew that he was a kind of monster in the eyes of the most people, but they would never understand how deep his feelings ran for those who belonged to him. It was hell for him to see what had been done to his lover; hearing his screams was something that would haunt him for a long time. The rage that had burnt in him when he realized Jim’s agony had sapped his mental strength. Coupled with his healing injury, he felt a rare tiredness gripping him.

And with that another completely normal albeit unexpected body function kicked in – his stomach growled.

Khan rolled his eyes. Of course, his body demanded its replenishments. His arm was still healing, slower than normal actually. And the emotional maelstrom was taking its toll.
Banishing the terrible memories of the moment to the cellars of his subconscious, the super-human went to the replicator to fetch something to eat, hoping that Diego had programmed the replicator to produce some Asian food. He had enough of the alien meals!

"Why wasn’t I informed sooner, José?" Richard Barnett had a strong sensation of déjà-vu as he stood in José Luengo’s office. He felt the heat of rage burning in his veins as he asked that same question all those weeks ago when he got the message about Khan’s escape – the Augment was after Kirk and his friends for revenge. Again the young office, one of his most troublesome but also best students, was the cause of his outburst.

"You were in the same meeting with Federation Council as I was. I learned about Kirk’s fate an hour ago – after I returned to my office," the Spaniard answered calmly. "And I informed you as soon as I could."

"The Klingons captured the captain of our flagship, and they ordered his execution – and your office has nothing better to do than telling the Enterprise that there is nothing Command can do?" Barnett braced his hands on the surface of José’s desk and fixed the Chief of the SBI. "How is that possible?"

"You gave the order that this meeting shouldn’t be interrupted for any reason, except… What did you say? ‘Unless the Klingons knock down our front door’." Luengo watched as Barnett threw his hands up before replying,

"Dammit, José! I didn’t want be interrupted for some report of a scratch on a starship hull. The Klingons took one of our commanding officers captive and ordered him to be executed by torture; that fucking counts as ‘knocking down our front door’. This execution is just more information gathering about us! Kirk is strong and stubborn as a pack of mules, but we both know the Klingon methods. They are going to break him – slowly – just to see how long he can last. And then? What about the outcome, the PR nightmare at leaving one of ours to die? What about the intelligence the Klingons get out of him before he succumbs?"

"Do you really think Kirk will talk? I don’t know him like you or Chris did. But our officers would rather die than to betray Starfleet or the Federation."

"There will be no salvation for him, no death until he tells them what they need to know. They can torture him for days – weeks even! It is our duty to do something. We are at war, and there are always sacrifices that leave scars on us all. But never – under no circumstance – do we leave a man
behind! And THAT is as old as war itself! Jim Kirk saved our planet just two years ago. He saved uncounted lives during his first one-year mission, and if I’ve read your report correct, he stayed behind to help a pregnant woman and her children to flee from Turkana.” His voice lowered dangerously, “We don’t have many heroes like him, and we need men like Jim Kirk if we are going to win this damn war!” He pointed at Luengo’s terminal. “When did the messages on Kirk come in?”

Luengo checked his received transmissions and replied, “Commodore Wesley’s report reached us fifteen hours ago; the Klingon commander’s message concerning Kirk’s execution came in seven hours later.” He grimaced, “We couldn’t have interfered even if we reacted immediately following the first transmission from the Lexington. The distance between here and Turkana is too great.” He looked up at Barnett. “I’m sorry, Richard. I know that you valued the young man highly, and he was one of our most promising officers, but…” He didn’t finish but took a deep breath.

“So, if I understand you correctly, Lord Kor’s message has been sent eight hours ago?” Richard asked; the Spaniard nodded and straightened. “Then it isn’t too late to do something. Death by torture – it means that the execution takes time. Maybe there is still a chance to get the boy out of the hell he is in now.”

He turned to leave, but looked back one more time. “And you should instruct your staff to understand the difference between bullshit reports and emergencies. If Kirk breaks and dies because of the SBI’s inaction, there will be consequences!” The door closed behind him – and out of the attached room Norton stepped into the office.

The two admirals exchanged a look, before José took a piece of paper and wrote something down; offering it Albert, who took the small sheet. ‘Golden Gate Park, boathouse at Stow Lake, 2200.”

Norton curtly nodded and left.

In the meantime, Barnett strode through the foyer like an angry bear; no one wanted to cross path his path. He stepped into his office. For a moment, he wished for a good old-fashioned door he could slam, instead of familiar swish of the entry sliding closed.

He ran his fingers through his dark curls, and pulled just short of tearing at them; a wild curse rushed past his lips. The weariness after the marathon of a conference had finally left him. Fifteen hours ago the SBI learned of Kirk’s fate. Given the distance, the report of the Lexington had been sent nineteen hours ago. Nineteen damn hours! There could be two strike groups, twenty ships at least, in Borderland by now to send the damn Klingons home and recover the young officer. Kor’s transmission, a name he had read so many times he thought he should know this Klingon lord, reached Starfleet Command seven hours later. At the latest then, he should have been informed, Barnett thought. A recovery team could have been dispatched, maybe already there. But because of those cretins blinded by the damn rules, Jim Kirk was delivered to a fate far more cruel than the
human mind can comprehend.

Barnett rubbed his face. He knew that it could be already too late to send the cavalry. If Kirk remained alive now, he certainly was only a shadow of his former self – crippled in body and soul. But Richard had to do something. And this without robbing the Council of their precious peace.

Of course, he understood that the president of the Federation and the council members, as well as the admiralty (mostly), wanted to end the war. But it was a never-ending loop; the Klingons attacked and were driven back only to assault the next planet – the next territory. Now that the Klingons had annexed the Borderland, with the allowance of the Orion Syndicate, Barnett was certain that they would the newly acquired territory to mount further attacks on surrounding Federation-space.

And as though the attacks weren’t enough, the Federation still had to contend with the enhanced Rigelian Fever bacterium the Klingon labs were breeding. If perfected, the war would take on a whole new dimension of horrifying with the introduction of biological weapons. Both sides had already suffered many losses, and Barnett was tired to read casualty reports day-after-day. This whole disaster had to end. He voted for peace talks with the Klingons, still he doubted that the enemy would listen. Klingons saw no crime in war. They embraced war as an inevitable destiny that filled them with pride. Reasoning with them was anything but easy.

Right in the middle of the casualties and looming bio attack is the loss of the Federation’s young hero, Jim Kirk. Perhaps his loss didn’t mean the loss of the war, but their side suffered severe handicap without the Enterprise’s captain. Though he knew that he should do nothing to complicate the prospect of peace talks, but he couldn’t let the young man down. He simply couldn't! He had never entrusted someone with this information, but the way Jim Kirk had faced trial during his time at the Academy, after he manipulated the Kobayashi Maru, had impressed the admiral.

Most students would have tried to talk themselves out of the trouble they were in, but not Jim Kirk. Hell, he even deigned to defend his deed and argued with the Vulcan, Spock. Most admirals, even Barnett, avoided confrontation with the Vulcan as much as possible. This kid had more courage and stood strong for what he believed good and right; more than other so-called heroes who did so out of convenience rather than conviction.

Kirk had always had that certain something in him, even from the time of Tarsus IV. That quality just needed someone with an eye to see it and bring out its true luster. Chris Pike saw what Kirk was and could be. He made him is protégée and defended him with the fierceness of a mother-le-matya. Maybe Richard didn’t see Kirk as Chris did, but if Chris valued something, that was good enough for him – even after death. It was up to Richard to pull the boy out of deep water – just like Chris would have done. Chris – or Bob Wesley; if it was good enough for Christ, it was good enough for Bob. Richard smiled at the thought.
The Chief-in-Command knew about the growing friendship between the nitty-gritty commodore and the Enterprise’s captain. He would bet a whole months pay that Bob already tried to save his younger friend’s neck – he didn’t need a Starfleet report to know that – there probably wasn’t one. Kirk wasn’t the first and wouldn’t be the last, who wasn’t that particular about rules. Bob had the same tendency – and maybe this was the solution for Jim Kirk’s rescue.

“Lieutenant?” he called his secretary through the direct-link, “Yes, sir?”

Barnett took a deep breath. “Open a deep-space frequency, Priority One, Code 9, and link it to my terminal!”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

Seconds later the channel switched on, and Barnett looked straight at the camera on his screen. “Lexington, Admiral Barnett speaking. I just learned that Captain Kirk of the USS Enterprise has fallen into the hands of the Klingons on Turkana. Commodore Wesley, if you have already dispatched a personnel recovery team, then I want the details. If not – do it now; try to save Kirk. No open confrontation; the mission must be done secretly. I give you free reign to do whatever is necessary; however, you cannot confront the Klingons. Any confrontation will blow our negotiations out of the water – spoil it all. As soon as Captain Kirk is rescued or confirmed dead, I expect your personal report, sent only to me! Barnett out!”

He re-played the recording and sent it over the Lexington’s very own frequency. Then he prepared a similar message for the Enterprise, ordering Spock to wait for Commodore Wesley’s instructions concerning the rescue-mission or if the mission had already started, to avoid open battle. He wished the crew of the flagship luck and sent the transmission on its way scrambled with the same security methods as the Lexington.

Now he could do nothing more than give his attention to other urgent matters that needed his attention. That – and hope that the young captain wouldn’t suffer too horribly before help arrived.

ST***ST***ST

The heat was excessive. It burnt under his skin, crept along his neural system, infiltrated his organs and drove the blood from his pores. Jim could feel his insides melting – dying – and there was nothing he could do to stop it. Neither the cool glass of the security-lock nor the figure on the other side, who looked on with wet, sorrowful, dark eyes could end the pain. “I’m scared, Spock… Strange feeling… Not used to… Help me not to feel.” The words fell from his bleeding lips.
The fear… This unbelievable, vise gripping fear… He would die – here and now – alone in this radiation-filled room, his body slowly shutting down. He could feel his heartbeat slow down; his lungs refused to inflate to take in much-needed air… Then everything stopped, and the world melted into the darkness…

The darkness lifted, chased away by burning pain in his back. Tearing his eyes open, Jim gasped for breath only to receive a murderous blow. An alabaster face with piercing blue-green eyes appeared. “Shall we continue?” The deep baritone was familiar, but it sounded… strange. It was full of wrath and hatred. Far from the warm tones with which he was accustomed to now. “Your Vulcan broke my arm last time we met – maybe it’s a good start for you,” the man in front of him sneered. He knew the man before him; this hate was wrong – it didn’t fit. There hadn’t been any rancor between them since… Well, quite some time. Jim felt ice running through him in agonizing contrast to the searing pain he felt.

No, this phantom was false, a trick of his mind. Nien and he were allies, brothers… more than that. They shared passionate, sweet kisses, gentle caresses and seducing touches that drove him over the edge. Nien wasn’t an enemy! He was…

Those sea-colored eyes became caring and tender; a strong hand gently cupped his cheek… “Jim, calm down. You are safe…”

The memory faded from pale marble to the dark, looming anger of two Klingon captains.

“What are Starfleet’s security codes?”

“Where are your strike groups?”

“Who was your back-up on Qo’noS? Give me his name!”

“What are your next orders?”

The questions showered down on him – and he couldn’t answer them. A blade sliced down his chest; a laser whip tore the skin from his back. Then another Klingon lifted a short, thick rod and pressed it against his side. Never had such agony flooded his senses. Another blow landed on his temple making his ears ring.
“Who was this man on Qo’noS?”

“I will not tell you,” Jim whispered hoarsely.

“What is he?”

“A thousand times better than you!” he gritted out, remembering the private and tender talks, the heroics of the Augment, who saved his good friend Bob Wesley.

He heard Khan’s voice from far away. “James, wake up!”

“Where is he?” the Klingon continued.

“Where you cannot get him!” the young captain gasped, imagining the super-human in the safe shelter of his quarters.

“What’s his name?”

“He has many names; all as great as he is,” Jim murmured while his mind only called out for one alone: Nien

“HIS NAME! Say it, human!”

New resolve flared up in Kirk. “Rumpelstiltskin! You don’t know Rumpelstiltskin? The little gnome, who taught the miller’s daughter how to spin gold, so that… The pain bestowed on him once again was incomparable to the one before.

One of the Klingons, the commander’s first officer, pressed a dagger against his chest. “I will skin you alive, Kirk! I will cut this sorry excuse of a biological coat from your body…”

“Fuck yourself, bastard!”
“Karum, step five!”

*Fire raged under his skin, found its way into his skull, and filled every fiber of his being with white-hot agony. Jim screamed and this time he was able to beg for the pain to stop. But there was no end to it, no escape, only searing torment…*

“Jim, do you hear me? Wake up!” The voice tried to cut through thick fog of his mind; it reached him – sort of.

*The ache remained, tore at his body, tried to tear his nerves to pieces… And this heat… Again this terrible, scorching heat! He…*

Something pressed against his neck, and almost instantly the brutal burning was soothed. He could breathe. Then he heard a deep, rich voice again calling to him.

“Jim, wake up! Come back to me, *pyāra* (Hindu for ‘love’), come on.”

Someone tapped him softly against his cheeks, and the familiar voice demanded he open his eyes.

The nightmare cleared; the gentle baritone chased away the fog. The harsh Klingon voices ebbed away, and the pain stopped. Fighting against the darkness that tried to envelop him once more, he forced his lids open and met the worried gaze of the voice’s owner.

Long fingers gently stroked his temple. “There you are.” Khan felt a wave of relief as Jim finally broke free from his restless sleep.

The moment the first nightmares stirred the younger man’s slumber, Khan hurried to his side, trying to soothe him, but for naught. Jim was deep in REM due to his exhaustion and the effects of the sedative. The Augment’s attempts to wake him up were unsuccessful. With dread, he watched the pain on Kirk’s face, listened to his pleas and cries to make the agony stop. And that’s exactly what he did.

Checking his torn and dirty coveralls, he had found the two hyposprays with the doping-agent and realized, to his relief, that one wasn’t emptied completely. Quickly, he injected Jim with the remains
and the young captain finally calmed down. The serum-mixture of Khan’s blood, adrenaline, vitamins and the pain-killer worked far better than the medicine he gave him earlier. Tapping the other man’s cheeks, he woke Jim.

Glad that the mental torment was over, the super-human ran his fingers through the sweat-damp hair. As he saw Jim’s disoriented, confused glances, he smiled. “There you are,” he whispered. “Stay calm, Jim, you are safe.”

“Where am I?” Kirk mumbled dazed.

“Aboard one of The Shadow’s vessels,” Khan replied while his fingertips wandered tenderly over the other man’s jaw, prickly with the first beard growth. He saw those glassy, sky-blue eyes roaming over the walls and overhead before fixing upon him again. “Everything is fine now, Jim, you are safe,” he repeated. And as he saw the uncomprehending but hopeful glance, he knew that healing would take some time. The younger man’s body was strong, but to enduring death and torture in the space of a year was something the mind couldn’t bear without lashing out. Lesser men would break, but Khan knew that James Kirk was no lesser man. Only time, though, would completely heal Jim’s wounded body, mind and soul.

Jim heard the words, but they took their time permeating his addled mind. Snatches of his dreams still echoed in his ears and before his eyes. It mixed itself with the truth around him. He heard the soft drone of engines, smelled cleaned air and the familiar scent of the man who bent over him and watched him with tender care and worry.

Nien…

His rescuer.

The man whose presence meant safety and protection.

Jim always loathed depending on someone else, but in these minutes he was glad for the sentry that kept watch over him. More than a sentry! Kirk’s memories were a blur, but he knew that he wouldn’t be here if it hadn’t been for Khan. The Augment rescued him from torment and prison, had fought like a lion for him and brought him to safety. The man, he had met as an enemy, had turned into a fierce protector, caring friend and…

The young captain moisture his lips, as his subconscious whispered a gentle ‘Lover’.
Yes, all this was Khan Noonien Singh now – and more. For a long moment Jim wanted nothing more than to be enveloped wholly by the other man, to be one with him, to know him in every sense of the word.

The super-human watched the reactions of the captain very carefully. He saw Jim’s tongue dart out to wet the dry, cracked lips. “Do you want something to drink or to eat?”

Finally, feeling a bit more himself again, Jim replied, “I’m thirsty.” His voice was rough.

Khan nodded, ordered the replicator to produce a glass of room temperature water, and helped Kirk sit, before he set the glass against the younger man’s lips and held it, while Jim downed the much-needed fluid.

“Slow down, James, or you’ll get sick,” the former dictator said, providing once again evidence of his medical knowledge.

Kirk obeyed. He was aware of the risk of nausea if he drank too quickly, but the thirst seemed insatiable; the cool water in his mouth was like heaven. He groaned in relief and Khan eased him down on the mattress again, before laying a hand against Jim’s forehead to check his temperature.

The captain still ran a fever – not unexpected. His immune system had to be in turmoil, what with all of the medications, foreign plasma, and not knowing what to cure first.

“I don’t want to inject you again,” the super-human said. “Let the fever and your immune system do the work for which it is intended. If the fever goes any higher then I will treat it, but it is not dangerous now.”

“Good. I don’t want another hypospray,” Kirk muttered. “How long did I sleep?”

“Not more than five hours,” Khan replied.

“Any news from the Enterprise?” Jim asked; the worry for his friends, his crew and his ship was present even in his current state.

“Two hour ago, Galven told me that Mr. Scott successfully built and installed the sensor-disturbing
device. The enemies have no chance of locating your ship anymore.”

Kirk sighed in relief and gave him a tired, but grateful smile. “Thanks, Nien. Thank you so much. Without your permission and instructions for Scotty, my crew would be certainly dead now.”

The Augment grimaced. “They are your family – the only reason I helped.” He observed the exhausted appearance of the younger man and added softly, “Try to sleep some more.”

Even with his eyes half closed Jim shook his head shuddering. “No, better not.”

The Augment lifted a brow. He didn’t need to ask why the man in his bed didn’t want to fall asleep again. Nightmares were horrible and could exacerbate an already existing exhaustion. Khan remembered all too well his own experiences – and he knew the perfect remedy.

“Scoot over,” he ordered gently, while he kicked off the light shoes produced by the replicator – after three failures. He caught Kirk’s confused gaze and smiled. “Scoot over,” he repeated, gesturing to the officer whose sharp intelligence was still more or less, well, not so sharp at the moment.

Finally, Jim registered the instruction and carefully moved to one side of the bed. The painkiller worked, but as Bones had warned them, his hyper-driven nerves continued to send pain signals to his brain.

Once again, the enhanced man showed how patient he could be. He gave Kirk all the time he needed to make room for him, and only then did he slip beneath the blankets. Almost chuckling over Jim’s expression, he made himself comfortable, facing his bedfellow. Reaching out, he softly touched the younger man’s shoulder and let his hand wander down over his arm. Khan remembered perfectly well where Kirk was injured; he carefully avoided these spots.

The warm caresses were like a balm for Jim. His rational mind told him that the worst of his recent experience was over; he escaped death, and he should stop thinking about what happened to him. But fear gripped him still, and he wasn’t ready for logic just yet. The wounds in his mind and soul were too fresh for such reason.

To be completely in the grips of an enemy who only seek the suffering of others was something out of a nightmare. It wasn’t just the torture itself that shook him so, but the fierce hate ruthlessness displayed by the two Klingon commanders and their first officers.
Nothing that would stop them; he would have to go through this cruel hell until death. That was how it was to be utterly and completely at an enemy’s mercy. He hadn’t felt so much dread even in the night Khan ambushed him in his apartment, prepared to beat him to death. Finding himself entirely helpless and defenseless, stripped of the innate rights of a living, feeling being, and faced with such inhuman cruelty made his soul scream in a desperate disbelief. They confronted him with such fury and brutal ferocity as if he were Satan himself.

Jim didn’t realize his eyes beginning to water as the memories rose in his mind like dark shadows ready to confront him with terror again. But Khan’s tender touches contrasted harshly with the violence he bore. It was almost too much to contain.

Long, delicate fingers ran softly through his hair and massaged his temple as a thumb drew light circles on Kirk’s swollen cheek. Jim looked deep into the blue-green eyes so close he could see his own reflection. Those eyes were so full of warmth and compassion; it made him tremble.

Khan knew the thoughts pinging around James’ mind – battering and clawing to spill out. He could almost see the sinister phantoms behind those sky-blue orbs tormenting the younger man. The super-human was very aware that memories could be as bad as the real thing. More than comfort was needed now.

Leaning forward, he laid his forehead against the feverish one of the man in his care. “Let it out, Jim,” he whispered, cupping Kirk’s jaw with his hand. “Let it out. A wound has to bleed before it can heal properly – and tears are the blood of the soul.”

Jim felt a lump in his throat and a sting in his eyes, and bit his lips. Even in his still slightly sedated state, his rebellious nature fought against the urge to give in to the temptation of reliving the pain. He was the captain of a starship for God’s sake, and not a child. And even as a child on Tarsus IV, he had learned better, quickly. Nor would he be caught dead, no pun intended, weeping in front of the man who ruled nearly a quarter of Earth. What would the super-human think of him should he start to cry like a toddler?

Even without being able to read the young man’s mind, Khan realized what was going on in Jim’s head – knowing that he would feel the same were he in Kirk’s place. He would try to hide everything behind an emotionless mask, wry comments and mockery, ignoring his screaming mind – and Jim was about to do the same.

But Kirk was not among subordinates or even enemies. Jim was with him! And Khan would not allow the younger man to hurt even more by ignoring his pain until the anguish grew into a constant companion.
He closed the small distance between them and let his hand glide over Jim’s shoulder again. “You don’t have to be ashamed,” he murmured. “We both are born leaders, ready to confront dangers wherever we meet them – to keep those safe who are close to us. But even we have our limits.” His lips brushed ever so gently over his lover’s forehead – a gesture of comfort. “You don’t have to hold back, Jim, not because of me. I know the turmoil that rages in you. Nothing is as bad as being forced to endure the rage of those that hate you – to be made lower than the dirt on their shoes. They think they have the right to do whatever they want to you. I’ve experienced it several times, too. I know what you’ve been through.” He watched those blue eyes fill with understanding and tears.

“Was it like this for you – in the labs?” Jim whispered with a thick voice, and Khan took a deep breath.

“Yes, but not only under Section 31 or Marcus’ ‘tender’ care. I – we were born and raised in a lab, you know. And not all of our ‘creators’ saw us as human,” he replied calmly. “The first time you face that callousness is the worst. You never get used to it but given time you learn how to endure.”

Jim gulped. “It wasn’t the first time I faced – brutality, but… They didn’t want to teach me a lesson; they wanted to kill me. I’ve never met them before; I never harmed them, but it was like they saw the devil in me; I was an animal and deserved only the most painful death.” He took a shuddering breath. “I’ve been hunted – like we were – before… on Tarsus IV… but I was a kid as saw things differently. Now…” He shook his head and closed his eyes.

The Augment had listened closely, and he heard the words between the lines. James and he were more alike than he thought. He didn’t know what happened on this planet, Tarsus IV, but being hunted down like a wild animal, even so young was familiar to Khan. He had his own congeneric experiences.

And like him, James Kirk had left it behind him, fought for his place in the world and Starfleet to become one of the youngest Starfleet captains in command of a flagship. Still the past held its demons, and they lurked in the shadows, waiting for their chance to pounce on a wounded soul.

All too aware of the pain of confronting one’s past, Khan pulled the younger man to him – and James came willingly. Cautiously, he wrapped his arms around Kirk. Ignoring the stinging pain of the warrigul’s bite, he ran his hand soothingly over his beloved’s feverish body, careful avoiding the injuries. He felt the tension in James’ frame and heard the hitched breath of suppressed tears. He didn’t know if he should roll his eyes or smile in understanding. They both loathed being weak, but there were times when weakness served as strength’s foundation – like now.

“This is not the place for pride and stubbornness, Jim,” he whispered. “When you are with me you don’t have to pretend. We have left this behind us, haven’t we? Let me see you.” His fingers ran gently over Kirk’s warm cheek. “The memories will not fade until you let them out.” He raised his
head and pressed a kiss to the tousled shock of blond hair as Jim faced away from him. “Just give in. Let the pain out, so that you can go on.”

Still Jim bit his lips and tried to swallow the lump in his throat – for naught. The peace of the small room and the knowledge of being safe again enveloped him. And then the gentle touches, the tender words of compassion, the feeling of security and understanding… It was too much. Against his will, the first tear spilled over and rolled down his cheek, followed by a second and a third one. And then the levee broke. At first suppressed, then heavy sobs shook him, and he hid his face in the crook of Khan’s neck as he finally surrendered to the anguish. His arms clung to the Augment as if the other man was the only lifeline in this storm of emotion that tore him apart.

Words weren’t necessary, and so Khan simply held him, offered him a place full of solace and appreciation. He felt the man’s tears wet his skin. It wasn’t their heat that burned through his skin to his soul, but their mere presence. It grieved him to see and to feel the younger man hurt, yet he knew that it was for the best to give him time to work off the horror he had faced.

Cradling the shaken captain even closer to him, he listened to the heart-wrenching sobs while Jim pressed himself in the Augment’s arms as if he wanted to crawl into him. Khan’s heart opened and went out to him. Oh, how he yearned for someone to hold him like this – and to hold someone again. So long ago, he had been nothing more than a small, scared child imprisoned in the labs, only allowed to leave his ‘living-area’ under observation. How often he wished for a willing ear to hear his fears, his nightmares and hopes. Those hopes only came true after he and other Augments escaped the claws of their ‘creators’, freed the younger ones and spread out into the world. But the memories of his youth never left him; they flared up once more now as he held Jim close and gave him that which had been denied for himself all those years – centuries ago – a shoulder to cry on.

“Oh James, I’d open you up and write my name inside of you. If only that you’d have me with you when you hurt.”

In these minutes, they weren’t a wanted criminal with enhanced DNA and a brilliant starship-captain, they were simply Nien and Jim – two men who shared congeneric painful experiences. Each needed to give and to receive comfort from the other.

It seemed to last hours. Jim give into all the fears, sorrows and pain he had suffered within the last year: the loss of his mentor, the fight for his friends’ lives and for his ship, his own death in the warp core chamber and his rebirth, the terror of war and terror of torment at the hands of his captors. Everything that had built up now broke loose; it seemed to find no end – because the pain went all the way back to his beginning.

There had been the unpleasant times with his stepfather, the moment his beloved elder brother Sam left the family to live with his grandfather, and the day his mother left him in the care of friends on
Tarsus IV. Several weeks later the governor of the colony ordered the execution of half of the population because of an unforeseen food crisis; Jim was among those who slated for death. He had fled and hid with other children; he tricked and stole to stay alive. Countless days of fear and stubborn will to survive went by, until Starfleet showed up. He had cried then too, but not like he did now.

He had wept for Chris Pike in front of Spock, who laid a hand on his back and bowed his head to offer his comfort as well as a Vulcan could. And he had shed tears for his friend Gary Mitchell; he didn’t survive their first-year mission. But none of it made him break like he did now. Perhaps it was a cumulative effect.

Like a drum filled by rain – it was this last drop, this straw that broke the camel’s back; it was the Klingons that nearly broke him – well anyway, that proverbial barrel overflowed. But Khan was there to secure him in the flood that was about to sweep him away.

After a while, Jim calmed down. The tears finally spent, his eyes burnt and his mouth was dry; he slowly came to himself again. He sniffled and hiccupped here and there, but the heart-rending sobs subsided until he simply lay there – quiet and exhausted. He moistened his lips and rubbed his nose on his sleeve; Khan squeezed him gently in a sudden wave of tenderness. Right now, James Kirk resembled a shaken child more than the strong commanding officer he was.

“S… Sorry,” was the first word Kirk muttered, not daring to look up at the other man. But there was no reason to be ashamed. The Augment’s elegant hand cupped his wet cheek, while the warm baritone murmured, “There is nothing to be sorry for, Jim. We all have our breaking points.” Gently, he forced the younger man to look at him. “Sometimes even the strongest have to surrender to their soul’s demands,” he whispered. “Remember? I already cried twice in front of you. How could I deplore you for my own actions?”

Kirk read between the lines. He knew Nien’s humiliation; how he despised weakness in front of strangers – mere humans. Khan was an Augment, proud of his enhanced abilities, yet he hadn’t been able to fight off his tears. If he couldn’t stay in control because he had borne too much, it was no surprise Jim found himself in the same place.

The captain bit his lips for the umpteenth time and nodded finally when he saw nothing but compassion and understanding in the eyes of this precious man (though the man may actually kill him if he called him that out loud, maybe). They shared another moment of closeness. “Thanks,” he breathed and sniffled. “This… Christ, I don’t do this, but…” He gulped and frowned. “Blasted Klingons!”

Khan had to smile. Jim was already blaming those responsible for his torment. This was a good sign.
“Better?” he whispered, and received an affirming gesture in return before Jim glanced downwards once again. Obviously he was still ashamed of his behavior; Khan understood. Leaning down, the super-human ever so softly kissed the closing eyes of the younger man; his lips followed the tracks of tears until he captured Jim’s mouth with his. This kiss was not born of desire, though that had its place here as well. No. Khan’s kiss wished to console his man.

For a moment Kirk hesitated, then the feeling of this tender mouth on his own overwhelmed him and almost shyly, so unbefitting of his character, he returned the endearment. Lovely, worthier memories rose from subconscious to replace the torrid ones that ate at him; memories of their first time together. After the threats, after the protests – he remembered the moments after each had come a third, maybe a fourth time; they laid there in a glorious post-coital bliss. Somehow Jim’s arms still held the Augment, finally out of breath. Then his captor had lifted his head and both men reacting on impulse and heat, kissed each other – not with the demanding force of before, but deep and sensual.

Just like it was now.

At first Khan only massaged at Jim’s mouth before his tongue darted out and slid over the other man’s lower lip, asking for entrance. And Jim was far away from denying him the access. It felt so good – the way the kiss bloomed, full of emotion and comfort.

Never before had the young captain been the object of true affection. Of course, he had shared gentle kisses with his female partners in the past, but not once it had been like this. Khan’s tongue caressed his slowly and almost lovingly; his lips fondled Kirk’s; his breath danced like a lover’s touch over the officer’s face. Contentment slowly spread through Jim’s body, warming him from the inside out, filling the cold emptiness after the emotional breakdown with warm light and tugged at his well secured heart. The exotic, masculine and fresh taste of the Augment overwhelmed the younger man’s senses, and he found his hands in Khan’s dark, silken hair, while the super-human’s fingers explored his body with care. The wounds on his chest and back stung, but he ignored it – forgot it even. All that mattered was the closeness – the tenderness.

Khan closed his eyes. To be near James like this again, eased the emotional strain of the last few days and gave him the security he didn’t even know he wanted. Jim’s utter trust in him, his hunger for nearness and touch, so similar to Khan’s own, and the devotion felt in this kiss warmed the super-human to the core. That Jim welcomed his affection was something he hadn’t experienced in a long time; centuries. It made him feel alive – more human. He was simply accepted for being him – Noonien Singh and not the dreaded Augment-leader. His enhanced part, the part that threw up defenses against such sentiment protested these pathetic thoughts once more, but Nien pushed them down deep. Not now – not when he had his James in his arms. He immersed himself in the sweet freshness and humanity that was so unique Jim Kirk mingled with the salt of too many tears Khan wanted to kiss away.
The need for breath forced Jim finally to break the kiss. His nose was congested from the weeping and felt twice the size. He didn’t want this kiss to end, still he had to sniff. “Even my nose conspires against me,” he grumbled.

“Absolutely unacceptable,” his bed-fellow chuckled, amused by the pout on Kirk’s face. “You’re the captain, so just order your nose to obey.”

The whole suggestion was silly enough to make Jim laugh, and Khan smiled, satisfied. The merry sound from his beloved woke an unfamiliar feeling in him; happiness, and as he saw the wide grin on James’ handsome yet bruised face, his heart raced.

“If my nose doesn’t obey my order, I have to take the usual measures for such misdeeds, but I haven’t my log-book here to leave a censure. What shall I do?” Jim pretended to ponder in mock tones.

Khan smirked. “Well, in this case it will be you who must obey. Believe me, in the end the nose has the upper hand.” He scrunched his nose at his poor pun.

“I don’t obey on principle,” Kirk stated with a gleam in his reddened eyes, and the Augment laughed out loud.

“I know this very well! You are certainly the most proud and stubborn man in the whole Alpha-quadrant.”

“Look, who’s talking,” Kirk grinned and sighed in contentment as the Augment’s lips found his once more. It was a short, but most sweet kiss, one of those pecks that proved a familiarity and ease with one another. Then Khan untangled himself from the younger man and rose, instantly missing the proximity. He shook his head of the sentiment and stepped to the replicator and ordered handkerchiefs. Jim gladly accepted these as the super-human returned to the bed. Blowing his nose, Jim felt another wave of serenity that seemed to come from Khan’s presence. But before he could give voice, the super-human’s attention was driven to a twinkling signal at the intercom and stepped to it.

“Drythen here,” he reported and Galven’s reticent voice answered, “Hey, Buddy, I hope, I didn’t disturb you. I didn’t want to wake you, so I sent a visual signal…”

“We are awake now,” Khan interrupted him not unkindly, and the Tellarit chuckled.
“Well, we caught a sub-space transmission from the Enterprise several minutes ago.” He spoke up now. “They left the Borderland unharmed and were returning to Starbase 12 to meet with the Lexington. The nice communications officer left a special frequency for the captain to use to contact his ship in private if he wants to.”

Khan looked over to Jim who beamed at him and called “Thank you, Commander Galven!” His voice was thick and rough, but considering his poor shape, the Tellarit certainly wouldn’t recognize the real reason for the odd tone.

“You’re welcome, Lad,” Galven answered with a clear smile in his voice. “Just relax and try to get better. Night, you two.” With that, the connection to the bridge was killed, and Khan returned to the bed chuckling.

“If someone had told me that I would meet a walking-talking pig on two legs and a human pussy-cat after I woke up from cryosleep, I would have called them insane. And look who I’m speeding through space with now.”

Jim smiled. “Is this whole universe one big fantasy for you?”

The former dictator lifted his brows. “Indeed. Maybe the same goes for you. You did talk about Rumpelstiltskin in your sleep,” he smirked as he slipped back into bed.

“What?” Jim looked with large eyes at him.

“You talked in your sleep and mentioned this fairytale character.” He braced himself on his elbow, took in Kirk’s baffled mien. “Wasn’t it about a gnome who could weave straw into gold? He helped a miller’s daughter cover her father’s lie. The gnome demanded her first-born in return for weaving gold for her?”

Jim had blinked several times, before he crammed his hanky beneath the pillow. “Why I am not surprised that you even know 19th-century occident fairytales?”

“Because you already know that I am a genius and that the whole lexicon is stuffed in my head,” the Augment replied – half joking, half smug – and Kirk had to laugh.
“Which edition?”

“The best one,” came the expected answer; then Khan cocked his head. “Ready to tell me, whom you referred to, as you mentioned Rumpelstiltskin?” To his surprise Jim blushed before he mumbled,

“The Klingons wanted me to give them your name. They know you were on Qo’noS and Kor knows you are…augmented, but not how or when. They asked me over and over again and then… well… I sort of went a bit defiant and told them ‘Rumpelstiltskin’. They didn’t buy it, mind you.”

“Rumpelstiltskin,” Khan deadpanned. “You called me Rumpelstiltskin?”

“Not you, but – well – you know, I gave them an answer and…” He smiled sheepishly. “After all you are a brilliant scientist in your own right. If anyone could weave straw into gold, it would be you and…” The younger man stopped his lame explanation, as the super-human glared darkly at him, only to suddenly move closer, his expression predatory.

“You are aware of the fact that this calls for revenge, don’t you?” Khan growled. “Revenge that will make you scream, dear Captain!”

In the past, Jim would have stiffened at those words, but times have changed. Now he only smirked, “Is that a promise?”

“Oh yes!” Khan nodded, his eyes full of longing and fire; a dangerous smile played around his lips that send a shiver of pleasure down Kirk’s spine.

Still grinning Jim snuggled back into the pillows. “I’m looking forward to it.”

The Augment’s soft snicker still vibrated in his chest, as he bent down and stole a passionate and far too short kiss from the young officer, before taking him carefully in his arms again. “Then heal quickly, James, because I think we both are hungry for something food will not satisfy.”

TBC…
Yeah, they both are starving for each other, still Jim has to heal more, before he can do what his heart and body scream for. Or not? Jim is stubborn if he wants something and even an Augment can be forced to send his sane mind to hell and to go with the feelings…

In the next chapter you will learn what Luengo and Norton are up to, one of Jim’s friend begins to approach the truth about Sunrise and there is a lot of candy and fluff concerning our two ‘boys’.

I hope you liked the last installment. Not only that Khan begins to learn to trust someone besides his family and Jim, he also shows his caring and tender side as he comforts his beloved. I really enjoyed to write these scenes and concerning ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ – I couldn’t resist (*laugh*).

Until next week

Yours Starflight
Hi my dear readers,

Thank you so much for your feedbacks and I’m still happy that you are so taken with the story. At this point I have to tell you that some of very beautiful phrases or additions are done or inspired by my dear beta-reader Rhiannon. Thank you so much for all the work you put into this story, Sweetie, I owe you a lot!

As I told you within the next chapters there will cute and sweet scenes, but there will be also the next shadows, which are going to raise and to encircle our dear ones.

I hope you’re going to enjoy the next chapter.

Have fun

Yours Starflight

Leonard McCoy sat at his desk without looking at the untouched food on his plate. A nurse brought it in half an hour ago, and it smelled delicious, but Bones was not hungry. Tired as hell, yes, but his stomach felt heavy and knotted.

He didn’t want to think about how close he had come to losing his best friend again – but he was. Only the daring commitment of a mysterious stranger prevented the worst. He knew he shouldn’t blame Spock. The Enterprise’s mission was a near disaster, and it was Jim’s damned misplaced bravery that nearly killed him. McCoy needed a place to vent. It was unfair, but he knew Spock wouldn’t take it personally. He felt so damn helpless! As a field doctor in wartime he had to be ready to face loss every day, but it would have broken his heart if Jim had died a second time. Hell, it broke his heart the first time.

Even though Jim had been rescued, Bones knew his young friend’s crisis wasn’t over. He learned enough about Klingon torture methods at the Academy to know that Jim would suffer physically and emotionally. The prospect of Kirk facing the trauma without him – without his doctor – filled Bones with unease. And ‘Sunrise’ filled him with unease.
And the Vulcan filled him with unease. Dammit, he was three for three.

Spock surprised McCoy when he failed to mention the device that allowed their escape in his report to Starfleet Command. Furthermore, he didn’t tell them that it was a single man who rescued their young Starfleet captain. When Bones asked him about it, he had received one of Spock’s typical non-answers, “There are too many open questions concerning Sunrise to mention him in an official report”.

“Bullshit, Spock. You know as well as I do, you have never submitted an incomplete report.” Leonard knew Spock had as many questions about Sunrise as he did, but Spock’s intentional negligence in the report was alarming to say the least.

First, Sunrise broke Code 9 – Starfleet Command would be up-in-arms as soon as it learned about that – but they wouldn’t because the damn hobgoblin left it out of the report. Then he distracted a Klingon strike group long enough for Starfleet to arrive. He rescued the Lexington. Finally, and God knows if he is finished, he snuck into a Klingon headquarters and saved Jim all on his own. Oh, and not to forget his divining technology out of thin air. Scotty talked excitedly for what felt like hours. Even Spock was enthusiastic – well, as enthusiastic as a Vulcan could be. The first officer lifted both brows, nodded and said, “Fascinating!” As close as the Vulcan would get to the excitement of a boy under the Christmas-tree.

‘How the hell do you fail to report all that, I’d like to know!’ Bones mentally cursed the Vulcan again. But Spock was correct on one account. Whoever this ‘Sunrise’ was, he was brilliant. Hell, he even knew a thing or two about medicine; he took care of Jim’s injuries and played the Orions and Klingons like an overgrown boy-genius with a penchant for mischief.

This guy was a real superman and…

Bones’ thoughts came to a screeching halt and for a moment he only blinked. He had a moment of déjà vu. When had he said that before? He remembered walking with Jim and Spock through the Enterprise’s corridors to…

… to the brig!

He referred to Khan as a superman. And he wasn’t wrong. Extremely intelligent, well-trained, quicker and stronger than any human, and extraordinary healing powers were only a few characteristics of this man. His abilities spoke an even more impressive language. Designed to be a ruthless fighter, he strategized in seconds and adjusted to new situation in the blink of an eye. He learned more in one year with Section 31 than others could if they spent half a lifetime studying. In
short, no one could learn all that this man knew in one lifetime.

Jim told Bone about his talk with Bob Wesley and how this ‘daredevil’ Drythen or ‘Sunrise’, had flown a maneuver no one in Starfleet had even considered.

And an awful thought rose from the depths of McCoy’s mind.

‘A maneuver no one in STARFLEET thought about before – perhaps he didn’t learn it in Starfleet. But Starfleet is 200 years old.’ Leonard thought with a sinking feeling. ‘The only living thing that precedes Starfleet is…Oh God, Khan! He’s the only one who could’ve trained outside the auspices of Starfleet. And that was a damn plausible explanation for why the D’Ghor looked like it was dogfighting in space. All Academy students study military history, even I had to sit through videos of MiGs and F-14s going at it in the air. So crude, but a dance worth watching. That’s what it reminded me of. Oh, and how easy would it be for a dictator to lead a militia successfully against the Klingons and Orions where others and Starfleet have failed… Maybe this is the answer. What if Drythen was more than just gifted? Why does he alter his voice and avoid visual transmission every time he contacts us? He has to hide, even if he is a kind of hero. Why does he have to hide? Because he is wanted.’

McCoy pursed his lips. It would make a lot of sense if the ‘daredevil’ and Khan were one and the same person, and it would answer a lot of questions…except… Why would the Augment risk his own life to save Jim Kirk? He hated him and the other senior officers of the Enterprise. And why would Jim cover for ‘Sunrise’? Jim had to know the man behind the pseudonym by now, and Kirk would never help Christopher Pike’s murderer. Never! Except Kirk had a moral compass like nobody’s business and a stubborn streak as wide as the alpha quadrant. Kirk had been outraged when he learned the Augment’s fate after the so-called trial, but that had nothing to do with a sudden feeling of… of loyalty or obligation toward the former dictator. It was simply rooted in the deep humanity of the young man and his far too compassionate heart.

No, ‘Sunrise’ couldn’t be Khan Noonien Singh. Jim would never align with him. He did it once, and it ended in a disaster. And he certainly wouldn’t keep the criminal’s identity and location a secret. Jim would not lie to his friends or would withhold such important information from Starfleet Command. Unless someone forced him to lie.

But the idea was too far-fetched; Leonard chided himself for being silly even entertaining the thought that Khan and Kirk’s rescuer were the same. Exhaustion. That was the explanation for his mind’s wanderings. McCoy told himself to go to bed. He’d been awake over 30 hours, and he was completely shot – his nerves frayed with worry over the damn ‘Iowa-kid’.

But the niggling at the edge of his mind had started, and you can’t kill an idea.
Golden Gate Park was quiet, bathed in the late evening darkness. Stow Lake enjoyed great popularity since it's opening in 1893. It lay like a black mirror positioned between old trees, enchanting meadows, rambling paths and large, gray boulders. The picnic areas, normally crowded during the day, were abandoned, and the night air carried the low rumbling of a distant waterfall splashing over boulders in its wake. The swans, ducks and geese sought refuge in the banks and the island for the night.

There were boathouses near the lake - all refurbished several times since the lake opened almost 450 years ago; each was made of wood, one story high, painted dark red and white with a gabled roof.

The boats and chairs and tables, normally bustling with use were stowed now; the autumn weather had turned cold and windy in San Francisco.

Albert Norton turned up his coat color against the wind. He looked down at the small tricorder he had taken with him, checking his surroundings for signs of life, but there were only animals and one single human in the locale. The person had remained still on the other side of the boathouse for more than ten minutes; waiting. The small display on the tricorder dimmed to display the local time – 2159. A final visual sweep confirmed he was alone and he took a deep breath.

It had been easy to fool the observers assigned to watch his apartment around the clock. He'd done it for more than four weeks now and had already advised Luengo to order improved training as soon as Starfleet Command was under their control. It was outrageous that someone under surveillance could throw their tail with so little difficulty! But right now it served Luengo and him well. The so-called surveillance team keeping their eyes glued on his apartment would see the flickering of the TV and the movement of a man either fetching something from the kitchen or going to the bathroom. God bless the ever-bickering old couple in the apartment three doors down. The old man wanted to watch baseball, but she watches those silly late-night shows; her husband refused to buy another TV.

Norton had listened to their squabbling for quite some time, and the whole ‘drama’ had come to him as a gift from God. Contact with the older couple had been easy. Everyone trusted a Starfleet officer and Norton could be charming when he wished. So the gray-haired idiot wasn’t the tiniest bit askance when Norton offered him his place to catch a ball game. This charade had gone on for about two months before Albert needed to get out without the surveillance team on his heels. He feigned a call from headquarters, excused himself and left the apartment, offering his neighbor use of the apartment to watch the ball game.

It worked.
At first he only made short trips around town, watching his tricorder and the passers-by with something his grandmother always had called an ‘eagle eye’. Then he had informed Luengo about his ability to walk freely through the city. He learned that the other admiral had used this same technique even longer than he. Of course, José made it very clear to Barnett and the High Council that he had to contact his assets without risking their identities. It meant he could take more liberties than Norton. Either way, he had to be careful, many in Tactical Operations and Surveillance were loyal to Section 31 rather than Barnett.

Both admirals had used the granted and gained liberties to follow their own intentions – intentions that would, in their opinion, lead Starfleet to a future of greater strength and power. Starfleet’s original purpose was outdated. Exploring the space was certainly important, and as a scientist Norton was as eager to find new planets and life forms as any other man or woman who answered Starfleet’s call. But a military was needed to protect borders, uphold regimes and fight.

The endless meetings of admirals, ambassadors and council members, as well as the President of the UFP, were useless according to Norton; diplomatic solutions were giving in. The Klingons interpret this ‘appeasement process' as a weakness. ‘We are practically advertising that Starfleet is unable to defend the Federation.’ Norton considered this appeasement by Barnett, Komack, the president and the others as high treason and he would not sit back and watch the downfall of the fleet and the Federation.

If they wanted to save the Federation and Starfleet of the shame that lay ahead, they had to act now – before it was too late. He was certain that Luengo agreed with him, and he needed him on his side.

He moved closer to the other side of the boathouse and a lone, dark figure stepped out of the shadows into the pale moonlight walking a dog. For a moment Norton hesitated, thinking he was facing the wrong man; then he recognized Luengo holding the leash. Closing the distance between them, Norton advanced and both men nodded curtly, while the dog sniffed at Albert’s legs. José Luengo wore a warm parka and scarf. He gestured down one of the paths. “Let’s walk. The trees over there will give us more cover.”

The two admirals strolled towards a group of large trees. Norton’s gaze found the funny pet again, and he lifted a brow. “Gone to the dogs, my friend?” he asked and the Spaniard shrugged. “Skippy belongs to my neighbors, who were glad to have me take him. I thought he would be a good cover. No one looking for me would look for two men walking a dog.”

“No, not a bit. Sergeant Addison is on duty tonight, and he’s one of my men. The two in front of your apartment are mine too.” They reached the tree line and walked into the woods before Albert stopped.
“You wanted to talk to me in private. Does it have something to do with this… meeting of the admiralty and the Council?”

Luengo snorted. “Meeting? You mean the discussion on how to destroy the Federation as quickly as possible?” He pressed his lips into a thin line before he continued, “The substrain of the Rigelian fever Professor Dashwood and Doctor Conelly have created convinced even the scientists among the members of the Council. They all think the Klingons developed a biological agent to use against the Federation. Adding the gene to the bacteria was brilliant.” He sighed. “It’s unfortunate that the pretense hasn’t had the desired outcome yet. Instead of increasing our forces, the president, Barnett, Komack and the Council have decided to attempt a diplomatic solution for the war.” He glanced into the darkness of the bushes. “I anticipated something like this though. Barnett is an academic and a judge, not a soldier.”

“We are aware,” Norton nodded. “During the conference, I got a message from our labs in Nevada transferred by one of your people. Professor Dashwood and Doctor Conelly were successful in producing an antidote for the new substrain and it’s stronger than necessary for our needs should it fall into the wrong hands. Officially they are still searching for the antagonist.”

“Is it possible to synthesize more of the new strain? We might need it.”

“Not in this form. Dashwood doesn’t have enough blood from prisoner 3158-17-215 to mass-produce the bacteria. The same goes for the other experiments they’ve been working on since their release from custody. Of course, the observers assigned to the scientists are very careful, but they don’t know that work. Dashwood and his team are using Latin, Vulcan or some other language whenever they refer to something that could cause us trouble. So far they haven’t been caught, but if we need more of the bacteria with enhanced DNA we have to have Khan’s blood, or perhaps one of the other Augments would do.”

Luengo lost himself in thought as they continued their way through the woods towards the next clearing; the dog was eager to sniff at all the interesting scents around him. “I thought the subject was the best enhanced of his species and that his blood is necessary to…”

“It would be best to have him back, but the prisoner is still on the run, and you told me four days ago that we lost the trail of the militia hiding him. The blood of the other Augments is better than nothing, but Dashwood would have to make adjustments if it were to work – and it might not.”

“Oh, there’s been a sign of life from our ‘friend’,” the chief of the SBI interrupted him. “Two hours ago, I was informed by my office that they received a transmission from the Enterprise. Kirk has been recovered…”
“I thought your office told the Enterprise that there wouldn’t be a recovery mission – though I still don’t understand what you have against Kirk,” Norton commented wryly. “He’s least likely to toe the line, but we need all of our commanding officers to win the war and force the Klingon Empire to its knees.”

José’s smile was humorless. “If you think I wanted revenge for all the insolent comments Kirk made about us in Barnett’s office when he found out we were… involved in returning the Augment to the labs, you’re wrong. I don’t care what this boy says. I’m rather of the opinion that our flagship should be commanded by an experienced captain and not by a Starfleet brat. I don’t give a shit what he did two years ago. He was only able to stop Nero because he defied the order banning him from the Academy until his trial wrapped up. His captain’s log reads like Gulliver’s Travels and that incident with the Tribbles on K7 provoked the Klingons even more – certainly another added reason for them to declare war. He broke the Prime Directive for Christ’s sake. Pike let him get away with far too much – and now Barnett’s doing the same thing. That kid should be back shoveling shit in Iowa! You heard Barnett today when he learned that Kirk had been captured by the Klingons. We need Kirk out of the way. He’s a loose cannon, and we don’t need him interfering with our plans.”

Norton cocked his head, almost amused at Luengo’s rant. “I understand your reasons for instructing your office to delay the information about Kirk’s capture – even if I feel a bit bad for the kid. A Klingon death is a cruel one, but, on the other hand, there was nothing we could have done in time.” He glanced at José, “Wait - what does his rescue have to do with the Augment?”

“Kirk was recovered by The Shadow.”

The Chief of Starfleet Research and Development stopped dead in his tracks. “WHAT?”

“You heard me. The Shadow recovered Kirk, alive,” Luengo confirmed; the other admiral stared wide-eyed at him. “He isn’t on the Enterprise at the moment. He’s still with them – the militia. Commander Spock will let us know where that is as soon as he knows.”

Albert blinked, still thunderstruck. “But… if Khan is with them…He hates Kirk! He swore revenge. Hell, Command lost their mind with the prisoner escaped, hacked into our database and found the addresses of Kirk and the Enterprise’s senior officers.”

“Yes – and now he’s managed to save his ass.” Luengo watched Skippy for a moment, and he continued. “Of course, this all could be a trick to get Kirk in his good graces before taking his revenge; and that could play right into our hand, but I doubt it. He had to know that Kirk would recognize him immediately. Why risk his cover being blown to save Kirk?”
“Maybe he stayed back and wasn’t a part of the recovery mission. Kirk may not know that Khan is involved at all and…”

“Please, Albert, think logically. The Shadow may be a functional group, capable of a few hit and run attacks against the Orions, but probing deep into enemy space without being caught, invading a Klingon base to free one a Klingons’ prisoners. Think of the physical demands, the coordination, the logistics! I can’t give a handful of untrained civilians credit for that. That bears the mark of a specialist with experience and high intelligence. Khan led that rescue mission; I’m sure of it. And I’m sure Kirk knows who rescued him! He’s a lot of things, but he’s not stupid. So, why would the Augment risk revealing himself like this?”

“Maybe he wants something from him,” Albert suggested. “If Khan is aligned with The Shadow, it must serve his purposes somehow. Does Kirk know where the other Augments are held?”

“No. The location is top secret and only a few have access aside from me.” The Spaniard continued walking, and Norton followed him. “Even if Khan asks Kirk about the whereabouts of his crew, the captain won’t be able to answer him. The question remains, what will Kirk do now? His duty is to arrest the Augment, kill him if the Augment threatens him, but I have my doubts that he will. The boy is too… generous for his own good.”

“You’re right,” Albert agreed with him. “And it won’t be his misguided gratefulness that stops Kirk from doing what he should with the Augment.”

“What do you mean?” Curious José glanced up at the other admiral.

“Dashwood told me in detail, how outraged Kirk was in Barnett’s office when he learned that the Augment wouldn’t survive another cryosleep – that it didn’t matter to the judge in his sentencing. He and the Enterprise’s senior officers were angry that Conelly sees the prisoner for what he is: a subject with the form of a human, but nevertheless non-human. That the Vulcan and the CMO disagreed is understandable. Vulcans value the life of a worm and doctors, of course, are to ‘do no harm’, but Kirk’s outburst was uncalled for. He had a fit; he offended Dashwood and Conelly and insulted us.” He lifted a brow. “And now Khan risked his cover and his life to save Kirk.” He stopped again. “Tell me this doesn’t sound as strange as I think it does.”

Luengo kept quiet for a long moment, pondering; then he nodded slowly. “It does. It remains to be seen, what Kirk will do after he returns to the Enterprise. At the very least, he is obligated to report Khan’s whereabouts if he cannot arrest him, and I’m sure he can’t single-handedly. But if he doesn’t report him…”
The two admirals looked at each other, and Norton narrowed his eyes. “You think Kirk will Khan let go?” He lifted a brow. “Kirk was Pike’s protégée. His death hurt him badly. He was eager to avenge him and…”

“…And then he moved hell and heaven to give Pike’s murderer a fair trial. As I said, the boy is too generous for his own good. I bet that he won’t turn Khan in – not after the Augment and the militia saved his ass.” He made a gesture, pulled gently at the leash to signal the dog to come along, and started back the way they came. “Maybe this will play our favor. We catch the prisoner ourselves and Kirk is forced out of Starfleet, officially.”

“What do you mean ‘officially’? If he’s insubordinate, we have all the right in the world to…”

“Kirk was Pike’s man and now he's Barnett’s. This could turn into a problem. Barnett, Komack, Morrow, Nogura… They’re all the same when it comes to bringing change to Starfleet, like increasing the fleet’s strike forces and advancing weaponry. They all fought against the development of the Dreadnaught class. Now we need them, but one ship would take over a year to build. We could’ve had it already if Barnett and his cronies, as well as the Council, agreed with my assessment, but they didn’t. That’s not the only mistake. The last one was the decision to talk to the Klingons. It has to stop – here and now! And those loyal to Barnett and his staff have to be silenced - including Kirk!”

He bent down as Skippy suddenly sat and whimpered; he took the offered paw into his hands to remove a pebble from between the pads. “Kirk has become a cult hero, and we can’t risk losing Starfleet’s popularity in the public eye if we cut him loose. The whole encounter with Section 31 has cost us enough. I agree with the Council’s and the admirals’ decision to keep the John Harrison – Khan disaster a secret. So we cannot accuse Kirk of teaming up with some criminal, who doesn’t officially exist. Besides, Kirk has friends in high places, not least among them the Advising Minister of New Vulcan, or Confederacy of Surak, whatever the Vulcans are calling the planet now. If we want to take control of Starfleet Command and to keep it, we have to be cleverer than our expected adversaries and remove them before the whole thing can backfire on us.”

“What?” Norton prompted as his colleague rose again and fell silent for a moment.

“Well, there must be a very good reason the Council of the Federation would accept me as the new Chief- in-Command. I’m still under observation, and if it weren’t for this war, I’d already be on trial. We have to aim our strike carefully to initiate a catalyst that will play into our hands.” He glanced up at Norton. “And it won’t be easy. There will be bloodshed, but keeping the Federation safe will be worth it.”
“Whose blood is being shed here?”

“Those who are in the way of strengthening Starfleet will have to die. What is the old saying, dead men tell no tales? If we only move the pieces out of the way rather than eliminate them altogether, it would prove fatal to our cause. No, every new way demands sacrifices. I do respect Barnett; I really do, but he, members of his staff and several others are hindering the fleet’s natural growth. She has to be strong, forceful and deadly in the face of her enemies.” He looked straight at Norton. “Are you with me?”

Albert made an affirming gesture. “I am!” He glanced at Skippy, who sat there and watched the two men, oblivious to the evil plans taking shape in front of him.

“What’s your plan?”

Luengo’s unwrapped his plot for Norton, carefully displaying his plan to take over Starfleet Command and to eliminate those that stood in his way as if it were a precious gift. Only the water-birds, a little dog and the calm, silent trees bore witness to the fiendish plans set before them.

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“It’s beautiful!” Jim whispered as he shielded his eyes with one hand against the bright sun. In front of him, the lake shimmered like fluid silver in the golden light of day – giving it its name ‘Silver Bayou’. Nestled in dark green, wooded hills, it’s nature intact nature and pristine, Kirk thought it looked like Canada or Pennsylvania in summertime. The air was warm and fresh; a soft wind breezed through tree branches, and birds were singing – their chirping and colorful plumage reminded him Earth’s exotic birds. Two of Aldebaran’s six moons shone dimly in the blue skies, and the third one was about to peek over the hill tops. Thalessis, one of the bigger cities of the planet, was located in the northwest of Aldebaran’s only continent. The climate was cool with mild summers averaging 25 °C and icy, snowy winters where the temperature dropped to -20 °C.

It was late summer now, just before the leaves changed their colors. The air and the wind were tepid and pungent with the scent of wild herbs and flowers blooming beneath the tall trees so similar to their Earth cousins. But you could see the difference in the leaves, bark and the way the roots spread over the ground before diving into the soil to take their nourishment.

It was quiet and peaceful – like a piece of paradise. Exactly what these two men needed. They stood near the shore where soft waves lapped at the sand and the grass.
A third man was on the porch of the wood cottage that seemed to come straight from the North American continent. Just a single-story with a shingled roof, white-painted window and door frames and a porch just large enough for a small table with two chairs. So much like a typical lake house bungalow found in Europe and America. So bucolic - this little house, the lake and the virgin nature – what an incredible contrast to the harsh world outside this little Eden.

Khan’s eyes roamed over their tranquil surroundings – a sight he never thought he’d see again. This may not be his India or even Asia, but it was so close to the untouched, natural beauty of his home – before the Eugenics Wars. He could smell the richness of the earth and the sweetness of the flowers; he listened to the gentle whispering of the wind in the trees and the lapping of the lake, and took a deep breath.

Peace!

For several stolen days, he would find some peace – not only in this seclusion, but in the presence of the younger man at his side. Jim was still pale and slightly feverish, but the haunted expression in his eyes finally retreated.

Galven was true to his word and didn’t wake them until after their arrival in the Aldebaran system. Khan was surprised to find he had slept over seven hours, but he was grateful for their rest.

Kirk shook off his slumber quickly, though both men had spent some more time in bed, simply lying there, holding each other and relishing in their proximity as well as the calm surrounding them. Finally, the Augment insisted they eat, and Jim relented. Afterward, he examined the captain’s injuries which were healing well. When Jim felt strong enough, Khan contacted the bridge to see if anyone remained aboard the ship.

Diego stayed aboard and grinned broadly when he met them in the transporter room. He beamed down with them directly to the Silver Bayou to show them his small, comfortable cottage – their home for the next several days. He didn’t rent out his cottage to tourists; he only welcomed friends here. Though he’d only known ‘Drythen’ for only a week and the Starfleet captain a few hours, he was glad that he made up his mind to offer them respite here. The young officer still looked like shit and truth be told, ‘Drythen’ was in need of a vacation too. The quiet peace would be a balm for the pair.

Diego may not know him well, but he respected the younger and oftentimes strange, dark-haired man; a technical genius, a hero, and a rescuer of the innocent and the man he loves. The Chilean had nothing against couples of the same gender. The experiences tying these two men bred feelings true and deep. ‘Drythen’ hadn’t left the captain’s side since he arrived onboard and even now he was poised to support him at any given moment. The giant smiled inwardly at the thought. If the two only knew what a sight they were to behold, as they stood there side-by-side at the water’s edge. They
Grinning, he went inside the cottage to give the men a moment alone; he nodded, satisfied when he saw that his friends from The Shadow kept their word. The windows were tilted, the freezer was stocked, the solar unit that ran the electricity had been activated and ‘Drythen’s’ gear lay on the large bed, the only bed, in the bungalow, along with some clothes and personal items for Kirk. Whistling a tune, Diego made coffee and unpacked pastries from the bakery in the small village.

His mind drifted back to when Galven told him that ‘Drythen’ had run off and why; he didn’t hesitate in offering his help to Galven and his crew. He knew that the Shadow and the Flash had to be well-known by now; his friends wouldn’t stand a chance if they tried to use one of them to go after Drythen. They needed his ship.

Now Diego didn’t offer his friendship easily. Skirting the edge of legal operations – often falling off that edge - made trust and friendship a valuable and expensive commodity. But he had taken a liking to the mysterious and quiet man. When he had found out that that ‘Drythen’ left – and left them to rescue this young captain, well, his romantic side overruled his more logical reasoning. Protecting love – finding it and helping it flourish in these dark times was important if they were to have hope for life after the war.

Diego’s whistling was interrupted when he heard the door open; he turned around. ‘Drythen’ helped Kirk inside. The captain took in his surroundings with wide eyes and wonder; the Chilean felt a twinge of pride and beamed.

“This is a wonderful cottage you have here, Diego,” Kirk said quietly, his voice still hoarse, and Diego chuckled.

“Well, it’s a safe haven, when I’ve had enough of crawling around turbines and engine rooms.”

“Is that ever the case?” Jim teased, and Diego started to laugh.

“Rarely – but it’s good to get away from time to time…” He rubbed his neck and looked around. “Sorry, guys, I asked Caviw to clean up here a little bit, but she’s afraid of water! Cats are all the same!” He sighed. “I haven’t used the cottage for quite a time and, well, it’s still a bit dusty.”

Khan smiled the tiniest bit. “We will not suffocate, Diego. It’s alright.”
“It’s more than ‘alright’. It’s perfect,” Jim corrected him softly; his eyes began to shine. He was still easily overwhelmed after his experience and the new emotions hung close to the surface. He studied his new surroundings carefully – another side effect of Klingon treatment.

They stood in the cottage’s largest room. The kitchen, dining room and living room were all open to each other. That comforted Kirk, ‘fewer obstacles for intruders to hide behind’. He chided himself with the thought. He shouldn’t worry about that here, but he continued his mental survey anyway. The furnishings were all made from native wood; the grain of these trees was warm, the color of copper – different than the trees of Earth. The décor was rustic and native, emphasized by the traditional masks of the Arauca tribe, ancient weapons hanging on the wall and the coverings of the chairs and the sofa – all wrapped in the rich colors of South America. Brightly colored curtains framed the windows, and Chilean rugs lay arranged on the floor like art. The only technology found here was in the kitchen and in the small communications station in the corner.

“Galven and Ritek filled the freezer; I hope, it’s to your liking,” Diego continued as he dumped the pastries on a plate. “Drinkable water comes directly from the lake to the treatment unit.” He pointed to the small device. “There’re more drinks stuffed down there,” he nodded to a countertop indicating storage space beneath the counter. “Some beer and wine from here and from Chile. Some friends delivered it for me.” He looked up and grinned. “Don’t tell anyone. Customs would be a bit upset at me if they knew how much import duty they lost.” He opened one of the cupboards and withdrew an exotic looking bottle filled with dark green fluid. “And of course, the export gem of Aldebaran. Their very own whiskey.” Diego closed his eyes, nearly salivating as he continued, “Smokey, full aroma, honey-smooth, best enjoyed after a good dinner outside on the porch or in front of a cozy fire on a cold winter evening.” He opened his eyes again and gestured towards the open fireplace. “But you cannot stay so long, can you? Though believe me, you’ll want to,” he added with a wink.

Jim smiled at him and carefully eased himself down on the sofa. His back hurt and his legs took some bruising during the flight – aching more since he had woken two hours ago. “Like at a five-star hotel,” he commented. “Thank you very much, Diego. I’ll pay everything back to you as soon as I’m back on the Enterprise.”

“Forget it, amigo!” The Chilean waved a hand. “I don’t take money from friends – and only friends are allowed to stay here.” He grinned while he took three cups out and filled them with the steaming coffee. He placed them on dining table in front of Kirk and a watchful ‘Drythen’. “I hope you know how to cook, guys, because I don’t have a replicator here.”

Khan gave him one of his smug smiles. “We will not starve, Diego, don’t worry.”

The Chilean chuckled. “Is there anything you can’t do?”

“Yes. Fly,” came Khan’s wry reply and Jim began to laugh.
“Then you get off completely.”

The sea-colored eyes brightened as they fixed on the captain. “Believe me, Jim, I will ‘get off’ as soon as I’m ‘flying’ in the… most pleasurable way possible.”

Diego burst out laughing, as Kirk’s face turned several shades of red. “Nien!” Kirk scolded, but all he earned was a very wicked smirk that held as much heat as it did humor.

Still snickering, the Chilean looked at the two men. “Why do you call him ‘Nien’?” he asked. “Don’t get me wrong here, lad, but the others heard you using this name, too, and we were all curious. It doesn’t fit anything we know of him.”

Khan schooled his features and directed his attention to Jim, waiting to see what story the younger man would spin.

Kirk didn’t hesitate. “It’s a very personal nickname.”

“Very personal,” the Augment confirmed, pleased with the quick answer of his charge – as he had come to think of him while in his care. He was quite amused that Jim still didn’t know, what the nickname meant.

“You two are so cute,” and he giggled when he thought of how that must sound coming from such a large man such as he. He retreated back to the small kitchen for sugar and milk.

Khan sat there, dumbfounded. Cute! Did Diego just call him cute? His shocked gaze found Jim, and he saw the younger man staring at him and fighting his laughter. Khan rolled his eyes and gave it a rest. He was far too relaxed to be angry, and he wasn’t about to insult his host. Still he snorted inwardly. ‘Cute’ – really!’ He could almost hear Joaquin’s snickers, ‘I always knew you were cute, big bro!’ Katie and Otto would tease him mercilessly.

He suppressed the voices and images and found himself looking straight at Kirk still trying to suppress giggles. Yes, that’s how Joaquin would look at him.

“How sweet. A starship captain and a former ruler are ‘cute’,” Jim whispered under his breath,
chuckling. Khan rolled his eyes again and shook his head. The degree to which he thought of James as one of his own, as his charge, surprised him, though it shouldn’t. He was a leader by nature, by breeding, and they were bonded by blood and by...by more than that. And that bond only strengthened through separation and trial. It was only a matter of time before James was well enough to test the strength of their bond. Then Khan would claim him completely; make him utterly his – or Khan would be claimed, perhaps he already was.

Over the next half hour, the three men talked and drank their coffee while munching on the interesting pastries. Finally, Diego prepared to leave. “A hyperbike is parked behind the cottage in the shed. The entrance code is 152347. You have to charge the solar batteries, but it doesn’t take more than an hour for a full charge. There is a path from the shed to the road. Follow that and turn left at the junction. From there it’s about thirty minutes to the village – in case you want to do some shopping or have had enough solitude. There’s a bar, “Six Moons” on the main road. It’s nice; they serve good food, and the drinks aren’t expensive. It’s run by a guy named Thomas. Give him my regards, and he’ll give you a drink on the house.” He opened a drawer and pulled out a simple old-fashioned scratchpad and a pencil. “Here is my private frequency. If you need something, just call me.” He looked at Jim and offered him a communicator. “If your ship contacts The Shadow, they’ll try to link your ship to frequency in the communicator.”

“Thanks, Diego.” Jim said gratefully, and the Chilean shrugged.

“No problem, amigo. You can return the communicator when you leave the planet. Until then, get well young man.” He offered his paw-like hand first to Khan, then to Kirk. “Have fun you two.” He lowered his voice to a conspiratory whisper loud enough for Jim to hear. He nudged the Augment. “And before you go at each other, get some rest. You both need it.” He grinned when he saw ‘Drythen’s’ cheeks flush. He waved one last time as he bounded down the porch steps. Flipping open his own communicator, he called his workshop. Several moments later the typical noise and golden light of a transporter beam engulfed the big man, and then there was only silence.

Jim and Khan looked at each other and only now did they fully realize that they had several days all to themselves - far away from war, enemies, duties and those hunting them down. They had their own personal Eden for a whole week, and a rare feeling of quietude settled over them.

Khan took a deep breath and looked at the door that led to the next room. Diego told them that there were some personal items and new clothes for Jim laid out on the bed. Interested, he stepped into the chamber, and his eyes lit up as he saw that there was only one large bed. So much the better. He hadn’t planned on sleeping alone, anyhow.

He looked to the carryall on the bed that held the few belongings he possessed; a bundle of comfortable footwear for Kirk.
Out of the corner of his eye he saw the curtains wave in the breeze and he looked to the bucolic tableau before him. A tree filtered and split the sunlight, turning it golden-green in the twilight. His attention shifted back to the room. There was a wooden wardrobe, a dressing table and chair and a mirror hung on the opposite wall near the door to the bathroom.

He crossed the room to the bathroom and grinned wryly, a shower. A real, hot water shower barely large enough for the two of them. Ah, but if he had his way – and he would – even water would be hard-pressed to find space between them. Snapping out of his reverie, he took note of the basin, towels laid for two, and a small heater guaranteeing cozy warmth even in winter. Soap, shampoo and whatever else they could need were stuffed on a second shelf. There were two new toothbrushes in glasses. Every detail was taken into account, right down to the matching razors.

Everything they needed for their stay was present.

Khan heard soft footsteps behind him, “This is heaven!” Kirk sighed happily, and Khan smiled as he turned to face his companion.

“I never knew you were so easily impressed, Jim,” he quirked an eyebrow at him and the young officer shrugged.

“I’m not, but… Well, like I said, it’s not a luxury hotel or maybe your home? But after these last few weeks, after…,” he gulped. “After Turkana... Well, we both need this. And no one would think to look for either of us here.”

The Augment cocked his head. He knew the thoughts Jim couldn’t bear to voice. This was the best place to forget Turkana or to make peace with it. He lifted a hand and gently cupped Jim’s jaw, still dark from the brutal Klingon fists. “You are right,” he simply said. “We must remember that despite technology, we are all – nature’s creatures. We can gain renewal resting Mother Nature’s lap - here.”

Jim returned the smile, relishing in the warmth of Khan’s elegant fingers on his face and sparkling eyes in front of him. He brought his hand up to Khan’s arm, closed his eyes and turned into Nien’s hand so that lips met palm. Then Kirk met the other man’s eyes. “I didn’t know you waxed poetic,” he said, smiling.

“There are many things you don’t know about me yet, pyāra,” Khan gently teased. Then he moved his hand and leaned in to brush his lips over Jim’s. But before Kirk could reach for him with his free hand, the super-human stepped around him and returned to the living room.

Jim groaned. The contact had been enough to send a wave of electricity through him that made his
heartbeat quicken; heat spread from his belly up to his cheeks, and he blushed. God, was desire this potent normal? Gulping, the captain followed his companion into the other room and lifted his brows as he saw Khan clearing the table and filling the sink with water. Watching the Augment being so… domestic. It was almost unnerving. This man had ruled nations, crushed skulls, and broke bones. Then he realized the Augment did the last two recently – for him.

Khan caught the younger man’s surprised expression. “Don’t get used to it,” he said wryly. “As soon as you are well, we’ll share the chores.”

“Of course – that is if I’m able to move at all.”

“And why wouldn’t you be able to move?” Khan wanted to know. He dipped the cups into the water ignoring the sting of the warrigul bite once again. The wound was healing, still it lingered longer than the other injuries, but it too would vanish.

Jim wriggled his eyebrows. “Well… If you plan to have a repeat of San Francisco, I won’t be able to leave the bed for days.”

“As long as I’m in that bed, I will not mind,” the Augment purred before he continued his work.

Jim closed the distance between them, still a little unsteady on his legs, but they hadn’t suffered as much as his upper body; the muscles of his arms and shoulders still ached. He leaned on the counter beside Khan and fixed his eyes curiously on the handsome profile of his former foe, amazed at how far they’d come together – from the Vengeance to this place.

“What did you call me earlier?” Jim asked.

The corner of the super-human’s mouth twitched just the slightest bit. “What do you mean?”

“Piarah? That word you said.”

Khan lifted his brows. Had he really called Jim ‘love’ in Hindi? Yes, his memories confirmed it. Twice, to be precise – and he was. He recalled the first time, after James’ nightmare and again just now. Alas, he ought to be more careful! He didn’t know how James would react if he understood what Khan really meant. Khan wasn’t sure, if… If what? If Jim would reject the feelings? Reject him? No, he wouldn’t. Still, voicing such sentiment was too early – too soon after the events that left
them so emotionally raw. But never before had the Augment developed such an intense affection for someone in so short a time. It was as strong as his love for his family, but so different, so sensual, as well as protective and caring. It was wretched, unnerving – and felt so damn good!

“‘Pyāra’,” he corrected the pronunciation and placed the clean cups on the drain board beside the sink.

“And what does it mean?”

“Take it… as a kind of nickname,” Khan avoided a clear answer and smirked at Jim’s frustrated huff. “Believe me, it’s far more… sensual than what you call me.”

That caught Jim’s attention. “I just shortened your given name,” he said hesitantly, already assuming he’d committed a faux pas.

“Americans!” the former dictator scoffed as he placed the spoons and the saucers beside the cups and removed the plug. The sink emptied. He saw that Jim still looked expectantly at him and turned around. “Oriental and Asian names are rooted in deities, saints, heroes or describe circumstances, strength and so on,” he explained. “Noonien is a compound word. Noon was the name of a Punjab clan in the former Pakistan - North India in its time. A mighty family that reached its summit in the 17th century. The same area where the Sikh empire was founded by Ranjit Singh.”

“Singh,” Jim nodded slowly. “Your family name.”

Khan smiled shortly. “Yes – even if I’m not part of them, not really.” He took a deep breath. “‘Nien’ is a kind of suffix, it means literally ‘yearly’.” He chuckled as he saw James’s eyes widen. “Both parts together indicate something akin to ‘an important year for the family of Noon’ – or that the year, I was… created, was ‘a strong one’. Singh means ‘lion’, as you may know. And I suppose ‘Khan’ doesn’t need a translation.”

Thoughtfully, Jim watched him. “Your name tells a lot about you – even if those who… were responsible for your life, didn’t really know you. You are a part of them, a part of India, regardless of the circumstances of your creation. And I for one am glad for it.” He placed his hand over the Augment’s attempting to relay the depth of feeling behind his words. After a moment, he broke the silence. “Do you descend from the clan Noon?”

Khan hadn’t missed that James didn’t say ‘that you exist’ and chose the word ‘life’ instead. To most
mere humans, he was nothing more than a creature, an experiment that didn’t deserve the ascription of life. By all merits, he was never born. There was no man who planted his seed into a woman’s womb granting Noonien Singh’s right to the world – the right to a soul. Even the priests of his day hadn’t accepted he and his kin as human – not his own or those western priests in collars or their great philosophers, like Aquinas, who held that God infused a person with a soul in the womb. He and his came from none.

Still he sensed that there was something to him besides his brilliant mind – he was more than the sum of his parts. There was warmth in him that wasn’t rational or physical. He didn’t feel it with his nervous system or endocrine system but with his heart – deeper than the chambers that pumped his blood. Of course, the scientists said these ‘emotions’ were rooted in his DNA, but the DNA was altered and enhanced, incomparable to ‘mere’ humans now and so, irrelevant.

They didn’t feel irrelevant now. They felt as real as the air he breathed. He felt…more now. His James sensed it in him, maybe showed it to him even before he knew it was there. And Nien was grateful beyond all measure for the sensibility of this so very strong-willed and compassionate young man who saw more in him than an engineered monster. To Jim he was a human with extraordinary abilities, part of mankind and imbued with a soul.

There was a time when he would’ve been offended if any had regarded him as…human. Now Jim did, Galven did, Caviw did, and the rest. And it was good. He belonged somewhere again, to someone. Another wave of warmth and a feeling of ‘home’ in James’ presence washed over him.

He met the still asking glance of his near-lover. Did Jim even realize the gift he had given him with this one, simple choice of word? He remembered that the young captain awaited an answer.

Jim waited on him patiently, though. Both men had so much to process.

Khan dried the cups and other dishes with a dishtowel. “You are right. My names indicate something like a connection to one of the clans, but I have no proof. There was no one who would tell me when I tried to find… well, the persons who provided their genetics for my creation.” He turned and leaned against the counter beside Jim and crossed his long arms in front of his chest. “I was fourteen and had escaped the labs together with the other Augments of my age and several of the younger ones. There were labs around the world – in Delhi, Tokyo, Hong Kong when it was still part of the Commonwealth; London, Paris, Jerusalem, New York, Rio…” He snorted. “Everywhere the same experiments with different outcomes. It’s no surprise that there were… Are…” Khan corrected himself, “many Augments with diverse talents.” He looked back at Kirk. “I tried to find my biological mother or father – unsuccessfully. Our donors didn’t want to have to do anything with me, us. Yet we were only children.”

“Idiots!” Jim growled. “Denying a child the support and safety of a family is a crime. Family is a
right, not a privilege.”

For just a moment, there was a soft, sad glint in the former dictator’s eyes; he glanced at Jim. ‘A mere human - one of those who hate and fear the Augments. Yet he is full of empathy and doesn’t mark the differences between us and his own kind. This man’s soul is deep as the ocean and bright as the sun,’ he thought, before he cleared his throat and replied, “I think they were afraid of me and the others.” He shook his head and his somber expression changed back to something lighter. “So, regarding the nickname you gave me, you are calling me ‘yearly’. It’s a little bit strange, don’t you think?”

Kirk grimaced. “Yeah! I didn't know Asian names were so complicated.” He had pondered for a moment before a certain boyish gleam appeared in his eyes. “So tell me Mr. Smartypants, did your people measure time like the ancient Egyptians or the Incan culture?”

Lifting a brow Khan nodded slowly. “As far as I know, yes. Why do you ask?” The triumphal expression on Jim’s face made him very wary – in a good way. He knew that Jim teased with no malice.

“Well, in ancient times, a year was calculated on the basis of the solar cycle,” Kirk explained his idea. “Some ancient cultures called a ‘year’ a ‘sun’. So, if you look at it like this, ‘Nien’ can also mean ‘sun’ – and since you allowed me the sunrise…” Jim drifted off before continuing, “Jesus, you gave me more of those than I thought I’d ever have when you saved my life,” Kirk swallowed at the gravity of that thought. “Besides, you use it as a cover yourself. I picked the right nickname for you.”

The super-human stared at him with open mouth – one second, two seconds, three seconds…Then he burst out laughing. The sound was so rich, full and melodious that it made Jim’s head spin. God, he loved that sound!

Khan held his belly and looked at the younger man with glistening eyes. He saw the smug face Jim wore, and had to laugh again. “James, you are impossible – but I don’t object to your logic,” he chuckled, after he regained his composure. He asked himself when he had last laughed so hard. It felt amazing – refreshing and freeing.

“We’ve had a hell of a year, haven’t we?” Jim winked.

Acting on impulse, he pulled the younger man to him and closed his lips over Kirk’s. The need to feel his James against him now was overwhelming – and Jim happily returned the embrace – and the kiss.
The two men lost themselves to time and the tranquility enveloping them. They kissed each other with searing passion.

Spock watched the image of Bob Wesley with a blank expression on the main screen of the bridge. They had not reached Starbase 12 until now but would in 3.5967 hours – if they didn’t get an order for another mission. The alpha shift had not started yet and of the senior officers, only Sulu and Uhura were with the acting captain in the control center of the Enterprise.

“If I understood you correctly, Commodore, Starfleet Command decided to mount a recovery mission after all?” The Vulcan lifted a brow. “A little bit late.”

Bob grimaced. “The transmission was made by Barnett himself in his office no less; it reached us five hours ago. I wanted to inform you as soon as your shift started.” He shook his head. “It came about the same time as your report regarding Jim’s rescue, still I’m glad that at least Barnett was ready to do something. I don’t want to ascribe anything the SBI, but their reaction was… disconcerting.”

Spock simply lifted a brow. Several hours ago Nyota had said something similar in their quarters, but the Vulcan was wise enough not to mention it. He had his own thoughts about it all – thoughts, he would ponder very carefully before he would discuss them.

“They had their reasons. As you told me, most members of the admiralty were in a conference with high-ranking politicians and diplomats. There were orders not to be disturbed.”

Wesley snorted. “The captain of our flagship was captured and the SBI thought it too trivial to report it immediately to the Chief in Command. That was a screw-up of epic proportions to say the least.” He took a deep breath. “The second reason I contacted you, Mr. Spock – the Enterprise has new orders. Several scouts reported increased Klingon activity near the Arakon System. That’s deeper in our territory than we thought they’d venture. From there it’s only a stone’s throw to Norellus. The Klingons are likely interested in the deuterium mines and station, Norellus run. Check these rumors and report back. If the Klingons are really trying to infiltrate Federation space, we have to act immediately. Starbase 133 and K7 have already fallen to the enemy; the next inhabited planets would be Arakon, again Tammeron and the Aldebaran system. I want to know if the Klingons are planning to expand their Empire with further assaults.”
Spock nodded slowly. “What about Captain Kirk?”

A quick smile flashed on Bob’s face. “I knew you would ask. Well, Jim is on convalescent leave. You have the con and will pick up your captain after your return. You shouldn’t need more than seven or eight days provided the situation remains as-is. If not, Jim gets more leave, or I’ll send a nearby ship to retrieve him. Speaking of – do you know where he is?”

“If we knew that, I’d be a much happier doctor!” another voice from the turbo lift answered, before the Vulcan had the possibility to do so.

Wesley was amused. The bridge crew sat huddled together as his own senior officers did. “Good morning, Doctor,” he greeted and McCoy returned it with a kind, “Good morning to you, sir!”

The commodore cocked his head. “So you still don’t know where Jim is, do you?” As Vulcan and CMO shook their heads, he sighed. “Can you contact him?”

“Only via The Shadow,” the first officer replied. “Though the organization has shown us support, their leaders are still very carefully keeping their distance from authorities.”

This time Wesley sighed. “Yes, they avoid us at all costs, especially this ‘Drythen’. You neglected putting him in your report on Turkana.”

Spock lifted a brow. “No, sir. I thought it in Sunrise’s best interest to avoid any conspicuous attention directed at him.”

Bob rolled his eyes. “I didn’t mention it because I assumed you would’ve given a complete report.” He frowned. “I want to know what our friend has done to be this cautious.” His attention was diverted when the buzzer of his quarters sounded. “One moment!” he called before he returned his attention to the screen on his desk.

“Well, Commander, you have your orders. Inform Jim via The Shadow about your deployment – without any details, of course. If you figure out where he is convalescing, let me know. If it becomes necessary, I can pick him up.”

Spock nodded shortly. “Understood, Commodore. Have a nice day.”
“You too, gentlemen!”

The transmission was cut off; the first officer and CMO looked at each other.

“So, we start without Jim?” The Vulcan asked himself why humans must always ask questions to which they already have an answer.

“You heard the commodore, Doctor. We have an order now.” He cocked his head at McCoy’s annoyed expression. “And you heard Jim. He told us to obey Starfleet orders.”

Yeah! We don’t have any clue, where he is. Safe or not, I’m still worried. This Sunrise guy may be a genius and know a bit of first aid, but I would feel better if I could treat Jim.”

“The point is, Doctor, that Jim does ‘feel better’. For now, he requires emotional and physical distance from his time in captivity. Sunrise seems to have provided the captain with both, though we do not know why as so far he has shown no motive for his actions. But, he seems to value the captain.”

McCoy stepped beside the captain’s chair and pursed his lips before he bent down and lowered his voice. “Do you trust this ‘Sunrise’?”

In the night-dark eyes of the Vulcan, something akin to surprise began to shine. “Where Jim is concerned, I do trust this man. He risked his life to save the captain; his concern for him showed in his vocal inflection if you remember the discussion we had, after he learned of Kirk’s capture.”

“We don’t know much about this guy. He’s a hell of good fighter, strategist, and technician and even understands a thing or two about medicine. And he is hell-bent to hide his identity. I don’t know what you all think, but something’s brewing and I’m not in the mood to get burned.”

The Vulcan just a bit. “Cooking, Doctor? What has the preparation of meals with heat to do with Sunrise’s abilities and identity?”

McCoy groaned while Uhura suppressed a chuckle. “I meant that there is something - odd, Spock. Hell, I thought you know our idioms.”
“Not all, Doctor,” Spock retorted. “Especially the old-fashioned ones. Those you indulge in quite often and I am not always familiar their use.”

“Old-fashioned ones? I’m old-fashioned?” Bones demanded, outraged.

The first officer lifted a brow. “Isn’t that what you always say, you are a good old country doctor? And I recall, you told the two scientists in Admiral Barnett’s office that you are a little bit old-fashioned? Since you are so fond of these idioms, I merely concluded that you are – indeed – someone who favors manners and points of view from the past.”

This time only Leonard stared at him, Uhura started to giggle. Then the CMO took a deep breath and straightened himself. “It’s too early to get angry, Len. Don’t fret, the bogey doesn’t know it better. Stay calm. Go to the officer’s mess and enjoy a hot, strong coffee!” he advised himself. Then he turned around and headed for the turbo lift.

That moment the doors of the transport cabin opened and Sulu and Chekov stepped out greeting the CMO instantly with a kind, “Good morning, Doctor!”

McCoy made a face. “I doubt it!” he growled and bypassed them, vanishing in the turbo lift.

“What’s zhe matter wiz him?” Pavel asked baffled, and to everyone’s surprise it was Spock, who answered wryly, “I think the good doctor got up on the wrong side of the bed.” He turned around in the chair and looked at the two newcomers and a very amused Uhura. “This phrase was correct, wasn’t it?”

“Perfect, sir!” Sulu grinned and stepped towards his station. “If you ask me, I’ll never understand what the side of the bed has to do with one’s mood. But if that’s the case, the doctor has never woken on the right side.”

“Ze left side is ze bad side. Zat’s an old Russian saying, because Czar Alexander the Great had one time…” Pavel couldn’t finish his Russian version of history because everyone snickered and laughed – expect, of course, for Spock. Still there was a tiny sparkle in his eyes. The mood on the Enterprise’s was light again; her captain was safe…

TBC…
Yeah, at least some Spock-Bones-banter – it had to be done finally. And of course with our two ‘boys’. Teasing is a sign of affection, after all, and Jim and Nien are going to ‘tease’ each other a lot within the next chapter – means: It will be HOT!!!

I hope you liked everything so far. Yes, Luengo and Norton are becoming quite the bad-asses and their plan will enfold soon. And anyone, who assumed that Bones will get the right idea about “Sunrise” – you were right! Okay, he hasn’t any proof until now, but he will (and you certainly can imagine the speech is going to give Jim, before he learns the whole truth – *snicker*).

I would be happy to learn of your thoughts and muses about everything and I’m looking forward for your comments.

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
You’re mine (but I belong to you)

Chapter Notes

Hello, my dear readers!

Thank you so very much for all the many comments and kudos, and I’m really sorry that I cannot answer them properly, but I have injured my right hand and have to write only with the left in the moment – quite difficult, if you have to type a lot. It’s only a good thing that I already wrote the new chapter two weeks ago, otherwise you would have to wait for the update.

But – being quite lucky in the circumstance – the chapter was done before the incident and you don’t have to wait for the HOT chapter.

Yeah, you read correctly, this chapter is definitely only for adults.

So have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 19 – You’re mine (but I belong to you)

Today, Jim Kirk went to bed early. Though had slept a lot during their travel to Aldebaran, he felt tired immediately following tonight’s dinner. They ate dinner on the porch outside. The fresh air, the nature’s tranquil tableau, and his still healing body, well, all demanded their own pound of his flesh. He wanted to protest it all – his exhaustion. Khan would have none of it; he could be very convincing when it came to the health of one who belonged to him. He did not force, and he did not threaten, only gently requested what was reasonable for them both.

The next two days flew by, and Jim’s health improved in leaps and bounds. He and Khan took short walks along the bayou’s shore and rested afterwards in deck chairs found in the shed. The gentle exercise, the climate and the excellent food worked miracles on the young man. And Khan knew that the peacefulness of the cottage and the removal of the element of danger were good for him, too. Only once were they interrupted. Galven called on the second day informing the men via communicator that Ritek had received a transmission from the Enterprise’s first officer. Starfleet sent Jim’s ship on a seven-day observation mission.
The men spent their time relaxing, reading and talking. Well, they talked but the former dictator noted what Jim did not talk about – his capture. After his breakdown during their travel to Aldebaran, the captain put on a brave mask, hiding the hurt of his soul. Khan knew that it was only a matter of time until the emotions would break through his facade again. The Augment remembered the few occasions he had buried horrors and nightmares deep beneath a stoic expression and distraction, only seeming not to care about what happened to him. Even the soft coaxing of Katie, Otto, Rodriguez, Pia or even Joaquin hadn’t made him talk before he had been ready for it. So he didn’t press the matter, and he wouldn’t. Kirk would talk when he was ready and not a moment sooner. Khan respected Jim far too much to demand something that the younger man couldn’t give.

So they spoke of harmless things – safe things, things that taught them more about one another. Jim told him about his time at the Academy. He never tired of answering Khan’s questions about the different alien races, cultures, and developments – as well as the development of the Federation following Earth’s exploration of space after Khan’s days. Nien learned more about the world in which he woke during these two days than in the one year forcibly spent indentured to Section 31 or following his escape. He couldn’t hide his fascination; his mind, always hungry for knowledge, found new levels of curiosity and knowledge. For the first time, he wanted to live – here, in this century, and if he allowed himself the thought – with this man.

Khan still missed his family deeply. The pain of separation was ever present. The point of separation from his loved ones ached as a lost limb or a bit of his soul amputated. The young captain kept the anguish at bay just enough that he could find some hours of peace. James was right for him and the former dictator could distract himself from the pain with the care of his beloved; it satisfied the part of the leader’s nature that told him to care for those in his charge – as he had when he first recovered Jim. An Augment’s genetic make-up ensured they would protect and seek solace in one another in order to enhance their chances of survival. Khan’s blood in Jim and Khan’s love for Jim engendered that familial bond now.

And Kirk felt it as keenly as he could feel he and Nien’s joined DNA in every cell of his body. Jim didn’t return Spock’s transmission. Not because he didn’t want to. The Enterprise and her crew were an extension of himself, and he was its heart. Without them (without him) he (the Enterprise) was incomplete – less. But he justified his inaction, telling himself that he still had to heal and wouldn’t be any good to his crew just now. Justification wasn’t the truth, though, was it? His heart, his soul, his blood told him why he really didn’t answer that transmission. They told him the truth, and the truth had eyes with the color of the ocean, full of warmth. The truth had sinful lips curved beneath cheekbones so sharp you could cut yourself on them.

Truth desired him, and he desired it right back.

The mutual longing was always there, simmering just under the surface. During the day, it was easy to distract each other especially in conversation. But as soon as they went quiet, the wish to be as close together as possible increased.
The nights were the worst. The first night Jim slept nearly without disturbing, but Khan felt too protective – on alert so much so that he ignored his own need for rest. The second was full of restlessness and unsatisfied longing. As they lay side-by-side listening to one another’s breath, the burning need to consume had been almost unbearable. Khan was shocked when sweat broke out on his forehead and palms; his mouth went dry with the suppressed urge to close the short distance between him and the younger man – to surrender to what they both craved. He was a superior human, and he was better; he had his emotions and his bodily demands under control! At least he thought he did. But to be this close to his beloved and not able to touch him was agony. And his enhanced senses heard Jim’s racing heart and smelled his arousal, and it was heady. He forced himself into meditation to prevent himself from reaching out to the captain.

At some point during the night they both fell asleep. But waking up entangled in one another did nothing to ease the longing or enable rational action. Yet Khan managed somehow, and Jim masked his disappointment with pride. Only the cool morning air let into the cottage by the thrown open windows allowed the men a path back to sanity.

The day went by as the last one had – a walk along the shore, resting, reading, talking…

As the afternoon gave way to evening and Jim had fallen asleep in his deck chair, Khan vanished into the cottage to prepare dinner, as he had the last two days. But this time he was up to something. He rifled through the goods Galven had left and found several ingredients that pleased him immensely.

Jim woke just as the sun set to an irresistible smell emanating from the cottage behind him, and he noticed that the table on the porch was set for dinner. Carefully folding the Chilean blanket that warmed him, he walked into the cottage curious and he must admit, hungry.

“What are you cooking?” he asked surprised as he found the Augment very busy in the small kitchen. It still was an unusual sight to see the super-human standing at the counter and preparing a meal. The sight itself wasn’t unusual; Khan had cooked the previous two days, but this was different. He was relaxed; he looked focused and pleased with himself. Kirk could see that Nien was aiming for something special tonight.

“It’s a surprise,” Khan answered and there was a certain gleam in his eyes, as he motioned towards the bedroom. “Wash up and slip into something warmer. The evenings are cool here.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Yes, Dad!”
He could feel the Augment’s gaze on his back as fetched a sweater and grinned broadly at the slightly scowling super-human as he returned to wash his hands in the sink beside Khan. The men walked together out to the porch carrying the night’s fare. The table was set beautifully – romantic even – with a tablecloth, a candle, fresh napkins, wine glasses and a bottle of white wine Khan chose for the meal.

The Augment pulled Kirk’s chair for him and served the meal as the trees’ shadows stretched toward the cottage. The meal consisted of a native bird’s flesh that reminded Jim of chicken. Fried fruits accompanied the bird along with a spicy, sweet sauce and bread and salad. Usually, Kirk favored the more American cuisine – steaks, burgers, sausages, potatoes, corn, and beans and so on – but this food was delicious. Kirk nearly devoured it; he caught Nien’s baffled glance and blushed in embarrassment, but the former dictator smirked knowingly and continued to eat. Kirk’s body craved the nutrient rich food.

Nien confirmed Jim’s assumption that the meal had an Indian flare. And he was inwardly thrilled that his James enjoyed it so much. One would think he looked almost happy. Kirk had to admit that he could get used to this kind of food. Bones would be head over heels if he exchanged his less healthy eating habits to this. Apparently, Khan shared the doctor’s opinion.

The dinner had sated Jim fully without feeling as though his belly would burst at any moment. That certainly would make it easier to lie down sans the feeling of stones in his stomach.

As they finished their dinner, the last rays of the sun bathed the landscape in a warm, golden and red glow, before darkness rose. A breeze of cool air wafted from the lake, bringing with it the rich scent of soil. The few birds still awake chirped; otherwise it was completely silent – except for the hushed tones of men’s voices sounding from the small porch of the secluded cottage.

Jim and Khan sat on the comfortable chairs and sipped the Chilean wine Diego left. It was full-flavored with a hint of nutmeg and berries, dark as a ruby and not too heavy; still this wine had to be taken carefully. The bottle read 14.5 % alcohol, perfect for after dinner.

Khan talked of India; he described the ancient temples, the ancient villages and bustling modern cities (modern for him anyway), and of the dense jungles and the sea in the south. He told of the raging typhoons, the sun’s heat and its beauty when set; the old traditions juxtaposed to the modernity of his age.

Curious and fascinated, Jim listened. Khan was a living history book. His words chronicled time with vivid images that flowed into Kirk’s mind on a soft, baritone wave. His rapt attention staved off his growing tiredness – for a short time.
Oh, but as Khan spoke, it didn’t slip his attention that the younger man was ready for bed. James’ lids drooped, his posture was far too relaxed and his cheeks grew pale in the light of the single candle burning between them. “Time to sleep,” he said gently, but Kirk shook his head.

“No. It’s so comfortable here,” he mumbled and suppressed a yawn while he looked up to the darkened sky. The light of four of the six moons now high over the mountains danced like silver on the dark surface of the lake and bathed the woods in its pale shimmer. “Did you know that the six moons were named after old shires of Ireland and Australia?” Kirk asked. “The first colonists came from there and some Scots, too. That’s why they named the capital New Aberdeen. Scotty told me one time. He was shocked that the whisky here was green and not gold. You should’ve heard how he groused that it didn’t compare to his ‘water of life’, ya know, ‘whisky’. That’s what he told me it meant.” He shook his head and grinned. “Scots are a strange bunch – but I like them. They are brutally truthful. I much prefer that over feigned politeness.”

Khan’s lips twitched in amusement. Jim’s speech slurred and slowed a bit – a further hint divulging how tired he was. Still the younger man refused to go to bed. ‘He has such a bright mind, so intelligent, but sometimes he acts like a little boy!’ the super-human thought and a wave of tender protectiveness swept over him usually reserved for Joaquin, Otto or Katie – or Kabir before his sacrifice while they tried to reach the Botany Bay. But, again this was somehow different with Jim. There was something added to the Augment’s emotions, something new.

He rose, placed his own and Kirk’s empty glass on the table and bent over a surprised starship captain. “Come on, James. It’s late enough. You have to rest, and I would like to lie down, too.”

Jim frowned. “You’re tired?” he asked surprised, and Khan rolled his eyes.

“As you’ve pointed out several times, I’m human, too.” He said this with a smile. “Of course I can get tired – especially after racing through space to save a reckless moron’s neck…”

“Hey!”

“… Being hunted by alien warriors, playing doctor and nurse, and now I’m…” Khan looked around his surroundings and noted the dishtowel slung over his shoulder, “…domestic.”

The truth was that Khan was anything but tired; he used a timeworn trick to get his will. He played on the younger man’s empathy. Khan was well aware he wasn’t playing fair, but his beloved’s health was far more important.
Jim looked with wide eyes at him, then smiled sheepishly – embarrassed at his perceived lack of compassion. “Sorry, Nien. I… don’t have much experience with your… enhanced abilities or your limits. Of course, you can get tired like anyone else.” He got to his feet and looked straight into the blue-green eyes of the former dictator. “Even if I think your fatigue is really you being concerned about me and just trying to get me into bed.” Kirk smiled knowingly at his double entendre.

Khan stared at him for several seconds – dammit; it was a mistake to underestimate James T. Kirk – with empathy comes perception. He gave him a shining smile. “You are free to think as you wish, Pyāra.”

Promptly the Enterprise’s captain laughed. “Ha! I knew it!” he grinned – and had to yawn.

“Yes, and I see that you are indeed tired.” Khan bent forwards and took the two glasses, blew out the candle and reached for the bottle. Instantly the men were enveloped in the dark; the moons’ light illuminated only the outside. Jim chuckled, “Well, I hope you are not only graceful as a cat, but can see like one too, because I can’t see anything now.”

Khan couldn’t help feeling some pride, pleased that Jim thought of him this way. Damn, how absurd! He was a genetically engineered warrior, a ruler of millions during his time, stronger and more intelligent than any other human. Yet here he stood on a strange planet on a porch of a small cottage, nothing more than a hut compared to his palace; but his heart thrummed in his ears and the compliment from a man six years his junior. That was insane – yet it felt so good. And Khan realized that this impossible, daring, terribly handsome and crazy boy-captain was slowly wrapping him around his little finger – and he didn’t even think about resistance! He only wanted to surrender to it. Joaquin would convulse with laughter, telling him that no one was safe from cupid’s arrows. “You think me graceful?” the former dictator asked quietly; despite the darkness he saw Kirk’s serious and open expression.

“Yes, I do,” Jim confirmed without any shyness or hesitation, while his hand found the Augment’s arm. “Go ahead, I’ll follow you.”

“You trust my guidance?” Nien wanted to know – more than just leading in the dark – though, he supposed he’d do that too.

Kirk shrugged. “I have before – in the air lock when you crouched down to get a better start as soon as the lock opened. And I trusted you in the dark to get us safely on the Vengeance. And I trusted you when we fled Turkana.” In the moonlight, Khan could clearly recognize, how Kirk’s eyes became very soft, as the officer added, “And when I didn’t trust you, on the bridge of the Vengeance, everything went to hell. But whenever I did trust you, I never had a reason to regret it. It’s those times – it’s now – I know I couldn’t have made a better decision.”
Warmth flooded through the former dictator. He had never met a mere human before, who knew exactly what he was and trusted him regardless. Yes, his servants, his army’s flag staff, all under his command followed him as expected, but this here was something entirely different. Jim didn’t entrust himself to Khan’s enhanced mind or abilities, but rather to a comrade-in-arms, a friend, a lover perhaps! There was no awkwardness in Kirk’s reaction to the super-human. There never was with him. He wore his heart openly and unashamedly. And because of that, Khan realized that Kirk treasured him – his companionship – not for what he could do or what he could give, as Marcus had. But for who he was and what he freely offered of himself.

Khan’s engineered intellect protested that the human’s feeling towards him didn’t matter, but his heart and soul spoke another language – a language that seemed to be made of melodies laced with touch, and light, and substance.

He bent forwards and showed Jim how much the words meant to him. He caught the lips of the younger man in a gentle kiss that deepened instantly as Jim wrapped his arms around him and opened his mouth – eager for more. Nien groaned; he tasted sweet from the wine and dinner, but James’ taste was laced with virility and electricity and all things James Kirk was. And Khan did his best to pour the melody his soul sung into James. Oh, but the sparks he felt singing through him; he feared electricity meeting spark would flash to set them both aflame, burning his already weak control to ash. He wanted to ravish the younger man badly, and that was anything but good given Jim’s state of health. But the longer he waited, the more he wanted.

He put glasses and bottle back on the table and snaked both arms gently but firmly around the slightly smaller frame and returned the kiss with fervor. He moaned as their tongues resumed their still familiar dual, each passionately vying for dominance. Heat rose in both men; it branded their bodies from the inside and their want consumed all rationality from their minds. Lips danced, and arms enfolded and all of it stirred the far too long denied hunger.

Only Khan’s strong will finally broke the kiss. Jim moaned in protest, missing the intimacy, but a tiny voice in the back of his mind reminded him of his healing injuries. He needed time and rest before he could follow his desire. Still Jim Kirk was not one to listen to reason when his gut told him otherwise – his gut or his heart. And both of those are what brought him this far.

He wanted Nien! He wanted him now; injuries be damned!

“Lead the way,” he whispered. His clever mind had plotted a way to break through Khan’s control already pouring from him as if from a sieve; the other man’s hoarse voice and the fire in his eyes told him as much.
The Augment, who didn’t know what his beloved was up to, nodded. He guided Jim inside the cottage and closed the door, leaving the lights off until they reached the bedroom where Khan closed the windows. Midge-like bugs existed even on Aldebaran, and neither the super-human nor the young officer wanted to suffer their bites.

Khan felt Jim’s eyes on his back as he drew the curtains closed and swallowed. His mouth had gone dry, and a certain throbbing in his groin made it obvious that he had a problem. A big problem – again! His prudence told him that James still needed time to heal, yet his blood thought differently – lower. It hummed with desire and pulsed demandingly through his entire being – even stronger than the night before.

“Do you think it safe if I take a shower?” Jim’s gentle tenor tore him out of his attempts to stay calm.

Jim…

Shower…

The first moment he had laid eyes on the bathroom he thought of their shower together back in San Francisco. Now those images were ever present at the edges of his consciousness. Well, they were. The images were quickly making their way to the forefront of his mind. His perfect memories showed him the naked younger man under the spray like a film; velvet skin glistened, and lips swelled from fierce kissing. Defiant eyes shined radiantly in the bliss of the afterglow…

Khan suppressed a groan. Dammit, he had already told himself last night that he was stronger than that! He was an Augment – superior – and stood above greedy bodily need. End of story!

Still, he didn’t trust his voice and cleared his throat before he answered, “If you don’t stay too long under the water, you should be fine.” He switched on the lamp on the nightstand and met Jim’s beaming smile. The soft light flickered and cast shadows on Kirk’s handsome face and made his hair shimmer like gold.

“So we are on the same page here,” the Enterprise’s captain said cheerfully and started to get undressed. “Help me with the bandages?” he asked casually; it didn’t slip his attention that Nien gulped. Oh, Khan’s control was about to become undone. Very good! Jim would add personal measures of his own to ensure it.

The Augment took a deep breath, not one of his better ideas because his enhanced senses could smell
the familiar scent of the younger man now even more intensely, and it was intoxicating. As he closed the
distance between them, he realized that his trousers were far too tight. And dammit again! He
looked in the sky-colored eyes of his beloved – did Jim know how difficult it was to stay controlled?
Khan reached for the bandages. The next minute demanded everything as the super-human had to
remain stoic, because every time his fingertips brushed over the warm, silken skin of the captain, heat
spread from his hands through his veins straight to the middle of his body.

And the gleam in Jim’s eyes and the bulge in his trousers said the same went for him.

Quickly, Nien distracted himself by observing the injuries.

“They’re healing well,” he murmured while he examined the few caked slits the dermal regenerator
hadn’t been able to close completely. The other bruises were still there, but many have faded now to
greens and yellows, much better than the ugly black and purples from the previous days. Kirk’s
healing abilities had always been good, but since the last shot augmented blood plasma, his healing
seems to have increased. “Yes, the shower will be no problem,” the former dictator murmured. And
Kirk flashed one of his winningest smiles. The kind that lit him up from the inside.

“Thanks, Doc!” Then Jim kicked off his shoes wriggled out of his blue jeans and his underwear,
threw them on the chair in front of the commode and walked without inhibition to the bathroom; the
proof of his arousal in plain view. This time it was he who felt the other man’s gaze like a burning
caress and smiled inwardly. Step one of the plan had been successful. Off to step two; hopefully step
three wouldn’t be necessary anymore.

Kirk momentarily forgot anything about steps though, as the spray splashed over his face and down
his body. It was pure heaven to wash the medicinal scent of the ointment and sweat from his body
finally. For a few minutes, he stood there and relished his first refreshing water shower in what
seemed ages. Then his mind drifted back in time to the moment, when Khan carried him bodily into
his own shower cabin. The thought struck him as funny now. Then he remembered those talented,
clever hands that cleaned him – everywhere after a mad bout of sex and two mind blowing orgasms.
And he thought about that time aboard the Enterprise after their talk via subspace-transmission.
‘Maybe that was…Yes, that was when I knew it. Oh God, the shower’. In a blink of an eye, new
desire flared up in the young captain.

Right, now he had to go to step two.

He reached for the soap he had taken with him into the shower-cabin and let it drop, yelping in faked
surprise. He bent down – knowing that his shape was visible through the frosted glass of the shower
cabin. His posture ought to give the Augment the wrong – correction – the right idea.
He didn’t have to wait very long. Seconds later the door to the bathroom was yanked open, and Khan’s deep baritone called, “Jim? Are you all right?”

Kirk suppressed a triumphant grin. “’M a’righ’,” he mumbled as slurred as possible and far too quiet to be heard properly – even for augmented hearing. His plan was perfect, because suddenly the door to the shower cabin was pulled aside, and cool air hit him. He straightened up and turned to smile sheepishly at Khan, who stood only there and stared.

“Soap slipped,” he explained apologetically and pointed down at the object of offense near the drain.

“Indeed,” the Augment said, his glance only grazed the soap for a moment before it roamed over Kirk’s body; taking in every firm muscle and soft curve beneath the glistening silk of skin. Jim’s breath was caught in his throat as he saw the fire in the super-human’s eyes locked onto his. For a long moment, neither of them spoke. Then as if pulled by invisible strings, Khan moved nearer, helplessly drawn by the memories that have sustained him these last weeks. Almost unbelieving that the real sight stood before him now.

And most certainly not believing that the young captain didn’t intentionally lure him here. It would be the best to turn and go, but he found himself unable to do so. His shaft throbbed with desire and his hands itched to explore Kirk’s delicious body. The yearning – the hunger – to get reunited with his beloved in the most intimate way, shut down any sane thought. He didn’t even stop and the strings continued to pull as the water hit him drenching his shirt and trousers. The air seemed to vibrate between them as they stood together.

Khan bent forwards not caring about the water, the hurt – not of it. “Don’t think that I can’t see what you are playing at, Kirk,” he whispered. His lips ghosted Jim’s neck and he moaned; pins pricked in the wake of Khan’s lips, around his mark of claim that neither could see, but both knew was there.

Jim shuddered as a bolt of energy shot through him; his loins tightened into a hard knot. He felt dizzy and held to the Augment’s shoulders to steady himself. The evidence of their desire brushed against each other, separated only by the material of Khan’s trousers. Kirk’s knees went weak as his cock pulsed against the wet material and throbbed with untamable need. Instinctively, his grip on Nien’s shoulder tightened to keep him from sinking boneless to the shower floor.

Despite the aromatic soap at his feet (still) the super-human could smell the younger man’s arousal and desire flared like an inferno. He had to put some distance between himself and Kirk. He ordered his legs to step back – but they didn’t obey him. The need – the desperate wish – to be close as possible to the one who held his heart overpowered his will. His rational mind melted away into the lava that ran through his veins. One of his arms snaked around Jim’s hips, and steadying them both with his free hand pressed against the wall, his mouth crashed down on that of his lover-to-be.
Both groaned; the levy broke and their control was washed away in the flood of emotions. The prospect of being one soon again made them light-headed. Mouths opened, their tongues swirled around each other, teeth nipped at one another’s lips. They kissed like there wouldn’t be another day together – perhaps there weren’t many. Their hearts and souls starved for closeness, their bodies hummed with longing unfulfilled.

Jim slipped his hands down to Khan’s hips, pulled the shirt out of Nien’s waistband and swiftly opened belt and trousers. The Augment gasped as the pressure on his throbbing shaft finally relented when Kirk shoved the garments down; he closed his eyes in relief – if only for a moment. Then he let go of the younger man, stepped out of the trousers and underwaear and rid himself of his shirt, tossing it beside his other clothes on the floor, instantly forgotten.

Jim’s hands ran back up Khan’s thighs to his waist, wandered over his back and up to the back of his neck to tangle in his hair. Kirk pressed himself against the other man, threw his head back and keened with need as Khan assaulted his neck with lips, tongue, and teeth. Their cocks aligned and slid bare together – hard as rocks, red with need and glistening with water and pre-cum. Their lips found each other in another searing kiss. They had held each other in a tight embrace, before Jim began to nibble at the Augment’s neck teasing the spot he left all those weeks ago, his own mark. He heard Nien groaning in pleasure and bit gently down on the soft skin before he sucked and kissed his way down over his the other man’s chest. He relished in the taste – nearly familiar now – and sighed as Khan’s fingers found his butt and kneaded it gently. The men rocked together, hinting of the dance that lie ahead for them, and as Kirk’s mouth closed over one of the Augment’s nipples, Khan let his head sink into Jim’s neck and closed his eyes in bliss. God, how much had he longed for this!

Fondling the sensitive little nub tenderly, Jim lowered closed his eyes against the shower spray. His hands explored the iron muscles beneath the wet velvet of Nien’s skin; his shaft rubbed unabashedly against Nien’s thigh so that his urge was almost painful.

Suddenly, Khan turned them both around and pressed Kirk carefully to the wall then slipped one hand between them encasing their both cocks in the cage of his long, delicate fingers. Jim gasped, and his head dropped back against the tile. He closed his eyes; his injuries stung under the water, but he could care less. Pure rapture made him tremble as his lover stroked them both expertly, and the Augment’s name escaped him in a low moan. Nien’s mouth found his again and despite the water raining down on them, neither took note of anything beyond the body pressed against them.

Khan’s movements increased as he worked himself and his beloved towards the edge. To feel James’ hard, silken member against his own was absolute bliss – and absolutely not enough. His body demanded to be sheathed in the warm body of the younger man again. And he would give into the demand just as soon as he took Kirk with him over ecstasy’s cliff. Kirk’s well-played seduction had blown his control, and he was not going looking for it now. Hell, as he said before, he was only human after all!
As the pressure in his loins grew, Jim thrust into Khan’s clever hand. He sighed and mewed as he felt his lover’s cock rub against his own in the circle of Khan’s tightening fingers. He knew he wouldn’t last much longer. The suppressed desire was about to be satisfied. Wrapping both arms around the slightly taller man, Jim panted as the heat in his groin started to tighten into a tight ball, ready to explode.

He wanted to warn Khan, but couldn’t utter a word as the fire in his veins roared up. His senses narrowed only to the warm, wet hand and the hard cock against his own; the hot demanding mouth on his neck nipped and sucked at the sensitive area that had reminded Jim of their first night together.

Pleasure rippled along his spine and down his legs; it weakened his knees and he clung to Nien for dear life when it became too much to contain. Pleasure’s explosion erupted from the depths of his body and soul. Shouting his lover’s name, Jim came long and hard; he heard somewhere at the edge of his perception the deep baritone moaning the Hindi word Khan had chosen for him. Tremors rocked Kirk, and if it weren’t for the Augment, he would have sunk into a heap on the floor as his knees gave out. As his orgasm ebbed slowly away, he felt the super-human shudder and held onto him in a soft embrace and buried his face Khan’s wet neck.

Khan tried to catch his breath and to find his way back to reality as he flowed down from his first peak. Some of the unbearable tension had left him, but it wasn’t enough! Finally, mind came back online, and as he lifted his head, he felt Jim clinging to him, warm breath on his throat. Their cocks had softened a bit and their cum, sticky between their bodies, mingled and flowed down the drain with the shower of water from above. He didn’t care because all that mattered most was in his arms and wrapped strong arms around the Augment’s waist, his heart and soul. And he still starved for that which mattered most.

“Wow,” escaped Jim’s lips in a whisper; it didn’t slip Khan’s attention.

The Augment chuckled, ‘Americans’, and pressed a kiss to Kirk’s temple before he murmured, “You’re all right?”

He had to wait for an answer before Jim sighed in content, “Mmm, far better than before.”

Of course, Nien understood words unspoken and grinned. “You’re insatiable.”

“Look, who’s talkin’,” the captain slurred and rubbed his cheek on Khan’s shoulder.
“Now who’s the ‘cat’?” the former dictator teased. “Getting all cuddly.” He laid his head against Jim’s and closed his eyes, still gloating at his accomplishment in the aftermath while he pulled his beloved towards him and away from the hard wall. Promptly Kirk snuggled even closer to him and for a small time they only stood there beneath the shower and enjoyed the closeness even more now that some of their sexual tension has abated.

Then Khan carefully straightened up with James and put a little distance between them. “We should get rid of – that,” he mumbled, pointing nonchalantly at the semen that remained.

“Well, I don’t think that will be all, do you?” Kirk snickered and fumbled for the soap, only to find it missing.

“Your companion in conspiracy lies at your feet.” Khan grumbled, pointing at the soap. He caught the officer’s innocent gaze and as James asked, “Why sweetheart, what do you mean?” he reached behind Kirk and gave his butt a slap.

“Ouch!” Jim pouted, rubbing his behind. “What was that for?”

“For tricking me! I told you: Don’t think that I failed to see your intention with your little soap trick.”

Kirk couldn’t help himself; he grinned broadly and mischievously – like a boy after pulling someone’s leg. “Well, it worked to both our benefit and…” He yelped as Khan wrapped both arms around his waist and hoisted him up, shaking him slightly.

“As I recall, I’ve sworn revenge for calling me ‘Rumpelstiltskin’, and now you’ve further offended me, Captain, so…”

“So be a man! Stay true to your word and take your revenge,” Jim smiled, snaking both arms around the Augment’s neck. He bent down until his forehead touched Nien’s. “I’m waiting for it,” he breathed.

New desire flared in the Augment; he felt empty and wanting again as his cock began to thicken. Cursing in his native tongue, he pressed Kirk to him with one arm, switched the water off with his free hand, opened the door of the shower cabin and stepped out; Jim still dangling.
“What did you say, gorgeous?” Kirk asked, again with feign innocence. He wrapped his legs around his lover’s middle eliciting a gasp from the super-human. For a moment Khan had to muster all his control to stay balanced as his knees wobbled – not from Jim’s added weight, but from lust thrumming through his veins.

“You are going to be the death of me, James Kirk!” the Augment growled, fixing those sky-blue eyes with his ocean-colored pools. Then he saw that bright smile – the one that made Kirk’s boyish features glow.

“Petite mort, right?”

The super-human chuckled as he carried Jim to the bedroom. “Believe me, Pyāra, nothing will be petite about this ‘mort’.”

“I thought so,” Kirk snickered. “Remember what I told you, if you want a repeat of our first night, I won’t be able to move for days.”

“At least you would be still, if only for a while. I swear, even I do not have enough eyes in my head to keep them on you with how you flit about.”

This time Jim laughed. “Hmmm, I’m not flitting about now and you still can’t…” The rest of his sentence got lost in a surprised yelp as Khan simply let him fall – straight onto the mattress. Before he could react the super-human slid over him, braced himself on his forearms besides Jim’s head and gave him a dangerous, predatorily smile.

“You are adding more and more offenses to which I must exact my revenge!”

Kirk only smirked while he let his hands roam over Khan’s back and down to his surprisingly plush backside. “Good!” He lifted his head and caught the other man’s lips with his own. Groaning, Nien gave in. There was no reason to fight this anymore; he responded to his beloved’s kiss as if to devour his James. His… ‘Lover’. He rolled the word over in his mind. He thought it before, but never was it as true as in this moment – in this time.

His lust was running deep; his hardness was demanding and hot now. Tearing his mouth away from Jim’s, Nien kissed the water droplets from the young captain’s face and throat. Then he gently bit down and sucked his claim, the mark visible again; the officer moaned in delight. Khan continued his path, down over the chest, where he carefully licked the healing cuts and bruises. He sucked
blushing marks into unmarred skin until James writhed beneath him whispering his love’s name over and over again, while his fingers wove into the Augment’s pitch-black tresses.

Khan could feel Jim’s blood rushing to the surface beneath his lips as he sucked – marked; he listened to his beloved’s heartbeat throbbing fast and hard, and smiled as he heard sighs and moans and his own name. Kirk’s skin shimmered like gold in the lamp’s dim light, and as Nien reached his lover’s navel and swirled his tongue around it, the younger man gasped and wrapped his legs around him.

Without wasting a moment the super-human continued his course, following the trail of honey-colored hair; he felt James tense beneath him. Lifting his head, he threw a heated glance at his bedfellow whose glassy eyes met his. The wicked smirk that pulled at the Augment’s sinful lips made Jim tremble in anticipation and kneading Khan’s scalp, he whispered a single word.

“Please…”

The tone, the desperate need in those sky-colored eyes and the scent of arousal mingled with soap and the unique fragrance of his lover were all Nien needed to give as he rarely had before. Bending down, he flicked his tongue out to touch the tip of Jim’s most vulnerable part. Instantly the younger man bucked up and moaned loud enough to be heard outside the cottage if there were any to hear, Khan smiled – tender and proud. Again, he licked the head of the rock-hard shaft and savored the taste of his mate, salty, intense and utterly James. Then he took the glans into his mouth – sucking gently at it before engulfing as much of Kirk’s large member as he could. This was not the act of submission he once thought. This was simultaneous claiming and worshipping; making his lover his own, and he, his lover’s own.

Jim was in heaven. The moment his cock was enveloped by the hot cavern of the Augment’s mouth, he was utterly lost. He had gotten blowjobs before; his reputation was well-earned. But this was different. Enthusiastic, certainly, but there was tenderness in the way Nien began to work him off, as if he poured his feeling into the task. But dangerous too, just the knowledge of Khan’s strength and what he could do was heady. Jim knew that the super-human would never hurt him – not anymore – but his mind was well aware of the power Khan wielded – like the tigers of his home country.

Gasping for air, he lifted his head and looked down to meet the fierce gaze of his lover peering back at him through long ebony lashes; the damp strands of his hair shadowed his features. Jim watched rapt, as his manhood vanished between those soft, curved lips. It was the most erotic sight he had ever laid eyes on, and his breath hitched in his throat. He felt Khan’s hand move along his sides, over his hips and back over his chest. Nimble fingers brushed over his nipples and wandered back towards his waist. This was bliss in its purest form and Jim lowered his lids in sheer rapture; moans and mewls escaping his lips.
Khan smiled inwardly. There was power in this worship. It pleased him to draw out those groans from Jim’s mouth, to feel his strong body tensing and trembling with fervor and shining with sweat. He heard how Kirk’s breath became quicker and sharper. Khan gave one last suck and sat up – much to the captain’s dismay.

“No… Please!” The young officer’s voice was hoarse and raspy; devastatingly sexy since Khan knew he was the cause.

Gently letting his left hand wander over the taut, flat belly of the younger man, Khan leaned over to the nightstand, opened the drawer and pulled out the bottle of lubrication he had found the first day. “Relax, Jim”, he murmured. “I will not let you down. I will make it even better for you.”

Their gaze met again, and Kirk realized what the Augment held in his hand; a new wave of anticipation washed over him. A part of him knew that what followed would be unpleasant at first – it’s been so long. But he longed to feel Nien inside him again. Reaching out to Khan, he stroked over the super-humans arms to his shoulders and down his chest, relishing in the steel-like muscles and the warm, still damp velvet of his alabaster skin. He watched as Nien drizzled the slick onto his right hand and moaned as those talented fingers carefully massaged his balls and perineum before they reached their goal.

One long finger circled and teased over his hole before gently dipping inside. It was uncomfortable, but the movement was so slow that Jim easily relaxed into it. He felt Nien’s hot breath on his chest as the Augment bent down and pressed open-mouth kisses to his body; the rippled muscle of his abdomen teased over Jim’s cock.

Khan took his time preparing his lover, smiling as Jim squeezed his eyes shut and groaned in pleasure; his face flushed with passion. He added a second finger and scissored inside of Jim, stroking his walls, and then a third finger. He crooked them to search out the almond bud inside him that Kirk (quite happily) now knew as his prostate. Scorching heat shot through his whole being and gasping he wrapped arms and legs around the super-human, begging wordlessly for more.

And more he got. Khan removed his fingers and sat back on his heels to take in the lovely, debauched sight beneath him. Jim thrashed his head from side-to-side and whined at the loss. The Augment slicked up his member and held it at its base. He flicked the head over Jim’s hole, catching it on the rim and Jim bucked up, nearly impaling himself on that gorgeous prick. Khan smiled mischievously, bent down to brush his thumb over his lover’s face and guided himself into Kirk in one long, tortuously slow push. Jim cried out, a mix of pain and pleasure, and gasping he clung to Khan, who stilled and gave him time to adjust. Breathing in the scent of his beloved, Nien closed his eyes; he was finally here, right where he belonged – where he felt home sheathed in the young captain again. The tightness and heat brought a wave of relief for his soul and heart as flames licked their way through his veins and down his spine and into loins. They whirled together into a storm of demanding desire.
With one last sane spark of lucidity, he remembered Jim’s injuries and rolled them over; making Kirk gasp in surprise. Then he raised James’ upper body, steadied him with strong hands and bucked up into the wanting, willing body.

Jim needed a second to realize what happened; he was straddling his lover whose cock speared hot through him. And then Khan arched his back and Jim felt a mix of exquisite pain. He burned for want of more; instinct took over, and he began to move in concert with the man beneath him. The last cognizant part of his mind worked out why Nien changed their position and warmth spread through him; then passion erased all thoughts.

Throwing his head back, Jim let himself fall; the sensation of being joined with his dangerous, secret lover, being filled by him, riding him, rocked his whole being. Bending forwards he looked at the locus point of connection linking them and stole a breathless kiss from those perfect lips before a shout of ecstasy tore from his throat. The new angle made the hard intruder stroke over the little knot of nerves deep inside him.

Khan felt his breath leaving him as Kirk involuntarily clenched around his shaft. He looked up at the glorious, golden creature hovering above him. The view brought him pleasure beyond measure. His James looked wild and free with his tousled shock of blond hair, gleaming eyes – blue and bright like the midday sky over the Indian Sea – and the expression of pure delight on his boyish face. Those luscious, kiss-swollen lips opened to take air in short gasps and pants and the pink tip of his tongue darted forward to lick over his bottom lip. A ripple of possessive pleasure shot through the Augment. ‘My James!’ And as his James bent down and kissed him, Nien held him close, trapping the younger man’s cock between their bodies, holding it close to him – hot and wet with new pre-cum.

Their movements became frantic; both craved their release. Nothing else existed for them, only their closeness; bodies remembering what once was. Jim felt his tension grow into an unbearably sweet torture; he wanted to come – to let go – but somehow his body prolonged the relief.

He heard Nien whispering his name, felt his long arms around him tighten. So he clenched around the cock that branded him hotly from the inside – filling him like nothing else could. A loud groan escaped the super-human as Kirk repeated the carnal teasing. Khan’s eyes flew open and stared at him, awestruck and absolutely rapturous – bright as if they wanted to burn him.

“Pyāra…” It was more a breath then an uttered word; then the Augment bucked up again, and Jim took the hint and squeezed his lover’s cock once more. The usually pale features flushed hot and pink; sweat pearled on the super-human’s forehead as he whispered in his native tongue. His thrusts increased and found their purchase in Jim’s equal enthusiasm. Every push and pull stroked hard over Jim’s prostate.
The heat between them was too much, the paroxysm of their passion threatened eruption – until it did. Orgasm hit them with the force of the inferno that raged in them.

Khan was hurled over the edge as he felt Jim’s burning walls clenching his shaft mindlessly and he screamed his pleasure when Kirk’s lips found his own claim on Khan’s throat; biting into it – not hard enough to break the skin but retrieving the mark he left all those weeks ago. Pulling the sweating, warm body to him, Nien let himself fall into the burning abyss of bliss, taking his lover with him, who seemed to be unable to stop coming. His mouth hung open, and his moans resonated as he painted Khan in long, milky stripes from chest to belly.

A last, low sob escaped Jim, as he finally – finally! – was spent. Trembling and soaring in the dark warmth of aftermath, he wasn’t aware that he clung to the Augment mouthing at his throat or that Khan was still in him. All he felt was the strong chest heaving beneath him, long arms around him and the incredible salvation after weeks of longing.

With eyes still closed, Khan let himself drift through the star-full and secure darkness of release; his heart sighed with contentment, and his mind rested for the first time in what seemed to be an eternity. Jim’s body on his was like a blanket of safety; the captain’s warm breath was caresses on his sweat-damp skin. He smelled the sweet musk scent of his beloved and the milky proof of their passion.

Fingering for one the edge of the sheet he leaned just a bit so he could wipe the semen from between them, then flung it away still holding James in his arms. He didn’t want to let go; he didn’t wish to slip out of this willing, soft body that welcomed him. He heard Jim murmur something and pressed a kiss to his temple, breathing deeply.

Usually, he wasn’t tired, but nothing was usual with James Kirk. The younger man stirred protectiveness in him as well as lust, tenderness and a feeling of safety – of finally belonging to the world – to someone. Cupping Jim’s cheek with one hand, he relaxed; relishing in the captain’s weight on him and enjoyed the afterglow.

It wasn’t long before soft snoring drifted through the room, coming from the two lovers…

ST***ST***ST

“Do I understand you correctly, Mr. President? You want to send Mrs. Batari Whitman as the Federation’s ambassador to Qo’noS? Your own representative?” Richard Barnett looked surprised at the President of the United Federation of Planets. He was elected more than two years ago, and so had less than two years left in his term before making room for the next president.
The president was in his late fifties. Two small protrusions on his forehead proved that his heritage wasn’t entirely human. His mother was from the planet Halii, and he had inherited the empathetic-telepathic abilities of the race, albeit limited. He and his family left the planet for Earth when he was a small child. He spent his childhood in Italy and later his teen years in New York where his career began. He was lean and tall; his shoulders were broad, and his tanned skin contrasted with his silver-blond hair. His dark eyes were calm, clear and bright as his mind, and his voice sounded a clear and strong tenor.

The president stood beside his desk as the men took their seats on plush, antique mahogany chairs. They were nearly as comely as the desk in front of them – a beautiful carved piece from the early 19th century. The rest of the room was just as striking there was a grand piano and centuries old oil paintings on loan from the Louvre. The only technology in the room was of the highest standard. Large windows revealed the lively capital of France. Paris, the seat of the Federation government.

Barnett had been here many times before since being named Chief-in-Command of Starfleet. He was here just three days ago for a meeting in the lower levels together with the other high-ranking admirals, ambassadors, and council members. Now he was back in the president’s office because President Anthony Robertson wanted to talk to him in private. They’ve known each other for quite some time, and they worked hand in hand back then and now.

Robertson looked at the baffled Chief-in-Command and took a deep breath. “I know that I wouldn't typically send the vice-president on such a mission, but Batari has not only has my utmost trust, but she is a very firm and strong-minded woman. We want to make the Klingons listen, so we have to show our strength. The Klingon counselor wouldn’t accept anyone less than me or my direct representative, and since the president must remain in Federation space during wartime, Batari is the only choice left.” His expression changed just a bit. “And she will not go alone.”

“Of course not. I’ll send my best men with her and…”

The president shook his head. “No, Richard, I thought of you.” He lifted a hand as Barnett instantly readied his protest. “I know all that you want to say, my friend. That the Chief would be a welcome hostage during wartime and that your place is at headquarters, but we must demonstrate power and fearlessness in the face of the enemy. Klingons are always accepting of courage, and their pride forbids any hostile behavior towards high-ranking delegates, even from an enemy. If you, as the head of Starfleet, accompany Batari and our ambassadors, the High Council of the Klingons will welcome you.”

He turned towards the window and looked at the Eiffel Tower that shimmered in the late midday light. “We have to try everything in our power to end this war before the whole universe burns. If I understand Admiral Luengo correctly, the Klingons will complete their biological agent and…”
“Oh, yes. I received the report that our labs have discovered and formulated an antidote, sir. We are prepared.”

Robertson turned around to face him again. “And how much do you have? How long will it take to distribute to every member of the Federation? How many will die before then?” He cocked his head. “And how long until the Klingons modifies the agent again making the antidote useless? No, Richard. We decided during the meeting to seek talks with the Klingons. You voted for it, too. We didn’t want that war, and if we have a chance to end this senseless bloodshed, we must grab for it – despite the danger.’

Barnett nodded slowly. “I understand, sir. My doubt isn’t for my safety but that of Mrs. Whitman, the council members, and the ambassadors. Even if the Klingons accept our proposal of peace talks, we have to cross the war zone to travel to Qo’noS. And there is also still the danger that some Klingons don’t commit themselves to the neutrality of delegation. It would be a catastrophe if the Federation lost her vice-president and some of the most prominent politicians and ambassadors.”

“I know,” the president affirmed. “Still we have to take the risk as soon as the Klingons agree to meet with us.”

This time Richard suppressed a sigh. He knew that Robertson was right, but he felt very uncomfortable about the whole situation. “Who will join the delegation?”

“We’ll send one ambassador from every founding member of the Federation and three members of the council, Mrs. Whitman, you and Harry Morrow. Sarek of Vulcan has already agreed to accompany the delegation, so has Ambassador Gav of Tellar – unfortunately. The relationship of the two ambassadors is… complicated. But they are the best.”

For a moment, a chuckle escaped Barnett. “I’ve witnessed the two in action last year. Icy logic meets hothead. It was almost funny.” He turned serious again. “Well, Sarek’s presence makes me feel a bit better. He is brilliant and uses his empathetic gifts brilliantly in his diplomacy.”

Robertson smiled. “I have the same opinion.” He pursed his lips. “I will personally send a message to the Klingon counselor to arrange a meeting with our delegation, him and the Klingon High Council. Knowing them, they will take their time to come to a decision and are going to weigh every word I say. But ending this disaster is in their interest, too. This continuous back and forth costs lives and resources on both sides. I am sure that there are enough bright minds in the Klingon council to listen to the voice of reason. The SBI must gather as much information as possible about the internal politics of the Klingons and its members. Maybe there are some council members who share our point of view and we can use them. I want you to arrange travel for our delegation. At first, I thought
to have the *Enterprise* to bring you to Qo’noS, but since the Klingons captured Captain Kirk and he escaped, I think it would be a provocation to send it now.”

“I share your opinion, sir. Kirk was taken from right under their noses. The Klingons would view it as an insult that Kirk of all our captains would accompany the delegation.” Barnett nodded, but he couldn’t suppress a little smile at the memory of receiving news about the young man’s rescue two days ago.

His thoughts drifted to the day he received Bob Wesley’s message and the initial information report of Commander Spock; a wave of relief hit him. His transmission to the *Lexington* was intercepted, that much was certain. He was glad Starfleet’s own was safe and healing. He also had been shocked to learn, who saved the young man’s neck. How the hell was The Shadow able to invade enemy space unnoticed for hours!? He got no answer. Neither Wesley nor Spock had given him details, and his curiosity grew. Somehow he knew that this mysterious ‘Sunrise’ had a part in the rescue mission, even if the reports failed to mention him. This man – whoever he was – had to be a well-trained warrior, maybe private security for some off-world firm. There was no other explanation for all that happened in association with The Shadow. In any event, Barnett didn’t care about the man’s real identity. Not as long as this mysterious phantom supported the Federation and Starfleet – and hauled reckless officers out of the mess in which they (Kirk) managed to find themselves (himself). Still he was curious…

Robertson watched the admiral, and a smile played around his mouth, too; he knew Barnett’s thoughts instinctively. “At least we have some good news – Kirk’s rescue, I mean. I was shocked when I learned that the man who saved our planet had fallen into enemy hands. Jesus – and their plans for him. I only met him once – two years ago after the Nero incident – and he is quite a brilliant and brave young man. His death would have been a great loss for us – not only for Starfleet, but also for the people. War needs heroes and public have taken a liking to him.” He sighed. “You failed to mention, how he was saved. Did his crew pull a stunt of their own?”

Richard shook his head. “No. We can thank The Shadow that we didn’t lose the captain of our flagship.”

The president’s eyes widened. “The Shadow? The same militia that repulsed an Orion attack on one of our outposts and warned us about the planned Klingon assault against Tammeron?” Robertson asked baffled; Barnett chuckled.

“Yes, the very same group. I sent a message to the *Lexington* and ordered Commodore Wesley to organize and man a recovery mission for Kirk only to receive the report several hours later that Kirk had been rescued by The Shadow, before Wesley or the *Enterprise* could act.”

“Did you get some details?”
“No, not really. The message was short, but the omission was far more interesting.” He snorted, amused. “I am absolutely certain that Wesley and the *Enterprise* were already planning on executing a recovery mission. The Shadow was faster; that’s all.”

Robertson frowned. “Invading enemy space, tricking the Klingons, freeing Kirk and successfully escaping is something I would like to think our assets capable of, but a gang of civilians…?” He pursed his lips. “War spawns heroes from surprising places,” he murmured; then he straightened up and made an offering gesture towards the chairs in front of his desk. “Take a seat and tell me all you know about this militia. We assume they operate illegally, but we don’t specifically know why or how. Are they traffickers, smugglers…Either way we need strong allies. Maybe we can…contract them.”

ST***ST***ST

“It’s runnin’ without a hitch!” Montgomery Scott stood beside the control station of the deflector shields and looked fondly at the device fitted to the deflector shields. “No problems. It’s a very simple but very effective little machine; no bells and whistles to cause needless trouble, nothin’ complicated. The Scotsman grinned. “If all of Starfleet’s silly equipment were like thi’ little baby, life would be so much easier!”

Spock lifted a brow and wordlessly analyzed the illogical phrases. He nodded, finally recognizing what the engineer meant. “So you think it would be quite safe to connect the sensor-disturbing device to our shields?”

Scott nodded. “Yes, sir! I ran several tests, and I’m sure that it will cause no trouble. Rather the opposite. It renders us invisible to enemy sensors, and there is no hint that this will change.” His eyes roamed over the small device. “This thing could save a lot of lives if Starfleet fitted it on all our ships.” He looked back at the first officer. “Have ya told Starfleet about this little trinket?”

“Trinket?” The Vulcan looked lost, and Montgomery smirked.

“It’s a valuable trinket,” he explained before he rubbed his neck. “Did ya report the device?”

“Not yet,” Spock replied. “I wanted to be sure that fitting the device wouldn’t be the source of any problems.”
This time Scotty looked very seriously at the first officer. “Sir, if ya’ve Sunrise in the line again, please advise him to file a patent application.” When he saw Spock raise an eyebrow in question he continued, “This device has been developed by Sunrise; therefore, he’s the owner of the idea and design. I know what it’s like to pour yer heart into a creation only to have it stolen from you by some higher rankin’ brass. Look what they did with my transwarp beamin’ device. They said ‘Very good, Commander Scott’, took the prototype and the construction plans, and I was left out in the cold. I got no lousy credit for it, no official appreciation. Nothin’! I only discovered Starfleet screwed me over after Daystrom – half melted and broken into pieces.” He huffed. “I don’t know much about this Sunrise, but if Starfleet wants to have his ‘baby’, she should pay for it like the rest of the free world!”

Spock watched the engineer with interest. Of course, he shared the same point of view that everything has its price, and intellectual property should be compensated fairly, but the passion with which the Scotsman spoke, surprised the Vulcan. He knew that Command had instantly taken the transwarp beaming device for testing, but he didn’t know that Scotty had received nothing in return for it. Actions like that were punishable by law, but Mr. Scott was a member of Starfleet and not a civilian scientist. Therefore, anything he developed was the property of the fleet.

The first officer sighed inwardly. Morality and law didn’t go hand in hand very often.

“If it comforts you, Mr. Scott, I will give Sunrise your advice. And I will certainly point out in my report that the sensor-disturbing device belongs to a civilian – um – engineer and is, therefore, his intellectual property. If Starfleet is interested in this device, it must purchase the design.” His gaze wandered to the small machine once again. “Maybe you should make some test reports. It will be interesting for Sunrise and Command, and then Sunrise can determine what he might want for the design.”

He turned to leave, but Scott held him back one, “Do ya know now, who this Sunrise is?”

The Vulcan maintained his calm mask, but Montgomery could see the gleam of frustration in his eyes as he replied, “We still lack the data required to identify him. Uhura has tried everything to remove the effect of the voice changer Sunrise uses without result. He must have used the changer and then fed it through a continuous loop, essentially hiding the original voice behind an infinite amount of data. There are no known identities that use ‘Sunrise’ or Drythen as an alias.” He hesitated a moment before adding, “As far as we know he has – differences with the authorities, so he avoids any direct contact with the Federation and Starfleet.”

“Then perhaps his little invention and good deeds can work fer him,” Scotty smirked pointing at the device. “If he ever has to face Federation authorities, he has these in the bank to getta good lawyer. He deserves it after he saved Tammeron and Jim!”

“How are these ‘in the bank’?” Spock shook his head slightly and lifted a hand to stop the Scotsman,
who opened his mouth to explain the idiom. “Never mind, Mr. Scott, I think I know what you meant.”

Montgomery chuckled. He understood that it had to be difficult for the Vulcan to acknowledge the slang of his colleagues and friends. Then he pursed his lips. “What was the other name of this Sunrise guy?”

“Drythen,” Spock repeated and Scotty cocked his head thoughtfully. “Ever heard this name before, Mr. Scott?” the first officer probed, and Montgomery sighed.

“No, not really, sir. But I’m almost certain that I’ve heard this word before, I just don’t remember when and where.”

The Vulcan nodded. “If you can recall the information, please notify me. Maybe…”

He was interrupted by the ship’s intercom. “Bridge to Mr. Spock,” Uhura’s gentle voice called; the first officer walked over to the terminal.

“Spock here. Yes, Lieutenant.”

“Sir, our sensors picked up a spacecraft coming from the former Neutral Zone.”

“Identity?” the Vulcan wanted to know and the Bantu woman answered calmly, “Not confirmed, sir. It seems to be a civilian vessel. It must be unregistered because I can’t tell where it is from, but it has set course for the Aldebaran system.”

Spock caught Scott’s wary glance and replied, “I’m on my way, Lieutenant.” With those words, he left the Engineering; Montgomery’s gazed followed him. He caught a movement from the corner of his eye, and he looked down to find Keenser, who emerged out of nowhere.

“Why do I’ve the feeling that means trouble?” he asked the small alien, and as Keenser only looked quietly up to him, he sighed. “This Scottish nose, knows when somethin’ is in the wind, and I can smell a storm comin’. Mark me words!”
Chapter End Notes

Well, is anybody melted or in need for a cold shower? Regarding the weather in Germany it would be enough to step out of the house for a minute because it is really ugly cold outside (shudder).

I do hope you loved this chapter and I can promise that our two ‘boys’ are facing a very erotically time within their next days, while in the ‘outer world’ new and old shadows are closing up.

In the next update there will be candies and jokes, but you – my dear readers – will meet also an old enemy Jim knows from his first-year-mission. And he will be there, on Aldebaran. And while this man is preparing a move against the Federation, Jim’s friends are still pondering of ‘Sunrise’s’ identity, until one of them comes across a certain hint.

Please, please leave me some comments and sorry again that I didn’t answer your last ones, but already needed half an hour to write the little prologue and epilogue of this chapter, so please understand my lack of reply.

Love from Germany

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Almost at time one week later you get now the next update. As promised there will be more sensual, sweet, sexy and funny scenes with our two ‘boys’, Spock gets more and more suspicious because of the whole situations around him and you’re going to meet an old ‘acquaintance’.

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos; I am still so happy that you’re loving this story so much.

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 20 – Sleep, lover; til Sunrise wakes us

Wakefulness occurs languidly, gently as multiple neurotransmitters dance through the midbrain, the hypothalamus, the thalamus, and the basal forebrain. Eugenic scientists saw this slow dance as an inefficiency to overcome in their progeny. An Augment, of course, takes the same path to awakening as any human, but they are better, more efficient. The dance through systems occurs in the blink of an eye. Usually. There are exceptions. When James Kirk is a variable, he creates exceptions. In other words, Kirk is the exception to the rule.

Khan floated from indulgent somnolence to the land of the living in pleasant languor. He felt the blanket of his lover, his variable. And with a contented sigh, he tightened his hold around the firm, warm body of Jim Kirk, who still lay sprawled over him. The super-human smiled as he followed memory’s thread back to the night’s intimacies that swelled with the heat of desperation and long suppressed desire. Now, as those flames finally mollified, he was – for once – simply at peace. And he wrapped that peace and around him as tightly as he held his mate.

‘My mate…’

He could deny it no more than he could deny the ever expanding universe. James Kirk was his mate
in blood, heart, and soul, and he would do anything to keep him safe and – hopefully – by his side. Khan knew the latter was an illusion. His past – both of his pasts – would force their separation sooner or later, but he found himself uncharacteristically clinging to a foolish spark of hope that maybe there were indeed miracles in the world, and one might befriend him – them.

Jim stirred, and Khan realized that he and James were adhered just a bit here and slippery just a bit there. He heaved a sigh, gently rolled Jim onto his side and disentangled himself from Jim’s sleep-heavy limbs to make his way to the bathroom. Not wanting his lover to wake to an empty bed, he quickly wet a cloth with warm water, cleaned himself and returned to the bed with another warmed cloth. He deftly and ever so gently cleaned his beloved from chest to belly then down through blond curls, so carefully over the cock. Sleeping Kirk seemingly enjoying these ministrations; he opened his legs, and Khan took that as an opportunity to swipe gently between cheeks and over a none-too-abused entrance.

That woke his dear captain who let out a hiss, “Wha’s ‘sis?”

Nien cocked one brow, amused. He recognized his beloved’s query despite his foggy mind and heavy tongue.

“Everything is all right, James,” he whispered as he propped himself on one elbow near Kirk’s head. He stroked gently through the shock of tousled blond hair, dropped the cloth to the floor and pulled the (relatively) cleanest part of the blanket to cover them both. “Go back to sleep. There are several hours until sunrise.”

Jim mumbled again and replied with a crooked grin, “Sunrise woke me up.” Then he frowned and groaned.

“What is it?” the Augment asked.

“Mmmm, my ass burns …” Kirk lifted his head, and the look in his eyes conveyed that he was fully awake now. “Did we…?” he began, before a broad grin spread over his sleep-softened features. “Yeah, we did!” He answered his own question and glanced positively gleeful at the amused Augment. Jim stretched and hooked a leg behind Khan’s knee to pull him closer; then he kissed his lover with deep affection – the gesture gratifyingly returned.

Holding his James as close as he dared without hurting him, Khan allowed himself time, a rare gift, to savor the sight of his mate – Alas how this word made his heart flutter! He touched and stroked, carefully caressed and fondled the younger man’s body, mentally cataloging and checking injuries – pleased that none had been aggravated. And only then settled in to enjoy the lazy semi-battle of
tongue and mouth, and teeth on jaw and throat.

Long minutes passed ensconced in peace and quiet; defenses down – each safe in one another’s presence. Hands roamed and stoked but no more than that. Even as passion simmered under the surface, just now they were content with exchanging tender caresses and sweet, long kisses, until the pre-dawn hour and weariness overwhelmed Jim once more. Khan was not aware of his own smile; he watched the boyish officer fall asleep – snuggled against him with one arm securely slung around Nien’s waist.

Jim’s breaths became calmer and deeper, warm against Khan’s neck as the young man tucked himself under the Augment’s chin. Nien closed his eyes and breathed Kirk’s scent in deeply, burying his nose in blond hair; dotting kisses. It was balm and helped to chase away niggling thoughts; their inevitable separation. Instead, he focused on his partner’s body language. Bared and open; defenseless and vulnerable in sleep, Kirk unknowingly (or did he) demonstrated trust and closeness. He showed the super-human, this ruler of nations long past, where he belonged – in this place and time – with his captain. And that likewise – his captain belonged to him. Come what may (and it would come), they were together, now.

Pressing another gentle kiss to his lover’s forehead, the former dictator relaxed and closed his eyes; wishing with all his heart that it could be like this forever – well, like this, and with his family safe.

But the phantoms of the past and war crept closer to the slumbering lovers …

ST***ST***ST

Spock stepped into the quarters he shared with Uhura. The alpha shift had ended four hours ago, still the Vulcan remained on the bridge to solve the riddle of the unidentified spacecraft – without success.

As the Enterprise reached the Aldebaran system, the unknown vessel had already taken a place at the space dock and a transmission between the starship and the space harbormaster’s office had only revealed the busy traffic of trading vessels. Every spacecraft berthed here was authorized to do so.

Nevertheless, the first officer was suspicious of the incident. The ship had come from the direction of the former Neutral Zone. Perhaps it harbored enemy spies.

The space harbormaster had not been pleased as Spock insisted on checking the licenses of all the
vessels that had arrived at Aldebaran III in the last ten hours. Only when he contacted the small outpost of Starfleet located near the spaceport was the responsible commander able to exercise his authority; Spock received the required information.

Attentively, Spock viewed the licenses, the freight documents, and the crew data, but he didn’t find anything unusual. Still, he simply knew that there was more to the incident than he could see. Jim would call it a ‘gut-feeling’; the first officer was confused that this human trait suddenly made its appearance. There was no logical reason to think that something was wrong with the information he received, but the whispering voice in the back of mind wouldn’t let up.

And as he finally ordered the Enterprise out of orbit to continue the patrol, his inner unrest increased. Aldebaran III became smaller and smaller. With one last look at the screen, the Vulcan left the bridge, relieved by the Scott who was the third in command and changed his shift to take the con. Little did he know that his captain and friend was a mere one hundred miles beneath the Enterprise on the planet’s surface – deep asleep and secure in the arms of a man regarded by all of Starfleet and the Federation as an enemy.

Uhura looked up from the sofa where she sat comfortably and laid the PADD aside. Her glance found that of her lover; it was enough to tell her all she needed to know.


“How do you know?” he asked while slipping out of his uniform shirt to change into the far more comfortable Vulcan robes.

“There is this certain expression in your eyes; you’re not satisfied with something. Beta shift warped us just a few minutes ago, so we are leaving the Aldebaran system. Logical conclusion: You found nothing unusual about the ship. Still you… you think there’s something wrong with it, don’t you?”

Spock observed her; his mouth twitched minutely, the Vulcan equivalent of a smile, then he nodded. “Your observation is correct, my dear. I checked the documents regarding the berthed vessels, their crews, and their cargos and found nothing that points to illegal activity, yet… I feel as though I overlooked something.”

Nyota smiled. “Kirk would call it a ‘gut-feeling’.”

“Exactly,” Spock nodded and closed the warm robe before he sat down on one of the two the
armchairs adorning the seating area. Bracing his elbows on his thighs, he folded his hands together and pressed the tips of the index fingers against each other – a typical gesture when in deep thought.

“There is a possibility that the spacecraft held more in its cargo than goods. It came from the direction of the Klingon Empire. Commodore Wesley sent us out here to check the rumors regarding Klingon activities. The chance that there is a connection lies...” He caught Uhura’s intense gaze and paused to calculate the odds. He knew that she didn’t exactly appreciate his precision in private, so he continued. “The probability of Klingon involvement is high, but I see no way to investigate since we have no cause to board. The documents are correct; the crews are ‘clean’, as you put it. The identified cargo was official trading goods.” He frowned slightly.

“Maybe everything is okay,” Nyota suggested and rose to make some tea.

“Maybe – maybe not,” her lover murmured before he leaned back in the armchair. The air wasn’t as warm as he was used to, but it was comfortable enough for him. “It is alarming regardless.”

“I know what you mean,” the young Bantu woman sighed. “An outsider could be a traitor or an enemy, or both. War makes us lose trust, and that leads to misunderstandings and aggression. Assessing a situation without bias is difficult.” She carried a tray with two cups full of steaming tea to the small living room. The long dark green kaftan she wore played elegantly around her legs. As she placed the dishes on the table, she observed the Vulcan. Strangers would call his expression stoic, but she had learned to read him. “You’re asking yourself, what Jim would do if he were here.”

The son of Sarek son looked up at her – not for the first time surprised by her empathy without having specific empathic faculties. “As illogical as it is, pondering another’s strategy when that person acts based on feeling and instinct…”

“As well as reason, discernment….” Uhura added gently. “He’s been more…level-headed, I guess since the…” She pursed her lips. She hated to even think about it. “Since the warp core.”

Again Spock lifted a brow; he added honey to his tea. “You are right, Nyota. Indeed, Jim has been more judicious in his decision-making, still he is quite impulsive when it comes to…others’ lives.” He sighed without realizing it. “Otherwise he would be here instead of a place we do not know and where we cannot reach him directly.”

Taking her seat near him again, Uhura bent forwards and laid one slender hand on his shoulder. “I don’t think that will ever change about him. And it’s saved every single one of us. I yell at him, but he wouldn’t be…Jim if he was any other way.” She sighed, “You’re still worried about him,” she stated and met his undefinable gaze.
“Worry is an emotion that...” He shut his mouth as Nyota merely looked at him with knowing eyes; he finally admitted softly, “You are right as you often are. I am still concerned for him. Yes, he has been rescued; The Shadow brought him to a place where he can recover, and this Sunrise is with him. It is this close connection to the captain that he has. It makes me – uncertain, wary. Jim has told me much about his family – or lack thereof. About his brother and sister-in-law, his friends from earlier days and from the Academy; those not so friendly, like Sean Finnegan, an upper classmate who took a great joy in playing pranks on the younger students as well as ‘bullying’ them. He entrusted me with much that he has otherwise kept private, but he never mentioned a ‘Sunrise’.”

“Of course, ‘Sunrise’ is a cover, not a real name.” Uhura sipped her tea. “But, let me guess, he never talked about a guy named ‘Drythen’ either, did he?”

The Vulcan nodded. “Exactly. Sunrise has extraordinary abilities, is well-trained – certainly in military tactics. He has a very unique combination of skill sets. Otherwise, he would not have been able to accomplish all that he has so far. Jim would have mentioned him at some point; I am sure of it.”

“Maybe he wasn’t allowed to? If this man was an asset, intelligence or spec ops, perhaps Jim had to keep his identity a secret – still does.”

“No.” Spock shook his head. “Since his contact with Sunrise via The Shadow, when he warned us of the planned attack of Tammeron, Kirk spoke freely about him, only hiding his real name. It is as if he had met this Sunrise only a short time ago. So why was this man so full of rage when he learned of Jim’s capture? Why did he risk his life to rescue the captain? Even though I have little experience with emotion, I do understand that strong feelings are involved – the feelings of someone who holds another one dear.”

Nyota blushed just a bit, knowingly, and put her glass back on the table. “Dear – as in a strong friendship?”

“Yes, perhaps. But a friendship like this does not emerge in only weeks or even months.” Spock folded his hands again. “We missed something here – I missed something. And I have no idea what it could be.”

A gentle smile played around Uhura’s lips. “Maybe you should give it a rest until Kirk is back. Then you can bombard him with questions until he snaps.” She winked at him and for her sake the Vulcan nodded. Still his worry remained; worry for his T’hy’la, who had an unfortunate tendency to fall into deep and troubled waters.
Said man faced no such trouble at this moment. Slowly rousing himself from sleep, Jim felt as warm and cozy as any man anywhere ever had. Perhaps it was the air or the blanket, or maybe it was the two long arms wrapped around him. Birds chirped, and natural, golden light shimmered through his still closed eyes. He lay sprawled across a slender, muscular body; his head pillowed on a powerful chest, rising and falling; his bristly cheek rested against the Augment’s silky skin. Nien’s familiar scent wafted around him, and the steady heartbeat of the super-human found its echo in Jim’s own pulse. He felt... home. There was no other word to describe the contentment, peace and security that covered him like a mantle.

For a long time, he simply lay there, not caring for the outside world. The stars of space forgotten for now. He felt lazy and a bit achy in certain parts of his anatomy, but in a good way; the memories of last night made Kirk smile. He relished in his serenity – in every sense and sensation around him. And with every breath that Khan drew, Jim felt practically dandled – safe, secure, and loved...

It was all so surreal, even more so hovering between sleep and wakefulness, to be snuggled up to a man who once – well twice – had tried to kill him. And then to have him transformed into a passionate, tender lover who fought for him like a tigress for her cubs. Khan cared for him as if he were the most precious thing in the world. Never had Kirk felt more precious than now.

And that wasn’t all – if only it were it would be enough. There was a tugging at his heart and his soul, urging him to hold the other man tight – to shield him from harm. Though Khan was stronger than any other human, he could be injured; the past had shown that much, and Jim would do anything to safeguard Nien’s heart and his body from any further harm. The man had endured so much for so long.

It was in the captain’s nature to protect his loved ones and those who depended on him – no less than it was in Nien’s.

Funny, his thoughts were only of Nien now. He loved his ship, his crew, and his friends dearly, but Khan...
heart beat faster and filled him with joy. What did it mean? It was like his affection for his friends but compounded a hundred times over. It touched a part of his soul he had shielded for so long. Fuck! Why now and why him? This… Khan could be taken away so easily.

An inner voice whispered the answer. It said, ‘Jim Kirk never did easy’. He might get scared, but he was no coward. This ‘thing’ between Khan and him would change so much; yet he was way past denial though; it would get him nowhere. No, it was better to face a situation than to run away from it. He learned that lesson long ago.

So, what was the situation, exactly?

‘Fucked up. That’s what it is,’ his inner voice told him kindly, and he almost groaned when he realized the plain truth. He was trapped this time. He wanted Nien in his life – for good. The sentiment was entirely new to him. He never had a committed relationship before. Well, not counting his crew, his friends, Spock, Bones…He couldn’t keep a relationship, even with his own family. A weekend with the same girl; that’s as close as he ever got. So what was Khan then? Kirk might be relationship phobic (until now). But he knew what he wanted. He just couldn’t believe who he wanted it with – a criminal, a fugitive, and a man responsible for the death of his beloved mentor. But that man was a hero now too. No, Kirk never did easy…

‘A weekend with the same girl’ Jim had been straightish – or so he thought. Jim was surprised; Khan surprised him. Sure, he could appreciate a beautiful – well, anything. The universe was vast. But he never thought desire could turn into something like this. He wasn’t only attracted to Nien; he burnt for his former foe. But there was more to it, he wanted to be close to the Augment, wanted to know him better, to see and explore more of the gentler side of Khan Noonien Singh.

Nien was a fierce, dangerous man, but there were feelings in him, strong ones. Not just hate, pain, and fear. But passion, gentleness, compassion. And they were directed at Jim. In his mind, the young captain went through all that happened within the last couple of days. He remembered how the Augment cradled him in his arms in the prison on Turkana, giving him the first ray of hope for rescue. Then there was the moment they held each other for what they both thought was the last time. Khan’s apology that he hadn’t been able to save him still echoed in the officer’s soul; the super-human had been ready to throw his own life and the safety of his family away to retrieve him. Khan put his Jim’s life above his own and that of his crew.

The thought floored him. Nothing was more important to Khan than his crew; Jim was sure of it… At least, he thought he was sure of it. Now he wasn’t sure of anything. His feelings or Nien’s. Every time he thought he understood something, it slipped through his fingers. Like trying to grasp water in his hand.

He let his thoughts tug him back again to the moments aboard Diego’s ship as the former dictator
washed him, tended his injuries and comforted him after the troublesome nightmares. The gentleness – the tenderness in those blue-green eyes seemed to flow like balm through Jim.

He remembered his breakdown – so uncalled for and humiliating, still Nien had given him the feeling that there was nothing to be ashamed of. He even revealed some of his own torments, just to ease Jim’s pain and shame. Nien had shown him an empathy that Kirk hadn’t thought possible. He comforted him, held him, and whispered sweet things to him to soothe the anguish that had broken through.

Jim smiled at the memory of the warm baritone’s murmured words. He hadn’t listened too closely at the time, but somehow they came back to him, ‘Oh James, I’d open you up and write my name inside of you. If only that you’d have me with you when you hurt…’

Those were the words the Augment had whispered as he cried. Khan wanted to keep him safe, to shield him from pain and danger, just like Kirk did. And this told more than anything else.

The young captain swallowed, as his pulse quickened again – not in passion but in another wave of affection. His sharp mind knew exactly what was happening to him: He was about to lose his heart!

He had always kept it protected by a thick wall made of flippancy, false bravado and denial. He never wanted to be hurt again as he had when his brother left and later his mother chose her career over him. Yet he longed to have someone with whom he could share his life with. Nien was certainly the most troublesome choice, but ‘trouble’ was Jim’s middle name, and he would be dammed if he was going to ignore his feelings now, just because the rest of the world expected it from him.

No! He and Khan were too much alike; they shared so many experiences, walked too similar a path and they had grown far too close to each other to let rationality win. Prudence melted into nothingness when love was born and grew and…

And Jim gulped as he realized what he had thought: ‘Love!’

Oh God, that’s what this was, wasn’t it. This tenderness, this fervor, this warmth, this security – all of it. The butterflies (was he a twelve year old girl?) in his stomach, their desire for each other and the trails of the shared blood. All of it was… What – love? Was it possible that he – James Tiberius Kirk – had finally fallen?
The answer was ‘Yes’.

Love’s web had caught them both and Jim didn’t want to leave its shining meshes again; he was certain that Nien felt likewise. Jesus, the man had even thought about Jim’s comfort in the throes of their passion as he turned and pulled Kirk atop himself to prevent any damage to the healing wounds. Nien’s feelings for him ran deep and the young captain had to admit that the Augment had found a hole in the wall around his heart and had slipped into it. It was the first no-win situation that he did not want to win. And it felt wonderful!

Jim Kirk opened his eyes to his emotions and to the world.

Sunlight slipped through partially closed curtains and bathed the sleeping room in daybreak’s first light. Dust danced in its rays and the chirping birds seemed sweeter all of sudden. The world was changing for the young captain – slowly but inevitably. He felt whole, happy in a way he never had before. Lifting his head, he looked at the sleeping man beside him and dared to hope that there was indeed someone for him in this universe, a soul mate. The future was uncertain – Khan’s past notwithstanding – but Jim would fight for them both no matter what.

Kirk’s sky-blue eyes roamed over the handsome face of the former dictator. His ebony hair fell tousled over his high forehead. The long black lashes lay like fans over high cheekbones and his sinful mouth curved into the slightest hue of a smile. His features – usually so controlled – were relaxed. He looked much younger, innocent even, and vulnerable. New protectiveness squeezed Jim and acting on impulse he craned his neck, and ever so gently kissed those well-shaped lips.

Something changed. For just a moment, there seemed to be an interruption in the steady breath of the Augment; then he stirred. For the length of a second Khan tensed – obviously feeling that he wasn’t alone, and his instincts tested the situation for danger. Then Jim felt his lover smile into the kiss, and one elegant hand came up and cupped his head.

Khan slept deeply when a warm, strange sensation spread through his subconscious. Immediately, his senses recognized a second presence nearby, and his adrenal response switched on. But then he smelled the unique, sweet masculine scent that meant something… Meant family to him. Then soft fondling lips touched his – and every caution was thrown to the wind.

‘Jim…’ he thought; then the last remaining vestiges of sleep mingled with gladness. His fingers found the golden, short strands of the younger man on their own and he returned the kiss slowly – a kiss that ended far too soon.

“Good morning.” He heard the gentle tenor and opened his eyes. The handsome face of his beloved
hovered directly above him; sky-colored eyes looked tenderly down at him. He could get used to that sight at the beginning of every day.

“Good morning,” he murmured back. It’s been a long time since he’d been woken by someone so close to him. The last time one of his family had roused him from sleep, Kabir was shaking him; the palace was under attack. This time couldn’t be more different, nor could this young man laying half on him, smiling down. Yes, this was definitely the best way to wake. “Did you sleep well?” he asked quietly, worried last night’s exploits may have done Jim’s healing injuries harm.

But his worry was uncalled for; Kirk nodded. “You mean after we finally fell asleep?” he teased and grinned. “Yeah, I did. You?”

Khan took a deep breath. Truth was he hadn’t slept well for what seemed an eternity. “Very well. Thank you, James.” He observed the bruises on the younger man’s face and lifted a brow. “How you are this morning? No – pain?”

“Ass is a bit sore, but it’s been a while.” Jim smirked and shrugged one shoulder. “It stings here and there, and my back hurts a bit, but I told it to shut up and maybe it’ll obey; who knows,” he answered humorously and winked at the Augment.

Promptly, Nien rolled his eyes and chuckled. “Your nose didn’t bother to. What gives you the idea that your back would listen to you?”

“Well, a man can hope,” Kirk grinned, and then turned serious again. “You were – thoughtful last night. I don’t know that I would’ve had the presence of mind to switch positions. I appreciate it.” He brushed his lips over the other man’s shoulder. “Otherwise I’d have more problems than my protesting back.”

A real smile brightened the Augment’s face, with the affirmation that his caretaking was a welcomed endeavor. “My pleasure, Jim,” he replied softly. Then his gaze found the mark on the left side of Kirk’s neck. Pride and possessiveness stirred in the super-human; his fingertips ghosted over the mark clearly visible to the whole world again.

A pleasant shiver ran through Jim’s body as his lover touched him. It ached, but in a good way due to the pleasant memories associated. Eyeing the twin mark at Khan’s throat, Jim ran his fingers over it carefully. Nien shuddered and his ocean eyes darkened with untold emotions. Curiosity sparked in the young captain.
“This isn’t a normal hickey, is it?” he asked quietly and met the calm gaze of the former dictator. “I felt it… In San Francisco and on the Enterprise even after it had healed and…”


“Yes. It kind of – itched, I guess. Mostly after I thought of you; definitely after we talked.” He cocked his head. “It had completely vanished, but…”

“It never vanished, James, it only became invisible. The broken vessels beneath the skin heal but… Well, it’s as though you remove the source of heat from a surface, but the heat signature remains. That is what this mark is like, and it will continue to be so,” Nien murmured stroking the mark on Jim’s neck again; his eyes shone like stars. When he caught the confused expression of his beloved, he explained, “I didn’t realize that I marked you during our first night together; it was consciously not my intention. I saw the bruise, your ‘hickey’, and I took it for the same.” He took a deep breath. “My nature overpowered my more – rational mind.”

Jim braced himself on one elbow and stared at his lover. “Marked?” he repeated. “You ‘marked’ me? How?”

“I am not sure; I certainly didn’t know it at the time,” Khan answered after a long moment of silence. His hand fell from Kirk’s neck and trailed down to lazily caress the other man’s hip while he thought. “Marking is not a concept unknown to humans, at least ancient humans, but I suppose today it’s unheard of, isn’t it? Still…” He moistened his lips. “Katie and Otto, two members of my family, fell in love and married half a year before we fled Earth. Otto told me several days after the ceremony that he and Katie had already bonded before the marriage; that they’d ‘marked’ each other during their lovemaking. The mark makes itself known under certain circumstances – like when you thought of me. You might feel it depending on our proximity too.”

His eyes and his thoughts went far away with thoughts of his family. “Katie and Otto and I talked about it with Paolo once. He is the eldest of us all. We think that our engineered DNA affected not only our bodies and our minds, but also our nature as it applies to the purpose for our creation. For instance, the need to protect each other as well as our home, our countries and our territory is – was crucial to our survival, even if as a species, we were created sterile. We considered that our ability to mark was an extension of our engineering to protect and care for one another as well as an extension of our ability to conquer, protect, and defend our territories.”

Jim listened very carefully and concentrated mainly on the facts as Khan knew them. They could talk about this ‘bonding-thing’ later. “They made you sterile! That’s… That’s barbaric!”
“Ahh, they made us that way, but if there is one thing the history of evolution has taught us it’s that life will not be contained. As we understand it, our bodies repaired us of sterility. It took a decade and a half, but there you have it.”

Kirk blew out a huff of air, “That’s fantastic.” For the moment, Kirk was more interested in the marking. “So… you think that your instinct to mark is a side-effect of your engineering?”

“That’s not just our instinct, but also our more base nature,” Khan nodded. “In earlier times, when the human race was still young, marking was a common way to show others who belonged to whom.” He frowned slightly. “Mostly it was done by branding or tattoos, depending on the culture, but there are other means.”

“Until someone came up with the idea of wedding rings; that’s a kind of modern mark,” Kirk thought aloud; he fingered his mark again. “But this…” He pursed his lips. “In theory an Augment should only be able to mark another Augment; I wasn’t engineered. Even with your blood… The blood and plasma cells have been replaced by now. So for me to have a mark – like an Augment…” He thought for a moment and chose his next words carefully. “My DNA must’ve changed, taken on some Augment properties after the blood transfusion and then have been continually reproduced in my cells.” Kirk stopped to breathe and reflect on his own words. What it might mean for him, for them, before continuing. “The marking, your nature… This is the genesis for the link between you and your family, isn’t it?”

Khan’s eyes widened. “How do you know…? What gave you the idea that there is a link between us?” he asked baffled; Jim sighed.

“Well, everything about you is – more. If you have more brain activity than a non-augmented human then your empathic or telepathic abilities will surpass a human’s capacity for the same; if they have any to begin with. Like twins, I guess.” He smiled gently down at the quite frankly, astonished super-human. “Besides, there is so much anguish and longing in you to be with them, to protect them. It must be like someone has a piece of your soul. That’s where the bond would be, I suppose. If it were anywhere.”

Nien marveled at Jim’s insight and intelligence. He understood his family and the bond they shared like no one ever had before – even better than the scientists who engineered them.

Jim saw the awe in Khan’s eyes and was embarrassed; he lowered his gaze. “I understand that bond because I share a kind of link with Spock, too.”

Nien suddenly felt as though Jim dumped a bucket of ice-water over him. His James was bonded to
Kirk saw shock on lover’s face; and hurt and anger. He realized what must be going through Khan’s mind and quickly took steps to diffuse the situation and appease his lover. Tenderly, he cupped an alabaster cheek with his free hand. “Nien, it’s not what you think. What Spock and I share is nothing like what we have.”

He could see wheels turn behind Khan’s eyes and felt the tension under his fingers. “Explain!”

Jim sighed. “When I was in…” he swiped his hand through the air at nothing. “…the hospital after the warp core last year. Even with your blood, I stopped recovering and started deteriorating, fast. Anyway, Spock came to visit. He told me my room was empty when I went into shock. So he performed a mind-meld on me; he shared his strength with me until Bones could get to me. Spock retreated then, but a shadow of connection remained. We only realized it later during a short mission. I got into trouble, and Spock felt it; he arrived with the cavalry just in time. We think that his half-human side fostered the mental link with another human – me in this case. We have a pretty multi-faceted friendship to begin with, for lack of better words.” He laughed to himself at this. “The Vulcans have a word: T’hy’la – it means… Huh… English is so inadequate here. It means friend, brother-in-soul, something like that. It’s the highest form of friendship and love.”

“Maybe,” Khan retorted; his eyes flashed. “So there is a friendship link between you and your first officer. Only friendship?”

A soft laughter escaped Kirk. “Oh Jesus, you’re jealous!” His heartbeat quickened while he returned the fierce gaze with his own, full of warmth and affection.

“I am not jealous!” Khan growled. “But I don’t like the idea that the Vulcan is mentally bonded to you. I do not share – least of all you!”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Nien, Spock and I are friends, no less and no more. Vulcans are touch telepaths and a mental connection to those they are close to… It’s common for them.” He bent down and kissed the pouting Augment. “There is no reason for the green monster,” the young captain whispered as he let his lover’s lips free. “Spock is happy with Uhura. Well, as happy as a Vulcan can be – and I’m happy with y…” He stopped and blushed as he realized what he had nearly said.

The tension began to leave the super-human. “You are happy with me?” he asked. And the mixture of awe and hope that lay deep in those blue-green pools woke the protectiveness in Jim again.
“Yes, I am,” he answered gently. “I know if you total it all up, we’ve only known each other for a
week, maybe. But it doesn’t feel that way.” He took a deep breath. “I’ve never had a real
relationship. I’ve been happy with my independence, and then came you and…” He gulped.
“Somehow you managed to wriggle right into me.” At this Nien raised an eyebrow. “Into my heart,
you idiot.” He groaned and let himself falling on the other man’s chest. “God, I’m lost!”

Feeling a smile tugging at his mouth, Nien wrapped his arms tightly around the younger man; the
pain he felt when he thought his James was bonded to another one faded into nothingness. “You are
not lost,” he whispered. “Not as long as I have you.”

“Then never let go,” Jim mumbled, his lips moving against the warm, soft marble-colored skin. He
could taste the salt of their mingled sweat, the musk of their night together and the unique spice that
was pure Nien.

Curling himself around the younger man, Khan held him close and buried his face in the golden,
tousled hair. “Never,” he vowed. He closed his eyes, feeling immense relief and contentment his
augmented mind fought against. He simply wasn’t used to these feelings, but he drank them like a
man parched in the desert.

It didn’t slip his attention that Jim avoided the detail about bonding via marking with a bite, but he
gave it a rest. They had to come to terms with their own hearts first; this trek into relationships, ardor,
and love was alien to them both. So he relaxed completely and enjoyed having this special man in his
arms – bonded to no one but belonging to him as much as he to his beloved.

The minutes ticked by while the two held another and took their pleasure in each other’s company.
Chaste kisses dotted faces then became an open-mouthed drag of lips over lips and tongue over
tongue. Hands roamed over shoulders and chests and hips, and cocks strained toward one another.
Khan brought his palm up to Jim’s cheek, and Kirk turned into it, nuzzling his hand then laving over
the palm with his tongue until it was slick with saliva. Nien took the hint and dropped his hand to
gather their erections together. Precum leaked from the tips of them both. Khan smeared it around
them with the pad of his thumb before dragging his fist down and drawing their foreskins back up to
the crown.

“Oh fuck, that’s – that’s good.” Jim stuttered out. His eyes closed, and he dropped his head to press
against Nien’s shoulder, mouthing kisses anywhere he could reach. With one hand, he stroked up
Khan’s arm, the one working them both off; he felt the ripple of muscles in forearm and bicep. And
with his other hand he interlocked their fingers curled around their erections, working with Khan to
shape each stroke.

“Jim, tell me. Tell me how.” Khan breathed out.
“Nggng, fast and light. Oh God, Oh, so good!” Khan earned an extra moan each time he ran his thumb over the crown, smearing the pre-cum over them as it leaked to ease his way down. Jim gave one long, low groan as his semen pulsed out between their fingers.

Khan let him go but holds him close with the other arm. Just a few more tight, rough strokes and he groaned his own pleasure, spilling over Kirk’s heaving stomach. He cleaned his hand on the side of the bed then brought it up to trace over the shell of Jim’s ears and his jaw before capturing his partner's lips in an easy kiss. Jim kept his hands lightly on Khan’s wrists; each man had only eyes for the other. The sunlight, the quietness of the cottage, the chirping of the birds, the scent of musk and sweat and sex – war was far away, and the peace of their little own world enveloped them whole. Khan reached over for the cloth on the floor to wipe them down; and then both men dozed wrapped in each other.

They rose much later, roused by Jim’s stomach causing the captain to blush; the Augment chuckled only to have his own belly grumbling at him, earning Khan a teasing snicker. They showered again, rinsing off the night and mornings deeds, but this time they merely washed each other, sharing a few gentle kisses. Khan left the shower cabin first, shaved and slipped into his comfortable Indic clothes before vanishing into the kitchen.

Jim took his time letting the hot water wash away at least some of the aches. Then he slipped into his shalwar pants and changed the sullied blankets and sheets. As he finished, Khan returned from the kitchen; a delicious scent waved through the cottage. He examined Kirk’s healing injuries again. He covered them with the ointment he took with him from Diego’s ship and bandaged Jim’s upper body as he had each morning. But before Nien could turn around and walk back into the living room, Jim’s hand shot forward and caught his wrist.

“What’s about your arm? I saw the bite marks last night,” he asked and firmly returned the gaze of the other man.

“The bite is healing,” came the cagey reply and Jim lifted both brows.

“Shouldn’t it be done by now?” he pressed gently and the super-human sighed.

“It could be that my DNA’s ability to cope with the alien saliva has, indeed, something to do with my retarded healing rate as you said.”

Kirk stared at him and chuckled. “You sound like Spock.” At that, the Augment only sneered. Then
the young officer turned serious again. “The warrigul bite still bothers you.” Concern shone in his eyes.

Khan shook his head. “That’s not necessary, James, I assure you. It’s just healing a bit slower than I’m used to. That’s all.” He reached out and stroked for a moment the other man’s cheek; touched by his lover’s concern. “Don’t worry, Pyāra, I’m all right.”

Jim pressed his face into the long, warm fingers. “You still haven’t told me, what ‘Pyāra’ means.”

Another sigh escaped the super-human, but before he could answer, a shrill beeping and the distinct smell of something charred came from the little kitchen. He cursed, whirled around and stormed out of the bedroom with Jim hot on his heels.

A pan was on the stove and a cloud of smoke rose into the air above it, activating the smoke alarm. Khan crossed the room in three long steps and reached the pan, took a potholder and pulled the pan off of the induction field. Jim followed him and looked down at the pan’s contents.

Black, shriveled, stinking…

“Ummm… What was this before it fell prey to the heat?” he asked, and Nien grimaced.

“Something like bacon – at least ‘Aldebaran bacon’ was written on the package.”

Jim nodded slowly, glancing at the blackened mess with interest. “Well, I do love my bacon crispy, but don’t you think you overdid it just a bit?”

The two men looked at each other; then Kirk burst out laughing, while Khan rolled his eyes. “If you didn’t stop me, I could’ve returned to the kitchen and this…” He waved his hand toward the object of his derision… “…could have been prevented.”

“Admit it, you’ve never done bacon before,” Jim grinned, and the former dictator groaned.

“No, it doesn’t exactly belong to India cuisine, you know.”
“And you tried to…” Kirk stopped as he realized the intentions of his forbidden lover, and cocked his head. “You did it for me.” he whispered; his words were a statement rather than a question. Khan was quiet, and so Kirk knew that he had hit the nail on the head. In an impulse, he cupped one of Nien’s cheeks, turned the super-human’s face toward him, bent forwards and placed a warm, lingering kiss on his lips. “Thanks,” he whispered as he drew back.

“What for?” Khan asked, a little bit confused. “I burned it.”

“For trying,” Jim answered. “It’s the thought that counts.” In a gesture of fondness, he pressed his forehead against the Augment’s then reached for the pan. “And now we can make something you’ll eat and…” Kirk stopped as Nien caught his arm, stilling him.

“You are still healing; no housework!”

“I can clean the pan, Nien. I’m not made of glass,” the Enterprise’s captain retorted wryly, but the super-human shook his head.

“You already made the bed. Right now you must take it easy, James – especially after last night,” he added with a knowing smirk.

“But I feel fine!” Kirk protested.

“And I’m glad for it, still, you have to rest.” Khan remained reasonable.

“If I don’t use my muscles soon, I’ll get weak.”

“You’ll become weaker if you don’t let your body heal properly. The workout last night was stressful and quite enough use of your muscles,” the super-human replied patiently.

“But I’ll go crazy if I can’t do anything.” Jim began to whine like a little boy.

“You mean crazier than you already are?” Khan teased. The captain’s eyes widened.
“Hey, that’s not nice!”

“The truth is rarely kind.”

“You are not kind,” Jim huffed.

“Oh, I can be very unkind as I’m sure you know – especially if the health of one my own is at stake. So put on you kurta, go to the sofa, sit down and wait until I’m done here.” Khan’s voice permitted no backtalk. But Kirk was not one to back down from a challenge, not from a Gorn, Orion, Klingon, and most certainly not from the beautiful creature in front of him.

“No! You can’t order me out of the room like a child…”

“Yes, I can if you are acting like one!”

“No, you can’t. I’m a fucking captain!”

Khan heaved a heavy sigh. “I’m not ordering you; I’m simply advising you to listen, for once, to the voice of reason.”

“I AM reasonable!”

“When you’re sleeping! As soon as you are awake you…”

“How long have you two been married?” The third voice sounded from the entrance, and both men turned around, startled, to find a large, grinning Diego. “Heavens, boys, you sound like my parents!” He chuckled and stepped towards them, a bag in his right hand. “I came by to bring you something to entertain yourselves, well, besides each other. Here are a few books and two PADDs.”

Khan grimaced; Otto or Paolo would’ve said something like that. Kirk just gave the newcomer a cheerful smile. “Thanks, man. For the record…” Jim jerked a thumb towards Khan. “He’s the mom.”
The Chilean began to laugh. “‘Mother-le-matya’ more like,” he joked. “Believe me, your Vulcan and our Drythen have quite the competition going on trying to protect you.” He placed the bag on the table. “Do you two always eat breakfast this late?” he asked curiously.

“Shit, how long have you been standing there?” Kirk asked.

Diego grinned.

Jim rolled his eyes at that. He was becoming quite the expert at it on this trip. “We weren’t in the mood for an early morning,” he answered and strolled to the bedroom to slip into his Indic shirt. Even with the home’s heat system running, the cottage was cool, and Diego went to fix some hot coffee for the men.

“Aldebran has 27 hours per day, but even by Earth’s standards, you’re up and about pretty late.”

“So, the nights here are longer than Earth’s?” Khan interrupted him, cocked his head and fixed Jim with a promising gaze through the open bedroom door. “That is a welcome fact.”

“Yes it is,” the cottage’s owner confirmed knowingly. “During this season, the nights are approximately an hour and a half longer than days. Once winter comes, the nights are two hours longer Earth’s.”

“Sounds like Alaska,” Jim quipped, returning from the bedroom.

Diego chuckled at the sight of the love bites along the line of Jim’s throat. Much darker than the pinkened marks at Khan’s throat – nearly healed now. “Hell and bells, boys; looks like I’m going to have to stock more linens.”

Jim blushed while the super-human just smirked. “We would be obliged, Diego,” Khan answered as the Chilean murmured, “I’m adding a lot of shower gel and slick to the shopping list!”

Kirk’s face flushed a shining, tomato red right up to the tips of his ears.

Of course, it didn’t slip Diego’s attention. “Ah, I see. You already need ‘em, huh? And here I
thought you had to heal.”

“He is still healing – that would be the conversation you walked in on,” the Augment drawled. Jim marveled at Khan’s nonchalant attitude regarding their relationship. A stranger was teasing them about their relationship, and Nien reacted as if it were nothing. Now, Kirk was anything but shy, but he wasn’t sure about his new partner. He kind of figured Khan would be more protective, more furtive of the relationship. Not out of shame – just... So as not to put all of his cards on the table in front of others. Either way, the Augment didn’t so much as look Diego’s way; he just continued on with breakfast’s second attempt.

“Ah, so he is eager as a foal,” Diego laughed. “Or should I say, a young stallion?”

“Latter fits best, I suppose” Khan nodded; he was clearly enjoying Kirk’s embarrassment much more than he felt the need to keep their...activities private. Jim reddened right down to his neck, and he tossed the former dictator a fierce gaze that could melt lead. ‘So much fire’. No wonder he had fallen for the younger man.


“Yes, but tigers don’t run from horses; they get caught in the end.”

“Oh, Nien, the chase is half the fun,” Jim answered pleasantly.

“And what is the other half?” Khan questioned wryly; Diego snickered.

“The fight to the finish, man,” Kirk replied with eyes lowered.

“So the old saying is true then.” Diego interjected. “The quarrel of lovers is the renewal of love!” He returned to the coffee machine and added water to the reservoir; he missed the severe stares the men leveled at each other.

“So, how’s everyone?” Jim changed the topic carefully, feeling warmth right down to his toes when Khan’s gaze softened towards him.
“Oh, the usual. Ritek and Galven bicker all day; Caviw tries to calm them down. Jeffrey and the others are enjoying the time-out.”

“How have you seen any news on the war?” Jim asked tentatively.

“Mmm, yeah, some. The media’re spinning the war any way it wants, but we’ve heard that before. Starfleet has increased her forces in the sectors near the former Neutral Zone. Aldebaran’s security is seriously high strung – no spacecraft is allowed port without a thorough check of documents and crews, so be glad that we arrived three days ago. Oh, UFP news says they’ll be a meeting of the Federation delegation and the Klingon High Council. Nothing’s official, but as it seems both sides finally remembered that you can use your mouth to solve problems rather than fists and photon torpedoes.” He leaned against the kitchen counter. “I’d definitely prefer a conference instead of more violence.”

“You are absolutely right,” Jim nodded. “To tell you the truth I’m fed up with the war! Still, I’m surprised that they are already considering a congress. The blood-letting usually goes on much longer before anyone’s ready for the roundtable – especially the Klingons.”

“Well, they’re still just rumors,” Diego shrugged; he brought the coffee pot to the table. “I don’t think that the common herd will learn the truth until the conference actually happens.” He sighed. “I have an idea. Are you two in the mood for a visit to town – or New Aberdeen?”

“What?” Jim lifted both brows, and the Chilean smiled.

“Well, you are doing better; war is near but far enough away that this planet still enjoys a bit peace. And since you are both from the outer world, I figured you would like to explore a little bit more than just the bayou.” He hesitated. “Have you already walked the shores?”

“Of course,” Khan nodded and brought fruits, bread, cheese and marmalade to the table; behind him in a second pan, scrambled eggs were notably uncharred and almost ready to be eaten.

“Then you should take a sight-seeing tour through New Aberdeen. The brother-in-law of my best friend’s cousin has a travel agency and… Man, do you always eat this healthy stuff?” He looked wide-eyed at the breakfast ‘Drythen’ had prepared.

The Augment smirked, “Of course, Diego.” He pointed at Jim. “It’s not for nothing he’s the Federation’s new hero; and I can damage a comms console with my fist. You don’t get that from
It was a joke – and a good one. Diego and Jim were both surprised at Khan’s show of humor this morning. Diego responded to it in the only possible way. He laughed.

“Really, Drythen, you’re a hell of a guy; I like you.” He became very aware of the intense glances the two younger men shared – all warmth and not-so-subtle passion. “I like you both!” He grinned and shook his head. “And when I look at you guys…” He glanced between them again. “I think our little trip to New Aberdeen should wait a few more days. But then you’re my guests, clear?” He sat down and poured the freshly brewed coffee into the three cups. “A shopping trip will me more necessary then.” He chuckled. “If I have to buy a new bed by then, just let me know!”

“Of course, my friend!”

Jim’s sputtered, nearly losing his coffee at Khan’s dry retort, leveling a stern gaze at his lover.

None of the men could foresee the threat on the horizon…

Crowds milled around the small café in the shopping center in New Melbourn. Most visitors came from the shops and offices in the neighborhood trying to catch lunch before they return to their jobs. The atmosphere was one big pretense of a light mood. Too many people feared that the war would reach the planet sooner rather than later, but no one talked about it. Somehow the silence made it easier to deny.

Guests milled, baristas shouted orders; they’d all flee if they knew the identities of five men in the corner booth.

At first, second, and even third glance, the men looked like any other human, albeit a little taller than the average Terran. But other than that, they resembled humans in every way. Only an extremely sensitive tricorder or a med-scan would have revealed their heritage – this or the language left unspoken in order that they not draw unwanted attention.

One of them stared with green-brown eyes down into his cup of coffee, clearly not enjoying the beverage. “I always knew that Terrans had terrible taste, but this here reminds me of the slap of an
enraged woman: Bitter and hot.” His accent was hard and guttural.

“Quit complaining and put some sugar or something in it,” another man murmured, glaring at him with dark eyes. They both had well-trimmed moustaches and short, shorn hair – exactly like the other three men, who stayed silent. “We are not here to discuss Terran food and drink.” His voice was sharper but bore the same accent as the first speaker. He lowered his head. “Can anyone see our contact?”

“He’s coming down the stairs outside in the shopping area now,” one of the other three men said.

The first speaker grumbled, “At least he isn’t late!”

They fell silent again and waited until another man stepped to their table. “Good day, gentlemen,” he greeted and pulled a chair to the table. He was in his late thirties with an ordinary face and dark blond hair – nothing remarkable. It was an asset as far as he was concerned. Lifting a hand, he ordered coffee and a salad before making a bit of small-talk with the five other occupants. When the newcomer’s meal arrived, the topic of discussion changed.

“Any problems arriving on Aldebaran?” he asked quietly, adding the table spices to his salad.

“None,” the leader of the little group answered, and the newcomer lifted both brows.

“Then you are unaware of the danger you barely escaped,” he said casually. “A Starfleet cruiser was here and checked every arriving vessel over the past day – including yours.”

The other man bent forwards. “What Starfleet cruiser? Did they find something? Did the cretin of a captain kept his mouth shut?” The newcomer only looked at him, not cowed by the threatening look being leveled at him. “Tell me Mr. Makfurton!”

“The name is McFurthon – Mc for ‘son of’ and…”

His table mate cut short his explanation hissing, “I do not care for the meaning of Terran names. Just answer my questions!”
For several seconds, both men glared at each other; then the newcomer lowered his voice, barely understandable. “The captain did what he was paid to do; he smuggled you and your comrades to Aldebaran. He kept quiet. No one would consider those documents false – after all I prepared them. The commanding officer of the Starfleet ship checked yours thoroughly because your vessel came from the former Neutral Zone, but he found nothing illegal.” He leaned back and looked smugly considering his own success. “And that ship that took notice of your vessel’s course. I’m sure you’ve heard of it. I advise you to keep calm if you don’t want to draw attention to yourselves.” He had paused for a second before he continued, “It was the Enterprise.”

“What?” the other man gasped; his comrades tensed. “The Enterprise? KIRK is here?”

The newcomer glared at him. “For God’s sake, Koloth, shut up!” He looked under his lashes around him, but no one took notice of them. “As far as I heard, the Enterprise is under the command of the Vulcan first officer – a Mr. Spock. One of your generals captured Captain Kirk. The transmission about Kirk’s ordered execution was…”

“Lord Kor caught him – but, it seems you are not up-to-date, spy! Kirk escaped!”

McFurthon stared at him. “He… escaped? How?”

“He had help. When Lord Kor gave me the Aldebaran-mission, he told me that the man responsible for the demise of our patrols on Qo’noS freed Kirk.” A deep frown appeared on the Klingon’s human-like brow; evidence that he too descended from those Klingon clans which had been treated with human augmented DNA. “Apparently Kor’s ‘hospitality’ did Kirk no good or he’d be in command of his ship.” His glare darkened even more. “Kirk defiled my reputation and my honor when he beamed over some damn fur-balls the humans call ‘Tribbles’. They spread through the whole Empire – a plague of the worst kind.” He spit out his words and balled his hand into a fist. “It was an attack against us. First his officers taunted my first officer,” he nodded towards the man he had been speaking with before McFurthon came. Hate glistened in his eyes. “And he picked a fight, treated us as if we were criminals and then he beamed the Tribbles onto my ship! If I ever get my hands on him, he will think Kor’s treatment was a caress!”

McFurthon sighed – Klingons and their pride! He fixed Koloth with a glare. “Forget about Kirk and concentrate on your mission. Your admiralty hired me to support you and paid me the half of the agreed price – the rest after your success. And your reputation will be restored to its former glory if you manage to blow up this system’s Starfleet’s base, making the way free for your fleet to pillage and plunder as it sees fit.”

Koloth snarled wordlessly at him but nodded. “You are right.” He pursed his lips. “How does it feel to betray the people you once considered your own?”
“You framed it correctly. Past tense! I once considered Starfleet my people. I gave them the best years of my life and they let me fall! I made one little mistake and everything I ever did for them was conveniently forgotten. I was stripped of my rank and am rotting in Admin hell. Well, their bad luck wasting my talents. The information I get on the job is valuable – as your admiralty admitted.”

“So you are doing this for revenge,” Koloth assumed.

“Yes. As your people say: Revenge is a dish best to be served cold. Starfleet won’t know what hit her when you’re done here.”

Koloth nodded, but inwardly he despised the human. Betrayal was something he could never and would never tolerate. A Klingon would rather die than betray his people. Well, right now the Terran’s weakness, his treason, suited his purposes. It made Koloth’s mission possible; still he loathed the way the Terran thought and acted, but it made the exploitation that much sweeter.

“So, you have the layout of the spaceport and the Starfleet quarters?” he asked quietly.

McFurthon smiled coldly. “Yes, I have. They are not far from each other,” He handed over a small data key. “Here is all the information you need; still you should check it out yourself. Visit the spaceport and have a closer look at Starfleet headquarters. Both are northwest of Thalassis in New Aberdeen; the address is there too.” He also handed him three credit cards and murmured, “They are loaded with a thousand credits. That should cover hotel and meals.” Then he leaned back. “I think two days will be enough for you to check everything; we’ll meet back in three days. Until then, I have the materials you need to destroy the headquarters and the spaceport. Then your fleet should have no trouble annexing the Aldebaran system.”

Koloth pursed his lips and rose. “Where will we meet?”

“Near the spaceport is a small pub called “The Stars”. We will meet there in three days at 1400, all right?”

The Klingon simply snorted, took the three credit cards and put them together with the data key into his trouser pocket. Without another word, he left the café, his officers trailing behind him.

McFurthon grimaced – Klingons! Then he realized that Koloth had left without paying the drink tab. Cursing he reached for his credit card to settle the bill the waitress had already in her hand…
Chapter End Notes

Surprise, surprise – Captain Koloth is the opponent of the past. Maybe some of you have guessed something like this, after all the Tribble-Incident that caused (along with other events) so much wrath in the Klingon High Council had already taken place before. And, as you certainly remember, Koloth has big mouth but less courage. I think you know to what this will head, hm? Yeah, our boys will kick some Klingon asses and are going to proof what a great team they make (not only in bed).

Well, referring to the ‘bed’: I think it was about time that Jim makes up his mind and that he realizes what his happening to him and Nien – that they both have developed deep feelings for each other. And the riddle of the mark had to be solved sooner or later, so I hope you liked it (and their bickering at the morning).

Within the two next chapter you will learn about Khan’s fate in the hands of Section 31 and there will be the overdue talk about Khan’s deeds afterwards (especially concerning Pike’s death because of it). And you will learn more about his past in the 20th century. Luengo and Norton will plotting, Koloth and his men will appear once amore and someone of Jim’s friends his going to solve the riddle of ‘Sunrise’.

You see, there is lot of coming for you now.

I hope you liked the chapter and I’m – as always – curious about your thoughts.

Until soon,

Love

Yours Starflight
Phantoms of the past

Chapter Notes

Hi my dear readers – and MERRY CHRISTMAS!!

I’m so sorry for the delay, but as I already wrote those who left a comment, the computer of my dear friend Rhiannon, who is my beta-reader, had a crash and she had to re-do the most of the work. And this before Christmas, when stress is an eternal companion. Thank you so much, Rhiannon, that you still managed to edit my writing during Christmas and for all the efforts you put in the story.

A big ‘thank you’ also to all my readers who left Kudos and comments. It really makes me happy that you love this story so much and even show it.

The new chapter has, indeed, something to do with the message of Christmas; of rue, sins, compassion and forgiving. Jim and Khan will talk about the things which happened one year ago, as the Augment ran amok. And I hope the whole thing is to your liking.

Have a very Merry Christmas,

Love from Germany

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 21 – Phantoms of the past

At the Silver Bayou, no one could know that war would finally reach Aldebaran. Nature’s repose contributed to the content atmosphere in the small house as well as a delicious lack of awareness of the universe around them. Not the rumors of a peace conference nor any other possible happenings with the war were discussed among the men after Diego left at the early midday with a promise to return in two days to take the two men on a day trip to New Aberdeen.

Jim and Khan strolled along the lake’s shore after their late breakfast; relishing in the sun-warmed, fresh air and the harmony of their surroundings. Kirk stripped off his shoes and socks, hitched up his trousers and walked through the cold water; Nien – to Jim’s surprise – followed his lead. The Augment relaxed; his expression was soft. Jim was glad for it – for him. He knew how long there had been nothing else than fight, flight and fear for the super-human, but he couldn’t comprehend that time – the centuries. But he knew what is was to be cast out, unwanted – and then hunted. He was thirteen when his hell began. No doubt that Khan’s youth was much the same.
The Augment felt the eyes of the officer resting upon him, and as he looked at him, he smirked. Jim grinned sheepishly, blushed and took a deep breath. “What is it?” Khan asked gently, and Kirk pursed his lips.

“You seem settled,” he answered after a short moment. “At peace.”

The former dictator smiled. “I am for once, yes.” He glanced around him. “This reminds me of one of the few times I was happy – sort of. It was one of the few occasions I was allowed to leave the labs completely; I had a bit of time off, officially to test my reaction to the outside world, to people. They wanted to assess my behavior. Some of the other younger Augments had been with me.” His smile brightened. “We were brought aboard a ship and stayed at sea for two days – only us, our guards and two scientists, and the crew.”

He tipped his head back toward the sun and took a deep breath. He was transported back to the days of when he was a child or while he was aboard Mazzini’s boat. The memory of the Italian captain made him grin. If Alessio or the others had seen him during his battle against the Klingons, they would be speechless.

Jim didn’t miss the suddenly Nien’s pleased look, but before he could ask, Nien chuckled, “If someone tried to tell me that two days on a boat would save my neck three hundred years later, I would have called them insane.” He caught the confused glance of his beloved and looked back; Kirk stopped and Khan did the same.

“What do you mean?” Jim asked; his brows furrowed in question. Khan sighed. “I was hired by a fishing vessel boat out of San Francisco. We were out at sea and…”

“You did what?” The ever so blue eyes of the young captain widened. “You worked on a fishing boat? As a fisherman?”

The smug expression on Khan’s face that had infuriated Kirk in earlier days was full of humor now. “Yes, I was a deckhand,” the Augment nodded, correcting Jim’s lexicon and amused by his reaction. His lover gaped at him. “Can’t imagine it, can you?” Nien chuckled. “The leader of the Augments, a king in his time, hauled in the catch of the day.” He laughed quietly. “Never occurred to Starfleet. They turned every stone in San Francisco, checked the air and spaceports, the transporters, everything. Watching the piers, the boats; it never occurred to them.” He grinned triumphantly. “Not that they were ever close to catching me. After our first trip, a joint team of Starfleet and Federation security were at the docks but they didn’t recognize me.”
“Really? You are a bit, ummm, unique looking.”

“Hmmm. Well coveralls, sweater, dirty, disheveled, sea-legs, and a beard.”

Jim looked him up and down, and began to snicker suddenly. “I’m trying to picture it. I can’t. You in a beard?” He grimaced. “I like my Augment clean-shaven. Must be a Starfleet thing.”

“Mmmm, I couldn’t agree more!” Nien nodded. “I got rid of it as soon as possible – on the outpost where the Orions attacked; I met Galven there.”

Cocking his head, Kirk pursed his lips. “And the other deckhands didn’t recognize you.”

“Of course not. As far as I know Starfleet swept my part in the whole disaster of Section 31 under the rug, so to say and therefore there are no official records about me. The fishermen were simple and good people; worked hard.” He closed his eyes again. “I enjoyed myself, the hard work, the men, after all the months in the lab. I hid more than two weeks on Alessio’s boat – just working; blending in, until the war threatened the colonies. One of the crew members, Nando, wanted to retrieve his sister and brother-in-law from one of the colonies near the former Neutral Zone. He’d never been in space before and was… anxious. I offered to accompany him and in turn he ‘arranged’ for a new ID-card for me. Once security was overextended with the Klingon threat, leaving Earth was easy.”

For a long moment Jim could only stare at him, and then he began to laugh. “You’re the cleverest and most imaginative man I’ve ever met and that’s saying a lot with Scotty on my ship. I learned early how to become invisible, but I think you’ve made it an art form.” He shook his head again and chuckled.

Khan smiled. “Have you never asked yourself how I evaded the authorities after I left your apartment? Surely they would assume I’d come for you first.”

The officer sighed. “I asked myself a lot of questions after you left. For example, why didn’t I alert Starfleet after I realized that you must have left only minutes before I woke up – my shower was still wet? Or why I found myself hoping that they wouldn’t catch up with you. I asked myself why I was affected by the note you left for me.” He winked. “By the way, thanks for putting the coffee table back. That damn thing weighs a ton.”

He padded out of the water and sat down on the grass; the Augment, again, followed suit and sat
close, touching from knees to shoulders. Jim pulled his knees up and lay his folded arms on them before he softly continued, “I asked myself why I couldn’t get you out of my head or why I lied to my friends. Bones came to my apartment in a panic. Spock told him that you had escaped cryosleep and were out for revenge. Then I asked myself why I couldn’t stop thinking about you or why I was glad, relieved even when I found out that Starfleet stopped looking for you.” He shook his head. “And I wonder why I am about to forgive you for Daystrom – for Pike.”

There it was – the thing that stood between them despite their feelings for each other.

The Daystrom Conference – the place where Khan’s revenge caused the death of the man who had been like a father to his James. Nien knew that these events would come up for discussion at some point. He was relieved that it happened here rather than on his or Jim’s ship. This was neutral territory without pretense or rank or running to get in the way.

“If I could change it, Jim, I would,” he said after several seconds of silence. “I do not regret that I fired at Marcus, and I certainly do not regret that I killed the admirals that I knew they were part of Section 31. I recognized them through the window.” He had pressed his lips into a firm line before he whispered, “But I do regret that I took your Admiral Pike from you. I knew him only from what I’d heard while in Section 31. I thought Section 31 was an official department of Starfleet; that’s what Marcus led me to believe. He convinced me that Starfleet knew about my crew and me; I thought they knew what Marcus was doing to me – to us – and they didn’t care.”

Jim knew that they had to talk about it. Lay it all out. The damage, the dirt, the hurt; all of it would fester and infect what they had if they didn’t clear it once and for all. So he headed straight for the hard parts. He never learned to take the easy way.

“Why did you think Marcus had killed your family after he found out that you hid them in the torpedoes?” He asked this first; it seemed to be the catalyst for the disaster that followed – Daystrom.

“He told me that he would switch off the cryotube’s life support if I ever tried to deceive him or flee. But I had to get them out! I knew that Marcus would never allow them to wake. He would keep me under his thumb by blackmailing me with their lives.” He pulled his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them – protecting himself from now invisible demons. “At first I thought he wasn’t serious. This is the 23rd century; the human race had progressed, allied itself with alien planets. I assumed cruelty, intolerance, greed and lust for war was a thing of the past – my past.” He snorted. “Naïve, I know. Those first days Marcus fed my notions. Then…he let his mask slip.”

“He insisted you work for him,” Jim supposed and Khan nodded.
“Yes. He began the tests then – nothing dramatic; more assessments, nothing I wasn’t used to or didn’t expect considering this world had never known anything like us. Afterward, he came to me and offered me a place on his staff. He also told me about the Federation’s enemy; he said I could help to defend my home in this new time. At first, it seemed like a good proposal; I thought I had found a place in this time. Then I realized that the threat didn’t exist. The Klingons never declared war. Eventually, I became aware of Marcus’ true intentions – he wanted a first strike against the Klingons after a century of peace, albeit tenuous.”

The former dictator lowered his head.

“I was born in a century where a powerful, mighty man launched a war by first strike; it cost millions of people their lives. Decades later, as I grew up, his shadow still loomed large. My people and I were created to bring peace to the world – to bring them out from the shadows. It only led to more war, the height of the Eugenics Wars. I know the damage, the folly of a first strike. I lived the bloody history that Marcus wanted to repeat; I warned him, and he would have none of it. He said that I was new to this world; that he could judge the present far better than I. So I refused to assist him any longer.”

“And that’s when he threatened you,” Jim murmured; meeting Khan’s steady but also painful gaze.

“Yes. First he threatened me; I tried to break away from him, from Section 31 and Starfleet – to flee with my people. I wasn’t familiar with the security systems and tech. I didn’t have enough time to learn it. I got far though – only two doors away from the space where he held my crew. Marcus took this as feigned motive to run more tests on me – on all of my abilities.” He took a deep breath. “Four weeks of anything he could think of, but I didn’t yield. Then he pressed his finger to the only breaking point I have: My family.”

He shivered, and Jim wrapped an arm around him, offering strength and creature comfort of touch. Kirk knew the worst was yet to come, and his heart went out to the man beside him. His marble pallor the color of marble’s ashen striations.

“One morning Marcus escorted me to the room where the cryotubes…” he squeezed his eyes closed and steeled himself. “…where my people were kept. He gave me a choice; I could cooperate or watch my family die.” He bit his lips. “Despite everything I had already suffered at his hand, I couldn’t believe – I didn’t want to believe – that he would murder people unable to defend themselves, asleep and unaware of the world.” His eyes went distant. “He switched off the stasis field of a tube. He had decided, indiscriminately, who of my crew would die. He killed Silvio, one of the younger ones.” He spoke every word from between clenched teeth, and lowered his head. “He was gentle, so peaceful. He didn’t have the aggression, so many of us did.” He glanced at Jim. “…do. A remarkable doctor and an even more remarkable man.” He looked Kirk straight in the eye and continued. “All my pleading for his life was for naught. Marcus didn’t re-activate the stasis. Silvio died right in front of me.”
Jim stared. He tried to hide the shock, but it was hard. Bad enough, Starfleet’s – or Marcus’s evil was inflicted on a loved one. Starfleet shocked at him. He trembled with anger at Marcus, at Starfleet’s blindness, intentional or not. Marcus would have stopped at nothing to get his war; everyone knew that now, but to look at a defenseless sleeping person and outright murder them – there was nothing worse, and the sadist did it to hurt another intentionally for his own gain. He pulled Khan closer; his lover’s grief reached straight to his soul. “Nien…,” he breathed, feeling his heart beating for the other man.

Khan took another shuddering breath; a lump built in his throat. It hurt to speak about it; he knew these wounds had to bleed themselves clean. He just wished that the bleeding would stop at some point. It felt like he’s bled for so long, that he has very little left to give. Hopefully talking about it would ease the wound – be the salve he needed to continue.

“Marcus killed four more of my family like this until I broke and gave him what he wanted,” he continued with a tight, quiet voice. “I was already grieving for the eight men and women whose cryotubes had failed during our venture. So I promised my support to his insane vision; war with the Klingons that he so yearned for – in exchange for my crews’ life.” Khan heaved a sigh, “But during the next few months, it became apparent that he never intended to let me or my crew go, so I devised a plan.” He chuckled bitterly. “I smuggled them in the torpedoes aboard the Vengeance. I was going to wake them during the first test flight, take over the ship and run. It was my only option – and it failed. Marcus discovered the tubes missing and knew. He ordered me shot. The Vengeance was as good as complete; he didn't need me anymore.”

He rubbed his arms as if he were cold. Jim understood. Even if the sun’s rays bathed them, he felt cold inside, too as he listened to Nien’s story.

“Under pretense, he led me to my stateroom where he had a team waiting for me. I avoided the first phaser blasts set to kill, and then I fought back. Somehow I managed to flee and reached the transporter room. I didn’t want to leave my family in his hands, but if he killed me, I’d be of no help to my people.” He bit his lips. “I programmed the transporter with the coordinates to the jump ship Marcus used to travel between the secret space dock and Earth. Then Marcus used the intercom for a ship-wide transmission so that I would hear it no matter where I was. There was no misunderstanding his intentions towards my people.”

Jim knew what was coming. He and Khan had had this conversation before; only Khan was in the brig and Jim was on the other side of the glass. Hearing it again, hearing how Nien was played over and over again made him nauseous. “What did he say?” he asked softly.

“He said ‘Whatever happens now would be my fault’. And then…” Khan swallowed. “I was already on the transporter platform as the transmission sounded through the ship. I beamed away just as I
heard him ordering his subordinates to switch off the life support systems of the cryotubes.” His eyes brimmed with unshed tears at the memory. “I tried to leave the platform then, ready to deliver myself to him again, even if it meant my death. I would rather die than fail my family. But it was too late. The transporter had caught me before I was able to take a step. I materialized in the jump ship knowing that I had lost everyone I ever loved.” He swallowed again, the pain fresh as if it happened only yesterday. “I’ve never felt so much horror,” he whispered. “Until I learned they were alive only to be deceived again when your Vulcan detonated the torpedoes. And then the rage. I’d never felt so much rage, not even during the wars.”

He was not surprised to see tears shimmering in Jim’s eyes. But he was surprised when Jim took his cheek forcing their eyes to meet and touched his forehead with his own; he just admitted he acted in rage, and that certainly deserved no comfort. But he got it anyway.

Jim knew that for Spock, there was no other solution. Eliminate the enemy and save as many lives as possible, and that included the lives entombed in the tubes; he had to trick Khan. Still, hearing what it did to the Augment pierced his heart. He saw Nien grieve in his apartment in San Francisco with the false knowledge of his family’s death. That breathed sympathy into him for the man. Strength, conviction, and sympathy – those are the things that fed his feelings for Khan. Even if they hadn’t, this story had been told by a stranger, it would not be any more palatable.

He wrapped his other arm around Khan and the super-human held to him tightly and uncurled his legs allowing Kirk to get closer. “I am sorry,” he murmured. “I’m sorry we added salt to such fresh wounds.”

“Don’t be. The decision was – logical. Your Vulcan friend did what he had to do to protect you and your crew,” Khan’s mouth twitched bitterly. “A small hint afterward that my crew was still alive would not have gone amiss rather than attempting to pound me into a garbage transport. I suppose he wanted – he needed to even the score. I can certainly relate to the need to avenge those you love. Only for Marcus had I ever felt that kind of rage, and I fought. I thought my loved ones had been murdered right next to me, so…” He shook his head and moistened his lips while he lowered his gaze.

Kirk took a deep breath. “I can understand why you did what you did,” he finally said, his voice gentle and quiet. “Twice you were deceived, lied to, made to believe your crew – your family – had been killed. And after all you’d been through at the hands of Marcus – the tests, the experiments, but…”

“You’re right!” The super-human nodded, his voice hoarse. “I was starved, frozen nearly to death, infected with viruses and bacteria, just to see how long I could live, how much I could endure. Not to mention the other experiments and… violations. And I had to endure it, or they would have taken other members of my family for tests. I suppose it’s not ‘legal’. But I did not know it then. I woke up in Marcus’ world; a world he spun for me.” Khan hissed out. He hugged his knees back into himself
as if he wanted to shield himself from the whole world. “And then this icy bastard ordered my family killed while I was unable to defend them. They were dead, murdered as far as I knew. The bond between us disappeared. I was so hurt that I didn’t realize our link, weakened due to their sleep, faded due to distance rather than death” His trembling fingers curled into the material of his trousers.

“It was too much for me to bear.” His voice was not more than a breath. “After everything I did to rescue them from war, after all I went through in the hands of Section 31 to keep them safe, losing them in the end was…” He took another deep breath to calm himself. “It was simply too much. I couldn’t think straight anymore – I couldn’t think at all. And I didn’t want to.”

He felt Jim pressing his cheek against him again as if trying to share in the pain. The proximity of his mate – he could say that now – the warmth, understanding and compassion which enveloped him, helped him to fight the pain that had risen from the depths of his subconscious. Well, all of it was welcomed in a way it hadn’t been for centuries.

For a long time, Jim held his lover close – deeply moved and hurting for him. He gave Nien time to come to terms with himself then he took up the threat again. “That’s when you decided to avenge your family.” It wasn’t a question but a statement, and the Augment nodded.

“Mmmm. For the first two days I was in agony. The link I no longer felt, physically hurt. I stayed in an abandoned flat in London until the pain abated – until the rage was not so hot.” He had hesitated before he murmured, “It didn’t. It was only replaced with emptiness and cold hatred replaced burning rage. That was when I began to plot my revenge. It was strange. Everything I did, all that I planned was… It was as if I was watching myself from a distance. It didn’t stop me from ensuring that I made them pay – everyone who held my heart out of my reach. I knew that I would die in the process, but I was determined to take as many murderers with me as possible.”

Jim bit his lips. “So it was – a one-man war.” Their gazes met – Khan’s with a hue of hope that someone finally understood and Kirk’s full of compassion but also sadness. “Nien,” the young officer continued gently. “I know the damage that grief can do and that there comes a point you don’t care about the outcome, but there were many losses at the Archive in London.”

“Losses?” Nien frowned. “Kirk, I’m certain you saw the pictures. Did you not notice? There were no victims outside of the Archive.” Khan’s voice was soft. “Security cameras must have images of the scene as I left. Jim, there were no bodies, no casualties.” He watched his beloved hesitating. “Why do you think there were…?”

“There were forty-two victims,” the captain cut in. “Forty-two, Nien!”
“Yes. And they all belonged to Section 31. Not to the civil employees of the archive above the secret facility!” The Augment moved slightly so he could look at Kirk. His gaze was intense. And deep down, beneath the stoic façade and intelligence, lay something like a plea. The man ached to be listened to and believed. “Marcus didn’t tell you and the other of officers these facts, Jim, did he?”

Kirk frowned. “So, are you trying to say that you cleared the streets before the bomb went off?” Khan didn’t answer. “How?” Jim demanded, thunderstruck. If Khan had taken care that he caught no innocent victims in his hurricane of revenge, then Marcus must have known about it and kept it a secret on purpose. Fucking bastard! He had planned to use Nien’s anguish from the beginning to get rid of him and to start the war he longed for without lifting a single finger. They were both Marcus’ tools!

“I have my ways, you know,” the Augment explained. “I was, after all, an asset of Section 31 and Marcus didn’t tell anyone outside of his personal staff who or what I was or that one of his ‘assets’ went rogue. I made a few calls, and the streets were barricaded for a feigned joint exercise; the civil archive was evacuated. Section 31 didn’t think anything of it; they were convinced that a civil exercise was being run.” He watched Jim’s eyes widen, and he cocked his head. “Everything planned to the last detail, but Marcus turned the tables once more by portraying me as a mass murderer of innocent civilians, even as he knew that there weren’t any civilian victims. And that was when he played his card to get his war – you. You joined the game.”

Jim groaned. “So he used us both, pulling at our strings like puppets. He knew exactly how we would react.”

“Yes, he was extremely intelligent. I have to give him that,” Khan growled before he snorted and glanced away.

Kirk assimilated this new information regarding the London. That in the explosion only members of Section 31 had been killed was somehow relieving. Mitigating collateral damage was paramount to Jim – to Starfleet, the real Starfleet anyhow – not Marcus’; morbid facsimile of Starfleet. Still, killing another person while their back was turned, even if they were the enemy, was wrong. Jim bit his lips. Whom was he kidding? He had killed – as Starfleet officer and before that, back on Tarsus IV. He killed only in defense of himself or others, but it was no less bitter. He remembered every death he caused, try as he might to bury it deep in the back most edges of his mind. He rubbed his forehead as if the physical action could tamp down his phantoms from the past.

Khan’s war against Starfleet – a fake Starfleet, Marcus’ perversion of Starfleet – was far more complicated than he thought. There were so many twists. And Marcus played them all into a perfect storm. They all should be glad it wasn’t a bigger disaster than it was. All this because a few men were greedy for power and might, or just scared shitless because of the so-called Klingon threat. Maybe it was worse; they were at war now. Marcus got what he wanted. He just didn’t live to see it the show.
Jim and Khan never asked for the starring roles but nonetheless they got them.

Kirk fixed the Augment, straightening up, not so angry anymore but wanting explanation. “You blew the Archive to eliminate members of Section 31, but you also knew would demand a meeting of the area fleet admirals, captains and first officers,” he said as a matter of fact. “You wanted us all together in one room. We were sitting ducks!”

“Yes – I had to stop them from continuing their work. I told you Marcus’ intentions. He and his staff wanted to start a war!”

Kirk pursed his lips before he stated sternly, “Not all admirals agreed with Marcus’ point of view. Many didn’t even know that Section 31 existed and if they would have taken it down! Chris Pike would have…”

“I told you, Jim, I didn’t know Admiral Pike, and Marcus boasted that ‘all of Starfleet’ was on board with plans to build the Vengeance. I assumed its secrecy was based on operational security reasons. There was no way I could know that Section 31 operated in secret. I woke up in Marcus’ world, the one he wanted me to believe in. I stayed believing he’d kill my family. All flag officers were guilty as far as I knew, they either agreed with Marcus and the work of Section 31 or, buried their heads and ignored the inhumanity against my family and me. Tell me, would you have thought otherwise if you would have been in my place?”

The young captain didn’t think long over the answer; Khan was right. He would have assumed the same. “Still I wouldn’t have fired on people if I wasn’t sure of their guilt – if I decided to meet out my own judgment at all, but I don’t and you already know that about me. Well, except for Qo’noS.”

“Yes, but that was personal. I understand that.” Khan paused for a moment. “At Daystrom, I was sure of the admiralty’s guilt. In the world Marcus painted for me, how could I have come to any other conclusion? But I assumed that lower-ranked officers weren’t informed of Marcus’ plan. In my time, flag officers kept their secrets among themselves, that’s one thing I know hasn’t changed in three centuries. That’s the why I didn’t torpedo the conference room. I took aim only at those who wore the uniform of an admiral or a commodore.”

Jim blinked. “What?”

Khan cocked his head. “Do you really think, you, your Vulcan or the other captains would be still alive if I had wanted you all dead? I hit one man unintentionally. He moved between my sites as I
was taking a shot.” He lifted on hand and cupped Jim’s face. “I had you in my sights twice, but recognized your insignias as that of a commander and didn’t pull the trigger. I am thankful for that decision. Had I done things differently, I would have never met you and would have missed the only real happiness I ever found in my life.”

For a long while, the officer was lost for words. God, this was all so fucked-up! “Then I owe you my life, again,” Jim finally murmured.

“After I threatened it, you mean?” There was a hint of a smile on those well-curved lips.

“ Seems to be a pattern with us, doesn’t it?” Kirk replied with a twinkle in his eye.

“Mmm, yes. But…When I saw you on Qo’noS I knew I’d found the only person in all of Starfleet who might hear me out. The moment you accepted my surrender on the behalf of a man you called ‘a friend’ and then took your hurt out on me for his death, I knew that I’d found a soul that hurt as mine did. There was something in your eyes, despite your sorrow and wrath that told me I could trust you.”

He slipped one arm around Jim’s waist. “But you turned on me, on the Vengeance. I can’t say I blamed you. But I didn’t see it coming – and that is a rare thing. That was how much I trusted you. Even so, when I was in your apartment, I realized that I wasn’t wrong about you. You have honor, James Kirk, and a depth of compassion that is rare. I never believed in kismet, but I may be ready to. You are the one, in all my time who understands me, who doesn’t see the monster.” He took another deep breath; the familiar scent of his beloved soothed his nerves and fears of rejection. “And I am so sorry that you had to suffer the loss of your mentor because I lashed out in anger. I couldn’t fight Marcus any other way; I didn’t know how. I didn’t have you. And it broke me.”

“I know,” Kirk whispered. “I know that now.” And he did. Kirk understood the difficulty it took for Khan to admit his weakness and his need. Only once had he seen the Augment so flayed open. He gave his lover a short, soft kiss. “Shit!” he whispered. “This is so fucked-up! The ones responsible are dead or will deny anything you say. How the hell will we get you out of it as a free man?”

Khan was thunderstruck. “We. You want to…what?”

Jim sighed and nodded. First, in sadness that Khan would be surprised that he wanted to help him through this – be with him and see him through it until the end and whatever came after for them. And he sighed knowing he was walking into yet another no-win situation as was his way. He was no fool. Khan was a convicted criminal, and his rampage cost many lives. Still, the Augment could not be held wholly responsible for those events. Kirk knew what it was to be driven to desperate
madness. His capture was still so fresh in his mind. Without Nien’s intervention, the Klingons would have forced him to his breaking point. He didn’t dare imagine what would have become of him then. Khan had been pushed and pulled over that line too many times. It was a miracle he maintained his sanity after all he had endured – and that he could build something real and true with Jim.

These last days as Khan threw his focus into Jim’s care, well, they’d shown him the man Khan truly was. Not who he could be, but who he was meant to be. The world just needed to see it.

This world, this century had denied him so much. Marcus woke him because of his natural savagery and used him just as those who built him had. He only sought to defend those he loved at his own cost. He had been met with threats and violence every step of the way. No one listened to his pleas, no one saw him for the person he was, and no one had considered his feelings. His feelings were so much more intense than those of ‘mere’ humans; it was no wonder he finally snapped.

Anyone with a spark of compassion would give Khan a second chance – Pike would have given him a second chance. Jim didn’t doubt it.

Pike…

Christopher Pike; the man held a saving hand over Jim even when he’d messed up. Pike had always considered both sides of a thrown coin, bore unique understanding, and always found the right words so that other could see another perspective.

For just a moment, sorrow rose in Kirk as he thought back to Pike. He still missed Chris; his senseless death left a scar on the young man’s soul. But the sadness, the anger was different now. It wasn’t directed at Nien anymore – the insanity of that one night in San Francisco and these last days eased the way to directing it where it truly belonged. The one responsible for Pike’s early grave was the one who brought him to Starfleet in the first place. Marcus! And if Jim were honest with himself, his eyes began to open the when Khan came to the Enterprise.

Jim had done just as Pike had done for him; he listened. He listened in the brig as Khan told him why he blew the archive, and he listened when the Augment told him of Marcus’ plans. Kirk made up his mind later – and sealed the decision that night in San Francisco – throes of pleasure notwithstanding. But it was Kirk’s own compassion that opened his heart. And now that he knew the Augment’s story, he couldn’t excoriate the super-human. He stopped damning Khan the moment he saw him kneeling on the floor, sobbing in relief at his family’s survival. No one who loved this deeply could be evil!

Now, after Kirk had come to know this dangerous, beautiful, breathtaking man, he found himself
unable to the past against him. Khan’s rampage was the logical outcome of Marcus’ puppeteering. No more, no less. It was a damn good thing Marcus was dead. Otherwise, Jim would go after him, himself – and Kirk didn’t want to think how far he would go for Khan. He was not one for vigilante justice, but here, for this man, it felt right.

For the uncounted time, Jim sighed again and leaned his head against Nien’s shoulder looking out over the peaceful, uncaring lake.

“I want to get you out of this, Nien!” He declared his intentions to an astonished Augment. “The real criminal was Marcus, not you. Sure, you snapped, but that’s what he wanted. Hell, even Spock lost his control trying to take you out. We all have our breaking points, and Marcus counted on yours. Your rampage is on him, not you. Marcus is the villain, not you or your family. I don’t know what happened during the Eugenic Wars, but I’ve watched you save people over and over again, I can’t imagine that you are a warmonger. No one can hold your past against you because there isn’t enough proof or even jurisdiction. It’s your word against a lousily documented history. The presumption of innocence applied to you and your people.” Jim touched Nien’s cheek so he could look him in the eye. “You’ve been through more any human should. Marcus ensured your breaking was not a question of ‘if’, but ‘when’. Any good lawyer can…”

There. Jim did it again. Never hesitating to call him human, a person. “The Vengeance…” Khan began, knowing that he would introduce another issue that could turn Jim away from him, still he wanted to put anything on the table. Here and now! It would be the best for both of them. But Kirk’s answer managed it to make him do something that was rare like a black pearl: He gaped.

“The Vengeance?” Jim grimaced. “I know that she wasn’t maneuverable after the torpedoes detonated. I talked to Sulu, Chekov and Spock. She fell to Earth like a stone and the heat from passing through the atmosphere only damaged her circuitry more. That she didn’t explode is almost a miracle. It could have been so much worse for San Francisco, but you couldn’t prevent it even if you wanted to. Khan, cameras recorded and thousands of witnesses stated that she altered her course. First, she headed for the Academy in Sausalito and the dozens of universities there, and then she changed her course to the sea before she crashed into the harbor.” He locked eyes with Khan. “There can be only one explanation for her altering course. Someone steered her manually – and you were the only person alive aboard.” He cocked his head. “You saved thousands of students and…”

“I ordered her to fly into Starfleet Headquarters,” the Augment heard himself saying, shocked that he revealed this horrid detail, but he wanted to tell James the whole truth. But again, the fear of rejection from the man he loved was bitter on his tongue – more so than the truth. And it scared him more than the truth. But it had to come out – it would come out someday. If it didn’t, if he even omitted the truth, Kirk would turn away from him.

The young captain fixed him, not surprised – not really. He knew Khan well enough to understand how the man ticked. “I know why you did it – for the same reason as you blew up archive in
London.” He took a deep breath. “Jesus, you were so far gone.”

He saw a glimpse of something in the sea-colored pools. Something that reminded him of rue – regret and sadness. Well, if the Augment felt remorse, it was the signal Kirk had looked for.

“You gave an order that couldn’t be followed anymore. And if you hadn’t tried to steer the ship manually, the outcome would have been devastating. The *Vengeance* would have crashed right into the universities. It was the middle of session in the middle of the day. The place was packed. The casualties would have been enormous if the *Vengeance* wouldn’t have altered her course. You wanted revenge, but you saved innocent kids. Maybe that means something to you.” Kirk uttered that last sentence quietly, and Khan felt a sharp pang in his chest.

For a long moment, he only stared at Kirk, relieved that his temporary insanity had somehow been a blessing, but there was a nagging feeling deep in him. In his anguish, he wasn’t thinking clearly as he set a new course for the *Vengeance*. But he never intended to bring death and destruction to civilians. He was shocked to the core when the *Vengeance* finally came to rest, and he saw the catastrophe the dying ship had caused through its torn-open hull.

Until now, he had thought that he was responsible for it, but it seemed fate had intervened again.

“The deaths in the harbor are bad enough,” Jim continued, “every victim was one too many, but the ship falling wasn’t your fault.” He lowered his head. “I talked with Spock about it often; after all he gave the order to use the torpedoes. But neither he nor anyone else could have anticipated that the *Vengeance* would be caught in Earth’s gravity.” He looked Nien straight into his hopeful eyes. “You could have ordered her to fly to Yellowstone Park, to the Pacific Ocean, or to Hawaii – she wouldn’t have done it. The computer wasn’t in charge anymore; our technicians figured it out after they took her apart. What happened was awful, but it was inevitable. That you somehow managed to steer her manually, saved countless lives.”

Khan bit his lips. Had he done that? He had no clear memories of those minutes on the destroyed bridge. His enhanced mind and memory let him down. Everything was a haze of white hot pain.

“I finally thought I had my family safe in my care. And then they died, and I had to watch it in a blazing inferno. I… I was mad with pain,” he heard himself saying; a part of him cringed, demanding a lie to protect himself. He found himself unable to do so. “As the *Vengeance* was falling, I realized I was above California, and I ordered her to fly to Starfleet Headquarters.” He saw Jim stiffen, and he had to turn his head away. For the first time, he was ashamed – and hid. “The computer told me that the destination was – maybe – not attainable, but I confirmed it nonetheless. One course was as good as another.”
He moistened his lips; his heart beat painfully slow. “As I came through the clouds, I knew the ship headed for Sausalito – the universities. The automatic controls failed, so I punched another course into the Nav computer, and then the Vengeance wasn’t reacting anymore.” He bit his lips. “Then I recognized that the ship was about to land in the water. I was… almost relieved; I wanted to die in that crash – share in my people’s fate. The next thing I knew was that hell broke loose and that I was hurled through the bridge, paralyzed for a short time. I came around and realized that I was still somehow alive; I went to the hole in the hull and saw what happened.”

An icy shiver ran down his spine so intense that Kirk felt him tremble; he squeezed the Augment to remind him that he still had him. Kirk was quiet, but present for him. Then he spoke again – no malice, just a statement. “You were ready to destroy the whole Headquarters.”

“You were ready to destroy the whole Headquarters.”

“Yes – the source of all that went wrong for me and my family.” He lifted his gaze bracing himself for the loathing he expected to see in Jim’s eyes. Kirk knew what Khan expected. ‘When will Nien believe that I’m with him – for him?’ Jim worked to radiate calm and to show the love he felt.

“I never intended to crash into a city full of civilians!” Khan continued nearly pleading for understanding. “I am no monster. Even if the humans have mistreated my kind over and over again, I can’t, I couldn’t kill innocents, but…” He stopped and shook his head; his voice echoed with despair, self-loathing, and bitterness. Closing his eyes he waited – waited for Kirk to turn around and to walk away; to tell him that he despised him for what he tried to do. He braced himself for the hurt and for the cold emptiness his James’ abandonment would cause him. It didn’t.

Instead of being confronted with disappointment, disgust and wrath he suddenly felt two warm fingers beneath his chin, “Nien, look at me – please.”

Feeling the irrational need to collect his courage, the super-human did as his beloved asked; he felt a tight knot in his stomach as he glanced at the younger man.

“What you tried to do. No one can find out …”

“The computers must have recorded my…”

Kirk interrupted the Augment firmly. “No, you don’t understand. No one can find out. There are no records left from the bridge. The main computer was destroyed in the crash; the records are irretrievable. No one knows what you planned and no one will. What they do know is that the Vengeance altered her course sparing the university center and the Academy. Even this information is not officially known. Starfleet only released that a prototype of a new ship came down into San Francisco Bay following a malfunction. Starfleet investigators and the Federation’s independent
investigators don’t know what happened after you had beamed Carol, Scotty and me back to the *Enterprise* and Spock sent over and detonated the torpedoes."

Khan swallowed. “You know the truth, James, and that matters to me.” He forced the next question to his lips; his augmented mind protested the fear that filled him. “How can you still look at me and not loathe me? I was…”

“Do you regret it?” Jim interrupted him slowly.

The super-human went still and for a long moment he didn’t answer; then he whispered, “There are not many things I regret, but that all those people…”

“There was no chance to prevent the disaster because the *Vengeance* helm control was no longer operational. I don’t mean the fuckin’ crash Nien, I mean your attempt.” Kirk said calmly, and Khan remembered his beloved’s words from the morning: ‘It’s the thought that counts’.

“I know now that Section 31 was an unsanctioned department and that they killed hundreds of men and women who had no part this,” Khan answered slowly, his voice hoarse. “I should…I wish I’d had more foresight, the ability to reason.”

Jim sighed. “Exactly! It’s a good thing the crash wasn’t your fault.” He brought his hand up to stroke through the dark, silken strands tousled by the wind. “You can’t do it again. You can’t lose it when the outcome is not the one you want.” He lifted a hand as Khan started to protest. “If we are going to do this, if we are going to get the fuckers, you need to keep it together. I need you for this…And…I need you. I know you thought they killed your family. You were abused, violated and…” He stopped as a horrible thought rose in him. “You said violated, do you mean…” He couldn’t say it. The thought was too cruel to finish.

Khan kept his stoic façade, but the flash of defiance, pain, and hate in his eyes told Jim everything.

“No,” Kirk breathed, feeling as if he would lose the contents of his stomach. “Oh fuck, no!”

“If there really is a higher power, it wasn’t watching over me when Conelly came to my cell to show me who was ‘stronger’. He used me after Section 31 starved me and froze me half to death for their ‘experiments’.”
Jim shot up like an arrow shot from a bow. “Conelly? Nathan Conelly?” he yelled, shocked.

Khan lifted both brows and looked up at him, surprised. “Yes.” His eyes narrowed. “You know him.”

Kirk didn’t listen. He could only look at the Augment in utter disbelief. His blood boiled and rushed in his ears. “That… That fucking, wretched, perverse, dirty pig! Talking about you as though you aren’t a person, calling you prisoner-what-ever-number, but raped you?” Jim’s face was red with rage now; he felt a sudden urge to tear something apart. The feeling wasn’t new to him, but it’s been a long time. “That cold-blooded, sneaking bastard! Thinking he’s better than you and doing that prove it! How dare he! How could he possibly do that to someone who’d already been subjected to... As far as I’m concerned an illegal conviction and even more illegal experimentation? Fucking coward, lower than dirt little shit! If I ever see him again, he will pay! Hear me?! I will make him pay for what he did to you! I will beat him to a bloody pulp and drag his ass to trial, so...”

“No, you won’t!” Khan interrupted the furious tirade that was a solace for him – someone in his corner, he supposed the saying went. He couldn’t remember the last time anyone defended him, not since he was separated from his family, but this could be dangerous for his James. He wouldn’t allow it. Gracefully, he rose and held Jim’s shoulders. “You will not accuse him and drag his ass to trial, because then you would have to admit how you know what you know, and that would reveal our contact. They’d know that you did nothing to facilitate my arrest.”

“I. Do. Not. Care!” Jim gritted out. “This asshole raped you, for God’s sake, and got away with it! He has to p...”

“He didn’t get away with it completely. Even Marcus had his line; he transferred Conelly to another project for disciplinary reasons. I was never threatened by him again.”

“Wrong!” The blue eyes of the young captain blazed. “Conelly is the assistant to the scientist who ran the tests on you in the LSH-lab in Nevada – Professor Dashwood. All that time you were half-conscious in your cryotube, Conelly had his filthy hands on you. He let you suffer and pretended to be a human when he is nothing more than an ice-cold, unfeeling, brutal monster!”

This time Khan went rigid. “He was...? He belongs to...? How do you know that? Did you meet him?”

“Yeah, I had the ‘pleasure’ of meeting him and his boss in Barnett’s office. Barnett called Bones, Spock and me to bid us farewell for our mission and there we met those two buggers. Both were eager to get you back for testing. Some serums – they said for most known diseases. Jesus, that...”
means you were probably infected with them too.” Jim had to stop at the thought, and Khan stayed silent. Kirk went on, “He, Conelly, kept calling you a subject,” Kirk spat. “I thought I was gonna lose it then and there. It wouldn’t have taken much more. I didn’t know you then; not like I do now. I was still…I was confused – by you; by my own actions. For not contacting Starfleet the minute, you were gone. I thought I made the wrong decision. But when I met those two disgusting freaks, I was glad that you ran, glad you got away.” He tried to regain some of his composure, but that was easier said than done. “If I had known about Conelly then – what he did, I’d ’ve beaten the shit out of him, there. Unbecoming behavior be damned!”

“What happened to him – him and Dashwood?” Khan hissed; wrath flashed in his eyes.

Jim took a deep breath. “Barnett wanted to put them on trial for running illegal experiments on a human – you, but I don’t know if anything came of it. Conelly should rot in prison until the end of his pathetic life for what he did.” He closed his eyes in an attempt to reign in his emotions; then he wrapped both arms around the Augment. “I’ll get him Nien; I promise!”

The super-human didn’t immediately return the gesture, but he laid his head on Jim’s shoulder. “You risk your career, your ship, and your freedom if you try to take him on,” he clung to Jim tightly now, held him close. “You would have to tell the judge how you know about this all, and I don’t think that even your Admiral Barnett could you get you off the hook for withholding information on a wanted man.”

“That has to change,” Jim murmured; he buried his face in Nien’s neck. The scent, the proximity to where he marked him, soothed him. “‘There are always possibilities’ Spock told me once, and I don’t believe in the no-win scenario,” he mumbled; his voice muffled, speaking almost into Khan’s skin. “And even if it grates on me that we agree; that he is usually right, I have to admit it makes me hopeful.” His hands wandered over the firm back of the Augment. “You deserve a second chance. If Pike were still alive, he’d give it to you. He gave me my second chance, and I was as lost as someone could be.”

“It’s easier to forgive a very young man some foolishness than to give a man like me a second chance,” Khan stated flatly. “In their eyes, I’m a mass murder and war criminal and…”

Jim lifted his head again, still feeling nauseous and outraged, but his fury was about to change into new determination. “You are anything but a war criminal, Nien. You are a hero. You saved the whole population of Tammeron; you saved the Lexington; you saved me; you saved my friends with your device you gave them! You saved those people on the outpost! You can’t count how many people that adds up to! I want to make the world see you for who you are really.” His fierce gaze was locked with the blue-green windows of the super-human’s soul. He continued, “I am confident that anyone on that outpost will take your side, as well as the people of Tammeron. Hell, Bob will support you, I’m sure! You should hear him talk about ‘the daredevil’ who saved him and his crew…”
“I didn’t help to gain favors, James.” Khan interrupted him softly and earned a loving smile for it.

“I know – and that makes a difference. You, Khan Noonien Singh, are a good man – and I will move heaven and hell to show this the rest of the world!”

“Jim…” Khan chuckled; there was a sad undertone in his voice and he pressed a gentle kiss to his beloved’s forehead, amused and touched by his mate’s naïveté. “Do you really think you could succeed? The world only sees what it wants to see and…”

“And I will make them want to see the truth! The world needs and loves heroes – you’re one!” He pressed closer to the Augment and scrunched nose in thought. “Nien, why did you save the Lexington? You said earlier that you hated the staff officers, yet you risked your life for Bob.”

Nien smiled; then he sighed. “You will not let it rest, will you?” As Jim merely shook his head, the former dictator gave in. “You told me that Pike was like a father to you. He died because of me. I understand Commodore Wesley is like Admiral Pike. That he filled the hole that Pike left. I cannot give you back your friend, whom you loved. But I realized that I could prevent your mourning another loss. So I decided to interfere by kicking some Klingon ass – as you say.” Khan concluded the sentence with a quirk of his lips and an eyebrow rose.

Any other time Kirk would have burst out laughing at the Augment’s use of the casual phrase with apparent distaste in his voice – just like Spock. But it hit him; Khan faced death to spare Jim grief.

“You… You did this for me?” Khan’s silence spoke volumes. “Why?” he asked, barely audible. “We weren’t exactly lovers at the time. You could’ve been found out. Why’d you risk it?”

Khan gathered his thoughts before he answered, “As you know, I am quite acquainted with the agony that accompanies the loss of those you love. Twelve of my people did not survive our escape from Earth; eight cryotubes failed. Four men and women fell prey to Marcus’ greed and determination to force my hand. The pain of their loss – it will never leave me. After all you did for me and… After I learned what kind of man you really are – I did not want you to suffer like that again. If there is one person in this whole universe who does not deserve that pain – that anguish, it is you, James.”

Jim felt a lump rise in his throat that he swallowed down with some effort. This damn manipulative, beautiful, bold and fierce man had turned Kirk’s life upside-down. He rescued his friend for the sole reason of sparing him pain. And then he risked his own life to save Jim.
The young captain didn’t know what to say. Gratefulness was only one of the emotions whirling through him. There was also warmth, a deep affection – and that jarred him. He wanted to tell Khan how much he appreciated his selfless act – how much the life of his friend and the sacrifice the Augment had been ready to make, meant to him. But his brain stuttered over the right words.

And so he did the only thing that came to his mind: He leaned in to close the short distance between himself and the Augment and closed his lips over this soft, plush mouth. After the turmoil of the last half hour, after all he learned during this time, the show of tenderness eased the stirred-up emotions of sorrow, shock, fury and hurt. He held Khan close. He wanted to shield him, to protect him, to fight for him until the whole universe saw how wrong they all had been about this special man! Above all, he wanted to be beside Nien – wanted to make him forget all he had been through. He wanted to kiss away the anguish and the cruel memories. He wanted to make up for what this century had done to him.

They stood there, bare-footed at the lake, wrapped around each other. Jim knew that he would walk with his lover till the end. He could still feel Nien hurting inside as if it were his soul that was bleeding. The world could be cold and hard, turning the kindest heart into stone, but the Augment fought against it. It tried to steal something he was accused of not having. In truth he had more of it than the most. He was filled to the brim with it: Humanity.

Kirk would protect it, cherish it, and make the world see it no matter the cost…

**ST***ST***ST**

“Hold still, man!” Dr. McCoy carefully laid one hand on Crewman Parsons’ shoulder who grimaced painfully. “I know it hurts, but if I don’t treat this wound quickly, it will get infected.”

The Welshman grimaced but did as instructed while the CMO cleaned the injury at his right forearm. Several of his colleagues stood around him and watched the procedure, concerned. Even Scotty’s pointed gazes, bidding them return to their work, didn’t move them.

It was just a minor accident. Crewman Parsons slipped on the ladder leading to one of the coolant tanks. He steadied himself at the very last moment with a hand on the rail, but he fell against the stairs, injuring his arm in the process. Within seconds a few crewmates were with him, another called for Scott who immediately raced to the unlucky fellow. Another one contacted the med bay. McCoy was on duty and hurried down to the Engineering, medical kit in hand.
The wound wasn’t deep, but it bled a lot, the flow lasting several minutes until the doctor had been able to stop it. Marvin Parsons was pale and obviously in pain, so Leonard quickly injected him with a painkiller before treating the injury. The Welshman cursed in a tongue McCoy assumed to be Welsh and smiled in sympathy.

Scott cleared pointedly his throat, and Parsons grinned sheepishly. “Sorry, Commander.”

Montgomery rolled his eyes and met McCoy’s asking glance. “You don’t want to know what he said, Doctor, believe me.”

“You understand Welsh?” The CMO sounded curious. “And there I thought you only spoke English and Gaelic.”

Promptly Scotty laughed. “There’re different Gaelic dialects all closely related. The Welsh are speakin’ P-Gaelic; the people in North Wales are easy ter understand fer us Scotts.” He bent down and padded Marvin on the shoulder. “Cheer up, lad, ya’re getting’ one or two days off.”

Parsons sighed. “Believe me, Sir, I would rather have a double-shift.”

His shipmates and Montgomery laughed quietly while McCoy rose. “All right, Mr. Parsons, off to the med bay. The bleeding has stopped, and I bandaged the arm, but I’ll have a closer look at it in a day or two. In the meantime, if it burns, turns red, anything like that, you tell me.” He began packing his medical. “Miss Shepard?” he referred to a young engineer who tore herself away from Parsons and to look at him.

“Yes, Doctor?”

“Please accompany Mr. Parsons to the med bay, I will take Scotty’s report for the records and follow.”

Montgomery pursed his lips and suppressed a smile. It was an open secret that Shepard and Parsons like another, a lot. The rumors had already reached the med bay. And as he caught Leonard’s smirk as he watched the two heading for the exit, Scott was sure that the rumors were already a hot topic here.

“Thanks, Doctor,” he said. “After the shock the two need a moment to themselves.” He glanced at
the walking couple one time more; then he stopped short as he saw the smirking faces of the others. “What’s the matter with ya, ladies and gentlemen? Do ya’ve nothin’ to do? Back ter yer posts! Now!”

Without any protest, the others obeyed, discussing the accident quietly as well as the obvious relationship of Shepard and Parsons. Scott shook his head. “Chatterin’ as if they were in the cafeteria and not at work. I swear, sometimes they’re like children!”

McCoy chuckled and closed his medical kit. “So, you speak more than one Gaelic dialect?” he asked while he rose. “I didn’t even know there were different dialects.”

“Aye, there’re! Irish, Scottish, Welsh and then all the other Nordic languages, like Icelandic. The latter is much different, but some words are even to find in Gaelic.” He accompanied the CMO as McCoy headed for the door. “We Scotts are proud that Gaelic is still a spoken language. It’s even taught at school – as an elective course. You can also learn Old English, the runes and literature, ancient culture…”

“Runes?” Bones shook his head. “Who, on Earth, still wants to learn runes? Right, historians maybe, but…”

Scott sighed. “Our history is very turbulent and shouldn’t be forgotten in this world of interplanetary alliances. Many texts from these times are in runes and…” He stopped, and his eyes widened. “One moment, my relays are working.”

McCoy frowned. “Your ‘relays’?”

The Scotsman began to beam. “Yes, now I remember where I heard the word ‘drythen’! In an old Nordic rune poem; a rhyme for every rune.” He laughed quietly. “I learned it in school, but I guess I forgot it. Wait, if I can get it!” He thought for a moment intensely; then he cleared his throat, took a deep breath and cited with an intense tone in his voice,

“Byþ on myrgþe his magan leof. Ceal þeah anra gehwylc oðrum swican. For ðam drythen wyle dome sine earme flæsc eorðan betæcan!”

McCoy stared at him. “Very nice,” he commented wryly. “And what does it mean?”
A low chuckle escaped Montgomery. “Oh, it means ‘Human is mirth to the beloved kin; he shall though each one deceive, when the Lord will doom this miserable flesh to be entrusted to earth’.” He continued his way, while Leonard followed him. “From this rhyme I figured out the name Sunrise also uses,” Scotty smiled. “‘Drythen’ is an old English word for ‘lord’ – or ‘king’.”

Bones lifted both brows. “So ‘drythen’ means ‘king’?”

“Yes, or ‘lord’. A warlord could also wear this title and… Doctor?”

The CMO stopped in his tracks; his eyes went wide as saucers, his face white as snow. Leonard didn’t hear Scott’s question. His world narrowed so that he didn’t take notice of anything around him. All of his thoughts focused on what he had learned seconds ago, and his bright mind wove the single strands of information into a strong cord.

Drythen – king – and king meant…

KHAN!

McCoy had the particular feeling that someone had pulled the rug out from under him. Icy fear ran down his spine.

Drythen was the old English word for king and the title ‘king’ translated to ‘khan’.

Sunrise was Khan – and Jim was with him right now – had been for days.

For a moment, something close to panic rose in Bones; then he called himself to order. First, the homogeneity of the names was a big hint but circumstantial at best. Second: Sunrise had saved Jim, had taken care of him. So if Drythen was really Khan, the Augment must have an important reason to take care of Jim.

Still, Jim could be in serious danger if Khan were with him. No one knew what the super-human was up to but they all knew how quickly he could snap. No one would ever forget that.

Bones needed proof – now! And he already had an idea how to get it.
“Doctor? What’s the matter? Yer pale like a ghost,” Scott asked concerned, laying a hand on the CMO’s back.

McCoy looked at him without actually seeing him; then broke into a run towards the exit. “I have to go!” he said and heard Montgomery calling,

“And what’s about the report?”

“Later! Send it to my office!” Bones had shouted over his shoulder before he bolted out of the exit as if the devil was on his heels.

Scott stared dumbfounded after him; then he stuck his fists on his hips and shook his head. “Sometimes I think a doctor's need for a physician is greater than their patient's.” He sighed, turned around and heard something above him. Groaning he rolled his eyes. “Keenser, come down from there. One accident at day is more than enough!”

The small alien looked down at him from his place high on one of the pipes and blinked. He may not have understood everything his friend and the CMO talked about, but he had sensed the fear and the shock in the doctor.

Something happened – and Keenser simply knew that it had to do with the captain…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Surprise or not surprise? It’s Bones who gets the right idea about ‘Sunrise’s’ identity. And, of course, our dear doctor will act on this in his very own, special way…

I also think it was about time that Jim and Khan spoke about the events that happened before (during STiD) and especially about Pike and the Vengeance. If you watch the course of the Vengeance before she grazes Alcatraz you can see her changing her course the slightest bit. I thought it could be because someone tried to steer her and that
gave me the idea of taking the blame away from Khan. I hope you like it – as well as his own story. I imagined how Marcus must have deceive him in the beginning before he let his mask slip and showed his true face to the man who was still recovering from a culture shock. That Marcus ran tests on him is clear and to use them to force him into service seems to be logical for someone who thinks like Marcus did. And I guess there are a few of you who want to kick Conelly's ass even more now.

In the next chapter Bones finds the proof of his assumption that ‘Drythen’ is Khan and, like I said earlier, he going to react on it in his own, very typical way. And this will lead to more…

I hope you liked the chapter and I’m very, very curious for your thoughts about it.

Until next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Revelation

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so much for all the Kudos and comments, and referring to the ‘silent’ readers: Thank for staying loyal to this story. When I see, how many ‘hits’ the fiction has, I simply know how many of you have taken a big liking to it.

And thanks to the quick work for dear Rhiannon, I’m able to give you a kind of early ‘New-Year-gift’, because – voila! – here is the next update.

After McCoy is well on the way to reveal the true identity of ‘Sunrise’, you certainly all more than curious what will come next. I think you will LOVE this chapter (*smile*).

Have fun,

Yours Sunrise

See the end of the chapter for more notes

22. Chapter – Revelation

McCoy stormed into the med bay. “Geoffrey!” He gestured to Parsons, who had already arrived, to sit down on the bio-bed; Shepard remained at her colleague’s side. Dr. Geoffrey M’Benga emerged from the lab, alerted by the CMO’s shouting. Before he could ask what the matter was, Bones pointed at the young patient. “Accident in the Engineering, take care of him. I’ve got another emergency!” Without waiting for an answer, he hurried to his office, closed the door behind him and locked it.

He was at his desk in a few steps. He sat down and took a deep breath to calm himself. The attempt failed; his heart beat like the hooves of a galloping horse, and he shivered. If this Sunrise was Khan, then…

Well, what ‘then’? Jim was with him; that was certain, but was his friend in danger? Any other time, Leonard would have answered this question with a resounding “YES!” But new information came to light that made Leonard doubt himself – and perhaps Jim’s sanity. Hell, who was he kidding? He doubted Jim’s sanity on a daily basis.

Like now. Jim must have known ‘Sunrise’s’ identity. He sounded tired as he spoke to them
following his recovery, but he had also sounded relaxed, even comfortable. How was that possible! He was in the presence of the man responsible for Pike's death. Khan had taken Kirk hostage and attacked the Enterprise. He was responsible for Kirk entering the warp core where he sacrificed himself to save his ship and his crew. Still Jim had obviously covered for the Augment. 'That can only mean he doesn’t see the Augment as a threat – not anymore.' Leonard thought.

But why?

The new information made no sense, but seemed the only logical conclusion. Damn, he was sounding like the Vulcan. Before he could take action on the new information, McCoy had to make certain that he was correct regarding Sunrise’s identity.

He stared at the computer screen while he carefully reviewed all that happened with the mysterious stranger in the last days. One detail stuck out in his mind: Sunrise’s transmission after Kirk had been left on Turkana and how furious he was when he learned of the young captain’s fate. There was something vaguely familiar in the way ‘Sunrise’ spoke – no miracle if this member of The Shadow was indeed Khan Noonien Singh. Still, the reason for his outburst made just as much sense as Jim’s obvious attempt to keep his rescuer’s identity a secret. That is, none at all.

McCoy pursed his lips. Uhura had tried everything to backtrack along the computations that scrambled the man’s voice in order to find the original, but it was no use. From what Bones gathered from Uhura’s explanation, ‘Sunrise’ had synthesized his voice several times and then encrypted the computations so that even the ship board computer couldn’t undo the alterations. Clever, brilliant even, she’d said. ‘Just like Khan’ he thought. Leonard was hell-bent on seeing through the Augment’s game and discerning his intentions towards Jim.

Leaning back in his chair, the CMO pondered how they could reveal Sunrise’s face. The conversation left no doubt Sunrise knew them well. Uhura said she couldn’t identify the voice because of the layers of data over the original transmission, but what, if…

Reaching for button to hail the bridge, McCoy spoke quickly to the lieutenant on duty at the comms station. The young man confirmed Leonard’s request without hesitation. If he thought anything of McCoy’s query, he said nothing; a CMO always had special status. Half a minute later Bones got the data he needed.

He listened to the recording of Sunrise’s transmission paying close attention to the heavily altered voice and his and Spock’s answers. Pressing his lips into a thin line, McCoy nodded grimly. Hell, he would bet the bourbon in his quarters that the mysterious man and Khan were one and the same person.
Bones took another deep breath. Familiar… He knew it was Khan, but why did he know it was Khan? On a whim he decided to play the security footage from the first time he had Khan in the med bay. Christ, he’d hoped he’d never have to see or hear that man again, but maybe seeing it – hearing him would shake something loose in his memory. “Computer, give me security footage from camera 1, med bay, star time 2058.0812.” A moment later Khan was on his screen. He sat on a bio beds, wrists cuffed, back rigid, posture absurdly straight with security on either side of him. McCoy scanned his vitals and murmured something about their moving at least. The Augment answered with a dark suggestion that no one was really safe.

“Computer, stop!” Bones ordered and leaned forwards. “Computer, replace the voice of the incoming transmission of star time 2059.1028-17 to the voice of the speaker from transmission star time 2058.0812-45.”

“One moment, please,” the board computer’s feminine voice answered as it fulfilled the requirement. “Order accomplished.”

“Play back!” Leonard said; anticipation knotted in his belly.

The computer complied with the imitated voice mimicking Khan. It was too close for McCoy’s comfort. “I know who you are, Vulcan! Where is Kirk!?” the deep baritone sounded, and McCoy held his breath with a sinking feeling in his gut.

“I am sorry to tell you that Captain Kirk isn’t aboard, Sunrise. He is still on Turkana.” Spock’s voice answered, followed by a tense “Have the Klingons arrived?” the mysterious stranger asked.

Again the Vulcan spoke, “Yes, over an hour ago. The captain stayed behind to help a woman and her children flee. He ordered us to leave.”

“You… left him?”

“We had to activate the deflector shields and leave immediately. The Klingon fleet commander gave us an ultimatum and Captain Kirk gave us an order…”

“YOU LET HIM DOWN?” ‘Sunrise’ roared and Bones ordered the computer to stop. He heard enough. The last outburst left no doubt: Sunrise was Khan!

McCoy moaned and rubbed his face. “Sweet Lord, Jim, in what have you gotten now?” he whispered, feeling dizzy with worry. Jim was with the Augment – the very same man who had
sworn revenge against them all. Heaven alone knew what the super-human was doing to the young captain right now, making Kirk pay for his defeat and anything else that happened following his capture. The thought made Leonard sick.

But again, something was off with that train of thought. Why had the super-human been concerned about Kirk’s well-being? Bones remembered Sunrise’s rage very well. Was it been real fury born out of worry for the captain or was it a part of a larger plan? McCoy firmly ordered the computer to continue, and a moment later the Augment’s enraged voice sounded again.

“You call yourself ‘his friend’ AND YOU LEFT HIM TO DIE?”

“I followed the captain’s order and had to think of more than thousand peo…” Spock interrupted but didn’t get far.

“HE DIED FOR YOU, VULCAN! He DIED once – and has now to face TORTURE AND DEATH AGAIN! HOW COULD YOU!? How DARE you to leave him to that fate after what he has done for you and his crew! I’ve been called a monster over and over again, BUT I WOULD NEVER LEAVE ONE OF MY OWN, NO MATTER THE COST!”

“Computer, stop!” McCoy pursed his lips and ran his hands nervously through his hair. He had real proof of his assumption – not the voice, but the words ‘Sunrise’ said. ‘I’ve been called a monster over and over again, but I would never leave one of my own…’

If you could say one good thing about Khan Noonien Singh, if he had but one quality – it was that he was loyal to the death where it concerned his crew – his family.

‘…one of my own…’

Bones leaned back and crossed his arms. Did he understand that correctly? Did Khan regard Jim as ‘one of his own’? How? Why, for God’s sake? They were enemies; Khan wanted to kill Kirk. Now he risked his neck to save the reckless Iowa-kid. He talked about him as if he were his ‘family’. Kirk was no Augment! The treatment of Khan’s blood had some side-effects: improved vitals, a stronger immune system, greater strength and so on, but Jim was no super-human.

And Khan couldn’t have learned about Jim’s therapy. There were only a few who knew about Jim’s death and ‘resurrection’ – a few admirals, Starfleet’s chief of internal medicine, and of course, the crew of the Enterprise. Still the Augment’s statement allowed no other conclusion. Khan must have heard or read about Jim’s death in the warp core chamber, of his revival and recovery. That was the only explanation for why he thought of Kirk as one of his own. And so he rescued the Starfleet
officer, treated him and took care of him.

When all possibilities have been ruled out, the impossible must be true. Christ, but this was one hell of a truth.

Still it provoked another question: How did Khan learn of Jim’s death and recovery? He could rule out the guards and staff of Starfleet Headquarters’ prison; they didn’t have the clearance or the access. Khan had very little contact with any flag officers and there was no reason for them to reveal the information. So, how had the Augment gathered that information? Bones was sure that it wasn’t in Kirk’s personal files the super-human hacked to get their home addresses.

On the other hand that wasn’t this critical; curious, but not critical. Far more important was the question of Jim’s safety in the company of the Augment. The super-human was a ticking time bomb, ready to explode the second you pushed his button. Jim had the uncanny ability to unnerve even a Vulcan. Hopefully, Kirk was careful around him, but Bones doubted that. His friend sounded far too easy in Khan’s presence – as if the Augment would and could not be a danger for him. That carelessness was unusual, even for Jim Kirk. The young captain may be reckless, but he wasn’t careless. He was calculating. Only Bones wasn’t always thrilled with the results of his calculations.

Therefore, Kirk must have discerned that he could trust Khan; God knows why!

‘Something happened between them,’ Leonard thought. ‘Something has drastically changed between them; otherwise Jim wouldn’t react this way. Hell, he trusted Khan’s information about the planned attack on Tammeron without question. And he spoke of him – of ‘Sunrise’ – as if he was a… a friend!’

McCoy’s fist landed hard on his desk. He had to talk with Jim – now! He had to make sure that the damn kid – his captain was all right. And he had to know what the hell going on. Of course, he also knew that he also should contact Spock immediately; tell him what he had found out. But he wasn’t going to do that. There was a reason Kirk was keeping the information close to his chest and if he was sure of one thing in the world, it was his trust. He trusted Jim Kirk implicitly, without condition, and without reservation. Bones didn’t have a clue what was going on between his friend and the Augment, but he had a feeling that it would end in a disaster if he informed Spock of his discovery. He would have faith in Jim – as long he wasn’t in any danger!

Bending forwards, he hailed the bridge. Uhura was back from lunch and surprised when the CMO asked her to contact The Shadow, but knowing McCoy she didn’t question his request. The good doctor did nothing without good reason, and so she hailed the militia with Code 9. It wasn’t long before the comm was answered by one of the militia’s members, Ritek. She linked him to McCoy and dutifully suppressing her curiosity.
From the science station, Spock looked at her with his eyebrow raised. “Did Dr. McCoy tell you why he wants to contact the captain?” There was no doubt that the CMO’s request for a transmission with The Shadow was an attempt to reach Jim.

Uhura shook her head. “No, he didn’t say anything to me. Maybe it’s private?”

At this both Spock’s brows practically vanished beneath his black hair – the Vulcan equivalent of a shocked expression. Normally the comms station was not used for private transmissions. On the other hand, it could be that McCoy only wanted to know how Kirk was doing as his friend and doctor. So Spock left the matter to rest. He’d ask McCoy next time he saw him.

Jim laid in one of the deckchairs with his eyes closed. He seemed relaxed, but inside turmoil roiled in him and he knew the same went for Khan who lay beside him in the second chair. It was late afternoon and normally the temperature dropped at this time, but not today – rather the opposite. It was even warmer than midday now and the air was thick. Without checking the forecast on the PADD, both men were well aware of the impending thunderstorm – not uncommon for this time of year. It was similar to the late August storms back home, Kirk thought to himself.

Maybe the stirred up barometric pressure affected the unrest in the two lovers.

Khan was still stunned that Jim was ready to forgive him Pike’s death – a man who had been like a father to Kirk. After everything he had learned about the admiral he was indeed sorry that the officer had fallen prey to his fury. Pike must have been a great man. Kirk had been quiet about his past, but there were small tells – hesitations and far-away looks. Kirk didn’t trust – didn’t make someone his family easily. But he did Christopher Pike, and he did it for Khan. That made Pike’s death all the more difficult. It made Khan, all the more sorrowful he’d hurt his James. Kirk was right. He needed consider all the pieces on the board before he made his move. After all, what good was an engineered mind if he didn’t use it?

But that wasn’t the only thing that kept the Augment deep in thought. Jim’s words – his point-of-view had opened the super-human’s eyes and his mind.

The Vengeance. In his pain, he wanted so badly to bring death and destruction to those he’d convicted of guilt. He hadn’t realized that in Starfleet Headquarters many, many men and women had no hand in his pain. He fought and killed those he regarded as a threat – as the enemy. But how
could a janitor be guilty? He was only at work, earning a meager living for his family. The cooks and servers in the cafeterias, all the civilian employees – none of them had anything to do with Starfleet besides the fact that they earned their living at Headquarters. He never thought of them or the cadets or even the school children that may have been on a trip to Starfleet.

Noonien Singh hadn’t thought of the innocent lives which had no part in Starfleet’s guilt – Section 31’s guilt! He had to change how he thought of this century’s explorers because now he knew the truth. A handful of power-hungry officers had subverted and sullied the noble cause Starfleet was founded upon – to explore and to protect. Perhaps he was no better than Marcus. He only saw his needs and his unbearable anguish. But his deeds were rooted in fidelity to his family. He only wanted to protect them. He thought he failed as he grieved for them. Marcus only wanted power. He provoked a war to show the whole world how ‘right’ he was about everything. At least the man considered his daughter’s life when he beamed her over to the *Vengeance* before he attacked the *Enterprise*. The act was against her will – practically kidnapping. Still, for a few moments Marcus had thought like a father.

A father…

Khan’s memories drifted back to Thomas Harewood. He was assigned to Section 31 in a minor capacity. Thinking about the officer and his behavior, the Augment was almost certain that the man believed he worked for Starfleet’s Secret Service and not for an illicit section of Starfleet. Nevertheless, Khan had used him as a jump point for his revenge. He used the man’s desire to save his daughter to turn him into a traitor. Harewood had been as desperate as he; still he showed no sympathy for the man or his family. A family now without a father.

It might have been guilt that stirred in the super-human, or perhaps remorse. One feeling was as unfamiliar as the next. He was glad that at least the little girl, Lucille, if he remembered correctly (and of course he did) might be healed. He had no proof; he would ask Jim if he knew anything about the child later, when they came down from their melancholy. With infallible instinct, Nien sensed the continuing turmoil in his beloved.

He would keep his promise to Harewood. He would leave the child and its mother alone even though she, like Jim, carried a bit of himself in her now.

One thought bled into another, but he had to work through each and every one of them for his own good – and theirs. And so he continued to follow its flow.

There was no doubt their shared blood linked him and Jim, but the blood was only the catalyst for their relationship. Now, he knew that nothing in the world – nothing he would say or do would make Kirk change his mind about him. And he meant to keep it that way. He wanted Kirk to be proud of him, wanted his approval. That was enough to scare the Augment. This wasn’t about blood anymore. Kirk thought Khan could be saved – was worthy of saving. From the beginning Jim
regarded him as a human being and over the last few days Kirk showed him just how precious he was in his captain’s eyes. Jim wanted to give him a second chance to find his place in this universe and this time. And when Jim found something worth fighting for – he didn’t stop until he won the fight. That was more the super-human could have ever hoped for in one lifetime. And now he’s been given a second lifetime complete with someone in his corner.

Khan wondered if the cost would be too great for Jim. He feared for Kirk in his determination to officially vindicate him; it could mean the end of Jim’s career, or worse. But risking his ship, his career, and even his freedom in an attempt at the impossible was typical for Kirk, who always did what he thought was right. Now quite familiar with the officer’s stubbornness, he’d wait for a chance to talk his James out of this insanity. He wouldn’t allow his Pyāra to sacrifice everything for his benefit. Khan was a criminal Earth could not forgive. Perhaps there was some small possibility that the law could be interpreted to his advantage, but who would listen to him – to his side of the story? Who would not look at him and see anything other than a terrorist?

Still, Marcus had shaped this present for him by reporting civilian casualties in London that never happened. But proving it would be difficult. And then there was Daystrom and Qo’noS. That trip was likely the catalyst for the Klingon declaration of war. And finally there was his attack on the Enterprise.

What had Jim said? ‘This is so fucked-up! The ones responsible are dead or will deny anything you say.’ A correct appraisal. There was no way on Earth that he would get out of this unpunished. But he didn’t care as long as his family and Jim were safe. But his crew was still in Starfleet’s hands, and Kirk ran the risk of getting caught up in this whirlwind because he covered for him.

Nien sighed. Of course it warmed him that the man beside him wanted to stay beside him – to shield him from penalty, still…

The communicator in his pocket interrupted his musings. Frowning, he pulled it out. He felt Jim’s asking glance on him as he opened the little device and lifted it to his ear. “Yes?”

“Hi, lad, it’s Ritek!” the Rigelian’s voice called cheerfully through the small speaker. “How things are going with you and the Federation’s hero?”

Khan’s sea-colored eyes moved towards Jim, “We are well, Ritek, thank you for asking. How can we be of service?”

“I got a transmission from the Enterprise’s doctor. The good man wants to speak with his captain. Seems urgent.”
The Augment lifted a brow and saw James tense. Something must have happened; otherwise the CMO wouldn’t try to contact Kirk. “Can he talk with him directly, Ritek?” the super-human wanted to know.

“The receiver and the transmitter of your communicator are too weak to cover the distance to the ship. The boys must be further out somewhere, but I may be able to piggyback the signal through our comms station to boost it.”

Jim rose, stepped to Khan and bent over him. “Ritek?” he called into the communicator. “Kirk here. I really appreciate your help, but maybe Dr. McCoy’s reasons for his call are…personal? Can you switch off the speaker at your station so that…?”

“I'll kill the link and leave the room. If I return in five minutes, will that be okay for you guys?”

Khan rose and handed Kirk the 23rd-century version of a cell phone; a smile played around Jim’s soft lips. This wasn’t a casual acquaintance with the militia now. The Shadow were friends! And the young captain was grateful for it. “Yeah, that would be okay. Thank you so much, Ritek.”

“You’re welcome, Captain. Just wait for the bill I’ll present Starfleet with for my work as a personal outpost comms station for one of their boys!” He laughed, before he continued, “Here is the good doctor, Ritek out!”

Khan pursed his lips. “I'll be in the cottage preparing dinner,” he said quietly, wanting to give his lover some privacy.

Jim smiled a beaming smile and cheekily blew him a silent kiss before turning his attention to the communicator. “Bones, that you?”

“Jim!” The doctor’s exclamation sounded relieved, and Khan asked himself what had happened that caused him such agitation. For Jim’s sake, the Augment hoped that nothing had befallen one of Kirk’s friends. Nodding at his beloved, he walked away to the cottage. He’d start dinner while Jim tried to placate his dear doctor.

Hearing McCoy’s voice filled Jim with joy. As much as he relished convalescing far away from the war with his lover beside him, he also missed his friends, his crew, and his ship; so he was glad for the contact. Then he sobered. Ritek said Leonard wanted to speak with him urgently. That could
only mean something was wrong.

“Bones, what happened? Is something wrong? Were you in another battle? Is everyone okay? Are you all right or…”

“Jim,” the CMO interrupted his friend's questions, and his voice turned firm. “Are you alone?”

Kirk frowned. “Well, Sunrise is in the cottage and I’m in the garden, but…”

“Can ‘Sunrise’ hear us?” Leonard cut in again, and Jim’s alarm bells rang; he had a feeling…

“No, I don’t think so,” he answered slowly, but he made his way towards the lake’s shore anyway. He knew that Nien’s hearing was engineered. He also knew that if Khan saw him walk down to the shore, he would know there was something Jim didn’t want him to hear. “Why, Bones?”

There was a short silence, before Leonard tensely said, “Because we both know that his ears are far better than ours – augmented, aren’t they?”

Jim felt the blood leave his face. “Beg your pardon?” he asked, but even in his own ears his voice sounded hollow.

“Don’t play dumb with me, Jim! I know who ‘Sunrise’ is – or should I call him ‘Drythen’? But that’s not right either, is it? Ya know what that name means? It’s the old English word for ‘king’. I don’t have to tell you what that title is in Asia, do I?” He sneered now, obviously angry.

Kirk stopped dead in his tracks. For several seconds, he could only stand and stare over the water, eyes focused on nothing; he only heard the blood pulse in his ears and the heat his cheeks. Then his thoughts came online and raced through his head fast, but still he was lost for words.

“Jim, are you still there?” New worry echoed in Leonard’s voice tearing Kirk from his shock.

“Yeah, I’m here.” He gulped as his mouth went suddenly dry. Caught! McCoy caught them and it was clear that he was none too delighted. “Bones, I…”
“Tell me I’m wrong, please Jim,” McCoy was pleading for what he knew wouldn’t be. “Tell me Sunrise isn’t who I think he is!” Leonard sounded calm – too calm.

Jim rubbed his head. He wouldn’t lie to him. Besides angering Bones, it’s just not something he’d do. He owed his friend more than that. “Bones, I can explain everything.”

“Oh, I’m eager to hear it,” the CMO growled. “Sweet Lord, KID, are you out of your corn-fed mind? You know this basta…”

“I thought I knew him – but things have changed, Bones. A lot of things!” Kirk had answered quietly, and he took a deep breath. He wasn’t willing to reveal more just yet. “Do the others know?”

“No, not yet. Even though there were countless hints left to identify this ‘daredevil’ Drythen. I’m damn proud that I figured it out before Spock, and that I figured out how to identify the voice when Uhura gave up on it. I’m a doctor, not a goddamn computer whiz.” McCoy grumbled that last bit out, but he was still angry. Jim could tell.

“Are you going to tell Spock now?” he asked, his tone small. He wasn’t afraid of the Vulcan’s reaction towards him, but rather, what he’d do to Nien, if he learned ‘Sunrise’s’ identity.

“Tell me one good reason why I shouldn’t inform your first officer, your Thy’la, that one of the most wanted individuals in the Federation is with you right now – close enough to snap your neck any second!” And before Jim could reply he added, “Is he threatening you? Blackmailing you? Is that the why you haven’t told us who he is?”

Kirk gasped. “What? No!” He shook his head. The mere thought of Nien threatening him was absurd after all they’d been through together. “No, I’m not in any danger, Bones. Far from it. He… He’s cared for me, healed me. Remember, Bones? It was him you gave instructions too.” Jim realized he’d just confirmed the doctor’s suspicions but he continued, “He’s helped me work through the…What I had to endure with the Klingons. It…It was bad, Bones. But he’s helped me, more than I can explain.”

“By fixin’ dinner, I suppose,” the CMO snorted. “I heard him before you got on the line.” Again the men were silent, then McCoy sighed heavily. “Jesus Christ, Jim, in what has gotten into you!? This man is a criminal – a murderer. He’s dangerous and…”
“He saved Bob and the *Lexington*; he saved the people of Tammeron; he saved me! Bones, I…” Jim closed for a moment his eyes. “Please, can I explain everything when I get back?” he pleaded with his friend now, rather than his subordinate.

“You mean if he lets you go,” the CMO groused.

“Why wouldn’t he? I’m not his prisoner if that’s what you’re worried about.”

McCoy huffed. “Dammit, Jim, don’t tell me that he’s just gone and forgotten that he swore revenge. He is…”

“He doesn’t want that – not anymore. Not after I told him that his family is still alive and… Well, there’s so much more, but…Christ, I don’t know. We’ve both gone through a lot. But we’re okay – with each other. I mean no one’s killing anyone, right now.”

“That’s not much of a comfort, Jim. You know that, right?”

“I know, but I also know that you trust me.” Jim was playing the friendship card now and Leonard knew it – and he let him. But he wasn’t letting Jim off easy.

“Is it because you’ve got some of his blood in your veins, now? Did he call you ‘one of his own’? He did you know, when he practically tore Spock a new one during his transmission – when the Klingons captured you.”

Jim blinked surprised. “He did?” He chuckled; a spark of amusement lightened the sinking feeling in his stomach. “That sounds like him. You should have seen how he shellacked the Klingons that interrogated me on Turkana. They literally had their heads handed to them.” Jim shuddered at his own comment – at the thought, but he sure wasn’t sorry.

“Yeah, God help anyone who messes with one of his majesty’s ‘own’. Don’t get me wrong kid, I’m glad that he kicked those bastards’ asses and saved yours. But you’re doing it again. Damn! Why do I have to point out the obvious to you?” Leonard fell silent once more, and Kirk dared to make his request.

“Bones, please don’t tell anyone about Sunrise, not yet. I’ll explain everything to you as soon as I’m aboard the *Enterprise* again, but… Bones, if Starfleet figures out who and where he is…” He bit his
lips. “I can’t bear to see him arrested, locked away like a wild animal. I don’t think he could now either. What if they sent him back to the labs? We both know how wrong that was in the first place.

“Starfleet liquidated Section 31 and the rest of them have been arres…” McCoy stopped himself. “No, dammit!” he thought aloud. “Luengo is still in charge. Spock and I found out when Command received word about your capture.”

Jim frowned. He would need to know more about this little detail, but just right now his worries lay elsewhere. “There you go. We know what happened to Nien the last time Command got their hands on him,” Jim took the same line, hoping to convince his friend to keep his secret.

“Nien’?” Leonard echoed. He groaned when Jim replied somewhat sheepishly “Yeah. Umm, it’s a nickname. It’s a bit less cumbersome than his given name.”

“You two are already use nicknames?” He snorted. “Please don’t tell me he calls you Jimmy. Jim and Nien are bad enough! Are you two holding hands, now?” McCoy was well-known for his sarcasm, but this time it didn’t bother the young captain; rather, it gave him a bit of hope.

“How did you know?” he asked innocently and to his relief heard a short laugh from his friend.

“Sure! Jim Kirk, Starfleet’s poster playboy is strung out on a guy.” He snorted. “Don’t pull my leg, Jim. It’s too creepy even for you!”

Jim chuckled – if Bones only knew – then he turned serious again. “So, you haven’t told anyone?” he asked softly; he could almost see the CMO roll his eyes. He didn’t receive an answer; he was close to begging now. “Bones?”

“You do know that you’re standing with one foot in prison?! Command will have your head if it ever came to light that you are covering for him.”

“Yes, I do, Bones, still…” Kirk answered gently, but firmly.

“Still you’re ready to risk everything for him!” Jim could almost hear as Leonard shook his head.
“He did it for me. Please trust me on this, Bones.”

“I know he did, kid. He stepped up, but I don’t trust that he doesn’t have an ulterior motive. I can’t believe you do,” the CMO grumbled. “This is a lot to ask Jim. If it wasn’t for my faith in you – and I have a lot of that, mind you, I would have already told Spock. We’d all move heaven and Earth to see the guy in shackles again. But Jim, I have the feeling you are still hiding something about him.”

Jim lowered his head; guilt rose in him. He wasn’t lying, but he didn’t like omitting either. “I can’t tell you everything over this line, Bones. By the way, Ritek granted us five minutes before he’d come back to the comms station. We gotta end this quick.” He glanced over the calm bayou and caught himself sending a prayer to the Lord. “Will you keep this to yourself, for now? Please?”

He heard Bones moan before he replied in frustration, “I will – and I hope you have some damn good answers when you’re back.”

Kirk felt a heavy weight fall from his shoulders, and his heart lifted just a bit. He sighed in relief. “Thank you, Bones! Thank you so much!”

A grumble sounded in Kirk’s ear, followed by an irritated, “Don’t make me regret this, Jim! I want you back aboard safe and as healthy as possible. And if Khan lays one finger on you, he’s going to have to face me. I don’t care if he is an Augment!”

Another short laugh that betrayed his now lightened heart escaped the young captain. If McCoy only knew how the super-human had laid all his fingers on him, in him, and all over him. He didn’t think the good doctor would recover from that bit of knowledge! Still he knew what Leonard meant. “He won’t, Bones, not like that. He really has been looking after me.”

“Yeah, it seems so – that’s what scares me!” Then his tone became calm for the first time since they had gotten into contact. “When will you back?”

“I don’t know exactly. A few days more would be nice, but…”

“Get well, Jim. I’m aware of the fact that the injuries those Klingon bastards inflicted on you are still healing, but what you really need to do is to get your head screwed back on straight after what they did.” He lowered his voice. “I’ve seen reports of Klingon torture at the Academy – really hard stuff. I can only imagine how you are. Actually, no I can’t. And now that I know who you’re with, I’m pretty sure your head is far from okay. So…”
“Damn, you’re going to hypo the hell out of me when I get back, aren’t you?”

“Oh, most definitely, kid.”

“Don’t worry, Bones, the flesh wounds are as good as closed and the deeper ones don’t bother me too much anymore,” Jim whispered warmly. “You helped. I know it bothered you that you weren’t there, but you were there for me. Just like you always are.” Jim nailed it. Leonard hated not being there for him and it came out as anger. As usual, Jim read it, read him like a book. Didn’t even need to see him to do it.

“I know what you’re trying to do, Jim. I wasn’t though.”

“You were! If not for you, I’d be a lot worse off. You told him what to do so he could get me well. He couldn’t do it without you. Between that and my good healing, I’m okay. Well, I’m getting okay. My head’s getting’ okay too.” He looked around him; the world seemed brighter again as the danger for Nien had evaporated. “A shimmering lake, woods, warm sun, naps on the deck chair, reading, talking and healthy food. Believe me, it helps. Not just with Turkana, but everything else too. I don’t think I knew how bad off I was.” It took a lot to admit that much. Bones knew it; he was just glad the kid was finally taking care of himself. His vitals hadn’t been right since they went to Qo’noS.

Jim took a deep breath. “Bones, I really would love to talk with you more, but I think our five minutes are up. Can we continue this later?”

There was another snort, before the CMO murmured, “Oh, bet on it, Jim. I wouldn’t miss it for the world!” Then he sighed a bit more deeply than before. “Take care of yourself – and tell your friend that not even his augmented ass would be enough to save him if he gets rough with you!”

Jim laughed, amused. He wondered what Bones would say. He could hardly imagine the super-human being rough with him now. Never before the young captain had experienced so much tenderness, coupled with the fierce passion Nien showed when they were together.

“Don’t worry, he won’t. Besides, I’m not helpless.” Kirk smiled.

“Rrrrrright,” McCoy scoffed. “After all he’s just a fallen angel trying to get some new white wings.” You almost could hear him grimacing. “Call us when you’re ready to come back. We miss you. Don’t get me wrong, Spock’s doing a good job, but the Enterprise isn’t the same when you’re not
“I know, Bones,” Jim sighed. “When do you finish the mission?”

“I don’t know exactly – maybe in a week. We’ll contact you then. Maybe we can pick you up…”

“In a week?” Ritek’s voice chimed in. “Boys, before you make more calls, think of my bill getting longer and longer.”


“Later, Jim – and please be careful!” the CMO couldn’t stop himself from warning Jim one more time. Then the link was cut off and there was only static. But Ritek was still on.

“Everything all right with you boys?”

Jim pinched his nose. Nope. Well, he was alright now, but he had much to answer for when he got back to the Enterprise.

“We’re all right, Ritek, thank you – for you concern and your help.”

The Regulian laughed. “You’re welcome, Kirk! Give Drythen my regards. Bye!” He killed the link and the officer closed the communicator; then he rubbed his forehead against the impending pressure.

Bones knew about Khan. Jim was more than grateful that the CMO had contacted him first instead of running to Spock and telling him what he suspected. Kirk knew that his first officer would have alerted the cavalry and that the Red Shirts would scour every planet in the area to find the ‘space-terrorist’ and his hostage. God bless McCoy’s big heart and his boundless trust in Jim. The young captain was well aware of the fact that his friend was worried about him and thought of Khan as a significant threat. Of course, Leonard didn’t know what Kirk knew now, but that was going to change – after McCoy browbeat him. Jim wasn’t looking forward to the talk, but it was necessary to convince Bones that Khan wasn’t what they all once thought he was. He had to get Leonard on board if he was going to protect Nien – no easy task, but he had to try.

Sighing deeply, Jim put the communicator in his trouser pocket and walked back to the cottage. He couldn’t smell anything. As the Starfleet officer stepped in, he saw that the Augment preparing a cold
dinner. Bread, cheese, assorted cold cuts, some vegetable and butter. All were ready to be set out on the porch; Khan was busy chopping the rest of the fowl from yesterday’s supper for a salad.

‘If Bones or Spock could see me now, they wouldn’t believe it,’ Kirk smiled at the thought. But it was too quickly replaced. For a short moment, he pictured Starfleet security storming the little cottage and taking Nien down – manhandling him in the fight the Augment would surely put up. Jim’s stomach knotted at the thought; his determination to protect his forbidden lover grew even more.

The super-human looked up as Kirk entered and lifted a brow. He not only saw but sensed that Jim was more troubled than before. “Is everything all right?” he asked, anticipating that the Enterprise had run in some trouble and that one of Kirk’s friends had been hurt.

“No,” Jim murmured and glanced hesitantly at him. “Bones – he knows.” He let the cat out of the bag and the former dictator frowned.

“What does your doctor-friend know?”

Taking a deep breath, the captain explained, “Bones knows that you’re ‘Sunrise’ – or Drythen.”

Khan let the cooking knife sink to the cutting board; his eyes widened with alarm. Then he asked in a voice far calmer than he felt, “Do I have to prepare myself for an arrest? Is Security going to come barging in here?”

Jim shook his head. “No.” He moistened his lips. “Bones doesn’t know where we are and…”

“And he assumes I’m a danger to you.” Khan lay the knife aside and straightened his stiffened frame. “What is he going to do? Alert your Vulcan? Maybe his lady friend will be able to retrace the good doctor’s transmission and so they’ll find out, where…”

“Bones won’t tell anyone about you,” Jim interrupted him softly, stepping towards him. He saw the disbelief written all over Nien’s face so he continued. “I asked him not to; I told him I’d explain everything when I’m back.” He shrugged. “It’ll be a hell of a talk, but as least he will stay silent until I’m aboard again.” Then he added, “I trust him Nien; that’s my family.”

For several seconds, Khan observed him carefully. He might not trust the doctor, but he did trust James – with his life and even the lives of his family if it ever came to that. McCoy. As far as he
knew, the doctor was very protective of Jim and a very close friend. His captain seemed to inspire that. The Augment smiled then continued his train of thought. What if the CMO went to the Vulcan first officer despite his promise to Kirk, just to protect his captain? Jim must realized what the Augment was thinking, because he added calmly, “Bones will keep his word, don’t worry. I can convince him that you’re not a threat to me or my crew – that I’m okay.”

Cocking his head, Khan pursed his lips. “So, he will stay silent about his discovery?”

Kirk sighed and nodded back at him. “Yes – he’ll make me pay for it later; I’ll get an earful as soon as we are in private.”

Little by little, the super-human relaxed. “What are you going to tell him?”


“The whole truth?” Suddenly a smirk appeared on Khan’s handsome face. “Then you should make certain that the good doctor has sedatives in a hypo near him. He’s going to need it after your confession.”

Kirk rolled his eyes again. “I will not shock him with the delicate details so get a grip on your dirty fantasy,” he grumbled. The super-human chuckled. “But I have to tell him as much as necessary with as few details as possible.” He rubbed his neck. “Fuck, admitting that we met in San Francisco is going to seriously piss Bones off. He arrived half an hour after I woke up, panic-struck because he thought you were there and had killed me. He was relieved when he found me untouched.” Khan looked at him from beneath long lashes. Kirk groaned, “Alright, untouched is not the best word to use following our roll between the sheets, and then on the floor, against the wall, the kitchen counter.” Kirk’s voice had drifted off before he began again. “But… you know what I mean.” He pulled a face. “Bones is going to get the shock of his life,” he whispered to himself.

“How much will you to tell him about me?” There was some tension in Khan’s voice now, and Jim fixed him with a gentle glance.

“As much I need to, to get him to see what I see – with your clothes on,” He added, trying to put Khan at ease. “Only what is necessary.” They both knew what Jim was really talking about – the violence Khan endured at the hands of Conelly.

The former dictator let out a held breath. It wasn’t only painful; it was humiliating and mortifying.
The Augment never wanted it discussed – not in public or even in private. Once was quite enough. He knew that he couldn’t forget it, ever. That – that hurt never leaves a person. He tried to forget it; he should be able to. Damn Conelly for dredging it all back up – forcing him to relive the trauma. It was centuries ago; he was just a child then. He thought as long as he didn't have to talk about it, he could deny that it ever happened. He preferred it this way. Seems humans never changed. It would almost be easier if Jim was like them. He’d know what to expect – no surprises, no complications. But he wasn’t. Jim surprised him over and over. “Thank you, James,” he murmured, and Jim closed the small distance to him, cupping his cheeks in his hands.

“What you entrust to me is safe with me, Nien. You are safe with me.” He softly reassured Khan; his thumbs circled tenderly over the Augment’s velvet cheek. “I will tell Bones some of what you’ve been through since Marcus woke you and what you’ve done since with The Shadow. I’ll explain him how you saved me, how you took care of me and how… How we are now, together. But that’s all. He will understand, you’ll see.”

Khan’s arms slipped around his beloved’s waist. “You’re sure about McCoy.”

“I am,” Kirk affirmed returning the gesture, wrapping his arms around slender, strong shoulders. “My good doctor has a big heart, is compassionate to a fault, and is the most loyal man I know.” He leaned forward and brushed his lips over Khan’s. “Everything is going to be okay, Nien. Bones will keep his word; he trusts me as his friend and his captain and he knows that I believe in him and you. If he betrays that trust than I’d be forced to do the same and he wouldn’t trust me enough to…” He frowned as he saw the amused smile on Nien’s face. “I stopped making sense a while ago, didn’t I?”

The Augment shook his head. “Yes, you’re rambling now.” He laughed quietly, finally relaxing again. “It tells me enough.” He leant his cheek against Jim’s and whispered into his ear. “You’re worried about me.”

Kirk shivered, sighed and pressed closer to love. “Yeah. I am. I’m not ready to let you go. I don’t want to be ready. So please stay out of trouble.”

“Isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black,” the former dictator teased before he lifted his head and captured Jim’s mouth fondly with his own. Hunger crept and stirred between them both.

ST***ST***ST

Ritek stared at the small screen that showed him several communication hot spots around Regula; they centered around the transmission stations. He used a standard desktop whenever the comms station on the Flash wasn’t operating – like now. He had switched it off after the Enterprise’s CMO,
and Kirk ended their conversation, and the Regulian wouldn’t activate the station anytime soon. He had to think – no distractions.

It wasn’t his intention to listen to the conversation between the two officers. Sometimes it was better to know less than more. He caught the beginning of the discussion purely by accident, because as soon as he had connected the Enterprise’s transmission to the communicator Diego had left for Kirk and ‘Drythen’, the doctor had started to talk. Ritek wasn’t out of the room before he heard more than he wanted.

At first, McCoy’s question if ‘Sunrise’ was out of ear’s shot had made him curious. After all the Enterprise’s crew knew that ‘Drythen’ had saved their captain. And then there had been that one word that had rooted him to the spot: augmented – ‘augmented ears’, the CMO said. And then the doctor said it: Augment!

Ritek wasn’t that familiar with Earth’s history; there were only rumors about the human Augments a century ago. Still he knew enough to be wary. He knew that Earth’s population had made attempts to breed a kind of super-race – that they took over most of the planet and it ended in war. Nearly two centuries later, there was an incident at one of the deep space stations. Young Augments seemed to come out of nowhere, and it caused a near-disaster with the Klingons. Some years later, Klingons appeared with an almost human-like appearance. Tests with augmented human DNA had gone wrong. That was why there appeared to be two Klingon races rather than one.

That was all Ritek knew about Augments – they were a biological mistake that caused a catastrophe and pain in epic proportions, but it was in the past. It had ended in the 22nd century.

Or so he thought. Obviously, he had been wrong. About everything. The Augments weren’t gone, and whatever Khan was, he was no mistake. Not to Ritek, not to The Shadow, and most certainly not to Kirk.

So he wasn’t a mistake, but how was he… Kirk and the doctor revealed much – enough to explain part of the riddle that was ‘Drythen’. After the transmission between Kirk and the CMO had ended, Ritek sat there in the calm of the Flash’s bridge and thought about all he had heard. He pondered what it meant – its implications.

The Regulian remembered all too well how his shipmate’s fist dented the comms station – it was still there – and how he brought the Klingon commander of the D’Ghor to his knees. He remembered ‘Drythen’s’ fight at the outpost. He seemed to be everywhere, hurling Orions far bigger than himself, and pirates through the air as if they weighed nothing. The plot ‘Drythen’ came up to put off the Klingon fleet long enough until Starfleet arrived to protect Tammeron, simply put, was brilliant. And as uncommon as it was brilliant. His flying, the sensor disturbing device. As far as Ritek knew, engineers and technicians tried to develop a working prototype for years now without success.
‘Drythen’ constructed one in a few days. But his pièce de résistance was his mission to recover Kirk. He had to reach the annexed planet, land on it and to arrive in the taken capital uncaught. Fortune had to smile on him. And he still had to sneak into the Klingon Headquarters, find Kirk, and flee – beyond the shields. An Augment could manage it, but never a mere human.

All the little clues now were like the stones of a mosaic. Set together they gave the whole picture. The doctor confirmed it: Drythen was a human Augment. His speed, his strength, his brilliance, his natural authority, even his protectiveness – all were the feature of his ‘race’.

‘Drythen’. They called him ‘Khan’ twice. It could be a family name. Either way, he had to avoid the authorities. McCoy called him a criminal and a murderer. But Ritek knew that sometimes judgments were meted out rashly. ‘Drythen’ seemed to have already a run-in with the Enterprise’s crew and therefore with Starfleet. That’s why he nearly panicked when the nice commodore offered him medical assistance.

So he was a wanted man – wanted by Starfleet and presumably this Section 31; Ritek hadn’t heard of them before. They had Khan once before; otherwise he couldn’t be handed back to them. He understood why it would anger Kirk and Khan, but Kirk seemed genuinely scared for him. The Rigelian had a very bad feeling about that. What if Khan was the result of a secret program – another attempt create stronger, faster – better people, maybe a kind of elite soldier? What if Khan had fled from the labs, killed some guards in the process and was now on the run?

And what about his family? Did he mean other Augments he thought dead – the one’s Kirk told him were alive? It made sense. Maybe there were several more ‘test-subjects’, still in the hands of this ‘Section 31’. Maybe they ‘bred’ elite soldiers. It was a hell of a lot of maybes. Ritek couldn’t imagine any of it was legal, so maybe the whole thing was top secret, flying under the radar without the High Council’s knowledge. That could only mean Section 31 was after Dryth… Khan, to stop him from outing them.

So, what did this mean for them – for Galven, Caviw, Jeff and all the others? The man they had welcomed into their little family was an Augment. But he was their friend too! He had proved more than once that he was loyal to them; he was grateful for their trust in him. Galven’s and his talk with him after Kirk’s rescue belied much more than his words. The man was surprised and deeply touched by Galven’s and Ritek’s concern for his well-being – as if he wasn’t used to these simple gestures – common among friends. He wasn’t used to being treated as an equal. He expected disappointment and was afraid to rely on others. Had Khan only known fear, loathing, or force with whomever he’s encountered?

If so, Kirk proved the exception. Their relationship must be so new; otherwise his friend, this doctor, would have known about it. Maybe their friendship had begun after Khan gave his blood to the young captain. Ritek remembered McCoy’s words concerning Khan’s blood in Kirk’s veins. That’s why the Augment abandoned his need for revenge against the Enterprise’s crew. Maybe this was the
reason for Khan’s icy, furious manner towards the Vulcan first officer. Ritek remembered his friend’s
conversation with another officer of the Enterprise and the nice female comms officer – Uhura if he
recalled her name correctly. Khan had been more or less polite towards them, but not to the Vulcan.
Bad blood he guessed, and he chortled at his own pun. That’s why he wanted revenge, now all but
abandoned because of the young captain.

But to McCoy and the rest of the crew, Khan was the enemy. Ritek supposed something must have
happened, and not too long ago either. Whatever Khan had done scared Kirk’s crew and angered
them so much that a captain had to plead with his friend and subordinate to stay silent about the
Augment.

And it wasn’t just because the captain and the super-human had a relationship (that Kirk pointedly
did not divulge). Ritek listened closely as the young captain tried to explain that they didn’t know
Khan – not like he did. The Regulian was sure Kirk wasn’t referring to some bedroom escapades,
but to who can really was – the man that The Shadow had come to know.

Ritek had to agree with the CMO, Khan was very dangerous. He figured Khan could kill a man in a
hundred different ways, without a weapon. But he was also loyal and honorable.

And that lent him far more credence than his augmented constitution. His character was all that
mattered as far as Ritek was concerned; he was sure the same went for Galven, Caviw, Jeff and the
others, even Diego. ‘Nien’ Khan was one of them now, and if some scientists messed with his DNA
to make him better or different, well, it wasn’t his fault. The Rigelian was sure that the man hadn’t
asked for it, but had to live with the consequences – consequences that had forced him into the role
of the lonely fighter. He had no one except for The Shadow, Kirk, and his family he seemed to
search for but couldn’t find. The Rigelian assumed correctly that his uncommon friend’s family was
somewhere locked away, and that Khan was desperate to free them. Perhaps that had something to
do with why he was a wanted man now. And his fierce protectiveness of Kirk. You didn’t need to
be a genius to figure out, how he would react if anyone threatened his family. Ritek assumed this
family also had their DNA engineered by science.

‘One of his own’ McCoy had said. He had used the same periphrasis as he referred to Khan’s
relationship with Kirk, obliquely referring to the Augment’s blood in the captain’s body. That’s why
the super-human considered Jim Kirk ‘one of his own’. It was another piece of the puzzle that was
Khan. His family must be Augments too. Well, if his family was anything like him, Ritek would
have no problem offering them a hand. And he’d support Khan in his attempt to save his family from
wherever they were. They owed Khan that much.

The Rigelian knew that the rest of their crew wouldn’t drop Khan like a hot potato. Not after he told
them what he knew. They’d stand with him, just as he would. Khan has more than earned their
allegiance.
Ritek took stock of the new information. Khan was an Augment; he was hiding from the authorities, was on the run from a mysterious Starfleet department, and he was searching for his people. What else? Khan was a good man. And he very likely was a man in love, even if he didn’t admit it. Maybe he didn’t know it himself. But Khan put the search for his family on hold, put himself in danger and within reach of Starfleet for the captain in his care. Whatever Khan had done, he’d certainly done his penance.

Nodding slowly to himself, the Rigelian rose. He would tell the others what he found out. Sharing what he knew, well, it was a matter of trust; he didn’t fear that Galven, Caviw or the rest of the crew would turn on ‘Drythen’ because of his past or who he was. Hell, they were all aliens now, the universe was so much bigger then Dryth... Khan realized. They’re all unique – some even stronger than Khan – maybe not smarter. They all had their run-ins with the law, and they all had their problems. Sharing these made them strong - a cohesive unit, a family. And now that family included Khan, Ritek didn’t doubt that for a moment.

What he didn’t know was how much the family would need each other, how deep The Shadow would get into the mire that was their future...

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‘Unbelievable – Jim’s covering for Khan! I know that he doesn’t do anything without reason. I don’t always get it, but I know him, I know that, but this is... It’s madness! Sweet Lord, this bastard blew up a building, killed innocent people, and he attacked the conference of Starfleet officers. He killed PIKE, for God’s sake! Hell, Jim DIED because of the son-of-a-bitch. Now he’s protecting him? It doesn’t make sense. Well, that was just par for the course with Jim, wasn't it?!’

Leonard McCoy stared at the wall straight ahead and had crossed his arms in front of his chest. The talk with his captain and friend had shocked and calmed him in one. Shocked because his worst fear was true – ‘Sunrise’ was Khan Noonien Singh! But Jim seemed to be okay, and the Augment didn’t appear to be a threat to the young man – not yet anyway. But Kirk’s instinct was rarely wrong and that was the only reason McCoy would keep his word. He’d keep quiet. Even though his mind screamed at him to not trust the Augment or his intentions. He wanted to send the cavalry to his friend’s rescue. Bones was almost certain that Uhura could backtrack the transmission so that they could find Jim and this monster, who... Who had done some good these last weeks. Why?

Without him, Starfleet wouldn’t have learned about the planned attack on Tammeron until it was too late. Who knows how many lives were saved. Without him, Jim would be dead by now – tortured to death. And without him and his development, the sensor disturbing device, the Orions and Klingons would have ambushed the Enterprise; they’d all would have had to face their makers, whoever they were.

Something else held McCoy back: Jim’s the gentle, pleading tone. Kirk’s gratefulness obvious. The
debt Jim owed Khan was bitter in Leonard’s mouth. Not only because the Augment saved his proverbial ass, but Khan stayed and cared for him. Leonard shuddered at the thought. How bad off was Jim when the super-human got him out of prison to let Khan of all people take care of him? But there was no doubt how much Kirk’s health had improved compared to when he first spoke to him. After his retrieval, Kirk could barely put together a sentence. McCoy remembered hearing how strained, how pained he sounded. Now Jim seemed well and at peace.

At peace in the company of the man who had killed his mentor and friend.

But nothing was more important to McCoy than his captain. It took Leonard a long time to come to terms with the attachment he had with Jim. His divorce made it so hard to form those attachments. But Jim was worth it, worth everything. And McCoy knew the rest of the crew felt the same way. Jim, the leader, inspired that kind of loyalty. It was unmatched in all of Starfleet. So McCoy could keep his promise to Kirk to keep ‘Sunrise’s’ identity for himself. He didn’t have to like it (he rarely liked Jim’s decisions), but he would do it. If Jim was ready to put aside Khan's past (and this was obviously the case for now), then Kirk must have good reason. It couldn’t just be that the Augment saved him. Jim understood debt and perhaps he felt he owed it to Khan to keep quiet for now. But it didn't explain why they were still together. Every minute with the captain was a risk to Khan. What was the reward then that outweighed the risk? McCoy had the feeling that he only hair’s breadth away from the riddle’s solution, but his brain was already overtaxed processing this new information.

It all boiled down to one thing. Jim asked him for something – his trust. And, dammit, McCoy had learned years ago to do just that. Bones would never begrudge him the fidelity that Kirk earned long ago. He loved him too much. No matter how reckless, wanton, a bit arrogant and just a little crazy, Jim Kirk knew exactly what he was doing. And if he could put aside Pike’s death to cover for and to work with Khan, then that's exactly what he would do, no matter the cost to himself. And McCoy would back him, no matter the cost. That's just who they were. 

‘Dear God, don’t let it end like the last time. Please, let Jim keep his eyes open. I don’t ask much, but I need this. Please keep him safe.’ Khan had grander plans, Leonard just knew it. Whatever they were, he knew they had to do with his ‘family’ and he needs Jim to carry them out. He certainly wasn’t caring for Jim out of some misplaced obligation. Jim didn’t turn him over to Marcus, saved him from that monster in fact – and did exactly what he said he would do! Maybe…”

His musings were interrupted by the door buzzer, and McCoy remembered that he was in his office and that this was still his shift. Groaning he rubbed his face. “If someone cut his finger and is crying he’s bleeding to death, I’ll give him a reason to need a doctor!” he growled and pushed the button on his desk to unlock the entrance.

As the doors slid open Bones opened his mouth to show exactly what he thought of the interruption, but closed it as soon as he recognized the tall, slender frame of the first officer. Of course, Spock would show up here – why wouldn’t he?
“Do you have a moment, Doctor?” Spock’s deep voice asked politely and Leonard rolled his eyes.

“If I say ‘no’ you wouldn’t believe me would you?” He watched confusion pass over the Vulcan’s face; he waved his hand. “Forget it. Please, come in.” He rose and pointed to the visitor chair on the opposite side of his desk. “Have a seat,” he offered, “Do you want something to drink? Tea, water or something else far too healthy?”

Stiffly, Spock sat down. “It eludes my understanding why you, as a doctor, would call something ‘too healthy’. Is it not in your interest that the crew take care of their health?”

McCoy looked from the replicator over his shoulder towards Spock and grimaced. “Of course, I’m glad when the crew looks after themselves, but believe me, sometimes a brandy goes a long way.” He brought the Vulcan his tea and looked at the clock on the screen. “End of shift – thank the Lord!” With that he opened the locker behind his desk and took out a bottle of Saurian Brandy and a glass.

Spock lifted a brow. “Am I assuming correctly that your talk with the captain wasn’t to your satisfaction?”

“Your perception never fails to surprise me, Spock,” Bones taunted and poured himself a finger (or a few) of the amber liquid. “And before you ask: yes he feels better and yes he will return to the Enterprise after our mission!”

This time Spock raised both brows. “That seems an agreeable outcome for all, Doctor, doesn’t it? I do not see why this wouldn’t satisfy you. But that was not the only reason for my visit. I also wanted to ask why you wished to contact Jim via The Shadow. We agreed that the captain would only be disturbed in an emergency; otherwise he was to be let alone to get some rest and heal per your orders.”

Bones pressed his lips shut for a moment – damn Vulcan curiosity! Then he sighed, “And it didn’t occur to you that, that’s why I contacted him?” He met Spock’s calm but asking glance and made a face. “I’m Jim’s doctor; he was rescued from Klingon torture just five days ago. It’s my duty to look after his health and discern his needs and further course of treatment. It bothers me that he isn’t seeking real medical treatment. Of course it doesn’t surprise me though.”

‘Good, Len, you didn’t lie to him, just applied a bit of misdirection,’ he encouraged himself. Still the firm gaze of the first officer made Leonard uncomfortable.
Spock cocked his head and rose his cup of tea. “As far as I know ‘Sunrise’ has at least rudimentary medical knowledge and you’ve already entrusted him with the captain’s health.”

McCoy had to carry it off well as the Vulcan called Khan by his cover name. He put the glass on his desk, finally sitting down across from the first officer. “He does know a thing or two about first aid and field aid, no doubt about it. But he isn’t a doctor, I don’t care how talented he is. Anyway, I would still require a report of Kirk’s status if ten professors and twenty doctors were treating him.” He raised the glass and took a too large gulp of brandy while Spock sipped at his tea.

“You are not… happy with the present situation,” he stated, and Leonard rolled his eyes.

“Obviously!”

“Do you have a reason to believe that ‘Sunrise’s’ treatment will not be enough to help Jim?” Something like concern sounded in the first officer’s voice. “Maybe Nyota can backtrack your transmission and…”

“There’s no need for it,” Bones cut in, sounding calmer than he felt. “Jim is doing better; he feels well where he is and ‘Sunrise’ seems to be good for him. He was preparing dinner for them while I spoke with Kirk.” The CMO emptied the glass but held it in his hand, while he felt a sudden grin tugging at his mouth. The mental image was kind of funny – imagining Khan in an apron, cooking on a little stovetop. Why the hell should that be funny? Oh yeah, because he was an augmented, murdering tyrant!

Spock observed him silently as he emptied his own cup. He wasn’t too familiar with human emotions, but his close relationship with Uhura had taught him much. He couldn’t read humans he didn’t know very well, but he knew McCoy – knew his baseline for reacting, and so he could discern McCoy’s behavior as a mixture of human frustration, worry and anger. Something must have happened, but knowing the CMO he wouldn’t say anything he didn’t want to and would rather make an excuse for privacy rather than give information he wasn’t ready to reveal.

But at least Jim seemed to be on the road to recovery, and for now that was enough for the Vulcan. So he rose and folded his hands behind in. “Then I suppose everything is in order. Please excuse me, Doctor, I’m still on duty. And thank you for the tea.”

“Yeah, you’re welcome,” McCoy murmured, nodding shortly at Spock before the science officer left the office. Pursing his lips, Leonard took a deep breath, before he refilled his glass. “Dammit, Jim! I
hope we can say everything is in order, as far as it can be for you. Because I don't trust Khan as far as I could throw him. Christ, don't let this be a trap – the moment Khan has been waiting for!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Oh dear, Spock will not be too delighted when he learns that McCoy kept ‘Sunrise’s’ identity to himself or the real reason why he contacted Jim. But this will happen after Jim’s return to the ship and even after Kirk gets an ear full of Bones, who will get in return the shock of his life (just as Jim foresees it - *laugh*.)

In the next chapter Ritek will inform the others about Drythen’s / Khan’s real heritage, you will learn more about Luengo’s plan to take over Starfleet Command, and there will be touching but also hot passionate scenes of our two love-birds.

I hope you liked the chapter and the talk no. one between Jim and Bones. It really was fun to write it and hopefully it gave you fun too. And – as always – I’m damn curious what you think of it.

The next chapter will be updated next week, so therefore I wish you all a beautiful New Year Eve-party and Happy New Year!

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

A little bit later but: HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! Sorry for the delay – new year, old running out of time like always (sigh) – but I think the chapter worth the wait. Just a little warning: This chapter is really only for adults and I would like to advise you to fetch some ice-cold orange- or apple-juice, because this chapter is going to be very, very HOT!!! Yeah, smug and romance in once – I’m sure you’re going to love it.

Just a little disclaimer: Jim’s quotes some lines from a poem that is well-known among military-members: “Through a Glass Darkly” from Patton. If you want to read it (it really fits well) then use following link: http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/543355/posts

And now have fun,

Thank you so very much for all the comments and kudos (I love you all)

Yours Starflight

“Drythen is a what? “ Galven stared at Ritek, who leaned against the open window in the small hotel room the Tellarit had rented. Outside the air was thick, brimming with electricity. Dark clouds loomed over New Aberdeen and reached far across the countryside; they loomed over the leaders of The Shadow.

The Rigelian sighed as he repeated, “Drythen’s real name is Khan. He’s what they called an Augment.” He lifted his hands in a helpless gesture as he caught Caviw’s reproachful stare. “I really didn’t want to listen to the conversation between Kirk and Dr. McCoy, but the man started talking before I could leave the room. Then I caught the word ‘augmented’ and that it had to do with ‘Sunrise’. So I stayed and – well – eavesdropped.” He rubbed his neck while he looked from the Caitian to Jeff and then to the confused, stout man he squabbled with so often. Still, he was his best friend, and he was going to do his damnedest to get him on his side.

“Well… Ung… All right,” Galven finally said. “Care to explain what an ‘Augment’ is?”
Jeff and Ritek stared disbelieving at him, while Caviw pursed her lips.

“Augment like in ‘augmented’ meaning… You mean he’s enhanced?” she asked and Ritek rolled his eyes.

“Sweetheart, you’re not too familiar with Earth history, aren’t you?”

Her long tail twitched. “Why would I be? Not everyone has the same interests as you and Jeff, Ritek,” she grumbled.

“Yes, that’s right, chipmunk,” Galven couldn’t resist to mock Ritek. “I think I heard something about those ‘Augments’ somewhere, but don’t ask me the context; I couldn’t tell you.”

“Maybe because you’re too busy with taking mud baths,” the Rigelian countered, but before another round of endless bickering could start, Caviw stepped gracefully between them; her red hair flamed in the light of the lamps as did her temper.

“Boys, I think we have other things to discuss now, so SHUT UP!”

“And how can we ‘discuss’ something if we are not allowed to speak?” the Tellarit asked innocently; his little eyes sparkling with mischief.

“Yeah, good question, Galven,” Ritek nodded and Caviw threw her hands up.

“Of course, as soon one of you out, you’re all the sudden thick like thieves!”

Jeff grinned. “That’s them – as always!” Then he turned serious again. “Concerning the Augment thing. The Augment program almost three hundred years ago was set up to… to construct… to breed stronger, more intelligent humans; they were made immune to nearly every malady of their time.” He shrugged when Galven and Caviw frowned. “They were… umm… bred to end the wars being waged in several countries over decades – to bring peace.” He sighed. “It backfired.”
“Some thought bringing peace meant ruling Earth; they took over country by country,” Ritek added, showing his knowledge about Earth’s history. “The ‘normal’ humans tried to stop them finally peaking in what were the Eugenic Wars. The Augments were either captured or killed; the war left a lot of destruction in its wake and it took decades for the planet to recover. Then a clever mind, Zefram Cochrane, developed the warp drive. That captured the attention of the Vulcans, who promptly visited Earth and the rest… well… is history.”

Galven frowned. “That would explain a lot – especially Drythen’s… Khan’s strengths, his quick mind and why he was able to get Kirk’s ass out of a Klingon prison.” He scratched his yaw. “So, he is a kind of super-human – and belongs to a breed race of living killing machines?” A hint of disbelief sounded in his voice.

“That doesn’t explain how he got here though.” said Ritek.

Jeff shrugged. “No, it doesn’t. Galven, I don’t think all were like this, but most. Yes.”

“Léo… Khan isn’t like this!” Caviw said firmly. She earned glares and eye-rolling but she ignored it. “You’ve seen him with Kirk and how tender he can be. And he was the whole time on our side, lived with us and…”

Ritek lifted both brows. “You don’t seem to be too surprised about this revelation,” he said and the Caitian-woman’s tail twitched several times again.

“No, I’m not. I knew he was…He’s human, but he’s more – different. I sensed a predator in him.” She caught the perplexed gazes of the men around her and sighed. “When Léo… Khan was injured at Tammeron, I stayed with him after we brought him to his quarters. I checked his vital signals over and again with the bio scanner the Commodore left us and… And after several hours, his injury was as good as healed.” She realized that everyone was staring at her, and she smiled, showing her sharp teeth. “His head wound had healed too before I left his quarters. His cells healing, regenerating with a speed that is impossible for a human. Now we have an explanation at least. He’s an Augment.”

Galven bent forwards. “And when were you planning on telling us about it?”

The Caitian shrugged – a gesture she had borrowed from her human fellows. “I didn’t think it was significant. It’s up to Khan to tell us. I found out about his healing properties by accident. It wasn’t my place to tell.”
“I rather think your feelings for him had something to do with it,” Jeff murmured, before he shook his head. “An Augment… I don’t know what to say. He’s become a good friend to us, still he’s…”

“Still he’s the same he was when we met him,” Galven cut in. “Just because we know more about him now, doesn’t mean anything. We met him, got to know him better – he’s one of us now. We all decided that when he went off after the captain. I don’t think it’s fair to pull away from him now just because we learned that some scientists messed with his DNA.”

Jeff rolled his eyes. “Do you know what the Augments did to my planet? They…”

“There! You said it yourself, Jeff: The Augments did. Khan’s alive now, not centuries ago. Humans have treated their own no better, especially in the 20th century. They killed their own and then they created a race to do it for them and…”

“And it still doesn’t explain where he comes from?”

Ritek cleared his throat. “Kirk said he was afraid Khan would be handed back to some lab if they caught him. And the doctor mentioned a Starfleet department – Section 31. If you ask me, I think Khan fled those labs, escaped. He’s hiding now, using us… No, not like that – with us because this Section 31 is after him. Maybe they tried to make some super-soldiers or something like that, or…”

“This can’t be legal,” Galven oinked. “Maybe they ran some tests on him and the outcome is his amped-up biology and brain. Anyway, we know he has good reason to avoid the authorities. He’s augmented; he’s running, and something bad happened involving him and Kirk’s ship.”

Caviw sat down on Galven’s bed. “You know I love to read databases which aren’t… publicly accessible.” The others chuckled. “I read somewhere that there was an incident a century back with augmented humans.”

“So, you’re saying there are still some of them left,” the Tellarit pondered. “And you think Khan is one of them?”

“He is too young to be a survivor of those Augments a century ago,” Jeff murmured. “Even if they age slower, that was never known. No one lived long enough, all the wars – no one knows what their life spans are – could have been. But Drythen, he can’t be older than, I don’t know, his early thirties.”
“Nien – Khan is an Augment I think he had a run-in with the Enterprise some time in the past,” Ritek said. “The doctor was less than pleased that Kirk covered for Dryth... I mean Khan. Kirk had to convince him not to inform the Vulcan first officer or Starfleet Command.” He grimaced.

“Whatever Khan did, it... It sounded bad. I thought the doctor was going to have a heart attack when he confronted Kirk about it. The captain defended Khan like a mother-le-matja would her cub.” He sighed. “But the ship’s doctor called him a criminal and a murderer. Said he was responsible for the death of a man who – sounded like he was a mentor to Kirk,” he revealed.

The Tellarit blinked. “Well, if Kirk forgave him, what obviously is the case, then it’s not up to us to judge Khan. Maybe everything went different that it sounds. I’m more worried about this ominous Section 31 and that the boy fears for Khan to be handed ‘back’ to the labs. Something isn’t right here and I’ve a certain feeling that our Augment-friend is in danger different from what we thought until now. He is threatened by this Starfleet-department, mark my words.”

“I remember that there was an accident at Starfleet in San Francisco – Earth last year,” Jeff threw him. “A new prototype of a large battleship fell down in the San Francisco Bay and killed a lot of people in the harbor. Before that, there was an attack on Headquarters. Officially, they said it was a terrorist attack, but who knows what actually happened?”

Galven’s snout twitched. “Hmm, now, after you said this, I remember the whole thing too. Media tried to find out as much as possible, but Command kept stonewalling. There were a lot of arrests of some high ranking officers. The media did a lot of speculating, said there was an illegal department. Starfleet denied it of course. Maybe this all goes together somehow? Maybe this shadow department is Section 31 and their responsible for Khan’s condition?”

“It could be an explanation,” Ritek murmured. “I thought that too, listening to the Captain and Dr. McCoy. There’s one thing more I thought of. Khan talked about his family, and it sounded like he isn’t on best terms with Starfleet because they took his family from him. Maybe his family are Augments too, and he’s trying to find them. What, if his people are locked up against their will? He...”

“He’s trying desperately to find someone. He hacked Starfleet’s database a few times. I saw. He was into the top secret stuff. He never found what he was searching for,” Caviw commented. She met the glances of the others and added, “I was with him when he was digging through the files. The information seemed really important to him. Must’ve been for him to take the risk. I offered to help him, but he never told me what he was looking for.”

“He hacked into the Starfleet’s top secret database?” Ritek looked at her with large eyes. “Holy moons! That alone would bring him years of prison if they found out. He really must be desperate to get that information.”
Galven nodded. “You’re right. Think how possessive and protective he is where Kirk is concerned. If I wouldn’t know it for certain that they’re lovers, I also could imagine them as a kind of brothers. But I don’t think it matters. If he thinks his family’s life is endangered, he must be half mad with worry. I can certainly understand that.” He looked at Jeff, as the younger man said,

“I can sympathize with Dryth… Khan. He is alone, isn’t he? Alone and half of Starfleet might be after him – or at least this Section 31. I know they worry Kirk enough that he would risk his career to protect Khan from them. If you ask me, there’s some serious bullshit around here and Khan is stepping all over it.” He took a deep breath. “But he’s an Augment and even if I’ve come to like him, I’m… I’m a little bit cautious. Augments are very aggressive and very intelligent…”

“And both of those qualities saved the Tammeron people, our necks, and the young hero of Starfleet,” Galven added softly for consideration. “Eventually, we figured out he wasn’t your typical human. The question is: Does our knowledge change the way we deal with him, or not? I say he’s done nothing to threaten or to harm us, rather the opposite. He even went out alone for Kirk. He didn’t drag us into his mess knowing full well he might have needed us – which he did. He’s a lone wolf, but so were we before we ended up The Shadow. I say he’s stuck with us and we’re with him. So, who thinks nothing has changed? Whomever believes name and DNA doesn’t mean shit, well, gentlemen – lift your hand. Pardon, Caviw – and her hand.”

He smiled as everyone lifted a hand to signal that they agreed with Galven’s assessment.

“I’m with you,” Ritek nodded. “He has given us no reason to distrust him – rather the opposite – and as long as this is the case he will be my friend. End of story!”

Jeff rubbed his neck. “Okay, I agree.” He looked at Caviw. “And if I know you, you’ll certainly stay on his side – or by his side,” Jeff winked at her, “no matter what.”

The Caitian smirked. “He may have a mate; nevertheless, I sense a related soul in him. We are both predators and therefore must hang together.” She chuckled. “And, by the way, I’m happy that he has a mate who understands and loves him for what he is. He and Kirk are cute together!”

“I think the good doctor will see things entirely differently,” Ritek laughed. “He’ll get the shock of his life if he learns that his captain and Khan are a couple!”

He was quite right about this detail, but this moment was still days ahead…
The waves slapped gently against the ships and docks contributing to the music of San Francisco harbor. Otherwise, it was quiet in the harbor. The charter boats had all returned now and the usually busy area was silent and abandoned except for the two men who sat between a ticket counter and a large sculpture of an anchor. Even if people passed the docks, no one would see the two lonely figures. Precisely as they intended.

“So, the president wants to go through with it!” Albert Norton shook his head. “And he wants to send his own representative?”

“Yes, Miss Whitman has the honor of speaking with the Klingons and a handful of high-ranking diplomats, including Sarek of Vulcan, Gav of Tellar, and a few more elite – names with planets after them, you know the type. Robertson insists that Barnett, Morrow, and Komack accompany them with a few tactical advisors, two linguists, and five other council members. I didn’t catch those names. Nogura will be in charge of Starfleet Command during Barnett’s absence.” Luengo looked up to the evening’s starry sky. “Their loss will be a blow to the Federation and will show Robertson that there cannot be any peace with the Klingons.”

Norton eyed him suspiciously. “You plan to eliminate the delegation and to make it look like the Klingons did it?” He pursed his lips. “You’re right; the loss would be immeasurable. Sarek is near irreplaceable. No one has the historical knowledge or diplomatic skill he does. Gav is the glue that keeps the Tellarites in check; you know how touchy they can get. And what is Starfleet without Barnett, Morrow, and Komack. Pike was bad enough, but four admirals?”

Luengo shot him a glare, obviously questioning Norton’s loyalty.

“No, no. I get it. I just don’t want anyone to think that four admirals lost in the span of a year is suspicious. “How do you want to do it?” He answered, placating the other man.

“Two of my men are in contact with some Orion pirates. They delivered some very interesting information to us – for a lot of money, mind you! They’ve profited the most from this war. I’m sure if we offer them independence from the Federation and officially give over sovereignty of the Borderland, they’ll take it, and they’ll support us. The Klingon attack must be successful. We’ll never get them to agree with our plans for the Orions otherwise, and we need them on our side. So…”

“There’s no way you’ll get any of the CO’s to go along with it,” Norton cut in. “A few might of them share our opinion of the Klingons, and some of them certainly would volunteer to head Section
31 given the chance, but none of them would torpedo their career committing treason. That's all this mission is until you're the new head of Starfleet, and we've convinced the president that we are right, and his advisers are wrong.”

“I know,” Luengo nodded calmly. “But I think I know an eligible candidate: A young commander who was Valedictorian for his year at the Academy. I checked his file, his preferences and tested his loyalties he showed towards Section 31 until it was nearly eliminated last year. He is intelligent, knows what he wants and comes from one of the best families in Great Britain. Alexander was fond of the young man, who has been passed over for a promotion he should've received. As far as I’m concerned; I would have preferred him to be promoted to a captain instead of Kirk, but the most of the admirals decided otherwise after he’d saved Earth. Maybe now I'll get my wish.” He crossed his arms in front of his chest as a cool wind breeze came from the sea. “Barnett declared that the USS Excalibur will ferry delegation. She’s nearly as powerful as the Enterprise, and Captain Helrom is an experienced CO,” he continued while Norton frowned.

“Tebra Helrom will never agree to a plan that…”

“Oh, he won’t command the ship. Regretfully he’ll be recovering from an accident he is going to have shortly before the Excalibur leaves Earth leaving wide open the opportunity for a newly promoted captain to get his first command.”

Norton snorted. “Do you really think Barnett or Komack would entrust someone inexperienced with such an important task of commanding a ship carrying the most elite of Federation and Starfleet?”

A terse smile played around Luengo’s lips. “They will; after all they and Morrow are on board and can have a look at the young man. He’ll play his part perfectly. I’ll also put some of my own Red Shirts aboard. I trust them implicitly. They can keep an eye on him.” He took a deep breath of cold, salt air. “I already talked to him. He shares our point of view. The Klingons can’t be trusted and Starfleet needs to adjust her mission as the Federation’s military. Force and power are all the Klingons understand and Starfleet needs to be able to show that. They’ll think twice before attacking. Our candidate knows this; I think he is our man to carry out the first step of our mission.”

Norton nodded slowly. “All right, then we’ll have to have our talk with him soon.”

“I thought so,” Luengo smiled, but like so often this smile didn’t reach his eyes. “I already arranged a meeting with him for tomorrow night. The security details who watch my and your apartment will be several my men so there will be no problem if we take a late evening walk, like today.”

A short chuckle escaped Albert. “That sounds good, José. I had to invite my neighbor again to get
away, and I swear this guy is eating me out of house and home. I'm coming home to an empty fridge.” He sighed. “Who is this young prodigy you want on board for our mission?”

“Commander Lawrence Robert Styles!”

Surprised, Norton glanced at the Head of the SBI. “Styles? As far as I know he was the only cadet who could rival Kirk at the Academy; except Kirk ended up skipping a year while Styles stayed the whole four years.”

Luengo laughed quietly, a real laugh this time. “Yes, and Styles will be happy to go along when we dangle the Enterprise in front of him. Once we've gathered enough proof of Kirk’s betrayal by protecting prisoner 3158-17-215 to remove him from command, we'll be rid of him once and for all. And if his officers take his side instead of saving their careers, they’ll share the same fate!”

He glanced out once again over the dark harbor, the lights of the illuminated Golden Gate Bridge and the black surface of the bay and the Pacific. “You’ll see, Albert, everything will play out just the way we planned. And no one – neither staff officers nor Kirk, his crew, or Khan will get in our way!”

The thunderstorm didn’t break loose suddenly but announced itself with heat lightning over the hills and a faraway growling high in the atmosphere. The air was heavy, thick enough to cut with a knife. The birds were quiet now – a calm before the storm. But this time the storm was real – the men’s’ tempest long past now.

Jim stood on the porch after he and Nien had their light but still delicious dinner, and listened with half an ear to the music the radio was playing inside the cottage. Khan relaxed at music and he seemed to have taken a liking to some classic and ballades – latter mostly unknown to Jim.

The young captain looked out to the dark bayou watching the approaching rage of Mother Nature. He liked this part of an approaching thunderstorm – just before the torrent. It reminded him of the days in Iowa, when Sam and he were still happy – the time before Frank came. The two boys – one not more than a toddler, the other ten years old – stood outside of the farmhouse under the eave and watched the storms form and swirl and grow in strength as it traveled. Of course, two-year-old Jim wasn’t too delighted at first, but Sam explained how a thunderstorm worked to a child’s understanding. The boy who would Starfleet’s hero captain years later was fascinated by the sky then. Not too long after, he’d set his sights far more distant – to the stars.
Kirk sighed. Odd that he would think of chatting with his brother now of all times. He loved his older brother dearly, even if he had been disappointed as Georg Samuel left the farm to live with his grandfather. Now, almost fifteen years later, he had come to understand his brother. They talked often and about everything that first year Jim attended the Academy, but since then their contact was much more – occasional. Sam married a beautiful woman named Aurelan and had two sons; a third child was on its way. Jim met his both nephews only once, but he liked the boys a lot and never forgot to send them something for their birthdays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Though Sam lived far away on Deneva, modern technology made it possible to stay in contact; Jim had not used since the war started. He was only glad that Deneva wasn’t in the area that was influenced by the battles until now. So he knew his brother and his family safe – as well as his mother who had flown to Deneva after the war began.

Even if he wasn’t on the best terms with his mother anymore, he didn’t want anything bad to happen to her. After she had left him in the care of friends on Tantalus IV to accompany a mission of xenobiologists, he had lost the last bit of trust he had for her – already damaged by her marriage to Frank. They planned for Jim to stay on Tarsus IV for six months with family friends; the mission was no place for a thirteen-year-old. During that time, Winona divorced Frank, finally, as Jim loved to say. Jim could either attend an Earth boarding school or stay where he was on Tantalus IV. What happened next wasn’t Winona’s fault. No one could have foreseen the governor’s insanity or the government's complacency and stalling actions. Still, Winona’s abandonment chipped away what was left between mother and son. The bitter taste lingered all these years later Jim. From time to time, the old nightmares still haunted him.

“Lost in thought, Pyāra?”

Jim flinched in surprise as he heard a deep voice at his back; a second later, long, warm arms wrapped around his waist, and a strong body pressed against his back, while he only now registered the music was a little bit louder since the Augment had come through the still open door.

“It’s only me, Jim,” Khan said gently, hearing his beloved’s heartbeat quicken. Leaning from behind, his cheek against that the younger man he smiled, “Sorry, if I startled you.”

A soft sigh escaped the young captain, and he relaxed into the solid body. “It’s okay, Nien. I… Just lost in thought, I suppose.” He saw the next flash above the bayou in the skies out of the corner of his eye followed by the distant growl of thunder. “My older brother and I loved to watch thunderstorms.” He chuckled. “I was afraid first, but Sam told me ‘big secret of thunder’ – why the beauty of the flashes is the real danger.” He laid his head backward on the Augment’s right shoulder; Khan’s warm breath danced over his skin. “It seems danger and beauty have accompanied me my whole life.” He twined his fingers through Khan’s, holding his hands tighter to his abdomen, snuggling closer to him.
Of course, the super-human realized instantly what Kirk meant – He meant the storms; he meant the stars, his ship. He meant him. The thought made him smile as did the meaning that Kirk missed. “Perhaps you need them because… Because you are like them.”

“I am…what?”

Khan only looked at him with love and a bit of forlornness at his ignorance.

Blushing Jim turned his head slightly and looked up at Nien. “You think I’m beautiful?” he asked perplex. “And dangerous? Hell, even Spock sees straight through me; I think he has a problem with me being so emotional. That’s no danger but…”

“You misunderstand me, James,” the Augment interrupted him almost tenderly. “You are dangerous because no one recognizes the predator in you until it’s too late. On the outside, you are beaming and careless. A boy made of sunshine.”

Jim beamed him his most open smile, "And you’re waxing poetic, again."

"Mmm, perhaps, but shut up now, I'm not finished with you yet."

Jim dropped his eyes and retorted with a cheeky, "Yes, sir."

The Augment let it go and continued. “I suppose the unobservant around you might only see the friendly, gullible man easily convinced of frivolity and trash because nature gave him beauty rather than brains. But they couldn't be more wrong, could they? You’re brilliant, discerning, and intuitive. You see the truth where others wouldn’t even think to look. You’re the bravest man I’ve ever had the pleasure of meeting – in this century or any other. You never quit. You are faithful to all that is true and right and good in the universe and will defend it to the end. You stand up for those you love, no matter the cost. And your heart is warm and compassionate. You are beautiful inside and out. And that’s what makes you dangerous. Your character is a mirror. It scares those too cowardly or too egotistical to do what you do.” He pressed a soft kiss against Jim’s cheek and smelled the metallic scent of Jim’s tears.

The younger man’s blue eyes brimmed with them as he whispered, “That’s how you see me?”

Khan looked fondly at him. “Yes, that’s how I see you – only you!” He watched a single tear roll
down his beloved's cheek and turned him gently around to press their hearts together – hearts that beat in perfect union.

Jim needed that, still emotionally raw and craving the security Khan offered. His capture did more than hurt him physically or emotionally; it shook his confidence. It made him doubt his instincts, his intuition, and his abilities as a leader and a warrior. He tried to swallow the lump building in his throat when a stabbing sensation of disbelief and hope ran through his chest. “I… But I’m… I’m reckless and shallow. I’m stubborn, rash and rebellious. I don’t know when to be respectful and… I’m unreasonable, irrational and…”

“Says who?” Nien interrupted him quietly, asking himself not for the first time, why this gorgeous oversized boy thought himself unloved, unlovable, and unable to love.

Almost helpless the young captain looked at him. “Everyone…,” he whispered and sounded so forlorn that it pained Khan. Slowly the former dictator shook his head.

“Everyone? I cannot imagine that the good doctor or your Vulcan friend think that of you. The same goes for your Scot engineer or your quite fierce communications officer. And the man who stood for you when we were on Qo’noS, Sulu; he obviously respects you, loves you. And then there was Admiral Pike. Why do you think he took you under his wing, made you his protégée? Bob Wesley does the same now for you, doesn't he? I’m certain that he was going to launch a recovery mission of his own when you were captured on Turkana. Every one of them sees much in you, but it’s not what you think. Diego only met you for a few minutes and offered you his cottage to recover in – and Diego doesn’t trust easily. Ritek and Galven both took almost instant liking to you, as well as Caviw.” He paused here and closed his eyes before continuing. “And my family – they’d welcome you, too. Not because of me, but because of your good and noble character.”

Jim was unable to swallow; the lump in his throat big and aching. His eyes watered so that he couldn’t see Nien clearly. Never had anyone said anything like this to him. He wasn’t used to compliments on his character, let alone confessions of love. But Khan’s words couldn’t be construed as anything else. It felt wonderful. It was like balm to his injured soul, beaten down over and again through the years. He had never thought that there would be someday someone, who would see anything else than a rebellious young man. Bones was the first real friend he ever had, followed later by Spock, Scotty, Uhura, Sulu and then young Chekov. But friends were one thing, and he was ever grateful for them. He never thought, never dared to hope that despite his damage, there'd be someone to love him, really love him.

But here he stood on the small porch awaiting the gathering storm together with this beautiful, powerful and stunning man. He was so much stronger, so much more intelligent. But he told him in the most wonderful words that he was more than just the hothead he thought himself – that others thought he was. It was… unbelievable – like a redemption and affirmation all in one.
Another tear spilled over, and Khan caught the salty pearl with his lips. “Why do you think I am here with you now?” He tightened his arms around the younger man, as he saw the intense mixture of unbelief and pleading in Jim’s gaze.

“Nien, don’t make me answer that, I can’t.”

“Jim, do you still think so little of yourself?”

“No, but…” He took a deep breath, ready to face the last doubts which still remained in him and were eating at his soul. “Dammit, that’s not it. Fine! Why aren’t you out there now, looking for them? You’re risking yourself every moment you stay with me. You have feelings for me, and you know I have them for you. You rescued me, and there isn’t a place I wouldn’t go or a thing I wouldn’t do for you, you know that now, I know you do.” Jim closed his eyes and whispered to him, “Tell me why you are still here.”

“I’m an Augment. I’m designed to be superior, to care for and protect those in my charge and destroy that which threatens the peace I and my kind were to bring into the world. I suppose those purposes are at odds aren’t they? In any event, my kind never regarded humans as equals. You changed that, James!” He leaned his forehead against that of his beloved and breathed in the fresh, sweet scent, now tainted by salty tears that made him feel at home. “You are my equal, though we are different. But you are more than that too; you are my light – my sun. I’ve walked most of my life in darkness, shrouded by a never-ending night. Only seeing through the glass, darkly; every shape a threat. But you brought light into my world, James. You allowed me to see the world as you reflect it the shining light of your soul. Your heart pulled me out of that darkness, enveloped me and warmed me. If I were religious, I’d say you were an angel – a warrior and guide like those of the Christian Bible. But I’m not. Still you gave me something I thought I’d lost a long time ago. You gave me back my faith. It’s more than anyone has given me in a long time.”

A suppressed sob escaped Jim – this is how Nien saw him? Utterly overwhelmed, he pressed himself against the Augment and buried his face in Nien’s neck. His tears wetted the mark that was invisible to all but them. Khan heard Jim murmuring, “So as through a glass, and darkly, the age long strife I see. Where I fought in many guises, many names, but always me.”

“Mmm, Patton, very good Pyāra.” Khan held him close; his hand moved in comforting circles over the muscular back of his mate.

His mate…
His kind may regard humans as less, weaker – inferior to his Augment physiology, but his nature – his instinct, designed to safeguard one another for their survival now ached to do just that. Khan sensed pain in Jim and by designed sought to heal him and vindicate him. Whoever did this to his James should pray that their paths would never cross. Until then, Khan vowed to defend and guard his mate – soothe, caress and love him until the old hurts disappeared into nothing. Heal Jim; that’s what his instinct compelled him to do – heal and nurture that which he cherished above all.

Leaning his cheek against Kirk’s temple and cheek, he murmured, “I don’t know who talked you into believing yourself unworthy of love, but they couldn’t be more wrong. Every trait, every little peculiarity has endeared me to you.” His lips had brushed against Jim’s cheek before he breathed, “Love!”

It lasted a moment until the young captain finally whispered, “What?”

“You asked me was Pyāra means.” He smiled. “It means ‘love’.”

For several seconds, Jim stood stock still unable to breathe. Then he lifted his head and stared with wide, teary eyes at the handsome face of his lover. The sea-colored windows to the Augment’s soul shone like stained glass in a church. Then Nien’s words sunk in.

Love…

Nien called him ‘Love’ – his love!

And Khan Noonien Singh didn’t know any half measures.

He – Jim Kirk – was unconditionally and utterly loved by another!

Jim felt his heartbeat quicken; felicity bubbled up within him threatening to spill from him in a rush of tears and nonsense. He knew the wish to see the stars together was reciprocated; he knew then he wasn’t just a replacement for those Khan had lost – that he wouldn’t be forgotten when the superhuman’s family was found. His sadness and doubt now replaced with hope for their future and joy – if a miracle happened and the authorities and Command would let Khan go.

In the light of the first real flash above them, he saw Nien’s tender smile, while in the background of the cottage a violin was crying; accompanied by the soft tones of a small orchestra. The Augment
went against every instinct to wear his heart on his sleeve for Jim; he exposed himself with his confession of love. Jim did the only logical thing he could think of and the only thing to keep him from spouting nonsensical declarations that both were so sure of now. He kissed him. His mouth closed over those sinfully bowed lips, pouring every emotion he felt at the moment into Khan’s mouth. Hope, warmth, endearment, passion and above all love, cascaded in happy moans over his tongue and into Khan’s mouth that he might swallow it down and take it into himself, imprinting Jim into his very DNA as he had done to Jim not so long ago.

Just then thunder rolled through the skies and the rain fell washing away dust and dirt that clung to the cottage. The symbolism was not lost as he felt finally purged himself. The filth that soiled and clung to him now washed away so that he could clearly see himself – not only in love, but that he loved! He loved this beautiful, breath-taking and unique man, who had once been his enemy. And he knew that there would never be another to share his life – himself.

And as Khan returned the kiss with the same tender fervor, Jim knew that he had indeed found his mate!

Happiness and endearment were suddenly too much to bear; it needed to come out and a place to go. So it did, and so it went. As if his feelings had a life of their own and purpose. They dribbled out of his fingertips guiding his movements. His fingers found their way beneath Nien’s kurta; they glided over the warm, silky skin of the Augment and savored the heat the strong body radiated. Another flash raced above them through the skies; its electricity no less intense than the sparks that flew between the two men. The following thunderclap echoed of the flaring passion kindled with love and tenderness.

Jim lost himself in the spicy, fresh and so familiar scent of his forbidden lover – citrus and cinnamon. Khan was everywhere – around him and in him. Not in his body, not quite yet, but most certainly in his soul, nestled in there in safety – like home, where he belonged. His confession of love whirled through Kirk’s mind, making him dizzy with emotions that he intended to show and to share.

Pressing himself closer to the Augment, he meant to hold – to lead this round of affection. His right hand slipped out from under Khan’s kurta and curled into the soft, mahogany hair; his hold was protective and loving. Jim needed a surprising amount of effort to end the fond duel of tongues so that he could rain delicate butterfly kisses on the high cheekbones, temples, nose and over closed eyes; Nien seemed to melt into him.

This was new for the super-human. Kirk welcomed his love with open arms, and now he took the lead. Khan wasn’t used to relinquishing command to another. He loved and led as the king, commander, and protector that he was. Of course, he enjoyed the fondling and caresses that were part and parcel of sex, but never was it connected with such longing and love, and time. In his time, sex was always heat and races to the end because danger lurked. Danger – war was always around him – but not now, not here. And for the first time, the temptation to give in and give up the lead not
only present, but it was overwhelming. The temptation swallowed up and tamped his nature that was always looking for an out, an escape. Affection and joy overcame instinct in a way that he’d never before experienced.

He gasped as his beloved’s lips found his again. The captain’s cleverness apparently extended to his tongue as it explored the hot cavern of his mouth again. Jim’s slightly broader shoulders shielded him from the wind, as the rain just beginning to wet them; they shielded him against the thunderstorm and against the whole world. Even if his engineered mind still knew that he was the stronger one of them both, he felt safe – protected, cherished, loved. Though neither Jim nor he had said those three words which moved the whole universe, he knew they both felt them; they both knew them. Khan recognized that Kirk confessed them now, with his body. Khan didn’t mind one bit – quite the opposite in fact. He was after all, a man of action.

So was Kirk.

As the younger man pushed him gently towards the door, never breaking his kiss, the Augment sighed and smiled. He had taken a risk when he had opened up to Jim – he had been hurt before and stating that he loved someone as deep as he did now made him vulnerable. Still his heart and his soul told him that he could trust this man with a heart of gold. If not him, whom then?

Kissing and touching, they somehow found their way to the bedroom, now only illuminated by the flashes outside and the dim lamp on the nightstand. The soft music from the radio was still playing as it did over dinner. Kirk gripped Nien’s kurta and lifted it, pulling it over the Augment’s head who blinked in surprise. No one had ever stripped him – not since he was a small boy. As he fingered for his trousers, Jim’s hands stopped him.

“Let me do this for you,” he whispered and the super-human knew that his lover meant to show affection for him even in this menial task! The incredible tenderness, mingled with the burning in those sky-blue eyes told Khan everything. Jim wanted to make love to him. It took much to weaken the Augment, much to make him feel as though he couldn’t stand tall. Apparently Kirk could do it with a look.

Their lovemaking has gone through many metamorphoses already. At first greedy and passionate, then tender, mindful and careful – fraught with pent up emotion. This would be different. He became aware of it the moment Jim took action – and kept it. His captain placed open-mouthed kisses over his chest, licking and nipping tenderly at the skin while strong yet gentle hands pushed the trousers down over his hips. He didn’t care that they landed in a heap on the floor beside the kurta – or that he kicked off the light shoes leaving everything in disarray. All that mattered was this special moment, because even now in his state of growing arousal, his brilliant mind realized that Jim had not only stripped him of his clothes but also of the inner wall he’d built around him for protection.
Bare and vulnerable (made even more so with Jim still clothed) he stood there ready to deliver himself to another man, and a common human at that. The Augment checked himself: James Kirk was anything but common, still Khan’s engineered instincts screamed in self-defense as the young captain pushed him gently to the bed, stripped himself quickly, and then followed him down.

Jim saw a quick flash of defiance in those bottomless, sea-colored eyes as the former dictator braced himself backward on his elbows, unwilling to drop any lower. Slowly he straddled Nien – carefully, so as not to make him any more uncomfortable. He cupped the super-human’s face with his hands. He knew how the man he loved had been hurt, and he could only imagine what scars it had left on Khan’s soul. Leaning his forehead against that of his mate he whispered, “Shhh, Nien, it’s me. It’s okay. If you want, we can always switch positions. Just say the word, and I’ll stop. But…But I want to show you – please let me show you how much you mean to me; let me show you that it’s your blood, your body that keeps my heart beating even now. Let me show you how deep this is – how deep we go.” His lips brushed over his lover’s. “I want to worship you, please you, if you would allow me to show you how beautiful it can be.” He kissed him again with a slow-building intensity. “You’ve been so good to me; took care not to hurt me even when we were still enemies. Trust me, baby, I’ll never hurt you. I only wanna make you feel good.”

Finally, something like resolve settled in his mind, but it was still tainted with fear – all those times he had been abused as a child and later the polluted by Conelly’s sullying dominance. They lurked in the shadowed corner of his mind where he’d hid them. But this was James – his James. His beloved spared his life more than once, protected him when ordered to give him up. Jim would never hurt him. And so he relented.

Wrapping one arm around the younger man’s waist, he sank back on the mattress; knowing full well that he was about to give himself to Jim. Again a part of him was ready to rebel, but his near desperate yearning to trust someone in the most intimate way was stronger. He was so tired of being alone, wary every waking moment and even in sleep. Jim had come into his life like a whirlwind, entirely different than anything he’d ever known, and he needed this affectionate, caring, passionate young man in so many ways it almost scared him. Believing in the goodness of a human being – it would be his liberation or his doom. But even with all the sinister experiences of his past, his heart knew it was safe with his James.

Jim sensed that Khan was still tense, even if he tried to hide it. His furrowed brow forced Jim to remember what his beloved had been through. He refused to give into the hot anger building in him at those who caused his lover pain. Tonight was not for the darkness of the past; it was for the light of the new days they had shared – and would share with each other. There would be time for anger later.

Bracing himself with one hand beside Nien’s head, he bent down and kissed him deeply; his free hand stroked gently over the Augment’s shoulder and neck. He broke the kiss to trace his lips over jaw – neck, before wandering to Khan’s mark, just a faint blue now. He smiled as he heard his lover moan and he closed his lips over the sensitive spot; licking and sucking, marking his soul-mate again. He could feel the other man hardening beneath him, and he bit gently down on the ‘hickey’. He let
his lips wander over the collarbone, down over the pale, muscular chest — smooth, hairless and with the unique taste and scent of Nien. The fingers of his free hand found one delicate nipple; his mouth sought its twin making the Augment gasp anew. He heard and felt his lover’s heartbeat and breath quicken. Khan’s long, elegant body trembled.

“You like that?” he whispered into the alabaster-white skin; only an approving sigh escaped the other, normally well-articulated man. Jim smiled at his accomplishment then turned his attention to the other nipple wetting and cooling it with his breath – teasing with teeth. Only as the little peaks turned to hardened pebbles and Khan’s heart beat madly beneath his lips did Jim let his mouth roam further, making sure no skin was left un kissed. He marveled how Nien reacted to every touch – however light; the muscles rippled beneath the human velvet that became salty with the first beads of sweat. He realized that the Augment still tried for control, but Jim Kirk would have none of it.

Leaving a wet line of hot kisses, he headed southwards – very much like Nien did the evening before. He stopped at the nest of dark curls and licked along its line. The long, flushed red cock of his lover flexed against his throat, begging for attention. But here was where Jim excelled; he knew exactly how to increase the anticipation of his bedfellow and he aimed for exactly that. Time was on his side, and he would make every minute count; he wanted to make it special for his beloved. Quite cruelly, Jim ignored Khan’s member. He let his hands slide down along the other man’s sides until they reached the points of his pelvis – quite pointedly ignoring... just along the line of hair.

If he had looked up, he would have seen Nien glaring at him with glassy eyes; burning desire flared in his gaze. The Augment wanted to will the younger man to use that gorgeous, full mouth there where he needed it most, but his pride kept him from begging. Biting his tongue, he let his head fall back on the pillow, knowing that he couldn’t do anything to sate the lava in his veins or the clenching in his groin. Alas, if James didn’t take him in his wicked mouth soon he would go mad. He grasped the sheets beneath him with an iron grip to deter himself from reaching into the golden shock of hair. He closed his eyes as the yearning and fire coursed hotter and hotter. He had lusted for Jim before — in San Francisco and afterward over and again until they were finally reunited, increasing his desire even more. But what he felt now was almost too much to bear. Maybe because this time there was nothing standing between them. This time there wouldn’t be any suspense, doubt or false modesty, no unspoken topics; their passions and feelings now lay as bare as they.

Suddenly Jim lifted his head and gave his soul-mate a long knowing, tender, smile with a hint of mischief and warning. Then he slipped his right hand between their bodies and...

And the world came to halt only to whirl back into motion a moment later.

The gentle, talented fingers of the young captain carefully captured heavy balls. He alternated between tugging and stroking its seam dragging load moans and tiny whimpers from Khan. Sparks danced behind his tightly closed eyes and he arched into the sensations. And again Jim’s mouth was on his belly, his tongue dipped into his shallow, sensitive navel.
Jim felt, could even smell the heady scent of arousal, sweat that dripped from every pore and pre-cum that leaked twitching cock at beneath him, pooling between them. His own shaft was hard and pulsed with lust, but he held back. This was for Nien – for the man who held his heart! He wanted to give him the most long-lasting pleasure possible.

“Jim…” It was not more than a breath, but it was enough for Kirk to take a peek. The usually pale cheeks of the super-human pinked; the color spread to his heaving chest, straining to draw in needed air. His legs twitched as if he needed every bit of his enormous control to avoid wrapping them around the younger man.

Taking mercy and giving into his own desire, he pushed himself backward and smiled as he realized that Khan gulped heavily in anticipation and longing. Glancing down he asked himself not for the first time, how the long, thick cock ever fit into him. Then he bent down to satisfy their hunger together.

Jim’s mouth closed around his shaft’s head; he dipped down and gave a long, slow suck up the shaft. Khan heard a loud moan echoing through the room; it took his bright mind just a second to realize the moan came from him. Then Kirk’s hot tongue glided carefully over his cock, swirling around the head – and every sane thought left the former dictator. Past lovers had satisfied him this way before, but never was it like this. Never by someone he truly loved and who cared for him – and not about the powerful dictator. Sheathed in his hot, wet cavern, teased with the soft, warm and firm tongue, he let go and just let the pleasure sing through his body. It made him forget everything around him. An entire security patrol could have burst through the door, and he wouldn’t have noticed. His whole world suddenly reduced to those soft, shining lips, clever tongue and torrid, burning mouth. And as Jim managed to take most of him in, a rapturous yelp escaped his lips.

And still those fingers were fondling him. Just. Right. There!

It was pure bliss – heaven! He wasn’t religious, but this WAS heaven!

His hands found their way to the younger man’s head – not urging or guiding, but searching for hold. Electricity sang along his legs to the tip of his toes and upwards along his back to his neck, his mates mark tingled. English slurred and slipped to Hindu, tumbling nonsensically over his lips. His shining intelligence finally dimmed.

He felt his loins tighten, the knot in his belly unbearable in its intensity, the flames beneath his skin were scorching him – and still this sweet, evil mouth worked him off. The knot unfolded into ecstasy; his breath faltered, the pressure in his balls increased under Jim’s ministrations…
“James… I…” His voice was hoarse and barely audible. Kirk heard the warning – and ignored it. He loved the taste in his mouth – so much his Nien and it was even stronger than ever before. He loved the way his soul-mate writhed with want and how his voice sounded – dark and throaty… He knew what his beloved needed from him. So he dropped further down letting his teeth run ever so carefully over the delicate soft skin covering the rock-hard shaft and hollowed his cheeks on the way back up to the glans. Here seemed a nice place to lavish attention; he sucked and kitten-licked, pressed his tongue into the slit and swirled it around the edge, but making sure not to neglect his sensitive balls just beginning to draw up. He gently pulled and ran his middle finger back and forth over his perineum.

It was Khan’s undoing.

Shouting his pleasure to the world and sans any control, he came – long and hard; spasm after spasm shook his frame; rapture washed over him. Stars danced behind his eyes; his whole body shuddered in release and his heart felt as if it would burst from his chest.

He felt as though Jim delivered him to his untamable orgasm that rocked his whole world. But he didn’t abandon him there. Jim drank down the first spurt and then noisily popped off. He wanted to see the evidence of Khan’s pleasure so he let it paint his chin and another rope pooled in the concave belly before sliding down in a silver rivulet. Kirk held him through the white and the aftershocks. And when the last slow, trickling stream of milky cum drooled from his dick he laid there so still–finally spent and floating in glowing aftermath. A single tear rolled down his heated cheek. Reality was far away, as soft, wet lips kissed his. He tasted spice and salt – the essence of himself mixed with the sweet, fresh taste with which he’d had become so familiar. Like citrus and cinnamon, they were together. And now he felt Jim’s weight on him; the younger man buried his fingers in the Augment’s dark strains. Warm, sticky wetness clung between them, mingled with sweat – and he didn’t care.

Slowly, his arms went around Jim, holding him close. Still his heart beat far too quickly – even his augmented body needed some time to come around after such an outburst of ecstasy. Soft tremors went through him again before he was finally able to open his eyes. He could only see a part of his beloved’s face because Kirk was still kissing him. The young man pulled gently away to look down at him. A shining, milky white droplet clung to the corner of his mouth, and he licked it away, purring like an oversized cat and stoking the craving that built-up in Nien.

Yes, he was engineered; his stamina certainly would have shocked the most biologists, but that he indeed felt new hunger for his mate just after a mind-blowing orgasm took even Khan by surprise.

On the other hand, it didn’t. He sensed Jim’s burning desire that fed his own; the hot, hard cock of his beloved against left thigh was not the only evidence of the younger man’s desire for him. Pushing
in from the edges of his mind, he felt their bond growing, bringing them closer together than ever before.

Arching up, the super-human caught his lover’s lips with his own and he smiled at their taste. He could get used to this. He had every intention of getting used to this! His hands roamed over the damp silk of Jim’s skin – exploring and caressing. He heard James’ breath hitch, and the younger man’s kiss became almost frantic. Then Kirk sat up, his eyes as bright as the sun.

“I need you,” Jim whispered; his loins and his shaft throbbed with unsatisfied want; his pulse a thundering echo in his ears that drowned out even the raging of nature outside the cottage.

“You have me,” Nien murmured; his deep baritone hoarse and purring.

As Kirk bent over to the nightstand to fetch the bottle of lube, a tingle of caution seated itself in Khan’s stomach, but he chased it away; his confidence in his captain was stronger than his fear. Steadying his beloved’s movement with a firm hand, he listened to the song of their bond and felt the flames of yearning that flared in his soul-mate – strengthening his own longing.

Their gazes met, and Jim sensed his returning awareness; he bent down and kissed him again – deep, gentle, and sensual. The golden shines of love flickered along the threads of the mental link between the men. Nien’s soul reacted to it immediately as he reached out for the light.

Jim smiled into the kiss as he felt his lover relaxing again. Even half mad with lust, he recognized the amount of trust Nien gave him and a wave of tenderness soothed the demanding desire enough to take it slowly – even through his ache. Swallowing despite his dry mouth, Kirk moved back between the long, slender thighs of his beloved, used more lube (oh they would definitely need more of this) and let his finger drift and stroke over the Augment’s already hardening shaft. He heard Khan hiss, and he grinned. Yeah, Nien was definitely ready for the next round.

Slicking his fingers one more time he let his fingers dip and slip behind Khan’s swelling balls, firmly stroked over his perineum then slowly circled round the tight pucker giving the super-human time – as much as he needed while he nipped and licked and kissed the Augment to distraction. Jim’s instincts told him that he had to be very gentle and careful. The following minutes would be far more important for Nien than for himself because an inner voice whispered that this man had never given himself like this of his own free will. Being filled in this way meant force and violence to him, and Jim was hell-bent on healing this trauma. Even if his body screamed to take what it needed most, his priority was to help and please the man he loved.

Bowing down he pressed a warm, tender kiss on the Augment’s belly, while he pushed his finger
with utter care into the tight, hot hole. Instantly Khan tensed up, and Jim paused; concentrating on kissing and soothing his mate. He listened to the speeding heartbeat and only after Nien relaxed again did he begin to move his finger – circling around the sensitive rim and dipping just the tip in and out.

Khan closed his eyes. The moment he felt something entering his body, his survival instincts flared up. But those delicious lips and warm breath on his skin stilled him again; his mind whispered only one word: ‘Jim’. He forced the tension out of his muscles. There was no danger – not with his James.

And then he felt soft pressure on the walls of his anus – not hard and brutal, but careful, almost exploratory. Jim stroked and sought and then… His fingertip brushed over the small nerve bundle, and a flash of pure lust went through him. And again – and again.

Jim’s mouth fondled his cock anew, licking it, kissing it; one hand came to lie at the super-human’s heart, shielding it from harm.

New bliss spread through Nien; his senses fixed on the utter tenderness with which he was imbued. James added a second and finally a third finger to the first one gently thrusting and withdrawing. Over and again they brushed over his prostate, making him dizzy with desire. He lifted his head and looked down at his beloved kneeling between his legs, poised to finish him off a second time. And it was not enough. He wanted to be filled – filled by this glorious golden creature; the only one who could set him free!

“Pyāra…” he groaned; the augmented part in him cringed at the plea in his voice.

Jim gave the pulsing, rock-hard shaft a last lick and glanced with burning eyes at him. They both needed each other as they did the air to breathe.

“Please…” Nien breathed. Alas, he did just beg, did he? Yes, he did – and it sounded right. There was no shame! Here, with Jim there was no need for pretense or demonstration of might. There were only them – two men, made for each other and caught in the net of love.

“I’ll be careful,” Kirk whispered; his tone rough with arousal.

Khan even didn’t bother with a nod. It was not necessary to confirm something he knew with certainly as he knew Earth’s sun rose every morning in the East. He was safe here. A low moan
escaped him with the loss of those talented fingers deep in him, but they soon were replaced with his beloved. Kirk sat up to generously slick himself up. Then unyielding but slowly and with care, Kirk pressed in, pressed home. It didn’t hurt, but it was strange – filling and full at first – lovely until the sting. Then the suppressed, dark phantoms rose from the shadowed corners of his memories.

And Jim saw it. Finally sheathed in the incredible scorching, warm, tight cave, his nerves were on fire. But he saw the haunted expression emerging in sea-colored eyes, nearly blackened with lust but tinged with – something else, not good. From where Kirk found the strength to stop was beyond him. A voice whispered in his mind that Nien had done the same for him – all those weeks back when he seduced him first against his will – and then not. Khan waited for him and so Jim forced himself to remain motionless.

“Love,” he whispered, willing his body to obey him; a new layer of sweat broke out on his forehead. “If you don’t want… One word and I’m out. I don’t want to hurt you; I’ll never hurt you…”

For several seconds, Khan had been back in the lab of Section 31, at a secret space doc near Jupiter. He was too weak to move, and his stomach clenched with fear and dread. He was naked in the semi-dark and cold room, lying over an even colder steel table and enduring brutal thrusts, Conelly's heavy panting in his ear and his sweat dripping onto his back.

Then warm hands stroked over his chest – tender and soft. A familiar voice drifted through the ghosts of the past; the words tearing him from haunted memories. Blinking the fog from his eyes, he looked into the sky-blue eyes above him; Jim looked down sweating, radiating desire and passion.

And then the words of his James sunk in.

He was given a choice – like always with Jim. He never pressed, he never forced, he never demanded – he asked, just like now.

He was with his love – with the man who had already saved him in so many ways – the only one who could cut the last chains away.

Nien licked his lips and squeezed the captain’s biceps. He wouldn’t give in to some stupid memories that could harm what he and Jim had worked so hard to develop. He was stronger than that – stronger because of the young man above him.

“Take me,” he said hoarsely. “Make love to me, James – free me, please!”
This plea, the meaning behind it, brought tears to Jim’s eyes; his desire mingled with determination and absolute affection. Slowly he began to move. Looking down to the point of their coupling only increased the sensation. He was finally inside the man who held his heart and touched his soul. And as he saw the first vestiges of pleasure softening Nien’s expression, he knew that he could beat back the sinister memories that had once held his beloved in their devil-grip.

Changing the angle the slightest bit, he could feel his glans skip over the small lump as it rubbed over the silk, hot walls around his shaft – and was rewarded with blissful moans.

“Yessss…” Khan’s voice was barely understandable anymore. “Just like this… Please, Jim, please…”

And Kirk didn’t need to be told twice. His thrusts still strong and steady, he increased his pace always taking care that despite the speed and strength, he kept his eyes on his mate trying as hard as he could to project the love that he felt – never taking, only giving his body into Nien. He watched Nien writhe beneath him; his head thrashed from side to side. Sweat and last remains of his first orgasm glistened like silver on his marble-white skin. The sight seared itself into Jim's soul for all eternity. The reckless boy from Iowa was undoing the strongest and most dangerous man of Earth. But he didn’t think about that now. He was only happy that he could give this gorgeous creature so much pleasure; that he was able to make him forget the horror he endured. Then his body’s demands took over, he knew it was safe to let go.

Nien’s eyes closed and opened again and again, the pleasure almost too much. It tore the chains of his denied trauma, Jim’s presence enough to destroy the past’s phantoms and blow their remains away like dust.

Feeling free – really free – for the first time he gave into his soul’s, heart’s and body’s yearning; surrendering to his feelings and to the man he loved. He let go the last final vestiges of control, pain, hurt. It all just – disappeared. And with this sweet surrender, the dark clouds that were as much a part of him as his own heart finally vanished, and the man he really was, soared to the surface; with them came the sheer rapture and bliss rolling hotly through him in wave after wave. James sat back even further, held onto the Augment’s hips and plowed over his prostate with every stroke.

Jim felt the silken walls of his lover tightening around him, spasming in time with his heaving breath. Enveloping Nien’s hard cock with one hand he began to stroke him in the same rhythm he pushed into him. Khan howled his pleasure – meeting every thrust. English and Hindi again spilled from his mouth; tears swam in his glassy eyes. Then he roared like the wild tigers of his home country as the ecstasy became too much. He arched up into Jim like a man possessed; milk-white fluid exploded from his prick in thick streams, striping across his chest and stomach.
Clenching walls squeezed around the young captain and in the blink of an eye, Jim tipped over the edge into euphoria right along with him. His arms couldn't hold him any longer; he shuddered his last into the man below, filling him and warming him from the inside before allowing himself fall on his beloved’s chest, unconcerned about the sticky mess between them. Wrapping both arms as far as possible around Nien, he closed his eyes.

Finally spent, sated, exhausted and consumed by love for one another, both men clung to each other as though they’d never let go – soaring in the glorious aftermath of giving themselves to the other one. In minutes, they dozed off – safe and secure in each other’s arms…

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Well, anyone still there or are you all puddles on the floor? *Laugh*, did I promise too much? I hope not. It was about time that both are making their confessions – one with words, one with action. Both are healing each other and I love the imagination that they’re setting each other’s soul free.

In the next chapter it’s up to Jim to let the past behind, and therefore the next chapter will have the title “Sweet surrender – part 2”. And there will be also a song for them.

I hope you loved this chapter and I’m dying in curiosity what you think of it (*grin*).

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

I am so, so sorry that it lasted that long 'til the next update. I really hoped that the January would be calmer for me, but the opposite was the case: Everything was in chaos – especially finishing my old job and my soon to be opened own shop.

I also want to apologize to those, who left me a comment and I haven’t answered it, but I needed every free minute to end the new chapter and to write the next one that is now in my beta-reader’s good care. I will answer your comments within the next week and hopefully also your newest reactions to the update.

The second part of ‘sweet surrender’ is not as hot as the first one, but it will be full of emotions – not only because of our two love-birds, but also because of Spock, because our dear Vulcan will realize something that will bring him sleepless nights.

One little (and needed) disclaimer: The song that is enacted and its lyrics aren’t mine. It’s sung by H. Fischer. Who want to listen to the ballade – here is the link:

http://www.musictory.com/music/Helene+Fischer/Sweet+Surrender

And now I hope you are going to enjoy the next installment.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 24 – Sweet surrender, part 2

Jim sighed as reluctantly, sleep set him free. He was draped over something warm, damp and firm; gentle hands roamed over his back, and soft lips nibbled at his neck. His face was somewhere between something that could be a pillow and… a shoulder. A familiar scent teased his nose and as he took a deep breath, peace bloomed.

Nien…

He lay on Nien, was held and caressed by him. And Jim didn’t want to open his eyes – just wished
he could stay like this forever – safe and sound in his beloved’s embrace.

“Jim?” The deep baritone was quiet and full of warmth, but demanded attention.

“Hm-hm?” His vocabulary had not come online yet.

“Pyāra, as much as I love having you this close – in me. I think soon it will become rather unpleasant for us to separate.”

“Why should we do that?” came the barely coherent reply as Jim snuggled even closer to him. And this was the moment he felt it: a soft twitch and jerk of his most vulnerable part firmly sheathed in Khan’s warm body.

Oh…

OH!

It was difficult to lift his head but somehow the young captain managed. His back ached exquisitely as did a particular spot on his neck, and his limbs felt as if they weighed a ton. A voice in his mind tried to lure him back to sleep. Still, he braced himself on his arms and glanced down at Khan, who looked as content as a cat that not only gotten the cream but the caviar, too.

Jim realized that he was nestled – caught between his lover’s cheeks. Carefully he tried to move though there was a bit of – adhering so to speak. Gently, Kirk pulled away.

The former dictator had never thought it to be possible, but he instantly missed the intimate contact. He missed Jim; their intimacy now too far away.

He reached to cup one of his James’ cheeks, pressed up and kissed him quickly, but fondly. Then he grinned. Barely awake and drowsy, James reminded him of a little boy – with the other hand he stroked through the tousled golden hair.

“Welcome back from dreamland, Pyāra.” His expression betrayed his manly satisfaction. “You blacked out!” he smirked. Kirk frowned, finally completely away.
“I didn’t! You fell asleep, and I didn’t want to wake you.”

Khan cocked his head. “Don’t you think that the other way around is more realistic?”

“Nope, no chance!” Jim shook his head – and a loud crack of thunder from outside startled him. He had forgotten about the weather.

“Don’t fear, little Jim, Khan will take care of you!” the Augment said dramatically and pulled him closer again; the Starfleet officer burst out laughing.

“Too late, baby; it’s been over twenty years since I was afraid of thunderstorms.”

“Shame! I want to keep you safe from the things that go bump in the night,” the super-human whispered and pressed this time a kiss to Kirk’s temple. There was suddenly seriousness in his voice, and Jim relaxed almost instantly while he nuzzled his lover’s neck.

“I know,” he murmured. “I want to do the same for you.”

For a long minute they simply laid there – happy and at peace; relishing in the proximity and emotional closeness they provided each other. The thunder clapped again and the wind seemed to increase while rain pelted the roof and windows.

“Jeez, that’s a good one.” Jim sighed and licked gently over the warm, salty skin of his Nien’s throat; savoring the taste.

Khan purred and dropped his hand from Kirk’s hair to wander over the younger man’s back. “Does it remind you of something?” he asked.

Jim chuckled. “Yeah, it does.” He kissed the Augment’s jaw before he continued, “Remember? There was a storm that night you came to my apartment and… well…” He lifted his head again and caught the glance of those blue-green orbs with his own sky-blue-ones. “Whenever something changes between us it’s accompanied with a lot of noise and electricity.” He gave Nien’s nose a peck. “It’s almost poet, don’t you think so?”
A soft smile played around the bowed lips of the super-human. “Yes, we clashed in the beginning but I believe we’ve cleared the air, and the outcome is something I would never want to miss.” He wrapped both arms around Jim. “The storm, it illustrates us.”

A flash sliced through the half-closed curtain followed by another of Mother Nature’s roars.

“Light and darkness – both fighting for dominance. Like us. Like you,” Jim murmured, cupping Khan’s jaw with one hand. He watched Khan; tenderness lay in his gaze. “Is the light stronger?” he asked quietly, hopefully. Nien smiled again.

“It is now – because of you.” He guided Kirk’s face back to his throat and marveled how the younger man’s body fitted to his – how Jim’s breath danced over his neck. The captain’s weight was a comfort – like home. He felt home – home like he had never before. It wasn’t the solitude of this little cottage nestled in the wilderness of a strange and beautiful planet, but because of his mate, who had banished the phantoms of the past and the ghosts of pain and humiliation that had haunted him for so long. Jim had burst his inner bonds and freed him. He felt not only accepted but loved – utterly and simply loved as any other human being. The feeling was positively gleeful.

The time before his James, before they grew close to each other, had been dark, stormy and full of the beginning self-destruction – not unlike the weather their first night together. Now the storm in his mind abated; the anguish was soothed and the bitter taste of the sinister memories vanished and made room for sweetness of his mate – as sweet as his mate’s soft and clever mouth tasted. He knew that Jim would be there for him, no matter the cost. He would be at his side – even if they would have to separate; Jim Kirk would always be with him. The young captain was a part of his soul now, mended the wounds and scars life had left there. For the first time, Khan didn’t mind that someone reached out to him – held out a hand to lead him out of the darkness. Not as someone exhorting their false authority over him, attempting to control him, but as an equal who only wanted to guide him away from pain and sorrow to a new day.

The music played on in the living room, and as he heard a woman’s voice sing a ballad, he closed his eyes and let the tune wash over him like the soft waves of the Indian Ocean.

Now I wondered where I was going to

Direction in the darkness until I saw you

Everytime I look and I see your light

I can't give up 'cause you're my life

Sweet surrender, now it's all that I can I feel
Sweet surrender, this time I know it's real
And like in a wonder my heart was born again
I'm not afraid to give you everything
Cause that's what sweet surrender means

Lightning and thunder continued through the skies and Jim snuggled closer to the Augment, burying his face in the crook of Nien’s neck. Here, in the arms of the man who had won his heart, he felt warmth in his soul and at peace. And beneath the blankets, Khan had pulled over them, Kirk felt Nien’s steady heartbeat beneath his palm and his gentle pulse beneath Jim’s lips. Kirk had never felt more whole – complete as he did now, with his beloved.

His beloved…

Jim tasted the word in his soul and heart, and it sounded right – beautiful even. It sounded right. A place where he belonged – a person to whom he belonged. He never dared to trust someone like this, not since he was abandoned by his mother and abused by his step-father. Bones and Spock were the exceptions. He would and had trusted them with his life. Scotty and Uhura – he would put his shirt on them, as well as on Sulu and Chekov; they were a family of his choosing. His faith in them was time-tested. Khan. Jim’s faith in him was tested too, but different all the same. It ran bone deep. He could feel Nien in every cell of his body so revealing his heart and soul was revealing what Khan already had right to – a right well-earned. There wasn’t any hesitation, doubt, or shyness in opening himself up utterly to this one man – how could he? Khan was already inside.

His heart beat wildly with his realization: He loved Khan – his Nien, his dark lion, his strong and elegant tiger. He loved this extraordinary, beautiful, feral, but also so gentle and protective creature with everything he was. It was more than he ever thought he had to give and he wasn’t sure that he’d reached the end of it yet.

Gone are all my doubts, gone is yesterday
I no longer want to turn and walk away
Sometimes I was lost I didn't see the signs
But now I'm found because you're mine

Sweet surrender now it's all that I can I feel
Sweet surrender, this time I know it's real
And like a wonder my heart was born again
I'm not afraid to give you everything
Cause that's what sweet surrender means

Jim sighed and pressed a gentle kiss to Nien’s neck, feeling the Augment purring his contentment while a strong, gentle hand caressed his side. Then Khan turned his head and their mouths met. Lips fondled, tongues tasted and teased, fingers flitted over velvet skin to silken hair and back again.

If those who knew the men best could see them now, none of them would believe that these two men – lost in tenderness and devotion – had been enemies. None would recognize the strong-willed, brilliant Starfleet captain or the fierce Augment leader. These sides of the two men had vanished into nothingness. Here, in this moment, they were only two hearts entwined with each other and wrapped in the golden warmth of love. There existed nothing else for themselves, except themselves and their private little harbor. Even the ferocity of nature was like a barrier that protected them from the rest of the world.

I almost feel ashamed, my heart, my everything
My weaknesses are there to see
But I don't care at all, I'll show you how I fall
Cause I know that it has to be

Sweet surrender now it's all that I can I feel
Sweet surrender, this time I know it's real
And like a wonder my heart was born again
I 'm not afraid to give you everything
Cause that's what sweet surrender means

The ballad in the living room faded away and made room for another song, but neither the voice nor the soft violin reached the mind of the two mates. Lost in the desire to be one again, they drifted through the haze of new awakening passion, eager to surrender to each other anew – to experience the bliss of falling and being caught and held…

ST***ST***ST

On Aldebaran, evening turned into night, and aboard the Enterprise the Alpha shift had been off
duty for more than six hours now; its members prepared for bed. Most of them. On the recreation
deck that lay beneath the living area of the ship, Montgomery Scott sat on an armchair in one of the
conversation pits near the large picture window. He nipped at his Scotch and talked with Keenser.

Well, Scott was talking. Keenser was listening to him as usual and to the conversation of the few
men and women from the alpha shift hung about this section of the recreation deck while other
worked out on the sports deck that was next door.

The engineer didn’t indulge in strenuous workouts. As chief engineer of a ship as large as the
Enterprise and with his own station at the bridge, he did quite enough exercising. Frankly, he was
glad finally to have some time to simply sit somewhere and to rest. He even denied himself the usual
pleasure of reading technical magazines; that said a lot. He was tired, well, not too tired to go to his
quarters.

“And then this idiot gearhead took a standard chart and wondered why the cadmium hardware failed
inspection, ‘cause…”

Scotty’s story about a study fellow who knew about as much about machines as he did about cows
laying eggs was interrupted; the tall, slender frame of the first and science officer approached.
Usually, he would already be in his and Uhura’s quarters, but as acting captain of the Enterprise he
had more responsibility now. For example, reading departments’ reports was a new duty he took on
in Jim’s absence. One of them brought him to this part of the ship where he wasn’t often seen.

“Good evening, Mr. Scott, Mr. Keenser,” he greeted politely.

The little alien nodded while Scotty looked at the Vulcan in surprise. “Good evening, Commander.
Around so late, are ye?”

Spock lifted a brow. “Obviously.” He crossed his arms behind his back in his typical gesture. “I am
sorry to disturb you during your free time, Mr. Scott, but I noticed in Dr. McCoy’s report, the
circumstances of Mr. Parson's accident. It is missing from your report.”

The Scotsman raised his brows at him. “I sent it to Dr. McCoy half an hour later. I’m certain that he
gotta it. There’s no error message indicating the transmission failed.”

Cocking his head, the Vulcan observed the chief engineer carefully. “Usually the section chiefs
report an incident to the CMO; he documents it in his report and adds their reports, too. But this time
both explanations about the unfortunate incident are missing.”

Thoughtfully, Scotty rubbed his neck. “Well, this time I couldn’t tell the good doctor exactly what happened, but I sent him my report half an hour later. Did you talk to him? What did he say?”

Fascinated, Montgomery watched how the first officer took a deep, slow breath before he answered with a clipped voice, the Vulcan version of irritated, “Dr. McCoy is… already asleep and it doesn’t seem wise to disturb him. He… concluded his shift by – how do you humans put it? By ‘flushing down his anger’.”

A broad grin spread over Scott’s face. “He had a drink?” Even if a Vulcan claimed that their expressions were expressionless, Montgomery could read something akin to frustration on Spock’s face. “Ah, he hadn’t one but a few drinks.” He chuckled. “Then Dr. McCoy must be really troubled by somethin’. I forgot that he had booze saved from shore leave.”

Spock decided not to advise Scott that such words weren’t to use by staff officers and continued, “Dr. McCoy was ‘in need’ of some brandy after he talked with the captain. Therefore…”

“He had Jim on the line?” When off duty or if he wanted to indicate something important to Kirk, Scotty used the captain’s nickname; Kirk didn’t mind. He and Scotty met each other under… They could be called extenuating circumstances; and the crazy Scotsman supported him from the beginning, without knowing much about the younger man. Scotty trusted Jim implicitly, as Jim did Scotty, even if they differed in opinion once in a while. The chief engineer felt relief hearing that McCoy had been in contact with Kirk because, despite Jim’s recovery from the Klingons and staying with The Shadow to heal, the engineer was worried about his friend. “How is Jim doin’?” he asked and Keenser, who was sensitive on the inside (though he seemed unmoved on the outside), bent forwards to take in the conversation.

“As far as I understood Dr. McCoy, the captain is still healing. He will return in a few days.” He could sense the relief now visible on Scott’s face. And inwardly, he too felt as calm as he thought of his Th’yl’la’s welfare now under Sunrise’s care.

“That’s good to hear, sir! I like the lad a lot and…” He cleared his throat. “I mean, I’m glad that the captain’s doin’ better.” Then he frowned. “But why is McCoy frustrated if Jim is gettin’ better?”

“I do not have enough data to analyze Dr. McCoy’s state of frustration, Mr. Scott, but his current emotional state is odd enough that he neglected to submit a complete report. That action is highly unusual for him.”
Montgomery pursed his lips. “Hmm, now that I think about it, it acted very strange after I told him where I know the word or name ‘Drythen’ from. He went rigid, stared at me as if I had turned into Nessie and raced out of engineering, calling back about some ‘emergency’.”

Spock looked emotionless as usual. Still Scott thought he sensed tension in the Vulcan’s posture as the acting captain of the Enterprise asked, “And from where do you know this name, Mr. Scott?”

“It’s not a name, but a word – a title, to be precise. I heard it in an old English rhyme from my school days. ‘Drythen’ means lord or king.” Surprised, he watched the Vulcan go rigid now, just as the doctor had. Scotty was sure he could see wheels turning in Spock’s mind; then the son of Sarek went pale.

“Are you sure about that, Mr. Scott?”

“Aye, of course, sir! I speak Gaelic – Scots and Irish, even a wee bit a Welsh and some Old English. ‘Drythen’ means lord, warlord or king and…”

“Thank you, Mr. Scott, you’re information is useful!” Spock cut in; he turned on his heels and left, nearly running.

Montgomery frowned. “’Good night, Mr. Scott! Have a nice evening, Mr. Scott!’” he growled. “So much for Vulcan politeness!”

Keenser blinked, pulled his legs up the chair and laid his folded arms across his bent knees. Contrary to humans, he had a particular ability for empathy, and what he felt from the Vulcan – shock, wariness, worry – concerned him. And he wasn’t alone in his worry; he sensed the same from his human friend.

Spock had to remind himself of Vulcan discipline as he headed for his and Uhura’s shared quarters. He felt the irrational impulse to run, but it would be uncalled for, for a staff officer to race through the ship without reason or alarm. But he was on alert – on red alert, so to speak.

Drythen meant king and he knew that ‘Khan’ was an Asian word for the same.
What if the super-human used his name and only disguised in in a different language? What, if Drythen was Khan Noonien Singh?

It made sense once ‘Sunrise’s’ many abilities were accounted for. A mere human, even a well-trained asset, couldn’t do what this ‘Drythen’ did. Still, Spock hadn’t any proof that ‘Sunrise’ was Khan, and he didn’t want leap to an illogical conclusion. He needed more data as quickly as possible! If the mysterious stranger from The Shadow was indeed the Augment, then Jim was in great danger. Spock had lost his brother in soul once at the hands of the super-human; he would not experience the pain of that loss a second time.

For a moment, he thought about waking McCoy. The good doctor’s frustration could be rooted in the realization that Jim’s rescuer was Khan, and if this were the case, then…

Spock stopped midstep, frozen in place.

If the CMO concluded that Sunrise was Khan, then why hadn’t he informed him immediately? McCoy’s very first reaction would have been to mobilize the whole ship and to rush to Kirk’s rescue. The doctor would have remained on the bridge, pestering everyone to find and to get to Jim as soon as possible. But instead of this, he stayed in his office in a worse mood than usual, and poured himself a brandy the minute his shift was over.

The pieces to the puzzle didn’t fit – unless Kirk had talked McCoy out of altering him. Nevertheless, the CMO wouldn’t keep something like this a secret if there were the slightest possibility that Jim’s health and life were at stake. Something convinced McCoy that Kirk wasn’t in danger. That fact contradicted the supposition that Sunrise was Khan. The former dictator had sworn revenge on them all, and if Jim was with him… The Vulcan didn’t need to imagine what the Augment would do to the young captain. For a moment, the old fury of last year knotted in his belly, but he suppressed it instantly. Emotions were no solution to a threat nor would it solve this puzzle.

Weighing logic when considering McCoy’s certainty of the captain’s safety, Spock thought it impossible – no – improbable (very improbable) that Sunrise was Khan. But, on the other hand, there was evidence to the contrary.

Spock pressed his lips into a firm line. Trying to work a Jim Kirk puzzle was like putting it all together nice and neat only to turn it over and see a different picture with no order at all! He needed more data – now! He hurried towards his quarters and stepped through the door.

Nyota was already in bed reading a book – a real one, not her PADD Spock realized. She looked up and gave him one of her soft, fond smiles she reserved for him. But she turned serious the moment
she recognized his stiff posture and the fire in his eyes. She and Kirk were two of a very small number of people who could read the Vulcun.

Placing the book on the nightstand she sat up. “What happened?” she asked and the son of Sarek took a deep breath. First, he had to get some answers before he could make accusations.

“When Dr. McCoy asked you to link him to The Shadow, did he sound… unusual?”

The young Bantu-woman glanced at him, surprised. “You mean, did he sound odd?” She reflected for a moment. “He seemed to be… tense and in a bit of a hurry, but that's not really new for him.”

Spock nodded; still the apparent nervousness of the CMO fitted discomfited him. “Did he speak to your relief while you were at lunch?”

She hesitated. “Joe reported only that McCoy requested some records from the communications database after we left Turkana. That's all.” Her slight hesitation indicated her guilt over leaving Kirk behind. Illogical. They merely followed his orders, and there hadn’t been another way to save the evacuees. Still, he understood guilt from a human point of view. Then his attention returned to the topic.

“What records did Dr. McCoy request?”

Uhura slipped out of bed, went to the computer terminal at her desk. She opened the program and logged in with her ID to obtain the information. “He wanted to have the record…” She frowned. “That’s odd. He wanted to have the record of Sunrise’s call after we left Turkana.” She glanced up at her lover, who stood motionless there; his face turned hard. He turned abruptly, sat down at his desk and began his research. Curious, Nyota stepped to him and glanced over his shoulder. “McCoy also retrieved med bay records from the ship’s computer base – older ones from more than a year ago,” she murmured as she saw the data logs Spock observed. “But which ones?”

“There are no tracks left,” the Vulcan answered. “Dr. McCoy deleted everything.” He switched off the terminal, leaned back and crossed his arms in front of his chest. His typical gesture when lost deep in uncomfortable thoughts.

Uhura knew better than to disturb him; she followed her own musings.
McCoy must have found out something critical he wanted to discuss with Kirk – something connected to Sunrise’s call and events from last year. She pursed her lips. The last year had been more or less calm if you compared it with their first-year-mission – Section 31 and Khan. The latter had been more than a year ago, and records from med bay were only taken out of security if necessary – only when there were prisoners aboard – prisoners that were deemed a threat.

And whom had the med bay held so dangerous that the red shirts were required?

Khan!

Nyota bit her lips. Could Sunrise be…?

No. She shook her head. Khan would kill Kirk, not rescue him. And he certainly wouldn’t go half mad with worry for the captain – or anyone that wasn’t his crew. Then again, the Augment was probably one of the few living beings in the whole universe who could sneak into Klingon headquarters, free Kirk and flee with him – successfully! The super-human also had many talents – in strategy, battlefield tactics, plotting and constructing. The sensor-disturbing device was as simple as it was brilliant (as Scotty stated with glee). Sunrise's knowledge of battlefield first-aid and medical knowledge further supported the hypothesis that Sunrise was indeed Khan. After all Khan was responsible for the cryotubes he used for his crew and himself, indicating advanced knowledge of biology.

It all sounded logical. In addition, Jim had to know this mysterious ‘Drythen’. Otherwise, he wouldn’t trust him so quickly. But if Kirk knew Sunrise’ was Khan, he would move heaven and Earth to capture the Augment, not cover for him.

Still a quiet voice whispered to her that the answer was right in front of her, but she waited until Spock moved, signaling the completion of his contemplative state. He took a deep breath and his lips twitched in irritation, and so she began to speak again. “You think this all has to do with Sunrise, don’t you?” He glanced up at her, and so she continued, “So, any idea who this ‘Sunrise’ is?”

“I have a theory, but I will need more data to confirm it,” Spock answered slowly.

“More data?” The communication officer fixed her eyes on him. “How much more data do you need? It's clearly someone Kirk knows and…”

“But hasn’t known for long,” her lover interrupted her calmly, “or I believe we would also have
heard of him. The captain would not keep that hidden – not even if the man in question is an asset. Also, whoever this man is, he knows us, and we must know who he is, or he would not have disguised his voice when making contact with the Enterprise.”

Uhura nodded. Spock’s deductions matched her assumptions. “Someone strong, intelligent, fast and resilient,” she began and the Vulcan cocked his head.

“Someone with considerable ingenuity and engineering skills; that sensor-disturbing-device is a complex mechanism, even if the build is simple,” he completed the list.

Sitting down on Spock’s desk, the young Bantu-woman looked him straight in the eyes. “So, stop me if I’m wrong here, but doesn’t that sound very much like someone we know?”

The son of Sarek lifted a brow. Obviously, Nyota had the same impression as he had. “Indeed it does, my dear. It sounds like Sunrise is Khan!” He paused for a moment. “And there is more. Mr. Scott told me earlier that he remembers where he had heard the word ‘drythen’ before and what it means.” He moistened his lips. “It means ‘lord’ – or ‘king’”. He heard Uhura taking a sharp breath and continued, “But we also know two things that would suggest we might be incorrect in that assumption. One, Khan and the captain are not friends. In fact, I would call them mortal enemies. Also, I would remind you that Khan is currently hiding. No one knows his whereabouts, and no one has heard from him since his flight from the lab in Nevada. His tracks stop somewhere in San Francisco.”

“Still, there is the likelihood that Khan is Sunrise. I think the evidence speaks for itself.” Uhura bent forwards so that her face was mere inches away from the Vulcan. “And assume Sunrise is Khan. Ah! I know what you think about assumptions. But consider this. If Sunrise is Khan, then it was him who warned Starfleet through us of the Klingon attack on Tammeron – saving millions of people by doing so. Afterwards, he saved the Lexington and as a result Commodore Wesley. A close friend of Kirk. Wesley has sort of slipped on Pike’s shoes for Kirk’s sake. And then Sunrise rescued Jim; he could have easily been killed. He saved Kirk, took care of him. He treated his injuries and, despite his anger at us for letting Kirk ‘down’, he shared his development with us so that we could escape Orion-controlled space. What does this sound like?”

This time the Vulcan lifted both brows. “As illogical as it should be, it sounds as if… He acts like - like he is Jim’s friend.”

Uhura smiled. No one would ever convince her that Spock didn’t understand humans. He did – he simply wouldn’t admit it, because it would show that he also experienced these emotions that made human’s tick. “Friendship? Yes – and given their history and the other circumstances, it must be an extraordinarily one. You would risk your life to save Jim, Spock. You already did! Why? Because he is not only your commanding officer and friend, but also your T’hy’la. Scotty would never share
any of his inventions getting the credit due him unless someone’s life is at stake; someone that he loved. He would and did it for Kirk though because his loyalty is based on friendship. Jim would fight for a friend or the family of a friend no matter the cost. He did just that when he saved you on Niburu and a hundred other times. You are his brother. The bonds of friendship tie us all together and make us do the extraordinary for each other.”

“You are correct,” Spock nodded.

“Now let’s talk about Sunrise – Khan, if we continue on the assumption,” Uhura went on. “He saved the Lexington because Jim considers Wesley the closest thing to a father he’s had since Pike. The question is: How does Khan now about it?”

Spock lifted a brow and opened his mouth to answer, but Nyota shook her head.

“No, just let me voice my thoughts. Then Sunrise blew up at us when we were forced to leave the captain behind. He sounded as if he considers us traitors. And, remember he said that people called him a ‘monster’ but that he would never let someone down who belonged to him. And at last he risked his life to recover Jim. Everything ‘Sunrise’ does lately is connected to Jim and his welfare. It’s as if he wants to protect him – to spare him pain. Just like we will always do for Kirk and each other because we are family.

Spock pondered those words for a short time, then he added for consideration, “You will remember, though, while Khan possesses strong ties to his crew, his own family, he has never showed any kind of loyalty to this crew, not least of all the captain. He may have helped us, but only to serve his own intentions.”

“Intentions that protected his family – and now he is protecting Kirk.” She bit her lips. “We both know how Bones saved Jim after the warp core chamber. McCoy used Khan’s blood plasma to force Kirk’s cells to start working and reproducing again – just like the Tribble experiment. Jim is stronger since then. You told me about how you've sparred with him since then, and how surprised you were to find his strength increased. He recovers quicker from injuries and is more vital than ever. Khan’s blood did more than to bring him back from the death; it enhanced him, even if just a bit. What if Khan feels responsible for him because of it?”

Thoughtfully, Spock observed her face looking for any trace that she was displaying human ‘humor’, but he didn’t find a hint of it. Of course not. Uhura was far too professional to joke in such a situation. She was serious – and it made him uncomfortable.

“You suggest that Khan sees Jim as family, like those…”
“Like those separated from him now. Stashed away somewhere secret where no one but a few admirals and council members know about. Think about it, Spock; Khan is utterly alone. The only one he has now is Jim – if my intuition is right – and it usually is.”

“So as a result of the blood plasma and the fact that his family is unreachable to him, you think he has developed some… loyalty towards the captain,” the Vulcan mused.

“This would explain a lot,” Nyota affirmed and Spock almost sighed.

“If Sunrise is indeed Khan, and McCoy somehow found out about it, Jim must have told him to stay silent. The reasons for the captain’s decisions to cover Khan could be that he is grateful towards the Augment for saving his life and…” He frowned the slightest bit. “Still it makes no sense. Khan is responsible for Pike’s death. Jim would never…”

“Forgetness is anchored in the Christian religion, Spock; Jim is religious to a certain degree. What, if he forgave him his personal loss? After all, most of his anger was based on Pike's death. Perhaps he found the strength to forgive Khan and that's why he's covering for him. As for Khan’s actions now. Kirk is like Pike was – thinks he can save anyone. You and the doctor know better than anyone... Jim changes people. I don't know if even Khan is immune to that side of Kirk.”

“After all Khan did – not just at Daystrom, but...?” Spock was thunderstruck, and his Vulcan mask slipped for several seconds.

“We never heard Khan’s version of the story – only what he told you and Kirk in the brig, and you admitted that it much but ‘very emotional’. We might have gotten more details if the Vengeance hadn’t shown up when it did.” She crossed her slender legs that were barely covered by the short negligée she wore. She was now thoroughly convinced of ‘Drythen’s’ identity. “Imagine Kirk and Khan are sitting somewhere together now on neutral ground. Jim is healing, Khan is taking care of him. What do they have to do, except talk? Maybe Kirk learned something that makes him see Khan in another light, and that's why he's protecting him.”

Spock nodded slowly, as his quick Vulcan mind went through the different possibilities, the different reasons why his friend and captain would protect the Augment. “Still, I see no logical explanation why Jim stayed silent about ‘Sunrise’s’ identity even before he was rescued by him. The captain trusted The Shadow’s information about the planned attack on Turkana the moment he got a private message from ‘Sunrise’. He must have known him – must have realized who his tipster was. Maybe that’s the reason he deleted the message as soon as he read it.”
Uhura cocked her head and brushed one long, loose strand behind her ear. “You’re right, that’s odd,” she confirmed. “I think you will have no other choice but to ask him after his return.”

“If he returns,” the Vulcan murmured; his eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

“Are you afraid that Khan won’t let him go?” the young Bantu-woman wanted to know, and Spock shrugged is one shoulder – a gesture borrowed from his mother.

“I’m not able to calculate the Augment’s reactions and decisions. He is brilliant; he is logical; there is no doubt. Still his actions are steered by emotion and as a result I cannot say what he will do if Jim wants to leave.” He pursed his lips. “It might depend on the captain’s persuasiveness. He must reassure Khan that he wouldn’t give him away to Command or the authorities.”

Nyota sighed. “In other words: There are a lot of ‘ifs’, ‘whens’ and ‘maybes’.” She lowered her head. “I don’t like this.”

“I have to agree, my dear,” the first- and science officer nodded. “I am unable to come to a decision.”

She reached out and touched his shoulder; tried to transfer some soothing calmness to him. “What do you want to do now?”

Her lover lifted a brow. “What I want to do is, to find out where the captain is exactly and rush to him to protect him from harm that could befall him any minute he is in Khan’s presence. What I should do is to alert Command and to give them any information I have.” He fixed her. “Can you backtrack the transmission between McCoy and Kirk?”

“Give me some time, and I’ll find out where Jim is,” she said. “The question is: Do you want to know because you are concerned about Kirk or do you want to report Khan to Starfleet?”

A small frown appeared on the Vulcan’s forehead. “What do you mean?”

Uhura sighed. “Look, if Jim’s protecting Khan, he has his reasons for it. They must be important to him, or he wouldn’t shield the man. Kirk is a little reckless from time to time and takes risks where other people play it safe, but he knows exactly how far he can go. He knows where the line is.”
“Still there is the risk that Khan will do something dangerous – hurt him, and…”

“How Kirk knows this; he’s not stupid.” Her hand on his shoulder began to massage his tensed muscles. “Do you trust Jim?”

For a long moment, Spock looked at her, baffled. “Of course!” came the almost indignant reply and Nyota smiled.

“You trust him as a friend – but do you trust him also as your captain?”

“I do not have to justify my concern nor should one question my trust in his abilities as a captain!” the Vulcan answered clipped; there was a particular fire in his dark eyes. It made Uhura smile even more.

“There you go, love! Kirk wouldn’t risk anyone’s safety – not the people of the planet he’s on and certainly not his crew. He’s made his decision to keep Khan a secret, as he sees it, in our best interest Trust him in this, and he’ll entrust you with his reasons.”

Spock let his gaze roam over her gentle, beautiful face and allowed himself a sigh.

Why was everything with humans always so complicated?

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The water poured down on the two men; the steaming heat bathed the whole room in a warm fog that smelled pleasantly of soap. Jim had wrapped his arms around Khan, and his head rested on the Augment’s shoulder while they gently massaged soap into tense muscles.

None of them – neither Kirk nor Khan – could know that their secret was slowly coming to light, now not only by McCoy but also the half-Vulcan and his human lover would find no sleep now. Jim and Nien only relished in the hot water that relaxed them after their second passionate round that finally forced them under the water to wash away the evidence of their devotion and ecstasy.

“Diego won’t be too thrilled when he gets the water bill,” Jim said as they stepped out the shower
cabin; rolling his eyes as he heard another thunder outside. Dammit, this blasted thunderstorm has definitely taken a liking to the area.

Khan chuckled as he offered his beloved a towel. “And the bill will increase when we finish the laundry.” He dried himself quickly and toweled his dark hair then he opened the bathroom door. “Oh Alas – do we have any clean sheets left?”

“Might be a set left,” Kirk shrugged and threw his towel on the sink. “Why?”

An amused smirk danced around the super-human’s mouth as he pointed at the bed. “Because I don’t think that we should lay back onto this!”

Kirk’s gaze followed Khan’s finger and groaned. Nien was right. The blankets and sheets were a wet mess. The air was musky and could tell a mile against the wind what happened here. Jim cocked his head. “Well… I see what you mean.” He looked at his lover. “Are you in the mood to… to do some housework now?”

Khan lifted a brow. “Definitely not! You?”

Promptly the younger man shook his head. “Nope! I rather want to crawl into something soft and warm, snuggle up with you and…”

“A brilliant idea, Captain!” the Augment teased, went to the wardrobe and fetched the two last sheets. “Check the pillows and see if they’re still usable then come to the living room.”

Confused Jim glanced at him. “Why?”

“You had an idea, Pyära; I only developed it a bit.” Whistling and nude, he vanished into the attached room and Kirk needed a moment to collect himself. Khan was whistling! That was new. And Khan seemed so at ease – unguarded; like a weight had been lifted from his heart and soul. Jim smiled happily. Was this change in Nien really his doing? Had he helped the Augment to overcome the horrors he had experienced most of his life? It sounded too good to be true, but maybe this night was truly the beginning of Khan’s healing. He hoped that his beloved could find some peace at last.

He checked the pillows – at least one was still clean – thrust it under his arm and went to the door. If it weren’t for the weather he would open the window, but the wind still raged. Closing the door
firmly behind him, he looked around for Khan and his eyes widened when he saw what the super-human was up to.

Nien piled the Chilean carpets in front of the open fire and added one of the woolen blankets he and Kirk had used outside to keep themselves warm while resting in the deck chairs. Then he spread a sheet above it and used the other one to cover the second wool plaid. He glanced up and smirked at Jim’s perplexed face. “It may not be soft as the bed, but if you get uncomfortable you can always use me as a cushion,” he offered with a subtle tone in his voice; mirth danced in his eyes.

Jim felt his heartbeat quicken once again. The man in front of him looked like Khan Noonien Singh, but his behavior had changed. He was… teasing, almost playful. Kirk loved this lighter side of the Augment just as much as he loved his ferocity.

“So… A makeshift bed in front of an open fire. Quite romantic,” he smiled, placing the pillow on one end of the bundle of blankets and carpets.

“And that’s not all,” Nien replied while he put wood to the fireplace; he added some paper to it and lit it with a long match from the small box that was placed on the ledge. “Lay down, James, I will bring us something to drink.”

Humming to the music from the small radio, he walked to the kitchenette, fetched two glasses and the last bottle of Chilean red wine. When he turned around, he found Jim already beneath the blanket; the corner was turned down in a silent invitation while the young captain stretched himself comfortably and crossed his hands beneath his head. The glowing flames in the open fireplace sent their shadows over the ground and bathed Jim’s clean, muscular body in a warm shine and danced in his short strands – a picture of seduction that Khan would remember for a very long time.

Returning, he uncorked the bottle and put it on the floor beside the two glasses, only then he slipped beside Jim beneath the blanket. “The wine has to breathe before I can offer it to you. The bouquet must unfold first.”

Kirk chuckled. “Yeah, I learned about it at the Academy. You don’t learn the value of a good wine in Iowa. The value of cheap beer, now that’s another story. My mother loved a good glass of wine, but she gave it up after she married Frank; he thought it was a waste of money.” He grimaced.

Khan turned towards him. “So… you and your stepfather weren’t on the best of terms?” he asked, already assuming that this ‘Frank’ was responsible for Jim’s feelings of inferiority. If so, then the man was lucky they would never meet!
A snort escaped the young captain. “Far from it,” he growled. “This bastard was all ‘nice as long as my mother was around. As soon as she went away to some conference or project, he’d order Sam and me around, treated us like dirt and if we disagreed with him, he beat us – made certain he put bruises where they wouldn’t be noticed. Hurt like hell. Worst was, she didn’t believe us at first. She thought we were trying to separate her and Frank because we were jealous, but we weren’t. Sam pleaded with him for us. It worked a bit in the beginning, but then Frank began to drink, and everything turned nasty.” He frowned. “He was an asshole.”

The hand that didn’t cup Kirk’s hip had curled into a fist. He. Had. Known It! This stepfather was the reason that this strong, bright, compassionate and brilliant young man weighed and found himself wanting. This Frank had driven James’ older brother out of the house – forced the boy to leave his younger brother behind – and had hurt Jim’s soul over and over again.

For long a moment Khan remembered another boy, far younger than he had been. Large brown eyes, a mess of dark gold and brown hair on his head, a slender hand that gripped his in search of safety and trust.

Joaquin, his little brother. Not by parentage, but to people who make their own family, parentage means very little.

He had met the churl as the older Augments helped to set free the younger. They tried to save as many from the labs as possible, never giving in the lurking fear for their own lives. Joaquin had been one of the last children rescued. He was a sweet little boy, only five years old and unaware of the fact that the men and women charged with his care were about to murder him.

Khan had fought for the little boy and in the process discovered the first bonds of a family of his own making. One look at the boy and he was lost – determined to protect him from all harm. The bond stretched both ways. In those first nights after their escape from the labs, the child sought him out desperate for some comfort. Seventeen year old Noonien Singh gave all that he had to give to the child.

He remembered the weeks Joaquin didn’t speak, traumatized by the events previous. Then he had tried some single words in English rather than. He had been raised fluent in many languages but chose not use them. He did use a resource he didn’t know he had – patience. During those long, dark nights, he tried to lure words from the boy who showed his affection by snuggling up to him. Then all of sudden, the levee broke. During one very long night, the child talked, and talked and talked – poured out his soul to the older boy who had saved him – fought ferociously for him and still showed so much tenderness. Young Noonien listened to the boy’s anguish and held the child ‘til the next morning. In those hours, the bond of brotherhood formed; and it grew through the years. Khan loved his crew – his family, his brothers and sister. But this young, bright and beautiful child
that grew into an equally beautiful young man held his heart like no one else had.

It took almost three hundred years for someone to try again – his James.

He listened to Jim’s story about his stepfather; his mother seemed overtaxed with the death of her husband and her two growing sons – unable or unwilling to give up her career for them. And then the older brother who left the younger one to walk his own way, Nien felt the spiritual kinship between himself and the young captain more than ever before. Alas, Jim even resembled Joaquin in some ways, and the Augment didn’t doubt that the two men would have gotten along quite well.

It was a cruel joke for fate to play. History replayed over and again, but no one was ready to see it – and only he had lived long enough to watch. But no one listened to the man who saw so much – had so much to give and teach. They only saw their own purposes. If only someone had listened – perhaps they wouldn’t be at war now. Oh, but if someone had listened, he would have never met Kirk. So maybe James was fate's peace offering to him for his pain. If he believed in fate.

Khan took a deep breath. “Knowing you and your strong sense of justice and morality, you didn’t tolerate your stepfather’s abuse for long,” he said. He sat up and poured some of the wine into the two glasses.

“Damn right,” Jim grumbled. “I got my revenge after he overdid it.”

Offering his beloved one of the glasses, the former dictator looked at him curiously. “What did you do? Did you burn a treasured item? Slash his car tires?”

Heartful laughter escaped Kirk while he braced himself on one arm and took the glass. “Well, I wouldn’t slash car tires. Even I wasn’t that evil – but I smashed a car. Ran it into a ravine.” He hesitated shortly. “Unintentional, honest.”

Khan toasted towards him and waited until the young captain took a sip of the wine; then he cocked his head curiously. His eyes seemed to be endlessly deep and a constant whirl of blue and green, mixed with a mysterious fog-grey. “This sounds interesting,” he commented and Jim grinned.

“How do I jump from a bridge into…”

“You love danger. I’m well aware of it now,” Nien interrupted him almost gently. “So, do tell, why
you hurled a car into an abyss – unintentionally.” The tone of the last word betrayed his disbelief at the statement.

Kirk grimaced. “Well… It belonged to my real father and Frank…” He sighed. “Sam just left us to live with my grandfather. Said he couldn’t be a ‘Kirk’ under our stepfather’s roof, and even if I could understand him, I was… shocked – outraged – that he left me alone. My mother was away for her job, again. She left me alone with this… God, he was really a bully. Anyway she had a blind spot when it came to him.” Jim pressed his full lips into a thin line then he continued, “I felt… betrayed, abandoned. Everyone left me – they didn’t care about me. And then Frank, drunk as usual, ordered me to clean dad’s Corvette and…”

“WHAT?” Khan went rigid all of sudden and looked almost shocked at him. “A Chevy Corvette? What model year?”

Jim shrugged. “I’m not entirely sure, but I think around 1962 or 1967… I don’t know… What is it Nien?” He never had seen the Augment that thunderstruck.

For a moment the super-human stared at him – mouth agape, eyes wide, utter disbelief written all over his face. “James, do you have the slightest… idea how prized that car was? It was practically priceless in my time – thirty years later. To think that the vehicle survived for three centuries…” He shook his head, half amused, and half baffled. “Your stepfather must have truly provoked you.”

Pursing his lips, the captain cocked his head. “He wanted to sell it behind my mother’s back. He knew that she didn’t want to lose it. He was going to do it while she was away. He never respected my real father, was always jealous of him. People always said I looked like my dad. Mom always said I had his smile. I think that’s why Frank loathed me so much – and Sam even more so because Sam was like my father: Generous, gentle, strong-willed and noble. Frank hated Sam, but he took it out on me – and my mother was too grief-stricken to realize it.” He took a sip of the heavy wine. “So anyway, after Sam left and Frank was foolish enough to tell me why I had to wash Dad’s car, he was selling it. I snapped. I took it and drove away.” His gaze became unfocused.

“I wanted to be free, wanted to feel what my Dad must have felt whenever he drove his car. I passed a classmate who recognized me. I didn’t care. I drove and Iowa’s vast and fuck it was I thrill. Frank was furious! He yelled, I could hear him through the speakers of the old comms station telling me to turn around. And on top of all a police officer on her hyper-bike followed me and put on the lights. Course, I didn’t stop. I veered off onto a wide trail.” He chuckled. “And then there was suddenly this fence, the warning sign that I was entering an abandoned mine. It was a dead end – literary – and I made a decision. I sped up. I barely had time to turn the wheel and to jump out of the car before it flew into the ravine.” He began to laugh. “And then the police officer caught up with me, stood there as fierce as she could be, demanding my name.” He grinned. “I told it with pride. I think that was the start of my first career – as a troublemaker.”
“You still are, James!” Khan’s voice was fond and teasing in one, yet his gaze spoke of gentleness and understanding. His lips twitched. “In a certain way you avenged Frank’s disrespect of your father’s memory.”

Kirk pondered those words and nodded slowly. “Yes – you are right. I did it for him, for Sam, for Mom and for me. This car wasn’t Frank’s to take. It was Dad’s! And he had put off Sam! I didn’t want him allow to do the same to me! And to Mom.” Jim looked back at the Augment. “First, when Mom introduced Frank, I hoped for someone who would take care of Sam and me. But he made us feel like intruders in our own home. It was about time he was taught a lesson – and I did it without regret. Mom would never have driven the car, Sam didn’t dare to touch it, and so it was up to me to decide what should happen to it. It belonged to my father, no-one else. And if he couldn’t drive it anymore and I was about to be robbed of it, I had to rescue it – it ended a bit disastrously, I have to admit.” He took a deep breath. “I’m sorry that that I destroyed it, but honestly, I’d rather than have it taken from our family – one of the last reminders of Dad.”

Khan smiled. A genuine smile that mirrored in his glances, then he began to chuckle. “That’s so like you – hurling a three hundred years old Corvette to its doom to teach your stepfather a lesson. You are a rebel, James Kirk – and I am glad that our paths crossed. You are all I could ever hope to find in a mate – and more.”

Promptly, Jim’s heart beat faster again as he caught the warm, fiery gaze of the Augment. He knew that Khan would understand. They were so alike in so many ways that it was eerie – as if they were two parts of a whole.

“So, have you wrecked anyone’s car?” he asked playfully and Khan began to laugh.

“No, Erwin had bigger toys – like a private jet that wasn’t any use after I was done with it. And it had the nice side-effect of ruining his plans. It saved many lives.” He sipped again at his wine.

“Care to tell?” Kirk looked to him with interest and Nien realized once more that he could deny the younger man nothing. Either way, it felt so right to about the family he loved so much with someone who was eager to hear!

“Well, Erwin was one of those Augments who wanted to take the biblical decree as gospel you could say: to subdue the Earth. At any rate, he didn’t care for people enhanced or not, and was about to inflict a catastrophe onto Russia. I – We! – stopped him just in time. And during combat, his jet was destroyed.”
“With him aboard?” Kirk’s voice was calm, and the super-human took a deep breath.

“Yes, but it was still on the ground, so there was no collateral damage.” Khan pursed his lips. “The expression of Erwin’s general was priceless. I am almost certain it was not Otto’s shot that killed him, but a heart attack.”

Curious, Jim watched him. “So you took down one of the other Augment leaders to protect people. Or, I guess a whole country.”

It was not a question, but a statement and Khan shrugged. “I hate senseless blood spilling. Leaders should take care of their people, even if it is a people conquered. To treat them with anything other than the most basic of human dignity is wrong. I admit, I’ve killed too often, but I always tried to avoid innocents.”

“Like the scientists in the LSH lab you escaped from,” Jim nodded slowly, and the former dictator lifted a brow.

“There wasn’t any reason to kill them. The scientist who accidently pulled me out of a coma served me alive better than dead; after all I needed someone to put in the cryotube. And the man whose identity made it possible for me to leave the lab, was a family man. I listened his talk to his little daughter as I snuck into the changing room. There was no need to take his life, so I didn’t.” He caught the thoughtful gaze of the younger man and rolled his eyes. “Contrary to the popular belief, I do not enjoy killing. If I have to do it, I do it without regret, but slaying without reason is beneath me.”

“I know this now,” Jim replied after a second, his face gentle. Then he sighed. “If only I’d known you sooner!” He laid down and placed the half-emptied glass beside him

“Yes, so many ‘ifs’,” Nien nodded, drained his own glass, put it down on his side of the makeshift bed and lay down. Kirk snuggled closer to him, wrapped one arm around his hip and smiled.

“Well, now we are beyond this ‘if,’” he murmured; ignoring the next growl of thunder outside. “Would you tell me more about your crew – your family?” Hopeful, he looked up at Khan who replied his gaze. A genius’ smile spread over the delicate features of the Augment and he pulled the younger man even closer.

“I would love to introduce them to you. I think you would like the most of them.”
Jim smiled too now, laid his head on the strong shoulder of his beloved and listened to the tales of ‘the Augments who left for good’…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, the two love-birds are really getting very close - while aboard the Enterprise Jim’s friends are worrying their heads off.

In the next chapter Spock will confront Bones with his assumptions and our dear doctor will find himself in a tight corner. Then you will meet Kor again and Jim begins to realize that the whole ‘marking-thing’ means a lot more than he thought.

Hopefully you liked the new chapter. It’s still calm and sweet for the two men, but this will soon change (the chapter after the next). Just right now they enjoy their ‘vacation’, not knowing that trouble is already on its way to get them.

Once again sorry for the delay and I hope you’re not too angry with me – and that you liked the candies and that the first part was a kind of ‘song-fic’. I love this song very much and I thought it fits to what Jim and Khan see and find in and through each other.

The next chapter will come sooner, promised.

Have a nice evening,

Love

Yours Starflight
Bonds of friendship and love

Chapter Notes

Dear readers,

I’m so sorry that I somehow missed publishing this chapter. Yes, this is the real chapter 25 and not 26 as you already know, comes afterwards. The mistake was the outcome of too much stress and chaos. I’m truly sorry and I hope this chapter makes up for it – especially the last part (*snicker*).

I promise an incredible talk between Spock and Bones, sweet fooling around by our two love-birds and at last something you all have certainly waited for.

Have fun

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 25 – Bonds of friendship and love

The morning brought no fairer weather than the night before. It was still raining and windy, but finally the thunderstorm had exhausted of this place and moved on. It didn’t matter the weather though, the two men in the small cottage at the Silver Bayou sensed nothing that wasn’t his pleasure or his partner. Khan spooned against Jim; both were still deeply asleep with smiles playing around their lips. They had talked until late, made love again and had finally drifted off – for once not caring about anything outside of their little world.

Aboard the Enterprise, another man lay still in slumber; he slept right through the alarm clock. It wasn’t often that Leonard McCoy got himself drunk, but last evening had been one of those occasions. Worry, frustration, and anger had caused him to forget that he had duty early in the morning. He knew that as the ship’s doctor and staff officer he ought to be a model of control and responsibility. His concern and irritation over Jim’s ‘idiotic, foolish and frankly sudden trust in that blasted superman’ caused his reaction.

Saurian Brandy was as strong as its Terran twin and its high sugar content ensured that the alcohol entered the blood system quickly. It was no surprise that McCoy didn’t register the alarm clock. At the same time, there was a very distressing (to his pounding head) noise repeating over and again, until it finally reached his drowsy mind; the door buzzer finally registered.
Opening one eye and then the next, Bones needed a moment to account for his continued existence and where that existence might be.

Was he in a bed? Yes!

Was it his own? Maybe. Good enough.

Was he in his quarters? He looked around, just to be sure.

Why was everything in a blur? Mmm, likely the headache.

What was that awful taste in his mouth? It could have something to do with the reason for his headache. Which might also have something to do with the empty bottle and tumbler over on the table. Well, that was good; at least his vision was beginning to clear.

What was this evil noise? It sounded like a doorbell, didn’t it?

As his mind came finally to the conclusion that he was indeed in his bed and that he felt like dying, he realized there was someone at his door demanding entrance; Leonard McCoy lifted his head carefully.

Not good!

Really not good!

He felt like a hypertruck had run him over.

His foggy gaze found the alarm-clock. 0830… Well, it was morning and…

Morning!
His shift started at 0800.

Oooohhh…. SHIT!

“One moment!” he called. Well, he wanted to call, but what came out of his mouth was something that sounded like a mixture of Chinese and Rigelian, spoken with a hot potato in his mouth.

Somehow he managed to throw the blanket off and swung his legs over the bed to rise. Promptly the walls around him started to move, and he had to hold himself steady with one hand on the nightstand as nausea washed over him. Sweet Lord, he hadn't had this bad of a hangover since his divorce! Staggering towards the door, he ordered the computer to let in the visitor. And as if the morning hadn’t started out bad enough, Spock stood at the threshold; his raised brows and his gaze transformed him into a kind of Vulcan avenging angel.

The science officer stared at the pitiful man in front of him, took in the red eyes, the pale face and the glassy gaze, and crossed his hands on his back. “Good morning, Doctor!”

McCoy rubbed his face – there were times he wished this ship could make him disappear. Unfortunately, he hated the beaming device. Of all people, it had to be Spock who caught him in this state.

“’Morning, Spock,” he greeted with a heavy sigh. “I’m… I’m sorry that I overslept but…”

The Vulcan simply entered the quarters and while the door slid close he interrupted the CMO calmly. “It appears you are not feeling well, Doctor. Maybe you should take the day off.”

Bones shook his head – a bad idea because all of sudden there seemed to be a little dwarf in his skull wielding his ax against the good doctor’s skull. Groaning, McCoy closed his eyes and pointed towards the living area. “Please, have a seat and…” He stopped as the alarm clock buzzed again and cursing, he returned to his bed and switched it off.

Spock had been in McCoy’s quarters only a few times before, but he knew the doctor to be fastidious. Right now though, it looked as though a bomb exploded. The CMO’s day-old uniform lay on the floor, his right boot was by the bed, his left boot at the door to the bathroom. An empty bottle and a likewise empty glass sat on the nightstand; some books had fallen off of the table, and the most of his blanket hung over the bed’s edge.
“Your frustration seems to have grown, Doctor,” he commented almost wryly and McCoy rolled his eyes.

“It’s nothing,” he shrugged and pulled the blanket back on the bed. God, he felt horrible.

“I wouldn’t call it that,” the Vulcan replied. He watched the other man very closely as he carefully chose his next words. He was going to take what humans would call ‘a shot in the dark’. “That Jim is with Khan is certainly not ‘nothing’.”

If someone had frozen time, Leonard would not have been more surprised. He stopped dead in his tracks; his eyes went wide and shock was apparent on his expression. “What?” he somehow managed; his voice not more than a squeak.

Spock lifted a brow. The CMO’s reaction told him all he needed, and for a moment a sinking feeling passed over him that he quickly suppressed. Nyota’s and his thoughts had been right. Sunrise was Khan! And McCoy had known it. For how long, he was not sure, but at least since his last conversation with the captain.

“Doctor, if you know something about Sunrise’s true identity – if you confronted the captain with your knowledge yesterday and Jim talked you out of passing this information to me or Starfleet Command, it is best to say so now.” The calm tone didn’t fool McCoy. The Vulcan was irritated. There was no doubt about it by the look in his nearly black, stormy eyes. And Bones was in deep water now. He willfully omitted passing valuable information to the ship’s acting captain and could face court martial.

Sighing again, Leonard sat down on the bed’s edge and looked up into the emotionless face. Still, he thought he could feel hot anger burning deep in the Vulcan – anger that began the moment Khan had taken Jim hostage aboard the Vengeance. It found its apex when Jim died on the other side of the warp core chamber’s safety glass. Vulcans may state that they had no feelings, but McCoy was convinced that this was a lie. They had repressed feelings and emotions at the very least, and Spock was only half Vulcan. His human side was in constant battle with his Vulcan side. ‘What happened when the human part of him broke through and unleashed its fury,’ Bones mused as Khan had been brought in unconscious state to his med bay? A mere human wouldn’t have survived the Vulcan’s wrath, and as Leonard looked into the black abyss of the first officer’s eyes, he saw a spark of this furious flame again.

Taking a deep breath, he bent forwards slightly. “Jim’s in no danger,” he began carefully. “He was alone when I talked to him, and he… He asked me to keep this – development – to myself, at least until he’s back. He promised to explain everything, but right now… Now he wants to enjoy his little timeout with…” He made a short gesture with one hand.
“With Khan?” Spock asked icily; both brows raised. Jim was indeed somewhere alone with the Augment, and McCoy stated that their friend and captain wasn’t in any danger? For a long moment, the acting captain of the Enterprise thought back to those minutes when he found the only friend he ever had, broken and dying, untouchable behind the glass in the Engineering. Jim was afraid and pleading with him to help him to face death without fear.

His human side had flooded him with unfamiliar emotion in those moments. As he had faced a mortal situation within the volcano on Nibiru, he had decided to feel nothing at all and after he had witnessed the emotions of Pike in his last moments he had thought he had made the right decision on Nibiru. Nyota had accused him of diminishing her – their relationship then, but he hadn’t. It had been a logical thing to do. To suppress any emotions in the face of the one’s impending death. But Jim did not have that option. Nor would he take it if he did. Jim was that kind of man. And so Spock longed to reach his friend – to share his mind with him and offer him strength and during the last minutes of his life as he had with Pike. But he could not. Jim had died alone, separated from his friends and without the comfort of just a touch. He could only feel life dripping out of his body and soul.

In the second Kirk’s gaze broke and the light left his eyes, Spock had felt hatred for the first time in his life. Real and burning, it seemed to consume him from within in hot flames. Pursuing the man responsible for the loss of his only friend had been something from which he could not stop himself. Logically, he knew he had to capture an immensely dangerous criminal to prevent any more death and destruction, but in truth he had chased the Augment down to avenge Jim’s death.

Afterwards, Spock needed many hours of meditation before he was even ready to admit that he had sought revenge – something a Vulcan should never allow himself. And he had needed even more time still to accept it.

Khan Noonien Singh had driven him to and behind his limits, had provoked the worst in him and had brought him a terrible loss that had shaken him no less as the destruction of his home planet. And the very same man was now with Jim. Yes, Khan may have saved Kirk, but the reasons for his doing were certainly no charitableness.

And he doubted that McCoy was that naïve to believe that Khan had found all of sudden a ‘golden heart’.

McCoy massaged his neck as he watched the quick change of expression on the Vulcan’s face before it was blank like always. He knew that he couldn’t deny this little secret any longer. “Yes,” he admitted and looked up at the first officer. “Yes, you are right. Jim is with Khan.” He watched how the first officer pressed his lips into a thin line before continuing calmly, “But, it was Khan who recovered Jim from the Klingons, and it was Khan who warned us about the planned attack on
Tammeron. He also saved the Lexington.” He shook his head. “I don’t know what happened. I don’t know why the bastard is all of the sudden so eager to keep Jim safe. But one thing is certain, the Klingons would have tortured Jim to death by now if not for Khan.”

Very slowly Spock nodded. ‘Nyota has been right!’ he thought. ‘Khan tries to protect Jim. The question is still: why!’ he cocked his head. ‘How did you find out about Sunrise’s identity? Why are you so sure that the captain isn’t in any danger?’

Bones rolled his eyes. “As I told you, Jim was alone as I finally had him in the line. He wasn’t forced to say anything he doesn’t want, still he almost begged me to stay silent about Khan’s presence. He fears that Section 31 will get its hands on the Augment again and that Khan will be handed back to the labs. He is very concerned about him. Don’t ask me, why. Aside from the fact that Khan saved his ass and fought on the right side this time, I honestly don’t know why Jim is all of sudden so protective of our special ‘friend’, but he is.”

Observing the CMO, the Vulcan lifted one brow again. “And how did you find out about Khan? Because of Mr. Scott’s hint that ‘Drythen’ means ‘lord’ or ‘king’?”

“So he told you too?” Bones pursed his lips for a moment; then he snorted. “I’m wonder if Scotty didn’t put two and two together and figured out by himself because he’s too busy with his machinery.” He sighed again. “I already had a suspicion that it could be Khan because everything Sunrise has done can’t be done by one human working alone. Still, I couldn’t imagine Jim covering for Khan, so I just figured I was going down the wrong path.” He grimaced. “After Scotty revealed the meaning of ‘Drythen’ I… did some researches. I compared Sunrise’s voice with the record of Khan’s while he had been in my med bay last year, and… Well… After, I had the computer transfer Sunrise’s voice into Khan’s, I had no doubt that it was him.”

Spock looked at him, and his eyes widened ever so slightly. “Fascinating!” he commented. “Even Nyota didn’t think to do that.”

McCoy grinned shortly. “As you see, this doctor can do more than just patch up careless crew members.” Then he turned serious again. “As I realized that all hints are pointing at Khan, I contacted Jim, confronted him and then…” He shrugged, clearly frustrated. “Well, the Iowa-kid knows exactly how to persuade me to do things I’d rather not.”

The first officer made an affirming gesture. Oh yes, he knew exactly how persuasive his T’hy’la could be. “And you are sure that the captain is not in any danger? It seems to be doubtful if Khan is involved.”
McCoy threw his hands up. “Jim was outside in the garden and Khan was inside fixing dinner just as Jim told me he’d be safe. He sounded like he was on vacation with a buddy.” He frowned and chuckled for a moment. “I imagined Khan in an apron stirring a pot on a stove. Somehow that struck me as funny.” This time Spock had no problem understanding human humor. He pictured moment the Augment in a domestic setting, and it was – unsettling. Then he turned his attention back to the problem at hand. “What isn’t funny, Doctor, is you withholding such information from me.”

Even with the mother of all hangovers and tired as a bear at the beginning of winter, Bones knew exactly how he could get away with something that was just this side of insubordination. “Jim asked for it and he is, even in his absence, still the captain of this ship. I just followed his order and…”

“As you already pointed out, Doctor, Jim asked you to stay silent. He didn’t and couldn’t order you in this particular situation.” He took a deep breath and suppressed a grimace. Even if the air conditioners worked flawlessly, he could still smell the alcohol on the CMO. “Khan is a wanted criminal. Starfleet Command had classed him as ‘highly dangerous’ and the last time I checked the status, there was still Admiral Barnett’s order to shoot Khan at sight. Why Jim covers for him now is beyond my understanding. He has all reason to be wary of the Augment and…”

“This Augment saved our friend and captain, Spock! He protected more than 18 million lives from Klingon rule and helped Wesley; probably saved his life. Shooting him on sight would be a hell of a way to repay this man’s help – even if I want to kick his ass from here to the next week for what he did last year. I still have nightmares of the moment the Red Shirts brought me the body bag. And only after I opened it could honestly believe that my best friend lay dead inside of it!” For a moment, Bones went silent before continuing. “But somehow Khan switched sides, or his plans mesh with Jim’s, I don’t know! But Jim deserves a chance to explain everything. He deserves everything we have to give him and you know it! If after all Khan has done to him, he is standing up for him now, protecting him, then he must know something we don’t. That’s good enough for me!”

The Vulcan crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I am still wary. Yes, the captain owes Khan his life – again – but the question is: Why did Khan come to his aid all of sudden? Why did he risk himself to rescue Jim? And why does Jim cover for him and refuse to hand him to the authorities?”

“Section 31,” McCoy answered without hesitation. “Jim is sure that not all members have been removed, and he thinks they’ll use Khan again as a lab rat. That man should be in jail, no doubt, but running illegal tests on anyone is a crime. So I can understand why Jim that he is hell-bent on sparing Khan that fate.”

Spock pondered these words for a minute. He had his own thoughts and they went mostly along with the CMO’s musing. “You and Jim are confident that Section 31 somehow… still exists,” he suggested, and Leonard nodded.
“Yes. Just think of the SBI’s reaction when it got your report of Jim’s capture. They gave us some bullshit about how sorry they were, but couldn’t do anything to help him. Then Barnett returned from the conference and ordered Wesley to start a rescue mission. It was unnecessary because Khan had already recovered Jim, but none of us knew it. Luengo was ready to sacrifice Jim; Barnett did the opposite when he learned about it.” He bent forwards. “Luengo was or is a member or a sympathizer of Section 31. He knew about Khan’s transfer to the secret lab and Barnett was about to put him and Norton in custody for misconduct. But Luengo is still free and leading the SBI as we speak. And when Jim was in trouble, he didn’t lift a finger to help him. It’s as though he’s trying to get him back sullying his good name.” The doctor thought for a moment. "Or he's trying to keep Jim quiet. Dead men tell no tales. I’d bet my last shirt that Section 31 is still operating, but staying well off the radar. And they want Jim out of the way. He ruined them once, rightly; he could do it again – maybe even with Khan’s help. The Augment worked for Section 31. He must have a few ideas of his own on how to take them down, permanently. Maybe that's why Jim is covering for him.”

Spock couldn’t deny the logic. “You mean that Khan and the captain made a deal. Khan testifies against members of Section 31 and in return he gets a reduction in sentence.”

“Something like that,” Bones nodded. “Khan was sentenced to cryosleep – a really odd sentence if you ask me. But then it isn’t if you consider what happened afterward. It was the only way they could use him as a lab rat again. And there was not consequence to that abuse of power. But that’s not all. He can’t be put back into cryosleep without it killing him. Twice he's been frozen and re-awoken; a third time would be too much. Even his engineered body has its limits. The Federation will repeat his trial. They only use the death penalty under a very specific set of circumstances. And after all Khan's done for the Federation and Starfleet over these last weeks, the death penalty is out of question. They'll sentence him to cryosleep again, and he won't survive. It's the death penalty without the name. He's the real victim here.”

“A victim?” Spock lifted his left brow. “Concerning the illegal tests he had been forced to endure and the blackmail by Section 31 – helping Marcus develop weapons and a warship. I suppose you can call him a ‘victim’, but nevertheless he is still a murderer and criminal.”

McCoy cocked his head. “Jim said something about how he didn’t know Khan as he does now – that he learned something that changed a lot. This could be the reason he's covering for Khan. Maybe they have some sort of deal – I help you; you don't turn me in.” He fixed the first officer with a look. “And that brings me back to Jim. We should give him the chance to explain himself and his decision. If you inform Command now about Khan, you also have to tell them where you got it. And then you'd put Jim at risk with Starfleet. Think of Nibiru and…”

“I am aware of the unfortunate chains of events that led to Jim’s temporary demotion, and it is not my intention to cause him another,” Spock replied firmly. “It was not my plan to inform Command about Sunrise’s identity without speaking with the captain first, yet… I am concerned about Jim’s well-being. Khan may have saved him, but the Augment is dangerous and…”
“Jim feels safe with him, as crazy as it sounds. And I think he can judge the situation better than we, after all, he's the one out there.” Bones shook his head. “I have to agree with you though. Khan is as harmless as a tiger on the hunt. I hope Jim doesn't do anything stupid like provoke him. On the other hand, Khan seems to need Jim; otherwise he wouldn’t have rescued him. They must have declared a kind of truce, and I don’t think it would be wise to destroy it by doing something rash.”

Before Spock could answer, Uhura’s voice sounded through the intercom, “Bridge to Commander Spock!”

The Vulcan stepped to the terminal on McCoy’s desk and activated the link. “Spock here. Go ahead, Lieutenant.”

“Sir, I was able to backtrack the transmission,” the young Bantu woman reported; a wave of uncertainty tainted in her voice. She didn’t know if the matter was official now or still private.

Recognizing his lover’s dilemma, Spock made his decision. “What did you find out, Nyota?” he asked quietly, indicating the private nature of the matter by addressing her with her given name.

A sort of relief sounded in her next words, “The transmission was answered from a comm station in the orbit of Aldebaran III and was transferred to a private communicator on the planet’s surface.”

Bones and Spock exchanged a look. They had been there only two days ago; never would they have thought that their friend was somewhere down on the planet, only a few kilometers away from them!

“Well done, Nyota, thank you,” the Vulcan answered and switched off the link, only to see that another call had arrived – this time from the med bay. Observing the tired and hangover CMO again, Spock called the med bay, told M’Benga that McCoy was still in a meeting with him and that the doctor would arrive later in the morning, barring an emergency.

Bones listened and smiled at Spock; grateful that the Vulcan more or less covered for him and gave him time to get sober. “Thanks, Spock,” he said quietly and the first officer lifted his brow and he switched off the terminal.

“There is nothing to thank me for, Doctor. As you say, extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Your – indulgence, I hope is only a reaction to the captain's current situation.”
“Of course,” Bones beamed. “It’s not my style to get drunk on a regular basis.”

“I am aware, Doctor,” the first officer replied and went to the door. “Because we cannot report officially on Sunrise’s true identity without giving Jim trouble, this stays private for now. Therefore, I can’t order a disciplinary action for withholding relevant information from the commanding officer of this ship, but if you’re slipping into the role of the literature detective Sherlock Holmes again and have success, I expect your report.” He saw the slightly guilty expression on McCoy’s pallid face.

“Sorry, Spock, but I only accepted Jim’s…”

“I know, Doctor. Under normal circumstances, I would have done the same, but we are speaking about Khan here. To use a human phrase: This is all a ‘bit not good’. Still you are right about giving the captain the credit of his discernment.”

Curiously, Bones looked at the Vulcan. “What will you do now?”

Spock hesitated a moment, before he carefully replied, “I will give the captain two days. If we haven’t heard anything from him by then, we will observe the former Neutral Zone near the Aldebaran system and pick him up during this mission. And if Khan gives us any problems, I will have no other choice than to arrest him.” He lowered his head in greeting. “Good day, Doctor!”

With those words, he was gone, and McCoy sighed deeply before he fetched some painkillers and readied a hypospray that would help him to get the alcohol out of his system.

ST***ST***ST

On Aldebaran, the two lovers weren’t aware of the fact that at least in part, Jim’s friends uncovered his secret. Khan was the first to wake up this morning, and a smile played around his lips as he realized that it was him this time who used the other one man as a make-shift pillow. His head lay on Kirk’s shoulder, one arm wrapped around his beloved’s waist, and their legs were entwined. He listened to the rain that still wept from the skies, to the steady heartbeat of his mate and to the soft noises of the wooden cottage. He could smell the cooling ashes of the fire that died during the night, the red wine left in one of the glasses and Jim’s ever present and now familiar scent.

Nien moistened his lips; his eyes remained closed. The Augment relished in the peace of the new day – a new day they both would use to find some rest. The super-human didn’t want to admit it, but he felt slightly tired after the last night full of sweet passion, sheer devotion, all-consuming ecstasies and
soaring aftermaths. And even his engineered nature hadn’t been able to make all evidence of his and Jim’s lovemaking vanish – those blooms left on his body and the sore muscles within. He was certain that his James would suffer even more for some hours.

No, today they would laze around, do some very necessary laundry, read, talk, cook – whatever they had mind to do. It wasn’t as if the weather would allow them to leave the cottage. There was no reason to get drenched.

The former dictator pursed his lips. He couldn’t remember when he had ever spent a day loafing before, now there had been several days that he did nothing but relax. Paolo would certainly call it a waste, but Khan was glad for the timeout. Even he needed time to recover. And the last two years – and the years before he and his family had to flee Earth – had been more than exhausting. An ordinary human would have already broken under the brutal emotional (and also physical) pressure he had to endure. And indeed he would have reached his limits by now if it hadn't been for the boy-captain who offered him a place in this strange world, his friendship and, above all, his trust and even his love.

Khan wasn’t aware that he snuggled closer to the strong, yet so fragile body of his mate, who responded in sleep by tightening his hold around the Augment. Nien felt safe – secure; an odd thing considering he was the stronger of them.

Deciding that it was too early to start the daily routine, the former dictator allowed himself to drift back to sleep and only woke later in the morning. He listened to Jim’s soft snoring and disentangled himself finally from his lover’s limbs. A quick look at Kirk’s upper body and arms showed him that the healing wounds had not re-opened and that the most of them were nothing more than some reddened stripes on the new skin. The captain’s healing abilities were indeed incredible, and it pleased Khan that it was due to his blood in his beloved’s body. ‘You saved my soul and my heart last night, James. I’m glad that I can give you something back, even if it is only a little bit of my blood.’

He rose and stretched himself and felt the tell-tale aches of his posterior; that was a new one! Then he spread the blanket carefully over Jim and went to the bathroom to do his morning routine. He finally returned clad only in his shalwar trousers and still damp hair. Kirk sat in the puddle of blankets and carpets on the floor, and his hair was tousled as though he had been out in the wind and his expression was still groggy.

“Good morning, Pyāra,” Nien greeted, chuckling as he got a spat of incomprehensible words as a reply. “Slept well?” he asked innocently, and Kirk shot him a glare before he massaged his left shoulder and said the first clear word he’d uttered all morning, “Ouch!”

“Oh, poor boy,” Khan teased him. “You’re in need of a stretching session.”
Promptly, Jim let himself fall back into the blankets. “I’m no glutton for punishment. I’m on vacation anyway,” he mumbled and pulled the blanket higher and closed his eyes. For a beautiful, long minute, he laid there and was about to enter dreamland again when something very wet and very cold was thrown toward his face. Cursing he started up, his right hand caught out of reflex the washcloth that had ended his slumber. With big eyes, he stared at a broad grinning Khan; then he hurled the wet ‘alarm-clock’ back at the Augment, followed by a loud “Are you crazy?”

The super-human didn’t even need to look at the terry cloth ‘missile’ to catch it as he laughed. “Laying will not help you to get the tension out of your muscles.” In two steps, he was beside his beloved and pulled the protesting captain to his feet. “Up and be ready for some training,” he said, and then he looked at the mess that still covered the younger man’s skin and lifted a brow.

“I think a long hot shower is more important now, and – by the way – that will take care of the relaxing stuff,” Jim stated triumphantly. “So, thank you for the offer, but you have the training area all to yourself.” He made an inviting gesture to the room and slipped away before Khan could stop him.

“No good morning kiss?” the Augment called; his gaze fixed on his lover’s firm but quite generous...butt as he made his way towards the bedroom door without a hint of inhibition.

Jim gave him one of his brightest smiles, as he answered, “Washcloth shooter don’t get any good morning kisses out of principle, sweetheart!” Then he turned away to go to the bathroom. He didn’t get but one step before two strong arms wrapped around his waist from behind and he was hauled up in the air; he yelped in shock.

“What the…? Nien, let go!” he protested and caught the evil gleam in Nien’s eyes. “That’s not nice!”

“What did you call me?” Khan asked with a low growl, and Jim began to snicker.

“Sweetheart!” he repeated, squealing as the super-human turned with him around, and he found himself back on the makeshift bed a second later. Laughing, he rolled on his back just before Nien dropped down on him. The half full glass of red wine beside them tumbled and spilled over the floor – ignored by the two men. Kirk bolted upwards as his waist was pinched – more startled than anything else.

“Hey!” he protested and caught the evil gleam in Nien’s eyes. “That’s not nice!”
“Are you ticklish, my James?” the Augment purred, and Jim had to laugh again, his sore muscles long forgotten.

“No, sorry to disappoint you, sweetie, but…” He gasped as all of sudden Khan gripped his wrists, and he found his hands forced over his head within a blink of an eye. Damn it, he had almost forgotten how incredibly quick the super-human could be. Unafraid and still laughing he glanced up at the dangerous, glistening eyes above him and wriggled seductively under the lean, strong body that covered his now. “Do you have a problem with sweet things, honey?” he asked full of mischief and Nien’s expression even darkened more. It only made Jim smirk more and continue to poke. “Nope, no chance! You can’t fool me, baby, you’re not angry. I can tell!” Kirk grinned. Khan rolled his eyes while shaking his head.

“I’ve been called a lot – even in bed – but never ‘sweetheart’!” He made a face as if he had bitten into something very sour.

“Well, then your former bed mates didn’t know you like I do,” Jim answered. He slipped one leg out from beneath the Augment and wrapped it around his hip, pressing them closer together. “You can be sweet like royal jelly and cuddly as an oversized cat, my dark lion,” he purred seductively before he arched his head up and nipped carefully at Nien’s left earlobe.

Khan gave in. He couldn’t even pretend to be irritated with this reckless churl of an officer. One look at this beautiful, soft but so masculine face, and this beaming grin and he melted like butter in the sun. “You’re impossible, James!” he stated and let go of Kirk’s arms which snaked instantly around him.

“And you love it,” Jim teased.

“Not only that,” the former dictator whispered, his heartbeat quickened before he caught his beloved’s lips with his and deepened the kiss instantly. All too willingly, Jim’s mouth opened and allowed him entrance while the eager hands of the younger man began to explore the Augment’s body anew; fondling him just above the waistband of his light trousers. Both felt their blood rush south and smiled into the kiss, as hardened against one another. Sweet Lord, they would never get enough of each other!

Pulling the shalwar down from Khan’s slender hips, Jim’s hands wandered over the Augment’s soft skin. With a low groan, Nien replied by rubbing his length against Kirk’s, slotting himself just right before he wriggling out of his trousers. He reached for the nearly empty bottle of lube beside the makeshift bed. They would need a lot more of it before morning’s end…
Lord Kor stared with wide, disbelieving eyes at the small screen in his private quarters that showed a staff general answering the High Council and the Chief Counselor. For a moment, the younger Klingon thought the general had made a joke, but General Kargan, Son of Keppa, was not known for humor – quite the opposite. He was cold, sober and given only to fact. Therefore, Kor could be sure that the news Kargan gave him was accurate.

“The Federation wants to send a delegation for peace talks?” The Klingon lord snorted. “Do we have them already in fear so much that they are driven to save their skins with rhetoric? Is that the only weapon they have left?”

Kargan bared his teeth. Unlike most other aristocratic clans, his family hadn’t joined the experiments with human Augment-DNA and hadn’t been infected with the virus that resulted from it. His forehead showed the sharp ridges typical of the Klingon race, his dark silver hair fell down to his waist, and his eyes were a piercing brown. Like many HemQuCh – ‘the proud forehead’ as what the common Klingon called themselves. It gave him a menacing appearance. He usually looked down on the QuChHa’, the ‘unlucky ones’, whose appearances were almost human. Kor was an exception. After all, he was not only the last descendant of the imperial family, but he was also a famous warrior – a hero of sorts.

So, Kargan used the Klingon high standard as he spoke to the lord. “I do not think that we’ve driven them to their knees just yet, my lord. Their president made no secret that he thinks the Federation can withstand our forces for years if necessary, but he also sees no sense in spilling blood. And even if it pains me to say this, but we haven’t gained much territory since the war started. The Borderland was given freely to us by the Orions, who hope for our support. And those few star bases we conquered are unimportant strategically speaking. The attack against Tammeron was useless and cost many ships. Starfleet is strong in power and number.”

Kor cocked his head. “So… we will accept the offer?” he asked carefully and Kargan shrugged.

“The counselor has not made his decision and there are many voices in the council demanding more forceful and greater forces against our enemies.” He bent forwards slightly. “How has the Aldebaran mission progressed?”

“Koloth and his men are on the planet. They spoke with our contact man and are observing the two targets. Our fleet is ready to annex the planet as soon as the spaceport and the Starfleet base are eliminated.”
“Very good! Maybe then they will be ready for ‘peace-talks’, but under conditions,” Kargan nodded. “What about your prisoner?”

Kor felt heat of anger rising in him, but he kept his expression neutral. “There is no news to share, General. Kirk escaped and his supporter too.”

“The Augment!” the other Klingon all but spat and the lord lifted his bushy brows.

“We have not confirmed that the man who broke Kirk out of prison is indeed an Augment, but he was well trained and one of the best warriors I ever saw. He can’t be pure human, this is for sure, still…” He had bared his teeth, before he continued, “The ship that picked up Kirk and his… friend wasn’t to locate anymore. I ordered a complete check of all sensor functions. I manually reviewed available data when the computer couldn’t match the emission signature to known ships. Everything is working, and the information isn’t there. The Federation must have a device designed to thwart our sensors from detecting their vessels.”

For a long moment Kargan went silent, then he growled, “Then I must ask myself why they want peace talks when they can move invisibly until they want us to see them. They could ambush and attack us before our units are readied for battle. Why not using this advantage?”

“Humans and Vulcans – what do you expect?” Kor’s voice betrayed some mockery directed at the Federation, and the general laughed shortly before he turned serious again. “That the terrorist Kirk escaped is… unfortunate. Not only could we have presented him to the council as a gift, but we also would have been rid of him. He will give us some trouble in the future, of that I am sure.”

“But not just yet,” Kor continued calmly. “He is weakened significantly and won’t be able to do anything other than convalesce!”

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“Don’t think that I am going to move anytime soon for you so-called training!” Jim Kirk’s slurred voice betrayed his fatigue. Khan lay beside him, still caught in a pleasant combination of endorphins and sweet exhaustion, despite the fact that he and his James slept more than three hours after they sated their newly awoken hunger for each other.

It was midday; the wind blew northeast now, and the rain vanished too. The sun fought to send its
rays through the thinning clouds, but the two men in the cottage could care less.

“Like San Francisco?” Nien asked, and Kirk began to chuckle.

“Yeah, but a lot less fighting this time. We got the good part first!”

The Augment lifted his head and looked around. “Well… the windows are smaller; we didn’t upend the living room furniture, and the wall seems intact.” He grinned. “There is only a large amount of laundry to be done and we ran out of lube.”

“Shame,” the young captain murmured.

“Which one? The laundry or the lack of lube?”

The two lovebirds looked at each other and started to chuckle. “Both!” they said in unison and laughed. Then Jim rolled carefully onto his side, wrapped one arm around Khan, put his head on the Augment’s chest and snuggled closer with a contented sigh.

“You do know that we can’t lie here all day,” the super-human murmured after several minutes while his hands caressed the younger man gently.

“Why not? We are on a vacation, baby. No duties, no…”

“Laundry!” Khan reminded him. “I refuse to sleep in the mess we made in the bedroom and the blankets aren’t in any better shape.”

Kirk stretched himself a little bit. “Feel free to do whatever you like, tiger,” he yawned and closed his eyes.

“Really?” the former dictator asked slowly.

The captain should have known better than to ignore this particular tone in his lover’s voice, but sleepy as he was, he simply mumbled a “Yes.”
Big mistake!

He realized it the moment he found himself quite suddenly pushed aside and lifted into the air. “Wha…?” he began betraying his intelligence as he was carried away – straight to the bathroom.

“A problem shared is a problem halved,” Khan replied and stepped with his beloved into the shower where he put Jim onto his feet as he switched on the water. “We get cleaned up and then we both take care of the mess we made!” Nien stated, and Kirk shook his head.

“I’m too tired – which is totally your fault by the way, and…” He yelped in shock as the Augment switched off the warm water, and the shower became icy. Gasping, Kirk tried to move back but to no avail.

“I’ll wake you up, Pyāra, somehow!” Nien grinned and wrapped his arms around the young Starfleet officer.

“Aaah hell, you’re mean – and cruel!” Jim sputtered, shivering beneath the cold shower.

“You will thank me later,” the super-human drawled, but allowed his lover to turn as he sought a bit of warmth in his arms.

For a minute, they remained beneath the cold spray; then Khan added hot water again to it and took care that they both warmed up before they leaving the shower cabin. Still, Jim shivered and shot his beloved a dark glare. “What is up with your sudden desire to hit me with something cold and wet – twice?”

“I have learned that this is the quickest yet gentlest method to tear someone out of sleep,” Nien answered wryly.

“Really?” Jim slipped in his boxer shorts and reached for his jeans. “And what is the ‘not-so-gentle’ method?”

“Waking up to the alert that your home and loved ones are under attack,” Khan answered calmly as he slipped into his kurta, looked around, frowned and went to the living room to get his shalwar.
Pursing his lips, Kirk took one of his sweaters and followed the Augment. He had learned a lot about Nien’s past during the night and the early hours of the morning, so he knew immediately to what events former dictator referred. But he didn’t want to douse the light mood, so he stayed silent and just nodded.

He saw the super-human standing beside the make-shift bed with a deep frown on his face, and as Kirk followed Khan’s gaze, he saw the dried, deep red spot on the floor. “Uh-oh, not only will Diego get a water bill as long as the Enterprise’s preflight checks, we left him a gift that isn’t.”

“With salt and lemon-juice you can reduce the red wine stains until they’re nothing more than a grey spot,” Nien answered before he looked towards the kitchenette. “Do we have some lemon left?”

Jim shrugged. “Yeah, you are asking the wrong captain. You are the cook here, tiger!”

Khan rolled his eyes. “You had to heal, and regarding your usual fare, your doctor friend’s knives would be out and pointed at me if I fed you some noxious fast-food. I thought it best for both of our health to prepare the meals myself.”

A large grin appeared on Kirk’s face. “You wouldn’t reject my filet mignon with my special barbeque sauce! People give their eye teeth for it.” He caught Nien’s mocking gaze and chuckled. “Wanna bet?”

“You would ruin a filet mignon with barbeque sauce?”

“Hey!”

“Yes,” Khan nodded. “I’ll take the bet. What are we wagering?”

Jim pondered this for a moment. “If you don’t like it I… I give you a full body massage with a massage oil of your choice and special attention paid to the – tenderest of places.”

The Augment smiled. “Sounds good. And if I lose, then you’ll get the same from me.” He caught the skeptical glance of his beloved, laid one hand over his heart and lifted the other one to an oath. “I swear that I play fair! I like it – you get the massage. I do not – I get your hands on my back and
“Deal!” the young captain beamed, and they shook hands. “And now we should make a shopping-list. When we’re in New Aberdeen tomorrow, we can get whatever we need.”

“Right!” Nien replied wryly. “But first we have to rob a bank – or try to win a lottery. Your wallet is now Klingon war booty and I don’t even have one.”

Jim scratched his head. “Shit – I forgot about that!” He pursed his lips. “Should we ask Diego to front us some Credits?”

Khan sighed. “I hate it to contract debt, but I don’t see another way.” He snorted and nodded finally to himself. “Diego it is then.” A grumbling noise from Jim’s belly woke his attention. “But first we need a decent breakfast, before you get thin.”

“Ha! If I lose any weight then it’s because of our – extracurricular activities,” Kirk joked and went to the kitchen. “So, some scrambled eggs, bacon and toast?” When he got no answer, he looked back over his shoulder at an amused Augment.

“And you call that a healthy breakfast?”

“Honey, it’s already midday, so look at it as a kind of brunch!” Cheerfully, Kirk gripped the pan and switched on the stove. He felt Khan step beside him before he saw the movement.

“Right, brunch – but not without some fruits and fresh juice. Honey!”

Kirk laughed. “See, I knew you’d like being called something sweet!” Whistling, he looked in the fridge for the bacon. “Where are the eggs?” he asked, pulling out the bacon.

“In the cupboard. Eggs stored in a fridge taste… funny.”

Jim looked at him. “Really? I didn’t even think about that.” He opened the cupboard. “Do we have salt and some synthetic garlic to…”
Khan frowned at him and chased him away, “Let me do the breakfast, otherwise you’ll never get anything decent in your stomach. If you want to make yourself useful, then start with the bedclothes!”

Jim pouted before he promptly saluted, “Yes, sir!” and he turned to his task. After a little tussle with the automatic washing machine, he joined Nien at the table and they had a tasty but in Kirk’s eyes a far too ‘healthy’ breakfast. Afterwards, they worked to bring some order into the chaos they had left during the night, and only then as the clean sheets and blanket went back to the wardrobe and the bed was made, they relaxed on the sofa, read, and talked.

Sometime that afternoon, Diego called and spoke with them about their planned sight-seeing trip the next day. He offered to beam them over from one of the official transporters within New Aberdeen or they could use his hyperbike that was in the shack beside the cottage. If they chose the longer way to New Aberdeen, they could meet at the edge of the town at a pub he knew.

The weather report said they’d get sunshine, even if the temperature would be lower than the days before. So Jim and Khan knew how they wanted to get to New Aberdeen. Kirk loved a ride on a hyperbike and Nien wanted to feel the wind of freedom on his face again. They agreed to meet Diego at the pub near the spaceport around at 1100 – that was 1230 regular time. They bid the Chilean farewell after he gave them again the code to unlock hyperbike.

During the afternoon, the sun won its battle against the clouds and the two men finally left the cottage and went to the shack to charge the bike’s solar battery. The air was still cold, nature glistened with the last drops of dampness and both lovebirds took pleasure in the fresh air after the thunderstorm.

The hyperbike was a two-seater. And after they wheeled it out of the shack and put it in front of the cottage to charge the battery, they took a walk along the lake, passing the spot where they had sat yesterday and had talked about the things that still tamped the bond between them. That was gone now. Out of instinct Jim entwined his fingers with Khan’s who smiled at him. Yesterday had been full of revelations and painful memories, but it led to a kind of salvation for them both that peaked in this playful and peaceful day.

They passed by the spot where they sat yesterday as they left the past behind them, and walked along the shore. They returned to the cottage as the dusk settled. Despite their parkas, Jim was shivering and drank the tea Khan prepared for them eagerly. After a light dinner, they lounged on the sofa, Kirk had his head in Nien’s lap and listened to the deep, soft baritone as Khan read to him from the PADD he had activated only to find an excellent selection of literature.
Jim sensed the relaxed state of his lover, and the inner warmth with which the Augment seemed to radiate. He pursed his lips in thought. It was as though he could feel Khan deep in his soul; as if the two flowed together through him.

And then he realized it. Their souls were entwined!

Not like a Vulcan mind-meld, still there were some similarities. He sensed another presence in himself, but it didn’t feel like an intruder. Rather it was like something had been added to him – made him…more. It was woven with an invisible cord tying his soul to another. It was… strange, but not unpleasant.

He thought back to what Khan told him about the ‘marking’ and ‘bonding’ in the process. Did he mean this? Was he now bonded to Khan Noonien Singh? He pondered this for a moment. There were little details and hints that answered his question with a resounding ‘yes’ and he wasn’t certain what he should think about that. His heart began to beat quicker and his soul felt a wave of bliss, yet his mind began to whisper complications. But James T. Kirk listened to no one, but even his own mind if his heart was set on something – or someone in this case. He knew that he had never felt like this. He’d never had such strong emotions for anyone before – and he would stand to his feelings and Nien, no matter what! Though, Kirk normally decided his endgame before he knew the way to the end.

“Stop thinking. It’s too loud,” Khan’s rumbling voice murmured at his ear, and Jim began to chuckle, looking up. The super-human had put the PADD aside and observed him with knowing eyes. “What is it, James?” he asked and Kirk hesitated a moment, before he beginning, treading carefully.

“You told me about the marking thing and that… that there is a… a bond.” As he saw the Augment nodding, he continued, “I… I don’t know, if I’m excited or if I’m saying this right, but… I have the strange feeling as if… you… you’re swimming in me. I don’t mean physically, but I do! I feel… different.” He added quickly, but this time Khan wouldn’t use the chance to tease his beloved. This topic was far too serious to make light.

“You are right, Jim,” he answered quietly. “As I explained, to mark, to bond with each other is in our nature. But even I don’t know why this is so. Most Augments are my age or younger and some of them were only about to choose a partner as we fled Earth. So I don’t have much practical experience in this matter, still I learned that we somehow bond to our mates. Two members of my family married. They told me later that they were linked mentally to each other after they had coupled and true feelings for each other surfaced.” He cocked his head. “And I remember Jonas, an Augment from Scandinavia. I met him a year before the Eugenics Wars broke out. He was attached to a young woman – a common human. He asked me if it was normal that he could feel her even when she wasn’t present.”
Jim stared at him. “Augments and humans had relationships?”

“Some of them,” Khan confirmed. “Those who saw in humans, an inferior race that had to be eliminated condemned them as ‘traitors’ and I heard that some of those dictators even executed them – something I deplored. Kabir had fallen in love with one of the service maids in my palace and I had no problem with it.” He took a deep breath. “She died during a violent uprising several days before my palace was attacked. I think Kabir’s decision to stay behind, to suspend our enemies long enough to give the rest of my family and crew a head-start was rooted in the loss of his beloved. Her death struck him hard and his inner fire was nearly out; it only to flared up again as he fought against those who took his mate away from him.”

His hand began to stroke through Jim’s short, blond hair, as the young captain murmured, “I can understand that. If someone killed you – or Bones and Spock – I, I would lose my mind and…” He stopped and their eyes met. Not only that he had mentioned Nien first, he also had set him in the same line with Kabir and the man’s lost love of his life. This meant only one thing: His soul and his heart saw in Khan its other half – its mate.

“Are…” He moistened his lips. “Are we … bonded?” he asked quietly.

Nien’s face was carefully steeled as he replied, “We are linked by my blood – and mentally.”

Kirk frowned. “I can understand that I’m tied to you because of the blood in the serum McCoy put in me. It… changed me; I know that. But the mental thing…” He fingered the blooming bruise that was the mark.

Khan’s free hand gently cupped Kirk’s fingers; his skin was warm and soft. “My people’s mental abilities are stronger than those of the ordinary humans. We are not telepaths like the Vulcans, but there is a cord that binds us together as family. When we take a mate from among our own, this bond strengthens. That is what occurred in the moment to you and I…”

Jim blinked. “You… you consider me your mate?”

“Yes, I do!” Nien said seriously. “You are my mate. There will not be another for me.”

A lump rose in Kirk’s throat. He knew both of their emotions ran deep, but that Nien truly regarded him as his mate! The prospect shocked and warmed him at the same time. “You mean because we’re sleeping together, have feelings for each other and…”
“It’s not just that, Pyāra. You opened your soul to me, James, and I did likewise. Understanding and compassion are all part of love. The three together form the three legs of empathy. And enhanced mental abilities in the partners can lead to an empathic bond, not unlike the Vulcan bond of brotherhood. In our case, it is the bond of mates.” He bent down and brushed his lips over the younger man’s mouth. “I’m a part of you now. We left our mark on each other; I staked my claim the moment I realized that you are my other half, my Pyāra – my heart in your body. It was unintentional at first, I admit, but there is no going back for me now. My mind, my heart, my soul, even my body chose you!” His hand slid slowly down over Jim’s temple and fondled the side of his face. “And when you are ready for it, you will claim me – leaving your mark.”

Jim felt a wave of uncertainty. Permanence seemed to allude him. It was never in the cards – or so he thought. “So… the whole bonding thing is still in progress?”

“Yes! The partners must want and accept the bond, only then it will be complete.” Nien kissed the forehead of his beloved.

Kirk felt his mouth go dry. “And it will last for the rest of our lives, won’t it?” As the Augment simply nodded, he took a deep breath. Bound to another for good. Christ, he was halfway there. If halfway felt like this, he couldn’t imagine what all the way would feel like. A mate to this glorious, dangerous creature who had a part in his temporary death, resurrected him, rescued, protected and healed him; Khan was already in his heart and soul to stay there, bond or no bond. Jim didn’t know if he should be thrilled or terrified.

Khan sensed the hesitation in his beloved and forced himself calm. He expected that Kirk would be confused. Still, trepidation – fear lurked at the edge of his mind. What if it was too soon or worse yet, unwelcome? What if James rejected the prospect of their bond and…

“So, do I have this right? We will be bonded – sort of married to each other when I claim you – when I leave my mark on you?”

“Yes.” Khan said slowly. “How do you feel about it?” Nien whispered now. His augmented mind didn’t mock him for his trepidation now. This was too important. This…This was his heart.

How did Kirk feel about it? He didn’t know quite yet and so he listened deep inside himself. Being bonded to Khan would bring him a whole set of new problems – a mountain of them. Nien was a wanted man; half of Starfleet was after him. His family was somewhere locked away and if certain bastards got their hands on him he would be nothing more than a test subject, a tool to be used until useless and tossed away. And if Command learned that he not only covered the Augment, but was his lover – his mate! – he’d be jailed and left to rot, his heroic rescue of Earth be damned.
The question was, though, did any of that matter?

No!

All that mattered was the man in whose lap his head lay; this man freely offered his trust and now his love – a love Jim refused to miss out on! He was bound to his Nien – body, heart and soul. The mere thought of losing it, of losing this feeling was unbearable. Being part of someone else and having them… He looked up at his mate. And having him, Khan, inside of him was like nothing else he’d ever known. Losing what Khan offered terrified him more than the Klingon torture he’d endured several days ago. He’d go through it all again if it meant he could have this. Oh God if he could keep this. The subliminal knowledge that his great love was always with him, even when separated, gave him strength and comfort; it made him feel stronger than he ever had before.

He smiled up into the face with adorably blushed and impossibly high cheekbones. Those ocean eyes spell-bounded him. He lifted a hand and cupped an alabaster cheek. For a fleeting moment he saw a spark of fear and hope in those eyes, and he knew that he could destroy this fierce, powerful man with one single word. But he had something else in mind – other words.

“It feels right,” he said softly, but firmly. “Being…” He swallowed hard. This was serious, certainly no time to jest or tease. “Being bonded to you feels, right! Being bonded to you is right. It’s like I’ve waited for it, for you all of my life. I only feel right, settled, you know whole – when I’m on my ship. She puts me right. But I feel that way now, with you. With you, I’m whole.”

Khan let his held breath escape. Jim didn’t reject their bond – didn’t reject him! He wanted to be his mate – his beloved – for good. He never thought he would find someone who would accept him, want him, even love him knowing who and what he was.

Bending down, he captured James’ mouth with his own; the kiss deepened quickly. Reaching up, Jim held him close; his fingers wove through the night-dark, silken strands as Nien wrapped his arms around the young captain; he thought he might never let go. Their tongues fondled and caressed one another slowly and sweetly, savoring the closeness of the body, heart and soul.

As Nien finally let Jim free, the men locked eyes in loving looks. All of sudden Kirk began to grin. “I can imagine Bones – oh God, when he learns that I’m bonded to you – to you of all people!”

A soft chuckle echoed in Khan’s chest. “I don’t know if I like you thinking of another man while in bed with me, but I’ll allow it this once. I think your doctor friend would have his own head
Jim burst out laughing feeling happy, completed all at the same time. He pulled the other man’s face down until their lips met again…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, there you have it – the bonding is in full progress and it’s now up to Jim to make the final step. At some time he simply has to do it and I’m certain you’re all eager for this to happen – so just wait (*evil smirk*).

I hope you liked the chapter, despite the chaos of didn’t publish it before chapter 26, and that it really made up for the turmoil.

The next chapter you already now, and chapter 27 will be published within the next three days.

Love

Yours Starflight
New trouble approaches

Chapter Notes

Dear readers,

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST!!! THE NEW CHAPTER IS THE PREVIOUS ONE!!!

Beta here. We are very sorry for the confusion, but we misnumbered the chapters and missed 25. Believe you, me; you will want to go back to read the new 25 which will explain so much of actual 26 as well as - you know...Most of it is set in the cottage. I know, careless of us. But is reading Khirk so much of a hardship, really. I thought not.

Again, we both apologize for the oversight. Really, Starflight tolerates me too well.

No onto the story! Enjoy - again.

Yours Starflight and Fleetwoodinflames

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 26 – New trouble approaches…

Admiral Barnett stepped into the conference room located at the seat of the government of the United Federation of Planets in Paris. It was one of the smaller rooms, designed for twenty to thirty people, just right for their twenty-six men and women, who stood in small groups talking. Instantly, Richard recognized the president speaking with a tall Vulcan whose once dark hair had gone grey. He had an expressive face, lacking emotionless mask the most Vulcans wore. There was a warm gleam in his brown eyes – sad eyes; those eyes told of too many things they had seen but wished they hadn’t. And there were wrinkles around those eyes and softly bowed lips. Those lines weren’t tracks of age or a lifetime of stoic expression, but of life and laughter. These traits made Ambassador Sarek unique among his people.

Every Vulcan who had survived the destruction of their home planet had been in more pain than many species could bear. But this particular man had faced another loss: The loss of his bound partner. Though this race controlled their emotions in a way that Barnett thought unhealthy. The death of a spouse made up for that in spades. Perhaps its result was so awful because every other emotion was repressed. The pain of repression had to come out somewhere – in the loss of the bonded left behind. This loss could lead to death. Fortunately that didn’t happen to this man; and perhaps it was because of the good lady Amanda and the proximity of Spock. He felt safe in his emotions with her and so without her, with his son, he could live. Her gifts to her beloved, if you will.
Nodding towards several council members, greeting ambassadors here and there, Barnett headed towards the president and his conversation partner; they ceased their conversation as so as they saw him make his way.

Offering Robertson his hand, he greeted him, “Mr. President!”

“Richard, thanks for coming.”

Then the admiral turned his attention to the other man, lifted a hand and his fingers spread into the Vulcan gesture of greeting. “Ambassador Sarek, it’s a pleasure to see you again. I only wish the circumstances were different.”

Sarek of Vulcan returned the gesture and answered in his warm baritone, “The pleasure is mine, Admiral Barnett, and I’m glad to offer my service in these hard times.”

Once more Richard was surprised at how easily this Vulcan used Terran phrases, full of expressions of emotions. And they sounded right coming from Sarek’s lips. ‘Lady Amanda’s influence was never overestimated,’ Barnett thought and regretted anew that the gentle, woman who married Sarek, had fallen prey to the insane Romulan. Nero’s greed for revenge ultimately destroyed the Lady Amanda and Vulcan. Barnett loved Amanda Grayson as had all those who met her. She had not only captured Sarek’s heart, but also that many Vulcans and UFP ambassadors; Richard was only one of her admirers.

‘His wife’s death hit him hard. The sight of her death, not to mention the death of his planet must have been traumatic’ Barnett mused as he observed the slight changes in the ambassador’s face. ‘I heard that often Vulcans who lose their bond partners even die due to mental shock. At least Sarek survived it. He still had his son near, a bit of Amanda to help him cope. Perhaps that helped him survive. Or maybe it was because Amanda was human rather than a telepath. Maybe that lessened their bond just a bit so Sarek could survive. Or maybe it was something else. Her strength – those things she could give Sarek that another Vulcan couldn’t – her wonderfully human traits and their unique son – that allowed him to survive rather than be ripped in two by her death.’

And aloud he said, “I’m grateful for your confirmed assistance in the upcoming mission. Your experiences and your diplomacy are more than welcome addition. Talking to Klingons is like speaking to, ugh, Lord of the Flies, war hungry knights of the middle Ages, and divas too good for the likes of us.”
He wasn’t surprised to see a ghost of a smile hovering around Sarek’s lips. The ambassador had learned decades before that it was easier to deal with humans in this manner. “The Klingons are a proud and aggressive race, of this I must agree, Admiral. Still some of them have a sense of accountability that does not directly impact their clan or their career. Find those Klingons. It is surely the best way to start the peace talks. Adaptations or shifts of thought are most successful when they come from within the ranks.”

“A very good suggestion,” Robertson joined in. “We have to come to an agreement regarding how the delegation will proceed. It won’t be easy to negotiate with the Klingons. Their reactions differ greatly from ours and we cannot be certain, who of them is listening and who is planning our demise. I’m glad that were able to get aid in this matter. Our application of support for this delicate mission has been granted. Betazed doesn’t belong to the UFP, but the mutually beneficial commercial relationship and the exchange of scientists are have made great strides in our new alliance. Lady Ania Morganth of the Third House of Betazed will accompany us to Qo’noS. She is an experienced diplomat and a successful politician, readily accepted by all races wherever she goes.”

“I know Mrs. Morganth,” Sarek said. “I met her five years ago at a conference. She is calm and unobtrusive… well-trained concerning her telepathic abilities – or controlling them I should say.”

Barnett nodded sympathetically. For Vulcans, it had to be hell working with the casual and open Betazoids who held the opinion that telepathy was something for everyone and should be used on little discretion. As a people, they talked openly about partnerships and their sexual life was – shockingly uninhibited. Still they were sensible and respected the wish of other non-telepathic species. So Betazoids stayed out of the otherworlder’s heads. Most time.

A Betazoid among the delegation would give the ambassadors and politicians a significant advantage when dealing with the Klingons. Lady Morganth could warn them if one or two of the Klingons didn’t feel bound to the law of hospitality. She could also sense and read the thoughts and intentions of their negotiating partners. It was always better to know their point of view before taking action.

“So, where is Lady Morganth?” Richard asked, looking around him. Betazoids were completely humanoid in appearance, only their irises were pitch-black. You could recognize one of their people quickly if you knew this little detail. Here, though, was no one he could identify as a Betazed.

“She will come aboard when it is time for travel,” Robertson answered. “Batari already talked with her and she is waiting for information on the rendezvous time. Lady Morganth and Batari are friends.” He nodded into the direction of a small woman of Asian heritage. Her long black hair was worn a tight knot at her neck and she wore a formal, knee length, red dress, accentuated by a wide, silken scarf that was over her left shoulder that hung nearly to the floor in sari-style Batari Withman was a beauty and as she turned around you could instantly see her bright intelligence and her calm, professional expression. She caught the gazes of the three men, excused herself from her conversation partner, an Andorian, and walked to them.
“Admiral Barnett, I’m honored that it is you who manage our security for the mission,” she said offering her slender hand. He took and kissed in hers politely.

“Mrs. Withman, the honor is all mine,” he replied.

“Hopefully, you Starfleet guys are able to keep any nasty surprises to a minimum,” a voice oinked behind them and Richard didn’t need to look at the suddenly cold expression of Sarek, or turn around to know who was speaking to him.

“Ambassador Gav!” Barnett greeted him politely. “Nice to see you again.”

The ambassador of Tellar looked him up and down, wrinkled his snout and nodded shortly. “Admiral!” was all he said, then the glance of his little eyes was fell on the Vulcan. “Maybe we don’t need the Starfleet guys to lose their touch to get in trouble. As far as I know, Klingons regard Vulcans as wimps. I doubt that one of them would even listen to the ‘wise’ speeches of you, Sarek.”

The Vulcan ambassador merely lifted a brow. “And my education forbids me to tell you exactly what the Klingons think of the Tellarites ‘and your inept grasp of Federation Standard.’” His baritone was no longer soft now, but icy; his dark eyes reminded one of two onyxes – shimmering and hard.

“Gentlemen,” Batari interrupted them before they exchanged harsher words. “I think all have arrived now.” She smiled at Robertson. “Shall we begin, Mr. President?”

“Of course, Madam,” he smiled, offering her his arm. Barnett looked around and saw that the Admirals Morrow, Komack and Nogura stood at the entrance, accompanied by two more council members. “Well, off to the first fight. That should lead to an agreement for productive talks,” Richard grumbled; his tone dripped with mockery – and stepped towards his colleagues.

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Captain Koloth of the Gr’oth stared with narrowed eyes out of the hotel’s window that was across the street of the spaceport. It was early morning and outside the weather had turned sunny again. Seeing how the most humans wore thick parkas, the Klingon mused that they found the temperature too low, but for him and his companions the colder air was perfect. Qo’noS’ temperature averaged ten degrees lower than Earth’s, and while the men, women and children down in the street were
unhappy with the chill, Koloth, Korax and the others were quite comfortable.

Each man had separately cased the spaceport to ensure proper intelligence gathering while taking care not to be seen together. Five men wandering through a spaceport for an entire day would have drawn attention.

Last evening’s thunderstorm forced the Klingons to improvise today’s meet; they convened in Koloth’s hotel room to exchange their impressions and observations. Security alerts and measures were high at the spaceport. You could enter and leave it without checks, but free roaming was limited. Passenger embarkation and cargo were in high-security zones only accessible through a security checkpoint that included a vital bio scanner.

It was well known in the Federation that many Klingons appeared human after the failed human Augment DNA experiments a century ago and here, in proximity to the former Neutral Zone, the authorities took no risk. The Klingons would certainly try to exploit every advantage.

So Koloth, Korax, and their men had to be very careful, but they hadn’t been chosen for this mission in vain. Koloth was famous for his undercover work, and his first officer was the best right hand out there. The men spent hours planning, not uncommon as they each had their own opinion about how things out go. And Koloth was a man who first thought and acted later. He sent his companions to bed, demanding time to rethink only to return the next morning with new plans. Failure was unacceptable, so every move was organized precisely.

Korax and the other three warriors arrived at their commander’s room before breakfast. Contrary to the most Klingon captains and their subordinates, there was no rivalry between Koloth and Korax; Korax had no desire for Koloth’s position and so their missions always bore fruit.

They conversed in hushed voices. The Klingon language is guttural and hard, and they needed to be sure that that speech was not recognized by passers-by. Discussions were conducted with practiced calmness, quite strange to them as the Klingon nature is anything but calm.

Finally the time for a solution had arrived.

Koloth pressed his lips into a firm line while he watched the people down on the street. They planned to check Starfleet quarters near the spaceport in the morning and meet their contact man midday at the inn called ‘The Stars’. There, they’d retrieve the weapons to conclude their mission. Everything was planned up until then.
He felt someone fall in stride beside him; he didn’t need to turn his head to know who it was.

“This weather yesterday evening crossed our schedule,” Korax murmured; his green-brown eyes flicked to the spaceport’s entrance.

“We checked; we have all we need to know about our target concerning the spaceport. We will case the Starfleet building this morning; the weather was too poor to do it properly last night.” Koloth replied, calmer than he felt. He pointed to the cargo service gate. “We will enter the high security zone there – this evening. I had a closer look at the arrival and departure screen in the spaceport. A cargo ship will arrive around midday and will leave tomorrow. No civilian ship is expected and none will leave. There should be few civilians in the immediate area of our strike.” His dark eyes wandered over a family that left the port, walking down the street to a waiting hypercar. “I have no interest in killing children and their parents. It is without honor.”

Korax nodded. Even if he loathed – hated the Federation and had no sympathy for humans and their allies, he took no pleasure in the murder of innocents. War was honorable when waged between warriors. Civilians had place in such fights. The death of children brought no fame – no glory. And nor did Kor who had assigned the mission. The Klingons were warriors, not cowards or murderers; that’s what he thought these soft target assaults amounted to – like Tammeron. But they had their orders; they would mitigate the casualties as best they could.

“Where do you want to place the bombs?” he asked his commander and friend of sorts. Koloth’s gaze dropped to the normal looking suitcase that contained PADDs, four scanners and technical equipment meant for the medical sector. Each item harmless items at the first sight, but the Klingons knew how to put them together to build quite a destructive device. If they were successful, the spaceport would be of no use to anyone and Starfleet’s quarters would be ash. Last but not least, McFurthun would furnish them with the main component the day after tomorrow: four small, hand-long tubes with a high blast power but without the danger of radiation. McFurthun wanted his revenge but he was not a mass murderer. He was after precision and Starfleet. He had no interest in collateral damage.

Still the number of victims would be great, and even if Koloth wanted to keep the body count low, there was no way to destroy the most important station in this planetary system without…breaking a few eggs as the humans said. But the victory would be sweet nonetheless. When Starfleet lost her base on Aldebaran, its destruction would call the defense vessels out of orbit down to the planet to help aid and evacuate survivors. The Klingon fleet hiding cloaked and silent near the former Neutral Zone would conquer the Aldebaran system easily in mere hours.

Koloth was lost in thought again, but he remembered Korax’s question and pointed towards the cargo service area again. “Inside there. Kurhan told me that a worker informed him that they are expecting a large shipment of liquid plastics. They can’t produce that here on Aldebaran. The tanks will be stored there for several days until customs completes their processing.” He looked at his first
officer. “It will go up ‘like a match’, as the humans say.”

“So we only need one bomb?”

Koloth shook his head. “No, two. One at the cargo area, the other one at arrivals. It’s connected to the main section of the spaceport and opens to the least populated section of the town. Only a few houses are there because of the noise from the spaceport. The blast will cripple the spaceport completely without much collateral damage.” He rubbed his jaw. “Regarding Starfleet, those in the building will not be so lucky. Too many dead for my taste and Lord Kor doesn’t like it either, but an order is an order. We annex the Aldebaran system, and we’ll gain a large part of the Federation’s territory in this part of the Alpha quadrant. From here we can strike the other systems.” He sighed. “Sometimes war is dirty – even I have to admit that.”

“But it is glorious.”

Koloth snorted. “Yes, it is when fought between warriors. But this here…” He gestured towards the spaceport. “This here is no glory. Kor sees it, and so do I.”

“What will happen if the Enterprise is still around? McFurthon told us that she was here investigating. Even if Kirk isn’t aboard, his officers…”

“They are nothing without him. And Kirk isn’t here to interference like he did at K7. Regretfully.” His dark eyes turned to stone. “I would like to shake his hand – and then break every bone in his body!”

**ST***ST***ST

“You find one yet?” Jim asked as he searched the right side of the shack for a motorcycle helmet or something similar. Khan was busy checking the other side of the small building and shook his head.

“No, neither helmets nor protective clothing.” He glanced up. “Diego must like it risky.”

“Well, as far as I understood you and Galven, Diego’s shipyard has some customers that prefer to fly under the radar. So yeah, I don’t think the risk bothers him all that much.” Kirk shrugged, then gave up the search and pressed his fists into his waist giving a nod in concession. “Right. Then we drive without helmets. More fun like that anyway. I love to feel the wind on my face; it’s been a long time.”
They smiled at each other – both grew up starved for freedom and risk was as much a part of them as their shared blood. They left the shack, locked the door and went to the porch where the hyperbike was parked. Jim’s looked coyly beneath lowered lashes at his lover.

Khan chose warmer clothes for this jaunt instead of the comfortable but thin Indic outfit. He wore a dove gray turtleneck sweater – the color turned his eyes from their intense blue-green into something that reminded Jim of a misty ocean on a foggy day. Black jeans covered his long legs and accentuated his lean body. A black parka would protect him against the cooler temperatures. He found two pairs of gloves, of which one he had given Jim and took the other pair for himself. The wind played in his ebony hair, and a few strands fell over his high forehead; mysteriously shadowing his bright eyes.

Jim gulped as Khan moved smoothly toward him. The Augment was a living temptation on two legs – legs that felt so nice wrapped around Kirk’s waist as they made love – like last night. In hindsight, the young captain couldn’t believe that they had found new flames of passion – again. After the night before and the morning, he thought their lust might be sated, but he had been wrong. Their lovemaking went from gentle to a fiery intensity and back to sweet just last night. Jim licked his lips as he relived it in his mind’s eye. Those first kilometers on the hyperbike wouldn’t be comfortable – either for him or for Nien.

Khan’s baritone ripped Jim from his reverie. “If you continue to strip me with your eyes, Pyāra, we might have to call off our trip to New Aberdeen and return to our still warm bed.”

“Wh-wh-what?” the officer asked, wincing inwardly as he sounded like a schoolboy caught with a bit of naughty literature hidden in his schoolbook. The Augment gave him one of his slow, lazy smirks and Jim rolled his eyes. “Ugh, you need a license for that smile,” he grumbled and caught Nien by surprise with this joke.

“A license for my smile?” Khan repeated confused, and Kirk gave him one of his own radiant smiles.

“You could melt stone and wrap anyone around your little finger with that thing,” he said nonchalantly and headed towards the hyperbike.

“Hmm, have I wrapped you around my little finger?” the former dictator purred and watched Kirk mount the hyperbike.
“Yup, you have!” Jim nodded and felt warmth rising in him as Nien sat down behind him and snuck one hand beneath Kirk’s dark blue parka; stroking his back with is thumb and just a bit of fingernail to feel Jim shiver.

“Without any protective gear, I’ll have to wrap you in my arms to keep you safe,” Khan whispered in his ear and nipped a bit of skin not covered by clothing. Then he snaked his arms around Jim’s waist and tensed his muscles. “Switch on this machine, Mr. Kirk! Off we go!” he called with a strong voice that betrayed a certain thrill of anticipation.

“Hold on!” Jim answered with a laugh and started the hyperbike. After feeling the bike out a bit, Kirk steered it onto the small street that led away from the cottage and opened the throttle as much as he dared given the poor state of the road that led them through the woods and out to the main ten minutes later.

He stopped at the intersection and Khan pointed left.

“Diego said we have to drive that way and to follow the signs to town.”

Jim nodded. “You ready?”

“Are you?” Khan retorted; he bent forwards and looked at Kirk over his shoulder, catching the knowing gaze.

The same words they had exchanged as they steeled themselves in the airlock of the Enterprise, ready to be hurled through space towards the Vengeance. Then, they were reluctant allies. Today… Today was worlds away from that time! Pressing a gentle kiss to Jim’s temple, Nien leaned back and gave the go-ahead. Grinning like mad, Jim let the machine roar and off they went. The wind blew through their hair, coolly caressed their faces and enveloped their bodies. Because they didn’t have safety glasses, Kirk couldn’t drive the bike to its limit but 120 kilometers per hour was enough speed to have a bit of fun. Jim watched the landscape fly by; he felt the pull of gravity and loved every bit of it.

Khan was bombarded with even more sensory details. His engineered senses scented the wood and earthy odor of the still wet forest floor, the dust of the street, and he felt Jim’s pulse beneath his gloved hands. But this was not all. He sensed the excitement and joy in his beloved and it was contagious. He relished in the freedom this ride presented, but he enjoyed the happiness of his mate even more.
They would need three or four hours to reach the spaceport and then the small inn in New Aberdeen where Diego would meet them, and both lovers had every intention of savoring the time as much as they could…

Sitting at her station aboard the Shadow, Caviw stared at the screen with widened eyes. Galven and Jeff were conducting ship’s checks, so she was using her time to do some research. She contacted the Library of Aurelia, an archive containing nearly all historical data of the most of the known planets. Pretending to be a student of Earth history, she requested data on late 20th-century political science, scientific, and biological developments of the time. Jeff talked about the first Augment program on Earth and what the ‘super-humans’ had done to his home during the 20th century so she wanted to research anything that could be connected to this ‘race’.

She read about the first two world wars on Earth and then the sudden appearance of humans that were faster, more intelligent, stronger and immune to the illnesses of the time: Augments. Her interest grew as she mined the data. Then she saw it; the name Khan Noonien Singh.

_Noo-nien – Nien_! Captain Kirk’s nickname for his lover. And the doctor of the Enterprise had called Léo ‘Khan’. Could it be that their Drythen was this man; a man who had ruled almost a quarter of Earth three hundred years ago? It sounded fantastic – unrealistic. But this strange reality surpassed fantasy as the name and face on the screen mocked her. She took in the alabaster white skin, the high cheekbones, the full, bowed lips and those piercing blue-green eyes she had fallen for the moment she first looked into them. His hair was longer. It fell long and thick over his shoulders down to his waist like a midnight-colored curtain and made the beautiful features softer. He wore silver and golden tunic with a high collar slightly open in the front and embroidered with pearls and small, precious stones. The clothes and the hair style were strange, but there was no doubt about the identity of the man in the old photo. It was Drythen – or, as Caviw now knew – Khan Noonien Singh.

“Holy tree, how have you survived for three hundred years?” she whispered, blinking several times. Her tail twitched as she continued to read. The archives told of rumors that he and approximately eighty other Augments escaped their purchasers in a sleeper ship called Botany Bay. Aptly named, it seemed, for Earth’s Australian penalty colony a century before the Augments appeared in history. Investigators found the launch platforms where Khan and his fellow Augments were thought to have vanished. But in the years and decades that followed, the rumbling rumors died down, and those convinced that Khan and his most loyal friends had fled Earth, died; the rumors became legend and the legend eventually forgotten. Back on Earth, the ‘mere’ humans chose to document the Eugenic Wars as they wished them remembered. The blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of the Augments whose names were not deemed fit to be taught in schools. Only those interested in Earth’s history ever hear about these super-humans.

“So, you are truly one of the first Augments the Terrans ever created. And you were a king – why
does that not surprise me?” she murmured. “Now you fly through space fighting side-by-side with creatures that must be… so strange to you and risk your life for a young human male who isn’t even one of your people.” Her eyes roamed over the photo. “You must have been so hurt – so without hope that you felt you had to leave your planet. Yet you remain sagacious and open to… love, perhaps? You are a brave man. It is your heart and soul that give you strength, Léo, not your engineered body.”

“Who are you talking to?” Galven’s voice asked from behind her. He startled her, and the Caitian woman jumped.

“Galven!” she squeaked. “By the four moons, do you want to give me a heart attack?”

The Tellarit grinned at her. “This is the first time I’ve ever been able to sneak up on you. What engrosses you so much that you didn’t even hear me approach?” He peeked around her and oinked in amusement. “Of course, our Drythen – or Khan. Sweetheart, you said yourself that he is taken and….” He stopped and cocked his head. “He looks… different. His hair…” He stepped nearer. “This photo can’t be older than two or three years, but…”

“But you couldn’t be more wrong,” Caviw sighed and pointed at the text beneath the photo. “It was taken on Earth 1995 – almost 265 years ago.”

“Not possible!” Galven grumbled and began to read the data.

Behind him Jeff stepped onto the bridge closing the small distance between them; he stared at the screen just like the Caitian had done several minutes ago. “This is…?” He took in the information the archive had sent and gasped sharply. “Our Drythen is… Khan Noonien Singh?” he burst out.

Galven looked up at him. “Does this name mean something to you?” he asked curiously; the young man snorted.

“It most certainly does! Khan Noonien Singh was one of the most powerful Augment leaders from 1990 to 1996. All of Asia and more was under his control.” His gaze lingered on the screen and took in the familiar yet suddenly strange features. With the lavishly decorated Indic clothing and long hair he looked… different from the ‘Drythen’ he had come to know. “I never saw a photo of him before. Odd, I always thought he would have a more… Indian or Asian appearance.” Galven and Caviw frowned in confusion, so he explained, “The people in this area have darker skin and brown sometimes almond-shaped eyes. Look at him. He is pale, and his eyes are like the ocean in summer…” He shook his head. “Maybe it’s the augmented DNA.”
“So… he was a kind of ruler?” Caviw asked. “That would fit. There is another photo from 1993. His residence.” She touched the screen and scrolled the view down revealing a large palace that seemed to come straight from an Indian fairy tale.

“The Hawa Mahal – Palace of Thousand Winds,” Jeff murmured, taking in the large building that shimmered in the sun. It was the color of gold and pale coral. Arched windows, too many to be counted, slender pillars and a flood of ornaments were only a few eye-catchers. The architecture spoke of the old Indic grandiosity. Even the high walls offering security for the palace’s inhabitants were not free of the beautiful ornamentation. “The Palace of Thousand Winds wears its name well,” the young man said with a sigh. “Its unusual architecture was and still is responsible for the fresh air that circulates throughout the building.” He pointed at the photo. “It around eight floors and its colonnades and latticework windows allowed the ladies of the harem to watch life on the streets and the festival processions of their lord.” His index finger pointed at the image. “Look at the arched tower-roofs, the columns, and the floral patterns. The whole palace is a mix of the Hindu and Islamic imagery and architecture.” He rubbed his neck. “Unlike most other Indian palaces, this one was built in the center of town and so the people were inherently part of palace life – perfect for a man who wants to show his superiority and wealth to the people. But it’s not without risk. If the citizens wanted to rebel, even the mighty walls wouldn’t have kept them at bay.”

Galven sniffled – a typical sign that he was thinking hard about something. “So… our Drythen was sure of himself, of his rule and chose a palace accordingly.”

“The Hawa Mahal is in Jaipur, a city in the southwest of Delhi that borders on Punjab; near Afghanistan in those days. Many small villages and summer residences of the Maharaja’s family were placed around the city. One of the great Maharajas of India built this at the end of the 18th century,” Jeff said. “I was there once; took a trip on my own.” He bit his lips. “I think this Maharaja was a Singh, too.”

“Built 1799 by Maharaja Sawaj Pratap Singh,” Caviw read while she looked at the small text beside the photo. “So, ‘Léo’ lived in the palace of his family.”

Jeff grimaced. “Singh is not really a name; it’s more of a title for the men of a religious group called Sikhs.” He observed the photo. “What a building! I’ve almost forgotten how big and magnificent it is.”

Galven grunted. “And now Drythen – Khan – is living in a small cabin and without a Credit in his pocket; his world doesn’t even exist anymore.” He glanced up at Jeff. “What does history tell about him?”
“The books say that he… He was a dictator but not a tyrant. During those days, many Augments saw humans as nothing more than inferior beings to be toyed with or eliminated. There were mass murders around the world, genocide if you want to call it that. But in Asia…” He took a deep breath. “In Asia there was peace – at least in the first years of his rule.”

Caviw nodded. “I also read that he only fought when his borders were attacked. He never struck first.” She glanced up at the two men. “That hasn’t changed.”

Galven scratched his snout. “Agreed! The first time I laid eyes on him, he was sitting at a table in the outpost’s bar. He only attacked to protect a family when the Orions attacked.”

Jeff pursed his lips. “Yeah. The first time I noticed him, he was shielding some teenagers from the pirates before he saved your butt, Galven.” His attention still lay on the screen. “Of all the Augment leaders, he was the most – peaceable, I guess is the word. It didn’t hinder him from fighting or protecting his people or borders when necessary.” He shook his head. “In the end, peace was of no use for him. The rebellion stripped him off his rank and his home, and he had to flee.”

“With some of the other Augments; they all vanished. Rumors say he escaped in a sleeper ship,” Caviw confirmed, pointing at the text beneath the photo.

Galven’s snout twitched. “So… if our Drythen is this former dictator from almost three centuries ago, then his ‘family’, he searches for, are the other Augments who fled with him together. No wonder he’s avoiding Starfleet…”

“…And this Section 31… The Enterprise’s doctor and Kirk mentioned them,” Jeff cut in. “Everything makes sense now. If Drythen is Khan Noonien Singh, then the legend of his sleeper ship is real. Maybe this Section 31 is a secret department of Starfleet; they found his ship, recognized who he was, took him prisoner, kept his crew and…”

“… And they ran tests on him. That would fit Kirk’s fear that Khan would be handed ‘back to the labs’,” the Caitian woman threw in.

“He must have escaped and is now trying to find his friends or family – whatever they are,” the Tellarit ended his musings.

The three friends looked at each other, then Caviw whispered, “All the alien species, the spaceships, the Federation… The universe is so different from the one he knew; it must be so strange to him.
Imagine you wake up after three hundred years; you have never seen someone from another planet, you are confronted technology that’s utterly foreign and then you are held against your will by a military organization. He was at the mercy of others wanting only to use him. He was alone, separated from his dear ones in the middle of new world, fighting for his life and maybe for his peoples’ lives. This must have been… Well, it is terrifying.”

“Yes – and he isn’t easy to terrify. The lad has courage without equal… And the Kirk-boy, I see why they get on so well. The captain is similarly brave, or he wouldn’t have risked his neck on Turkana to help a woman and her children knowing what lay ahead: The Klingons. Still Dryth… Khan never showed any fear – not for himself.”

“But he feared for Kirk,” Caviw sighed.

Jeff sat down in one of the free chairs. “I have to admit that I have no sympathy for Augments, but we already agreed that Drythen… Khan is one of us now and that we won’t turn our backs because of what he is. Now we know who he is for real and…” He threw his hands up. “Hell, we are dealing with a king. Deposed and from a bygone era, but still! He is a great warrior and a brilliant strategist, but he’s been a loyal friend, too. I’m having trouble seeing the dictator he once was, but… he was.”

“My words,” Galven agreed; smirking before he shook his head. “One year ago I was a simple technician on my home planet; now I’m speeding through space with more loyal friends than I ever thought I’d have. We kick Orion and Klingon asses and keep the company of a fugitive king.” He snorted. “Life is crazy and I’ve never been happier.”

Jeff grimaced. “Who’re you tellin?!?” He pursed his lips, thinking once again of the former dictator’s possible past fate. “Damn this is fucked up! If Starfleet is after Khan because he’s an Augment, then who’s to say whether they are right or wrong trying to capture him? The Augments could become a danger to us all. On the other hand, if they did stick Khan into some lab just to see how he ticks, then fuck them. They deserve to get their asses handed to them. Augment or not he is human and has feelings! Jesus, if Kirk, Starfleet’s newest hero, is willing to protect him – risk his career and his life for him… And it’s not only because he and Khan are together. But there’s… There’s just more to this all I’m sayin’.” He hesitated. “Guys, I think we are in the middle of a stirred up hornet’s nest. Starfleet has the other Augments, Khan wants them back; he’s on the run because Starfleet wants him too – maybe for some more possibly illegal tests. And Kirk is the only one who has taken his side, unconditionally.”

“Ritek already assumed something like this because this doctor was upset with Kirk’s covering for Khan,” Galven thought aloud. “Maybe the Enterprise had indeed a run-in with him and it had been Kirk’s job to arrest the Augment, but he didn’t. And why didn’t he follow his order? Because he realized that there is a much bigger mess than just an escaped Augment; Khan is a part of it, an unwilling part, and Kirk is just doing what his conscience tells him is right.”
“And his heart,” Caviw added. “There are reasons we are not privy to as to why Léo trusts the captain as he does, and the captain does likewise.” Her gaze wandered back to the screen. “Whether he was a dictator or a king centuries ago does not matter anymore. All I read tells of a firm but fair leader. During my research, I learned that life was difficult in his territory and that the most people lived from hand to mouth. Khan changed that. Of course, those changes didn’t proceed without force and fighting, but then there was peace in this area of Earth. His intentions were good and noble, and he has shown us that they still are considering his actions on the outpost, during the Tammeron incident, and his near suicide mission getting Kirk.”

“And still Starfleet wouldn’t hesitate to arrest him and lock him away,” the Tellarit murmured. “I know these uniform-wearers. Orders and rules are all they know. Morality and even humanity don’t count if they stand in their way. There are exceptions – like this boy-captain. But otherwise, Khan is alone in the universe. In other words, he needs help – our help.” He looked at his two friends. “If Starfleet has locked his people away because of their DNA then it’s racism. That’s against all that the Federation represents.” He pointed one hooved hand at the screen. “And I bet my last credit that Starfleet blackmailed him with the welfare of his people until he was able to escape. Now he’s trying to recover his friends.”

“You could be right, Galven, but think. What if he finds his people and frees them. What then? Then we have dozens of Augments roaming free through the universe and…”

Jeff was interrupted by the Tellarit. “Really Jeff! How is it different than the strength of the Gorn or the intelligence of the Vulcans? What if Starfleet tried this on the other races it’s encountered. It wouldn’t dare because we are not helpless; we have our own worlds and technology. They took advantage of him…of them because they have no home or defenses save their own strength. Holding a race of people hostage because who they are is against all that the Federation presents. If this is allowed that it will be the beginning of the end of the Federation as we know it. And concerning the Augments’ – as far as I can tell they fled Earth to escape war and therefore gave their enemies no further reason to speak with the weapons. They give the Federation no reason to hold them hostage. They did the only thing possible to protect the people in their area and to stay alive. I call this responsibility. It’s further proof that Khan prefers peace. This is no calculated intention, but a trait of his character. Give him a place where he and his people can live in freedom and peace, and they will take this offer gladly.” He looked straight at Jeff. “Everyone deserves a second chance, don’t you think so?”

The young Terran sighed. “Yeah, you’re right. Khan was no Napoleon or Hitler, rather a kind of Alexander the Great or King Richard – totalitarian but not an insane mass murderer.” He crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Think about it. We have a real king from three hundred years ago with us. And he is seriously out of his element.”

Galven snorted at him, “Hey brainiac, you are going all professor on us again. But we know what you mean.”
Caviw grinned. “So, we will help our lordship?”

Galven chuckled. “Don’t call him that. I don’t think that he would appreciate it.”

“We should keep it to ourselves that we know his true identity,” Jeff nodded. “We don’t want him to feel threatened and then leave. It would only be a matter of time until this Section 31 catches him.”

“There, now you have revealed how you truly regard him,” the Caitian rejoiced. She caught Jeff’s confused gaze and explained, “You are not afraid of him hurting us if he learns we know who he is, only that he will leave, and you fear for his safety.” She giggled as the young man rolled his eyes. “You see a friend in him – despite who he is.”

Lifting his hands in mock surrender he grumbled, “You caught me! Yes, in my eyes he is our friend.” He let his hands sink. “If you would have asked me a year ago what I would do if I ever met an Augment, I would said ‘lock them away on a faraway planet’. Now… Now I meet one, and he’s a comrade-in-arms and a friend and…” He sighed.

“And now this is all that counts,” Galven smiled. “Right! We continue to call him ‘Drythen’ or ‘Léo’…”

“‘Léo’!?” Jeff interrupted him; throwing up his hands. “How could I be so blind? Singh means lion! He gave us his true name, just in another language.” He glanced once again at the screen smirking. “Cheating bastard! But I have to admit that was clever. He didn’t even lie to us when he gave us his name.”

“And he is like a lion,” Caviw nodded. “I’ve read a little bit about these predator cats and…”

“Sorry, Sweetheart, I’d compare him to a white tiger now,” Jeff grumbled, and before his two friends could as, he ordered the computer to show a picture of these big cats on another screen. Caviw gasped, and even Galven oinked in respect; the photo of a large white tiger lying gracefully on a stone with its mighty paws crossed and head held proudly reminded them all of the image of the king. The tiger’s ice-blue eyes fixed the rag-tag group through space and time as Drythen was able.

“It’s beautiful!” the Caitian whispered and Jeff made an affirming gesture. “Yes, I have to agree. Tigers are fascinating, beautiful, dangerous animals – especially the white tigers. Their coloring is due to a pigment mutation. They are larger and often stronger than the orange tigers, too. They were
bred in zoos, overbred, and biologists messed with their genetics for more dramatic snow white color and the intensity of their black stripes. They sold them off to other zoos, safari parks, and even shows. Some of them escaped and roamed the wilderness, but they didn’t stand a chance at survival. They were hunted for their coat or because people were afraid of them. By the middle of the 21st century, they were nearly extinct; today they only live in animal parks.”

“That’s so sad,” Caviw said quietly.

Galven murmured, “That fits our friend all right, not only because of his appearance but also because of their fate.” He pursed his lips while he sc...
The young captain laughed. “At last there is one thing I’m better at,” he joked, winking at the Augment, who promptly rolled his eyes back at the captain and chuckled in amusement.

After they’d come about halfway, they took a little rest and then Khan had tried his luck with the hyperbike. He had ‘borrowed’ a similar machine from the man in the labs, whose identity he used to escape, but Diego’s bike was old yet unsteady as a young Arabian stallion; its handling was completely different from the bikes of Khan’s days. So he thought it wiser to let Jim drive, and he just enjoyed the ride behind his beloved who transformed from a determined officer into a big teenager during their trip. And Nien was glad for his mate. Jim’s progress in healing after his ordeal at the hands of the Klingons gave the super-human a kind of peace.

Dismounting the bike and securing it with the code, both men left it where it was parked and crossed the road. The weather was sunny and now that it was midday, the air began to warm. Hypercars zoomed through the street and passersby walked lacking the usual hurry of other big cities. Somewhere a woman called down from a window to her husband and a dog followed several giggling girls wearing school uniforms – probably on their way home. The trees at the side of the road shadowed the pavement, and their large leaves rustled gently in the soft wind.

It was like a late summer day in the north of Earth, and even the proximity of the spaceport couldn’t disturb the peace that lived in this town. War was far away – or so it seemed. But neither Jim and Khan nor Diego could know the claws of war were so near… And about to strike.

The Chilean grinned broadly as the two younger men reached him, and he gave them a warm, firm handshake. “Hi, boys, how are you doing?” he asked. “Is my cottage still intact?”

“Tidy and clean as it should be,” Khan answered; already knowing that Diego would take the bait. He was right.

“Had to do some spring-cleaning, haven’t you? And I think my sheets have been washed several times by now. Do I have to fear a higher water bill?” He winked at them.

“Maybe,” Khan drawled before he nodded at Jim. “He had to heal and therefore I had to cook a lot.”

“Oh, come on, guys, you can’t tell me that you needed a lot of water only for cooking,” the giant Chilean chuckled and nudged Kirk with one elbow, who only grinned with a hue of a blush.

“Na, not really,” the Starfleet officer admitted. “And speaking of cooking – I need your help my
Diego cocked his head. “Anytime. What do you need?”

“Well, Nien and I made a bet that he will like my special steak with self-made barbeque-sauce. You have to know, he thinks the American food is unhealthy, and I want to show him that we have some dishes even his spoiled tongue would be pleased to taste.” He ignored Khan’s double-meaning look at the words ‘spoiled tongue’. “We placed bets; winner gets a back massage, and I really want to get one, but I have to buy the steaks and the stuff for the sauce at all.”

Diego scratched his neck; amused by the obvious playfulness between this strange technical genius with the eyes of the seas and the young Starfleet captain who already had become a hero despite his youth. “Well, there is a meat marked down the road and a supermarket three streets away. I can show you the way if you like and…“ He stopped as he saw Kirk’s sheepish smile, and it made clearly ‘click’ in his mind. “You two are out of money, as far as I remember, and…”

“The Klingons took my wallet, and he hasn’t even one,” Jim sighed.

“And we also need some further… toiletries,” the Augment added – and the Chilean began to laugh.

“Hah! I can only guess.” He winked at the two other men. “No problem, guys. I’ll help you out with some Credits. If I can’t trust the captain of the Federation flagship, who can I trust?” He looked at his chronometer. “May I suggest something? A few blocks down the street there’s a nice pub that serves good food. We’ll stop there for a bite to eat after some sightseeing. And before you drive home we’ll go shopping. Sound good?”

Jim smiled widely at him. “Thank you so much, Diego. I’ll pay back any Credit when my ship picks me up.”

The ship mechanic waved one hand. “Don’t rack your brain over it, amigo. That goes for you too, Drythen,” he grinned. Then he led the way down the street. “Come on, guys, I’m certain you are hungry after the trip.”

“What about the bike?” Khan asked, taking their responsibility very seriously.

Diego turned around and walked back toward the Augment, smirking. “What about it? You are in
New Aberdeen here, not in New York City or Rio de Janeiro on good old Mother Earth. The crime rate amounts to 4 percent. I’m no Vulcan, but the odds that this bike’ll be stolen are, I assure you, very low.” Then he turned around again and began to whistle; Jim and Khan followed him.

A minute later they stepped into the pub ‘The Stars’. The place was crowded as though they were giving away free food and drinks. Diego shoved through the people to the bar. “Sean? I need my table and…“ He hesitated when he saw a stranger behind the bar. “Where is Sean?” he asked and the other man jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

“In the kitchen. The cook is ill, and Sean is holding the kitchen down on his own right now. Have you booked a table?”

Diego frowned. “No, I have a fixed table whenever I’m here.”

The man who appeared to be bussing tables and waiting on customers looked him up and down; he clearly disliked Diego’s casual appearance. “Well, this time not. We are full and…”

The Chilean pointed at a table in the corner. “It’s the table over there – and it isn’t taken. So…”

The stranger, a large man with light hair in his forties, lifted a brow. “Sorry, it’s booked.”

“Now?”

“No. In about forty-five minutes,” the stranger answered.

“We will be finished by then. I’ll take the corner then…”

“No, sorry, I told you it’s booked,” the stranger said cleaning the bar with a rag. The waiter had taken money under the table from a man yesterday to hold the table for a small group. And he was not going to return that money because of this ‘guest’…whatever he said. Besides, he had the distinct feeling it would be bad for his health if he tried to return the cash.

The Chilean’s eyes narrowed in anger. “Listen, gringo, I am Diego Carlo Franco Esteban Juan Soto de la Vega-Martinez! I own the shipyard in this orbit, and I won’t be treated like this! That table is
mine whenever I’m here and if you have a problem with it, go talk to Sean!” With those words, he spun on his heel, fought his way back through the crowd, waved at his two companions and sat down in his usual corner.

“Problem?” Khan asked. He had listened to most of the conversation despite the noise in the room.

“Nothing I couldn't handle,” Diego grumbled, took the menu from the waitress, ordered three glasses of wine and then recommended dishes he thought his guests would enjoy.

A half hour later the three men were full and enjoying their mochas. Jim could still taste the spareribs he had ordered and devoured them like he was starving. Diego ordered the chili con carne and Khan had chosen a salad with fruits, chicken strips and mango chutney. The food was good here and Jim and Nien savored the familiar taste of foods they hadn’t had for quite some time.

“One bite more and I’m going to explode,” Kirk sighed, rubbing his belly.

“Please do this outside, Pyāra. It would be too much for Diego’s wallet to pay for the mess your ‘explosion’ would cause,” the Augment teased wryly, feeling at ease.

“Well, to prevent it, I’m going to hit the restroom,” the young captain commented. “Anyone else?”

Khan rose with Kirk. “Though they say only women cannot go to the restrooms alone, I feel I must accompany you.”

Diego pointed to a door behind the bar. “The restrooms are there. Turn left at the door, and you’ll face the entrance.” Smiling, he watched to two men go; then he leaned back and sipped his mocha. ‘They are quite adorable,’ he thought. ‘And so much in love! I wonder if they even realize how deep their feelings run!’

His attention was diverted to the six newcomers entering the pub. The men looked around, and one of them headed to the bar talking to a waiter. Diego had caught the man’s irritated glare before he turned again to the new guest; he nodded the direction of the of the corner table. So these were the guys who had booked ‘his’ table! Well, Jim, Drythen and he were almost done, and the six men could wait. He lifted his hand to signal the waitress to bring the bill and watched then the men who remained in front of the bar. There was nothing unusual about them – simple workers it seemed. Still an odd feeling was rising in the Chilean. Dealing with customers the authorities shouldn’t learn of had made him sensible and wary, and something about those men made him beware of them.
Kirk dried his hands in the bathroom and watched Khan wash his own. “So what would you be most interested in seeing here in New Aberdeen?” he asked, and the Augment shrugged.

“I’m not familiar with the city, and the few things I know comes from the information on the PADD Diego gave us. The town is kind of like a Scottish colony and even has some manors and a small castle. Maybe we should start with them?”

Jim grinned. Of course, Khan chose something that he knew from his own time. “Right then,” he nodded, before he added teasingly, “You and Scotty have a lot in common regarding your love for technics, but in one thing you two are quite different. Scotty would have started with the distillery, not with the castle.”

“Even if the whisky here is green as the grass?” the super-human commented amusedly and held the door for Jim – an absurdity under ordinary circumstances. He would have never done this for an ‘inferior’, but James was his mate, and so it felt natural to show him this kind of respect and affection. Chuckling at Kirk’s cheeky “Thank you, Tiger!” he followed the younger man, amused and touched by his Jim’s returned affection.

The Starfleet officer smiled at him; his eyes sparkled with mischief. “You’re right about the whisky and its color here. Probably why Scotty turns up his nose and goes on about ‘real whisky’ for hours.” He chuckled, opened the door to the pub’s main room, looked at the bar, and stopped dead in his tracks. Then he whirled around and shoved Khan back into the small hallway, taking the Augment utterly by surprise. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been able to move him at all. Following quickly he closed the door ‘til only a small gap remained, and leaned against the wall pale and panting.

“Klingons!” he whispered and met the perplexed gaze of his beloved whose enhanced reflexes prevented him from falling none too gracefully on his butt.

“Klingons? Here?” Khan’s voice barely above a whisper, he forgot the comment about the rude behavior instantly. He glanced shortly through the gap and pursed his lips. “James, I don’t see any Klingons. You must be mistaken. There only humans. Not one of them has the ridged forehead and…” He stopped as he caught Kirk’s confused expression; then Jim’s eyes widened.

“You don’t know…? He never told you…?” The captain stopped himself, grimacing. “Of course the bastard wouldn’t tell you. From his point of view, it would have been foolish.” He shook his head
angrily before turning to the Klingons at the bar once more, outraged at their casual behavior – atypical for their race. What in God’s name did they want here? They were pretending to be human, and that they were up to something nasty was practically written in big letters on their smooth foreheads.

“James? What is it Marcus didn’t tell me?” the former dictator asked, and Jim sighed knowing that the super-human wouldn’t drop the topic before he got at least a few details. If something had stirred Khan’s curiosity, he could be stubborn as a mule – just like Kirk.

“A century ago the Klingons conducted some…undesirable experiments with DNA of human-Augments,” he explained quickly, throwing a glance back to his lover who went rigid. “It backfired and brought on a virus out that threatened to go pandemic. It was stopped, finally as were the experiments, but, as a result, many Klingons have a more human appearance. The Augment-DNA was too aggressive even for Klingon genetics its results remained today.” His attention turned back to the five – now six – men at the bar.


“Yes and no. I’ll tell you the whole story later.” He reached back, found Nien’s hand, squeezed it and added a soft “Promise!” before focusing his attention back to the Klingons. “But right now we have to watch the surprise guests over there.” He took a deep breath. “I know two of them.” He pointed at one of the men. “See the guy with the slicked back hair and the trimmed beard? And next to him, the other one with the curly hair? They’re Koloth and Korax – two Klingon officers that I had the displeasure of meeting at deep space station K7.” He cocked his head. “I think they weren’t too happy that my intervention disturbed their plans to bring poisoned corn to Sherman’s planet.” He grinned for a moment. “And I think they were less happy with the farewell gift we gave them.”

“Farewell gift?” Nien needed some distraction from the news he had just received. Experiments with human-Augment DNA in the last century. So some of his people must have survived. Maybe there were other Augments left. If so, he had to find them. They were his brothers and sisters too…

“We met at K7 a man who dealt in purring, sweet little furballs. They practically enchanted my crew – even Spock – until there were so many that, in two days I found them in my captain’s chair and even in my coffee cup. They were in the ventilation system, and they ate half of our provisions!” Jim gave a short version of the incident. “Scotty got rid of them – by sending them to the Klingons; they didn’t like that one bit. Maybe you’ve heard of them? Tribbles?”

Khan frowned. “Your engineer sent Tribbles to the Klingons?”
For just a moment, Jim resembled a churl who had successfully played a prank. “Hundreds. And I think Koloth wasn’t too happy about it.” He turned back to the Klingons again and saw them leave with another man. He had spoken to the man at the bar. “They are going. Quick, we have to find out what they’re up to.”

“Trouble, no doubt,” the former dictator growled and followed his beloved quickly shoving the information about other human Augments from so long ago to the back of his mind. Right now, his mate was about to throw himself into danger’s path again, and he had to protect him.

Diego rose as they neared the corner table “I already paid, but those guys who booked my table, didn’t want to wait any longer.” He took his parka and looked to the two other men. “Is everything all right?”

“No!” Jim said slipping into his own parka. “The guys you mentioned are Klingons.”

The Chilean went stock still. “What?”

“I know two of them – met them a while ago,” Kirk grumbled. “Come on, they’re here for something and I have the distinct feeling that this purpose is very, very bad.” He headed for the entrance. “We have to follow them and…”

He stopped dead in his tracks. He had just opened the door and came face to face with none other than Captain Koloth…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Of course latter had to happen, don’t you think so? Of course Koloth and Jim have to stumble about each other and I can already promise that this ‘meeting’ will lead to a lot of chaos.

In the next chapter you will learn more about McFurthon’s abilities, Koloth and his comrades are preparing to strike, Jim and Khan are determined to stop the Klingons (even if they only can assume to what the enemy is up to), Spock gets an ‘interesting’ sensor-scan and The Shadow is ready to show the whole world anew that you better
shouldn’t mess with this militia.

I hope you enjoyed the last installment and – of course – I’m curious like a little girl to learn about your thoughts.

Have a nice week

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, dear readers!

Yeah, already the next update. After the chaos with chapter 25 and 26, Rhiannon and I had to make something up to you. I hope anybody read the new posted no. 25, because the talk between Spock and McCoy and the whole bondage-mate-thing between Jim and Khan in the end of said chapter are really important for the storyline.

Now up to chapter 27.

Trouble is coming. Spock and the others recognize the Klingon fleet, Jim and Koloth face each other (and more) and The Shadow will be involved once more in ‘Starfleet-stuff’.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 27 – The threats around us

Aboard the Enterprise, Spock intensely watched the display of the long-range-sensors at his station and felt the eyes of the other officers heavy upon him. Finally, he lifted his head and looked at Sulu who had alerted him just a few minutes earlier.

“Your observations are correct, Lieutenant, the sensors are showing energy fluctuations and the emissions of several warp engines in the former Neutral Zone between Starbase 133 and deep space K7.”

“How many vessels do you think there are?” the Japanese helmsman asked, and the first officer lifted a brow.

“I don’t have enough data to give a precise answer. The distance of 1,036 parsecs doesn’t allow for a detailed scan, but regarding the mass of the emission the sensors caught, I daresay that it has to be a large squadron.” He paused for a moment, thinking back to the spacecraft they had followed to
Aldebaran several days ago. Even after checking the ship thoroughly, Spock had an illogical ‘feeling’ concerning the vessel’s true mission. It seemed that his ‘gut-feeling’ had been right. The Aldebaran System was shaped like a triangle with Starbase 133 and deep space K7 at the two corners. The possibility that the warp drive emissions belonged to the vessel they followed was high. Spock could guess (not that he did) what the Klingon activity meant. He raised his voice just a bit. “Computer, show tactical display of the area around the warp emissions.”

The section emerged and overlaid on a map that included the former Neutral Zone, the newest borders and the seized space stations and planets. The Klingon emblem blinked where the vessels had been found and Spock pursed his lips.

“If these emissions are from Klingon vessels, then they are likely planning a large-scale attack beginning with the Aldebaran System,” the Vulcan thought aloud.

“Shall I contact Command and…” Uhura began, but Spock shook his head.

“No, Lieutenant, we first have to ascertain that these emissions are indeed coming from Klingon ships, and we have to find out how many vessels the enemy has dedicated to this mission. Estimates are not very useful when we need exact numbers. But please send a transmission to Commodore Wesley. Tell him that the rumors the SBI caught seem to contain more truth than originally thought.”

He returned to the captain’s chair and activated the intercom. “Bridge to Engineering. Mr. Scott, is the sensor-disturbing device still activated?”

A moment later the Scot’s voice answered, “Purrin’ like a kitten, sir. And I’m almost done with linkin’ it to the helm console so that ya can check and control it any time ya need.”

One Vulcan eyebrow climbed up at the unprofessional description; the first officer let this phrase pass. “That is good to hear, Mr. Scott. And please take care that it continues to ‘purr’. We will need this device very soon. Bridge out.”

He addressed the helmsman. “Mr. Sulu, put us on course to the location of the emissions, Warp 8. We’ll drop out of warp just outside of enemy sensors so that the Klingons can’t see us. The sensor-disturbing device will prevent our detection while we scan their vessels. Time of arrival, Mr. Sulu?”

The lieutenant had already set the course and watched his display on the helm console. “Three hours, twenty-nine minutes, sir.”
“Very good, Mr. Sulu, Warp 8!” He sat down on the captain’s chair. “Lieutenant Uhura, did you inform Commodore Wesley of our development?”

“Yes, sir, and I also added that we are concealed.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant. From now on, no external communications. Please inform the departments of our mission!” He leaned back in the chair. “I don’t want to make any hasty conclusions, but I think the Klingons haven’t answered the Federation’s proposals for peace talks because they plan a strike!”

ST***ST***ST

Koloth, captain of the Gr’oth, watched McFurthon as they left the pub. It seemed the man’s connections weren’t as good as he’d imagined. The table in the corner that the human booked was occupied by another Terran who obviously held more sway than the ‘strangers’ here. Maybe it would be better if they left. An argument with a regular guest would put them on radars they would rather avoid. Remaining unnoticed was best for the five Klingons and their contact man.

“These humans have odd unwritten laws, but this one I understand,” Korax whispered towards his commander. “You have to stay back if another one has the older right.”

Koloth nodded. “Yes, in some things, Terrans indeed make sense – not many though!” He looked at an irritated McFurthon and closed his parka, grazing his belt while doing so – and went rigid. His communicator was missing!

Frowning, he turned around and looked to the entrance of the pub. Thievery by a Terran occurred to him more quickly than the possibility that he had lost it. Either way he needed to get it back. It didn’t bear contemplating what would happen if Kor or the general tried to contact them and got a mere Terran on the line!

“I’ll be back in a few seconds,” he said in Federation Standard to McFurthon, and headed back to the entrance with firm steps, determined to get his communicator back that was, thanks to Kahless, not a Klingon but a Federation model. Gripping the handle, he opened the door…

… And froze, firmly planted and rightly stunned.
Directly in front of him was a young human male readying to leave the pub, a man with blue eyes, blond hair and smooth, youthful features. A man he recognized immediately!

‘Kirk!’ he shouted inwardly as he stared at his enemy’s face bearing the same surprise he felt.

Jim Kirk’s eyes were wide as saucers as the Klingon captain he wanted to follow was all of sudden in front of him. And one of the many devils of mischief the young Starfleet officer had never been able to tamp, woke in him.

Giving the Klingon one of his brightest smiles, he called cheerfully, “Ah, Captain Koloth! Nice to see you again. How’s is the Tribble breeding business?”

Behind him, Khan stifled a groan. That was most definitely the wrong thing to say! He watched the Klingon’s face turn from surprise into a thunderstorm of pure rage and tensed, ready to shove James out of harm’s way. The Augment’s foresight came in handy.

The reasonable part of Koloth ordered him to react circumspectly, the mission was more important than James Kirk, but the savage in him flared up at the sight of the man. The captain was to blame for his failure at K7 and the disaster with the furry, purring pestilence that plagued his ship! And now he mocked him!

Seeing red, Koloth coldcocked his fist back and let it fly at the human’s face only to be caught in a steel-like grip as Kirk was pushed away by the man behind him.

And Koloth got his second shock.

He took in the pale, slender face, the fierce blue-green eyes and the black locks that fell over the Terran’s forehead as his fist was squeezed in those long, thin but inhumanly strong fingers.

There was no mistaking this man’s identity.
“You!” he snarled.

Khan glared back. “Me!” he confirmed with a low growl, realizing that this Klingon recognized him. He tried to push Jim further behind him with his free arm – a gesture Kirk appreciated but didn’t allow.

“You honor us with your visit Captain Koloth. What are you doing here?” Jim asked, his voice dripping with feigned politeness. Diego glared over the officer’s head at the stranger.

“What’s the matter boys? You know him? Is he trouble?” he asked. His voice resonated with warning. The blood of his native ancestors thrummed through his veins, keeping his senses keen and sharp.

“Diego? What’s wrong?” someone called from the kitchen door as several guests turned to see what the commotion was about.

“Someone seems to have a problem with my taking my regular table, Sean, that’s all!” the Chilean answered loud, knowing that it would be foolish to start a fight with Klingons in the pub. He didn’t want anyone hurt or his friend’s property damaged.

Outside of the little restaurant, the others in Koloth’s group had realized that something was not right. Seeing his commander still at the threshold, Korax walked to him. His green-brown eyes widened as he recognized none other than James Kirk – and beside him…

“Qli-jagh (the Dark Warrior)!” he gasped reaching for his phaser. The gesture was not lost on Khan.

Once again the super-human proved why he was so dangerous when provoked. He shoved Jim out of the way and attacked Koloth all in the same movement. He threw Koloth and himself at Korax who stumbled and fell to the ground.

Koloth somehow managed to shove the Terran he knew to be an Augment away and rose on his feet. Khan jumped up like one of the striped predator cats of his home-country. Both men met and wrestled with each other before the force of their combat brought them back into the pub where a group of men protected the dining families from the fighters with their bodies, trying to keep the melee contained. From somewhere inside, a man called to the group to calm the hell down, but his words fell on deaf ears.

Korax followed his commander as Kirk rushed forward to attack the Klingon in an effort to cover
Nien’s back. It earned him a hard hit in his stomach, but he held his ground. Most of the time when Kirk fought, he fought for himself. This was different; this time he fought not only to defend himself, but to protect his love – not that his love couldn’t hold his own, he could. But that didn’t make Kirk any less formidable.

In the meantime, the guests in the background had realized that an argument at the front had turned into a scuffle and they began to take sides. They didn’t need a reason for the brawl, just a side to shout for.

“The younger man attacked first; I saw it!”

“Nonsense! The guy who wanted Diego’s table tried to hit the boy over there; the other one knocked him out of the way.”

“What? No way! Are you blind?”

“No, I ain’t had that much to drink!”

“Are you sayin’ I’m drunk?”

“Aye, like a sailor!”

“Hey, play nice guys!”

“Stay out of it!”

And the beginning disputes between the patrons came to blows. They also saw strangers who had been here only a minute ago, return and attack the two younger men and Diego; that was enough for them to interfere. Diego was well-known here, and his two companions were, therefore, as welcome as he. Scotch and Irish tempers flared hot with the fierce desire to protect and serve those friends under their roof in the name of good old hospitality.

A huge hulk of a Scotsman with a temper as short as he was tall slammed his glass on the counter and pushed through the crowd. “Lads, stop that nonsense now!” he called and came face to face with
one of the strangers who cracked him in the jaw. Tumbling backward, two other guests caught him; he regained his footing, but lost his control.

“Who are ye comin’ here an hittin’ me without a reason, eh?” he shouted and tackled the other man to the ground.

Another stranger entering the pub and had a phaser in his hand, but two other spirited visitors attacked him, grabbed for the phaser and tried to wrestle him to the floor, upending a table, dishes and someone’s lunch. The people at the table jumped up and joined the fight.

By now many patrons had taken their verbal discussion about who had started the bout very seriously and fists and bottles started to fly, provoking onlookers and friends to come to aid. Mayhem engulfed the pub. Sean tried to calm the disorder, but it was for naught. He sought shelter behind the bar, watching the melee with outrage and horror as tables and chairs were turned into kindling, dishes broke, and the large mirror behind the bar was smashed to pieces as it was hit by a thrown bottle.

And in the middle of it all, Koloth and Khan fought with unleashed fury. The Klingon captain was a well-trained fighter and even if he preferred cleverness above pub brawls, he didn’t hold back when he attacked the Augment with all he had, only to find every blow, every kick and every use of leverage blocked and returned by his adversary. He had seen this man on the recordings of Qo’noS and he knew how quick and extraordinarily strong this Terran was. Facing him in a hand-to-hand-combat was something else entirely though. Koloth realized that he wouldn’t gain victory over this man and tried something else; he entrapped him into struggling with another.

Well, it was an attempt, because the ‘another’ was an Irishman who, when hit on the back, whirled around. But with one look at the threatening face of the pale man with the sea-colored, flashing eyes – and he knew that retreat was in his best interest. He backed away, sensing the predator.

Koloth was clever enough to use the distraction to put some distance between himself and the Augment. His right foot crushed something that lay on the floor. He looked down and cursed in his mother-tongue as he recognized the remains of his communicator. He must have dropped it when he first entered the pub. For good measure, he added more colorful curses to his tirade, retreating back only to bump into the back of another patron: Kirk! He was still fighting with Korax.

Hissing with hate, Koloth wrapped one arm around the young human’s throat from behind. Kirk yelped in surprise. Koloth squeezed harder, choking him, trying with all his might to crush the young man’s fragile trachea.
All of sudden, Jim found himself hauled back from Korax with a vice-like grip around his throat. He clawed at the cruel arm that cut off his breath, but his enemy was too strong – a Klingon, no doubt. And a moment later he knew who had him as he heard the familiar voice growl, “I swore that you would someday pay for the humiliation you brought upon me, Kirk. Now die!”

Koloth! And he was serious!

Still, Jim was angry rather than fearful. He had been trained in the Academy for this and Spock had had trained him in Vulcan hand-to-hand combat on the sport deck of the Enterprise. But here, the ‘Iowa-kid’ who fought before he thought – did react by instincts. Kirk slammed his elbow back into Koloth’s stomach.

The Klingon grunted but didn’t loosen his grip, so Kirk kicked back at his enemy’s shin and threw his head back hitting Koloth in the jaw.

By now Korax was on his feet and attacked the young in Koloth’s grip, delivering brutal blows to Kirk’s midsection – but didn’t last. All of sudden, a snarl that would drive a warrigul away was heard and the Klingon found himself lifted off his feet and hurled through the air straight at McFurthon still standing at the pub’s entrance. The former officer didn’t know whether to move or catch and ended up doing neither of it. Both men landed in a heap, crying out in confusion and anger.

Koloth stared at the furious Augment and tightened his grip around Kirk’s throat; he understood the engineered man would protect the captain – perhaps for the reasons Lord Kor assumed. “One move more and I break his neck!” the Klingon spat out and he held fast the wild, struggling human with brutal strength.

The Augment stopped.

“Let. Him. Go!” Three words, but they couldn’t have sounded more threatening if Khan had pointed a phaser at the Klingon. This creature menaced his Jim! Fury mingled with fear in the former dictator. He was overwhelmed with the urge to fight ‘til the last drop of blood in order to protect his mate. “Let him go and I let you live!”

Koloth opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. Someone fell against the Klingon captain, taking him by surprise. That bump was all Khan needed. Lashing out, he gripped Koloth’s right wrist and forced his arm away from Kirk, breaking bones in the process.
Despite Klingon pride, the commander screamed in pain; then he lost the ground beneath his feet and was thrown away like a doll over the heads of the other rumbling patrons. He landed on Korax and McFurthon, both just finding their footing. All three tumbled to the ground again in a heap of limbs.

“Thanks,” Jim croaked hoarsely and looked gratefully at Nien, rubbing his throat and his belly. “You shortened an epic beating and…”

“He would have crushed your trachea if I hadn’t interfered,” the former dictator corrected wryly, blocked a falling man before he could stumble against Kirk. He looked around quickly. His eyes only found men fighting all around him, and he and Jim ducked as something was hurled over their heads.

“Time to go,” Jim stated and Khan nodded. “Indeed! The pub’s owner, Sean, has called the police.” His eyes narrowed suddenly, and he pulled Kirk to him and out of the way of a swinging chair leg. The Augment gave the attacker a dangerous growl and one of his piercing gazes, and wisely the man thought it best to turn and hurry away.

“You heard him calling the police in this racket?” Jim addressed Nien, impressed – and saw a bottle aimed at his lover's head. Without a thought he pushed him out of the way; the bottle missed Khan by an inch.

“Are you nuts, man?” Jim shouted. “What’s he done to you?”

The man didn’t get a chance to answer, because Khan finished the conversation his own way. He struck out blindly as he never saw the attacker, and landed a lucky punch. The man fell to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

Apparently, three men nearby didn’t like their friend being knocked-out and decided to try their luck with the pale stranger by attacking him together. Jim tried to come to his aid, but a strong hand on his shoulder held him back.

“Jim, Sean called the police and if you don’t them to arrest the captain of Starfleet’s flagship we should go!”

Diego!
Kirk was torn between helping Khan – who really didn’t need any assistance; he was handling himself quite… beautifully – and getting out of the pub. Then he realized that the Klingons weren’t there anymore! Anger rose hot in his face. They used whole bar fight to flee – and he hadn’t paid attention. Dammit!

“Help Nien and get him out of here! The police can’t see him. His welfare and his life depend on it!” he said urgently. Then he pushed through the crowd, earning a few hits in the process; he ignored them. There were far more important things to do. Storming out of the pub he looked around and saw six people running down the street, their distance growing alarmingly fast.

“Shit!” he cursed, balling his fists.

In the pub, Khan delivered one well-aimed hit at his last remaining adversary; he watched the man crumble like a marionette who had its strings cut, then felt someone at his back. Whirling around, he stopped his fist in the last second when he recognized Diego who looked tousled and out of breath. Besides a darkening bruise around his eye, he was unharmed.

“We have to go. The police will be soon here and the Klingons have already gone!” the Chilean panted and Khan nodded, pulling Diego with him. They fought their way outside, only stopping once they got to the street where many passers-by looked curiously at them and the tumult in the pub. The Chilean bore signs of the brawl contrary to Khan. His only evidence was tousled hair and crumbled clothes; not one bruise marred his handsome face.

“Where is Jim?” he asked, scanning the street for his mate and fearing the Klingons may have taken him. Then he heard a noise coming up from behind him. Police sirens howled through the streets.

“NIEN! GET ON!”

Kirk brought the hyperbike to a halt beside his lover who immediately mounted behind the young captain. Jim caught the Chilean’s attention, shouting over the clamor. “Diego, call Galven and the others. Tell them that Klingons are here and we need help. I’ll contact you as soon as I know to where the bastards are off to!” With that he opened the throttle and raced down the road; Khan clung tightly to him.

For a moment, Kirk meant he saw a flash and hoped that he hadn’t passed a speed-trap. He didn’t much care if he was caught speeding – it was an emergency. But his passenger couldn’t risk discovery.
It was indeed an emergency. And neither of the two lovers could guess its outcome.

Koloth stormed up beside Korax and his three warriors down the road. His teeth gritted and his lips pressed into a thin line he tried to fight off the throbbing, intense pain in his injured right arm as well as his burning rage.

Kirk!

And the Augment! The man the Klingons now called Qli-jagh (the Dark Warrior).

The two most wanted enemies of the Empire were here on this planet, right where the Klingon admiralty planned to strike next! This couldn’t be a coincidence. Starfleet’s intelligence must have heard about the planned moves of the Empire and sent this infuriating child. And the Augment, was he Starfleet’s newest weapon?

And as much as Koloth had wanted and tried to kill them both, it had been impossible to gain victory over them. The super-human was too strong and too quick – even for a Klingon. So Koloth went for Kirk and overpowered him, ready to break his neck, only to be stopped by this cursed Augment again, whose only purpose seemed to be to protect the Starfleet captain.

What had Kor told him in secret? There seemed to be a kind connection between the two Terrans – a romantic relationship perhaps? Well, Koloth could only confirm this assumption. The super-human was more protective of Kirk than a warrigul mother of her whelps, and fought with feral force to keep the younger man safe. But Kirk also knew how to battle. He had proven to be far more combative than thought.

And if he were quite honest with himself, he would admit that Kirk and the Augment had kicked Koloth’s, Korax’s and the others’ asses. They ought to call themselves lucky to be still alive. The Augment did not seem to make idle threats.

They were alive, but hurt. Korax limped, Kaghon, Kurhan and Noras had some bruises. Koloth notes that he too suffered from abdominal pain after Kirk elbowed him and his arm ached from two broken arm bones.

The Klingon captain growled deeply in his throat as he and the others followed McFurthon. He would get Kirk for that! Kirk and the Augment! He would kill them both or capture them. And when
he did, the whole of Starfleet wouldn’t be able to recover them!

McFurthon ran down the road cursing the unfortunate circumstance that brought him and the others into Kirk’s path. He knew a thing or two about Starfleet’s newest and youngest hero. He was bold and reckless. But he was also brave and committed. Rumors had it that he and his officers were a tight-knit group. They’d go through fire and hell for each other – and they had.

Where Kirk was, his crew was near. That meant the Enterprise had to be somewhere around and not, as the Klingons assumed, somewhere else after her brief stop at the planet several days ago. Maybe the scrutiny of the space harbor in the orbit had been a distraction so that Kirk could beam to the planet and go undercover.

Not good. A Klingon squadron lurked only hours away in the former Neutral Zone, ready to attack as soon as the spaceport and the Starfleet building on Aldebaran were eliminated.

If the Enterprise was alone she wouldn’t stand a chance against so many Klingon vessels. If she was a scout and Starfleet planted other starships nearby, then the Klingon mission would be for naught.

Dammit all to hell and back! They had to do something – but first they had to escape Kirk.

McFurthon had looked back over his shoulder. After he had managed to get the Klingons out of the pub, he saw the unmistakable golden shock of the captain’s hair outside of the inn. Kirk had watched them leave and the former officer would have bet his last shirt on the horse that the kid would try to hunt them down. A further look later proved his assumption right; the captain was following them on a hyperbike; another man sat behind him.

McFurthon raced around a corner onto a narrower street and then into another, before vanishing into an alley between two houses with shops; he waved at the Klingons to follow.

Hurrying through the alley, the former Starfleet officer entered a crowded pub by an open backdoor; he passed through the restaurant and left through the front, the five Klingons on his tail. Again, they crossed a street and walked quickly but without drawing attention to themselves. The group rounded a few more corners and finally McFurthon stepped into a house, held the door for his companions and gestured to the staircase. “Go up to the second floor. Take the door on the right!” he panted.

A few moments later, the six men entered an apartment that was, as the former officer confirmed, his own. “Take a seat!” he said and walked to the window. Still out of breath, he peered through the
drapes down on the street. Only then, did he allow himself relief. “They didn’t follow us – that I’m calling luck. Kirk is young and clever – fucking tireless.” He turned around and faced the Klingons.

Koloth, whose face was gray with pain beneath his tanned skin, sat at the table, and Korax tried to treat his broken arm bones. McFurthon glared angrily at him. “I said that Kirk was unimportant compared to the mission. Why…”

“Don’t lecture me, human!” Koloth spat; wrath reddened his cheeks. “It wasn’t me who attacked first!”

The former Starfleet officer tried to keep his temper in check. “Why did you go back to the pub? If you would have just stayed with us, then we wouldn’t have met Kirk or that… he waved his hand in the air as if grasping for words, “…whatever that other one was, and…”

“One of those filthy Terrans stole my communicator. Would you have preferred the thief have a dedicated line to our admiralty?” the Klingon growled.

McFurthon stared at him, cursed and took a deep breath. “Did you get it back?”

Koloth only glared at him. “I destroyed it, Macfuarsen…”

“McFurthon, Captain!”

“I destroyed it after fighting with that damn Augment, just before the cursed Ha’DlbaH (animal) crushed my bones!” He lifted his injured arm.

The human man frowned. “An Augment?” he asked disbelievingly. “We don’t have any Augments and…”

“Qli-Jagh, the Dark Warrior, attacked my captain. He is the one responsible for the death of the Klingon patrol on Qo’noS more than one of your Earth years ago. He also freed Kirk on Turkana – and he is now here with him, shielding him from danger, like he is his hu’tegh (damn) bodyguard!”

McFurthon blinked several times. “An Augment … During my time in Starfleet, I never heard
“Show me a mere Terran who can hold and fire a phaser canon like a handgun, jump down more than 10 meters unharmed, destroy a Klingon scout ship and finish off a whole patrol single-handedly! And then he sneaks in one of our headquarters, frees a captive, kills an entire unit of guards without that one of them giving alarm and above all, escapes with the captive. No Klingon or a Romulan could manage that – no matter the training!”

Rubbing his neck, McFurthon took a deep breath. “I don’t know what’s going on, but whoever he is, he’s not Starfleet and he’s not Federation. Starfleet may be a bunch of arrogant, self-loving uniform-wearers with a sickening pretense of so-called ‘morality’, but the Augment program ended three hundred years ago. And what almost happened last century hasn’t been forgotten. This man can only be the result of…of something else – probably illegal.”

“Illegal or not, we have to stop him – and Kirk! Those two are a danger to our plan!” Korax threw in; his captain nodded.

“Yes! We have to act – now!” He looked around. “Kirk doesn’t know where we are going or where we are now, so we have some time.”

“If he alerts Starfleet, they will scan the whole town and then they will find you,” McFurthon added for consideration, but Koloth only lifted his brows.

“All the more reason more to complete our mission as soon as possible. Do you have the core tubes for the explosives?” As the human nodded, the Klingon captain bared his teeth. “Then we have to retriever our parts from the hotel before we begin!”

“I got more for you,” McFurthon said and stepped to his desk, activating a communication console. “I adjusted it to the emergency Starfleet frequency only Starfleet members use,” he said, gesturing to the device. “If Kirk tries to contact the outpost, we will know it!”

Koloth rose, ignored the throbbing pain in his arm, and stepped beside McFurthon. “Brilliant!” he commented with some respect. “So, if Kirk tries to contact the others…”

“I can intercept the transmission – or answer it instead of the communications officer in the outpost.” He glanced at the console. “He will need support to find us, but he won’t know to who he’s talking to. It’ll give us a chance to delay Starfleet and find Kirk” He glanced at Koloth. “You up for a man
Jim brought the hyperbike to a stop and glanced around him, then his fist hit the handlebars.
“Dammit, where can they be?” He had followed Koloth, Korax, and the others as they had turned onto another street. He kept well back from his prey, though, to prevent any provocation that could lead to a gunfight that would injure innocents. He realized too, that they had a human ally – a traitor! Who would ally with the Federation’s enemy? And why?

Banning this question to the back of his mind, Kirk started again and concentrated on maintaining his adversaries’ in his sight. But as they ran down several small streets, vanishing into an alley between two houses, he realized he couldn’t follow them without risking the safety of passers-by. Watching them cross a yard, he sped down the street. He made two right turns hoping to cut them off, but they were nowhere to be seen. Reducing his speed, Jim drove along the buildings, peered into the shop and restaurant windows. He didn’t see them. And Nien’s “I think they escaped!” didn’t raised his hopes any.

Finally, he brought the hyperbike to a halt and braced himself with one firm food on the road. Cursing under his breath he began to weigh his options. “Why are they here?” he murmured. “What could they want here? We only saw five Klingons. I don’t think there’d be more – it’s possible, but the more Klingons, the greater their risk of being found out. So, I suppose it’s likely that what we saw is all there is, here.”

Khan bent slightly forwards, bracing with one foot the hyperbike, while he mused, “An undercover mission. They dress as if they are native to the area, they were in company of a human who apparently knows who they are, and they fled instead of fighting to the death as though it were normal. Conclusion. They have a certain destiny what weights more than their so-called honor. And what could that be? A mission ordered by their superiors.”

Jim nodded slowly. “You are right. Koloth is sneaky. He’s not your typical Klingon. He’d rather worm his way out of a problem. Fighting isn’t his style… Well, a few minutes ago it was, but…”

“What did you expect? He was about to be revealed and you insulted him by asking about the Tribbles you sent him. It is no wonder he ‘saw red’.” Khan’s voice sounded wry, and Kirk glanced over his shoulder, grinning.

“I couldn’t resist.”
“Yes, that was plain to see, Pyāra!” the Augment retorted with some amusement, and then he turned serious again. “Are you hurt? The Klingon, Koloth, had you and the other Klingon…”

“Don’t worry, honey. I’m fine,” Jim cut in, smiling shortly at him – amused by Khan’s grimace at the word ‘honey’. He just couldn’t help baiting. Then he frowned. “We have to find the bastards, figure out what they’re up to and stop them. If I only knew what they’re here for and…”

A hypercar sped down the road and forced another car aside. The drivers honked angrily at each other and the one who ignored the speed limit called through the open car window, “Move, you idiot! Some of us have a spaceport schedule to keep!”

Jim and Khan watched the whole scene; then both went rigid and looked at each other.

“The spaceport…” the young captain whispered. “If they destroy it, Aldebaran would be defenseless.”

“Starfleet has a station here, too,” the former dictator mused. “Where are her vessels based?”

“Two in orbit above the space harbor as far as I know; the rest are smaller scouts that are…” His eyes widened. “…based at the spaceport on the planet’s surface. They use it for military missions and sometimes police support.”

The two lovers stared at each other – comprehending the Klingons’ target instantly. Then Jim gripped the communicator and opened a line. They would need help, but Kirk didn’t dare contact Starfleet yet. He wouldn’t risk Nien being revealed to them. “Kirk to Diego. Come in, please!”

He had to hail the Chilean three times more before he got an answer, “Nice of you to remember me, amigo. After you lovebirds sped away, I barely escaped police. Where are you?”

“Don’t ask me,” Jim replied. “Somewhere near the spaceport. We lost the Klingons.”

Diego cursed before continuing, “I’ve contacted Galven. He’s alerting the others. You can close the line but activate the signal, Jim. He and the others will beam to your position within the few next minutes!”
“Understood!” Kirk confirmed. He closed the communicator and sent the signal, then dropped the
device into his pocket. Only then did he allow himself a moment for a deep breath; he and Khan
dismounted the hyperbike and threw the stand. “I want to know what’s gotten into the Klingons!” he
murmured. “First Tammeron, now they’re trying the same with Aldebaran. Haven’t they learned
their lesson? Haven’t we beaten them enough for them to realize that the Federation is not going give
up territory that easily? Idiots! The only thing they’ll get are bloody noses and damaged ships!”

Nien’s pale, sea-colored eyes fixed him – forcefully and urgently. “Don’t underestimate the
Klingons, Jim. Their way is brutality and force, but believe me, that isn’t all. They want to spread
terror in the Federation. Confusion and soft target strikes like the spaceport must be part of a larger
plan.”

“What plan?” Kirk asked. “What could they possibly win by terrorizing civilians?”

“That may not be correct question, Pyāra. What is their endgame? How long do you think the
planets’ governments will tolerate Klingon assaults like the one Koloth is up to? How long do you
think are the governments willing to watch Starfleet’s attempts to keep the Klingons out of
Federation territory? Eventually, they will demand more from the Council and the Admiralty. How
long until they take matters into their own hands? Some of them already have. And what would it
mean for the future of the Federation?”

Jim stared at him and realized his lover was right. “It would be the beginning of the end of the
Federation – of the allies and partnerships.”

Khan nodded. “The Klingons’ tactic is simple. Simple but successful: Drive a wedge between the
members of the Federation, and rip the union apart. Then the Klingons can seize planets one-by-one
including Earth. And, if you ask me, they’re already doing a damn good job!”

Kirk rubbed his neck uncomfortably. “So,” he began slowly. “What would you suggest?”

This time real bafflement appeared on the Augment’s face. “You are asking me how your Starfleet
should proceed to win the war?”

“You are not only one of the most brilliant men in the universe, but you have a unique perception of
the world. I hate to admit it, but Starfleet’s current structure may… actually preclude it from taking
the actions it needs to take in the time it takes act.” He caught Khan’s quick, smug, smirk and rolled
his eyes, before he continued, “You, on the other hand, think more quickly and have the freedom to
act without consulting a committee. You do what it is necessary, when it is necessary and without expending needless energy. So… I’m guessing you already have a few ideas cooking in that brain of yours.”

A little chuckle escaped the super-human and a soft shimmer emerged in his eyes. “This is a most unusual request.” He cocked his head. “You do realize that even if I did have a plan, Starfleet would never listen to it?”

The younger man shrugged. “I am here and you know that I’m a good listener. Maybe we can come up with something together?” He grinned. “Besides, we make a good team. Just look at our body count! My numbers have more than doubled since I got you.”

Khan snorted amusedly. “Yes. And I am entirely certain that your superiors would throw their hands up in horror if they ever found out who ‘you got’.”

“Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, which brings us back to the topic at hand.” He bent forwards and locked eyes with his beloved. “Are you going to help?”

“Help with what?”

Jim grimaced. “Oh, come on, baby. This ‘I-don’t-know-what-you-mean’ really doesn’t suit you. You are far too smart for it.” His gaze roamed softly over the pale features of the Augment, who had managed to crawl under his skin straight into his heart and soul. He stepped closer to Khan so that their bodies so very nearly touched and spoke – almost into his lips. “Would you help me…” He punctuated his words with a kiss. “…figure out…” And another. “…how to stop the insanity that threatens to burn the whole galaxy?” He nudged Khan’s cheek with his own and kissed him again, then stepped back just a bit.

For a long moment Khan didn’t say anything and only looked at the young captain. Then he bent forward; his countenance was solemn. “Whenever you need me or my help, Jim, just ask. You are my mate – the most important person to me, followed by my family. And even if I could find my crew right now and take them to safety, I would be there for you.” He took Jim’s hand in his own and squeezed it gently. “We are bound to each other now, by blood and so much more. I will never let you down.”

“Yes, I know… and I do. Need you.” Kirk whispered to him, touched. Warm feelings rose in him as he saw the absolute fondness in his lover’s eyes and heard – again – his special vow of loyalty and love. “And…” He stopped, as he heard the familiar buzzing of transporter beams. A moment later Galven, Caviw, and Jeff materialized beside them, grinning as they watched the two men stepping
hastily away from each other dropping one another’s hands.

“And this in broad daylight,” Galven oinked. “Really, boys, you can’t keep your hands off of each other, can you?”

“It’s difficult, yes,” Khan drawled. Then he turned his attention to a person jogging around the corner closing in on them. It was Diego; he’d apparently had gotten their location from Galven or one his fellows.

Jeff observed Kirk. The last time he had seen him, the young captain had been full of bruises, cuts, and other injuries. Though most of them were nothing more than some shadows, nearly healed now; some new ones had been added. He frowned. “You got yourself a few more… war wounds,” he murmured, but Jim only grinned,

“You should see the other guy.”

“Yes, after Drythen finished with him. Or shall I say ‘with them’?” Diego’s voice panted behind them. The Chilean was out of breath and smirked at the two lovers. “Brimstone and gall, amigos, do you always leave a track of chaos like this? I certainly can’t show up at Sean’s ever again.”

Jim was about to apologize, and then he saw the excited gleam in Diego’s eyes and the broad grin on his face before the Chilean turned serious again. “All jokes aside, my friends, what about the Klingons?”

“We lost them,” Kirk grumbled. “Nien and I have surmised as best we could. It definitely has something to do with the spaceport or Starfleet’s base here in town – or both.”

Jeff nodded slowly. “That would make sense. Why don’t you contact Starfleet for reinforcements? They can find the Klingons faster. Problem solved.”

Kirk hesitated, the same idea had already occurred to him; then he shook his head. “Not possible, Jeff.” His looked to Khan who instantly understood.

“You don’t worry about me, Jim. The chance that one of them will recognize me is…” The former dictator hesitated. “It’s very small.”
“I’m not taking the risk and I’m not letting you!” the younger man said fiercely, locking his mate with his gaze. “You know what would happen, if they find you.” And as Khan went to protest, Kirk added, “Protecting your mate is not a one-way street! It goes both ways, and you will let me – end of story!” It was the first time he’d addressed Khan as such in front of the group, but the Augment needed to understand he loved him just as much as Khan did him – and he was capable of protecting that love even against Nien’s will. Ignoring the Augment’s scowl, he addressed Galven who hid a smile at the captain’s confession. “Do one of your ships have some decent sensors? Maybe we can locate them.”

“Standard sensors, nothing special,” the Tellarit answered and Jim cursed quietly. With standard sensors, they would need hours to scan the whole town – hours they didn’t have.

“What if we use all three ships? Their sensors can scan parallel different parts of the town and…” Caviw’s suggestion was well intended, but Kirk shook his head.

“Still too slow. The Klingons we met are descendants from those altered with human Augment-DNA. Their body temperature is still lower than that of Terrans and their heart rate is faster, but even the Enterprise’s sensors would need some time to locate Koloth and the others in a bio scan. And there is still the matter of the traitor, who is with them. We couldn’t locate him that way.”

“A traitor?” Jeff asked, and Khan nodded sharply. If there was one thing he hated on principle, it was traitors.

“A middle-ages man, Terran heritage as far as I could see. He was with the Klingons and led them through the streets as we pursued them. He has to be a contact man given his familiarity with the area.”

“Then he must know about the spaceport and the Starfleet base if these are the Klingons’ targets,” Galven mused; his little eyes lay on Kirk. “I think, lad, you have no other choice than to contact your uniformed comrades.” His gaze shifted to Khan. “And concerning our Drythen here – we can beam you to the Shadow or the Flash. Then they will not see you and…”

“That’s out of the question!” the super-human interrupted him, fixing his gaze on the captain. “I know your tendency to get in deep water, James. I’ll go with you!”

The young captain sighed. “Nien, if Starfleet takes the matter into her own hands, then we’re out of the shot, so to speak. We might be out of our league anyway. The Klingons didn’t come unprepared
to Aldebaran, and they have support here. Whatever they’re up to is definitely well-planned, and it might be too big for us – even with The Shadows’ crews.”

Khan cocked his head. “I’m familiar with the scenario you’re imagining, Jim. This is war after all and…”

Kirk laid one hand on his lover’s arm. “This is not your war to fight, Nien,” he said quietly.

“But you are my fight. You are mine to fight for,” the Augment replied softly, yet determined to make his point. “And there is nothing or no one that will stop me from keeping you as safe!”

Caviw smiled smugly at the others; her gaze clearly said ‘told you so’, while Jeff pursed his lips. He recognized love when he saw it and that the engineered man was deeply in love with the young captain was as clear as the cloudless skies above them. Jeff had to admit that he was relieved that he made the right decision concerning Khan. The former Augment leader was anything but evil!

Galven snorted, half amused, half touched at this display of intense feelings, and Diego glanced fondly at the two younger men so madly smitten with each other. Then he took a deep breath and nudged Kirk in the side. “Go on, Jim, call Starfleet. And besides if the mission becomes official, the police can’t get my ass for the trouble in ‘The Stars’, after all I helped an important Starfleet officer. The brawl was official business, yeah?”

“Did they recognize you?” Kirk wanted to know, and the Chilean scoffed.

“Oh, definitely! And even if they didn’t, it’s only a matter of time before one of the patrons gives me away. No-one wants to pay for the mess we made, and the other guests will demand my share.”

Jim bit his lips, and looked from one man to another then murmured, “If you want to stay out of it, I understand.”

The Tellarit grunted in irritation. “We are not ducking out, lad; call your comrades!”

Resigned at their decision, but thankful all the same, Kirk opened the communicator and set it to a frequency only Starfleet members used and lifted the little device to talk. “This is Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise. I’m trying to reach Starfleet Quarters on Aldebaran III. Please come in!”
For a moment there was silence on the line; then a male voice answered, “This is Starfleet Quarters on Aldebaran III, Lieutenant Taylor. Identify yourself.”

Jim frowned. Hadn’t he given his name already? “This is Captain James T. Kirk from the USS…”

“I require you to refrain from jokes or get off the line. This frequency is only for Starfleet personnel, so…”

The young captain took a deep breath. “Haven’t I made myself clear, Lieutenant? I am Starfleet! This is Captain James Kirk, and I order you to put me through to your commander. This is an emergency code red, so…”

“Listen, man, because I’m only telling you this once: Captain Kirk is dead – caught and executed by Klingons as a general transmission from them informed us several days ago. So skip the nonsense and get off the line!”

Jim stared at Khan, then at Galven and gritted his teeth. “It seems the news about my death are a bit exaggerated, Lieutenant! I’m on Aldebaran on an undercover mission and…”

The line was cut off, and Kirk stared at the communicator as it was itself to blame for the Lieutenant’s stupidity. “I don’t believe it!” the Enterprise’s captain growled and hailed the frequency again. As soon as he got an answer he snapped, “Before you cut the line again, Lieutenant, I advise you to contact the Enterprise. Ask for…”

Again the line went dead, and Jim growled in frustration. “Idiot! I wanna rip his rank off through the communicator!” He snapped the communicator closed and frowned; his clever mind was already musing alternatives. “Galven, is Ritek still on his ship in the orbit?”

“Yes, my message caught him under the sonic shower and he said he would come in several minutes. So…”

“Call him and ask him to contact the Enterprise.”

“Your ship will be light years away, Jim. Your officers’ intervention would come too late,” Khan
said quietly, and Jim smirked.

“‘If the mountain won’t come to Muhammad; Muhammad must go to the mountain’ – or something like that. I hope for the sake of this overeager lieutenant’s career that he will believe Spock.”

Galven’s oink was accompanied by a snicker; then he took out his own communicator. “Chipmunk here speaks the cleverer of us two.”

For a moment there was silence before the unmistakable voice of Ritek answered, “I doubt that highly, Mr. Piggy. So, what’s up?”

“Can you hail the Enterprise?” Galven asked; his eyes flashed at the new nickname the Rigelian had given him.

“Does it concern the boy’s newest development down on the planet?” Ritek sounded very serious all of sudden and Jim raised his voice.

“Yeah, it’s about that, Ritek. So could you…?”

“Consider it done, Captain!”

Jim sighed, hoping that everything would be easier after talking with Spock. He couldn’t know that his Vulcan friend was unable to answer the call…

ST***ST***ST

McFurthon had closed the channel and smiled. Korax showed a sense of Klingon humor as he said, “That was clever, ‘Lieutenant Taylor’.” He pointed at the console. “Do you know where Kirk is?”

The former officer nodded. “Three streets up at the main road; he’s cut off from any support Starfleet could give him.” He left the console on standby so that it would mask him as soon as Kirk tried another Starfleet frequency. “We can’t attack him there – too many witnesses. But I think we will meet him at our targets. The man is no idiot and has likely guessed why you are here and what you plan to do.” He pointed to a lowboy. “I stored some phasers for you in there, as well as two
tricorders. I am sure they will be needed to eliminate the nuisance Kirk. And even if the man in his company is an Augment, I don’t think his body can resist a phase set to kill!” He glanced at Koloth. “You want revenge for you humiliation, your broken arm and your dead comrades on your home world? I think you are very close to getting it!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, this is nasty. McFurthon is anything but stupid and is a step ahead our friends – or so it seems. After all, he has two geniuses as opponents (Jim and Khan).

In the next chapter anything starts to become worse for our dear captain, his lover and their unusual friends. And Nien will ask Jim for the other Augments of one century back, what will lead to a certain decision.

I hope you liked the new chapter and I’m – as always – curious of your thoughts.

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

Yeah, the next update is installed and I hope you’re going to like it. Thank you so much for the comments and kudos; I’m really happy that the break of almost one month didn’t drive you away and that you’re still so attached to the story.

In the new chapter old loose strings will come together – the Klingon strike group is approaching, the Enterprise is still on the scout-mission, yet Spock and the others are worrying mainly for their captain. Ritek will show once again how clever he is, Galven and the others try to find Koloth (who has his own plans), and then there will be the talk between Jim and Nien concerning the other young Augments a century ago. It will be heart-wrenching, believe me.

I wish you fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 28 – Of tricks and contemplations

The Enterprise raced through the space, nearing enemy annexed territory – the former Neutral Zone and deep space K7. Everyone’s nerves were on edge – tight as a bowstring. Beta shift was ready for relief but the bridge was crowded. But Spock knew better than to insist they leave. The atmosphere on board was already tense. Everyone worried over their captain, even the ones who knew his whereabouts. If Kirk needed to convalesce for so long, his injuries had to be bad and the uncertainty of the captain’s health combined with a possible Klingon strike hurt the crew morale; the tension was so palatable you could cut it with a knife.

Sulu and Chekov remained at their stations as did Scotty, McCoy and of course Spock. They needed the whole crew for this task. If together, they could figure out the enemy’s next move, it could mean survival of the UFP. Every officer gave their best. All of them (save the Vulcan) wanted to make their captain and friend proud of them. None of them wanted their captain safe and back among them more than the Vulcan.

Suddenly, Nyota turned in her seat; her eyes went wide. “Commander, I’m receiving a transmission from The Shadow. Mr. Ritek wants to speak with you. He says it’s urgent.”
Spock lifted a brow. Even without data he simply knew that the militia’s attempt to get in contact with him had to do with Kirk. There could not be another reason for it. And Jim wouldn’t try to reach him if it were not important.

“Time of arrival, Mr. Sulu?” he asked, and the helmsman answered, “Two hours and fifty-eight minutes, sir.”

The Vulcan nodded slowly. Answering the call now could give them away even if The Shadow used Code 9. The Klingons hadn’t cracked that encryption yet. But if they did, the Klingons could triangulate the signal and attack. Or even worse, if the enemy cracked the encryption and stayed quiet, they would have the opportunity to learn of Starfleet’s plans and gain the strategic advantage. Spock inwardly begged Jim’s forgiveness. Highly illogical, but he couldn’t answer the hail and know for certain that the Enterprise would be safe and though the probability was high that it was Kirk, there was no way to be certain. He turned around in the captain’s chair. “No reply, Lieutenant,” he ordered and caught the sideways glances of the crew. “Any external communication could be caught by the Klingons. Even if they cannot decrypt the transmission, they would know that there is a Starfleet vessel in this parsec. That would put us all in unnecessary danger, and the captain needs us and his ship safe if he is to return.” Spock smartly appealed to their love for their captain.

“And… if the captain needs our help?” Uhura asked quietly, returning her lover’s firm gaze with one of her own.

“The Shadow is orbiting the same planet that the captain is on and Jim has a ‘bodyguard’, as you and Dr. McCoy are convinced. Whatever the situation, Jim is well equipped to handle it.”

“Isn’t hope an emotion?” one of the officers mumbled under his breath; still the Vulcan’s sensitive hearing caught it, but he let it pass. The tension on the bridge was already thick enough. So Spock leaned back in the captain’s chair and fixed his eyes on the large screen, indeed ‘hoping’ that Jim would be all right.

ST***ST***ST

On Aldebaran III, Jim Kirk paced nervously back and forth. Ritek had been trying to reach the Enterprise for more than a quarter of an hour now without success. Normally, the ship wasn’t out of subspace communications range. If fleet command dismissed the Enterprise from her current mission, Spock would have sent him a message. His Vulcan friend wouldn’t leave without informing him. So, why did his ship not answer? The Enterprise was on an observing mission – relatively safe as mission go, but Jim didn’t have any details. What if his friends had run into Klingons and…?
Suddenly a warm, slender hand lay on his shoulder. “Stop this, Jim, or you’ll run a hole in the street,” Khan said calmly. “Maybe your ship is out of range and…”

“Spock would not leave without telling me,” Kirk murmured. “That means he can’t answer the hails. But, why?” He bit his lips before he whispered. “They were ordered on a scouting mission. What if they were attacked…?” He made a gesture with his hand; the worry that was so palpable reflected in his eyes.

“Or they must maintain radio silence due to the mission; perhaps they found something and need to gather more information,” the Augment suggested. “I didn’t answer the hails as I headed to Turkana for you. The Enterprise tried for hours, but I could not reply for fear of revealing myself.”

Jim tried to smile, and failed miserably. “Maybe – maybe not. Not knowing what’s happening out there, if my friends, my crew, and my ship are all okay… Fuck. I hate it!”

“I know, James,” Nien answered quietly. “I know exactly what you are enduring.”

The two lovers looked at each other, and Kirk nodded finally; he remembered all too well what Khan told him about the uncertain times after his family and he fled Earth, and the time after when he had been woken up by Marcus – never sure what really happened to his dear ones, only knowing that they were in danger. Nien was perhaps the only one who understood his fear. It was the fear of a leader, a friend, and a brother. It reminded him to thank fate, God, whatever, for his lover.

Galven stepped near to them; sympathy, but also determination mirrored in his small eyes. “Ritek will remain aboard the Flash and continue trying to get your ship, Captain, but I think we should take some measures of our own.”

Kirk made an affirming gesture. “Yes, we should – and we will. Do you have any portable scanners aboard?”

“We have some tricorders and…”

“Very good. We’ll split up. We’ll take a look at the spaceport and the Starfleet outpost. Each group gets one tricorder. I know Koloth and the others, you guys don’t, so you have to scan every man who passes by the entrances. It’s cumbersome, but it’s our only chance to find them.”
“What could they achieve by blowing up the spaceport and the outpost? Aldebaran, I understand, but then what? We don’t have many mineral resources or anything else that could be in their interest,” Diego grumbled.

Kirk sighed, “They would have another piece of the Federation under their control.” He pursed his lips. “Not a pleasant thought. Then they’d have another staging area to continue their of more Federation airspace. From here, it’s not far to the other inhabited planets in this sector that belong to the Federation and…”

“Jim, maybe this is only the beginning of a larger invasion,” Khan mused and caught is beloved’s asking glance. “The Federation wants peace talks; as far as we know the Klingons have not responded until now. Maybe they want to make a last attempt at victory before they decide to accept the offer.”

“By seizing a single planet system?” Jeff cocked his head. “They already occupy so much and…”

“I am not familiar with the exact layout of the Federation’s borders, but maybe to seizing Aldebaran is strategically important,” Khan mused, and Kirk frowned.

“You could be right,” he murmured. “Their target could be the Aldebaran System, first, and then Tandar and finally Betazed. If the Klingons seized those parsecs, they would isolate all the planets of the Federation between Klingon Empire and the Cardassian Union. One-by-one, they could take down all our colonies and allied planets without having to fear Starfleet intervention. We wouldn’t be able to help them. The Klingons would bag a quarter of the Federation, and we’d be rendered helpless.”

“So attacking Aldebaran first is logical,” Nien nodded. “If I wanted to annex territory, I would proceed the same way. Encircling first, then strike. The Klingons are at the beginning stages of a major offensive! Koloth’s presence leaves no doubt.” He cocked his head. “And maybe this is why the Enterprise will not answer. If a major offensive is imminent, then one or two Fleet strike groups have to be nearby – possibly directly in the former Neutral Zone. It is possible that your ship saw them and is observing them from a safe distance.”

Jim paled. “If the Klingons find them, then…”

“Remember, your friends have my device. I don’t know much about of your chief engineer aside from his name. You called on him often during our flight between the two ships; I will never forget it…”
Kirk grimaced. Yeah, he had called ‘Scotty’ a lot.

“… but as far as I understand he is a good engineer…”

“He’s not just good; he’s a genius,” Jim sighed; it made Khan smile for a moment before he continued, “… and I have no doubt that ‘Scotty’ has studied my device, and that it is integrated in the general ship’s functions by now. The Klingons will not be able to scan the Enterprise. They can only recognize her if she comes into visual contact. Your Vulcan can prevent that. He is highly intelligent, I have to give him that.” His gaze became warmer. “So, don’t worry too much, Pyāra. They will be relatively safe.”

The young captain looked grateful at Nien; the Augment’s words soothed him a little bit – well, concerning his ship. But the other matters…

“So, we are facing a major Klingon strike – a bid to take over Federation space starting right here – on this planet, in this town, directly under our noses. And I’m standing here and can’t anything about it because some little, smartass doesn’t believe that I am me,” Jim growled. “Dammit!” He took a deep breath, suppressing his frustration. “All right, we’ll split up. Caviw and Diego, you go to the Starfleet station and watch the entries. Scan the area for Klingon bio-signs. Galven, you and Jeff go to the main entrance of the spaceport. Koloth and the traitor have never seen you so they won’t get suspicious when they see you. Nien and I are will watch the side entrance and…”

“There is also a large cargo area,” Diego interrupted him. In the background, Galven called Ritek and asked for three tricorders and some phasers. “Usually cargo is stored there until the customs is done with it. The area holds HAZMAT. If they decide to plant explosives there, the effect would be devastating.”

“Right, then Nien and I will check the cargo area, too. We’ll remain in contact, but switch-off the audio on your communicators. It’s safer this way. Set them to vibrate so you can tell if someone is trying to get in touch with you.”

He looked to Galven as the Tellarit closed the small distance to him. “Ritek will beam down everything we need to my location in a few minutes. I’ll go into the pub to use the restroom. I’ll receive the ‘cargo’ there. I don’t think it wise if other people see phasers materializing in front of us.”

Jim grinned at him. “Clever,” he said, then he addressed Khan. “You sure you want to do this? It’s dangerous, and if the authorities show…” He stopped when the Augment glared at him, and lifted
both hands. “Alright, alright, I’ll shut up.”

“Good!” Khan grumbled. The others laughed and Jim pouted. Then Kirk turned serious again. “Okay, guys, even if our super-hero here sees this as a walk in the part, I can assure you it’s not! It can and will be very dangerous as soon as we locate the Klingons. So if someone wants to back out, do it now or forever hold your peace!” Five pairs of eyes looked to him, but the mouths stayed silent, and Jim smiled. “Thanks,” he said softly. “I appreciate it.”

“Then you certainly will be even more happy to hear that Ritek has alerted our other members and that they are ready to support us,” Galven oinked. “All you have to do is ask, and the whole gang comes running – or beaming, in this case.” He winked at the young captain and headed for the small restaurant to receive the ‘cargo’ as he put it.

Jim and Khan exchanged a glance. It was good to have friends!

ST***ST***ST

Korax and Kaghon entered the hotel. Koloth had stayed with McFurthon, who had much to do, what with their change of plans. Kurhan and Noras were also with their commander awaiting instructions. All Korax knew about the new plan was that his commander was going to lure Kirk into a trap; the rest were continuing with the original plan of bringing down Aldebaran’s defenses. The first officer mused that Koloth would also use Kirk as a hostage to keep the Augment at bay and to force surrender. The *Qli-jagh* wouldn’t risk Kirk’s life; that much was obvious from the Turkana ordeal as well as the more recent pub brawl.

‘It is a shame! The *Qli-jagh* is a great and fierce warrior yet he sticks to this weak, common human. Yes, Kirk is a warrior but without honor – a terrorist. The *Qli-jagh* could do better than be taken with Kirk. Feelings… Every human becomes weak with them, even the augmented ones!’

He entered his commander’s room and quickly selected the harmless materials there suited to his needs. Each piece, on its own, seemed useless but taken together they would bring death and destruction.

Kaghon looked out of the window and suddenly tensed. “Kirk is there! And the Augment too,” he said, pointing outside. Korax was at his side in a flash. Sneering, the first officer nodded as he watched two human males walking quickly down the pavement.

“Koloth was right. Kirk saw through our intent – but it will be of no use. Our plans have changed and he and his Augment friend will walk straight into our trap.” He pulled his communicator from
his belt and activated it.

“Captain?” he hailed his commanding officer. “You were right – Kirk is here!”

He didn’t have to wait very long for an answer. “Very good! Where is he heading?”

“To the cargo area of the spaceport,” Korax replied and heard his captain chuckling.

“Perfect! Koloth out!”

Korax deactivated the communicator and exchanged a glance with Kaghon. “Everything is going smoothly!” he said.

ST***ST***ST

Caviw and Jeff stared across the street at the Starfleet outpost located in one of the less harried quarters of New Aldebaran. Surrounding the outpost were several contract companies and consulate buildings. The few houses that could be seen belonged to company CEOs and the few diplomats posted on Aldebaran. A small restaurant stood across from the Starfleet building; the Caitian and the young human were there watching the passersby. They ordered a bit of food and something to drink so as to seem innocuous. Every now and then secretly checking the pedestrians and patrons with their tricorder; the two pretended to be a pair of lovers, feigning slight touches and loving looks, hoping that nothing would slip their attention.

Covering as an Aldebaran resident showing the spaceport to a friend he hadn’t seen in a long time, Diego and Galven ‘enjoyed’ the port’s shops. The Chilean checked today’s arrivals and frowned as he read on the large displays that only a freighter was expected in the next half hour. Because he was well-known in the spaceport, it was Galven who went to the information office pretending to be a businessman waiting for his goods. A young Andorian lady was very sorry to tell him that the freighter Athena didn’t come from Tellar and didn’t carry the Tellarian food he was waiting for, but liquid plastic used for Aldebaran industry. Thanking the woman, Galven left to tell Diego what he had learned.

Alarm bells went off in the heads of both men. “Liquid plastic is quite flammable. The freighter is carrying hundreds of tons of the stuff. Can you imagine what would happen if those tanks are blown up?” Galven whispered, and Diego nodded, reaching for his communicator. The Tellarit continued observing the area with his tricorder, and the Chilean hailed Kirk.
He had to wait a moment, before the quite voice of the young captain answered. Quickly he informed the Starfleet officer what Galven and he had learned.

“Dammit!” Jim whispered. “The plastic would increase the impact of whatever they are using as an explosive several times over. We have to find the others before it’s too late.”

“I’ll get what we need from our comrades,” Galven murmured and opened his own communicator, putting distance between himself and Diego.

“Can you enter the cargo area without trouble, Jim?” the Chilean wanted to know and heard the captain snorting,

“There are four guards. Several minutes ago, a man attempted entry. They had him present a slew of documents before they let him pass. Security is everywhere; still Koloth’s going to find a way inside. Can he beam inside, maybe, using the official transporter?”

“Negative,” Diego sighed. “The cargo area is shielded. Otherwise too many ‘businessmen’ would see a self-serve and help themselves to the goods.”

“Rrright. Well at least that option is off the table. On the other hand, Nien and I are having trouble entering the area, what with all the guards and…”

“I know most of the guards because I do a lot of shipping and receiving. Maybe I can smuggle you inside. Where are you?”

“Across the street from the west entrance into the cargo area,” Khan’s deep baritone answered, and Diego nodded unseen by the two men.

“All right, just wait. I’ll be there in a few minutes.” He closed the communicator and looked at Galven, who ended his own call just then.

“We will have seven of our people here about three minutes,” the Tellarit said. “Go to Kirk and Kh-Drythen. We have to have them inside of the cargo area.”
Diego made an affirming gesture, for a moment confused why Galven had stumbled over Drythen’s name. Then he waved at the Tellarit and quickly walked away.

McFurthon looked up from the communications station and glanced at Koloth whose face wore an even more determined expression than before. “So, Kirk thinks the cargo area is safe because of the shield. Naïve, if you ask me, but his misdirection is handy. He will not know the plan until it is too late,” the former officer said. He congratulated himself as he thought back to Kirk’s communication interception. He turned his attention to the check-in list of the space harbor that he had hacked into earlier. He smiled as the name of the expected freighter appeared on the screen.

“The vessel has arrived,” he informed the Klingon captain. “Usually unloading proceedings begin within an hour of arrival.”

Koloth bared his teeth in a parody of a smile. “Right, then it begins now!” He activated his borrowed communicator, opened another frequency, and hailed the Klingon strike group waiting in the former Neutral Zone.

“General? I’m honored to inform you that the triumphal strike can begin!”

The answer came back in the guttural Klingon language, and Koloth cut off the link with a satisfied grin. “They are coming!”

“Time to arrival, Mr. Sulu?” Spock asked even though he knew that they would need more than another hour to reach their destiny.

“Sixty-five minutes, sir,” the helmsman answered; his body suddenly went stiff. “What the hell…” he whispered, before turning sharply around with his chair. “Mr. Spock, the vessels are moving – they’ve entered warp.”

The Vulcan was on his feet in a blink of an eye. “Course?” he asked as he hurried to his own station.
“I’m not sure, sir. It could be Aldebaran,” Hikaru said after another look at his instruments. He didn’t see the first officer stiffen, nor would he know why if he did. He added, “If they remain at speed, they will see us in twenty-three minutes and…”

“Full stop, Mr. Sulu!” the Vulcan interrupted him, and the Enterprise came to halt. Suppressing the sudden stab deep in him at the mere thought that the Klingons could be heading to the planet where his T’yth’la was recovering, Spock checked his sensors. Pressing his lips into a thin line for a moment, he murmured, “Eighteen vessels make up the strike group. That is what the sensors read before the ships cloaked.” He looked at the helmsman. “Mr. Sulu, standard measure points for ion trails and warp signatures. We have to find their exact heading.” His gaze found Uhura’s. “And we have to risk recognition. Transmit to the Lexington, Code 9: Klingon invasion. And give Commodore Wesley the coordinates of the Klingon’s last location.”

He bent over his sensors again, while he ordered, “Yellow alert, Mr. Chekov; General Quarters. We are going into battle.”

ST***ST***ST

“Pablo! It’s a surprise to see you on duty!” Diego beamed at the young guard at the cargo area check-in. Pablo Sanchez came from Chile too, and knew Diego very well, “I thought you were still on your honeymoon with sweet Maria!”

Sanchez grinned at him; his white teeth made for a sharp contrast against his tanned skin. “It’s my first day back at work,” he said. “It’s hard to be apart from her, but… well… duty, you know?”

The giant Chilean nodded and smirked. “Yeah, duty can royally disturb a lovely day.”

“Yeah, who you tellin’,” Pablo sighed; then he looked at the two strangers. “And who are you?” he asked.

His eyes went wide, and he was stock-still when his fellow countryman bent forwards and whispered, “Don’t tell anyone, but this is Captain James T. Kirk and one of his officers.”

The other Chilean stared with eyes large as saucers. “You are…” He looked at the young from top to bottom and took a sharp breath. “Indeed, it is you. I watched your memorial speech on the television and saw your picture on the news.” He blushed, and extended his hand. “It is a great honor to meet
you, Captain Kirk.”

Jim, who hadn’t known that Diego would blurt out his identity, cleared his throat and returned the gesture. “Thank you, Mr. Sanchez.” He pointed at Khan to whom Ritek had beamed down an old-fashioned baseball cap that the Augment wore pulled down over his eyes, a thoughtful measure by the Regulian. “My… tactical officer, Commander…”

“Commander Lavi, at your service, Mr. Sanchez,” Khan said, shaking the younger man’s hand too.

“Nice to meet you, Commander,” Pablo answered.

Jim glanced quickly at his beloved – Lavi? Why not! – And decided to grab the bull by the horns. “Mr. Sanchez, I’m undercover here and Commander Lavi and I need your help.”

The young guard snapped to attention. “How can I help you, sir?”

“We need to get into the cargo area. We think that spies of the enemy are here and…”

“Spies?” Thank the Lord the young man was bright; he lowered his voice. “Klingons?”

Jim nodded. “Yes.”

Sanchez paled. “Why don’t you call the Starfleet outpost here and…”

“They are already in the area and looking for them too,” Kirk lied through his teeth before he nodded at the large hold. “We have to…”

Pablo simply waved at them. “Follow me, sir!” he said; he walked to the check-in, signaled to the other watchmen, and then led the three men into the cargo area.

ST***ST***ST
General K’taH sat centrally in the upper leveled of the flag ship’s bridge and stared at the screen as if he could force the Federation ship to appear by his will alone. It was there; he trusted his comms officer to be right in this – or he’d pay with his life. The transmission had been scrambled using the same encryption that Klingon intelligence had been trying to crack for some time now. That was not all; it was as if the message had been sent from nowhere at all. There had to be a dispatcher, yet the sensors could not locate the source of the transmission. This was a riddle K’taH wanted to solve.

He had read Lord Kor’s report of the small vessel that appeared from nowhere at Turkana. The ship beamed aboard the sentenced terrorist Kirk and his rescuer, and then vanished. Kor had pursued it as long as he and his men were able and fired when in range. Once visual contact was lost though, no sensor aboard the Klingon ship could locate the vessel.

The same went now for the Federation vessel; it had to be near, still the sensors showed nothing.

The bulky, though strong Klingon rubbed his beard. He didn’t belong to those Klingons whose appearance had been influenced by the Augment DNA experiments, and he was proud of his pure, ridged Klingon appearance. Aye, he respected Kor, the last descendant of the Imperial Family, but he was convinced that the more human-like Klingons such as Kor also thought too much like humans. Kor was a fighter, but still there were several Klingons who regarded him as weak and – Kahless help him – even regarded him as a traitor after the negotiation of Organia.

Kor, son of Rynar, had negotiated with a staff-officer of Starfleet. It was some commodore K’taH didn’t remember, but Kor had talked about him with great respect. The general knew that there were indeed some humans, who were warrior enough to earn respect, still he would never say this aloud. Kor had told the High Council that they could trust this Earthling’s words; K’taH doubted this statement. And since the glorious Klingon Empire was at war with the Federation, he saw in her members nothing more than whimpering cowards. This offer of peace talks – offer! It was an offense!

“Something new?” he barked, looking over at his science officer who turned around towards him.

“I am sorry, Milord, but the sensors still find nothing. Neither our sensors, nor those of our other ships.”

“There was a short message, but it’s impossible to tell from where it has been sent,” the communication officer confirmed.

K’taH bared his teeth, but stayed silent. Still his mind was in turmoil. ‘The Federation has developed a new technical device that hinders our sensors from detecting her ships. Another low trick of these cowards!’ He cocked his head and felt his long, thick plaited hair fall over his shoulder.
“Sensors on maximum power! Even if this Federation vessel is playing dead it has to leave a warp signature. Find them!”

His science officer nodded and fixed his attention back on his station. K’taH bit his lips. ‘Nothing is invisible!’ he thought. ‘Even the enhancements of our newest generation of cloaking-devices which will be installed at our vessels soon will be obsolete in a matter of months!’

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“The Shadow is still trying to contact us, Commander,” Uhura reported and looked at her lover, who seemed lost in the information at his station.

“The short message to the Lexington was risky enough. If we send a longer transmission, the Klingons would have enough data to triangulate its point of origin - us, but we still need more information about them before we can continue.”

“New data from the fourth measuring point, Mr. Spock,” Sulu said while he watched his display intensely. “In due consideration of the first measuring point and their present course, they are heading for Aldebaran. With regard to their speed, sir, they are going to see us in two minutes.”

Spock nodded. He had already anticipated the disaster. “Does the sensor-disturbing device still work, Mr. Sulu?” he wanted to know and the helmsman glanced back at him.

“Yes, sir, it running smoothly.”

The Vulcan straightened his frame. “Red alert, Mr. Chekov! All hands to their battle stations. Mr. Sulu, take us away from here. Course – Aldebaran.” His gaze found Uhura’s again. “Send a message to Starfleet Command. The Klingons have begun a major strike against this sector! And please inform Commodore Wesley about the enemy’s target. The Klingons will reach it in two hours and fifty-three minutes.” He stepped beside the captain’s chair and activated the intercom. “Engineering, battle stations.” He changed the frequency. “Bridge to med bay. Doctor McCoy, prepare your station for casualties.” Before he could cut off the link, the CMO’s voice sounded.

“What’s happening up there, Spock?”
The Vulcan’s keen eyes lay on the screen and the tactical picture of the advancing enemy. “The Klingons have decided to annex this sector,” he said calmly. “A larger strike-group is on its way to Aldebaran and…”

“Holy shit – JIM is there!” Bones yelled. Sulu and Chekov looked over their shoulders at the acting captain. He and the doctor knew where Kirk was and hadn’t said anything? Not that they were obligated to, but Kirk was Hikaru’s and young Pavel’s friend too. They were just as concerned and wanted to know the whereabouts of the ship’s ‘heart’ so to speak.

Spock lifted a brow. “I’m aware of it, Doctor.”

“And are you going to do about it?” Leonard almost challenged.

“Whatsoever is necessary!” With those words, he cut off the line and sat down in the captain’s chair.

McCoy was right.

Jim was on Aldebaran!

If the Klingons seized the star-system and its third planet, his T’hy’la would fall into the enemy’s hands again. The planet was not as well protected as it should be, but if the Klingons arrived before Starfleet, the Enterprise might be able to stall the assault just long enough to enable reinforcements to arrive before the entire planet was subdued.

“One ship against eighteen. That’s not logic; it’s hope at best!” his Vulcan side whispered, and the first officer pursed his lips. Maybe he chose a way that wasn’t a way at all, but, as Jim Kirk says, ‘if you run out of options go with your gut.’

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Ritek leaned back in his chair, frustrated and resigned to failure. “You either can’t or won’t answer, Enterprise?” he grumbled. “Holy stones, when you uniform-wearers are needed, you’re unreachable!” He shook his head. Someone had to tell this idiot of lieutenant down at the Starfleet station that Kirk was indeed… well, Kirk! Someone who knew the young captain had to clear up the misunderstanding and…”
The Rigelian went rigid before he groaned and slapped his forehead – a gesture he had adopted from his Terran friends. “Not the lieutenant. Damn, I’m an idiot! Why didn’t I think of it sooner?” He bent forwards again and adjusted a wideband frequency using the Code 9. “This is The Shadow to USS Lexington! Come in, Lexington!”

He had to repeat his hail three times before he received an answer.

“This is the USS Lexington. Who is speaking?” a male voice wanted to know.

“This is Ritek from The Shadow. Patch me through to Commodore Wesley, please. It’s urgent! Captain Kirk needs…”

“One moment!” he interrupted the voice; then the visual signal caught up with the voice. Quickly, Ritek activated the large main screen on the small bridge. He looked straight at the level gaze of Bob Wesley. Tension and worry lay in the commodore’s brown eyes, and he seemed to have some more grey hair since the last visual transmission. He bent forwards slightly. “Mr. Ritek!” he greeted and the Rigelian nodded back.

“Commodore, we have a situation here – a grave one. Klingons are here – we think to blow up our spaceport, and one of your outposts. The outpost doesn’t believe that Kirk is Kirk, and now…”

Wesley lifted a hand. Since receiving the first message from the Enterprise indicating that a Klingon strike group had entered Federation space between former K7 and DS 133, his ship was on red alert. He had ordered all ships in the surrounding parsecs to the area. Even without the new information from Kirk’s Vulcan first officer, he simply knew that a decisive battle in this war was imminent. Receiving a kind of SOS from The Shadow concerning a ‘situation’ and Kirk was something he didn’t need. Still, he knew he couldn’t ignore it. What’s more, if he was quite honest with himself, he’d admit that the situation did need Kirk. “Please, one thing at a time, Mr. Ritek. Where are you? And what does Captain Kirk need from me?”

Sighing, the Rigelian quickly explained what happened and was about to happen. The commodore’s expression changed from concern to shock and finally became grim while his hands tightened around the armrests of his chair. “It fits!” he whispered. “Their planned major strike begins on Aldebaran!”

Ritek had heard the quiet words and went pale. “A Klingon invasion? Kirk and Drythen think the same thing. Koloth and his Klingons are here on Aldebaran to…”
“Koloth? Captain Koloth?” Wesley interrupted him and the Rigelian nodded.

“Yes, that’s the name Captain Kirk mentioned. He, Drythen and one of our friends had a run-in with this Koloth and…”

Bob groaned. “Of course those two had to run into each other!” He shook his head and asked himself, not for the first time, how it was possible that Kirk always stumbled into trouble! Scratch that. He didn’t stumble into it - he went looking for it! Then he went rigid. “So the Klingons are aware that we know of their presence on Aldebaran?” As the Rigelian made another gesture of confirmation, he sighed. “They will change their plans. No doubt about it. Can you…”

“Commodore, an incoming message from the Enterprise!” his communication officer interrupted him. “Code red!”

“Mr. Ritek, hold the line, please!” Wesley said, and then he nodded to Palmer. “On speaker Lieutenant.”

He heard the warm, melodious voice of the young, dark-skinned woman he knew to be Nyota Uhura. “This is the USS Enterprise. The Klingon invaders are heading for the Aldebaran System. Estimated time of arrival, two hours and fifty-three minutes.”

Wesley cursed. It was becoming a habit since the war started. But he didn’t question the Enterprise, he knew better. “Message our ships, Lieutenant Palmer. Klingon invasion. Target annexation of Aldebaran. Prepare to intercept the enemy at coordinates 42.3591.” He looked at his helmsman. “Set course to Aldebaran, Warp 9!” He made a signal, and Ritek was on the air again. “Mr. Ritek, what I’m telling you now is very delicate information. I hope you’re able to handle it with prudence. A Klingon strike group is on its way to Aldebaran. It's most certainly in connection with Koloth’s presence on the planet. I need to…”

“… To talk to Kirk?” the Rigelian threw in. He had paled at what he just learned but remained calm.

“Yes, after I spoke with our outpost. Something is odd here. To ignore an emergency code red is… uncommon.”

Ritek nodded. “All right, sir, I’m on standby.” The Rigelian’s expression was determined, after he had overcome his shock.
“One more moment, Mr. Ritek,” Bob said, lifting a hand. “What’s the name of said lieutenant, who ignored an emergency code red on our own frequency?”

“Taylor, sir,” Ritek answered, before he added, “Commodore, Kirk is with my people down on the planet. They’re trying to locate the Klingons, but we can’t do it alone. They only have tricorders to scan the bio-signals around them and the Klingons in question are from Imperial families. Human looking, we’re afraid we won’t recognize them. The differences between human and human-like Klingon bio-signals is difficult to ascertain. I’ll have my ship and Galven’s ship scan the area, but we only have simple standard sensors and…”

“I’ll take care of it, Mr. Ritek. Thank you for your quick reaction and please continue with your scans. Maybe you’ll find our ‘friends’ before we can. And please remain ready to receive the equipment!”

The screen on board of the *Flash* went dark and Ritek gulped. A Klingon invasion – here, on this planet. And he was stuck in middle.

“SHIT! As Galven asked me to kick some Orion asses I never dreamed that I would find myself involved in the war, helping Starfleet!” He punched the buttons on his station. “I’m going to send Command a bill when this is over!”

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Back on Aldebaran at the Starfleet outpost, Commander Elias Capricio ruminated over the last reports of yesterday’s patrol; he saw that another freighter had arrived in the space harbor. He was about to answer his messages when the intercom buzzed.

“Commander, Commodore Wesley on the line for you.”

Capricio’s dark eyebrows shot up. *Santa Maria!* What could the highest ranking officer in this sector want from him? “Patch him through Lieutenant Anderson!” he ordered and watched the screen on his desk come alive; the grey haired staff-officer appeared. He knew him only knew from video transmissions and holographs.

“Commodore Wesley!” he greeted; the other man nodded shortly.
“Commander Capricio, You have a big problem. Two to be precise. Listen…”

Wesley explained the planet’s impending situation. Capricio reacted as a Starfleet officer in his position ought. Even as Wesley was on the screen, the Italian gave the red alert, called his leading officers to his office, and ordered a complete scan of the town.

Bob looked at the outpost’s commander. “You would have been informed sooner, but one of your communication officers omitted passing an emergency code red call to you!”

The Italian man stared wide-eyed at his superior. “I… beg your pardon, sir? I don’t know about a call like that. When…”

“That’s the problem. Lieutenant Taylor refused to link Captain Kirk to you. He’s on Aldebaran and requires…”

“I hate to interrupt you, sir, but I none of my officers go by that name. Not anymore.”

The commander’s dark eyes narrowed. “Explain!”

“Lieutenant Josef Taylor transferred to Starbase 67 a week ago, and there is no one else by that name, sir.”

Wesley frowned. “Where’d he work?”

“Comms, sir,” Capricio replied.

Pursing his lips, Bob thought about his knew bit of information. “So, you have no Lieutenant Taylor on your team, but Kirk spoke to one when he tried to contact this post. This man refused to patch Kirk through. Told the answering officer that the Enterprise’s captain was dead which is not the case!”

The commander bent forwards slightly. “Sir, I have no information that Captain Kirk is on this planet, and…”
“He is… he’s on mission now, but that’s not important right now, Commander.” Wesley took a deep breath. “What is important is that you have a mole on your team, and we know that because Kirk tried to reach you via our emergency frequency, but was put off. Who is on duty now?”

“Lieutenant Anderson, sir. He’s been on for about five hours now. He’s a good man – one of my best. I can’t imagine it’d be him intercepting calls for the enemy.”

Wesley nodded slowly. “Alright, we’ll take care of that detail later. You have another problem to solve. I’m on my way to Aldebaran, but we won’t be there for another…” He glanced at his helmsman, who said,

“Two hours, fifteen minutes, sir.”

“You heard that?” Bob said to him; he nodded.

“I understand, Commodore. I’ll keep you updated. Aldebaran out.” He switched off the comm screen and looked up when his senior officers stepped into his office. “Ladies and gentlemen, we have a situation!” he said rising up from his seat.

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On Aldebaran, Jim and Khan left Diego who continued watching the entrance of the cargo area with Pablo’s help. Even though this section of the spaceport was shielded, Kirk didn’t trust the stillness around them. He had met Koloth only one time, but he knew perfectly well how sneaky this particular Klingon was, and he didn’t want to give his adversary the chance to get the jump on them or succeed in his plans.

Hiding between two tanks with Nien beside him, he could see the entire area. He watched the borrowed tricorder’s display, ready to react as soon as the device detected Klingon presence.

Khan remained silent beside him; his engineered senses caught the quietest of noises and the stillest of movements. Still his thoughts drifted away from him. He reflected on what he had learned about the Klingon human appearance. There must be others! His people alive! Otherwise those experiments would have never been.
He pursed his lips. Though, in their present situation, this might not be the best time to ask, he decided to use the short pause fate had granted them to ask the questions that had been niggling at the edges of his thoughts since he learned about the other Augments. “Jim,” he began quietly. “Tell me about the Klingon experiments with… with the DNA of – of my people.”

Kirk stayed silent for moment. He nearly forgot about the topic. But now he would have to tell Nien. He didn’t look forward to the task. He never wanted to intentionally cause distress to the man who had captured his heart. And he certainly didn’t want to be the one to tell him that he and his people were the last of their kind. He also knew that this time was anything but ideal. But the matter embittered his beloved’s mind and soul. His man was a good man and deserved nothing less than the truth.

Giving the tricorder’s little display a last glance, he faced Khan, whose posture betrayed his tension. Taking a deep breath he began gently – feeling out his words, “After the Eugenics Wars, eighteen hundred embryos were found in labs around the world – Augment-embryos. Discussions regarding what to do with them went on for a long time. Finally the Organization of Human Rights won out. The embryos were kept in a sort of stasis.” He saw the tension growing in Khan and instinctively took one of his hands in his own before continuing. “Later, warp drive was developed and Earth made contact with Vulcans and other species. So – and I don’t know who was in charge at this point. The embryos were brought to a safer place – a space station called Cold Station 12. Mid twenty-second century, a scientist – Dr. Soong – decided to prove that the Augments weren’t evil. Not like history made them out to be. He stole and raised twenty Augments from childhood, but he was caught by the authorities when the children were ten years old. The authorities didn’t know about them, though. Dr. Soong was arrested for illegal and unethical experimentation. The children grew up alone.”

“Alone! Ten year-old children!” Khan shook his head, shocked at the thought. “And I thought my poor excuse of a ‘childhood’ was difficult.” He felt Jim’s thumb stroking soothing circles on the back of his hand. The movement told him that there was worse to come. He was right.

“Mmm, they escaped about ten years later when a ship passed by the planet they were living on. They took it and freed the man they knew as their ‘father’ – the doctor. As far as is known, their leader just wanted to go somewhere safe and to live in peace but it didn’t work out. He was killed during a combat with another young Augment who wanted to ‘recover’ the Augment embryos for himself. They stole a Klingon bird-of-prey, RAID Cold Station 12, and forced the scientists to hand over the remaining embryos. The new leader took them and headed for the Klingon Empire. A Starfleet ship followed them and warned the Klingons. They tried to stop the young Augments, but they were determined to incite the Federation and Klingons into war against each other. If they destroyed a habited planet in the Empire, the Klingons would blame the Federation and go after them.”

“What?” The former dictator went rigid. “That is… against everything we were created for!”

“Born for, Nien. You and your people are not machines, you are enhanced humans!” Jim corrected
him softly, before he continued gingerly, “The Starfleet vessel would have prevented the disaster, but instead of giving up, the leader of the young Augments…” And here James struggled to pull a name from his memory. He knew just how important every Augment was for Khan – how precious each name was to him. “Malik, I think, was his name. … He activated the self-destruct on the ship.” He bit his lips before adding, “All of the embryos aboard were… they were no longer viable.”

Khan stared at him, horrified; he was in complete disbelief. “He… he killed all of…?” The last words were choked off. He couldn’t say it, couldn’t even imagine it. The embryos – the last remains of his people… Dead! Killed by one of their own! It couldn’t be true! Then he saw Jim’s compassionate expression and his brilliant mind allowed no doubt. Jim wouldn’t lie and he would tell Khan if he doubted the information. Moaning as if in physical pain, he closed his eyes. “All the unborn children…” Khan couldn’t imagine it. He risked his life – he waited three hundred years to get his crew to safety, and he was still working for their safety and eventual freedom. Nothing, not time, not Starfleet, not war would keep him from his goal. His family was everything. These children never learned that. Never learned what it was to be Augment. They had no one to teach them – no one to look to. “All that was left of us… Killed by one of our own! How hopeless the child must he have felt to commit genocide on his own kind?” He felt his throat tightening. “I can’t… This is…” He couldn’t the words.

“I’m sorry, Nien,” Jim whispered; he let go if Khan’s hand and cupped his cheek. He anticipated that the news would be hard – would hurt his beloved deeply, but he hadn’t thought that Nien would take it that bad – that he would be left speechless. It brought him back to San Francisco – that night. “I am sorry for your loss – even if you never knew them. They… belonged to your people and…” As he saw the anguish in the Augment’s eyes, he closed the small distance to him and gathered him in his arms, ignoring the small weight and the pulsing lights of the tricorder in his left hand. “I am sorry, baby. I’m sorry that we’ll never get to know what could have been.” And he was. He continued to hold the man he loved in a calm, secure embrace.

For a long moment Khan simply leaned into him, his arms encircled the young captain’s waist as if searching for support and shelter; knowing that in his captain’s arms, he was safe from prying eyes. Then, after a short while, he straightened his frame again.

Sadness will make even the best of men lash out. “Would you say that if you didn’t lo-?” He stopped, unable to continue that train of thought. “Would you say it if you didn’t know me – if we weren’t this? Would you still be sorry for them – for their loss?”

“I… Nien. Please don’t ask me what I can’t answer. That’s not the way it is. I know you. I see you. And there is no going back from that – ever! So I am sorry for it – for them. I’m sorry for what could have been because I know what could have been. I only know that because of all that you’ve shown me. So don’t ask me – don’t you dare ask me to go back there – back to…” And now it was Kirk’s turn to choke on his words. And he couldn’t meet Khan’s eyes. “… to when I hated you.”
The words stung Khan like a slap and now he was instantly sorry for his words. He didn’t want to ever, ever bring Jim back to that place nor did he want to visit it himself. But you lash out at those you love because they are safe, because they will continue to love you – because they are the only ones that can bring you safely to the other side and away from the things that hurt you.

Khan placed his hands on either side of James’ neck; his thumbs stroked along his jaw and he brought their foreheads to touch. “I am sorry. That was not fair of me. I cannot bear to think of you hating me.”

Nien lowered his gaze. Those events were a century away now. It didn’t make it any less painful, but it wasn’t James’ fault. While he – Khan – and his family were caught in cryosleep, what remained of his people were killed at the hand of one of themselves. Though he only learned of them now, he knew that with them went the last hope of survival for his kind.

He felt… guilty – guilty for not being there. Not being able to save them. Not being the leader – the father he should have been to those unborn children and the twenty young adults. His rational mind told him that there was nothing that could have been done, but it didn’t make it any easier to bear.

Three centuries since he and the others fled Earth. In the meantime so much has happened – so much he’d never know. He knew all seventy-two of his peoples’ names. He knew everything about them. He didn’t know the children’s names save one. Malik. The young man was responsible for the death of his own kind. The other names were lost along with those unnamed. Khan’s eyes stung at the thought. And then chastised himself for it. Blaming himself for events a hundred years ago was foolish. His mind warred with itself. The embryos – even those young Augments – they belonged to his people and he had been their last remaining leader. He still was. There should have been something he could have done before they fell into rebel hands and…

He frowned and looked up again. “The Klingon experiments… When were they?”

“They were months after, when…”

“After?” Khan cocked his head. “If every Augment embryo and the young Augments were dead, how could the Klingons experiment with their DNA at all?”

Jim looked at him sadly. “The embryos were well protected in containment, but the blast… From what we know, the Klingons were experimenting with non-viable embryos recovered from the blast site. The Klingons feared that Earth was experimenting with enhanced DNA to make Starfleet stronger and began with their own tests. It ended in disaster. The genes ended up mutating the Levodian flu virus carried by one the test subjects. It became an endemic within the empire. It was a
Starfleet doctor, actually, who designed an effective treatment; he was assigned to the ship that pursued the bird-of-prey. They kidnapped him. His captain, the doctor’s that is, followed him and offered himself as a test subject. His risk saved millions of Klingons. And as a ‘thank you’ they’re at war with us now.” He shook his head. “Never trust a Klingon.” he added sourly.

Nien’s stomach was in knots at the onslaught of the new and distressing information so his subconscious did the only logical thing: It distracted him with something else.

“You know of these…events,” he said quietly. “I learned many things about Starfleet; this isn’t covered in Academy curriculum.”

Jim smiled sadly. “No, it’s not. I admit; I did some research after…our first encounter last year – after I was treated and discharged from hospital.” He chuckled softly. “Care to guess, the Starfleet ship’s name that chased the bird-of-prey and tried to stop Malik?”

Something in Kirk’s voice told Khan everything. “Don’t say it was named…” He made a gesture with one hand, and Jim nodded with a mixture of a grin and a grimace.

“Yeah, it was the first Enterprise commissioned by Starfleet.”

For a long moment the super-human only stared at him, and then he rolled his eyes. “Of course – why am I not surprised?”

“Fate has an odd sense of humor, don’t you think so?” Jim sighed and Khan huffed.

“Obviously!” He cocked his head. “And this doctor, who later helped the Klingons, and the captain who agreed to test the treatment must have been staff officers of that same ship.”

Jim went from smirk to smile in seconds. “You got yourself hundred points! Yes, it was Captain Archer and Dr. Phlox, who were involved both times.”

Khan snorted. “The captain and the CMO of another Enterprise… Like McCoy healing Kirk. Kismet,” he murmured. “And there I have never believed in it.” He pursed his lips before he asked, “And those experiments the Klingons did…”
Jim made an affirming gesture. “The gene causing the virus mutation affected the offspring of those infected. It changed their appearance. The Augment genes in the DNA overpowered their own. Since then, there have been two different Klingon types.” He snorted. “Those more human looking ones belong to the Empire’s high society. Their parents, of course, were the first to receive the treatment for the flu. They were also eager to line up because they thought they might become ‘stronger’ and ‘quicker’. You know, like an Augment.”

Khan had listened carefully. “Mmmhmm, but you speak in the subjunctive. So they are not ‘stronger’ and ‘quicker’?”

“No,” Jim shook his head. “They’re as strong and fast as a common Klingon. They just look like us humans. That is as far as the similarity goes though. Earned ‘em some colorful nicknames.” He took a deep breath and murmured full of sympathy for his lover, “But the embryos Malik kidnapped… None of them survived.” He met his beloved’s gaze again and saw the sorrow in those blue-green pools. “I’m sorry, Nien. There are no other Augments left. You and your crew are the last.”

Very slowly the former dictator nodded. “I thought so,” he murmured and felt Jim squeeze his hand again. It did his heart good – this warm compassion and understanding. “The space station - …”

“Cold Station 12.”

“Yes, if it once held Augment embryos it must be a maximum security facility. Could it be possible that…” He didn’t finish the sentence and looked hopefully at Kirk; he hated having to shake his head again.

“Starfleet deserted Cold Station 12 over fifty years ago. It’s nothing more than a ruin in a rock in space.” He pursed his lips. “But you’re giving me an idea. There are other facilities like Cold Station 12. Maybe your people are there.”

He saw new hope sparkling in Nien’s eyes and pushed an ebony lock of hair off of the superhuman’s high forehead. “I’ll check it as soon as I’m back on the Enterprise. Our computer must hold some information about those space stations.”

Khan froze; his eyes widened. “You will help me to find my crew?” he whispered. Even if Jim and he were lovers – mates – he hadn’t dared to hope that Kirk would support his desperate attempt to find his people. He would never have asked this of him, never have made him choose between his loyalty to Starfleet or to him. It wouldn’t have been fair and Nien didn’t want Jim to believe he had seduced him into a relationship only to use him. He would never try to use his James again, like he
Jim trusted him and he wouldn’t risk what they had – not even for the sake of his people. But Kirk’s offer to do some research on his own made his heartbeat quicken and filled him with new hope.

Jim took a very deep breath. If he searched for Augments and disseminated his finding to Khan, it was a betrayal to Starfleet and the Federation – even if they were in the wrong. Command would have his head for it, no doubt. But on the other hand, Khan’s people had never done anything wrong – not in this century. Whatever happened in the twentieth century was unclear and in a time of war. The records of the Eugenic Wars were lost. Either way, in Jim’s eyes someone was innocent until proven otherwise. Joaquin, Rodriguez, Katie, Otto – they should not be condemned to endless cryosleep on some far away space station – perhaps until their cryotubes failed. These people wanted to escape the horrors of war – not contribute to them. It was Earth’s regimes that created the situation allowing for the remaining embryos to be taken. They created the situation that led to Malik’s fatal decision for an entire race of people. Blood covered the hands of those in authority on Earth – then and now. It was not on Khan’s and not his people’s.

Jim would never stand by and watch another wronged when he could stop it. He didn’t on Tarsus IV, his own life be damned. And he wouldn’t here either. If there was one thing James T. Kirk was up to, it was doing right thing! And Khan was his lover now – his mate. His everything. He had little say in Kirk’s decision.

“Yes, I’ll help you to find your family,” Jim said slowly, but clearly. He saw how Nien’s eyes widened. “It’s wrong to deny them a chance to live a life in freedom and peace. It’s wrong to blame them on principle because of what they are. They are people. And it’s wrong to keep them apart from you.” He smiled softly. “I’ll help you in any way I can. I told you, everyone deserves a second chance. As far as I know, your crew never had a part in the war crimes. Damning them to endless cryosleep is a crime. It’s unlawful detention and racism – and I will fight it with you!” He watched Nien’s eyes glisten with tears that threatened to spill. The desire to comfort him was overwhelming so he embraced him anew. “We’ll find them – and I will move hell and Earth to make everyone see all that you are – see you how I see you, how The Shadow sees you.”

Khan had lowered his head; a lump rose in his throat. Not only did his soulmate intend to stand by him and bear his burden with him, no, Jim would risk his own freedom to help him and his family. You didn’t have to be a genius to figure out just what Command would do to the young captain if his intentions were revealed.

Wrapping both arms around his beloved, he whispered, “I should not accept your offer, James. It is too much to ask. Still, I am unable to reject it. I –.”

“I didn’t offer anything, Nien. I told you what I intend to do. I intend to help you. I intend to make things right for them. I intend to move hell and Earth to get it done – with you. I expect you, to expect nothing less of me. I told you once, this is who we are.”
Khan nodded in reticence. This is why he loved the man. His bravery, his single-minded morality. To deny James his intentions was to remove the very things he loved about him. “I have to find and recover them, and I am at a dead end. They could be anywhere and the universe is so large. I have tried my luck often enough, hacking into Starfleet’s computer base. I was nearly caught once; I put Galven and his crew in danger – I was onboard at the time. Nevertheless, I am ready to try it again as soon as possible. My family trusted me beyond sanity when they agreed to follow me aboard the *Botany Bay*, not knowing if they ever would wake up again. They counted on me – they still do, even in sleep.” He gulped and buried his face in the crook of Jim’s neck, just there where the mark was left – now mottled from their days and nights together. He brushed his nose and lips over it, then spoke. “But on the other hand, I don’t want to bring Galven and his crew – least of all you into more danger because of my promise to myself and my people. Besides, I just put you back together.” He sighed and breathed in Jim’s familiar scent. “This all is… is so…”

“So fucked up?” Jim helped him out; he heard and felt the Augment chuckling.

“Yes,” was all Khan said before tightening his arms around the younger man; his heart beat with joy and dread in one.

Kirk thought he could sense the inner turmoil of his beloved and held him close. “We’ll find a way, baby! We’ll find a way and…”

Khan’s communicator buzzed soundlessly, but its vibration didn’t slip the men’s attention. Frowning Nien activated it, and heard Ritek’s voice, “Drythen, is Kirk with you?”

The frown lining the Augment’s forehead deepened. “Yes, he is. Why don’t you contact him inst-…?”

“Kirk’s last transmission was compromised. I’ve got Commodore Wesley on the line for him.” The Rigelian paused for a second before adding, “We are in really deep, deep water, guys!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Yeah, in the middle of the upcoming action with Koloth and the approaching Klingon strike group, there are another very emotional mess involved. I only watched “Borderland” and “Cold Station 12” because of Khan (mainly because of STiD) and I thought of Khan’s reaction, if he would ever learn of the events. While in the original series he shows a kind of egoism – even if he is utterly loyal to his crew – the Khan in STiD is so attached to his ‘family’ that he even endured the slavery and violating of Section 31. It shows, how absolutely smitten he is with his people – and to them Malik and the others count too. It somehow was logical for me that he would take these news very bad. He is a leader through and through, a kind of father for the younger ones of his people, and therefore the incidents with Malik must hit him hard.

I hope you like the way the talk went between Nien and Jim and that latter made up his mind to help his beloved to find the other Augments. As Kirk said, it’s a kind of racism Starfleet Command and even some members of the Federation Council are showing here and Kirk being Kirk he had to stop this. I already can promise you that a hell-ride of rollercoaster lies ahead for the two lovebirds, but their devotion for each other is also an example for their friends and is going to make them supporting the two.

As I already told you all, action is coming more and more. While the two fleets are closing the distance and battle approaches, Jim and Koloth will face each other again on Aldebaran – in the next chapter. Also Jim will have contact with Bob Wesley, McFurtho shows how ruthless yet brilliant he is, because a part of his plan will work. In other words, the next chapters won’t be anything for poor nerves (*snicker*).

Please give me some feedbacks, what you think of the last chapter. The updates will come more regular now, after my dear beta is done with the most of her stress.

Love,

Until soon

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers,

Thank you so much once again for the comments and the kudos. I’m really happy that so many of you stick loyal to the story.

As I already warned you the action begins to take full place now. Kirk and Koloth will face each other again in this chapter, McFurthon’s plan is partly successful what leads to a starting catastrophe, and our heroes have all hands full to do.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

Chapter 29 – Kirk vs. Koloth

“Here we go,” McFurthon grumbled pointing toward the platform of the official transporter. Koloth and his four men followed him – wary and cautious. Seeing their contact man in uniform was strange, to say the least. He made no secret of his hatred of Starfleet. But stranger still was the sight of five Klingons clad in Starfleet affects. The clothes didn’t fit all that well; after all they belonged to McFurthon. Their ownership, however, was irrelevant. All that counted was that the uniforms were part of the masquerade that would bring them to their destiny – the orbital space harbor from where they would launch their attacks.

They didn’t have to pay at the official transporter station as was usual for this kind of transport system. And they didn’t even need to check in – standard procedure if someone wanted to enter the orbital space harbor via transporter. McFurthon’s Starfleet ID card let them use the equipment without hindrance; they could beam directly into the orbit-station in the security area. Even the attaché cases they carried aroused no suspicion. The two Klingons wore Starfleet’s Administration insignia on their shirts.

Koloth had warned the Terran. After the assault, Starfleet wouldn’t need much time figuring that it had been one of their own who beamed to the station shortly before the attacks. Any idiot could put two and two together and discover the conspirator. McFurthon’s history told it all.

The former officer didn’t care. He had put his past behind him and only lived to fulfill his revenge against those who had let him fall. He was going to fall again; he knew that. He would not survive
his revenge, but neither would many others. He had nothing to live for anymore and wanted to cause as much damage to the fleet as possible – to the fleet, the Federation, whoever in his opinion, had betrayed him.

They materialized behind the security checkpoint at the arrival terminal in the space harbor. McFurthon greeted the two personnel who looked at them wide-eyed before they saluted and then let them alone.

“This way,” the former officer said quietly. “The cargo drop will start soon and then the cargo area shields will be down.” He looked around, “No one’ll notice when the tanks and a few uninvited guests beam down before it’s too late.”

Koloth, who held his injured arm close to his body, nodded. “Right! Noras, Koghan – you will come with me down to the spaceport! We will catch Kirk and his Augment pet by surprise. Kurhan, ready to beam back to the Starfleet base. Let them feel Klingon fire! You, Korax and you, MacWulson will stay here, ready to ’warm up’ this place.”

McFurthon rolled his eyes. This damn Klingon would never learn to speak his name correctly!

Koloth glanced at his chronometer. “Our fleet will reach us in approximately three hours, and then the defenses of this planet will be – up in flames.” He looked at his comrades. “*Heghl’meH QaQ jajavim* – this is a good day to die! *Qapla!* (Success)”

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Khan lifted both brows at Ritek’s message and glanced at Jim. He had a notion of why the Commodore was on the other end of the line; Ritek must have called him after he couldn’t contact the *Enterprise*. Clever, he had to give that to the alien man. “Hold the line a second,” the super-human whispered and offered the communicator to Kirk. “Ritek has someone for you,” he said, and caught the hopeful look of his beloved and shook his head. “It’s not your ship,” he added softly; he hated that the hope died in Jim’s eyes.

“Kirk here,” the young captain said quietly, trying to hide his disappointment and his increasing worry.

“It’s Ritek. Captain, I’m patching someone through who urgently needs to speak with you.”
“Right,” Kirk murmured, asking himself who could be on the other end; he hadn’t anticipated the voice sounding through the little speaker of the communicator.

“Jim? It’s good to hear you.”

“Bob?!” It was evident how thunderstruck the younger one of the two officers was.

“Yeah, it’s me. One of your Shadow friends, Mr. Ritek, was intelligent enough to contact me after he couldn’t reach the Enterprise.”

Jim felt an icy knot tightening in his belly. “What’s wrong with my ship?!” he demanded. He felt Nien’s gaze on him, but ignored it this time.

“Your ship’s near the former Neutral Zone. They’re fine, Kirk. They spotted a Klingon strike group on its way to Aldebaran – where you are and, as Mr. Ritek has informed me, our ‘friend’ Captain Koloth is, too.”

That was it; that is what Ritek meant when he said they were all ‘in deep, deep water’. “Dammit, I knew it! I knew those bastards were planning something big!” Jim snarled; his outburst persuaded Khan to lay a calming hand on his shoulder. Then the Augment took the tricorder from Kirk and watched its display, listening intently to the talk about the incoming Klingon fleet; his brilliant mind already considering their options.

“That’s not all,” Wesley continued. “Your communicator’s been intercepted, Jim. Lieutenant Taylor – there is no Lieutenant Taylor. He was transferred a week ago. You spoke to an imposter so…”

“Koloth isn’t here alone,” Kirk interrupted him. “I had a bit of an encounter with him, his first officer Korax, and three other Klingons…”

“That much I got from Mr. Ritek,” Bob commented wryly.

“…and they were accompanied by a human; they knew where he was going too. He helped them get away and hid them somewhere. He’s probably the one I talked to.”
“You used a Starfleet frequency. Whoever he is, he’s familiar with Starfleet frequencies and protocol, but not as such with the post because he did not know that the real Taylor has been transferred. Maybe this man is a deserter or perhaps dishonorably discharged and bitter,” Khan whispered meeting Jim’s widening eyes.

“You could be right,” he mused. But the side conversation was not lost on Bob, “Who is with you?”

Kirk grimaced. Sometimes he wished Wesley wasn’t so smart! “Sunrise is with me,” he replied. The commodore sighed. “As far as I can gather, he isn’t willing to speak with me. Please give him my regards. I haven’t forgotten that my crew and I owe him our lives.”

Khan only nodded and caught Jim’s warm smile before the young captain answered back, “He sends his too, Bob.” He steered back to the topic at hand. “When will the Klingon fleet be here?”

“I only received a short message from the Enterprise and… Hold on, Jim, your ship is calling me again.”

Jim’s heartbeat quickened as he listened to the short conversation in the background and heard Spock’s deep voice. Then Wesley addressed him again. “Your ship is on its way to Aldebaran as is every available Starfleet vessel within four parsecs. The Enterprise is at Warp 6 now, still watching the enemy. She should reach you in two hours and thirty-four minutes. We’ll be there about twenty minutes sooner. The Klingons were traveling at Warp 6 too when they activated their cloaking devices. You can expect them a little bit after the Enterprise and me.”

Kirk pursed his lips. “We need a full scan of the town, the spaceport, and the space harbor. Can you arrange that the outpost here…”

“We let them know and you have their full support. Commander Capricio will contact you soon. I’ll let him know this frequency. It’s encrypted; Mr. Ritek has assured me.”

“Right. Some members of The Shadow are already guarding the outpost; others are in the spaceport, where I am too, in the cargo-area to be precise. They are expecting a delivery of liquid plastic here that…”

“The explosion would take more than the building with it, and the fumes could sicken even more,” Bob groaned. “Perfect!” he added with some sarcasm. Then he turned serious again. “Jim, you have to stop Koloth at any cost. The planned assault is a distraction from the genuine danger, and a way to
weaken Aldebaran. I’ll inform the governor when we’re done here, but I doubt that his police will be able to prevent Koloth from anything. It’s up to you and the outpost to stop this, Kirk.”

“I know. I didn’t inform the authorities or Security. We need to avoid public mass. If the Klingons get wind that we know they’re here – and evacuating half the town will do just that – Koloth may do something rash. We need him to stick to his plan because we know, for the most part, what it is. If he deviates, it’ll leave us in the dark. The Shadow, Starfleet’s outpost and I will do everything in our power to keep them from their goal. You make sure the Klingons don’t take this planet.”

“You can be sure of it, Jim,” Wesley replied, sounding grim.

Kirk sighed. “Right! Please, keep me updated, Bob.”

“Of course. Lexington out!”

Khan looked at him. “The situation is exactly the one we imagined,” he said, and Jim nodded with another heavy sigh while he closed the communicator.

“Yeah – and worse. Eighteen Klingon ships are on their way to Aldebaran.” He shook his head. “I hate war!” He rubbed his neck; another worry stirred in him. “As soon as this Commander Capricio contacts me and shows up with his men, you should beam up to…”

“We already had that talk, James. I will stay here at your side!” Khan interrupted him; his baritone firm.

Jim groaned. “Nien, if they recognize you, then…”

The Augment bent forwards. “The chance is minimal as I told you!” His blue-green eyes hooded from the shadow the baseball cap became piercing; that expression has made lesser men cower, but Kirk was no lesser man. Defiantly, he lifted his chin.

“But still, there is the possibility that someone will figure out who you are. They will arrest you, lock you away. The chance that you’re – mistreated again is... Well, it's fucking likely! I can’t and won’t stand by for it. The risk is…” He was interrupted again as Khan’s communicator vibrated in Jim’s hand. Rolling his eyes, the young captain answered the call. “Kirk here!”
“Commander Capricio from the Starfleet outpost on Aldebaran. Captain Kirk, it’s a pleasure to hear from you,” an unknown voice with an Italian accent replied.

“Thank you, Commander!” Jim said businesslike. “ Commodore Wesley informed you about the current situation?”

“Yes, Captain, I already ordered a full scan of New Aberdeen and I’ll have the data in no more than fifteen minutes. I also informed the spaceport’s security about the danger and twenty of my men are on their way to your position.”

Jim sighed, half with relief, half with worry; the latter concerned the damned stubborn, gorgeous man beside him. “Alright, Commander. I have two friends of mine near the outpost observing. They’re looking for the Klingons who are likely planning to attack the building. It would be nice if you could get them to safety. You’ll identify them easily. It’s a young Caitian woman and a young man – Caviw and Jeff.”

“Understood. I instructed two from the security team to find them and get them somewhere safe. I will order an evacuation of the area around the spaceport and our outpost.”

“I'd advise you to wait on this, Commander. I know the Klingon captain who is on the planet. If he thinks that he and his men are about to get cut off from their goal, he’ll overreact and do something - possibly worse. I don’t want to have Klingons running amok near our base or the spaceport. An ignorant Klingon is easiest to beat.”

For a moment there was silence, then Capricio answered, “If you know this Klingon then I suppose you could be right, Captain. Still, the civilians around our outpost are my responsibility, and I am also bound to the contract between Starfleet, Aldebaran Security, and the governor that states we will support them during times of need or crisis. If we are not able to stop the Klingons, there will be a body count and Starfleet may be blamed.”

“There will be more victims if you force Koloth’s hand, Commander Capricio,” Jim retorted. “May I suggest that we try to find and to catch him and his people, as well as the traitor who is with them, and if we don’t locate them soon, we… We could force an evacuation of the spaceport by setting off the fire alarms – maybe some smoke bombs to make it more real?”

“Hmm, Koloth could think that the ensuing melee’ would be the best moment to enter the spaceport in secret; we can catch him then,” Khan whispered.
Jim grinned at him. “A good plan, ‘Commander’!” He had winked at him before he turned back to the communicator. “Commander Capricio, I think we can lure Koloth into a trap.”

There was a moment of silence before Capricio answered, “Where you are exactly, Captain?”

“I’m in the cargo area,” Kirk told him. “A friend is with me, and I’ve got another man and a port guard watching another section of the spaceport.”

“Excellent, Captain. What about the space harbor in orbit?”

Kirk pondered this suggestion for a moment. “Can civilians access the orbital station transporters?”

“You have to identify yourself and anyone arriving there without a shuttle, is checked,” the Italian answered. “We introduced that security measure several years back after several instances of theft.”

Jim nodded slowly. “So Koloth and his comrades shouldn’t be able to beam up without someone seeing them.” He pursed his lips shortly. “Give the alert in the harbor, Commander, but make sure your people handle the shipment per your standard protocol. Koloth has to believe that everything is cool.”

“I agree Captain. I will be with you soon. Capricio out!”

Jim closed his communicator. “Here we go,” he whispered reaching for Khan’s hand. Khan squeezed back soothingly, telling him wordlessly that everything was going to be fine even if this conviction was truly only hope.

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Koloth’s dark eyes watched the transporter Athena. She hung like a fat animal in the large hangar in the inner part of the orbital space harbor. Several smaller ships were stationed here, too. Two of them belonged to Starfleet; they were small and built for speed. Two security scout vessels and three civilian spacecraft docked at the other side of the hangar. The zero gravity and vacuum left each ship looking as though suspended by unseen strings.
The Klingon captain cocked his head and looked down at his arms covered by Starfleet red. One golden stripe indicated the rank of lieutenant and he traded his Administration insignia for one of Security.

Not one of the so-called ‘red-shirts’ had stopped him or the others as they walked through the harbor following McFurthon. No one hindered them as they entered the observation deck. From there they could watch the progress of the soon-to-be discharged cargo.

All of sudden the alert sounded and yellow lights flashed – the lowest of alerts. Cautious, Koloth turned around and glared at McFurthon who frowned before he headed to the door and left observation deck. The Klingons followed him.

Outside the situation was still calm, but two security members walked towards them. Disguised, McFurthon demanded, “Report!”

One of the two men answered, “Commander Capricio ordered the alert, sir! He said that enemy spies may be targeting the station.”

Inwardly, McFurthon cursed. Kirk! He would bet his last shirt that the damn boy-captain was responsible for this! Outwardly, he remained calm as he asked, “What about the schedule for unloading *Athena’s* cargo?”

The man who had just spoken replied, “There’s been no change in the schedule so far, sir!”

McFurthon suppressed a sigh of relief. “Right, you two watch the area around the observation deck. Lieutenant?” he addressed Koloth, who stayed true to his role.

“Aye, sir?”

“Come with me! We will secure the arrival area and the transporter rooms.” He glanced back at the two security personnel he’d fooled. “As you were!”

Both red-shirts saluted. “Aye, aye, sir!” They walked down the corridor while McFurthon hurried in the other direction; Koloth and his comrades were on his heels.
“Small change in our plans if you agree, Captain,” he said quietly to the Klingon leader. “You and your men beam down with the second tank. Mr. Korax and I will start the distraction maneuver two minutes after you’ve beamed down. This will give you enough time to orient yourselves to the area. Act as soon as you can. I am almost sure that they’re scanning the area, so they will be aware of your presence relatively quickly. The same goes for Mr. Kurhan. Act the moment you’re down on the planet.” He glanced at Kurhan; his face in a twisted sneer of satisfaction with his task of destroying the Starfleet outpost in New Aldebaran. He looked back to the other four Klingons. “Any questions?”

Koloth shook his head, answering for all of them.

“Right. Then let’s begin!”

They headed for the cargo transporter room and again it was McFurthon’s ranking security officer’s uniform that opened every door to them. They reached their intended destination without trouble; only to two guards stood in front of the door to the transporter room.

Korax looked at his captain who nodded. A moment later, the Klingon first officer and Kurhan pulled out their phasers, stepped around the corner, and shot before the two Terrans could comprehend the unfolding events. The Klingons merely stunned both humans; a full-blast phaser shot would have been recognized by the station internal sensors setting off a red alert. As it was, the stun blast incited no reaction for the system.

Without hesitation, McFurthon stepped over the two unconscious men and entered the transporter room facing the transporter chief and a technician who had just overseen the unloading.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen,” he greeted politely. “Just a little security check; seeing if everything is all right.” Behind him, Koloth and Noras stepped in using their phasers without hesitation as Korax and Kurhan had before; they pulled the stunned red-shirts into the room with them. The Klingon first officer and Noras quickly began to mount the different parts together, adding the explosive bins to them. In just over a minute, they had built four bombs – two for the spaceport, one for the Starfleet outpost, and one for the orbital station; each placed for maximum impact.

“All clear,” McFurthon murmured, and stepped to the transporter controls. “Ready, gentlemen? I’ll beam you down with the second transport.”

They answered only in dark glares making the former officer smile.
Jim and Khan hid; they saw several Starfleet members stepping out from the large depot hall into the outside area of the cargo bay where the container was expected. Realizing that Diego, Jeff, and Caviw were with them, gesturing and chattering, he knew that support from the Starfleet outpost had finally arrived. Signaling Khan to stand back, he left the small hide-out and walked towards the small group. He saw a light in the corner of his eyes, and it caught his attention; the Augment must have noticed if Kirk read the man’s reaction correctly. He pulled the collar of his parka higher; there were observation cameras installed. Jim cursed inwardly; hoping that the silly cap Khan was wearing would stay on his head; otherwise Starfleet Command would soon know about the super-human’s whereabouts and of Jim’s involvement with the former dictator.

Bringing his attention back to the main problem, his gaze wandered to the insignias on the station-uniforms the men wore. He addressed one of them directly as they had closed the distance towards him. “Commander Capricio?”

“Si, Elias Capricio.” He extended his hand to the younger officer. “It’s a pleasure, Captain Kirk,” he said; his accent fluid and silky.

Jim shook the other man’s hand, and then he gestured back to the Augment. “My tactical officer, Commander Lavi.”

Holding himself in the shadows the late afternoon sun created, Khan nodded towards the strangers. “Commander Capricio,” he greeted neutrally, and Capricio returned the greeting.

“Commander Lavi!” Then the Italian turned his attention back to Kirk. “Our sensors are almost done with scanning the town. We paid special attention to the quarters around the spaceport and our outpost. We detected no Klingon bio-signals.”

“Maybe they ran,” Diego mumbled. “They knew we found them out and, of course, knew Jim’s next step would be to stop them.”

Capricio looked at him. “You could be right, Mr. de la Vega-Martinez.” He caught Kirk’s amused gaze and explained, “Mr. de la Vega-Martinez and I already know each other. He is an excellent ship technician; he helped us with some repairs three months back.” A communicator buzzed, and the commander opened his. “Capricio here,” he said.
A voice reported, “Lieutenant Svenson. Sir, the space station is on yellow alert; all security measures initiated. The freighter unload can begin if you still want to…”

Capricio glanced at Kirk, still uncertain if he should continue the charade and act as if nothing was about to happen. At the young captain’s encouraging nod, he sighed soundlessly and added, “Beam down the first three tanks and then the next three in two minutes.” He opened another frequency. “Ensign Haver? Set off the spaceport fire alert! We want to make it easy for Koloth.”

Khan took his communicator from Jim and hailed Galven, telling him ‘the dance’ would begin now. An oinked “Keep your neck out of the mud, buddy!” came back to him. Then the sirens began to howl while several Starfleet members at another part of the spaceport unpacked little devices. A moment later, smoke filled the air at the rarely visited traveler check-in in the large building complex. Almost instantly, chaos let loose and the staff members, as well as the few visitors, hurried to the exits. It was certainly an uncommon way to evacuate a spaceport, but it was effective, and they could kill two birds with one stone. Koloth would think his task easy.

Capricio closed the communicator and gestured for the others to withdraw with him back into the large hall. Jim saw Caviw and Jeff looking from the Starfleet member to Khan. They seemed to be worried about him, as if they knew his freedom was at stake. Caviw and Jeff only followed Capricio as Diego, Kirk, and the Augment did the same.

Behind them, the air began to glimmer as the first tanks were beamed down. None of them knew that a traitor, one of Starfleet’s own, took the transport order from Lieutenant Svenson to pull the strings of fate.

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“General!” The Klingon science officer aboard the flagship ReghQIS, the ‘bleeding knife’, turned around and looked straight at his superior. “Our sensors are registering the warp signatures of about fifteen vessels which are on a direct intercept course to our fleet.”

General K’taH went rigid. “Starfleet?”

“Obviously,” the younger man nodded.

K’taH frowned. “Fifteen Starfleet vessels… They are outnumbered. But even if their numbers were
even, they stand no chance! Not against us!” He bent forwards. “What about the ship that sent the transmission burst?”

The science officer shook his head. “No trace of them, Milord. I caught the emissions of a warp drive that had to be somewhere in the area, but it’s impossible to track it down or to get information. The ship is as good as non-existent to our sensors.”

“Like at Turkana,” the general murmured. “But the other ships are not invisible.” His dark eyes were directed at the science officer again. “Have you identified them?”

“Only one, sir. The USS Lexington. Her warp signature is well known by now. Regarding the other ships, our computer is still working on it.”

K’taH bared his teeth. “So, Kor’s Starfleet commodore is one of our adversaries. Very good!” He stared at the screen. “I only hope the Enterprise is there somewhere too, maybe with Kirk and his Augment friend. It would be a real pleasure to atomize them!”

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Caviw had crossed her arms in front of her chest and watched Kirk and Khan discussing something quietly while Jeff stood beside her in the large hall. Deep frown lines lined his face. Still the sirens continued to blare, but the firemen were quickly informed about the exact nature of the incident; they pretended to work.

“Something isn’t right here. We missed something.” Jeff mumbled, and the Caitian woman rolled her eyes.

“Yes, we missed telling Kirk not to sic his Starfleet boys on us.”

The young man sighed, while outside the next three tanks were beamed down. “He only wanted us out of danger. I think it’s nice of him and…”

“In the case you don’t get it, Jeff, we are still in danger. If something is going to happen, then it will happen here and…” She stopped, and her tail tensed. “There was something,” she said glancing towards the large door that led outside. “There was a movement.” Without waiting for Jeff’s reply, she walked to Khan.
He acknowledged her approach even before she had closed the distance to him. He glanced over his shoulder at her, and then he looked down at his tricorder again. “Captain, they are here!” he reported quietly, just before Caviw reached him. “I am reading three Klingon bio-signals directly between the three containers which were beamed down.

Kirk’s eyes narrowed. “I knew it!” Then he hesitated. “The Klingons and the containers came together?” he asked perplexed. “But the tanks are from the *Athena* in the orbital station and the Klingons…”

“… had to come from there too,” Khan completed Jim’s thought. Both men’s eyes widened in alert; then Kirk whirled around, stopping Capricio, who was about to send the red-shirts out to capture the enemies.

“Commander, the Klingons came from the space harbor! And they’re three, not five! Two must still be up there.”

The Italian stared at him, shocked, but only for a moment. Then he activated his communicator. “Lieutenant Svenson!” he barked into the little device. “The enemy is in the orbital station! Two Klingons and a human ally.”

“I’ll check the internal sensors, sir!” Svenson said. “I’ll give the red alert and…” He didn’t get further because all of sudden a deafening explosion sounded through the communicator’s speaker followed by screams and shouts. Static hummed for a moment, sounding over the sirens of the space harbor.

“Svenson!” Capricio called; he was pale as ash. “Svenson, are you hurt? Status report!”

For a long moment there was no answer, then the lieutenant panted, “The explosion was somewhere in the cargo section near the *Athena*. I just got the call; the center of the blast has to be at dock 12 where the *Athena* is berthed.”

“The remaining tanks aboard the freighter!” Jim gasped. “If they explode, then it could tear apart the space harbor and…”

“Lieutenant Svenson,” Capricio acted without letting Jim finish. “Evacuate the area. And, for God’s sake, take care that the damn freighter leaves the station before it catches fire, too! I’ll be up there in a few minutes.” He glanced at Kirk. “This is a disturbing! They are refocusing our attention from our
‘friends’ outside to the shit that’s happening over our heads!’

“Go, I’ll take over from here,” Jim said, addressing several red-shirts. “Spread out and surround the Klingons outside. Don’t take any risks; stun them at sight!” He pulled out his phaser and hurried towards the large door; Khan at his side, followed by Diego, Caviw, and Jeff.

Capricio cursed. He thought they had foreseen every circumstance; the space harbor should be secure against invasions of this kind. But they had been wrong. The traitor, whoever it was, and two Klingons were up there and about to blow up the orbital station. The fallout would be a catastrophe. Like meteors, pieces of the station would fall to the planet bringing death and destruction over a large portion of New Aberdeen that lay directly beneath the space harbor. And this was only the beginning!

He couldn’t know that one of their enemies wasn’t in the space harbor anymore; he only kept on his mission – weakening Aldebaran.

ST***ST***ST

Kurhan had materialized only a minute ago in a small street near the Starfleet outpost and to his surprise, passersby were still around. From the workshop of a nearby business, noises sounded. A few cafés were open and at the edge of the street young men stood together discussing sports. ‘Drivel and trivial human banter’, the Klingon thought to himself as he passed them.

His right hand closed around the handle of the attaché case holding the bomb. No one took notice of a ‘red-shirt’ as he walked down the street, took the corner, and headed towards the Starfleet station. From beneath lowered lashes, he looked around him over and again, but he saw nothing unusual. A young woman and a middle-aged man in an ice cream shop flirted with each other; another couple were necking hidden behind a tree. An Andorian studied his PADD and sipped a drink and women walked down the lane, chattering as only females can do. At the entrance of the Starfleet outpost, two guards were on duty and looked cautiously at everyone who passed them by, but they only wore standard phasers as their weapon without phaser resistant uniforms or helmets.

Kurhan frowned. The commanding officer of Starfleet on this planet had given yellow alert for the space harbor in the orbit because he assumed spies were there, but he didn’t secure his own building? Did he feel safe?

‘Idiots!’ Kurhan thought. ‘Starfleet’s arrogance will be her downfall as well as the damn Federation!’ He walked to the two guards; his left hand fingered for his hidden phaser. Something had to be done quickly. He would shoot them, and then activate the bomb, throw it inside and wait
for Kahless’ Black Fleet to take him. He had settled his affairs and felt only pride to be the one who would weaken the enemy enough to let the glorious Klingon fleet annex this system.

All of sudden a young woman stood before him and addressed him. “Excuse me, sir, can you please tell me what time it is?”

Kurhan stared at her; for a moment he felt a hint of panic, but there was nothing noticeable about the Terran female. She was small with slender curves beneath her dress. Bright large eyes were made brighter by her friendly face. A shame that she maybe wouldn’t live to see another evening.

“I’m sorry, Miss, but I don’t have a chronometer with me,” he answered politely and tried to step around her.

“Odd – don’t you need one for your duties?” the woman replied, and a moment later he felt her grip his wrist. Whirling around, he pulled out his phaser; then a blue light enveloped him. Everything around him began to sway and blur. Darkness crept over him, and he fell.

The young woman stepped back, glaring at the approaching couple the Klingon had watched kissing only moments ago. “What took you so long?”

“Well, we…” The young man blushed while his companion scanned the area. “Only one of them is here,” she said. The guards, the elder man and his young coquette, as well as the young men talking sports, came running with their phasers drawn. Others also scanned the area, but no one found the other Klingons.

“Is he alone?” the elder man asked, and the young woman nodded.

“Yes, sir! I watched him as he turned onto the street. He was alone.”

“He materialized just twenty meters away from us, sir!” one said. “There was no one else with him.”

The two guards had searched the stunned Klingon’s pocket, and one of them was able to open the attaché case. “Shit!” he cursed. “The bastard put a bomb in it. It’s activated; the countdown is set to ten seconds.” He glared down at the unconscious enemy. “This was a suicide mission.”
The elder man nodded. “Cuff him. Get him into custody.” He took a deep breath. “At least one of these bastards can’t do any more damage. I hope the commander and Captain Kirk are successful too!” His communicator buzzed and quickly he opened it.

“Rickman,” he answered; he listened for a moment and paled drastically. “I understand, sir. We got one of the Klingons. He was about to blow up our outpost. He was stunned, and the bomb is in a safe place, deactivated. Any orders regarding the orbital station?” He waited for Capricio’s answer and nodded grimly. “Aye, aye, sir!” Then he deactivated the communicator and looked at his comrades. “Someone blew up a part of the cargo section of the space harbor. We have to be ready to help the evacuation effort.”

“They know we are here!” Noras said quietly while he hurried beside Koloth and Koghan. The area was sun drenched, and the only shelter was the space between the tanks.

“Of course. Kirk is not stupid,” Koloth answered and peeked around a tank. He gestured toward the smoke that came from one of the buildings in the spaceport. Sirens were blaring, and he watched firemen running everywhere – some toward the smoke and some to a fire that broke out in another part of the spaceport. “How handy that someone forgot to switch off the oven,” Koloth said. “Fire is exactly what we need.” He pulled the first bomb out from his bag, passing it to Noras. “Go over there.” He pointed towards the parked ships, “and mount it to one of the vessels; then run if you don’t want to join the Black Fleet today!” He took the second bomb. “I will take care that these tanks explode in celebratory fire.” He heard steps approaching quickly. He didn’t need to look; he knew who it had to be. “Koghan, cover our backs.” With those words, he sped off. Koghan went for cover beside a tank knowing that Kirk and the others wouldn’t dare shoot at him as long as he was beside the large container full of liquid plastic.

Baring his teeth, he saw Kirk rushing out of the hall with a slender man donned in a ball cap. Despite this ‘masquerade’, the Klingon recognized the male at Kirk’s right hand. It was the Augment.

“Down!” Jim shouted as phaser blasts were suddenly shot in their direction. One of the security personnel screamed in pain while the others dropped to the ground. Another red-shirt was hit and disintegrated in the deadly blast. His comrades shot back, and Jim yelled, “Cease fire! If you hit the
tank, it’ll all be over!”

“We’re set to stun, Captain!” the security officer called back; then he was hurled back by a full blast. And the blast left no remains.

“Withdraw!” Jim shouted. “We’re too exposed! Withdraw!” Rising and pulling Khan with him, unwilling to leave him behind, he ran back toward shelter, the others on his heels. Two more red-shirts had died before they all made it to safety; Jeff bled from a shot that grazed him and Caviw’s eyes were dark and large with fear. Diego cursed from somewhere beside him while Jim gathered the others around him.

Time! They had no time to plan. The Klingon outside was only there to buy time for Koloth and the others to do what they came for.

“Give me your communicator,” he said, looking at Khan, who immediately offered him the little device. Opening a frequency, Jim called, “Kirk to Flash!”

“Ritek here,” came the reply instantly.

“Ritek, we need your help. Klingons are here, but they’re covered. We can’t reach them without getting shot ourselves. They’re about twenty meters away. Locate me and beam me behind them.”

“I could beam them up and…” The Rigelian’s voice was cut off by the young captain.

“Too risky, they’re well-armed, well-trained, and would overwhelm you in seconds. Locate me and beam me back behind them.” Before he could continue, Khan gripped his wrist and said with a voice that brokered no backtalk, “Beam me with Jim, Ritek!”

Kirk groaned. “Nien, I…”

“No discussion!” the Augment snapped; his green-blue eyes glistened dangerously. “We go together or not at all!”

Jim caught some surprised gazes from the Securities and lowered his voice. “You’re gonna blow
your cover! None of my officers would dare…"

“They would keep you safe, too! Your Vulcan did; your doctor-friend would do the same,” Khan hissed back, barely above a whisper. “We go together or we or not at all! Choose!”

Kirk pressed his lips into a thin line. They didn’t have time for this! “Ritek, beam Nien and me over.” He lowered the communicator and looked at the security team. “As soon as Commander Lavi and I leave, create a distraction.” His looked to the two members of The Shadow and Diego. “Leave while you can. There’s no guarantee that we can stop the Klingons.”

“Just kick their asses, Captain!” Jeff said through clenched teeth while Caviw treated his injury. “Don’t worry about us!”

Jim suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. “Ritek, energize!”

He and Khan felt the typical disorientation and prickling of the transporter beam. For just a moment, they found themselves in a small room only to re-materialized seconds later behind the six tanks of the liquid plastic, blinded for a moment by the sun. Directly in front of them, they saw a figure cowering behind one of the containers, firing at the large door of the cargo hall in quick bursts.

Jim didn’t know this man; he had only seen him for a short time during the bar brawl. The man wore civilian clothes, and if it hadn’t been for the gun in his hand and his obvious role in this evil game, Kirk would have mistaken him for any other human.

The Klingon heard the soft bell-like buzz of a transporter over the noise of the phaser blasts. He whirled around, phaser drawn. Khan’s reactions were fast. He had barely materialized when he kicked the phaser from the Klingon’s hands and stunned him with a blow to the back of the head. Like a falling tree, Koghan hit the ground, unconscious.

Jim smirked – never underestimate an Augment! He glanced quickly at his tricorder. “One is over by the parking pad, by those ships over there; the other one is by the third tank!” he whispered.

Khan nodded; his bright mind was already calculating the information. The man nearby could be Koloth. Injured as the Klingon captain was, he wasn't fit for quick movements and a fight; the other adversary went to the vessels. That would give the Klingon an unforeseen advantage. Without hesitation, Nien made the only logical decision he could in order to keep his mate safe. “I’ll take the Klingon at the parking area; you catch the other one,” he murmured and was on his way before Kirk
could protest.

The young captain cursed. Of course, Khan had to choose the riskiest action, damn him! He headed in the direction of the Klingon in question. An inner voice whispered that it had to be Koloth. He clearly remembered hearing bones breaking as Nien fought the Klingon commander. It likely saved Jim’s life. Koloth needed shelter to act. A part of Kirk hoped to face the menace of K7 again and pay him back. His throat still hurt where Koloth had brutally gripped him only half an hour ago. That annoyed him. What infuriated him was that the Klingon was about to kill innocent civilians. Jim would find satisfaction in catching the bastard himself.

Looking at his tricorder, he watched the display that showed the location of the Klingon. Quickly and silently, Jim rushed forward; then he heard a gentle click and another sound to his right. Putting the tricorder on the ground, he gripped his phaser with both hands, crept forwards quietly and jumped out of his cover aiming at his adversary only to find himself facing the barrel of a phaser; Koloth’s face smirked at him in triumph from behind the weapon.

“I knew we would come face-to-face again before this was over,” the Klingon captain said in a low growl.

“Well, it's a small world,” Jim shot back; his eyed a little device attached to the tank behind Koloth. The small display blinked and showed a rapidly declining countdown from forty-five seconds, then forty-four, forty-three… “Is this how the proud and honorable Klingons fight now? With assaults against innocent civilians like a common terrorist?” he asked angrily. Fury boiled in him while cold fear crept through his veins. If this bomb blew, there would be no escape for any of them, and Nien would die with him in the mighty fireball that would blow a crater where the spaceport stood.

No! He wouldn’t allow it! Not if he had any chance to stop it.

Koloth watched the young Terran with a sneer on his face. “Thank the fire over there, most of the civilians have already left the spaceport. After our little encounter a short time ago, you had enough time to warn everyone, Kirk – ever the hero.” He lifted his broken arm. “I regret that I can’t kill your Augment pet with my bare hands, but it soothes me that he will die along with you!”

Thirty seconds…

And Jim heard several fast approaching steps. After body checking the gunman out of commission, there was nothing to hinder Security from reaching the source of danger. Still, they could come too late.
“Pet?” Jim mocked and stepped nearer ignoring the phaser that aimed at him. “You should know. After all you brought a whole shipload of cute, little pets home with you. Tell me, how much does a Tribble go for Qo’noS?”

Twenty-five seconds…

A snarl escaped Koloth. “For the shame you brought upon me, you should die slowly and painfully. Death by fire should achieve that end.”

“And you’ll still go down in Klingon history as the warrior who brought fussy, chirping furballs to the Klingon Empire rather than rule over Sherman’s Planet!” Kirk taunted.

Twenty seconds…

Jim’s last words had the reaction he hoped for. Pure rage showed on Koloth’s face, and he hissed, “Ready to die like a warrior or do you want to stand there and wait for the end, human?”

“If that’s an invitation to beat the shit out of you again, I’m all over it.” He didn’t play fair this time, he knew the Klingon wouldn’t either – wouldn’t sacrifice a win for honor. Jim threw his phaser at Koloth, hitting his weapon hand the moment a blast shot out from the barrel. It went high and missed the young captain and the container behind him by only a few centimeters. Without waiting a second, Kirk hurled himself against the Klingon who, despite his broken arm, clawed at Jim’s throat. The Enterprise’s captain dodged the grip at the last moment, and they went down to the ground. For a while they only grappled with each other, both determined to get the upper hand; then they were surrounded by Security. Someone shouted an order, feet hastily hurried to the bomb while hands gripped for the two fighters caught in combat.

“Captain, we got the explosive charge – the countdown is stopped!” someone called, but Kirk was far too busy holding the furious Klingon at bay.

“Jim, move aside!” a familiar baritone barked, but it was easier said than done because both men were still in a hand-to-hand struggle, neither was ready to quit.

Koloth grunted; hate near blinded him. He managed to grip his D’g tahg, the Klingon dagger, and pulled it out from his belt with his good arm, but the side of a pale hand collided with his neck and strength immediately left him. His muscles gave out, and he found himself lying on the ground; the
dagger clattered down beside him. His whole body paralyzed.

“I already told you to let him alone, Klingon! You should be happy, I let you live!” Khan snarled, standing threateningly and proud above him. The wind blew open his parka and through his dark hair; he had lost the cap while wrestling the enemy. Two red-shirts bent over the fallen Koloth and cuffed him. The Augment gave the Klingon a last dangerous glare before he turned towards a tousled and breathless Kirk. “You really have a thing for fights, don’t you?”

“Hey, he started it!” Jim protested, and Nien rolled his eyes. Sometimes his beloved sounded like a pubescent boy.

“Captain, that was close,” the chief of Security said, handing the bomb to Kirk who looked at the display. Three seconds! Jim gulped. “Well, at least there was enough time to switch it off.” He glanced at Khan, who only snorted in amusement. “What’s with your Klingon?”

“My Klingon?” The Augment shook his head. “Let me put it this way. He didn’t like the way the ships were parked and wanted to give them a hand back up in the air. I broke the hand, and then I broke his neck.” He gestured towards a red-shirt, who held another identical blasting composition like the one Koloth had placed on the container. “By the way, I won our little competition.” As Jim looked uncomprehending at him, he smirked, “There were only two seconds left after I convinced the detonator to stop where it was.”

One of the red-shirts began to chuckle. “‘Convinced’ is a nice choice of words, Commander. I would rather call it ‘tearing it apart’.” He lifted the explosive device that looked… odd.

Curious, Jim stepped to the man and observed the bomb. “The detonator… You tore it out?” he gasped; comprehending how close he had come to lose the man he loved. Shocked, he glanced at the super-human. And then he noticed it: Khan’s face was no longer hidden by the cap. Dammit! At least here, between the containers, were no cameras.

Khan shrugged. “I was not familiar with this type of bomb, but without a detonator there is no explosion – end of story,” he explained nonchalantly.

Diego, Caviw and a pale Jeff, who had accompanied the security team ready to help Kirk and Khan, stared at him as if he had suddenly grown a second head. The red-shirts gasped or snickered, the chief’s jaw fell open, and Kirk shook his head. This was so typical of Nien! He always chose the simplest solutions to a problem.
“End of story?” Jim groaned not knowing if he should be irritated or not. “That story could have had a much unhappier ending!”

“But it didn’t,” the Augment answered lazily, giving Kirk one of his slow, smug smiles. Then his communicator buzzed.

He answered the hail and recognized the Rigelian’s voice, “Ritek here! If you answered, does that mean you caught the bastards?”

“Yes, they can’t hurt anyone anymore,” Nien replied, watching the security chief reporting their success to someone with Kirk beside him. Then his attention turned back to his to Ritek. “Is there any news on the station?”

“I left with the *Flash* from Diego’s shipyard to help with the evacuation. I can see a fire at the space harbor, but I’m not certain which section is affected.” He stopped and groaned, “And another attempt from the *Enterprise* to reach her captain. Is Kirk there? His first officer has been trying to get him for several minutes now and is, as it seems, quite upset – well, for a Vulcan.”

Khan grimaced. The Vulcan grated on his nerves though the Augment could understand his concerns. They both worried constantly about the cocky, oversized boy talking with the security chief and someone else on the line; his face paled. Their eyes met, and the former dictator made a gesture. “Wait a sec, Ritek, I’ll patch you through and…”

“Shit! The space harbor's sending a ton of SOSs!” Ritek interrupted him. “I have to answer!” His voice changed slightly. “*Enterprise*, I’ll put you through!” Then the link switched to the *Enterprise*, and Khan heard the deep, calm voice of the first officer.

“Captain? Is this you?”

Khan growled – and dammit again! Then he whispered into the speaker, “Hold the line a moment, your captain is busy!” Not waiting for a response, he let the communicator drop to his side and stepped to Jim, who listened intensely to Capriccio speaking from the orbital station, “The gravity is affected too. The evacuation has begun, but because of the faltering energy supply we can’t use the transporters anymore. It’s too dangerous. We’re stuck using the escape capsules, and there are not enough of them to bring every one of the approx. 500 people to safety.”

“Pity the universe still cannot build a decent ship. Don’t tell me that the *Titanic* is up there!” Khan
sneered, forgetting that his communicator frequency was open and that a keen-hearing Vulcan was on the other end.

“Titanic? What do you mean?” Capricio asked, confused.

Khan stared disbelievingly at Kirk. Was the most infamous ship catastrophe of Earth’s past already forgotten?

Jim rolled his eyes. “A historic event – a luxury liner sank more than three hundred years ago in the Atlantic Ocean,” he answered the commander’s question quickly, displaying his penchant for history. “They didn’t have enough lifeboats to save as many passengers as were aboard.” Then he got back to the topic. “What’s about the _Athena_? Can she leave?”

“The airlock and moorings are keeping her in place! The _Athena_ can’t move without tearing the dock apart; we’d lose all the air in the station. The explosion destroyed part of Engineering; the fire suppressant system and security bulkheads are out of commission. The fire is completely out of control, and if it reaches the central power units, the outcome will be catastrophic.” Capricio’s voice sounded harried. “The captain and his officers have sealed the _Athena_’s bridge entrance. If the moorings fail, they’ll lose the air. It'll be a vacuum in there except for the bridge. Yet as long as the mooring holds, Captain On’thara’s hands are tied.”

“Can we beam the rest of the freighter’s cargo down here?” Jim asked. His attention focused on the upcoming disaster – the likely explosion of the orbital station.

“No, interference is too strong because of all the SOSs and the unpredictable power supply,” Capricio answered through the communicator. “And the cargo transporter up here is destroyed. The only chance to prevent the tanks from being blown up is to make sure that the _Athena_ leaves in time.”

“And what about the two Klingons?” the super-human asked after their other problem.

“One was caught in front of our outpost and is in custody. Our scanners showed another here in the space harbor after we materialized, but the systems are down so we're not receiving any data,” the Italian said.

“So, the bastard and the traitor are still alive!” Jim groused; then he, Khan, and the others heard another explosion in the background. “Commander?” Kirk called. When he didn’t get an answer he
yelled, “Capricio!”

“We’re still here!” the Italian replied; his voice hoarse while coughed. “Dammit, that was one of the auxiliary power supplies. *Santa Maria*, it’s only a matter of time before the main power fails completely and we’re sitting in the dark. But what frightens more is the possibility that the next explosion will damage the *Athena*; her cargo will go up like a Christmas tree.”

“Is it possible to unlock the mooring manually?” the Augment asked. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Caviw, Jeff, and Diego stepping toward him, Jim, and the chief.

“The way in is cut off by the fire and we can’t use the supply line because of the smoke. We tried to contact the control room but got no answer. Most times a technician is there, but he either abandoned the station or he's dead.”

Jim and Nien exchanged a glance. “Commander, has the fire hit the dock’s control room? Can we get in there?” Kirk wanted to know, and the former dictator sighed soundlessly, already knowing his beloved’s thoughts.

“The fire is not there yet as far as I know, but it’s only a matter of ti…”

“Right, then we beam in, unlock the mooring, try to close her airlock manually, and beam back to safety!”

“That could work, but it’s very dangerous,” Capricio answered hesitantly.

“Since death has been, so life has been always dangerous. Ain’t stopped me yet,” Jim deadpanned wryly. “We’re on our way, Commander! Kirk out!” He looked at the chief. “Secure the area and be ready to receive evacuees.”

The Lieutenant nodded and jogged over to his men. Jim turned back to Khan. “I would go alone, but…”

“I thought we discussed this topic thoroughly, Jim!” the super-human said impatiently. “I’ll go with you!”
Kirk sighed. “I said, I would go alone, but I might need a hand up there.”

“I’ll accompany you too, Jim!” Diego cut in. “You’re one of the Federation’s best and brightest, I’m sure, but you’re no engineer. Drythen is a hell of a good technician, but four hands can do more than two.”

“I accept,” Kirk said, and then he pointed at Caviw and Jeff. “You two, try to find Galven. Take care of your injuries and help with the evacuation. If Nien, Diego and I don’t prevent the *Athena* from being blown, then the orbital station will crack like a walnut. The spread of the debris field will cause serious damage; we need all the help we can get. Stay with Ritek aboard the *Flash* or with Galven. We’ll probably need you to beam us out before we end up fried.”

Khan’s eyes widened at Kirk’s words.

Ritek!

The Rigelian had patched the *Enterprise* through minutes ago and…

… And he had joined the discussion openly without altering his voice!

Gritting his teeth, Nien lifted his communicator; knowing that there was no need to hide his identity now. The Vulcan’s sensitive hearing picked up the conversation. He must have recognized Khan’s voice. “*Enterprise*, I’ll pass you to your Captain!” he said firmly.

Spock’s stoic reply proved his surmise correct. “I would appreciate it, Mr. Singh!”

Kirk looked at his lover with questioning eyes as Khan offered him his communicator. “Your Vulcan officer, Jim,” the Augment said quietly. Slowly, realization made its way across Kirk’s features; his sky blue eyes widened. Nien nodded slowly. “He listened to us. He knows!”

Jim stared at his soul-mate, shocked and a little afraid. Khan’s identity was now revealed to the bridge crew of the *Enterprise*. Gulping, Kirk took the small communication device and lifted it to his ear as they made their way to the next transporter room. “Spock?” he asked quietly, realizing that the moment had come to let the cat out of the bag; and he would stay true to the choice he had already made.
ТВС...
Battle for Aldebaran - part 1

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

And once again I have to thank you all for the comments and left kudos – and for all, who are hungry for more action: Here it comes! The next two and a half chapters will be full of action, and even afterwards several things will hold you at the edges of your seats, so to say.

Therefore I don’t waste any more words in this little ‘prologue’ and off you go to the 23rd century.

Have fun

Yours Starflight

Chapter 30 - Battle for Aldebaran, Part 1

Aboard the Enterprise, McCoy stood beside the captain’s chair and waited. His heart beat near out of his chest as the Rigelian, Ritek, patched over the call. He was sure that Spock was as tense as he was. The impending battle loomed large over them; Kirk was on a planet the enemy wanted. What was worse, Starfleet’s own was part of a misfit band of ‘Robin Hoods’ with Khan of all people!

He listened as the Vulcan spoke quickly with Ritek; he learned that the Klingon assault had already begun. Then the Rigelian was interrupted by incoming SOS messages; he put them through so that the Enterprise could hear the transmissions.

Spock lifted a brow. ‘Civilians! How typical of them to ignore proper channels.’ Taking a quick breath, he said clearly, “Captain? Is that you?”

But instead of the familiar bright, tenor of his best friend, there was silence; then a voice whispered, “Hold the line a moment, your captain is busy!” There was a commotion in the background; the whole bridge crew listened to the far away conversation between their captain and a man with an Italian accent apparently on another communicator. McCoy and Spock exchanged a glance as they heard the situation on Aldebaran and its space harbor; then Spock’s usually expressionless face
became hard as a third voice joined the conversation. He instantly identified the smooth baritone voice as belonging to Khan Noonien Singh!

The Augment was with Jim, and Spock didn’t know if he should be even more worried than he already was. If McCoy and Nyota were right and the engineered man was indeed protecting Jim, then the captain would be safer with Khan. After all, the super-human was not only a formidable warrior, but also brilliant minded, comparable even to a Vulcan. But the abilities of the former dictator wouldn’t be enough to keep Kirk and the inhabitants of Aldebaran safe if the Klingons won the next battle.

Sulu and Chekov frowned but kept their discomfort from the acting captain. This voice was somehow – familiar in its timbre and articulation, but they couldn’t put a finger as to why it was so familiar, until now. At the comms station, Uhura looked with widened eyes at her lover as she recognized the third man’s voice as Spock and obviously McCoy already had. Khan!

Bones moistened his lips as he listened to the quick discussion. If Khan was there, he knew that Jim was about run headlong into the next precipitous situation. Frustrated, he balled his hands into fists. Kirk had to be danger-addicted. There was no other explanation for the younger man’s constant readiness to run towards a fire. Not that McCoy, himself, wouldn’t have tried everything to save anyone whose lives were at stake anywhere – the orbital station included. And if the space harbor were to explode and fall to Aldebaran, the casualties would reach into the thousands because New Aberdeen lay directly beneath it!

Spock remained calm on the outside during the talk he and the others had to listen to, but deep inside he already calculated Jim’s chances of preventing the catastrophe in the orbit of Aldebaran. The result wasn’t good, still he knew that it would be impossible to stop Kirk from doing what he had to do. He knew his friend and his stubbornness far too well. All of sudden, Khan’s voice sounded clear and no longer altered through the speakers, “Enterprise, I’ll pass you to your Captain!”

The Vulcan’s face was stoic; he masked the old anger and pushed it to the back of his mind. “I would appreciate it, Mr. Singh!” he answered flatly, watching Sulu and Chekov go rigid before turning sharply in their seats. They stared at him, and he merely gave them one of his famous stares. He heard the Augment say, “Your Vulcan friend, Jim!”

The way the super-human addressed Kirk elicited a reaction from Spock, who lifted both brows. ‘Jim’?

There was a soft murmur from the former dictator, so quiet even the first officer couldn’t hear, and then finally, their captain's voice sounded through the bridge.
“Spock?”

“Hello, Captain. It’s good to hear your voice,” the son of Sarek replied carefully.

“You too,” Kirk answered; his tone tense.

For a second, both men went silent; then Leonard chimed in breaking the growing, uncomfortable quietness. “Hey, Jim. Is everything all right?” He almost heard Jim’s smile as the captain answered, “Yeah, I’m fine, Bones. Had a short run-in with some Klingons, but…”

“We already heard about it from Commodore Wesley,” McCoy interrupted him. “Are you all right? Anything broken?”

“Some tables and chairs, a few Klingon bones, nothing else,” Kirk deadpanned; then he turned serious again. “Spock, Bob reached me via The Shadow and told me that a Klingon fleet is on its way to Aldebaran. What’s the status?”

The Vulcan lifted a brow. Jim avoided the ‘Khan’ topic and was all business, a logical decision Spock welcomed. There were more important matters at hand. He would confront his T’yl’la about the Augment later when this was over. If Khan was determined to protect Jim during the upcoming rescue mission of the orbital station that was obviously in danger, Spock would not protest.

“We have a head start of thirty minutes,” he reported. “I do not have more precise data because the enemy is cloaked, and the emissions do not allow for an exact analysis. The Enterprise is one hour, fifty-six minutes, and twelve seconds away from Aldebaran, ready for battle. We will join with the strike group in one hour and seventeen minutes.”

“Right! I wish I would be with you guys, but right now we’re trying to prevent a space station from falling on our heads. I’ll contact you as soon as the danger lets up.” Kirk’s voice sounded out of breath as if he were rushed. Then after a short hesitation, he added carefully. “Concerning my companion, Spock…”

“As far as I was able to follow your discussion, Captain, your… rescuer is with you. He lacks the experience required to operate in space, but his talents are many. I hope, Mr. Singh’s offer of help is as sincere as it was when he recovered you from Turkana.”
Jim stopped dead in his tracks. “You know…? How?”

“Doctor McCoy didn’t tell me anything in case you assumed such a thing, Captain. It was sheer logic that brought me to the conclusion of the identity of your rescuer.”

Again Jim said nothing for a long moment. He had known that Bones would cover for him; still the Vulcan was too smart to be fooled. He groaned inwardly before he asked, concerned, “What will you do, Spock?”

The first officer had expected this question. “Nothing, Captain. I trust your reasoning; I trust you.” Spock heard an audible sigh on the other end of the line, “Thank you, Spock!”

The Vulcan had pursed his lips, before he replied, “I listened to your plan to beam into the space harbor to give Commander Capricio, whom I know from an earlier encounter, a hand. Try to stay alive until we’ll arrive, Jim.” He purposefully chose to call his captain and friend by his given name. This was private now, and he didn’t know if he would have the chance to speak with his T’hy’la ever again. They both were about to face mortal situations whose outcome none of them could calculate. If one of them died, this was the last possibility for them to exchange private words.

Kirk’s smile echoed in his voice as he heard the worry in his friend’s voice. “Spock, you know me!”

“Yes, we all know you, kid, so stay the hell away from those Klingons and that traitor! Let Khan handle them!” McCoy cut in. Sulu and Chekov coughed, and Kirk chuckled, if only for a moment.

“Nien already had two run-ins with them. I don’t think the Klingon bastards will risk another fight with him – not a fair one anyway.”

Bones smirked. Yes, he was a doctor first, and he loathed violence, but in this case he was glad that Khan had such overwhelming protective instincts, not only for his crew but also for Kirk. He watched Spock’s face betray his confusion and shock as Jim called Khan ‘Nien’; he directed his next words to his younger friend again. “Even with your superman at your side, you’re in a hell of a hot spot. Be careful Jim, promise me!”

“Yeah, I’ll be careful; I promise!” Kirk grumbled; his eye-roll apparent in his voice. “Good God, three mother hens is more than enough!”
Pavel allowed himself a hidden grin at this comment, while McCoy snapped, “Don't think I don't know who you're talking about, Jim, but Spock and I aren't with you and ‘Nien’ has his hands full with that freighter – and you! So – so just be careful, kid, okay?”

“Yes, Mom!” the captain sighed. “The same goes for you, guys. Don’t try anything with the Klingon squadron. Oh, and that’s an order, Spock!”

“Understood, Captain. It is not my intention to ‘experiment’ with the Klingons. Enterprise out!” He nodded at Uhura, who cut the connection; then the Vulcan looked up at an anxious McCoy. “’Nien?’” he repeated consternated, almost not trusting his ears, and Bones shrugged helplessly.

“Whaddyawantmetosay? Lookslike they get along, now.”

“Obviously,” Spock replied wryly, not knowing what he should think of the sudden comradeship between his T'hy'la and the Augment.

ST***ST

On Aldebaran, Jim, Khan (who had raised his parka’s collar to hide as much of his face as possible), and Diego had separated from the others during Kirk’s conversation with Spock. They hastened towards the next transporter. They needed the exact coordinates from Capricio to beam directly into the technical room of the dock that held the Athena so that they could avoid the flames and smoke. The men hoped the commander would have this information for them soon. Pablo and two other security personnel had offered to show them the way to the transporter room, but Kirk declined. Diego knew the spaceport inside out, and all hands were needed down here to deal with the chaos.

Nien’s heightened hearing had caught most of the conversation between his beloved and the Vulcan, but not all. Cautious, he glanced at Jim as the younger man shut the line. He knew that his Pyāra would do anything to keep him safe, and McCoy had promised to stay silent about his friend’s ‘little secret’, but now the first officer knew, and Khan felt a wave of uncertainty. He knew that his freedom lay in the Vulcan’s hands – an unnerving thought. “Commander Spock knows who I am,” he stated quietly, hurrying at Kirk’s side down the large cargo hold towards an exit.

Jim sighed. “Yeah.” He shook his head. “Dammit, how’d you miss him on the line?” There was no malice, just the honest question, and Khan recognized that.

“Ritek patched your ship through too quickly, as the emergency transmissions were coming
“I… I forgot for a moment that I had Spock at the other end of the transmission when I heard you and Capricio.” He grimaced. “It appears you are correct. Even Aug… I make mistakes!”

Jim frowned. “You made some suggestions, and Spock heard your voice, of course.” He rubbed his forehead. “And we were so careful – you were so careful!” He shook his head ignoring Diego’s curious glances. “I’m just relieved that he won’t tell Command instantly or come barreling in with the cavalry.”

The Augment was still tense as they stepped through the door that Diego showed them. “There is no guarantee that he will not contact Command after the battle is over and…”

“He said he trusts my reasoning. In other words, there will be a hell of a lot of explaining to do when I get back,” Kirk snorted. “And not only to Bones, but to Spock too, and my bridge crew, because Uhura, Sulu, Chekov and the others on duty know that we're working together now.”

They reached the transporter room and Diego looked back over his shoulder at ‘Drythen’. “You must have messed up pretty bad if the Enterprise is that shocked to hear about you and Jim working together.”

“An old story,” Khan replied as he followed the two men into the room.

A technician looked at them. “I already got the coordinates from Commander Capricio, gentlemen. He also said that two engineers have managed to reach the main power control room and will try to prevent the worst from happening.” He pointed towards the platform. “Please take your stations,” he said while a second technician handed Khan a bag of tools; he shouldered it with his tricorder.

“Thanks!” Kirk said, and within seconds he, Khan and the Chilean were on the transporter platform.

The technician at the station glanced at them. “Now the fire is spreading through dock 12 B; that’s where the Athena is. The security bulkheads, which should seal off unaffected sections, are not working. The air conditioners failed just a minute ago; the gravity control function is intermittent. If you can’t avoid the disaster, please send an emergency signal. My partner and I will remain here to beam you back instantly.”

Jim nodded grimly. “Thank you again!” he replied; then the transporter was activated, and they re-materialized some moments later in a dark room lit only with auxiliary lighting. Smoke traveled
through the ventilation shaft; the alert sirens blared, and from far away, voices screamed and shouted. The orbital station was groaning like a dying animal.

Kirk and Khan took a second to orient themselves; both men were far too well trained for emergencies like this to get distracted. Diego needed a second longer, still he recognized, as the other men had, the Starfleet member at the controls.

The man turned around, baffled; then he sighed in relief. “Support finally!” he said.

“James Kirk, Enterprise!” Jim introduced himself quickly and stepped towards the uniformed security man whose face he didn’t recognize. “Report, Lieutenant!”

“The power for the mooring has failed, and the Athena is stuck,” the man answered. “The fire…”

“JIM! DOWN!” Khan’s roar drowned out the sirens as he hurled himself against the young captain. He pulled Diego with him who yelped in surprise.

Not a moment too soon. A phaser blast came from behind and hissed along where the three men had stood only a second before. It hit the opposite wall leaving scorch marks. At the same time, the security guard who had welcomed them had his phaser in hand. Khan hurled his tricorder at the man with all the strength he could muster.

McFurthon screamed as the tricorder hit his left shoulder, and the sheer force broke a bone. He could still hold his weapon, but for several moments the pain paralyzed him.

Jim, who was the closest to him, attacked without another thought, wriggling out of Khan’s protective grip like an eel. Now he realized where he had seen this face before. It was at the entrance of ‘The Stars’. This man was the traitor, and Kirk’s temper flared up hot as the flames outside.

Khan’s quick mind had already analyzed that the real danger came from the shooter behind them. Staying close to the floor, he crouched behind the next console, leaving the tool bag where it was. Another shot missed him by hair’s breadth. Pulling out his own phaser, he looked to the console. He saw a reflection, a shape of a man in a red shirt near the door and fired.

The reflexes of his adversary were too quick for a human. The man ducked and threw himself out of harm’s way; returning the shots which didn’t hit home.
‘The last remaining Klingon!’ Khan thought and looked quickly over his shoulder. The traitor and Kirk were still wrestling with each other; they made a good target. Cursing inwardly, the former dictator jumped up and offered himself to the Klingon’s phaser; determined to distract the hostile man from Jim. He shot back in the enemy’s direction as he sped toward the control console. To his surprise, his opponent didn’t fight back. And then he heard a gasp from his previous position, followed by a voice that belonged unmistakably to a Klingon, “STOP this instant, or he dies!”

The Augment gritted his teeth as he recognized Diego. The Klingon forced him to his feet at gunpoint. One arm was brutally bent backward by the hostile warrior. Behind Diego, Khan saw the Klingon for the first time clearly and recognized him as the man who had fought and hit Jim at ‘The Stars’.

“Drythen, shoot!” Diego called. “We have to stop them. Don’t worry about me!”

The super-human had pressed his lips into a thin line. What the Chilean said was true enough, and logical. One life for hundreds, perhaps thousands. But Khan couldn’t. He had done it too often in his life – accepted the sacrifice of a friend to prevent worse fate. He had lost too many people who had earned his trust and even his friendship. He couldn’t and wouldn’t be responsible for another comrade’s death. Those burdens were too much to bear.

“No, Diego,” he murmured. “I will not watch him kill you.”

Near him, Jim and the traitor were still fighting; grunts, hisses, and yells were almost drowned out by the blaring sirens, but not for Khan’s enhanced hearing. Louder than the fighting, louder than the sirens was the sense of his beloved’s fury. It made the blood pound in his ears.

Korax realized that he could blackmail the super-human and raised his voice again. “I said STOP!”

Finally, the two gamecocks heard him. Pushing Kirk back, McFurthon rose and wiped away the blood from his nose. Then he stepped back, bending down to retrieve his phaser. He pointed it at Jim and Khan.

“I really would like to shoot someone right now,” McFurthon panted; pain from Kirk’s fists made his eyes water. “But I have something better in mind!” He stared at the two men with hate. “Drop your weapons!”
Diego tried to rear up, but the Klingon’s hold on his arm was too strong. “No!” he shouted. “Jim, Drythen, for God’s sake! If we don’t stop them, then…” he gasped as the Klingon’s grip increased, nearly dislocating his arm.

“Last chance, Kirk!” Korax snarled. “The same goes for you, Augment! Surrender, or he dies!”

Jim and Khan exchanged a short glance, and both agreed without the need for words. They would find another way – without losing Diego! Pulling out his phaser, Jim let it fall as Khan threw away his weapon; then they raised their hands. Holding the men at gunpoint, McFurthon gestured that Kirk and Khan should move to the other end of the room. Unwillingly they obeyed, waiting for a chance to turn the tables.

McFurthon nodded, satisfied. “Korax, keep them covered!” Then he turned around and shot full phaser blasts at the controls, destroying them, before he walked towards the Klingon and aimed at the two men. “The manual control for the mooring is useless, gentlemen, as was your attempt to stop us. I’ll grant you a few last minutes before the fire reaches this room. With any luck, you’ll have already suffered from smoke inhalation before you burn to death.” He stepped to the entrance and the doors slid aside. The first billows of smoke entered the control room.

Korax glared at him. “Let us shoot them and be done with them, McFurthon. The Augment…”

The demoted officer’s eyes moved to Khan. “This is your so-called Augment?” He looked him up and down, and Nien bared his teeth.

“Ready for a demonstration Judas?” he growled.

McFurthon laughed at him. “Judas? You’re quick to judge. Starfleet let me fall. I risked everything for them and for one little mistake, they stripped me of my rank.”

“Maybe your mistake wasn’t so small,” Jim snarled. “Good men get a second chance and…”

“The nobility you speak of, Kirk, is nothing but a farce. Look at your companion!” He pointed at Khan. “If he really is an Augment, then I’m certain he came from Starfleet’s lab! Just ask yourself how noble is your ‘club’ if they are willing to create that!” He collected the two phasers and nodded towards Korax. “Let us go. They are no danger to us anymore. Suffocation will be their punishment for meddling.”
The Klingon grumbled something but stepped backward as McFurthon did, pulling the still struggling Diego with him. Only after Korax had crossed the threshold did he push the large Chilean back. McFurthon closed the entrance from outside, locking the men inside.

Inside of the control room, Diego fell to his knees cursing in his mother-tongue before he gathered his injured arm to his body. “Dammit!” he spat.

Jim sprinted towards the doors, passing Diego. “Are you okay?” Then he went to the entrance that was, of course, sealed. Opening the cover of the manual control, he tried to unlock the doors, but again nothing happened. “They must have destroyed the emergency lever on the other side!”

A flurry of Indic words (which needed no translation) woke his and Diego’s attention. Helping the Chilean back on his feet, Kirk closed distance to his lover who stared bitterly down at something on the floor. The young captain followed his gaze and took a sharp breath. The reason for the unanswered hails lay one the floor in a pool of blood. The man at the comms station had his throat slit. Jim knew a D’g tahg injury when he saw one!

“God dammit!” he whispered. “I’ll get that bastard! I’ll get Korax for this! Mark my words!”

“First we have to make sure that you’ll get the chance to catch him at all,” Nien stated. He loathed unnecessary violence, and this man’s death was utterly senseless. It would have been enough to stun him, but the Klingon had slaughtered him.

Diego had followed Kirk, looked down at the death technician, gulped, and went to the controls that were shooting sparks into the air. “They’re done for!” he grumbled. “That cursed gringo made sure of it!”

“Korax called him McFurthon,” Jim said and pulled out his communicator. “Kirk to Capricio!”

He had to repeat his hail three times before the commander answered. Watching Khan and Diego try to douse out the flames on the console, he gave a quick report to the Italian whose voice rose in anger when Jim mentioned the traitor.

“McFurthon? Edgar McFurthon? From the archive? Santa Maria, I knew we should have kicked him out!” Several harsh sounding Italian words followed which, again, needed no translation. Then Capricio spoke up again. “What’s your status, Captain? Can you leave the control room?”
“Say again!” Jim stated, “We can only …” Interferences and static interrupted the transmission. “Commander?” Kirk called, but he only heard a few syllables before the static hissed and whistled high enough to call dogs and to hurt their ears. “Oh, for God’s sake!” Jim snarled and closed the communicator. He looked at Nien and Diego. “Can you re-activate the controls?”

“No chance!” the Chilean groused; then his eyes widened as he saw something above him. From the air conditioning shafts, he could see smoke thickening above them. “The door is locked and the fire is coming! What a way to go!”

“We’re not done yet,” Jim said firmly, opening a wider frequency range. “Kirk to Ritek! Can you beam us out of here?”

No answer.

“Kirk to spaceport!”

Again only static could be heard through the small speaker.

He glanced at the other two men. “Do you think you can somehow… force one door half aside?” he asked Khan.

The former dictator frowned in thought. “It’s worth a try. Give me a minute,” he said and stepped to the door. For a moment, he simply stood there, took a deep breath and closed his eyes in concentration. Then he pressed his palms together, and even the parka couldn’t hide tensed, coiled muscles. Then he laid his hands against the door and began to shove.

Diego stared at him. “If he thinks he can move it, then…”

“If any of us can do it, Nien can,” Jim murmured, watching his beloved.

Diego stared at him. Drythen was strong, but in order to move a locked sliding door by sheer physical force, you have to have the strength of a Vulcan or… He frowned and something the Klingon had said sunk in. “Augment?” he asked, blinking. “Did those two bastards call him an Augment?”
Kirk pressed his lips shut. Dammit, he didn’t want to reveal Nien’s secret to more people than necessary.

Khan gasped; his face went red, and then something cracked and the door moved slowly, but steadily.

Thunderstruck, Diego stared at him. “I don’t believe it!” he whispered; his eyes were large as saucers. Then he turned towards Kirk. “Don’t tell me that the Klingon was right – that Drythen is – is…”

Jim sighed and nodded slowly. There was no way they could hide Nien’s identity any longer. “Yes, he is genetically enhanced,” he answered quietly, and the Chilean’s jaw almost hit the ground.

“But, how? There aren’t any Augments anymore. They’re history!”

“Sometimes it’s a bit early to call a situation or people ‘history’,” Jim murmured. He had watched his lover’s efforts a second longer before he turned to Diego. “Nien didn’t ask to be what he is. He was born like this and has been used since then over and over again. He’s free now and on the right side. Don’t you agree?” He saw the uncertainty in the man’s dark eyes and added, “You saw a friend the entire time he’s been with you. You saw someone who risked his life for his comrades time and time again. And down there, in the spaceport, for hundreds of nameless people. Are you going to change how you feel about him just because you know where he comes from?”

De la Vega-Martinez bit his lips. “I shouldn’t,” he murmured. “After all, my people know the best how it feels to be treated like a non-human because of the color of their skin. Still…” He didn’t explain further.

A shout of anger and defiance was torn from Khan’s lips, partly with effort as much as to encourage himself. Jim left Diego’s side to lend his hand.

“Stay back!” Nien hissed. “If I slip, I could hurt you!” Again he tensed his muscles and pushed with all his might, and the door vanished into the slit of the wall. Despite Khan’s warning, Jim added his own strength, and together they managed to open the entrance enough to let a grown man slip through. Khan waved at Jim to go first; then he pushed the door a little bit more to make room for the Diego who looked half shocked and half baffled at him. The former dictator went after them and blinked in the smoky corridor that was dim in the auxiliary lighting. The air continued to heat. The fire approached slowly but steadily, and they still had to unlock the mooring of the *Athena*, and catch McFurthon and Korax.
Somehow they had to manage!

Aboard the Shadow, Galven stared at the glimmering red and yellow within the orbital space station while two of his crew beamed people aboard – those whose SOS signals they intercepted. Then they sent them down to the planet’s surface in New Aberdeen. Beside the Shadow, the Flash did the same; but the Tellarit and Ritek agreed on one thing – their efforts weren’t enough! The space harbor was full of people even though only the Athena was expected today. The staff consisted of more than five hundred people, and then there were the Starfleet members and the men and women of the security team. There were escape capsules, of course, but they wouldn’t be enough to bring everyone to safety. Those people who didn’t catch one of the escape capsules had to be evacuated another way.

And they were running out of time.

The Starfleet scouts based at the spaceport on the planet had arrived and tried their best to help. The same went for the private vessels, but their efforts evaporated as quickly as a drop of water on hot stone. If the fire didn’t get under control soon, the orbital station would be lost.

Galven scratched his snout while his little eyes shifted between the sensor display and the space harbor. Somewhere inside of this growing inferno the last Augment and the Federation’s newest hero were fighting for others’ and their own lives. And the Tellarit was hell bent on supporting them in any way possible.

Suddenly one of the sensors beeped and Galven gasped. The scanner showed a Klingon bio-signal aboard the space harbor. Grunting, his hoof-like fist landed on the console. “Got you, you bastard!” he oinked. Then he called out, “Martin? Stop the evacuation. I got the damn Klingon! When we beam him out then…”

“No chance, Galven!” the man called through the open door, “the problems down on the orbital station are all blocking our sensors. We can’t beam anyone else out of that mess.” Martin Hudson stepped on the bridge. “I regret to inform you that the transporters are to no use to us anymore.”

Galven cursed and gestured to Caviw. “Hail this Starfleet commander and give him the Klingon’s last known position. Maybe he can arrest the bastard.”
The Caitian nodded while Galven glanced at Martin. “No chance we can boost the signal and cut through the interference?”

“No,” regretfully the Terran shook his head.

“Ritek to Shadow!” The Rigelian’s voice sounded through the speakers. Caviw had opened the line while she talked to Capricio.

“What is it?” Galven asked.

“We can’t beam anyone else outta there.”

“The same goes for us,” the Tellarit grumbled. “The blasted interference is too strong now.”

“Yeah. Are you in the mood for an old-fashioned rescue-mission?”

Galven rolled his eyes. “It is becoming a habit. You think so?”

Ritek laughed shortly. “Yes. By the way, our two troublemakers and Diego could use some extra hands, I think.”

The Tellarit grunted in agreement; then he turned towards an Andorian, who sat at the helm in Khan’s absence. “How good are your docking skills?”

The Andorian’s antennas vibrated. “I think I can berth the Shadow without crushing her.”

“Rrrright!” Galven glanced at Caviw. “What’s about the commander?”

The young Caitian woman grimaced. “I can’t reach anyone at the station, neither the commander nor Jim, ‘Léo’ or Diego.” She looked to Jeff who sat beside her; he was pale with a makeshift bandage around his arm. “Do we get the bastard ourselves?”
A small smile played over the Tellarit’s face. “You can bet your life on it!”

“Dammit, it is small here!” Diego’s face betrayed his irritation and the emotional stress he was suffering. As quickly as possible, they had raced down the corridor, straight towards the small observation windows where they could see the *Athena* hanging in the hangar just meters away from them. Coughing because of the thickening smoke, the three men felt their way down the corridor and had found the shaft that led down to the anchoring mechanism of the *Athena*. Only a wall of metal separated them from the deadly vacuum outside.

Diego and Khan had stripped off their parkas to make their way through the shaft and to the mooring; they examined it quickly, but thoroughly.

“How’s it look?” Jim called from above them and the Augment shook his head in irritation.

“It is going to take much work.” He glanced up; Kirk’s face was nothing more than a pale spot in the darkness pierced only by the display of the two last remaining tricorders Khan and Diego had taken with them from the control room; the one the Augment hurled against McFurthon’s shoulder was broken. The tool bag lay useless beside the young captain in the shaft. “We have to loosen it and…”

“Here is something like a hand lever!” Diego suddenly yelled; his voice sounded excited.

“Can you use it?” Jim wanted to know, feeling a spark of hope.

Khan pressed himself up against the large Chilean and observed the mechanism Diego had found. “I think so!” he replied and opened the cover of the manual device. It was a simple lever, so simple the Augment felt the irrational impulse to laugh. Here he was, in the 23rd century where space travel to other star systems was a common occurrence, and a simple lever was still just a simple lever. He gripped it and hissed. The object was cold!

Too cold!

The small room where it was installed was not insulated against the bitter cold of space. “Jim!” he
yelled, “throw my parka down. I need something to protect my hand, or my fingers are going to freeze!”

“Okay!” A moment later Kirk added, “Here it comes!”

The soft material fell to the super-human who pulled it in front of him; he wrapped his right hand in the sleeve of his parka and gripped the lever again. He couldn’t get a secure hold as he needed, still, he was too determined to quit. He and Jim Kirk shared personality traits; stubbornness was one of them.

Pulling with all his considerable might, Khan tried to move the unlocking lever but the lubrication inside of the mechanism was frozen. Khan tried again, but the hand gear would not budge. This time even his engineered muscles were too weak. He was, after all, human.

“Together?” Diego suggested, who had watched the vain attempts of ‘Drythen’. If the man he thought he knew went by the name ‘Drythen’ at all.

Khan took a deep breath. In his time, there had been Augments who had been offended at offers from ‘mere’ humans, but Noonien Singh had never thought that way. Every individual had his or her own advantages and strengths. Why not accept it? An added hand could be the difference between victory or failure. Looking at Diego, he nodded. “Together!” he agreed; he offered the Chilean the other sleeve of his parka and made room for him to grip the handle. “On three!” he said taking command as was his. “One, two, three!”

What followed then was a major effort; later no one would have been able to tell how they managed to move the frozen lever at all, but they did!

Khan’s muscles screamed with exertion; they felt as though they would tear from his bones, but he didn’t give in. He was not only driven by the knowledge that hundreds, maybe thousands of innocent people would die if he failed, but also by the thought of his mate and his crew. The threatening firestorm would kill him – kill them if the fire reached the _Athena_. If that happened, his family wouldn’t have any chance at freedom. And Jim would die with him. He couldn't accept that; he couldn’t even grasp it! Jim was his family; Jim was his mate! He would never quit as long as his beloved’s life was at stake!

And so he pulled, ignoring the agony in his muscles.
Millimeter by millimeter, the lever moved with the combined strength of human and enhanced muscle. Little by little the mechanism gave in.

“How’s it going?” Kirk called, and it was Diego who answered, though just a bit out of breath, “It's moving, but slowly.”

“All right, I’m off to Athena’s airlock and try to seal it manually. If the ship moves with the damn bulkhead still open, the obit section will be a lot more crowded in the Aberdeen Press!” Jim began to move but hesitated one more moment. “Be careful, Nien, will you?”

The reply came in a grunt; the Augment couldn’t answer.

Khan listened with one ear for Jim’s movements; his beloved was crawling back through the shaft. Again he concentrated on the lever. The blasted thing gave him hell, but he was not one to surrender.

Together with Diego, who was very strong for a human, they both pulled ignoring their screaming muscles. A fine layer of sweat broke out on Khan’s forehead and back; his jaw hurt from clenching his teeth with the effort, but the torture was not for naught. The lever was moving.

Suddenly and finally giving in to the men’s combined strength, the hand gear went down setting the mooring of the Athena free; both men sighed deeply in relief. Diego let fall himself backward against the cold wall and heaved for breath. Nien was more reluctant to show his fatigue at the act of strength. He rolled his shoulders and his neck trying to loosen his cramped muscles. Then he took a deep breath and readied himself to return to the supply shaft and Jim.

“How did we…? How did you do it?” Diego panted.

Khan looked at the Chilean. Of course, he had heard the short exchange between the South American and Jim concerning his origin, and so he answered, “You know, how. The Klingon and the traitor told you, and Jim confirmed their statement. I am indeed an Augment.” He had hesitated for just a moment before looking into the Chilean's the eyes. “Still I needed your strength to set the Athena free; so, thank you.”

He glanced up through the shaft. “Let’s go, Jim needs us!” With those words, he wormed his way up to the main shaft again; Diego, still a bit shocked, followed him.
Trusting Khan to look after himself, Jim left the shaft and checked his own tricorder as soon as he reached the corridor again. Somewhere behind him, near the heat source, the small scanner showed a Klingon bio-signal, Kirk had to ignore for now. There was a larger problem at hand. Orienting himself, he turned right and stormed down the hallway; coughing because of the smoke that was thicker here. Turning a corner, he saw the open bulkhead of the dock and, to his relief, the closed airlock of the Athena. Obviously one of her technicians had been able to move the door manually. Still there was the danger that any air left would escape the hangar if the ship moved.

‘Dammit, why didn’t the technician tried to close the dock’s lock manually?’ Kirk thought angrily; he closed the distance to it and observed the emergency lever that… That was melted – most certainly by a phaser blast.

‘Korax or McFurthon! To hell with them!’

Jim pursed his lips and examined the powerless electrical controls. Just then, he heard a muffled noise from deep beneath his feet followed by a jerking motion of the Athena. A wave of panic gripped the young captain; the slightest gap between the freighter and the lock would mean death. He held his breath and waited for the inevitable hissing of escaping air, but it never came. The Athena was still docked.

Gulping and with pounding heart, Jim activated his communicator; he was irritated that he hadn’t thought to try communicating with the freighter sooner. Maybe the interference wouldn’t affect the ship since the distance was short. ‘Kirk to Athena. Come in, Athena!’

“Athena, this is Captain On’thara!” the high voice of a Benzite answered. Benzites came from the planet Benzar – famed for gaming and computer programming.

“This is Captain James Kirk of Starfleet,” the officer replied. “Stay on the dock until we close the bulkhead, or I give another order. If you don’t, everyone in this section will die!”

“Understood, Captain. We’ll wait for your instructions! Athena out!”

Jim sighed, finally a little victory. He turned his attention back to the bulkhead control. The smoke was becoming more unbearable by the moment, and Kirk coughed several times. Then he felt Nien’s presence before he heard his lover’s and Diego’s steps.
“The mooring is unlocked!” Khan said and stopped beside his mate; a fine layer of sweat shone on his forehead.

Jim looked shortly at him. “You’re all right?” he asked with concern. It was rare that Khan showed signs of exhaustion, well, aside from their rounds of intense lovemaking.

The former dictator shrugged and immediately grimaced. His face betrayed that even his augmented muscles had reached their limits. “That was an effort I do not wish to repeat any time soon,” he grumbled before he observed the bulkhead controls. “No power!” he stated. “And the emergency lever is destroyed.”

Diego pushed aside his new knowledge of Drythen as well as any residual apprehension related to it; he pursed his lips in concentration. Sweet Lord, his arms, shoulders, and neck screamed in pain after the inhuman exertion, but the pain didn’t stop him from trying to find the technical solution to the given problem. “Maybe we can override the controls with a tricorder?” he mused. “It has its own battery, and if we connect the tricorder to the controls, we maybe can re-activate them using the tricorder as a secondary control unit.”

Jim and Nien exchanged a glance – brilliant! Then Kirk smiled at the Chilean. “Can you manage on your own?”

“Are you trying to offend me, amigo? Of course, I can manage!” Diego answered with feigned indignation.

The young captain grinned at him. “Right, then do what you can and if you succeed, inform Captain On’thara on the *Athena* that he can leave the station. Communication with him is possible despite the interferences, because of the short distance to the ship.” He glanced down at his tricorder. “Nien and I are off on a Klingon hunt!”

Diego frowned. “Our egress is cut off by the fire and…”

“Korax and McFurthon must have left this part of the dock,” Jim interrupted him. “We’ll search for them; hunt them down before they do more harm than they already have!” His eyes found Khan’s. “Shall we?”

“With pleasure, Pyāra!”
Spock watched the display of his sensors; the captain’s chair remained empty for quite a while now. After his talk with Kirk, he had left the captain's chair and had returned to his own station. Observing the Klingons’ movements was the most important thing now. The possibility of an upcoming battle depended on the data he collected and sent encrypted to the Lexington and the rest of the strike group. He knew that the enemy would become – or perhaps they already were – aware of the transmissions. But Code 9 was still secure and as long as the sensor disturbing device worked, the Enterprise couldn’t be found by the Klingons.

The task demanded the Vulcan’s concentration. He watched the enemy’s speed to make sure that the Enterprise was still out of sight; otherwise even Khan’s development wouldn’t be enough to protect the ship anymore.

The sensor disturbing device…

Something Starfleet’s engineers were working on for years, and Khan had constructed one in just days. Spock remembered Jim’s words in the brig when they interviewed the Augment for the first time. ‘What does a Starfleet admiral want from a three hundred years old frozen man?’ Kirk had asked provokingly. And the former dictator had stated calmly that Marcus needed his brilliant mind and his savagery. Khan’s technical abilities were extraordinary. It was no miracle that the Vengeance had equipment and technology unlike any Starfleet vessel. Noonien Singh’s mind worked well beyond imagination. Under other circumstances, Spock would have not only respected but also admired the genius of it, but after all that had happened last year, the first officer had trouble with seeing the enhanced man as anything other than a foe.

‘These thoughts are secondary to the circumstances at hand and illogical to waste them on someone who is not aboard nor a threat to this ship.’ His right eyebrow twitched ever so slightly. ‘But Khan is with Jim, and this is, indeed, a factor for concern!’

“Commander, I'm getting more from the space station in Aldebaran's orbit,” Uhura’s voice cut in. “The primary communications have failed, but there are enough private communications.” One of her slender hands remained on the receiver at her ear while she looked at her lover. “All available spacecraft are helping with the evacuation, but…” She listened. “I caught a transmission between Mr. Ritek and Mr. Galven. It appears the interference from the orbital station is too strong to continue beaming the evacuees to the planet's surface.”

Sulu allowed himself a quiet curse while Chekov murmured his own in Russian.
Spock bit his lips. Jim was on the orbital station fighting a losing battle. The Vulcan simply knew that Kirk wouldn’t leave the space harbor as long as people were in danger there.

He met the asking, piercing gaze of Uhura; her dark eyes screamed at him. ‘Do something! Our friend is trapped there! Do something!’

Taking a deep breath, he made a decision. The only logical decision he could make because the *Enterprise* needed her captain; and illogical because the main reason for his decision lay in his heart, in his friendship with the young man. “Hail the *Lexington*, Lieutenant. As far as I understand, she must pass Aldebaran before she joins the strike group. Maybe Commodore Wesley can help Kirk and the others out by sending shuttles. If the transporters are useless, the evacuation must be done the old-fashioned way.

A hint of a gentle smile softened the tense expression of the Bantu woman before she quickly did as ordered. Spock pursed his lips; it was the only sign of the turmoil that plagued his usually calm mind. He was risking much with the transmission, still he knew that Jim would have done the same for him if the tables were turned. Jim did when he broke the Prime Directive to save him on Niburu. This was friendship – willingness to break your own rules in order to keep the one’s you love safe.

And for just a moment, the first officer asked himself if Khan had done the same as he rescued Jim from Turkana and cared for him afterward.

ST***ST***ST

“General, there is another transmission from the unseen vessel!” The Klingon communication officer turned around in his seat and looked at K’taH, who went rigid.

“Are you now able to locate the origin of the dispatch?” he growled, and the younger warrior turned towards the science officer. “I will send all information to your station,” he said off the responsibility of actually answering the question.

The thin, tall Klingon scientist watched his sensors with intense concentration, not caring that the general was impatient. K’taH was always impatient, so letting him wait bore fewer risks than giving him wrong information.

“It has to be half a light year away from us, similar to the last transmission. It is holding its distance in
proximity to us and matching our speed.” He glanced at the general. “In my opinion, it is a larger starship because the smaller vessels can only manage up to warp six for a short time.”

“Can you unscramble the transmission?” K’taH wanted to know, and his comms officer shook his head.

“No, Milord, they’re still using the encrypted code for transmission. But this time the communication was longer and was sent on the same frequency as before.”

The general leaned back in his chair, thinking. Suddenly, he rose. “Helmsman, increase speed to warp eight. Comms officer, inform the others that we are in a hurry now.” His dark eyes looked to the science officer. “Watch your sensors. We will catch the Federation-weaklings by surprise, and then maybe we can gather more information on them before they adjust their speed to match ours – if they can.”

He sat down again. “The sooner the battle starts, the better!”

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“Mr. Spock, the Klingons are speeding up!” Sulu’s alarmed shout made all on the bridge turn towards him. Only the Vulcan remained calm, periodically checking his sensors.

“You are right, Mr. Sulu, warp nine. Hold for twenty seconds, then reduce to warp eight, too. Maintain your distance to the enemy.”

Chekov had cursed in Russia before he shouted, “There they are!”

The young man’s outburst was enough to alert Spock, too. He turned his attention to the main screen where he could see the Klingon vessels just for a moment.

Sulu closed his eyes in silent prayer. All tests on the ship’s newest warp capabilities had been simulation only. This would be her first real test – and she couldn’t afford to fail. The Enterprise sped to warp nine increasing their distance from the hostile strike group; then Sulu reduced her to warp eight again, holding their position out of sight.
“They saw us,” the first officer stated as calm if he were talking about the weather.

“Do you think they identified us?” Uhura asked, and the Vulcan lifted a brow.

“They only could see us for a short time, and they can’t do anything other than follow our emissions. Scanning us is impossible.” ‘Thanks to Khan’s technical development,’ an unbidden voice in his mind whispered. He left his station and took a seat in the captain’s chair. “Hold the Enterprise on course, Mr. Sulu. Lieutenant Uhura, inform the Lexington that the Klingons have increased their speed. They will reach Aldebaran twenty seven minutes earlier than expected.”

ST***ST

Aboard the Klingon flagship, General K’taH stared at the main screen. For just a moment, they all had seen the Federation ship, a large one – a constitution class starship. Then it vanished as it went to warp nine.

“We cannot scan them, Milord. Our sensors do not detect the ship, only the warp signature,” the Klingon science officer reported.

“Could you zoom in?” K’taH demanded and met the other man’s pleased expression.

“Yes, Milord. The name or the registration number were not in view, but regarding the new deflector dish, the individual form of the warp nacelles and the signal lights, I am sure it is the Enterprise.”

The general stared at him and then he began to laugh – a low, barking sound. “So, the legendary Enterprise! It will be the last time that she crosses our path.” He glanced back at the main screen. “I don’t know if you’re aboard your ship or not, Kirk, but it will be history soon, and hopefully you along with it!”

ST***ST***ST

“Commander Spock requires what?” Wesley looked at his communications officer, Palmer, in disbelief.
The Lieutenant took a deep breath. “Sir, this is the message. The orbital station of Aldebaran is apparently more damaged than they thought. They’re having trouble evacuating the remaining people, among them Captain Kirk. The interference is blocking the scanners of the transporters. The Enterprise requests that we lend a hand when we pass the planet and send some of our shuttles to the station to…” Palmer stopped. “Another transmission from the Enterprise, sir. They’re warning us that…” His eyes widened. “Dammit, the Klingons have increased their speed to warp 8. They’ll reach Aldebaran twenty seven minutes earlier than previously estimated.”

“And I’m going make a side trip to shuttle evacuees?” The commodore shook his head, rose from his chair, and went to the tactical station. Looking at the newest calculation of the point of impact between the enemy and their own fleet, Wesley made up his mind. “Message to all ships, Lieutenant. Change intercept course; contact enemy at coordinates 2.05S 2.03E, 10.6, 56.5, -17.1 – and hurry, for God’s sake!” He glanced at his navigator. “How much time would we lose if we get close enough to Aldebaran to send shuttles that would reach the space harbor in time?”

“In order to disembark the shuttles as soon as we drop out of warp and then resume present speed, we would need four minutes and fifty-three seconds, sir.”

Bob bit his lips. It was a decision that could lead to disaster if he arrived too late. On the other hand, there were hundreds of lives at stake not least among them one of the most promising and admired Starfleet captains. “Mr. Sonik,” he addressed the Vulcan helmsman who was on duty. “Change course to Aldebaran. Lieutenant Palmer, inform Security of our new mission and that they have to have the shuttles ready to leave the moment we stop. Everything hinges on their speed, now.”

He returned to his chair and sat down. “Speed, warp 8, Mr. Sonik, and if our engineer has a problem with it, tell him to make it happen anyway!” He had closed his eyes for a moment, before he added quietly, “We have to be faster than the Klingons!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, that not everything would go the way Jim and Khan hoped for, doesn’t come unexpected. There are always some hindrances fate simply loves to put in the way. But – at least – they gained some small victories, even if the real problems are still lying ahead.

In the next chapter the great battle will take place, while the people aboard the space harbor are fighting their own fight against time and death – Jim, Khan and Diego among
them. McFurthon isn’t done with all the tricks he has down his sleeve, Korax will give some more trouble, Jim shows one time more that he is a leader through and through, and Khan can demonstrate again that there are indeed advantages, if you have an Augment on your side.

I hope you liked the new chapter and I’m – like always – really, really curious of your comments.

Happy Eastern to all of you

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I hope you all had beautiful holidays during Easter and that the weather wasn’t that bad. After all: To search for Easter eggs in the snow isn’t really funny.

Thanks a lot for your comments and kudos. As promised there is still action now – a lot of action, but also sentiments. And a little warning: In the end you all are going to be mad at me (*smirk*).

Enjoy

Yours Starflight

Chapter 31 – Battle for Aldebaran, part 2

Aboard the space harbor, the bedlam swelled. As the people learned that they couldn’t be beamed away anymore, they began to panic. Others tried to calm down the situations or to help the security team or the firemen to keep the fire at bay, but the flames only grew in their intensity. Sparking cables spread the fire through the station wherever it found fuel to feed on.

The air conditioners were about to fail along with the central power units, and smoke crept in thin billows through the station’s airshafts. Two sections were cut off by the protective barriers that had closed automatically after the first explosion. The emergency fire suppressant systems worked only where the fire was not, and where the suppressant was needed, there was none. On an earlier casing, McFurthon sabotaged the automatic alarm check valves thus stopping the chemical foam from flowing to ensure the maximum amount of damage. The gravity and the lights wavered with the failing current of the main power. The few engineers able to reach the power control room tried everything to stabilize the electricity and the life support systems, but they were fighting a losing battle.

The people were safe where they were, though, as long as the orbital station remained in orbit, and the life support systems continued to function. But they still required evacuation.

Through the thin smoke that infiltrated the air like fear, two males hurried through the orbital station trying to catch an emergency capsule.
Korax gritted his teeth; his right leg, injured in the bar-fight at ‘The Stars’, gave him trouble. While he and the others began their destruction, he had ignored it. But once they had crippled the orbital station, the pain was constantly on his mind, humiliating and mocking him! The only thing he was glad for was the fact that Kirk and his Augment friend had to be dead by now – suffocated and burnt!

Beside him, McFurthon walked with long strides down the corridor lit only by auxiliary power. Pain showed on his pale features. He knew instantly that the tricorder hurled at him had broken bones. Pretending to belong to security, McFurthon and Korax followed the passengers, visitors, and staff members.

They had found a way out of dock 12 by climbing down the emergency ladder to the next lower level where the smoke wasn’t as thick; then they used an elevator shaft to continue their escape. The escape was not easy. McFurthon knew that he had inhaled too much smoke, but they had made it. They were now in the main sector of the station, ready to evacuate with a group of staff members and…

Behind them, an angry voice sounded over the clamor. Glancing over his shoulder, the demoted officer couldn’t believe his eyes; two figures pushed through the throng of people. Despite the dark and dirtied faces, there was no doubt who the two were.

“Kirk and the Augment!” McFurthon gasped the moment his and the captain’s eyes met. He saw the fury in the blue depths just before the man at the officer’s side ran at him with a speed impossible for a human. No, there was no doubt what this man was!

Without another thought, the traitor gripped the Klingon’s arm. “RUN!”

Ruthlessly, they shoved women and men out of their way not caring that who they toppled or hurt as they stumbled over them.

Kirk saw fear grow into panic among the people, and panic would cost lives!

“STARFLEET!” Jim roared. “EVERYBODY DOWN! NOW!”

To his relief, the staff and technicians were trained well enough to realize the gravity of the situation, and they dropped at his command pulling others with them. Jim and Khan had no phasers. The
enemies that they were hunting had stolen their weapons. It was a blessing that most people now were out of harm's way. Korax and the traitor had no scruples, and both lifted their phasers set to kill. McFurthon directed two shots at Khan whose incredible reflexes saved his life. The shots missed their mark when Khan threw himself aside; then a courageous man – orbit security – made up his mind and attacked the former officer. An attacker shooting at an unarmed Starfleet man was enough to spur him into action.

The attack took McFurthon by surprise and for a moment they wrestled. Then the red-shirted security member yelped in pain as Korax appeared beside him and thrust his dagger into the man’s waist. With his other hand, he fired towards Kirk.

Khan rolled over his shoulder to evade fire and glanced over his shoulder as he heard the phaser blast. For a second, fear gripped him – the icy, searing fear that his beloved was hit, but Jim had ducked out of the way and threw his tricorder at the Klingon. It didn’t have the same effect as Khan’s attack on McFurthon in the dock 12 control room, but it was enough to distract Koloth’s first officer. A few brave men attempted to tackle the Klingon.

Korax growled in fury, shook the two men away like flies, and aimed at the Augment again, but too late. Khan was above him like a snarling demon; his pale eyes burnt with an inner fire that the Klingon might have admired if the circumstances had been different. The long, slender fingers of the enhanced Terran closed around Korax’ wrist, hard enough to force the weapon to drop from the Klingon’s hand. The next moment, Korax brought his dagger in his other hand to the human’s throat, but again the Augment was too quick. Turning aside, the blade only grazed his shoulder; then his fist hit Korax in the belly with a force that expelled the air from his lungs. Hooking one foot behind his enemy’s leg, he dropped the Klingon but was pulled down with him.

Around him, the people were on their feet again and clearly panicked as they tried to put as much distance between themselves and the men on the ground.

The injured security man continued his fight with McFurthon, but was slowing down due to the blood loss from his injury. His comrades appeared, but Jim reached the traitor first. Pushing the red shirt aside, he gripped McFurthon, braced his foot against the traitor’s midsection, and dropped to the floor launching him.

The former officer screamed in agony as he hit the floor on his injured shoulder; the pain paralyzed him for a moment. Kirk kicked the phaser out of McFurthon’s hand. Security was there to haul the Judas to his feet. Behind them, a woman yelled she was a nurse and pushed through the crowd to take care for the wounded security man.

Suddenly all the lights went out; everyone stood still in pitch darkness; then the gravity failed. Jim cursed as his feet left the ground; nausea caught him for several seconds – the typical physical
reaction to a sudden loss of gravity. Somewhere nearby, he could hear the unmistakable growl of his lover, “Don’t you dare to move, Klingon, or I’ll tear your throat out!”

Apparently Korax took this threat seriously; he was silent.

“Everybody stay calm!” Jim called firmly; his voice full of authority now. “Find someplace safe, stand fast and await further instruction!” The people murmured agreements here and there, but there were quiet sobs and far too quick breaths. He could understand the people, this was not in their plan of the day. He felt queasy. Experience taught him what a sudden failure of synthetic gravity could do – how painful a fall from that height could be when gravity returned suddenly.

Then he and all the others heard it – the dangerous groaning of stressed metal. The attack had compromised the integrity of the structure; Jim didn’t want to think about the moment the hull would give in. All of sudden, gravity was back along with the auxiliary lighting. The young captain pulled his legs into his body as he fell to the floor and onto McFurthon, who howled in pain.

‘At least the bastard is useful for something!’ Jim thought with grim satisfaction. He glanced in Khan’s direction and felt the urge to laugh because the Augment had used the Klingon to buffer his own fall. A tirade of Klingon curses tore from Korax’s lips before the Klingon pushed the former dictator away, jumped up and tried to escape.

Khan’s reaction resulted in a few rather unsavory words in his native tongue; then he was on his feet again chasing after the fleeing Klingon.

He got as far as the catwalk that linked the central section to the next dock. Korax was halfway across. Brutally, the Klingon shoved a young woman in Starfleet Security’s red uniform out of his way when she tried to stop him. She lost her footing and tumbled over the handrail into the chasm between the catwalk and the lower level deck.

No one would ever be able to tell how the following two seconds were possible. Even with his enhanced musculature which provided Khan with strength five times that of a human, it was unimaginable that he could accomplish the feat, but he did. Forcing his legs to run even faster, he pushed himself off his feet. Nearly flying, he closed the gap between himself and the falling woman and gripped her hand. He slipped under the handrail but caught himself with his free hand. He gritted his teeth; his shoulder stung where the Klingon dagger had slit open the skin, yet his grip didn’t slacken.

The young woman yelped as the jerking motion nearly dislocated her arm, but she didn’t fall. With teary eyes, she looked up at the strange, pale man who had appeared out of nowhere and spared her
likely life-threatening injuries, maybe even death. Still mortal dread coursed through her veins; her heart raced.

“Hold on, I have you!” Khan shouted down to the young female whose big, wet eyes looked at him with awe, hope, and fear. Then a staff member was beside him and bent down to take the woman’s other hand. Together they pulled the female security member back onto the bridge where she sat down cradling her aching arm; she was shaking and weeping, but grateful beyond imagination.

“Thank you,” she whispered to Khan. “You saved my life.”

“You are welcome,” he answered before he addressed the Starfleet enlisted man. “Take care of her!” Then he stormed over the catwalk after the Klingon, who was already out of sight. But the Augment didn’t need a tricorder to find the fleeing enemy. Somewhere in front of him, angry shouts and yelps paved his way. Pushing his strength once again to its limits, he pursued Korax through the station. His enhanced senses combined with his almost feral instinct turned him into a hunter.

He rounded a corner and looked to the source of the noise; he stopped dead in his tracks.

The Klingon lay on the ground between two people very familiar to Khan. Galven sat on the enemy’s chest and used his remarkable weight to hold down his foe while behind him Caviw pointed a phaser at Korax. The Tellarit looked up when he heard the approaching steps. “Hello, Buddy. Look, who just ran straight into my arms. It seemed the poor guy was so afraid that he searched for comfort in my embrace!” Galven’s little eyes sparkled with mirth.

“Get off me, you stinking animal!” Korax roared; he gasped as Caviw stepped on his injured wrist.

“Tut-tut, that is not very nice!” she said with false sweetness. “If he is an animal, then consider what am I – and what can I do with these?” She lifted her free hand showing him her nails that were, well, more claws than nails really.

Khan took some needed breaths and shook his head in sudden amusement. Galven had a tendency to show up at the most incredible times. His gaze wandered to the large observation window on his right. It showed the hangar, and in it the freighter that was still a danger to the orbital station. Then the super-human heard steps behind him and sensed his mate before he saw Kirk storming around the corner. But Jim was not alone. Capricio, a lieutenant, and four security personnel were with him – dirty, full of grit and ashes, but determined and calm.
“Mr. Korax,” the commander addressed the Klingon by the name he heard from Captain Kirk. Purposefully, he headed towards him. “You are under arrest as a prisoner of war of the United Federation of Planets. You are accused of crimes against civilians. Under Federation Interplanetary Law, this is a war crime. Anything you say may be used against you in the Federation court of law. You have the right to an attorney prior to questioning. Do you understand these rights as I have stated them?” The Klingon grunted an acknowledgment, “You’ll get a lawyer as soon as you’re processed, until then everything you say can and will be used against you.” The Italian’s voice was hard. “Lieutenant Svenson, cuff him and take him away!” he ordered. Only when Security had the Klingon in a firm grip did Galven rise and let him up.

Around them, people whispered, others tried to get away, and a few stayed looking on curiously.

Jim had gone to Khan and smiled at him. “The woman back there,” he pointed with a thumb over his shoulder, “she owes you her life, right? You’re the ‘protecting angel’ who prevented her from falling.”

Nien shrugged. “The Klingon shoved her, and she fell; I was quicker than gravity; that’s all.” He realized that Kirk stayed silent and finally tore his gaze from Korax and Capricio. He looked at the captain and saw the utter warmth and tenderness in his mate’s eyes. He cleared his throat. “It was nothing,” he added.

“Nothing!?” Jim shook his head, grinning. “You’re way too modest.”

“Perhaps,” Khan replied nonchalantly refuting Kirk’s statement in jest. He earned a chuckle from his lover who quickly turned serious again.

“You’re hurt,” he murmured and grabbed Nien’s parka; his gaze fixed on the blood seeping through the Augment’s shirt.

“It is just a scratch, James, don’t worry,” the former dictator whispered gently, touched by the care his mate showed. “It will heal soon.”

Kirk rolled his eyes. “I can’t help it. I worry.”

A tender smile played around Khan’s lips; this smile made its way to his ocean-colored eyes. “I know,” he said. Then the main power sprang back to life. The sirens began to blare again. “Damn, can’t they switch that off? An idiot could figure out that the station is in trouble!” he groaned; his
enhanced hearing protested the shrill noise. Sighing, he broached the next topic. “What about the traitor?”

“He’s arrested just like Korax.” Jim bit his lips before adding quietly. “They know what you are. If they tell Capricio or other officers, then…”

“That was a risk I had to take,” Nien interrupted; then he frowned. “And I put you in danger in doing so. If your Starfleet learns that we worked together, it may jeopardize you and your career.”

Jim sighed. “I knew the risks when I took up with you.” His looked to Korax. “Well, at least I can say that we caught a group of Klingons.” He addressed Khan while keeping his eyes locked on Korax, “Without you, we never would have been able to…” His eyes widened suddenly. “Diego made it!” he shouted in delight. Khan turned around and saw the Athena was moving away from the damaged dock; the airlock she had been bound was closed. “Damn Chilean daredevil!” Kirk grinned before he addressed the Klingon, “Looks like your victory was a bit premature, ya think?”

Koloth’s first officer didn’t answer; his brown-green eyes burned with hate.

That moment, a technician raced towards them; he spoke quickly with Capricio, who nodded grimly before closing the small distance to Kirk and Khan. “The drives holding the station in orbit are near failing. They won’t function much longer. The engineers tried to reroute power to the main portals so the Athena and the other small vessels could leave. But if the drives fail, it’s only a matter of time before the station falls and burns up in the atmosphere.”

Jim gritted his teeth. “How many people are still here?”

“More than five hundred, we think, including those in each of the sections. We don’t have exact numbers because comms are down.” He looked out of the observation window; small ships followed the Athena away from the station. “The ships are full, but it’s not enough.”

“We have room for forty people aboard my ship; it’s similar to the Flash,” Galven cut in. “We’re on outer dock number 7. If you bring the people aboard, I’ll take them with us. And as soon as the interference from the station clears, we’ll beam people to the planet with our transporters.”

Capricio looked at the Tellarit. He didn’t know who this guy was, but he had a sneaking suspicion that he was dealing with the militia that was the talk of the Federation. It didn’t matter; he was grateful for any help he could get. “That is very kind of you, Mr…?”
“It’s Galven; skip the ‘mister’.” He waved towards Caviw. “Come on, sweetheart, we have a lot to do if we want to find the strays who need a ticket out of here.” He looked at his Andorian comrade. “Go back to the Shadow and inform Ritek. We need his help too.”

Jim addressed Capricio. “Do you have a layout of the station? We have to make sure we find everyone and get them to the evacuation docks. Can the harbormaster…”

“He is dead. The explosion took out cargo transporter room and the central office,” Capricio sighed.

Kirk groaned. “Okay, then we have to split up – proceed methodically. Commander Lavi and I will search the lower sections for people and send them up. We also have to search for our friend, the one who freed the Athena.”

The Italian nodded. “Bene. How long do you need, Captain?”

“I’m not sure. We should agree to meet where security can lead the evacuees to the Shadow and the Flash. Since comms are down, we need to decide on a time,” Kirk suggested and thanked the damage controlman who handed them respirators. It wouldn’t keep all the smoke from their lungs, but it would have to do while they returned to dock 12.

“The engineer told me that the station will be close enough to the atmosphere to break apart fifty minutes after the last stabilizers fail. That could happen any minute. We need to have those two ships in forty-five minutes at latest.”

“Done!” Jim nodded as he and Khan accepted new tricorders from one of the security personnel. The two lovers turned around as three of Starfleet’s security passed them by with McFurthon in between them. The man spat in Capricio’s direction and hurled insults. The commander remained surprisingly calm.

Then gravity faltered just a bit; McFurthon took advantage of the opportunity and hurled himself at his guards. Kicking one of the security personnel in the stomach, he tried to flee leaving Korax to his own devices and raced down the hallway. He ignored shouts calling for him to stop and running zigzag, he avoided the stun blasts shot in his direction.

“Follow him and bring him back!” Capricio ordered furiously.
Khan tensed his muscles and readied himself to pursue the fleeing traitor, but Jim held him back. “No, Nien, we have to search for Diego and the survivors,” he said quietly; the Augment nodded. It was only a question of time before they would get him. Finding Diego was far more important now.

“Let’s go,” he murmured and a moment later the two men were on their way to recovering their Chilean friend, and helping those who needed them.

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“Our ships are in sensor range. Five Constitution-class starships, four heavy cruisers, two Armstrong types and the others are Mayflower and Newton class ships; one is the USS Biddeford. The Lexington has changed her course and is heading towards Aldebaran at warp eight.” Sulu looked up from his scanners towards the science station where Spock stood.

“So Commodore Wesley is going to aid the captain,” the Vulcan murmured; a hint of a frown moved his usually expressionless face. “If both sides continue at this speed they will meet in eighteen minutes. The Lexington will reach us in thirty-two minutes, but she needs time to send her shuttles to the orbital station.” He adjusted his long distance scanners, and his left brow shot up. “The station is beginning to rotate,” he murmured. “And its energy is levels are fluctuating. If the drives and stabilizes fail, it will drop out of orbit.”

Uhura gasped while Sulu and Chekov turned in their seats. “Will it hold until the shuttles get there or will the station break apart?” the Japanese asked tensely. Worry for his captain and friend echoed in his voice.

“I do not have enough data to answer this question, Mr. Sulu,” the Vulcan replied calmly.

“Then collect the goddam information, man!” McCoy groused from the open doors of the turbo lift. “Jim is down there!”

“I have already requested support from the Lexington granted by Commodore Wesley. If the station survives the next thirty minutes, shuttles will be there to get the last of the evacuees, and with them Jim.”

Leonard bobbed up and down on his feet. “Hopefully! Knowing Jim, he’ll be one of the last to leave the space harbor. He and Khan.” He shook his head. “I never thought I’d say this, but after the
enhanced bastard saved Jim – hell he’s probably doing it now! Well, I want him to survive if only for Jim’s sake.”

Spock only looked at him before returning his gaze to the scanners. Aside from his worry for his T’hy’la (to which he would never admit), he also had to think of the upcoming battle. And until the Lexington arrives at the scene, the Enterprise would lead the strike group; after all she was the Federation’s flagship.

ST***ST***ST

McFurthon ran as quick as his feet could carry him. Security was on his heels and even in the chaos around him they didn’t lose him. Turning the corner, he crashed into two technicians and they landed in a heap on the floor.

Shouting in pain due to his injured shoulder, the defamed officer regained his footing and continued running. One of the two other men saw his handcuffs and heard shouts from the red shirts to stop. Kicking the technician in the belly, he tried to flee again, but the other man grabbed his legs and McFurthon fell again. Falling, he turned around and brought his bound arm over the man’s head, strangling him despite the searing hot agony that shot from his shoulder. “Stay back, or I crush his throat!” he screamed; the four men stopped in their tracks.

“Give up, man, you don’t stand a chance!” one of the red shirts said, and McFurthon laughed a slightly hysteric laughter. “He’s the one that doesn’t stand a chance if you don’t let me go!” he shouted increasing his pressure on the technician’s throat.

But the former officer hadn’t considered that his ‘victim’ didn’t want to be a victim at all. The man was almost sure that his captor belonged to the group of terrorists that had attacked the station. He had also realized that his captor was injured. Bringing his elbow back, he hit the aggressor in the liver while his colleague, who had gotten a gulp of air, attacked from behind.

The tussle was the only excuse security needed to join the fray. Two of them tried to overwhelm McFurthon, but the two technicians were furious and remained in the way, stopping them from doing their duty.

Suddenly the gravity failed completely, and anyone who was in the space was suddenly in the air. The technicians were confused. McFurthon used the chance to push himself up, leaving the technicians alone. Soaring through the smoky air, he drifted through the corridor towards the next door ignoring orders to stop.
A stun blast whizzed by him, but he made no attempt to slow down. He knew that they couldn’t shoot accurately just then, and he was determined to use this last opportunity to escape, even if he didn’t quite know to where.

The noises behind him told him that the four Red Shirts were chasing him again, moving hand over hand across the bulkheads to compensation for the lost gravity and gain some momentum. He floated through the door that led to an emergency ladder. Using the handrails, he half launched himself toward the higher decks where he knew there must be an emergency capsule.

Beneath him a voice shouted to stop; another phaser blast missed him by inches. This one was set to kill – obviously one of his purchaser wanted some revenge. Gritting his teeth against the pain, McFurthon continued his way and pushed himself up to the handrail of the next level.

It happened without warning. Gravity. One moment he was reaching with for the rail with cuffed hands, the next the world seem to come to a halt; and then he was falling straight, and with increasing speed, down, down, down…

The security chief held onto the handrail, his feet firmly rooted to the steps; his three comrades were beside him. They watched the man who had been once a loyal member of Starfleet plunge past them and down between the ladders. His screams echoed off of the walls and ended abruptly the moment he hit the deck several levels below.

The chief took a deep breath, coughed shortly because of the smoke, and looked at his companions. “Maybe it’s better this way!” he murmured and returned with them to the main section where he knew his superior had to be. In the same moment, a hollow sound echoed through the station and a jerk went through it. The chief cursed while one of his men whispered, “The drives have shut down. We’re lost!”

Diego searched to find his way out of the hell he was in. He was able to override the airlock control closed it with the help of his altered tricorder. If he had been able to contact Athena’s captain, he would tell the man that his ship was free and could leave, but now the Chilean had to think of himself.

And leaving that burning dock behind him was precisely Diego’s intention. Kirk had said that the Klingon and the traitor had left this part of the station and that they would follow, but which direction
the young Starfleet officer and his Augment lover had gone was beyond the Chilean. Still he continued his search, never once giving up.

The air was almost too thick to breathe anymore. Biting fumes from the burning plastic, cables, and melting covers brought tears to his eyes and pained his lungs. He knew that the risk of suffocation was higher than the risk of burning alive; still either prospect woke a mortal fear in him. Then for just a minute, gravity failed again; he needed every bit of strength to keep from panicking.

Protecting himself from the smoke by pressing one arm against his nose after gravity was switched once again, he glanced around and realized that he had lost his way. The smoke was thick like a fog and in his despair he got on his knees because the thickest smoke was up overhead. As romantic as he sometimes was, most times he was a realist, and he knew that his chances of getting out of here were zero.

Closing his wet eyes, he tried to gather his strength one last time if only to delay the inevitable. ‘Shit – and I had so many plans for my life!’ he thought.

All of the sudden two boots appeared in front of him, and then two strong hands pulled him to his feet. Despite the fact that everything was a blur, he recognized the pale face immediately beneath the mask – Drythen, or whatever his name was. Relief flooded the Chilean – relief and gratefulness. The Augment had come back for him. If there had been any doubts about this man’s character, they were blown away now.

Khan needed only one look to realize the state Diego was in; he took a last deep breath then stripped off the mask and put it over the other man’s nose and mouth. The technician tried to bat his hands away, but the former dictator shook his head firmly and fixed the mask. Quickly, he pulled Diego with him and headed back the way he came.

The lung capacity of an Augment is fifty percent greater than an ordinary human; still Nien knew that he had to hurry if he wanted to reach the emergency ladder before he required respiration. The smoke was dangerous, even for him. Trusting his sense of direction, he rushed through the foggy corridor searching for way back.

Above them the ceiling began to glow; the fire had reached the dock’s arm and found enough fuel to burn. It was hot enough to melt the fireproof material. In front of them something cracked, and a wave of heat swept towards them.

Khan didn’t waste any time; he dragged Diego with him faster now. His muffled coughs and nausea became more pronounced with every step.
They reached the door to the emergency ladder just before the fire was there; greedy flames licked down through the thoroughly perforated overhead and over the long bulkhead walls towards the exit. The two men pushed through the door, and Khan gasped for breath. To run holding your breath was difficult even for him, and he had to cough through the smoke-filled air. For just a moment, his mind slipped back in time – a time he had to lead his people through smoke and fire while saving the younger ones, which were still hold captive within the labs. Some died then. Diego would not! He ran faster pulling Diego along with him. As quickly as possible, they climbed down the ladder, stepped into the lowest corridor, and headed toward the disabled elevator that would allow them to leave dock 12.

The doors were still open where Korax had forced them apart during his flight with McFurthon. This was the end, or the beginning, of the elevator shaft that led to the upper levels. But as Khan and Diego stepped in and looked up they could see the yellow and orange flickering above them and smoke slowly sifted its way down the shaft.

“Four levels,” the Augment coughed. “We have to hurry. If the fire destroys the lift cabin, it will come down like a missile. Quick, you go first and I will follow. Should you stumble, I can catch you.”

Diego nodded; not doubting the ability of the other man to catch him should he fall. Somehow it was soothing to be with someone who was so much stronger and quicker than himself. Hastily, he stepped to the ladder and began to climb; the enhanced man followed him instantly.

The Chilean could feel the heat increasing and knew that they were running out of time. Above him, he saw the bottom of the lift cabin and the flames above that. The dock had turned into an inferno. The metal of the emergency ladder beneath his fingertips grew hotter, and the smoke thickened. Diego was thrilled when he finally reached the fourth level, swung himself through the open doors, and looked quickly around him – more smoke. He offered a supporting hand to ‘Drythen’ who took it without hesitation, and finally the two men stood in the corridor near the next dock.

Diego wanted to strip off the mask to offer it to Khan; he shook his head again. “No, you need it more than me!” he said and pulled him with him again.

They walked like this quickly down the corridor and met Jim Kirk, who also wore his respirator. “I checked this section,” he said. “There's no one here.”

Khan nodded. “As I suspected,” he grumbled glaring at the young captain. When they had returned to dock 12, Jim took the lead slipping in the role of a scout. Nien pointedly did not approve. Not because he didn’t trust Kirk’s instincts and qualities as a leader, but because the Augment’s reflexes
Kirk would have none of it though; Nien was the only one strong enough to haul Diego the rest of the distance if it came to that.

Kirk caught his beloved’s irritated gaze and sighed while they hurried down the corridor towards the next dock. “Nien, you can’t shield me for the rest of our lives. It’s…”

Khan instantly recognized that Jim said ‘the rest of our lives’! He assumed they had a future together. Nien barely dared to hope that he could have that. So he concentrated on what his beloved had said and growled, “I know that. I do not have to like it though.”

Kirk made a face at the almost pouting Augment. If it were cute, he’d never admit it. “Like I don’t like watching you throwing yourself in harm’s way. This ‘I am better, quicker and stronger at all’. It’s going to... I just got you, and I'm not ready to lose you!”

“That will not happen!”

“I don't want it to, but that doesn't mean it won't!”

Diego couldn’t help himself; he had to chuckle. It was muffled by his respirator. “Really you two, if someone is going to write a new love drama with the potential of ‘Romeo and Juliet’, it should star you two!”

"Yeah, well I’m not Juliet. And I'm gonna kill him if he doesn't get himself killed first." Jim sternly stated, mostly amused, but not quite.

This earned him two sideward glares; then their attention was brought back to the real danger they were in. An eerie shallow sound echoed through the station like a dark omen. It felt like the station shivered; they felt it in their bodies.

They knew what happened, but it was Jim who voiced it, “The stabilizer and drives have failed!”

ST***ST***ST

“Shuttle bay to Commodore; this is Commander Marceaux’s. We’re ready to launch.”
Bob Wesley sat in his chair; his eyes turned from the right side of the main screen that showed the orbital station. But soon the empty space would fill with vessels battling each other for dominance. “Understood, Marceaux. Good luck. And tell Kirk that he owes me one. Bridge out!” He deactivated the intercom at his armrest and addressed the helmsman.

“Mr. Sonik, as soon as the shuttles have left and are out of range of the expected warp field, warp eight to the rendezvous.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” the Vulcan replied calmly.

The engineer, who sat at his station, tracked the launch process of eight shuttles carrying only pilots and medical supplies. The *Lexington* couldn’t give anymore. As painful as it was for her commanding officer, he had to think of the casualties the upcoming battle would demand as payment. And if he had to give up the ship, they would need shuttles to give the crew a chance at escape.

“Commodore, a transmission from headquarters, Aldebaran. The acting commander there informs us that three of the five Klingon intruders are in custody. The fourth is dead, the fifth is on the orbital station, but they don’t know more about him. Contact broke an hour ago.”

“Sir, the orbital station drives have failed, the stabilizer too,” the science officer cut in. “The space harbor is drifting. It will be caught in Aldebaran’s gravity in an hour!”

Bob cursed quietly. The space harbor would crash down on the planet; that was for sure. Hopefully, the spin will take it away from its position above New Aberdeen; otherwise the casualties will be enormous. The atmosphere would burn up much of the orbital station, but not enough. Pieces would rain down on the town like meteorites, and the larger parts including the reactors would be like bombs to the helpless town.

For a moment, he considered flying directly to the station to steady it with the *Lexington*’s tractor beam. But the ship would be too weak to hold the colossus in orbit. The fleet needed him, needed a leader for the approaching battle. Not only a town or even a planet, but the whole sector depended on him and his leadership to keep them safe.

He damned the Klingons into next week and considered his next move. Whatever was necessary and whatever the cost, that's what he would do. That's what made him great at his job - and that's why Jim loved him near as much as he once did Pike. And if Jim was the only one down on that planet,
Bob was pretty sure he'd still do anything, no matter the cost. The young captain deserved that and more from him. And then he silently damned himself for not doing enough while Jim was trapped on Turkana. To hell with the admiralty or Starfleet if they thought differently.

“Shuttles have departed; closing hangar door now, sir,” the engineer reported, and Bob nodded.

“Right. Lieutenant Palmer?” he addressed his communication officer. “Confirm transmission and tell our station on Aldebaran that eight shuttles are on their way to aid the evacuation effort. I'll order every available ship equipped with a tractor beam to lock onto the harbor. We can't hold her up forever, but we can put her over an uninhabited area.”

“Aye, sir!”

The engineer turned around in his chair. “Sir, it’s safe to warp now.”

“All right. Mr. Sonik, warp eight! The quickest way you know how to the rendezvous. Lieutenant Palmer, inform the Enterprise that we sent the requested rescue shuttles, and we're on our way. Until our arrival, she is in command of the strike group!”

ST***ST***ST

Jim, Khan, and Diego sped down the hallway towards the central section of the space harbor. All three coughed continuously; even Nien’s enhanced body could not remove the smoke particles from his lungs fast enough to prevent smoke inhalation. The volume was too great. As they finally reached the massive hall, chaos unleashed again.

The security and staff tried to bring some order to the evacuation procedure without success. It didn't take a genius to figure out that the station was lost after it had become apparent that the drives and stabilizes had gone down. It would burn up in the atmosphere scattering pieces all over Aldebaran’s surface. Everybody wanted to catch a ride on the last remaining evacuation vessel to escape certain death.

Jim found Capricio on one of the catwalks talking hectically with his chiefs; Lieutenant Svenson stood beside him. Closing the distance to the commander, Kirk, Khan, and Diego heard the last words concerning the disposition of the people. Then Capricio turned around towards them.
“Kirk, Lavi! Thank the Lord! I thought you were lost when a fireman reported that dock 12 had burned.”

“We made it just in time,” Jim answered hoarsely. “What about McFurthon?”

“He’s dead – fell down the ladder when gravity returned. Went right down the middle more than fourteen levels. No one could survive that.”

Usually, Kirk wouldn't feel satisfaction at another's death, but not this time. McFurthon’s betrayal had brought cost so many innocent people their lives, and the real fight for survival had only just begun.

“Were there any survivors in the sections you searched?” Capricio asked, and Jim shook his head.

“No, there was no one besides our friend here who cut the last link holding Athena.”

Capricio offered Diego his hand. “You've outdone yourself once again, Mr. de la Vega-Martinez. Even if I don’t think that we will make it out alive, I want to tell you how proud and glad I am to have such a man as you among my people here at the station, and as my friend. Thank you!”

Diego had returned the handshake and made to gesture to Khan before he thought the better of it. He might not know everything, but he knew enough. The man saved his life, the life of his friends, and so many others. If Kirk protected him, then he was worth protecting. “Thank you, sir. We appreciate that.”

Capricio shook Khan’s hand too. “And that you, too.”

“You are welcome,” the Augment said politely.

The Italian looked to question Kirk about this other man but he was interrupted.

“COMMANDER!”
The shout sounded not scared, but happy!

And as the men turned around towards one of the outer observation windows, they felt a wave of hope. A handful of shimmering Starfleet shuttles appeared from behind one of the six moons and raced towards the station bringing rescue to the stranded people.

“Thank the Lord!” Capricio sighed. “With Galven’s and his friends’ transporter and the shuttles, we can save – maybe everyone on the station before she goes belly up.”

Jim smiled shortly; something in his gut told him that Spock was responsible for this little miracle.

And outside of the Aldebaran system, unseen and unknown by even the most enhanced of men, the battle had begun.

ST***ST***ST

Spock did not know but made the safe assumption based on probability (because a Vulcan does not assume) that the visual contact between the Enterprise and the Klingon fleet gave her identity away. He was right. Starfleet’s strike group had barely met with their flagship before the enemy spread; three birds-of-prey attempted to flank Kirk’s gray lady.

Before the Vulcan could order evasive maneuvers, Sulu pushed the ship downward beneath the three ships, forcing the Klingon vessels to alter their course if they didn’t want to crash. “Uncommon but very effective, Mr. Sulu!”

The Japanese grinned at him. “It’s called ‘Kamikaze’. Except we don’t have to sacrifice ourselves to outwit the foe.”

After that, all verbal communication revolved around requirements, orders, and reports. There was not time for banter.

The battle broke loose with all the merciless, terrifying brutality that war brings with it. The Potemkin and the Hood II, sister ships of the Enterprise, built a triangle with the flagship and attacked the enemy while shielding the smaller ships without robbing them of the opportunity to shoot at their opponents. The Klingon birds-of-prey, on the other hand, used their cloaking devices to vanish, only to reappear at the flanks or aft of the Federation ships.
It was a hazardous game; both sides were equally strong in different ways.

Damage reports flooded the bridge after the Enterprise endured severe hits. Her shields still held, but she suffered damage. While Spock directed fleet strategy, he also tried to mitigate risk to the strike group. McCoy and his team received the battle's first casualties; they did all that they could. Scotty shooed his staff through the Engineering, doused a fire here, and gave a hand there. Keenser's incredible climbing ability came in handy as a leak in the cooling system threatened to strand them where they were and fill a good part of the Engineering with acidic cooling gas. The little Royalan had closed the leak quickly as he was immune to the effects of the fumes.

Not only was the Enterprise in trouble, but two Mayflower-class ships took heavy damage; the Potemkin suffered seven torpedo hits, and two interceptors were still upright only because a heavy cruiser shielded them against the Klingon strikes.

The enemy had losses as well. Three birds-of-prey had lost their weapons; one was destroyed, and two had lost their cloaking devices. Still the battle waged; the universe was a silent witness of the madness.

Flying directly into the chaos of phaser blasts, photon torpedoes, drifting vessels, emergency transmissions and cries of the injured and dying, the Lexington appeared as a silver saving grace.

Her presence turned the tide of the battle; she eliminated one of the two enemy spacecraft, which ‘welcomed’ her, and rendered the other one nearly helpless. Bob quickly ordered his ship into the center of the battle; he sent missiles to any enemy that was in range. Still the readouts he got from the fleet’s status were worrisome.

Behind him, two junior officers doused a fire that had broken out after Lexington swallowed a few too many hits. Bob wiped the sweat from his forehead not realizing that he was spreading ash over his face. “Spock's done a good job; there could've been more of them,” he murmured, and then he turned to his communications officer. “Tell the Enterprise that we’re taking command. Spock's got enough problems aboard without having the responsibility of fleet commander.”

Palmer nodded and hailed the Lexington’s sister ship before he continued to pass messages from damaged sections to the emergency department.

Bob’s concentration lay on the position of the Federation’s ships and the Klingons’ vessels. Then he saw something strange, a bird-of-prey. It looked different somehow - newer construction or design.
What caught his curiosity was its armament. It looked - better, more menacing if that were possible.

“It’s their flagship,” he mused.

“Sir?” Sonik asked from the helm, and Bob stepped to him. “This ship there,” he said, pointing at the main screen. “It’s the Klingon flagship. If we hit it hard enough, they might retreat. It’s like fighting against a swarm of bees. Kill the queen and the drones will stop their attack.” He smiled slowly. “We beat them before that way – at Tammeron. Palmer, give me the Enterprise. We have to flank it.”

ST***ST

On the Enterprise’s bridge, Spock bent over the sensors at his station; the captain’s chair was abandoned. In the Vulcan's opinion, it was not necessary to sit there if he was needed at the scanners. He could give his orders from here as well as from the centered seat!

“Sir, I’ve Commodore Wesley for you!” Uhura called. A bruise darkly decorated her right temple, and her uniform dress was ripped at her left shoulder; dirt clung to the material. Still she held firm and stood her ground proudly like a brave sailor in a storm.

“On the screen, Lieutenant. Mr. Ashton, watch the enemy!” he ordered the junior science officer, who stood at the science console near the captain’s chair.

“Mr. Spock!” Wesley looked terrible, but the fire in his eyes and his determined expression told another story. “We figured out which Klingon vessel is their flagship. It’s the ReghQIS on your starboard side. We’ll flank it and fire until either they surrender or they’re destroyed!”

“Aye, sir; Enterprise out!” the Vulcan replied. Then he addressed the helmsman again. “Mr. Sulu, you heard the Commodore.”

“It will be my pleasure, sir!” the Japanese growled altering their course.

ST***ST

Aboard the ReghQIS, General K’taH ignored his bleeding temple. The trickle blinded his left eye.
He also suffered broken ribs as he was hurled from his chair after a severe hit in the aft section of his ship. He barked orders; he was hell bent on victory or to dying a noble death.

Suddenly his science officer whirled around. “Milord, the Enterprise and the Lexington are encircling us. They…”

The ship shook like a boat in a storm as it was hit from both sides. “Return fire!” K’taH roared. He gripped his armrests as a volley of blows shook his ship. Gritting his teeth, he knew that he stood no chance against two starships!

And how right he was. Even as other birds-of-prey came to the general’s aid, it didn’t change his outcome because the other Starfleet ships held the Klingon group at bay while the Enterprise and the Lexington attacked the ReghQIS. The shields collapsed, the left wing of the bird-of-prey exploded in a fireball as three torpedoes hit the ship simultaneously. Fire made its way through the central part of the vessel.

Balling his fists as Engineering reported the complete breakdown of the warp drive and that the warp core was about to explode, K’taH lifted his chin ready to give the last order.

“Helmsman, activate self-destruct! We are going to take the Enterprise and the other ship with us and…”

“General, I have the commander of Starfleet’s strike group on the line. Commodore Wesley.”

Wesley, the man Kor had spoken so highly of! ‘This is about your honor Starfleet officer!’ he thought with loathing.

“On screen!” he snapped, straightening himself in his chair.

A moment later, a middle-aged human male appeared on the flickering screen, a symptom of their failing systems.

“This is Commodore Robert Wesley from the USS Lexington,” the Terran said with a strong, firm voice. “Our sensors show that your warp core is about to explode. Surrender, and we’ll beam the survivals of your crew aboard. Otherwise…”
“A Klingon doesn’t surrender, Earthling!” K’taH spat. “He dies with pride in a battle, earning his place in the Black Fleet. Only cowards give in!”

“Cowardice seems to be a new trend in the Klingon Empire; obvious since you weren’t ashamed to send five of your men to a planet to terrorize civilians. And you didn’t even need a ship to do it. Avoiding a real fight, then?”

“Don’t you dare to call us cowards, human! We don’t run from a battle! We…”

“PujwI HIvlul’chugh qvbe’lu – There is no honor in attacking the weak. That’s one of your phrases, isn’t it?” Wesley spat out. “I learned that from a real honorable warrior of the Empire. Who came up with the plan to terrorize Aldebaran? There is no honor in that act. Bad luck for you that your spies were found and caught!”

“They were successful,” K’taH boasted. “The orbital station…”

“… Is secure,” Wesley lied, “No harm came to the spaceport or Starfleet headquarters, and your spies are in custody. And you, General, are about to lose this battle too. Surrender and…”

“Bogh tlhInganpu’, SuvwI’pu’ moj, Hegh!” the Klingon fleet commander roared. “Klingons are born, live, and die as warriors! You will die with us, Earthling!” With those words, he signaled the comms officer to close the frequency.

ST***ST

The Enterprise’s junior science officer, Ensign Ashton, flinched. “Mr. Spock, they’ve activated the self-destruct!”

Spock, who had finally taken the captain’s seat again during the attack, was on his feet in the blink of an eye. “Mr. Sulu, take us away from here! Uhura, warn all our ships. Explosion in damage range!”

On the screen, he watched the Lexington depart the area while Nyota caught the warning from her counterpart on Wesley’s ship.
The Starfleet vessels were informed about the impending self-destruct of the Klingon flagship. The commanders gave orders to put a safe distance between them and the dying flagship. None of them would run from a danger as a coward, but if they wanted continue to fight, they had to survive at the very least.

KissnaH, a much-experienced captain, took over the command of the Klingon fleet per their chain-of-command. Ordering the other ships into formation, he watched the dying flagship as did his enemy. Then he addressed his comms officer, “Transfer to the Qachjan (swinging sword), Captain Kreth shall break away as soon as the battle resumes. He will fly to Aldebaran to pick up Koloth and his men. We cannot allow the Federation to question them.”

The man saluted and contacted the other ship – a quick and agile scout class bird-of-prey. Then KissnaH rose from his chair as the ReghQIS exploded into a massive fireball. He roared his warning to the ceiling for Kahless and the Black Fleet to expect the great warriors.

ST***ST***ST

At the orbital station, no one knew what was happening at the edge of the Aldebaran system – not even those informed of the Klingon invasion. Jean-Claude Marceaux, the commander of the small shuttle fleet Wesley had called for rescue, had given a quick report to Capricio. He greeted Kirk and set to work helping out with the evacuation. He sent two of his shuttles to the two docks that were separated by the closed security barriers.

As if on cue, the interference that made it impossible to beam the evacuees safely, cleared so the work could resume. Galven and Ritek, together with Diego were busy with beaming people out of the station and down on the planet. The transporter together with the evacuation space aboard the shuttles, they would be successful in bringing everyone away from the station before it burned up in the atmosphere.

Khan stood beside Jim and pursed his lips while he watched the people leaving by shuttle. Others gathered in a group and The Shadow beamed them away one-by-one. “Now this I will call a last minute rescue,” the former dictator said quietly, pleased.

“Yeah, Hollywood-style!” Then Kirk sighed heavily. “I don’t wanna think about what comes next though. Hopefully, the station can alter its course before it comes down. Otherwise, it'll crash into New Aberdeen and… What is…?” Jim had seen that Khan’s eyes suddenly widened as he stared out of the observation window.
“There is something coming,” the Augment said quietly and pointed straight ahead. “A vessel – it just dropped out of warp.”

Jim turned around and hope sparked in him. It could be the *Enterprise*! But hope was doused the moment Nien stated far too calmly, “It’s a bird-of-prey.”

Kirk paled. “You’re sure?”

Khan’s gaze spoke volumes and without further hesitation, Jim raced towards Capricio and Marceaux calling, “A Klingon ship is coming!” He heard shouts of fear from the people, but he ignored them. Even if he were quiet, they’d see it soon enough.

The Italian whirled around. “Holy Mother of God,” he gasped while Marceaux hailed his counterpart on one of the shuttles. “John, a Klingon vessel is coming. Contact them and tell them that we’re on a rescue mission here and that we have children aboard. Maybe this will stop these bastards from blowing us up!”

Khan had stepped towards the large window and watched the bird-of-prey slowing down before it passed the orbital station. Its dark form was in sharp contrast to the pale moon. At the same time, one of the security personnel shouted, “Commander, the prisoner has been beamed away!”

The bird-of-prey didn’t stop but dived down towards the planet’s surface only to turn again and head straight for the space harbor.

The Augment pressed his lips closed while Jim closed the distance to him. “They’ve gotten what they came for, Koloth and the others,” he growled still observing the green bird.

“And somehow I do not think they are finished here,” Nien nodded slowly. He saw the ship turn sharply toward them.

Kirk’s eyes were wide as saucers as he saw the position the enemy took. “They won’t…” he whispered, his words born of denial instead of the facts unfolding outside. “They will not attack a dying station full of innocent people!”

Khan felt his mouth go dry as the bird-of-prey faced the station now. “They will,” he murmured. “They will and it will tear the station apart.”
In the background, the people had realized what the Klingon ship was about to do, and panic broke out once again. Others simply stood there, paralyzed, or reached for their neighbors’ hands in order that they not die alone.

Jim saw how the phaser canons at the end of the spacecraft’s wings pointed directly at the space harbor. Ice crept through his veins and his stomach knotted while a shiver ran down his spine.

This was it!

This was the end!

Several well-aimed phaser blasts and the station would explode.

There was no escape from it.

Not this time!

Death would find him again in the cold void of space, and Khan with him!

Looking away from the steel eagle, Jim’s gaze caught the blue-green eyes of the man who had captured his heart and soul. Not caring that they were in public – it didn't matter now – Jim reached out for him the same moment Khan moved to him. Each knew that death had started a countdown for all aboard the station. Embracing each other, the lovers buried their faces in the crook of each other's neck, inhaling their familiar scents and feeling their hearts beat in unison for the last time.

Jim took a deep breath. This was the last chance to say the thing that burnt inside him for days now, always on the tip of his tongue. Squeezing his arms around the slender, sturdy frame of his mate he whispered, “Given a choice between you or a life in space, I would have chosen you, Khan Noonien Singh. I love you!”

Those three words that moved the world were like a warm balm for the Augment’s soul. Here, in this space station far away from the planet he once called home, seconds before his life was over, those words were his! Finally, they were meant for him – for the man behind the mask of a leader. Bliss
and sorrow rose in him like day and night – the bliss of requited love and sorrow over love lost too soon. And if he wanted one thing more; could be granted one more wish than the love of this warm-hearted, passionate, bright, beautiful young man – it was that his Jim would live!

But it was not to be. Death had spread its wings over them and would take them away.

Kissing the mark beneath his lips, Nien murmured, “You are the best that has ever happened to me, James Kirk. You woke my soul and filled my existence with life.” He pulled his mate even closer, clinging to him in dread that they soon would be ripped apart by death. “Tumasē pyāra karatā,” he whispered those important words back that he hadn’t dared voice before now. Then he closed his stinging eyes and waited for the inevitable, silently pleading with his family for forgiveness. In his death, they would remain in cryosleep forever.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaall right, please put away any knifes, phasers, daggers and so on – you should know me by now. I LOVE evil cliff-hangers. I also gave you a fair warning, didn’t I? (*grin evilly and wriggling my brows).

I don’t tell you much now about the next chapter. I’m really curious, of which solutions for our two ‘boy’ you’re thinking (*snicker*).

I hope you liked the last chapter and that I was able to catch the dread of the battle (in space and on the orbital station), the greater and smaller deeds of heroes, and the emotions. Please leave some comments.

Until soon,

Yours Starflight
At the last minute

Chapter Notes

Hi my dear readers!

Finally the next chapter – just in time for Sunday. Thank you so very, very much for all your comments, and even if the action will ceased with this chapter at the moment, you can look forward to several scenes you all waited for (*snicker*).

I don’t want to reveal too much of the new installment, therefore I already release you to the 23rd century.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 32 – At the last minute

The battle had begun anew before the last vestiges of the Klingon flagship dimmed in the cold vacuum of space that suffocated the last flames. The fight seemed fiercer than before. The Klingons were motivated to avenge their leader’s death; the Starfleet captains were hell-bent on forcing the enemy back behind the lines of the former Neutral Zone.

Wesley had ordered a new attack strategy and used the fact that the Klingons had to build a new formation before they could strike again. Apparently, K’tahH’s death didn’t leave them leaderless; someone else had taken the general’s place. Still the Klingons were too slow, perhaps because of the confusion caused by the change of command mid-battle. The outcome was not one any would hope for. Two birds-of-prey fell to well-placed Starfleet torpedoes; another Klingon scout was rendered powerless. Starfleet was gaining the upper hand.

And in the middle of battle, Ensign Ashton aboard the Enterprise received a sensor readout that made him alert his senior officers.

“Mr. Spock,” he called, and his tone made the Vulcan look away from the main screen towards him; he raised an eyebrow in question. “Sir, one of the smaller enemy ships left the battle zone and is heading for Aldebaran.”
Spock rose and scanned the area himself. The Klingon vessel didn’t use its cloaking device; the device would have depleted its energy. So the Vulcan could follow and calculate the ship’s course and destination. “They’re flying to Aldebaran III,” he murmured before he was distracted by Sulu’s call, “They’re firing at us again!”

A moment later the Enterprise shook with the impact of a full phaser blast.

“Ze shields are down forty-eight percent, sir!” Chekov reported; his Russian accent now thick with fear.

The first officer steadied himself at his station. “Return fire, Mr. Sulu,” he called while he watched the sensors. “What do they have in mind?” he whispered; a short, unpleasant sting coursed through his stomach.

“Maybe they want to free Koloth and the others. Commodore Wesley told the general about their capture, and I’m sure this transmission has been intercepted,” Uhura said. “They won’t risk Koloth and his men telling us anything.”

Spock pursed his lips; it was the only reaction to his thoughts that he allowed. Again, something Jim called a ‘gut-feeling’ spread through him. There was no logical reason to think that this hostile vessel would be a danger to his T’hy’la. His human side thought otherwise.

“Mr. Sulu, how is our fleet proceeding?” he asked knowing he could not leave if there was the slightest chance that the Enterprise’s absence would cause Starfleet’s defeat.

“Two more Klingon ships are dead in the water, four are close, one more was destroyed,” the helmsman reported after checking his scanners. “I dare to say that we have the upper hand,” he added realizing the reason for the first officer’s question. Spock could and indeed had seen the evidence in his scanners. The Vulcan needed a second statement to warrant the order they all were waiting for. Save the captain.

The battle for the sector was on the line; his brother’s life was in danger as well as Aldebaran III. He knew the consequences per Starfleet regulation if he left the battlefield without the permission of the fleet’s commander, but the feeling in him – the pull of his T’hy’la became stronger with each passing second. Was this what Jim had been through as he made his decision on Nibiru to ignore Prime Directive and come to his aid?
The Vulcan pressed his lips together in thought. He was running out of time, and he had to make up his mind now!

The needs of the many. The war needed Jim Kirk; the universe needed Jim Kirk. He needed Jim Kirk.

Taking a deep breath, he looked at Uhura. “Send a transmission to Commodore Wesley. Tell him of our development. Tell him we are going to Aldebaran. Perhaps the Klingons are trying to avenge their defeat with an attack on the planet.” He looked intensely at her. “Please, Nyota,” he whispered. A short nod proved that his lover had understood his true intention.

While the young Bantu woman turned around and took care to squelch the interference disrupting her transmission to the Lexington, Spock addressed the helmsman. “Mr. Sulu, warp nine. Course, Aldebaran!”

“The warp drive is damaged, sir, we can only reach warp six,” the Japanese man called, and the first officer gritted his teeth.

“Then as quick as we’re able, Mr. Sulu! I think the captain needs us!”

ST***ST

The Lexington’s helmsman, Sonik, lifted a brow as he saw the Enterprise fly out of sight rendering a Klingon scout defenseless in its wake. That same moment, the science officer reported a bird-of-prey heading for Aldebaran.

Bob Wesley’s eyes widened. “A Klingon ship to Aldebaran?” He turned around in his chair. “What about the Enterprise?”

“I’m sorry, sir, but I can’t locate her. The Enterprise’s sensor-disturbing device must be on. But regarding her course before she vanished from our screen, I think she…”

“… Is heading for Aldebaran of course!” Bob growled remembering the Enterprise's unofficial trip to Borderland. “For some reason, Mr. Spock seems to have a problem informing me about his self-
assigned missions! Saves him from lying, I suppose.”

“Sir, the Enterprise is hailing us, but I can't hear her through the interference,” Lieutenant Palmer called.

“On speaker!” the Commodore ordered, gritting his teeth. He already guessed the contents of the message.

“… bird-of-pr… hea… Aldeba… revenge f… dead genera… protec… habi… Lexing… answ… ple… bir…prey hea… Al… planned reven… general… habita… Lex…”

“I can't get it any clearer!” Palmer stated, and Wesley took a deep breath. He had heard enough of the Enterprise’s communications officer, and he had a damn good idea of what she was trying to tell them. Dammit, what had gotten into Spock? They were in the middle of a battle for God’s sake and…

“Sir, another bird-of-prey is drifting, warp core malfunction in ten seconds,” Sonik interrupted him. “I can’t get a read on them, sir.”

“Hmm. A farewell gift from the Enterprise before flies off to Aldebaran to stop that bird-of-prey,” Bob nodded. “How is the fleet’s status?”

“The Klingon's casualties are high compared to ours,” the science officer reported, and the Commodore leaned back in his chair. “Right, message at the Potemkin and the Hood II. They’ll have to fill in the gap left by the Enterprise.” He took a deep breath of the air thick with the smell of hot metal and electricity. “And give the Enterprise the go-ahead to save her captain’s ass, Palmer! That's the reason for her side trip!” He frowned, ‘You’ll have some explaining to do with this is over, Spock! So you better bring his ass back in one piece.'

ST***ST***ST

Kreth, Captain of the Qachjan, looked at Koloth and Korax, who stood beside him watched the drifting space harbor. “You are sure?”

Korax’s face contorted in anger and pain; his broken shoulder ached. He nodded grimly. “Yes, they’re lying! There are no children aboard the space harbor. I was there, as you know. I did not see a single child! It is a ruse used to extort our pity.” He fixed Kreth in his sights. “But Kirk is there! Kirk and the Augment!”
The captain bared his teeth. “Kirk? Now this I call good fortune! And the Augment too? Even if we lose this battle, we can report to the counselor that two most wanted enemies of our Empire are dead.” He bent forwards. “Weapons officer, take aim at the space harbor. I don’t care for more victims; just blow this station apart. Kirk and the Augment must die!”

Koloth, who had regained his ability to move just before he was beamed out of Starfleet’s prison, smiled slowly. Every bone in his body hurt; his neck was stiff where the Augment had struck him, but his shame of failure wouldn’t be for naught. At last Kirk and the dark warrior would lose their lives. At least he would have this triumph to lie at the feet of his superiors despite the failure of the mission.

Feeling a wave of satisfaction, he listened to Kreth’s command “FIRE!” and watched the deadly blasts make their way to the space station.

ST***ST***ST

The jolt and shudder that went through the space harbor as the first phaser blasts hit home were not unexpected, not after all those aboard had seen the bird-of-prey position itself for an attack. Screams of terror and despair rent from the passengers. Men and women fell; others froze in fear then came to their senses and tried for the shuttles. As if on cue, the auxiliary power hummed back to life and the emergency barriers began to close, trapping those not quick enough to reach the gates where the shuttles waited.

Marceaux, Capricio, and the others officers hurried the people along. Three of the shuttles took off into space, their occupants hoping and praying that the hostile ship wouldn’t fire at them.

Galven, Ritek, and a nauseous Diego did their best to beam the last of the remaining men and women away, but had to quickly undock as the orbital station began to drift and fire broke out.

Another volley was aimed at the space station and Diego paled. “Sweet Lord, please don’t let Jim and Drythen still be there!”

ST***ST***ST

The Enterprise raced the short distance from the battlefield to Aldebaran. The hostile vessel had a head start, but no one on the bridge doubted that they would arrive in time. Ashton had observed the
bird-of-prey's speed and orientation and reported that the ship had reached the planet just two minutes ago. Uhura had stated that she recorded Wesley’s permission to leave the battlefield in order to stop the Klingon vessel. Thankfully, that would spare them a court martial.

Spock sat in the command chair; his mind was fixed on his need to reach Aldebaran as quickly as possible. He focused as though he could will the ship to fly faster despite the warp drive roaring like a hurt animal. He knew that Mr. Scott had all hands on task keeping the ship going; still he would run the ship into the ground if it meant finding Jim and getting him to safety. This inner voice he had never heard before meeting Kirk whispered now that his T’hy’la needed him. It did not escape his notice that his inner voice always pertained to his captain.

“Mr. Sulu, stop the engines ten seconds before we reach Aldebaran III’s orbit. That will place us exactly four thousand kilometers away from the space harbor!” he instructed, knowing perfectly well the risk of this maneuver.

The helmsman nodded grimly; he had a bad feeling that Kirk was in serious trouble.

He was right!

ST***ST***ST

In the main hall of the space harbor, there were still a dozen men and women, and among them Jim and Khan. After the second phaser hit, the orbital station listed hard; it was impossible to keep one’s footing. Helplessly, the passengers slid toward the far wall.

Nien reached for the leg of a mounted bench and held Jim tight with the other arm. His muscles, overtaxed at the inhuman amount of strength required to free the Athena, burned and screamed in pain; still Khan didn’t let go. The Augments had been bred to survive at all cost; their survival instincts were stronger than those of mere humans. But now there was only one instinct that drove Khan – protect his mate. Nothing else mattered; his genetics, his heart, and his soul affixed to this one purpose. Not even the thought of trying to escape alone occurred to him. He would stay with Jim; there was no other option!

Then the space harbor shook again; explosions were heard throughout the structure, and an awful, disastrous tearing sound grew louder. At the same time, a storm broke loose – literary. Everything that wasn’t nailed down flew toward the starboard bulkhead. There had to be a crack in the outer hull.
As the bird-of-prey fired at the dying station a third time, Galven squealed in anger and desperation. He stood at the transporter controls trying to find the bio-signals of those trapped in the main hall of the space harbor; one bio-signal after another blinked out like the stars at first light. Jeff remained beside him cursing God and whispering prayers.

Suddenly Caviw shouted in triumph, “There they are!”

Abandoning the controls, Jeff raced to the bridge, pushing himself through the evacuees who were huddled tightly together. He arrived just in time to see why the Caitian woman was so delighted.

A giant, silver-grey shape emerged from beneath the Klingon vessel and hovered over it; it was nearly three times larger than the hostile spacecraft. A golden-blue phaser blast pierced through space striking the green bird like St. George’s spear into the dragon.

The bird-of-prey instantly swooped and took flight; its commander was perfectly aware of the fact that he couldn’t withstand the power of a Constitution class starship.

Then Jeff and the others saw the number and name on the large discus of the spacecraft: USS Enterprise, NCC-1701.

Kirk’s gray lady and his friends had come to save the day.

Khan felt the pulling of the vacuum, terrible in its power; he heard the death screams of passengers forced toward the gap in the bulkhead. Lifting his head and pressing Jim to him, he watched them disappear one-by-one. And then it came – the cold. As the heat escaped, the cold found its way into the hall – merciless and deadly.

Closing his eyes again, the Augment clung to the bench leg and his mate with all his might, ignoring the agony in muscles that were stressed beyond their limits. He felt Jim tremble; the younger man tried to wriggle even closer to him seeking warmth and hope for survival.
The air thinned and the cold enveloped Khan along with the hands of Death himself. Somehow, Nien managed to wrap his legs around Jim’s shivering frame and buried his face against Kirk’s throat finding some comfort. Within seconds, the temperature dropped below the freezing and pierced his flesh. Memories of the moment cryosleep took him rose from the depths of his mind. His only solace was the man in his arms whose heart began to slow dangerously. He thought back to their time on Turkana, to Jim’s request to kill him as the Klingons had surrounded them. And now the fate they avoided once was back to claim them; the younger man’s breath became shallower.

Kirk was dying in his arms!

The realization cut through Khan’s heart like a sharp sword. The tears, which sprung to his eyes, were painfully hot behind his closed lids against the bitter cold that flooded around him; then his consciousness began to waver.

Everything became a blur as though he were looking through an autumn. His hearing dimmed; his senses ceased their function, and the blood in his veins rushed to the surface due to the falling pressure.

‘I love you, Pyāra!’ he thought; despair shook him, and his mind drifted in and out of time.

Still, he clung to sanity; he didn’t give in, and he didn’t give him up. He loved life, and he loved the man so bound to him too much to loosen his grip. He couldn’t keep hold; finally his fingers went stiff and lost their grip.

A cry, no more than a hoarse whisper, escaped his blue lips.

His cry was lost in the sea of voices, but he couldn’t make sense of the words. Something hot touched his shoulder, but his enhanced mind was too far gone to react.

An eternity, or perhaps only moments later, warmth spread from his neck through his upper body, and through sheer will-power, he forced his lids open just one more time. He saw lights and a face hovering above him – a face he knew but couldn’t place. Then someone tried to loosen his grip around Jim.

Someone wanted to separate him from his soul-mate – wanted to take him away. Acting on instinct alone, he tightened his hold on the younger man.
No! Nobody would take his beloved from him!

He had to keep him warm – had to protect him! If he let go, Jim would die! Khan’s body was the only thing keeping his lover’s heart beating.

Wrapping himself tighter around the strong, yet so fragile body of the man he loved, Nien closed his eyes. It cost him a considerable amount of strength but somehow he was able to move his face up to Jim’s tousled, golden hair. He breathed his love in deep and clung to him like a lifeline.

Voices were around him again; then the merciful darkness pulled him under once more.

ST***ST

Spock stared at the main screen, and for a second, his Vulcan control slipped as he saw his worst assumption was correct. The Klingon vessel was indeed firing at the dying orbital station! And deep in him was the nagging feeling that his captain and friend was in terrible danger.

“Mr. Sulu, aim at the bird-of-prey and – FIRE!” he ordered; his voice unusually sharp.

The helmsman punched the button, and the Enterprise’s phaser bank within the discus sent a full photon blast at the hostile ship. It would have been easy to chase the bird-of-prey now and destroy it, but there were more important matters at hand.

Spock rose. “Mr. Sulu, lower shields! Transporter room, make ready to beam the survivors over!”

Lieutenant Kyle stood at the transporter controls and checked the sensor data. There were three dozen people in the outer docks where the Lexington’s shuttles anchored to recover the men and women. Eight bio-signals were in a large space within the station, but two of them vanished almost as quickly as Kyle had registered them, then one more. The readout of the scanner showed that there was a gap in the hull, and the deadly vacuum began to pull the air out of the station and into space.

When the order came from the bridge, he didn’t hesitate; he activated the transporter. Its transmitters and receivers locked on the only three bio-signals left in that mortal trap. Kyle hoped that he got those three signals in time. The golden shimmer of the beam left behind two men laying curled around each other on the transporter field floor; a third person lay beside them.
“Quick, gentlemen, we have to beam up the others!” Kyle called and Ensign Shelton, Kyle’s assistant, hurried towards them ready to give them a hand. He bent over the two males, who held each other in their arms and tried to move them. He froze in shock.

“Oh my God, it’s the captain!” he almost screamed, and knelt down beside Kirk and the dark-haired man he had never seen before. “He’s unconscious!”

“Shit!” Kyle cursed and activated the intercom. “Transporter room to med bay, Dr. McCoy! Emergency! I have…”

“Med bay. This is Nurse Barbara. Doctor McCoy is busy. I’ll send you…”

“It’s Captain Kirk!” Kyle snarled while Ashton yelled over his shoulder, “He barely has a pulse, and he’s half frozen. The other two are in the same condition!”

Before the nurse could answer, they heard the CMO shouting from the background, “I’m on my way!” Then the connection went dead.

“Dammit!” The transporter chief left the controls while Ashton slipped off his uniform shirt and covered his captain in an attempt to warm him. Kyle crouched down beside the stranger who enveloped Kirk with his legs and an arm; his other arm was outstretched as if clinging to something. The man trembled like a leaf in the wind; his teeth chattered, and his breath stuttered. He was barely conscious. Kyle removed his own shirt and placed it over the man then carefully shook his shoulder.

“Mister, do you hear me? Mister!”

“Bridge to transporter room! Mr. Kyle, why did you stop beaming over the survivors?” Spock’s deep voice rang with urgency from the speakers.

“Because our captain is blocking the transporter deck!” Kyle shouted back. “He’s barely alive and…”

He didn’t get any further, as McCoy stormed into the transporter room; two assistants with three hover carriers followed him.
“Holy shit – JIM!” Bones yelled horrified; he as at his friend’s side in less than a second. One look at the second male holding onto Kirk as if his life depended on it was enough to send McCoy into a tailspin of emotion. Khan! Of course!

Quickly, the CMO waved his bio-scanner over Kirk and the Augment; he took data from the third man. All of the readouts showed men in very poor condition.

“Ben!” Leonard called over his shoulder and took out three hyposprays from his medical kit. “Inject this here the other guy over there!” he said, pointing at the third man and handed one of the hypos to his assistant. He barely heard Spock order the cargo transporter to continue its recovery mission while he took two more hypos and pressed them to Jim’s and the Augment’s neck, injecting both men with stabilizers for blood circulation and adrenaline. “They’re highly concentrated; capillary damage beneath the skin was extensive because of the severe drop in air pressure. Kirk has some bruising; he’s suffering from a smoke inhalation and a concussion. Our special friend here is about the same, and he has a deep gash in his shoulder; looks like a knife or a dagger. He’s also severely strained his muscles, tendons, and ligaments. The third man, I don’t know who he is, is in worse shape. I don’t think he’ll make it.” He spoke loud enough for Spock to hear him through the open intercom link.

Then something caught his attention and he gasped.

The Augment was still conscious; his eyelids suddenly fluttered. The CMO looked into the blue-green depths that lacked the cold intensity he had come to know. Instead, it was replaced by confusion and fear; then the super-human began to shake so badly that Leonard couldn’t stop himself from laying a soothing hand on his shoulder.

“Mr. Singh, can you hear me?”

The former dictator didn’t answer; apparently even his enhanced abilities had reached their limits. Carefully, McCoy tried to move Khan’s arm and legs to separate him from Kirk, but without success.

Rather the opposite in fact. The Augment moved his free arm slowly and wrapped it around Jim; every attempt of the CMO to prevent it was useless. Khan held tight to the younger man and slowly pressed his face back into Jim’s hair while continuing to shiver from head to toe. McCoy groaned; Khan was in his over-protective mode! Determined, Bones tried to move Jim’s arms away from the super-human’s waist, but it was impossible to loosen even Kirk’s vice-like grip.
“Ugh! You’d think they were glued together!” he groused. Suddenly, Khan’s body was loosed of its tension; nature finally demanded tribute and the super-human was robbed of his remaining consciousness. But he continued to shroud Kirk with his body, and his subconscious stayed fixed on the younger man.

“Dammit! They have to be naked before I can stick them in the infrared chamber to warm them up properly.” He saw Jim shudder; his breath heaved, and the tricorder showed an atrial flutter. “Oh no, you don’t!” McCoy snarled. “Don’t you dare to die on me again, Jim!”

“Doctor, how is the captain?”

McCoy thought he could hear a note of concern in the Vulcan’s voice and at any other time, he would have taunted the first officer over it, but not now. They were both worried out of their heads for their friend. “Not good! I’ll give you an update as soon as I can,” he answered while injecting Kirk with a dose of medicine designed to keep his body functions working. “Hold on, Jim! For God’s sake, hold on!”

Then he rose. “Alright Kyle, ship’s emergency transport. Beam Kirk and Mr. Singh directly into infrared chamber one and the other man into chamber two. Quick!” With those words he stormed off to return to the med bay; his assistants followed him with the unused hover carriers. On his way, the CMO informed his chief nurse of the incoming casualties; he arrived just as Nurse Barbara switched on the two infrared chambers. Geoffrey M’Benga was busy connecting Kirk and Khan to their life-support systems. In the second infrared chamber, Dr. N’Halro an Andorian did the same with the third man that Kyle beamed aboard.

“Status!” McCoy demanded as he stepped beside his colleague into the small chamber where Jim and the Augment lay. The infrared light had been switched on and bathed the four men in a red glow that would warm the two patients without the risk of cardiac infarction due to warming the body too quickly.

“I stabilized the captain; readouts are on your computer and the chambers’ monitors!” M’Benga answered.

Leonard took another bio-scan with his medical tricorder to see for himself. He sighed in relief as he saw his friend’s heart rate increase. “Thank the Lord!” he murmured. “Body temperature at 34.7, heart rate at 24 and rising, brainwaves…” He frowned. Khan’s brain activity was far above human standards, even injured; that was normal, but as he read Jim’s scans, his eyes widened.

M’Benga turned his head. “Something wrong, Len?” he asked, and McCoy gulped.
“Well, if I’m reading this thing right, our captain will be even more… Christ, a bigger pain in my ass as soon as he comes out of this!” He showed his colleague the results and Geoffrey whistled.

“Our captain is a genius.”

“Yes – a genius with a tendency to get his ass fried any time he gets a chance,” McCoy sneered and bent over Jim and Khan and attempted to remove their clothes.

“He looks more frozen then fried,” M’Benga grumbled. He watched Leonard taking boots off of the two men before demanding a scalpel from one of the nurses to cut off Kirk’s parka, shirt, and jeans. He pulled and tore at the material removing it from between the two men.

M’Benga lifted both brows. “Wouldn’t it be easier just to separate them?”

McCoy’s face was red with effort. He wheezed, “If you can get them apart without breaking anything, be my guest! The bastard is holding onto Jim like he’s the last solid rock in the sea, and Jim is clinging to him like the infant he is!”

Geoffrey chuckled at his boss and stepped beside him to help in the task. “Well, all this points to exposure to the vacuum of space and sub-zero temperatures. There might have been a hole in the hull of the area they were in. If that’s the case, then this ‘bastard’s’ strength is the only reason they’re still alive.”

“Please don’t remind me that Jim owes Khan his life – again. That’s like the fourth, fifth or … Awww hell, I’ve lost count!”

The doctor pursed his lips. “I read your reports from the incident with Section 31 last year; this is the Augment, isn’t it?”

Bones rolled his eyes. “Yes, be ‘honored’ to meet Khan Noonien Singh, last dictator of Asia, Augment, killer, and savior.” He bit his lips while he ripped the torn parka from Jim’s motionless body. “And a genius. The sensor-disturbing device is his baby.”

M’Benga stared at him. “Well, then I think we all owe him our lives. We wouldn’t have made it out
of Borderland without that little engineering miracle.”

“Yeah!” McCoy said while he concentrated on removing Kirk’s and Khan’s clothes. Two minutes and more than a little of the doctor’s sweat later and Kirk and the Augment lay on the bed naked as the day they were born. Petechiae and mottled blue bruises covered their bodies. M’Benga took the torn, dirty clothes out of the infrared chamber, trashed them, and returned to his other duties while McCoy examined the two men; he was completely out of breath.

“Even knocked out you idiots give me trouble!” he growled in Khan’s direction before his attention lay only on Kirk. He let his bio-scanner wander over his friend’s body and with a critical eye, took in all the injuries the little device read out to him. There was some swelling and bruising on his upper body, and two serious looking contusions on his left leg – likely a hand-to-hand fight. Right, Kirk, ‘the Iowa-kid’ went a few rounds with the Klingons aboard the space harbor. There were also older wounds, as good as healed, striping his assaulted body.

Frowning, McCoy took a closer look at them and recognized them for who they were. These were the remains of torture that Kirk endured at the hands of the Klingons. The pink lines were nothing more than the remains of healing skin after they had been split open by something very sharp. Bones had a good idea of their cause – daggers. There were also fading bruises, greens and yellows, inflicted by brutal beatings pain sticks, too.

McCoy shook his head in disbelief. Jim had a good constitution, especially after the help of Khan’s blood more than a year ago. But this was... This was something different, unusual even for Kirk. There were no scabs, only the traces of scars, even though the torturous ordeal was only eight or nine days ago. There was no way that a human body could heal this quickly – not even Kirk’s.

This, together with the higher brain activity and the fact that Jim’s poor condition had been stabilized with the first treatment, made the CMO cautious. “What happened to you, Jim?” he whispered. He took a scan of Khan and compared it to Kirk’s readouts, and pursed his lips in thought. “Your cells are regenerating not at the same speed, but still yours are working very quick, kid.”

The conclusion came quickly. Still McCoy would run some tests before he accepted the results. Quickly, he took blood samples from both men. He swore under his breath as he needed three attempts before he got blood from Khan; the Augment’s soft but tough skin resisted the needle at first.

Afterward, he checked the newer bruises and carefully examined Jim’s hip; the bio scanner showed that his right leg was out of alignment. Thank the Lord, Kirk only had a dislocated the thigh and no breaks to show for the ordeal. A quick pull and twist and the joint popped back into its place. “Sorry about that, Jim, but in two days you’re going to thank me.”
Then his gaze drifted down over Jim’s back and to his buttocks; they were reddened, and a bit abraded. ‘As if he slid over something hard. Maybe that's how he dislocated his thigh,’ Leonard thought; then he choked as the bio scanner gave a complete different explanation for Kirk’s state. “Erythema in the rectum?” McCoy didn’t even realize how high-pitched his voice sounded. He gaped at his friend who habitually flirted with any female that resembled humanoid. Then he remembered another time when Jim had been in the med bay; he admitted almost shyly (something Kirk was most definitely not) to having a wild night with some guy.

Listening to an inner voice, Bones bent over the younger man and carefully lifted his head to have a closer look at his neck. There was a bruise on his throat as if some hand tried to strangle him, and next to the bruise was the biggest goddamn hickey McCoy had ever seen. Well, almost. He remembered the hickey Kirk sported a few weeks ago after...

Thunderstruck, he laid Kirk’s head carefully down; then he looked at the Augment still wrapped around the captain, driven by his need to protect. Leonard dropped his head and remembered Kirk’s words, ‘…things have changed, Bones. A lot of things…” McCoy had confronted Kirk with his knowledge about Sunrise’s real identity. ‘…I’m not in any danger, Bones. Far from it. He’s cared for me, healed me…” That had been Jim’s words. ‘…he’s helped me, more than I can explain… we’re okay – with each other…”

“Sweet Lord, don’t tell me…” Leonard whispered hoarsely and made a quick bio-scan of Khan’s lower abdomen. And sure as hell the readouts were the same – well, almost, because the Augment’s enhanced body had already righted itself. But that wasn’t the only evidence of amorous activity between the men. McCoy saw finger pattern bruising on Jim’s shoulders as thought someone had clung to him. A deep tissue scan revealed more bruising no longer visible on the skin – nothing serious. But it all added up. Jim and Khan were… Were what? Fucking? In lo-? Oh dear God, not that. But that first day in the med bay, the rescue, the – ugh, caring. And then the physical evidence he had now as well as the fact that he still couldn’t move a muscle on either man.

McCoy leaned against the curved wall of the infrared chamber; it wasn’t the heat that made McCoy sweat.

He remembered all too clearly another exchange of words.

‘…You two are already use nicknames? …Are you holding hands now?’ he had asked, and Kirk’s reply had been an innocent. ‘How did you know?’

“God dammit, Jim, I hit the nail on the head; you even confirmed it, and I didn’t believe it even then!” Bones hissed. He felt anger rising – anger at himself and Kirk. “I can’t believe it! You risk
your career, your freedom and even your life for a – for a…” He couldn’t finish the sentence.
“Stupid kid! You got the brain of a genius, but you think with your dick!”

Bending down, he spread a special warming blanket over the men designed to trap the infrared and reduce heat loss; it also offered privacy for the two men.

“You have a lot of explaining to do, my friend! Your bio, your healing, and what the hell has gotten into you that you think rolling around with Khan is a good idea!?” he growled; then he left the infrared chamber closing the door firmly behind him.

He glanced over at the second chamber and checked the readouts of the other man Kyle had beamed aboard. There was no guarantee that he would make it; still Bones would give his best. He never stopped trying to save a patient’s life even if it was hopeless. What had his father said once?
’Hopeless is only what you don’t try’. This sentence had been firmly stuck in his brain ever since, and ever since it helped him to find solutions where no one else could. It made him one of the best doctors in Starfleet.

“Doctor, new patients are arriving – survivors from the space harbor!” Barbara called from the main room of the med bay crowded with injured crew members. McCoy moaned. Good God, would this nightmare that began with a phaser blast ever end?

Quickly he returned to the large room as the lights began to dim. There was still enough energy for the life support systems, the bio scanners, and one quick look at the monitor proved to Bones that there was enough power for the surgery suites. Still it was obvious that the Enterprise was losing power for some reason.

“What the hell is Spock doing up there!?”

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As McCoy had ordered the intership transport of Jim Kirk, Khan, and a third man straight to the infrared chambers of the med bay, Spock knew that he wouldn’t get any information about the captain’s condition. The CMO would first assess and treat his patients; inside the med bay doors, he might as well be CO. The Vulcan turned his attention back other urgent matters, the kind of that looked like a drifting, rotating mass of devastation.

“All remaining harbor passengers have been beamed aboard with the cargo transporter,” Uhura
reported. “And Mr. Scott wants me to tell you that ‘the engines are ready in fer a funeral’, if we don’t stop using the power he needs to keep the warp core going on.”

Spock lifted his brow. He had to have a talk with the engineer about more professional reports when this was over. “Understood and acknowledged,” the first officer commented wryly before his gaze wandered over the main screen. He watched the remaining ships depart the orbital station and fly a safe distance from the dying space harbor. Cocking his head, the Vulcan addressed the helmsman. “Mr. Sulu, what is the station’s orientation and projected trajectory?”

The helmsmen turned around in his chair; his face was pale. “It’s shifted from its original position above New Aberdeen. Still, the largest part of the town and the smaller villages around it will be directly affected when the space harbor burns up and breaks apart in the atmosphere.”

The crease in his forehead betrayed his frustration; Spock returned to his station, “ETA to planet’s atmosphere?”

“Fifteen minutes and forty-nine seconds, sir,” Hikaru answered promptly anticipating the question.

The science officer didn’t waste time calculating before he glanced at Uhura. “Lieutenant, how are the comms? Is our transmitter working again?”

Nyota met his gaze. “Yes, it is, sir.”

Understanding and concern passed between the two lovers; then Spock straightened. “Hail the Lexington. Ask Commodore Wesley if he can spare six ships. We will need six tractor beams in addition to our own if we are to hold and pull it from Aldebaran’s gravity.”

Uhura’s eyes widened, while Chekov murmured, “I already hear Mr. Scott complaining.”

Aboard the Qachjan, the Klingon Captain Kreth cursed while his comms officer continued to receive damage reports. The Enterprise had come out of nowhere. No sensors and no readouts had warned them of the starship’s approach until it was behind them. There was no doubt that it was the same ‘phantom’ that had accompanied the strike group at a safe distance and informed Starfleet about the Klingon fleet.
Koloth stood beside him; his gaze was dark and furious. “Just like Turkana!” he growled. “Kor told me about the small ship that was suddenly there and then gone. The Federation has developed something to impede our sensors.”

“But why doesn’t Starfleet use it on every ship? The only vessel we could not scan during the battle was the Enterprise and…” Kreth stopped when his ship reached the battlefield again, and it was obvious that Starfleet would have its victory.

He cursed colorfully when he got the order to withdraw the still operative members of the Klingon strike group – back to the Neutral Zone. The battle the Klingons had looked forward to was lost. There would be no annexation of the Aldebaran system or its neighbors; they would not be able to cut this sector off from the rest of the Federation. The Klingon attempt to expand their Empire was brought to an end.

As the hostile ships took flight, Bob Wesley decided to make sure they left Federation space for good.

He was about to order five ships to follow the fleeing enemy, but just as he was about to give the order, Palmer turned around in his chair. “Commodore, I have the Enterprise. Commander Spock wants to speak to you.”

“Ah, let me guess, the interference has magically disappeared!”

His comms officer just shrugged, and Bob groaned in frustration. To hell with this crazy clique of officers. He supposed their looking out for one another ought to be an admirable trait. “On screen, Lieutenant!” he growled and gave the Vulcan, whose face appeared on the screen, a dark glare. “As I can see your communication systems are working perfectly again, Mr. Spock!”

“Sorry, Commodore; there was an electrical short in the transmitter. I was able to bypass the route pending repair,” he heard the Enterprise’s female comms officer state in the background and Bob grimaced. “In this short a time? Well done, Lieutenant Uhura, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir,” the woman answered; then Spock rose to speak.
“Commodore, I want to report that all have been evacuated from the orbital station, but we still have an emergency situation here. The space harbor doesn’t have any power and will drop into Aldebaran’s atmosphere in approximately fourteen minutes. The sensor readouts state that the station’s damaged drives cannot alter its current projected trajectory over New Aberdeen. We require six vessels with tractor beams in order to hold space harbor in orbit and shift it away from Aldebaran’s populated areas. Otherwise, there will be thousands of victims despite the Klingon retreat.”

Wesley cursed like a twentieth-century sailor before addressing his comms officer, “Palmer, broadcast to Mayflower III, Al’dh’re, Hood II and the two scouts. I want them to follow the Klingons to the end of the sector. Everyone else, max speed to Aldebaran. Explain to them what the Enterprise is proposing. I expect their cooperation.” He punched the intercom button on his armrest.

“Engineering, ready for maximum warp and ready the tractor beam. We’re going to pull a space station away from Aldebaran – and I don’t want to hear a word about our engines. I know that they’re in a bad way, but I want you to make it happen. Bridge out!” His gaze returned to the screen. “We’ll be with you in a few minutes; use your tractor beam to slow its rotation and decent if you can, Mr. Spock.”

“Aye, Commodore!”

“And one thing more. The next time you go off on your own little venture, inform me! Lexington out!” His hand gripped the armrests. “Mr. Sonik, maximum warp, now!”

The Lexington and the other vessels arrived as the space harbor was nearing Aldebaran III’s atmosphere. The continent below was on alert including New Aberdeen and the eastern. The smaller towns around New Aberdeen, as well as the area between the capital and the coast, were warned, too. People sought shelter in their cellars and small bunkers; the planetary defense systems were ready to shoot larger parts into smaller pieces as soon as entered the atmosphere. But it wouldn’t do much to mitigate the upcoming disaster.

The Shadow’s two vessels, the Lexington’s shuttles, the two Starfleet ships previously stationed in the space harbor and the private spacecraft, all crowded with the evacuees, remained in the orbit. The people were safer there than down on the planet. After Spock had broadcasted his plan and instructions, all ships equipped with tractor beams helped the Enterprise stabilize the orbital station as best they could.

The bridge crew of Starfleet’s flagship watched the mental giant slowly disintegrate as pieces broke apart and floated down toward the atmosphere before flaring and disappearing like a spark in a fire. Each broken piece foreshadowed what could be – what they were now trying to avoid – a planetary disaster. The effect of the fallen orbital station would mirror the effect of a large meteor. Tsunamis,
dust, and debris would spread for miles and miles from the point of impact, and New Aberdeen would cease to be.

The remaining vessels of the strike group led by the *Lexington* finally arrived. With military precision, the *Lexington* and the other ships took their positions between the private spaceships; everyone activated their tractor beams. Caught in the energized net, the space harbor’s descent slowed down and finally stopped.

Aboard each ship, engineers frantically fought to keep the engines and tractor beams functioning despite the damages. Valves popped, electronic circuits were overstressed and sent sparks through the air; still the crews managed the impossible.

Spock watched the sensors; Sulu corrected and recorrected his ship’s course – careful to keep a safe distance from the many ships around them. Chekov calculated the course to the outer moon where the damaged space station could be towed; Uhura recorded the damage reports each of the ships’ sections and their needs. Each Starfleet ship sounded the same.

They did it. The combined power of the starships and the smaller vessels overcame Aldebaran’s gravity; they dragged the former space harbor away from the planet at first meter by meter, and then a little faster.

Aboard the *Enterprise*, the lights in the corridors and ships’ spaces flickered; life support systems not necessary were switched off, and even the main lights on the bridge had been reduced to only what was needed. The command center illuminated mainly by the displays of the consoles. The ship shivered; the engines roared, but the proud ‘gray lady’ didn’t let her crew down.

Finally, as they reached the sixth and outermost moon of Aldebaran, the tractor beam was switched off; everyone on the bridge sighed in relief. Even Spock had allowed himself a deep breath before he glanced at Uhura. “Damage report, Lieutenant.”

Nyota Uhura was always professional, but right now her nerves were frayed. “May I report what isn’t damaged? It will save time, sir.”

Her unusual answer confused Spock for a moment; then the bridge crew burst out laughing. The Vulcan lifted a brow. Of course, he understood that this illogical fit of laughter was a kind of release of stress for the all-to-human crew. Human reactions were often more than illogical – if that were logically possible!
“Engineerin’ ter bridge!” Scott’s voice sounded as grim as his ancestors must have as they battled their own invaders. “Sorry, if I maybe donna use a polite tone, sir, but are ye done wit’ squeezin’ out t’e engines like an orange? I swear, this isn’t an Engineerin’ anymore, but a junkyard!”

Serenely, Spock cocked his head. “Then I suggest you should start to bring it back to order, Mr. Scott.”

“And with what, sir? With a shovel?”

This time the first officer lifted both brows. “If you think that this measure is necessary, you should contact the laboratory in the arboretum. I am sure that Lieutenant Ti-Ming will lend you a shovel.”

A snort was heard followed by an outraged, “If that be a Vulcan’s idea of a joke, I canna laugh about it.”

“I merely answered your question, Mr. Scott. I await your status report in an hour. Bridge out.” He heard a curse, then the connection was cut off. Spock straightened in his chair. “The same goes for the other sections. Status reports in one hour. I will be in the med bay.” He glanced at the helmsman. “Mr. Sulu, you have the bridge.”

The Japanese man rose. “Aye, sir.”

With a nod, the Vulcan left command central, stepped into the turbo lift, and rode it down to the medical deck. In every corridor, only the auxiliary lights were lit; crew members and evacuees, the least serious of the injured aboard, crowded outside of the med bay. McCoy had claimed a few neighboring spaces as a necessary expansion of the medical department.

As Spock stepped into the med bay, he was instantly confronted by controlled chaos. His gaze wandered to the wounded men and women; the medical staff did what they could with the dwindling supplies that they had. The surgery lamp was lit and from within, McCoy’s voice could be heard barking orders.

Searching his way through the cots and couches, he stepped into the CMO’s office. McCoy appeared seconds later soiled, sweaty, and distressed; he demanded medical files from the onboard computer.
“Spock!” Leonard acknowledged the Vulcan. “I’m very busy.”

“I am aware, Doctor,” the science officer replied calmly. “I only wish to look in on the captain.”

Bones was bent over his desk but looked up. “He’s out of danger. Kyle beamed him and Khan up just in time. The third man died a few minutes ago. His pulmonary and circulatory systems were too damaged to save him.” He gritted his teeth. “I hate losing patients!” He took his PADD and headed for the door, distracting himself with another topic. “What have you done up there that we have only auxiliary power?”

“We pulled the space harbor away from Aldebaran’s atmosphere and to its outer moon and away from the gravitational pull of the planet,” Spock answered as calmly as if he was talking about the weather.

McCoy stopped dead in his tracks and looked agape at the Vulcan searching for a hint that the first officer was joking. That was not the case. “We dragged the entire space harbor away?” he asked in disbelief and watched as Spock crossed his arms.

“Not only the Enterprise, but also the strike group minus five ship that are following the Klingons now,” he corrected the CMO. Then he lifted a brow. “So, the captain is no longer in mortal danger. How is his condition?”

McCoy grimaced and turned around. “Barbara!” he yelled and the nurse hurried to him. With a “Give this Geoffrey!” he handed her his PADD, and then he gestured to the Vulcan to follow him. Together they stepped into the room containing the infrared chambers. “Jim and Khan are in there,” he said pointing to his right.

Spock frowned slightly. “Why didn’t you separate the captain and Khan?”

At this Leonard had to snort. “You can try if you like,” he simply answered and stepped to the small observation window of the chamber where his friend and the Augment rested. “Just have a look. You see why I had to stick them in this tube together?”

Spock stood beside Bones and glanced through the window; his stoic expression changed just a bit and betrayed his bafflement. There, bathed in the warm infrared light, was his T’hy’la, naked and half covered by a warming blanket and lying in Khan’s arms! The Augment had wrapped himself around the younger man, his face looked – tranquil, and was an inch away from Kirk, who returned
the former dictator’s embrace.

“Doctor, can you explain why they…?” Spock began astonished but was interrupted by the CMO.

“M’Benga assumed and Kyle confirmed some minutes ago that the space from where Kirk, Khan, and the third man had been must have had a crack that opened directly into space. Kyle said that one of Khan’s arms was outstretched as though he were holding onto something. He was holding onto Jim with his remaining arm and legs when they materialized on the transporter deck. It seems Khan held onto Kirk to prevent him from being pulled into the gap. His muscle and tendon damage attest to it.”

Spock’s gaze remained on the super-human. Something deep in him stirred as he saw the too-familiar face again after all this time. It was anger that he quickly repressed. Whatever the enhanced man had done more than a year ago and despite the fact that the Augment had been responsible for Kirk’s temporary death, it didn’t matter now. Now the former dictator took care of the young captain; he had paid a penance. Slowly Spock looked at McCoy. “So, Khan protected Jim, again, but that doesn’t explain this… embrace!” There was a hint of repulsion in his voice.

McCoy sighed frustrated and irritated. It would be easy to tell the Vulcan about Kirk’s newest ‘conquest’, but it was Jim’s place to admit his foolishness to his friend and first officer. He didn’t want to spit Kirk’s dirty little secret out before Jim had the chance to explain. “Khan is very protective about those he regards as ‘his’,” the CMO said carefully. “He refuses to let go of Jim even in his unconscious state. He seems to be possessive of our captain.”

“Why should he regard Jim as his?” The Vulcan voiced the question he had asked himself a dozen times and more. “Because of the blood you used to… revive the captain last year?”

Bones made a face. “Maybe, but there’s more. During my examination, I found out that Jim’s cells regenerate nearly as fast as Khan’s.”

Alerted, Spock lifted both brows. “I beg your pardon?”

“How should I explain it?” McCoy felt a new wave of headache stinging behind his temples. “Jim had been tortured by Klingons barely a week ago; still all the wounds are as good as healed. His brain activity has increased; his body is already fighting off the aftershocks of being hit with temperatures beneath -50 degrees and lowered air pressure. Hell, he survived a room that was about to become a part of space – just like Khan. Aside from Jim’s only slightly slower processes, their scans are identical.” His glance switched back to the two men who cuddled together like two small children in sleep. “It wasn’t like that at Jim’s last exam. There were some side-effects after the
procedure last year that brought him back, but not like this.”

“Do you think Khan gave him some of his blood plasma when he rescued him from Turkana? Perhaps to increase the captain’s strength for the flight?” Spock made the right conclusion, and Bones rubbed his neck.

“That – or he injected him something afterwards to help him heal. I have no clue how much our superman knows about field medicine, but it’s obviously it is enough to mix some decent drugs and treat Jim after he recovered him. Don’t forget, I instructed ‘Sunrise’, but he knew enough to carry it out.” He shook his head.

“Will these ‘changes’ be a problem for Jim?” Spock asked carefully, and McCoy threw his hands up.

“How should I know? I don’t think so, but the tests I started running aren’t finished. I don’t think that there will be any serious biological implications. His body has already accepted the few augmented functions I’m seeing. What I fear is that he will be even more… Jim Kirk than usual. In other words: We will have even more trouble holding him in check!”

Spock nodded slowly understanding what McCoy meant. “How long do you want to keep them in the infrared chamber?”

Bones glanced at the monitor. “Their temperature is by 35.2 and 35.4 now, heart rate at 29 and 32. It’s an improvement, but not enough to remove them from the chamber. If they continue to improve, I think I can let them out in four hours – five at latest. I want their heart rates over 65 beats per minute and warmed through and through, before I place them in regular med-beds.”

“In separate ones, please!” Spock said; his face gave away the slightest hint of rejection.

Promptly, the CMO rolled his eyes. “Believe me, I’ll do my very best!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Well, that was in the last nick of time that the Enterprise came to rescue. And that Khan gave Jim this ‘doping-drug’ made of his blood plasma not only helped him to escape on Turkana, but also saved him now, otherwise he wouldn’t have survived the whole disaster at the space station. Yet it will not save him from several necessary talks and explanations.

And latter goes for Spock, too, because in the next chapter he will have to answer to Bob Wesley, who is anything but pleased about our favorite Vulcan’s newest self-given mission. Parallel our two boys are giving Bones and later Spock another shock, and Galven and the others learn that their friend ‘Drythen’ is exactly there where he never wanted to be: On a Starfleet vessel. Of course that is going to make them act.

I hope you liked the new chapter – beginning with the action and ending with an outraged Bones because of his development concerning Jim’s and Khan’s relationship, and a thunderstruck Spock who will have some problems to recognize what McCoy already knows.

Thank you in advance for your comments,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi my dear readers!

Sorry about the new delay, but my time was running short again and my dear beta-reader was in a lot of stress, too. But now I’m glad to get the corrected chapter and to be able to upload it for you. There will be candies, something to grin about, some hair-tearing situations and a lot of fun.

Thank you so very, very much for all the comments,

enjoy the new chapter,

Yours Starlight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 33 – What’s going on here?

The next hours flew by for all of them. While McCoy continued to treat all those who needed medical attention, Spock received the ship status report, and he relayed the information to Wesley. Then the Enterprise and those vessels, which had evacuees on board returned to Aldebaran on impulse power. They beamed the recovered down to New Aberdeen. The needed repairs began, and all able-bodied crew members pitched in.

It was the same aboard the Lexington and the other ships. The starships most damaged would remain at Aldebaran for repair. Diego would be busy, that was certain. Two vessels would also stay to secure the planet while the other Starfleet cruisers would fly to different starbases for the needed technical refits among them the Enterprise. Her departure for Starbase 6-S between Aldebaran and Betazed was planned within the next 24 hours. Until then some auxiliary installments would be finished to ensure the ship’s functions.

And even if she had suffered some severe hits, Scott adamant that he would make the most repairs by himself. He didn’t trust some ‘civilian gearhead to mess with his babies’.

Said ‘civilian gearhead’ remained with Galven and the others, but as the poison smoke thickened, he began to vomit and to shake. The Tellarit took care that the Chilean made it to one of the overcrowded hospitals. But Diego’s condition wasn’t the only thing that worried Galven. He hadn’t heard word about Khan and Kirk. As soon as he was certain that Diego was in good care he began
to search for the Augment and the young captain – starting, of course, at the Enterprise. If someone had to know about the officer’s whereabouts, and therefore for Khan’s too, it had to be his friends.

Ritek contacted the starship. A wave of relief spread through the militia when they learned that Kirk and ‘Drythen’ had been beamed aboard in the very last moment and were now recovering in the Enterprise’s med bay. But this knowledge brought new concern to Galven and the others. The man they had known as ‘Drythen’ was now held by Starfleet, whether Starfleet knew it or not. He’d avoided it this long, and Galven, Caviw, Jeff and Ritek knew exactly why.

“We have to get him out of there before the uniform-wearers lock him away!” Galven oinked, and Ritek lifted both brows.

“Kirk wouldn’t allow this. He would never…”

“His hands are tied,” the Tellarit cut in. “There must be some kind of Federation warrant for Khan and with his first officer is in charge, well… One word and our augmented friend will find himself in custody.”

“The ship’s doctor promised Kirk he’d give him the chance to explain everything, and the Vulcan is his friend, too,” Ritek mused. “If he arrests Khan, he’ll also be condemning his captain. I don’t think that this Spock will do anything against our daredevil – for now.”

Galven had listened to the Rigelian’s words and scratched his snout. “Still, we should think of a plan to pull Khan’s ass out of the hot water he’s in. The boy can try to protect him as much as he wants, he will have no other choice than to bow to the laws or risk trial, too.” He cocked his head. “And to spare both the drama especially our young hero, we should act.” He glanced around. “What do you think?”

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“What do you think of this?” Geoffrey M’Benga turned away from the two men in the infrared chamber and towards McCoy who studied the readouts on the monitor.

“What their body temperatures are nearly normal now; their heart rate and breathing are steady. I don’t think another hour will hurt them, and then we should put them into med-beds.” He turned towards his friend and colleague. “With regards to ‘Sunrise’s’ true identity and his tendency to tear a place apart if things don’t go along with his wishes, we should keep Khan away from the other patients.”
M’Benga pursed his lips, looking back at the two males who still clung to each other. No, not clung – that was the wrong term. They snuggled against each other. “Len, you said Augments register higher brainwaves.”

“And this whole time, he's hanging onto the captain as if he thinks Kirk might disappear. In other words, he cares deeply enough for our captain that even unconscious, we can’t pull him away from Kirk. I think it would be the best for all of us not to separate them.” As he caught the baffled expression of the CMO, he added, “Khan’s instincts are fixed on Kirk and his subconscious will know if the captain isn’t with him anymore. And then we could have a real problem. An Augment only driven by his basic instinct is nothing I want to deal with.”

Bones rubbed his neck, acknowledging the truth in the other doctor’s assumption. “Rrrrright,” he grumbled. “Then make a room ready for the two – alone. The senior officer staterooms are all crowded, so clear out storeroom 3 and equip it with two med-beds, the portable life support, and link them to the terminal on my desk. I don’t want to let either of them out of my sight.”

Thoughtfully, the African doctor watched his colleague. “I do understand that you don’t trust Khan given your history with this man, but Kirk…”

“… May trust Khan too much,” McCoy interrupted him; driving his attention back to the small observation window of the infrared chamber. “Khan does nothing without purpose, and I'll be damned if I allow him to use Jim – not that I know what I'd do. But I'm watching him with both eyes wide open!”

Geoffrey nodded slowly. “Okay. I'll get a room ready.”

“Thanks,” Bones smiled at him and watched him leave the room. Then he glanced back at his friend and the Augment, who...Who was just starting to stir. 'Of course he’d wake up first. Even with more smoke than air in his lungs, and more bruising than skin, his brain just won't let him rest! I wonder if his enhanced intelligence isn’t a curse sometimes.'
He didn’t know what happened – or where he was. His keen hearing caught a gentle hum, and he thought he saw a red glow through his still closed eyes. The air was warm but synthetic, and he was laying on something comfortable.

And he wasn’t alone.

More asleep than awake, he felt a weight against him and in his arms; his nose caught a familiar scent mixed with traces of smoke and sweat.

Jim…

His mind and soul reached out for their mate and without his own doing, Nien shifted closer to the younger man in his embrace; instinctively searching his nearness. His action, as slow as it was, sent a sharp pain through his shoulders and screaming muscles in his arms. It hurt enough to wake him if only for a few seconds.

The soft buzzing and red shimmer caught his attention again. As he tried to analyze the data his senses were delivering to his mind, an intense headache began. Unable to suppress a small groan, he forced his eyes open.

All he could see was a metal, curved wall in arm’s reach and Jim’s face close to his own bruised, ash gray, dirty with grit, but relaxed. What was most important, he could feel and hear his beloved’s heartbeat and breath.

Memories crept to the surface.

Smoke, fire, shaking ground, explosion, screaming…

A large window showing the stars, a giant green bird on the other side of the glass, flashes of photon shots…

A raging storm in the hall; people were dragged away by the wind. There were more screams and then cold.
Khan shivered as his body remembered the iciness that had hit him. He began to tremble, and his teeth clattered with the memory of the cruel coldness. It was in his muscles, his bones, his heart, and even his soul. It reminded him far too much of cryosleep’s beginnings, and everything in him refused to endure that again.

Freezing, he closed his eyes again and searched for warmth. The warm air and the blanket, he only felt now, were not enough. His body and soul had its own ideas of fighting the cold and finding solace in one. Tightening his arms around Jim and ignoring the increasing pain in his arms and shoulder, he cuddled against the young captain; his instincts told him that they were safe with each other.

Safe, after they had been in danger.

Most of the memories of recent events shrouded themselves in the dark, but the Augment knew that death had tried for them and that they somehow escaped the Grim Reaper.

One memory, though, shone like a beacon brighter and warmer than the sun. His beloved’s voice, "I love you."

Jim loved him!

Nien had known it for quite some time, but neither Jim nor he had dared to voice it.

But in the face of death they had uttered those words that moved worlds.

Peace spread through the Augment. He was injured, this much he realized, and he was in a strange chamber filled with hot light. Infrared, his mind told him, but he didn’t care. All that mattered was that fact that he and Jim somehow escaped mortal danger; they both were safe, and this beautiful, shining young man loved him!

Listening to his own breath still shaky from the cold, he was soothed by the steady heartbeat of his beloved. He nuzzled the captain’s cheek and pressed a kiss to Jim’s dirty forehead. Somehow he knew that he could be happy; he had the man who held his heart and soul.

The tender gesture was enough to pierce Kirk’s consciousness. Feeling only warmth around him and the familiar proximity of the man he loved, one of Jim’s arms snaked around the Augment’s waist,
and he slipped a leg between Khan’s. His subconscious yearned to be as close as possible to his mate. Then sleep took him again.

Khan sighed quietly before he tugged Kirk’s head beneath his chin – relieved. Their lives were not threatened at the moment, this much his mind knew. They were safe and cared for, and just right now, that was all that mattered. Relaxing again the super-human drifted quickly back to sleep.

And outside the infrared chamber, a shocked Leonard McCoy stood and tried to comprehend what he just had witnessed.

ST***ST***ST

“Welcome aboard, Commodore!” Spock stood in the transporter room and greeted Bob Wesley who had showered and changed into a clean uniform before he beamed over to the Enterprise. He had gathered reports from all ships, had visited the Potemkin, and he wasn’t about to rob himself of the chance to get some explanations from the Enterprise’s first officer in person.

“Mr. Spock,” Wesley replied, then nodded at Kyle before he addressed the Vulcan again. “As you informed me, Kirk was among those you rescued from the wrecked space harbor. How is he doing?” he asked while leaving the transporter field. He followed the science officer into the corridor.

“The captain is still being warmed in one of our infrared chambers and has not regained consciousness. As far as we could trace back the situation aboard the orbital station, he and others were trapped in a hall that was about to crack open completely.”

Wesley stopped dead in his tracks. “What?” he gasped and as the Vulcan faced him, he thought he could see an echo of emotion in the almost black eyes of the other man.

“He suffers from capillary damage indicative of exposure,” Spock revealed. “Both definitive proof of being in contact with extreme cold and rapidly falling air pressure, that points toward one conclusion.”

“The room he was in must have had a breach in the bulkhead,” Bob murmured. He rubbed his neck feeling exhaustion for the first time since the battle ended. “Holy shit! A few seconds later and he would have been dead.”
“Exactly,” Spock commented calmly. Wesley shook his head. How was it possible that Vulcans could act on concern but never show it? Spock, as well as every other Vulcan, was a riddle to him.

“In other words: You saved your captain’s neck,” he straightened his frame, “by leaving a battlefield without conferring with me first.” As the science officer opened his mouth, Wesley groused, “Oh, I forgot, the problem of the Enterprise’s communication system. It came handy, don’t you think so? You are lucky to have such a capable comms officer who repaired an electrical short in a few short minutes.”

Spock recognized sarcasm; one cannot spend five minutes with Jim Kirk and remain ignorant to this particular human characteristic. And his so human inner voice now told him not to test the boundaries of Bob Wesley. Even he had his limits. Spock’s unilateral decision to follow the Klingon ship and Nyota’s lie could end in a trial for both of them.

“Lieutenant Uhura was top of her class for good reason,” was all Spock had said concerning his lover before addressing the main topic. “Our scanners reported that a Klingon ship left the battlefield and headed for Aldebaran shortly after General K’taH’s death. The action made clear that they planned to avenge him; the battle was as good as lost for them. Klingons do not go down without setting an example. Attacking the planet they had come to seize fits their modus operandi.” He and Wesley continued their way toward Engineering.

“Yet they didn’t attack Aldebaran, but the space harbor,” Bob murmured.

“Commander Capriccio informed me that all Klingon prisoners were beamed away – recovered by the bird-of-prey. Perhaps one of them informed the Klingon captain of Kirk’s presence at the station. That might have led to an attack. Jim and I are two of the most wanted persons in the Klingon Empire. It should come as no surprise that the hostile commander was tempted to gain at least one small victory by killing a declared public enemy.”

Wesley pursed his lips and stepped into the turbo lift followed by Spock. “Is this speculation or do you have proof?”

“Only Koloth, Korax or the hostile captain can answer,” the Vulcan replied casually lifting a brow. “But the events speak for themselves.”

Sighing, Bob shook his head and glared at Spock. “Still, your decision to race to Aldebaran should have been reported to me before the action took place.” He stopped the first officer’s reply with his hand raised. “You did the same at Turkana.”
“Sir, you gave us your permission to…”

“You were already in enemy territory when I gave you my unofficial permission, Mr. Spock. Don’t forget that little detail. You launched a rescue mission on your own without informing me twice now.” He fixed the Vulcan in his sights. “Jim Kirk’s tendency to bend the rules to his whim seems to have rubbed off on you!”

Spock had no reply and Bob snorted. “You boys give me more gray hair than I need. I’m happy with the loyalty and even friendship between my senior officers, but you’re crew are thick as thieves. Not that this is a bad thing – rather the opposite, because out here in the depths of space we need each other. But I’ll remind you that you all made an oath. This friendship cannot lead to insubordination, and what you did, Spock, comes very close to it.”

“Without my rash decision not only would the remaining people in the space harbor have died, but there would be thousands of casualties if the orbital station had crashed.”

“Do you think I don’t know this?” Wesley growled. “It’s the only reason I don’t drag your ass to court martial!”

The lift doors opened and revealed an absolute mess at the first sight; still Bob recognized some order in the chaos in front of him. “And now I want details about this sensor-disturbing thing that makes the Enterprise invisible for sensors.” He stepped out of the lift, Spock at his heels.

Together they searched for Scotty while Wesley got a first-hand report on the Enterprise’s condition. The deflector shields had to be repaired, and Wesley was determined to see this device that rendered the Enterprise invisible to sensors.

They found the Scottish engineer in one of the supply shafts that led to an overload valve. Well, a young technician told them that the pair of booted legs which hung out of the shaft belonged to Mr. Scott. And the fact that Keenser stood beside them like a small vision of a bodyguard confirmed the technician’s statement. The little alien was never far away from Montgomery.

“Mr. Scott?” Spock raised his voice; he got Scott’s typical answer.

“Ach, nae now, Mr. Spock. Tha’ damn valve ‘s about ter drive me insane!”
“Then I hope a short break will save you from the insanity’s unpleasantries, Commander Scott!” Wesley said firmly. The legs in front of him stopped moving.

“Commodore Wesley?” sounded the Scot’s muffled voice.

“In person, Mr. Scott,” Bob answered feeling amusement prickling in him, as the feet in front of his face kicked and struggled; their owner crept backward. First the waist, then the upper body and shoulders, and finally the tousled shock of hair came into view. Finally, Scotty slipped out of the shaft and landed on his feet, steadied by Keenser. Turning around, it was plain to see to what the Engineer had been up to these last hours. His clothes and face were full of grit, grease, and anything else you’d find climbing into an engine. ‘One thing’s for sure: An engineer will give his last breath for his machines!’ Bob thought smiling inwardly. It was the same with his own chief engineer. It seemed these men were cut from the same cloth.

“Commodore,” Scott saluted, and Bob allowed his smile to break through.

“Mr. Scott – busy with repairs, I can see.”

Montgomery nodded. “Aye, sir! Those bloody Klingons hurt not only my engines, but many of the systems that draw their power from the engines. It’ll be days until they’re fixed.”

‘He’s about those engines like they’re his kids just like my chief engineer. Hell, those technicians are all crazy!’ Aloud Bob said, “Well, then I don’t want to keep you away from your duties for too long. I’ve got a couple of questions concerning this experimental device you installed.”

Confused Scotty looked between Spock and Wesley back and forth. “Experimental device, Commodore?”

Bob sighed. “You know damn well I’m talking about whatever it is that you have that makes ships invisible to scanners.”

“Ah!” Montgomery nodded enlightened. “Well… it’s, as ya already said, an experiment and…”

“And when were you going to report this ‘experiment’s’ results officially to Starfleet Command?”
Bob asked.

Scott made a face. “Sir, all due respect, but the little machine wasn’t developed by a Starfleet member. Its owner is a civilian, and he shared his development with us only to… Well, to help us.”

“To get you out of Borderland, I know,” Wesley said calmly. “And I also know that our secret hero ‘Sunrise’ developed it. I only want to have a closer look at it before…”

“Commodore, I developed the transwarp beaming device. Command confiscated my work, and a psychopath terrorist used it to hop through the galaxy straight to Qo’noS. I got nothin’ more than a ‘Ya did well, Mr. Scott’ and that was it. This Sunrise guy developed somethin’ that could be critical to the survival of Starfleet, and he should get his money for it!”

Wesley lifted both brows. “Do you know ‘Sunrise’?”

“Na, I dunna, sir, but he must be a hell of a good engineer, and we engineers stick together. Professional honor, ya understand?”

“Of course, Mr. Scott, but you know the Starfleet regulation stating every new installment of new technology must be tested and the results submitted to Starfleet.” He smiled. “I also understand that you had to run tests first and then were too busy afterward because of the battle, so I understand your lack of information. But I’m sure you understand that I ask you to find a few minutes show me this device.”

Scott felt his cheeks heat up, and he gulped. Wesley’s words were a warning that he was treading on thin ice. “Well, it’s connected to the deflector shields that are being repaired as we speak. So I can’t demonstrate it, but show ya, sir.”

“That’s all I asked for, Mr. Scott,” Bob replied wryly before following Scott and Spock through the bustling engineering space. “Don’t you worry about me absconding with Sunrise’s development. If Command gets word and is interested in the technology, they have to offer him a fair compensation in return. I’ll see to that myself.” He glanced at the Vulcan while they climbed down the ladderwells built around the cooling tanks. “Speaking of ‘Sunrise’, what are the odds that he is aboard the Enterprise?”

Spock stiffened ever so slightly. “May I ask how you came by that assumption, Commodore?”
“Because he was with Kirk when I spoke with him via The Shadow. And, by the way, you aren’t the only one who talked with Commander Capricio. Care to guess what interesting news I got from him? He met Kirk in the spaceport – him and his ‘tactical officer’ who goes by the name ‘Nien Lavi’.”

He let two technicians pass carrying an obviously damaged engine part and remained rooted to the spot as he continued. “I could be wrong, but as far as I know there is no ‘Commander Nien Lavi’ officially aboard this ship, and the position of tactical officer and navigator is given to our Russian wonder-boy Chekov. Kirk, however, introduced a man named ‘Lavi’ to Capricio as the Enterprise’s tactical officer. Hazard another guess, Mr. Spock, who accompanied Kirk to the orbital station? Not only the owner of the civil shipyard over there that Capricio speaks so highly of,” he pointed to his left. “But also ‘Commander Lavi’, who was able to disengage a cargo ship full of liquid plastic that was about to explode because of the fire at the space harbor.”

He saw Spock’s face become even more stoic while Scott stared wide-eyed at him. Wesley wasn’t done.

“Capricio described him as a slender, dark-haired man in his late twenties or early thirties with pale eyes. The description fits extremely well with the account a young woman related to us of her rescuer aboard the space harbor. A Klingon pushed her over the balustrade of a catwalk, but ‘Lavi’ somehow managed to catch her at the very last moment. I learned this little story from one of the shuttle pilots I sent to help with the evacuation; he had the young lady aboard. She is quite head over heels for her savior.” He crossed his arms in front of his chest, looking straight at Spock. “Commander Lavi, Sunrise – or Drythen – are one and the same person. And he was with Kirk the whole time. You beamed Jim up, didn’t you? And he wasn’t alone, right?”

Spock had listened to the commodore’s conclusion and felt the highly illogical urge to curse. Wesley was brilliant; the Vulcan had known this for quite a time now. But how the Commodore wove the cords of information was – impressive.

Bob interpreted the first officer’s silence. “Don’t make me ask your transporter chief if he beamed up Kirk alone or if there was another man with him, Mr. Spock!”

Crossing his arms behind his back, Spock looked at the Commodore; his expression was stoic but different than others. ‘I’d never play poker with this man!” Wesley thought; then his thoughts were interrupted by the Vulcan’s answer.

“Jim wasn’t the only one rescued from that exposed hall. Two other males were beamed aboard of which one, regrettably, was lost even after all of Dr. McCoy’s efforts.”
After the first officer stopped and didn’t make any move to continue, Bob narrowed his eyes. “I haven’t forgotten; there is still the third man you mentioned but won’t talk about!” he huffed; irritated. “For God’s sake, man, spit it out! Is Sunrise aboard in McCoy skilled hands? Yes or no?”

Spock took a deep breath, ignoring the smell of burnt cables, hot metal, and other unpleasant reminders of their recent confrontation. He knew that he had to answer the Commodore. “Yes, he is,” he replied.

Wesley sighed. “Hell, this admission took some doing!” He shook his head. “And you know is true identity?”

Again the Vulcan felt cornered – not for Khan, but for Jim who would be in deep water if it came out that he worked hand-in-hand with a wanted terrorist. “Yes, I know this man.”

Scott stared wide-eyed at him. “Ye do, sir?”

Bob cocked his head. “But you don’t want to reveal his true name.” As Spock again only looked at him, he threw his hands up. “What has this man done that he needs to hide? And who is he that even you'll keep his identity a secret? Did he rob the crown jewels or what?”

“No, sir, not the English crown jewels. You do mean the English ones, don’t you?”

“Quit doing that delay of clear answers!” Wesley had snapped before he pinched his nose. “Spock, I only want to speak with him. I don’t know why everyone is so hell bent on hiding him, but I give you my word that I won’t tell anyone about his identity. Neither my nor your officers nor Starfleet Command will find out about him from me! But dammit, I have to talk to that man!”

“I understand,” the Vulcan replied carefully. “Right now he remains unconscious in the infrared chamber as is Captain Kirk.”

Bob grimaced. “I knew you’d point that out. But you’re leaving in about twenty hours for Starbase S-6. Maybe the two gentlemen sleeping beauties will wake long enough to answer a few questions before the Enterprise is on her way.”

With those words, he turned around to a curious and confused engineer. “Shall we visit Mr. X’s device now?”
Scott nodded wordlessly and guided the Commodore through Engineering; the Vulcan followed him, lost in thought.

Jim had given Spock his word that he would explain Khan’s presence and why Kirk not only protected but trusted the Augment after their experience with him one year ago. Only afterward would the Vulcan decide on his next course of action. He had learned to trust Kirk’s lead and didn’t doubt his friend and captain’s decisions. But in this case, he didn’t know what to think of Jim’s actions. Still he promised to stay silent – a promise he was forced to extend to another person. He knew Kirk did not want that; it was against Khan’s interests. Spock could only hope that the super-human wouldn’t feel threatened and betrayed, wouldn’t feel the need to retaliate.

ST***ST***ST

The information that the Klingons had left Federation territory and withdraw to the new Neutral Zone reached Wesley two hours later after he had returned to the Lexington. The Hood II and the other ships remained near K7, annexed by the enemy. The ships patrolled along the new border.

Aboard the Enterprise, the crew was still busy despite the late hour. McCoy finally removed Jim and Khan from the infrared chamber after their temperature and bio-signs had finally regulated. Still they would suffer chills for a while longer.

Switching the infrared light to a sonic beam, he took care that his friend and the super-human were washed before he left the chamber. It wasn’t easy to separate them, but with the help of M’Benga, Nurse Barbara, and Paramedic Ben, they finally had the two men laying in separate beds and clad in hospital gowns. Together they connected them to their devices and monitors. Once again checking their bio-signals, Bones finally left the former storeroom 3 and returned to his office – glad that for his short break.

The main room of the med bay was dimly lit for the night; most of the on-call nurses rested in the staff room and except for the soft peeping of the bio-scanners and life support systems it was quiet. Rubbing his eyes, Bones let himself fall back into his chair. He closed his eyes – tired like as he hadn’t been in a very long time.

He didn’t even realize that he fell asleep until a warm, strong hand gently shook him accompanied by a deep, familiar voice. “Dr. McCoy?”

Grumbling, he unwillingly opened his eyes feeling groggy and exhausted. Above him Spock’s face
hovered; his dark eyes were unusually soft.

“I’m sorry to disturb your well-earned rest, but if you sit like that for several hours you will adversely affect your neck and back. Besides, I have to speak with you.”

Bones sighed. Sometimes he wished the Vulcan away to anywhere but here. He yawned and straightened up. An unpleasant stabbing pain in his neck and shoulders punished him for his unusual sleeping position. “Ouch!” he groused, rubbing his face with both hands. “Past tense, Spock, I already have back problems.”

“No wonder, your sleep position is incongruous with proper rest or sustained health,” the first officer commented wryly and stepped back at the other side of the desk.

Shooting the Vulcan a dark glare, McCoy massaged his neck, forcing his mind to return to work. God, was he tired! “So, what can I do for you?”

To his surprise, Spock seemed to be uncertain. “I came to…” He hesitated, highly unusual for him. “I need your advice, Doctor.”

This admission was enough to catch Leonard’s full attention. “You need my advice?” He scratched his temple. “I have to mark this day red in the calendar.” As he saw the Vulcan stiffen, he waved it away. “Forget my comment. When I’m ready to drop, I get sarcastic.”

“Then you are obviously quite often ‘ready to drop’,” Spock replied arching brow.

McCoy rolled his eyes. “Point taken,” he said; then he clasped his hands on the desktop and looked expectantly at the Vulcan. “So, how can I help you?”

The first officer took a deep breath. “Commodore Wesley was aboard…”

“So I heard,” Leonard mumbled.

“… he is demanding to meet Sunrise – Khan.” He saw the CMO go rigid; McCoy stared at him, shocked.
“What?” As Spock nodded, Leonard gasped, “I hope you talked him out of it.”

“I was unable, Doctor. Commodore Wesley insists on speaking with ‘Sunrise’.” He sat down in the visitor chair. “He also promised to keep our special ‘guest’s’ identity a secret.”

“And you gave in,” Bones groaned. “Sweet Lord, now the shit is going to hit the fan. When Wesley learns about Sunrise, he’ll have to turn him in. And Jim will go right along with him not only because he participated in the cover-up but because of his damned misplaced loyalties!”

Spock raised his brows. “We all covered for Khan by staying silent after we discovered his identity. And this is precisely my dilemma,” he said. “I have to obey the indirect but still firm request of the Commodore, but I also made a promise to Jim. If I keep that promise, I can be put to trial for insubordination. I would risk court martial if the act would prevent what Jim fears, but it would only delay the inevitable and negate the benefit to Jim. The Commodore is already suspicious. Preventing this meeting would alert him, and we may appear unreliable; he might reconsider his decision to ignore ‘Sunrise’s’ past.”

Leonard pursed his lips, aware of the dilemma the Vulcan faced. “And you think as long as Wesley stays in the dark about ‘Sunrise’, Jim and Khan are safe – more or less. But that all depends on whether the Commodore recognizes Khan. It’s not like we can ask him. We can only find out when they meet.” McCoy dropped his head. “Superb!” he growled.

“Not exactly the words I would choose, but we agree on the topic,” Spock said.

Bones looked back at him. “A joke? From you, Spock? Jesus, now I’m worried.” He ran his fingers through his already tousled hair. “God dammit!” he groaned. “All this,” he gestured wildly around him, “mess because Jim is suddenly all buddy with that blasted ‘I’m-better-at-everything’!” He shook his head. “He’s taking years off my life!”

For a long moment both officers were silent, then the Vulcan continued quietly. “There is more I wish to discuss with you concerning Khan. He has a short temper. And he is going to feel threatened as soon as he realizes where he as well as when the Commodore arrives. Khan is known for his brutality where his survival is concerned. He told us himself that his instincts were engineered to survive at all costs. I will send Security to the room where he and the captain are…”

“Oh no, you don’t!” McCoy said firmly fixing the first officer with an intense stare. “My med bay is crowded enough. I don’t need here six or eight gorillas in red-shirts taking up even more room. Khan
“How can you be so sure, Doctor?” Spock interrupted him. “Because Khan saved Jim’s life? Perhaps he feels a familial bond because of the blood and plasma he has shared with him in the past, but I do not believe we can trust Khan if he feels threatened or…”

He stopped as an alert from the monitor at his desk beeped. The CMO’s eyes widened.

Bones gulped as he saw the readouts. Khan’s med-bed sent the alarm – no signal.

“Shit!” Bones whispered. No signal meant one of two things: Khan was dead or had pulled off his connectors. That meant that he was out of his bed.

“What is it, Doctor?” Spock asked curtly.

“Khan’s med-bed isn’t reading.” He rose. “And I highly doubt he’s dead. That means…”

“…He is up; he left the bed!” the Vulcan finished the CMO’s sentence. Both men had rushed out of the CMO’s office before Spock spoke the last word.

Cold… It was so bitter cold. Snow crunched beneath his fast fleeting feet. In front of him a boy two or three years younger than he stopped, heaving for breath he just couldn’t catch. He looked around panic-struck. “If they find us, we’re dead.”

“I don’t get it, Kevin. Why did this man murder my mother’s friends? Why kill all those people? I know food is scarce here, but killing half of us isn’t the answer. Supply vessels are on their way and…” He stopped, and the other boy pulled him along. “Run, Jim, they’re coming!”

And he ran until the surroundings changed. He wasn’t on Tarsus, the lost colony where the self-proclaimed governor Kodos ordered the execution of half the planet’s population to grant the other half survival. He was on a small ice-moon, marooned after Nero destroyed Vulcan. And he wasn’t alone; a mighty, hungry lobster-like creature hunted him for its next meal. And this time there was
no cave nearby, nowhere where help could find him.

Jim ran like never before through the icy cold air…

All of the sudden, strong arms stopped him and for a moment he struggled with all his might, then warmth seeped through his clothes right down to his bones.

He was pulled into a secure embrace, and when he turned into the shelter of those arms, he inhaled safety and love. His heartbeat slowed until it beat in unison with the man who held him tight – took him away from the planet and the hungry beast that would eat him alive.

ST***ST

The moment McCoy stepped into the former storeroom, he knew that he would find Khan’s med-bed empty. He wasn’t mistaken. The bed was abandoned; the blanket hung to the floor.

Leonard’s gaze flicked right to where Kirk’s bed was placed, and his jaw nearly hit the floor. Behind him, Spock stopped dead in his tracks and inhaled sharply.

With uneasy steps, Khan walked slowly towards the young captain unaware of the two other men’s arrival. Jim thrashed frantically in his sleep, whimpering and moaning. Astonished, Bones watched as the Augment lifted the blanket that covered Jim and slipped beneath it. He gathered the young man in his arms once more who… Who almost instantly relaxed in his arms! Jim gave a miserable whine then turned towards Khan and snuggled into his embrace only to sigh with contentment.

The bio scanner attached to Kirk’s bed recorded the data of both men now, and Bones eyes became wide as saucers. “That… that’s not right!” he whispered, staring at the readouts before looking back to the two men in the med bed again.

“What is it, Doctor?” Spock asked; his tense voice betrayed the shock that had hit him, too.

“He… he’s asleep!” McCoy turned around and looked at the first officer. Spock looked irritated. And if you could tell the emotion of a Vulcan by his face, well, McCoy felt the urge to hide the breakables. Spock looked as though he would spring at the slightest provocation.
“Of course he is asleep. Jim evidently experienced a nightmare and…”

“I'm not talking about Jim, Spock. I'm talking about Khan. The scans say he's asleep, but he got out of that bed,” he pointed across the room, “and walked over to Jim in his sleep!” His attention shifted back to the two males lost somewhere in dreamland; they looked peaceful. McCoy refused to think ‘cute’, so peaceful would have to do. “Khan’s survival instincts may be strong,” Bones whispered, “but his protective streak is intense – and it's directed at Jim.” He sighed and rubbed his face again, his headache return.

Spock stared at his friend and the Augment feeling a certain… There was something his logical mind hid from him – something he couldn’t put a finger on. “There must be a fundamental reason for Khan’s changed behavior towards Kirk,” he murmured.

Biting his lips, McCoy remained silent. He knew that ‘fundamental reason’, and the prospect that there were deeper feelings involved rather than only lust made him uneasy. Jim's never had a relationship that lasted longer than several days – a few weeks at best. Something told Bones that Khan was quite the opposite; he didn’t seem like a guy who had many one-night stands. Not with his personality. He gave and demanded fidelity. Bones knew that just by the way he spoke of his people. If Jim didn’t take seriously whatever it was that was between them, Bones was sure it would lead to a disaster beyond his pretty damn vivid imagination.

Still there was that inner voice whispering to the CMO that this was entirely different – that there was more to the two men than just desire and sex. Khan was unconsciously pulled to Jim even in sleep. McCoy knew mothers went to their children if they cried at night. He saw Jocelyn do it when she was asleep. Khan reacted in nearly the same manner by literally sleepwalking to the younger man to comfort him; he must have felt the captain’s distress. This was only possible if there was a strong bond present, like that between parents and children, siblings or twins perhaps – always between family.

Family!

Khan did everything for his family. And now he did everything for Jim.

Jim was family to Khan by blood, but that didn’t account for all the evidence – the men together, the bruising, and the cottage banter.

Bones had time to process the information, but it didn’t make it any easier. He had come to know Khan as a foe – a mortal enemy. And leopards can’t change their spots, so what the hell was going on?
Khan’s feelings for Jim influenced his decisions.

McCoy took another deep breath and turned his attention back to other matters concerning their ‘guest’. “I don’t think we have to fear about Khan flipping out when he realizes where he is or that Wesley insists on speaking to him,” he murmured after several seconds. “He won’t threaten Jim’s captaincy – let alone his health and life.”

Spock looked at the two entwined figures on the bed and then back to the CMO. Even without examining how the doctor came to the conclusion, he realized that McCoy was right. For reasons that defied all logic, the Augment had gone from an enemy to someone who valued Kirk’s life more than the own. His actions at Kirk’s side then and in his bed now spoke for themselves – comfort in impending death, and in life.

Spock’s Vulcan mind didn’t understand what was happening between his friend and the former dictator, but his human side began to formulate an answer – one he did not want to consider.

Ten minutes later he stepped into his and Uhura’s quarters; he found his lover deeply asleep. Of course, they had all pulled more than two shifts; each gave their best and more to win – against the enemy, against time, and against the odds their friend and captain faced. Even the strongest of constitutions required rest after the strain and stress of recent events. Even Spock, who could go for days without sleep, knew its importance in restoration and maintenance of health.

Quietly, he stripped off his uniform, chose a short, light Vulcan robe and pants, and slipped beneath the blanket careful not to wake Uhura. Nevertheless, she began to stir; one of her hands reached for him. Even if Spock avoided other’s touch, he tolerated the young Bantu woman’s need to feel him near. As her fingers curled into the soft material of his robe, he turned towards her. And like so often, she scooted closer and snuggled against him – still asleep.

Spock lifted a brow. He had experienced this behavior often enough and had never asked about it, but it triggered another memory of a similar scene only a quarter hour ago. Like Nyota, Khan had been asleep yet reacted to another’s presence. Pursing his lips, the Vulcan pondered. As McCoy said, instincts played their part in the actions of many different species – perhaps all of them. Even Vulcans acted on instinct if the course of action was logical. Still there was the question of how.

“Sevrythinrigh?”
Spock needed a moment to comprehend what Uhura had mumbled, that she had woken up. He answered quietly. “I am all right, thank you, my dear.”

She took a deep breath and exhaled with a soft, contented sound before she relaxed; asleep again in seconds.

Again Spock felt a wave of confusion. How was it both Uhura and Khan display similar nocturnal behaviors towards others and what did it mean?

ST***ST***ST

Jim noted first the warmth around him. Then one by one, his senses came back online and each one reported. He had a foul taste in his mouth, a sore throat, pain in his chest, right hip and thigh, nausea, and exhaustion that seemed to weigh down his whole body. But the warmth; he wasn’t alone, and he didn’t need to open his eyes to know that it was Nien holding him in his arms.

This was a good thing!

It meant they were together and most likely safe; so why did he feel like he’d been run down by a dozen hypertrucks? He moistened his lips and felt his head throb.

A hangover perhaps? If so, then this was the granddaddy of all hangovers.

Then a chill from deep inside passed through him. Shivering, he pressed himself closer to the Augment whose body offered the heat Jim needed. Still trembling, he listened to the quiet sounds around him. There was a hum, muffled steps far away, hushed voices…

Where were they? They weren’t in the little cottage, their very own private heaven, of that he was quite sure. Well, he would have to open his eyes to have a look at his surroundings, but the first try turned out to be a mistake. The light was dimmed, but still too bright. Instantly his headache went from dull to pounding. With a moan, he quickly closed his eyes again; looking around was not an option to figure out where they were.

“I know you’re awake, Jim,” a familiar voice said calmly. Kirk forced himself to open his eyes once more; he saw McCoy’s face above him.
“Bones?” he whispered in surprise and relief; he ignored the pain that the light caused.

“Yeah, it’s me,” the CMO nodded; he scrutinized the captain. “How do you feel?”

“Not good,” Kirk admitted after a second.

Leonard snorted, “That’s no surprise; you suffered space exposure.”

Uncomprehending, Jim blinked at him; then his memories returned.

The assault on the orbital station…

The fight against the flames, the traitor, and Korax…

Starfleet shuttles and the hope of escape…

Then the bird-of-prey fired at the space harbor…

Certain death…

The gap in the bulkhead…

The terrible pull with the escaping air. The cold…

Nien holding him tight…

Nien!
Jim turned his head, and his gaze fell instantly on the beloved’s face – pale and now marred by spider webs of tiny dark veins. His eyes moved beneath the closed lids; otherwise he lay perfectly still on their shared bed.

Happy but concerned, Kirk’s gaze roamed over the Augment’s features before his eyes found McCoy’s again; the pain in his temples lessened a little bit. “How’s he doing?” he whispered hoarsely; it hurt to speak.

“He’s strained the muscles, ligaments and tendons in his arms and inhaled too much smoke just like you. I also treated a gash on his shoulder. That’s the medical bits. But why it was and still is impossible to separate you two is beyond me.”

“’scuse me?” Jim mumbled, confused, and Bones rolled his eyes.

“He held onto you as we beamed you aboard…”

“Aboard?” Somehow the young captain was able to lift his head despite the apparent effort it took to do so. Disoriented, he looked around and McCoy grimaced.

“You’re back on the Enterprise, Jim.” He met the widening eyes of his friend and continued, “Spock went all ‘Jim Kirk’ on us and came to get you. We arrived just in time too. Had to chase away a Klingon or two and then we beamed you and Khan from where you were trapped.” He shook his head, and his eyes betrayed his so oft-hidden emotions – well, except anger, frustration, dismay; those are normally on his sleeve. “Two or three seconds later and you both would be dead now,” he mumbled.

Jim’s eyes were wide as saucers now; the shock woke him up just a bit more. They would have died if… The pain in his body stopped his movements. With a groan, he let his head sink back. “Jesus!”

“You can say that!” McCoy deadpanned; he was angry and relieved all at once.

Taking a deep breath that made his nausea worse, Kirk moistened his lips. “Are you guys okay? Any losses? What about the ship – and the battle? Did we win – is the sector safe?”

This time Bones smiled for a moment. These questions were so typical of his friend who always thought about others first. Then the CMO turned serious again. “We won – but had to pay a price for
it. Nine of the crew didn’t make it; forty-eight are my guests at the moment. The man we beamed with you and Khan aboard died, too. He was too far gone to stabilize his condition.” He grimaced and caught Jim’s sympathetic gaze; the young captain knew all too well how much the older man hated to lose a patient. “As for the ship,” McCoy continued. “Mr. Scott says ‘she’s hurt pretty bad and will need quite the miracle to be right again’. Spock told me that we could fly with warp four if necessary and that, except for several needed repairs, the ship is in ‘remarkably satisfactory condition considering the overall optempo of the battle’. We’re heading to space station 6-S in the next couple of hours for a technical refit. Scotty needs some parts to keep the ship going until we reach 6-S, so he says,”

Jim groaned. “Those two…I should find out for myself.”

The CMO raised his brows and resembled Spock for just a second. “First you have to get well – again, Jim. Smoke inhalation is nothing to sniff out – no pun intended. And your body is suffering from not getting the opportunity it needs to heal completely before you go wrecking it all over again – regardless of whether you can recover almost as fast as Superman over there.” He nodded at the still deeply sleeping Khan. “Any explanation?”

Very slowly Kirk nodded. “Yeah. Nien gave me something when he broke me out of the Klingon prison. A mixture of his blood-plasma, adrenalin and some… well… whatever he had.” His gaze wandered back to the Augment; warmth and tenderness lay in his eyes. “Without it I wouldn’t have made it – the flight, I mean. I was… I was in a bad condition, Bones.” His gaze flickered back to the CMO whose face was uncommonly expressionless.

“I thought as much,” McCoy stated quietly before he added, “But this drug he gave you affected your cells, Jim, your physiology overall.”

“I know, but I didn’t care then, and I don’t care now.” He swallowed. “It was hard, Bones. I thought I was going to go insane from the pain. The hatred, the knives, the whip, the pain sticks… It all hurt so much.” He closed his eyes to the sting. He hadn’t gotten over it yet, not completely. Healing needed love, but it needed time too. “Then Nien was suddenly there and stopped them; he freed me, held me…” He gulped down the rising lump in his throat and tightened his arms around the former dictator.

For just a moment Khan stirred and his lids fluttered open only to pull Jim closer; he was asleep a second later.

McCoy, whose little-known compassion sparked as he listened to Jim’s words, frowned now at this new compulsion. The way the two men acted spoke volumes. Leonard didn’t want to consider what that meant at the moment. There were more urgent matters at hand, like, for example, this cozying up thing! Couldn’t Jim see what this looked like? Obviously not. Crossing his arms in front of his chest,
Leonard glared at his friend. He felt anything but doctor-like with an urge to punch some sanity in the younger man who was about to lose everything because of the man in his bed – literally. That would come, but Leonard had to triage what he could see, now.

“You know, I have nothing against a nice cuddle, but this isn’t the goddamn time or place! You two already give me and even Spock the chills.” He caught Kirk’s confused gaze and explained, “We couldn’t separate you after Kyle beamed you aboard. I had to cut off your both clothes before I could stick you into one of my infrared-chambers. Only later, after M’Benga and I somehow managed to put you in two different beds. But later Mr. ‘Better-at-everything’ actually sleepwalked to snuggle up to you again.” He watched his friend’s cheeks reddening and growled. “You wanna imagine Spock’s face when he saw you two?”

Jim stared in alert at him. “Spock saw…?”

“Of course! And you can call yourself lucky that your friend was able to stall Wesley. He wanted to make a sick bed visit during his short stay yesterday evening. Explaining why you two are inseparable in one of my infrared-chambers would have been a bit awkward!” He watched Jim bite his lips. The anger he had felt when he found out about the true nature of Kirk’s and Khan’s relationship rose again. “Are you going to tell me why you two are clinging to each other like little children, or not?”

Jim felt the heat in his cheeks increasing in his whole face. Did Bones know? No, how could he? Kirk knew he had to tell Bones the truth, but right now he just didn’t have the strength. “Instinct?” he offered sheepishly; his friend’s expression darkened.

Jim lied down in shock trying to comprehend what just happened. McCoy was angry with him; this much was obvious. Bones had been less than delighted when he found out about ‘Sunrise’s’ identity, but he had promised to give Jim a chance to explain. So why was he so irritated now? Because Khan and he sought comfort in each other after all they’d been through? They had faced death from fire,
smoke, phaser blasts and – dammit – by exposure to space! What did Bones expect? That they just say, “Excellent, we're still alive,” and be done with it? Hell, they both had been through more traumas in the last hours than most people have in a lifetime. In their lifetime, they both had been abused and tortured; they both have suffered at the hands of others. Wasn’t it normal to seek for solace and security – to bond with someone who shared in your traumatic experiences? Bones was a doctor, for God’s sake! That includes at least some basic psychology, doesn't it?

“If you want to sulk, I can’t stop you!” Jim grumbled to no longer present Bones.

Well, on the other hand Bones was right on one point. The whole senior staff would be in trouble if Bob Wesley recognized Khan. In the crew’s silence, they all had covered for Kirk and the Augment; they had all hidden the former dictator’s identity. They could all face trial for not reporting the location of a wanted criminal to the Federation authorities or Starfleet Command.

Jim groaned and closed his eyes. He and Khan had been beamed out of mortal danger only to find themselves in another precarious situation that not only might cost his and Nien’s freedom, but also his friends' careers.

“Fuck!” Kirk swore under his breath and buried his face in Khan’s crook of the neck. But even the familiar scent of his beloved couldn’t mollify him; there was just so much at stake. Yet he wasn’t able to avoid the gentle pull of sleep that finally overwhelmed him…”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

This I’m calling ‘from smoke to smother’ – and in this case this proverb has a double meaning (smile). Bones got another demonstration of his friend’s new found relationship and how an Augment reacts emotionally, Spock got a little shock (the big one is still to come yet) and Jim is cornered. And above all Khan’s identity is about to be exposed to Wesley.

In other words: Our two boys are again in deep water.

I don’t want to tell you much about the next chapter, only that Uhura takes some own action, The Shadow and Diego are about to help ‘Drythen’ but are stopped by something, you all are not expecting and that Wesley…

No, you’ll have to wait until the next chapter will be published.
I hope you liked the new installment and I’m – as always – damn curious about your reactions.

Have a nice rest of the week

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi my dear readers,

Just in time for the weekend comes the new update. Thank you once again for all the kudos and comments. Yes, our two heroes are safely aboard the Enterprise, yet both are still at stake – last but not least because of a certain commodore, who (after all) presents Starfleet Command in this sector. And Bob gets some very serious hints which give him the right idea about ‘Sunrise’.

Parallel Diego, Galven and Caviw are getting a little bit in action, Uhura realizes something her lover just can’t and then comes the confrontation between Bob, his protégée and ‘Sunrise’.

Enjoy the next chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 34 – Everything comes to light in the end

While McCoy talked to a still groggy Jim Kirk, elsewhere, Uhura watched Spock slip into his uniform shirt while she pulled on her boots. Her lover was often quiet in the morning, but the Vulcan was so lost in thought that he didn’t recognize her apology as she stepped out of the bathroom nearly running into him. His usually expressionless face appeared tense. He stopped his movements and cocked his head as if he listening to a voice only he could hear; Nyota had enough.

“All right, Spock, out with it!” She said rising from her chair.

This time she got a real reaction of surprise as her lover looked at her rather than through her for the first time this morning. “I beg your pardon?” he asked; Nyota sighed.

“Love, the whole morning you’ve been off to worlds unknown. You were so lost in your own head; you didn’t even react when I nearly walked into you. What’s going on!?”
For a long moment, the Vulcan pondered his answer; then he decided instead to voice the question that plagued him for hours now. “Nyota, as I came to bed last night, you were deeply asleep; still you reacted to my presence by closing the small distance between us and pressing your body to mine. Why? Or perhaps how might be the better question.”

Uhura pulled her long hair up into a ponytail. “Did it bother you?” she asked baffled; since they've been in a relationship, Spock had never complained of her touching him.

The first officer shook his head. “No, of course not, my dear. I am sorry if I intimated a false conjecture because of my question. No, I ask because I do not understand how you could react when you were asleep. I made sure that I was silent and careful to not disturb you when I came to bed; still my presence elicited a response.”

Cocking her head, Nyota watched him attentively. “Well, I don’t remember it, but if you say that I acknowledged your presence, then I must have just sensed it.”

“You… You sensed it?” Curiosity shimmered in the Vulcan’s eyes, and the young woman sighed again.

“How can I describe it? We are very close – perhaps closer than purely human couples because you're touch telepath. We share a bond due to your abilities that touches both of us. If my mind is not otherwise occupied, I can feel your presence – it's a gentle feeling and deep. I probably sensed your arrival last night in that same way. When you’re asleep, the conscious part of your brain is turned off. The subconscious becomes alert and able to react.” She examined his face – his eyes, which had widened ever so slightly.

Pursing her lips, Uhura continued softly, “Let me guess, your question is not just about us, rather you're thinking of someone else.”

Spock nodded slowly. “Yes, you are right. Your reaction was similar to something I witnessed just before I came to our quarters.” As he caught her asking glance, he added quietly, “I am thinking of Khan.”

“Of Khan? Did he…?” Uhura frowned. “He reacted to someone while he was asleep?” As the Vulcan made another affirming gesture, she blinked in confusion. “To whom? I mean, with him being an Augment and all, his subconscious must work on a whole another level when it comes to his crew, but…” She stopped when her bright mind gave her the only possible answer. “Kirk!” she said quietly, and Spock allowed himself a sigh.
“I went to the med bay last night; the captain had a nightmare. Khan left his bed and went to him for comfort I suppose – while he was asleep.”

“Khan… sleepwalked?” Uhura’s eyes were wide now.

“Yes, sort of, as Dr. McCoy explained. And what confuses me even more is the fact that Jim calmed instantly after Khan…” He made a short gesture. Nyota realized what her lover saw but didn’t want to voice.

“Khan held Kirk in his arms and Kirk returned the gesture – like how they were when they were beamed aboard.”

A Vulcan brow rose. “How do you know?”

“Kyle. We were all worried about the captain. When Kyle came to the bridge to give me his report for the log, Sulu asked him for details. He told us that Kirk was beamed away from the station securely held by a tall and slender man with dark hair. We all know by now that ‘Sunrise’ is Khan; you don’t have to be a genius to figure it out. Kyle also told us that the stranger was barely conscious, and Kirk was out cold. The other man has to be Khan. And besides, you’ve been frustrated since we got Kirk back onboard and you visited the med bay.”

This time Spock lifted both brows. “I am a Vulcan, Nyota; I do not get frustrated.”

Uhura groaned. “Oh, please, Spock, don’t deny the obvious. You’re irritated just like McCoy. We all contacted the doctor yesterday to ask after Kirk. All Leonard says is Jim’s got more luck than judgment. True, but Kirk could steal his grandmother’s silver and the doctor would defend him. Only Khan could get his ire up like that.”

Spock looked at her sweet face, took in the healing bruise at her temple, and the bright intelligence that shone in her night-dark eyes. “You are one of the few humans able to fuse the facts into a logical conclusion, Nyota.”

She smiled. “Thanks for the compliment.”
“It is no compliment, but the truth."

She began to laugh. “Still a compliment, coming from you.” She rubbed her neck. “I want the doctor to take a look at this.” She pointed to her head. “Still hurts more than I thought it would. While I'm there, I'll look in on the captain and his new friend.”

“I would appreciate it, Nyota, but please be careful around Khan. He may be weakened at the moment, and Dr. McCoy is convinced that he will not do anything to cause trouble, still…”

“Hell, him being aboard is trouble,” Uhura deadpanned.

Taking a deep breath the first officer nodded. “You are right again. Commodore Wesley insists on meeting with ‘Sunrise’ and…”

“What?” Nyota stared at him, before she let her head sink into the neck. “Oh Jesus Christ, then we all are in trouble – especially you and McCoy. And Kirk, of course!” She glanced back at her lover. “After Khan escaped several weeks ago, the Federation authorities and Starfleet circulated his photo all across the quadrant. It’s impossible that Wesley wouldn’t recognize him.”

“I know,” Spock answered softly and reached out a soothing hand as Uhura’s look betrayed her fear for him.

“Couldn’t we – you know… Could we somehow disguise him? A wig or a beard maybe?”

A hint of surprise flashed over the clear-cut features of the first officer. “Khan’s face is very recognizable; Wesley would not be fooled, and if Khan were found out, we'd likely be in deeper trouble than without the ruse. As it is, Jim and Khan had a part in Koloth’s and the other Klingon’s arrest at the spaceport. The two were likely caught by security cameras. One look at the security feed and Wesley would recognize him. Human reaction may puzzle me at times, but I am sure a deceitful action would anger Wesley and cause a consequence that none of us want. Hiding Khan’s identity is one thing, lying to a superior officer is an offense that would force Wesley's hand.”

Uhura pursed her lips and nodded slowly. “Yes, I know; I didn't think it through.” She rubbed her neck; worry edged soft lines in her face.

“I do not think the worst,” Spock continued gently, sensing his lover’s discomfort and concern. He
tried to soothe her. “Commodore Wesley promised to keep ‘Sunrise’s’ identity a secret, and he owes Khan his life. His own and the lives of his crew. Bob Wesley may get irritated, but I regard him as a man of honor who keeps his word.”

“Still you, Dr. McCoy – we’re all are going to get an ear full from Wesley – especially after our little trip yesterday.” Nyota shook her head. “What the hell was Kirk thinking, trying to cover for Khan in the first place?”

ST***ST***ST

“Jim and Drythen are where?” Diego stared wide-eyed at Galven and Caviw who had come to make a sick bed visit. The Chilean still felt as though he'd partied too hard for too long, played too hard for too long, and spent too much time in the cigar bar. He knew that the doctors would let him go shortly. There were people in greater need for a hospital bed than Diego.

“They’re aboard the Enterprise,” the Tellarit answered. “And Drythen, well… You already know he is on the run from the authorities. And he…”

“He already had a run-in with the other officers of the Enterprise. They were less than delighted to learn he was with Kirk when he spoke to them,” Diego interrupted him. “I figured out a thing or two yesterday as we were on our way to the transporter room to beam up to the space station. Jim spoke with his first officer via communicator.” He sighed and rubbed his face. “Drythen is in deep water now. They know who he is.”

“‘Who he is?’” Galven echoed while behind him, Caviw tensed. She was in a sour mood since she learned that ‘Léo’ could be in danger because of the very same people he helped. And she worried over Jeff who had been brought to another hospital to get his phaser wound treated.

The Chilean looked questioningly at his friend and the Caitian. “You know?” he asked.

Galven answered with an avoiding, “We know what?”

“How Drythen is,” Diego replied tensing. He watched the two look to each other clearly uncertain. He groaned. “Guys, is there the slightest possibility that you found out something about Drythen you don’t want to talk about?”
Galven rubbed his snout and while Caviw’s tail twitched.

Again the Chilean sighed heavily. “Guys, Drythen and I unlocked the mooring of the *Athena* with only our combined strength. Do you really think this would be possible if it not for Drythen? I’m strong, but not *that* strong. Drythen did the most of the work. And he got me out of that burning hell hole I would have suffocated in. Plus, he single-handedly rescued Kirk from a *Klingon prison*.”

Again Galven and Caviw exchanged a glance before the Tellarit carefully asked, “And you know, why he is so strong – so resilient?”

“And so quick, so brilliant in fight, so intelligent with a passion that burns far stronger than in any other human?” Diego nodded. “The Klingon and the traitor knew his background and Kirk confirmed it as did Drythen, if that is his true name.”

Galven sighed while Caviw wrapped her tail around her middle – a clear signal of her discomfort. “You… you are okay with it?” she asked quietly, and the Chilean snorted.

“That he owes his super-strength some damn scientists? Jim asked me an important question. He asked if it would change my mind about Drythen.” He leaned back into the cushions supporting him. “It doesn’t!” he declared. That earned him very relieved smiles.

None of them had to utter the word that described their friend’s heritage. They knew better than to mention it in public. Besides, they had more urgent matters to discuss.

Galven crouched down on the Chilean’s bed edge. “So, you understand why we have to get ‘Drythen’ away from the *Enterprise* before they lock him away?”

Diego blinked baffled. “Jim would never allow it. The two are so utterly and madly in love with each other, he would rather…”

Caviw’s communicator beeped. She answered call and listened a moment; her large eyes grew wide. “What?” She hissed and snarled something in her native language then said “Thank you, Ritek!” and closed the little device again. Meeting the asking looks of her two friends she growled, “Ritek intercepted a transmission between the *Enterprise* and the *Lexington*. Commodore Wesley wanted to know if ‘Sunrise’ and Kirk have finally woken up. He’s demanding to be informed as soon as they are.”
Diego stiffened. “Jesus Christ, if he recognized Drythen...”

“... And he finds him aboard the Enterprise with Kirk...” Galven nodded.

“... Then both boys are in a hell of a lot of trouble!” Caviw ended the thought.

Determined, the Chilean threw the blankets away and waved away Galven’s worried, “You’re not released yet, Diego!”

“That crazy superman is going to need our help,” Diego grunted. He carefully rose to his feet and was instantly supported by his two friends. “And I know how we can get him out of the tight spot he’s stuck himself in – he and Kirk!” He took a deep breath and grimaced. “Santa Maria, the smell here is horrible! I'll be glad to get out of here.”

“Mr. de la Vega?” The voice caught the attention of the three friends.

“Yes?” Diego answered before laying eyes on the man who addressed him. A sinking feeling spread through his gut. At the door of the room stood two Federation police officers, and the Chilean knew exactly why they were here. Their stunt in the bar ‘The Stars’ found them out.

ST***ST***ST

“Ouch!” Nyota Uhura was not one to complain, and Nurse Barbara was careful, but the bruise was anything but pleasant for the comms officer.

“Sorry, Lieutenant, maybe you should have come earlier,” Barbara apologized.

Uhura sighed, “Too much to do and I thought it wouldn’t be that bad. You had enough patients here and... Ouch!” Uhura shied as the nurse set the small medical device to her temple again.

“Lieutenant, please keep still,” Barbara said sternly; grimacing Nyota obeyed. Her gaze moved through the crowded room of the med bay, then to the door that led to McCoy’s office. It finally rested on the corner hall that led to the small storerooms and restrooms. Spock had told her that Kirk and Khan were in one of the storerooms and that no one knew Khan was aboard and in sickbay.
“There, all done!” Barbara said, and Uhura hopped off the bio-bed.

“Thanks, Nurse Barbara,” she said with a smile; she signed the short report and walked away as if to leave the med bay. She looked to make sure Barbara and Dr. M'Benga weren't looking her way and rushed to her destination.

Several seconds later, Nyota stood in front of the door that led to storeroom 3, took a deep breath, and stepped in.

The lights were dim and a monitor showed a patient's readings. The room smelled of medicine and disinfectant. All was quiet; so different from the hustle and bustle of the med bay.

Uhura instantly saw the empty bed to her left and then the occupied bed to her right. Frowning, she saw a heap covered by a blanket. Recognizing this 'heap' as her captain and the Augment, she walked silently to the two men.

Startled, she looked to Kirk’s pale features covered in a thin net of veins and capillaries as well as bruises. She didn’t need a closer look to know that his whole body must look like this. Then her gaze wandered to the second man on the mattress. She bit her lips as she realized that the Augment wasn’t in much better condition than Kirk. The Grim Reaper touched both men; it was a miracle that they were still alive.

Only after she overcame the shock of seeing her captain and friend like this did she remember her second reason for coming here.

Spock had been right – of course he had. Still it was awkward seeing Jim Kirk and Khan Noonien Singh snuggled together on the bed. Kirk’s head rested on the super-human’s left shoulder, one of his arms was wrapped around the Augment’s middle, and his expression was peaceful – as was Khan’s. The former dictator held Kirk in a gentle embrace as if it was the most natural thing in the world. His usually tight features were relaxed making him look younger – almost innocent.

Uhura cocked her head. To think that Khan left the other bed and walked to Kirk while asleep just to hold him – it was a language Spock couldn’t understand. But Nyota Uhura did. This intimacy, this finding peace in each other’s arms. This was a lover's language.

‘This can’t be!’ Uhura’s mind yelled. ‘Khan killed Pike, and he attacked us. Kirk died because of
him – and then…’ She frowned as another thought occurred to her. ‘And since when is Kirk attracted to men? Hell, he got on my last nerve with his flirting; a skirt was a challenge just to feed his fat ego. He’s a Casanova; there’s no way that he can be attracted to men!’

Still, her women’s intuition told her she was lying to herself – except for the Casanova part. He seemed to still have that. Then her eyes caught a dark, mottled shadow on Kirk’s neck. Carefully she moved around the bed to Jim’s side. She reached for the collar of his hospital gown and moved it away.

And sure as Earth’s sun rose in the east, there was a hickey – a hickey just like the one he had when they started their five-year-mission. It was even, as far as she remembered, in the same place.

‘A mark!’ the words shot through Uhura’s mind. ‘That is a stake-your-claim mark!’

She didn’t dare to examine Khan’s neck for a match, but she was almost certain that the bond between the men was two-sided. Pressing her lips together, Uhura eyed her captain.

‘Of all the foolish things you’ve ever done, James Kirk, this is the biggest one. But I can’t help feeling that this is the most serious relationship you ever have had.’

Sighing, she turned away. She knew that Spock wanted answers, but her love for him didn’t make her blind to the loyalty she held for her captain and friend. It wasn’t her place to tell Spock about Kirk’s newest tryst. The two friends had to discuss this privately – and probably with McCoy.

Her thoughts came to a grinding halt as she came face to face the CMO who looked none too amused at finding her here.

“Lieutenant, may I ask what you are doing here?” he asked quietly so as not to disturb the two men, but firmly enough to give Uhura the impression of a pupil caught doing something forbidden. But, like the rest of the senior officers of this unique ship, she was not one to sway by just any breeze.

“I wanted to make a sick bed visit. We’re all worried about him.” She saw McCoy’s gaze wander to the med-bed and added, “Don’t worry, Doc, I won’t tell anyone about our captain’s admirer – or is it the other way around?” She watched McCoy’s eyes go wide and sighed. “It’s obvious why Khan sleepwalked and why they look like little love birds – they are.”
Bones stared at the young Bantu woman. You can't hide anything from Nyota Uhura. “And you’re… You're okay with it?” he asked in disbelief.

Uhura frowned. “What? No, of course not!” She realized how this sounded and added with a sigh, “I mean… I don’t have anything against him with a man – that's just a surprise.” She gestured to the two males. Shaking her head, she added, “But this – It’s beyond stupid. I’d say unbelievable except they’re right there! Kirk was ready to kill Khan when Marcus sent us after him. Spock talked him out of it; still Kirk got carried away in his rage even after Khan surrendered on Qo’noS and beat the crap out of him. Even for the short time they were allied, they were ready to walk over each other’s dead body. And now this?” She grimaced and looked back at the two sleeping men.

They hadn’t moved. Off someplace in dreamland and peace in each other’s arms, content in the shared proximity.

“I guess Kirk could get over his anger, but Khan?” she was almost talking to herself now. “He must have or he wouldn’t have gone after Kirk and rescued him from the Klingons. Something happened between them that changed everything. I loathe prejudgment, so I guess we’ll all have to wait for Kirk’s explanation. If he overcame his fury enough to develop feelings for him, then there have to be reasons he was able to forgive him in the first place. Without forgiveness, he wouldn’t have shared his bed with Khan.” She turned back to McCoy. “God, I really want to punch some sense into Kirk right now,” she gritted out, “but I don’t want him to get into any more trouble than he already is. I’m on the bridge.” She turned and addressed McCoy, “I’ll warn you when Wesley comes aboard. Maybe those two shouldn't be,” she flitted her hand toward the bed, “like that when he shows up!”

With those words she left, and McCoy looked after her, surprised before his he turned his attention back to Jim. ‘You’re the luckiest idiot in the whole universe to have such good friends. Damn corn fed farmboy! Even now, none of us will let you down!’

ST***ST***ST

“I beg your pardon?” Wesley stared at Lieutenant Palmer as if the younger man had suddenly grown a second head.

“Well, sir, I received transmissions from very frustrated captains of the ships staying back for the repairs. ‘Diego’s Shipyards’ can’t work for us because their boss has been arrested for a bar fight he was in. I also got a call from The Shadow. This Tellarit, Galven, wants to speak with you, because… How did he put it? ‘Diego was only arrested because he helped our young Starfleet-hero and was therefore involved in a Starfleet mission. And now it’s the commodore’s damn duty to get him out of custody’.”
Bob’s eyes even grew wider. “When was the call made?”

“Thirty minutes ago, Sir. I wanted to inform you, but you were in a teleconference with Aldebaran’s governor.”

Wesley stopped him with a wave of his hand. “You were right not to interrupt.” He rubbed his neck. “Did you find out if this ‘Diego’ is really in custody?”

Palmer sighed. “Yes, I contacted the Aldebaran’s police force, but they said it was a civilian issue, and Starfleet has no jurisdiction.” He rubbed his stubbled chin. Alpha shift had been on duty long enough.

“So, do I have this right? A part of our fleet is dead in the water because some power-happy civilians think a damn bar fight is more important than winning a war against the Klingons?” Not for the first time in these last hours, Bob felt a headache approaching. “Link me to the idiot! We need this Diego de… What’s his name?”

“Diego de la Vega. I’ll spare you the long form,” Palmer answered with a hint of humor. He turned around in his chair and called the police station. Whether the police chief was very busy or if he was playing a power game, Wesley wasn’t sure. But he was sure to be pretty pissed that he had to wait ten minutes to speak to the man.

He was a stout male in his late fifties; his red hair and beard showed the first streaks of silver. The many wrinkles around his green eyes spoke of too much work, too little sleep, and maybe too much Aldebaran whisky.

“Lieutenant Mark O’Donner,” he introduced himself; the Lexington’s commanding officer straightened.

“Commodore Robert Wesley, fleet-commander of Starfleet in this sector. Lieutenant, you arrested a man working for Starfleet to…”

“Sorry to interrupt you, Commodore, but if you’re talking about the troublemaker de la Vega that your men have asked for, I’m afraid I can’t help you. He is accused of starting a bar fight that resulted in destruction of property, seven injured patrons, and three passers-by. He and two of his friends…”
“Lieutenant, I really don't care about a bar fight or its outcome. You can't tell me there isn’t a space station or an outpost in the whole of Federation space where such incidents don’t happen every few weeks.”

“Commodore, you and I may serve under different authorities, but our vocation is the same. We’ve both taken oaths to obey the written rules and laws. I can’t let a man go who is responsible for the destruction of a pub and who fled the scene, not caring for the injured that he left behind. But maybe you can answer me a question. De la Vega stated that he helped out a Starfleet officer who had a run-in with some alleged Klingons here, on Aldebaran. Maybe you can explain, how…”

Wesley’s eyes widened only to narrow a second later before he barked. “In case it has slipped your well-trained attention, Lieutenant, Aldebaran has suffered a terrorist attack from the Klingons. That's why the capital is on alert. That's why there is a mass evacuation. That's why your hospitals are crowded. My ships dragged that harbor away to prevent a planetary catastrophe. And that's why the damage to the planet wasn't worse!” His voice had become louder. “And when you tell me that de la Vega said he assisted a Starfleet officer, then I say you should give him a fucking medal! He is one of the three men who secured the space harbor until we could reach the scene to move the station out of your orbit with our tractor beams. One of his ‘two friends’ who allegedly started the bar fight was none other than Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise. Does the name ring a bell?”

O’Donner stared at him. “Of course, it does. And if he and your people fought for the safety of our town, then we are grateful for their help. Still this doesn't help the pub’s owner. His restaurant is closed, and it can’t reopen without extensive and expensive repairs. If de la Vega was indeed involved in a Starfleet mission, then Starfleet has to pay for the damage. I do think the pub’s owner will be glad to hear that there is a chance for him to gain restitution.”

“I don’t believe it,” Bob groaned. “Without Kirk and the others there, there’d be no pub or town, and you’re worried about restitution?”

“The pub’s owner wants to press charges and I have to fulfill my duty, Commodore. I’m sure you understand. Your hands are tied as well where your rules demand it.” He bent forward at his desk. “The pub’s owner gave us a record from the security camera he had installed above the counter. I can offer you a copy, and if one of the three guys is really Captain Kirk, then I’m certain Starfleet will not hesitate to pay for this unfortunate incident. And if they post bail for Mr. de la Vega, I can let him go.”

Not for the first time, Bob wanted to curse but he controlled himself. He knew that the lieutenant was right. Starfleet held no power over any civilian security force. They were bound to obey the laws of the individual planets. “All right, Mr. O’Donner, please send me the copy and the documents for the bail. I’ll check it and let you know if one of the three men you mentioned is indeed Captain Kirk. But regarding de la Vega, he has to be released immediately! We are at war, man, and we need him to keep our fleet operational.”
“I know, Commodore, sometimes the law hinders proper function.” He leaned back again. “One thing more. I got a report from our traffic department. A hyperbike drove away from the pub at twice the posted speed limit several minutes after the fight started. The hyperbike is registered to Mr. de la Vega, but it wasn't him on the bike. It was his two friends who started the brawl. If the driver is Captain Kirk, perhaps you can arrange a payment for the traffic ticket we have for him.”

Bob gritted his teeth and counted slowly to three before he gave his answer. “If the driver is indeed Captain Kirk, then he was on said mission and, therefore, isn't subject to the speed limit as any emergency vehicle would be. But I promise that I will check into it!” He was about to turn away but added sharply, “Oh, by the way, the reason that you’re still in that exalted position and not a Klingon is because my men fought them. My fleet took out a Klingon strike group that was on its way to annex Aldebaran. Maybe you should think twice before you decide to hinder Starfleet again. Otherwise, it is my duty to contact your governor. I'll happily explain my and your situation to him. The safety of the United Federation of Planets can’t be threatened by a single police officer, who thinks he can demonstrate his power by abusing his authority rather than cooperating with Starfleet. Lexington out!”

He felt the eyes of his officers on him and took a deep breath. “God damned, stupid civilian!” he groused. “How dare he come to me with that petty shit!” He grimaced.

“Do you really think it was Captain Kirk, who…” his science officer began, and Wesley snorted.

“He told me that he was involved in a ‘run-in’ with Koloth and the others. And Commander Capricio mentioned Diego de la Vega in his report as one of those men who fought alongside Kirk’s and ‘Commander Lavi’s’ side on the space harbor. He had to be with them the whole time.” He planted his fists at his waist and shook his head. “Why is it always Jim Kirk, who…”

“Commodore, I got the records from O'Donner,” Palmer said and Bob went up to the comms station where the other man already activated one of the smaller screens. “Here it is,” he said and left to give his commander some privacy.

In the next minutes, Bob watched the arrival of Koloth, the four other Klingons and a human male in their company; then he saw them leave again. Then Jim Kirk and another man at his side ran straight into Koloth as he returned. Seconds later, Koloth hurled a fist at the young captain that was caught by the dark-haired man who accompanied Kirk. Then the fight started and the pub's patrons joined the fray. With widening eyes, Wesley witnessed how one of the Klingons was suddenly thrown over the heads of the group. “What the hell?” he whispered and he concentrated on the man who did the throwing. He only caught glimpses of him, but he was always near Kirk and protected him any way he could.
Bob had the feeling that he knew this man, not that he'd met him before, but something struck a
chord with him. Logic dictated that he was looking at ‘Sunrise’ for the first time, but his gut also told
him that this wasn’t the first time he’d seen him.

Frowning, he witnessed the Klingons use the opportunity afforded them by the chaos to leave the
bar. A short time later, Kirk followed them. Wesley also noticed a large man box his way through the
crowd. He followed the captain; a smaller man was at his side. Now the screen showed only the
fighting guests.

Opening O’Donner's second file, he saw a short recording and some holo-photos of two men on a
hyperbike; a line stated that they were clocked at 120. The speed limit was fifty-five kilometers per
hour.

Bob worried at his bottom lie and stared at the photo of Jim Kirk – the short, tousled golden hair, his
grim face, his eyes narrowed in fury. Behind him sat the other man, one arm was wrapped firmly
around Kirk’s middle. The wind blew his night-dark hair away from his face; Wesley zoomed in. It
had to be ‘Sunrise’.

The man’s features were angled and despite the poor video quality, Wesley could make out the pale-
colored eyes. The man’s expression was calm, yet determined. Bob knew that look.

In his mind, the shadows of a memory lurked; the memory of a holo-photo he once saw. If he only
could remember, where and when, then…

In his mind’s eye, he saw an incoming message; a man wearing the insignia of Starfleet Command –
a warning of an escaped criminal – of a terrorist. It had reached the Lexington some days before the
war started and…

“That can't be!” Bob whispered and quickly obtained the file from the ship’s data banks. A second
later, another image appeared on the small screen beside the photo of the speeders.

The man depicted wore a black Starfleet undershirt, his hair was dark and swept off of his high
forehead, and there was a stoical expression on his features. The similarities were plain as day!

Bob Wesley sat down heavily on the comms station’s chair; a sinking feeling swept through him.
“Jesus, Jim, have you lost your mind!?”
He rubbed his temples with both hands; his headache grew in intensity. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place now – because of his word to Spock, because of everything this man did before and after prison, and because of one captain who could turn a world upside-down. It had to be. The man on the holo-photo that Command sent and the man on the recordings were indeed one and the same.

“Palmer!” he barked and closed the files. His comms officer hurried to him. “Send this idiot cop the documents and tell him that Starfleet will post Mr. de la Vega’s bail!” Bob growled and rose. “And then hail the Enterprise. I have to speak with Kirk. If he’s is still out, then advise McCoy that he should use a bucket of cold water to wake him up. I will speak with Kirk now!”

McCoy hastened into storeroom 3 and stared at the two men who still lay entwined on the med-bed. The EEG’s readout showed that they were asleep just as it had done the last time he was in the room. Kirk slipped back into unconsciousness just minutes after his short talk with the CMO, and he hadn’t woken since then. With a low growl deep in his throat, Leonard hurried to the men and bent over Kirk, ready to shake him awake. A second later, there was a very quick movement at Jim’s side; a strong, slender hand gripped Bones’ wrist. Glassy green-blue eyes fixed him half confused and half threatening; they flashed a warning to stay right where he was.

But Bones was not the kind of man that shied away at a look. He fought to tame his temper, and far too calmly he stated, “Good day, Mr. Singh! Sorry to disturb your beauty sleep, but if you don’t want to cause any more trouble for yourself or Jim than you already have, you should let me wake him now.”

Khan glared at the hovering man. Even exhausted and disoriented following the days' events, his foggy, yet brilliant mind quickly came back online to take over where his instinct had formerly kept charge.

“Dr. McCoy,” he acknowledged, and the other man pulled a face.

“In the flesh and bone you're about to crush!” He caught Augment’s confused stare; he added sharply, “Excuse me, but there are people aside from you who need my medical care. I’d appreciate it if you would let go of my wrist and keep it intact, please.”

Khan blinked – then his senses registered several things at once. There was a soft hum – the background noise of the engines; the air smelled of disinfectant, and there were voices and steps outside the room where he and Jim were placed. Logical conclusion – they were aboard a ship. It didn’t take a genius to figure out which.
He felt a firm tug on his fingers and realized that he still held McCoy’s wrist in a vice-like grip, and let him free. “My apologies, Doctor,” he said; his usually deep, velvet voice was still hoarse.

Bones held his wrist in this other hand and shot the former dictator an irritated look, before bending down over Kirk to shake him. “Jim, wake up!”

The younger man only sighed. Bones groaned in frustration. “Oh, for God’s sake, kid, WAKE UP!”

Kirk’s face twitched and he snuggled closer to Khan. “Fifmominets!” he mumbled. Bones had needed a moment before he understood, five more minutes.

“Absolutely not!” he groused. “In five minutes the hell is descending on all of us, so wake up!”

Usually, Jim was awake in just a few seconds. A childhood lived in fear and officer’s training was to blame, but just now, his mind still was far from grasping the straw of reality. “Whasgonnaon?” he mumbled groggily finally looking up into the angry but also quite determined face of Leonard McCoy.

“Wesley ordered me to wake you up; he’s on his way here. And I don’t think he should find you like this!” the CMO answered impatiently; he pulled the blanket away from Kirk and a frowning Khan covered himself and helped the young captain sit up. “For the love of Christ, hurry!” he snapped when Jim didn’t react.

“Commodore Wesley is coming?” Khan asked; his body instantly switched to an alarmed state.

McCoy spared him a quick look. “Yes – and don’t get all crazy. It’ll only worsen the situation!” Then he turned his attention back to a slow-moving Kirk. “Hurry, Jim – dammit!”

“I’m coming, Bones,” Jim groaned. He began to tremble. “Jesus, it’s cold!”

“Yeah, you’ll feel like that for a few more days since you boys thought a trip into space sans a suit was a good idea.” the CMO muttered; he pulled the younger man to the edge of bed.
Kirk tried to suppress the shivers that wracked his body. He took several deep breaths before he braced himself and rose – only to cry out in pain; he tumbled forward.

Khan went to jump and catch him, but a sharp pain in his arms, shoulders and neck stopped him. A sound of discomfort escaped him as he watched McCoy catch Jim at the last moment.

“Sorry, I thought you knew that you dislocated your right femur,” Leonard said to the younger man. “I put ‘er back, but still needs time.”

“No, I didn’t know,” Jim moaned and pressed his lips into a thin line as Bones draped one of Jim’s arms around his shoulder to support him. “Where are we going?” Kirk asked feeling weak; he hobbled across the room hating that he looked like Huckleberry Finn – that he was so weak.

“To the other bed, genius. You’re not leaving med bay for another day or two, but we don't want Wesley to find you cuddling with a wanted criminal.” He had glared back over his shoulder at the super-human before he added, “Uhura told me that he sounded angry when he insisted that I wake you. That can only mean one thing. He knows about Sunrise, here.”

It was impossible, but Jim paled even more. “But… how?”

“How should I know? You two mixed it up pretty good the spaceport and the space harbor. Probably on a dozen cameras. Maybe you two geniuses forgot this little detail. Or maybe Wesley had enough pieces of the puzzle; he's anything but stupid.”

Jim stopped dead in his tracks as his mind comprehended the events to come. ‘Wesley will be here any minute, and he knows that ‘Sunrise’ is Khan.’ God dammit, why had he fallen asleep instead of thinking of a way out of this? After all, McCoy did warn him. Fear clouded his eyes as he looked back to his mate. “You have to run – now!”

“Are you crazy?” Bones snarled. “If Wesley knows that Sunrise is Khan and comes over only to find him gone, we all land in prison.” Firmly he pulled Kirk with him. “Besides, you two can’t go anywhere at the moment. Too cold, too much smoke, too many bruises!” He helped Jim down onto the med-bed while he growled in the Augment’s direction. “Same goes for you, too, Mister! Super-biology or not, you’re in no condition to go anywhere!”

Ignoring the own aches and pains, the former dictator watched his mate and the CMO. His instinct screamed at him to find a way to escape the inevitability of certainly being arrested which would lead
certainly to his demise. Still, he found himself unable to make an attempt to flee. Besides the fact that McCoy was right, and he wouldn’t get far in his current state, he couldn’t let Jim face the Commodore alone. It would, indeed, worsen the younger man’s situation. And Nien would never, under any circumstances, let his mate down. His mind continued to search for any possibility of breaking free of the trap he was in. But it would destroy his last chances to save is family.

His family… Joaquin, Otto, Katie, Pablo, Rodriguez… Their lives and freedom depended on him; still there was no way that he would abandon Jim.

Panic at his dilemma grew with every passing second. It spread through his heart, soul and mind piercing through each layer like a sword.

McCoy had spread a blanket over Kirk before turning back to Khan. He raised his brows when he saw the Augment half sitting, half cowering on the med-bed. The monitor above him signaled the enhanced man's alarm. The CMO had to calm him and quickly before fright turned to fight. Maybe Spock’s suggestion of posting guards wasn't so off base after all!

Trying to appear calm, the CMO stepped towards Khan, feeling as though he were trying to sooth a predatory cat. “Move over some so at least there's the pretense you two didn't share a bed.”

Piercing sea-colored eyes narrowed ever so slightly, and Leonard thought the great cat of a man might strike. ‘Well, his name means ‘lion’; at least he's consistent!’ his dark humor shining through if only in his own mind.

“Do you think it will change anything if Wesley finds out that Jim and I not only worked hand-in-hand, but became… friends?” Khan sneered though he did as the other man asked. He had no choice; he would wait and see what fate, what Wesley, had in store for him. He hated being caged like an animal – being at the mercy of another's whim. He could only hope that Wesley was that type of man he thought him to be – honorable.

McCoy decided to ignore the comment. Everything depended on Wesley’s mood and whether he was willing to keep his promise concerning ‘Sunrise’. Finding Jim and Khan in bed together wouldn’t help the situation. Outside, he heard voices raise; taking a deep breath Bones said firmly, “Right, you two, show time. Stay polite and for God's sake, stay calm! No one wins here if you two are freak out.”

The doors slid open. Spock’s deep voice followed the Commodore striding in. “After you, Commodore.”
“Thanks,” Wesley’s usually warm tenor did nothing to hide his irritation. Spock followed the Commodore into the room. Bob’s brown eyes had roamed quickly over the two beds before coming to a halt on Kirk.

“Jim,” he said. “It’s good to see you alive – and awake.”

Carefully Kirk tried to sit up, but one sharp glare from McCoy and Wesley's imploring him to take it easy stopped him. “Thanks, Bob,” he whispered; his throat still felt as though he'd been fed sandpaper. He looked to the Vulcan, who remained at the door. “Hey there, Spock,” he said hoarsely, and for just a moment the first officer’s expression softened.

“Hello, Captain. I have to agree with Commodore Wesley. It is good to see you awake,”

Bob glanced back at the Vulcan. “You two haven't spoken yet?”

“No,” the science officer replied. “Captain Kirk slept through the night and was only awake for a few minutes this morning, as I have heard.”

Bob nodded shortly. “Yeah, sleeping is easier than facing the music.” Then he looked back at Jim; a frown creased his forehead. “You've given me some serious gray this past week; you also have a lot of explaining to do, son!” He turned his attention to the second bed and as his gaze roamed over the features of the dark-haired man, who looked calmly back at him. But Wesley wasn’t fooled by the outer calm exuded by this man, whose blue-green eyes held a cautious gleam in those. He was poised and tense – ready to spring at the slightest provocation. There was no uncertainty in his eyes though, rather an air of authority and superiority. If this was a pretense, it was pretty damn good, but Wesley doubted it was.

He took a deep breath. Yes, there was absolutely no doubt, whom he was facing. This was the very same man who was responsible for the London archive bombing and the Daystrom attack. He fled to Qo’noS and had been taken captive by Jim Kirk before stealing the Vengeance only to be taken prisoner again by Commander Spock. This same man who had been sentenced to cryosleep but had been somehow escaped a year later.

Bob knew that he shouldn’t speak to him – that he should take action to lock this criminal away in the most secure brig possible. But without this man, he and his crew would be dead right now; the same went for Kirk, the inhabitants of a planet, and the citizens of New Aldebaran.
God, what a mess! Against the institution he vowed to support and defend, and against his own good judgment, Wesley did the only thing he could. “At least we meet, Sunrise,” he said slowly. “I promised myself when I met you face-to-face, I would shake your hand.” He stepped to the second med-bed and extended his hand. The offer surprised Khan; gestures of good-will always did, but he accepted. Long, pale fingers covered by a fading net of damaged capillaries enveloped Wesley’s strong, tanned hand.

Bob was aware that these fingers could crush his, still he remained cool. He gently squeezed and pumped Khan's hand, “My crew and I owe you our lives, so I'm glad that I can finally give you our thanks in person, Mr. Singh.”

Jim moaned inwardly. Bob knew!

Khan returned the brave gesture carefully; a hint of a smile played around his lips, and he replied neutrally, “And I am pleased that my notion of you proves to be true, Commodore Wesley. I assumed you to be a man of honor and conscience when I learned what you mean to Jim, how you have mentored him. I was right.” He let go of Wesley’s hand, and the Commodore stepped back. The Augment watched the staff officer warily. As the older man eyed him, he added, “As far as I understand, we are aboard the Enterprise. She was in the midst of battle when a Klingon bird-of-prey attacked the space station. Therefore, you must have sent her from the battle to us. I thank you.”

“Don’t thank me; thank Mr. Spock, who takes his role as acting captain of this ship quite seriously. So much so, that he seems to have picked up a few of Jim’s traits,” Wesley replied. He shot a look at Spock, who stood at a relaxed parade rest and returned the commodore’s stare.

Jim’s gaze had wandered to Spock as he heard Nien’s words. The implication was not lost on Kirk, and he felt then, the depth of their friendship – he felt the true meaning of T’hy’la, as he did the day he died. His Vulcan friend had risked all to come to Khan’s and his rescue – his ship, his career. Warmth spread through Kirk. “Thank you, Spock,” he said quietly. “Bones told me what you did. Nien and I owe you.”

“You are welcome, Jim,” the Vulcan replied, but for a short moment there was a hint of warmth in his eyes as he looked at his T’hy’la. The moment passed far too quickly to be recognized by humans – except for Khan. He felt a stir of jealousy in his gut, but it left as soon as it came. The Augment reminded himself that Jim and Spock's relationship was different, unique. It did not endanger or in any way minimize the bond between himself and his Pyāra. That bond, too, was unique, and there was room for both.

“Hm, and because Spock’s side trip saved thousands of people, I cannot reprimand him, especially
after I permitted the mission with some… delay,” Wesley growled. “And I also cannot act now as I ought.” He looked squarely at Khan. “I gave my word, and I intend to keep it; I and my crew are in your debt. Your identity is safe with me.” He looked around the room. His words brokered no argument as if it was the most natural thing in the world for dutiful officers to protect a wanted criminal.

“Are you three aware of the position you put me in?” Bob exploded; his face flushed in anger. “My first reaction should be to put Mr. Singh under arrest, locking him in the next Starbase's high-security brig, ordering twelve guards on him at all times, and only then contact Command to tell them that I caught one of the most wanted men in the Federation. And since you three covered for him – hid him – I would have to arrest you, too, as well as the senior staff of this ship, because I am absolutely certain that they all were complacent. But instead, I’m bound to the promise you elicited from me, Spock, as I am to a personal code that forbids me from delivering a criminal to the authorities because he not only saved my ship and my crew, but also the entire population of Tammeron.” He looked back to Khan. “You saved my friend; that will never be forgotten. You fought with him against our enemy preventing a planetary catastrophe, and you made certain that our flagship could get away from Borderland without being blasted into atoms. I am grateful; do not doubt that, ever, Mr. Singh.”

He closed his eyes, pinched his nose, and swore under his breath. His voice held a tone of irony, “Seeing that I’m in the presence of not one but four geniuses, perhaps one of you gentlemen can tell me what I ought to do now!”

After a bit, Khan was first to break the silence. “I would suggest that you calm down, maybe Dr. McCoy’s can prescribe something useful. You do not look well. You were in a battle, accountable for thousands of lives and to an outcome crucial to the tide of the war. You have had too little sleep and even less food, of that I am sure. Therefore, the level of your emotional stress is understandable, but unhealthy – and you are needed, Commodore. Not only by your ship and your Starfleet but your friends and your family as well. Perhaps you might take a seat and hear Captain Kirk and me out.”

Perplexed, Bob turned towards the Augment and stared at him. “That's a joke, right?”

Khan lifted both brows; his reply wry in its tone, but the Augment wore no man's uniform. He could be charged with much, but not insubordination. “No, Commodore, you asked for a suggestion and I made one.”

Wesley looked at him with widened eyes. Then he couldn’t help himself; he laughed, before he shook his head. “Look at that; there's a bit of humor in you after all.”

“All intelligent people have humor,” Nien replied pleasantly before his gaze meandered to the Vulcan. “Well, almost all!”
Jim saw the Vulcan’s body tense ever so slightly; a cold glimmer appeared in Spock’s eyes. He quickly piped, “I think, Nien is right. You look weary, Bob.”

“And whose fault is that?” Wesley snapped.

“The Klingons?” Kirk stated, and the Commodore rolled his eyes. “Ten birds-of-prey can’t wear me out like you do – you and your damn impulsiveness.” He took another deep breath. “Right, you want to explain everything? You got your chance!”

“Oh yes, this I want to hear,” McCoy nodded fixing Jim with a dark glare.

Kirk sighed. “Bones, I…”

“I understand that you tried to help some woman on Turkana, even if it meant you had to put your neck in a noose. That's just your way, kid, I understand that. But why Khan, of all people, came to your rescue in the first place – how you two are good buddies now is completely beyond me!” McCoy interrupted him.

“Be grateful that I was able to recover James. You left him.” Nien spit through clenched teeth, but Spock’s returned the comment with ice of his own.

“The captain gave us a direct order and contrary to your indefensible assertion during our first meeting, I am indeed capable of breaking bones without breaking rules.”

Khan sat up despite the burning pain in his shoulders and arms; his eyes narrowed to threatening slits. But before he could give a fitting reply, Wesley rose to speak.

“Spock, I always thought that Vulcans were unable to lie, but you cut it real close. We both know that you broke not one but a dozen rules when you entered Borderland without orders and when you sped off to Aldebaran to save Kirk’s and Mr. Singh’s necks without informing me of your leaving the theater.”

“Sir, we informed you of the reason for…”
“Yes, yes, an electrical short at the comms station, I know!” Bob shot the first officer an angry glance. “Don’t make me check the ship's logs!” It was a warning; one Spock was forced to accept for Nyota’s and his own sake.

“I am impressed, Mr. Spock! You are a maverick, after all,” Khan taunted. “I misjudged you at our first meeting.”

“But I will not make that mistake with you, Mr. Singh! Your determination to protect Captain Kirk lies in no change of heart but for your own purposes and intent.”

In the blink of an eye, the Augment was on his feet; his eyes flashed dangerously. “Don’t you dare to accuse me of misusing Jim!” His voice was low and angry.

Still the Vulcan remained unimpressed. “It would not be the first time that you have used the captain’s desperate situation to your own advantage.”

“Spock, you don’t know what happened,” Jim cut in trying to diffuse the impending quarrel. “Before you judge Nien's intentions, you need to get the details and…”

“Mr. Singh is very clever in his choice of words, Captain, therefore…”

“All right, that’s enough!” Bob said with rising voice. He turned around to Spock and Bones, pointing at the door. “Out!”

“What?” McCoy asked disbelieving and then remembered himself. “Yes, sir.”

It was Spock who seemed to forget himself. “Commodore, you are not familiar with the manipulating ways of Kh…”

Bob’s voice sharpened. “Jim Kirk is your commanding officer, and he has to answer to none of you! Neither to the first officer nor to the CMO. The only person in this room entitled to demand an explanation of his decisions and actions is me. I know that you were worried about him as I was, but you have no right to bring his orders and motives into question. And since I want to hear the true story behind this mess, I have to speak with Jim and Mr. Singh alone – without you fussing over one
“Commodore,” Bones began, “the chance that Jim has been…”

“Enough!” Wesley said sharply. “If you want answers from Jim as your friend, then wait! I have to make a decision that not only will impact your future, but mine as well. I don’t need two overprotective mother-hens puffing themselves up to keep their little chap out of harm’s way. This ‘little chap’ is your captain and a grown man who does nothing without consideration. He earned this ship, and you will treat him like it. As his friend, you can ask, lecture and scold him all you want; I know he’ll give it right back. But only *after* I learn what I have to learn. I can't do that with you around.” He gestured once more towards the doors. “Dismissed, gentlemen!”

Leonard chewed his lips, gave Jim and Khan one last glance that screamed ‘*Don’t do anything stupid!*’ and walked to the door, while Spock’s glare warned and challenged Khan in one to do something that would cause Jim even more trouble. Only then did the Vulcan turn to leave.

“Oh, and one of the gentlemen should be so nice to bring me a chair. I think I’m going to be here a while!” Wesley said sternly; he didn’t wait for a reply before turning towards the two remaining men. He sighed deeply. “Heavens, sometimes I can’t shrug off the idea that I’m in a kindergarten!” he muttered under his breath. Then his gaze wandered back to Khan who still stood beside the med-bed; his pale, furious eyes fixed on the spot where Spock had stood.

“Please lie down, Mr. Singh,” Bob reasoned. “You’re in no shape to be out of bed.” As those ocean-colored depths glared at him, he added, “You’ve analyzed my condition quite well, but I’m not blind. You’re still enduring the effects of the events aboard the space station, and even if your enhanced body recovers far quicker than Jim’s or mine, you're still doing just that, recovering. So please, go back to bed.”

Still, Khan only looked at him; then he gave Kirk a quick glance, and the captain nodded encouragingly at him. Right, he had to play along for now. This may be his only chance to stay out of prison. Cautiously, he let himself sink onto the bed, and he gingerly pulled his feet back on the bed. Feeling the all too human urge to cover himself against the inner cold and the outer world, he slowly reached for the blanket gritting his teeth as his aching muscles and tendons made themselves known again. He froze as two strong, ruddy hands took the material and spread it over him.

Bewildered that someone who knew who he was, cared enough to help him out, he glanced up at Wesley questioningly. “I’m not a doctor, but again, I’m not blind. I see you’re in pain. You probably shouldn’t move so abruptly for a while, huh?” Bob straightened again. “How’d you hurt your arms?”
“He loosened the mooring of the *Athena* manually and held onto me when the hull split,” Jim murmured; his glance roamed gently over his mate’s face. “The last thing I remember is you holding me with your arm and legs while you clung to something stationary.” He sighed. “I would have been pulled into the gap and dead within seconds if it hadn’t been for you – again! I don’t know how many times over I owe you my life now.”

The Augment smiled at him quickly; it was a real smile full of warmth. “You’re welcome, Py… Jim.”

Bob lifted both brows as he witnessed the short interaction of the two men. Interesting. Then McCoy returned with a chair he placed wordlessly between the beds and left again; the door closed behind him.

“Right,” Wesley sighed and sat down addressing Jim. “Tell me the whole story starting with Turkana – the woman and her children you helped and stop when you get -,” he gestured to the room, “here.”

Jim’s eyes widened. “The whole story?”

“Yes, and now that I think about it, you should start earlier. For example, how you came in contact with ‘Sunrise’ at all. How and why did you vouch for him?”

Kirk gulped. He couldn’t tell Bob the circumstances of the Sunrise cover. It would be too much even for Wesley's infamous patience. “That's rather long story, Bob,” he tried carefully.

Wesley only smiled at him. “I have time, Jim.”

“Really?” The captain’s face was pure innocence. “I thought you were busy and the *Enterprise* is about to leave…”

“Don’t worry about me being in a hurry, Jim. I can take all the time I need.” He leaned back. “And the *Enterprise* will not leave Aldebaran before I’m done here, so, gentlemen, please begin!”

TBC…
Well, so far Bob isn’t a treat for our two boys, yet he will learn things he has to add to consideration, before he can make up his mind. And, of course, Bones and Spock are not too delighted about the whole situation, yet they have to remain silent (snicker, it’s hard – especially for Bones). And then you shouldn’t forget the records which have been made from Jim and Nien…

In the next chapter comes the big talk between Bob and our two love-birds; The Shadow and Diego are hell-bent to ‘save’ Khan and there are a few decisions to make, which will separate our boys or bring them closer together.

I hope you liked the last chapter and I’m – as always – curious what you think about it.

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Of laws and tricks

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Just before Whitsun is over I can provide you with another update. Thank you so much for all the comments and kudos; I’m baffled every time I see all the results a new chapter entails.

I know that you’re curious about the talk between Wesley, Jim and Khan, but also what The Shadow will do, thinking their friend to be in danger. Well, I hope the outcome is to your liking.

Enjoy the new installment,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 35 – Of laws and tricks

Diego!” Galven waved at the tall Chilean, who stepped out of the police station; Diego brusquely returned the gesture, and then crossed the street and headed towards the Tellarit and Caviw. The city was still in a state of chaos though the catastrophe was nearly forty-eight hours ago. Crossing the street was a chore; the whole town was out and about, and it seemed they forgot the law – traffic law included.

When he finally reached his two friends, he shook his head. “The people are crazy,” he grumbled. He embraced Caviw first and then Galven. “Thanks for your help, guys. If you hadn't have contacted that Commodore you talked about earlier, I would still be rotting in prison.”

“Well, we didn’t talk to him directly,” the Tellarit responded; his hoof-like hands poked Diego’s back in a friendly manner. “He was in a conference, but his radio officer informed him shortly afterward of the mess one of yesterday’s heroes was in.”

“Yeah, Starfleet posted my bail,” the Chilean nodded, “they’ll probably deduct the amount when I send them my bill for the repairs and parts.” He sighed. “But I can’t complain. Without this Commodore Wesley, I would still be in custody. Hell, it still took them more than three hours before
these cursed police bureaucrats readied the documents for my release!” He grimaced. “That Sean would accuse me is unbelievable. I’ve been going to his place for over twelve years, still…” He shook his head.

“As soon money is in the game; friends are forgotten,” the Tellarit oinked. “Well, mostly. You could offer me a million credits; I wouldn’t backstab a friend for it.”

“And I appreciate that. You got a good crew; can’t put a price on that,” Diego said. “What about Drythen now? Me being arrested put a damper on us being able to help him.”

Caviw laid a hand on his arm. “Ritek contacted the Enterprise two hours ago and asked for Kirk and Drythen, telling the comms-officer that we were worried and wanted to speak with them. We were informed that Commodore Wesley is with them and that they are not available.” Her tail twitched while she glanced gloomily to the ground. “If Wesley knows who Léo is, it is too late to help him.”

“Maybe not,” Diego pondered pursing his lips. “The Enterprise needs parts-equipment; that much is obvious. And to deliver the right equipment to one of the newest ships in the fleet, I should appeal to her engineer in person.” He saw his friends’ widening eyes and grinned. “Starfleet wants repairs and material from my shipyard; they won’t deny me the access to a ship in need – not when I have what they need. I’ll take an assistant and a lady from my office, they will not deny you access.” He glanced down at the chuckling Tellarit. “Now, amigo, you can demonstrate your technical knowledge.” He looked at Caviw. “And you can show your acting skills.”

The Caitian woman cocked her head. “How so?”

“Just wait, my dear!” He turned to leave but hesitated. “Oh, and Galven? Ritek should ready one of your ships for departure.”

ST***ST****ST

Aboard the Enterprise, none of the three men in the storeroom turned patient’s quarters was aware that The Shadow was preparing a rescue of one of its members – unnecessary as it was.

Jim told Bob Wesley everything that happened since the militia contacted the Enterprise that first time. The Commodore didn’t know what to think of it all. If he called Capricio’s report an adventure story, then this here was a thriller ready to storm the bestseller list. He was outraged when he learned of the betrayal of the woman’s husband on Turkana. Selling a Starfleet officer out to the enemy in a
time of war was high treason. Wesley would love to get his hands on this bastard – throw his ass into prison. Because of this coward, Jim Kirk went through hell; he was lucky to come out on the other side of it alive. As Kirk told him about the ‘hearing’, Bob had been horrified. He felt another wave of gratefulness towards the other man in the room. Khan sat in his med-bed and kept silent, for the most part, only adding details here and there or answering questions to which only he had answers. The Augment had not only saved the young captain, sparing him an agonizing, cruel death, he took care of him afterward – helped Kirk to overcome the horrors he had faced.

But there was so much more Bob had to consider. This man, this criminal – a terrorist – had risked his life several times over to protect innocent people. Tammeron, the citizens of New Aberdeen, the people on the outpost where he first met the gang that was later called ‘The Shadow’ – so many people alive because he was free. According to Starfleet Command, he was a cold-blooded, mass-murderer without scruples or conscience. Coldly, he preyed on a vulnerable father and then exploded a hellfire of photon blasts on Daystrom.

But now...

After Jim had finished giving his report about the events as they occurred after Turkana, he turned to those events plaguing Bob. Why this man, who had ruled a quarter of Earth three hundred centuries ago, did it – the manipulation, the violence. Jim was right in a way; Khan’s outburst of violence had been the results of a shattered soul, broken once too often.

Wesley had glanced at Khan from time to time while Jim told him about the background and the unbelievable crimes perpetrated on the super-human. He chose his words carefully to spare the engineered man the pain of reliving the memories. And the former dictator had listened to Kirk’s words. He sat quietly, his face a stoic mask. His eyes stared at nothing; they looked dead, as though there weren’t sparks and flashes of dread, pain, fury, bitterness, and sorrow mingled together in a dark kaleidoscope of emotions that could tear the strongest man apart. Yet there was another spark. One, Kirk was responsible for – that spark that saved the Augment’s soul.

And because of Kirk, Bob understand that whatever the super-human had done back in the twentieth century and now in the twenty-third – no human being should have to endure what he had. Snapping was inevitable. Lashing out at everything and everyone was never a question of ‘if’, but ‘when’.

Guilt. Bob felt guilt, anger, and bile in his throat as he learned that the Starfleet he loved and served for over thirty years caused the Augment’s suffering. True, Section 31 hadn’t been an official part of Starfleet, but it was responsible for all that went down - the Vengeance going down over San Francisco. The former Chief of Command, admirals, and even commodores had been members of this ‘shadow department’. It made Wesley physically sick that that the peaceful organization dedicated to exploration and extending a message of peace was infiltrated by the power-hungry. Section 31 was a cancer; Marcus was a cancer metastasizing, causing the decay of Starfleet from the inside, out. Marcus had abused, blackmailed, violated and enslaved Khan Noonien Singh for his
own purposes. He murdered four of his crew in front of his eyes to force his obedience. He made him believe that all of his sacrifice was for naught when he ordered the Augments’ death. Khan broke then – inside, and he wanted to make the world break with him.

Though his treatment in this century was horrible; the deaths he caused due to it were no better. But Wesley could understand them, even empathize on some level.

As Kirk’s tale came to the end, Wesley noticed his nausea. For more than a minute, he simply sat there in silence trying to comprehend the incomprehensible – the horror Khan suffered at the hands of Wesley’s own people. The image of a human being used as a lab rat, forced to the brink of death. Several times Wesley was reminded of Earth's twentieth century Second World War. 'We know our history and still we repeat it.'

Jim started to become anxious as his superior and mentor stayed quiet for so long. Nien’s fate lay completely in Bob’s hands now. He had given the older man all the information necessary to make a call. He left out only the most intimate and violating of detail as well as the true circumstances of their confrontation in San Francisco, the night before the start of the five-year mission. And, of course, Jim had kept the nature of their relationship a secret. Not because he was ashamed – far from it. Rather, he thought it wouldn’t do either of them any good if he revealed it now. Wesley might believe that Jim’s motives for covering Khan lay in his dick rather than his belief in justice and things right. Well, there may be truth to both, but Kirk liked to think that even without the carnal relationship, he'd make right choices for Khan and for Starfleet.

As the minutes stretched on, Jim felt a wave of uncertainty – fear that his report and his words weren’t enough to keep his beloved safe. But, if Bob Wesley were really as ticked as Kirk thought, then the older man would give Khan a chance for real equity and defense. If Bob’s sense of justice and humanity was a great as Jim believed, the commodore wouldn’t arrest the Augment but would support the plan Kirk had in mind.

Khan watched the staff officer carefully. Hearing it all again pained him, but he was grateful for the way Jim described his captivity at the hands of Marcus. His beloved had not minced words but had called attention to facts and their effect on his emotions without the need for the graphic details – details that thus far remained between them. The narrative also proved to Khan just how much Jim cared for him and his feelings. Now, his future depended wholly on Robert Wesley.

Said officer took a deep, deep breath and looked up again. “If this all is true…”

“It is!” Kirk said sternly.
The Augment murmured, “Jim spared you… There are more painful details that Jim left out, but they are not essential to the account as he has told you.”

Wesley's head spun, but he didn't doubt the statement for a moment. “If this all is true, then there are no right words in which I or Starfleet could beg for forgiveness for all that have been done to you and your people, Mr. Singh. Neither your past nor your genetic make-up gave Marcus and his followers the right to put you through that, any more than any other species in the universe. But you are no other species; you are human. I am deeply ashamed that these acts were done under the guise of Starfleet and saddened that they were done at all.”

Khan lifted both brows. Again the commodore had managed to surprise him. He could see, now, how Jim became so fond of the older man and why he would regard him as a father figure. The same kind heart and fierce propensity toward justice that constituted his Pyāra was evident in Wesley. He was indeed a man of honor, and the Augment was glad that he had been able to save this officer and his crew. Not only would Jim have lost another father figure, but the world would have lost a great man – and men like Commodore Wesley were needed to heal the damage men like Marcus left in their wake!

“Thank you, Commodore. After Marcus, I thought it impossible that there were right men left in the world, but then I met Jim – and now you. It is not for you to apologize for Section 31 or Marcus. You had no part in it. If I had known then what I know now, I would have tried to contact you before any of it happened. That being said, Commodore, it will be up to you to heal your precious Starfleet. You and James must make it now what you once thought it was.”

“I don't disagree with you. Perhaps then the mess in London and Daystrom wouldn't have happened, and several very good women and men would be still alive. Daystrom didn't just have Section 31, but also officers ignorant to Marcus' first strike plan. They – I would have stopped him had we known. They're dead now. I needed them, and they're dead now because of your rampage. I can understand its reasons, but it did more harm than good for your cause – our cause now, I suppose.” Bob sighed and rubbed his temples.

“I know,” the former dictator replied softly. “And after I learned the truth from Jim, I do regret my actions. Still, I was kept from the truth – I was kept from the real world. Marcus had…”

“…Had built a false world around you,” Bob nodded remembering one of the many details of Jim’s explanations. He grimaced before glanced at the younger officer. “What do you want to do now?”

There was no hesitation, as Kirk answered, “I want to get Nien out of it!” As Khan rose to speak, Jim quickly added, “He and his people will never find peace and the freedom all have a right to, if this mess stays as it is.”
Wesley laughed. “I should have expected that answer from you, Jim.”

“James, we both know that there is no chance of me getting out of it as you put it,” Khan tried to reason with his mate; Kirk stubbornly shook his head.

“I don’t give up when I’ve set my mind to something. You should know that by now!”

Bob snorted. “Yeah, you’re as thick-headed as a pack of mules,” he grumbled before he turned serious again. “Jim, this is a rocky path. Mr. Singh has already been convicted and…”

"No, he hasn't!” the Enterprise’s captain cut in.

This time the commodore stared wide-eyed at him. “No? Jim, Mr. Singh went on trial last year. You might have been out of it, but surely you know by being told about it.”

“I mean, yeah, he was convicted but it wasn’t a fair trial. He faced a judge without a lawyer, no defense, not even his own word was allowed in court. Only his sentence ‘back to cryosleep’ and that’s that!” Kirk growled. His still hoarse voice gained a dangerous edge.

Wesley frowned. “What?” He glanced from his protégée to Khan, who made a slow confirming gesture.

“It’s the truth, Commodore. I had no legal aid, not even a public defender as was customary in the western civilizations of my time.”

"Well, they damn well are here!” Kirk croaked out.

“That’s… that’s not possible!” Bob gasped. “Since the Federation’s founding, the right to trial with representation is an untouchable Federation right granted to all sentient species housed on Earth.”

“Marcus’ successor stripped my people and me of this right. He, like Marcus, didn’t regard me as either human or of Earth. I wasn’t – my people weren’t supposed to be. We were laboratory
specimens then, and we were treated as such now. We were supposed to be dead – long dead, he told us. He said we lost our rights to Earth,” The former dictator choked, “the only home we knew.” His eyes glistened, but he remained calm.

Khan didn’t need to continue. And as Wesley said, he wasn’t a doctor, but he didn’t have to be able to imagine just what the Augment had been through. Any color that had returned to the Commodore’s face vanished again. White as snow, he looked between the two younger, then closed his eyes. “Oh good God!” he whispered. Bob now understood how Jim was able to put Pike's death behind him – or better yet, in the proper perspective. The real monster was not the dark-haired man with the strength five times greater than a human and a mind brighter than the sun. The real monsters wore command gray, the same uniform Bob Wesley wore. For just a moment, he wanted to rip it off. Marcus, Alexander, and the rest of their cronies showed an inhumanity that was difficult to grasp. “Does Barnett know what happened to Mr. Singh after he was sentenced to cryosleep?” He addressed Kirk, who nodded.

“Yeah. The lab alerted Command after Nien escaped; the scientists had to fess up.” His blue eyes flashed in fury. “I had the displeasure of meeting him in Barnett’s office. Him too, he knew and condoned what was done to Nien. He must have. I met him just before we started the five-year mission that the Klingons cut short with damn war. Barnett acted outraged, but he ordered Nien shot on sight.”

“Barnett cancelled that order,” Bob cut in. “Still though, there's the warrant. And I should enforce it, but I can't.” He nodded at Khan, "Not after I promised you, not after all you've done for me, and certainly not after what I know now.” He saw Jim breathe a sigh of relief, and the Augment’s face softened for the slightest moment.

“Thank you, Bob!” Kirk whispered, and Wesley rubbed his neck; the whole situation made him uncomfortable.

“You’ve put me in a hell of position, son. But I'm glad you did. Mr. Singh deserves justice as much as anyone!” His eyes wandered back to Khan. “You, Mr. Singh, have every right in the world to press charges against Starfleet for the miscarriage of justice done to you, unlawful dentation, slavery, blackmail, human rights abuses, and, above all, the murder of your crew and their detention and whatever else a lawyer can think of. Hell, wake them and let them sue – I don't know how all of this is going to come out in the wash.” He cocked his head. “Unfortunately, no matter how guilty Starfleet is, they will not go down without trying to take you with it. The trial will be repeated and you'll be accused of a terrorist attack on London and Daystrom.”

“Nien took care that the streets were empty around the former archive, Bob. There were no civilian casualties, neither outside the archive nor inside. He used his affiliation with Starfleet to get the local law enforcement to block the streets for a Starfleet exercise. We could prove that; there have to be records.”
Wesley lifted both brows. “You lost your mind out there, but you still had the presence of mind to mitigate collateral damage?” he addressed the super-human. “Impressive. Another point for premeditation, but impressive nonetheless.”

“I am an Augment, Commodore. I was bred to protect those in my charge or sphere of influence so long as I am not threatened by them. It’s in my genes so to speak. After the agony of losing my family as I had been led to believe, I suppose the proclivity to protect ebbed a little bit. I went on auto-pilot as they said in my time.”

Thoughtfully, Bob watched the other man and nodded finally. It made sense, and it highlighted just how Augments differed from humans. In earlier centuries, the differences would have frightened humans, but time had changed. In a world in where sentient species lived together in relative harmony, tolerance within the given standard of behavior was not only normal; it was expected.

Wesley cleared his throat and looked back to Kirk. “I doubt that any documentation on Mr. Singh's call exists. Marcus certainly took care that everything vanished. But even if Mr. Singh’s precaution can be proven – if Marcus never found out about the call to the local law enforcement agencies, then there is still the attack on Daystrom. That can also be construed as terrorist in nature.”

“Marcus gave Nien the rank of commander, but in his time he was like a general and the leader of a country – of a few of them. He fought against an unprovoked attack on him and his people, like any other soldier would. Who are the terrorists, Bob, because it doesn't look like him?”

“I understand why you took Mr. Singh’s side, Jim! After hearing what really happened, I'd personally drag Marcus’ ass to the Council if he were still alive. The fact that we can't complicates matters a bit.” He looked at Khan sternly. “You might have snapped and you can't be blamed completely for that. But killing Marcus for revenge? That was murder.”

“No, maybe not,” Kirk chirped in again. “Marcus threatened his life.” Bob glared at him in exasperation, but Jim plowed on, “Marcus tried to persuade me to turn Noonien over to him. He promised me he’d spare the Enterprise. That implies he meant to...” He dropped off and looked down at his hands in his lap. "He meant to kill us - to take out the Enterprise." Kirk looked up. Bob could see how hurt he was that his beloved Starfleet would threaten him and his ship. "Marcus said that he would make everything vanish – our part with if I would let him have him. He told us Nien and his people had been sentenced to death in the twentieth century, I believe Marcus intended to carry out that sentence. In other words, he threatened to kill Khan. Isn't Nien’s reaction then self-defense?” Jim argued, and before Bob could reply Jim added, “And, by the way, there is no proof that any twentieth-century authority either tried or sentenced Nien and his people to death. As far as I researched, history's treated him fairly well. Marcus made the whole thing up to justify his intent concerning Khan and his family. He had to eliminate them to keep his plans secret! I’m convinced
that he not only would have killed Nien and his people, but my crew and me, too, as soon as we turned our backs.”

Wesley grimaced. The fierce way in which Kirk defended this man spoke volumes to the nature of the changed relationship of the former enemies. “There's no trial here, Jim; you don’t have to defend Mr. Singh. Not against me. I believe you; you know that, and I demonstrated my support to you both by allowing Mr. Singh remain free. That could land the lot of us in the brig if it comes out.” He turned his attention back to the former dictator. “But Jim is right. If you want to end this cat-and-mouse game, if you want to be a free man in this time, then you've got to get clear of this once and for all.” He pursed his lips. “You’re going to need a very, very good lawyer not just to get and keep your freedom, but to avoid a rehabilitation center.”

Jim went rigid. “A rehabilitation center?” he gasped, horrified. “You’re kidding, Bob, right?”

The commodore’s brown eyes fixed Kirk’s sky-blue ones. “No, I'm not, and you know that. Despite the fact that sentencing someone to cryosleep is way outside the norm, I don’t think a second trial would deliver the same sentence again. After all, this would be really then a double jeopardy issue here.” He glanced back at Khan. “Latter could be a chance for you to get out of it. You’re already sentenced, they can’t give you another penalty for it. On the other hand, cryosleep is not a legal penalty.” He shook his head. “This whole case is absolute unique.”

“Nien can’t go back to cryosleep,” Jim threw in. “He's been subjected to cryosleep too often. If he goes down like that again, he'll die; Bones confirmed that, so did those bastard scientists.”

Wesley nodded, ignoring the young officer's harsh language. “There you go. The chance that Mr. Singh would be sent to a rehabilitation center for God knows how long is high. To prevent this, he's going to need a hell of a good lawyer.”

“Do you know one?” Jim asked hopefully.

“I know our lawyers, but this doesn’t seem the best solution.”

Khan cleared his throat. “I’m grateful that there are men – good men – concerned about me, it will never cease to surprise me, but…”

“I promised you I'd find a way to get you out of this, and I will!” the young captain snapped.
“In case you have forgotten a small but not unimportant detail, Kirk, I own only the dirt beneath my fingernails. Lawyers are expensive; I don’t think that has changed.”

“No, it hasn't, but we'll find a solution. I've got credits saved…”

“You will absolutely NOT pay for me,” the Augment said sharply.

“Oh, come down from your high horse, Your Majesty!” Jim groaned, rolling his eyes. “You’re going to need all the help you can get.”

“This has nothing to do with pride, Jim!” Khan replied, ignoring Kirk’s snort. “Can you imagine what would happen if you, the captain of Starfleet’s flagship, pays for the defense of a man suing Starfleet itself? A man regarded as a criminal and even a terrorist as Commodore Wesley pointed out? You’ll lose your command and your rank faster than you can say ‘Bob’s my uncle’.”

At those words, both officers blinked in confusion.

“Bob is not my uncle,” Jim said baffled. “Why would I say that?”

Khan sighed and closed his eyes. He quickly opened them again and grimaced ever so slightly. “I apologize, gentlemen, my mistake. It is an old phrase from my time one of my brothers loved to use, and means that something will happen quickly.”

“Okay, I understood,” Jim murmured, while Wesley looked in amusement at the two other men, before he smirked nonchalantly at his protégé. “Ugh, well, say anything but that. That's just too weird.”

Kirk grinned when the super-human’s lips curled ever so softly in a smile. They'd had little reason to smile these last few days. Then they both turned serious again.

“I understand why you don’t want to have Jim do this,” Wesley addressed the Augment. “And it tells me a lot about your new found friendship – that you think of him first, even if you're the one in trouble.” Bob fixed Khan. “And I think I have a solution for you, Mr. Singh.” He bent forwards; his elbows rested on his thighs. “This device you built is of utmost interest to Starfleet – and they will pay a lot for the design. You…”
“I never made a design,” Khan interrupted him cautiosly. “The Enterprise’s engineering already has a device. All you have to do is…”

This time it was Bob who did the interrupting. “Contrary to the opinion of a certain chief engineer aboard this ship, we are not thieves, Mr. Singh. This sensor-disturbing device is your baby, so to speak – your intellectual property. Apply for a patent and Starfleet cannot take it from you without remuneration. And the price is up to you though I’d suggest you demand at last two mil for it.” He heard Jim gasp and added, “For the design you'd come up with, the value to the Federation, and for the patent, it's appropriate – maybe even low-balling now that I think about it.”

Jim stared at Khan – not in envy, but in shock and joy. If Nien could put his hands on that much money, he could hire a whole cadre of lawyers for him and for his people!

And Wesley wasn’t finished yet. He knew that Noonien Singh was a murderer in the eyes of Starfleet and the Council. But this man's hand had been forced by the wrongs done him over and again by Starfleet. A bit of advice on how to gain the advantage was well overdue as far as Bob was concerned. “I'd suggest that you reserve the rights to oversee future tests and development. You'd kill two birds with one stone. You’ll have enough money to employ all the lawyers you need for business and Starfleet would realize that they need you out of prison and out of a rehab.”

Cocking his head, Khan watched the commodore waiting for the punchline. None came. “You’re serious,” he said after a long pause.

Wesley nodded, “Of course!”

“There is one catch,” the Augment replied slowly. “I am in no position to apply for a patent. I cannot risk…”

“Galven!” Jim cut in – his hope stoked now by Wesley's words. “It’s easy. Galven is a technician and knows how Nien's device works. Hire him as your assistant, give him power-of-attorney or whatever they call it to act in your name.”

“My name?”

“Nien Sunrise, for example, or something else in another language, ‘Commander Lavi’,” Kirk grinned before continuing, “Galven applies for the patent for you and then the contact between you
and Command goes via Galven, until…”

“Jim, the patent would be null and void if it’s applied for under a false name,” Bob cut in. “As soon as Command learns about this detail, they won’t be bound to the patent or the contract. Hell, they could demand their money back and sue Mr. Singh as well as this Galven, too.” He glanced at the Augment. “Does Galven know who you are?”

Khan shook his head slowly; the movement was uncomfortable in his shoulders. “No, they do not. Only Diego de la Vega-Martinez-Martinze; he learned that I’m an Augment aboard the space station, but even he does not know my real name.”

Wesley pursed his lips. “Still Galven could get into trouble, if anyone finds out he's working on your behalf.”

“Well, ‘Sunrise’ could be a cover name or a pseudonym, right?” Kirk asked. Wesley made an indifferent sort of gesture and Jim continued. “There are a lot of people who use those to market something – art or tech stuff. Hell, books are written under a pseudonyms and the content belongs to the author no matter what name he uses. The same has to go for a patent, right?”

“I don’t know about patent law; I was a leader, then a runaway, then a prisoner. I haven’t been keeping up, but I suppose that's possible,” the former dictator sneered with little malice intended.

A sigh escaped Wesley. “I guess I'll just have to do some research. I'm just an old pilot.” He looked from one man to the other. “Suppose it's possible for Mr. Singh to patent the sensor-disturbing device. The moment the cat is out of the bag on the designer, we're in trouble.”

Jim shrugged. “If Nien follows the law and stays in the background, what can they do? This device can save thousands – Starfleet, Federation civilians. We need this; Starfleet will have to choke on their charges when they figure out who invented it.” He glanced at Khan. “You get the money; pay the best lawyers. All you need is someone who doesn’t belong to Starfleet and is willing to help. Any of The Shadow would do it for you, but I think Galven is the best choice. Give him enough to support The Shadow and everyone's happy!”

Khan laughed quietly – a warm sound that rumpled in his still hoarse throat. Amusement lit his green-blue eyes. “You are an optimist, James Kirk!”

“Yeah, that’s me,” Jim nodded with a bright smile.
"I'm still going to need some sort of documentation to apply for these patents, aren't I?" the Augment teased.

"That can be arranged," the younger man shrugged, and Wesley cleared his throat.

"I'm sure I didn't hear that, Jim!"

"Rrrright!" Then the captain smirked as a memory struck him. "Didn't you get some kind of papers when you on that fishing boat?" he addressed Khan again. Bob let his head sink into the neck; groaning, "Oh good Lord, stop!"

"That I did; they served me well when I left Earth, but I don't know if they would hold up against real scrutiny," Nien mused.

"If you slipped through an Earth port without getting stopped, they have to be perfect," Jim chuckled. "Use them, they'll be all right."

"Nothing will be 'all right', if it comes out that we are talking here," Wesley grumbled and rose. "And so it's important that no one becomes curious about the newest 'crew-member' of the Enterprise. Mr. Singh has to stay out of sight until everything is set into motion – especially when it comes to the trial." He looked from one to the other and back. "So, please no extra trips, no escapades, no attention-getting at all, gentlemen. We are all in this now, and I don't want to see any one of us or all of us ending up behind an energy barrier with a bunch of Redshirts watching our every move."

"I agree. I've spent a lot of time in your so-called prison cells, first under Marcus, then here," Khan deadpanned. "I felt like a fish in a fishbowl."

Jim looked at him, puzzled. "A fishbowl?"

"Yes, you don't know...? A fishbowl is a round glass bowl filled with water for a small fish, like a goldfish."

"Hey, I'm not mocking you, darlin'. We've still got aquariums here and I know what a goldfish is –
“you can't eat them.”

With a groan, Nien closed his eyes again. “Why do you always think of food?”

“Because I’m hungry?” Kirk offered with a grin.

Khan glanced back at him. “Hungry – after smoke inhalation and all we've been through? You are as tough as any of my people.”

“I knew you'd rub off on me!” Jim smirked. “But why'd you call the cell a fishbowl?”

“Because the barriers are transparent, you are stared at like an animal at the zoo.”

Jim pursed his lips. “I never thought much about it, but you're right. No much privacy there, huh?”

“That is quite the understatement!”

Wesley had listened to the curt encounter and pursed his lips. Yes, Jim and the Augment were most definitely friends! “Leaving fishbowls and lunch to get back on topic, I think both gentlemen agree that Mr. Singh's whereabouts must remain secret. If Command figures out Mr. Singh is aboard this ship, we're all doomed.”

“Perhaps I should leave the Enterprise then?” Khan asked feeling a surprisingly sharp stab in his gut at the mere thought of separating from Jim. He had never needed someone like he needed Jim, and admitting that he needed at all was foreign – but undeniable in its truth. His mate near him was as necessary as food and air. But he would suppress his needs if it meant his beloved was safe.

Jim looked at him as though he'd just invited a Klingon to dinner. That would get as resounding a 'No!' as the implication that he should leave. Not if he had a say – and he's the captain; he always had the say. “You’ll stay!” he said firmly, and then added a soft “Please,” remembering that his beloved would appreciate choice that was so long denied him.

Khan sighed. “Jim, many of your crew members will recognize me. And then they will ask questions – questions you can’t answer. And if one of them goes to Starfleet behind your back... You need not
Kirk thought about the issue a moment, then he replied thoughtfully, “If the crew discovers what you've done since escaping the shitty situation you were put in. If we tell them that you saved millions of people and me, no-one will turn you in. Sure they may be a few less than thrilled at the prospect of having you aboard, but I let Spock check the files. I’ll speak to those personally who hold a grudge. They will understand – I'll make them.”

Bob had listened closely and looked at Kirk. “It’s your crew. You know them the best, but be warned. If just one of them thinks that this is a good chance to take revenge on Mr. Singh, you, your senior officers and Mr. Singh will end up jail. Me, too. I don't mean to sound self-important, but we're at war; Starfleet and the Federation need you – need the both of us.”

“I wouldn’t tell anyone that you know about Nien.”

“Don’t be stupid, Jim!” Wesley snapped. “If Command learns the truth, your only hope is me, so of course I know where he is.”

“They would arrest you, too,” Khan added for consideration, and Wesley nodded.

“Yes, but we've got our own set of rules and the war forces exceptions.” He took a deep breath. “When a staff officer guarantees for someone due to their usefulness, the Council must accept it. Like an informant in law enforcement. If all of our covert contacts were required to be clean, we'd never get anything done.”

Khan cocked his head. “What do you mean by guarantee?”

“Well, Jim did it in not so many words when he informed me about your warning concerning Tammeron.”

“Yes,” Nien nodded; after all he had heard the talk between Kirk and Wesley as he listened in on their transmission.

Bob didn’t seem to be surprised that the Augment knew to what degree Jim trusted him. “As much as Jim believes in you, Mr. Singh, so will I. Jim's earned that much,” he nodded at the young man. "I know my faith is not misplaced – not where he is concerned, and so I will extend it to you. These
extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. But know the risk that Jim and I take for you. I know what you've done for him. Make no mistake, I will not hesitate to do the same.”

Thunderstruck, Khan stared at the older man. Oh yes, he knew what risk came with placing so much trust in someone! Jim had done it only several weeks ago, and it had touched the super-human. But Wesley had no reason to offer his own. Yes, the commodore and his crew owed the Augment their lives. But Nien could only hope that it would spare him an arrest. He never expected Wesley to cover for him. Of course, it was Jim who inspired more in those around him.

“Thank you, Commodore,” he said with open honesty. “I do understand the risk you take on my behalf.” He took a deep breath and offered his hand to Wesley, who closed the distance between them and accepted.

“I'll make an official statement in my log and send a copy to Jim so that he can present it, should this step becomes necessary.” He fixed the Augment. “You are under my protection now; if I had more to offer, I would, but don’t make me regret this!”

“I will not, Commodore. You have my word of honor!” Khan replied; his tone changed with the promise he made as they shook hands.

Khan Noonien Singh had met many men – honorable men and less than, naïve and intelligent ones, strong and weak ones. But never had he met such men as his mate and Commodore Wesley. There were mere humans, ‘inferiors and weaklings’, as some Augments would have called them. As far as Khan was concerned, the worth of these men was far above so many of his own kind.

Bob watched the super-human. He's had the benefit of a lifetime of experience with humans and aliens alike. Many were great actors – subtexting their parts and hiding who they really were and what they wanted – dubious intentions included. Now he knew that many of them belonged to Starfleet – were friends he no longer trusted. But where trust was lost, trust was gained, and Wesley knew that the man sitting in the bed before him was serious, and more honest than whom he thought were the most honest of men.

Smiling, he let go of the pale, strong hand. “Right! And now we should set the whole patent issue in motion as soon as possible,” he went on to plan. “I'm sure that Mr. Galven is willing to help if you can apply for a patent under a pseudonym. After that's done, I'll send my report to Starfleet Command about the sensor-disturbing device. Mr. Scott should be done with the tests by then. I'll also send my permission to test non-Starfleet technology aboard the Enterprise to Mr. Spock. That'll keep us on the right side of things for when Command asks questions. We have to expect that. I'll also hunt down some names of the better-known lawyers in patent law and military tribunal law.” He lowered his voice. “We have to be very careful, gentlemen – completely aboveboard and by the book. One slip and this is all over before it begins!”
“We know, Bob,” Jim said firmly and Wesley nodded.

“Good!” He turned around to go but stopped. “By the way, you never told me how you came to know that ‘Sunrise’ is Mr. Singh.”

Jim’s face was pure innocence as he replied, “We had a conversation once about the ‘last sunrise’. When The Shadow contacted us, he sent a piggy-backed transmission and referred to himself as ‘Sunrise’ I knew it was him.” Well, he didn’t lie. When Khan came to his apartment, it was only the third time they had met.

Bob cocked his head having no reason to doubt Kirk’s words. “And you trusted him? Why?”

“He risked discovery to warn us of a planned Klingon strike against a neutral planet. He knew what was at stake and the risk it posed to him; still he put the well-being of the planet above his own. That was enough, I thought, to go on.”

Wesley frowned; then he shook his head. “Gut feeling?”

“Yes,” the younger man confirmed, and the commodore snorted before addressing the super-human. “And you contacted the Enterprise because you knew how Kirk would react?”

“Jim listened to me when I told him about Marcus and his intentions. He is open to suggestions and is not afraid to hear unpleasant truths, so I hoped that he would believe me. And, I never lied to him. I hurt him, and for that I am sorry. But I did not lie to him.”

“That’s right,” the captain said. His eyes shined, and he hoped it escaped Bob's notice. “Nien's never lied to me. Last time he warned me about something, it was true, and so I believed him again.”

Bob chuckled quietly and shook his head in amusement. “You two are a hell of a team; I'll give you that,” he said. “Well, I’ll head back to the Lexington and try to get this Mr. Galven. Maybe…”

“Commodore,” Khan cut in. “What about my crew?”
“Your crew?” Wesley asked.

“Bob, they’re somewhere locked away in a secure facility. I’d bet good credits that the admirals who knew Nien was being tested on know where his people are. I’m assuming – God I hope they are still in cryosleep,” Jim explained. “But they’ve done nothing that justifies it. They are human and have a right to their life and peace!”

“Minutes ago you told me that the former Chief of Command stripped Mr. Singh and his people of their status as human. Granted, that’s crazy as whether or not they are human has little bearing on their treatment in the Federation. We are one of many species!” the commodore replied and glanced back at Khan. “Consider it slander and sue ’em for whatever else your lawyer can come up with. Starfleet has neither the authority nor the right to make such an outrageous call.”

“So there is a chance to free them using the law?” Nien demanded, and Wesley sighed.

“I should think so! They aren’t accused of anything and leaving them in their current state due to world events that occurred centuries ago is idiotic nor can any alleged crimes be verified. You left the planet! What charges could they possibly face? I don't think the Council will have any other choice than to wake them and support their… your building new lives.”

“They are Augments, like me. I fear due to history, my own recent included, we will not be looked on kindly. Do you really think they would grant us true freedom?” Khan pressed, and the older man nodded.

“Yes, I do – but we shouldn’t rush anything. First, we have to make certain that you get a fair trial. As well, your lawyers will press charges against Command with regards to the confinement of your people.” He pursed his lips and then asked. “How many are you?”

“Seventy-two,” the former dictator replied.

“Right. I’ll try to find them. I’m a staff-officer; I’ve got half-way decent access. Kirk, I may need your help though.”

"Of course, Commodore."

Hope flashed in the ocean-colored eyes of the super-human. Both men saw it. “I can’t promise you
that I’ll be successful, but you have my word that I will try,” Wesley said quietly.

“Thank you, Commodore – once again.”

Bob smiled. “You’re welcome.” He straightened up. “Right, you two, now get better and…” He was interrupted; voices outside became louder, and Khan went rigid.

“That is Caviw!” he stated surprised, as he recognized the female voice that sounded rather angry.

“Caviw?” Wesley repeated curiously. Jim’s eyes became wide as saucers.

“What is she doing here?” He glanced at Bob. “She belongs to The Shadow.”

“One way to find out what the lady wants,” Wesley commented wryly and left the room. In the main part of sickbay stood a Caitian woman with fire-red hair. She planted her fists on her slender hips and glared at McCoy.

“If I say I have a stomach ache, then…”

“Miss, my little machine here shows that you are in perfect health! You told me you were aboard the space station we dragged away. Maybe you took in a bit too much smoke, but my instruments don't see it. You're healthy, end of story!” the CMO said sternly before addressing a Redshirt. “Please escort the lady back to the Engineering and…”

“But my stomach hurts!” Caviw hissed, ignoring the curious and baffled gazes of the other patients who lay around her in the beds.

“Perhaps your upset stomach is the result of your concern for Mr. Sunrise and Captain Kirk?” Wesley offered. He watched the catlike woman whirl around to face him, and he offered her one of his winning smiles. Closing the distance between them, he offered the lady his hand and winked at McCoy. “May I introduce myself, young lady?” Bob began, but before he could continue, he fell victim to a full load of Caitian charm.

“Commodore Wesley!” Caviw called; she took the baffled officer’s hand in long fingers with nails
sharp as claws, and looked up at him like a lost little girl. “I’m so glad you’re here. Finally a gentleman. I want…”

“Miss, may I ask what you’re doing on this ship and how you got here in the first place?” Wesley interrupted her; his cheeks flushed as the Caitian's tail wound around his left arm. She stood far too close.

“I accompanied Mr. de la Vega-Martinez, who is in the Engineering. I negotiate the terms of Mr. de la Vega-Martinez's agreements to make sure he is fairly compensated for his sales. During our walk through Engineering, I felt nauseous. Mr. Scott offered the service of this sickbay, and I took him up on it. This nice gentleman there,” she pointed at the Redshirt, “brought me here, but the doctor…”

“Can’t find anything because she is fit as a fiddle,” Bones cut in. “I agree, Commodore, her abdominal pain is certainly due to the two troublemakers next room. So is mine!”

“What?” Caviw snarled. “I made no pretense. Just ask Galven! He helped me before Mr. Scott…”

“Do I understand you correctly, Miss? Mr. Galven is aboard, too?” Wesley asked. The Caitian nodded hesitantly. He smiled. “Now that’s a spot of luck I wasn't expecting. I was just about to contact him.” He stepped away to the intercom and hailed Engineering.

“Engineering, Allistor here,” a voice answered.

“Engineering, this is Commodore Wesley. Mr. Allistor, does Mr. Scott have visitors?”

“Affirmative. Mr. de la Vega-Martinez and Mr. Galven are here, Commodore,” Spock’s voice came through the intercom as the Vulcan replaced the young technician. “They asked for permission to come aboard to speak with Mr. Scott about some needed equipment. I have accompanied them since their arrival.”

“Excellent, Mr. Spock. Please inform Mr. Galven that I need him in med-bay as soon as he is available.”

“Is this about Miss Caviw?” the first officer wanted to know and Bob smirked.
“No, it’s about two other troublemakers. Please tell Mr. Galven that his presence is needed. Wesley out.” He turned around, saw McCoy studying a readout of a med-bed’s monitor, and then he realized that the Caitian woman crept away. “Miss Caviw?”

The catlike female stiffened at the Commodore's voice.

“Please give me your communicator before you visit Mr. Sunrise,” Bob said walking towards her. With big, innocent eyes she looked at him.

“But sir, I didn’t want to…”

“Lady, my hair may be grey, but I’m not senile. You’re here to ‘help’ Mr. Sunrise by giving him a communicator so that he can be beamed away the moment a signal is sent.” As Caviw opened her mouth to protest, he added, “Shall I contact the bridge to see if there is a ship near us that belongs to your little group – or maybe I won't see it. Our mutual friend is quite the genius, isn't he?”

Caviw gave up her little act and glared angrily at him. Everything had run smoothly until now. Diego had managed to get her and Galven aboard the Enterprise telling the cautious first officer that he had hired the two former members of The Shadow to help him with the extra work Starfleet had brought him since the war held the Federation in its grip. Meeting Mr. Scott in Engineering, just minutes later, the Caitian feigned stomach pain, whereupon she had been brought to sickbay. She planned to find out where Khan was being held so that she could send a signal to the _Flash_. Ritek would then beam the Augment away. The whole, clever plan had been fouled by Commodore Wesley. The man was sharp, yet she knew that she couldn’t let ‘Léo’ down.

“I will not let you arrest him!” she hissed, and McCoy grimaced. Why, for the love of God, were so many people hell-bent on keeping the enhanced bastard out of harm’s way? This man was trouble incarnate – something he and Kirk had in common!

“Who says I'm going to arrest Mr. Sunrise?” Bob asked; he watched as confusion marred the pretty face in front of him.

“You won’t?” Caviw gasped, and Wesley shrugged.

“No, I won’t.” He nodded towards the storeroom. “If you want to visit him, I have no problem with that – the doctor on the other hand... I'd only ask that you be sure to keep it short. Both men need their rest. They've had it rough of late.”
Staring just a second longer at the older Terran, Caviw chewed at her bottom lip with her sharp teeth and finally stepped around him. A warm hand caught her arm. “Your communicator, please!” the commodore said once again, and with a furious growl the Caitian pressed the little device into his free hand. “Thank you, Miss, I’ll return it to you when you’re done with your visit,” he said politely.

“So he isn’t free!” she snarled and Bob sighed.

“He is free. He is choosing to stay, and the captain will have him. It’s important that he remain aboard the Enterprise. So, please no rescue attempts! It would do him more harm than good.”

Giving him another glare, Caviw strode gracefully away and several moments later stepped into the storeroom where the men she sought were held. Shocked, she looked at Kirk and Khan. Both men were still pale; damaged capillaries etched into their features made them look sicker than they were. “Oh holy tree!” she whispered. “How are you gentlemen doing?”

“Better. Thank you, Caviw,” Nien said quickly. He continued. “Thank you not only for your concern but also for your willingness to rescue me.” He saw her blush and added, “I am grateful for such good friends, but Wesley told you the truth. I’m in no danger here.”

The Caitian’s tail twitched. “You heard? Of course, you did,” she answered her own question. “Your hearing is as good as that of my people, maybe even better.” She saw his relaxed features tense and decided to tell him the truth. “I… We know,” she said softly.

Those blue-green eyes pierced her, and she stepped back just a bit. “You know what, Caviw?”

She took a deep breath. “We know what you are and who you are, Khan Noonien Singh.” She dipped her head in respect and to show that she brought no malice with her. “We have known for several days now. That’s the reason Galven and I are here. We thought that Wesley would recognize and arrest you, and so we wanted to help you escape.”

The Augment stared at her bewildered. “You… You know? And you came for me anyway?”

Promptly, Caviw recovered herself. She planted her hands on her hips and shot back, “Of course we want to help you. You’re one of us now – our friend! And we don’t let our friends down! It doesn’t matter what you are. Look at us – you’re one of us.”
Jim smiled at those words and looked at an utterly baffled Augment. He blinked quickly then answered, “If you know my real name, then you must know my past. You…”

“Ritek was an unwilling witness to Kirk and McCoy’s conversation; he figured out that you’re an Augment – ‘Khan’. There are no Augments, so I did some research and found out about you. We know that you are the result of mans’ attempts to create super-humans, that you became a ruler in your time. Man came to fear their own creation and that fear resulted in a war on Earth. You and some of your kind escaped in a sleeper ship.” She looked firmly at him. “And it doesn’t matter to us! We know you as a trustworthy, honorable, and loyal comrade-in-arms, now even a friend. You are dangerous, this much is clear, but so it goes with the warrior. You listen to your heart, as the Terrans say. You never gave us a reason to mistrust you; you rather impressed us with your fiercely loyalty, and your sincere love for our young hero here.” She nodded in the direction of a blushing Kirk. “That is far from evil. So we came for you.”

“Nien is not a prisoner here; he is free to go. He is choosing to stay,” Jim said touched by the regard The Shadow had for his beloved.

Khan nodded in affirmation at Jim’s statement. He still had trouble, though, comprehending the fact that his comrades knew who he was; they never let on but remained loyal to him; continued to treat him as they had from the beginning – with tolerance, respect, and friendship. He moistened his lips. “Caviw, you do not know Earth history. We are accused of…”

“Jeff is familiar with your planet’s history, as is Ritek. Both agreed that your genetics and your past make no difference in our regard for you. You are our friend; that’s that!” She bounced on the balls of her feet.

Jim beamed at those words while he looked at his mate. “Times have changed, don’t you think so?”

“Quite,” the former dictator whispered, still astonished at the turn of events.

That moment, the door opened again revealing Galven and Wesley. The Tellarit had glanced at the two men and Caviw before stepping into the room; the commodore followed him.

“Right,” Wesley said businesslike. “Well, everyone in the boat, seems to be – In the same boat. Excellent.” He smiled at his poor pun, and then pointed to the empty chair still between the two beds. “Please, Miss Caviw, have a seat. We have important matters to discuss.”
An hour later, everything was settled. Galven agreed to work with Khan. He would be the public face until it was safe for Khan to be so. Wesley learned that the leaders of The Shadow did discover their friend's background; none turned away from Khan. They continued to regard him as a friend and told the commodore as much, and that he made the right decision. This man had earned his second chance.

Wesley looked around at the unlikely alliance. Mostly at its two newest members; he was taken with their fidelity toward one another. He knew that Jim Kirk would do everything in his power to drag the super-human’s neck out of the noose he was caught in, and if Wesley didn’t want to lose one of the most promising Starfleet captains (and he damn well didn’t), he would have to help his protégée. Besides, having the Augment as an ally was hundred times better than having him as an enemy!

As their discussion neared its end, the door slid open revealing a rather irritated CMO, who stood at the threshold before entering the crowded space. “I’m sorry to disturb the coffee klatch, but there are patients here who need rest! So if the lady and the gentlemen could conclude this panel discussion, I'd appreciate it!”

Jim smirked inwardly as he caught Bob Wesley’s astonished expression; Galven laughed, sounding a little bit like a pig with hiccup, and Caviw snickered.

“I beg your pardon, Doctor,” the commodore found his voice.

McCoy sighed. “I know that our ‘friend’s’ presence here gives us reason enough to talk, but this is a sickbay, and both Captain Kirk and Mr. ‘Sunrise’ are still far from peak health. So unless the fate of the Federation depends on this little chat, I must insist you leave the patients alone now.”

Bob looked at Jim. “Is he always like this?”

“When it comes down to the well-being of his patients, Bones goes from ‘simple country doctor’ into some combination of hyena, a warrigul and a le-matya. Or – yes, he is.”

Wesley shook his head, half amused, half irritated. “And there I thought my CMO was bad.”
“Oh no, Bones set that bar,” Kirk deadpanned; he caught another dark glare from McCoy.

“Be careful, Jim, you’re still healing. I can always help it along with a few hypos.”

Kirk’s eyes widened. He hated hypo-sprays! “You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me!”

“I’m the captain here!”

“And I’m the CMO treating the captain!” Bones replied wryly.

Wesley chuckled quietly. “Before he makes good on his threats, we should conclude.” He looked at Kirk and Khan. “You two will hear from me as soon as possible. Mr. Galven, we will remain in contact. I’ll give you my private frequency, so if something is off, even by a little, you can hail me.”

His gaze found the Caitian woman. “Miss Caviw, I don’t think I have to remind you how important it is to keep silent about.”

“Of course, Commodore,” Caviw answered giving him a bright smile. She was glad – relieved even that the staff officer chose to protect ‘Léo’. Neither Galven, nor she had the slightest idea what had gone on between Khan and Starfleet or this Section 31. Kirk, Wesley and even Khan chose to avoid the topic for now. “Get better, white tiger,” she smiled at Nien, who frowned at this new nick-name.

“White tiger?” he asked confused and earned another blinding grin.

“Bright white, deep black and blue-green eyes, combined with grace and strength,” the Caitian answered. “You understand?” Winking at him, she the Tellarit left it. Yet Caviw knew that as much was said as went unsaid; a gut feeling told her that the Augment would need them again.

Bidding their farewell, Galven and Caviw finally left the room followed by Wesley, who wished the two patients well before ordering security to escort the visitors back to the Engineering; returning the communicator back to Caviw. Afterwards, he made a few more sick-bed visits, asked about the injured’s well-being, and offered comfort and thanks for a job well-done. Usually, that was Kirk’s duty, but seeing as the young captain was still bed-ridden and Spock was in Engineering, Wesley took it upon himself to acknowledge and encourage the injured crew members of the Enterprise as well as those rescued from the space station.

As McCoy finally returned from the next room, Wesley stepped to him and murmured, “I have to
Bones nodded and led the commodore into his office; he locked the door behind them, and then hailed Engineering. Upon hearing that de la Vega-Martinez-Martinez and the two other civilians had been accompanied to the transporter room, the two men waited only a few minutes before the first officer stepped into the office. He was tense; his normally impassive face held a hint of uncharacteristic uncertainty.

Wesley pointed to one of the visitor chairs. “Please have a seat, Mr. Spock. You too, Doctor.” As soon as the two men obeyed, he took a deep breath. “Gentlemen, what I have to tell you now must be kept secret – a secret between us three, Jim Kirk and Mr. Singh.” He looked from one to another. “I’ve learned much surrounding the circumstances that led to the disaster last year with Khan; as such he is under my protection.” He watched the Vulcan raise both his brows as McCoy gasped. “I know that you have your own history with Mr. Singh, but justice must be done for him as well as his victims. And that is exactly what is going to happen.”

“Khan will never agree to go to trial,” Spock said. “He is trying to trick you, sir, and…”

“Spock; Jim, Mr. Singh and I came to an agreement – an agreement that serves all sides well. I don’t want to go into details. It’s up to your captain to explain. Still, you should know how we plan on proceeding in the near future so that you can support your friend and captain. Jim's career and freedom are at stake as is my own – and Mr. Singh’s life and future.” He sat down on the second visitor chair. “Listen…”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, Bob Wesley certainly is a man of honor – and of compassion. He understands that cruelty can lead to another cruelty, and that justice has to go both sides. Otherwise he wouldn’t have taken Khan under his wing, too. Of course Bones and Spock will have to accept the unpalatable compromises, which have been made, and it will be hard for them.

In the next chapter Jim and Khan will be alone together for the first time after the incidents in the space station, you’ll meet Barnet again (and also Kor), and the senior officers are worrying still their heads off for Kirk’s newest friend (except for Scotty, who is still marvelous unaware of ‘Sunrise’s’ identity, what will change later).

As always I hope you liked the new chapter and I’m dying to learn of your thoughts.
about it.

Have a nice start in the week.

Love

Yours Starflight
Anger and confusion

Chapter Notes

Hi my dear readers!

Sorry once again for the delay, but in the moment spared time is a rare thing. I hope it will be better in the future, because there is still a lot to come yet within the story.

Thank you for the comments and kudos. I’m always happy to realize how many people are reading my story.

After Bob listened more to his mind and heart than to the rules, Jim and Khan are temporary off the hook, but only concerning the authorities. Jim is going to have a lot to explain to his friends and members of his crew, while our Augment must find his place within the little world of the Enterprise.

And there is still the war. In this chapter you meet Kor again, but also Barnett – and two other admirals, who are following their own plans.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 36 – Anger and confusions

Wesley, Caviw, Galven and McCoy left; Kirk and Khan were finally alone for the first time since the life threatening events aboard the space station – alone and relieved for the Commodore’s support. And Jim’s. Nien trusted Jim as he did his own family, but he had been uncertain how Wesley would react. Instead of prison, the Augment was shown the path to justice, and for that he was grateful.

Kirk was happy because of the turn of event. A significant burden fell from his shoulders, though he knew that the road was tenuous.

But roads, trials and patents were not all that occupied the mind of the young captain in the moment.

He hurt. He felt nauseous; his head felt ready to split as did his throat. Residual chills lingered in every bone and cell of his body, and he was unable to rest. And if he could, his mind wouldn’t let him. There was so much to say to the man in the second bed – to the man who saved him again, who
held him, who loved him! Jim didn’t speak Hindi; still he had caught the word pyāra. Nien had whispered it to him just before the Klingons opened fire at the orbital station. There was no doubt what the Augment had voiced. It echoed Kirk’s own words.

I love you…

These words were surely most important to the one intended, but Jim Kirk was unprepared for how they would affect him. He lacked experience and was unprepared for the depth in which they would reach down into him. Those words had never been directed at him before; not like this. He'd heard it from his mother none too often, and he knew that his friends loved him as well. But it was quite different from what he and Nien shared. Hidden in its meaning was the sentiment that life held as a new purpose. Before, Nien lived so that others might live. Now he lived that he might have life with him – Jim.

This made the young captain almost tremble. Love like this made him want to weep and laugh. He wanted nothing more than to walk to the other bed and take his mate in his arms. The desire for nearness grew until resistance became impossible. He looked to Khan who lay in the opposite bed. He was tense; his eyes were closed. Kirk sat up and pulled the blanket away.

Instantly chills quaked through his body, but he was willing to endure it; warmth in the proximity of his lover called him like a siren’s song.

The quiet rustle of the bedclothes and the clacking of the captain's teeth were enough to wake the Augment’s attention. Frowning, Khan lifted his head as he watched Jim carefully swing his legs over the bed’s edge. “What are you doing?” he asked; his voice strained painfully around the words. He should have healed by now. Apparently the toll exacted on his body had finally exhausted his abilities.

“You are much too far away,” Jim replied roughly. The former dictator sat up.

“Your hip was dislocated. You can’t take a single step without pain, so do not walk,” he said. The lines furrowed his brow as he saw Kirk make no move to stop.

“Then I’ll hop on the good leg.”

Nien groaned and slipped out of bed. “You’re the most stubborn, unreasonable, and reckless human in the whole of the universe!”
“Love you too, Tiger!” Kirk grinned; mirth sparkled in his gaze.

Rolling his eyes, the super-human walked slowly to the other bed. The bio-scanner on his med bed sent an alarm without Khan there to monitor, yet the former dictator ignored it. Carefully, he sat down beside Jim who took one of his hands in his own. The simple gesture was enough to soothe the young officer’s heart and mind, but soft tremors continued to rock his body. Kirk felt as though he were locked in a freezer. It didn’t slip Nien’s attention.

Gritting his teeth against the pain in his arms and shoulders, he drew up the blanket with his free hand and wrapped it around them both. Their bare feet stuck out from under their gowns exposed to the warm, dry air; yet it wasn’t enough to soothe the coldness in their bodies.

Jim could tell that his mate tried to mask the discomfort he felt. He asked worriedly, “Still in pain?” Khan murmured something Jim couldn’t understand, so he added, “I don’t speak Hindi, love; English, right?”

The blue-green eyes looked at him, and a hint of a smile played around the Augment's bowed lips. “Do you have the slightest idea how much your concern means to me?” he whispered.

Jim’s own sky-blue pools shined. “I am always concerned about you. I'll stop, maybe, when you’re healthy and out of danger,” he answered tenderly.

“Then you know how I feel, when you’re jump head-first into the dangers of space,” Khan replied softly; he gently squeezed the younger man’s fingers. Jim caught the reference to their flight toward the Vengeance. Khan's gaze became somber. “I almost lost you – again!” He felt his mouth going dry. “On the space station as the hull began to split apart, I felt your heartbeat slow.” Fighting the burn in his shoulder, he pulled his hand from Jim’s fingers and wrapped his arm around his beloved. Resting his forehead against Kirk’s, he whispered. “You were dying – and there was nothing I could do to save you this time. I held you close, tried to warm you, but…” He closed his eyes for a moment, and as he opened them again, Jim saw the tears that didn’t fall, but they did give away the Augment’s inner turmoil. “I can’t lose you, James Kirk! Ever! And one thing more. If we should face a no-win situation again as we did on Turkana, never – never ask me to end your life. Not after I’ve held it in my hands and begged for it to stay with me.”

Jim’s eyes widened as he realized how his desperate plea made not so long ago still troubled his lover. But before he could say something, Nien added, “You’re my mate; a part of me now. Not just in blood, but so much deeper than that. Your soul is in mine, and I am yours. Killing you would shred the remains of me. A suicide of sorts.” He pulled Kirk closer to him. “Those moments that I felt you dying in my arms were the most horrible of my life. I have lost enough people close to me –
brothers and sisters. I will never stop hurting because of it, but time has drawn out most of the venom. Your demise would rip me open – bleed me of my very life. I felt a sword pierce me through as life stole out of you. I never want to feel it again. If death ever comes to take you from me, I will follow you. My body might continue to function, but existence would be just that; life – _living_ would cease.”

He took a deep breath as continued to reveal himself to the younger man; he knew the outpouring of his heart was safe with Jim. “I was more broken than thought when I came to your apartment that night in San Francisco. I realize now how shattered I was – now after you mended me. You healed my soul; you made it whole and gave it new life.” His gaze intensified. “So promise me – _promise_! Promise you will temper your recklessness. I have lived for my people, but I want to live for myself now – for the joy of it, loved by you.”

Jim gulped, but he couldn't swallow the lump that threatened to spill in a sob from his throat. Never before had anyone poured themselves into him; never had he meant so much to one person – been the center of another one’s life. And never has another meant so much. Kirk realized the moments aboard the orbital station had traumatized his beloved in a way that not even Marcus had. He saw the pleading in Nien’s eyes – the ocean now a storm of emotion. Jim closed his eyes and breathed the ever-familiar, sweet scent of his mate and felt Nien’s thumb draw circles on his waist. He understood now with the greatest of severity Khan’s biggest fear. He feared losing love – being left unmoored in this time after he had just found his anchor.

Kirk and Nien had much in common, but one thing in particular stood out – certainly not a pleasant thing. They had both been left behind by those they loved more often than they cared to recall. Whether by death or desertion, they had mourned for those closest – those gone. The fear that the future would strike one or the other down hung over them like the sword of Damocles.

And after all the Augment had done for him, and all that he meant, there was only one possible response. “I promise,” he said softly, knowing that Khan needed the reassurance as he did. “I promise. I promise to take care, that I may take care of you.” He brushed his mouth over Nien’s lips. “I promise that I will never leave you – not of my own free will. Only Death now, can separate us, and we've given him a run for his money. We don't come easy and we don't come cheap.”

The former dictator took a deep breath and relief washed over his features; Kirk’s heart beat faster with affection.

“The same goes for you, Mr. Super-strong; you keep me – I keep you,” Jim murmured and cupped Nien’s cheeks in his hand, feeling the first traces of stubble beneath his palm. “If you want to beat the shit out of someone threatening me, you, or anyone – no problem. But please don’t try to play ‘catch me if you can’ with a phaser or disarm a bomb by tearing out the detonator.” He saw the beginnings of a grin on Khan’s face and snaked both arms around the other man’s middle. “You are my other half – my mate! It hurts every time I see you hurt. Losing this thing – you, when I just found it... I
can't imagine that pain. I know that you're faster and stronger; still, the chance that just once you're not fast enough is too high, and then I'd be left behind. Left only to exist rather than live.” He placed another tender kiss on his mate’s lips. “I love you, Nien! I never thought that I could feel like this. So – so endless and whole, but here I am – helplessly and utterly pulled to you forever. I promised you I’d never to turn my back on you, but I need you to do the same – please, don’t leave.” He voiced his deepest fears that were so similar to that of the other man. “I love you,” he whispered again before he captured Khan’s lips with his own – properly this time.

Instantly, Nien’s mouth opened and their kiss deepened – not in heated passion, but in tender devotion. Everything their admission had set free rose and poured out in the gentle play of their tongues and the soft caresses of their hands along each other’s body. With every breath they took, they breathed in each other – their very essence.

Pulling the super-human with him, Jim let himself sink back on the mattress, not caring that he was in sickbay. However, something else reminded him that it wasn’t the best idea to get intimate here and now. Lying down sent a sharp pain through his right hip and leg, and he hissed just as Khan stiffened and grimaced. The gash in the Augment’s shoulder and his sore muscles made themselves known, too.

Groaning, the former dictator lifted his head and ended the kiss. The lovers looked at each other, almost pouting, before Jim suddenly smirked. “I can’t walk and you can’t use your arms. Good Lord, what a couple we are!”

Khan chuckled. “Well, if it becomes necessary, you lend me your arms, and I will give you my legs.”

“That'd be a sight,” Kirk grinned. “You standing behind me and telling me what to do with my arms, or I can climb on your back and you do the running.”

The Augment’s eyes widened, then he began to laugh, as he imagined the description. He lay down beside Jim. “I think your doctor-friend would order a complete psychological evaluation on us both.”

“He'll do it anyways when he figures out we're a bit more than friends.” Kirk sighed. “I'm so not looking forward to that talk.” He turned onto his left side to face Khan, raised a hand, and carded his fingers through his beloved’s hair. “But he's got to know the truth – I just don’t know how to tell him that you, of all the people in the universe, are the love of my life.”

The last words sent another wave of warmth through the Augment. “Perhaps he already assumes as much,” he suggested, relishing in the tender gesture of his lover.
“You think so?”

Nien had pursed his lips before he spoke. “He is a very good doctor, highly intelligent. He figured out my identity by himself, and after he found us asleep in one bed he likely put two and two together.” He frowned. “How did it come that you were in my bed?”

Jim blinked in surprise. “As far as I understood this morning, you came to my bed – sleepwalking.”

“Sleepwalking?” The Augment’s eyes widened in bewilderment as he stared at Kirk. “Impossible!”

“Bones said so. He told me that you walked to my bed while you slept, ergo… He also told me that when they beamed us aboard, they couldn't separate us; they put us in the infrared chamber together to warm us up.”

Thoughtfully Nien’s gaze roamed over the younger man’s soft features. “I… remember,” he said slowly. “I remember that all of the sudden we were somewhere else; there were voices… And there was a face, McCoy’s. Then I woke in a warm, small room with you in my arms.” Carefully he reached out and wrapped one arm around Jim’s waist. “I remember that I felt cold – colder than now – and I held you close.” He wrinkled his nose. “If McCoy saw this, then he certainly knows about us.”

“Spock saw us too,” Jim murmured. “But knowing him, he probably didn’t come to any sort of sordid conclusions. Vulcans may be brilliant, but when it comes to emotions, they’re lost.”

“Yet he has a girlfriend from Earth.” Khan chuckled. “Your Lieutenant Uhura must be quite tolerant if she puts up with him.”

“Oh, they have their issues. The last time there was trouble in paradise, I had the honor of mediating. It was while flying to Qo’noS to catch you. They argued; I sat in the middle trying to stay neutral, but they sucked me in anyways.”

Khan had looked cautiously at him before he smirked. “Huh, why do I get the feeling that you couldn't stay out of a conflict, even a verbal one, if your life depended on it.”
“Me?” Jim’s face was pure innocence.

“You,” Nien nodded. “You always must have the final word; Qo’noS was certainly no exception.”

“Hey!” Kirk huffed; it amused the Augment enough to bend forwards and to kiss his beloved, ignoring the pain the movement caused. Still, Jim sensed it. He continued to comb his fingers gently through the dark, thick hair. “I’m sorry Korax got you,” he whispered as Khan’s mouth gave him free. “It should have been me.”

“Don’t say that,” Khan interrupted him; his deep voice was a soft purr. “It will heal by tomorrow at the latest. You would have suffered for a week or more had it been you.”

“Still…” Jim shook his head. Nien would never admit it, but Kirk recognized the exhaustion in his mate’s eyes. “How are you doing?” he whispered, and the Augment sighed.

“I could be better,” he said carefully and returned Kirk’s soft smile. “And you?”

“Well, how can I describe it? Punched, knocked-out, minced; I generally feel like I’ve been put through a grinder – in that order,” the young captain moaned; closing his eyes for a moment.

“You feel as though put through a grinder? Mmm! If that be an enticement to your tender flesh, I will gladly partake when we are well again. I shall eat you raw, ferine – warmed only by my own heat surrounding you.” Nien answered, wriggling suggestively his brows.

Kirk’s jaw dropped and heat pooled in his stomach. “Dear Jesus, I would love that,” he said softly. “Among other things. I wanna show you exactly how much you mean to me by cherishing every inch of you until you collapse in pleasure.”

“Is this a promise?” Khan purred, and Jim nodded slowly.

“You can bet your life on it!”

They continued to look at each other; unfulfilled longing flushed their skin, warming them. The monitor above Kirk’s med-bed showed the racing of their hearts. Both men ignored the alert – at
least until a certain CMO came in, carrying a tray with two glasses of water.

“I think the gentlemen should have…” He stopped dead in his tracks as he saw the two men lying together on one bed with their bare legs dangling, looking at each other with hungry eyes. “Oh, for God’s sake! Can’t I leave you two alone for ten minutes?” Bones groused feeling a headache coming on. He placed the tray with the glasses on the small table beside the entrance. “What part of the order to stay in bed and rest did you not understand?”

Jim was clever enough to put on a sheepish face while Khan glared at the outraged CMO. “I don’t know why you’re so upset, Doctor. We are in bed, and we are resting,” he sneered.

“You call this resting?” Bones demanded. “That has to be uncomfortable. And the monitor shows that you two were anything but resting!” He had pointed at the bio-scanner before planting his hands on his hips. He addressed the Augment now. “And what is it with you that you are constantly slipping into Jim’s bed? Haven’t you…”

“Simple logic, Doctor. Maybe you should take some lessons from Mr. Spock,” Khan drawled, hiding his amusement as he watched the other man’s cheeks reddening in anger.

“I’m just a country doc, but I’m no idiot; I can make leaps of logic every once in a while. But your behavior defies logic. Care to explain the logic of leaving your bed and…”

“Jim can’t walk, so I went to him,” Khan replied; giving Leonard a smug smile.

“And you two have to stick so close together why?” Before one of his both patients could answer, he added a mockingly, “Should I replace the med-beds with a king-size bed so that you can snuggle together more comfortably?”

“Not a bad idea,” Jim commented and ducked his head, as Bones exploded.

“I knew that you’d say that, but this is still a med bay, and you two are here to heal! Running around ain’t gonna help…”

“I didn’t run around!” Kirk protested.
“Only because I came to you, otherwise you would have hopped over, as you have stated,” Nien clarified.

“Tattletale!” the younger man complained.

“You wanted to hop…?” McCoy stopped himself and pinched his nose. “For crying out loud, Jim, how old are you? Twenty-seven or two?”

“Hey!”

“Why on Earth were you going to hop around? You…”

“Ever heard of shared body heat, Bones?” Kirk cut in, and the CMO went rigid for a moment before he threw his hands up.

“That is the lamest excuse I ever heard!” He took a deep breath, glared at Khan and pointed to the other med bed. “You – in your bed! Jim, you stay in yours! Pronto, gentlemen!”

“But I’m cold!” Kirk pouted.

“If you would have just stayed under your blanked, you’d be fine!” McCoy snapped.

“But it wasn’t enou…”

“One word more and I hypo you into the next week!” Bones threatened.

He ended up with a dose of territorial and protective Augment. “Do you really think you could get close enough to carry out that threat?” Khan asked icily; his expression and glare served as warning.

But McCoy didn’t buy the Augment’s dangerous pretense – not this time. He wasn’t just a great doctor – he was intuitive as well; and perhaps that made him a great doctor. He could read people. That ability allowed him to look past Jim’s playboy persona – allowed him to see what others overlooked. It gained him his greatest friend and advocate. As such, he was as protective of Jim as
Khan. And he could see that Khan was utterly taken with Jim. He wouldn't hurt a friend of Kirk's—certainly not his caretaker. “Oh, don't give me your ‘no-one comes near Jim’ bluster,” he growled. “I might be a lowly human, but I'm smart enough to see that you regard Jim as one of your own now—especially after you gave him another hit of your super-blood. But even that won't be enough to fix him if he doesn't get any rest so...!”

Khan interrupted him by rising, aware of the fact that the Enterprise’s CMO wasn’t one to shy away out of fear, nor was he fooled easily. Nien wouldn’t hurt someone who was close to his mate, so he decided to confront McCoy with the fact that Noonien Singh was not accustomed to taking orders. “Very well, Doctor, I’ll take care that Jim rests.” He turned around to Kirk and facing him said, “Scoot over, Pyära.”

Thunderstruck, the young captain, looked up at him. “What?”

“You heard the good doctor. We must remain in bed and rest. We will be most fruitful if we ‘share body heat’ and relax.” He glanced over his shoulder at a shocked McCoy, who gaped at them. “Isn’t that right, Doctor?” He addressed Bones with feigned kindness before he slipped beneath the blanket.

Leonard found his speech again. “This is an Augment thing, right?”

The pale blue-green eyes challenged him. “You could say that,” Khan confirmed with an undertone mock derision in his voice.

Disbelieving, McCoy watched how the former dictator make himself comfortable beside Kirk, but at least they didn’t snuggle up together. Still...

With a groan, his head drooped “Ungh, if this is what I have to look forward to in the coming days, I'm putting in for leave!” he grumbled and turned to go.

“Bones?” Jim held him back one last time, and as Leonard glanced back the young captain said, “I'm a little bit hungry. Maybe…”

“Oh, of course, Jim, no problem. I’ll bring you a bowl of oatmeal. It’s light – very healthy.”

Kirk lifted his head. “Awww come on. Synthesized oatmeal is gross. It tastes like baby food!” he
“Yeah! Well, you're acting like one!” He exited with a “Don’t run away, you two!”

“I don’t believe it,” Jim whispered. “I’m the captain here and he…” He glanced at Khan. “What’s gotten into him?”

Amused the Augment smiled at him. “He knows.”

Kirk gulped. “You think so?”

“Yes!”

“Oh God!” Jim moaned and closed his eyes, only to open them again and to beam, “If he knows, then there is no reason to hide. It’s difficult to keep up the mask – not look at you, smile at you.” He shifted closer to Nien and pulled him softly into an embrace. “I think this is exactly what you would do now if you could move your arms without hurting yourself,” he whispered, gently petting the dark, silken dark hair of the super-human.

Khan began to chuckle. “So this is how you would lend me your arms?”

“Yes.”

“You could not have made a better decision!” the former dictator murmured and indeed relaxed; his head pillowed on Kirk’s shoulder. It wasn't long before both were asleep again.

ST***ST***ST

Richard Barnett, Chief of Command, leaned back in the chair at his desk and closed his eyes for a moment; he was worn, and a headache loomed over him like a storm.

During the last two days and nights, after Robert Wesley informed him of an approaching Klingon strike group near Aldebaran, he, the other admirals and Harhan Robertson, the president of the UFP,
had sat in one of the conference rooms and waited for word. The outcome of the battle was far from
their influence. The news yesterday that they gained victory had been a relief, but the good mood
was quickly tamped by the information of the assaults of Aldebaran III and the orbital station above
the planet. Hearing that five Klingons and a traitor from their own ranks had been responsible for the
attacks led to new discussions about the validity of offered peace talks. Still, Robertson insisted on
them. A wise move, perhaps, but Barnett understood why others would be against them.

The Klingon attack reeked of desperation as if they were reaching the limits of their abilities – or
maybe it was logistics, who knew. If that were the case, Starfleet could invade Empire territory –
annex a part of it. But that wasn't the Federation's way. Membership wasn’t forced but offered, and a
refusal was, of course, accepted. It had never been Starfleet’s purpose to expand its territory through
the use of force or preemptive defense, as some admirals called it.

Robert Barnett opened his eyes again and glanced at his terminal. He read Wesley’s latest report
concerning the status of the ships that had been involved in the battle again. Some of them were
severely damaged; others were still functional and only needed minor repairs to return to their
respective missions – among them, the Enterprise.

The Enterprise…

Of course it had to be Kirk who found out about the Klingon's planned attack. And of course, it had
to be Kirk who prevented the worst on Aldebaran. This ship and its crew had a tendency to get
involved in the most dreadful messes.

Wesley’s statement and Commander Capricio’s report read like an adventure novel portraying a
dangerous game that Kirk and the civilians won. Capricio also sent information about a particular
group of civilians – a Caitian woman, several Terrans, a Tellarit, a Rigelian… Barnett didn’t need
Wesley to point out the obvious, namely that these ‘civilians’ were members of The Shadow. They
had recovered Kirk, and so he was with them and as such, in the middle of the chaos. Jim Kirk
seemed to attract trouble’s attention like moths to a flame. It was a miracle he made it out alive –
again.

Wesley didn’t tell much about Kirk’s operation aboard the space harbor in his report. Only that the
Enterprise had been able to save him and others at the very last moment, but Barnett didn’t need the
details. He knew that it had been a close call for Kirk – again! And he didn’t want to ask how and
why the flagship had arrived in time while the battle still waged on. He had a certain feeling that
answers would lead to trouble for the Enterprise’s senior officers, but as long as Wesley didn’t
accuse them of insubordination, Barnett didn’t need to take any measures of his own.

Sighing, he closed the reports and rubbed his neck. It had been pure luck that The Shadow had been
on Aldebaran as the Klingon spies struck. And it was even luckier that Kirk had stumbled over them,
recognized two, and took action. He and The Shadow – and among them that man who called himself Sunrise. Wesley didn’t mention this mysterious man in his report, but the Chief of Command would bet not only his last shirt, but also a whole month’s salary that all those miracles he had only skimmed over in the report, had to do with this man.

He’d become a folk-hero of sorts, but avoided any official contact and vanished before anyone could see or hear him, only to return in secret when necessary.

“Who are you?” Barnett whispered. “And why are you hiding?” Shaking his head he stood to fetch himself a cup of coffee. It was almost evening and normally he was off duty by this time, but there was so much to do – so much to think over that he decided to stay a little bit longer.

His limbs creaked as he rose. Moving around a bit would clear his mind after all the hours of worry and tension – and maybe he would get some more answers with Wesley’s final report still to come.

Crossing his office, he went to the replicator for a strong coffee; his secretary was gone. He sent her home an hour ago. Sipping at the bitter hot drink, he went to one of the large windows and looked out over the glistening surface of San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge; they shimmered deep red in the setting sun. Everything seemed so peaceful, but peace was an illusion. As long as the war continued, there wouldn’t be any peace for mind or soul.

Taking another sip of the coffee, Barnett sighed. Hopefully the lost battle would make the Klingon Council rethink the Federation’s offer of peace talks. Robert knew how proud this race was; practically it would be a white flag of surrender if they accepted the notion of peace talks at all. Still, the admiral hoped that reason would win over the aggressive nature of the Klingons.

Kor sat at his desk in his quarters while his ship continued to orbit Turkana. Silently, he read the last reports of the commanders who had returned from their attempt to annex Aldebaran and then the neighboring star systems. Koloth’s was among those reports. He tried to make his statements seem as though the operation was a success with florid language and subterfuge before divulging that his team had not been able to complete the task because of their human contact.

Well, Kor believed his old friend when he asserted that this Terran, McFurthon, had a hand in the partially failed mission, but the real reason wore the name ‘James T. Kirk’. Again!
If the Klingon lord believed in bad luck, he would have so named this situation. It was as though Kahless had turned his face away from his people. It was a nasty joke of the fates that Kirk, of all Terrans, had to be on Aldebaran and run into Koloth. True, the Starfleet officer had done what Kor would have also done in his place. He tried to stop the enemy; he fought with everything he had. And this ‘everything’ was the warrior at his side who made it impossible to get to Kirk. Koloth and Korax had reported their encounters with the two Earthlings in their reports. All doubt about the Qli-jagh’s heritage had vanished now. This man was an Augment and had, again, fought like a demon to keep Kirk out of harm’s way. The two made a far too good a team for Kor’s taste.

The two men and their little band – this militia he has heard about often enough now. He first remembered hearing about them during a conversation with the Orion ‘commodore’ who complained about a gang that drove them from the outpost. Later, Kor received information about them during the Tammeron crisis. A small ship invisible to sensors appeared out of nothing to beam Kirk and the Augment aboard at the last minute. Kor had heard the short transmission between the ship and the enhanced man; the commander aboard was obviously a Tellarit. And now, as Korax reported, he had been chased by the Augment through the space station above Aberdeen and was caught by a Tellarit. The Tellarit called the engineered warrior ‘buddy’ just like the Tellarit who had recovered Kirk and his rescuer from Turkana.

So, Kirk had help from this ‘militia’ again. Perhaps he had been with them since his flight from Turkana. Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong!

Kahless, if he only had killed Kirk when he had the chance – information be damned; the young captain was not worth the trouble. But no, he had to go through with the original sentence of the council – execution by torture in hopes of learning Starfleet plans. If he had simply shot Kirk, the Augment would have never had the chance to free the officer and both wouldn’t be giving him trouble now.

And trouble he had in spades!

His order had been to cause a distraction by damaging the space port in the capital city of Aldebaran and destroying Starfleet headquarters. Koloth had changed these plans after he stumbled onto Kirk. It was only logical to change the mission, especially after Korax found out that Kirk and the Augment were tracking them. Still, the order had been clear. Kor didn’t want to think about the planetary catastrophe that would have happened if the orbital station had crashed down on Aldebaran – directly on the city.

Kor was a proud Klingon warrior; he didn’t shrink from violence, and there was blood on his hands. But that blood was the blood of warriors, not civilians – not innocents. Not, if there were other ways. Kreth fired at the space station, knowing what that would mean for the planet. The action infuriated the Klingon emperor. Yes, Koloth had told the other commander that Kirk and the Augment were in the station, but did this justify bringing doom a town full of people?
Acting on their own authority changed the battle. Even if some of the generals would see it otherwise, Kor wasn’t that ignorant as to accept that their fleet had avoided another defeat. The reports spoke volumes, and only Starfleet's ships raced to Aldebaran to save the heavily damaged space station had prevented the destruction of the Klingon strike fleet. Only five had made it back to the former Neutral Zone, chased by the Starfleet vessels that had spared them.

The attempt to extend the Empire had been a disaster; no Klingon had foreseen the failure. Not even Kor, one of the few high-ranking Klingons who weighed pro and con before acting – knowing that more than might and bravery was required for success. It had been bad luck that Kirk and the Augment had been on Aldebaran, but this didn’t change the fact that the Klingon fleet was weakened. First the catastrophe at Tammeron, and now at Aldebaran. And around Borderland and along the former Neutral Zone, Starfleet had increased her presence. Those ships that had been damaged during the Tammeron-conflict were repaired, and Kor didn’t need to be a genius to figure out that the Starfleet vessels involved in the ‘Battle of Aldebaran’ would soon be operational.

The Federation's resources were nearly inexhaustible where the Klingon Empire requires weeks to repair its ships and months to build new ones. Starfleet would be back to her full strengths within days!

‘Maybe the Federation’s offer of peace talks is not an attempt to humiliate us, but to spare us losses that would take years to recover,’ Kor thought. He knew though, these thoughts would mark him a traitor if anyone learned of them. Still ‘thoughts are free’, Bob Wesley said during a break at the conference on Organia.

Wesley…

He had led the striking group that had stopped the Klingon fleet – and reading the reports Kor couldn’t help himself but admire the used strategies of the Terran commodore. He really wished he could meet that man again, before he would – maybe – sent to the Black Fleet during the next battles.

If there were any more battles. When logically considering the situation, he knew the Empire would have to accept the offer of peace talks. Still there were so many thick-headed council members and generals that the talks to have the talks could last months before they reached an agreement to meet the Federation at the table. And until then…

“Milord?”
Kor’s adjutant’s appearance at the door distracted him. He looked up, irritated at the younger warrior. “Yes?”

“Milord, the technicians with the enhanced cloaking device have arrived. Their chief gave me this to give you.” He offered Kor the Klingon equivalent of a PADD, and the Klingon lord quickly read over the specifications for the new equipment. Schooling his features, he glanced at his subordinate. “We have the honor of testing the new cloaking device on two of our ships. Chief Kh’il has our complete support, Lieutenant. Please lead him to my personal guest quarters. And then return. I’ll honor two of my commanders with engineers’ newest development for testing!”

The younger Klingon pressed his fist against his chest in salute and left. Kor glanced thoughtfully at the closed door but his mind was elsewhere. Improvements on the standard cloaking device had come too late. They could have used it during the attempt to cut off the neighboring sector by annexing Tammeron and the nearby star systems. Now it would only prolong the war – a war that was, in Kor’s opinion, lost.

Lost because of a genial Starfleet commodore and the interventions of this boy-captain and his Augment friend… Lover perhaps? Whatever the enhanced man was to Kirk!

ST***ST***ST

He couldn’t know the Enterprise’s CMO was thinking the same thing as he was busied with the whole afternoon, long after Wesley had gone and returned to the Lexington.

Bones returned with two light lunches for the men who were currently acting like little boys in his opinion. He found the ‘cherubs’ asleep and entangled as if it was the most normal thing in the world to snuggle with your former mortal enemy in the middle of a sickbay. Well, not in the middle, after all the storeroom offered some privacy, yet the fact that both didn’t care what others may thought about their childish behavior irritated McCoy.

Jim was an adult – the captain of Starfleet’s flagship! But he acted like a love-sick schoolboy! And while McCoy watched the two men sleep, he realized how comfortable they seemed to be with each other. They were used to sleep side-by-side, this much was evident. But that made Leonard even more apprehensive as he left the storeroom. He prayed that it was only sex connecting Jim and Khan and not something more serious, deeper. He knew he was fooling himself.

He had to speak to Jim as soon as possible. Knowing his friend as he did, he was aware that he wouldn’t stand a chance against Kirk’s stubbornness, yet he hoped he could talk some sense into the ‘Iowa-kid’. It was one thing if Jim was attracted to the Augment, but if they planned on divulging the
relationship, even Wesley’s tolerance would find its end.

Bones was still baffled by the commodore’s willingness to support Khan. Wesley hadn’t explained much; only given the necessary information to Spock and McCoy. That Khan was not only victim but victimized – dehumanized by Marcus and Section 31. The Augment had all the right in the universe to press charges against Starfleet – and he would. Wesley also added for consideration, Khan’s role in the war during these last weeks. Millions of people owed their lives to the former dictator – including Jim Kirk.

Both Spock and McCoy didn’t know what to make of the commodore’s decision to protect Khan. Often the Vulcan and the Commodore agreed on logical plans of action. This time they didn’t. But Wesley’s orders were just that, and as Jim was safe aboard now, Spock would honor them despite logic dictating a criminal’s place is in the brig. The Vulcan was sure that his T’hy’la would not allow it and instead he would offer Khan guest quarters as soon as the two were able to leave med bay.

While McCoy looked after his two unique patients and oversaw his sickbay, Spock returned to the bridge and signed Engineering requisitions for parts. He looked over Wesley’s permission to test non-Starfleet technology aboard and went on with the daily routine.

Over and over again he caught the asking glances of Sulu and Chekov. They were busy with station repairs but obviously distracted as they peeked out from underneath, looking as though they wanted to say something then thinking the better of it.

Finally, Spock had enough. “Mr. Sulu, Mr. Chekov?” He addressed the helmsman and the navigator as he made his way toward their console; both were still working beneath it.

The men pushed themselves out from under the console. “Sir?” Hikaru answered as his rank allowed him such privilege.

“It did not slip my attention that you two have your minds elsewhere. What is it you will not say?”

Sulu and Pavel exchanged a puzzled look. Vulcans weren’t known for their grasp of body language or emotional intelligence. Still, Spock was not an ordinary Vulcan; nevertheless, the men were taken by surprise.

The helmsman pursed his lips for a moment, before he began quietly so as not to be overheard, “Sir, Chekov and I learned yesterday, who this Sunrise guy is – and he was beamed aboard with the captain. As far as we know both are still in med bay, recovering from their injuries. And today Commodore Wesley talked with them. He has to know who Sunrise is and… Well… Pavel and I are
“Ze keptin has covered for Khan,” Chekov murmured; concern lay on his boyish face and in his large eyes. “Wesley must be outraged and we… We’re worrying what will happen now to ze keptin.”

Spock lifted a brow. The two officers’ anxiety had nothing to do with typical human curiosity, but was born out of concern for their commander that they regarded as a friend. Still, the Vulcan was aware of the danger in revealing too much information. He did not fear that one of the two would report Khan’s presence to Starfleet Command, but he was not ready to tell them about the sudden ‘friendship’ between Jim and the Augment either. He, himself, could neither understand nor explain the captain’s new relationship or his unusual decisions and behavior towards the former dictator.”

He knelt between Sulu and Chekov, and answered calmly, “Commodore Wesley spoke with the captain and Khan. He will not turn the captain over to Starfleet authorities for concealing his knowledge of Khan's whereabouts, nor will he turn Khan over.”

Pavel gaped at him, and Hikaru frowned. “I’m glad that he is not taking measures to relieve the captain, but have I understood you correctly, sir? He didn’t arrest Khan?”

“No, they have agreed that for now, Khan will remain aboard the Enterprise until – certain inquiries are made. I am not allowed to give details, but I can assure you that he will take no action against the ship or the crew.”

“Well, if he stays in the brig, then…”

The Vulcan shook his head. “You misunderstood me, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Singh remains free. Commodore Wesley and Captain Kirk are convinced that he will not be a danger to us.”

Pavel glanced at the floor lost in thought. “He – he did save ze keptin and ze Lexington. And he saved all zose people on Tammeron and Aldebaran. Maybe he… changed?”

“A leopard can't change its spots, Pavel,” Sulu reminded him.

The young Russian shrugged, “Anyzing is possible.”
Spock looked from one man to the other. “Do either of you gentlemen have any further questions or are you able to return to duty now?”

Sulu knew that the Vulcan was not irritated by their curiosity, but because of the situation as a whole. So he replied neutrally, “How is the captain doing? Dr. McCoy doesn’t do much more than grunt at me when I ask.”

“The captain is still recovering but will be able to leave med bay tomorrow or the day after, at the latest,” the first officer informed him. Then Spock rose. “Now, back to work, please!”

“Aye, sir!” Sulu nodded and Pavel smile quickly before slipping back beneath his console. He cursed in Russian as, a moment later, sparks flew and three alert lights blinked on.

Spock sighed inwardly and turned away. His eyes met those of Uhura and with hers, she tried to convey understanding, reassurance and affection. He nodded slowly and his face softened for a second before the expressionless Vulcan mask was back in place. Even though he assured Sulu and Chekov only a minute ago that the Augment was not a threat to the ship, he was far from convinced.

ST***ST

Jim and Khan awoke during the evening; both felt better if a bit hungry. Not pressing the CMO’s nerves more than he already had, the Augment returned to his own bed and eat two plates full of vegetables, fruits and protein in front of McCoy’s wide, disbelieving eyes. Jim ate even more, devouring the food in no time. He asked for a third plate and nearly cleaned it before he was full.

As McCoy finally collected the dishes, he couldn’t help but comment. “Don’t get me wrong, Jim, but where do you put it? Jesus, you ate more than my Uncle George, and that's saying something.”

Kirk shrugged. “I was hungry. The last thing I ate was some spareribs yesterday around midday. A lot's happened since then.”

Pursing his lips, Leonard analyzed the readouts on Jim’s monitor. “Your healing process is accelerated,” he murmured before noting the similar readings over Khan’s med bed. “Just like yours.” He cocked his head. “You need food – energy – to maintain the healing process, correct?” he addressed the super-human in a business-like manner who nodded slowly.
“It’s a very simple process, Doctor. The body needs more strength to regenerate at the accelerated rate and therefore has greater nutrient requirements.”

“And because of our increased cellular metabolism, your body needs more food than a human would normally take in for the same job,” McCoy thought aloud. “Logical.” He turned his attention back to Kirk. “Your cellular regeneration is slower and isn’t increasing as quickly after a meal.”

“Jim’s cells bear some augmented mitochondrion now and his lysosomes are affected as well,” Khan told him calmly.

“The nutrients gained from food are consumed quicker thus speeding the healing process, and he is immune to disease then because of the engineered lysosomes now,” the CMO mused.

“That’s a good thing, don’t you think?” Kirk beamed, remembering his biology class at the academy which allowed him to follow the conversation.

“It only tells me that you’ll probably be even more reckless because you think you’re invincible; I’m not convinced you didn’t think that before,” Bones growled.

Jim shook his head. “No, I will be more careful from now on. I gave Nien my word.”

McCoy rolled his eyes. “We’ll see,” he sighed, “Does this side effect of your little doping serum last?” he asked Khan.

“I do not know,” the Augment admitted. “Your treatment with my blood plasma to revive Jim last year left a lingering effect on his body so I think the injection I gave him would act as a booster and continued to help him to heal faster and more completely.”

“Hm, an advantage for you to be sure – even if I don’t know what to make of it.” Bones looked back at Kirk. “Right. Well, since you’ve managed to heal miraculously, I think it’s safe to discharge you tomorrow afternoon.” He lifted a hand quickly as Jim sat up and opened his mouth. “Stop, Jim, you’re not allowed back to duty for another day! You still need rest, and that leg needs more time before it bears your weight fulltime. If you’re a good boy, you can start getting on your officers’ nerves in two days.”
Kirk gave him his time-tested puppy dog face; McCoy groaned loudly.

“No, under no circumstances, Jim! You're lucky to be alive. Other people would be out for days. And, by the way, you don’t want to frighten your crew with your appearance.”

“It’s not that bad,” the young captain replied.

Leonard snorted. “No, for Halloween it would be the perfect mask.” He smirked, forgetting for a moment his irritation with his friend. Kirk stuck his tongue out to him and laid back into the pillows. Then, all of sudden, the lights dimmed before coming back to full power.

“What?” Jim began.

Bones sighed. “Scotty is still busy patching up his baby’. He asked for you this afternoon via intercom. As far as I heard he hasn’t slept since yesterday – just ghosting through the Engineering.”

Jim smiled. That was his crew – and he was damn proud of them! “Maybe if I could get a report then I could…”

“I said you’re not allowed back on duty until the day after tomorrow!” Leonard said sternly, glaring at Kirk.

“I’m not talking about running straight to the bridge or the Engineering. I want a report of my ship’s status. I’m certainly not too weak to hold a PADD or to speak with Scotty!” Jim’s voice became more serious.

McCoy groaned. “You won't give it a rest, will you?”

“No,” Kirk replied firmly; he was all captain now, and McCoy knew when it was time to obey. “No, I won’t, Bones. This is my ship, and it was in a battle. Of course I need a report on its status, and you know it!”

“Right,” Leonard sighed. “I’ll contact Scotty and tell him to make sure you have a status report tomorrow morning.” As Jim went to protest, he added, “I only agree to this to prevent you from
breaking the CMO’s order; even a captain has to obey to.” He took the trays and walked to the door. “Good night, gentlemen – and stay in your own beds!”

With those words he left. Darkness filled the room illuminated only by the soft glow of the monitors.

“Your doctor-friend can be quite grumpy,” Khan’s deep voice murmured, and Jim snorted.

“Yeah, you should see him early in the morning. We shared a room at the academy; I could write songs about it.” He suppressed a shiver as the cold in his bones racked his body once more. “He was always up first but didn’t talk much until that first cup of coffee.” Trembling, he continued, “But on Sunday morning, it was almost suicide to wake him up before ten o’clock.” Kirk rolled himself into a ball, then, ignoring his protesting hip.

Suddenly a warm hand was on his cheek, and Khan’s familiar scent seized and comforted him. A moment later the blankets were lifted and the Augment slipped beneath them, pulling Jim into a warming embrace the second he lay beside him.

“Your arms…” Kirk whispered a protest, but he snuggled against Nien Nonetheless.

The super-human smiled. “They do not hurt as they did a few hours ago, and the wound is as good as closed. Don’t forget, Pyāra, my body was designed to heal quickly.” He hissed as Jim instinctively pushed his feet between Khan’s legs. “Those are ice-blocks, not feet!”

“Sorry, baby, I think Bones was right; I think I’m going to be shivering for a while,” the captain murmured, and Nien rolled his eyes.

“Obviously!” He brushed his lips over Jim’s forehead; his mate’s hair tickled his jaw, and their hearts, once again, beat in unison. Peace washed over him, and he relaxed under the blanket to Jim’s steady, lulling breath. Still, his mind busied itself with another topic. He pondered the irresistible pull he felt into another’s orbit.

This urge to touch was new. True, they had slept together for more than a week, literally as well as figuratively, yet this need to be close was unusual – even before the long sleep. But he had never claimed or felt so claimed before. And Kirk still had to leave his own mark. The prospect of being further bound to another was a thrill and frightening at the same time. It was uncharted territory for both of them.
The former dictator would have loved to ask Otto about it. His ‘brother’ was the only Augment alive with experience in this department. But Otto was, like all the others, hidden away from him in cryo-sleep.

Khan listened to the quiet noises of the ship and the soft huffs of breath from his mate. Soothing as it was, it woke in him the terrible yearning for his family. Jim was the only one now to which he felt the love of family. But the loneliness for those kept from him was sharp. Made sharper by the knowledge that he was only allowed here because of the commodore’s order and Jim’s protection. Otherwise, he was still an intruder, perhaps still the enemy. Released from the med bay, he knew he’d get the full measure of those feelings.

He had before. Fear and hate were expected from humans. He hoped that at least some of them would come to accept him. Not that he voiced this hope – not even to Jim. His beloved had enough problems because of him without him complaining about something he should be used to by now. Still he hoped – there was little else to do at the moment.

And perhaps hope wasn’t as far-fetched as he thought. The evidence lay in his arms in the form of this fierce, compassionate, lovingly, beautiful man. And again Jim’s nearness worked miracles because Khan did not notice when sleep pulled him under.

In the CMO’s office, McCoy closed the medical files of three crew members and rose to go to bed. Looking one last time at the readouts of his two most troublesome patients, he had a feeling of déjà-vu. One med-bed was no longer sending a signal to his monitor and the second one transmitted two.

Bones threw his hands up. “I give up!”

The Enterprise’s doctor wasn’t the only one who was frustrated by a certain young captain. Hundreds of light-years away in San Francisco, two admirals had their own reasons for their frustration. The Enterprise was synchronized to Pacific Time in keeping with Starfleet’s Headquarters in California where it was also late evening. Once again, Luengo and Norton walked through the quiet Golden Gate Park.

They too had been part of the very long conference. Nothing more than an endless waiting for news coming from the battle zone near the Aldebaran system. Both men had been relieved as had all in attendance, when word of the victory reached them. They felt vindicated in their point of view that Starfleet should increase its military might - the Federation should hold a more aggressive stance toward non-Federation races or races that refused to join. A victory light-years away meant the war
was still far from Earth.

It was irritating. Again the *Enterprise* played a central role in the victory. Even without the insolent farm boy in the captain’s seat, the starship’s crew was always good for a surprise. Not that this was a bad thing. Both staff officers agreed that the Federation owed its victor to the watchfulness of the first officer. He revealed the Klingon invasion. The flagship’s name was once again on the lips of all Starfleet.

And so was Kirk’s!

The media fell all over themselves to tell the story of how a young Starfleet captain and a handful of civilians stopped a Klingon assault in the planet’s capitol and prevented the orbital station from crashing down onto the town. They printed unverified stories of three men aboard the space station who freed a cargo ship in danger of exploding and the pursued the villains. In interviews, people told how a young blond man took control of the dire situation as the last remaining Klingon tried to flee. Others spoke of another man – dark haired – who ‘quick as a flash’ saved a woman from falling over a catwalk. There were also the tales of a Tellarit and a Caitian woman who caught the Klingon. Then again, others spoke a Klingon bird-of-prey that opened fire at the dying space station, when suddenly, a constitution class ship appeared and chased the hostile vessel away and beamed the survivors out at the very last minute.

For Luengo and Norton, the whole thing was clear as a California summer day. Kirk and The Shadow saved the day again – and the Augment had to be with them. ‘*The man with the dark hair and quick as a flash*’ fit the Augment’s description. But even if Kirk was working with Khan – something both admirals were convinced of – no one would take notice of this little detail.

“Kirk did it again – pulling a stunt that put him on the top of the popularity scale,” Albert Norton murmured. “He’s the public’s ‘knight-in-shining armor’. It will be difficult to silence him and those who think Starfleet is some sort of moral code.”

José Luengo snorted quietly. “Yeah, Kirk stuck his neck out all right. Our leading officer on Aldebaran, Carpricio, reported that Kirk, a civilian technician who has a shipyard on Aldebaran, and one of Kirk’s officers, Commander Lavi, beamed aboard the space station and tried to prevent the catastrophe.” He glanced over the black surface of the lake. “I checked the files. There is no one in Starfleet by that name, Lavi. But the choice of name is interesting. It’s Hebrew - means ‘lion’.”

Norton stared at him and chuckled for a moment. “The impertinence of this – thing is unbelievable. He’s taunting us.” He took a deep breath of the cool air. In the late autumn, it was almost cold in San Francisco. “Where is Khan now?”
“Kirk and other survivors were beamed aboard the Enterprise. It was in Commodore Wesley's report. Kirk's suffering from space exposure. Most didn’t make it; others are still healing. I’m sure that Khan is among the latter – and aboard the Enterprise.”

This time Albert gasped. “If that's the case, then the senior officers have to know about him, and they're staying silent?”

“Jesus Christ! If that's the case...” José threw in for consideration. “If Khan is aboard, then at the very least Spock and the CMO – what was his name?”

“McCoy. Leonard McCoy.”

“Yeah, Spock and McCoy have to know that Khan is on that ship. I don’t think that Wesley is involved. Kirk certainly has hidden Khan from him, but the Augment is there. And it would give us just the possibility to throw the lever. We could kill two birds with one stone. We can eliminate Kirk and his officers – one less problem – and we get the Augment back.” He looked back at the lake. “Of course first we have to make certain that the subject is aboard.”

Norton cocked his head. “Barnett mentioned that the Enterprise will head to Starbase 6-S for repair. And she lost crew members – losses that will need to be replaced.” He glanced intensely at Luengo who looked back at him; the ghost of a smile played around his lips and made his mustache twitch.

“Indeed!” was all he had said, before he changed the topic. “And while we wait for Kirk to stumble over his own arrogance, maybe the Klingons will tell us they’re ready to come to the table, what will be their downfall. This latest victory has hopefully made them see reason and accept the Federation’s offer. Barnett and the others will be on their way to the meeting with the Klingon council.” His eyes showed no emotions. “What about young Styles?”

“He’s ready to act in Starfleet’s best interest,” Albert stated. “He wants to see the Federation broaden its territory – and see his academy rival, Kirk, fall.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Yes, the noose is slowly tightening on Jim, his friends and Khan. Luengo and Norton are opponents worse than the Klingons, as you all will learn soon.

In the next chapter Khan will be confronted with another friend of Jim, who hadn’t the slightest clue until now who ‘Sunrise’ is, and I can promise some funny scenes. And you’ll meet Diego again, while Bones and Spock still try to cope with their friend’s newest escapades.

I hope you liked the new chapter and that I not overdid it with the romance, but it was about time that both are admitting fully their love for each other – without shyness and with the heart on the sleeve.

And - as always - I'm sooooo curious what you think of the newest installment, so please some comments?

Until next time,

Love

Your Starflight
Hi, my dear readers,

Yeah, my beta and I managed to make the next chapter ready to publish very much faster than the last ones. I’m sorry that the distance between the installments grew so much, but sometimes time is even a bigger enemy than those within my story are for Jim, Khan and the others.

I really hope that the lack of comments for the last chapter has the same reason (shortage of time), and not in some dislike for it. I know everyone waits for ‘The Talk’, but Bones and Spock would never – under any circumstances – put Jim under stress when he suffers from injuries. Therefore he has to heal a little bit more, before they can ask those questions which almost suffocate them.

But do not fear, ‘The Talk’ has its harbinger in this chapter and it will happen in the next one. Yet I do hope you’re going to like the new update. Scotty will learn of ‘Sunrise’s’ true identity and Diego will be back.

So, enjoy,

Yours Starflight

Chapter 37 – We’re amigos, you and I

The night went by without any interruptions and morning announced itself with the arrival of a certain CMO, who seemed to be in a worse mood than the evening before.

“Lights, one hundred percent!” was the morning greeting, followed by bang and rattle of dishes as a tray was placed firmly on the small table.

Khan was awake in a second, while Jim mumbled something unintelligible against the Augment’s throat, pressing himself closer to Nien.

“Good morning, Doctor,” the former dictator said coolly; he met the McCoy's irritated glare. His voice was back to its usual deep rich baritone. The hoarse voice due to smoke inhalation had vanished completely.
“Morning!” Leonard replied flatly and stared at the pair on the bed. “Would it be too much to ask if you two could at least eat in separate beds, or do you want to feed each other?”

Something like, “I’m not a child anymore,” was heard from the lump beneath the blankets, and Leonard snorted mockingly. “Really? I couldn't tell!” He stood with his hands on his hips. “Well?” he demanded, glaring a challenge at the former dictator. “Are you ready to get back to your bed and get breakfast, or not? I don’t have all day.”

“We don’t want to steal too much of your precious time, Doctor. As soon as Jim is awake, I’ll serve us breakfast.” Before McCoy could protest, Khan added with smoothness in his voice, “This would not be the first time. Who do you think took care of Jim’s needs as he recovered from the events on Turkana?”

“Ungh – I don’t want to know what ‘needs’ you’re talking about!” Bones growled and left without another word.

Kirk’s tousled shock of hair appeared, and a pair of groggy, sky-blue eyes glanced at the closed door. “Something crawled up his ass!”

“Yes, this ‘something’ is knowledge!” Nien nodded; he gave Jim a peck on the lips and slipped out of bed to fetch the tray.

An hour later, both men had eaten, managed a decent shower with real water in the hygiene stall beside the restrooms, shaved, and were back in their beds resting – as much as the two men could. Being left alone gave them the chance to talk about the events on Aldebaran and the space station. Khan told him just how he found Diego in Dock 12 as it burned. At that moment, the doors opened, and Spock stepped in.

“Good morning, Captain,” he greeted, “Mr. Singh,” he added neutrally.

Kirk smiled at him. “Morning, Spock! Sleep well?”

Confused, the Vulcan lifted a brow. The question was not one Jim usually asked at the beginning of a shift. “Thank you, the night was quiet. Yours?”
“The same,” Jim sighed. “But if I don’t leave this damn bed soon, I’ll go crazy!”

“You complained about exactly the same thing in the cottage; a good thing that I insisted on your rest,” Khan commented wryly.

Kirk rolled his eyes and looked at his Vulcan friend again. “What’s up, Spock? This isn’t just a sick bed visit. You’ve got that special gleam in your eye that tells me you want to talk.”

The first officer did not show his surprise at how well his human friend knew him. “Dr. McCoy informed me that you want a full report of the ship’s status.” He offered Kirk a PADD. “I recorded everything for you including an interim report from Mr. Scott. The equipment and parts from Mr. de la Vega-Martinez’s shipyard will be delivered midday ship’s time. Once they are installed, we will leave for Starbase 6-S.”

Jim had begun to read the reports and pressed his lips in a thin line, before he murmured, “Two blasts hit where she is most vulnerable. Even with the shields functioning suffered severe damage.”

“As Mr. Scott pointed it out, it could have been worse. I agree with him. The Enterprise was in charge of the strike group until the Lexington arrived. Several times, the Klingons targeted the ship in well-planned attacks. It seems her destruction was the goal – a logical strategy since she is the newest and strongest ship of the fleet. The Klingons would have gained a tactical advantage had the attack been successful.”

Jim nodded grimly. “I knew that those bastards would have her weak spots analyzed before we even left the dock. Spock, continue, please…” He shook his head. “You and the others were in the middle of the action?”

“From the beginning of the engagement until your rescue,” the Vulcan affirmed and Kirk cocked his head.

“Considering that you were in the middle of the fray, I suppose we could have had it much worse.”

The first officer crossed his arms behind him; his face showed a hint of hostility. “We did not make an easy target thanks to Mr. Singh’s device. It not only blocks the aggressor's sensors, but it also confuses the target lock.”
Jim instantly made the right conclusion. “So, by not being able to scan the Enterprise, the enemy couldn’t take aim. They were shooting blind?”

“Exactly,” Spock nodded, and Jim beamed at Khan. “Your device kills two birds with one stone. They can only fire manually decreasing their accuracy because…”

“…Because the automatic target lock is dependent on the input to the sensors, which deliver nonsense because of the sensor-disturbing device,” the Augment finished Jim’s thought. “A nice addition.”

“But the device's function wavered when our shields dropped to thirty-two percent,” Spock stated neutrally.

“Of course. The SDD is linked to the shields,” Khan replied calmly. He caught the two confused stares and added, “As Commodore Wesley and you pointed out, Jim, I should apply a patent for my development. I can give it an acronym if I so choose.”

“SDD – sensor-disturbing device,” Jim grinned. “I like it!” He saw amusement sparkle in his beloved’s eyes; then the former dictator turned serious again as he addressed Spock in a businesslike manner.

“So, the SDD’s function faltered when the shields destabilized during the battle. To prevent this from happening again, the SDD should have an independent power source.”

Fixing the super-human with an expressionless stare, the Vulcan replied carefully, “To link it to…” He didn’t get further because suddenly the lights went out. Light returned quickly though, and the alert sounded. The first officer pulled out his communicator since the storeroom didn’t have an intercom. “Spock to Engineering. Mr. Scott, what happened?”

He had to wait for an answer; then the Scotsman’s voice called, “We’d an energy short in the warp drive like yesterday evenin’ and durin’ the night, sir. Ye know the reason for it.”

“What’s the actual status, Scotty?” Jim raised his voice and waited with quick beating heart.

“Capt’n, is that ye?” the chief engineer asked and Kirk had to smile.
“Yeah, Scotty, it’s me.”

A loud sigh was heard through the communicator, “I’m glad ter hear yer voice, Jim. How are ye?”

“Could be better, could be worse – but I’ll live either way,” Kirk replied, touched by the obvious relief and joy in the Scotsman’s voice.

“In other words, Ye’re carryin’ yer head beneath the arm, but ye’re up for work. Typical!” He chuckled to himself. “Well, regardin’ the status, I sent Mr. Spock a report. Ye probably have it by now. But we’ve new problems with the shields. We had to cut off the sensor disturbing device. We’ll re-mount it as soon as the deflectors are workin’ again. It'll take a day or so, but I really dunna want ta race through space without deflectors and this little wonder that Sunrise gave us. If we could put it to work separately, then…”

“If you link the device to an independent power source, it will work regardless of the state of the deflector shields are down,” Khan threw in, not caring that he would compromise his presence to the engineer. It was only a matter of time before Scott would learn it anyway. “Can you connect it to the auxiliary power, for example?”

There was a short hesitation; then Montgomery’s baffled tone came back. “I know that voice!”

“Yeah, you know the voice, Scotty,” Jim sighed. “Please, just answer the question.”

Again there was no reply; then Scott shouted, “Don’t tell me that Sunrise is…” He interrupted himself. “I’m on my way!” Then the link was cut off.

Spock closed the communicator. “It seems you will be getting another sick-bed visit, Captain,” he commented dryly. Jim groaned before he looked at a smirking Augment.

“You love to shock my crew, don’t you?”

“Your Mr. Scott is a hot-tempered man. I admire him. And I admired his mind long before this. I’m sorry, Jim, but I couldn’t resist.”
“And here I thought I was the only one with a devil on my shoulder,” the young captain grumbled.

Khan ‘comforted’ him. “Mine is bigger.”

“I believe you!” Jim snorted, rolling his eyes again.

A minute later the doors opened, revealing a breathless Montgomery Scott; he stepped in and stopped dead in his tracks. His eyes widened; his jaw dropped when he caught sight of the man in the bed. “Oh, holy moly…” His gaze snapped to Jim. “What the hell is he doin’ here aboard? Why isn't he in the brig?” the engineer blurted out.

‘A very good question,’ Spock thought.

“You wanted to meet the engineer who developed the sensor-disturbing device?” Jim smiled at Montgomery. “Well, here he is.” He gestured between the two men. “Sunrise – Scotty; Scotty – Sunrise!”

Scott opened his mouth again, but nothing came out; He just looked like a fish out of water. Khan couldn’t help it but chuckled at the memory of Jim's first introduction of the two men in the hanger of the Vengeance. Giving the engineer one of his lazy, arrogant smiles, he greeted Scott just as Scotty did him one year ago. “Hello.”

Montgomery had stared at him, then at Kirk, before he looked back at the Augment. “Holy shit! Ye’re Dryth…?” He interrupted himself and slapped his forehead. “I’m an idiot!” he moaned not noticing Khan’s smile grow into a full smirk. “I even translated yer name and didn’t get the hint! Drythen is king, and king in Asia is…” He shook his head.

“Maybe your beloved scotch clouded your thoughts,” the super-human suggested with an echo of mockery.

“I'd like to address my captain,” Scotty growled through gritted teeth and looked at Kirk. “Ye’re off duty?”

“Yes.”
“So I can speak freely without fearin’ trouble?”

Jim already knew what would come, and so he sighed, “Scotty, it never stopped you before. Go ahead.”

“Right.” Scott had taken a deep breath before becoming – loud. And red. “Have ye lost yer bloody mind, Jim? Or is this one of those jokes a simple Scotsman like me doesn’t get? This man…”

“… Saved our all lives – including yours, Scotty,” Kirk cut in and the engineer looked with before working himself up into a frenzy again.

“If ye speak of him pullin’ yer reckless neck out of a Klingon noose, Jim, ye’re right. If ye’re talkin’ about him givin’ us this device that got us out of Orion territory, ye’re right there too. If ye refer to his warnin’ concerning Tammeron, ye’re more than right. But perhaps there is the possibility that ye forgot he shot at the Enterprise last year?” He stared furiously at Khan. “Engineerin’ – this ship was a graveyard and…”

“It’s not now and it might have been without him!” Jim threw in. “I read in the report; you have a lot to do before the Enterprise is back to herself. You'd have a lot more if not for him.”

“That was the Klingons’ fault!” Scott snarled, before he pointed at Khan again. “He fired at us. He killed you!”

“Marcus fired at us, Scotty,” Kirk stated calmly. “He sabotaged and shot our ship to pieces. Nien only…”

“‘Nien’?” Montgomery blinked several times, before turning around to a fascinated Spock, who watched Jim as if he was observing a rare species. “Has McCoy checked his head?” Scotty asked, flipping a thump at Kirk.

“Hey, just because I changed my opinion of the man after gathering all the facts, doesn't mean you have to get vicious,” Jim protested. “You don’t know one-tenth of what I know.”

“Enlighten me! We're friends, aren't we? You can do that much, can't you?” the engineer said
harshly, turning back to Kirk adding quickly, “Sir!”

Jim rubbed his face. “Scotty, it's a long story and not for right now.”

“He fired at the Enterprise!” Scott groused outraged.

“Nien had…”

“And I saw ye die behind a bloody door, Jim! It killed me that I couldn’t stop ye from enterin' the damn warp core, and I couldn't follow you in there! I tried to calm down a sobbin’ Uhura and saw Spock lose his treasured control because of him.” Montgomery yelled indignantly; he didn't see the Vulcan wince at the mention of what he regarded as one of his biggest failures. “And now…”

“And now I know what really happened. I know why it happened, and I'm asking you to trust me, Scotty.” Jim cut into Scott’s tirade softly. “And to trust Khan.”

“’To trust Khan’?” Montgomery echoed disbelieving. He blinked and asked himself again if his friend and captain had been hit over the head during his last mission. That was the only explanation for such an insane requirement. “No!” He said sternly; he planted his fists firmly on his hips and glared darkly at Jim – only to feel his resolve melting as he saw the gentle, pleading expression in those blue, puppy dog eyes. Biting his lip, he growled again, “No!”

Jim’s smile became even softer and more endearing; it could have melted stone.

“No!” Scott persisted defiantly.

These ever-so-blue eyes implored him now and spoke to the deep trust the Scotsman felt for his captain.

“No, for God’s sake!” Scotty snapped and crossed his arms in front of his chest returning Jim’s gaze for several seconds before he let his arms sink in submission. “Oh… For the love of… Do ye know how often ye manage to sway me with that look?”

Jim laughed quietly; the relief was written all over his face. “No, but I know that I can count on you,
The engineer snorted. “Aye, of course! One little-boy-look and ye’ve me wrapped around yer finger! Ye know that isn’t fair?!”

“I know, what you mean,” Khan commented and as Scott glanced irritated at him, he added, “Your captain can win even the hardest of men.”

“Aye, he can – and the worst is he knows it and uses the skill without remorse!” the engineer confirmed heartily, forgetting for a moment his anger for the Augment.

Jim didn’t mind that he was the target of the ribbing because it meant that Scotty got along with Khan if only for a few seconds. More moments like these would come; Kirk was sure of it. Both were technicians, both loved challenges, both were fiercely loyal to those closest to them. Those things they shared would lead to an understanding. Kirk knew it.

In the same moment, the lights wavered again, and Scott went rigid. “By Nessie’s giant flippers, what’s happenin’ now?” He looked around at the walls and frowned. “Is here no intercom?”

“Please feel free to use my communicator, Mr. Scott,” Spock said; he offered Montgomery his device.

“Thanks!” Scotty grumbled and called the Engineering. “Ye had ter switch off the main power to re-start it? And ye don’t think it wise ter call me first?” he groused to Allistor.

“I made a ship-wide hail for you, but you didn’t answer, Gomery,” Allistor replied irritated.

“Aye – there’s no intercom in here; I couldn’t hear ye,” the engineer grumbled. “Right, keep at it, Scott out!” He glanced at Spock. “Why is there no intercom in here?”

“Because it’s a storeroom, Mr. Scott,” the Vulcan answered calmly.

“A storeroom?” Montgomery looked at Kirk. “McCoy put ye in a storeroom? What have ye done to piss him off?”
“I would tell you if I knew,” Jim sighed before he gestured towards the communicator. “What’s going on, Scotty? And please don’t sugarcoat it. I can handle bad news.”

The Scotsman sighed. “One of the hits damaged our warp-drive and draggin’ the space station overloaded the warp core. We’ll be able to reach warp 3 as soon as we have the new parts, but until the shipyard owner brings them, we are going to have some energy fluctuations. We could use the auxiliary power but that’s keeping the life support workin’. The med bay and the impulse drive are also takin’ up much of the usable power.”

“No chance to stabilize the warp core?” Jim wanted to know, and the chief engineer shrugged.

“The fluctuations are from a small slit in the dilithium crystal and a malfunction in one of the transformers. Both happened when the main-drive was overloaded. I tried to mitigate the damage by reducin’ the energy production of the damaged crystal, but the failin’ transformer still can't keep up with the ship's power needs. So, I have to shut down and re-start the system from time to time.”

“Don’t we have two or three new dilithium crystals stored aboard?” Jim asked baffled. “I signed the delivery documents for them myself.”

“We HAD – that is until one of the damn Klingons hit the section and we lost the equipment and the three dilithium crystals to space. Thank the Lord, this section was secured by safety bulkheads, otherwise we’d a lost crew members along with those crystals.” He rubbed through his already tousled hair. “Ten of my men are busy closin’ the leakage, but it’s more improvisin’ than a real repair. That can only be done at the starbase.”

Jim moaned and rubbed his face. “Dammit!” He looked up again. “Does Diego have dilithium crystals to replace the damaged one?”

Scott shook his head. “Yes and no. The ones that he has are too small. I already contacted Starbase 6-S. They have the dilithium crystals for Starfleet's ships, but until we get there, we'll have to hobble through space.”

“Can’t you override the power loss from the transformer by modifying the energy output from the other ones?” Khan cut in; his eyes shone with interest as the engineer in him awoke.

Scotty frowned and looked at him. “Are ye wantin’ to do me job too, Mister?”
Instantly, Jim tensed, ready to intervene, but Khan remained surprisingly relaxed. “Of course not, but there is not harm exchanging ideas for the good of the ship. She has a problem that may grow worse on the way to Starbase 6-S. Sometimes an outside eye is needed to find a solution.”

Crossing his arms in front of his chest, Scotty glared at him. “We tried to adjust the transformers so that we could shut down the damaged one completely, but they overloaded. Besides that, the damaged crystal makes it impossible achieve a constant energy level even if we didn't have the load problem.” He bounced on the balls of his feet. “Any suggestions?” he challenged.

Pursing his lips, the Augment cocked his head. “If you let the other transformers take on most of the work and drop most of the load from the damaged one – only giving it the minimum amount of load that allows it to function at a consistent level, the others shouldn't overload unless the damaged one completely shuts down.”

Scrutinizing the former dictator, Montgomery pondered the man's proposal. He was an enemy just a few minutes ago – what was he to make of the suggestion? “Are ye really an engineer or is your device just somethin' out of yer super brain?”

Jim nerves were frayed from the conversation. It was awkward listening to Scotty talk to Nien in such a manner, but the super-human remained perfectly composed. No longer was he like an angry, defensive caged animal ready to strike at a moment's provocation. He was easy, deferent even – ready to concede ground to win this man over. Jim smiled despite himself, happy for him.

“I am an engineer, Mr. Scott. It was I who developed the transwarp drive for the Vengeance and the long-range torpedoes that Marcus wanted to use to start a war with the Klingons.”

Impressed, Scotty looked him up and down, then he nodded. “That was a fine work ye did,” he said slowly before he came back to the topic. “So, how would ye modify the other transformers, or rather their generators?”

“By increasing their input and, in turn, their output,” Khan answered immediately.

“Ye would modify the input?” Montgomery thought about this for a moment. “Right, increase the input and the level of the output is reduced that same amount in the generator of the damaged transformer. But that would lead to an overloading of the linked systems.”
“Is the generator of the damaged transformer failing, too or is the problem elsewhere?” Nien asked. Scotty shook his head.

“No. When the dilithium crystal was overloaded and cracked it backfired and took out the input unit of the transformer. The generator would run perfectly if we could get those levels stabilized.”

Khan nodded slowly; an idea formed in his mind. “So, why not transfer directly the increased input of the other transformers to the working generator of the damaged one? It could do its work without the involvement of the damaged input unit. The output would be consistent – stable.”

“Transferring the energy from the other transformers to the generator of the damaged unit holds the risk of overloading them all,” Spock threw in. “The ship would be without its main power supply.”

“If we run some simulations first, they should reduce the risk and we’ll have an idea of what to expect,” Scotty mused, not seeing the icy glare Khan gave the Vulcan. “And if we first…” He went over the details – half in his mind and half out loud. Khan had turned his attention back to the Scotsman following his train of though. Within minutes, the two men were discussing different solutions for the transformer problem, using words Kirk hadn't heard since the academy – and he sure didn't remember what they were. Thanks God for Scotty.

Jim leaned back into the pillows, smiling happily from ear to ear. Sure, he was concerned about the problems in Engineering, but he knew that Scotty and Nien would find a way together. Seeing Khan and the Scotsman talking as if they'd known each other for years was a relief for the young captain. He heard the engineer’s voice go from tense to easy as he lost himself in the technical discussion, clearly glad to be able to exchange knowledge with someone on his level and with his passion; the Augment sounded likewise. Even Spock lost a bit of his frosty layer as he joined the discussion, adding his own welcomed advice and opinions.

Not able to follow most of the conversation, Jim turned his attention to the PADD and read reports submitted.

Scotty’s, “Rrright!” distracted him.

“This could be the solution to the problem,” Montgomery said excitedly. “I’ll run some simulations in the computer. Perhaps ye could work out an independent energy supply for the SDD, Mr. Singh? It would save us some time so that we can leave for Starbase 6-S a wee bit earlier than we thought we could have. We’re already late with regard to the original schedule.”
Jim grinned as he realized that Scotty was using the name Khan had given his development. He was even casual, now, with the Augment – polite even.


“Permission granted,” the captain beamed, realizing that Khan was about to work hand-in-hand with one of his friends – his crew.

Returning Kirk’s shining smile with a softer one of his own, the former dictator addressed the chief engineer again. “I need a layout of the system and…”

“No problem!” Scott stepped to Kirk, “Excuse me, Jim!” He took the PADD from the surprised captain and checked its files. “Nope, that won’t do,” he murmured and pushed the PADD back into Kirk’s hands before heading for the door. “Back in a minute!”

“Thanks for let me keeping the reports,” Jim called after him, but Scotty’s answer was cut off by the closing door. “Crazy Scot,” Kirk chuckled before he looked at Khan. “It seems you won him.”

“He is a very skilled technician and highly intelligent. It’s refreshing to speak with someone whose mental abilities on the subject meet my own,” Nien answered with a hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth.

“I’m glad,” Jim replied; a soft shimmer lit his gaze.

Spock watched Khan carefully. The Augment’s willingness to help them may be a result of his obvious affection for Jim Kirk; it could also be part of a larger plan to deceive them all. Of the latter, the Vulcan was convinced. But before he could voice his concern, Scott returned with McCoy on his heels.

“You gonna tell me why you need my spare PADD and usurped my terminal for data you could get from your own se…” Bones stopped as Scotty offered Khan the little device.

“Here, I copied the needed layouts to this PADD from our data banks as well as the layouts of our auxiliary energy network because the SDD should be linked ter them too.”
“I agree,” Nien nodded. He switched on the PADD and checked the files.

In the background, an astonished CMO asked Spock in a hushed tone, “What the hell is going on?”

“Very good, I can work with this,” Khan said, ignorant of the conversation in the background, and Montgomery grinned at him; having completely forgotten his grudge against the Augment for the time being.

“Right. And as soon as our good doctor lets ye out of his clutches, ye should have a look at the transformer problem and the new mounting for the SDD. I’ll ask ye ter come ter Engineering.” He ignored Spock’s imminent protest and glanced at Kirk. “Would that be all right, Jim?”

The young captain had nodded, positively gleeful before he turned towards the Augment. “That is, if you want to.”

“To see my development in action, and tinker with it? You know, I have not yet had the pleasure?” The blue-green eyes began to shine. “And so, I would – yes.”

“Then it’s settled.”

McCoy frowned, and Spock lifted a brow. “Captain, I must protest. Mr. Singh is not a member of this crew and allowing a civilian to experiment with our engines, could…”

“He’s the inventor of the SDD and I need his help to make it as effective as possible for our safety. So I really don’t care if he is a civilian or not,” Scott argued.

“Maybe you should remember that Mr. Singh is not only a civilian but also a wanted man, who is free only due to the commodore’s actions. To allow someone…”

“Spock,” Jim was all captain here and immediately Spock knew the tone brokered no argument, “the Enterprise has a problem in Engineering and this SDD is needed to keep us out of view of the Klingons. Your opinion is noted.” The Vulcan reluctantly nodded, and Kirk continued, “If Nien can help us to solve the problem and Scotty is requesting his assistance, then I will accept his support. He has just as much interest in not getting captured by the Klingons as the rest of us.”
“Aye!” the chief engineer nodded before he stopped within the movement and gave Khan a very stern glare while he pointed a finger at him like a father lecturing his son. “But if ye ever shoot at my girl again, ye’ll learn what kind of hell a Scotsman can bring down on ye!”

Nien’s lips twitched in amusement. “The fierce temper of your people is well-known, Mr. Scott. But that’s not why I endeavor now to protect this ship and its captain.”

‘And that's probably the only thing I'll believe, you seducing son-of-a-bitch! You'd rather share Jim’s bed instead of atomizing it!’ McCoy thought indigantly.

Spock’s face held an expression of barely hidden consternation while he stared at the former dictator. Again something prickled in the depths of his subconscious he couldn’t grasp.

“Okay,” Bones said firmly. “If you all think Scottish temperament is fierce I suggest you refrain from trying a Southerner.” He caught the confused gazes of the other four men and pointed at the door. “Spock, Scotty, time to go – Now! It'll be a while longer before I consider discharging these troublemakers.” He waited. When both officers didn’t react, he tapped impatiently his right foot. “Well, what are you waiting for? You have nothing better to do than loiter in my sickbay, gentlemen?”

The engineer sighed. “He’s as bad as I am when it comes to his territory.” Waving at no one particular, he left the room followed by Spock, who gave McCoy one of his infamous stares before the doors swished closed behind him.

Bones sighed. “Finally!” His attention returned to his two patients who looked back at him with interest.

“The good doctor is very determined, isn’t he?” Nien asked quietly, and Jim took a deep breath.

“He's always like that.”

“Really? How did you put up with him?”

“I wouldn't want him any other way. I don't have patience for wishy-washy and indecision. He’s the
best doctor in the sky, and despite his foul moods, he's a damn good friend,” Jim stated softly, smiling carefully at McCoy.

“Yes, I suppose that explains it,” Khan commented with a hint of wistfulness in his voice; then he concentrated on the PADD; excited to address the challenge in front of him.

Bob Wesley hadn’t slept well. Not one bit. His mind roiled with more questions than answers and wouldn’t let him rest. The war. The state of Starfleet's squadrons. Kirk and the Augment.

The Commodore was no fool. He knew the risk he took on himself when he put Khan Noonien Singh under his protection and made the decision to keep quiet about the guest on the Enterprise for the good of its captain and crew. If Jim was right and Section 31 was still in the game, then the risk to Khan was doubly increased. Its members would stop at nothing to silence the Augment and the crew of the Enterprise. Bob knew now that they would deem Kirk as knowing too much and thus a danger to the Section. And now he knew what Kirk knew. Which painted a target on Bob, too. Luckily, the Council and Command were still in the dark. If word got back to them about the Augment and James Kirk – well, the Klingons would be the least of their problems. The danger was from within now.

Pondering the different options on getting Kirk, his officers, Khan and himself out of the mess they all were in, Wesley finally drifted off to sleep. He woke late. That never happened! Shocked, Bob stared at the chronometer at his nightstand. It was 1000 ship time; his shift started two hours ago. Apparently, someone had switched off the alert to grant him some rest – a touching gesture. Still, Wesley was irritated as he raced minutes later to the bridge.

He found a mixture of well-controlled chaos and the determined work of his crew they enacted the necessary repairs on the bridge; none of his officers noticed his arrival until he raised his voice. “Whoever switched off the alarm on my chronometer this morning – I appreciate the sentiment. But do it again and there will be consequences. Understood?”

Several sheepish smiles were aimed in his direction accompanied by nods and yes sirs.

“Right,” he grumbled. “Status report!” he addressed his first officer.

“Repairs are thirty-two percent complete. Warp drive will be ready in approximately seven hours.
Leakage repair are sixty percent complete with med bay being among the first completed. The governor of Aldebaran wants to honor Captain Kirk and the two men with him. I let him know that you will contact him. The Chi-Zo is on her way to Starbase 132; the Enterprise will leave as soon as she receives her final equipment delivery. Oh, and that police officer – desk jockey – O’Donner, insists on getting the results of your research concerning the bar-fight in New Aberdeen.”

Wesley groaned and cursed quietly. “Tell him that the fight was, indeed, between the Klingon spies and Captain Kirk. Starfleet will pay for the damages. He can send the documents to Capricio.” He glanced at his subordinate. “And if that wanna-be-soldier still insists on a traffic ticket for Jim then I will inform the governor that O’Donner can’t tell the difference between moving violation and a military action that saved his ass!” He let himself sink into his captain’s chair. “And now someone could make me really happy by bringing me some tea and a sandwich.”

ST***ST***ST

Five hours later, Jim didn’t know if he should hug Bones or limp away as quickly as possible when McCoy discharged him and Khan – not without stern orders on how to behave few the next days. Then he provided the pair with clothes and pointedly accompanied Kirk to his quarters. That could mean one thing. ‘The talk’

Handing Jim a walker, McCoy led his two most troublesome patients out of their 'private' room. The crew members they passed moved to the side for their captain, but stared wide-eyed at him and his companion. He was dressed in the casual black Starfleet clothing and hobbled between the med-beds and bio-beds. He greeted and was greeted by the crewmen and woman who weren't agape. One injured redshirt gasped when he recognized Khan. Kirk told him kindly that everything was all right, that there was very good reason why this man was aboard and NOT in handcuffs and that he would explain everything later.

Jim sighed in relief when he finally made it out of med bay. He walked between Bones and Khan along Deck 5 where med bay, the transporter room, some briefing rooms and the impulse drive were located as well as crew quarters. His crew greeted him with joy and stepped aside, asked how he was doing, and smiled at Khan. It was an open secret that Kirk had been recovered by a man belonging to The Shadow. This stranger (and he was to most of them) had to be the man that freed their captain from the Klingons and fought at his side during the Aldebaran crisis.

After all of the well-wishes, they finally made it to the captain's quarters. Before the Enterprise’s retrofitting, the captain’s quarters was on Deck 12, but Jim had used the opportunity last year to take a space nearer to the bridge located on Deck 1.

Spock strode towards them. “Captain, it is good to see you up,” he greeted his T’hy’la, before he and Khan exchanged an icy glance.
“Yeah, I feel like new – a hurt new, but it sure beats how I have been,” Jim sighed, happy to be out of bed even if is hip was giving him hell. But the talk with Bones was at the back of his mind and he wasn't looking forward to that.

“You can say that again! What you’ve been through would have sent others to their maker - twice over.” McCoy grumbled. “So don't overdo it right out of the gate.”

Jim grimaced and muttered something about a mother-hen beneath his breath; then he turned back to the Vulcan. “When is the last equipment delivery? And how far has Scotty gotten with the busted transformer?”

“Mr. Scott is still busy programming the main computer to run the simulations. Mr. de la Vega-Martinez came onboard an hour ago and remains in Engineering.” The first officer fell into slow step beside Jim, ignoring Khan’s glare. “He asks if he could visit you, Captain – and you too, Mr. Singh,” Spock added with another quick look at the super-human. “He said he brought your 'stuff'. He carried two duffels with him when he beamed aboard. Security cleared the bags.”

Jim grinned and glanced over his shoulder at Nien. “I think he cleaned out the cottage.” His eyes widened. “Dammit, the red wine spot on the floor… We didn't have chance to clean it.”

“I'm certain he will be all right with the souvenir,” Khan retorted dryly.

Spock addressed Kirk again. “So you agree to the visit, Captain?”

“Of course. Nien and I didn't have a chance to say adios on the space station. We owe him that and then some more. Please send him up when he finishes in Engineering.” They passed a few turns when the Vulcan stopped in front of a door. “Mr. Singh, this is your room,” he said neutrally. Jim smiled.

“You put Nien in officer’s quarters?” He looked with barely hidden joy at his beloved. “Mine is only four doors down!” he said, pointing ahead.

‘Jesus, they'll be sneaking down the hall like horny teenagers,’ McCoy groused to himself. He pictured his friend creeping down the hallway and vanishing into the Augment’s quarters – or the other way around.
Khan’s face showed no emotion – just a simple ‘thank you’, he replied. Then his glance found Jim’s enthusiastic one and his features softened; he nodded at his beloved and stepped in range of the door sensors.

Despite McCoy’s protest, Jim followed Nien and looked around. A sideboard parted the sleeping area from the small living room that held a desk with a terminal, a sofa and table, and an arm chair. On the other side, a door led to the hygiene cell. The furniture was functional – cozy even. The carpets and a holophoto showed a beautiful alien landscape gave the room a homey atmosphere.

“Is this standard on board your ship?” Khan asked, a bit surprised, and Kirk grinned at him.

“Yes – at least for the officers.” He pointed at the device built into the wall beside the door that led to the bathroom. “The replicator is over there; the terminal is connected to a computer bank that stores – whatever for food, I don’t really know how it works – it just does. And there's an entertainment program from the recreation deck. If you link the PADD Scotty gave you…”

“My spare PADD,” Bones grumbled but was ignored.

“… to the terminal you can download literature. We have quite a selection of books from Earth from of the time periods, but also some from other planets, as well as records from the Federation’s members. So feel free to read them.”

Khan looked at him. Marcus voiced a similar sentiment after he had woken him from cryosleep. But trust of the innocent is the liar's most useful tool. And Marcus wielded that tool fiercely. Khan was no innocent to this time any more, but Jim proved himself no liar. For a second, Khan allowed himself to wish this was the face he first woke to.

“Thank you, Pyāra,” he said quietly; warmth shone in his blue-green eyes. “Thank you for everything.”

“You’re welcome, hon… Nien!” Jim replied, catching himself quickly. He knew that Bones and Spock stood behind him with far too keen ears, and he wasn't ready to out their relationship before ‘the talk’. Well, if Khan was right, and he normally was, Leonard already knew. But Jim didn’t want to give Spock a shock in front of Nien. “’kay. Make yourself comfortable and enjoy the quiet. After Scotty gets a hold of you, you’ll be busy for a while.”
“That’s quite a warning,” Nien chuckled. “But I’m looking forward to the task. This sitting idle is maddening.”

“Who’re you telling,” the young captain sighed and grimaced as McCoy cleared his throat. “Yeah, I know, Bones. Rest!” He shook his head; his attention lay still on Khan. “You’ll come to my quarters for dinner? I would visit you, but…”

“Dr. McCoy is right, Jim, you still have to rest your leg. Call me and I will come to you. Four doors, you said?”

“Yes, 3F 121 on the left.” He waved at Khan. “Bye. See you later.” He hobbled away, Leonard at his side, while Spock gave the Augment one last warning glance before he left, too.

Khan brushed his hair back from his forehead. He knew that the next hours would be anything but easy for his mate. Jim’s two closest friends would demand answers, the nature of which would be very delicate.

ST***ST

Jim limped down the hallway between McCoy and Spock and sighed as he reached his quarters. Entering his room, he looked around. Everything was familiar – but somehow strange. He had been away approximately ten days but with everything that happened in that time, it was too much to ask of him – to feel at home again.

With a groan, he sank onto his the sofa in the living area. The room was similar to that of Spock’s and Uhura’s quarters albeit a bit smaller since they were in quarters designed for two.

“Tired?” McCoy asked; Jim smiled sheepishly.

“Not tired like in ‘tired’, but relieved to sit down.” He rubbed his hip carefully. “Dammit, it still hurts even with all the hypos you pumped into me.”

Leonard nodded. “Yeah, back in Khan’s time, you’d be out of commission for six to eight weeks.”
Jim sighed and looked up at his two friends who stood side-by-side like angels heralding Judgment. “So…,” he began slowly. The intercom sounded. Grace from judgment – for now.

“Bridge to Mr. Spock!”

The Vulcan went to Kirk’s desk and activated the terminal. “Spock here, Lieutenant.”

Uhura’s face appeared on the screen – professional as always. “Sir, Mr. Scott requests you meet him in Engineering.”

Spock lifted a brow. “Has Mr. Scott told you why he requests my presence in the Engineering?”

Nyota suppressed a smile. “No, he only stated that he – maybe – needs equipment for the solution that’s been worked out to address the ship’s power supply.”

Sighing inwardly, the Vulcan nodded. “I’m on my way.” He closed the link and straightened himself. “Captain, Doctor, please excuse me. I’ll be back as soon as I can.” He nodded shortly to the two humans and left.

Jim watched him go and then looked back to Bones. So it was just them now. But Kirk knew one less man would make this no easier. And more than likely, the opposite. Spock, he could parry with – his brother. But Bones... He didn't want to disappoint him – didn't want the doctor to think less of him.

ST***ST

Khan made himself comfortable on the sofa as Kirk suggested, took the PADD and began to work at the different problems presented to him by the Engineering chief. Well, he tried to apply himself to the problems presented, but his usually impeccable concentration wavered. There was an unrest in him like something was scratching – shifting uncomfortably at the edge of his subconscious.

Finally giving up, he let the PADD sink to his lap; he closed his eyes and tried to analyze what distracted him. There was an echo in his mind, but the echo wasn't his; the echo was outside of him – sorrow, fear, frustration. But there was more there – a lightness like a private smile felt, yet it was uncertain.
And then it hit him: He sensed his mate’s inner turmoil. The discussion with McCoy and Spock proved more difficult than they’d thought, and the protective instincts of the Augment flared up like a jet of flames. But there was that private smile in his mind – he felt the things that gave Jim a sense of ease.

But it did nothing to dull the urge to go to Jim’s aid; it would do more harm than good, though. Firstly, his Pyāra could capably defend himself – fight his own battles and win. He had long before Khan – and he beat even him once upon a time. Perhaps twice. Secondly, it was important to Jim that he made his friend understand the situation presented to him. Khan was neither blind nor arrogant – he understood the perception that surrounded him, the enemy. He was responsible for it. Finally, he would not make Jim choose between him and his friends. That’s what would happen if he interfered. His beloved must fight this battle alone even if every fiber of the super-human pulled him toward the door.

To distract himself from his own (and Jim’s) uneasy mind, he decided to try the terminal at the desk. He switched it on, checked a few links. The access allowed surprised him – the entire ship’s library, the Augment couldn’t resist roaming through it.

The distraction was short-lived. His thoughts drifted. He felt him. He and Jim shared a bond that seemed to enable him to sense Jim’s deeper emotions, and he wondered if it went both ways. He remembered once, a long time ago, the feeling as something for Joaquin was about to go wrong. And that niggling at the edge of his mind proved to be correct. His ‘little brother’ had maneuvered himself into deep water – literally. Joaquin was caught with some Augments and a handful of villagers outside of town in the middle of a monsoon. It was only at the last minute that Khan, Rodriguez, and Kabir had been able to save Joaquin and the others. It was Khan’s first real taste of the bond between him and his people.

And so it was too, with Jim Kirk – as impossible as it seemed. True, the captain’s body was altered, right down to his cells. Still his beloved was only human. But the bond, the impression of his lover so far away, was as strong as any he felt with his kin.

And then it would surpass the bonds of his family when Jim finally marked him as his own. Of that he was sure. If one mark did this, then two would...He shivered with the thought in anticipation.

The door buzzer interrupted the super-human’s musings, snapping him back to the present. “Enter!” he called and the door slipped open, revealing a large, familiar shadow and an almost equally tall one, but more slender.

“Please, Mr. de la Vega-Martinez, Mr. ‘Sunrise’s’ quarters,” the Vulcan’s deep voice sounded. “Mr.
Scott will inform you as soon as your companion beams over the last of the requisition. I am told it will be one half hour."

“Gracias, Commander,” Diego answered and stepped in; Spock was gone before the doors closed.

In the guest quarters, the Chilean turned around to its current occupier and smiled. “I brought yours and Jim’s belongings,” he said and let the two sea bags he carried over his right shoulder slide to the ground.

The former dictator rose to meet his friend. “Thank you, Diego,” he replied as calm as ever, but the voice did not match the tense body. The Chilean knew who he was, and it did not sit well with Khan – not yet. “Please, have a seat,” he said, pointing at the living room group.

“Gracias,” Diego replied and sat down, watching the super-human. Khan stepped to the replicator and ordered two glasses of red wine.

“Mr. Scott said you and Kirk ended up with capillary damage and some bruising from being trapped in the room where the bird-of-prey took its shots; you were exposed to open space.” The large man shook his head. “You’re damn lucky to be alive – almost healed too. You skin should be covered spider-webs, but you’re white as marble. I suppose it's not a surprise.”

Khan returned with the two glasses and placed one on the table for the Chilean. “I beg your pardon?”

“You’re an Augment, aren’t you? That explains a lot,” Diego murmured; blue-green eyes looked cautiously at him.

“Jim confirmed Korax’s and McFurthon’s statement,” Nien said flatly; he took a seat and confirmed the statement. “Yes, I’m an Augment.”

Diego frowned. “How…?”

“Oh please!” Khan sneered. “You must have heard of genetic engineering at some point in your life.”
“I’m not talking about – how, Drythen,” the Chilean interrupted him softly, feeling the anger's first spark light the Augment. Obviously the super-human did not like to speak about his circumstance. “I meant, how is that anyone messed with you in the first place? Jim told me you were born like this. That means genetic engineering was going on thirty years ago, except, it wasn't. Genetic experimentation is illegal.”

“I am very much older, Diego,” the former dictator answered quickly, sounding suddenly tired; he placed his own glass on the table.

And Khan did indeed feel tired – tired of explaining his heritage, its circumstances – how he was here at all. But it seemed explanation was once again inevitable. “I – I come from the time of the first Augments.” He watched the nearly black eyes of the South American widen in disbelief. “I was ‘born’ 1964 in a lab in New Delhi,” he continued. “I am one of eighty-five Augments who tried to bring peace to the world. There were more – others who looked on the human race with loathing, regarded them as unworthy of existence. You must have learned how it ended some time in your schooling.”

Diego stared at him in shock. “The Eugenic Wars,” he whispered. “You’re from…?” He shook his head. “How is that possible?” He didn’t doubt ‘Drythen’s’ words for one moment. The words rather explained riddles that surrounded the strange man – they cleared the cobwebs.

“Cryosleep,” Khan deadpanned. “I am an engineer and developed the equipment needed to enable my family to leave our world – go far away and live. It saved them – my family and me.”

Diego cocked his head. “I heard sometime in school about a legend – a sleeper ship with Augments that fled Earth.”

Khan looked him straight in the eye. “The legend is true,” he said slowly. “Those Augments are my family – brother, sisters, friends… Some a bit older than I; most are younger – one practically a child.” He took a deep breath.

Diego examined the other male; his bowed lips were drawn tight, and those normally bright, expressive eyes were so far away now. But everything about this man was different – stronger, expressive, outstanding, even beautiful – beautiful in a strange way, but all the more remarkable for it. “So, you’re not thirty but three hundred years old? Congratulations! You’re certainly the most youthful looking old Terran in the whole galaxy.” He smiled teasingly. “At least I don’t have to worry about fangs or a thirst for blood. I prefer the reality of Augments to vampires. You had me worried for a bit.”
Khan stared at him thunderstruck; then he saw the humor light the other man’s face. “You’re okay with it,” he stated and Diego shrugged.

“Hey, I’m living in a universe full of people who would have driven the most religious to panic just three hundred years ago. So your abilities aren’t the results of environment or adaptations. We’re in the twenty-third century now, multiculturalism isn’t a pipedream; it’s reality. And I think Augments have their own strengths and weaknesses just like any other race in the universe. The galaxy is full of people who are far stranger than you and your family. A few of you overdid back then, but this goes for the whole history of mankind – the ancient Egyptians, Babylonian, Greeks and Romans, Napoleon and Hitler. Not that I’m saying you’re them – sorry.” He pursed his lips shortly. “You’re not after the presidency, are you?”

Khan couldn’t help himself: He had to laugh. “Certainly not! I doubt I could name all of the alien races that I’ve met thus far, and I have no desire to rule.” He felt a wave of relief when Diego laughed with him and allowed himself to smirk at the Chilean. “I must admit, you surprised me. I was certain you would turn away or worse yet, fear me.”

“Why? You were a friend of my friend. You are an engineer, as I am. And then I came to know that you are a loyal man – a man who thinks nothing of using his strength for the protection of those in need. You risked your life for your man, and the men and women of New Aberdeen. Hell, Galven told me about your stunt to buy time for Starfleet during the Tammeron crisis. I think right now, this universe would be in a much darker place if you weren’t in it. So long as I am on your side, and you won me over a long time ago, I have nothing to fear.”

“People always feared us,” Khan threw in and the Chilean shrugged again.

“People were afraid of thunder, so-called witches and wizards, the Northern Lights, lunar eclipses… Humans always fear what they don’t understand, but I like to think we’ve made a little progress in the last two hundred years. Our eyes and our minds cracked open just a little more after the first contact with aliens – Vulcans, to be precise. And then we met more and more people from other planets. We had two choices really – tolerance and charity or hide away in fear. We rightly chose the first path.”

“Obviously!” Khan replied dryly; then he felt another hue of Jim’s distress. ‘Tolerance is something his friends should show him’ he thought before he returned his attention back to Diego. “To tolerance, charity, and the progress of humankind,” he toasted and raised his glass while Diego did the same.

“To tolerance and charity!” Their glasses clinked against each other; then both men took a deep sip.
“Ah, a Chilean one. So you liked the wine I left for you?”

“Yes, it was an excellent wine,” the former dictator nodded. “Jim and I have to apologize for the wine stain on your carpet. It was an accident. We wanted to take care of it and intended to when we returned from New Aberdeen, but then…”

“Then some Klingons showed up; all hell broke loose,” Diego grinned. “Santa Maria, that was a hell of a ride the day before yesterday. I certainly will never forget my encounter with Starfleet’s newest hero and you, Dryth…” He hesitated. “What is your real name? Somehow I doubt that it is ‘Drythen’.”

‘Clever!’ the Augment thought before he sighed. “Drythen is my true name – only in another language. Translated in my mother tongue it is Khan. And HŹdgere Léo is old English for Noonien Singh.”

Diego bit his lips. “I think... I've heard that name; I've heard of you.”

“Certainly,” Khan nodded, before he carefully added, “I was not unimportant in Asia where I ruled. I tried to help my people forge a life worth living – the humans and my brothers and sisters, together.” He snorted bitterly. “It wasn’t meant to be.”

“Good intentions are for naught if people refuse to see the good in the intention,” the Chilean murmured, and took another sip of his wine. “Jim asked me if my opinion of you would change now that I know what you are. My answer was and is ‘no’; it changes nothing! You’ve proven yourself a loyal and honorable friend over and over again.” He bent forwards and offered Khan, his hand. “We’re amigos, you and I.”

What would his family think of him now – the great Khan Noonien Singh, grateful – modest even. But the former dictator knew the darkness – had been through dark times alone. And if he were honest with himself (and he was) he had no desire face it alone again. He wasn’t scared of the dark, but now he truly knew the comfort of friends – brave friends who would face anything by his side and a lover to light his every step. And he would fight for every one of them, and to keep every one of them as they had fought for him.

“Gracias,” he said quietly and accepted the offered hand. “I only have one request.”

“To stay silent about your true identity?” de la Vega-Martinez guessed. “No problem. I think I know
now why you've avoided Starfleet. You had already a run-in with them and…” He went rigid. “You said, your family accompanied you to space – and you also told Galven you had to avoid the authorities because they took your family from you. Does this mean that your brothers and sisters are… held hostage somewhere?”

Khan’s jaw tensed. “Yes.”

“By Starfleet?”

“They’re locked away at a high-security facility so far as I can surmise. Few know the location. They are still in cryosleep, and if the admirals have anything to say about, they will remain so indefinitely – until their tubes…” He shook his head, and Diego cursed.

“Dammit – to escape the hellfires of war with your dear ones only to be separated is cruel, not to mention that those damn uniform-wearers are intentionally drawing out the decision to wake them; it could kill them and they know it!” He frowned. “And now you’re aboard Starfleet’s flagship. Galven said you safe here, still…”

“Commodore Wesley learned much about me that has been kept secret. He has vowed to keep me safe here – not to notify Starfleet. He, Jim and I came up with an idea on how to proceed legally for my and my people's freedom. We will beat our opponents with their own laws in their own arena.”

Diego nodded slowly before he straightened his up and fixed the other man. “If you ever need help, you or your family, let me know. You are not only my friend but I also owe you my life. If there is anything I can do, just tell me.”

A warm wave affection for the big man filled Nien. This was the second time in two days that someone had offered to help him despite who he was – an Augment – a deposed ruler. Times had changed! If he had ever doubted it, he could look to Jim, Wesley, and Diego. “Thank you, Diego!” he said truthfully. “If I ever need your help, I will let you know.”

“All right!”

“And one thing more,” Khan continued. “Caviw found out about me. She heard the story of the Augments and then hacked into some library databases.” He snorted. “I underestimated the pussy cat.” He heard Diego chuckling and added, “She, Galven, Ritek and Jeff know about me, so you are free to speak around them, but only them.”
“No problem,” the Chilean answered. “I knew they had it figured out when they came to see me in the hospital; we were worried about you when we heard you were on a Starfleet ship. They didn’t tell me your name, though.” He cocked his head. “They’re okay with it – you, as I am.”

“Yes, they are,” the super-human murmured. “I never thought I would have this – friends. Even Jim was a surprise. And when we became – more... I thought perhaps I was lucky enough to have one friend. I am thankful for you all.”

“Well, friends don’t judge the man, but the deeds of the man. Yours are laudable. You’re a fine man, Noonien Singh. I don’t give a shit what anyone else says. Wait, I do give a shit – and if they say anything against you, they say it me – to all of us. And they'll be sorry they did.” He lifted his glass again. “To friendship.”

“To friendship,” Khan replied, grateful to have found another ally. He hoped that would not come that he really would need Diego’s and The Shadow’s help.

Fate would have other ideas…

TBC…
Chapter 38 – Necessary conversation

As Spock left Kirk’s quarters to go to the Engineering, Jim knew his moment had arrived. He glanced at Bones; he was the eye of a hurricane – the calm before the storm. ‘Here we go!’ he thought. “I think it’s time I explained things to you,” he began slowly. “Please sit, Bones.” He motioned to the chairs.

The CMO walked towards the sofa and the two arm chairs, but remained standing; his eyes were unusually hard. He looked angrier now than when he had found out about ‘Drythen’s’ true identity. Sighing, Kirk repeated quietly, “Please, Bones, sit down.”

“If you don’t mind, I think I’m gonna stand, Jim,” McCoy answered. Kirk’s face reddened as if slapped and he looked like a hurt puppy. Leonard inwardly winced, but would not back down from this; he took a deep breath and attacked the topic. “Before we get to ‘Khan’ I only want one answer from you: Did you lie to me – to all of us – just for a good fuck!? Or is there another reason you covered for a murderer who killed your mentor? Pike was like a father to you!”

“What?” Jim couldn't believe his ears. The vehemence in Bones’ voice – it was so wrong.

“Don’t. You. Dare!” Leonard snarled. “Don’t you dare deny it, Jim! Don’t insult my intelligence and
do NOT doubt my competence as a doctor! I read your bio-scans – inside and out – ass and all. And
I really want to kick it right now. It showed ALL the signs of being thoroughly fucked. For days,
Jim! And Khan was the only one around.” He stepped closer to Jim, looming over the red-faced
captain. He leaned down and pulled the collar of Jim's shirt down roughly. “And this is the mother of
all hickeys. He hit this spot a few times – and those aren't the only bruises you 'lover' left. Almost
forgot how strong he was – bet you didn't though! But you... Even Khan’s enhanced body couldn’t
hide your romp in the sack!”

Jim gulped. Nien had been right. Bones knew – had known for two days. Kirk moaned inwardly. He
didn't want his friend to find out like this, but the horse was out of the barn – and this one wasn't
going back. “It just sort of... happened,” he began sheepishly.

McCoy exploded. “‘It sort of happened?’ He watched Kirk lowering his head and hissed, “Have
you finally completely lost it, Jim? Not only did you lie to us – and that might, MIGHT hurt the
most. You covered for him. You fucked him! Pike would turn in his grave, if he knew…”

“He would understand if he knew what I know,” Jim interrupted him softly and rubbed his forehead.
He realized how shallow he had sounded up until now. It was about time to give the whole truth –
without any embellishment. “Bones, before you pass judgment, please hear me out.”

“So, you don’t deny that you and Khan slept together?” McCoy growled and Kirk threw his hands
up.

“You asked me not to deny it – not to lie. I'm not going to blow smoke. You'd see through it. You're
a good doctor.”

“Don’t compliment me, Jim!” Leonard snapped. “I’m really not in the mood for it! And you'd have
to be a blind man or a Vulcan not to see what you two are together – that you sleep with each other!”
He turned around and walked away as if he couldn’t bear to be near Kirk. He stayed silent, before he
quietly asked, “Why!? He turned back to his younger friend and stared fiercely at him. “Tell me
why him, Jim!”

“Bones…”

“I got nothing against two men together – we're long past that now. But why Khan of all people?
Because he saved you? Is this your way of rewarding him for a job well-done?”
“That's too far, Bones!” Jim’s voice turned suddenly sharp. “I love a good lay same as anyone, but I’m not a whore!”

“I didn't say that!” Leonard answered equally hard. “But excuse me if I have problems imagining you professing your undying love to anyone – never mind him!”

Kirk groaned. If Bones only knew that he had hit the nail on the head. Not at first – it wasn't like that in the beginning. Khan’s seduction wasn't exactly what you would call consenting. But later… Dear God, he wouldn’t give up that first night for all Credits in the world. And that didn’t include the nights and days that followed. Pinching his nose, he closed his eyes. “Bones, you told me to explain, so let me!”

For some seconds, the CMO glared at him; then he stiffly took a seat. “Fine – explain!” he demanded, not caring the slightest that he was ordering his captain around. They weren’t captain and chief medical officer now, but two friends. And one of them was hurt – betrayed when you got down to it!

Taking McCoy’s sitting as a good sign, Jim sat down too and braced his forearms on his knees. He knew that he had to tell Bones the complete truth, not the masked one he gave Wesley. “You're right. I knew from the beginning, who ‘Sunrise’ was,” he began.

“How?”

“Because he chose a cover name he knew I'd recognize. And I recognized his writing; I knew it was him who warned us of the Klingon’s planned attack.”

“And how do you know his handwriting?” McCoy pressed.

“I’ll get to that,” Jim replied carefully. He knew it would be better to make Bones see the real Nien before he admitted how the Augment and he met back in San Francisco. “I recognized his handwriting when Caviw told us about the Klingons’ next move. We knew that we were talking to the militia that fought the Orions and Klingons – the one from the outpost that the Orions attacked. So we trusted the information. It was a calculated risk.”

“So Khan only sent you the note to let you know that he was with this militia? Why?”
“To make it clear how important the transmission was. I learned later that he only wanted to contact the Enterprise – me – because he knew that I would believe the message’s content if I realized that it was him offering the information.”

“And now you lost me,” McCoy stated. “You two already trusted each other? Why, for God’s sake? You knew he escaped those labs and was out for revenge. How is it you are all ‘Hi there, nice to hear from you!’ instead of ‘Find and arrest him!’” He shook his head. “He wanted to kill us, Jim! He hacked in yours, Spock’s and my file to get our private addresses. You know what he wanted! Command was up-in-arms over it. Hell, they even sent us away early for our safety and still you trusted him enough to give unconfirmed information about a Klingon attack to Command, just because he told you so?” He bent forwards. “You even vouched for him in front of Bob Wesley, Jim! What if this had been a trap to play into his hand?”

“It wasn’t a trap, Bones, as you well know.”

“I know that now, but back then it could have been a trap. Why were you so damn sure about it? I can respect that you can’t hate him after he rescued you from Klingon hell, but back then, he was still the enemy!”

Jim sighed. It seemed he would have to tell the whole story from the beginning, otherwise they’d be talking in circles. “He wasn’t my enemy, Bones. Not by then.”

The CMO frowned in confusion. “You told me a minute ago that he informed you he was with The Shadow. So you couldn’t know where he was before that – no one did after his escape. That transmission had to be your first contact, but you already believed him; that makes no…” McCoy interrupted himself, as another thought grasped him.

He remembered the minutes in Barnett’s office – Jim’s outrage as the two scientists talked about Khan as if he were a specimen in a petri dish. McCoy had been disgusted, too. The Augment was a human after all! But Kirk had defended the former dictator like a lion would its mate. He defended Khan’s human rights as well as his right to be treated as a member of the Federation – starting with rescinding the order to kill the Augment on sight. Jim had stood up for Khan, then he trusted him, vouched for him, and later was saved by the super-human who risked his own life for Jim.

Kirk’s one-eighty must have begun before Khan became ‘Sunrise’! It had started back in San Francisco and…

Bones leapt on his feet, his eyes wide.
San Francisco…

The mysterious missing communicator and phaser…

Jim’s cleaning up…

Jim’s ‘rough’ night…

Jim’s hickey – identical to the one that adorned his neck now, and in the same place…

Jim’s admission that he had slept with a man…

“Don’t tell me that you met him back in San Francisco!” he whispered. He stared down at his friend whose cheeks began to burn a bright red – a confession all its own. “No!” McCoy closed his eyes. “Jim, please don’t tell me that you met the bastard and let him go. That you lied to me back then, when I was scared to death that I’d find you torn in fucking half.” McCoy was shouting by the end.

For a long moment, Kirk didn’t respond. Finally, in a soft voice, he began, “It was the evening after the memorial speech I gave. I got out of the shower and he was there – in my apartment.”

Bones opened his eyes again and glared at the younger man, who continued,

“He came to kill me, there was no doubt about it. I tried to call for help – get to my phaser, but he crushed the communicator and kicked my phaser away. We fought and…” He took a deep breath. “I didn’t have a chance against him, Bones. I’m good in a fight; you know that. I have a lot of tricks up my sleeve, Academy training, even Spock has taught me, but it was nothing compared to what I faced then. Khan is too strong. He had me down in a second and then he was just toying with me.”

McCoy had turned pale and sat down again. “The bruises you got…”

Jim nodded. “They came from him. He wanted to kill me with his bare hands.” He moistened his lips. It was as if he was describing events from another life – reciting facts out of a book. "But it
never came to that. We’d made a lot of noise, and Mr. Arnheim heard us. You know him, the old guy, who…”

“Story, Jim, I know who he is,” the CMO cut in and Kirk sighed.

“Right! He told us to keep it down. I was afraid Khan would kill him too, so I told him everything was fine and apologized. Mr. Arnheim went away. When the fighting stopped, just for that moment – it was like Khan focused – on me. He smelled his blood in me, and everything changed.” He rubbed his neck. “Everything…” he murmured, getting lost in the memory.

Leonard watched him closely. He could only imagine the raw fear Jim must have felt in those minutes. And then his heart broke for his friend. “Jim,” he said, his voice turning softer, “I don’t want to pry here if you don’t want me to, but if Khan did something that you didn’t want, then it isn’t your fault. And you don’t have to rationalize what he did.”

Kirk glanced dumbfounded at him. “What?”

A quiet sigh escaped Bones; he was uncertain, but he was a doctor first and foremost, and he loved his friend. “I know victims don’t want to talk about it; they’ll blame themselves. Especially strong ones – men and women alike. It happens. They think they should have been able to defend themselves. Or they cooperate in hopes that it will end quickly. That's not consent. You don't have to build a relationship around the event.”

“What do you implying, Bones?" Kirk interrupted him with a low growl.

The CMO took another deep breath. “Okay, let me shoot straight. Jim, did he rape you?”

Aghast, the young captain, stared at him. “What? NO! No, of course not!”

McCoy looked at him for a long moment. Jim's reaction was an all too typical response. Carefully he replied, “Jim, you don’t have to deny i…”

“He didn’t rape me. He wouldn't do that – not to anyone!” Kirk cut in harshly; he was angry that someone could think that of his Nien. He didn’t even realize that for the first time, he thought of Khan as ‘his’.
“You know that he has a… an odd sense of right or wrong and…” McCoy began carefully.

But it wasn't careful enough – it was the straw that broke the captain.

Jim jumped up, ignoring the sharp pain in his hip and Leonard instantly protested, telling him to sit down – for naught. A new fire burned in Kirk’s eyes – the fire of someone who would defend is love to his last breath. “He has the same sense of right or wrong as you and me, Bones – perhaps more because he is not afraid to do right no matter the cost. Back then? He snapped. He was falsely accused, trapped, abused, violated, and treated as less than… an animal. That he can love anything is fucking amazing and a testament to the kind of man he is. Why is that so hard to see?”

“You don’t have to defend him, Jim,” the CMO tried to calm his friend; his efforts had the opposite effect. They seemed fuel for Kirk’s fire.

“If I don't, who would, Bones? You? Spock? Starfleet Command? Who is going to defend the man that no one thinks deserves defense!? Who even wants to give him a chance – to see his life from his point of view? Who even gives a shit that he is in pain? I'll tell you! No one except for Bob and me. Because it's a hell of a lot easier to condemn someone – remove them and forget them forever, than to look hard at someone, even the unlovable and figure out why age-old scars still bleed.”

“Jim…” McCoy tried to reason with the younger man, but again for naught. Kirk's fired roared.

“Of course it's easy to accuse him of the worst. He has killed – like any other soldier must do at some point. But his genetics make him different. He must be some sort of cruel rapist monster! Makes no difference that he's suffered that humiliation and cruelty himself. After all he is an Augment – evil incarnate – and would do it, himself.”

Jim stopped when he saw the shocked expression of his friend. He realized what he'd blurted out in his anger and haste. Groaning, he covered his face with his hands. Guilt gutted him. “Oh God!” he whispered. “I… I promised him…”

He felt a hand on his shoulder and as he looked up, Bones stood beside him – pale, appalled. But he was strong and composed as ever. He'd always been like a stone in a raging sea to Kirk. “Is this true, Jim? Was Khan raped?” he asked softly.

Like a puppet cut from its strings, Kirk’s usually proud and erect frame slumped. “I promised him…”
he whispered. McCoy wrapped one arm around his friend, his anger forgotten for the moment. He was not only a doctor, but also a compassionate man. The mere thought of rape made his stomach turn. Even if Khan was a criminal, a former tyrant, no one should be subjected to the basest of all violence.

His gaze stayed on his friend and as he saw the burning guilt in those sky-blue eyes, he sighed soundlessly. This talk went every way but the one he expected. He felt sympathy for the superhuman – who wouldn’t? And he felt like an idiot now, assuming Khan had perpetrated the horrible act. After all, he had witnessed the intense protectiveness and obvious affection the former dictator had displayed toward the young captain. But only now was Bones convinced that this unbelievable friendship between the two men wasn’t born out of violence. Still, he was concerned for Jim.

“What you told me is absolutely confidential, Jim. And you know that, not just because I'm a doctor, but because I'm your friend – remember that. If Khan was violated, I'm certainly not going to blab it around. The violation is humiliation enough; I'm not going to add insult to injury. Hard enough for someone to admit it once. A man as strong as him, likely will not admit it twice. If Khan entrusted you; that's saying a lot about – whatever it is you two have.” He pursed his lips. “So... This frankly shitty, despicable act... Was it more than once?” he asked softly, and Kirk nodded slowly.

“As a teen – back then. And later, under Marcus’ ‘care’.”

A gasp escaped McCoy; he went rigid with shock and disgust. “As a kid and... And under Marcus!?”

The two friends looked at each other, and Jim sighed deeply. He had revealed already more than he wanted to, so he wouldn’t spoil too much anymore by telling Bones everything. Maybe this would make him regard Khan in a different way.

“He told me about his so-called ‘childhood’. He was raised in labs and one of the guards...” He had made a short gesture with his hand before he continued. “And Marcus – his tests, if you can call them that, were designed to see how much damage and disease his body could take. He was injected with viruses, starved, you name it. One of the scientists decided to show Khan an Augment isn't always – superior.”

Any color had left Leonard’s face. “Do you know who it was?”

Jim nodded; hate began to burn in his narrowed eyes. “You know him too. It was Connelly...”
“WHAT?”

“… the same man we met in Barnett’s office. The one who described Nien as a ‘subject’ with no rights!”

McCoy stepped back, shocked to the core. Then his cheeks reddened in fury. “This rotten bastard! Treating another man like a petri dish, stripping him of his rights, abnegating him his humanity. And then sexually abusing him! This is sick – insane! This guy has to be locked up and throw away the fucking key!” He met Jim’s burning gaze and tried to calm down. “I won’t ask for details, Jim. But – but I’m sorry I accused Khan of doing that with you. It was a rash judgment. After I realized the nature of your relationship and saw how possessive he was when you held onto him, I thought I had it all figured out.” He sighed. “I was wrong.”

Jim gulped; he felt nausea as he remembered Nien’s quiet confession. “Do you understand now, Bones, how much his past hurts him? He didn't ask to be born the way he is, and he has to live with the knowledge that he is and will forever be a monster in the eyes of others – in the eyes of those who made him what he is in the first place! Do you think he liked being locked away as a child? Tested on over and over again? Treated like an emotionless creature? When he wanted nothing more than some comfort and understanding – same as any child? Same as I did once.”

“Jim…,” McCoy began gently, realizing the parallels between Kirk and Khan, but the young captain didn't let him interrupt – didn't want to hear the pity in McCoy’s voice.

“Do you think he wanted to be hunted like an animal, while he had to take care of his ‘siblings’ – make sure that they would survive!?”

Jim was practically telling his own story from his time on Tarsus IV and McCoy knew it.

"He didn't ask for the war – either of them – this one or the Eugenic Wars. He watched the so-called ‘Liberators’ slaughter whole villages because the habitants loved ‘their Khan’ – the man who made their lives better, who protected their women from the atrocities he’d already faced. He gave them hope of a better future. He saw one of his closest friends sacrifice himself so that he and the others could flee. None of them, not even he, knew for certain that the Botany Bay would make it or that they would ever wake up again. And once they slept – he was the one who had to make the decision for them all. Not knowing if one decision or the other would kill those he loved most in the world.”

“That's the responsibility of a leader – you know that better than anyone, Jim. And you know I do too,” McCoy murmured. Both men made hard decisions that meant life or death to others.
But what Bones missed before, was right in front of him now. Jim and Khan shared a story, shared a
history, and shared the most intimate parts of their lives. Listening to Khan's story was like listening
to Jim – the first time he talked about being despised by his step-father, abandoned by his mother,
and then Tarsus IV. Jim couldn't talk about it sober, and Bones sure didn't hear it sober. He hoped
these two men at least had something to take the edge off during those conversations.

Kirk smiled sadly. “You’re right. In this case you, Spock, Nien and I – we know what it's like.” He
swallowed. “When Marcus found Nien’s ship…” He stopped; the doorbell buzzed. Jim knew that it
was his Vulcan friend requiring entrance. Oh, for the love of God… “Enter!” he called, and the first
officer stepped in; his gaze roamed over the two men.

“Captain, we've placed the last order for parts, and Mr. de la Vega is visiting Mr. Singh. He'll stay
until his people make the final delivery.” He came nearer and looked back and forth between Kirk
and McCoy.

Jim sighed inwardly. “Please sit down, Spock. We just got started.”

Spock lifted a brow. ‘Just’? Certainly not. He had been away for almost twenty minutes and his
T’hy’la and the CMO seemed to be on edge already. The discussion must have been none too
pleasant thus far as Kirk was standing despite his injury.

Taking the seat opposite Jim, he straightened his posture and looked to his captain and friend who
finally sat down with McCoy’s help. McCoy remained beside him.

“Jim was about to tell me what happened to Khan, after Section 31 found him,” Bones steered the
conversation right to the point and made it easy for Kirk to continue.

“Am I right that you received this information from Khan?” the Vulcan asked, and Jim nodded.

“Yeah – and before you doubt him – he told the truth.” He took another deep breath. “Marcus,
himself, found the Botany Bay adrift during a security patrol after the incident with Nero. Eight
cryotubes had already failed, but the others were still functioning – still are so far as I know. Marcus
must have known what he found. He woke Khan and let him believe he was the kind, benevolent
leader of the union protecting Earth and its allies against nasty aliens out to kill us all. Marcus knew
exactly which buttons to push. He played on Khan’s protective streak – defend your home – your
planet. Only later did Nien figured out Marcus' game. He tried to pull out – he was created for peace,
not war. That's when it all fell apart for him – a Marcus-style hell.”
“Marcus tried to force him into his service,” Spock assumed and Kirk nodded grimly.

“Yes – the torture Nien was subjected to following that... It was too much, even for him.” In those next minutes, the Enterprise’s commanding officer told his two friends everything he learned from his forbidden lover. He told about the inhumane tests, the starvation, the cold-cell torture, how Khan had been pushed to his limits over and over again. He told them how Marcus finally killed four Augments, four of Nien's family, in front of him, finally bringing the proud super-human to his knees.

“Marcus would have killed them all. Nien realized it and gave in. That was the beginning of all that happened afterward,” he said quietly. He saw the shock written on Bone’s face and even Spock usually expressionless features showed something close to revulsion.

CMO and first officer continued to listen as Jim spoke of Khan’s plotting to save his people, how his plan was discovered and how Marcus made him believe that he had killed the other Augments – murdered them in their sleep. “He snapped,” Kirk came to the end. “He lost it and tried for Marcus using the Daystrom gathering. This rest is history.”

“This history cost many lives, Jim,” Spock said after several seconds of silence. “I accept that Marcus pushed him past a 'breaking point' as you call it. Yet he declared over and over again that he is superior to ‘mere humans’. As such, he should have been able to control himself.”

Jim looked his soul-brother straight in the eye. “Spock, I don’t want to offend you, but you of all people should understand Khan the best.”

The Vulcan’s frame became rigid. “If you’re talking about the loss of my people then…”

“No, Spock, I'm not referring to Vulcan. I'm talking about you.” He saw how his friend tensed and added gently, “Nien told me that you did not hunt him down to arrest him, but to avenge me.” He held Spock’s flickering gaze. “And Scotty said this morning that you lost it after… After I died. You chased Nien through half San Francisco, fought him bare-handed, broke his arm and punched him unconscious. That is hardly the Vulcan way. You, my T’hy’la, found your breaking point, and ran amok right over it.”

It was the first time Jim addressed his friend by the Vulcan word for the bond they shared. It took the sting out of the addressing of Spock’s indecorous actions.
For a very long moment, the first officer stared at the younger Terran, fighting the unbidden shame that still lingered deep in him. He recognized the truth in Jim’s words and nodded slowly. It was almost a relief to suddenly discover an explanation for the actions he had struggled to cope with this past year. His actions a year ago – it was like an overload of a circuit that backed up into the main system and sparked it to fire. But he was no mere human – and neither was Khan. But both, it seemed, found their breaking point, regardless.

“You are right. My… My reaction cannot be described otherwise. It was illogical and inexcusable to my people,” Spock said quietly.

“See,” Kirk continued softly. “You were broken. You've lost so many, Spock. First your Mom, then the most of your people, finally me – your friend, your brother. It was too much. Everything that had bottled up in you needed a release – and it did. Same goes for Nien.”

His Vulcan friend blinked before he accepted this statement. But not without question, “How so?”

“His past was... It was a lot like ours, Spock. So. Much. Loss. For all of us. It's no wonder you and he reacted as you did.”

"You didn't," Spock said quickly. "You said ‘ours’, but you did not ‘break’ as you say. You lost your people. Your mother left you, your brother left you, your friends – the children you watched over and fed on Tarsus IV. You did not break."

"You didn't see me then – but anyway later I had Pike, then Bones. Then you, T'hy'la.” He bowed his head to his bonded brother to show the gravity of his statement.

“You are not a 'mere human', Jim!”

“No. Mere humans don't have what I have, brother.” Kirk smiled, before he continued, “Since Nien was a teen, he had only one concern: that his brothers and sisters, those like him would survive. He did everything toward that purpose. He knew only how to fight for their lives – until they were finally taken from him – or so he thought. And the pain, fear and sorrow he experienced pushed him over the precipice.”

“The moment he thought Marcus had killed his crew,” Spock assumed, and Jim made an affirming gesture.
“He woke alone – without them in the 23rd century and faced all the strange, the new – *alone*. He knew that his family was near; he felt them. It gave him the strength to take all Marcus doled out to him. And then even this last assurance was taken from him. He didn't even have the comfort of their safety in sleep. He was utterly alone in a strange world full of strange creatures and a military union that had showed him only cruelty. They killed his family, or so he thought, after all he endured and sacrificed to keep them safe. If I had been in his place, with no one to keep me sane, I might've done the same. If I would have been forced to watch you two, Uhura, Scotty, Sulu, Chekov or Carol die just to force my hand... You – you all keep me right. I'd go mad without you all. He did. And we helped to push him.” He lowered his head.

Leonard watched Jim closely. He saw the hurt in Jim's eyes for his lover, friend... oh God, whatever Khan was for Kirk now. And Bones’ kind heart hurt with him, for the super-human. It must have been a serious culture shock to wake up almost three centuries later, to face real aliens but also the same old hatred and abuse. But that had been Marcus’ way, not Jim's, so why... “What do you mean we pushed him? What did we do?”

Blue eyes were clouded with pain. “We made him believe that we killed the people most dear to him.” Jim’s glance wandered back to Spock. The Vulcan looked calmly back at him, yet there was a gleam in his gaze that Jim couldn’t place. “No one told him that his family was still alive. No one informed him that they weren't killed when the torpedoes detonated. They let him suffocate in his grief for them. He was condemned and forced back into cryosleep, thinking everyone he ever loved was dead; that he failed his family.”

Spock lifted a brow silently, recognizing the unbearable pressure the Augment had been under for months – years if adding the previous lives and previous centuries; previous wars. Though enhanced – engineered, Khan still was human. Engineered and enhanced control meant enhanced emotions if unbridled. The first officer began to understand what moved the Augment’s hands.

Bones took a deep breath, too. Anyone with a hint of compassion in his heart would be moved by the mere thought of Khan's agonizing, twisted path. “No one told him the truth? No one told him it was a ruse Spock thought up?”

“That ruse pushed Nien over the edge – again,” Jim whispered, his eyes moistening. “To think you’ve lost everyone you love with all your heart is the cruelest pain imaginable – and he didn’t face this agony once, but twice! He didn’t defend himself during his so-called trial, a trial without a defense, because he had nothing to live for anymore.”

“What? He didn't have a lawyer?” McCoy stared at him. “But that's – like against the law!”
“As Admiral Barnett pointed out, Mr. Singh is not considered a human being and so he was granted none of the rights, Doctor,” Spock reminded him.

Jim nodded. “Nien was condemned and frozen – discarded like a piece of trash. No one told him the family he loved and lived for was alive. He died in that cryotube only to be reawakened to another kind of torture – those fucking tests.” He felt a lump rising in his throat. “Most times he was semi-conscious; he knew what they were doing. They infected him with diseases to harvest the antibodies he produced. They tested poisons on him. No one cared how much he suffered or how much pain he was in as his body struggled to heal over and over again.” Jim watched as Leonard turned white, and Spock flushed yellow-green with shock. “One of the scientists slipped; he was finally able to escape. All that was left for him was revenge. I can’t blame him for that.”

Bones chewed at his lips; his mind, heart and soul were in turmoil over the man, made harder and harder to hate. “Well shit, Jim. After all that, I suppose I don’t have it in me to damn him – doesn’t mean I have to like him, though” he confessed finally. “I know everyone breaks – you know better ‘n anyone I come damn close to mine. Concerning his abuse at the hands of those – scientists…” He rubbed his forehead as a headache was beginning to form behind his eyes. “I’ll never call them doctors. I’d love to put my fist through all of ’em. I only hope Barnett put them on ice like he said he would.” He took a deep breath. “And Khan… I get it – I get the revenge. I just wish it was different for him – for all of us.”

Spock cocked his head. “I, too, understand revenge. What I do not understand, Jim, is how Mr. Singh has come to change his attitude about you so much that he would risk his own life in defense of yours?”

Kirk felt his mouth go dry. Telling Bones was one thing. Spock – it was another. Not the sex. It was Pike. Spock regarded Pike as Jim had. Not like a father, but a great mentor. His loss hit Sarek’s son hard. The mind-meld made it harder. Telling Spock that he was intimate – that he loved the man responsible for Chris’ death was going to be very difficult.

“Things changed – between us,” he began lamely, and Spock lifted both brows at that.

“Obviously,” he stated wryly. “The questions remain: why and how?”

Jim felt heat rising to his cheeks – and McCoy rolled his eyes. “For God’s sake, Jim, tell him!” As he caught the half uncertain, half irritated gaze of his younger friend, he added firmly. “Spock risked his career and his freedom to save your ass. Never mind how much we all worried about you – he worried about you. The least you can do is to tell him the whole truth – him, your brother!”
This little speech brought more blood to Kirk’s face, and shame lurked in the background of his conscious. Then he sobered. He would not be ashamed of the love Nien and he shared! Quite the opposite. If love was that needed hiding, then truly the end of humankind had begun!

Jim steeled himself, took a very, very deep breath and moistened his lips before he said in a low voice, “He came to me – that night in San Francisco. I told him his family was alive. Things happened – that night. He – we changed. Nien and I... We're together.”

There! He said it plain and clear.

Spock blinked for several seconds not comprehending what his friend was trying to tell him. “Of course you and Mr. Singh are – were – together, Jim. He got you out of Klingon prison, fought at your side…”

Apparently, not as clear as he thought.

“Spock!” Jim groaned; his head dropped to his chest. His eyes closed. Damn the Vulcan taking everything literally! “I… I mean, Nien and I are together!”

Still the Vulcan didn’t get the hint – or, as McCoy assumed, he was in denial. He threw Jim a glare. ‘Thank you for letting me explain your dirty secret to Spock of all people!’ Then he addressed the first officer. “What Jim means is that he and Khan are together, like you and Uhura.”

Again, Spock looked blankly at the two other males, as he turned the information over in his mind. Was this terran ‘humor’? Both men did not seem to be in a jovial mood. Jim’s face was a frightening shade of red now. He was trying to avoid the Vulcan’s gaze. McCoy crossed his arms in front of his chest and glanced sternly at Kirk, daring him to continue.

And then the pieces of information slid into place, freeing the Vulcan’s understanding.

Were…

Were Jim and Khan really…
Utterly disbelief seized Spock, and for several seconds his Vulcan mask slipped. “You… You and Mr. Singh are – a pair?” he asked, astonished.

Under other circumstances, Bones would have loved to tease Spock mercilessly for his display of emotion, but at the moment he was not in the mood.

“Yes,” Jim confirmed quietly; he finally met his T’hy’la’s eyes. “Nien and I are together.”

Still thunderstruck the Vulcan raised both brows. “But… I was under the impression that you favored female partners.”

“Surprise, surprise, Jim Kirk is a bi!” McCoy scoffed. “And of course he decides to save his fidelity for a man.” He sighed dramatically. “You know what this means if it becomes public? The whole female population of the Federation will break down in tears; half in relief, finally safe from your flirting, and the other half in sorrow.”

Jim frowned at his older friend. “Hey, I’m not that bad!”

“You? You’re worse – were worse, to be precise,” Leonard replied wryly, then he cocked his head. “Tell me, is this relationship with Khan serious or is it just a lust thing?”

Lowering his head to hide the warmth that instantly welled up and showed in his cheeks, Jim answered, “It’s serious. It's – it's it.”

Bones nodded slowly. “Do you love him?” He ignored Spock’s sharp intake of breath at this question and let his attention rest on Kirk.

“Yes,” came the equally quiet, but firm reply.

“And does he? Return it, I mean?” McCoy asked further but gave himself the answer, “He has to. Sleepwalking to your bed when you had a nightmare, the cuddling, his decision to come get you – Jesus!” He sighed. “I always wanted to see the day when you, of all people, finally fell in love. But does it have to be a wanted man – the one the Federation and the entire Klingon Empire is after?”
Jim smiled sheepishly. “I never do easy – and you can’t decide who your gonna love, Bones.”

“Yeah, I know,” the CMO grumbled; then he looked back at the first officer. Concerned, he frowned. “Spock, you’re a little bit green in the face. Is that a blush or are you not feeling well?”

The Vulcan ignored him and stared at Kirk. “Have I understood you correctly, Jim? You are in love with Khan?”

“No,” the young man said softly. “I’m not in love; I love him!”

Confusion appeared in his friend’s dark eyes, but it was Bones who explained the difference to Spock, “In love is the beginning of love. In love wants the person. Love needs the person. In love cares for the person; love cares for the person more than your own life. It is a fullness rather than a development.” He shook his head and glared back at Jim. “You know that this is risky – not just because your sweetheart is a wanted criminal. You do realize the responsibility you both have taken for each other?”

Jim nodded. “If I let him down – if I left him, it would break him.”

McCoy sighed. “Yeah – and it's gonna work the other way round, too.” He sighed. “I know you, Jim. I know that you don’t trust easily, and when you do, you go whole hog. This wasn't an overnight thing.” He stopped, as Kirk grinned ambivalently and groaned, “Yeah, I get it, it was ‘overnight’ – literally!”

He heard Spock clearing his throat. He glanced back at the Vulcan, who rose to speak in an oddly flat and neutral tone – more so than his usual. “As far as I understand human love begins with attraction before the relationship can take place.”

“Remember how it started with you and Uhura?” McCoy commented.

“My memories are quite clear, Doctor, and I can assure you that it did not begin with an attempt to kill each other.” Spock’s gaze fixed on Jim. “Did it with you and Khan?” Spock was angry and belligerent unlike him. The tone remained flat, but his words stung. “I saw many love-affairs burgeon at the Academy, aboard, everywhere. Not one of them began with crime and murder. Odd.”

“Spock…” Jim murmured, but this time the Vulcan didn’t give him the chance to speak.
“Khan Noonien Singh has been cruelly abused. This is a shameful fact I will not deny. But he has in turn – killed. And when he escaped, he intended to do so again as an act of revenge on you, Dr. McCoy, me, perhaps even Nyota. You met him, again, and… And I fail to understand T’hyl’a, and it is...distressing.”

Kirk bit his lips. He felt Bones nudging him; he sighed. “Turkana wasn’t the first time I saw him after… after what happened last year.” Spock's eyes bore into him. He gulped and continued. “He came to my apartment the night before we left Earth. He wanted to kill me, we fought. It was brief – I would've lost. Then he smelled my blood – his in mine to be precise. Then everything changed.”

Spock drew himself taut as a bowstring and arrows shone in his eyes ready to fly. “What did he do?” There was a certain, seldom heard growl in the first officer’s voice. Vulcan warriors of old were reflected in his gaze and sounded in his voice.

“He… seduced me,” Jim admitted; he was a little bit relieved that Spock didn’t accuse Nien of a certain violation as Bones had. Well – if he did, he didn’t voice it.

Spock’s mouth pulled down at the corners. “He – seduced you?”

Jim grimaced. “He wasn’t – umm – gentle about it. I think he was angry at himself for feeling the way he did, angry at me for making him feel that way – for the blood. And then it happened. I was furious and scared as hell. Then, well, you know…” He made a floppy gesture with one hand and sighed quietly.

“Hm, sounds like a kind of Stockholm Syndrome if it weren't so short a time together.” Bones pondered, “On the other hand, you must have felt something for him too, somewhere down the line. Otherwise, your feelings couldn’t have changed that quickly and drastically.” He saw the slightest hue of a blush rising in the younger man’s cheeks and groaned. “Don’t tell me… Fine! He is attractive. Hell, he’s handsome. I’m straight through and through, but I know what looks good. Still… um… You're Starfleet’s number one playboy…”

“HEY!”

“… and you undress every good-looking female you see with your eyes. I never thought I see the day you did that with a guy. Jesus, never mind Khan.”
Jim shrugged. “I told you during a physical that I found some guys – you know. I just never acted on it. And then came Nien and…” He sighed. I sounded so stupidly love-struck that Bones rolled his eyes and Spock nearly winced. “He’s so friggin’ strong; and I know that he’s dangerous, but he is also so… tender and careful,” Kirk continued. “I feel safe with him – protected. But still – I can be at ease – with him. No pretense or impressing a girl. As strong as I want to be – am. But at the same secure with someone even stronger. Everything about him just – caught me. What he's done for others since – then. What he's done – what he's been for me. The way he took care of me even then…” Jim moistened his lips. “Yeah – so at first it was against my will, I have to admit that, but he didn’t force himself on me.”

The CMO shook his head. “I can understand that you see him differently after hearing his sob story, but seducing someone against his will is definitely a violating act – even if you wanted it by the end. I guess you did.”

“No, he wasn't” Kirk murmured, thinking of a way to make his two friends understand. “He was – like I said, gentle about it – took his time to be careful. He realized I'd never done it, and he made sure to make me… want it – want him.” He bit his lips. “He knew every trick in the book and I think he added a few pages of his own.”

McCoy made a face. “Better at everything,” he commented wryly and Jim smiled for a second.

“Yeah, he is!” Kirk rubbed his neck again. “He knew exactly which buttons to press to make me want him.”

Snorting, the CMO commented, “And you don't call that a violation? He forced you to do something you didn’t want to – maybe to humiliate you before he was going to kill you!”

“He wouldn’t have killed me, Bones – not anymore.”

“You could not know that T’hy’la,” Spock threw in; his whole posture betrayed his state of suppressed anger. He would never admit it openly, but he had been afraid for his captain’s life when he got the call from Command about Khan’s escape. Learning now that Kirk had been intimate with Khan that whole night and Jim did not tell him… It woken a deep irritation in the Vulcan. He masked it now as he did the other emotions that seethed deep in him – coiling around his warrior nature. “Khan thought you to be one of those responsible for his family’s death.”

“Show me a murderer who takes care of his soon-to-be-victim like he did!” Jim interrupted him. “He – ugh! He did all the lover aftercare stuff. Wiped us down, took me to shower, washed me, helped me to…”
“Jim, shut up! Too much information,” Bones spoke up. “Not just for Spock's tender, pointy-eared sake, but mine too.”

Kirk gave his friends another sheepish smile. “Sorry!” He had sighed before he continued. “But after all that, I knew he wasn't going to kill me. Not after he made sure I enjoyed it as much as he did. He still thought that I was responsible for his family’s death – along with Spock. But he was still – good. The world may see a monster in him, but he isn’t one – not by a longshot.” He glanced at the wall straight ahead. “Anyway, I didn't know that – that he didn't know. When I got out of the shower, he was watching TV. We talked, and that's when I knew he didn't know they were still alive.” His voice became quiet. “You should have seen him when I told him the truth. At first he didn’t believe it; he thought I were taunting him, but then…” He gulped. His mind clearly conjured Khan's reaction down to the most painful detail as if it were yesterday.

“He wept. He absolutely broke down and sobbed. I'd never seen anything like it and I never thought I would from him. It was relief and anguish. All the grieving he did was taken away from him. It was all in vain!” Kirk went on. "You two are going to ask me if I didn't have a chance to get to my phaser or get out, aren't you? The answer is ‘yes’. I had a chance to get to my phaser. I couldn’t do it. I simply couldn’t kill him – he was so miserable. All I saw was a man who had endured so much and was falling apart.” He closed his eyes for a moment; he hurt with the memory – with the man he loved now with every fiber of his being.

“I did what you woulda done, Bones. I walked into the kitchen, fetched two glasses and the scotch Scotty gave me as a birthday gift. We drank and then we talked. I learned a few things about what happened to him after he was taken in. No one, not even the guards, exchanged one single word with him. The judge told him the verdict and sentenced him. There was a man grieving deeply for his family and no one cared. No one even conceded him his emotions. They brought him to some facility, sedated him – without much success – and put him back into his cryotube.” He glanced back at McCoy. “Did you know that he felt everything? How his cells froze, his heartbeat slowed down, the panic as his respirations slowed, and he clung to the last sane thoughts he could muster before the darkness closed in around him.”

Taken aback, Leonard blinked. “He felt it all?” He shook his head. “Dammit, he shouldn't have.”

“Yeah! After he and I nearly went to the void, I know how it feels. I asked him if it was like that – cryosleep. He confirmed it – that it was hell. The first time it was of his own free will – for his people and their future and freedom. The second time he was forced without any chance to defend himself and believing he’d lost everything he ever loved.”

McCoy pressed his lips shut and pondered all he had heard for a long moment. ‘I ain't denyin' that what happened to him was wrong! I'm a doctor not a sadist. But he’s still a criminal and now a
fugitive. If Command ever learns that he was in your apartment, and you didn’t alert them as soon as he left... Jim, you know what could happen!”

“I know – still I wouldn’t change a moment of it even if I could.” He leaned back; the tension was leaving him bit by bit. “After we talked, he... we both did. It was – quite consensual by that point. He was good – I wanted him, and I wanted him to want me back – and he did. I don't know if it was just me or if I was just a respite, a way to forget, the outpouring of relief that they were alive. All of it maybe. I know I'd never been so tired in my life afterward.” He heard McCoy clearing his throat again, while Spock frowned. He chuckled softly. “Sorry, guys.” He pursed his lips. “Bones, you asked me how I knew that he was Sunrise – how I knew his handwriting. When Nien ambushed me in my apartment, he said he hoped that I had enjoyed my last sunrise because I wouldn't live to see another one. I woke up the morning after; the sun was shining through my window – I was never so happy to have it wake me up. Anyway, I found a handwritten note on my pillow. It was from him, saying that he ‘gave’ me another sunrise as a gift.” He smiled again. “When Uhura showed me the hidden message The Shadow sent along with their first transmission, I instantly realized that ‘Sunrise’ had to be Nien – I recognized his script. And there was something else I understood; he trusted me enough to reveal himself – practically telling me where he was.”

“It was a test to determine whether he could trust you,” Spock assumed a businesslike manner now and Kirk shrugged.

“I think so, yes. I think he knew that I would take The Shadow’s warning seriously because he wouldn’t risk getting caught for information that wasn't important – it had to be crucial.”

“So, he trusted you first and you him, then.” McCoy cocked his head. “You really have a way with people.” He pursed his lips. “What I don’t get is why Khan wanted you in the first place. Oh don't look at me like that, you know what I mean. I can understand, almost, that he sensed something familial. But lust wouldn't be a result – shouldn't be a result. So why…”

“He told me that he was attracted to me the moment he first laid eyes on me,” Jim said shyly through a smile. “At Daystrom, when I knocked out his ship... He was impressed. And later, on Qo’noS, he recognized me – what I said about Chris. He saw we both knew loss. Then I tried to beat him into the ground; he understood that – said he would have done it too being in my place. When I put him in the brig rather than kill him – thank you, Spock – he knew I was different.” He moistened his lips. “That's when he felt something more. I remember – man my stomach dropped – when my helmet cracked, and I lost my display. He came up beside me. I looked over. He didn't look smug like I thought he would. It was more like ‘Did you think I would let you down?’ or ‘We're together in this – I have you!’ And then he even smiled the tiniest bit. Christ, I was never so grateful. He saved my ass out there, just like he did on Qo’noS.”

Bones nodded slowly. “So he helped you. Guess that made you a bit less pissed. And he was attracted to you from the beginning. That didn't stop him from taking you hostage and attacking us.”
“Yeah, well I ordered Scotty to stun him. I backstabbed him, Bones so I can't blame him for being angry. I betrayed him – might as well have been Marcus as far as he was concerned. He was following my lead, waited for my orders, and I didn’t see it.” He shook his head. “It was my fault. I woke up the warrior in him again. You know how it turned out.” He snorted. “I think he still felt something for me – if only some sort of kinship in loss. He easily could have broken every bone in my body when he punched me on the Vengeance, but he didn’t. He didn’t need me as a hostage. He spared me despite my deceit.”

“He beat you pretty bad. You looked about as bad as when we saw you at your apartment. Trying to kill someone with bare hands is seriously personal, though. The victim is obviously valuable to the killer – not in the way you want obviously, but you know what I mean. You told me how Khan killed Marcus. That's as good an example as they come. He could have just shot him. Instead, he squeezed the life out of him. Not unlike what Marcus did to him over a longer period.”

Impressed at McCoy's insight, Kirk bent forwards. “And what does it tell you?” he asked, genuinely interested. Bones was not only a damn good doctor, he also had a natural talent for psychology. He could read Jim like an open book, and there were only a few who could claim that. So, maybe Leonard had developed other hypotheses that explained Nien’s actions.

“He doesn’t attack first,” McCoy answered slowly, trying each word. He knew how important that was for what lay ahead for Jim and them all. “He only attacks when provoked or in defense of himself or loved ones. But there is more. There's the outpost and Tammeron; he will defend the weak. I think that sense of purpose – that leader in him provides the groundwork for his sense of morality. I also think deep down he's desperate to be understood. You said he began to trust you during ‘Mission Vengeance’ as I like to call it. He saved you; followed you, and only snapped after you ordered Scotty to stun him. He not only ‘snapped’, he lost it. So he wants to trust someone – longs for it, even. You're right, Jim, he is lonely. He’s absolutely and utterly alone in a world that’s not his anymore. I think it scared the hell out of him – scares him even now – not as bad with you, but I'd hate to see it if he lost you. He's stubborn and proud so he'll deny it.”

“Still bothers me that I fucked it up back then,” the young officer murmured, sounding miserable.

“You made the right choice in that situation and you know it. It was a classic risk assessment scenario. You didn't know Khan, then, like you do now. And Marcus used the both of you, throwing in another variable.”

“He forged a world for Nien – around him – a false one. Nien was convinced that Section 31 was an authorized part of Starfleet’s Secret Service; that the admiralty knew about him and his people and condoned Marcus’ methods. That’s why he attacked Daystrom. All he knew was that Marcus had killed his crew, and the staff officers were aware and acceptant of the actions. He purposely spared
the first officers – Spock and me. He could have taken us out with a blast charge in that conference room and killed everyone, but he didn’t.” Kirk swallowed. “Nien told me that twice he had me in his sights, but he didn’t pull the trigger because he recognized the commander's uniform.”

Spock lifted a brow again. That detail had slipped his observation as he was busy with helping the injured to safety and then all of his attention was focused on Pike.

Bones had turned pale at Jim’s words umpteenth time. He came so close to losing Jim – and Spock that day. It made him sick. He felt grateful - and guilty for being grateful that the Augment took aim only at the senior officers, sparing the men he held most dear. “Can't ever be simple with you Jim. You boys either dance to Death's fiddle or you sleep together. Can't you just do friends?”

Kirk smiled again. “Ha! Told you I don't do easy. I wanted to tear him apart after Chris died. Spock talked me down – made me do the right thing per regulations, of course. I – I wasn’t myself, and I don't think anyone but Spock could have made me change my mind.”

“I know.”

Spock nodded his head in deference at the compliment.

“Yeah, and the move played right into Marcus' hand!” Kirk shook his head. “But fate had other plans for Nien and me. That time I listened to my first officer; I followed regulation. Pike in my heart and Spock next to me – that's what got us here! Because of that, I was able to listen to Nien’s story in the brig; hear him out in my apartment. He trusted me with everything – his childhood, his struggles in the 20th century, everything he’s been through since he woke up – and he did it because I listened to you, Spock, and Pike – finally. Anyway, he knows his mistakes; he owns them, but he shouldn't bear full responsibility for them. A long time ago Pike gave me a second chance. I don't even think I deserved it, but he did anyway. Khan is more than deserving true justice and I'll see to it that he gets his second chance.”

“And he wants one?” Spock cut in flatly.

“Who wouldn’t? It's funny – without Chris' belief in me, I would've never been on the in the first place. After Nibiru, I was slated to go back to the Academy. Chris made me his first officer instead. God, I hate that Marcus used that. Chris was right; Nibiru – I endangered my crew, you, Spock. I didn't respect the chair. But Chris took me back anyway; gave me that second chance when I fucked my first one away. It woke me up – made me see just a bit clearer. His death made me see what I was damn lucky to have – you both. I won't take it for granted and I'll never forget the lesson.”
Spock nodded slowly. “Hence Khan’s second chance,” he stated quietly.

A gentle smile spread over the young captain’s softened features. “After all I know now – all I’ve seen; his loyalty to those he deems worthy – The Shadow – this ship. His determination to fight for peace – for me. And how...How he loves me. I do know it’s the right thing to help him. In his heart, he’s good. Chris would do it. He and Wesley are cut from the same cloth; I’m sure about that.”

“Yeah, Pike had a weak spot for hopeless cases!” Bones deadpanned, giving Kirk a pointing look and his friend laughed shortly. Then McCoy shook his head before turning serious again. “You know that you’re in some deep water if Command ever figures out you're in a relationship with Khan?”

The look of Jim’s eyes became firm. “I don’t care! I'm not letting him fall – not for this or anything else. I've saved worlds – we have, so I'm not afraid to go up against the world for this. I'd do it for any of you, and I'll do it for him!”

The Vulcan bent forwards. “It could cost you more than your command, Jim. I could cost you your freedom – allying yourself with a fugitive.”

“And that's gotta change! He shouldn't be a fugitive. The trial was a farce!” Kirk stated. “He’s a person, a victim, and he was denied due process! Wesley thinks so too, – and it's a good thing. He's on our side; he offered his help. I’m sure he already told you about it.”

“Commodore Wesley informed us that Mr. Singh is ready to face a real trial. He will countersue Starfleet. And he will remain on board under the commodore’s protection until everything is settled. After learning about Mr. Singh’s fate in the hands of Marcus, the commodore’s decision to support him is... understandable,” Spock stated reluctantly.

Jim beamed at him. “There, you said it yourself. Nien deserves justice for himself and his family. And justice should be served against his tormentors.”

Groaning McCoy leant back. “I know that look, Jim,” he grumbled. “You’re hell-bent on getting Khan out of trouble and getting us into a no-win situation.” As Kirk simply nodded, Bones looked to the ceiling; moaning “Sweet Lord, have mercy.” He glanced back at his younger friend, who wore his famous boyish grin and rubbed his forehead. “Do you have some brandy here?”
“Something far better,” Kirk chuckled. “I’ve got Scotty’s scotch!” He pointed at the cupboard. “Grab two glasses and…”

“Three!” Spock corrected him, taking the two other men utterly by surprise.


“My mother had a special proverb for times such as this: Extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures.”

Jim smirked. “Right, three please, Bones.”

“I’m a doctor, not a bartender,” the CMO grumbled, but did as Kirk asked.

Spock watched McCoy bring the glasses and the bottle. Normally, he saw absolutely no reason to drink – to inhibit his logic and intellect. But just right now he understood, maybe for the first time, why humans took ‘a drink’ when they were troubled. Not that he would ever admit to being troubled. But he had much information to sort through, categorize and store in his mind.

And he would speak with Nyota. After she had returned from med bay this morning, she had told him gently but sternly that she had an idea concerning Khan’s sleepwalking – why he sought out Jim. She also stated that he, Spock, had to figure it out by himself or wait until Kirk explained for himself.

The Vulcan was convinced that his lover instantly realized the affair, and her respect for her captain and friendship silenced her. Spock would not confront. Uhura’s loyalty to Jim was appreciated by the first officer, but he would ask her other questions regarding attraction and human emotion.

He was confused – completely baffled was more apt. Jim had mourned for Christopher Pike – he had wept for him. He wanted to kill the man who had murdered the admiral. Now Jim and said man were… a pair. Jim had all but pledged that their destinies be yoked. And how is it that Spock had overlooked his T’hy’la’s romantic preference? Romance – so human, and wrongly discounted by the Vulcan. And so Spock was shocked that Jim had developed feelings for Khan at all. Even given the injustice done to the Augment during the last two years, Spock couldn’t grasp how Jim was able to feel anything more than compassion toward the former dictator. Perhaps Uhura could explain to him the complexity of combined feelings that formed the foundation of the ‘love’ Kirk felt for the super-human.
“Spo-ock!”

Startled, the Vulcan glanced up at the two amused faces. Obviously Kirk and McCoy had been addressing him for a while now. “I apologize, gentlemen, I was lost in thought.”

“Well, well, first he shows an emotion other than apathy and then he wants a drink. Now he's daydreaming. Should I be worried, Spock?” Bones taunted; the first officer sighed soundlessly.

“Not more or less then is your baseline for such an emotion, Doctor,” he replied and lifted his glass as the other two men did.

Just down the passageway, the main topic of the trio's conversation and his Chilean friend were having their own discussion about what the future might hold…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

There – it’s done. ‘The Talk’ – and Jim’s head is still attached to his shoulders (*snicker*). It really was super to write this chapter and the whole thing came easily to me, yet some details were hard to mention because it showed the cruelty Khan went through what led to so much chaos and blood share. It’s a good thing that he now found someone he can count on.

Of course the whole ‘love-relationship’ was a blow for Spock. There he thought he was finally able to understand humans and then came the next shock. Poor Vulcan, he really must think that all humans are crazy (*laugh*).

In the next chapter the waves will be moor calmed down for our love-birds, still there are hurdles they have to overcome. Spock will talk with Uhura about his ‘discovery’, Diego will meet Jim again, aaaand our boys will have a little go with each other.

I hope the chapter was like you wanted it to go and I’m really, REALLY curious what you think of it.

Have a nice rest of the week and a nice weekend,

Your Starflight
Hi my dear readers!

Sorry for the delay, but this damn summer-heat really slowed down everything – even the hobbies. But now my dear beta and I are done with the next chapter, and I hope you’re going to enjoy it. As promised there will be a hot scene between our boys again (so be warned), but also some serious things.

Thank you so very, very much for all the comments and kudos; I’m glad that you liked so much the last outcome, yet there is still a lot to come.

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 39 – First step to acceptance

Just minutes later, Scotty reported that the last of the equipment shipment had arrived. Spock contacted Diego in Khan’s quarters. They didn’t have to wait very long before the doorbell buzzed, and the tall Chilean stepped into the room. Grinning from ear to ear, he offered Kirk a paw-like hand; he made no secret of his delight at seeing the young captain again. He blustered cheerfully, “Hey, *amigo*! It’s good to see you up and around – well, almost. You look a bit like the ghost stories we use to keep disobedient children in line, but at least you’re alive!” He pumped Jim's hand hard, and then let go and greeted McCoy likewise.

“Ah, the great medicine man with the magical hands. Nice to meet you, *amigo!*”

Bones checked his hand for damage after de la Vega-Martinez finally freed him. He returned the greeting with a careful, “Hello.”

Diego didn't notice; he let a seabag slide from his shoulders. “I brought your stuff, Jim. Khan's got his, but I wasn’t sure who had which PADD or whose clothes were whose – nice though. Indian, I guess? I figured you two would divvy it up right.”
Jim cocked his head in surprise. “He told you his name?”

“*Si*, he did. Guess he trusts me enough to share his secret. Well, after our clever Caviw figured him out, and he found out that I knew too, he saw no reason to keep me in the dark.” He lifted the seabag to the sofa. “He’s careful, but I can’t blame him.”

Kirk, who had risen as the Chilean entered his quarters, opened the bag and looked in, smiling widely. “Thanks, Diego. I appreciate it. This all… holds memories.”

Diego roared with laughter. “I bet I know what you’re talking about, *chico*. I was surprised to find all the sheets and blankets washed, and all soap, shampoo and lubrication gone, but…” He stopped and glanced over his shoulder at the CMO as McCoy demonstratively cleared his throat. “Do they know?”

“They do now,” Jim said with a wicked gleam in his eye. Diego's eyes had widened before Jim allayed his fear. “Kidding, friend. For a bit now, yeah,” Kirk sighed. “Bo… Dr. McCoy knew after we came aboard – examination while we were out,” he answered sheepishly.

The Chilean turned towards the other officers, who didn’t look too happy, and smiled broadly at them. “They can tell that? Ah, come on, guys, don’t give your captain a hard time. He’s been through a lot – both have. The ability to find solace, comfort and love in another one’s arms, is a fortune not all of us will have the luck to experience. Mark my words.”

“We don’t have a problem with Jim finding love; we are concerned whether he has found someone trustworthy to love,” Bones grumbled and Diego’s eyes widened.

“You're afraid our superman is not being honest with Jim?” He laughed. “Guys, those two are so completely in love with each other, you don’t need any sugar in the house to sweeten things up. Just watching them is enough.” He grinned broadly. “It's cute seeing them fret over each other every time they were about run headlong into trouble.”

McCoy stared at Kirk. “You were fretting over Khan?” he asked in disbelief.

“Hey, the Aldebaran mission was dangerous. He's not indestructible – and he got hurt. Of course, I was worried about him,” Jim defended himself.
To his utter astonishment and Spock’s evident confusion, Leonard burst out laughing, clapping his hands. “FINALLY!!” he rejoiced. “Finally you get a taste of the same medicine, Spock, Uhura, Scotty, I and all the others have to swallow every time you throw yourself head first into trouble!” He rubbed his hands in glee. “Maybe now you can understand what you put us through, kid!”

Jim rolled his eyes. “There, you see what I have to put up with,” he complained to Diego, who chuckled in amusement.

“You're all crazy – and this is Starfleet’s finest, eh?” He caught Spock’s indignant gaze and corrected himself. “Well, at least one of you can still manage a bit of decorum.”

Kirk snickered, then he went rigid. “Oh, Jesus, I almost forgot.” He took his walker and hobbled to his desk, ignoring McCoy’s protest that he should sit down and spare his hip. “Give me your account data, Diego. I'll transfer the Credits to you,” he said; he switched on his terminal and sat down carefully.

“If you think I'm taking anything, amigo, then…”

“You bought Nien and me new clothes; you provided food, wine, and God knows what else, including lunch out. Of course…”

“You two are my friends, and you were my guests. I don’t take money from either on principle!” the Chilean said sternly.

Sighing, Jim turned towards him. “Diego, I would have paid for myself, but the Klingons took my wallet, and Nien doesn't even have one. As much as we are grateful to you, you shouldn't have to foot the whole bill.”

De la Vega-Martinez grinned. “Are you kidding? I've never had so much fun. I always walked the fine line between legal and illegal in my businesses. Frankly, it's exhausting. Then Galven showed up with this technical genius in his wake, and my whole world turned upside-down. I've learned so much, flew into an annexed area to drag the Federation’s newest hero’s ass out of wherever the hell he was in – with his new man, got into a bar fight – God, that's been ages, smuggled you boys into a spaceport and got the chance to save the day.” He shook his head. “Don’t you dare to pay me for that, Jim. Giving you and Khan a timeout was the least I could do. And, by the way, Galven already pointed out that I’m a hopeless romantic. When I saw how you two handle each other and how much you’re in love, I had to help that out.”
For a long moment Jim looked at Diego, ignoring the indignant gazes of his two friends when Diego talked of his 'romance'. “You’re serious about that,” he stated and the Chilean nodded firmly.

“You can bet your shirt on it, amigo. Don’t you dare to send me any money. I’ll get enough from your club, anyway.”

Kirk sighed. “Starfleet pays pretty quickly, but if it should come out that you were involved in the brawl at ‘The Stars’…”

“It already came out; I was in custody, and the kind Commodore Wesley posted my bail and so I’m free now. He made it clear that I was a part of a Starfleet-mission so they can’t prosecute me.” Smiling in triumph, Diego bounced on the balls of his feet.

“Wesley paid…” Jim cut off himself and groaned.

McCoy commented wryly, “The wings Wesley covers you with, Jim, are bigger than a Klingon battlecruiser's!”

“I know,” the young captain sighed, then he rose carefully. Extending his hand, he smiled at the Chilean. “Gracias, Diego. Thank you so much for your help and your understanding, not to mention your courage and loyalty. I’m glad to have met you, and I’m lucky that I can count you among my friends.”

Touched, de la Vega-Martinez accepted the offered hand. “You’re welcome, Jim. I told Khan and I'm telling you, too. If you ever need my help, just contact me, and I’ll come. Deal?”

Jim chuckled. “Deal!” he said. “Good luck dealing with Starfleet, and be careful who you deal with – especially if the equipment is going on me ship.” Kirk winked at him.

Spock’s brows shot up. That man… fenced? Well, what could he expect from a man who was friendly with the new militia? On the other hand, this Terran aided his T'hy'la, risked his life to protect Aldebaran and now used his resources to lend his support to Starfleet. As Kirk and McCoy would put it, Diego de la Vega-Martinez was ‘a good man’ though Starfleet's eventual victory was in the interest of all.
“Thanks,” the Chilean replied. “And be careful the next time you attempt to kick some Klingons ass. Keep your man close by.” He turned to leave but stopped one last time. “Oh, and keep quiet about the Tribbles. I think it made that Koloth see red.”

“You did what?” Bones’ nearly screeched.

“I asked him how the Tribble business was working for him,” Kirk answered innocently. “We hadn’t seen each other in a while and I figured I’d be polite. Couldn’t hurt, right?” he teased.

McCoy let his head sink and groaned. “I really should check your head!”

“A good idea, Doctor,” Spock deadpanned, showing just enough humor to make Leonard suspicious.

“A joke – from you? Again? Right, that’s two appointments I’m gonna make.”

Chuckling again, Diego waved good-bye. Spock followed him. “I will accompany you to the transporter room, Mr. de la Vega-Martinez.”

“Thanks, Commander. I’d probably lose my way otherwise,” the Chilean smiled, and then the door closed behind the two men. Kirk and McCoy were alone again.

Staying silent for several seconds, Leonard finally rose to speak. “You do know that you’re not off the hook, Jim?” As he met his friend’s asking glance, he added, “I can forgive a lot; I have. But the lies. I didn't think we did that.”

“I had to keep Nien’s identity a secret, Bones,” Kirk interrupted him softly. “Don’t you understand?”

“I'm not talking about that. You confirmed who he was when we talked over the transmission. I'm talking about yesterday when I asked you about Khan’s need to be so close to you, and you gave me some shit explanation.” He saw how the younger man’s face flushed. “Do you trust me that little, Jim?” he asked quietly.

Kirk shook his head slowly. “No, Bones! That's not it at all. If there's anyone I trust implicitly, it's
you.” He took a deep breath. “I – I was afraid of your reaction – your disappointment. I know that
you don’t go along with my lifestyle. I find fun wherever I can, you know that – and you've always
taken me as I am. But… Nien is something different. We got close, very close. It doesn't mean I don't
remember last year; I do. By all rights, he should be my enemy, and I understand that you and Spock
will still think of him that way. And because of that, I was afraid that I failed you somehow – maybe
irrevocably damaged us.”

Bones watched his friend, took in his misery, and shook his head slowly. “You’re a corn-fed idiot
sometimes, you know that?” he said with a low voice, but not without fondness. “The only thing that
hurt me was you lying to me, not the fact that you somehow got the hots for an enemy. Not even if
you share his bed. Though I really didn't see that one coming.” He closed the distance to Kirk; his
tone and gaze became intense. “Listen, Jim, and listen very closely. I know that you were under
more stress than any man should endure in a lifetime. This relationship is at best, a bomb ready to
detonate, and at worst, it’s gonna take us all out with it. So keep your finger off the goddam
detonator. But I would never judge you for who you fall in love with. I can give you my advice and
voice my concern – not like I ever held that back. But it’s not my place to condemn you because you
love someone. But if you ever – ever! – lie to me again, then you see our friendship as less a priority
than I do. And that hurts like hell to say.”

“You are my best friend,” Jim interrupted him; his voice sounded tight from the lump in his throat.
He was afraid that he was about to lose Bones. “You are more a big brother to me than Sam. I love
you like a brother. I was afraid of your disappointment – I didn't want to be the cause of it – I don't
ever,” he confessed quietly.

There! There was it again. Kirk's deepest fear. To be left alone – abandoned. Bones knew how
deeply it was rooted in his friend. It was a trauma Jim had never really overcome.

Sighing, the older man pulled Kirk in a hug. “Silly kid,” he whispered. “You could never disappoint
me that way. I always hoped that you'd find someone one day who could be your other half. Not like
Spock and the whole tila-thing…”

“T'hy'la,” Jim mumbled, and the CMO rolled his eyes.

“Whatever!” He gently clapped Kirk on the back. “As I said, I never gave up hope that you’d find
the love of your life one day – and if I understand you correctly, Khan is it.” As he felt Jim nodding,
he moaned. “I only ask – and I know I won't get an answer – why the love of your life has to be the
better, dangerous, wanton, brilliant superman wanted by half the galaxy?” As he felt the younger
man tightening his arms around him, he had to chuckle. “It’s never easy with you?”

“I can’t help it,” Kirk whispered and McCoy pulled a face.
“I know. Believe me. I know!” Then he stepped back and looked at his friend’s. He saw the aftermath of the emotional storm in those tired blue eyes, but also relief. He gently push Jim's chin with his fist and grumbled, “You take years off my life, kid!” He nodded towards the bed. “And now lie down and rest. You need it.”

To his surprise, Jim didn’t protest, but turned around and hobbled, with the help of the walker, towards his bed. The move spoke volumes. After helping Jim out of his clothes, he looked around for something comfortable to wear. Kirk pointed at the bag on the couch. “The kurta's over there and the shalwar pants must be in the seabag.”

Bones frowned. “That sounds foreign.”

“It is,” Kirk nodded. “They're loose fitting cotton pants. And ridiculously comfortable.”

Bones pulled out two odd looking trousers from within the bag, lifting them with a questioning look. “Which one?”

“It doesn’t matter; they're the same size.”

Nodding, Leonard handed Jim a shalwar and tunic. “Khan gave them to you?” he asked already knowing the answer.

“Yes. After Turkana, I – well – didn't have much to wear. Nien programmed the replicator for these, in an effort to make me as comfortable as possible.” He slipped it over his head. “I'm really starting to like them.”

‘Khan's every move since that first transmission has been for Jim, right down to the clothes on his back,’ Bones thought. ‘The enhanced bastard does care.’

After helping Kirk get comfortable in bed, he spread a blanket over him; then he hesitated. He saw restlessness in his friend’s eyes. Bones drew his lips in a tight line as he made up his mind. He would test the Augment in his own way. He saw the Augment's delight at the challenge Scott had given. If he would put that aside and make his way to Jim's room then…
‘Who am I kidding? This man sleepwalked right into Jim's bed. There's not a thing in the world that will keep him away from Captain Trouble.’

Still his decision was made. “Try to get some sleep,” he told his friend; then he turned to leave, but Jim held him back one last time.

“Bones?”

“Yeah?” The CMO looked back at his friend.

“We lost nine crewmen, right?” As McCoy nodded, the young captain continued, “Please send me the report so I can inform their families.”

“Spock already started down the list,” Leonard said gently, but Jim wouldn't have it; no matter what, he was the captain; this was his duty.

“They died because they fought aboard my ship. The least I can do to is send a personal message to their families.”

A sad smile tugged at McCoy’s mouth. Typical Jim Kirk. He always took it personally when he lost crew members – like any good captain should but less didn’t these days. “I'll give them to you tomorrow – promise.”

“Thanks,” Kirk mumbled and he closed his eyes, too tired even for feigned irritation in his weakened state.

Bones left the captain’s quarters and walked four doors down the corridor. Half a minute later he touched the door-buzzer and heard the dark voice call sharply, “Enter!”

Stepping into the quarters, McCoy saw the super-human sitting at the dining table. Two empty glasses were in front of him; he had his PADD in his hands but it was switched off. ‘So, no working on Scotty's problems. That's interesting!’ the CMO thought. He caught and held Khan's angry, piercing glare.
“Are you two done picking your captain apart?” the Augment growled.

Leonard sighed; it was becoming too commonplace. “We didn’t pick him apart; we needed answers and explanations from our friend who we are concerned about. We got’em.”

“I'm sure you did. Jim is too gracious and too good a man not to concede, but as a doctor you should know the danger emotional stress poses to one still healing from life-threatening injury!” Khan snarled; his eyes flashed dangerously even if his face remained nearly expressionless – nearly. Yet it was the super-human’s statement that caught McCoy’s attention.

“How do you know that Jim was stressed?”

“You do not have to be a genius to figure that out,” the former dictator spat; in one fluid movement he stood – once again a predator through and through.

Bones didn’t flinch. “Granted,” he said slowly. “But you sensed it, didn't you? Just like you did his nightmare.”

That woke Khan’s awareness. “What do you mean?”

McCoy rolled his eyes. “Oh, come on, Genius! We both know that with your level of brain activity, the likelihood of some empathic ability is high and your unconscious actions support that hypothesis as far as Jim is concerned. I surmise, without the benefit of being a genius, that you share an empathic bond with Jim. It explains how you sensed Jim’s nightmare and your actions following the event.” That got Khan; the CMO could plainly see it.

The Augment's features pinched as he regarded the doctor, “You are right concerning our connection. It is not unlike that which I share with my people, but it is... more. I am still not sure as to its breadth and boundaries. Jim and I… We believe its origin was…”

“That damn hickey!” McCoy mused when the super-human didn’t finish the sentence. “It’s a mark, isn’t it?” As Khan nodded very carefully, Leonard continued, “I gave him your blood and you claimed him – in every sense of the word. You can sense intense emotion. With Spock, it is more emotion spiked with adrenalin – fight or flight response, fear. The only regs Spock ever broke were for Jim's sake.” He rubbed his neck while the former dictator watched him, silent and tense. “Rrrrrright,” Bones grumbled finally. “Is he your...,” he swallowed. “Other empathic or telepathic species use the term mate – do you? Is that what Jim is to you?”
Khan cocked his head at the clipped tone. “Any objections, Doctor?”

McCoy snorted. “I could list a dozen objections why this relationship is crazy at best, but it’s not up to me is it? I can warn Jim, I can advise him, and I can be there for him, but that is all I can do for him. I will love him nevertheless – he is my friend. And I will follow him – he is my captain.” He straightened his posture and walked to the Augment. Stopping mere inches away from the engineered man, Leonard McCoy looked him directly in the eyes. “I never saw Jim fall for someone like he did you; he still is, you know. He never trusted anyone enough to let them in – not like you. As far as I can tell, you’ve entrusted experiences and secrets to on another that no one else will ever hear. I can’t and won’t stand in the way of whatever it is you got going. For Jim, this is very serious. Seems to be for you too. Now, all that being said, I will make your life hell if you hurt him. I may be just simple country doctor, and physically you’re stronger than me. No doubt. But if you hurt the man I consider the greatest of men, friend, and brother, then even your super-enhanced abilities won’t save you.”

He saw Khan’s eyes widen in surprise, and then something close to admiration appeared in those ocean-colored depths.

“Spoken like a man,” Nien said calmly; a hint of a real smile curled his lips. “And you have my regard as well as my respect, Doctor. I can assure you that I would rather lose a limb before I knowingly hurt Jim or allow him to be harmed.” He sighed quietly. “The latter, however, is easier said than done. You know his tendency toward recklessness.”

For another long moment, McCoy stared, stunned at the common ground he’d just found with the Augment; then he nodded slowly. “Yeah, it drives us all crazy. Welcome to the club.”

“I see,” Khan commented dryly. The irritation in his voice earned him a low chuckle.

Leonard observed as he was trained to do, now – trying to see him as Jim did. This man certainly held a strange beauty that men normally lacked. He was a vision of danger thrumming like electricity – emitting it from every unseen pore in that creamy skin. Combine danger with grace, strength, unabashed bravado, loyalty, and love – it was no wonder that Jim had fallen for him.

Bones stepped back – out of Khan’s personal space. There was no reason to continue in that bubble; his point made clear enough. “If you’re not too busy with Scotty, you might consider keeping Jim company.”
Baffled the Augment cocked his head. “Not complaining that I am too close to him, Doctor?” His velvet voice hinted sarcasm and McCoy shrugged.

“I know I can’t stop you, and I can be sure that Jim stays in bed. He’s tired now, but knowing how he gets ants in his pants, he’ll be up again in an hour. So you going to him'll work in both our favor. Besides, I also can tell just by looking at you that you want to go to him after we mixed it up.”

A sparkle of amusement danced in Khan’s eyes. “Believe me, Doctor, if you really had ‘mixed it up’ with Jim in the sense as I know it, we wouldn’t be standing here and speaking right now, and you'd be enjoying the decor of your sickbay.” The calm intonation took the edge out of the statement. Bending down, Khan grabbed his PADD. “Excuse me, Doctor, my mate needs me.”

With those words, he left McCoy standing there, staring wide-eyed at the door. “He doesn’t even deny that he is about to… to bond with Jim – however, that's supposed to go down!” He frowned. “What does that even mean? They gonna be married or something?” He scratched his head. “Answers! I need answers! And the only one who understands the mental shit has the emotional intelligence of an ox!” He massaged his temples and groaned, “Why me!”

ST***ST

Jim lay in the semi-dark of his quarters – tired, unable to sleep, and cold again. The latter made the second impossible despite the first. “Computer, raise temperature to 27 degrees,” he ordered; hoping to find some warmth then.

“Confirmed!” the synthetic female voice answered and warm air blew into the room.

Still it was cold – too cold.

The door slid open, and Jim sensed the familiar presence he had missed. Carefully turning over, his eyes fell on the tall, slender figure, illuminated by the corridor light. Khan crossed the threshold, and the entrance closed.

“Still alive?” Nien’s deep voice held a hint of a smile, and Jim sighed.

“Yeah, they didn’t tear my head off. Came damn close to, but still I’m among the living.” He sat up, grimacing as his hip protested. “How’d you get access to my quarters? I didn’t hear you buzz me to
let you in."

The Augment had closed the distance to the bed; he didn't need more light to clearly see his surroundings. He was curious about Jim’s quarters. What personal items would his beloved keep with him on his journeys? But the super-human’s attention remained only on the younger man. “I cracked the code,” he simply said.

“You… You cracked my door code?” Kirk asked thunderstruck. “Just like that?”

“Yes, I am proficient at bypassing security to get what I want,” Nien shrugged and the young captain didn’t know if he should laugh or be irritated.

“Tell me what you’re not good at,” he mumbled. His beloved smiled tenderly.

“Thanks for the compliment.” Then Khan rounded Kirk’s bed and sat down on the edge; he bent forwards. The hand not holding the PADD reached out to stroke through Kirk’s tousled shock of hair. “Feeling better now that everything is out in the open and your friends can begin to make sense of your choices?”

For a while, Jim simply relished in the tender gesture; then he looked curiously at his soul-mate. “How do you know about Bones?”

“Because the good doctor was in my quarters only a minute ago. He gave an impressive speech intoning that he would have my head if I dare hurt you.” He chuckled as he watched Jim’s eyes widen. “Then he welcomed me to the club.”

“Which club?” Kirk asked, completely baffled.

“To the club of those to whom you add a gray hair every time you plunge into danger.” He smiled. “You doctor friend is gruff and perhaps a bit surly. I believe it is a façade, masking a more caring and gentle nature – the one that makes him the great doctor you see. He loves you like a brother and he has earned my trust and my assurance, if ever he needs, by threatening me if I ever betrayed your trust.”

Jim could only stare at him; gaining credence through threats. Well, McCoy was nothing if not brave. He shook his head and began to laugh. “Bones! That’s… so typical.” He reached out and cupped Nien’s cheek with one hand. “And you get him. Not many people bother to look past his rough...
exterior.” His thumb circled softly over the Augment’s silken skin. “What do you mean with ‘he earned your assurance’?”

“Simple,” Nien replied, “those close to you, are my concern. If something should happen and they are in need, I will be there. Not because I have developed a sudden liking for them, but because they are your family. That is reason enough.”

Deeply touched, Jim bent towards him. “Just like when you gave Scotty the SDD?”

“Just like that,” Khan nodded; he met Jim where he was and captured the young captain’s mouth with his own. Letting the PADD fall and sliding down to lay beside his mate, he gathered Kirk in his arms never breaking the kiss, knowing that this was the only thing to soothe them both. So much happened in the past few hours – reliving and retelling of old nightmares, escapes, and escapades. It was an exhausting purge for both of them. No matter how tenderly Jim treated the subject, Khan sensed that the events drained his beloved more than he would let on.

That Jim had feared the reaction of his friends was obvious. That Jim's fear was unfounded, was apparent to his lover, now. McCoy’s words told Nien that the CMO would soon come to terms with his friend’s relationship. The revelation was important to Jim, not because he sought his friend's approval and fretted over his disappointment, though he did. But the CMO was a respected man on the ship. He would serve as an example of acceptance and loyalty toward the captain.

Breathing in the familiar, sweet and uniquely male scent of his beloved, Khan nuzzled Jim’s forehead and whispered, “By the way, thank you!”

Confused the young officer frowned. “For what?”

“For standing up for me – for defending me against your friends’ understandable anger. I know that was not easy for you, but you did admirably and perhaps successfully.” His mouth touched Jim’s for another long, sweet moment. “Thank you.”

Kirk smiled again. “I told you; I’ll move heaven and Earth to make the whole world see you as I see you. And my friends are a good start.” He buried his face in the crook of Khan’s neck, grateful for the Augment’s words and his consideration. He was stretched out toward Jim's good side making these tender moments as pleasurable as possible. “They’re going to accept you, and they’ll like you, too, once they know you better,” Jim said. One of his arms snaked around the super-human’s slender waist. “Trust me,” he murmured into his beloved’s skin, closing his eyes.
“With my life, Jim Kirk,” Nien replied softly. “With my life!” Lying there, Khan listened to the steady breaths and heartbeat of his beloved; then he felt Kirk relax in his arms. The younger man had fallen asleep. Smiling, the super-human stretched out an arm to the floor and reached for the PADD. Picking it up he switched it on, bent one knee until he could lean the little device against his thigh and began working on Scotty's challenges. He felt a contentment that perhaps he never had before. Almost domestic as he tapped and clicked and thought while holding his slumbering mate secure in his other arm.

ST***ST***ST

“Milord, Commander Koval of the BortaS and Commander Noy from the MeQ’lw have arrived!” The Klingon stepped back to let the two captains enter Kor’s quarters. Pressing their fists against their chests, they greeted him with the traditional “Kaplaah!” (victory) then they spread their legs and stood still and proud.

“Koval, Noy,” the Klingon lord nodded curtly at the pair. “As you have heard, the attempted annexing of the Aldebaran system and other inhabited planets in this sector has been arrested by our enemies. We suffered great loss, but so has Starfleet. As far as we know, over half of her vessels stationed in this sector are damaged. While the honorable councilors discuss a political solution for the gridlocked situation, new military options will be tested. And the weakened Federation Starfleet gives us plenty of opportunities to do so.”

He rose. “Gentlemen, I chose you as the first to test the enhanced cloaking device technology.” The cousins looked quickly at each other; their eyes burned with the fervor befitting the warriors they were.

“This is indeed a great honor, Milord,” Koval spoke up as the older of the two.

Kor sighed soundlessly. “Yes, it is, and it was my decision to choose you. After you lost your first officers to the deeds of a single Federation assassin, I’m certain you are eager to test our enemies’ technical limitations. Our scientists state that their enhanced cloaking device is undetectable to Starfleet’s sensors because it also cloaks the neutron emissions of the warp core. It’s your job to prove this to be true – or not.” He bent over his terminal and turned the screen, beckoning the two commanders closer.

“Here is the schematic of the new cloaking device and how it works.” He touched the screen and started the demonstration video. “The BortaS and the MeQ’lw will be equipped with it in two days’ time; then the testing will begin. You must familiarize yourselves with the technical innovation and support our fleet’s scientists in every way possible. If politics fail, we will face new battles, and be ready.”
Noy frowned; the ridges on his forehead twitched slightly. “There are rumors that the Federation offered peace talks,” he said slowly, his voice deep and rough.

“The rumors are true,” Kor nodded. “And after we lost the second battle, not to speak of some more lost little combats, our counselor chose to give politics a try.”

Koval looked over to him. “The Federation managed two larger victories, and they are offering peace talks? This makes no sense. Only the defeated beg for mercy at the table of diplomacy!”

“The Federations thinks differently,” the last member of the emperor’s family said calmly. “She sees no honor in destroying a weakened enemy, rather she finds honor in the preservation of life through diplomacy.” He looked at the confused warriors and allowed himself an audible sigh. “Other races, other ways – or however the saying goes. The Federation regards tolerance as the backbone of continued civilization.”

“Weaklings!” Noy scoffed, and Kor lifted both bushy brows.

“Sometimes tolerance demands strength. Tolerance requires one deny himself his point of view. Fighting oneself is more difficult than fighting the enemy.”

“Each warrior must master himself!” Koval growled, and Kor nodded.

“I agree! And until the High Council determines its next steps, we must make certain that we prepared for anything the counselor decides – especially should the war continue.” He pointed at the screen. “It is our duty to strengthen the Empire against its enemies. Starfleet experiments with technology designed to disturb our sensors. We will make your ships completely invisible. Lastly, as you are entrusted with the Empire's newest technology, you must protect it as such.”

Both commanders slapped their fists again over the center of their chests and stood at attention; each hoped that they would have the chance to test under aggravated conditions – battle.

*ST***ST***ST*

The door closed behind the first officer; comfortable silence and dim light of their shared quarters
enveloped him. The young Bantu woman was still in her uniform; she placed a pot of fresh Rooibos tea on the table beside two empty, waiting cups. The homely atmosphere pacified the Vulcan's inner turbulence, yet he knew he would need to meditate before he could find his way back to inner balance.

He met Uhura’s dark, warm eyes and took a deep breath, to stay calm but the urge to blurt his thoughts was too strong. “They are together,” stiffening as the words left his mouth. His usual control had slipped away. He failed to greet his partner, the woman who held his deepest respects – his ‘love’, his mother would tell him. And he spoke without thinking, like a human schoolboy. On the other hand, if he was right (and he usually was), then Nyota already knew the truth of Kirk and Khan.

The communications officer cocked her head; her hair that lay loose fell over her shoulder like a curtain of black silk. “I thought so,” she nodded.

Spock lifted a brow, went to the dining area, and sat down; Uhura took her place opposite. He looked at her, using her calm countenance as an anchor to moor himself – and his raging thoughts. “Nyota, you told me this morning that you had a certain suspicion regarding the instincts which drove Khan to comfort Jim even in sleep, yet you did not give me any details. I think you did it out of respect for the captain because you realized something I did not until this afternoon.”

Nyota groaned inwardly. Spock dove headlong into the subject matter when he was least comfortable. Knowing her lover as she did, she asked a question to his question, in order to allow him to work toward the answer on his own, “So, Kirk did tell you about him and Khan?”

Spock, still tense, slowly replied, “Yes, Jim confessed his close relationship with Khan.”

Nodding, the young Bantu-woman watched him. “I recognized it the moment I saw them lying together. They looked so peaceful lying there wrapped around each other. That kind of contentment is only found in family and lovers. And that hickey! But it wasn’t my place to tell you about it. Jim is your T’hy’la. Telling you is his place, alone.” She cocked her head. “It surprised you,” she stated slowly and Spock nodded.

“It… confuses me;” he admitted.

Nyota drew her lips into a thin line in thought as she filled the cups with steaming tea. “Of all crazy things Jim Kirk ever did, this may be the craziest one. Not only because out of the blue, he's with a guy. But leave it to Kirk to find the most dangerous man in the universe to attach himself to – the one who tried to kill him.”
“And that is what I do not understand,” Spock said quietly. “I know now that there was initial attraction…”

“Kirk was attracted to him last year?” Uhura blinked baffled. “Uh, weirdness, I name thee ‘James Kirk’.” She snorted. “Right, Khan is attractive – handsome even. And he has this dark aura of power and danger. Kirk is nothing if not addicted to danger. Yet…” She rubbed her neck. “I think it’s the perfect mix of difference and similarities that put them together.”

“I do understand the nature of human attraction,” the Vulcan murmured. “What I don’t understand is how Jim was able to forgive Khan, Pike’s death.”

Uhura’s eyes widened. “He told you so?”

“In his own pedestrian way, as well as an explanation of what Khan has been through at the hands of Section 31 and the LSH labs. Jim’s compassion is… understandable. He is a man of deep feelings. But how compassion evolved into love for his former enemy, is beyond my comprehension.”

“Love?” Uhura pressed, then she nodded slowly. “Yes, that makes sense! You told me that Khan sleepwalked when Jim had a nightmare. And you asked me about my reaction as you came to bed when I didn’t wake. Our actions are based on the same principle. We both reacted to our loved ones’ presence – our affection and love for them.” She put some honey in her tea. “Did Jim tell you that he loves Khan?”

“Yes, he confessed to McCoy and me – and he said that Khan returned the sentiment.”

“I believe him – I believe them both,” the young Bantu woman said thoughtfully. “Khan not only risked his life when he rescued Kirk from the Klingons; he was ready to give up his life for him – I think then, and in that space station.”

Lifting a brow again, the Vulcan looked at her. “What do you mean with ‘he was ready to give up his life’ for Jim?”

A sigh escaped Nyota. “It would have been easy for Khan to escape – to run to one of the rescue vessels and to leave the station and Jim to find his family. But he stayed – even when the Klingon bird-of-prey opened fire at the station. It meant certain death; both of them knew it, and Khan stayed at his side anyway – held him when the hull cracked, accepted death so long as it was with Jim. And
this from a man created to survive at all costs. What he feels for Kirk is stronger than his genetics.” She smiled. “This is love in its purest form.” She grimaced. “Although I’m confident there's a good deal of passion involved.”

Spock moved uncomfortably in his seat. “And you think this is enough for Jim to forgive Khan…”

“Put it together, love,” Uhura interrupted him softly. “The hidden attraction and the passion was enough to turn them from enemies into lovers, but love... You said that Khan was abused by Marcus and Section 31. Kirk is driven by his sense of adventure and guided by his sense of justice. We know that – and he has you partly to thank for it. This got them talking. He learned more about him…”

“Jim holds the view that Khan was driven past his emotional breaking point once too often,” Spock cut in and Uhura’s eyes widened.

“One time too often? Isn't once enough?” She bit her lips as she saw the Vulcan nodding. “That's more than a human can bear – even an enhanced one,” she whispered.

Taking a deep breath, the first officer made a decision. “What I tell you now, my dear, has to remain a secret between us, McCoy, and of course Jim and Khan. After learning the facts of Khan's confinement by Starfleet, it appears that Section 31 and therefore Command is guilty of slavery, unlawful detention, blackmailing, abuse, torture, murder and possibly more.”

Uhura felt a knot form in her stomach. “Nothing you say will leave this room, love,” she said slowly like an oath. “Go on.”

ST***ST

Jim drifted through dreamland from afternoon to early evening. And Khan never left him. He thought and figured and worked on the challenges presented by Scotty and the SDD. At one time, he felt a soft vibration. The Enterprise had activated her warp-drive. They were leaving Aldebaran, and Nien felt a tinge of regret. Aldebaran was the first place he had felt at home since leaving New Delhi and Earth. Perhaps that feeling was due to his relationship with Jim that finally bloomed on the shores of the Silver Bayou. No – that's not it – not all of it. The planet had reminded him at Earth – an Earth before the wars. An inner voice whispered that he could find a new home there.

But it was nothing more than a dream. He had no home anymore. He never did. New Delhi and the summer palace were never his real home – never truly his choice.
‘Home is where your heart beats’, wasn't that the old saying? His heart beat with – no! Now for his mate beside him. Where Jim was, he wanted to be too. And even if Kirk’s determination to get him off the hook didn’t work...

Khan caught himself – he needed to cling to hope, as irrational as it was. Life and centuries-long experience had shown him that there was no real justice, and faith destroyed was worse than none at all. There was a part of him that wanted so badly – savored the idea of a happy ending. Naïve? Maybe! Foolish? Certainly! Yet it felt too good to push it away. The first hurdle was cleared – he had the protection of a high-ranking officer who knew the true meaning of honor, and Kirk’s friends would come to accept him. McCoy and Scott were a beginning – not an end, Nien was sure of it. Maybe there was the chance that other hurdles could be cleared, too.

Pondering the chances he had been given and those still to come, Khan lost track of time – that was until the door swished open; this time by a priority override, revealing McCoy.

The CMO stood at the threshold for a moment; Khan whispered quietly “Light on 25 percent.” The light was enough that the doctor could see two men on the bed.

“Jim still asleep?” he whispered, and the Augment nodded.

“Sound as an infant,” he replied, and even if his expression remained neutral, Leonard could see the warmth in the super-human’s eyes.

“Very good. Sleep’s the best thing now.” He offered Khan a hypo-spray. “I know he hates them. Can I ask you to give these to him when he wakes up? It’s a muscle relaxant, and’ll strengthen the weakened ligaments.”

The engineered man nodded slowly and took the hypo-spray – a little bit surprised that the CMO trusted him enough to let him treat Jim again. His face must have given him away because McCoy murmured, “It’s all right. If I trusted you to do it after Turkana, no reason I shouldn’t trust you now.”

The hint of a smile curved the Augment’s bowed lips. “Yes, that was quite the primer you gave me – including permission to do anything I thought useful to keep Jim in bed.”

Bones’ eyes widened, then he grimaced. “Yeah, well, I didn't know your methods, then did I? Otherwise, I probably would have said something very different.” He saw the beginning smile on
Khan’s face widen, and he snorted in amusement. “At least Jim wasn’t in any condition to do much more than snuggling.”

“Oh, believe me, Doctor, Jim Kirk will push through pain if the reward merits it.”

Leonard sighed; he knew what he meant. “Then I’m glad that you’ve got brains enough to stop before Jim injured himself any more than he already had.”

Cocking his head, the super-human chuckled. “I have to admit that didn’t help after a while. Jim is … persuasive.”

“I’m well aware – he always was, and he obviously hasn’t lost his touch, seeing that he even got Wesley on his – your side.” He activated his bio-scanner and checked Kirk quickly. “Right, a few more days rest and he’ll be as good as new.” He gave the Augment a pointing look. “That means that you both have to behave!”

Knowing that it made McCoy uncomfortable, Khan smiled lazily at him. “There are other methods to satisfy our needs without threatening Jim’s recovery.”

Leonard immediately blushed. “Not a lick of modesty, do you?”

“Modesty is for the meek, Doctor. Those too cowardly to stay – to keep hold of what they most want in the world. Of course, even I can maintain a decent sense of propriety. Jim is the captain of this ship; I will not cause him embarrassment.” He lifted his chin slightly. “Not that much,” he added with a suggestive undertone in his deep voice.

“Should I be concerned?” Bones asked, deactivating the bio-scanner.

“Rather the contrary, Doctor. It should be a relief to know that even I can play by the rules.”

Rolling his eyes, Bones turned to leave. “Now why does that worry me even more?”

“Because you’re a wise man,” Khan replied wryly, making Leonard’s alert bells ring. “Good night, Doctor,” the former dictator said politely; and only as McCoy stepped back into the corridor did he
realize that the Augment had dismissed him like a servant.

“I’ll get you for that, you arrogant bastard! And if you think you can play your games with me, you got the wrong guy.” He stopped as he met the confused gaze of a passer-by. “Great!” Bones moaned. “Now the gossip factory’ll spread word about the crazy CMO talking to himself!”

“Who are you talking to, Doctor?” Sulu, sweaty and clad in his gym clothes, came down the hallway, heading toward the turbolift.

“Myself, since no one else listens to me,” McCoy growled. The helmsman looked baffled before replying, “Well, if you need someone to talk to, we can go to the recreation deck, have a coffee and – well, whatever's bothering you, I'm all ears.”

Leonard had to smile. Typical Hikaru – brilliant helmsman, fighter, and officer, yet compassionate and caring to those he regarded as close comrades and friends. For a moment Bone hesitated, then he nodded. “Why not?” He clapped the shorter man on the back. “Lead the way.”

Mirroring the smile, Hikaru continued his way but turned left at the next corner; heading for the recreation deck. McCoy followed him, ready for another Saurian Brandy – the last he promised himself.

ST***ST

Jim slept until late evening and when he woke, he looked far better than he had in days. There were no nightmares; his defender stood sentry over his sleep. Until he was a hypospray wielding nightmare. Of course, the super-human didn’t accept any excuse from Kirk, “I’m feeling better”, “there is really no need for that, I’m not in pain” or “your super-blood is better than this stuff”. Even Jim’s time-tested puppy eyes found no purchase. Nien insisted on injecting him finally. Pouting and grumbling, Kirk acquiesced.

“Really, Captain, so much complaining about a little sting!” the former dictator taunted; amusement shone in his eyes as he sat on the edge of the bed to shove the shalwar from his beloved’s hips.

“I hate hypo-sprays!” Jim huffed. “Have I ever told you how Bones smuggled me aboard the Enterprise when I was still a cadet? He infected me with some little disease and told the Officer Of the Deck that patients with certain illnesses have to be treated by their own doctor, meaning I had to accompany him. This ‘little harmless disease’ is one of the rare things I’m allergic to and what did
Bones do? He gave me a hypo and then another, and another, until I was slurring like a drunk and my hands had swelled up to twice their normal size – ouch!

Nien looked up from his task and put the empty hypo-spray aside. “There, all done – and you are still alive.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Stop mocking me. I have all reason in the world to hate hypos until the end of my days!”

“Oh, poor boy,” the Augment teased, gently massaging the area. “Challenging Klingons, racing through a burning space station to catch a villain, and hurtling himself headlong into every fight possible, but panicking because of a little needle! That does not fit the image of the Federation’s newest hero.”

Kirk stuck his tongue out at Khan, grinning as the super-human simply lifted both brows in a manner that was anything but serious. Nien continued to gently massage the tense muscles, and Jim got another, far better idea of what Nien could be doing right there. “It hurts more to the left,” he said quietly; heat and want rushed south as those pale, clever fingers kneaded Jim's hip and thigh.

The Augment didn't miss his proximity to Jim's sex, and a fire lit in his eyes as he looked at the younger man. “Let me guess; it aches!” he said; his voice turned into a dark, velvet purr.

Jim's mouth dried; that tone went straight through him, right down to his loins and stoked the fire. “Yes,” he croaked. “Maybe… you know how to relieve it?”

A quiet chuckle escaped Khan. “Of course, Pyāra, but it would not do your hip any good. We both know how passionate you are – untamed even.”

Moistening his lips, Kirk suggested, “And if I keep still?”

A short burst of laughter escaped the super-human. “Jim, you only keep still when you've lost consciousness – and you likely would after I have finished with you.” He gave him a pointed look, and his desired flared despite his better judgment.

And Jim saw it in his eyes – sensed it right down to his bones.
Reaching out, he stroked through his lover’s midnight-dark hair, before his fingertips ghosted over Nien’s lips. He watched his mate shudder in pleasure; then he bent forwards and caught the other man’s mouth with his own. Playfully, yet determined, his tongue danced over Khan’s soft bottom lip before it attacked and plundered the damp cavern. Jim groaned as he relished in the unique exotic taste that was so familiar to him now, yet he couldn’t get enough of it.

Nien closed his eyes. Only two days ago he had felt the life leaving his mate – thought to die with him; dooming his family along with himself. Now he and Jim were saved and sheltered on the Enterprise in the captain’s quarters, protected by a commodore’s honor, bruised but alive and healing. And very, very hungry for each other! Jim’s breath danced over his face; the surprisingly strong arms held him close, their hearts beat in unison like so often – even as their pulse increased.

Wrapping his free arm around the younger man, he replied to the kiss in the only way possible: by returning it with all the fire Jim was able to wake him with a few touches. It was unbelievable – laughable even – that he, who ruled almost a quarter of Earth and whose mind and body were superior to all others, would fall that hard for an inferior simple country-boy, whose cockiness was only beaten by his bravery. But here he was – loving said ‘country-boy’ with every fiber of his being, caught by his mate’s inner and outer beauty that shone in so many facets it almost blinded him.

Who was he to deny this special man and himself the pleasure they both needed to overcome the horrors they had been through? Yes, McCoy was right to order Kirk rest and to spare his hip any undue effort until the muscles, tendons, and ligament were completely healed, yet Khan knew a way to make it work.

Gently, he pushed Jim down and followed him – careful not to rest his weight on Kirk’s right side. Deepening the kiss, his hand that had massaged the captain’s hip, wandered to the younger man’s pointed bulk.

Kirk moaned as Khan’s fingers closed around his hard shaft, pulsing with anticipation. Instinctively he lifted his hips, and the Augment broke the kiss and pushed himself up, supporting himself on his free arm.

“Listen, James!” he said hoarsely; his eyes bright with lust and determination. “You lay still – no wild movements, no physical urging! Otherwise, I will stop.”

Jim gulped; the need to be undone by his beloved was stronger than his pride. “Promise,” he breathed. “Please, Nien, I…” The sentence went down in another groan as those talented fingers began to stroke. Closing his eyes, the young captain concentrated on the pleasure that sent waves of
bliss through his body and soul; his mind tried to focus on the task of keeping still. He gasped as his mouth was attacked with more searing kisses, robbing him of breath. Clinging to the man above him, he kissed him back; their tongues fought their own erotic battle.

Far too quickly, heat rose; it seeped from the clever hand around his shaft to his loins, spread through his veins, licked beneath the skin and pooled in his gut. He was close. And still completely dressed – like a teenager. Touched and desperate for more where it counted, he kissed like it all could end in the next moment. Jim felt the beginning tension of orgasm. He tried to tear his mouth away from these scorching lips to warn his lover, but Khan would not have it. He wanted what his mate would give, and pumped him harder, quicker.

Jim’s breath came in short gasps; the fiery snake of passion curled in his loins ready to strike, and then the lust exploded in him. His body moved of its own accord as he pushed himself into the warm fist that shattered his world into a thousand blissful pieces.

Still Nien didn’t stop; he milked him through the last drop, smiling into the kiss that swallowed the younger man’s shouts of pleasure. Only when his beloved calmed down and finally relaxed did the Augment lift his head and looked down at the masculine face now boyish and shining. His blue eyes were glassy slits, Jim’s cheeks, now red, made the capillary damage almost nonexistent, and his swollen lips seemed to beg for him.

“Did I not instruct you to stop moving?” Khan murmured; his hand, sticky with the proof of Kirk’s carnal peak, quickly examined his beloved’s right hip. No damage done – good!

“Couldn’t help it,” Jim was finally able to talk, but he was still floating and seeing stars. Forcing his eyes fully open, he looked up at the man who held his heart; then he lifted a hand and cupped a pale cheek. “Thank you,” he whispered. The soft smile that Khan gave him sent a wave of tenderness through him. He looked at the Augments milky striped and now ruined shirt. “Oops,” Kirk murmured; his gaze raked down his lover’s body. “I think, you need a little help down there,” he said slowly before he glanced back in Nien’s eyes. “May I?”

Until now Khan had been able to control – almost ignoring his own need. Feeling his mate soar to the heights of a full blown climax, hearing his moans swallowed into kisses, and feeling his hands claw him – cling to him in desperate need had given him pleasure – had been enough to restrain his own urges, but not enough to douse his desire. Quite the opposite. The black Starfleet-trousers were uncomfortably tight, his loins throbbed, and he could feel himself grow hot with desire.

Still he found the strength to tease his lover. “You are right – the shirt is done for, as are these trousers. Perhaps you can help me undress so that I might slip into something new?”
Jim grinned. “The only thing you can ‘slip in’ is into me, sweetheart!” He gripped the shirt and began to lift it. “And yes, those clothes have got to go.”

“As do yours,” Khan murmured, allowing Kirk to remove the shirt from him. “Yet I fear that I must reject your offer, seeing that your hip is still…” He gasped as Jim gripped him gently through the material of his trousers and began to massage him. Closing his eyes, he could do nothing but enjoy the sensations that wracked his body.

“You were saying, baby?” the young captain whispered and squeezed softly his mate’s rock-hard cock; then he bent forwards and closed his lips around one of Nien’s nipples.

Khan gritted his teeth, fighting for control. “Do you have to be so… unreasonable every time you want something that is counter to good judgment?”

Jim’s quiet chuckle was felt rather than heard, and it made the Augment tremble in excitement.

Swirling his tongue one last time around the hard little knob of flesh, Kirk lifted his head again. “You still don’t know the answer to that?” A hint of laughter echoed in his voice. As Nien opened his eyes again he, caught the glance full of mischief, longing and love. With still flushed cheeks, swollen lips and tousled hair, smelling heavily of musk and them together, bathed in the dimmed light, James Kirk was pure seduction. Skillfully, the younger man gently twisted the already reddened nipple between his fingers; he smiled as Khan took another sharp intake of breath. “After Aldebaran, I can't believe you'd ask that. You really should…,” he kissed Nien’s collarbone, “… give me…,” he softly bit in the other nipple, “… a try!” His talented hand worked its way under the trouser material and covered Khan's pulsing, silken cock.

That was all it took. Khan’s resolve crumbled like a wall bombarded to rubble.

“You!” the Augment growled before he pushed down all his good intention and brilliance to make room for whatever Jim had for him. In less than a minute, the men were sans clothes. They lay forgotten, sweat-soaked and stained, on the floor.

Jim mewled in delight when he finally felt his beloved from head to toe without anything between them. His own lust had grown so that he could care less if his damn leg fell off at this point. But Khan could see through him and took care for his comfort. He had pushed a cushion beneath the younger man’s head before he straddled Jim’s shoulders; his shaft glistened with pre-cum when he offered it to Kirk.
“An appetizer,” Jim whispered, and looked beneath lowered lashes up to the man above him whose gaze seemed to burn him. “May I taste it?”

“Stop talking and put your mouth to better use,” Khan hissed; his whole body tensed with need that had switched off his normally superior intelligence.

Kirk chuckled and gave the long, thick shaft a slow lick. He heard Nien moan and repeated it. “I could get used to this,” he chuffed, ignoring his own clenching inguen – the seat of his desire which sprang back to life at the view. “Maybe…”

“Kirk! Dammit! Do not make me plead for you!” Khan almost snarled; his chest heaved. Sweat broke out on his forehead with the anticipation of it all. Alas, he had always loathed men driven by their dicks rather than their brains, and yet he had fallen prey to the same. He would beg if it meant the pleasure his mind and body craved.

Gripping his beloved’s hips, Kirk closed his lips around the spit-slick glans, stroked it with his tongue and let it pop out again. “Fuck, that's delicious,” he said; then he caught the half fierce, half desperate expression on the face above him, and took as much of his lover in his mouth as he could. The loud moan that was torn from the super-human’s throat was repayment enough, and Jim was grateful that the walls were soundproof. He refocused on the task in front – in him and licked and sucked, alternating quick and slow, slow and quick.

Nien was in paradise. The hot, wet cavern of Jim's mouth around his shaft, the eager tongue on the most sensitive part of his body, the warm breath on his skin that rustled the dark curls – it made him almost dizzy with lust. Throwing his head back and pressing his lids shut, he concentrated on the intense pleasure he was receiving. Hands stroked his buttocks, along his spine, and back again. Khan felt free as a bird, yet caught in this shining web of love he never wanted to untangle from. His hands reached down to hold Jim’s head; his fingers spread through the damp, golden locks. And then he looked down.

His cock vanished and reappeared over and over again through the circle of the young captain’s lips. Sky blue pools gazed up at him, full of adoration; it was his undoing. Normally, he could go on for a small eternity before he allowed himself the release of orgasm, but not this time. The events of the past days had driven his soul to the edge of what it could bear. Only his beloved, now, could pull him from the brink – and he would. In the most intimate way possible, his mate would pull him back from the edge and set him free.

His loins tightened; somehow he managed to gasp a warning, but the words that left his lips were in Hindi – proof that his brain function was reduced to only feeling. And then it was too late to repeat the warning in English; his self-control failed him.
With a roar that would have driven away lions, Nien came – long and hard, unable to hold anything back. His knees buckled, his frame trembled and only his will, and Jim’s strong hands, prevented his crumbling into a heap. He braced himself with both hands on the headboard and then let himself sink to Jim's side. Laying sprawled on the mattress, he fought to catch his breath and to calm his trembling limbs.

Only as the soft tremors left him, he was he able to open his eyes and to look at Jim. There wasn’t much to see of his spending and his mate licked his lips, smiling at him. When his brain came back online, he realized that Kirk must have swallowed; the evidence was missing and Jim looked like the cat that got the cream (and he did).

“Best appetizer ever,” Jim purred; loving the taste in his mouth that held so much of his Nien.

“You never cease to amaze me, James,” Khan whispered and he sighed in contentment as Kirk’s hands reached out to gently stroke over his side and down his hip. Then his gaze found ‘little Jim’ – angry, red and begging for attention again. “I think I have to help you out again, Pyāra,” he murmured and shifted around so he could kiss and mouth at the soft skin of Jim's balls before working back up to envelope the hard shaft. Jim’s moan was loud enough that security would've come running if they could only hear their captain now.

Khan smiled, pleasuring his mate in return for what he had been gifted with only minutes ago. Yes, he definitely liked this part of their love-making – the give and take combined with power over each other – the trust it inferred. Jim wriggled and arched beneath him, and Nien quickly put both hands around his beloved’s hips and stilled him, while showing Kirk exactly how much he loved to drive him mad with desire.

Though he'd already climaxed, it didn’t take long before Jim came a second time, feeding his mate with himself until he was utterly spent. Floating beneath the warm waves of bliss, he lay there not caring that his right hip already began to protest the evening's affair.

“I have to agree – best appetizer ever; perhaps it will be enough to tide you over until the main course,” Nien’s velvet voice breathed in his ear before wet lips closed over his and gave him a taste of himself. Lazily, wrapping both arms around the love of his life, Jim returned the kiss so full of devotion – vowing to himself that he would claim his mate eternally as soon as he was well.

TBC…
Yeah, this scene was just an appetizer, yet it will last two chapters more until Jim will claim his Nien completely – and I just know you’re going to love the whole thing. But first Jim and Khan has to face a little bit more trouble, but also funny things. In the next chapter Khan will keep his promise to Scotty and is going to help in the Engineering, Scott notes for the first time that there is something strange between the Augment and Kirk going on – and then there is also the matter that a certain former admiral’s daughter is aboard. And you will read more of the eventually upcoming peace-talks with the Klingons.

I hope you liked the last chapter and – like always – I’m dying with curiosity what you think of it.

Have a nice rest of the week,

Yours Starflight
"Admiral?" Barnett looked up at the voice sounding from intercom.

“Yes, Yeoman?” he answered.

“Sir, I’ve got the president on the line for you.”

“Thank you. Please put him through,” Richard answered and he looked at his screen. For a moment, the image of the president flickered; then the picture steadied. It showed the pale, tired face of Harhan Robertson.

“Good morning, Richard.” He greeted the admiral who returned the pleasantries before the president continued. “We received a message from the Klingon High Council two hours ago. Counselor M’Rek informed us via visual transmission that diplomacy may be considered. It seems the last defeat has opened his eyes to the fact that he can’t win against the Federation. They need another way to solve their problems and long-standing grudges.”

Barnett didn’t know if he should feel relieved or worried. “M’Rek already gave in? Only three days after the offensive against the Aldebaran system?” He cocked his head. “Usually, Klingons are not
that quick with their decisions, especially when it comes to battle and pride.”

“You are right, Richard. I rather think this is a kind of character assessment to determine how far we will bend and what they can expect from further negotiation. They still have some tricks up their sleeve, but two battles lost in such a small timeframe made them aware that this is a war they can’t win. Not with violence.”

“So they have to try something else without losing face,” Barnet mused and Robertson nodded.

“Yes, we have to be very careful.” He took a deep breath. “This is our first chance at peace. Starfleet’s lost enough good women and men to the damn war, not to mention the thousands of civilians along the former Neutral Zone who live in a permanent state of fear or whose planets are already annexed, like Sherman’s Planet. We are going to need all the diplomatic skill and experience we have at our disposal.”

Richard pursed his lips; new hope woke in him that the war could be over sooner than thought. “So you’ll send the full delegation to this meeting?”

Again the president made an affirming gesture. “Yes, as soon as the Klingons agree to our condition that every combat operation be stopped immediately until the conference is over. The Council is shaping a statement at the moment to that effect.” He took a deep breath. “When we get a positive answer, we can send the delegation. Mrs. Whitman and the ambassadors are on standby. One word and they are on their way. It’s up to you now. You and your staff will take them to the rendezvous point to pick up Lady Morganth of Betazed first and then accompany them to the conference.”

“I talked to Captain Helrom yesterday. The *Excalibur* is ready to leave tomorrow, Mr. President,” Richard stated and Robertson smiled curtly.

“Excellent. We need more communication with the Klingon council before we start, though. I think departure in six days at 1200 standard time will be the plan. Mrs. Whitman will contact Lady Morganth so that she can come to the rendezvous point in four days. From there the journey will continue directly to the conference.”

“And where is this conference set?” Barnett asked. “There is no real Neutral Zone anymore and…”

“This is the part you are not going to like, Richard. It’s ‘neutral’ in its own; it doesn’t belong to the Federation or the Klingon Empire.”
The Chief of Command frowned again. “I can’t imagine that the Romulans will welcome us, the same goes for the Tholians, and the Cardassians. So, the only one area left that fits your description is the Borderland.” As Robertson lifted both brows, Barnett allowed himself a groan. “Mr. President, we would be in an area that is controlled by the Klingons, more or less, whose allies are slavers and pirates. I don’t think this is a wise idea.”

“M’Rek suggested that the conference should take place on Celendi I, a small planet with a breathable atmosphere at the edge of the Celendi nebula. The Klingons are going to install a transport station, but the planet doesn’t belong to their empire, and the Orions have no interest in the area. It’s in the triangle of the Federation, the Klingon Empire, and Borderland…”

“And near the Romulan Empire, which…” Barnett’s eyes widened. “Now I understand. M’Rek wants to demonstrate Klingon strength to the Romulans. They have business dealings with each other, but the relationship is tense. Maybe M’Rek fears that the Romulans are going to exploit a weakened Klingon Empire and try to gain more territory. A demonstration of good-will between Federation and Klingons – maybe agreeing to a peace contract – will keep the Romulans at bay. And M’Rek can retreat quickly should the conference not end to his liking.”

Robertson nodded. “Yes, that’s what I think, too. SBI report increased activity near the Romulan Neutral Zone, and history taught us that our ‘dear neighbors’ are always good for a surprise. Klingon intelligence must see the activity as we do, and M’Rek wants to preempt any Romulan aggression by presenting an alliance between his people and the Federation. This should be a good starting point for the peace talks and serve as a way to urge the Klingons to end the war without hurting their pride.” He bent forwards so that his face almost seemed to touch the inside of Barnett’s terminal. “This is a unique chance, Richard. I’m almost disappointed that I can’t join the delegation because their journey will be historic. Can you guarantee that the Excalibur will be ready to leave within two days after I got M’Rek’s agreement to our conditions? I don’t want to give the Klingon counselor the time of our arrival, just that we are late.”

“The Excalibur will be ready when you need her, Mr. President,” Barnett assured him. “I’ll contact Captain Helrom immediately, sir. Boarding will be in six days at 0800 unless the Klingons change their mind about the talks.”

“Very good; I will inform Mr. Whitman and the ambassadors. Thank you, Richard.” He was about to cut the link, but Barnett stopped him at the very last moment.

“Sir, what if this is a trap to get a hold of the most important diplomats and admirals of the Federation?”
Robertson hesitated. “Taking hostages isn’t the Klingon style, – and weakening the enemy by luring its leaders into a trap is dishonorable. We don’t understand much of their culture, but we do understand their concept of honor.” He sighed. “We have to give it a try or the bloodshed and the killing on both sides will go on indefinitely. We owe it the people of the Federation of Planets and our allies to do all we can to end the war. Still, I am not blind to the risk of sending our deputy president, high-ranking diplomats and staff-officers to such a conference. But we all were aware that we will face death eventually. Our vocation is a risky one. This goes for you just as it does Sarek of Vulcan, Galven of Tellar or Mrs. Whitman – or Lady Morganth whose planet even isn’t a member of the Federation.”

“I know, sir. I am concerned for the safety of the delegation members, not just for them but what their loss would mean to the Federation and her relationships. Their loss would weaken the Federation's position at any bargaining table.” He breathed in deeply. “At the same time, I’m aware that this maybe the only chance to end the war before more harm is done – especially if the Romulans become a player. You know what the say, ‘when two quarrel, a third rejoices’. Their involvement is the last thing we should allow, especially at the risk of giving them the wrong idea of a weakened Federation or Klingon Empire.”


“Mr. President!”

The link was cut, and the Chief of Command looked at the blank screen for several long seconds; then he leaned back in his chair and sighed. The day was young, but it felt like he'd been here for hours.

Several levels down, in the main office of the SBI, José Luengo leaned back in his own chair and crossed his arms satisfied with the results of the 'rerouting' of Barnett's desk-intercom. One of his men inside had made the adjustment during a routine inventory of office electronics. Learning what Barnett and the president had talked about was very important for the plan he would soon set into motion.

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Jim stretched and yawned heartily, feeling refreshed and rested. His right hip ached some, but not enough to irritate him. Looking up at the dark ceiling illuminated only by the light of the alarm clock beside his bed, he enjoyed the familiar soft noises of his ship in warp; he was home again. Then he heard the steady breath beside him and smiled. He turned his head and his gaze fell on the man who lay on his front, snuggled into the pillows. The blanket had slipped to his waist revealing a strong, pale back – like a marble statue of a Greek god in one of the museums back on Earth.
Kirk couldn’t resist; he supported himself on one elbow and bent over the sleeping Augment, pressing a soft, wet kiss to the middle of his back. The gesture was answered in a sigh that morphed into a low purr before ebbing away as the enhanced man slipped back to sleep. Khan’s senses were usually on alert, but right now they were resting – here, in Jim’s presence where he felt safe. It seemed that his healing abilities demanded some payment from him as well.

Jim’s eyes shone with love. The short but intense pleasure they shared last night had been good for both of them. After all the danger, the tension, and the stress, intimacy – cherishing each other – had been a salve. Kirk tried to simply lie back and sleep a little bit longer; after all he wasn’t released from McCoy as fit for duty, but Jim knew that he had a lot to do this morning.

While Bones, Spock, and he had sat in the dining area yesterday afternoon drinking whisky together, Kirk had asked his Vulcan friend to make a list of those crew members who might hold a personal grudge against Khan. The first officer had promised to get the list onto his desk in the morning. Jim would have to check every file, prepare himself for when he talked with women and men of his crew.

Women – Carol Marcus! Only now did Kirk realize the one particular crew member who had a very good reason to hold a grudge – to hate Khan. Carol had been forced to watch the Augment kill the admiral. And even if Alexander Marcus had become a cold-blooded monster who sacrificed anyone standing between him and his mad goals, he had still been Carol’s father. Jim knew that he would have to talk to her first before he could face any others.

This was not his only duty today. There was the sad matter of writing condolences to the families of those who hadn’t survived the Battle of Aldebaran. Jim loathed this duty but took it very seriously. Even if he hadn’t been aboard during the battle, he felt responsible for the losses and would try to learn more of the personalities of the fallen crew members to send their dear ones the right words of sympathy and honor.

And then there was still the problem in Engineering. Nien had accepted Scotty’s invitation to work together even though the Augment would do better to keep his head down in his quarters. Kirk would accompany him and make certain that everything went smoothly. Nien's backing from the captain would go a long way. Most of the crew would likely behave, but it was inevitable that Khan would meet someone with a long enough memory and a penchant for revenge. Jim was aware that only his sense combined with his authority could prevent a small catastrophe. He wanted to help both sides and would have to find the right words to make this situation work. Understanding was always the first step to soothing anger and resentment. He was hell-bent on championing his beloved that the crew might see the Augment in another – in the right light!

Sighing, the young captain made certain that Nien was covered, and he left the bed. “Lights, fifteen
percent," he ordered quietly and was glad that his whisper didn’t wake Khan. The super-human would have denied it vehemently, but Jim knew that Nien needed rest. Walking as silently as possible, the young officer snuck to the bathroom for a shower. When he returned shaved, clean, with hair still damp, Khan slowly raised himself with the grace of a cat, nude and as beautiful as Adam on his first day.

“Good morning, Pyāra,” he said; he smiled and stretched himself. His muscles danced beneath his alabaster skin.

Jim felt an all too familiar stirring in his gut. Khan’s dark hair was in disarray, and some strands fell on his high forehead, shadowing his sea-colored eyes. “Is the shower free?” the Augment asked. Kirk gulped and nodded. Khan strolled to the bathroom, giving Jim’s butt a sharp slap as he passed.

“Hey!” the captain protested and caught another smirk from his beloved who saw straight through him.

“Stop your dirty thoughts, James, or you will never make it to the bridge!” With those words, he vanished into the bathroom, and Kirk sighed.

“Bridge! That would be great if Bones allowed it!”

Half an hour later, showered, shaved and clad in matching Starfleet black, both men sat at the table and had a quick breakfast. The clothes and ruined sheets were on their way to the cleaning service several decks below. Afterwards, Kirk checked his terminal. Spock had already sent the required list of the crew members Jim would have to talk to before the former dictator could walk through the Enterprise safely. The list wasn’t as long as the young officer had feared. Only thirty-six women and men had been aboard last year during the ‘Marcus-crisis’, as the captain called it; seven more had lost friends or family members during the debacle.

Sending the intended short message that he expected those personnel at 1100 ship’s time in briefing room 2 on deck 3, Kirk turned around; Khan sat at the dining table working on his PADD. A deep frown marred his forehead, and he murmured something in Hindi, clearly irritated.

“What’s wrong?” Jim wanted to know. He had to wait a short time before the super-human sighed and finally looked up.

“It is not working as I theorized it would. The Enterprise’s technology differs from the Vengeance,
and even if Marcus gave me near complete access to the construction plans of several starship classes I didn’t busy myself too much with its details.” He glanced back at the PADD. “But I think we can configure the warp drive to its full potential and deliver more energy to the deflectors, the auxiliary power, and the SDD.” He pressed his lips tight in thought; his eyes hung on the data the little display showed him. “I should speak with Mr. Scott about this. Maybe after the main repairs in 6-S are done we can try this out.” He tapped the screen.

Kirk smiled. Khan and Scott were becoming a team; it filled Jim with pure joy. First, Scotty released his bitterness toward the Augment and filled the space with acknowledgment of their shared love for technology. Then Bones gave the former dictator a speech about trust, only to find he trusted Khan with Jim's heart. And then...

As if on clue the door buzzer sounded; a moment later said CMO stepped in. “Morning, you two!” he greeted without his usual grumbling. He glanced at Kirk at the desk and then at Khan in the dining area where still two dishes remained and frowned. “Don’t tell me you were here the whole night!”

“You asked me to keep an eye on Jim before the ‘ants in his pants’ got the better of him. I didn’t want to disappoint you or fail in your task – not when you are just coming to trust me, Doctor,” the super-human returned lazily.

Jim glared at Leonard. “I have what in my pants? Are you nuts?”

McCoy rolled his eyes at the Augment, gave Kirk a short smile, and took the med-scanner out of his med kit. “Ya got ants in your pants, Jim, don’t deny it. Getting you to sit still is almost impossible.” He walked over to his friend.

Seeing his mate pout, Khan watched attentively as the CMO exanimated Jim before he asked, “How is his condition, Doctor?”

“Oh, today he has the pleasure of rest and relaxation; tomorrow he can go back to ticking off his bridge crew.” Bones closed his med kit, “Did you give him the hypospray?”

“Of course,” the super-human confirmed before smiling at Kirk with a gleam in his eyes. “It turns out that our dear captain only needs a little reward to incite good behavior. He was placent as a kitten.”

Leonard rolled his eyes. “Do I want to know what this ‘reward’ was?”
“No,” sounded from the other two males in one breath, and Leonard groaned but kept his mouth shut to his thoughts. Instead of making one of his typical snarky comments, the CMO changed the topic. “I got the test results back, Jim. It’s like Khan said, your immune system is more or less enhanced. Muscle cell regeneration as well as muscle recovery post exertion is also enhanced.” He saw the beginnings of a grin on his younger friend’s face and added sternly, “We need to keep it quiet for now, Jim. Spock and M’Benga know, but Geoffrey is subject to doctor-patient confidentiality, and Spock won’t say anything to anybody. People could become wary of you and your loyalties if they find out, even if it’s only temporary.”

Jim frowned. “I don’t care what people…”

“You should care; they are your crew, and you are the highest authority on this ship,” Khan interrupted him. “Man may have made improvements – become better, still some things never change. But even in a century of alien civilizations, man will recoil in the face of a synthetic human. Believe me. I’ve been called ‘freak’ far too often to expect anything different in this time.”

“Idiots!” Kirk murmured. “They don’t know anything about you.”

“This does not temper their judgment. It is merely a human characteristic – likely one that will remain as long as humans do.” The former dictator smiled slightly. “You are one of the few exceptions I have met in my life; you have treated me like a human from the beginning.”

“Wouldn’t that offend you?” McCoy wanted to know – not to provoke but to gain knowledge the Augment mindset. “After all you said you were better at everything.”

“I am better at the most things, but I am not offended if I am termed ‘human,’” Khan answered slowly. “The same goes for my crew. But there were others of us who thought they were above ‘mere humans’ and treated them thus – I did not tolerate it under my rule. I rather consider the Indian saying: ‘There is nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is being superior to your previous self’. Regrettably there were, and there will always be men who think otherwise. Those were responsible for the Eugenic Wars. Several times I tried to reason with them, but for naught. Rather, I was thought weak because I protected the people within my borders against the Augments.” He shook his head. “Scientists engineered our bodies to an almost perfect result, including increased brain activity and therefore greater intelligence. But one thing they forgot to eliminate: human vanity and arrogance. Absolute power corrupts us both. Some of us went so far as to view themselves as demi-gods of a sort though we have no belief in a higher power.”

Thoughtfully McCoy listened. It was the first time that he exchanged more than a few sentences with the super-human. Khan had a calm and steady way about him; he was able to make someone
listening without raising his voice. His velvet voice had a capturing nuance that made someone want to listen, and his choice of words was easy but intelligent. Against his will, Bones felt some fascination awaking in him.

“So, you are not religious?”

“No, I’m not, but I respect its importance and usefulness. Religions were important for the human race’s growing up; it united them, gave them laws and a set standard of behavior toward one another. Some religious precepts set forth commands for living in hostile territory even addressed cleanliness before its importance was known.”

“I never considered religions use from that point of view,” Kirk murmured, interested.

McCoy smiled. “I’ve read articles about it during my college days. I don’t like to use Spock’s favorite word, but I have to admit that it is fascinating how religion influenced the evolution of human thought and history.”

Khan nodded approvingly. “The belief in higher beings explained natural events ancient humans couldn’t understand. It assuaged many fears – important for a growing young race.” He sighed quietly. “I accept those truths. I hardly believe in a bearded old man sitting on a cloud, watching his creation, or for that matter, a man hurling lightning through the air. And there are certainly not three men who represent creation, preservation, and destruction, nor a demon-king with ten heads and ten arms on either side.”

“A demon with ten heads?” Jim looked at him with surprise. “He must have had a hell of a big throat.”

Nien chuckled. “Our demons, half-gods and messengers of gods are scarier than a figure in a white gown with wings, strumming a golden instrument.”

Bones grinned despite himself. “Well, at least our Michael had a flaming sword.”

“A water sprinkler could help, in that case,” the Augment replied wryly, making Jim snicker and McCoy laugh quietly. Then the CMO turned serious again. “Are there many parallels between religions? I’m religious to some extent, though of course where science prevails...”
“Understandable, Doctor. You are a man of science,” Khan replied almost kindly. “There are a lot of parallels in almost all religions on Earth. The parallels illustrate that mankind has varied little in their thought. You would be surprised what the research reveals.”

Bones nodded. “Yes, I'm sure I would. But I wouldn’t be surprised if some moron thought Jim a ‘freak’ if they learned exactly how he survived the radioactivity and now he's got your super-healing because of what we've both pumped into him. So stay quiet about it, Jim!” He looked firmly at his friend who made an affirming gesture.

“Don’t worry, I'll keep it quiet,” he promised, realizing that his friend and his mate were right in this matter.

McCoy eyed him; then he realized that Kirk was serious and smiled, satisfied with the outcome. “Right, problem solved.” He lifted his med-kit. “Okay, you two, I have a lot to do. Have a good day.” He turned to leave. “Ungh, Jim, I'll send you the reports of the crew members we've lost in an hour or so. Had a lot to do this morning.” He glanced back at his friend. “You’re not the only one who tried to get out of sick bay early.”

“Perhaps it’s your Southern charm; your patients are trying to remove themselves from you gentlemanly hospitality as quickly as possible.” Khan suggested with a hint of mockery. He narrowed his eyes and drew his lips together when McCoy shot him one of his special looks.

“Oh, I can be very charming. Only I don’t waste it on folks who don’t value it.” He nodded and left.

The two men looked at each other. “Well, alpha shift is on deck, gamma shift is in bed and beta shift is probably just waking up. So it's not crowded out there. Ready for a trip to Engineering?” Jim asked, eager to stroll through the Enterprise again.

“I believe the doctor ordered you to rest today?” the Augment replied; brows raised.

“Yes and I listened. I'm not on duty; I just want to take a little walk. Gotta get my muscles used to hauling me around again, and I need to get out of here for a while. After all the body heals quicker when the mind is happy, don’t you agree?”

Quiet laughter escaped Khan. “You always find an excuse to get your way, don’t you?”
“Yeah, that’s me,” Jim beamed; he gripped his cane and rose. “Ready?”

Taking his PADD, the Augment rose, too. “Always!”

Jim used his cane; the few crew members he met on the way, greeted him with concern and relief. Two of them stared at Khan, frowning, and Kirk recognized them as those who knew of the superhuman and had reason for a grudge against the former dictator. None of them dared acknowledge the Augment’s presence aboard and simply nodded as their captain, clearly still off duty, told them that he would answer any questions at 1100 in briefing room 2.

Ten minutes later, the captain and Augment stepped into the ‘ship’s beating heart’, as Scott deemed his domain, and took a good look around. They faced the special hell that is controlled chaos, nearly the same as the first repairs Kirk saw three weeks ago. Technicians and computer specialists hurried back and forth, bent over consoles, or worked in shafts or at terminals. Pods were removed, cables hung loose, terminals were dismounted. In other words, Engineering looked like a tornado had raged through it.

Holding a young ensign back, Jim asked for Scott’s location; the young woman pointed towards the warp core and the transformers with a smile. “Mr. Scott is over there, sir,” she said, adding shyly, “It’s good to have you back, Captain. I hope, you’re doing better.”

Jim returned the smile. “Thank you, Ensign, if it wasn’t for our over-protective CMO, I’d be back on the bridge.”

She chuckled, saluted and walked away.

Khan had watched the short interaction and, not for the first time, he realized that the crew not only respected Kirk, but really liked him. They all were one team. For a long moment, Nien thought back on his own crew – his family. Melancholic longing woke in him; he was distracted as Jim hobbled deeper into the Engineering toward the warp core. They bypassed a security door and suddenly Nien sensed distress from his mate before Jim regained his composure.

It hit him almost immediately.

This was the door Jim had used to enter the warp core chamber to save his friends, his crew, and his ship. Behind this door, his James had died – alone, in pain, deeply afraid, and cut off from any comfort. Scott’s angry words concerning this hurtful experience that he, the female communication
officer and even the Vulcan had still rang in the Augment’s ears.

And it had been his attack against the Enterprise that crippled and finally robbed her of power, rendering her helpless as Earth’s gravity caught her. Sure, Jim had backstabbed him. Noonien Singh had thought he would fight another enemy – one who would hunt him and his family until they died. He couldn’t have been more wrong. More than a year back, Jim and he had been nemesis – and even three months back. Now, merely the image of his beloved dying on the other side of this security door ran like ice through his veins.

Without thinking, he gripped for Kirk’s hand and squeezed it gently as if his heart and soul wanted to make sure that Jim was indeed alive and here with him. Surprised, those sky-blue eyes looked at him and Jim saw the reason for Khan’s sudden urge for his touch. “Yes, it was over there,” he said quietly and the Augment took a deep breath.

“I made grave mistakes last year,” he whispered, “yet I didn’t regard them as such back then.” He moistened his lips. “I… changed the target coordinates Marcus’ weapon officer had programmed to destroy your ship. I wanted to avoid the bridge and the most vulnerable parts of the Enterprise because your crew wasn’t to blame for what happened between us. Still, I knew that the ship’s chances of survival were low; I took the shot anyhow.” He took a deep breath. “I never thought that we could become so close one day.” He shook his head; his thumb circled gently over the back of Jim’s hand. “I’m sorry.”

Those three words, this simple but somber apology meant the world to Jim. It meant that Jim saved one more man; he saved the man who saved him. “There is more than enough blame to spread it around. You can’t only blame yourself, Nien. You were under a hell of a lot of stress, and I had a big part in you snapping the second time.” He smiled softly. “Remember what I told you on the shore at Silver Bayou? If you learn from your mistakes, at least they were good for one thing.”

“You died because of me,” the super-human murmured, his gaze full of guilty anguish. “Yet you forgive me even that?”

"Firstly, I lived because of you; the only reason I'm still alive is because of you.” Kirk pursed his lips tightly before he gently replied, “Yes, I have forgiven you even before you came to my rescue on Turkana. When I found out what happened to you. When I began to understand you – see things as you saw them, as you helped me to see them. That's when I did it. Forgiveness came with understanding.” He sighed as his glance wandered back to the security door. “Looking down the barrel at death is an experience I never want to repeat – not until I'm ancient, wrinkly and white-haired. However, it had one advantage. I grew up.”

Khan lifted both brows, resembling Spock for just a moment. “Are you really calling yourself an adult?” he asked teasingly, trying to lift the mood.
“Of course!” Jim nodded. “Compared to the academy or before Qo’noS, I’m a very reasonable, responsible grown man now.”

Promptly, the former dictator chuckled. “Yes, you are – and still you are a mischievous, over-sized boy. Brahma, what an unbelievable human you have managed to create!”

“Brahma?” Jim echoed. “Isn’t that one of the Indian gods?”

With eyes widened, Khan looked at him. “Did I address Brahma?” As Jim nodded, he snorted. “There you go. I need to use the long-range scanners. Maybe they will find my mind. I must have lost it somewhere along the way.”

Kirk laughed, squeezed his beloved’s fingers one time more, turned around, and stopped dead in his tracks. “Scotty!” he yelped, startled.

The Scotsman stood just three meters away, fists on his hips, and his head cocked to the side. His gaze slipped from the two men’s joined hands to their faces; both pinked quickly. Clearing his throat, he smiled innocuously. “Captain, Mr. Singh, it’s good to see you.” He stepped closer; out of the corner of his eye, he saw them release one another's fingers. “You came just in time for the last tests, Mr. Singh.” He flipped his thumb back over his shoulder towards a row of consoles lines with viewing screens. “Care to have a look at the readouts?”

“It would be my pleasure, Mr. Scott,” the Augment answered, asking himself how much the engineer had seen and heard. He had been too distracted by his mate and was surprisingly unaware of the other man’s presence. But there was no malice in the Scott’s eyes, only confusion. Nodding politely at the curious looking Allistor who sat at one of the terminals, Khan took a position beside the chief engineer, studying the screens.

“That’s interesting,” he murmured after several seconds, and Scotty nodded.

“Very interesting. The simulations show that we could increase the power output when we adjust the generators.”

“Yes, that is what I discovered, too.” He offered the chief engineer his PADD. Scotty switched it on and began to study Khan’s work.
“Any progress regarding our current problems?” Kirk asked and closed the distance to them.

“Aye, the simulations we ran on the onboard computer are positive. Next two times, we’ll have ter interrupt warp ter restart the systems. I’ll try ter adjust the generators an’ get a steady energy level. Afterwards, I can take care of the deflectors. Cross ye fingers that we don’t have contact with the enemy before then.”

The Enterprise’s captain shifted his weight. Khan noticed. “You should sit down, Jim. Do not stress that hip,” he said.

Allistor glanced up at his captain and instantly rose. “Please, sir, take my seat,” he said. And then his eyes widened as the strange dark-haired man closed the short distance to Kirk and helped him to sit down.

Scotty watched the two men, too. Even if his mind was occupied with the technical problems of the hour, this didn’t slip his attention – how gently the Augment handled Kirk. How the younger man accepted the support without any protest. The Scotsman had never thought it possible given the pride and the fierce independence that drove his captain. There was a familiarity between the men; he saw them holding hands only a minute ago. And the same familiarity – tenderness even – underlined their behavior. From the corner of his eye, he watched his friend and captain, before he bend forward to observe the data on the terminal’s screen. The Augment put a hand on Kirk’s shoulder, remaining at his side as if to shield him. Montgomery pursed his lips. ‘Shut mae geggy; there be somthin’ here. I just dinnae know what.’

“So, you built simulations that show the effect of change to the generator inputs,” Kirk mumbled and took in the data. “This looks good. When can you give it a try?” he asked Scotty.

The engineer answered immediately. “As soon as we can be certain that the process will not leave us powerless and driftin’. The best time is durin’ an interruptin’ of the warp transfer when we have ter restart.”

“What’s our speed?” Jim wanted to know. “When did we leave Aldebaran?”

“Yesteday afternoon, 1700.” Scott smiled when he saw the surprised expression on the younger man’s face. “After Mr. de la Vega-Martinez delivered the last of the parts, Keenser, Allistor and I were able ter patch the babies up a bit. Spock set the Enterprise on a course to Starbase 6-S. We’re at warp 3; after the generator problem is solved, we’ll be able to hit warp 4, 5 at best.”
Kirk nodded slowly. Of course, there was no logical reason to delay the departure. Still, Jim was used to directing and approving his Gray Lady's heading and destination. And he would have liked to bid Ritek and Jeff farewell, too. He only hoped that he would meet them again. He'd come to admire them all – each member of The Shadow. They reminded him so much of his own crew – his family.

“What's our ETA to Starbase 6-S? Anyone accompanying us?” he wanted to know.

“ETA depends on the progress we make with the warp drive in the next eighteen hours. If we keep at warp 3, we should reach Starbase in forty-three hours. If all goes well, nineteen hours. Hood II will reach us in two days.” Montgomery smiled. “We’ll have more or less the full attention of the repair teams when we arrive.”

“Good,” Jim nodded. “What do you think, Scotty? How long will it take to get the Enterprise back to one hundred percent?”

The Scotsman had pondered this for a longer moment, before he answered, “Given her condition, it would usually take about eight or nine days, Captain.”

“Usually, huh?” Kirk cocked his head. “And how about unusually?”

Montgomery began to grin. “Well, seein’ that ye’ve the incredible luck of havin’ not one but two technical geniuses aboard –,” he pointed at Khan and himself “– and also our little, brilliant height-lovin’ oyster on two short legs, not to mention our Russian whiz-kid, and friend Allistor here, I think we're gonna leave Starbase six to seven days after arrival.”

Jim saw Nien’s baffled expression at Scotty’s little speech had to snicker. “I knew I could count on my Scottish Merlin,” he smiled. He addressed Khan, “And on you.” His eyes shined warmly, and Scott pursed his lips as he watched the intense gaze exchanged between the two men. Aye, here was something happening – something very big! The engineer only wasn’t sure exactly what.

He checked the readouts of the computer again. “If the count-down is correct, we’ll be out of warp in twenty-four minutes.” He glanced at Khan. “Do ye wanna stay for the next re-start and the simulations? Of course, only if ye feel fit enough fer it. I really donna want an angry McCoy at me throat fer tirin’ ye out.”
Khan lifted his brows. “Mr. Scott, I appreciate your concern, but be assured that I am fully recovered and able to work on the simulations and the SDD.”

Montgomery chuckled. “Aye, I thought so; ye know our doctor though.” He turned his attention fully to the screens, reading the generator reports. “We should…”

“Jim?” a female voice called in surprise and Kirk turned around in his chair, looking to the young woman with shoulder-length blond hair and the blue uniform dress. Carol Marcus.

It had been three hard days for Carol. First the preparation for battle, then the battle itself, and finally bringing order back to the weapons bay again. One serious hit had affected torpedoes shafts and a phaser-bank; they failed. The young woman had only allowed herself three or four hours sleep during the last few nights. Then she was back at her station. Thanks to the efforts of her and her staff, the ship was now able to defend itself again. She went to Engineering to speak with Scotty. And then she saw her captain.

Carol had barely found time to ask about Jim Kirk’s well-being after she heard that Kirk and his mysterious rescuer ‘Sunrise’ had been beamed out of the damaged space station. Rumor had it that the captain and the other man had nearly been exposed to space and were stuck in med bay, so she was surprised to see him here and out of uniform. He was obviously still injured given the cane. Yet here he was, out of sickbay and bed.

“Jim?” she asked baffled. She didn't use his title, noting his dress. He must be off-duty. And they were on a first name basis.

He turned around in the technician’s chair, and Carol saw the fading net of damaged capillaries covering his face and throat, but his eyes shone brightly as he looked at her.

“Carol?” he asked, obviously pleased to see her, then he tensed.

“Hello, Jim,” Carol replied and headed towards him, relieved that he seemed to be in better condition than she thought. “How are you?”

To her astonishment, he looked increasingly uncomfortable. “Ungh… better,” he said.

A quiet laughter escaped her, as she thought she knew the reason for his tension. “Don’t fret over
your looks, Jim. It'll get better. You’ll see, in a few days, you'll be back to your handsome self, right? Don’t worry.” She winked at him; then her gaze wandered to Allistor, Scott and –

And her eyes widened in shock; she recognized the man between Kirk and Scott instantly. She would never – never! – forget that face, those high cheekbones, and those piercing blue-green eyes! But she never thought she’d see him again, let alone here, aboard the Enterprise sans handcuffs, and in the middle of the Engineering.

“You…” she whispered.

Khan, who had recognized her instantly, knew that there was no chance of avoiding a confrontation, and so he replied with calm politeness, “Good morning, Dr. Marcus.”

Carol thought that she would lose the ground beneath her feet, as she heard the deep, cool voice. Her father's killer, the mass-murderer and terrorist who attacked the Kelvin Archive, Starfleet’s HQ, and the Enterprise, was here in the Engineering, chit-chatting with Kirk, Scott and the third engineer, as if he belonged to the staff.

Jim groaned inwardly, as he saw, first, the shock and then the rising anger on the young woman’s face. Oh God, out of all of them, it had to be her who met Khan before he could talk to the group! Nien had suffered inhumanly in her father’s hands, yet she had lost her father because of the Augment’s desire for revenge. If the situation with Bones and the others had been fucked-up, then this here was going to be a catastrophe!

Kirk watched Carol fighting for air; her cheeks reddened. Before he could utter a word, she whirled around and fled. Jim sprang into action. Without wasting another thought, he took the cane and followed her; cursing the hip that slowed him down despite the cane. “Carol, WAIT!”

He hobbled along the main deck and gritted his teeth against the pain in his thigh while trying to close the distance to the young woman who raced towards the exit.

“Carol, stop!” he called, but the daughter of the former admiral ignored him. Jim had a bad feeling that everything would turn into a disaster as soon as the weapons officer went through this door. She would report Khan to Starfleet Command, no doubt about it.

“DR. MARCUS! Stop this instant! That’s an order!” he thundered; his voice held all the authority of the commanding officer he was. Around him, crewmembers stopped their work. Large eyes stared
half shocked, half curious at him and Marcus. Supporting himself on the cane, Kirk’s fierce gaze remained on Carol. She turned around towards him; betrayal was written all over her features.

“You are still off duty, so…” she began but was cut off by Kirk sharply.

“Injured or not, I’m still the captain of this ship! And when I give an order, I expect my officers to obey.”

“Jim?” Scotty had closed the distance to his friend and captain while most other men and women glanced around more or less bewildered. Confused and worried, Scotty looked at an outraged Jim Kirk and a furious and also hurt Carol Marcus. Behind him, Khan’s slender figure remained at the console, wisely staying in the background.

“And what are your orders, Captain?” Carol asked harshly, trembling in anger. “To keep the presence of a…”

“We’ll continue this in Mr. Scott’s office!” Kirk interrupted her firmly. He turned towards the Scotsman. “I need your office for a few minutes!” He saw the chief engineer hesitate, he added, “Is that a problem, Scotty?”

“No, of course not, sir,” Montgomery sighed.

Kirk began to limp towards the office, not taking his eyes off Carol. “You coming, Dr. Marcus?”

Exchanging a short glance with Scott, Marcus followed Jim. The door of the office closed behind them – locking out the confused crew members, their chief, and a rightfully concerned Augment.

You couldn’t tell if the atmosphere in Scott’s office was hot or icy. Somehow both were present and radiated off the two people in the room. They sat down at the engineer’s desk and visitor chair, glaring at each other.

Then Jim’s face softened. He could understand the confusion and anger of the young woman in front of him, and if he wanted to soothe the situation and to keep Nien safe, he would have to make her understand.
Carol,” began gently. “I know that this is a shock for you and believe me when I say that I do understand you, but Khan is…”

“How dare you!” she whispered. Wet, furious eyes bore into those of the Enterprise’s captain.

“Carol,” Jim began anew. “Khan is Sunrise. He is the one, who…”

“He is Sunrise?” She interrupted him, only to continue with a shaking voice, “How dare you cover for him!”

“Carol, you don’t know what he…”

“How dare you even shelter him!” she gritted out; turning her face away. “Him, the murderer of my father and hundreds of innocent people!”

“And the savior of millions of people.” Kirk pointed out before his tone softened again. “Carol, look at me, please!” The moment she looked at him again, he continued, “As I tried to tell you a moment ago, Khan is Sunrise – the very same man who warned us of the planned Klingon strike against Tammeron. He and his group kept the Klingons engaged long enough for Starfleet to arrive to defend the planet. He even saved the Lexington.”

“Is that why Wesley is okay with his presence aboard this ship? He was in sickbay yesterday to visit you – and him! He must know who ‘Sunrise’ is then, yet this murdering bastard is still free!” Bitterness lay on her face. “Did Wesley let him go because Khan saved him?”

“Khan not only saved Bob and his crew, but he also saved the whole Tammeron population,” Jim corrected her gently. “He recovered me from Turkana. It was him who broke into the Klingon HQ in Turkana City and got me outta there. He fought with me during the Klingon assault on Aldebaran, preventing the space harbor from exploding three seconds before detonating near tanks of liquid plastic. If he had not risked his life, then there'd be a crater where the space harbor and the town had been.” He bent slightly forwards. “He was the one who broke a cargo ship’s anchor containing the other tanks of fluid plastic aboard. Can you imagine what would have happened if the flames reached the vessel? The space station would have exploded and dropped down on Aldebaran – directly onto the capital! You’re a weapons specialist. Tell me, what percent of the inhabitants would have survived that crash. And that doesn't include the planetary catastrophe the impact would have had.”
Carol stared at him and bit her lips. If the Augment was really the mysterious Sunrise, then he had, indeed, saved uncountable lives from certain death, including Jim’s. Still…

“But he is also the man who blew up an archive in London, who attacked a conference of Starfleet officers, and who…”

“He lost it, Carol,” Jim interrupted her quietly. “After all he was forced to endure, he…”

“He killed my father! I had my differences with Dad, and I was ashamed of what he had done and was about to do, but he was still my father! Khan murdered him, attacked you – attacked the Enterprise! You died because of him!”

“I died because your father crippled my ship!” Jim corrected her firmly. “It was your father who gave the order to sabotage our warp core – to strand us in Klingon space. He was going to sacrifice us for his plans! It was your father who attacked us and shot us out of warp. After he beamed you aboard he told me and the whole bridge crew that it was never his intention to spare us. He ordered his weapons officer to destroy the Enterprise! He was ready to kill approx. twelve hundred people, including Khan’s sleeping crew! Hell, he would have tried to silence even you because you could have given him away!”

Carol took a deep breath. Jim’s words held the unpleasant weight of truth. Yet… “I know that my father… I know he lost his way – had lost it somehow, but that’s no reason to murder him! There is a civil way to deal with criminals, like courts!”

“A court? Like that one, Khan faced?” Jim challenged.

“He was sentenced and…”

“Khan never faced trial – not in the way you and I understand it,” Kirk explained; new, hot anger stirred in him at the mere thought what had been done to the man he loved. “He was brought before a military judge, heard his so-called sentence – doom, not justice, and was forced back into cryosleep. All this without a lawyer. He never got the chance to defend himself or press charges against Starfleet after all he had been through because of your father.”

Crossing her arms in front of her chest, the young woman stared at Kirk. To hear Jim standing up for the man who murdered Kirk’s own mentor, who killed her father and was responsible for many deaths was almost… surreal!
“Dad woke him up and tried to use his intelligence for his own plans. I admit that this wasn’t right, but…”

“He not only woke him up, Carol! He abused him – in every way you can think of. He lied to Khan from the beginning, and when Nien found out the truth about the intended first strike your father planned, he refused to capitulate. Your father tried to force him back into service by running biological tests on him until Khan was no more than a barely alive shell of a man.” He saw her pale and added, “And when even this was unsuccessful, he chose the ultimate blackmail. He threatened the lives of Khan’s crew. Well, he…”

Carol gasped and rose abruptly. “That’s a lie! Dad wouldn’t have…”

“He killed four of Khan’s people in their sleep – in cold blood and without hesitation. Just as he ordered the death of my crew and me – without any regret!” Jim said mercilessly, and as he saw her flush in shame at her father's actions, he knew that this was the angle to take to make her understand. “The wish to gain an upper hand above an enemy, who even wasn’t an enemy at that time, the Klingons, and the hunger for power, turned your father in a murderer, Carol. Four of Khan’s people and more than hundred people of my crew died because of him – because he ordered their deaths without scruples. They all – we all – were only tools to him, and nothing more. Human life didn’t count to him. All that mattered was his own personal gain. And for that he was ready to break the oaths he took, and deceive anyone, including the High Council, the Federation’s most important laws, and even you, his daughter.” His voice softened. “Maybe you should consider all that before you damn Khan as a ‘cold-blooded’ murderer. He was one of your father’s many victims – only he struck back.”

For the second time in several minutes, Marcus had the feeling the ground beneath her feet was about to swallow her whole. Her dad, the man she had loved her whole life, had killed needlessly? Yes, he had ordered to destroy the Enterprise, yet she had avoided thinking about it too much. Now she was forced to face the truth about her father. He had changed drastically; his loyalty to Starfleet and the Federation had led him to a wrong way – a way full of blood and death. And for his goal, he wouldn’t have stopped for anything. She had realized this even as she had been brought to the Vengeance’s bridge. She had felt utterly betrayed; that's why she slapped him in front of his officers. She had barely recognized him in those minutes. But his brutal demise had made her close her eyes before the bitter truth: that her father had become a monster.

Sitting down again, she bit her lips. Jim was right. Both men – Khan and her father – had killed. It was what soldiers were forced to do if the situation demanded it of them. Still…

“So you are okay with the fact that Khan murdered my father?” she asked quietly.
“No, I am not. Vengeance isn’t an answer, but I can understand it. Nien had suffered unimaginably under your fa…”

“’Nien’?” she cut in, hearing this name for the first time now.

“Shit. Sorry. Short for his given name,” Jim answered calmly, then he continued, “Your father not only tortured him, quite literally, but he also made him believe that he had killed all the other Augments – the people who are brothers and sisters to Khan – his whole family that he loves dearly. It was too much for him; he finally broke. And this was the beginning of everything that came afterwards – everything that happened to us last year.”

Carol swallowed; her mouth was dry. The cruelty her father had displayed shocked her to the core. “Dad… drove Khan to do that?”

“Yes,” Jim sighed. “And I was so stupid. Backstabbing him on the bridge of the *Vengeance* after he was starting to trust me was not one of my most brilliant actions. And he’d saved me twice by that time – no wonder he lost it then and there again.”

“Yeah – by breaking my leg!” the young woman growled.

Jim rubbed his neck. “Carol, I know it was brutal, and I am sorry you went through that – that any of my crew were hurt, but think. You are the daughter of the man who tormented Khan – brought him to his breaking-point and beyond. The simplest way to get his revenge on your father would have been to kill you, but he didn’t. He checked you, and it hurt like hell – I know it, but he didn’t kill you. He saved that for the man who put him through physical and psychological torment, who would threaten his brothers and sisters again. Your father offered to let me and my ship go if I delivered Khan to him. He tried it once and then again aboard the *Vengeance*. Khan felt cornered by it – who wouldn’t? So he attacked again – for his family’s and his own survival.”

Looking down at her crossed arms, Carol was quiet for a long time before she whispered, “And that’s the reason Wesley didn’t arrest him yesterday and why he’s still… out of prison? Because you and Khan told him the whole truth?”

“Yes,” Kirk nodded. “Nien has agreed that everything will come out in court. And he will press charges against Starfleet in return. That’s the only way real justice is going to happen. And either justice is the backbone of our Federation, or there is no Federation.”
The weapon officer cocked her head. “And you think Khan will sit here, discusses tech with Scotty and wait for his trial? Why you are so certain that he won’t try anything else, like…”

“Because I have his word; because he agreed to Wesley’s suggestion in the first place. And there's no place safer than this ship. Bob's watching out for him; that'll protect him to a certain degree unless he does something very stupid which will not be the case. Nien will not throw his second chance away; he's far too intelligent for that. Do you think Wesley would have chosen to help him if there was any risk that Khan would backstab us?”

“You… You trust Khan enough to put him not in custody,” the young woman murmured. It wasn’t a question but a statement.

“Yes, I trust him with my life, Carol. Nien's risked his neck to rescue me from the Klingons…”

“Maybe he wanted to earn your trust so that he can…”

“No!” Jim shook his head, groaning inwardly. Did everyone think Khan’s motive for saving his ass was for the purposes of betraying him in the end? How stupid did they think Kirk was that he could be to get lured in such a simple trap? “When he got me off Turkana and when we were aboard the space station – both times he was ready to go out with me. We both knew we had next to no chance of coming out of any of it alive. Tell me, Carol, what advantage would he have gained if the outcome meant his death. Would've really put a damper on his final plans, wouldn’t it?”

Cocking her head, the young woman studied the captain. “Alright. Why was he ready to throw his life away? Why was he ready to die for you? As far as I understand his main concern is his crew who are presumably locked away still in cryosleep. His death would have sealed their fate, too. Why would he sacrifice not only himself but his people, too?”

This was a question that Jim had asked himself too. Well, until Nien told him that his death would rip him apart – that his soul would shatter beyond repair. They were together, mated now – the bond near complete and whole. But even before that, the young captain knew their burgeoning relationship had a big part in Khan’s decision to fight death at Jim’s side till their last breath.

Without realizing, Kirk touched Khan’s claiming mark through the high collar of his shirt while he tried to find an explanation to Carol’s question without giving away the real nature of Nien’s and his relationship. “His family is still alive, and times have changed. The world is bigger than the one he knew,” he began slowly. “He hoped... hopes that one day they can be released and…”
“This makes no sense, Jim!” Carol cut in; her bright mind wasn’t easily fooled. “If the entirety, the scope of his life is his crew, why would he place you above them? Because that’s what he did when he rushed to your rescue and when he stayed by your side in that doomed space station. His strength wouldn’t have been enough to save him if the Klingons had gotten to you or if the Enterprise had been too late.” She bent slightly forwards and fixed him in a piercing stare. “You're important to him – very important! Important enough to value your life over his own and his so-called family.” She wasn’t sure if his ears turned pink; his pallor mid-healing made it hard to tell. But he was most certainly blushing. “So, why are you, all of sudden, so important to him?”

“I – I guess Khan understands that I’ve got his back this time. I’m certainly not going to stun him now. But I’m in a position to help him so it’s worth it to him to save my ass, I suppose.”

“I don’t believe that for a minute. He has the mind to find his family on his own and with The Shadow, he has the means,” the young woman frowned.

“I’ve promised him, I’d help him,” Jim sighed; realizing that Carol was far too smart to be fooled. He had to be careful now, because to reveal the truth would be dangerous. She would think his reason to support the super-human lay within some sexual adventures – something she wouldn’t accept. “He deserves it. As far as I’m concerned he deserves anything I can give him – the rest is private. We’ve – we’ve been through a lot together,” Kirk replied slowly.

“Private?” she echoed and blinked at him, baffled; he nodded silently. She snorted. “If Khan were a woman, I could at least guess what you mean, but he’s not so I’m a little bit lost here about what his ‘private reason’ could be.”

Jim smiled engagingly. “That’s the reason it’s called ‘private’, Carol. It's not a topic for this conversation.”

The young woman threw her hands up and shook her head. Then she took another deep breath. “So, he'll remain free until the trial happens – several weeks, I'd guess?”

“I think so. At the moment, the admiralty and the council have a few other problems to resolve. Until then, Khan will remain on the Enterprise. I’m going to talk to those that were around or affected by the events last year. They deserve a heads-up and an explanation.” He hesitated. “I'm going to ask you to stay silent about Khan’s presence aboard. The turmoil, should Command hear, isn’t something Starfleet needs right now. Neither she nor her flagship has the luxury of being divisive – after all we are still at war.”

“And it would keep you both out of prison,” Carol sighed; then she closed her eyes and pinched her
nose. “I… I can understand that you're trying to help Khan. From what he's told you, you can put yourself in his shoes; that changes things, and it's your strength as a captain. I get that. I regret that he suffered so much because of my father. But I'm not you. I can't forgive him Dad’s death easily. I can accept that he broke beneath the pressure he had to endure, still…” She sighed and looked back at Jim. “If you want him aboard, I've no right to say otherwise, but please note my protest.”

Kirk nodded. “Of course, Carol. You’re one of my crew and my weapons officer, and I respect you and your opinion as a person and a friend. Your protest is noted. That being said, he will stay.”

“I knew you would say that,” she replied. “There are other people aboard who have reasons to hate him. What about them? They could be a risk for your – your new friend.”

“I sent orders to all of 'em to meet in briefing-room 2 at 1100. I also sent a transmission to your terminal to meet me half an hour earlier. I wanted to talk to you in private before everyone else. Didn’t you get it?”

Carol sighed. “I haven’t checked my terminal in the last two hours. I was too busy with phaser bank 4's repair.” She rubbed her temples. “Well, we talked. Am I dismissed?”

“Yes,” Jim answered and rose; Marcus did the same. “Carol,” he said gently, stopping her one last time. He understood her agitation; he really did! “I know that this is hard for you. After all that has happened – all that your father did, he was still your father and you lost him twice. Once when he betrayed everything he taught you to believe in and then again when he died. But all the suffering, all the pain and the loss on both sides – it shouldn't be in vain. The dust'll only finally settle for all of us when justice is truly served. So, please, keep Khan’s presence aboard to yourself; don’t contact Command. I have reason to believe that Section 31 still exists. They delivered Khan to the LSH labs in Nevada after they put him back into cryosleep. You can imagine what would happen to him if they got him back.”

Carol stared astonished at him. “Khan… He was in the LSH labs all last year?”

“Almost.” With a clear, concise explanation, he told her what happened to Khan after he had been returned to cryosleep. How he fell into the scientists' hands. The inhumane testing they subjected him to. “Section 31 would try to silence Bones, Spock, Wesley, me and anyone else who knows about Nien because they have reason to fear a real trial,” he came to the end. “So…” He made a gesture with his left hand and Carol nodded.

“I understand,” she murmured, clearly shocked again. “I won't contact Command. It's up to you when you think the time is right for it.” She turned to leave, but looked back one more time. “But
please make certain that Khan keeps his distance. I... I don't want him anywhere near me. Not because I think he will attack me, but... I truly can't stand the sight of him – not now – not yet.”

He watched her take another deep breath knowing that he couldn’t push the topic any further. “All right. Good day, Carol – and thank you,” he said softly.

She nodded slightly at him. “See you later, Jim,” she replied and left.

Sighing in relief, Kirk let himself sink back into the chair. The last two days had been emotionally exhausting and once again he realized that the hours in Klingon captivity still lurked deep in his soul. For a long moment, he felt depressed, as hopeless as he had felt then.

Suddenly the door opened and, Scott stepped in followed by Khan. Both men looked at him with concern. “How are you doing?” the Augment asked right away, sensing his mate’s distress.


“And what’s about Dr. Marcus?” Scotty wanted to know. “The lass was outraged and she looked even more confused and crestfallen then she had when she went in there with you.”

Jim rubbed his neck, “She keeps quiet about Khan’s presence aboard. She isn’t happy with the situation, but she's coping.”

“Aye, but not very well by the looks of it.” Montgomery thought aloud and Kirk threw his hands up.

“I didn’t want to re-open old wounds where it concerned Admiral Marcus, but I had to stop her before she could do something stupid like alerting Command. It would have only lead to trouble and end not just with my and Nien’s arrest, but also Spock’s, Bones’, and yours. And Wesley's career would have been in jeopardy.” He pinched his nose. “Jesus, I really need...”

The lights began to flicker and Scott cleared his throat. “Ungh, we’ll have the re-start in two minutes, so...”

“Thanks for the warning,” Jim grumbled and rose, smiling as Khan supported him. “I’ll stay here
until the re-start is finished, then I’m off to meet with the group before the rumors fly – well, not rumors, I suppose.” He saw a hint of concern flicker in his mate’s eyes and he smiled, “It’ll be a test my influence – whether I can get people to see you in another light and give you a chance. After all, in some weeks, I'll be speaking for you in court, and will accept nothing less than you leaving the courtroom with me. No manacles or handcuffs. No rehab colony!”

“I’m grateful for your help, Jim, but please don’t push too hard. I don’t want to be the reason for trouble between you and your crew,” the former dictator said quietly, but Kirk only shrugged.

“Problems are there to be solved,” Jim shrugged.

“Still Captain, you should talk to Sulu and Chekov in private, too,” Montgomery suggested. “And I have also some questions regarding our newest addition aboard, Jim.” He looked at Khan. “Don’t get me wrong, Mr. Singh, but last time we met ye were about ter kill the capt’n, now ye risk body and soul to keep him safe. Aside from that, I see ye working as if this be yer war to win. I'd like some answers myself.”

The former dictator nodded. He trusted Jim's (mostly) good sense to say what must be said and no more. “I do understand you, Mr. Scott. I will first leave questions to Jim's efforts as he is the captain. If you have any other questions for me after Jim has said his peace, I am willing to continue the conversation with Jim's blessing.”

“SCOTTY? WE’RE READY!” Allistor shouted across the space, effectively closing the conversation between the three men. A minute later, the Enterprise dropped out of warp and lights went out. She was back on and on her way in a few minutes – off to a destiny no one aboard knew...

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, we knew that the situation would become strained as soon as Carol learned about. And Jim would try anything to keep his beloved safe was also a surety. I also imagine a longer the scene in which Khan actually sees the place Jim died, and how he would react to it since they’ve become lovers and more. I also loved writing the first real talk between Bones and Nien, and how Khan, afterwards, begins to work with Scotty hand-in-hand. The two are going to build a great team, just wait.
In the next chapter Jim will be back where the other half of his heart beats: the bridge. A new quarrel between Bones and Spock is in order, but this time someone is eavesdropping, and I can promise much humor. Then there is a confrontation concerning Carol (after all Bones IS a Southern gentleman through and through) and Khan will meet Keenser…

I hope you liked the new update and as always, I’m dying to read your comments.

I’ll go on holiday, Friday and I’ll back on the 2nd August – hopefully with the next chapter I already sent my dear beta, Rhiannon.

Have a nice week,

Love and Yours Always,

Starflight
Darkness sneaks up

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

After I’m just back from my vacation you already get the next chapter. Sorry for the lack of response to your lovely comments, I’ll answer them during that day (some time during cleaning my shop, doing laundry and shopping to end the emptiness of my fridge). But I didn’t want to let you wait any longer for the next installment, so here it is.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 41 – Darkness sneaks up

Khan stayed in the Engineering, assisting Scotty and Allistor. There were no further incidents concerning the super-human’s presence aboard, and to Nien’s surprise, the chief engineer even opened up to him a little bit more after they bonded over ship tech. Allistor joined them and together they finally worked out a solution to the problem of the damaged generator allowing the Enterprise to reach warp five by the time the final tests were complete.

Jim had left the Engineering and returned to his quarters to fulfill the sad duty of informing the families of the fallen crew members. Afterward, he went to briefing room 2 and spent two hours explaining and answering questions. Carol was present as well, and as it turned out, her acceptance (begrudging as it was) influenced the other crew members positively. She had lost her father because of the Augment; if she could put that aside as a show of respect for her captain's unusual request concerning the super-human, then so too would the others.

Feeling pleased with the results, the young captain headed straight to his heart's second home: the bridge. He entered the control center; no one took notice, but he wasn't expected today so he wouldn't fault them. For a long moment, Jim stood at the threshold of the turbo-lift and relished in the familiar scent, sounds, and view; then Uhura looked up, and her eyes widened. “Captain!” she exclaimed. A radiant smile lit her features.
“Keptin on ze bridge!” the young Russian quickly remembered his protocol despite his surprise and he called out the notice with a large smile plastered on his boyish face. Sulu quickly stood up beside him. Kirk grinned and raised his hand to wave.

Spock heard them and rose from the captain’s chair.

“As you were, please. I’m not back on duty – thanks to a certain CMO. I just wanted to visit.”

The statement elicited soft chuckles and amused glances. Spock stood at a loose parade rest and raised a brow. A gleam shone in his almost black eyes, and his stoic face showed a hint of something that could be the beginnings of a smile. “It is good to see you on the bridge, Captain,” he said.

“It’s good to be back here again,” Jim said, limping down the two steps to the lower section of the bridge. He caught Sulu’s asking glance that was directed toward his cane and sighed. “Yeah, I stayed relatively unhurt despite a bit of hand-to-hand combat with Klingons and a space station on fire. Slipped at a bird-of-prey’s first shot and managed to dislocate my thigh and pull anything that could be pulled.” He shook his head; his eyes shone as the others made noises of comfort and amusement.

Spock made an inviting gesture to the captain’s chair. “Please take your seat, Captain. The chair belongs to you whether or not you are on duty.”

Kirk hesitated the tiniest bit; after all Spock had the con. But he couldn’t resist and sat down.

Home!

He was home again! It was almost surreal, being back where he belonged after all the torment, despair and mortal fear he went through.

But the last two weeks weren't filled only with horrors. Rather the opposite. Despite the hours in Klingon captivity and the assault on and above Aldebaran, most of the time had been among the most pleasurable times of his life. When he had left the bridge to beam down to Turkana, he’d had nothing more than a few shared transmissions with Khan – God, that seemed so long ago. Now Nien was more than a forbidden lover – he was the love of his life.

Funny where you find love when you're not looking. Sometimes with the one you never imagined
(because he's aiming a full phaser-blast at your ship). And that's the one your soul wants – that's the one that becomes your other half, the half you cannot live without. So much has changed, but the things that remained the same are an anchor – the bridge of his ship. And as Jim Kirk looked around and saw the barely hidden smiles of his bridge crew and smiled back while he felt in the minutest vibrations, as his ship race through space.

Just then, Engineering called the bridge to inform Spock that the problem with the damaged generator was fixed and that they would be able to reach warp five after the next system restart.

‘And there I thought my presence was the reason for her steady grace. Really, Jim, Nien is right. Sometimes you think and act like a kid!’ Kirk thought amusedly while his Vulcan friend confirmed the information.

“Understood, Mr. Scott. How long until the next restart?”

In the background, Jim and Spock heard the quiet, deep baritone of Khan and Allistor's light tenor before Montgomery answered, “Ten minutes, sir. Another question, is the capt’n with you, Mr. Spock?”

“I’m here, Scotty,” Kirk answered; several snickers sounded from the speakers.

“It seems, Mr. Singh and I won the bet, Allistor,” the Scotsman said; his grin was plainly heard in his voice. “Ye owe us a drink.”

“Gentlemen, do I understand you correctly that you took a bet out on this ship’s captain?” Jim tried to sound stern and indignant, but he failed miserably due to the wide smirk plastered on his face; it echoed in his voice. Scott and Khan were wagering on his actions? That spoke volumes!

“Na, sir, I’d never dare. Only a friendly bet betrayin' how well I know me friends, that’s all.”

At that moment the turbo-lift doors opened and an irritated voice called, “I knew it!” McCoy ignored the surprised gazes of those on the bridge. Frowning deeply, he strolled down to the captain’s chair. “I knew you’d be here when I couldn't get you in your quarters!” Bones groused. “Didn’t I tell you that you are NOT released fit for duty until tomorrow and…”

“I’m not on duty, Bones,” an innocent, smiling Jim Kirk interrupted him. “Spock still has the con. He
only offered me the chair so that I can sit down – sparing my hip, you know.”

Leonard’s eyes flashed while he closed the distance to the command post. “How many excuses have you tried since we’ve known each other and how often were you successful with them?” he asked in a low, growling voice. Even off duty, Kirk was still the captain; lecturing him officially wasn’t the cleverest move, but McCoy’s status as CMO gave him that right.

“Not often, but it’s not an excuse, Bones. I’m here of my own accord, just to visit,” Jim said charmingly.

“To visit? Do you actually believe what you’re saying? I gotta wade through it, it’s so deep.” Bones almost snapped.

“The captain is right, Doctor, I am, indeed, still responsible for the Enterprise. Jim simply wanted to make a cordial visit, that is all,” the first officer cut in; his own voice was quiet, too – but not so as to be missed by the silent listener on the other end of the open link to the Engineering.

The CMO threw his hands up. “Of course you'd take his side. You two are thick as thieves!”

“So, why you are surprised, Doctor?” Spock replied, lifting a brow; forgetting for a moment the still activated intercom to Scott’s space. “Though your statement that I ‘always take the captain’s side’ is not correct, I must admit that I agree far more often with his opinion than with yours.”

McCoy grimaced. “Tell me something new – and I still assume that you only disagree with me because it's fun!”

“Fun, Doctor, is a subjective precursor to an excited state or emotion – neither of which I care to indulge in. However, that you see conspiracy in such an activity solely for your spite is indeed nothing ‘new’.” Spock's description of the doctor was never so eloquently stated, and the Vulcan’s wit was lost on no one. In the background, a cough was heard, and Uhura suppressed a giggle; her keen hearing caught every word. “Vulcans do not function on the basis of an action being 'fun' as you put it,” the first officer’s continued. His face remained expressionless, yet he managed to look almost disgusted at the mention of the last word.

“Maybe that’s your problem, Spock!” Bones taunted. “You would be far more relaxed if you let yourself have some fun here and there.”
“Relaxing on duty could be a very grave mistake, Doctor, and I’m surprised that you would suggest such a thing. Perhaps this is the explanation for the discomfort of your patients and why they attempt to leave sickbay as soon as possible. A ‘relaxed’ CMO can do more harm than no CMO at all.”

Leonard’s face turned red. “You know exactly what I'm talking about, Spock. And you can bet your pointy ears that I'm not slacking on duty!” He spread his arms. “I meant if you wound so damn tight all time – if you had a little fun from time to time. It’d go a long way toward giving you an actual personality, you know! But what should I expect from…” He stopped as he heard suppressed laughter through the intercom, interrupted by a perplexed question spoken from a deep baritone, “Are they always like this?”

“This is nothing. Ye should hear them other times,” Scott answered, clearly amused. And McCoy realized that his little tiff with Spock had been more public than he’d intended. Not only was he heard by those officers present, they were used to such scenes, but he was heard by Engineering.

“Is that…” Bones stopped and made a fleeting gesture, while Jim chuckled.

“Yeah, we were talking with Scotty and Khan when you huffed in here ready to unleash your tirade,” Kirk nodded. He almost rubbed his hands as Leonard flushed. Then McCoy frowned. “Khan is in Engineering?”

“I invited him yesterday ter check out the tests we had prepared, as I’m sure ye remember, Doc,” Scotty said. “And before ye pull out a sword and attack me for lettin’ an ‘ill man’ work, Mr. Singh convinced me that he’s fine – doin’ well now. So some hours here are nothin’ ter be concerned about!”

While Sulu and Chekov exchanged a quick look (was Scotty indeed okay with the Augment’s presence?), McCoy groaned and rubbed his forehead. “Their bodies are still healing. Why does no one ever listen to me?” he complained.

“Perhaps you say so much that you are tuned out like white noise,” Spock deadpanned; his face was still stony, yet there was a certain sparkling deep in his eyes that betrayed him. In his own special way he was amused – as far as a Vulcan could be amused.

Jim was laughing openly now. Jesus, it was so good to be back in his chair, listening to the endless verbal volleying of his two closest friends. Everything was as it should be, and Kirk felt like a great weight had lifted itself away from his heart. He saw Sulu’s und Chekov’s shoulders shaking with silent laughter and behind him Uhura had pressed a hand to her mouth to muffle the giggles threatening to escape. Scotty could care less about stifling himself; his guffaws echoed through the
bridge while Khan’s baritone voice could be heard chuckling in the background.

Spock and McCoy looked at each other. The Vulcan looked almost bored at McCoy, and the clearly irritated CMO glared daggers back at the science officer. Then Bones glanced down at the still snickering Kirk and snapped, “Don’t think that you’re off the hook, Jim, even if your first officer is trying every trick in the book to distract me. Nice attempt, but absolutely useless, because despite what ’Ol Pointy-Ear says, I am very strict when it comes to my patients. So –” He pointed at the turbo-lift. “– in you go.”

“Sorry, Bones, but my hip aches and I think it’s better not to move too much. I don’t want to risk a relapse. Don’t you agree?”

“Let me guess, this ache’s gonna last until the end of the alpha shift,” Leonard growled and Jim shook his head.

“No, I hope not. I have to rest so that I can be back on duty tomorrow.” He was all innocence again.

“And what are you doing now?” McCoy challenged.

“I’m not on duty – I’m just observing.”

“So nothing different than what you already do,” the CMO taunted.


“As much as I hate to interrupt this fascinating discussion on the challenges of leadership, I must notify the bridge of a system restart in approximately three minutes,” Khan’s voice sounded from Engineering through the open link; his voice held a hint of irritation now and Jim spoke up instantly.

“Thanks for the warning, Nien. Scotty, we’re losing gravity with this one, yes?”

“Yes, sir. We want to shut down everything to restart the generator and completely reset all systems,” Montgomery answered. “We’ll be without gravity for about 5 seconds.”
“Very well. Yellow alert! Uhura, ship-wide broadcast.” A quick look confirmed that he was on air. “Attention, crew, this is Captain Kirk on the bridge. There will be a ship-wide shut-down of all systems in two and a half minutes. Shut down will include gravity. Loss of gravity will last for five seconds. All personnel stow and secure all loose items for zero gravity and then secure yourself at your general quarters station. Repeat – stow for zero gravity and secure yourself at your general quarters station.” He nodded at Spock, who returned to his own station while the junior tech officer signaled that the science and the engineering terminals were synchronized. With a strong voice, the Vulcan began the countdown; safety-belts automatically out secured the bridge crew to their seats.

Hopefully the test would go off without a hitch and without any damage to his ship. All hands had been instructed to ready their quarters and their stations for the zero gravity occurrence during the final restart. All departments reported their stations ready.

McCoy clung to Jim’s chair, whispering, “So, you're not on duty then?”

Kirk smiled sheepishly. “This is an emergency, Bones!”

The CMO shook his head. “I give up!” he sighed, and he walked to one of the empty chairs and sat down, too, grimacing as the safety belts wrapped themselves around his shoulders the moment his weight activated the automatic safety device Spock had switched on for all bridge chairs.

“Three… two… one!” the Vulcan ended the count-down and all the lights went out. Jim and the others felt a wave of nausea as the gravity disappeared.

As soon as gravity came back online, the crew became aware of the own weight again. The lights flickered back on and the hum of the life support systems and ship’s drives sounded again.

“Status?” Jim demanded and the first officer looked up from his station.

“All systems normal, Captain.”

“Rerouting of power from the defective generator was successful, Capt’n,” Scott reported through the intercom.
“Power output ninety-eight percent,” Khan’s voice informed, too. “Ready for warp 5.”

Jim grinned. “Well done, everyone!” He glanced at the helmsman. “Mr. Sulu, warp 4. If everything goes the way it should, increase speed up to warp 5.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” Hikaru nodded, clearly pleased.

“Mr. Chekov, ETA for Starbase 6-S?”

“If we continue at warp 5, Keptin, ETA twelve hours and seventeen minutes,” the young Russian answered.

Kirk felt how the Enterprise seemed to collect herself before she returned to warp. “Very good,” he smiled. “Uhura? Send a message to the Lexington. Inform Commodore Wesley that the emergency repair to our warp drive was successful and give him our ETA to 6-S. Then go ahead and hail 6-S. Give them our ETA, too. I expect full support when we arrive.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

“Increasing speed to warp 5, Captain,” Sulu said; the bridge crew held its collective breath as the helmsman demanded more from the drives.

“Engineering!” Kirk hailed the ship’s ‘beating heart’ again. “How are my engines doing, Scotty?”

“Your engines, Sir!? Well, our lady is purring with a groan here and there, but she’ll hold well for the trip, Capt’n.”

“Purring like a tiger, perhaps,” Khan commented wryly from somewhere near the intercom, and Jim snickered.

“Understood. Good work, you two!”

“Any time again, Capt’n,” Scotty replied; the former dictator murmured a “My pleasure, Jim.” Then
the link was cut and Kirk leaned back in his chair. The safety belts were deactivated. Yes, he definitely was home again!

Luengo sat at his desk and studied the files of the Excalibur’s senior officers. It wasn’t unusual that the SBI periodically reviewed the officers involved in important missions. The Federation’s well-trained men and women changed, grew, and found new niches over their careers; the personnel files gave some indications about their current abilities and updated skill sets. So no one gave it a second thought when they delivered the files to Luengo as he required them. In truth, he wanted to learn more about Captain Helrom’s officer staff. Would any of them pose a threat to his plans? When Styles took Heldrom’s place, he didn’t need curious and distrustful officers – he didn’t want ones who would question their orders. A green group of young officers would be best for this task.

To José’s irritation, he realized that the first officer, the comms officer, and the navigator were from old school; they served under Heldrom for ten years, and the files testified to distinctions and commendations. In two words: Good officers – people Starfleet needed. Too dangerous for The Plan as José had begun to call it. Other might refer to it as a coup.

Somehow he needed to get three officers to Earth that were expendable – that Starfleet could do without. It was bad enough that Heldrom would be the first to sacrifice himself unknowingly for Luengo’s plan.

While the Chief of the SBI checked the other files, his secretary informed him that the daily reports and incoming messages from the outposts had arrived. For security purposes, every incoming report was automatically fed through the SBI to search for hidden signals, viruses, and malware. He was informed of any suspect reporting before the outposts were informed of the irregularity. Sometimes the odd report slipped through though. This was one of those times.

A report from Commander Capricio of Aldebaran III. It was a police report cataloging damages made by a Starfleet officer during a secret mission. The aggrieved party demanded payment. He rolled his eyes at the civilian demand.

Remembering that Kirk fought with the Klingon Koloth on Aldebaran, Luengo quickly opened the report to read.

Yes, it referred to the bar fight in New Aberdeen in which Kirk was involved. Thanks to the farm boy, the little restaurant needed extensive repairs. Starfleet officers were encouraged to avoid damaging any property but particularly civilian property. It happened from time-to-time though. So
the collateral damage caused by Kirk during his mission was irritating but not a surprise – perhaps even inevitable. And, as the report informed, the Klingon had started the fight.

Luengo didn't care who had started the quarrel and if some restaurant owner demanded recovery for the damages of a Starfleet mission. No, what interested him was the reporting of a ‘Commander Lavi’, the second officer involved in the fight – very interesting indeed.

Activating the intercom, José called his secretary. “Lieutenant Zh’zilok?” He asked, and the Andorian woman answered instantly, “Yes, sir?”

“Send a message to Commander Capricio on Aldebaran. I want him to transfer all reports concerning Captain Kirk’s clash with the Klingons that led to the bar fight Starfleet has to pay for. I want to check the reporting on the entire incident.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” his secretary confirmed and cut the link.

Luengo leaned back in his chair. “Maybe the bar had a security camera, and if it does, I’m absolutely certain that the recordings will prove ‘Commander Lavi’ is our fugitive Augment!” Then he cocked his head and activated the intercom again. “Lieutenant Zh’zilok, I also need the list of the women and men who will be assigned to the Enterprise replacing the ones they lost.”

“Thirty percent of them are new recruits, second year at the Academy,” the Andorian pointed out and Luengo nodded. “So I heard, Lieutenant. The list please.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

ST***ST***ST

Jim didn’t press his luck with a very irritated McCoy, and he left the bridge half an hour before the alpha shift ended. Bones had returned to med-bay some minutes after the Enterprise went to warp 5, but not without a warning to Kirk that he would make an entry in his file if he didn’t obey the CMO’s orders in the near immediate term. Well, in Jim’s opinion, four hours was nearly immediate. He asked Sulu and Chekov to meet him tomorrow at 0900 in the officer’s lounge. Though they are on the alpha shift, they would be off duty. Each shift only provided a skeleton crew for watches while ships are docked. Both officers agreed, knowing that their captain would explain the matter of Khan aboard.
Then Kirk returned to his quarters, tired but happy. It was empty and dark, but this time Jim didn’t mind. He would never admit it, but he felt a bit exhausted. Pulling off his boots, he lay down on his bed still fully clothed. When he woke up he was still alone; the clock showed that he had slept for more than three hours.

The buzzing of his door must've woken him. “Come in!” he called and sat up; it had to be Nien, Spock or Bones. The man at the door may not have been exactly what he wanted, but it was what he needed. The CMO examined him carefully then grumbled, “Sleep well?”

“Yeah,” Kirk nodded with a smile before he sighed. “Is it normal that I still feel like hell?”

Bones scanned his friend and nodded. “Yes, it is. Healing takes time. You have super-healing now, but it’s exacting a toll on your body you're not used to. So it’s no surprise you're tired.” He put the scanner aside. “How long did you stay on the bridge?”

“I left before alpha shift ended. You can ask Spock.”

McCoy snorted. “As if the hobgoblin would tell me the truth concerning you, kid.” He cocked his head. “Seriously, Jim, do you think you're ready for duty tomorrow?”

A sigh escaped the young captain. “Bones, we’ll reach 6-S tonight. My only duty tomorrow will be signing a mountain of documents for the repairs. And I need to check over the duty rosters since half the crew is taking leave while we're on 6-S. What do you think? How much action could I possibly see in the next couple of days?”

“Yeah, paper pushing better be the only ‘action’,” Leonard grumbled and rolled his eyes when Kirk smirked at him. Shaking his head, Bones sighed, “Right, you can return to duty tomorrow, but call me if you feel unusually tired or if your hip and thigh give you any trouble.” He hesitated and bit his lips; it woke Jim’s attention.

“What is it, Bones?”

His friend had taken a very deep breath, before he sat down on the bed’s edge, getting straight to the point. “I met Carol in the officer’s lounge for dinner. She was wrung out, Jim. When I asked her about it, she only said that she saw Khan in Engineering and that you told her what happened to him. Why he's all of sudden under your and Wesley’s protection.”
“She understood, Bones,” Jim cut in, rising from the bed and getting restless. “She even supported me when I had the meeting with everyone who was part of the crew last year – that mess.”

“Yes, she did because she likes you and she trusts you as a captain and as a fair man. But taking Khan’s side – it shocked her to say the least. You made sense to her, but she’s not coping well. I don’t like to see her like this. I know Khan’s saved your life more than a few times, but nothing is bringing back Carol’s father. Even if Marcus was a bastard, and I would have liked to see his ass dragged to trial, stripped of his rank and God-willing his pride, she hasn’t come to terms with all that’s happened, and it’s going to be harder for her with Khan onboard. I’d appreciate it if you would consider her feelings where your new friend is involved.”

Jim sighed. It hadn’t slipped his attention that Bones was drawn to the dead admiral’s daughter. Bones flirting was epic as they say, and on full force that day they were on the planetoid together to open the torpedo containing one of Khan’s people. Though the events last year and the war through everyone for a loop, Leonard made no secret of his fondness for the young woman. Of course, he was worried about her. And Kirk refused to make Bones choose between his friendship and her affection. He trusted his friend whom he loved like a brother, and he knew that Leonard would choose him every time. And because of that he would tread carefully.

“I know what you’re talking about, Bones, and I truly didn’t want to open fresh wounds. That wasn't my intention at all, but I couldn't hide the truth from her. Not about her father. She deserved to know – not believe a lie about him or Khan. And it was also the only way I could get her not to call Command. It would’ve only gotten you, me, Nien, and Spock arrested, and threatened Bob’s career. I didn't want to hurt her, but I had to make her see.”

McCoy crossed his arms in front of his chest; a deep frown creased his face. “You’re playing some high stakes poker; I don't want you to ante with more than you're willing to lose.”

Jim groaned. bones and his metaphors! “You know I always keep an ace up my sleeve. This time it's the commodore’s guarantee and my friends’ loyalty.”

“The ace doesn't do you a lick of good if you got nothin’ in your hand – even if we can tolerate your relationship with Khan.” He caught his friend’s indignant expression and added, “Be careful, Jim. This isn't a game I want you to lose – and I'm scared you're gonna.”

The young captain rubbed his temples. “I know. But I can't change it. I'm not folding, and I'm not walking away. Nien is more than…”

“I know, Jim. And you being obviously in love with him is the only reason I’m willing to accept the
“Nien not only saved me and this ship, but he's near single-handedly won battles in support of Starfleet for the Federation. They can’t close their eyes to that fact.”

McCoy nodded slowly. “Given that Barnett is the Chief in Command and for some ungodly reason is fond of you – that and you're stupidly lucky – it all might add up to working in your favor. But we both know that even Barnett has his limits. I'm just asking you to be aware of the risks, and be sensitive where Carol is concerned.”

This time Jim couldn’t hide a smile anymore. “You like her, don’t you?”

A hint of a flush pinked the CMO’s cheeks. “Infant,” he huffed. “I really should know better than to fall for a woman again after the mess I went through with Jocelyn, but I really can’t get it for a guy. And Carol… She's special – special enough to throw my own convictions out the window and risk getting burned again.”

Laughing quietly, Kirk slapped him on the shoulder. “As long as you don’t take the metaphor literally and open a window out here, everything might just be okay.”

“Hopefully,” Bones sighed; then he cocked his head. “Does she know about you and Khan?”

Jim shook his head. “No. I thought it wise to stay silent about that for now. It’s enough that you and Spock know about it. Some people could get the wrong idea about why I’m helping Nien.”

“Is it that far off the mark?” Bones cut in; almost teasingly. “Don’t tell me what you two have together isn’t a part of it.”

“Our relationship… Maybe it was the reason I was able to open my eyes and my ears to what he was telling me, but that’s not all of it. You know I seeing the big guy win just because he’s bigger – in this case the big guy is Starfleet. When he told me what happened – Bones, I've never been so angry. It burned. It's Tarsus again, the ones in power treating the ones in their charge as expendable. You get that? Cuz I sure do.”
The CMO’s clear eyes shone. “You’re a compassionate man, Jim. You can see past any mask and draw the hardest of the hard into your orbit. You always could. You did me. I'll never forget it. I had a hangover, hated world after the divorce and had lost all faith in people. I thought that no one would hear me – see what I wanted them to see. And then I sat down next to a veritable teenager telling me I had signed up for the wrong club because I get space-sick because Starfleet works in space, you said.” He chuckled. “So I talked to you – God knows what possessed me. But you heard me, and then I saw sympathy when I told you about Jocelyn. Not just that – it was compassion. I knew you'd seen as much as I had – maybe more.” He shook his head. “Damn good thing that we both ended up in the same room at the Academy. I never had such a friend as you.”

“Some friend. You tell me I give you gray on a regular basis,” Jim chuckled, and Leonard began to laugh.

“Don't even joke about that. You keep me on my toes, and I wouldn't have it or you any other way. Except for when you die, and I have to bring your ass back. Then I'm cursing you into the next century – and I'll pull your ass back to do it again.”

They looked at each other; smiling. Then the door buzzer sounded again. Jim's voice released it and Khan stepped in. He was still in Starfleet black and his hair was a little bit tousled, but his eyes shone brightly and he was relaxed even when he saw McCoy. “Good evening, Jim. Doctor,” he greeted and Kirk instantly noticed the lack of tension in his beloved’s voice. He seemed to be content – satisfied even.

“Evening, Khan,” Leonard returned the greeting, but remained seated. “All done in Engineering?”

“Not quite, majority of the work has to be done during and after the repairs. But the warp drive is quite good given what we have to work with, and we hope to solve the problem of the deflectors soon,” the Augment answered.

Jim and Bones both noted that the Augment said ‘we’ when he spoke of Scott, Allistor, and himself. Kirk felt joy rising in him. Scotty had accepted Khan; there was no doubt about it. Nevertheless, he would send the chief engineer a short invitation to the private meeting tomorrow. After that, the young captain was sure the Scotsman, as well as Sulu and Chekov, would see the matter of Khan in a whole new light.

Nien’s eyes wandered critically over Kirk’s body and took in his tired face. But Jim was delighted as well; he could tell. “You are all right?”
“I’m good, honey,” Kirk winked back.

Bones grimaced. “Okay, that's even too sweet for me.” He rose. “Night you two. See ya tomorrow.” He stopped at the door one last time. “And behave for once! The sooner that troublemaker over there is all better –,” he pointed at Kirk, “ – the sooner you both can do whatever it is you do!”

Surprised, Khan looked after him, then he chuckled. “He seems to be getting used to us together.”

“It’s always like that with Bones,” Jim smiled and slipped from the bed. “First he grouses, complains, taunts, and then he mothers.” He took his cane. “Care to join me for dinner?”

Khan nodded instantly. “I would like that, Pyāra!” He placed his PADD on the table. “Your stay on the bridge was pleasant?”

Promptly Kirk grinned. “Yeah, it was. Bones finally gave in and I stayed 'til nearly the end of shift.” His eyes roamed over Nien’s face and took in the relaxed features once again. “You liked it in Engineering, didn't you?”

The Augment nodded slowly. “Mr. Scott is a skilled and able engineer, I must admit. The way he thinks surprises me. He can envision what he wants and create it. He is a technician through and through, yet he has a profound depth of emotion. He… He opened up to me after we made this bet whether you'd be on the bridge despite McCoy’s orders.” He smiled shortly. “I did not think I would be treated so well by your people so soon. Well, as far as Mr. Scott and his staff are concerned.”

A happy sigh escaped the younger man. “Scotty is not easy to win, but if you do manage to win his friendship – and it is a prize – it sticks no matter what. That's just how he is. Even if you don't agree on the heavy stuff. Last year he didn’t want to sign the delivery documents for your torpedoes. Starfleet wouldn't give him the energy or propulsion source, so he wouldn't accept them. I was hard-headed, angry still.” He lowered his head. “I had no clue that there were people hidden in them -”

“I know, Jim,” Nien interrupted him softly and reached out to the young captain. “You found out from me.” He entwined his fingers with Kirk’s right hand. “Go on, please.”

Jim moistened his lips. “I insisted they stay. Scotty insisted no. I didn’t listen. I forced his hand and he resigned. He left. Just like that. And I let him. But not only did he leave – Keenser, too. It turned out to be a blessing, because if Scotty hadn't of stayed behind on Earth, there wouldn’t have been anyone to check the coordinates you gave me. And then no one would have been aboard the
Vengeance to stop Marcus from shooting at us. There'd be no one to get us aboard that ship.”

Khan nodded slowly. “Little details are the strings of fate woven in our fabric,” he said slowly. “It’s an old Greek saying, but it fits.” His keen eyes fixed on Jim’s face. “And there is another saying, healing requires strength. Dinner now.”

Another smirk played around Kirk’s lips. “And what about you? You can tell Scotty about your perfection all you want, but I know that you’re not one hundred percent yet. You need something to eat, too.”

Chuckling, Khan shook his head. “Who or what gave you the idea that I wouldn’t eat, Pyāra?” he asked teasingly.

“But, I thought you were only talking about me. You said -” He was silenced by a warm, tender kiss stolen by his beloved before Nien walked over to the replicator. But before he could order something, Kirk called, “Pizza with cheese, tomato, ham, zucchini, and paprika.”

A firm gaze was thrown in his direction. “You think that’s healthy?”

“Aww, come on, baby. I’ll eat healthy tomorrow. Promise! But right now I’m really up for some…”

“Fast food!” Khan grimaced.

“Hey, pizza traditional Italian cuisine and…”

“Wrong, Love. Pizza originally comes from the country known now as Turkey. The Romans incorporated the idea via cultural diffusion as they made their way west. Something they did every chance they got. They brought it home and only then did it become a ‘typical Italian dinner’.” He turned towards the replicator and to Jim’s delight, he ordered the pizza. For himself, he chose sweet and sour chicken, steamed fruits, and rice. He brought both to the table, went back for two glasses of wine, and took a seat beside Kirk.

“Have you meet Keenser yet?” Jim asked, unfolding his napkin.
“No. I heard a lot about him, but I have not met him yet. Mr. Scott told me he assigned him to gamma shift to replace an injured crewman.” He took his own napkin. “Can you tell me why everyone smiled as though it were a private joke when Mr. Scott said I would recognize Mr. Keenser when I saw him?”

Kirk laughed quietly. “Because he is really… unique looking. Don’t pout, but I won’t spoil the surprise. You’ll have to wait until you meet him.” He took a slice and bit into his pizza and sighed in delight. “That’s fantastic! You’re spoiling me, baby,” he said, chewing blissfully.

“As I said at Silver Bayou, don’t get used to it,” Khan replied dryly, but the gleam in his eyes told Kirk that the Augment loved this – doting on him when time and place allowed for it.

“Hm,” the young captain mused; he swallowed and cocked his head. “Maybe we’ll have a special dessert afterward?”

Khan stopped his movement; his fork hung on the half way between his plate and his mouth. “We will share a proper, special dessert as soon as your hip is healed. We will not go back to your doctor-friend because you need treatment for not being careful.”

Jim batted his eyes. “Please?”

“When you are well! Do not try to seduce me again, you insatiable man. I will resist this time!” the super-human said sternly before continuing his meal. And, to Jim’s dismay, he made a lude show of placing the fork in his mouth, closing his lips around it and holding it there while looking heatedly at his lover.

“You know that's mean, right?” Kirk asked; his voice was hoarse and want flared in his gut.

Again, the former dictator laughed quietly. “And you, ‘honey’, are having dirty thoughts again.”

“Whose fault is that?” Jim complained, but he continued to eat. He could get used to this – this mix of private life and duty as it had been today. Is this what it was like to serve with your significant other? He glanced at Khan again, and for the first time he thought that the Augment might fit in this little world of the Enterprise.

Yes, Jim could get used to this – Quite!
The *Enterprise* arrived at Space Station 6-S shortly after midnight. Scotty had taken a nap after his shift. He’d be back on duty when the ship docked. Spock would be on the bridge taking care of the formalities that would get the repair work off the ground. Jim woke the next morning beside Khan, already working with his PADD. Spock’s report of the repairs was waiting for him at his terminal as well as the list of crewmembers on leave. Everything was signed and in order.

Feeling grateful for his Vulcan friend’s show of thoughtfulness (again), Kirk slipped into his uniform, grinning as Nien did the same – back into his Starfleet black. But this time it was because he wanted to. They had breakfast and then went their separate ways. Khan went down to Engineering where a tired Scotty introduced him as a civilian technician who was working on a new device for Starfleet. It was a necessary half-truth to explain the Augment’s presence in the belly of Starfleet’s flagship.

Jim walked to the bridge where he took the con from Spock, did the routine duties, and the delegated the con to a junior officer who was more than a little surprised (and glad) to be trusted with such a task. Kirk smiled inwardly while he walked to the officer’s lounge. The ensign had only been aboard two months, but he was a promising young man, and Kirk was easily reached. It never hurt to show young officers faith in their abilities. It strengthened them.

Sulu, Chekov, and a very tired looking Scott were already there as Jim reached the officer’s mess. As expected they were alone, and so the four men could sit down and talk. It didn’t last more than half an hour. The chief engineer, the helmsman and the navigator understood why Kirk had taken the Augment under his protective wing. Even if they didn’t trust the former dictator – too much had happened last year – they agreed to give him a chance to prove himself. And they all shared Kirk’s opinion that Khan should have a shot at real justice. Jim’s explanation about what had happened to the enhanced man while under Marcus’ ‘care’ outraged them, and they saw Khan’s reactions in a new light – exactly as the young captain had expected.

Glad that his other friends accepted Nien’s presence aboard, Kirk returned to his duties – few as they were while docked at a space station with dozens of workers aboard crawling through every service shaft possible. He invited the space station’s commander, Major H’nahil, a Deltan, to lunch aboard the ship and spent the majority of the afternoon in Engineering.

Curious, Kirk paid close attention to the action around him. He listened to Khan’s and Allistor’s discussion regarding the boosting of the auxiliary power, and finally got an explanation of the SDD’s workings. Eventually, Jim had sent Scott to his quarters to get some rest, but the Scotsman appeared back in Engineering in beta shift’s first half-hour of duty. And he wasn’t alone.
Scotty was talking with the Augment when suddenly a banging noise clanged above them and Montgomery looked up. “By kelpie’s nasty teeth, how often do I tell ye not ter climb up so high? Come down from there!” he yelled.

Khan followed the Scotsman’s irritated gaze, and then his eyes widened; he saw a small figure, no larger than a child, sitting on one of the struts that stabilized the warp core’s sheathing. Astonished, he looked straight into a green-grey face that… that resembled an oyster, only it had a nose, a mouth, and two pitch-black eyes. Perplexed, he watched the little alien climb down with speed and skill that could outdo even an Augment – maybe.

“Is this Keenser?” he whispered, already knowing the answer, and Jim began to smirk.

“Yeah, this is Scotty’s ‘oyster on two legs’.” He watched his beloved as the super-human stared wide-eyed at the little alien. “I told you, you’d recognize him immediately, didn’t I?”

“You did,” the former dictator whispered astonished; his gaze hung on the strange, child-sized creature. “What is he?” he murmured, fascinated.

“He’s a Roylan. The only one in Starfleet,” the younger man smiled. “My father belonged to the landing party that visited Royla and made the first contact. Keenser is…Well, he's extraordinarily tall for his kind and was kind of a target for bullies. But he saved the day for my father – gave him incredible tech advice for the USS Kelvin, the ship my father served on. He accompanied my father to the Federation and remained by his side ‘til the end. He only left him after Dad asked him to watch over my mother who was about have me when Nero attacked the Kelvin.” He sighed. “Keenser became a member of Starfleet; he worked on an outpost together with Scotty, as Spo...”

He stopped himself, remembering clearly the old Vulcan’s warning not to mention his identity – that he was the older self of the Enterprise’s first officer. The time line had been damaged enough because of Nero. Jim didn’t want to add to it, and so he sighed, “Well, I was in trouble on said outpost; an old Vulcan helped me and so I met Scotty and Keenser. Scotty went with me to the Enterprise to help me to fight Nero, later Keenser followed.” His gaze found the little alien who reached them just then. “And now I only have to listen for Scotty’s ever present ‘come down from there’ to know where I can find both of them.” He winked at Keenser, who glanced unblinkingly back, before answering, “Yes.”

Scott had listened to the shortened version of the story half smiling, and then turned his attention back to the Roylan. “Ye’re assigned ter gamma-shift. Why are ye here?”

“Must.”
“Ye must? Why?”

“Much work.”

Scotty rolled his eyes. “I know we’ve a lot ter do, but ye need your breaks too.” He frowned suddenly. “And what the hell did ye do up there?” He pointed at the ceiling.

“Repair.”

“What repair?”

“Cooling pipe.”

“The coolin’ pipe needed ter be repaired? Why?”

“Leak.”

“There was a leak?” Scott shook his head. “Impossible! The computer would’ve said…”

“Switched off.”

“What’s switched off? The computer’s monitoring?” Montgomery pressed and as Keenser simply nodded, he threw his hands up. “There, I’m away three hours and already it’s all haywire!” He shook his head. “Is the leak fixed?”

“Aye,” Keenser replied.

“How did ye find out about it at all?”
“Smell,” the Roylan answered, and again Khan addressed Jim quietly, “Does he always say so little?”

“Yep, that’s our Keenser. Not very talkative, but he understands the tech at a level higher than even Starfleet’s best.” He smiled at the little alien whose shell-like features remained expressionless, yet there seemed to be a soft shimmer in his black eyes.

Keenser surveyed his captain and took in the fading network of capillaries that Terrans and other soft-skinned humanoids had so close beneath their derma. He saw his captain’s trademark playfulness reflected in his blue eyes before the severity of a commanding officer returned. Very good! He had learned over the years it was a sign of well-being when humans smiled through an injury. He was glad that the young man, who was the son of the officer he had admired, was doing better now.

Then the Roylan’s gaze found the man beside his captain. His keen senses instantly detected the differences between him and the other human males, though he was clearly a Terran. He felt curiosity radiate from the man, yet he had also caught waves of warmth as the stranger looked to his captain. With a unique vantage point from above the small group, Keenser had been able to watch not only with his eyes, but also with his senses. He knew that the stranger was the mysterious man who rescued Kirk from the Klingons. And he was the very same man who was involved in the debacle with Section 31 last year. But Keenser felt no hostility from him. Rather the opposite as the pale eyes of the Terran were fixed on Kirk. Again, Keenser thought he sensed affection, and he cocked his head. There was something about the pair – they were that, no doubt. He’d keep silent about it, though, as was his way.

Several minutes later, Jim and Nien returned to their respective quarters. For the first time since he was aboard, Khan excused himself and used his own private rooms to refresh himself while Jim did the same. Afterwards, they met again; Jim saw no reason why the Augment shouldn’t accompany him to the recreation deck.

The large room with its partitioned areas was less crowded than it usually was at this time of evening. Almost the half of the crew was aboard the space station – those on leave or not on duty.

Khan took a deep breath when he looked out and saw the giant silver hull of the station. Other than that, there were only stars as far as the eye could see and a nearby nebula shining in shades of pink, rose, white and gold. “Space holds so much beauty; it’s so endless and wide - so infinite. Is there not room enough for all?” he whispered. Jim knew that wasn’t just speaking about alien races – Klingons and humans, but of his own people too – himself. Once again Kirk realized how strange this all must be for his mate, and he gently squeezed his hand.

“There’s enough room for all as long as the neighbors can tolerate the people next door – no matter who they are. Take the Klingons for example. They are belligerent, their way of life is not always
understood by us. Their pride is only outdone by their strange sense of honor. But they value life, love their families, and forge long-lasting friendships. I can respect that and I would have nothing against a peaceful coexistence with them. But still, we are at war with them because they feel threatened by us. Why is beyond me. Yet…”

“They can’t imagine a federation of diverse races that doesn’t want to expand its territory,” the former dictator mused. “They believe all people think as they do.”

Jim nodded. “And they are anything but rich. As far as Starfleet Intelligence knows, the Klingon planets are rather poor in mineral deposits, and agriculture is only possible in a few of their colonies. If we worked together, both sides could profit, but they rather raise their weapons and spend money on war rather than caring for their people.” He shook his head, then he pointed at a table. “You want to sit down?”

Nien smiled ever so slightly. “Is this a date?” he asked teasingly.

Jim grinned. “If you want it to be then it is.”

“Hm, you should have told me sooner. I would have brought flowers.”

Promptly the younger man’s eyes widened. “Don’t you dare!” he gasped, before he snickered, “The only flowers aboard are in the botany lab, and if you touched one of Sulu’s beloved flowers, you’d have a not to pleasant meeting with the end of his sword.”

The Augment chuckled softly. “That is a risk I would not take – even for you.” A hint of mockery was laced in his tone, but it was good-natured.

Laughing, Jim pulled his beloved with him, and they sat down at a table near one of the windows facing toward space. Drinking red wine and talking together – eyes only for one another. They didn’t notice the crew members glancing over in their direction. The onlookers were curious, amused or, in the case of those Kirk had talked to the day before, cautious.

The evening flew by and even though the ship was docked, Kirk knew that he had to be on duty the next morning. Giving the storekeeper his credit card, he paid for their drinks. The cantina and the galley were free, but not in the bar on the recreation deck. Then the pair departed.
It wasn’t an option for Khan to go to his own quarters. He needed his mate, and so he followed Jim wordlessly. Half an hour later they lay in bed wrapped around each other and savoring the proximity and feel of one another. Sleep found them easily.

Crowds milled around the cafe despite the late hour. People readying for their shift or just getting off work came and went. Some simply wanted to enjoy an evening off; they filled the rooms, talking, laughing, and drinking…

At a table in one of the more private corners sat a lone man; his appearance gave him away as southern European or perhaps Middle or South American. He wore a simple suit in the newest fashion, and had a PADD beside him on the table. He was sipping his coffee.

Suddenly, two men headed for him. One was a middle-aged man with silver-blond hair and icy gray eyes. The second man must have been in his early twenties with an unremarkable face, short dark hair, and brown eyes.

The man at the table looked up. “You’re late, Albert.”

“Sorry, José but you know – damn traffic.” He pointed to his companion. “May I introduce Lieutenant Philippe Nureaux – one of our brightest graduates from the Academy last year.”

“Lieutenant,” Luengo greeted him; the young man suppressed the urge to salute.

“Sir, it’s a great honor to meet you,” he replied.

As the chief of the SBI lifted one dark brow, Norton said, “I explained to Lieutenant Nureaux that this is an unofficial meeting of the utmost secrecy. Hence the unusual location.”

Luengo nodded, “Very well, Lieutenant, please take a seat. Albert, you too.” He waved to the waitress, placed an order, and then lowered his voice, “Lieutenant, I studied your files and I have to admit your marks at the Academy were impressive. You also received praise from Major DueValle on your first mission three months ago, and your superiors at the SBI are quite satisfied with your progress. They say you'll make agent quickly.”
“Thank you, sir,” Nureaux replied, nodding politely at the admiral.

“I have another kind of mission for you, young man,” José continued. “The SBI and I have a lot more work since the war started, not just because of the Klingons, but also because of enemies in our own ranks.” He saw the younger man’s eyes widening and continued, “To my regret, I sometimes learn things that I wish could be ignored, but they can't be. The security of Starfleet and, as such, the entire Federation is at stake. Something like this is happening right now while we’re talking.” He bent slightly forwards. “I understand you lost a friend and a cousin last year during the incident with one of our agents who went rogue.”

“Yes, sir. Both were among the victims in San Francisco where the Vengeance came down. The media reported it as a tragic accident.”

“An accident – yes that was the official statement. But there are two sides to the coin, Lieutenant,” Luengo interrupted him; then he glanced up and saw the waitress coming to their table. He waited until she had served three cups of coffee and left. He lowered his voice and continued. “What I’m telling you now – no one is to hear about it. Not your coworkers, your superiors, not even your family. This ‘accident’ wasn’t an accident at all. Someone steered the Vengeance into downtown on purpose.”

“What?” Phillipe Nureaux frowned.

“Yes, that’s the bitter truth. The man who was responsible for it was an agent of ours.”

Again, the lieutenant stared at Starfleet's highest ranking officer of the SBI. “They said no one onboard the Vengeance survived. Why – why am I here, sir?”

“No one survived the attack. The attacker, our agent, isn't so easy to kill. This man – he is an Augment,” José let the cat out of the bag and watched the younger man very closely.

“An Augment?” Philippe was still in control of his reactions – he kept his voice low, but there was a hint of disbelief in his voice.

“Yes, a man from the 20th century, who escaped with other Augments in an old-fashioned sleeper-ship. Admiral Marcus found it. He made the mistake of waking the Augment, hoping to win his knowledge in defense of his home and ours, Earth. It turned into a mess. The Augment deceived
Marcus, blew the London Archives, attacked HQ, and then he fled. Marcus sent the *Enterprise* after him. Kirk received clear orders, and he disobeyed them. Instead of killing the Augment, he took him prisoner and then it really got out of hand, to say the least, ultimately resulting in the *Vengeance*’s crash into San Francisco. The Augment was taken captive again and was locked away – placed back in cryosleep with his crew. But several months ago he escaped again. And now for the bad news.”

He made a short pause and took in the shocked face of Nuraux. “Our information indicates that the Augment is hiding aboard the *Enterprise*.”

“Aboard…” Philippe paled. “And Kirk knows?”

“Yes, he does,” Norton cut in. “We have incriminating evidence that Kirk is working with the Augment. Maybe he has been since as early as last year. That would explain why he disobeyed the kill order.”

“The difficulty is that Kirk has become a kind of hero after he saved Earth two years ago; he's won several battles for us recently, and just a few days ago, he even stopped a Klingon assault against Aldebaran III. The public loves him. We need an airtight reason to arrest him and get him on trial. And here's where you come in, son,” Luengo headed for the crux of the matter. “The *Enterprise* lost approximately sixty crew members in these last weeks and Admiral Barnett ordered support for our flagship. Twenty, second-year cadets and forty more experienced personnel will leave tomorrow to become members of the *Enterprise*’s crew. And you will go with them.”

“We need proof that the Augment is aboard the *Enterprise*, Lieutenant. We need a man on the scene to be our ‘eyes and ears’ so to speak,” Norton added. “We have to make absolutely certain that Kirk is hiding the madman before we can take action.”

“What’s about Kirk’s other officers?” Nuraux asked quietly. “They would have to know about the Augment. Why don’t they…”

“Kirk wields great influence over his command, and he is personal friends with many of his officers,” Luengo explained, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “They’ll cover for him even if it means having an insane murderer with inhuman strength in their midst. So be careful, Lieutenant. Don’t do anything to attract Kirk’s or his officer’s attention – especially the bridge crew and especially the Vulcan who has developed a deep and quite illogical, if I may add, loyalty towards Kirk. Perhaps because of what they both experienced during the Nero incident.”

“But why would Kirk protect the Augment at all?” Philippe was at loss.

“We are not sure, but we think Kirk has his own designs – something he needs the Augment for. In
repayment, it's possible he promised him to help him free his crew. With Kirk, anything is possible,” Albert scoffed.

“It wouldn't be the first time that success and fame made someone believe they were untouchable. Kirk isn't the first nor will he be the last,” Luengo sighed before he bent forwards. “We have to know if the Augment is on that ship – the very man who steered the Vengeance into San Francisco and killed your friend and your cousin in the process. Do you think you are ready for your first important mission for the SBI?”

Nureaux's maintained a facade of calm, but inside a flame burned. “Yes, sir, I am! How do I identify the Augment?”

José pushed the PADD towards him. “Here's all the information you need – holophotos, a voice recording from his time with Marcus as John Harrison. He is actually Khan Noonien Singh, a leader of his people during the Eugenics Wars, so be very careful. He has no scruples and will kill in the blink of an eye. He's brutal – a cold-blooded killing machine without an ounce of humanity, compassion, or mercy. He looks like a human, but he is not. He’s a synthetically bred creature without a soul. Don't be taken in by him. He is a psychopath, charming when he needs to be. Or he'll feign any other emotion – sorrow even. None of it's real; it's all one big act to gain the upper hand.”

Nureaux nodded slowly and took the PADD. “I will not disappoint you, sir. How do I contact you?”

Luengo reached into the jacket pocket and pulled out a little box he offered the lieutenant. “Only open it when you’re aboard the ship that will take you and the others to Space Station 6-S where the Enterprise docked for repair. It’s a high functioning, long-range transmitter cloaked against internal ship sensors and programmed with the newest code that even most senior staff don’t use yet. It’s set to transmit only to my terminal. We have to work in absolute secrecy. Kirk has many benefactors and we don't need their interference.”

“Understood,” Nureaux said a firm voice. “I also know that this conversation never happened.”

Luengo smiled. “Good job, son. I see that you'll fit in well!”

TBC…
Well, the dark shadows are indeed beginning to rise – not only for Command, but also for our friends and especially for our two ‘boys’. And it will peak in the final clash you all are waiting for.

But I also know that you all are waiting for our love-birds to become one again and for Jim to claim his Nien in the ancient, yet new way the Augments are bonding each other. This will come in the next chapter and I can already promise very hot – HOT – scenes.

I hope the last update was to your liking, even if not too much happened. Yet all details are coming together in the end and are responsible for the danger, Kirk, Khan and the others will have to face.

I wish you a nice week,

Please, please leave some comments (as always I’m curious of your thoughts),

Yours Starflight.
Hallo, my dear readers!

As I already promised the next chapter comes at the weekend – and for those, who have the displeasure to face rainy and cold weather, be sure that you will feel very much warmer after you read the next chapter.

Just for good measure: The new chapter contains really, REALLY adult-stuff (means strong sex-scenes). Please make sure to have some cold juice, water (or wine) with you before you start to read, because this installment holds strong stuff – after all we’re speaking of out two love-birds, who are going to mark and to claim each other for all eternity.

Thank you so much for the comments you left on the last chapter; I hope you all had wonderful holidays.

Love from Germany to everyone,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 42 – Mark of claim

The next day went by, same as the one before. Only this time Jim was bored. There really was nothing for him to do aside from reading and signing reports. Khan stayed in Engineering for the duration of Scotty's shifts. Spock was away with Uhura on the station as were Chekov and Sulu. The only one who remained aboard was Bones. He still had patients, and M'Benga had taken shore leave. At least the spider-web of broken capillaries had vanished almost completely, and his hip wasn't giving him hell. McCoy was more than satisfied with the results of Jim’s last examination, declaring him ‘as good as healed’, but reminded him to take things slowly.

Slowly…

How the young captain loathed that word! Nevertheless, he followed the CMO’s advice and started to train his muscles 'slowly'. He started by swimming and then moved to working out on the sports deck. That occupied only three hours, though; then he was alone with himself again.
For a long moment, he pondered his options – go down to the Engineering and to join Khan, perhaps. But he stopped himself. Nien should not be disturbed while working with the SDD, drafting its technical data for the patent offices of the UFP and Command. And, Jim didn’t trust himself around the Augment.

Even if the absolutely delicious go two nights previous had satisfied his desire a little bit, desire was always present in his mind and body. It had been six days since they had properly been together, but after all the intense love-making prior, even a passionate man like Jim Kirk should be content, but he wasn’t. He felt thrust into a desert.

It had started yesterday evening with Khan on the recreation deck, and it only grew through the night. In the morning, Jim had been ready to jump his beloved’s bones; only duty had prevented from doing so. He had thought (hoped really) that during the day, when they were apart, the yearning would ease itself. It did not. Even the workout hadn’t helped. He hungered for his lover – for his mate – with unnerving intensity.

His mate…

Eight days ago, Khan had bonded to him, explaining later that the bond wasn’t complete until he claimed the Augment for himself. Maybe this was what he was feeling now. Whatever it was – why ever it was, desire licked beneath his skin – burned him from the outside in, rendering his soul nothing but ashes. This was the result of the bond unfinished. One-half lay open – fresh, raw, exposed. The procedure needing finishing, suturing – the result of which would bind him – bond him truly to his mate.

Jim rubbed his temples and felt a headache approaching. For a second, he considered getting something from Bones for it, but decided against it. ‘Let sleeping dogs lie!’ he warned himself. ‘Bones will get all mothery again and that’s the last thing I need right now. I need Nien naked, in my bed and… Ungh, Jim, get a grip!’ Scolding himself, he walked down the Enterprise’s corridors; without realizing it, his feet carried him to the officer’s lounge. It was the early afternoon. He hadn’t had any lunch; maybe something sweet to eat would sooth his nerves enough to endure this horrible, endless day until the evening came – until he had Khan back.

Kirk stepped into the comfortable area with the large viewing windows, covered at the moment. Then he saw two technicians at the replicator, discussing something.

“Is there a problem, gentlemen?” he addressed them and the men whirled around.

“Captain!” one of them almost yelped, before he had himself under control again. “Sorry, sir, we
didn't see you come in.”

Jim smiled. “No problem at all, Gar… Garrol, right?”

The man nodded, pleased that his commanding officer remembered his name. “Yes, sir, John Garrol, at your service.”

Kirk looked at the replicator. “Is something wrong with it?” he wanted to know, and the second technician sighed.

“The main unit of the replicator is about to be replaced. We're disconnecting it from the terminal.”

Jim stopped; alarm bells rang. “Do I understand you correctly, crewman? The main replicator is being shut down?”

Garrol nodded. “Yes, sir – until tomorrow midday. The galley’s informed and they're busy preparing food for the remaining crew – all 200 of ‘em.”

‘Now that's a challenge for the galley. At least fresh cooked meal is better than the replicated once,’ Kirk thought. ‘And tomorrow, the mess crew's gonna sleep like a rock.’

It was at that moment, an idea struck him.

There was still a bet to be won – a bet with a prize of a massage that could and would lead to so much more!

He wasn’t aware of the triumphant and quite conspiratorial smile that spread over his face as he waved a hand, “As you were!” Then he walked through the officer’s mess and headed towards the double doors. A wave of pleasant smells, heat, voices and clattering greeted him as he crossed the threshold and found himself in one of the three galleys aboard. He quietly watched four culinary specialists working hard at the ovens, stovetops, and around the counters. His gaze fell on the fifth man, who wore traditional chef's whites with a Starfleet insignia and epaulettes – Hank Briston, the Chief Culinary Specialist aboard.
He wasn't noticed in the busy kitchen so Kirk raised his voice, “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen!” He chuckled inwardly as five figures whirled around.

“Attention on deck!” Brinston called. A young crewman snapped to attention so quickly he forgot to put down the spoon he'd been stirring a sauce with; he flung the sauce onto his uniform as the hand holding the spoon whipped to his side.

Kirk had to laugh. The man blushed fiercely, and Jim patted him on the shoulder as he passed by. “Relax, Crewman. Attention always catches you by surprise in the beginning.” Then he addressed the group, “As you were.”

He stepped towards the chief who greeted him heartily, “Captain, this is a surprise.”

Jim nodded. “I know. Maybe I should stop by more often – after all, the mood aboard is practically dictated right here – no matter how bad or good a day anyone has – you guys always have a knack for making it better. Even with the war. A large part of the morale is born right here. And I do appreciate that.” He looked around. “You got yourselves quite the job with the replicators shut down.”

“Nothing my crew and I can't handle, Captain, but thank you for your kind words,” Hank answered, pleased that his and his crews’ work was appreciated.

Kirk took a deep breath. “Mr. Briston, as far as I understood our technicians, the replicator won't be functioning until tomorrow afternoon. What's your schedule like after that?”

“It will be only me and an assistant cook when the replicator is back online. The junior officers will eat in the cantina and the only staff-officers aboard are Commander Scott, Doctor McCoy and you, sir – Mr. Scott hasn't been in the officer’s mess for four days.”

“Hm – And I don't think he'll be down until the repairs are done the way he wants them,” Jim murmured; then he remembered what Bones told him about his plans to invite Carol to dinner at the space station the next day. That bit of information all of sudden became important. “Dr. McCoy will be away tomorrow, so you don’t have to take care of him, either. And for me – I’m going to need your help, but not with the cooking – which, by the way, is excellent. I need information.”

Briston blinked in confusion. “How can I be of service, Captain?”
Kirk rubbed his neck. “Well, I need to know where I can get the best steaks. You know what's on the station. And I need a few ingredients and…”

“You want to cook for yourself, sir?” The cook stared wide-eyed at him. In all his experience, he's never had an officer – certainly not a captain – ask to prepare his own meal.

A kind smile widened on Jim's face. “I lost a bet, and now I have to cook dinner,” he twisted the truth a little bit. “And I want to surprise the winner with a special steak I used to do back in San Francisco.”

Briston nodded slowly. “Understood, sir!” He definitely did not!

“So I need the steaks and ingredients for my sauce; you know brown sugar, red onions, tomatoes, cumin…” He went on with a list.

The cook listened and lifted his brows. “Barbeque sauce, sir?”

“Correct,” Jim smirked, and Briston pursed his lips; still astonished of his captain’s request.

“Well, I definitely think you should go to ‘Star-Store’ on deck 12. They sell goods imported from Earth. They've got a butcher – the steaks are the best. Make sure you buy the darkest cut you can find. Only the darkest meat has been hung long enough. You'll find corn on the cob or potatoes if you prefer. The ingredients you need for the barbeque sauce are all aboard, sir. If you want, I'll put them aside for you in a bag with your name on it. I'll put it in that fridge.” He gestured to his left. “Pots and pans are over there, and the dishes are in there!” He pointed to a large hutch near the entrance. “I can set up a table for you if you like and…”

Kirk shook his head. “Thanks, but this is something I have to do myself - terms of the bet.” He clapped the cook on the shoulder. “Thank you for the advice. You and your crew take liberty after lunch tomorrow.”

“Thank you, sir,” Briston smiled at him. “And don’t worry about to do the dishes. We'll take care of them so you can, you know, enjoy the evening without the interruption of housework.”

“I'll definitely take you up on that,” Jim replied. “Thanks!”
Briston had chuckled quietly, before he added, “Shall I introduce you to the stove and oven, sir? It works differently than your common household model.”

“That'd be great.” Jim glanced at the next herd. “Well, let’s begin.”

The evening came quickly, and Jim hummed joyfully as he made his way back to his quarters. Learning how to operate the ship's oven and stoves didn't take too long and the chief had time to show Kirk a few tricks. Briston wouldn’t say it, but he was impressed that his captain seemed to know a thing or two about preparing a decent meal – a near lost art in the age of replicators. He had no idea about Kirk's time in Silver Bayou with Khan. Jim had watched the Augment, and his quick mind had memorized everything. The young man was convinced that his lover would love the dinner he would cook for him the next day.

But this evening would hold its own surprises. Jim stunned Khan with an invitation to the officer’s lounge where they enjoyed a good meal and even more the company. McCoy and four junior officers joined them; Kirk didn’t mind the pleasant interruption. Time with the captain was good for morale, and he never berated or looked down the junior officers serving and learning the ropes under him. Hell, he was still learning every day. Besides, he'd be depriving them of the mess tomorrow for his 'private' purpose.

At first, the super-human was stiff and reluctant with the group, but Leonard wouldn't have it. He involved Khan in the conversation he was having with two of the junior officers. After Nien had caught an encouraging smile from his mate, the former dictator began to relax a little bit. As the evening wore on, he became more comfortable. It didn't slip Jim’s or Bones’ attention that Khan's new self – or maybe this was the one that realized former defense mechanisms were no longer required – was less arrogant, more charming. And it wasn’t a mask. With fascination, McCoy realized that the enhanced man had somehow softened his sharp edges. There was no other way to describe it. The CMO didn’t doubt that Khan would be back to his icy superiority and fierce behavior if circumstances demanded it of him, but here beside Jim in a non-threatening atmosphere, the Augment was almost at peace in his surroundings.

‘Incredible what love can do,’ Bones thought while Jim poured Khan and himself another glass of wine. He smiled as he saw the gazes exchanged by the two love-birds. ‘Look at ’em so damn content. Never seen Jim like this. And Khan… Well, our hobgoblin is usually right – but not here. Khan ain't about to do anything to Jim beyond nailing him into a mattress I suppose. Maybe I shouldn't have cleared him for duty just yet. It would have given them some extra time for themselves.’
The evening faded to night; McCoy watched his younger friend and the former dictator stroll down the corridor – Kirk finally without his cane. Bones had a clear image what would come in the next few hours.

But Leonard guessed wrong. Jim caught Khan’s asking glance as they prepared themselves for bed; he gave him an innocent smile and slipped beneath the covers. Nien joined him shortly afterward. “I’ve got another surprise for you – tomorrow.”

His beloved turned towards him. “Another surprise? What is it?”

Kirk snickered. “If I tell you, genius, it wouldn’t be a surprise. Would it?” He grinned as Khan fixed him with a gentle gaze that was close to pleading. ‘Genetically enhanced and curiosity is his weakness; he can’t stand surprises!’ He stretched out a hand and let his fingertips graze over his beloved’s smooth cheeks. “We still have a bet, baby, and we have the officer’s mess all to ourselves tomorrow evening.”

Nien’s eyes widened ever so slightly. “You want to cook – here, aboard the Enterprise?”

Jim chuckled. “Why not? It’s my ship. And the food service guys need a rest after the double-shifts they’re going to pull with that replicators shut-down. I gave them off tomorrow evening, and I got the address of a place that has everything I need.”

For a long moment, Khan only looked at him; his sea-colored eyes shimmered in the semi-darkness. “Do you know what sort of impression we will give, if this comes out?”

Inching his head forward, Jim caught Nien’s lips with his own for a sweet, long moment. “They are free to think as they pleased. I don’t pry in my crews’ private life; they will return the favor. And officially, I lost a bet. Unofficially, we’ll have to wait and see what you think of my barbecue steak.”

The warmth that lay in Nien’s gaze took Jim’s breath away, then the Augment pulled him gently into an embrace; his arms and legs were a protective cocoon around the younger man. Never – never! – he thought for the thousandth time in just a few weeks, did he ever deign to believe a ‘mere human’ would see more in him than just a tyrant and a monster. He knew he was handsome – he was bred so, but inside his own genome more resembled Frankenstein’s monster. Did people still read that? He wasn't conceived – he was built. Yet here he was – aboard a starship whose captain, once an enemy, had opened his heart and soul to him. Everything James did these last weeks and everything he was about to do spoke only of love. Deep, unconditional love. It was like being born again. Now, when he reached out for love, his arms and his starving soul were filled, and his hurts had begun to heal.
Cupping one of Jim’s cheeks with his long, slender hand, he whispered, “I love you!” Then their mouths found each other. The next minutes were spent holding, cherishing and kissing one another. They weren’t up for more; the sheer tenderness and the feeling of belonging to each other was enough for them – this time.

Sleep overwhelmed them benevolently, without their noticing.

ST***ST

The next day went by like the last one – with one exception. While half of the crew was on leave and the other half fulfilling whatever duties it was they had, Kirk left the Enterprise with his shopping list; he left Scotty the bridge.

The last two days, Jim had been present aboard when junior staff had stood watch on the bridge. With him gone, he entrusted his ship only to his chief engineer who might love the Grey Lady as much as Kirk, himself. Scotty stayed in Engineering for most of the watch. The deflectors were as good as repaired, but the generators were giving him trouble – they were still offline. The same went for the new dilithium crystal; that was a bigger problem than originally thought. Khan put the SDD project off to the side and offered Scott his assistance; the engineer gladly accepted. Both men had come to terms with each other, not least because of the respect they held for one another. They were a good team – a well-oiled machine together with Keenser whose calm presence utterly fascinated the Augment.

The sensitive Roylan perceived the strange Terran’s roil of emotions. He was used to the fact that most soft-skinned humanoids regarded him either as something to protect because of his diminutive stature (by the moons, he was one of the tallest of his race – silly humans!) or as someone not to be taken seriously – often both. It was different with the created man. Keenser was met with true geniality coupled with respect for his knowledge. And the Terran did not hide his curiosity; he was honest with it. In turn, Keenser admired the man’s abilities, and together with Scotty they worked miracles in the Engineering.

The moment Keenser crawled into a repair shaft, Scotty complained about his ‘too broad shoulders’ – otherwise he would have done the repair by himself. Khan let his simulations run at a nearby terminal; smiling to himself about the two friend’s bickering.

ST***ST
Jim Kirk wandered through the corridors of 6-S and finally found the ‘Star Shop’ Briston told him about.

An hour later and many credits less, he left the shop with bags full of items he'd never intended on. He had spent his money on two steaks a five-star chef would drool over, as well as three bottles of an expensive year (God knows what) California Merlot. But that wasn't all. There was a bottle of Indian arrack, a silver candelabra, real wax candles, and ingredients for Gulab Jamun, an Indian dessert he had read about in the ship’s library. It would be the ‘first course dessert’, as he liked to call it. The second course would be made with fire, devotion and ecstasy – in spades.

He also bought two bottles of champagne – real champagne from Champagne, France. The purchases devoured his credits. Jim didn't really want to think about it. A larger bottle of expensive massage oil also had found its way in his shopping cart, and the young captain intended its use for much more than a back massage. Oh, he was convinced that Nien was going to like the dinner, but Kirk wasn't going to allow his beloved to pay the house for this bet – even though the house felt like the winner here. He would cherish and worship his man until he opened up to him completely – until he willingly gave himself over to Jim to be claimed.

Tonight, their bonding would be complete. Jim felt his mouth go dry and his heartbeat quicken at the thought. There was no going back now – there wasn’t then, for that matter. They both had crossed the point of no return at Silver Bayou. And Jim wouldn't apologize to anyone for any of it, not for anything they've done or will do – or will become. He'd embrace every moment from here on out.

Walking through the shopping area of the space station, he passed by a shop that sold leather goods. And another idea struck the young captain. Ten minutes later and several credits poorer, he had a small wrapped package in one of his shopping bags. It was a wallet made of fine black leather, similar to the one in his trouser pocket – a gift to the both of them since the Klingons took his. Practical and elegant – and not flowers.

Nien didn’t have official papers or even credits – money of any sort, but this would change soon. It already had. This Federation shop was run by a Terran – he had a tray of odd coins available. Jim didn’t know if this little good-luck tradition was done in India, in Khan’s time; it didn’t matter. He asked the clerk if he had any Earth coins – maybe some from India. He did, and three Indian rupees were placed in the new wallet before it was gift-wrapped. It wasn’t a large or extravagant gift, but it would remind Nien of their earliest times together when neither had a dime or a credit between them, but they'd been richer than all Aldebaran. Kirk slipped his new wallet into his pocket, and then left the leather store and continued shopping. He bought himself and Nien a couple of shirts, swim trunks, and work-out clothing. No matter what anyone says, store bought is much better quality than replicator clothing. More credits. If he kept going, he'd leave a paycheck at 6-S. But, on the other hand, captains were well-paid, and what else was there to spend money on, really.

“Keptin?” a young voice called from behind. Turning around, he saw Sulu and Chekov loaded
down with shopping-bags.

“Jesus, did you two leave anything for the rest of the station or did you close the place down?” he teased, and Hikaru began to laugh.

“No, sir. We left a little for you.” He nodded at the shopping bags in his commanding officer’s hands, and Kirk had to grin.

“You caught me, Mr. Sulu.” He cocked his head. “You guys still on leave?”

“Yes, sir, ’til the day after tomorrow,” the helmsman nodded and Jim’s face brightened.

“Right. You two have time for a coffee? Come on – captain’s treat.” He nodded towards a coffee and ice cream shop, and the two younger men agreed, pleased.

Spending an hour in pleasant company and drinking unreplicated, actual brewed coffee, Jim returned to the Enterprise in the early afternoon pleased with the world. A quick check in with Scotty confirmed nothing out of the ordinary – even better. Then the young captain prepped his quarters for the night. Before he and Khan parted that morning, Kirk had asked him to use his own quarters to freshen up; he had another surprise. Making certain that everything was tidy, Jim flipped back the covers, requested another pillow and blanket from ship’s service. Then he programmed the computer to play music he thought Nien would like.

The champagne was a problem. Of course he had a bar in his quarters, but no champagne flutes – or a cooler. He left his quarters and went to the officer’s lounge. It was closed. He used his personal code and crossed the mess to the galley. Ten minutes and many opened cabinets later, Kirk strode back to his stateroom, triumphantly holding two champagne glasses and a cooler in his arms. Putting one of the two champagne bottles into his mini-fridge, he placed the other one in the cooler and activated the cooling system to chill the alcohol for when he and Khan returned to the captain’s quarters.

Satisfied with the results, Kirk glanced at the clock – Alpha shift was over. He quickly changed out of his uniform and into civilian clothes – a pair of navy-blue cotton trousers, a light-blue silk shirt, and a matching jacket. He gathered his purchases – the wine, an apron (not ruining this shirt until after dinner), and table cloth and retrieved the steaks from the mini-fridge where he had stored them. Then he made his way down to the galley not noticing or not caring for the odd looks he got along the way.
Kirk slipped into the room, sealed the door and unpacked everything he brought with him. He had invited Nien to dinner at 1900. That gave him three hours to prepare.

Checking the fridge in the kitchen, he found the bag with his name on it, just as Briston promised – 'good man'. Shrugging off his jacket, he put on the apron and requested some up-beat tunes from the computer. Then he went to work. Half an hour later the barbecue sauce was done, and the steaks were washed, salted and left to marinate in the pan. That'd take just over an hour. Jim might not have learned much from his mother, but barbecue was in a midwestern man's blood and his grandfather made sure that the tradition was passed down as it ought be. Preparing the Gulab Jamun, made from Khoa (a special Indian crème), Ghee (Indian clarified butter), cardamom and saffron brought a sweat to Jim’s forehead, but he managed – he was a genius in his own right, after all.

Once everything was in an oven, he left to set up a table in one of the comfortable niches. He used the candelabra he found in the shop, and the officer's china he'd found, normally used for receptions or holidays. Smiling, he placed the little gift beside Khan’s plate, hoping the object of tonight's affections would enjoy the gift. Then he ordered the computer to retract the protective bulkheads in front of the picture windows revealing the soft shimmer of stars and the star nebular. Its light filled the dim room.

Returning to the kitchen, Kirk took care of the potatoes, sliced them evenly, spiced them and added fresh onions. So as not to offend his mate's delicate senses, he used lemon to remove the unpleasant scent from his skin. Khan had done it at the cottage. Using the fresh pressed juice of a lemon, he washed his hands with it and like magic, the smell vanished. Afterward, he sliced bacon that would be added to the roast potatoes. Then he turned his attention to the shucked corn; he coated them with butter and sugar and placed them into a pan, adding more butter.

Finally, he removed the steaks from the marinade, he basted them with some of the sauce and put them into a fourth pan to cook. Thank God, Briston promised him, he'd take care of the dishes. Jim was determined to repay the man for the favor. The rest of the sauce would be warmed up again and served with the steaks.

The time flew by, and before he knew it, there was just a few minutes left until Khan was due for his date – umm, bet. Knowing the Augment, he would enter the officer’s mess at the stroke 1900, so Jim unlocked the door, removed his apron, slipped back into his jacket, and lit the candles. Then he opened the wine bottle to give it a chance to breathe. He learned that from the good doctor.

“Computer, stop music. Play Kirk 4!” The computer played the music he had selected and saved that morning, hoping it would be to Nien’s liking. As the first soft sounds filled the air, the doors opened, revealing the tall, slender figure of the man Jim longed to see.

Thanks to the clothing replicators, Khan had been able to order new clothes. He wore dark-grey
trousers, a silver, silk turtleneck, and a dove grey jacket. The color made his eyes all the more vibrant. His hair was sleeked back, and a soft smile played around his bowed lips. He stepped in with the grace of a large cat; every movement made with a fluid elegance that would make a ballet dancer jealous.

“Good evening, Jim!”

Kirk felt his mouth go dry; his body trembled at the sound of the deep, velvet baritone purring his name.

“Good evening, Nien,” he replied, and his voice sounded hoarse, shaky in his own ears.

The smile on Khan’s lips widened and amusement was added to the warmth in his gaze – a gaze that travelled over his beloved’s body. Blue was definitely James’ color. It gave his eyes more depth – brilliant and endless like the skies of Earth on a clear summer day. And the classy, timeless style he had chosen for his jacket hugged his broad shoulders and slender frame in a way that would make even the most pious man weak – and Khan was anything but pious. He was unashamedly hungry. Dinner would not be able to suppress it even if the smells promised a delicious meal. The longing to be one with his mate again – to be claimed; it made his pulse race, yet he kept control. Jim had made significant efforts for this date – to make it happen, and Nien was determined to enjoy it exceedingly. He couldn’t remember the last time someone had done something like this for him – Noonien Singh, and not Khan, the ruler of a quarter of Earth.

“May I show you to your table, sir?” Jim addressed him like a concierge of an expensive restaurant.

A soft chuckle escaped the Augment. “You may,” he answered in his haughtiest voice and the men chuckled at themselves.

Following Kirk, Khan’s eyes widened as he reached the table. His gaze wandered over the flickering candles, the crystal wine glasses and the fine china – all of it bathed in the dim light provided by the room and the shimmering stars outside. Jim spared no effort or expense to make this special. And Nien surmised that this was not only about the bet – this was more. He was being wooed in the most romantic and traditional of ways. Focusing his attention for a moment on his beloved, he took in the healed capillaries, the way Jim walked without any trace of discomfort, and he sensed the longing and the determination.

The Augment gulped. There was absolutely no doubt how this night would proceed; his James was ready to make the last step. When morning came, he – Khan Noonien Singh – would be bound to another one; he would be claimed in body, heart, and soul by the only person in the whole universe
he could imagine as his one and only mate.

Pleasure zinged through his gut and lightly flushed him as he took the seat Jim offered. “An appetizer, my dear?” Kirk asked, and Nien’s brows shot up when he recognized the smell coming from the bottle the younger man lifted.

“Aarrack?” Astonishment echoed in his voice, and Jim smiled.

“I thought you would like to have something from your country.” He poured some of the dark gold fluid in the smaller glasses for Khan and himself. “May this evening be something we both will remember with happiness!” he toasted, and a wave of warm sentiments enveloped Nien.

“To us,” he replied in a whisper; then they clinked their glasses to the toast.

The taste that filled Jim’s mouth was strange, but not unpleasant. After the second sip, he found he enjoyed the unusual drink. He watched how Khan’s gaze fell on the little wrapped package, and then met his baffled look.

“A gift?” the Augment asked, and Jim chuckled softly.

“Nothing big. Just something I figured you’d need and... And maybe help you remember those first days together on Aldebaran.”

Surprised and touched, Nien placed the glass back on the table and took the little package in his long fingers. There had been times when a pair of stolen jeans or shirt had been a great gift given to him by one of his siblings courtesy of a stroll through New Delhi after they escaped the labs. Then there had been the years he was bestowed with gifts to garner his favor. But real presents given out of love had been a rare thing. Joaquin had given him small gifts, as had Katie, Otto, Pedro and Rodriguez. They had been precious to him, but they were long lost now – destroyed in the madness of the Eugenics War or stolen by Marcus after he seized the *Botany Bay*.

This was the first time someone besides his closest family members had given him a gift simply out of love.

For a moment his throat became tight; then he unwrapped the little package. His eyes widened. “A wallet?” he asked, taken aback.
Jim grinned. “Well, I realized you didn't have one when we were on Aldebaran. You’re going to need a wallet very soon. So I thought it was a first step in giving you some sense of normalcy in this time.”

Khan’s keen ears heard a gentle tinkling as he took it out of the box, and opened it. “Indian rupees!” he gasped, staring from the three coins to Kirk and back. “But I thought... We don't use money anymore.”

“You can still find coins here and there – collectors and things like that. The leather store I visited had them for the whole ‘good fortune thing’. I thought it would be a nice way to remember your time and connect you to the present.”

Nien looked at him with large eyes – eyes that moistened suddenly. Then the Augment rose and a moment later Jim found himself caught in a tight embrace. It was almost unbelievable that someone who was the leader of a whole race – one of the mightiest men on Earth – was overwhelmed with joy because of such a little gift. It was the gesture that touched Khan so; the thought his beloved had spent on the matter to make his day. No one other than Joaquín and his closest family had ever done something like this for him.

“Thank you,” he whispered, pressing a kiss on Jim’s temple. Kirk’s arm snaked around his waist and held him close, squeezing him gently.

“You’re welcome, Nien,” he murmured back, happy that his little surprise pleased his lover that much. Then the smell from the kitchen became more intense, and clapping Nien on the back Jim disentangled himself from his mate, stole a kiss, and raced to the kitchen. “Back in a minute!” he called over the shoulder. “Sit. I gotta check the potatoes!”

Still deeply touched, the Augment sat down again and poured Kirk and himself a glass of the wine, wanting to take some pressure off his beloved.

The ‘one minute’ became five – a short period of time that the former dictator used to enjoy the soft music, the view of the star nebula, the sparkling diamonds shining out in space, and the peacefulness around him. Jim came back carrying two plates with the dinner and beaming from ear to ear. He was happy with the result of his culinary skills, and as he placed the plates on the table, he eagerly awaited Nien’s opinion.

Khan’s gaze wandered over the thick steak, the dark-red sauce that smelled sweet and smoky, corn
on the cob – shining with melted butter – and the roast potatoes with onions and bacon. If it tasted half as delicious as it looked, then he was certainly in for a treat – and on the losing end of this bet.

“Enjoy your meal,” Jim said and watched the other man as he took the first bites.

Letting the taste slide over his taste buds, Nien analyzed the food. A mixture of surprise and pleasure spread over his features. “Excellent,” he beamed when his mouth was empty again. “Absolutely excellent, Jim! Congratulations – and don’t expect me to prepare dinner ever again. You did a fantastic job.”

Kirk began to laugh. “Well, from time to time, I’m gonna want some Indian food again – especially your mango-curry. I can do a lot, but cooking is definitely your domain.”

Joining his mate’s laughter, Nien raised his glass. “I’ve never lost a bet without disappointment, but right now I am glad for it. Thank you for all the trouble you must have gone through to make this real.”

Sheer, almost boyish happiness danced in the younger man’s eyes, as he lowered his head. “It was more than my pleasure. To us!” They toasted, then they began to eat.

It really was a superb dinner, and when their plates were finally empty, both men thought they might explode.

“Not one more bite,” Khan sighed as he laid his napkin beside the dishes and reached for his wine.

“Oh – come on, honey. I even attempted an Indian dessert.”

Dessert… There it was again. Cocking his head, Nien’s glance rested on his beloved. “Do you mean a dessert or ‘dessert’?” The last word was expelled on one deep, suggestive purring breath.

Kirk gulped. Yeah, they both longed for the ‘special dessert’, but that would come later. “First the dessert for a fine palette, then… Well, the night is young.” Giving his mate a mischievous smile, Jim rose, took the plates and vanished back into the kitchen. Khan moistened his lips. Oh yes, he was definitely ready for what would come as soon as they left the officers mess, yet he was curious which Indian dessert his beloved had given a try. The smell that wafted from the kitchen was familiar – very familiar, though it had been years ago since he last smelled it. Could it be that Jim had made some…
At that moment, the Enterprise’s captain reappeared, carrying two dessert plates. Khan’s eyes became wide as saucers as he that saw his assumption was true. “Gulab Jamun,” he whispered while his gaze hung on the little balls fried in oil and soaked in rose-water with cardamom and saffron. Now it was covered in a delicate dusting of sugar. They were still lukewarm and spread an alluring scent through the air.

“I hope I did it right,” Jim sighed while he served the dessert. “I found the recipe in the computer library this morning and hoped that the ‘Star Shop’ would have some Khoa and Ghee. They had an Asian section, and I found ‘em. Their exotics section was pretty cool, too – even had stuff from other planets.”

He sat down and smiled as he saw Khan’s perplexed face. “You prepared Gulab Jamun!” the former dictator murmured; his augmented side winced at the childish joy that rushed through him. Happy because of a sweet dessert – and magnified when he realized it wasn’t the first time his superior mind and behavior left him completely where this incredible boy-captain was involved. Jim Kirk had the tendency to wake the human side of him. One he forgot existed but was never forgotten by Kirk. “Thank you,” he said quietly – for the uncounted time this evening. He had expected that his mate would try to please him with some surprises, but he never had anticipated this.

“You’re most welcome,” Kirk answered, then both began to eat again, telling their protesting stomachs to shut up and enjoy it. Jim was proud as Khan confirmed that the Gulab Jamun was perfect – not in a way of compliment, but in telling the plain truth. After the last bite had found its way into their mouths, Jim poured two brandies to help their full bellies – even if a glass of water would have done a better job. And they sat there for a long time; talking or simply enjoying each other’s company.

The atmosphere was cozy and warm, but the fire that warmed them was inside, lurking but hidden. It began to flow hot through their veins – first stoked by their shared laughter and then light touches. It found its way to their eyes in heated looks then thrummed softly in their loins and finally began to affect their breathing – getting heavier. Emptying their glasses, they simply looked at each other – watching, waiting, anticipating.

“I declare you the winner of our bet,” Nien said, his voice a deep, hoarse growl. “You have won yourself a back massage.”

“Sounds fantastic,” Jim answered; his voice betrayed his state. He wouldn’t reveal to his lover that he intended to change the outcome of the bet to Nien’s advantage, knowing the Augment would have protested. So Kirk would simply wait until the last minute – a minute that would only come if they could just get to his quarters. He rose. “Ready to get a bit more comfortable?” he asked, and the other man was on his feet.
“With pleasure!” He looked around. “What about the dishes?” he asked and Jim made a waving gesture.

“I have an agreement with the mess chief. He offered to take care of everything, and I accepted. I'll give him a day of liberty.” He stepped to his lover and took his hand, pulling him gently towards the door. “Computer, music and lights out!” he ordered as they reached the exit; then they left.

The corridors were as good as empty. They met only four people on their way to Jim’s quarters and returned their greetings before reaching their destiny. Unlocking his door, Kirk stepped in first and ordered the lights to fifty percent and the music on. And then he welcomed the object of his efforts; he needed only one quick look to see that the efforts were well worth their while. The dinner served as opening for the night that would change their lives for once and all.

The inviting folded back covers, the cooled champagne, the music, the light… In his way, Jim showed a romantic streak no one aside from Khan would have expected of the young, usually cocky captain.

That cockiness was a mask Nien had seen through for some time now. He knew that beneath it lays a very sensitive and damaged man, though no more than he was. The Augment turned around, and their eyes met; longing, tenderness, fire and devotion brimmed in their depths.

“Nien,” Jim whispered, a hint of uncertainty washed over his face quickly. It passed as quickly as it came before he cleared his throat and continued, “you told me that we share a bond, but that... That I had to complete it – the bond – when I’m ready.” He moistened his lips. “Well, I’m more than ready, but… This is up to you to, if...” He searched for the right words.

Words that Khan found for him, “If you want to know, whether I wish for you to bond with me – to claim me – then the answer is ‘Yes’!” he said with an intensity in his voice and a fire in his eyes that took Jim’s breath away. The former dictator reached out for Kirk, saying words he’d never imagined passing his lips, “Take me – make me yours, just as I have you and will do again!”

There wasn’t anything left to say. With a fluid movement, Jim closed the small distance between them the moment Nien stepped towards him. They met half way, their hands sought out one another's body; their mouths clashed together.

And the hunger that had lingered deep in them for days now, roared up – demanded sating in the only way possible.
Closing his eyes, Jim wrapped his arms around his beloved’s body; his fingers glided over the fine cotton of Khan’s jacket and found their way into his midnight dark, silken strands. Kirk felt Nien’s tongue slipping over his lower lip, and he allowed access – stroking and dueling with the warm intruder. The Augment’s hot breath danced over his cheek and then Khan’s hands tugged on Jim’s jacket – pushing it from his shoulders, forcing the younger man to let go of him, if only for the short moment it took for the garment slide down his arms to the floor. Returning the favor, Jim made a short work of stripping his lover of his own jacket while Khan gave no thought to Kirk’s silken shirt (and neither did Kirk); he simple tore it apart.

A gasp escaped the young captain; the eagerness of his soon-to-be bonded mate turned him on more than he could put to words. His loins throbbed demandingly; heat flushed his skin, and his heartbeat quickened, finding an echo in Khan’s.

Jim had planned to make this slow and romantic, but his and Nien’s desire foiled it. The sheer knowledge that they were about to become one again, and this time not only in body but also in soul – that they were about to entwine their entire selves forever – drowned out everything else.

Neither cared about their clothes, which soon lay spread and ruined on the floor. Groaning in pleasure as they were finally skin to skin, they stumbled towards the bed, kissing, fondling and half mad with passion.

“*I love you,*” Jim whispered before he slammed their mouths together once more.

The Augment responded quickly, opening his mouth to Jim. Pulling Kirk even closer to him, he let his arms drop so that his hands cupped the younger male’s behind. He squeezed, causing Jim to gasp; then he dropped his hands further and lifted his mate. Never wasting a chance to get what he wanted, Jim wrapped his legs around the super-human, kissing him as if every kiss could be his last.

They stayed like that for a time, never feeling time pass, just holding and being held, kissing and savoring each other’s nearness. Then Khan brought them to the bed and lay Kirk down beneath him, worshipping the lithe, muscled, golden body with his hands and lips, until Jim writhed in pleasure.

“*Turn over,*” Nien murmured into the plush, swollen lips of his beloved who glanced uncomprehending and glassy-eyed at him.

“What?” Jim whispered hoarsely, and Khan gave him one of his half-smirks; his usually pale face flushed with lust while he picked up the bottle of massage oil from the night stand. “*Your prize, James – the back massage.*”
Jim blinked – a back massage? Now? Really? No! He was too far gone to enjoy something like that right now. And – hadn’t he intended to give Nien the massage? Yes, he had – but this was hardly the time.

Shaking his head, he tightened his arms around Khan. “Not now, baby, please,” he answered; his voice hitched with headless desire. “How about another kind of massage. One, we both will enjoy?”

The answer was another deep, scorching kiss. Jim heard the snick of the cap, and then those delicious long fingers traveled over abdominals, pubis, tickled down his cock, over his balls, past his perineum to the cleft of his buttocks and straight to the opening that hummed – clenched – longed to be filled. Jim sighed into Khan’s mouth while the Augment prepared him. Each added finger pulled another moan from Kirk as his hole fluttered around the invading digits, drawing the fingers into him. The younger man’s countenance alternated between pained, needy, and loving as he looked at his lover. Nien got the hint and set a tortuous pace for them both – maddeningly slow. Fucking his fingers in and out of the gasping body beneath him.

Craving the pleasure only his beloved could give him, Jim tore his lips away from Khan’s. “Nien, please… I need...”

But Khan only smiled and focused solely on pleasure for them both – savored pleasure – long, drawn out pleasure. As the young captain nearly sobbed with desire, the Augment buried his face in Kirk's neck and entered him.

A loud, wanton moan escaped Jim and for a moment he could do nothing. He was flying – lost in the sensation – joined with his true soul mate again. Nien’s quick breath at his throat grounded him and he slid his fingers into Khan’s hair.

“I want to see you, baby.” Not giving his lover the chance to protest, he brought Khan's face up to meet his and kissed him deeply and full of devotion.

Khan groaned as the intense pleasure of being reunited with his James rippled through his body and soul. Not able to hold himself back anymore, he began to move. The thrusts between the two lovers were unhurried at first; each man met the other, but it wasn’t enough for either of them. The super-human’s desperation grew – the desperation of a longing not fulfilled – just beyond his reach. He needed to be buried in his mate’s body – needed to bury himself deeper – impossible in this position.

He slipped out, ignored Jim’s protests, and flipped him over. Staying on his knees he pulled the younger man up so that chest and back met and impaled him with one firm, swift stroke. He claimed Kirk's warm, inviting body like he had claimed Kirk’s own soul. His arms snaked around Jim’s chest
and waist, pulling the captain closer and pressing him down to thrust into him, seeking depth. The angle had his cock slide over Jim’s prostate with every push powered by tireless thighs. Bending his head, Nien’s mouth found the faded mark on Jim’s neck and a shout of pleasure erupted from the young man’s lips as Khan bit down – hard, bruising, almost painful. And then the bite turned into sucking, licking and kissing. Finger bruises bloomed on Kirk’s chest with the pressure of the Augment’s arms and hands, holding him tight. The thrusts came stronger and faster now.

Jim let his head fell back onto Nien’s right shoulder. His eyes closed and he was completely supported – helpless – caught within those arms that delivered him to the merciless burning, smooth as silk-over-steel that hammered into him and brought him agonizing pleasure like he’d never felt before. Moans and hoarse cries tumbled from his lips, mixed with half-sobs and meaningless babble. His loins tightened, his cock threatened to burst at the hammering his prostate took, and its own needs. Jim wrapped his right hand around himself and felt the sticky precum.

Khan never missed a trick – or anything as important as the wellness of someone dear to him. Being a selfish man at times, but not a selfish lover, the arm around Kirk dropped down, and his hand gently peeled Jim’s fingers away. Getting the hint, Kirk let go and hissed in pleasure as his lover began to stroke him just. Right. There!

Smiling into the younger man’s neck, Khan grasped and smeared the pearlescent precum around the smooth, velvet glans and down to the root of Jim’s shaft before dragging the foreskin back up again to cover the head. Not willing to deny himself the pleasure, Nien looked over his beloved’s shoulder as the glans disappeared and reappeared shiny and hot from the foreskin – an erotic sight that spurred on his own desire. Finally, with purpose, he worked Kirk and cored him more violently, eliciting more moans from his lover until Jim used Khan’s hard thrusts to push himself into the super-human’s skilled long fingers. Each man was now chasing his ecstasy, lost in the sensation.

The prickle. Kirk could feel it on the back of his neck now, where Khan’s lips and mouth and breath danced over the freshly mottled mark. Again Nien’s teeth grazed that spot. Jim leaned into it and bared his neck further. Those teeth – more pressure now, almost breaking skin. Kirk hissed, but continued fucking forward into the fist that clenched around him and back on the cock that stabbed into him.

The former dictator was pulled to the younger man, drawn to his neck. It was magnetic, attractive, and impulsive, already wearing his mark, but not enough – not red enough. Losing all control, his teeth sank into the taut flesh – straight into the emblem of his claim. Sweet, sweat, and copper filled his mouth; Jim’s scream of pain, pleasure and ecstasy echoed in his ears and in his senses like the song of a siren. And then they came together, the flavor and the men, with a roar that reverberated through the room; the proof of their desire’s fulfillment shot in hot, white streams. Both men shook with tears and aftershocks as they fell down onto the mattress – still entwined and amazed at the intensity of what they found with each other.
Finally able to catch his breath, Khan smelled the copper of Jim’s blood and lifting his head he looked down on the bite that marred Kirk’s neck, branding the younger man forever with the mark of claim – even slightly visible for all times. He tilted his face towards the result of his slipped control, and gently closed his lips over the injury; his saliva slid off of his tongue and onto the wound. He hoped the enhanced cells contained there might have another miracle.

Kirk's neck throbbed, but the pain dissipated quickly. God knows how that worked – and who the hell cared! The discomfort was nothing in comparison to the all-consuming ecstasy that had brought him to new heights. Still soaring in the star-filled, velvet aftermath and held by his mate, Jim didn't think – he was only feeling now.

It was some time before even the Augment came around again. Finding himself drifting back to the present, he slipped out of the young man. He regarded the angry bite, his mark, on James – no longer bleeding now – and ran his hands over his beloved's wet chest and hips down to his thighs and back again. Then one of his hands slipped between his buttocks. Putting a bit of distance between them, he spread the captain wide; exposing him.

Jim sighed. The air over his hole was chilly with oil and cum. Still high, Jim didn't move but allowed Nien to do as he wished. Khan swiped a finger through the cum, leaking from his lover’s red, glistening opening and offered it to him – an offer the younger man accepted, as he took the finger into his mouth to taste his lover. Smiling, Nien rubbed his finger around his mate’s palette, his tongue. Then he shimmied down and dipped his head to the captain's shimmering entrance. The possessiveness Khan suddenly felt was overwhelming – the need to mark his mate inside and out again. With the flat of his tongue, the former dictator licked Jim firmly from balls to sacrum, and he placed a light kiss on his back.

“Nien…” Jim was breathless, nearly listless, but Khan spread him once more and brought his mouth to kiss Kirk’s still open, dripping hole – fuck-red, puffy – gleaming and beautiful. He let his tongue dance in alternating circles around the pucker, kissing on each pass, and it quivered under his ministrations. The younger man whimpered at the stimulation, but the Augment showed no mercy. He would take what he needed. Following ancient instincts. He closed his lips around the hole and sucked as a child would draw nourishment from its mother’s breast – bringing his seed to the entrance. His tongue darted from his lips to spear inside of Kirk; the stiffened muscle fucked into his lover far enough to stroke the velvet walls inside. He used his tongue to bring himself out of Jim and into his mouth, holding it there. When he finally drew back, his nose, mouth and chin were shiny with spit and cum. Determined, Khan crawled up beside his devoted and turned him over to press their open, hungry mouths together to share the bounty.

The younger man was still blissed out and pliant, near sleep but not quite. Yet Nien was far from finished. He was an Augment, and he has more – wanted more – wanted to give more. Khan moved forward to bracket his beloved with his knees. Kneeling above Jim and gazing down at those swollen lips, he stroked himself back to hardness. Realizing what his lover was about to do, Jim looked at him and opened his mouth. Khan smiled down at his man, held himself and slowly fed him his cock, keeping his thrusts gentle and shallow – just as he had three nights ago. Using his hand to
stroke the base of himself, he began to soar towards another eruption of ecstasy.

Without hesitation, Jim flattened his tongue to provide friction and tongued from slit to frenulum and back again, as far down the shaft as Khan allowed. This was not about the solo chase to orgasm or marking one another now. This act was about taking one another into themselves. Kirk understood his mate’s need and Nien took what Jim freely offered – so different from the first time the men came together.

Feeling passion overwhelming him again, Khan spilled himself, soundlessly this time, into Jim’s mouth, and his lover held it for him, waiting for him to come and share it between their lips. He did, and it was wet and hot, and it was glorious. Out of breath, Nien crawled down to lap up the remains of the younger man’s cum, now mingled with the salty sweat that marred his body and then kissed him again, making sure Kirk tasted himself on Nien’s tongue as the enhanced man had done for him.

Finally sated, they spent time kissing and stroking each other, learning each other’s bodies anew – trying to imprint each other by sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound. They listened to each hitch of breath and tried to recreate the effect for one another. Teeth dragged over jawlines, over tendons, biting, sucking, and marking. They turned each other over to run noses up and down spines to feel other others planes and curves as if they were a drug for each other. They tasted sweet and sweat and musk – and it was nectar.

Holding Nien close, Jim knew he was far from done. The time to give back – to claim his mate forever – had come.

He reached back over to the discarded bottle of oil and handed it to Khan. Taking the bottle from his lover, Nien coated Jim’s fingers, stroking each one, massaging them – never taking his gaze away from those sky-blue eyes which looked at him with love and longing. Taking the bottle away from the super-human, Jim pushed him gently down and crawled over him. He braced himself on his left arm and tangled his fingers into Khan’s hair. Jim let his other hand glide slowly down the alabaster white chest beneath him, over the half-hard cock and stroked firmly over Nien’s perineum. Then ever so slowly moved he his index finger down and placed it directly over his beloved’s hole – hesitating for his mate’s sake.

“Tell me you’re alright, Nien,” he whispered, ready to retreat if the enhanced man would become uncomfortable with what lie ahead.

He feared for nothing. Khan moaned and nodded. “Yes, Pyāra, I… I’m more than alright.”

Relieved, Kirk circled his beloved’s tight pucker lightly, then stilled and inserted his finger, keeping a
steady stroking pressure on his perineum with his thumb. Nien was so tight, his body responded to
the invasion by tensing, but the young captain was patient, waiting until Khan willed his body to
relax and accept. Kirk thrust gently with his finger, stroking inside of him with every outward drag
until he heard Khan breathe, “More, James!” And the captain happily obliged him, adding a finger –
stroking and scissoring. Above, the men dotted each other with kisses and nips and dragged hands
and lips across any bit of skin they could find.

“More, Jim – please!” The low sigh was music to Kirk’s ears, who fed a third finger inside the
Augment’s body. This time he sat up a bit so he could watch those three fingers disappear into the
willing body beneath him. Khan had the presence of mind to bear down a bit, and the fingers
disappeared to the last knuckle. A loud moan escaped the former ruler while a mixture of intense
pleasure and pain spread over his flushed features.

Kirk angled his fingers upward and sought the small lump. He brushed over it gently and continued
pressure outside with his thumb – an exquisite sweet torture that made the Augment beneath him
keen and thrust into the air seeking relief. The pain was gone. And Jim kept on, enthralled. He bent
down to lick the dewy precum now leaking from Khan’s prick, but didn’t move his hands – didn’t
give him the friction he so obviously needed. That would come later. Stroking the velvet heat inside,
he ran his palm over the velvet cock outside – not nearly enough for relief. When Kirk felt he’d
loosened Nien enough, and the Augment was pliant from his two previous orgasms, he went to pull
his fingers out.

In a flash, Khan grabbed his wrist, stilling it. Jim looked up. The man was wrecked. His chest
heaved, and he was nearly luminescent with the sheet of sweat covering his face and chest. “More,
James,” he rasped, feeling the claiming he yearned for closing in.

“Nien, are you sure?” Jim asked – knowing exactly what had been done to his mate before. He never
– never – would demand more from the man who held his heart and soul than the man could give.

Hazy blue-green eyes met his, and as Khan nodded, Kirk withdrew his hand just a bit and
generously added more lube to his fingers, his thumb and his hand; then he added more to Nien’s
open hole – circling around the shining, pink orifice and dipping inside with his thumb. He leaned
over the Augment and kissed him in a feeble attempt to pour his feelings into him through use of lips
and tongue, trying to show Nien that he understood the gift he was given. Then he trailed that
beautiful body with kisses until he reached the head of Khan’s cock. He took him into his mouth and
simultaneously pressed two fingers in; crooking them in search of his mate’s prostate.

The enhanced man hitched his breath and arched, making Jim back off just a bit – he wasn’t ready to
tip him over the edge just yet. He got Khan used to the stroking again before kissing off a bead of
precum leaking onto the super-human’s belly. Then he added a third, and then a fourth finger slowly.
All the while bobbing his head up and down his lover’s dick; stroking the underside vein with his
tongue and flicking the frenulum on each upsweep. Khan was a writhing, fucking mess of sweat and
fisted sheets, moaning and arching.

Kirk came off with a vulgar pop. “Are you okay?”

The former leader of almost a quarter of Earth didn’t care about pleading anymore. His pride had gone and left him utterly exposed to this all-consuming desire that ruled his whole being now. “M-mm-more, Jim. Oh fuck, please!”

Kirk placed a calming hand on his chest and pressed a kiss to the Augment’s hip. Slowly, ever so slowly, the young captain pushed his thumb in atop his four fingers. He sat back to look at the beautiful, debauched, open, needy creature laid out before him. Khan’s hands gripped the sheets; his needy mewling and undulating hips begged Jim to end what he had begun. He took Khan’s cock in his hand again, leaned over and let the saliva pooled in his mouth drop over the head. He soaked that beautiful cock in precum and spit and worked it gently, twisting his wrist and sliding over his thumb over the slit.

“I want you to be mine,” Jim whispered and met the glassy eyes which resembled a stormy sea.

“I’m yours – for now – always,” Nien breathed, not trusting his own voice anymore. The moment had come – he knew it. He would be claimed – bonded to this golden man forever.

“I’d open you up and write my name inside of you….” That’s what Khan told him. So slowly, Jim didn’t want his lover taken over the edge yet, he moved his index finger against and around the soft almond-shaped nerve bundle and traced ‘J’. Jim didn’t know if his lover’s augmented body would allow him to feel his intention…

A loud yelp escaped the Augment. “Ahhh, Kirk, please!” He begged; he pleaded for…for this, for him, for time, for release.

‘A’. It was so tight he could hardly move his fingers. He could feel Khan’s heartbeat inside of him – around his fingers.

Khan grabbed for Kirk’s wrist and thrashed his head in the pillow.

‘M’. Fresh beads of sweat broke out on his forehead and upper lip. He thrust his hips up, trying to force the younger man to tighten the hold on his cock; to finish him.
Then his sanity returned for a moment and it clicked; he felt it now. “You’re… You’re writing… your…” The shaky voice couldn’t continue. The sentiment – how his *Pyāra* intended mark him – was too overwhelming.

Jim smiled. The genius got it. “Shhh. I have you. I have you. Oh fuck, baby, I have you.” Kirk continued his endearments as he began to work the foreskin with his free hand in earnest, watching the precum pool in Khan’s cockslit before sliding down onto his fist.

‘E’. Jim traced the next letter.

‘S’. He exaggerated the last curl as much as the tight space allowed, finishing his mark deep in his mate’s body.

“Jim. I…I…Ahhh!” It was too much – the memory of his own words said to his beloved rang in his head. The knowledge that Jim’s name was now branded inside of him, made his mental chains broke apart.

Their eyes met, and it wasn’t sweat pouring down the Augments face now. His glazed and wet eyes squeezed closed; a sob escaped him. His hips began thrusting his cock feverishly into Kirk’s fist, needing the release as he did air to breathe. Jim pushed his hand and watched as Nien’s hole opened to allow him entry, and then devour him up to his wrist. The superhuman screamed; the sound reverberated off of the walls and rang in Kirk’s ears. Cum erupted from Khan’s prick to paint his chin, his chest, his stomach. It was the most beautiful thing Kirk had ever seen. He continued pushing and pulling, fucking his lover with his closed hand and watched the streams erupt, drop, pool, and slide down his torso in time to his movement. Finally, his prick drooled its last, weak release over the captain’s hand.

Jim didn’t withdraw his hand completely. He stoked and hummed and whispered and kissed the man below through the aftershocks and waited. He knew what Khan wanted, and it wasn’t emptiness.

When Nien’s breath evened out just a bit, Jim withdrew his hand slowly, just enough to leave three fingers in the gaping, twitching orifice. There was just enough room to lay himself into his hand. He retrieved the lubricant once more and liberally coated his member. Then he placed his dick onto his palm and pressed himself into the willing body atop his fingers. Watching his mushroom head disappear inside the other man left him agape – in awe and most wonderfully in love. He relished the feeling of his body inside the slick heat of his mate. Their gazes met, and with a nod from Nien, Jim finally withdrew his hand and pressed in to the root. He let both of them adjust to the sensation – Kirk mostly, after the intensity before, he didn’t want to spend himself too soon. This was to savor. He stroked his hand down Khan’s right leg and lifted it to his shoulder. He kissed the inside of the
knee, smiled down at the exquisite creature below him, and moved.

The sensation was almost too much again. Both men groaned. Nien was tightening around him, his enhanced body already setting itself back to right. It was wonderful and maddening all at the same time. Jim slowly dragged out to corona and pushed back in, savoring the tightening channel that caught his foreskin anddragged it over his cockhead and back down again. He kept his thrusts slow and deliberate, thankful they’d already come tonight. He found himself staring. He couldn’t take his eyes from that beautiful face with the high cheekbones and the swollen, bowed, sinful lips. He pumped into Nien a few more times, making sure to rub his lover’s prostate from within before lowering the leg and then bent down for a kiss. It was hungry and shaky and breathy. Nothing short of glorious.

After the grandeur of the last flight to the stars and the fulfillment of their bonding, Khan needed his beloved’s proximity more than ever before. His arms wrapped around Kirk’s shoulders, holding him close.

When Jim’s abdomen lowered over Nien’s prick, the super-human’s breath hitched. Kirk felt that lovely cock once again filling out beneath him – wonderful Augment refractory period. He pulled away and gave his lover a wicked grin, dragging his rippled, muscular stomach down over his mate’s hardening prick, then back up again. Oh, his shoulders stung. Khan’s nails dug in, and God only knew if he drew blood; the sweat falling into those marks hurt, but it didn’t bother the younger man. It was fantastic, adding anticipation to the already building sensation pooling in his gut.

Both men were pulling in heaving breaths now. Their sweat dripped and mingled together before rolling onto the sheets tangled under their bodies. Time had long left Kirk; he had no idea how long they had stretched on – how long they could.

Bending down, his lips sought out the other mark he left all those nights ago – back in San Francisco, not knowing at the time that he had branded Khan then. His mouth found the spot on Nien’s neck and closed over it – sucking, licking, kissing. And another wave of far too intense sensation overwhelmed the former dictator, and Khan’s orgasm gave way first. He roared again and clutched at Kirk’s shoulders, pelvis pumping beneath Jim, his shuddering walls pulling the younger man in him deeper as if trying to swallow him whole. The tightening of Nien’s muscles around Jim’s cock pulled his ecstasy from him and spurt after spurt of hot cum coated his beloved’s insides. James painted himself over his name as he yelled into the Augment’s neck. And he bit into the salty, exotic tasting flesh again – renewing the mark.

The circuit closed – invisible chords of a bond that only death could tear apart now laced together - chained their souls to one.

Each man now had marked the other – imprinted himself on the other inside and out – to last.
When Kirk came back to himself he kissed Nien’s mouth, let himself slip from his body, and then kissed down the super-human’s lean frame. He gently licked and sucked his lover's cock clean, careful not to overstimulate. He sat back on his heels, lifted and spread his bondmate’s legs. Cum slid from Nien, over the plump of his ass onto the sheets below. Jim gathered it onto his fingers and added it to the creamy liquid that striped his lover’s stomach and chest. He swirled it together, gathered it back onto his fingers and brought them to Khan’s parted lips who took them into his mouth, licking and sucking the digits clean. Jim repeated the action, using mouth and hand – kissing Nien – stroking his mouth with his tongue until they'd consumed the last of the viscous liquid. Not a drop wasted between them.

Finally each man lay sated, side-by-side facing one another, their lips found each other again – sweetly now – gently. Their hands roamed each other’s face and tangled in hair. Their bodies pressed against one another and legs twined beneath covers. When they took a moment for breath, Kirk pressed his forehead to Khan’s. He swallowed, looked into the still wet pools of his mate’s eyes and saw the emotion brimming in them. “I love you,” he whispered. “I love you so much!” He wrapped one arm even more firmly around Nien’s waist. “You have saved me, so many times, in so many ways. You are a great man, but more so, you are a good one. And you are…” Kirk swallowed again, hard. He had to get this right, for them, “…my mate. You are my man, my brother. You are my crew, Noonien – my family.”

Khan finally met his eyes. He knew the implications of Kirk’s words, what they meant for both of them – the history of those words.

“I am – and you are mine.” Nien whispered before he kissed Jim one last time. Then he pulled the younger man into him, dragged Jim’s leg over his own and closed his eyes.

They were one. They could feel their souls interwoven – a constant soft presence at the edge of their subconscious. Neither of them would ever be alone again as long as they lived.

A tear he’d never admit to, slipped out of Jim’s eye and over the bridge of his nose, down his cheek onto his pillow. He stroked Khan’s hair and face and neck. Finally, Jim wrapped himself around his Augment as best he could and closed his eyes in utter happiness and peace, allowing sleep to pull him under.

TBC…
Rrrright, everyone still there – or have you all already sought out your cold showers? Yeah, I know, it was really strong, hot sex but still it also branded our boys to each other. And Nien’s whispers that he wanted to open Jim to print his name into him to have him close all time had to find some sweet consequences. I also wanted to start the whole thing in a completely romantically and gentle way, and which way would have been better than to begin with a good dinner? We say in Germany ‘Love finds its way through the stomach’ – means, a good meal relaxes and opens up everyone’s soul and heart. Therefore I thought it a good start for our two boys to begin the evening with this sweet-silly bet Jim definitely won.

In the next chapter our two boys are still in heaven, Bones gets a hint what happened, Spock’s mental sensibility kicks in – and there will be important changes concerning the war; changes which should mean peace but they are the start for Luengo and Norton to go through with their plans.

I hope you liked the new chapter and I’m really, really curious what you think of it.

Love you all,

Have a nice Sunday,

Yours Starflight
New hope

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

I don’t know if your all summer holidays are already over of if someone still have or looking forward to their vacation, yet I hope you all found some time to relax and to enjoy recreation.

Thank you once again for your reviews; I knew would love the last chapter. And the ‘aftermath’ concerning Jim’s friends when they are going to learn of the ‘last step’ will certainly make you smirk. In the new chapter there will be also news about the Klingons and the war, you’ll read about Carol’s thoughts concerning Khan, and… Well, just read the update.

Enjoy,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 43 – New hope

“Mr. President, sir!”

Robertson’s secretary’s voice pulled him from sleep. Groggily lifting his head from the pillow, he glanced at the alarm clock beside him on the nightstand and frowned. It was half-past two in the morning. Rubbing his face he sat up; At that moment, his secretary called again via intercom.

“Mr. President, I’m sorry to disturb you, but it’s urgent!”

Asking himself if the woman ever slept, he activated the link but without visual transfer. It wasn’t necessary that see him sleep-tousled in his pajamas. “Robertson here, Julie. What’s up?”

“Mr. President, I apologize for waking you, but we got a message from the Klingon Empire – from Chancellor M’Rek. It’s for your eyes only, sir.”
The mightiest man of the Federation felt a mix of anticipation and dread; he threw his blanket away. “Put it through to my desk terminal! I'll be there in a minute!” he ordered. He reached for his dressing gown and left the bedroom. With long strides, he crossed the hallway, nodded at two guards, stepped into his private office and went to his desk. A moment later, he saw the stylized triangle overlaying a circle – the Klingon emblem. Then the face of a very old Klingon appeared; his silver mane fell over his broad shoulders, and the scar on his left cheek seemed to glow in the twilight surrounding him. The sharp gaze of his dark eyes pierced Robertson even over the distance and despite the fact that this was a recorded transmission sent away more than eight hours ago.

“To the President of the United Federation of Planets. Mr. Robertson, I have received your suggestion of a temporary ceasefire to ensure the safety of the delegations. Though no member of our delegation fears death, it would be a disadvantage to lose our diplomats to the ‘Grim Ripper’, as you call death. As such, I agree to the ceasefire for the duration of the peace-talks. I have instructed our fleet to halt all military actions beginning in twenty-four of your hours and demand that the same order be given by you to Starfleet. I advise you not to abuse our good will. Otherwise, any further talks will be forfeit. M'Rek out!”

The screen became dark again, and Robertson sighed in relief. Finally, there was a chance to make peace! Then he shook his head and chuckled. “You can’t be anything other than what you are, can you? Making it sound as if we would be the ones to burn that bridge, and not you.” He rose. “Klingon pride – I sometimes ask myself if there is anything bigger in the whole universe.”

He activated the link to his office, knowing that Julie would be there. This time he didn’t care that the woman would see him in his sleep clothes, and so he met her curious gaze as the connection was made.

“Julie, the Klingons accepted the temporary ceasefire,” he said; he smiled as his secretary showed all the signs of the relief he felt himself. “Contact Admiral Barnett. He has to call off his commodores and captains. As long as the peace talks go one, there will not be bloodshed.”

ST***ST***ST

Soft music played in the dimly illuminated captain’s quarters of the USS Enterprise. Both men, now bonded together for all time, lay on the bed, sipping at their champagne and relishing in the peacefulness that filled their joined heart and soul.

It had become a ritual for them to take a shower together after they lived out their scorching passion, washing and caressing each other under the water spray. This time had been no exception. After several hours of well-earned sleep, they had showered, washed each other with care and tenderness,
and dried each other off. Then they changed the sheets and covers; neither of them wanted to sleep in the sticky mess their coupling had left. Restarting the music and opening the bottle of champagne, Jim had returned to bed where Khan already waited for him. And contrary to most times when they snuggled together, Kirk now lay beneath, and the Augment cuddled into him. Sprawled on his back Jim opened his legs to allow his soulmate to place himself between them. Nien’s back rested on the younger man’s chest; his head was pillowed on the captain’s shoulder, and one of Jim’s arms was wrapped protecting and lovingly around the super-human’s waist. Their free hands they held their glasses.

They were silent; words weren’t necessary at the moment. It was true familiarity that silence could be as comfortable as talking. Even Jim, who always had something to say, enjoyed the comfortable quiet, the music, and relished in the warm weight of his beloved on his body and Khan’s unique scent in his nose. Leaning his cheek against the Augment’s head, Kirk closed his eyes and felt his lover's long, strong fingers stroking over his arm.

Khan took a deep breath and concentrated on the new feelings washing through his mind and soul. He had felt Jim’s presence before – his emotions whenever they were in turmoil, but not like this. It was like a part of the younger man was in him – a soft, warm breeze that mingled with his own breath. He tried to grasp this sensation, to deepen it – and promptly Jim stirred.

“Something wrong, baby?” he whispered.

Nien began to smile. “No – rather the opposite,” he murmured before he fixed his full attention on the link between them. He heard and felt Jim’s sharp intake of air and knew that his mate felt it, too. With all the tenderness and love he held for the young captain, he looked up over his shoulder as Kirk’s asked surprised, “What are you doing?”

Ocean blue-green eyes met the sky. “Can you feel it, Pyāra?” Khan whispered. “Can you feel me – not in your body, but in your soul?”

Jim moistened his lips and closed his eyes. There! There it was again. A gentle fondling at the edge of his consciousness – a constant whisper deep in his soul. The feeling of not being alone – of being whole for the first time in his life.

He had experienced something akin to this in his first mind meld with the old Spock from the other timeline. Then, a year later, ‘his’ Spock shared his own strength with him and kept him alive in the hospital during that grave time while Khan’s blood repaired his damaged cells.

Since then they have been connected to each other – brothers, but greater than. But he’d never felt
anything like this from his Vulcan friend. He knew that Spock shielded himself – not from him in particular, but from all of his human companions to protect himself from their emotions. It was rare that Kirk felt an impulse of his first officer at all. Rare, but not unheard of. During the first-year mission, when Spock had been in danger, he felt him. And, weeks later, Jim had learned that the link worked the other way around too; as he had faced great risk, suddenly the Vulcan had been there despite all logic just as he had when the Enterprise raced to Aldebaran to save Kirk and Khan. Spock could tell him whatever he wanted, Jim simply knew that his fear as the Klingon ship appeared at the space station had been sensed by the Vulcan and had made him act. Their link worked somehow, even if Kirk had none of the telepathic ability of a Vulcan. The increased brain activity wouldn't do much to change that.

But the bond with Khan was different. The link with Spock was thin but strong – a thread of tritanium. His connection with Nien was so much more; deeper, more powerful, but gentle. He could feel the presence of his mate like the caress of the sun at a summer day – bright and warm. It filled the parts of him that had been empty until now. It chased away the loneliness that had always followed him like a shadow.

They were one now – two men with shared souls; both still individuals, yet their beings were woven together with the strongest of stuff.

“I feel you,” he said quietly, kissing Nien’s temple. “I can feel you like... It's so much more than before. How do I explain it? It's like a soft touch in my very being and always there - it's not going anywhere, no matter what.” He looked in awe at the Augment. “Is this the bond?” he asked though he already knew the answer.

Khan nodded slowly. “Yes, it is.” He took a deep breath, tasted Jim’s sweet, masculine scent on his tongue. “It is exactly as Otto and Katie explained. They are never without the other, even when apart.” He frowned. “I am unsure about effect due to the distances of space, but I hope that we will always sense each other’s presence in our souls.”

“We will, baby,” Jim murmured, bent down and caught his mate’s lips with his own, giving him a tender kiss. “So,” he said, barely pulling away, “does this mean that we are… umm… kind of married now?”

A sparkle of amusement danced in the former dictator’s eyes. “We vowed to belong to each other forever and we bonded. If you would like to call it ‘marriage’ I have no objection. I know it does not resemble the ceremony humans are accustomed too, but it is one nonetheless.”

Jim began to smile. “So I can call you husband from now on?” He saw the astonished expression of his beloved and began to snicker. “You are my husband now, and I’m yours, right?”
“Yes,” Khan nodded before he added with mischief in his gaze, “but please don’t refer to me as such in front of your Vulcan without me. I really – really! – want to see his face when he hears it.”

Kirk began to laugh and tightened his embrace around his mate, who in rare accusations, was almost boyish. “I already know what it'll look like. Eyebrows up to his hair, indignance, disbelief. But if you blink you'll miss it. Then he'll put his hands behind him and lecture me on how illogical it is in our position.”

“As if his relationship with your comms officer were any more logical,” Khan taunted, yet the chuckle took out the sharpness of his mockery. Emptying his glass, he let it dangle over the bed's edge and dropped it. The soft thud told him it didn't shatter. Then he leaned his head back on Jim’s shoulder and closed his eyes – content and utterly relaxed. Here, with Jim, he didn't need to wear the mask of the strong leader or be on constant alert. They both didn’t need to hide their real selves – they could simply be.

Another gentle sound told Khan that Kirk dropped his own glass. Then Jim wrapped his arm around him, holding him close.

Closing his eyes, Nien smiled. The soft music, the cozy atmosphere, the still lingering warm aftermath of their bonding, Jim’s heartbeat at his back, the feeling of being sheltered for once – he could lay like this for all eternity. And for once, he pushed all concerns and worries for his family, Jim and himself far away. For once he chose the bliss of forgetting – if only for a few hours.

Jim rubbed his cheek on the still drying, midnight dark strands of the man who was a part of him now. Closing his own eyes, he took in a deep breath. Sleep began to envelop them both with its own warm blanket.

ST***ST

Several decks below a crew member couldn’t find sleep despite the late hour and eventful past few days.

Carol Marcus lay beneath her thin blanket and stared into nothing – tired, yet too troubled to relax. The reason was not the lovely evening with Len McCoy. Quite the opposite. ‘Bones’ was not only a gentleman in private, but he was also humorous in his own wry way and a fantastic conversationalist. He was truly brilliant – not just as a doctor, but he was well-read in a variety of topics. His flirting was sweet, and she loved how the tiny wrinkles around his clear eyes danced when he laughed. He
had his own rough charm, and she enjoyed his company very much.

Len had invited her to the best restaurant in the starbase and then for drinks at a classy bar. When they returned to the ship, he had walked her to her quarters. His chivalry was a little old-fashioned, but Carol had been raised in England where it was still taught and passed down. It was pleasant, being accompanied by a gentleman and being treated like a lady for a change.

They had taken their time saying good night; neither party wanted to end the evening, but both agreed without a word that their budding relationship was too fresh for more at the moment. So she gave into a smaller impulse and kissed Len. It surprised them both. But before McCoy had been able to do anything, she had rushed into her quarters, heart beating wildly and excitement brimming in her chest.

The latter had remained deep in her heart until she slipped into bed and ordered the lights out.

Then the shadows came back – the ghosts of what happened over a year ago – the things she had pushed firmly out of her mind during the evening.

The alienation from her father had been the beginning of the catastrophe she had been forced to watch unfold. The admiral had used lame excuses to reject her help and became angrier whenever she asked questions about his intentions. She became determined to find out what was going on. Then her father dismissed her from all of his projects – understandable today since she's learned what he was really up to.

Still, she had never thought that he would go as far as he did. But the proof was right before her eyes – exploding all around her during the Vengeance's attack. She had believed that she could stop her father from killing over a thousand people, but this was an illusion. She should have known him better. Jim Kirk saw through him. Hell, even Khan had known the admiral well enough to know that Marcus would stop at nothing. The Augment had warned them – her, to be precise, by suggesting that none of them was safe; he knew the extent of the Vengeance's power. Of course he did, after all he had his own part in the Dreadnaught Class ship's completion.

At the beginning of the 'project', she had seen Khan only twice. The admiral explained that the stranger in civilian clothes was an agent of Starfleet Intelligence; she hadn't asked any further questions. After all nothing was more secret than the identity of SBI operative.

She had no idea who the man was for real, and only later as she flew down to the asteroid together with McCoy and opened one of the long-distance torpedoes, did she learn the whole truth. Almost instantly, she had realized how dangerous Khan and those people, hidden in the weapons he
constructed, were. Still, the scientist in the young woman admired the man from three centuries ago; he learned quickly and grasped modern technology's intricacies in order to support and develop complicated projects within Starfleet’s most secret departments.

And then she witnessed the other side of him – the side her father talked about during the transmission between the *Vengeance* and the *Enterprise*. As cultivated as Khan seemed to be, deep in him was a deadly savage who used his intelligence to reach his goals no matter the cost. In a twisted way, they resembled each other – the former Chief in Command of Starfleet and the former Augment-leader. The way Khan killed her father in his fury the moment he gained control over the *Vengeance’s* bridge showed Carol that this man couldn’t be tamed. He was a wolf in Starfleet's clothing – handsome, polite, charming and brilliant on the outside, deadly in the inside.

Or so she thought until Jim Kirk told her the story of Khan’s past and what the super-human had been through because of her father. The young woman had to admit that she felt sorry for the enhanced man. No one should go through such torment. But he was still a murderer who had to face the consequences of his deeds. And surprisingly, he seemed to be ready for that. Seemed. She doubted the sincerity of his promise to Kirk.

The man had been created to survive – at any cost. His behavior and his responses were rooted in his genes. It was his nature to win. Nothing and no one would ever be able to stop him if he set his mind to something. She had learned that the hard way. His purpose had been to take revenge on her father, and revenge he got. But even after all her Dad did, even after his attempt to sacrifice the entire crew of the *Enterprise* (and the sleeping Augments), Carol hadn't wanted to lose him like that – or at all. Her father had lost his way, no doubt about it, but that was no reason to kill him. But there was no stopping Khan from snuffing out her father’s life like a candle.

The mere thought that the Augment-leader was here aboard, free and even protected, left a bitter taste in her mouth. On the other hand, the same determination that had driven Khan to make the man pay who brought pain and anguish to him, had forced the super-human’s hand and his decisions as he raced to Jim’s rescue on Turkana. The very same mind decided to stay at Kirk’s side as the Klingon vessel attacked the space dock. And maybe this same incomprehensible loyalty Khan developed for the young captain would drive him to face his trial in fulfilment of his promise to Kirk.

Carol bit her lips. This whole thing made no sense. Not the slightest bit!

Jim told her that Khan regarded his crew as his family – as his brothers and sisters. The catastrophe had begun after her father killed four of his people and made him believe that the other Augments were killed, too. Carol could understand the horrible pain the Augment must have endured when he thought his whole ‘family’ was dead. She had ‘only’ lost her father – the man who raised her. If she had understood Jim correctly, than Khan's relationship with many of the Augments was similarly close. Yet Khan had been ready to die along with Kirk, leaving his people to an unknown fate.
‘It’s private,’ Jim had said.

Private...

Well, Carol belonged to the small circle of people who knew that it had been Khan’s blood that brought the young captain back to the land of the living – that healed him.

Maybe it had to do with the blood? Did Khan regard Kirk as one of his own now? Did the blood change more in Jim than was anticipated? Was he even still himself?

For a moment, she doubted it. Jim's defense and protection of the man who killed his mentor didn’t fit the captain's personality at all. Those changes seemed too great to be rooted only in sympathy and Kirk’s firm belief in right and wrong. On the other hand, if Jim had changed too much, Len and Spock wouldn’t trust him – but they did.

So maybe Kirk's reasons for backing up the Augment were different than what she originally thought them to be. But then, what were they?

Carol rolled over, ordered lights on and rose to fetch a glass of water.

Besides all the questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’, there was still the main reason for her unrest. Her father's killer was aboard – and she had promised to keep his presence a secret. For Jim. For Jim and the other senior officers, who would be in deep trouble if the truth came out too early. She could accept that. She didn’t want to see Len, Jim, Spock, Uhura, or the others arrested. She had found a home aboard the Enterprise, and her friends were her family now. Not so unlike Khan and his crew – she couldn't deny that.

She would keep silent – she gave her word. But as she took the glass of water from the replicator and sipped it, she hoped that she wasn’t about to make a big mistake – maybe the biggest one in her life.

And with this thought, her doubts returned.
The morning came far too early. His internal clock woke Kirk before his alarm clock and ordered the lights to twenty percent. He watched Nien in the dimmed light

Nien…

Now and forever his soulmate – his husband!

For a moment, the mere sound of the word frightened him. He – married! Well, sort of. But this was forever – their bond stronger than any spoken vow.

And with this knowledge, utter calm and peace filled the young captain.

He wasn’t alone anymore. He was with someone who would stay by his side, no matter what. And he had someone now whose side he’d never leave – someone to fight for. Sure they’d have periods of disagreement, maybe even fights, but one thing was certain. Khan would never abandon him no matter the circumstance!

Finally, he never had to fear being left behind again. Someone would share the good and the bad, the joy and the sadness – his whole life. He’d stay for it all.

The thought brought tears to Jim’s eyes. He braced himself on one arm, glanced down on Nien’s relaxed face, and kissed him gently.

A small sound escaped the Augment, and he stiffened for just a moment – like Kirk he was always wary; ready to fight. Then he sighed contentedly and sleepily wrapped both arms around Jim, his subconscious recognizing his mate instantly.

Hovering over Nien, the young captain took his time softly kissing his beloved awake. He smiled as the former dictator replied with tenderness of his own.
That was until the alarm clock went off. With a groan, Kirk lifted his head, ordered the device to, "Shut the hell up," and snuggled back into the warm cocoon of Khan’s arms.

For several long minutes, they lay there pressed together and enjoying the warm energy brimming along their bond. But minutes ticked away mercilessly. Having nothing to do that couldn't be put off, Jim didn’t want to leave bed so soon, but duty called. Most of the senior officers were still enjoying liberty. He'd check the ship's status, leave the con to a junior officer standing watch and then find something to kill the boredom.

“You first, or me?” he mumbled.

Khan, who, of course, knew what his mate meant, took a deep breath. “You. A captain must be ready at all times – for anything.”

“Yeah – even if the ship is stuck in space dock,” Jim grumbled, reluctantly untangling himself from his beloved. He rose, pouting.

Coming out of the bathroom half an hour later, he was greeted with a very, very strange view – at least in his opinion. In the still dim light, he could see two shalwar-covered legs protrude from the other side of the empty bed.

'Is Nien doing a headstand? Why?’ Jim thought perplexed. He closed the distance between them and looked at his lover, who supported himself in a perfect triangle of head and hands. His face reddened due to the position. “Is that comfortable?” the young captain asked jokingly, and Khan threw him a wide grin.

“It’s good for the circulation and refreshes the brain.” With the elegance of a cat, the super-human first put the right and then the left foot back on the floor before rising. “And, it’s a good start to Tai Chi.”

“Tai Chi?” Jim pursed his lips. He had heard of it, but he'd never actually seen it in action. “Doesn't that have something to do with stretching?”

Khan chuckled quietly. “That’s a part of it, yes, but it’s far more. If you like I’ll show you if you can find the time in all that you have to do.” His tone teased, and Kirk began to snicker.
“I’m dying of boredom these days, and you know it.” He cocked his head. “I think I can leave bridge late in the morning. Care to join me on the sports deck? Or is the SDD project keeping you busy all day?”

A smile played around the Augment’s lips. “I still have a lot to do, but today I am not in the mood to spend my time making technical drawings and instructions for something I have already built. The sports deck sounds like a fine idea.”

Jim beamed at him. “Right! Get ready, honey, we’re having that breakfast.”

While Khan was in the bathroom, Jim put things back in order, but he was keeping the champagne cooler and the glasses. He knew that there would be more opportunities for their use, so he put them into one of the sideboards.

Kirk thought Nien had ‘hidden’ enough; it was about time to integrate him beyond just Engineering. Half an hour later, the two men entered the officer’s mess for breakfast.

McCoy and – oh wonder of wonders! – Scotty appeared. They were about to get their food when they saw Kirk and Khan. Waving at him, Bones gestured towards a table with two sets of dishes and room for three more. A young man served coffee and smiled as he recognized his commanding officer.

“Good morning, Captain!” he said, dipping his head before addressing Khan, “Sir!”

“Good morning, Mr. Howard,” Jim replied and sat down. “An Assam for Mr. Singh and a coffee for me, please. Oh, and two orange juices.”

“Aye, sir!” Howard confirmed and returned with two more sets of dishes the moment the two other officers returned to their table; trays in their hands.

“Morning, you two,” Bones greeted.

Scotty beamed at them. “Mornin’ Jim – Mr. Singh!”
The goofy smile McCoy wore didn’t slip Kirk’s attention. It seemed the evening with Carol Marcus had been a complete success for his friend who placed his tray beside his.

And Jim was right. Bones was walking on clouds, and just from a kiss good night at the threshold of Carol's quarters. They had a very pleasant evening aboard the space station, a delicious dinner in one of the best restaurants whose viewing window showed the nebula, and afterwards they had taken a walk, window-shopping. It had been later, when they returned to the Enterprise, that Carol had kissed him.

For almost a minute, Leonard had stood in front of her door after that kiss, showing all the signs of a love-struck boy, before he had gone to his own quarters lost in a daydream and happy.

And this delight still lingered in him; the CMO was indeed in a bright, sunny mood. “You, my dear friend, are in a unique position. Your doctor'll bring you breakfast,” he said to Jim. “So, what do you have in mind? Ham, eggs, Chicago hard roll, or…”

“Really! Yeah, and some fruit, please,” Kirk grinned.

McCoy’s eyes made like they would pop out of their sockets. “You're gonna eat fruit of your own free will?” he gasped, clearly shocked. Scott blinked in surprise, then his glance found the Augment and as he saw the hidden smirk on the narrow face, he instantly knew who was responsible for Kirk’s sudden appreciation for healthy food.

Bones figured the same because he stared at Khan; astonishment was thick in his voice as he said, “You have to tell me how you managed to talk some sense into the kid. He'll eat stuff I can't even identify.”

The super-human chuckled quietly. “Jim is always reasonable when the argument is convincing. The only challenge is explaining its necessity.”

“Hey!” the young captain protested while Bones went to the buffet to get Jim’s breakfast.

Kirk didn’t notice Scotty closely watching him and Khan. Once again, the Scotsman discerned how easily the two men handled each other. They sat close together, unaware of how they almost leaned into each other, and the shimmer in their gazes spoke a language of… The chief engineer pursed his lips. If he didn't know better he would assume they were a couple. But Kirk’s reputation... Scotty'd witnessed and wingman'd enough to know that no attractive female was safe from his flirting. To
think that the young captain could be attracted to a man was almost crazy, but…

“Good morning, Captain!” Briston stepped up to the table clad in the brightest chef’s whites Kirk had ever seen. He looked so much in his element surrounded by real food. He smiled at Kirk who returned the grin with one of his own.

“Mr. Briston! Thank you once again for your help yesterday. I hope I didn’t make too much of a mess in your kitchen.”

The chief chuckled. “No, sir, don’t worry. You were kind enough to soak the pans, so cleaning them quickly was no problem.”

Kirk shrugged. “Well, my mother had a fit on regular basis if I didn’t soak our pots or pans whenever I helped her in the kitchen, so it became second nature.” He interrupted himself as McCoy returned and placed a plate in front of him. “Thanks, Bones!”

Leonard smiled. “You’re welcome!”

Jim’s attention returned to Briston. “By the way, let me know when you want that 24-hour liberty; just send me a message and it’s done.”

Briston’s eyes widened, then he smirked. “Sir, as much as I appreciate your offer, may I ask for a different favor?” As Kirk made an asking gesture with his left hand, he said, “Please give me the recipe to your barbecue sauce.” Jim’s baffled expression was enough to make him add, “You had left some of it in a sauce boat and I couldn’t resist testing it. I have to admit that your sauce is better than mine, so if you’ll allow it, I’d like to use your recipe.”

A soft laughter escaped the Enterprise’s captain. “No problem, Briston. I learned it from my grandfather. But I have to confess that there isn’t a real recipe. I wing it like he did, but I can type it out and send it to you.”

The cook’s eyes shined at that. “That would be very nice, sir. I’ll name it ‘Captain’s Barbeque Sauce’, if you don’t mind.”

To his surprise, Kirk felt heat rising in his cheeks. “I am honored, Mr. Briston, thank you.”
“I’m the one who should say thank you, Captain.” He nodded at the Kirk’s breakfast. “Can I bring you a fried egg with some ham?”

“Love some,” Jim beamed and looked at Khan. “You too?” he asked and as the Augment only nodded, clearly amused, Kirk ordered two fried eggs, before the chef vanished.

McCoy and Scott had listened to the conversation and stared in astonishment at their friend and commanding officer. “Did I hear that right?” Bones asked astonished. “You cooked?”

“Why not?” he answered.

“Here, in the officer’s mess – alone, for yourself?” Without realizing, Bones imitated Spock as he lifted both brows.

“Of course not. It was a bet – and I won,” Jim grinned; his face was pure innocence.

“A bet?” The CMO cocked his head, glanced quickly at Khan, and as he saw the smug expression on the pale, slender face and it all clicked. “Ah, I understand. You and Khan wagered on your… sauce?”

“No, my honor in regards to my cooking abilities was at stake. I bet that he would like my barbecue steak.” He put sweetener in his coffee. “I won.”

“And what did you win?” Leonard pressed as his friend fell silent, sipping his coffee.

“I don’t think you want details,” Kirk replied wryly, wriggling his eyebrows.

McCoy choked at his coffee, almost spitting it out. Scotty clapped him several times on the back, chuckling. “Easy, Doc. It canna be that bad.”

“You’ve no idea,” Bones wheezed, fighting for air.
“Bridge to Captain Kirk!” a female voice sounded through the speakers. It wasn’t Uhura but the young junior officer she had taken under her wing. Jim knew the ensign’s voice well enough by now to hear the urgency in it. In a second, he changed from a mischievous, oversized youngster back into the firm, confident commanding officer he was.

Quickly he rose and went to the intercom, activating it. “Kirk here.”

“Captain, we received a message from Starfleet Command, priority one. It’s from Admiral Barnett, himself.”

Throwing a glance at Nien, Bones and Scotty he answered, “Is it encrypted or…”

“No sir, it came without any code.”

Bones stared first at Scott then at Khan. A priority one message from Command without a code, therefore easily understood by the enemy. That could only mean one of two things: The war was at some sort of impasse or the war was over. Starfleet wanted the enemy to hear the message.

Jim had similar thoughts, as he ordered, “Patch it to the terminal in the officer’s mess, Ensign.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

Kirk walked to the terminal with long strides. It was situated in a niche and normally used for emergencies. Activating it, the screen sprang to life and showed the firmly set, dark features of the Chief in Command. “To all fleet commanders and captains of the fleet, this is Admiral Richard Barnett. I have the pleasure of informing you that a temporary ceasefire has been declared between the Klingons and the United Federation of Planets beginning stardate 2259.1106, at 1200. Peace talks will begin in five days. For this period, all aggressive actions are prohibited for both sides! I should not have to emphasize how important it is that all combat operations are ceased! Any infraction will result in hostilities worse than before. Any infraction, therefore, will be punished. All commodores and admirals, report your squadron’s status. Keep your channels open and on standby to receive further instructions. Admiral Barnett out!”

Jim looked with surprise at the screen; then a large grin broadened his face while the around him voices grew louder. Obviously, everyone had listened to the message, and as he glanced up, he saw relief on most faces and caution on some. He couldn’t blame the latter. Klingons agreeing to peace-talks – that was a surprise.
Returning to his table, he was greeted with Scotty’s, “I just canna believe it!” And Bones smiled, “At least it's good news!”

Khan pursed shortly his lips. “Do you think the Klingons are honestly pursuing diplomacy as a strategy?”

Kirk shrugged. “Say what you will about Klingons, the concept of bluffing or lying – it's just not what they do. They fight with the ventail open. Maybe the defeat at Aldebaran opened their eyes, or maybe they're reaching the end of their resources. Perhaps both are the reason they're willing to put some effort into ending the war without losing face, of course.” He took a deep breath. “But I really don’t care why they're all of sudden ready to talk, I’m just glad they are. And I think most of the crew share my opinion. I'm going to the bridge to make a proper ship-wide transmission. See you!”

He was about to turn when McCoy’s hand shot forward and held his wrist. “Your breakfast, Jim!” he said sternly, throwing a pointed glance at the steaming egg.

Kirk rolled his eyes. “Bones, this may be the end of the goddamn war. Breakfast can wait.” He met the firm gaze of his friend and CMO, and groaned. “Two months ago you complained about me gaining weight and now…”

“Two months ago you weren’t held captive, tortured, suffering from the effects of smoke inhalation, and nearly exposed to the vacuum of space. Just take a bite, man.”

Kirk sighed and took his cup of coffee. The movement caused his collar to slip a little bit, revealing the renewed hickey now clearly a bite mark healing. McCoy’s eyes widened. “What the hell…” he began in a hushed voice, and it didn’t calm him any when Jim only grinned at him.

“Everything is perfectly fine, Bones,” he said, smiled innocently; he put his cup back and practically raced out of the room as McCoy had barely let go of his wrist.

“Jim, wait!” Leonard called, but the doors already closed behind the captain. “Oh, for the love of God, there I thought the kid would have a decent breakfast for once, and then…”

“Do not fret, Doctor, I will take care of him,” Khan interrupted him and leaned back, sipping his Assam.
The CMO frowned darkly at him. “Like you did last night? Don’t think I didn't see that... That thing!”

Beside him, Scotty blinked in confusion; McCoy’s body had shielded Kirk’s mark from his view. He didn’t know what had irritated McCoy so much, but it had to do with Khan, that was for sure. Curious, he looked at the other man.

The former dictator smirked arrogantly at the CMO. “What you saw is only on the surface, Doctor. What is inside is far greater and stronger – for eternity.”

“What do you mean?” Leonard demanded, but the Augment stayed perfectly calm – casual even.

“I already told you what began; it is completed now.” He watched McCoy frown, and then he obviously understood what Khan had been hinting at. He stared at him absolutely agape. Nien chuckled, rising to get his own breakfast, leaving behind a profoundly alarmed CMO and a very confused chief engineer.

ST***ST

Jim reached the bridge and went straight to his chair. He signaled the junior officer at Uhura’s station to open an internal channel for a ship-wide broadcast, and then he informed the crew of the new situation. Finally, he demanded reports from all stations; they would be transmitted to Bob Wesley later. Command needed reports to ascertain fleet readiness so that preparations could be made in the event diplomacy became – undiplomatic.

He had barely finished when the lift doors opened again and he felt a familiar presence. Not that of Nien, but of…

“Spock!?” Surprised the young captain stared at his first office still clad in his civilian attire; Uhura was at his side. “Don’t you two have a day left before you’re back on duty?” He rose and watched the quick smile wash over Nyota’s face while the Vulcan lifted a brow.

“Rumors are running through the space station. We heard that the Klingons want to talk to the Federation?” the young Bantu woman said with the question written on her face. Kirk began to grin.

“Well, it seems rumors are still the fastest thing in the universe.” He smiled at the couple. “This one's true. Barnett sent a transmission saying that the Klingons accepted our offer for peace-talks. There's a ceasefire in place starting now and it’ll last as long as the talks last.”
Uhura took a deep breath and relief reflected itself on her beautiful face; Spock allowed himself the hint of something close to pleasure slip into his expression before he murmured, “A positive step toward ending the war.”

Jim nodded, strolling over to his two friends. “And how's liberty?”

“Peaceful,” Uhura sighed. “Very peaceful. I know every store, including the relaxation deck, the wellness deck and the best place for nails and a massage.” She looked at her station almost longingly. And as the junior officer threw her an asking glance, she walked away with a quick “Excuse me, Captain,” to her usual seat, bending over the ensign to check her station.

Jim chuckled. “We’re all workaholics, I guess.” He turned his attention back to Spock. He had Jim trapped in a very intense gaze. “Is something wrong?” Kirk asked confused. For a long moment, he got no answer.

The first officer stared at his friend. Something was… different about him – in him. The Vulcan shut out everything around him – the soft hum of the ventilation, the low voices in the background.

Something happened – deep within his T’hy’la. Spock was sure of it. He concentrated harder, fumbled toward the mental link of brotherhood that bound him to the young Terran. The Vulcan thought he could sense an addition to the bond – as if he wasn't the only one sharing a bond with Jim anymore; there was another. Spock knew with absolute certainty that something fundamental had changed.

“Jim, what has happened to you?” he asked quietly so that no one else could hear.

Kirk blinked, surprised. “What do you mean?” he wanted to know. His life hadn't been threatened in the last twenty-four hours so he wasn't sure what might concern Spock.

The dark eyes in front of him became even sharper, before he suddenly said, “May I have a word with you, Captain?”

That confused the younger man even more. “Sure. What’s bothering you?”
Lifting a brow, the Vulcan fixed him in his stare. “Not here, sir. The topic must be addressed privately.”

Well, this was a little bit alarming, but trusting his friend unconditionally, he turned around to the junior officer at the communications station. “Ensign, you have the con. If you need us, we’re in briefing room 2 on deck 6” he said, before he gestured to the lift doors. “After you, Mr. Spock.”

Two minutes later, both men stepped in the smaller briefing room where Jim ordered the lights to seventy percent. He faced his first officer. “All right, what is it Spock?”

The Vulcan watched him closely before he said slowly, “Our bond has changed. Something or someone has intruded!”

Again Jim was at a loss; then it hit him. His bond with Nien – did Spock sense it, too? He lifted a hand as a calming gesture. “There is nothing to be worried about, Spock,” he said softly.

A black brow was raised. “Your pardon, Jim, but I consider this matter my concern. Your mind is… invaded. I can sense another presence like…”

Kirk’s deep sigh interrupted him, and with something akin to worry he looked at his T’hy’la, waiting. Obviously the young Terran already knew exactly what had changed.

Jim rubbed his neck. “What you sense, Spock, is Nien.” He looked at the Vulcan and realized that Spock didn’t understand. He went on to explain, “Augments also have the ability to bond as pairs – couples – more empath than telepath, though, he explained. There is a married couple among his crew – they’re bonded. That’s – that’s what we did. Some of it happened weeks ago, but we – we completed it last night.”

For a very long moment Spock only stared at him, before he carefully replied, “Are you trying to tell me, Jim, that you have bonded with Khan?” As the younger man nodded, Sarek’s son took a deep breath. Shock coursed through him. Was Kirk compromised that he would give himself to the Augment in such a manner? Wasn’t it enough that he was intimate with him? Must Khan have access to Kirk’s innermost being, also? The enhanced man had tricked Jim into trusting him before. Had Kirk not learned from this experience? That could not be possible – Kirk was brilliant by human standards. Compromised emotionally, then. Khan had saved Jim – risked his life and had been ready to die along with him. It did not matter – it did matter, but the first officer saw motive behind the action – personal gain and was wary when it came to the former dictator.
A bond between two beings – a bond of mind and soul meant more than a simple promise as humans made when they married. A mental link couldn’t be undone except through death. And it was power. Surely, Kirk knew this by virtue of their bond. What, if Khan abused the power of the bond to influence Kirk?

As the silence lengthened, Jim shifted his weight from one foot to the other and cocked his head. “Spock, please say something.”

Again the Vulcan took a deep breath, steeling himself before he murmured, “Are you aware of the consequences your bond with Khan will bring – already brings?”

“Apart from our feeling for each other, sensing each other's emotions whether we are apart or not? Our souls are operate together now, and only our death will separate them. I understand that, Spock, you know I do. It's the same with us, brother, albeit with the addition of – of intimate love. Nien set that bond – its groundwork, I guess – without realizing it. Eventually, he figured out what had happened. And that I needed to complete the bond – for his and my own sake. We both wanted it. It was like being hungry for something.” He moistened his lips. “You remember when Nien sleepwalked to get to me when I had that nightmare?” As Spock only nodded, Kirk continued, “Nien thinks that was the start of it – a result of the bond's beginning. He felt my fear and acted on it – just like you do when I’m in trouble or the other way around.”

Crossing his arms on his back, the Spock’s gaze roamed over Jim’s youthful face. “What we share is a link of brotherhood, Jim. But what you and Khan have done would be regarded as a kind of… marriage on Vulcan… New Vulcan.” He had corrected himself, before he watched his friend blushing, and allowed himself to sigh. “You knew this, too, didn’t you? Despite an already existing bond, you knowingly chose a second.”

“Well, you can’t compare Nien’s and my bonding with an exchange of vows and a big party afterward, but I think in a certain way it has the same meaning. And I didn’t know that I needed permission.”

“Please do not be flippant, Captain. I only mean that based on probability I projected that when you took a spouse, it would be a psi-null species, most likely human. I did not consider the possibility of another being bonding with my T’hy’la. That has never occurred with my people.” “I’m not being flippant. This is new to me Spock. Very new! You are my friend and my brother, I know that – I understand that. Nien is my – my spouse. I know that and understand that, too. I truly didn’t know that this would affect us both like this. Still – I wouldn’t change everything if I had the chance to do it.”

Spock allowed himself a sigh; realizing that this was far more sensible than thought. “It affects my perception of you – your bond. It is different. My mind must relearn aspects of you and I must share. The new development requires meditation.”
“Will it hurt us, Spock – what we are?” Jim whispered; concerned that he had traded one familiarity to another one.

“Captain…”

“Jim, come on Spock,” Kirk groaned. Sometimes he really wanted to curse his Vulcan friend’s stiffness when it came to topics like that one.

Sarek’s son got the hint – and what his T’hy’la needed now. “Jim, if you are asking whether I am experiencing jealously, I can honestly say that I do not know. I do know that I am and always will be your friend and your brother. I merely need time to meditate on this new development.”

“Of course, take all the time you need,” Kirk murmured; relieved that Spock didn’t turn his back on him like feared. Heck, he really should get used to the fact that his friends would be there for him no matter what. Still he would have to talk to Bones and…

“And here I thought I’d be your best man,” McCoy’s voice sounded from behind, and Jim whirled around, startled.

“Bones!” he gasped. “You almost gave me a heart attack.”

“Do I look like I have a death wish, Jim? Your boyfriend would have my head,” the CMO deadpanned.

“How did you know that I… we were here?” Jim asked; he wasn’t surprised at all as Leonard replied dryly, “Uhura!” McCoy stepped closer; his gaze was piercing. “Did I hear that right, Jim? You and Khan did your version of getting hitched last night?” The good doctor pointedly ignored the rest of the conversation.

“I would call it a mental bond, Doctor,” Spock threw in. “The captain and Khan are bonded partners now.”

“That ain’t what I’d call it, looking at that bite Jim got,” Leonard growled.
“Bite?” This time Spock was at a loss.

In three strides, McCoy was in front of Jim and pulled his collar down. “What would you call this?”

Spock lifted a brow while Kirk grabbed the CMO’s wrist and pushed it away. “That's Nien’s and my business, Bones! Don’t push it!” he said firmly; he was anything but amused.

“He bit you, for God’s sake!” McCoy snapped.

“Ever heard of the word ‘love-bite’? Or is that too savage for a Southern gentleman like you?” Jim taunted.

McCoy frowned. “You don't have to get nasty, Jim! I thought Augments were above animal behaviors. Looks like they fell back into the Stone Ages when it comes to – that.”

The captain’s eyes narrowed. “So he’s a little – passionate. I don’t think it’s any of your business.”

“If it leaves a mark, bleeds, coughs or any of that – it sure is my concern, both as your friend and your CMO.” He spread fingers through his hair, exasperated. “Hell, Jim, a human bite is dangerous! It can easily become infected and…”

“Nien took care of that, Bones. It’s already getting better.”

“Yeah, thanks to your suddenly super healing and I'd suppose your lover’s super spit. Mate? Whatever you two are now.”

“The word you’re searching for, Doctor, is ‘husband’!” The deep baritone sounded from the door, and this time all three officers jumped in surprise – well, Spock lifted both brows, and his eyes widened. The Vulcan equivalent.

Khan stood at the entrance, posture straight, jaw firmly set; his bright eyes glittered dangerously. Then he closed the distance between him and the three men; his strides were determined – strong and
graceful as an approaching tiger – and every bit as intimidating. Each perceptible movement controlled, but beneath the surface his temper had risen to boiling.

He had been on his way to the Engineering with Scott when he felt Jim's rising irritation through their bond. Even more, he sensed it had nothing to do with his duties as captain, but something more private. Already assuming the reason for his beloved’s inner turmoil – after all McCoy saw the mark on Jim’s throat – Khan had ordered the turbo lift to stop on the 6th deck; sensing where to search for his mate.

“What’s the matter?” Scotty asked with surprise.

“I will be in Engineering momentarily, Mr. Scott” then he had strode to the briefing room, where he found his beloved and his friends.

Glaring at McCoy and Spock, Khan stepped beside Jim. He watched the shock written on the CMO’s expression while the Vulcan looked a little bit green around the nose. He began to relax as satisfaction replaced anger. Ah, those faces – he had longed to see them when this special word was spoken for the first time.

Wrapping an arm around Kirk’s shoulder, he said with a clear, hard voice, “You both are right when you assume that Jim’s and my bonding is comparable to marriage. I am certain, Mr. Spock understands the implications better than you, Doctor, after all, Vulcans bond in body, mind, and soul as we do.” He cocked his head, relishing in the perplexed glances of Spock and McCoy. “That leaves you with only two choices, gentlemen. You can deny our bond and all of its implications – or you can congratulate us.”

Jim felt his irritation fade as he watched his closest friends exchange thunderstruck looks mingled with utter confusion; then a breath of warmth washed over him as Nien’s hand on his shoulder squeezed him – not in comfort but with a bit of conspiratorial joy and comradeship. Beaming at his two friends, he snaked an arm around Khan’s waist and leaned into him – a clear signal to his friends.

“I would offer you some champagne, guys, but since we’re on duty, and Spock isn’t fond of alcohol, I think we should postpone the little party until after shift, agree?” he asked cheerfully.

Bones finally found his ability to speak again. “Are you telling me, seriously, that you and Khan are married now?”
“As far as his people do it, yeah! And it's a hell of a lot more permanent than the way we do it.”

“If you want to have a proper wedding, Pyāra, we can do that later,” Nien offered, winking at Kirk. And then it hit Jim. Khan had fun shocking the two other officers, but it was not his intention to irritate them too much. This was a game. Going along with the mischievous former dictator, the young captain replied, “That would be wonderful, honey.”

Bones choked for the second time this morning. “Please stop, or I'll need to pump myself full of insulin.” Then he saw the hidden mirth in Jim's and the Augment’s eyes, and he realized to what the two were doing. They were teasing him and Spock. And – they looked so damn comfortable with each other. The way their bodies fit so well against each other – looked so good together – sun's gold and night black. Yin and Yang. There was no doubt how much they belonged together.

Letting his head sink, Leonard groaned. “For the love of God, I don’t believe it: Jim Kirk is married – to a guy. Angels may have mercy on us all.”

“I do not think the goodwill of mystical creatures will be able to help, Doctor,” Spock commented wryly; he studied his T'hy'la and the super-human in front of him. He could sense the power of their shared bond; it brimmed with energy and emotion, and he knew that he had to be careful from now on not to invade the bond by accident. He would have to shield himself to grant his brother's privacy – and Khan’s. As much as he still distrusted the Augment, Spock also respected the other man’s right as mated. And, this much he could tell; Jim was happy. No, ‘happy’ was the wrong word. The word only captured one emotion. Jim was content; he seemed fulfilled – whole. He had found his place in the world, on this ship. But now he found the rest of himself, and it was in the man at his side. The Augment was rock solid – strong, confident, unwavering and loyal.

It was difficult for the Vulcan to admit the latter, but moreso it was illogical to deny. And the fact in the face of the evidence presented. The Augment had been nothing but completely loyal to Jim as his bonded partner and as captain of this vessel. He only intervened when he thought it necessary to defend or protect the captain.

Like now. The super-human had come when he felt Jim’s anger at McCoy through their shared bond, had confronted the CMO – and Spock, himself – with the truth about their relationship. He then lightened the mood by teasing his mate, affecting comfort through the bond.

Humans’ reactions were still sometimes a riddle for the Vulcan, but this time Spock understood the Augment’s behavior. Khan had made it very clear that he and Jim were together, despite anything the others may say; still he didn’t want to drive a wedge between Kirk’s friendship with his officers. The super-human knew that Kirk’s friends were family to the young man. And if there was one thing the former dictator respected unconditionally, it was the importance of family.
The Vulcans dark eyes and the blue-green’s of the Augment met, and a momentary acceptance passed between them; then Spock gave the other man a short nod, signifying his respect for the new situation. There was nothing to be done about it though he would have appreciated it if Jim had sought his counsel as was the place of the first officer and T’hy’la. But truly this decision was solely up to Jim who had earned Spock’s love and undying fidelity a long time ago.

For most, Spock was a closed book, but Khan knew what went through the Vulcans head. The first officer respected the bond. Nodding at Spock in return, the former dictator drew his attention back to the CMO, who pinched his nose.

“Still, were going to need support from heaven when Command learns about this,” McCoy used Spock’s comment to voice his concern. “And how you’re gonna explain your ‘marriage’ to Wesley is beyond me, Jim. But I figure you’ll manage the truth without pissing him off entirely.”

Jim grinned. “Don’t worry, Bob will understand. He’s been happily married for more than twenty years now.”

“Yes, but not to a wanted criminal – sorry, Khan, no offense,” McCoy added, and the Augment shrugged.

“At the moment, I am a criminal in the eyes of the authorities, so no damage done, Doctor.”

Bones nodded, then he glanced back to his younger friend. “One thing I have to admit, Jim. You manage to surprise us over and over again! Doesn’t seem to matter how many years we’ve been doing this.”

A chuckle escaped Kirk. “I don’t know why you’re so surprised. I already told you two about my feelings for Nien. I figured you’d expect this since I always jump in head first.”

“Yes, but not so soon – not this,” Bones grumbled. “I would have at least thrown you a party.”

“Things change, and you still can,” the captain snickered. “The bonding was not exactly for public consumption, but a party...”
He didn’t get any further, as Khan laughed sardonically. “Our ‘bonding ceremony’ would have shocked the guests, and our good doctor would have had a full medbay,” he stated with amusement.

Jim blushed and nudged his mate, who simply grinned. Then it ‘clicked’. Khan had called Bones ‘our doctor’, just as he had referred to his and Scotty’s work as ‘us’ two days ago. This could only mean Nien was settling in as part of the crew.

Relief and joy spread through Jim, while McCoy moaned, “Please, no details, boys! I don’t want to have nightmares!”

Spock pursed his lips and watched the three Terrans with the interest of a doctor studying a new species in a petri dish. It always astonished him how easily humans spoke of intimate things. Among Vulcans, this was taboo, but the freedom with which Jim, Nyota and McCoy spoke of them seemed – positive. And Khan too seemed to be comfortable with this kind of topic.

Cocking his head and sighing inwardly, the first officer tried to embrace the fact that his T’hy’la had chosen a bond mate – one of the most dangerous men in the whole galaxy. Yet one thing the Vulcan could sense. There was no deceit in the Augment. His love for Jim Kirk was true – and that concerned Spock even more than if the super-human had been playing them all along…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, our boys are really bonded now, the ‘cat is out of the bag’ so to say, and there is new hope for peace. What no-one even assume is the fact that there will be always people who use the chaos of combat and even war for their benefit.

In the next chapter things will be set for the new course – and I think you all are going to curse at Luengo and Section 31 (snicker). And further more Khan will learn of Jim’s past concerning Tarsus IV because of a new crew-member who will come aboard.

I do hope you loved this new chapter, and I’m sorry that it took so long to publish it.

As always I’m hungry for reviews, so please leave some comments.

Have a nice rest of the week and a beautiful weekend,

Yours Starflight
The ghosts of Tarsus IV

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Sorry for the delay but my dear beta-reader was sick and she only got back to work several days ago. I’m glad that she’s doing better now and I do know that you understand the late update.

Thanks a lot for the recent comments and kudos. I’m always thrilled to read reviews (snicker).

In the following chapter something takes place that was overdue – Tarsus. After all, it had a big part in Jim’s developing of character and strengths. You also will meet Luengo again, who finds something out that isn’t for the best concerning our love-birds, and Wesley is in his own way very busy.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 44 – The ghosts of Tarsus IV

Luengo’s eyes focused on the file that showed the schedule of the delegation’s departure. The Excalibur would be ready in two days; most of the ambassadors would begin arriving tomorrow afternoon and continue arriving through the evening. Helrom and his staff monitored the last of the preparations before going home for the evening. Luengo would use their absence to set The Plan in motion.

Pursing his lips, he reached for his cup of coffee when the voice of his secretary sounded through the speaker at his desk. “Admiral, I have the files you requested from Aldebaran,” she stated, and José felt anticipation tightening in his gut.

“Transfer them to my terminal,” he ordered and switched off the intercom, waiting for the data.

The first was a police report concerning the brawl at ‘The Stars’ and the arrest of one of the
instigators, Diego-whatever - de la Vega-Martinez, the very same man contracted to repair Starfleet vessels on Aldebaran. The second file showed a recording from the security camera at the bar where the chaos started.

He watched Kirk head toward the entrance. A slender man with dark hair dressed in black clothes was on the captain’s heels. Then Kirk and ran into another male – Koloth. Luengo recognized him instantly. Seconds later the fight broke out when the Klingon struck out at the Enterprise’s commanding officer. He was frustrated by the stranger at Kirk’s side – Khan. Of course. With growing fascination, the admiral again witnessed the incredible strength of the Augment as the former dictator protected Kirk fiercely. Another male – tall, South American perhaps, certainly this Diego joined the quarrel until Koloth, and his men fled the bar. Kirk followed them. Khan and the third man went after the young captain, leaving the restaurant.

“Interesting,” the Chief of the SBI murmured. “You defend Kirk as if your life depends on it – and Kirk, too. You are more than allies.”

Pressing his lips together, he opened the third file – the traffic report. Luengo’s dark eyes roamed over the holophoto taken of the two men on a hyperbike, driving far too fast. It was clearly Kirk – the rushing air wind blew his blond hair away from his face; his parka billowed. Behind him sat Khan. Both of his arms wrapped around the younger man; his chin almost touched Kirk’s shoulder. It was intimate – familiar. Both males’ expressions were grim and determined. They were hunting.

They were successful and saved thousands of people.

‘You two are a team now – friends even. And I would bet my last shirt that your new friend is on your ship, Kirk! You’re hiding him? Protecting him?’ José thought and leaned back in his chair. ‘This’ll ruin you, farm-boy! Aiding and abetting is still a crime. I’ll have your head and your ship for it! I’ll bring you and your friends down. You’re not going to interfere again, Kirk – you or that Augment. All I need is proof that Khan is aboard your ship, and I’ll have you and your little club rotting in a prison for the rest of your lives – if you survive!’

Then his thoughts returned to another problem at hand – a problem that had to do with The Plan, but didn’t involve Kirk or his Augment pet. He activated a shielded frequency on his communicator and asked, “Any answer from D’nyrrs?”

He had to wait a moment for the reply, “He and his partner agree. The Syndicate is unaware of their cooperation.”

Luengo smiled quickly. So far, everything was going just the way he wanted.
Many light years away, Spock and McCoy had just heard about the 'wedding' and were still coming to terms with the news when Uhura’s familiar voice was heard.

“Bridge to Captain Kirk!”

Jim shook his head, chuckling. “Can't stay away, can she?” Activating the intercom, he answered the hail. Bob Wesley was on the line.

“Speak of the devil…” Bones murmured. It earned him a grimace from Jim and a risen brow from Spock.

“Put him through, Uhura,” Kirk ordered, went to the table and switched on the prism screen that instantly showed the familiar face of the Commodore, who seemed to be in his quarters.

“Good morning, Bob!” Jim greeted.

Wesley smiled shortly. “Good morning, Jim – Mr. Spock, Doctor, Mr. Singh! I hope I didn't interrupt anything important?”

“Nope, just an update on the Enterprise’s status,” Kirk lied; Spock crossed his arms behind his back and put on his, McCoy loved to call it his ‘poker-face’.

“That's what I called about,” Bob replied. “You got the message about the upcoming peace talks with the Klingons?”

The young captain nodded. “Yeah, we all did. We were all relieved. News spread so fast through S-6 that even a few of my officers came back from their liberty early.”

“That'll come in handy, Jim. How fast can the Enterprise be ready?”
Kirk frowned. “Do we have a new mission?”

Bob sighed. “Despite the agreed upon ceasefire, Command will take no risks; heavy cruisers are ordered on patrol. The Enterprise will patrol between the Cardassian Realm and Borderland. We scanned Klingon ships in the area. I don’t trust them. Patrol that sector, Jim. If you are contacted by Klingons, be cordial but not weak – you know how to do it. Don’t let them goad you into anything; don’t get involved in anything the Klingons could try. The SBI discovered that a number of Klingon generals are unsatisfied with M’Rek’s decision. Some of them may try to provoke a reaction from Starfleet to sabotage the peace talks.”

Jim took a deep breath. “So the Klingon chancellor agreed to the offer? That gives us some hope. But you’re right, there are plenty of warmongers in the Imperial Fleet who would love to end the talks before they even get started. The Enterprise won’t be provoked, you’ve got my word, Bob!”

“Right. What’s the ship’s current status?”

Khan stepped forwards. “The new dilithium crystal was installed yesterday; we have to run more tests to determine the warp drive’s status. The defective power generator and electrical circuits have all had their repairs completed. The deflector shields are almost fully functional, and the SDD is linked to the auxiliary power so it’ll be fine should the shields fail.”

Wesley stared perplex at him. “Are you Mr. Scott’s new right hand man?”

“Nien was kind enough to assist Scotty, Keenser and Allistor while he also worked on the SDD,” Kirk explained.

“SDD? I assume that's the name for the sensor disturbing device?” Bob concluded correctly; the three officers and the Augment simply nodded. “Right. I’ve also some good news for you, Mr. Singh. The law allows the use of pseudonyms in applying for patents. A lot of technicians and scientists already do it to maintain anonymity and protect their privacy.”

Jim beamed. “Perfect!” He turned towards Khan. “All you have to do is to finish the tech manual and construction plans, send them to Galven, and then he can apply for you.”

With a spark of amusement, Bob watched the enthusiasm of his protégée and how the Augment returned the smile of the younger man with one of his own. Affection washed over the super-human’s face. ‘Hell, if I didn't know about Kirk’s reputation as Starfleet’s playboy, I'd guess those
two were lovebirds!" Wesley thought. He quickly shook off the thought and continued. “I’m also still gathering information on potential lawyers, but I think we should wait until the patent is applied for, and Command agrees to buy the SDD before we contact any. It would let the cat out of the bag and put you in jeopardy before we can even think of mounting a defense.”

“Sounds good to me,” Kirk replied and looked at Khan. “You?”

“I agree,” the former dictator nodded; then his attention turned back to Wesley. “Commodore, have you found anything with regards to – to my family?”

Sympathy appeared in Bob’s brown eyes. “I’m trying to find information, but everything that has to do with the events last year are top secret with limited access. As far as I learned only a few people have that access – I don’t. I’m not giving up yet, though. There are a few high-security facilities in Federation space and there’s been rumors and chatter about the Augments in connection with them. I'll find out more. Just give me time.”

Khan hid his disappointment well. He had known that the place where his crew was hold captive was top secret, yet he had hoped that Wesley as a Commodore would have access to the files. On the other hand, he was aware of how Starfleet Command worked. They'd pretend he – they never happened. They’d rather lock the Augments away and be done with them. Bastards!

He felt Jim’s warm fingers slip into his and squeezed them in a gesture of comfort. He sighed soundlessly. He had been always proud of his patience, but somehow it had begun to run out.

Wesley seemed to understand his silence because he said softly, “I know that you hoped for better news, but I can’t rush ahead here. I don’t want to be the focus of Command’s attention and have it lead to you. That’s what they’d suspect if they see I’m suddenly interested in high-security facilities or the whereabouts of your people. I don’t want them to make that leap. There’s too much at stake to risk this – your and Jim’s freedom, Kirk’s senior officers and mine.”

Khan nodded slowly. “I do understand, Commodore, and I agree that we have to be very careful.”

“That’s why I told Aldebaran’s governor that you two are back on an important mission and that he has to wait to honor you, Jim, and ‘Commander Lavi’. Mr. de la Vega-Martinez already received a medal and a nice sum of a reward that he promptly donated several schools on Aldebaran. Anyway, we need Mr. Singh to contact The Shadow to tell them to stand down for now. I know they’re successfully frustrating the Orion’s slave trade, but for now the Orions are officially allied with the Empire. An attack on the Orions could destabilize the ceasefire giving the Klingons an excuse to restart hostilities and blame it on us.”
The former dictator lifted both brows. “I’ll try to contact Galven and let you know about the outcome afterwards.”

“Regarding the Orions, Bob. Does the ceasefire apply to them too?” Jim asked, and Wesley sighed.

“I think they’ll abide by it. They’re involved indirectly.”

Kirk frowned. “How so? They are slavers and pirates. We don’t …”

“And the Klingons’ official allies at the moment. And there's more. The Excílibur leaves in two days to pick up Lady Morganth, a Betazoid, who will be a part of the delegation. Then she’ll go to Celendi I, where the conference will be held.”

Jim gaped. “Celendi I? Isn’t that in the Borderland?” Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Nien and Bones tense while Spock lifted a brow.

“Yes, it is – in the triangle between the Klingon, the Romulan Empire, and Federation near the Celendi Nebula,” the commodore confirmed. “President Robertson thinks the Klingons want to demonstrate their strength to the Romulans. No one wants them to see a weak Federation or Empire. We have enough on our plate without them jumping into the fray. Celendi I is indeed neutral, but I have to admit that I’m personally not that happy with the location. The president has the final say, though.” Bob bent forwards in his desk chair; his face seemed to press against the prism screen. “And that’s the reason The Shadow needs to stand fast. The Excílibur has to cross Borderland, and the Orions would not honor the ceasefire if the militia attacked. Likely the Klingons would get involved and then the shit'll hit the fan.”

Khan knew that Wesley was addressing him indirectly, and he nodded. “I understand. I will contact Galven and inform him.”

“Thanks,” Bob smiled. “When will you be able to leave 6-S?”

“One moment, sir,” the young captain answered, and pushed button on the conference table to hail Engineering.
“If everythin’ keeps runnin' as smoothly as it is now, our grey lady can be on her way again in three days,” Scotty answered. Jim thanked him, switched off the line and looked at Wesley. “You heard him?”

“Yes, I did. Three days is good. By that time, your new crew members will have arrived at 6-S.”

“My new… what?” Baffled Kirk raised both brows.

“Your new crew members. As far as I know the Enterprise lost around seventy people over the last few weeks thanks to the war. Command decided to send you some replacements – men and women, eager to serve on Starfleet’s flagship.”

Jim didn’t know if he should be pleased or not. “Let me guess. Not all of them are 'experienced', as in never seen the inside of a starship.”

Bob chuckled. “Aw, come on. Everyone's had a tour of one. Sorry, son, but if the devil can't get a soul, he'll take almost anything. About half of them are second-year cadets.” He smiled in sympathy as Kirk almost winced. “Come on, Jim, you were a cadet yourself, and you kicked Nero’s ass – saved the world if I remember correctly. Give the youth a little credit. I got the list from Barnett, who emphasized that they the best of their year. I'll send you the list and the files after we’re done here.”

“Right,” Jim sighed. “And the flagship of the fleet is patrolling, not escorting.” He cocked his head and changed the topic. “So, when will this conference start?”

“The Excalibur will need three days to reach the outpost near Betazed and then four days to the conference.”

“In the middle of nowhere, one step away from the Klingon border and a stone’s throw away from the Romulan Empire. That’s not a comforting thought.”

Wesley shrugged. “I know, Jim, I feel the same way, but obviously our president is willing to take the risk rather than to let a chance at peace pass us by. And Captain Helrom from the Excalibur is a very experienced and patient man. If anything goes wrong, he'll know what to do.” He bent forwards and reached for the standby-button on his desk. “I’ll send you the orders and the list in a few minutes. Good day, gentlemen!” With those words, the transmission was shut off and the screen went dark.
“A patrol mission along the Borderland, while our delegation is enroute screams ‘trap’.” Kirk crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I don’t like this! Not. One. Bit!”

“Sometimes the attempt at peace demands more courage than even battle requires and perhaps some good faith,” Khan said quietly, then he looked straight at Jim. “We have to talk with Galven and Ritek. I think it’s the best, if your talented Asante queen tried to reach them.”

“‘Scuse Me?”

“Asante queen, a fierce warrior queen from the continent of Africa – western Africa to be more precise,” Khan explained shortly.

At this name for Uhura, Jim had to chuckle. Yes, the young Bantu woman was a fierce warrior when necessary, and Kirk knew that Nien had his own experiences with Nyota – not good ones, yet he respected her. This much was obvious. After all Uhura had attacked him to protect her lover and to save him – Jim Kirk. Family – it came always back to this when the Augment was involved!

Still grinning, Kirk hailed the bridge and sure as he was standing there, Uhura was still at her station. Cocking her head, she listened to his orders and confirmed them, but before she could switch off the link, Khan bent slightly forward. “Lieutenant?” he asked politely and Nyota returned his gaze firmly.

“Mr. Singh,” she simply replied,

“Please use frequency 183.69,” he said. “Galven gave me the frequency before we parted.”

She nodded. “Understood. I’ll contact you as soon as I have them on the line.”

Now there was nothing else for the four men to do but wait…

ST***ST

The talk with The Shadow went well. Of course Galven, Ritek, Caviw, Jeff and the others couldn’t believe that the Klingons had accepted the offer of diplomacy and that a ceasefire had been arranged, but they didn’t doubt Kirk’s word. The chance that the war might be at an end lifted the mood of the militia who was still on Aldebaran, helping where they could. They weren’t too happy to learn that the Orions were off limits for the moment; with little grumbling, they agreed to lie low. No one wanted to be the reason for failed diplomacy before the diplomacy had even begun.
Galven, who was working with Diego in his shop, was relieved to hear from Nien that he could apply for the patent with a pseudonym as soon as the test result documentation was complete. A quick discussion with Scotty affirmed that the chief engineer would write the report concerning the SDD test results. The fact that those tests had been run on a Starfleet ship would have the benefit of Starfleet encouraging the patent office personnel to push the paperwork through quickly.

Khan could pay for the patent first and later to receive the money from Command. Galven agreed to help him out by opening a second bank account by proxy to manage the transfers.

After all these things had been settled, Jim sent a private message to Bob confirming that The Shadow had been relayed the necessary information and that they agreed to stand down. Only then did the men leave the conference room. Spock returned to Uhura’s and his quarters to change into his uniform. McCoy headed for the med bay. There was much to be done before a new mission. Khan helped Scott and then went to his own quarters to work on the SDD documentation. Jim didn’t disturb him, knowing that Nien wanted to finish his task before the Enterprise was off on her next mission. He had a feeling, as he told Kirk, that his spare time would be limited then.

He couldn’t know how right he was. The dark, looming danger in the background had already begun to weave the web that would catch them all.

Sitting at his desk, Jim checked the list of the new crew members Wesley had sent him. Suddenly he jerked as if bitten. Kirk’s eyes widened and his gaze fixed on one name: Kevin Thomas Riley.

Thunderstruck, he blinked several times but the name didn’t change. Kevin Riley, seven years younger than Kirk – and his file held a detail Jim remembered all too well. The young man of Irish descent had been on Tarsus IV – just like him. He was one of the nine children who survived the massacre ordered by the dictator Kodos.

Jim’s hands shook as he opened the personnel file; he looked at the results from the Academy and saw a holophoto of the boy whom he had protected and comforted during their fight for survival. He was a man now - twenty years old. They lost track of each other after Starfleet came to Tarsus IV. Riley remained in San Francisco with relatives while Jim returned to Iowa with his mother who interrupted her mission when she learned of the danger her son had lived through.

Jim was still staring at the screen when someone used his private code to open the door. The young officer didn’t need to turn around to know Khan had arrived. The warmth that brimmed over the bond spoke volumes.
“What happened?” The deep baritone was gentle and sounded more statement than a question belying the super-human’s worry.

Kirk took a deep breath. “I got the list of the new crew members,” he murmured before he finally turned his chair around; blue eyes found ocean-colored. “One of them… He’s an old friend. Someone I haven’t seen in a long time.”

Lifting both brows, Nien questioned him. “Is this good or bad?” he asked quietly, and his mate snorted. “Both!” As he caught Khan’s confused gaze, Jim rubbed his forehead with one hand. “We were children and… Well, he is seven years younger than me, and he needed help.” He lowered his gaze. “We all did.”

Memories stirred in the Augment’s mind, something Kirk mentioned during their time at the Silver Bayou. He had been forced to kill as a child on a planet… “Tarsus?” Khan took a shot into the dark and hit home.

Jim nodded quietly, moistening his lips. The super-human could feel pain, fear, and anger rising in his bond mate. Following his instincts, he crossed the room and knelt down in front of the younger man – a gesture that once would have been silly given the fact that he was made greater. Now it came naturally to him. Lifting a hand, he stroked a golden strand way from Jim’s forehead in comfort and affection. “Do you want to talk about it?”

For a long moment, the young captain didn’t answer, and then he sighed deeply. “…I don’t talk about it much – ever really. Bones knows – and Spock. Well… it’s mentioned in my file, of course, but it doesn’t matter to Command.” He rubbed his neck. “It mattered to Chris Pike though. I think it was one of the reasons why he persuaded me to join Starfleet. I had a history with the fleet aside from what my father did.”

Khan watched him carefully. “You do not have to talk about it, if it pains you too much, Pyāra. But know that I am here to listen if ever you are ready to talk about what happened to you on this planet.”

A low snort escaped Jim. “The phantoms will come with Kevin, I’m sure.” He reached out and cupped one of Nien’s cheeks. “Your past holds so much sorrow. Do you really want to deal with the horrors of someone else’s?”

This time the enhanced man lifted both brows. “This ‘someone else’ is my bonded. Your sorrows are mine – the ones that were, and those yet to come. If you feel safe with me – enough to share that which still troubles you after so long, then I am here for you.”
A smile played around Kirk’s lips. His thumb traced soft circles on Nien’s cheeks. “If I feel safe with you? I never felt safer with anyone in my life.” He took another deep breath before he rose, entwined his fingers with Khan’s and pulled the Augment to his feet. Together they went to the living room. Jim ordered two brandies. Khan knew that what he would hear would very likely shake even him!

The men sat down on the sofa side-by-side. Jim began to tell him the tale of Kodos the Executioner. Of the man who first rallied the people’s hope when a fungus nearly destroyed the colony’s entire food supply. It was clear that the legally elected governor was helpless and didn’t know what to do after he made the emergency calls. A rebellion broke out led by Kodos. He usurped the governor.

“The rebellion cost more than hundred lives; to be on the streets – it was dangerous. My host parents forbade Michael, their son, and me to leave the house during that time,” Jim said quietly. “It calmed down though, and we heard that the rebellion was over. The next day, we were called to the market. When we got there, we noticed only certain families or even only parts of families were there. And lots of old people. Leaders of the rebellion, Kodos’ people were on the perimeter. It made me suspicious. And others too. People were asking questions. See, we hadn’t ever seen Kodos – no one had. He appeared on a balcony.” He lowered his head. “Even today I remember his words exactly: ‘The revolution is successful. But survival depends on drastic measures. Your continued existence represents a threat to the well-being of society. Your lives mean slow death to the more valued members of the colony. Therefore, I have no alternative but to sentence you to death. Your execution is ordered!’”

Jim closed his eyes for a moment; his memories replayed the event and showed the man who sentenced him to death.

“He… He saw in you and the others, a less valued people. He wanted to execute you in order to increase another’s survival?” Khan asked, shocked. “By which criteria did he make that determination?”

“Eugenics and social standing – those with the most promising genes and means should live; the others had to die,” Kirk answered pressed.

Nien paled, he seemed to look through the captain. “History repeats itself,” he whispered.

The young captain snorted. “Yeah, it sounds familiar, doesn’t it?”

The former dictator swallowed. “Obviously the criteria for his selection was wrong, seeing that he
sentenced the boy who grew into one of the most brilliant of Starfleet’s captains to death.”

Jim gave him a quick smile. “Thanks for the compliment.” He took a deep breath. “I think Kodos also wanted to eliminate people he thought would be a threat to his rule. There were many people upset about the way he became governor, and he was definitely afraid of another revolution not realizing that he was going to get one anyway.” He moistened his lips. “Kodos barely finished his speech when the first shots were fired into the crowd. My host mother pushed Michael towards me and told us to run and not look back. She and her husband attacked the so-called ‘soldiers’.”

Taking a sip of his brandy, Kirk continued, “I’ve had my run-ins with the authorities…”

“Yes, after driving you father’s car over a cliff,” Khan cut in, and Jim grimaced.

“Exactly. And that wasn’t the last time I got in trouble with the law. I knew and still know a trick or two for evading the authorities. But I couldn’t get Michael to come; he struggled. He wanted to stay with his parents. Even when I promised we’d meet his parents at a ‘secret place’, I couldn’t change his mind. He tore his hand from mine and ran back to his parents – and died along with them. I watched, helpless, as long as I could before I ran.”

Kirk revealed more of this traumatic past in a low, monotone voice, “I stayed underground those first days. Stayed in the sewers for shelter. Hunger and thirst drove me back topside. It was like another world. The colony was silent, depressed. Kodos’s soldiers were out looking for any of the ‘condemned’ who had escaped. Sneaking back to my house, I realized that the family was dead; the building was abandoned. Then I heard light, quick steps and saw a boy I knew from the neighborhood. Kevin Riley. He was running hard down the street; two soldiers were chasing him. It was obvious what they were going to do.

“I don’t know exactly what happened. I snapped – I was impulsive. I found myself throwing rocks at the soldier as hard as I could. I landed a few on their head – I could see the blood. I ran for Kevin, snatched him and pulled him away – got him underground. Kevin was only one of the nine other children including me who escaped the massacre at the market that day, shielded by their dying parents or other family members. They all found Kevin and me, and we stuck together. I was one of the oldest kids, and somehow it was always me they turned to for the next move, so I made decisions and took the lead.”

“As it is in your nature,” Nien nodded, laying a comforting hand on his beloved’s back.

“For a longer time, we could sneak out into the streets, steal a little food and water. Sometimes we had help from those allowed to live. Then Kodos’ captain realized there were more of us alive than
just me and Kevin,” Jim murmured. “Two days later some soldiers almost caught Ralph, one of us kids, when he ‘organized’ an outing to get food. Good thing that he was careful. He knew he was being watched and hid in abandoned houses overnight, switching the places over and over again, until he could get back to us. I was crazy with worry, but he did good. Because of what he did, we stayed safe then. But it didn't last; they found us.”

Lowering his gaze, Jim took another breath; the memories as strong as if the events had been only yesterday. “The weather was changing, winter was coming, and it was bitter cold. That night – the first time, it was a close call. We heard boots stomping through the tunnels, so we ran to another part of the sewer system. I knew that it was only a matter of time before they found us; we had only a finite number of places to go. So we built barricades with all we could get from the surface, and Ralph and I explored some more tunnels that could be used as an escape. I was right. Two days later they came back.”

He felt Khan wrapping an arm around him, and the warmth of his body chased away the chills that ran down Jim’s back – if only for a moment.

“Ralph and I chased the younger ones away and stayed behind to give them a head-start. I didn’t realize that Kevin stayed behind with us. I only saw him when he threw rocks at the men hunting us.” Kirk bit his lips before he murmured, “Then it came to a head. The soldiers shot at us; the barricades saved us from getting hit. Then they attacked; ten soldiers against three boys; one only seven years old. The outcome... we knew how it would turn out. Then I snapped – again I guess. One of the guys aimed his gun at Kevin. I hurled myself at him and took him by surprise. Obviously the bastard didn't expect that from a kid. We fell, and I was able to get hold of his phaser. The next thing I knew, the weapon fired and the soldier stopped moving.”

Khan nodded slowly. “You killed him,” he said quietly, and Jim gulped, his conscience niggling him after all these years.

“Yes. At first I didn’t know – I didn’t realize I'd shot him. I thought he was just unconscious. But I took the phaser and shot down three others to protect Kevin and Ralph. I thought it was on stun.” He moistened his lips. “It wasn't. They had been ready to murder nine children. Kodos had ordered ‘no exceptions’, and they followed it without question.” He shook his head. “Ralph and I managed to drive them away; then we went back to the other kids. Kevin was in shock. For more than two days and nights, he wouldn't leave my side. After that came the nightmares; we all had 'em, but I think they affected him the most. He'd get real close and cry. He was so quiet about it. I guess he didn't want to wake anyone or was afraid the soldiers would hear. I wasn't used to comforting anything, but Kevin was different. I guess I was his Sam. My brother did the same for me once.”

This time Nien sighed. The story, especially that last part, reminded him far too much of his own past – of Joaquin. The first time Khan had killed was to protect the little boy threatened by his creator. The Augment never forgot the feeling of dread that spread through him when he first took another's
life. It wasn't the last time, but it never got easier – the sadness that his hand had been forced. He could very well understand what Jim had been through; he understood that nightmares that continued to haunt.

“I know the moment you kill someone to defend yourself or someone you love, your soul fractures just a bit. A special kind of innocence that most people maintain throughout their life is lost. Guilt, albeit misplaced, fills in the cracks,” he said softly, pulling Jim closer to him. “You had no choice. It was them or you and your children – and they were yours. You protected a small child that didn't stand a chance against the monsters. You were responsible for those children’s' lives and your own. You did the only thing possible to ensure the survival of those who counted on you.”

A bitter smiled washed over Kirk’s face. “Yeah – I try. I don't look for it, but I won't turn away either. I'd do it for them again, and I'd do it for my crew again.” He felt a breeze of guilt and realized that it wasn’t his own emotion he was sensing, but Khan’s. “That wasn’t your fault, Nien,” he whispered quickly, brushing his lips over his mate's pale cheek. “We already talked about that, didn’t we?” When the super-human didn’t answer, he went back to the original topic.

“Kodos heard about us – of me. His soldiers told him about gang of boys and girls who had escaped. That one of the boys shot three of his men. Up 'til then, he didn't see us as a threat, but now... Much of the colony was still in shock, but after that we were seen as kind of heroes I guess. Those that were allowed to live gave us shelter at their own risk. Doing that was punishable by death. But they really were our only hope of survival. Kodos’ soldiers were using sensors to try to find us, but they really didn't know what we looked like, and the census records weren't that good after the mass execution. We could openly hide among other families.”

He took a sip of his brandy, before he continued, “Pretty soon after, Kodos lost control. The survivors snapped out of their reverie and rose up. Another revolution started. Kodos’ people quite violently tried to stamp it out. Somehow we managed to stay alive, hiding in sewers again; then it happened. One of the soldiers I had fought before recognized me, and then they were after us. Two dozen armed soldiers determined to finish us off – not because of the food shortage, but because we were the cause of the rebellion. We'd seen Kodos for what he really was. A murdering coward.”

Another shiver ran down Kirk’s spine. “We had to split up. Kevin and I stayed together and hid in an abandoned building, but we couldn't hide forever, we ran from the building when the soldiers found us. And then it happened so fast. All of sudden, there were people beaming down, wearing real uniforms. When they saw the men aiming at two children they stunned them and then they came over to us. Kevin and I were more starved than hurt, but man we looked a sight.”

Again a smile curled Kirk’s lips, this time a melancholy one. “Two crewmen instantly stripped off their parkas and wrapped them around us, a female officer picked up Riley, and I spoke with another officer. It turned out that the emergency call had reached Starfleet and then it was relayed to the ships on mission in deep space. That's apparently why it took so long. Anyway, I told the officer about
Kodos' massacre. The officer was shocked, but he took care of us. An hour later Kevin and I were in the care of a Starfleet doctor aboard a ship, they treated us and fed us. Ralph and the others were brought to us too. They were a mess – injured, sick. But they were all alive. A day later the Commodore of the squadron asked us about what happened on the planet. He told us that the surviving colonists were all in Starfleet’s care. The med bays were crowded, and they sent counselors to help the people, the families work through the trauma. Everyone had lost someone. Someone said that for every drop of blood shed, a tear was shed to match it.” His voice trailed off; the pain he relived radiated in his eyes and through the bond.

Nien held Jim close, shocked and furious. His James had lived as a fugitive, hunted by soldiers, forced to kill, and was nearly starved to death. Alas, it sounded too much like his own childhood after his escape. He wouldn't wish it on even his worst enemies, let alone his mate – his beloved! This was another experience they shared, and it pained Khan that this beautiful, bright, compassionate young man had been through such childhood trauma – because of one man's cruelty.

“What happened to Kodos?” he asked quietly, pressing a kiss on the tousled golden hair of his bonding-partner.

“He was killed at the end of the rebellion around the time Starfleet showed up. Starfleet’s Security gave the people new hope and courage. The tables were turned. This time it was Kodos’ soldiers who were hunted. As far as I know no one really tried to find out what happened to most of Kodos’ bloodhounds. Kodos’ body was found in his quarters, burnt. He stoked the fire of hate that burned him in the end.” Jim laid his head on Nien’s shoulder. “Kevin and I stayed in the med bay for about a week; then the ship’s captain told me he got a message from my mother, who was on her way back to Earth. The ship brought us back to the Headquarters in San Francisco, where my mother, Kevin’s relatives, and other family members waited.” He snorted. “My little gang was pronounced heroes – nine children ousted a tyrant. The media ate it up.”

“But they overlooked the trauma,” Khan mused, but Jim shook his head.

"That part doesn't make such a good story. But Starfleet did try. The CMO and the First Nurse were there around the clock for us; the captain himself showed us around and even invited us to the sports deck and the officer’s lounge. The trip to Earth was long, and the crew and the psychologists supported us in any way they could. We were offered counseling on Earth too, but the memories don't disappear. The pain became less over time, but it's never really gone, ya know?"

Oh, Khan knew exactly and all too well; it brought tears to his eyes. Kissing Jim’s forehead, he simply held him – safe and sheltered in his arms. For a long moment, neither man spoke for a long while. Then Nien whispered, “And this boy, Kevin, he'll be part of the new crew?”

“Yeah,” the young officer mumbled. “We tried to stay in contact, but then we lost track of each
other. He was so sad when our families came to take us. He saw a kind of older brother in me, and I have to admit that he had become a little brother to me. I missed him terribly in the beginning.” He had blinked dry tears away before he chuckled. “I’m curious to know what happened to him – how his life was after that. I hope it was good. He’s twenty now, and he’s second-year at the Academy. His results are very promising, and he already got a commendation in his file. He specializes in navigation and communication.” He snorted, amused. “It fits. Kevin had a very good memory when it came to direction - the sewers and tunnels and street layouts. And communication – well, he had an Irish temper back then. I don’t think those go away.”

Khan felt a smile tug at his mouth as he sensed his beloved’s calm. Still holding Jim in a tender embrace, he tried to send warmth and comfort through their mental link, soothing still tense nerves. Finally, the young captain sighed and raised his head. His eyes found Nien’s. “Thank you for listening – and for being here,” he whispered. The super-human’s heart beat faster. The fondness Jim showed him never ceased to surprise him.

“You’re welcome, Pyāra,” he murmured; he bent forward – their lips met half way in a kiss full of affection and comfort. For a longer time neither man spoke. They simply sat together and their proximity chased away the dark phantoms of the past.

Neither knew the ghosts yet to come.

ST***ST***ST

The rest of that day and the next went by without incident. Khan finished the documentation for the SDD and sent it together with the test results from Scotty over to Galven, who promised to forward it along for patenting as they had discussed. Afterward, the Augment helped Scotty in Engineering while Jim did his own research of Starfleet’s high-security facilities. There were five of them, and any could hold Khan’s crew – his family. Jim knew that it was too dangerous to request further information about the facilities. He’d have to check them out in person as soon as it was possible. That would likely have to wait for the end of the war.

And maybe that wasn’t so far off. The media was quickly spreading the news of the upcoming peace talks with the Klingons, and the mood aboard the ship had improved considerably in the face of possible peace. Suspicion, however, was still quite prevalent – the Enterprise was not alone in that sentiment.

Captain Helrom shared the sentiment. He left his apartment in Sausalito at five o’clock in the morning, his hands full of luggage. If everything ran smoothly, he would be back in two or three weeks, but the length of the mission depended on the peace talks. Slipping into the seat of his hyper-car, he drove to pick-up his first officer, Commander Stephen Bleach. They’d been friends for a long time now, and Helrom would appreciate the company.
Bleach expected him and met the hypercar. Helrom helped him get his luggage into the trunk.

Suddenly, another car appeared and sped toward the men. Captain and Commander turned around, shaking their heads at the oddity. It happened so fast. The hyper-car seemed to lose control; breaks screamed, the vessel swung wide, and its rear-end hit the two officers. They didn't have a chance. As the car sped away, Helrom was barely conscious; his first officer lay beside him moaning in pain before he lost consciousness.

Two minutes later, a communicator buzzed in an apartment on the other side of the bay in San Francisco. Luengo opened it and heard the message he had been waiting for: “It’s done.”

ST***ST***ST

A quick, hectic search for the missing officers that did not arrive at their destination had begun in San Francisco. Far away aboard the Enterprise, Kirk and Khan began their morning routine and went to the officer’s mess for breakfast. They met McCoy and Sulu there – that latter watched the Augment curiously; his caution had decreased of late regarding the enhanced man. If the captain and the CMO were relaxed in the super-human’s presence, then there must be nothing to.

Breakfast was nearly over when Uhura’s voice sounded, “Bridge to Mr. Singh.”

Surprised, Khan wiped his hands with a napkin then rose; a frown lined his forehead. This was the first time he was called in a ship-wide broadcast. He headed for the intercom and activated it.

“Khan here,” he answered.

“Mr. Singh, I have Mr. Galven in the line for you,” Uhura said businesslike. “Do you want to take the call where you are or in your quarters?”

“In my quarters please, Lieutenant. I will be quick,” he replied. He switched off the line and walked with long strides toward the door. Jim gave him an asking glance, and as the Augment nodded, the captain rose and accompanied him. Sulu and McCoy watched them leave, and then the helmsman frowned.
“They always stick together,” he murmured, and the CMO sighed.

“Yes, they have become… good friends,” he grumbled, and as he caught the surprised gaze of the younger man, he shrugged. “They have their history with each other – beyond trying to kill each other at this point. It's bonded them.”

Hikaru snorted and sipped his tea. “Still… It’s weird to see them like that.”

“You have no idea, how ‘weird’ it really is,” Bones thought, returning his attention back to his breakfast. Hopefully, Jim would find time to actually finish a meal – after all, the captain was, despite his good condition, still recovering.

A minute later, the strange friends reached Nien’s quarters, and Uhura patched the Tellarit through.

“Good evening, Buddy – Jim!” Galven oinked cheerfully the moment his little eyes met the former dictator and the captain. “How are things with you two lovebirds?”

“Very well, thank you for asking,” Khan retorted. “I must correct you, though. It’s ‘good morning’.”

The Tellarit blinked several times then squealed his laugh. “Aldebaran has more hours per day than you have aboard there, lad, so here it is still evening while you two face a new day all fresh and rested… Ah, forget that. You were too busy to sleep, I'd guess.” He winked at them.

Khan only sighed and changed the topic tactfully. “How can I be of service?”

Galven smirked knowingly, but let the topic drop. “It’s rather the other way around, lad. I was very busy today – got the patent for you.”

The Augment was surprised by the wave of relief that washed over him. “Well done, Galven. Thank you.” He gave the Tellarit a real smile.

Galven began to chuckle. “Well, it cost me three dozen credits and my nerves; the technicians at the patent office are slow.” He poked himself at the forehead – a gesture he copied from his human friends. “But when they understood the device's use and saw the Enterprise’s chief engineer's
reports, they issued the patent without another question.” He grinned broadly. “Now it’s up to you and the Commodore to set things in motion.”

“I am in your debt, my friend,” Khan answered seriously, but Galven simply waved his hoof-like hand.

“Don’t mention it. What are friends for? I also opened an account for you. I’ll send you the data. At least you’ll get some money as soon as the uniform-wearers buy your ‘baby’.”

Jim grinned widely at Khan. Finally, his mate would get remuneration for his invention; he’d be able to hire the best lawyers. Kirk’s hand found the long elegant fingers of the Augment and squeezed them, earning a smile in return before Nien’s attention returned to Galven. “Commodore Wesley will contact you as soon as he has spoken with his superiors. As my agent, you have free hand to negotiate, but please keep me updated of the progress and the sum Command is ready to pay before you agree to the contract.”

Galven chuckled. “Of course. Starfleet will be out of their mind with glee to get their hands on a piece of tech that its scientists couldn’t manage to build – even if the war with the Klingons ends.” He cocked his head. “Do you really trust those dragonheads to make peace with the Federation?” This time he addressed Jim who grimaced.

“There are so many variables; I really can’t answer this question fairly. Still, hope dies last. We’ll be on patrol during that time in case the Klingons decide not to play fair.”

The Tellarit nodded quickly. “Yeah, we’ll keep our eyes and ears open, too.” He winked at Jim before he turned back to Khan. “I’ll send you the account data and wait for Wesley to contact me, boss.”

Nien almost choked as he heard the last word, staring half amused, half confused at his stout friend. “’Boss’?” he replied, and an oinking laughter sounded.

“Yes – in this case, you’re the boss, lad, but don’t get used to it.” He waved. “Be well, you two – and don’t be late to duty, m’boy, just because you can’t leave your lover alone in bed,” he added, grinning broadly at Jim, who rolled his eyes.

“Don’t worry – I’ve always got Spock to make sure I don’t miss duty.”
“Yeah, Vulcans are particular about those things,” Galven chuckled. “Bye, you two.” The link was cut, and the screen went black.

Kirk took a deep breath before he faced Khan, smiling widely at him. “The next step is finished. You’ll see, soon you’ll have the money to get the lawyers you need for a fair trial and defense for your people.” He cupped Nien’s cheek with one hand. “It'll turn out; I know it will.”

Khan smiled melancholy. “You are ever the optimist, James,” he whispered. “Still, I know that the path I have chosen is the only one that will bring me peace. So I will finish what I have started.” He brushed his mouth over Jim’s and murmured, “And now we only can only hope that Wesley convinces Command to buy the SDD.” The Augment rubbed his neck. “Still I cannot rid myself of the feeling that the other shoe will drop soon, as illogical as the feeling is.”

“Nothing worth it is easy,” Jim nodded and wrapped an arm around his beloved’s shoulders. “This is worth it, but chin up; we’ll make it.”

The warmth in the super-human’s eyes was worth more than any words of gratitude or encouragement, and sighing contentedly, Jim laid his head on Nien’s shoulder. They held each other in comfortable silence.

ST***ST***ST

“Captain Helrom is where?” Barnett stared, shocked, at Lieutenant Chuan Li, the comms officer of the Excalibur. The Chinese man was pale beneath his tanned skin.

“We received a message several minutes ago from the University Hospital in Sausalito. Captain Helrom and Commander Bleach had an accident early in the morning outside Bleach’s apartment building. Neighbors reported a crash and investigated. They found the men bleeding on the street behind their hypercar that was smashed too. Looks like a hit-and-run. When the ambulance arrived, both men were unconscious. Thankfully the officer on-scene got their identification and took the time to call Starfleet. Apparently, it took him a while to find the right people, but that’s how we found out.” He swallowed; clearly upset.

Barnett rubbed his neck and turned around; his gaze wandered through the stateroom that would be his home for the duration of the journey. He had moved in late last night only to be woken up at 0630 by a call from the bridge stating that Captain Helrom and Commander Bleach hadn’t come aboard when they were expected, and neither could be reached.
The search had started immediately, but only now they learned of what happened to the two officers – one of them the commander of the starship that had to leave now!

Dammit!

“What's their condition?” Richard asked.

Li took a deep breath. “They're not out of danger yet. Bleach is worse off than Helrom, though. He has a broken rib that pierced a lung and he lost a lot of blood before doctors got their hands on him.”

Barnett bit his lips. “In other words, they're out, and the *Excalibur* is without her captain and first officer.” He cursed inwardly. “Commander Handers is the next in line, right?”

“Yes, sir, but he's our Chief of Security. Of course he can take command of the *Excalibur*, but…”

“But his first duty is the safety of the delegation; he can’t do both effectively.” Barnett finished Li’s statement. “Dammit!” He went to his desk and activated the intercom and view screen. “Barnett to Komack!” he hailed his colleague.

“Komack here,” came the reply instantly.

Barnett sat down on the chair. “James, we have a problem. Helrom and Bleach were involved in a car accident this morning – a hit and run. They're both in the hospital. Commander Handers will have all hands full ensuring the delegation’s safety. We need a replacement for Helrom. Who's available to take command of the *Excalibur*?”

Komack cursed quietly under his breath, too; his round face flushed in irritation, and then he thought for a longer moment before he answered, “All available captains are deployed. Maybe…”

“Bridge to Admiral Barnett,” the conversation was interrupted. “Sir, I have Admiral Luengo on the line for you,” the second comms officer reported, and Richard made a face.

“Patch him through,” he ordered.
The picture on the split screen showed José Luengo.

“Richard, I just heard about Helrom and his first officer’s accident. The police report says the driver hasn’t been found yet. We hope there are witnesses that will come forward with information.”

“Witnesses – at that time of morning in Sausalito? Good luck!” Barnett growled. “What worries me more is the fact that we have no captain now, and any officer with command experience is out in space.”

“What’s about one of the commanders?” Luengo suggested and earned a disbelieving look from Richard.

“You can’t be serious, José! Now is not the time to give someone their first command!”

“There are some very promising commanders who are ready for their first commands,” Komack cut in, not knowing he was playing right into Luengo’s hand. “And what would be better to a newly promoted captain than to have half the Admiralty watching his back?”

Barnett stared at the screen. “I don’t like this!” he said quietly. “This mission is too important for someone so green.”

“Excuse me, Richard, but Kirk was pretty green once, too – and look at the successes he's already had over the challenges he's been presented with,” Luengo pointed neutrally out. “Give a young man a chance to prove himself; while you are aboard and interfere should a crisis happen.”

“José is right,” Komack cut in again. “There are a few experienced senior officers aboard the Excalibur, who would help a young acting captain. And you, Harry, Heihachiro, Thomas and I - we're here, too. That should be enough help if he needs it.”

The Chief in Command sighed heavily. “It seems we have no other choice. Do you have someone in mind, James?” he asked Komack, who pressed his lips together in thought.

“Well, there is Joe Hudson, Alice Summer, Lawrence Robert Styles…”
“Styles?” Barnett blinked shortly. “Archibald’s son, right?” As both men on the screen nodded, Richard thought about it.

Luengo dipped his head and was obviously busy reading before he said, “Hudson and Summer are both in space. Styles just got back from a mission ten days ago. Looks like he's ready to go out again with the Bradbury in two days. One word from you and he can be promoted to captain. As far as I can tell, his promotion is overdue.”

Komack cocked his head. “He comes from a well-known English family with a long history in the fleet and the Royal Navy before that. He is ambitious, knows protocols to a tee, and has an overall calm demeanor about him. If any of 'em could succeed, it’s him.”

Barnett allowed this thought a few more seconds before he nodded. “Right. When can he get there?”

“If you want, I'll contact him,” Luengo offered. “I’ve requested his file while we were talking, and I have his data. My secretary can call him. He’ll be aboard in less than an hour.”

Something in Richard stirred – a deep, nagging gut-feeling. He had enough experience to know that he trusted those. ‘You’re nervous because the mission is a powder keg,’ he thought, and then he straightened up. He had to make a decision fast. “Right,” he said. “Contact Styles and give him the orders to report to the Excalibur in one hour.”

“Of course,” José nodded. “I’ll let you know as soon as I get a reply from him.” The screen blinked again as Luengo interrupted the link; only Komack’s face was visible now.

“I'll inform Morrow, Shepard and Nogura,” Barnett said. “We're meeting in briefing room 1 to promote the young man, and then we'll be off. We can’t permit any more delays.”

James nodded. “I agree. I also hope this surprise isn’t a bad omen for the mission.”

He couldn’t know how right he was.

TBC…
Chapter End Notes

Yeah, we are nearing the next big, big action that will take place, before they come together to build the groundwork for events to come. And I’m certain that many of my readers will be infuriated even more with Luengo and Section 31 soon.

In the next chapter Jim will meet Kevin again, while the events of Luengo’s plan unfold. I don’t want to reveal too much, yet I know the next chapters will keep you on the edge of your seat.

I hope you liked the last installment –Tarsus had to be on the table at one time, after all it mirrors Khan’s own youth in some ways. I’m looking forward your feedback.

Have a nice weekend

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear Readers!

I really have to apologize that the new update needed so long to be published, but after summer-holidays everything is really quite busy, and – to my regret – the hobby has to stand back. Nevertheless my Beta and I use every spared minute to proceed with the story what begins to head to the next action just right NOW. I’m sure that many of you are going to curse me within the next chapters (*snicker*).

Thank you so much for the comments and kudos; I know the story runs a long way and still isn’t finished, but I promise that the next turns will keep you smitten with it – even if everything becomes now darker and sinister.

So, enough of this little prologue,

Have fun

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 45 – Old friends, new threats

The same time Lawrence Robert Styles reached the Excalibur to make his way to the briefing room, the new crew members of the Enterprise arrived at space station 6-S. The moment Styles took his command as the newly promoted captain – carry out his duties as commander and as a secret agent of Section 31 – Jim Kirk, Spock and Quartermaster Sylvia McLally with nine members of her staff watched the doors of the recreation deck (that offered enough room for so many people) slide open to reveal more than 60 men and women, who would support his decimated crew.

A man in his mid-twenties stepped forward and saluted, “Lieutenant Philippe Nureaux, 42 crewmen, and 23 cadets are ready for duty, sir.” He nodded at Spock. “Sir!” He addressed him, too.

Kirk returned the salute. “Thank you, Lieutenant. Welcome aboard the Enterprise, ladies and gentlemen. I know that it comes as a surprise for most cadets – to be called on duty aboard Starfleet’s flagship in the middle of a mission, but in times of war we must be flexible. And, believe me, when you return to the Academy, that lesson will put you head and shoulders above your peers.” The last sentence was spoken with a conspiratorial undertone; it earned him some chuckles before the young men and women regained their composure.
Jim’s eyes wandered over the still unknown faces until his eyes found what he was searching for. His heart leapt in his chest. There he stood. A young man – almost a boy, really – with short dark hair. He had grown, of course, but it was the same face and the same green-brown eyes that locked him in his gaze. For a moment, they lit, and Kevin Riley allowed himself a quick smile – one Kirk couldn’t help but returned, then the captain’s attention snapped back to the other new arrived crew members.

“As you all have heard, a ceasefire has been declared between the Klingons and the Federation, and will last for the duration of the upcoming peace conference that will take place in five days. We have orders to patrol the sector between here and Borderland and to avoid any confrontation with the Klingons and the Orions; so your first trip into deep space should be uneventful. Still, and this goes especially for the cadets, do not forget that we’re here on our own and that anything you say and do can leave a trail endangering the security of this ship. So if you’re uncertain about something, have questions or problems, your superior officers, my first officer Mr. Spock and even I are there for you and will offer our advice and our guidance. The same goes for our CMO, Dr. McCoy. And speaking of the good Doctor, please don’t forget to report to medbay for you the physical. Don't worry, his bark is worse than his bite.”

Again, the group chuckled, and Kirk saw the most cadets try to hide their relief. He could understand it. They were still youths – at the threshold of adulthood, and they were far away from home. Each had his or her own dreams of exploration, not war. Knowing they had the support of the senior staff meant much to the group. He remembered his first real mission in space two years ago more clearly than he sometimes wished for.

Jim gestured to his companions. “Quartermaster McLally and her staff will show you your quarters; Mr. Spock will transfer the duty schedules to your desks. Report to your departments and stations at the beginning of your shift. Those who are on beta or gamma have a bit of spare time. Use it to get familiar with the Enterprise – she's a big girl.” Here and there, Jim saw a smile and he relaxed a bit.

“Well, then I have nothing else except ‘welcome aboard’. I hope you all and I expect you all to integrate yourselves beyond just crewmembers. You are part of the team. Dismissed!”

McLally stepped forward, looked at her PADD and called the names of the new crew members and announced their quarters. Her staff summoned gathered them into small groups.

Spock watched them closely. He had, of course, read their files, too and as his gaze wandered to Jim. He saw that his friend was looking at a young man. The Vulcan identified him as Kevin Riley – a boy who had shared the captain’s horrors on Tarsus IV. Spock knew his T’hy’la well enough to know that Kirk would take the young ensign under his protective wing. Despite his bad experiences with family, Jim was at heart family-man. He understood as Spock had come to learn that family was
more than blood – extends beyond blood. Jim spread his affection and protection to those he regarded as his own. That young Riley was family to Jim, was as clear Earth's sky on a bright summer day.

Half an hour later, all were settled in. Kevin Riley shared his quarters with another ensign from the navigation department – a Rigelian, who went by the name Dunit and on duty now as he had been informed by the second quartermaster. The young Irishman looked around the small room and felt the excitement running through his veins that hadn’t left him since he learned that he had orders to the Enterprise. Of course he knew who her captain was – half the Federation knew it. Since James Kirk had saved Earth two years back, his name was well-known. After he had won two important battles during the war and successfully saved the space harbor and space station of Aldebaran, he was even practically infamous.

Kevin smiled to himself as he unpacked his luggage. Of course it had to be Jim Kirk in line to save the Federation. It seemed to be his fate – always there where the danger was the greatest; always there to make it right. Just like he did on Tarsus IV. Just like he did during the Nero-incident. And now was no different. Riley couldn’t help himself; he grinned goofily when he thought back to their meeting. As soon as his eyes met the captain's in the briefing room, the warm, soft expression on the face of his former savior told him everything. It destroyed the small doubts he harbored at the back of his mind. Jim hadn’t forgotten about him; he seemed genuinely glad to see him again.

And so was Kevin. He had thought about contacting Kirk after his name was first mentioned in the news two years ago. He thought the better of it when he learned some days later that Jim had been promoted to captain and his first command – Starfleet’s flagship. That was three days before Kevin stepped through the Academy doors for the first time. His secret goal had been to be the best of his class and to maybe get a chance to join Jim’s crew. He wouldn’t have dared to dream that just two years later his dream would come to fruition, but here he was on the same ship that was captained by the man who protected him – very likely saved his life and allowed him to become the man he was now.

And what a fine man James Kirk had become.

He had changed from a young teen into a tall, strong, handsome young man – proud, yet kind. His little speech had proved what was rumored throughout the Academy: The captain of the Enterprise had a command-style based on comradeship, yet his persona left no doubt of who and what he was. He was someone you could look up to – as he had been since they were children.

Whistling an Irish song, Kevin was about to put his toiletries stuff into the small bathroom when the door buzzer sounded. Surprised, he turned around. “Enter!” he called
The door slid open to reveal the broad-shouldered shape of Jim Kirk, who crossed the threshold; the door closed behind him.

For a long moment, both men didn’t move. Then they grinned at each other. Protocol out the proverbial window, Kevin flung everything he had in his arms onto his bunk and walked towards Kirk, who simply spread his arms. The men embraced, laughing.

“It’s really you! I couldn’t believe it at first when I read the names of the crew,” Jim said, beaming from one ear to the other one.

Clapping each other on the back, Kevin stepped back and smiled at Kirk. “It’s a pleasure to see you again, Captain.”

The superior officer rolled his eyes. “Hey, off duty you still call me ‘Jim,’ right?”

The young Irishman chuckled. “Thanks – Jim.” He took a deep breath; his gaze roamed over the familiar face that had changed but was still the same. “I can’t get it. Us again after all those years.”

“I tried to stay in contact,” Kirk apologized, “but then you moved to Rigel with your relatives and…”

“We only stayed there six months. When I got back to Earth, there was no one at your address. I found out that your mom sold the farm, but that was as far as I could get.”

Jim grimaced. “Yeah, we moved into an apartment in a town not far from the farm. And – well – after my mother signed on for another mission, I stayed in college for a while and then…” He shrugged and shook his head, smiling. “Never thought that I would end up in space – that we’d both end up on the same ship.”

“Aye – but I’m still a student, and you are the Federation’s newest hero,” Riley snickered and burst out laughing, as Jim groaned, “Don’t start with that! I hate the whole ‘he’s so great’ media shit.”

“I knew it! You were never one to stand in the limelight for the sake of it.” Kevin turned serious. “Not then and not now either.”
The captain rubbed his neck. “Well, I have to admit there was a time when I did things just to say I could, even when I knew I was being goaded into it. I accepted Pike’s challenge to join Starfleet – to be better than my dad. And if someone says it'll take me four years then I . . .”

“Ha! I'll do it in three', I think you said.” Kevin smirked again. “Believe me, they still talk about that – and the professors have nothing better to do than rub our faces in that comment.”

Jim’s eyes widened. “And here I thought they would only talk about me as 'the biggest troublemaker that ever graced the Academy'.”

“Why? Because you cheated on the Kobayashi Maru?” Riley snickered again. “That alone made you a hero, and I'm certain a few instructors are still impressed, too. They just don't admit it to us.”

At this moment, the intercom sprang to life. “Bridge to Captain Kirk!” sounded the deep voice of Spock and Jim sighed, went to the small desk and answered the hail.

“Kirk here. What’s up, Spock?”

“We’re about to depart, sir. Mr. Scott reports Engineering is ready; all stations manned, sir.”

“Thanks, Spock, I'll be on the bridge in two minutes. Kirk out.” He turned around. “Sorry, Kevin, duty calls. When do you start your shift?”

“I'm on beta shift on the auxiliary bridge.”

Kirk pursed his lips. “Right. Let us see how much you've learned at the Academy. I intend to give the most promising cadets the chance work on the main bridge within the next few days. Rotate you in and out of the position. I hope to see you there then.”

Kevin stared surprised at him. “That would be . . . highly unusual for cadets.”

Shrugging, the captain answered. “Theory is one thing, putting it into practice is another. If the senior
officers want to know exactly how far the cadets are in their training, they have to test them. There may be a ceasefire now, but the situation could quickly escalate back to a full-blown war. I want my ship to be prepared if that happens. I need all of my officers and all of their reliefs in the event something happens. I read your results. They're impressive. I'm sure I'll see you on the bridge soon.” He chuckled as he saw Kevin blushing and turned to leave. “See you later, Kevin.”

“See you, Jim!”

The door closed behind the captain and Riley sighed. They only talked for a few minutes, but one thing was certain. The old friendship hadn't aged – the familiarity they developed on Tarsus hadn't left either of them.

ST***ST

The departure from 6-S went off without a hitch, and the Enterprise began her patrol. The mission, routine as it was, still needed the full attention of the bridge crew. Should the Klingons be bluffing, this would be the best opportunity for another strike. Spock and Sulu’s sensors were scanning their full range, and despite the calm, there was tension on the bridge.

At the end of the alpha-shift, Jim went down to Engineering as he had each day since Khan had begun working with Scotty. Because of the new crew members and to avoid unnecessary questions, Khan wore the red coveralls of a technician. None of the newcomers in Engineering paid attention to him and only noticed that he always worked with the chief engineer.

Just like now. Jim found both at one of the main control station of the warp core, discussing technical details while Keenser listened carefully. His pitch dark eyes looked clear and even warm at the enhanced man, who glanced towards Jim as the young captain strode around the corner.

Instantly, Jim felt the tension of the last hours drain from him the moment Nien’s and his eyes locked. He had felt his bond partner this whole day deep in him, but there was a restlessness niggling him that melted away as he closed the distance to the Augment.

“Hi there,” he greeted, nodding at Scotty and Keenser before he stopped beside Khan. He stood too close to allow for the normal amount of personal space, yet the former dictator only smiled at Kirk.

Montgomery pursed his lips in thought. An inner voice whispered an answer that he just couldn't hear, and he was still unable to grasp all the hints and put them together to get a picture of what was
going on right in front of him.

“Mr. Scott and I were discussing the possibility of extracting a higher output from the warp core. We also thought about connecting the SDD to the main power with a link to the auxiliary power should the warp core fail.”

“Aye, but then if we ask her to put more out, we have to get it from somewhere. Mr. Singh thinks he can draw more. We'll run some simulations and then test it once he's finished. It's a good time to do so with us on patrol and no one shootin' at us.”

“Sounds good to me,” Jim beamed before he addressed Khan. “Are you done here or do you still have work to do?”

Nien shook his head. “I’m done for today.” He glanced back at the Scotsman. “I will work something out for the sockets – what we need for them.”

“Right, and I'll run some simulations. See ya tomorrow?”

“Of course,” Khan nodded.

“Well, then – have a good day, gentlemen,” Scotty greeted and walked away; the Roylan like a small shadow on his heels.

“Inseparable,” Jim chuckled, then he turned towards the exit. “You coming?”

“With pleasure.” Remaining at the captain’s side Khan left the Engineering. “Do you have something in mind for us?” he asked, and Kirk smiled.

“Yes. Care to join me on the sports deck and to show me this relaxing, stretching thing you did a couple of days ago?”

For a moment Nien’s eyes widened, then he laughed – quiet, warm and deep. The sound washed over Jim’s heart and soul like soft velvet. “The ‘relaxing, stretching thing’ is called Tai Chi – and I would love to teach you.”
They headed for the next turbo lift.

“You really like working in Engineering, don’t you?” Jim asked.

A hint of a smile curved the Augment’s bowed lips. “I can finally do what I was truly made for. I can build and create – technology that is.” He chuckled. “It is the same with the short, oyster-looking man. He told me that the males of his family were engineers. It is part of what makes them who they are as, say, leadership is part of what makes you, you.”

“Keenser talked to you about his family?” Jim stopped mid-step and stared at his beloved, baffled. “How long did this talk last, seeing that he only uses a word or two at a time?”

Khan laughed again; this time mirth danced in his eyes. “Oh, I made a few guesses; he confirmed them.” He snorted. “He is an odd sort but has a brilliant mind, and he is loyal to the death. He and Scott are close – like brothers.”

“They are. They’ve definitely found kindred spirits in each other,” Kirk nodded and started walking again. “Not in the way we did, but they are close.”

They reached the turbo lift and stepped in when it arrived. Jim smiled at Khan. “I’m just happy that you’re getting in with people here besides me.”

“I am – thanks to you. Funny way to tell Mr. Scott, Sunrise’s identity. It broke the ice – or started a small fire. He does have a temper.”

“No wonder you two work so well together,” Jim smiled, closed the small distance to his soul-mate and gave him a tender kiss that the super-human returned. For a long moment, Khan felt at peace again. A tiny voice in his mind whispered that he would love to have this is every day – challenges, duty, acceptance and his mate by his side. Then the tiny voice was interrupted. A female cleared her throat.

Jim and Khan broke apart, startled; they turned and looked straight at a very stern-looking Uhura, who stood at the threshold of the open lift.

Nyota watched both men, one of whom one seemed to be a bit irritated (Khan) and the other almost humiliated (Kirk). It had been a bit awkward to catch the two kissing. Even if she knew about them, it was strange to see Jim Kirk, of all people, with a man. Stepping into the lift, she ordered “Deck 7!” and the cabin began to move again.

For a long moment, an uncomfortable silence hung in the air while Uhura fixed the Augment in her sites. He'd driven her and lover over the edge last year. And this was the first time she faced him since she and Spock had taken him down. Making up her mind she resolutely activated the emergency break before she addressed the former dictator without hesitation.

“I know what you've done – in the war, for our side. I know you helped those who needed it, and I know that you risked your life for the captain, more than once."

“Lieutenant…,” Jim began with a certain warning undertone in his voice but shut up as Nyota simply put one hand on his chest. He knew better than to stop her when she was in this mood.

“Sorry, but this has to be said, Captain!” Her gaze didn’t waver as she looked straight into Khan’s pale eyes. “Do you really love him?” she asked bluntly; taking the Augment by surprise for a moment before he caught himself.

“You are very direct, Lieutenant,” he said, and she nodded.

“Yes, I am! I always am when it comes to what is most important to me. My duty, my friends – family, so to speak. So, please, answer my question.”

Nien’s instincts told him that it would be better to swallow down the rising irritation and to suppress his natural arrogance. This petite woman had a key role aboard this ship and in Kirk's life. Her impertinence was based on her worry for her friend and he could accept that. She was Jim’s family. He would make peace with her as he had with the doctor.

“Yes, I do,” he said clearly. “With all that I have to love him with.”

Uhura searched sea-colored eyes for a hint of a lie; she found only sincerity. She nodded shortly.
“Right,” she said slowly. “As long as you are serious, I can live with it.” She closed the distance to him and lifted her head. “But if you ever hurt him, I’ll claw your eyes out!” There was no heat in her voice, only a cold, stern tone. “That’s your only warning!”

Kirk wanted to interrupt. Dear God, he didn’t need another mother-hen! But Khan was quicker. A smirk curled around his lips as he replied. “You would get very well along with Katie,” he said, amused with the young woman’s behavior. “She would have said something similar – she did when it came to her family.” His gaze flickered to a half shocked, half sure looking Kirk. “And you see in Jim a brother, do you not?”

“Sometimes he’s a bit of a terror like any brother,” Nyota answered without any hesitation.

Khan made an affirming gesture. “Very well, Lieutenant. If I ever do anything that would bring harm to my mate, I will be sure to inflict the consequences, you need not to worry.”

Uhura stared at the two. ‘I knew it. They REALLY are together!’ it echoed through her mind. “Mates?” She glanced from one to the other and then shook her head – not in denial but as if she wanted to clear her thoughts. “I knew it!” she grumbled. “That sleepwalking; the fact that you two are inseparable, your voices when you talk to each other.” She snorted, half amused.

This time it was Jim, who cleared his throat. “Uhh… Uhura, Spock and Bones know, but I’d appreciate it if it didn’t get around.”

Indignantly, the woman planted her fists on her waist; her eyes flashed at him. “Is that what you think of me, Captain? I would never, and you know it! A comms officer hears more than they ever wanted to every day. We’d never get any work done if we took the time to tell all that we know!”

Quickly Kirk lifted both hands. “Lower you weapon, Nyota. I'm sorry, I said it. I know you wouldn't.”

“Bridge to turbo lift cabin 12F. Are you in need of assistance?” the first officer’s voice suddenly sounded through the speaker. Quickly, Uhura activated the link. “No, Spock, everything is fine.”

For a moment there was silence; then the Vulcan asked, “Why did you use the emergency stop and fail to restart the lift in the requisite two minutes, Nyota? The bridge was alerted.”
Khan chuckled, as he saw how the chocolate-brown skin of the woman turned even darker. “Sorry, we…,” Uhura began but was interrupted by Kirk.

“We got a little bit carried away in our conversation, Spock. We forgot that the emergency stop was still on.”

“Captain?”

“Yeah, it’s me, Spock. Uhura, Khan and I were talking; we got distracted is all.” He reached beside Nyota and punched a button. “We’re on our way now.”

“Thank you, Captain; your cabin blocked four others.”

Jim blushed. “Sorry.” Then he cocked his head. “Why are you still on duty, Spock? Your shift ended.”

“I’m modifying our scanners, sir. The process will take time.”

Jim sighed. Workaholics – that’s what they are. “Fine, but get your downtime, Spock. Your girl could get the wrong idea.”

Uhura shot him a glare. “Captain!”

“Captain?” Spock sounded confused, and Jim chuckled.

“It was a joke; calm down you two. Kirk out!”

“I am a Vulcan. I do not experience excitement from which I must find calm,” came the indignant reply before the intercom was shut off.

“And I thought Vulcans could not lie,” Khan commented wryly.
“A myth!” Uhura deadpanned while the cabin moved through the shafts. It stopped on deck 5 where Kirk and Khan exited the lift. Uhura nodded her good-byes to her captain and his mate. The doors slid closed, and she disappeared.

“Phew, that went better than I thought it would. She can be tough,” Jim said and met Nien’s amused gaze.

“She is very fond of you,” he stated, and Kirk snorted.

“I remember the first time I met her.” He shook his head, and as he caught Khan’s curious gaze, he sighed. “She was in a bar in Iowa with some Starfleet cadets. I flirted with her; she resisted my charms, so I tried harder. The cadets around didn't like me hitting on her. It ended… well, you can figure that out.”

“It ended in a good old bar brawl, I imagine,” the super-human assumed, and Jim snickered while they walked down the corridor.

“Yes – and it was a good fight, even if I lost that one – well, I probably was going to lose. And then Pike came in. I can still hear that whistle ringing in my ears.” His smile was melancholic at the memory. “He handed me a napkin to shove into my nose, bought me a drink and told me he knew who I was. He was good friends with my dad. Told me I should join Starfleet. He was convinced that I had what my father did – dared me to do better than my father, which was a tall order. At first I didn’t want to hear any of it; then I thought about it. I made up my mind the moment I saw a ship being built in the shipyard; it was the Enterprise.” Something akin to love shone in his eyes, and he stopped walking. “When I saw her – her shape, her power – I vowed to myself that I'd command her one day. I got to the shuttle at the last minute, gave my hyperbike to a yard worker, and told Pike I'd finish the Academy in three years. I got on board, met Bones and the rest, as they say, is history.”

Khan's gaze roamed his beloved’s face. “A brawl and a man's first love was all it took to make a hero who doesn't believe in defeat, defends the weak, and remains true to himself and those he calls family.” He lifted a hand and cupped the young captain’s cheek. “James Kirk, I am honored to know a man like you. It is no wonder that I fell so hard.” He leaned forwards, his intention clear. At that moment, voices drew nearer, and quickly both men retreated a step.

“So… uh… You think the output of the warp core can be increased?” Kirk asked lamely as a few crew members came down the hallway, greeting him respectfully.

Khan chuckled soundlessly. “Clever!” he whispered as soon as the crew members had passed them by.
“What else could I do?” Jim murmured. For a long moment, they only looked at each other, and then Kirk cocked his head.

“Sports deck or… my quarters?”

New fire burned in those pale green-blue eyes – a fire that instantly stoked the Captain's own.

“Quarters!” was the only answer Khan gave; his voice deep and purring.

It was a good thing that no one saw the two race down the corridor and vanish into the captain’s quarters.

ST***ST***ST

The air was smoky and reeked of cheap ale, much liquor, and food. The air was filled with voices all talking in different languages, but one stood out. A rough, guttural language – Orion. In the corner of a bar situated in the planet's capital (if you could call it a capital at all; Orion culture lacked the structure of Federation planets) sat seven men of varying races. Three Klingons, two Orions and two Terran men, though not of Earth, sat together. The noises around them prevented any eavesdropping on the little group. Nevertheless, they spoke in hushed voices. No one wanted to risk revealing his intentions.

“So, you have finally a plan to make the whole thing work?” One of the human men asked and the three Klingons only grunted with a short nod, before one of them rumpled,

“So, you have finally a plan to make the whole thing work?” One of the human men asked and the three Klingons only grunted with a short nod, before one of them rumpled,

“Still, I don’t get it.” He looked at the leader of the three Orions at the other side of the table. “Why, exactly, should I name my ship J’Ethl after Lord Kor’s flagship?”

D’nyrrs rolled his eyes in an almost human manner. He was larger than the most Orions; his tunic stretched taut across his shoulders and his ice-blue eyes shimmered ominously in his round face. The twilight in the bar made his green skin appear darker, but it couldn’t hide a scar that split his upper lip. “It’s simple, Klokh. Play them for the fools they are. The Federation will the Klingons have broken the ceasefire and the Empire will believe it is Kor’s fault.”
The human who had spoken first frowned. “Why Kor?” Interest lay in Commander Grader’s voice while he sipped his wine — wine that was far too sweet for his taste, but he didn’t mention it. It was a common drink in Borderland, and he wouldn’t offend his partners by complaining about a simple wine. He was too well-trained. All members of Section 31 were trained in Xeno courtesies before they were entrusted with missions.

The Orion snorted at Grader’s question. “Kor is a peace-maker. Neither Klokh nor I need such a thing around our business. Business has been good since the war began, don’t you agree?” He lifted a glass of Romulan Ale towards his Klingon partner and took a drought. Banned liquor was only one of many things outlaws could buy in Borderland and on Orion.

The pirates traded anything of value — a value that didn’t conform to the Federation's legal system. Slaves were sold as well as dilithium crystals, stolen ships, and drugs. D’nyrrs headed a group employed an outlaws. The Orion culture was all but lawless; he had free hand to do as he wished so long as he did not endanger the operations of the Syndicate, a group of the most influential Orions, who had the final say when it came to smuggler and pirate disputes. They meted out punishment - sometimes harshly if the crime endangered the existence of the Syndicate.

And he would certainly get in trouble with the Syndicate if it would D'nyrrs' plans were revealed. But the offer of money and the promise of becoming a very well-paid Starfleet spy was enough that he put cautions aside. The Orion Syndicate had agreed to abide by the declared ceasefire between the Klingon Empire and the Federation, but D’nyrrs learned just days ago that not all admirals were happy with the developments. And if those admirals wanted to continue the war with the Klingons, then he would not stop them. Quite the opposite in fact, Klokh and he had never earned so much money as he had since the war started. They had no interest in peace.

The opportunity to eliminate the delegation and to make it look like one of the most important Klingon warlords was responsible for the act was something D’nyrrs was going to love. The Syndicate came to an agreement with the Klingons several weeks ago. They requested Klingon protection. The slavers and pirates had thought that this would work to their advantage. They would be wrong. The Klingon warlord responsible for Borderland, Kor, held to an oddly more Federation-like morality. He informed the Syndicate that the seizure of ships and taking captives for the slave-market was a punishable crime. The Orions furiously protested, but they were bound to obey Kor’s commands. And if this man was removed from his guard because the talks failed before they began, then D’nyrrs was more than happy to have a hand in it. ‘Killing two birds with one stone’, like the Terran proverb went.

His eyes remained on Klokh’s face, typically ridged as most Klingon's were. His long hair was tousled as was his beard, yet he maintained an aura of strength and power. It was beyond D’nyrrs that a warrior of this Klingon's caliber had been forced out of the Imperial Fleet because of a battle lost against a renegade Klingon colony. Well, the Empire would pay for this mistake, this much the Orion could tell. Klokh and his two most loyal officers had fled with his commandeered bird-of-prey. Since then, they had stolen two more D4-cruisers and have been in the Borderland in their own private enterprise with D’nyrrs’ help which was rewarded with Klokh’s support when needed.
As it was now, D’nyrrs didn’t have to persuade his Klingon partner to join him in the mission, especially when Klokh learned that he would be able to exact revenge on his former home.

Klokh bared his teeth when his Orion partner mentioned Kor, and growled, “He is a traitor! A traitor to the Klingon way. I have heard that he has sympathized with a Federation staff officer, and now this nonsense. As I have told you, if I get the opportunity to best him in battle, I will not hesitate nor will I show mercy.” He looked back at the human. “So, in three days the Excalibur will enter Borderland?” As the man nodded, he sneered. “My ship will wear the J’Ethl for all to see. The J’Ethl will be the last thing the Excalibur sees.”

“As the soon-to-be Chief in Command stated, The Excalibur must return to Federation space in order that she tell the tale, so you cannot destroy her!” Grader said sternly. “The captain of the ship is among the Chief's confidantes, and he will do anything in his power to get the delegation onto a shuttle and off that ship. That’s your chance then to shoot the shuttle or shuttles into pieces. The whole thing will be recorded by the Excalibur. As soon as she is back in Federation space, she’ll contact the admiralty and the ceasefire will come to an end.” He passed the Klingon and the Orion two envelopes. “Here is the course and heading of the Excalibur and the first half of the agreed upon payment. Two credit cards with one hundred thousand Credits for each of you. You will get the rest when the job is done. Know that the Chief knows how to show his gratitude for a job well-done. We are going to need some trustworthy men in the Borderland if we want to win the war. And when that happens, it would mean that the Klingons retreat from your territory and you are free to go about your business unhindered.”

The two partners grinned at each other; their companions looked satisfied.

“Right, my friend, then a toast to our victory!” D’nyrrs said, and he lifted his glass. The others followed his example, looking forward to sealing the delegation’s fate.

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The next day went by uneventfully for the most part. While the Excalibur raced to the rendezvous point to meet Lady Ania Morganth of the Third House of Betazed, the Enterprise patrolled her assigned sector. There was not a Klingon in sight, but everyone aboard remained cautious.

As were members of The Shadow, who were about to leave Aldebaran to have a closer look at the Borderland. Galven hoped that the declared ceasefire would give him the chance to find something out about the fate of his brother, yet he doubted it. Too much time had passed since his brother and the others had been kidnapped. The chance of finding them was very small. Still there was hope…
But first Galven contacted Wesley shortly after his talk with Khan and Kirk, telling the Commodore about the good news. But he had to make an official offer for Starfleet concerning the SDD, meaning he had to iron out the details with Khan, which took several calls and many hours. Afterwards, Galven sent the offer to the Lexington, including the analysis of the tests done aboard the Enterprise, a copy of the patent document and a well a hammered-out deal Wesley could present the admiralty. Bob promised to deal with the rest and that he would keep Galven update.

Wesley was well aware of the risk he took by helping a wanted criminal do business with Command by using a pseudonym, but Bob was determined to repay the man for saving his life and that of his crew. He believed in right and wrong. And he believed in Khan's promise. But if was going to get a fair trial, he needed money, and Wesley would support him. He owed the super-human that much. As well, Khan’s fierce protectiveness of Kirk touched Bob. There was something between his protégée, and the Augment that Wesley couldn’t name, but he felt that he had to help the two personal unhappiness; they'd both been through so much.

So he pondered very carefully which admiral he should contact concerning the SDD. The sudden appearance of the device would lead to questions – not the least of which how it came that the technology had been already tested aboard the Enterprise when Command had no knowledge of it.

Wesley knew that the half of the admiralty was on its way to the conference. Normally he would have contacted the Chief of Starfleet Advanced Technology (StAT), Rear Admiral Cartwright, at the Headquarters, but something stopped him from doing so. Jim’s thought that Section 31 still existed made him wary, and he never did completely trust Cartwright. Something was about this man made Wesley approach him with the caution of an unarmed man approaching a le-matya.

When the admiralty and the council discovered the truth about Section 31, Cartwright had been the first to fall under suspicion as a chief operative or a sympathizer, yet there was no proof to back up an accusation.

Still Wesley distrusted Cartwright, and if Section 31 was still operating in secret with Cartwright as a supporter, then the wrong people would find out about the SDD. Maybe they would find out about the man behind the device and those who hid and helped him. They would be not only in trouble; they’d be in danger. Wesley felt sick all over again when he remembered what Section 31 had done to the Augment and how the shadowy department had been ready to start a war just to establish its power. And he felt even worse with the thought that they might still be active.

No, he had to contact someone he knew who loathed Section 31 as he did and whom he could trust. That circle was few, and all were aboard the Excalibur at the moment. Harry Morrow, James Komack, Heihachiro Nogura, Thomas Shepard and Richard Barnett were old school; they valued honor and were true to their oaths. He could trust them never to have sympathized with Section 31 or
Wesley pondered his options – who to contact first. Then he made up his mind. Never go to the middle man when you have access to the boss, as the old saying went. That was exactly what Bob was going to do. Sitting in his quarters after alpha-shift, he contacted the bridge and requested a direct link with Barnett aboard the Excalibur. Being the commanding staff-officer had its perks. He could speak with the Chief in Command directly, sans protocols.

He didn't wait long; the screen on his desk came to life and showed the kind, open face of Richard Barnett, who seemed to be a little bit surprised. After Bob’s report, he'd be no less baffled, that was for sure.

“Good afternoon, Richard,” Wesley greeted.

“The same to you, Bob. Is there trouble out there, or is this of a more sensitive nature that you'd contact me directly?”

Wesley kept his expression calm and kindly before he answered, “Everything is fine here, and your assumption is correct. This is more of a private call though the topic is very important for Starfleet.”

That got him Barnett’s full attention. “You’re talking in riddles, my friend,” he said confused, and Bob chuckled warmly.

“I know but when I’ve explained everything to you, you'll understand why I had to talk to you first.” He bent forwards slightly. “What would you say if we had a device that could make the warp signature of a ship invisible to any sensor?”

He couldn’t help himself; he felt some amusement as Barnett’s eyes widened. The man was speechless for just a moment before a “What?” escaped his mouth.

The commodore nodded. “You heard me right, Richard. Something our technicians have been working on for months, years – has been built by a civilian. And it's already been successfully tested.”

For several seconds, Barnett stared at him, and then he frowned. “Where did you get this information? Who's the technician and who's tested it? You know that civilian tests have to be
repeated by Starfleet…”

“The man’s patent comes from Aldebaran and the tests have been done by Starfleet already – on board the Enterprise, to be precise.” He held a neutral expression when Richard’s jaw dropped.

“What?”

Bob made an affirming gesture. “Commander Scott, chief engineer of the Enterprise, informed me that he got the instructions for building the device from a civilian technician. He wanted to test the SDD – the Sensor Disturbing Device they call it. After I had learned how it worked, I gave my permission even though I doubted it would work. It did Richard! It worked during the Battle of Aldebaran. Neither our ships’ sensors nor the Klingons’ were able to detect the Enterprise. They only fired when she was in view. She also used it to patrol along the new border of the former Neutral Zone and was able to observe the enemy’s fleet when it intruded on Federation space and headed for Aldebaran.” He took a deep breath. “The device works – no sensors can track the Enterprise when the SDD is on. And I think this is exactly what we need, even if we end up with some semblance of a peace deal. A ship that can’t be tracked is always an advantage. After all, we’ll have to deal with the Romulans sooner or later, as well as others who are neutral at best.”

Barnett looked at his long-time friend thunderstruck, and then Bob’s words sunk in. “Are you telling me that a civilian tech was able to construct something all our engineers couldn’t?”

Wesley smiled. “I don’t know how we didn't know, but you know how civilians just don’t have the constraints we do. Or maybe a fresh pair of eyes was needed to see the problem without the preconceived notions we have.” He bent forwards slightly. “I’ve got the test results from the Enterprise and Commander Scott’s records. I also put together a summary of the sensor’s operations in connection with the visual records of the battle. You’re going to see the Enterprise come into view, but the sensors can’t see her. And she was hit fewer times than the other ships even though she had tactical command of the battle and was squarely in the middle of the volleys. The automatic phaser target locks and photon torpedoes require sensor data, but when the sensors don’t see anything, you have to fire manually. That’s why the Enterprise got away with proportionally less damage than the other ships in the battle space.”

A mixture of a snort and a chuckle came from Barnett. “I don’t believe it,” he whispered. “There we press our engineers, give incentives and then…” He shook his head. “Who is this man? How did he get the Enterprise to do the testing?” He frowned again. “And why was Command not informed sooner?”

Bob knew Richard would ask these questions, and he was well prepared. “The man is a friend of Mr. Galven – the head of The Shadow. We made contact when the militia aided in Captain Kirk’s rescue. Mr. Scott was first very doubtful and did a few tests before committing to something more
official. After I had reviewed the information, I gave my permission which resulted in the Enterprise’s successful patrol and her coming out of the battle relatively unscathed, we all were convinced.”

This time, Barnett rolled his eyes. “Why is it always the Enterprise?” he asked himself more than Bob. Then he addressed the Commodore again. “Have you seen the device?”

Wesley nodded. “Yes, during my inspection after the battle; Commander Spock and Commander Scott showed me the SDD. They had trouble with it because of its link to the deflector shields that were inoperable for a bit, but they fixed that problem. It went online two days ago. It’s connected to the auxiliary power now and runs flawlessly.”

Richard watched him closely, before he slowly replied, “If this SDD is as good as it sounds, then it’s exactly what we need. Not only if the Klingons insist on war, but also for our patrols along the Neutral Zone and the Romulan border. It could also prove useful in exploration. Many civilizations have the technical know-how to scan space around their home planet, and if our ships are invisible to their sensors, then we can observe them without being revealed. It will be a very useful tool as far as the Prime Directive is concerned.” He grimaced. “Even for Jim Kirk as long as he remembers to turn the damn thing on and manages to stay off of the planet's surface.”

Bob chuckled. “He was young – still is – and his best friend and first officer's life was at stake. I know the protocols don't make allowances when it comes to the Prime Directive, but I can understand Kirk's position. Our humanity should not be left out in the cold because of rules. It would have further damaged the recovering population of the Vulcans and surely hurt our relationship with them. He and the Enterprise’s senior officers stopped Nero. And without that team, her accomplishments these last two years would not have been possible.” He leaned back in his chair and brought the conversation back to the topic at hand. “Concerning the SDD, I’ve got a copy of the patent as well Mr. Scott’s analysis, and a short presentation. I’ll send them to you for a look.”

Barnett nodded. “I'd appreciate it. Like I said, if it's as good as it sounds, then we should make an official offer to… What was the man’s name?”

“I haven’t given you his name yet. Evan Brendon.” Wesley revealed, using the name Khan had used when he got the documentation to leave Earth shortly after his escape from the SBI lab. The Augment didn’t tell the commodore how he got the documents, and Bob thought it better to leave it that way. He had a feeling that he shouldn’t know every detail of the super-human’s doings.

The name meant nothing to Richard. “I've never heard of him before. You said he was a friend of this Galven, the head of The Shadow. Does he belong to the militia?”
“Not anymore,” Bob answered truthfully. “As far as I know he's stepped away from the group to put his efforts into the SDD.”

“Right,” the Chief in Command grumbled. “As much as we all owe The Shadow, they still operate outside of Federation law. Doing business with them could give some people the wrong idea.”

“Richard, in times of war ‘legal’ is a term that loses its value,” Bob reasoned. “Thanks to this man’s development, we were able to prevent the Klingons from annexing not only Aldebaran but also every planet system between K7 and Betazed. It's probably the only reason the Klingons decided to come to the table. And, by the way, the owner of the shipyard at Aldebaran, Mr. de la Vega-Martinez, has his little run-ins with the authorities, but we continue to do business with him. I see no reason why Command shouldn’t consider business with a civilian technician who had a part in the rescue of one of our captains and who managed to lay the foundation for a successful defense against enemies of the Federation.”

Barnett sighed. “You are right – of course.” He rubbed his jaw. “Still you should have informed me sooner. That the Enterprise’s engineer wanted to run the tests first is understandable, and then Aldebaran happened, but it's been over a week, now. Why…”

“Mr. Scott first wanted to make sure that the SDD could work on auxiliary power. That way he'd be sure that the shields' operability would not affect the operability of the SDD. They could only run the simulations and test after the Enterprise’s repairs. Oh yes, that reminds me, Mr. Brendon also had to complete the technical manuals and documentation.” As he caught Richard’s baffled expression, he chuckled. “As far as I understand the man is a tinkerer – first work then the necessary paperwork.”

Barnett rolled his eyes. Civilians! It was always the same with them. “Well, send me the reports and the presentation. I'll check them and then contact Cartwright.”

Bob held his neutral expression. “Sir, with all due respect, I think protocol should be - umm - abridged in this cast. If the StAT gets involved, it'll take weeks to get the device past the red tape and anywhere near a ship. You know Cartwright. He needs time, and he takes his time – especially if it has anything to do with civilian technology. Forgive me, but you are going to be unavailable for almost three weeks, and the purchase has to be authorized by you in person. With the looming threat of a break-down in diplomacy, I recommend that the ok be given, and I'll inform Cartwright afterwards. After all, the purchase comes out of his budget.”

A sigh escaped Richard. “You know that I don’t like going over my colleagues' head. It's the fastest way to burn a bridge. But I get your point, and I agree. If anything goes wrong with the peace talks, we'll be trading phaser blasts in a matter of hours. We need that device.”
“Exactly,” the commodore affirmed.

Barnet pursed his lips. “I agree that we should be prepared for the worst, which does mean we bypass official channels. Cartwright will be angry, though.” He sighed. “Any idea how much Brendon wants for his bit of magic?”

“He’s named a price. It includes instructions for installation on a Constitution-class ship, the tech manual, and the prototype currently on board the *Enterprise*. Permission for mass production is extra, and his terms include continued rights to work on the device enhancements.”

“What?” The Chief in Command bent forwards. “He wants to have a say in what we do with it – after he’s sold it to us?”

Bob knew that this was one of the critical details he would have to make work. It was one of the few things that would make Command think twice before they sentenced the Augment to some God-forsaken colony. If Khan were needed to further develop the SDD’s capabilities, then Command would bargain for his freedom in exchange for his services.

“It’s only logical,” he said carefully. “He constructed it. He’s the one who knows its capabilities and its potential best. We’d be crazy to turn down his offer.”

“Yeah – and it ensures he keeps collecting a paycheck,” Barnett grumbled.

Bob laughed quietly. “He wouldn’t be the first, and he won’t be the last.”

Richard murmured something under his breath. “Send me what you have and I’ll discuss it with Nogura and Morrow. Komack and Shepard too. Nogura knows a thing or two about tech. If he is O.K. with it, I see no reason we shouldn’t take the man up on his offer. I’ll keep you updated.”

“Thank you, Richard,” Wesley smiled. “I’ll send you everything in the next few minutes.”

“Okay, but don’t expect my answer before tomorrow. We’re nearing the rendezvous with the Betazed ship, and I’ve got the honor of welcoming Lady Morganath in the name of Starfleet.”
The Commodore grinned. "Well, it could be worse. I’ve seen pictures of her. She is beautiful."

"Yeah – most of them are; I also know they make overtures on anyone they find attractive. I'm just not that kind of guy."

"Yeah, but it would mean that you still got it," Bob teased, earning him a glare from the Chief in Command that wasn’t as serious as it seemed as he tried to make it.

"Thanks for the compliment,” Barnett grumbled sarcastically. “Send me your reports and you’ll hear from me. Have a nice day.”

“Same to you, Richard. Wesley out!”

Satisfied with the outcome of the conversation, Bob smiled to himself as he transferred the information to Barnett. He knew that the admirals would be ecstatic after they read them, and eager to get their hands on the device. Then he chuckled to himself. ‘Dear God, Bob, you're getting crazy in your old age. You're helping a wanted man fight your good ol' boys' club. But it's the right thing to do, I suppose – like Jim said.’ He shook his head. ‘Really, Kirk, as young as you are, you're showing us old guys what's important in life. Make it right no matter the cost. I hope everything turns out the way you want it to. You're playing a dangerous game, my friend, and I don't want to see you hurt again.’

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Wesley didn't know how dangerous the ‘game’ was that Kirk had been playing. The crew knew a civilian technician was aboard testing new device with the chief engineer. The new crew members were told about the civilian, and they didn’t ask any questions. It wasn’t unheard of for civilians to be aboard a ship working with new technology they might have developed, or as scientists.

It piqued Philippe Nureaux’s interest. Luengo hadn’t mentioned a civilian aboard the Enterprise and after all the data the admiral gave him, Nureaux would have expected this little detail. After all, the Augment was a ‘civilian’. So could this be a clue as to the Augment's whereabouts?

Very carefully, Nureaux attempted to gather more information about this ominous ‘civilian’ and found an excuse to visit Engineering the next day, but he didn't see anyone that was not in a uniform. Several hours later, after shift’s end, he asked a junior engineer about the civilian only to find that the mysterious man was not in Engineering. He was in his quarters going over reports. The lieutenant
didn’t give up. No one could stay hidden forever, even on a ship as large as the Enterprise.

Nureaux was assigned to the alpha shift, and so his schedule was the same as the captain. If the captain were hiding a criminal aboard his ship, then he’d be more likely to find him when Kirk was off duty. Perhaps Kirk was spending time with the enhanced man.

Following Kirk wouldn’t be easy; he could be found out any number of ways, but after two days Nureaux realized that he had no other choice. Philippe gave himself a difficult task. The following day after the alpha-shift, Kirk didn’t go to the deck where his quarters was located. When Nureaux lingered near the turbo lift a bit too long, he received a few odd looks and had to leave.

Frustrated he went to work out his stress on the recreation deck. This time, Lady Luck showed her face; he met the captain.

At the same time as Wesley was speaking with Barnett, Kirk came down the corridor and was headed straight towards the lieutenant. Stopping to salute, Nureaux was the picture of the dutiful officer. “Captain!” he greeted with feigned respect, and Kirk looked at him before stopping.

“Lieutenant Nureaux, still on duty as I see.”

“Yes, sir, shift ended, but I have a few things to finish up.”

The captain, who was about his age, smiled openly. “I won't stop my crew from doing their duty, but free time is important. Don’t deny yourself down time, Lieutenant.” Kirk cocked his head. “You’ve only been here two days. Is everything all right? Do you have some questions?”

Surprised, Philippe looked at him. He’d never heard of a commanding officer asking a subordinate how he was doing. Comradery… Luengo and Norton had told him that this was Kirk’s leadership style, but only now did he grasp their meaning. He couldn’t say that he disliked it. Kirk may be friendly towards his crew, but he demanded respect and obedience like any other captain. The only difference was that Kirk seemed to care for his crew. Why would he risk it all for a veritable demon in human form? ‘I don’t believe it! He’s such a good captain; his crew loves him. Hell, the whole Federation loves him. And he goes and conspires with a wanted criminal! What a waste – what a shame!’ He answered aloud, “Thank you very much for your concern, sir, but everything’s all right. I can’t speak for all of us, but as far as I’ve heard everyone’s content with their duties and the welcome aboard we got.”
Kirk’s smile widened. “That’s good to hear. If you have any problems, please don’t hesitate to let me or the first officer know. We’ll make time. Take care,” he said.

“Same to you, Captain,” Nureaux answered, swearing under his breath as he watched Kirk leave. He glanced around. ‘Where did this corridor lead? Ah yes, crew quarters, the ship’s laundry, Recreation Deck 6 and... auxiliary control.’

‘So, what had been the captain’s business on this deck? Was the Augment hidden here?’

Striding determinedly down the hallway, he passed the open door to the auxiliary control room where one of the cadets, Riley he recognized, and the Russian, Chekov were examining a station. They were talking about something quite interesting.

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“So, you know ze keptin from earlier times?” The Russian accent was easy to place. He must be training some of the cadets in his off-time. Now he was showing the helm and nav station in the auxiliary control room which was offline at the moment.

“How... How do you know?” Kevin stared wide-eyed at the other ensign.

“Ze way he spoke to you a minute ago, he was relaxed and zere was zis twinkle in his eye zat he has just for his friends.” Pavel straightened up. “I've only known him for two years, but it is long enough to recognize zose signs. And you had zis smile on your face as he came in. So – you know him not just as our keptin.”

Riley sighed. “Jim was right – you are a whiz-kid!”

Promptly Chekov rolled his eyes. “Nyet – I simply put two and two togezer.” Expectantly, he glanced at the other young man who just a little older than himself.

“We were kids. He was fourteen; I was seven when we met,” the Irishman began carefully. “He... He helped me during a very hard time – saved me, really.” Riley went silent, not ready to reveal their shared history on Tarsus IV.
Pavel grinned at him. “Zat’s just what he does – helping. And he demands only what he is willing to do himself.” He chuckled. “No wonder zat ze whole crew is behind him.”

Kevin nodded. “Yeah, I know what you mean.”

Pointing at the navigation console, Chekov suggested, “Ready for ze next lesson?”

“Definitely. It’s a thousand times better than reading computer records.”

Both laughed; unaware of the silent listener outside.

Philippe had heard enough and quickly walked away lost in thought. So, the Irish boy was a childhood friend of Kirk. The captain obviously trusted him. Maybe Riley was the route to the Augment. He only had to find a clever way to get the information he needed. Perhaps he could gain the cadet’s trust.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, the trap is about to spring – Section 31 is a step ahead of everyone else. Spies in Borderland, aboard the Enterprise and at the Excalibur. And even if Jim and the others are cautious they can’t know how close they are to find themselves in deep water.

In the next chapter Styles is going to begin and to end his given mission – means, the Excalibur will find herself within a battle none of the origin officers could have foreseen. But not only the Excalibur is about to face trouble. There are still the Klingon cousins out and they have not only the new cloaking device, but they also want only one thing on Kirk and his friends: Revenge. And fate seems to be on their side for once.

I hope you liked the new chapter, and – again – I’m sorry that it took so long for the update.

I would be very, very happy to get some more reviews to know what you think of the story’s progress.

Have a nice rest of the week,

Love
Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear Readers!

And once again I can only say how happy I am that you still love the story so much. Thank you for all the comments and kudos. And if you thought the rollercoaster is already moving then wait what happens within the next chapters. I think at the end of the newest installment there will be a big uproar from you all (snicker). Cliffi-warning here – and you know, if I warn of a cliffhanger it really is one.

Therefore no-more words anymore,

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 46 – A mission to be fulfilled

The next day, Admiral Richard Barnett felt more uncomfortable in his own skin than he had even as a cadet. No, it had nothing to do with the arrival of Lady Ania Morganth of the Third House of Betazed yesterday, who was beautiful in every sense of the word with her honey-dark hair, midnight-colored eyes, warm voice. It also had nothing to do with Gav mocking and provoking Sarek of Vulcan at every opportunity so that Barnett finally felt it necessary to interfere; sending the angry, spitting Tellarit away. It earned him a glance of relief (almost) from the Vulcan ambassador. Richard’s unrest was also not due to the growing tension within the delegation as the Excalibur headed for Borderland.

No, it was a deep, nagging gut feeling that kept the Chief in Command on edge. And he realized the other staff officers felt the same.

Despite that feeling, Shepward, Komack, Morrow and Nogura were speechless when he presented them with news of the SDD and its documentation. And then they were ecstatic. Nogura, who understood technology best in the group, went over the documentation several times, read the reports over and over again, and even discussed it with the Excalibur’s chief engineer.

And thus it went, Nogura and Komack insisted that the documents should be sent do Cartwright for further examination. Barnett knew that they were right, and he contacted his colleague at
Headquarters via subspace transmission, transferring everything directly to Cartwright’s terminal together with the message that the deal had to be made before they reached the conference. The transmission needed four hours to reach Earth. And when it got there, it took Cartwright by surprise.

The staff officer, whose family came from Africa to England several generations ago, had been back from lunch no more than ten minutes before a message came Priority One. After taking it all in, he sat there with his mouth hanging open. The device – SDD – was simple as it was brilliant. This much he could tell.

Quickly, he called his technical staff together which included several engineers, and they all confirmed one thing. The device would work. And it would serve Starfleet very well should the peace talks fail and the war continue.

Wesley was right. Admiral Jonathan Cartwright was not an impulsive man, yet he had to admit that the Chief in Command was right. There were only two or three weeks left to until Starfleet might need that SDD to win the war. The process had to be completed quickly.

Seven hours later, an answer was transmitted back to Barnett’s terminal aboard the Excalibur. The sound from the terminal ripped the Chief from his much-needed sleep. The message was short. ‘Tech staff confirms device should work for us. I recommend purchase of prototype and further testing. Upon positive review of device, arrange contact with developer for further negotiation. Required sum of credits is awaiting transfer. Have reported information to Council. Signed, J. Cartwright, Rear Admiral.’

Nodding to himself, Barnett sent a short message to the Lexington, and another one to his four colleagues, summoning them to a short meeting before breakfast, and then he returned to bed.

The next morning, as the Excalibur neared Borderland, five admirals sat together in Barnett’s quarters. Richard told the group about Cartwright’s decision. The four staff officers were pleasantly surprised that their colleague had acted so quickly.

“So, Jonathan agreed to circumvent the usual route and got the two million?” Morrow wanted to know before he shook his head. “If someone would have told me that we could make such a big move in two days, I would have called them crazy and had them committed. Nothing is slower than Federation bureaucracy, but here we are, buying a device for two million credits easy as if I were walking into a store for a D’Baren suit.”

Nogura looked at him; amused. “You’re wearing suits from D’Baren?” he asked teasingly.
“Do I look like I make a million a year? A shirt costs a months salary, at least,” Harry grumbled while the others chuckled. D’Baren was one of the most famous and expensive fashion designers in the Federation. An admiral couldn't afford his clothing.

“Yes, we bought a device for two million. To be honest, we would have paid more, but don't tell Brendon. He wants more for serial production of the device.”

“As far as I understood, he's demanding not only credits for the serial production, but he wants to be the principal lead on any further developments,” Shepard murmured.

Barnett nipped at his coffee. “Nothing unusual if you ask me. Whoever this man is, he seems to be able to bargain.”

“I checked our data banks for a man named Evan Brendon. He isn’t there,” Komack informed no one in particular. “Not even traffic tickets.”

“In other words, a decent citizen of the Federation,” Morrow sighed.

“Geniuses stay hidden until they have something to share with the world. That’s nothing new,” the Chief in Command shrugged. “Bob is convinced that this SDD is exactly what our engineers are searching – have tried to perfect for years. Even Cartwright seems to think so. This Brendon found the solution, and we need it with or without the war.”

Nogura nodded slowly before he looked up from the screen holding his attention. His dark, almond eyes shone with excitement. “I watched the Lexington’s recordings and read her data from the battle near Aldebaran. If it weren't for that, I wouldn’t believe it, but here it is. A device that shields our ships from sensors! And this man has a patent for it. Two million credits isn't too much for it. As for his other demands – well, I can understand.”

“How can we contact this Brendon?” Komack asked, and Barnett grimaced.

“At the moment, the only contact is between Wesley and Brendon’s assistant on Aldebaran. Brendon is staying in the background – unusual but not unheard of.”

Morrow pursed his lips. “Still… I want to meet this man before we have any further business dealings with him.”
“He’ll have to show up in person sooner or later when he wants to have his say in upcoming projects over the next years,” Nogura mused. “We shouldn’t press him. If he wants to stay in the background, let him. He’ll come to us when he’s ready. Starfleet’s honor has suffered enough after the mess with Section 31 last year. Compelling a civilian into something we can’t legally compel him to do – well, there is no way in hell the media won’t get wind of it.” He leaned back in his chair. “And, by the way, whoever this guy is: He did us a big favor by developing and…” He stopped as the door buzzer sounded.

“Enter!”

The door slid open revealing the newly promoted captain of the Excalibur. “Admiral,” Styles greeted before stepping in. He stopped in surprise at seeing the group of admirals in the room. “I apologize. Am I interrupting something important?”

Barnett smiled and shook his head. He wasn’t too fond of the young man. He had an air of arrogance that Richard disliked on principle – yet he had to admit that Styles had performed well over the past days. “Not at all, Captain. This is just an informal chat before breakfast with our guests.”

Styles nodded and offered Barnett his PADD. “You asked me to give you a full report on all stations’ status, sir.” He clasped his hands on his back. “I’d like to further report that Ambassador Gav has stayed away from Ambassador Sarek since he was counseled on diplomatic behavior.”

“So that’s why it’s so quiet on board,” Komack almost mocked. “Gav is louder than a pack of Tellarits!”

Barnett quickly checked the reports and handed the PADD back. “Very good, Captain! You’ve got everything under control. And congratulations. The accomplishment of such a promotion is something to be proud of. You’re doing very well.”

The young Englishman lifted his chin. “Some things are just in the blood, sir. My family has been linked to the service for centuries.”

There was it again – the undercurrent of conceit. Barnett simply ignored it. “Right. Well, I see it’s time for breakfast. Will you be accompanying us to the officer’s mess before your shift begins?”

“With pleasure, Admiral,” Lawrence answered. He let the five staff officers pass and followed them
out of the room.

Captain Styles’ curiosity woke. He had interrupted something important; this much he could tell. Something was going on between the five admirals who had weakened Starfleet. They certainly were planning something now. Why else would they all be together? He had to find out what they were up to and soon, because, by midday, it would be too late; they’d all be gone.

He listened to the steps of the admirals and for a moment something stirred in him – a mix of hesitation and guilt. An unwilling accomplice – he felt he was accompanying them to what may be the last meal for the delegation.

ST***ST***ST

“You have to let go of your active thoughts, Jim. Tune out the noises around you – the hum of the engine. Feel the air on your skin; feel the beating of your heart. Feel the ground beneath your feet; breathe deeply, and then listen only to me and your own body.”

Khan’s velvet baritone washed over Jim Kirk like a warm wave. It was an hour before the start of alpha shift, and the young captain stood in the middle of a small room on the sports deck, dressed in his workout clothes. His eyes were closed, and he tried to think of nothing – difficult for a high-energy man like him. He tried to master his busy thoughts.

On his left, the Augment watched him, smiling to himself as he saw the younger man relax. Replacing one’s thoughts with only what was going on inside is difficult, especially the first time. But the practice was necessary for Tai Chi – awareness of the internal rather than the external. A meditation in and of itself. After he was certain that Jim was completely relaxed – well, as relaxed as the spirited captain could be – Khan gently ordered, “Lift your arms slowly as you breathe in deeply and let them widen; be cognizant of your lungs expanding as you inhale. Hold the breath, hold it, hold it – now breathe out and let your hands come back to center.”

Kirk did as he was instructed and sensed a soft prickling deep in him.

“Repeat once more, and then you will slowly, slowly and deliberately push your arms out and pull them back in as if rolling them over a ball, in time with your breath.”

Again the young captain followed the commands. Nien had told him about the ancient Chinese belief in qi – energy flow through the body traversing energy points along the body. Tai Chi practitioners
sought to support and improve the flow of energy in order for health and wellness. It calmed, refreshed and rejuvenated. All things Kirk needed after last night and these last months.

The intercom beeped, interrupting Jim's concentration. “Bridge to Captain Kirk!”

Groaning, Jim went to the next terminal to answer the call. “Kirk here!”

“Sir, I’ve got Commodore Wesley for you in the line.”

The both lovers exchanged a glance, frowning. “Put him through, Ensign,” Kirk instructed; a moment later they heard Bob’s warm voice.

“Jim?”

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“Is Mr. Singh with you?”

Khan stepped beside his mate. “Good morning, Commodore,” he said calmly. “How can I be of service?”

“It’s rather the other way around, Mr. Singh. I got a message from Admiral Barnett last night. Starfleet will accept your offer. They want to buy the prototype and all associated tech manuals.”

Jim and Nien looked at each other; relieved. Kirk even looked joyful at the news.

“That is good news, Commodore,” the Augment answered; his voice betrayed a hint of joy. “I’ll inform Galven. When do you think they will transfer the credits?”

“Barnett said that the StAT, the office responsible for the purchase, agreed to the deal. Their chief already requested the money be sent. You can expect payment in the next two days.”
A real smile broadened over Khan’s face. “Very good. As soon as the funds are released to the account, Galven will send you the documentation via subspace-transmission, as well as the documents naming Starfleet as the new owner of the SDD prototype. And my other demands?”

Wesley chuckled. “Well, Barnett wasn’t too happy, but that’s to be expected since he is dependent on you now, Mr. Brendon. I don’t think it will be a problem though as soon as he is convinced of the SDDs place in Starfleet. And the Council will be happy with the enhanced technology.”


A snort escaped the Commodore. “You’re welcome – both of you. I do wish the whole thing was history already. Our necks are too close to the noose for my liking.”

“Everything will turn out just fine,” Kirk said cheerfully. “I have to believe in a year we’ll all be together having a drink and reminiscing about this.”

“Your word to God’s ear, Jim,” Bob sighed. “Well, have a nice day you two.”

“The same to you, Commodore,” Khan answered. “My deepest thanks for your support.”

“No problem, Mr. Singh. Wesley out.”

As Kirk switched off the intercom and looked at his beloved, he saw the relief written plainly on Nien’s face. Without hesitation, he pulled him into his arms and hugged him tightly – a gesture that was instantly mirrored by the Augment.

Neither Wesley nor the two love-birds could know that the next days would be another in a long line of trials past and to come.

And it would start soon!
Captain Lawrence Robert Styles sat in the captain’s chair and watched the screen. They had crossed the border into Borderland five hours ago and had passed Orion two hours later. They were deep in dangerous territory only made safe by the current ceasefire. Not for long. Styles’ tension grew; the show was about to start. He’d and his ship would be there when the curtain fell, but not the delegation.

But his conscience pricked him. He admired Vice President Batari Whitman, and Lady Ania Morganth was every man’s dream. He’d like to get to know her better, yet her hours were numbered – something he regretted.

He also knew that she regarded him with suspicion. Knowing the race were empaths, he didn’t hide his nervousness too much. He was young; this was his first command. They were deep in enemy space, of course, he was nervous about the potential challenges ahead. During the banquet the evening before yesterday, he realized that she took his unrest as just that and nothing more.

And challenges were what he would face in the next few minutes. His ship would be seriously damaged, and he could only hope that Luengo’s allies would stay true to the agreement and spare the Excalibur at the last moment.

His adrenalin raised as his science officer turned around in his chair. “Captain, our sensors are picking up movement in subspace – warp-signatures.”

Styles braced himself. ‘Here we go!’ he thought and turned his chair towards the upper bridge section. “Class?”

“I’m not certain, sir. It could be…” He adjusted his sensors again and frowned. “Klingon, sir. Three ships, to be precise. They're not cloaked.”

“They’re getting closer,” the helmsman Martin Wilson reported, watching his display. “Heading straight towards us.”

Styles nodded. “Well, let's see if this ceasefire is as good as the padd it's written on, Mr. Wilson,” he addressed the helmsman, “Impulse drive. Lieutenant Li, open a frequency and hail them.”

The comms officer nodded. “Excalibur to approaching Klingon ships, come in, please.”
No answer. Li tried again, but the result was the same. The Klingons didn’t return the hail.

“That’s odd,” Styles murmured, exchanging a glance with his first officer Brain Thammerson, who replaced the *Excalibur*’s usual first officer. “Put me on, Mr. Li!”

Li adjusted something at his console and nodded towards his captain, who raised his voice, “Klingon ship, this is Captain Styles of the USS *Excalibur*. Greetings. We’re on a diplomatic mission and have the permission of your High Council and the Orion Syndicate to pass through Borderland. Please, respond!”

At that moment the lift doors opened, and Barnett stepped on the bridge. He looked tired; the gut-feeling of foreboding that hadn’t left him for the last three days kept him awake most nights. That same instinct made him head to the bridge when he felt the *Excalibur* slow down.

“What’s the ma…?” Barnett stopped himself when his was signaled to be quiet. Li signaled that the frequency was open.

Styles looked back at the turbo-lift and tensed when he saw his superior standing there; then he relaxed. This could play into his hand if the Chief in Command witnessed what was about to unfold.

“Klingon vessels, this is the USS *Excalibur* under the command of Captain Styles. Answer our hail, please!” he repeated. Again, no answer. He signaled Li to kill the transmission.

“Klingons?” Barnett asked as soon as he could speak openly again. He stepped down the stairs and headed straight towards Styles.

“Three vessels, Admiral. They’ve been approaching us – closing the gap between us for some minutes. They’re not answering our transmissions. They…”

“There they are!” Wilson reported; tension mired his voice.

A bird-of-prey and two older D4-cruisers materialized not far away as they dropped out of warp.
“They have their deflector shields up and – Captain, they are aiming at us!” the science officer shouted.

“Shields up; ready to return fire!” Styles said. “But hold until they fire at us first. It's still a ceasefire; they could be postu-”

The bird-of-prey on the screen shot two torpedoes in their direction. The *Excalibur* shook with the impact; the shields prevented serious damage.

“God dammit, what're they doing?” Barnett growled and turned towards the comms station. “Li, try to hail them again and demand an explanation. Why are they firing at us? We've got the fucking diplomats for Christ's sake!”

“Captain, Admiral, I've identified one of the ships,” the science officer called. “It’s the *J’Ethl*, Lord Kor’s ship.”


“The computer's identified it as the *J’Ethl*, sir!”

Barnett grew pale beneath his dark skin. “Has Kor lost his mind?”

“Incoming again, sir!” the helmsman reported. Quite redundantly as torpedo shaft at the front of the vessel glowed when it spit its deadly load again. The *Excalibur* shuddered again; while the comms officer reported, “Automatic system's reporting damage.”

“Shields down to eighty-nine percent,” the navigator, Lieutenant Joe Kramer, added.

“Return fire!” Barnett ordered. “Lieutenant Li, send message to Command. Tell them that we are under attack in the middle of Borderland – that it's Lord Kor. We need to warn the fleet that the ceasefire's a trap. But they gotta wait for orders before firing on any Klingons. We don't know if he's acting alone.”

“Aye, sir!” Li turned around to prepare the message, then frowned. “Sir, they're jamming all the
frequencies. And there's interference. The bandwidth is – unavailable.”

Instantly, Thammerson was at his side, and he checked the comms console, too, before he nodded grimly. “No way to send a message via sub-space transmission, Captain!”


The *Excalibur* continued to return fire, but the Klingons broke formation to mount an attack on all three sides. It was only a matter of time before the shields would give.

ST***ST

Five decks below, Sarek of Vulcan caught himself on the wall as another hit shook the ship. They were under attack; this much was certain.

“A Klingon’s word is to be regarded with caution,” his assistant Sokel said; he cited the Head of the Vulcan Council, T’Pau, after she learned about the ceasefire and contacted Sarek.

Spock’s father nodded. “The Lady T’Pau is correct – again. Yet we do not yet know who our attacker is. It may be the Orions attacking us. In that case, it would mean that the Klingons did not betray the…”

Again the ground shook hard enough to bring the two Vulcans to their knees. It felt as though a knife went into Sarek’s right side and he frowned. ‘*No, not now!*’ he thought, knowing the signals far too well. Without his assistant’s noticing, he pressed one hand to his side against his heart. The pain faded, and he took a deep breath before rising to his feet. Sokel was already up and watched him, ready to offer his help, but the older man stood gracefully as the events were the most mundane in the world.

“Ought we remain in our quarters or should we…”

Sarek interrupted his assistant calmly. “We would only be in the way. Let the crew handle these matters. If we are needed, the crew will let us know,” he said quietly while he concentrated on his inner shields and his body, willing the lingering pain around his heart to retreat. Months ago the healers revealed that this pain would become a medical concern requiring treatment. At this moment, he felt that day was coming sooner rather than later.
“That’s our biggest problem!” Scotty pointed to the connection between the SDD, and the main and the auxiliary power. “We can only link it ter one of the two energy sources. Together, they overload her, and she crumbles.”

Khan, who had been called to engineering five minutes ago, frowned. Bending forwards, he looked around the chaos of cables only an engineer could follow. “I think we should install another overload fuse between the ship’s main power and the SDD. And then we could reroute the excess power to one of the generators.”

“Hm!” Scott cocked his head. “That means we'd have to remove the SDD completely, install the fuse and mount her again.” They looked at each other, and Montgomery sighed. “Ter tell ya the truth, I donna want ter let the Enterprise be seen out here anymore than she has ter. Aye, there is that ceasefire, but I don’t trust it.”

“You have more experience with Klingons than I, yet I’ve come to understand that a Klingon warrior does not go back on his word. He would rather die than lose face so to speak. I believe a lack of honor in such matters is a fate worse than death,” the former dictator mused; he looked at the chief engineer in question.

Scott nodded. “Aye, that’s true, but I’ll eat my hat if there are not some Klingons unhappy about their council’s decision. Heck, Klingons rose up in rank after they murdered their superior. I wouldn’t put it past anyone ter sabotage the conference by breakin’ the ceasefire agreement. And there are enough Klingon commanders who would love ter tear our ship apart.”

Khan lifted both brows. “In that you are correct, Mr. Scott. But we solve the problem now before we face hostilities.” He activated the intercom at the terminal nearby. “Engineering to bridge.”

“Kirk here,” Jim replied. Warmth breathed over Nien at the sound of Kirk's voice. These fluffy feelings would be laughable for an Augment, but he was mated now. He was not his own and as such, these things they calmed and satisfied him – made him more content.

“Jim, we have to dismount the SDD for an hour to add some fuses. The Enterprise will be vulnerable during this time. Is that alright with you?”
“Hold one,” Kirk’s clear tenor answered, “Spock, what's out there?”

Another second of silence, then the Vulcan’s baritone sounded, “The long-range sensors show nothing within a radius of one parsec, Captain, except the Briar Patch and asteroid field nearby.”

“Right,” Jim answered, before he replied to Khan, “Engineering, go ahead but have her back online in an hour.”

“Yes, captain. Engineering out,” the Augment replied and switched off the intercom before he looked at Scott. “Well?”

The Scotsman sighed and took some tools. “Aye, let's do it!”

ST***ST***ST

Commander Koval of the BortaS looked at his science officer and his chief engineer. The men on the bridge were calm as they reported to their captain. The enhanced cloaking device worked flawlessly; they had snuck through Federation space right under the nose of two Starfleet scout vessels.

“Commander Noy from the MeQ’lw has added to our success; he met the Excalibur on her way into Borderland without being detected,” the science officer said. “Our ship was invisible to the Starfleet ship. It continued on its way towards the conference oblivious to the company.”

The conference – Koval didn’t know what to think of it, and the same went for Noy. He and his cousin were warriors. Each was of the opinion that the Federation, especially Starfleet, deserved death. Both lost family during Kirk’s assault on Qo’noS. Add to the list of victims the captain and his Augment friend, the deaths of their first officers and others they left in their wake. Both of them knew if given the chance for revenge on Kirk and the Qli-jagh, they would gladly take it.

In secret, Koval hoped that they would meet the Enterprise and its Captain Kirk. He had heard of Koloth’s veritable failure at Aldebaran and that Kirk and the Augment had been saved by Starfleet’s flagship as such the Empire’s greatest enemies were still alive. He wouldn’t hesitate to attack and show the High Council (and Starfleet) that the Klingons were stronger than ever; it would be the Federation to crawl and cry for peace in the end. He knew his cousin felt the same.
Dismissing his subordinates, he leaned back in his command chair and looked at the screen. The red light from his console reflected in a shimmer on his metallic sash and his harness.

All of sudden his science officer looked up. “Sir, we've detected a warp signature half parsec away between Elora and Tandar, near the asteroid field.”

Koval bent forwards. “Can you identify it?”

For a moment, he felt irritation rise in him as his inferior bared his teeth in a grin, but any anger at this behavior vanished when the man said, “It’s the Enterprise!”

ST***ST***ST

“Shields at twenty-eight percent, phaser bank 2, 5 and 7 are down, torpedo shafts 1 and 5 are useless, main power's at thirty-seven percent, auxiliary power is still functioning, but the output is fluctuating. Hull breach on decks 12 and 13, fire on deck 8 and 9.” Li looked at Barnett. He was sweating and bled from a gash on his temple. Harry Morrow arrived on the bridge looking ragged.

The Excalibur was hit again; her outer hull groaned as if in pain. “Losses, injuries?” Harry demanded.

“Medbay reports eighteen losses. The injured are too many to count, and they are still coming in. Four ambassadors are hurt too, but not badly,” Thammerson replied standing beside Li.

Styles knew that this was the moment he could end this cruel game. He didn’t want to have more loss – more death, more injury. Every woman and man aboard were fine Starfleet members; their death was necessary now, but he wanted their sacrifice to be as small as possible. “Commander!” he addressed the science officer. “Is there a planet or a planetoid nearby that we can at least breathe on?”

The man checked his sensors. “Only the moon Yaska at Yaraka, class L. Distance 0.8 light years.”

“Any information about the surface?” Styles asked.
“Not much, sir. The stratosphere has a strong magnetic field, yet the information in the data bank states that the surface is made up of solid rock, water, and the temperature is low but acceptable.”

The captain nodded. “Get us as close as you can, Mr. Wilson!” he ordered before he looked at Barnett and Morrow. The Excalibur shook with the force of another hit. “There is only one option. We have to evacuate the delegation, the admirals and you two.” Before the staff officers could protest, he added, “The ceasefire was a trap – a trap to get the most important diplomats and admirals out into the open to eliminate them. What would be left of Starfleet if you were all dead? Starfleet – the Federation – will be weak. And that’s what the Klingons want.”

“He’s right, Admiral!” Martin Wilson braved the comment but under the circumstances, he was right. After receiving an approving glance from his captain, he added, “The Klingons will use the opportunity of a Starfleet decimated of its leadership to overrun the Federation. You two and the other admirals have to survive, not to mention the vice president and the diplomats!”

Inwardly, Styles applauded Wilson. He knew that the helmsman was a part of Section 31, too, who had been transferred to the Excalibur two weeks ago. And, like Luengo, promised he’d get the man’s support when it counted the most.

Barnett balled his fists. Styles and Wilson were right. But he hated running away. Yet the lives of his colleagues and the delegation were more important than his pride. But they couldn’t leave the ship in the middle of the fight. The Klingons would destroy the escape shuttles in seconds.

That same moment the comms officer turned around. “Sir, the Klingons are hailing us,” he said.

“On screen!” Styles growled. He didn’t need to pretend to be outraged. He was. Luengo said that the Excalibur would come out of this in one piece. Although one piece wouldn't be without some damage.

“It’s a voice transmission only, sir. Should I patch it through?”

“Yes – and record everything. We're gonna need it.”

A moment later a rough, hard voice sounded from the speakers. “Excalibur, this is the J’Ethl, under the command of Lord Kor. Our sensors show that you can’t hold up much longer. Lower your shields and prepare for boarding!”
The officers stared at each other – a boarding party of Klingons on the *Excalibur*? That's insane!

Admiral Barnett took a step forwards. “Lord Kor, this is Admiral Richard Barnett, Chief in Command of Starfleet. The Federation and the Klingon High Council agreed on a ceasefire for the duration of the peace conference. You attacked without provocation. Explain yourself!”

“You do not have the latest information, Admiral. There will be no meeting…”

“But…”

“And there is no ceasefire. Surrender or we destroy your ship! You have five of your minutes to decide! *J’Ethl* out!” The transmission was ended, and a deadly silence filled the bridge.

Then Barnett balled his fists. “Lieutenant Li, try to send the message to Headquarters again. Maybe…”

“All frequencies are blocked again, Admiral,” the comms officer said quietly, clearly furious.

Styles took a deep breath – he was ready for the next step. He looked up at the two admirals. “Sir, this is your only – your *last* chance to leave the ship. Take two shuttles and split up as soon as you leave the hangar, head straight for Yaska. We’ll try for a surprise attack against the Klingons and lure them away. It’s the only way to ensure that at least one of you make it. We are going to try to reach Federation space to send the HQ a transmission and get reinforcements into Borderland again to pick you up.”

He met first Barnett’s and then Morrow’s eyes. His conscience would not let him feel good about any of this.

“I will not run like a scared rabbit from those bastards!” Richard gritted out.

“This has nothing to do with cowardice, sir. ‘The Chief in Command and his staff has to be kept secure in times of war at any price’. You know that’s the protocol. Sir, Starfleet needs you; the Federation needs you!” He saw the hesitation on both men's faces and addressed Li, knowing exactly what to do. “Ship-wide hail. Inform the delegation and the other admirals to gather in the shuttle-bay. Whoever isn't there in three minutes will have to remain aboard. It’s up to them!”
Li nodded while Morrow shook his head. “This is madness at best,” He whispered. “One of us should stay here with you, Captain. You don't have the experience and…”

“No two fights are alike. We learned that at the Academy. And I’ve got Commander Thammerson who is very experienced.” He glanced at his second in command, who also belonged to Section 31 as far as Styles knew. Brian nodded encouragement, and so Lawrence continued, “Only the outcome counts, especially in situations like this one. My crew and I will fight the Klingons to the last breath, maybe take one or two ships with us, but the most important thing is that you all have a better chance of surviving if you leave.” He rose. “Admirals,” he said quietly, “it was an honor being chosen to take you to the conference – the first chance for peace. It shouldn’t be the only one. Please don’t waste the chance of survival. The people of the Federation – they need you.”

Morrow took a deep breath. The bridge smelled of burning plastic, too much smoke, and sweat. “You’re a brave young man, Styles. You are a credit to your family. I hope with all my heart that you and your crew make it.” He offered his hand. “Kick ass and come back to get us, m’boy.”

“It would be my greatest pleasure, sir” Robert lied; then he shook Barnett’s hand. “Sir, if you get the chance, force the damn Klingons to their knees. They have no honor!”

Richard nodded. “Be careful, son! With any luck, we'll be in my office on Earth celebrating with a whiskey!”

“I hope so, sir!” Styles saluted, and the two staff officers left the command center.

Harry shook his hand, too. “We’ll see you soon, son!” he said quietly.

Styles nodded, and then he activated the intercom on the chair. “Bridge to shuttle bay. Is everything ready?” he demanded.

Commander Handers, the second officer and Chief of Security answered, “The delegation members are all here, including the injured, Admirals Komack, Nogura, and Shepard.”

Styles sighed inwardly in relief. The plan may have some rough edges, but it worked. “Right! Accompany them, Commander! If you make it to that moon, the delegation will need professional support and leadership to survive.”
Handers hesitated. “But sir…”

“That's an order, Commander!” Styles said sharply. Handers was loyal to Heldrom; he was an officer from the old school. He didn't need that guy aboard.

“Affirmative, Captain,” the other man replied, clearly reluctant.

“Right. Good luck, Commander!”

“The same to you, Captain!” Handers answered; then the link was cut.

“Mr. Wilson, prepare for evasive maneuvers. Mr. Kramer, I want a concentrated blast at the Klingons. I want the Excalibur firing with everything she has on my command.” He glanced at the screen – Yaska filled a quarter of it. He activated the intercom again. “Shuttle bay, ready for shuttle launch!”

“Aye, sir!” the chief engineer replied. “The men and women are all aboard!”

“Right.”

“Sir, shuttle-bay doors are open,” Wilson reported. “Shuttles are launching now.”

Styles took a deep breath. “Kramer, fire phaser bank 5.”

“Sir? Phaser bank 5 is not fully functional.” He looked over his shoulder at his captain and Styles nodded. Kramer couldn’t know his captain's true intention. The shot would be a sign to the Klingons. The shuttles were launched.

“That’s right, Mr. Kramer. The Klingons will think us done for, and when make to follow the shuttles, we open fire with all we have. It'll take them by surprise.” He sat down in the captain’s chair and leaned back. If everything turned out the way he imagined, then the shuttles would be destroyed in a minute, and they would be on their way back to Federation space with news of the Klingon
“Betrayal.”

“Sir, the shuttles are gone,” Li reported.

“Right!” Styles said, his voice low with tension. “Mr. Kramer, now!”

“Fuses installed,” Keenser reported and waited for Khan’s approval as the Augment quickly checked the little alien’s work.

“Very good,” he said calmly. “Mr. Scott, what about the connection to the bridge?”

The Scotsman looked inside the supply shaft between the SDD and its anchoring. “Seems ter be okay, but we’ll have ter check it.” He opened his communicator, and it chirped. “Scott ter bridge. Allistor? Do ya’ve contact with the SDD?”

A moment silence, then, “No, the switches aren’t working, Scotty.”

“Blast it!” Montgomery groused. “Why not?”

“I’ll have to dismantle the console or change out the switch we use.”

“Do ya need a hand?” Scott asked. “I dunna think the Cap’n will be too happy if we can’t getter ta work.”

“Correct, Scotty!” Kirk’s voice sounded. “We are stopping here instead of being on patrol. Send someone up to help Mr. Allistor.”

“Aye, sir!” Montgomery affirmed and closed the communicator. He began to wriggle backward. “I’ll go myself.”
Khan lifted both brows. “You are already in place for the test, Mr. Scott. With your permission, I will go to the bridge to lend Mr. Allistor a hand.”

The wriggling stopped, and Khan heard a relieved “Aye!”

Nodding at Keenser, the former dictator left Engineering and took the turbolift to the bridge.

A minute later Khan entered the bridge – the ‘brain’ of the Enterprise – for the first time. He had seen the bridge from the Vengeance, but he was surprised that the two control centers were nearly identical in size, even if the Dreadnought class ship was twice the size of the Enterprise. The Vengeance had been built to be manned by a minimal crew, and that included the bridge-staff. So there wasn't the need to increase the size of the bridge in proportion to the size of the ship overall.

The first observation that struck the Augment was the lighting – silver and blue. Well-lit and friendly. The atmosphere was warm due in large part to the care of the commanding officer for his crew. His depth of affection for them set the tone in that space. The large window display showed the depths and beauty of the galaxy – and, at the moment, a large field of asteroids. On their starboard side a stellar nebula, the Briar Patch, shimmered in a kaleidoscope of rose, pink and earthen reds – a sight to behold.

Khan met Uhura’s surprised gaze; Jim turned his chair around the moment he felt his mate’s presence, interrupting his conversation with Spock, who stood beside Kirk. Instantly, a smile spread over the captain’s face; Nien returned it. “Permission to enter the bridge, Captain?” he asked.

Jim tried to hide the affection he felt, yet the warmth in his eyes remained. “Permission granted, Mr. Singh,” he said lightly; their gazes stayed locked until the Augment lowered his head. He looked around and found Allistor at the engineer's station and headed towards him.

The second engineer grinned. “Thanks,” he said as Khan bent over the console.

“You are welcome,” Nien answered almost pleasantly.

Spock watched the two men at the console; his mouth turned down before he quickly steeled his expression.

“So, this asteroid field out there is interesting to you?” Jim came back to the topic his Vulcan friend
and he had been discussing; Spock nodded.

“I’ve checked the records against the read-out of our sensors, Captain. The asteroids are moving due to the effect of the Briar Patch rather than the gravity of a larger body.” He pointed at the flickering stellar nebula behind the asteroid field that no one had dared to explore before now. Every attempt to enter it via warp ended in a disaster. Transmissions were impossible and impulse drive seemed the only option in the strong magnetic fields, but the asteroids made an attempt far too dangerous. “It would be interesting to see the rate of change of the asteroids' relative positions from the last stellar chart created four years and three months ago.”

Jim shrugged. “We’re sitting here until our resident engineers over there are done with the SDD connection. Feel free to use the time as you see fit until we can resume the patrol.”

“Thank you, sir!” Spock nodded and returned to his station; watching Khan out of the corner of his eye; his wariness towards the super-human was still firmly in place.

The Augment’s hands flew, nearly invisible and with perfect precision as he made the new connections. Allistor assisted him while a junior engineer stood beside them, clearly astonished.

Finally, after several minutes, Jim’s curiosity got the better of him, and he joined the little group of technicians. “So, how’s she doing?” he asked.

Khan rose from his crouch beneath the console with cat-like grace. “Well,” he answered. “We will be ready in the next…” He stopped, and a deep frown appeared on his forehead; his eyes locked on something behind his mate. “Do we have a problem with the screen?” he asked, not realizing that he referred to the Enterprise’s matters as in terms of them – theirs.

Kirk turned around, as did Spock. For several seconds, Jim watched the large screen. It showed nothing unusual. “What do you mean?” he asked confused.

“Seven o’clock position,” the super-human replied, pointing to the area of concern. Now Kirk recognized to what Nien was referring. There was a distortion on the screen so slight that even the Vulcan missed it.

“Spock?” Jim addressed his first officer, who checked the computer as Sulu did.
“There is no error in the system, Captain,” Hikaru said.

“Sir,” the Vulcan added. “According to systems check, the screen is functioning correctly.”

“So the visual is showing something outside of the Enterprise,” Khan mused. “The question is, what?”

“Any reads from the sensors; emissions?” Jim walked to the science station where Spock watched intently his display.

“Negative, Captain.”

The super-human nodded. “Jim, when we distracted the Klingon fleet at Tammeron, they were able to follow our warp emissions despite the fact that we were invisible so to speak. That gave me the idea to work something out to hide that emission. The result was the SDD that does not hide the trail, but confuses the sensors. Still a vessel is visible, unless…”

“… unless it’s cloaked,” Kirk finished the sentence. He exchanged a glance first with Khan, then with Spock, who looked up from his sensors. “Is there a cloaked ship out there?” Jim addressed his Vulcan friend.

The science officer lifted one elegant brow. “If there is, as Mr. Singh is implying, it is a new one – one that not only tricks the eyes by breaking the reflection of light, but also hides its emission signature.”

Khan nodded. “That is similar to the SDD with the addition of Klingon cloaking technology.”

Jim bit his lips; he became tense. A deep, nagging gut-feeling told him that something was very – VERY – off. “Spock, do we have any intel about a new Klingon cloaking device?”

His first officer shook his head. “Reporting indicates Klingons are working on new technology that may be related to cloaking technology, but nothing indicates a readiness for deployment.”

Jim took a deep breath; his eyes focused on the swimming distortion on the screen. “Evasive
"Maneuvers, Mr. Sulu! 30 degrees starboard!" he ordered. "Let us see if this thing, whatever it is, follows us or not."

"Aye, sir!" Hikaru nodded.

STS***STS***STS

"They're not following us!" Nogura said, watching the shuttle's scanners intendedly. Beside him, Barnett sat at the small helm, steering their vessel toward the moon filling screen. Komack and Morrow had taken their seats behind them, followed by Gav and Sarek, as well the Andorian and the Risan ambassador; every diplomat with his assistant. In the middle sat Batari Whitman and Lady Morganth. Both women personified impressive calm, even if their minds were in turmoil.

Ania Morganth had braced her mental shields against the fears of her companions. Her empathy for her companions made maintaining those shields a trial. Even the four admirals doubted a successful escape and despite their training, their survival instincts screamed at them. The only calm poles in the ocean of stormy emotions around her were the two Vulcans. Their content presence gave her strength – strength to endure the feelings of the others which bombarded her from all sides.

Suddenly she met the Vulcan ambassador's gaze. His dark eyes caught hers and understanding reflected in Sarek's gaze – as if he knew exactly what she was going through. Maybe he did. Even touch telepaths were not immune to such a torrential a tide of emotion.

The shuttle shook, and instantly Ania's and Batari's attention turned to the pilot seat. They heard Barnett curse under his breath. They shuttle neared the stratosphere of Yaska. Hope went through each passenger that perhaps they'd make it to the surface alive, but the moon's magnetic fields made the vessel tremble a leaf.

The CMO of the Excalibur, Dr. Christopher Kojewski, frowned. He accompanied them to tend to the injured Deltan and Andorian diplomats. And if they were on the moon longer than expected, they'd likely need his medical expertise.

He gazed out the window. To their right, the second shuttle raced through space away from the battle that took place as soon as the Excalibur opened fire to distract the enemies from the fleeing delegation. Shepard was at the helm assisted by Commander Handers, who looked at the rest of the ambassadors from time to time over his shoulder, making certain that they were secure.
Barnett’s face was grim. “So far Styles’ plan is working.”

Those words did not assure Sarek of Vulcan that they would make it. Something Amanda called a ‘gut-feeling’ roiled in him and settled. And it had nothing to do with his ever-quickening pulse.

Suddenly Nogura hissed in his native tongue; a second later Barnett cursed, “Shit!”

“What is wrong?” Gav demanded; his little eyes glittered in fury and fear.

“Kor’s ship is heading toward us,” Komack answered quickly.

ST***ST

Aboard the *Excalibur*, the science officer turned to his commanding officer. “Captain, the J’Ethl is going after the shuttles.”

Styles cursed, his acting in place and laced feigned concern. “Mr. Kramer, fire with everything we have! Mr. Wilson, ready to turn the ship. We have to protect the shuttles.”

As though they heard him, the two D4-cruisers sent another volley. On the bridge of the *Excalibur*, the lights flickered and went out. For a moment everything was pitch black; then auxiliary power kicked in.

“Shields at nine percent; the phaser banks are empty. Torpedo shaft 4 is the only one functioning, and we've got more hull breaches!” Lieutenant Li reported. “Sir, there is also…”

Styles lifted a hand, interrupting his comms officer. “Were you able to send the message to HQ?”

Li shook his head. “They're still blocking the frequencies.”

“Right. Commander,” he addressed the science officer. “Ready to deploy message buoy. Course, Earth. All energy to the starboard deflectors, Mr. Wilson. Get under the Klingons and bank hard to starboard; then head for the shuttles. Maybe we can prevent…”
“Captain, they're firing on the shuttles!” Wilson interrupted him; watching his scanners.

“Can we see it?” Lawrence demanded.

“Yes, sir,” came Wilson’s replay; he switched on the visuals. They could see bright stripes in the darkness, and they knew they couldn't get there in time to help.

ST***ST

Barnett pressed several buttons. “Shields at one-hundred percent; the phasers are ready. ETA to Yaska’s atmosphere 2.2934 minutes – a long time given our circumstances.” He exchanged a glance with Nogura, who contacted the other shuttle.

“Thomas, Kor is hot on our heels. We…”

“I saw it. Defense systems ready,” Shepard replied; his voice didn’t betray his rising fright. “If they want to fight, they'll learn that even our shuttles can ‘bite’!”

They raced towards the moon and the first phaser blasts hit them. The shields stayed up, but after the third hit they were terribly weakened. Pressing his lips into a thin line, Barnett returned fire, shooting with the two small phaser banks installed in the long distance shuttles he and Shepard had chosen.

It was no use. The bird-of-prey was three times larger than the shuttles, had more weapon capacity, and its commander was experienced. The shields went down with the fourth phaser hit. Fire broke out in the back of the shuttle. Morrow, Sarek, and Sokel tried to extinguish it.

Then it happened. The shuttle shook as if an invisible fist had knocked it off its course; shocked outcries sounded from the other passengers.

Barnett shouted, “THOMAS!” That plea – that cry told Sarek all he needed. The other shuttle was destroyed and the blast wave from its exploding warp core had hit their shuttle.
“Reaching magnetic field; entering atmosphere in twelve seconds. Everyone hold tight!” Nogura’s voice was calm given the circumstances.

Sarek gave Sokel a signal and pulled Morrow with him, who at first tried to refuse. Then he obeyed the necessity to return to his seat and use the seatbelt.

That same moment, the engines failed; the vessel was rendered helpless. The shuttle broke through the atmosphere and spiraled downwards. Barnett had been always proud of his piloting abilities, but it was impossible to steer the shuttle even for him. Without power, the helm controls were useless.

Sarek sat beside Sokel; his hands closed around the ends of the armrests. He quickly calculated their chance of surviving the impending crash. Given the altitude, the speed, and lack of power, their chances were zero. He watched Richard Barnett trying to bring the shuttle into a position where it could glide to the ground, and the Vulcan admired the stubborn, iron will of the human. But he knew it was for naught.

“It was an honor to serve with you, Ambassador,” Sokel said quietly beside him, and Sarek looked at him.

“It was a pleasure having you as my assistant, Sokel,” he replied; then he closed his eyes. He saw Amanda’s face in his mind first; her large brown eyes were gentle – soft and loving. Then the face changed – became younger and more like his own, but the eyes stayed the same. Spock, his son. After the terrible day when Vulcan was destroyed, he and his son came to terms with each other for the sake of their race and the woman they both loved so much. They never talked about Spock’s decision ten years ago that led to the distance between them. Now it was too late to tell his son that he had been always proud of him – that he, his son, held his heart as only a child could. Of all the things he might regret, this was the greatest.

The silence that had spread through the cabin broke and the passengers screamed. The next second, hell broke loose as the shuttle crashed down onto the moon’s surface, tumbled over, went airborne, and crashed down again.

Sarek still clung to his seat and his eyes found the front windows, which shattered as the shuttle was thrown against a large rock.

Then everything went black.
“One of the shuttles is destroyed!” the science officer of the *Excalibur* yelled; his usually calm demeanor failed him.

“Incoming!” Wilson alerted his captain, making sure that the screen showed the two approaching Klingon vessels.

Styles cursed while Thammerson addressed him. “Sir, we don’t stand a chance against them – not in the condition the ship’s in.”

“The second shuttle,” Lawrence protested, adding some fury for good measure into his voice.

“They are as good as dead. If we go back, the two D4-cruisers will follow us and that will be the end of the shuttle – and us, when the Klingons have three vessels again. If we don’t go back, the second shuttle will be lost. Sir, as much as it pains me, we’ve got to run – return to the Federation and to inform Headquarters about what happened here. We…”

“Sir, the last shuttle reached Yaska and…” The science officer gasped. “I lost the signal, sir.” He looked up, pale and shocked. “Captain, it's destroyed. It has to be. I'm sorry, sir.”

Aboard the *J’Ethl* that was not, Klokh stared at the man who had served under him as his science officer while they were in the Imperial Fleet. Most of his former crew had accompanied him, choosing life over suicide when they fell from grace.

“The second shuttle?” he barked, and the man watched his sensors.

“The stratosphere's magnetic field makes it impossible to get any data, but the shuttle was heavily damaged when it entered the atmosphere.” He looked up. “I don't know that there is a Providence that can save them.”

Klokh bared his teeth. “The *Excalibur*?”
“Is still on the run, sir. Should we…”

The Klingon commander made a harsh gesture that silenced the other man. He addressed his comms officer. “Call D’nyrrs! He will take care of the survivors – if there are some survivors at all.” His attention turned back to the main screen. “We’ve to make this look real; pursue the Excalibur, but don’t shoot – at least, not to kill. This admiral whoever-he-is needs his toy back to present the UFP with a reason continue the war!”

ST***ST

The Excalibur took more blasts, and the computer reported damage too serious to do anything other than flee – flee or die. Styles sat in his captain’s chair, seat belt firmly around his torso. “Wilson, set course for the Federation,” he growled. “Quickest way out of Borderland, maximum warp.”

“Aye, sir!” the helmsman affirmed.

“Lieutenant Li, record for the ship’s log: Evacuation shuttle destroyed, star-date 2059.11.23-1340.5. Lost signal of second evacuation shuttle. Mission canceled to return to Federation space.” He turned back to the helm and navigation consoles when the ship shivered, moaned, and groaned as it was thrown into sub-space and accelerated to Warp 4. The engines could give no more. “Are they following us?” he asked. Wilson nodded quickly. “Yeah, but we’re not being targeted. Obviously they can’t while they’re at warp. The D4’s are old. The tech just wasn’t there yet.”

“Well, at least we have that,” Styles hissed, and he looked to the science station. “Is there a signal from the second shuttle?”

The man shook his head. “No, sir, we last heard from them over two minutes ago as they were entering Yaska’s atmosphere. The sensors aren’t reading her now.”

The bridge officers looked at each other in disbelief, fury, and shock. Then an audible signal from the helm startled them. “They’re – they’re not chasing us anymore, sir!” Wilson reported. He glanced back at his captain. The men locked eyes for several seconds; a wordless message passed between them. Mission accomplished!

TBC…
All right, I think I don’t have to comment anything. I simply know that you’re all shocked, furious, disbelieving… And the next chapter will be equally bad, if not worse (so be warned!).

In the next update Jim, Khan, Spock and the others are going to face the two Klingon cousins. As I already told you many chapters ago, the two will re-appear to bring a lot of trouble to our friends, and exactly this will happen in the upcoming chapter.

I hope you liked the last update, even with this unforeseen turn of events (and I know you dislike Styles now even more).

Like always I’m dying in curiosity to learn of your thoughts and feeling concerning the new chapter.

Have a nice rest of the week and an even better weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I don’t know about the holidays in the US, but here in Europe we’ve autumn holidays, and I really hope our American friends relish in the same time-out. Right, the weather here is cold and rainy, yet the autumn plays with any of its colours you can think of and I really love this time of the year.

In my story it’s late autumn too, but I don’t think that Jim, Khan, Spock, Bones and all the others are happy with the present happenings. And during and after this chapter they certainly will not change their minds about it. WARNING: Next cliff-hanger!!!

Thank you so much for your left comments and I hope you’re going to like the new chapter even more.

Have fun

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 47 – Revenge is a dish best served cold

Unaware of the drama that unfolded just parsecs away, the Enterprise’s bridge crew watched the main screen as the ship altered its course. The distortion held its position on the screen. Almost! If it weren’t for Khan’s enhanced vision, they all would have missed the moment the distortion on the screen moved before it was back in the former place.

Alarms rang in the Augment. “There’s a delay so whatever we are seeing is outside of the ship!” he called; his posture did nothing to hide his trepidation. “And its movement is intended!”

Jim knew what that meant; he didn't waste a moment. “Red alert, Mr. Sulu!” he yelled. “Shields up! Battle stations!”

Instantly the bright light dimmed red, and the alert howled through the ship. With determined strides, Kirk returned to his chair while Uhura announced that this battle stations call was not a drill.
“All phaser banks and torpedos are ready, Keptin!” Pavel Chekov reported and looked over his shoulder at his commanding officer.

From above, Khan stared at the navigator with widened eyes. He hadn’t paid much attention to the other bridge officers since he arrived ten minutes ago to help Allistor. He noticed the ensign now, for the first time. That was no man – he was a child. A bridge officer, really? Wasn’t there a minimum age for commission? The young Russian must have been a boy at the Academy, of that Khan had no doubt.

Then the super-human’s attention turned back to the problem at hand. The distortion on the screen wavered, and Khan braced his hands on the rail of the bridge's upper section; he was the warrior now he had been made for. “If it is Klingon, they cannot shoot while cloaked,” he stated forcefully. His gaze flicked to the screen and back to his mate. “You have three seconds at most to fire. I suggest at their front torpedo shaft! It would have a disastrous effect.”

“Yeah, I know – and I’ve got the strict orders not to fire first!” Kirk gritted out. “Uhura, record all camera and sensor data for the ship's logs!”

That moment, the distortion quivered violently then melted away to reveal a bird-of-prey; its torpedo shaft glowed portentously.

“They’re aiming at us!” Sulu called, and Jim made a quick decision. To hell with the order! This was an act of war. The Klingons were about to shoot at his ship! “Chekov, left wing – fire!”

The Enterprise’s phasers cut through the darkness of space with a bright flash and hit the bird-of-prey where Kirk had ordered. The impact threw the hostile vessel around and the torpedo that left the enemy’s space-craft at that moment missed the Enterprise by a mere few hundred meters.

Jim smiled grimly. “Got you first, you lying bastards!” he growled. “What do the sensors say, Spock?”

The Vulcan was already scanning the hostile vessel. “D6 cruiser, launched one year ago, shields twenty-five percent, helm control failure, but they should have it back soon as the damage appears minimal.”

“Right!” Jim hissed. “Uhura, hail them. Ask them why they fired on us. It's supposed to be a
ceasefire, dammit!"

“Aye, sir!” Nyota confirmed. Her slender hands raced over the buttons at her station.

“Engineering ter bridge. Cap’n, what the hell is happenin’ up there?”

“Klingons, Scotty! I need full power!” Jim called back, not waiting for an answer.

“Captain,” Spock addressed him. “The computer has identified the vessel. It is the BortaS. Database maintains limited information. It is…” He stopped as he saw Jim pale.

“Koval,” Kirk whispered, remembering the instruction Kor had given his two executioners. The shock quickly left him and his fighting spirit made its way to the surface again. “Look aft! They're always in pairs!” he shouted, bolting from his chair towards the helms console.

The moment Sulu switched the cameras, Spock called, “Klingon vessel decloaking behind us. They’re…” He didn’t get further, as strong flashes of lights were to see on the screen, and then the Enterprise shook. Impact. Again the MeQ’lw shot several more torpedoes at her. Jim was hurled to the ground along with two junior officers. Only Khan remained on his feet.

“The BortaS is taking aim again, Captain!” Spock’s calm voice drowned out the noise.

“Increase forward shields!” Jim called from his position on the floor as he tried to rise. His order came too late. The BortaS regained control and was firing at the heavy Federation cruiser. The Enterprise was caught in the crossfire; the two ships hit her with everything they had.

"Chekov, return fire now!" Kirk ordered, standing back up.

He didn’t need to tell the young Russian twice. The Enterprise’s phasers and torpedoes raced through space and hit their intended targets. But the Enterprise was hit again as well. The shields' power wavered then steadied. However, the ships' power dipped. The safety belts didn't deploy.

Sulu heard a low hiss at his station. He didn’t have enough time to react, as a part of the helm exploded in front of him. He was thrown back several meters and landed beside the captain’s chair
like a broken doll – limbs spread, eyes closed, burns on his left cheek, shoulder, and arm.

“SULU!” Jim shouted in alarm, but his helmsman and friend didn’t move and blood pooled beneath him.

That moment, the ships’ gravity increased without warning, pinning the officers on deck in place, and the Enterprise started to drift towards the asteroid field. Another hit pushed her forward and the collision alert sounded. Jim tried to get to the remains of the helm, but the gravity held him firmly there where he kneeled. Spock managed with his Vulcan strength to rise and pushed himself against the gravity. Then a movement in the corner of his eyes got his attention.

Khan clung to the handrail as the ship bucked like a wild horse beneath his feet. His mind took in several things at once. The Enterprise was rudderless, she moved with alarming speed straight toward a mighty asteroid and no one on the bridge could reach the helm to steer her manually.

The Augment used one hand on the handrail to brace himself. Against gravity he leaped over it; his strong legs caught the brunt of the impact. Racing forward, he jumped over the unconscious, bloody form of the young Japanese on the floor and reached the helm. Not wasting a second he took a seat in the ruined chair, looked over the controls, saw the damage to the automatic systems and switched on the manual control.

The same moment, gravity was restored, and Kirk rose. His eyes widened in horror as he saw how close the asteroid was. In the background the female computer voice coldly counted the seconds to the impact that would smash the Enterprise as though it were delicate glass.

“Nien, hard to starboard!” he shouted. “Uhura, take care of Sulu!” He was back in his chair in two steps, and Nyota ran to Hikaru; one of the junior officers took her place at the comms station and called med bay.

“Kirk to Engineering. Scotty, reverse thrusters! Everything we have!” Jim yelled into the intercom set in his armrest; a hint of fear tinged his voice.

It hadn’t been necessary to tell Khan what to do. The Augment gritted his teeth as he tried to steer the heavy cruiser away from the threat, forcing his mate’s Grey Lady to obey his will by holding to the manual helm with all his might. As if in slow motion, the starship altered its course, still the asteroid was close – damn close. It filled two-thirds of the screen. The super-human felt Kirk reach his side.
Jim steadied himself at the wrecked remains of the console; his blue eyes stayed glued the screen, and his fingers clawed the metal as if he could make the ship turn by his will alone. “Chekov, aim our phasers at the asteroid, dial down to fifty percent. I don’t want to destroy it; I want to MOVE it!” Kirk said; his heart beat hard in his chest and he could feel the adrenalin pumping through his system.

“Aye, Keptin!” Pavel affirmed, then four bright blue beams left the starship and hit the solid rock. The asteroid began to move and the Enterprise’s speed slowed, but it was a close-call. A hand’s breadth separated her discus segment from the asteroid’s surface as she finally was able to heave by, but it was enough. One of the warp nacelles grazed the rock as the starship swayed aside like an injured eagle, and the noise seemed to echo through the entire vessel, but the outer hull remained intact.

“Zey’re aiming again, Keptin!” Chekov called.

“Target their torpedo shafts, Pavel. Fire!” Kirk all but snarled.

The two birds-of-prey flew an evasive maneuver, and then they vanished.

“They have cloaked,” Spock told them unnecessarily. “We are unable to see what they are doing.”

Jim bit his lips; his whole body was tense as a bow ready to send an arrow. “What do we got to hit ‘em with, Ensign?”

Chekov’s answer came instantly. “We hev eighteen torpedoes left and only 27.38 percent power in ze phaser banks, Keptin.”

“I want a three-sixty visual onscreen, now!” Kirk ordered. “If the sensors are lying to us we have to trust our eyes.”

Behind him, the turbolift doors opened, and McCoy entered the bridge quickly. The sight in front of him stopped him in his tracks. Smoke, a half destroyed console and… Was that Khan at the helm? Dear God, it was!

Khan Noonien Sing was steering the Enterprise!
Leonard didn’t know if what he saw was a dream or a nightmare. Then his gaze fell on Jim, who stood beside the former dictator. Beside the captain’s chair, Uhura crouched down and cradled Sulu in her lap.

Swearing beneath his breath, Bones ran down the two steps to the lower part of the bridge and knelt beside the unconscious helmsman. He didn’t need to ask what happened; it was obvious. Opening his med kit, he took out the med-scanner to examine Sulu while Uhura returned to her station. With one ear listening to the conversation around him, McCoy gave Hikaru hypos to raise his blood pressure.

“Zey could be anywhere,” Chekov said quietly. “Zey could be zere where we looked only second before.”

“Uhura, distress call to all Starfleet ships available,” Jim ordered. “Tell them we're being attacked by two Klingon ships using some kinda new cloaking device. We need reinforcements.”

“Aye, Captain!”

“Fluctuations 12.8 degrees starboard!” Spock called, who bent over his sensors. “Emission output…”

“Target their position, Chekov. Phaser bank 5 and 6 fire – NOW!” Jim ordered grimly; not letting his first officer finish. “Nien, visual…”

Khan had already pulled the view that Jim needed onto the main screen, and it showed a bird-of-prey decloaking. That moment the phaser blasts struck. The resulting explosion was terrific. The spacecraft was hurled around on its axis and tumbled away like a wing-clipped bird, and it drifted away.

“What the hell…” Kirk whispered; astonished. “How'd the hit have that kind of impact? Are their shields down?”

Spock continued to hover over his sensors. “Their deflector shields were down as they de-cloaked.” He looked over at Jim with one brow arched. “There are two to three seconds between the time the cloaking device is powered off and the time they can raise their shields.”
“And we managed to get them in their only Achille's heel?” the young captain grinned with utter satisfaction. “Which one was it?”

“The BortaS, Captain,” the Vulcan answered. “Your reactions when I first mentioned the name seemed to imply that you know the two ships.”

“Not the BortaS and the MeQ'lw, but their commanders Koval and Noy,” Kirk growled. “Cousins, and they were made my executioners!”

He saw Spock's understanding and the flash of something akin to fury in the Vulcan’s eyes as they looked at each other.

“Jim!” He turned quickly back to the screen. “Over there!” The former king called to his captain and pointed to the right side of the screen. In the last frame, Kirk saw the bird-shaped distortion vanish behind the asteroids.

“They're hiding – waiting for a chance to attack us again. That's what happened to the BortaS. They know they can't underestimate us,” Jim murmured.

“Captain,” Uhura addressed him; the strain was etched on her face. “I can’t override the Patch's magnetic field to send a distress call.”

“Can we transmit at all?”

“Our range is limited, Captain. Sub-space transmission is impossible. I’m sorry.” Her eyes betrayed her irritation – not with him, but with the situation plaguing them.

Jim growled deep in his throat. He was afraid of something like this. He knew that he didn’t need to ask Nyota to try her magic. She aleady had. Taking a deep breath, he tried not to grimace. They were on their own now!

He cocked his head. “Status of the BortaS?”
Spock took one quick look at the screen. “Energy levels fourteen percent; warp drive destroyed, and a hull breach at the left wing. Life support system function is minimal.” He looked expectantly at Jim. The hostile vessel’s status left them only one option. They must provide asylum to the survivors. Anything less would be a criminal, though no law demanded such an act of mercy. Some things didn't need writing in deep space.

Kirk balled his fists; a toxic desire for revenge vexed him, but he was a better man than that. His fierce gaze found Uhura. “Lieutenant, open a frequency.” At her nod, he raised his voice. “BortaS, this is the USS Enterprise under the command of Captain James T. Kirk. Our sensors show that you’re losing power and your life-support along with it. Prepare to be beamed aboard!”

ST***ST

Aboard the BortaS, Koval rose to his feet. The heavy impact had hurled him out of his chair and across the bridge. His right arm hung uselessly at his side; pink-tinged blood dripped onto the floor from the large gash in his flesh.

“Hull breach, warp drive is down, only one torpedo shaft is functional. We don't have a weapon to load in there anyway. Life support systems are down!” his new first officer called over the chaos.

Koval knew what that meant. They were lost. “Message to the MeQ’lw. Noy, it was an honor to call you family and a great honor to serve with you. May we see each other again in the Black Fleet!”

His comms officer, strong, but injured and fading, nodded and sent the message. Koval stared at the flickering screen. He saw the Enterprise mere kellicams away. She had suffered, no doubt, yet she had beaten him. Kirk had beaten him. That cursed boy-captain had more luck than any man Koval had ever met.

“Sir, the Enterprise is hailing us,” his comms officer said in a rasping voice; his breath hitched as his lungs began to fail him.

Koval stepped beside him and opened the frequency himself. His subordinate's eyes dimmed. A moment later, he heard the clear tenor of the Terran he had vowed to kill. Gritting his teeth, he listened to Kirk's offer – Kirk's humiliation!

ST***ST
Jim waited for Koval’s answer. His body tensed; his nerves grated – shivering under his skin. He hoped he’d never meet or hear from this Klingon again. But fate was a finicky mistress, and she had other plans. She usually did.

“Kirk, I would rather meet the Black Fleet today than accept help from an accursed terrorist like you!” the vaguely familiar voice barked over the speakers. That voice still pierced Jim’s nightmares. No more, he vowed to himself. No longer. When he was done with Koval, he would move on – leave the past and all its ghosts behind him.

Kirk took a deep breath. “A captain can’t be led by his desires – selfish ambition. His crew is everything to him, Koval!” he replied with strong, icy voice. “Everything else is self-serving. It's ego, and it has no place on a ship!”

A harsh, quick noise was the answer – the parody of laughter. “I saw you weak, Kirk, hanging from the ceiling, ready to beg for mercy. You would have given in to our demands, too, if it had not been for your Augment saving your sorry ass. He killed my first officer! We want nothing from you or the Dark Warrior!”

At the engineer’s station, Allistor turned around and glanced at Singh – the Klingon's dark warrior. And now he was the captain’s rescuer? This guy called ‘Sunrise’? And Singh was... Singh was an Augment? That explained the inhuman strength Singh had displayed when the gravity overcame them all. He was able to reach the helm in time to prevent the Enterprise from crashing into an asteroid many times her size! And he managed to get Kirk out of Klingon prison – alone! Many crew members aboard had asked themselves how this single man had succeeded in recover their captain without further help. That Singh was an Augment explained everything.

Jim didn’t react to the Klingon’s revelation concerning Khan’s nature. Most on the bridge already knew the truth and the rest... He would deal with them later. At the moment, his concentration was fixed on the conversation at hand. “At least we're not cowards feigning diplomacy to murder the innocent. That, Koval, is contrary to Klingon honor. You have no honor!”

“If a true warrior had spoken those words I would be offended. Those words coming from you? They mean nothing to me. Today is a good day to die. A warrior of your kind said that once a long time ago. And it will be for us. I will have my revenge on you and your Augment friend. Koval out!”

The transmission ended.

Spock called with a sudden urgency. “They’ve activated the self-destruct, Captain.”
“Shit!” Jim yelled, and switched on the intercom. “Scotty, ready for warp 4 and…”

“We’ve no warp drive, Capt’n!” the Scotsman’s voice called from somewhere afar. “I had to cut it off. She was overloadin’.”

“Damn, full impulse, now!” He looked at Khan. “Nien, course…” His gaze landed on the helm's manual controls, and he stopped himself when he saw that his mate had already set a course away from the drifting Klingon ship.

Slowly, far too slowly, the Enterprise moved away from the BortaS.

“The MeQ’lw is decloaking!” Spock said; his voice was tense.

“Ready the torpedoes!” Kirk gritted out. “Pavel, kick their asses!”

“Wiz pleasure, Keptin!”

Two torpedoes left the starship and headed for the second bird-of-prey that moved away and cloaking again. Dammit! They were unable to fire now. “They have headed to port most likely, out of the asteroid field before the sensors could locate them,” the Vulcan reported, and Kirk nodded.

“In other words, they are somewhere out there – waiting for us! Dammit!” His eyes stayed glued to the screen that showed the drifting BortaS before he activated the intercom again. “Attention, crew, brace for shockwave impact!” He switched off the ship's internal transmission circuit and looked back to Spock. “Estimated time to self-destr…”

His words stuck in his throat when all of the sudden Khan wrapped one long, strong arm around his waist and pulled him onto his lap, securing him in the same moment when an unbearable bright light flashed on the screen. The Enterprise shook like she had hit solid wall at full speed. This time even the Augment couldn’t keep his balance, and he landed on the ground still holding Jim, turning himself over before he hit the ground so that the younger man was on top of him.

Then all hell broke loose. Sparks flew from the consoles; smoke filled the air, crew-members screamed in shock or pain or both. The hull moaned like an injured animal. The overhead cracked
and cables fell; the lights flickered.

Bones held Sulu tightly, curled himself around the young Japanese man, shielding him with his own body. His terrified gaze wandered over to the other pair on the ground. Despite his fear, a wave of relief filled him as he watched Khan roll Jim beneath him, covering him completely to protect him.

Behind the CMO, on the upper part of the bridge, Spock pressed Uhura to himself with one arm, while he clung to his console with his free hand. But the bucking of the starship was too powerful, and the Vulcan lost his balance. Falling to the floor, he took care that Nyota didn’t hit the console or the handrail. His care resulted in him hitting his head painfully on his own station. He gritted his teeth until his Vulcan control was firmly back in place, yet he felt the illogical urge to curse.

The moment the noise stopped and the Enterprise quit shaking like a leaf in a storm, the former dictator was on his feet again and raced to the helm. Not without surprise, he realized that the young ensign had remained in his seat clinging to the armrests. ‘Extraordinary in every sense!’ he thought before he brought his attention back to the helm.

“Engines full stop!” Jim called hoarsely; he rose carefully, grimacing as his right hip felt as though a dagger twisted inside. ‘Please, not again’!

“Full stop!” Khan affirmed while he tried to steady the Enterprise.

“Damage report!” Kirk demanded, and he hobbled to his seat. “How’s Sulu, Bones?” he asked as Uhura returned to her station to gather the incoming damage reports.

“Skull fracture, three broken ribs, I’m hoping he didn’t puncture a lung, internal bleeding, and third-degree burns,” Leonard stated; the tremble in his voice betrayed his not so professional state at the moment. “I stabilized him; an anti-grav carrier is on the way.”

Jim nodded; dread filled him as his gaze hung on the pale and bloody face of his friend. “Take good care of him, Bones,” he whispered before Uhura called for his attention. She listed the worst of it, and Kirk cursed. Dammit, and here his Grey Lady just came from the shop. He really – really! – hated this fucking war!

“Any trace of the MeQ’lw, Spock?” he asked, and the Vulcan shook his head slowly; his gaze fixed on his sensors. It didn’t slip Kirk’s attention that his first officer was injured. Green droplets rolled down his temple. “You’re hurt!” Jim blurted out in worry; ready to bolt from his seat to get to his
“The injury is not serious, Captain,” Spock tried to reassure him and a concerned looking Uhura.

Bones appeared beside him, med-scanner in hand. “Nothing serious’ my ass! You have a concussion and that laceration.”

“I assure you, Doctor, I am fully functional.”

“You’re a living being, not a damn computer, Spock, even if your brain works like one of those electronic buckets. So stop talking about being ‘functional’,” McCoy groused while he took disinfectant spray and a pressure bandage from the med kit. Ignoring the Vulcan’s protest, he began to treat him. Spock tried to avoid Leonard’s attempt to wrap the bandage around his head, but Bones had enough. “Hold still or I’ll take you with me to med bay. Your choice!” he snapped.

“Those are hardly choices, Doctor; I find it closer to blackmail.”

“Call it what you want, I’m the CMO aboard; crewmembers will obey my orders when it comes to their well-being!” The lift doors opened, and two medical assistants appeared with a carrier between them. “Bring him to surgery!” he called, pointing at Sulu. “Be careful, he's got a skull fracture and broken ribs. I’ll be down in a minute.”

The two men nodded and hastened to the still unconscious helmsman just as the intercom signal sounded.

“Engineering ter bridge! Capt’n, we have a serious problem with the main power,” Scott reported, clearly stressed. “The impact caused several circuits to short as well as the auxiliary power!”

“Energy level's at twenty-eight percent,” Allistor added.

“And out there is another bird-of-prey waiting to finish us off,” Jim growled. “Dammit, I knew I should have stayed in bed this morning!”

“You absence on the bridge would not have prevented the events, Captain,” Spock couldn’t help but
comment and ignored McCoy's exasperated sigh of frustration as he searched for something in his med kit, after he finished taping the Vulcan.

“It's just an expression, Spock! For God’s sake, I thought a human girlfriend would have taught you a thing or two about those!”

Kirk decided to ignore the two. “Nien, set a course for those asteroids. They'll give us at least a bit of shelter.”

Khan nodded. He had been about to make the same suggestion when Jim gave the order. It really shouldn’t surprise him anymore that he and his mate were of one mind so often.

“Captain, image distortion; six o'clock!” the first officer called and switched the view on the screen to aft of the ship.

“There they are again,” the super-human growled, pointing at the distortion on the screen.

“Chekov, take aim and fire!” Kirk’s voice could have cut through stone.

The young Russian obeyed instantly, and one of the torpedoes hit home. For a moment there was a wavering silhouette of the MeQ’lw, and then it vanished again. “They’re heading for the asteroids as well,” Spock said, looking back at Jim. “The situation seems to be what you humans would call a game of cat and mouse.”

“Ha, I knew it! Can't tell us you don't know what me mean, now, Spock. Your secret’s out. You speak human” McCoy grumbled. He raised his arm and quickly pressed a hypo against the Vulcan’s neck who flinched and glared icily at him.

“I would have appreciated a little warning, Doctor!”

“Don’t tell me that you’re afraid of hypos too, Spock!” He closed his med kit. “I'll be in med bay. No house calls from me for the next few hours, so watch yourselves, gentlemen – milady!” He vanished into the lift and called out, “I’ll keep you updated with Sulu’s condition, Jim,” before the doors closed.
“Thanks,” Kirk murmured; his gaze fixed on the screen as the Enterprise slid between the first solid objects. “Any idea, where they could be?” he asked no one in particular.

“Not an idea, but we have information that lead us to a probable conclusion as to their location, Captain,” Spock said. “Their cloaking device is experiencing fluctuations in its power supply or perhaps there is a malfunction. I cannot be sure. Sensors located the resulting distortion. There are energy fluctuations at zero-six-zero.”

“They are using the asteroids to shield themselves same as us,” Jim thought aloud. “Full stop!”

“Engines full stop, sir,” Khan affirmed, drawing down on impulse power. He accepted his mate’s commanding position without hesitation. This was Jim’s ship and, at this moment, he was crew.

“Captain, the sensors read the energy fluctuation bearing zero-six-five, mark seven-five,” Spock stated.

“The MeQ’lw?”

“I cannot say with a one hundred percent degree of certainty, but given the course of the MeQ’lw before she vanished and the data we received from her weakened cloaking device, the likelihood that this is our enemy is 89.537 percent.”

“A simple ‘yes’ would have been enough,” Khan murmured, rolling his eyes. He asked himself how his mate could put up with the Vulcan.

“That response would have been incorrect, Mr. Singh,” Spock replied wryly; proving that Khan wasn’t the only one with keen ears on the bridge.

“Given the percentage of likelihood that you have calculated, ‘yes’ would have been the correct term!”

“Stop it, you two!” Jim interrupted them, frowning. Then his attention turned back to the screen. Somewhere between those asteroids, just a fraction of a unit away, Noy and his ship were waiting for them – for him! The first to make a mistake would be the one to suffer the most (if not total) loss. There was no doubt about it. And Kirk was hell-bent on his ship – his crew being the survivors.
“What do you think, Spock, how much energy do they have until they have to decloak in order to run the engines and life support systems?”

“Unknown, Captain. I cannot ascertain the power expended because this seems to be a new generation of cloaking device. However, the device with which we are familiar and most likely serves as a foundation for this model may be our guide. We have seen its power fluctuate already. I presume we only have a short time before they must switch off the cloaking device in order to retain the power needed to return to Klingon territory.”

Jim turned his chair towards his Vulcan friend. The bandage around his head and his tousled hair gave Spock the appearance of a character in one of those karate movies that Sulu had subjected him to on more than one occasion. But the impression that Spock made was not camp. His first officer was a warrior – a fighter beneath all of his layers of logic and self-control. “How ‘short’ do you think it is? Any idea?”

Spock shrugged with one shoulder. “Two hours at most,” he replied carefully.

Rubbing his jaw, Kirk looked back at the screen. “Hours! We don't have that kind of time.”

“What do you mean?” the Vulcan asked, and Jim sighed.

“There are two possibilities. Koval and Noy attacked us on their own, no orders, in order to hide their actions from their fleet commander. That would mean that the ceasefire is still officially active. They went rogue. Or they are a kind of advance sent to keep us stuck here while they wait for the fleet to arrive. If their accepting diplomacy and the ceasefire was a trap to weaken us, then they want to make sure that an attack hits Starfleet there where it hurts the most – namely her most advanced ship and flagship. If that's the case, then we can expect at least a dozen birds-of-prey soon. I'm not looking forward to that prospect. We have to act – now! ‘And if they really want to destroy diplomacy they’ll go after the diplomats and our most important admirals – Fuck!’

Khan had listened to Jim’s thoughts, and once again, he admired the clear and simple, brilliant logical conclusions his mate was able come up with. And a part of him was also impressed at the utterly perfect way Jim and his Vulcan friend’s thoughts and actions complimented each other. They were a good team; it was no wonder they could come up with solutions for the most dreaded situations. And in Jim’s case, those ‘solutions’ were usually absolutely crazy, like the moment Jim simply pushed the asteroid out of his ship’s path and…
Khan frowned. An idea was forming in his mind – an idea he had to perfect in theory if it was to work at all.

Jim crossed his arms in front of his chest and pursed his lips while he rolled around his own ideas in his head. Then he saw his mate tense; he turned to look where Kirk looked. “Do we have an accurate layout out of the asteroids nearby in our data bank?”

Kirk lifted both brows and glanced at his science officer. “Spock?”

“The data I had collected before we were attacked, are no longer time-relevant. The shock wave caused by the BortaS’s explosion has altered the relative positions of the nearest asteroids. I must make a new scan. Altering the scans into a tactical layout requires two minutes.”

Jim exchanged a quick look with Khan, who nodded. “Do it. Put it on screen as soon as you finish.” He rose from his chair and walked to the navigation console. “What’s your plan, Nien?” he asked quietly.

“We are running out of options,” the Augment began quietly, “and if there really is the possibility that a Klingon strike group is coming for us, we have to act quickly, as you already rightfully suggested. We need to speed up the inevitable confrontation.” He lifted both brows. “My plan may be crazy, but…”

“… but the craziest plans are mostly the best ones,” the young captain finished, grinning. “Right, I trust you, you know that. Now tell me what you need.”

Khan’s attention slipped to the boy-ensign beside him. “Mr. Chekov, right?”

Pavel, who had listened closely to his superior and the Augment, nodded. “Aye, sir.”

“Mr. Chekov, how many torpedoes do we have left?”

“Thirteen, sir.” Pavel looked at his display. “Phaser banks are down to nineteen perzent, but can be reloaded as soon as ze warp core is back online.”
“Very good! I need two phaser blasts, the first one weaker than the second. I still have to calculate the exactly intensity after I get information about that asteroid over there.” He pointed at a large soaring rock floating just right of the screen. “And then I will need two torpedoes, perhaps three.”

Confused, Kirk stared at him; then Spock called from behind, “The tactical scheme is ready, Captain. Onscreen, computer.”

The image on the screen changed. It showed no longer the view outside, but schematics of the asteroid field around them.

“Mark the point where we think the MeQ’lw is located,” Khan said neutrally; without hesitation Spock did as he was asked.

Jim frowned and stared at the screen. “The MeQ’lw was there,” he pointed at the screen, hidden behind the asteroid Khan pointed out. Behind the D6-cruiser, there was another asteroid just a little smaller than his ‘brother’ in front of the Klingon vessel. There’s no way to hit it directly…

And then his mate’s intention hit Kirk with the force of a hyper-truck “You… You want to use the asteroid in front of them to…”

“… to shove them against the rock behind them.” Khan finished Jim’s sentence. He smiled. “The Klingons are invisible, but physically present. And while cloaked they are without their shields. Contact with a solid object will damage them just as it would us. They'll lose control, lose power, and drift. Their deflectors will be weakened. And when they can't hide behind that asteroid any longer but have to escape from it, our torpedos will have an easy target.”

Silence spread over the bridge. The plan was shockingly simple, and could work, as Spock affirmed a moment later, “Plan success is 79.5398 percent, Captain.”

Jim chuckled; Uhura shook her head in astonishment, and the bridge officers snickered. “Well, I'll call that a damn good chance of success,” Kirk said, while placing a hand on Khan’s shoulder. Then he addressed Chekov. “All right, Pavel, you heard Mr. Singh. Ready three torpedoes and phaser banks 4 and 5. Wait for my order.”

Khan raised his voice; his tone neutral again. “Mr. Spock, I need material make-up and weight of the asteroid to calculate the appropriate phaser strength.”
“Iron core, fifty-eight percent; carbon matter, thirty-six percent. The remaining six percent are a mix of base elements. Weight 928.5349 tons,” Spock answered without delay. “The computer has calculated the required phaser power required. Adjust first blast to 43.2935 percent of maximum capacity. Deviation above will destroy the asteroid and cause collateral damage – us. Deviation below will not move the asteroid at all. The second blast must be increased to sixty-eight capacity thus increasing asteroid speed. It is my hope that the Klingons will not be able to act fast enough to avoid our weapons.”

The Augment nodded. “Understood!” He glanced at Chekov. “Switch the phaser control to my terminal, Ensign. I will fire manually.”

The navigator raised his brows and looked at his captain.

“Just do it, Pavel,” Jim said. “He's a good shot, Ensign, don't worry.” He turned to Khan. "Nien, send the torpedoes home as soon as we see those Klingons!”

“Aye, Keptin!”

“Yes, Captain.”

Silence spread through the bridge; tension hung so thick in the air a phaser blast could make it bleed. Uhura looked at Spock knowing that the next seconds would decide their fate – their survival. The Vulcan mask slipped. She gazed into brown eyes full of warmth and love, and she gave him one of her special smiles reserved only for him. Khan’s voice shook them out of their reverie.

“Ready to fire, Captain.”

“Rrrright!” Jim took a deep breath, looked a question at Chekov, who nodded back and straightened up. “Good, give them a taste of their own medicine!” he growled; his gaze went back to the crosshairs on the screen over the asteroid.

Khan took this for Kirk’s permission to act. “Be ready to send the Klingons our greeting cards, Mr. Chekov,” he said and then he punched the phaser trigger. Two glowing, blue blasts raced towards the asteroid and pushed it out of its orbit. The Augment sent another phaser blast at the solid rock, and it floated away. That same moment something flashed. A green metal wing came into view. As it turned toward the Enterprise, the crew could see damaged hull of the MeQ’lw.
Jim bared his teeth in a mixture of triumph and fury. “Pavel, fire our torpedoes!”

Chekov didn’t waste any time with a verbal affirmation. He let loose three torpedoes at the bird-of-prey. She spun on her right wing. The MeQ’hw was caught between the two asteroids. Then the three missiles hit home. One pierced the right wing; the two more found their targets. Explosions shot fireworks from the vessels fuselage and rocked the peace of space. A piece of the ship's wing splintered off and floated away while flames licked along the open ripped vessels; doused by the space’s merciless vacuum and coldness.

“The MeQ’hw has lost all power, Captain. The ship is, for all intents and purposes, dead,” Spock reported.

“Uhura, hail them!” Kirk ordered.

Nyota, thoroughly relieved that this crazy plan worked, punched the comms console. “Go ahead sir!” she said.

“Attention MeQ’hw! This is Captain James Kirk speaking. Commander Noy, I know you’re there. I need your permission to beam you and your crew over. Your ship is lost, Commander, but you don't have to sacrifice yourself like your cousin did! Come on!” Kirk knew what it was to face death and he wouldn't needlessly wish it on his worst enemy.

Static and interference sounded from the speakers, then an unfamiliar voice called, “This is Commander K’Hreff, second in command. Captain Noy is dead – killed during your last attack. We will not surrender to Starfleet or you, Kirk. We…”

“I'm not talking about surrender, Commander K’Hreff. I'm talking about your survival. I guarantee fair treatment of you and your people…”

“I don’t believe you, human!” the rough voice growled. “It was my commander’s last order before he died that you and your kind do not get your blood-stained hands on this vessel.”

“If you're talking about that new cloaking device you’re using, we've got enough data on it now that we know how it works and how to neutralize its effects. I repeat, there is no need to sacrifice yourself and your crew! You’ll get fair treatment, and if it means peace between us, I will campaign for you to go home.”
For a moment there was silence, and then the Klingon answered, “I have heard that you lack honor, Captain, yet I am beginning to doubt the assertion. You offered Commander Koval the safety of your ship as you do us even after the torture you suffered at the hand of my captain and his relates. In your own way, I suppose you have honor of a sort. And so you must know the path we will take. We have made a decision. There are only two viable options, Kirk. Victory or death. There is no middle path. May your death be an honorable one – in the not too distant future!”

The connection was cut off, and Jim groaned. “Klingons and their stupid pride.” He glanced at Spock. “Please, don’t tell me that they activated the self-destruct, too.”

The Vulcan lifted a brow. “I assure you, Captain, they cannot use the device anymore. Energy levels, two point six percent and…” He nodded towards the screen and Kirk followed his eyes. He watched as the lights aboard the crippled D6-cruiser blinked out, knowing what it meant for the inhabitants inside.

“God dammit!” he hissed. “Their deaths are unnecessary and a waste!” He addressed his first officer again. “Any life signs?”

“Positive, sir; seven life signs to be exact, but their bio signals are weakening. Life support systems have failed, the temperature is dropping rapidly and…”

Jim activated the intercom. “Transporter room 2, locate seven Klingon life forms. Mr. Spock is transferring their coordinates to your terminal now.” He nodded at the Vulcan, who simply lifted a brow and did as Kirk ordered. “Kyle, beam them out of there and straight to the brig! But have medical personnel on stand-by” Jim commanded.

“Aye, sir!” the transporter chief answered. Several seconds later he said, “Captain, they are in brig 4. Security reports that all are injured and unconscious.”

“Good. Medical can treat them while they're sleeping. We'd never be able to help them otherwise.”

“Affirmative, Captain.”

Jim grimaced as he switched off the intercom, meeting Nien’s and then Spock’s piercing gaze. “What?” he demanded. “Since when do I have to listen to what a Klingon tells me to do? There's been enough blood shed already. It'll make us look good as far as the peace talks are concerned and we might learn more about why they attacked us. I want to know if the ceasefire was a fake or if…”
Spock’s station gave an alarm, and the Vulcan quickly turned around.

“Captain!” he said; his voice betrayed fear and urgency for the first time since the battle had begun. “The long distance sensors are registering twelve vessels. They've just dropped out of warp; distance 0.36493 parsecs from our position. It appears they've come from the direction of the Borderland.”

Jim felt his stomach drop. “Alright, what are they?”

His friend’s dark eyes revealed the inner storm that was about to break loose in him. “Klingon, sir.”

The color left Kirk’s face, and then he bent over the intercom again, hailing Engineering. “Scotty!” he shouted. “We need warp speed in five minutes or we’re all dead!”

“What’s happening now?” the chief yelled back from somewhere in the background.

“A Klingon squadron is approaching! ETA?” He looked at Spock, who answered, “9 minutes, 14.381 seconds.”

“Mother Mary, we’ve not enough energy to restart the warp core!” Montgomery’ sounded furious and scared.

“Is the warp core even ready for a restart?” Khan demanded.

“Not now, but in four or five minutes I could make it. We just don’t have the energy to do it tough…”

Nien didn’t let him finish. “How many torpedoes remain?” he asked Chekov.

“Ten, sir,” the young ensign answered, and the Augment nodded.

“Right! Mr. Scott, the torpedoes have their own propulsion fuel. If you use the power from two or
three torpedoes, you can load the generators to initiate a restart of the warp core.”

Silence! You could've heard a pin drop, but they couldn't spare the time to listen for it. Then Scotty spoke, “You want me to use the torpedoes’ propulsion for the generators?” His voice nearly squeaked.

“Yes – like a kind of an old-fashioned voltaic cell!” Khan nodded.

“That’s a good idea, lad; there is only one problem: the phases. If we feed our generators with the power from the torpedoes propulsion system, they’ll explode. And having torpedoes in Engineerin’ – the Enterprise will go up like a firework.”

“Not if we remove ze warhead and adjust ze phases so zat we can control ze speed of energy transfer into ze core!” Chekov hastily chirped in. He found himself the center of attention rather quickly, caught in the sights of his captain and the super-human. “Wiz a phase modulator, we can transfer ze output of ze torpedo drives generators and…”

“He’s right!” Scotty interrupted him, both astonished and excited. “This might work!”

“Okay!” Jim decided. “Chekov, go down and help Scotty! I’ll take your chair,” he ordered, and the young Russian bolted from his station.

“Sir, we’re needin’ anyone who knows a thing or two about torpedoes and…” Montgomery Scott didn't need to say any more. Kirk looked at his mate.

“Nien?”

Khan had already risen and switched the helm to the navigation console. “I’m on my way to the weapons bay, Mr. Scott,” he called. “Send someone our way with the modulator!” With quick strides, he raced to the lift doors where Chekov waited. Scott called his affirmation. A quick look passed between the bondmates. Neither man knew whether this was a permenant good-bye or a short parting; then the super-human and Pavel vanished.

With rising dread, Jim called the weapons bay and ordered Carol Marcus to make ready the torpedoes. They were going to remove the warheads. Then he sat down at the navigation console. Behind him, Uhura called for the helm and navigation reliefs. She swore under her breath as she
addressed Kirk. “Lieutenant Frowln and Ensign N’roll are both in med bay, Captain. Should I…”

“Call Ensign Riley. He probably imagined his first day on the bridge would be different, but that’s life! I’ll take the helm!”

Two minutes later, Kevin appeared out of breath and bruised, but otherwise unharmed. Jim turned around and rose. “Take the navigation, Ensign!” he ordered and went to the helm. “What happened?” he asked quietly as Riley sat at navigation control.

“I was helping to evacuate a section on deck 7 and 8, sir. S’not bad, sir.”

“Hope not,” Jim agreed, glancing once again at his young friend – his younger ‘brother’. He wanted to get to know him again. He had looked forward to the day Kevin would be on the main bridge for the first time. Now it could be that his first day would also be his last. A wave of dread and sorrow rose in Kirk; then he chided himself. Wasn’t it well-known, even in the Academy, that he didn’t believe in no-win-scenarios? Hadn’t he kicked death off his ship enough times? The one time that the Reaper had won him, his friends wouldn’t allow him to keep their captain, and they pulled him back. Somehow together, they always found a way to survive. And Nien, who kept them out of death's dark grip this time, had made an art out of staying alive.

No, he wouldn’t allow the fear to take hold – take him over. As illogical as it sounded, he simply knew that they would make it again. Hurt and damaged, but they would make it – somehow. And Kevin would be safe, too!

Taking a deep breath, Jim finally had a chance to take a proper look at the damaged console. He winced at how she was laid bare. That was going to be a hell of a lot of work – if they had the chance to do it. ‘We will.’ “ETA?” he asked Spock.

“Six minutes, nine seconds, Captain.”

Despite his wish to banish the fear, Jim felt sweat break out on his forehead. There was not enough time! ‘Come on, Nien – Scotty! Just bring the damn warp core up again!’ he spurred them on inwardly. Just sitting, waiting, was eating him alive, but there was little else to be done.
Down in weapons bay, Carol Marcus and her staff were unloading three torpedos. They placed them on carriers for transport to Engineering and quickly removed the warheads. Accompanying the torpedoes, she headed to Engineering ready to assist Scott any way she could. At the halfway point, two people raced around the corner, and the young woman stiffened when she recognized Khan besides Chekov.

Both men carried a phase modulator. The Augment opened the cover of the first torpedo the moment he reached it. “Keep moving!” he ordered the young man controlling the carrier. He started remodulating the torpedo’s drive as they hurried through the corridors. Chekov did the same to the second missile.

Carol tried to ignore the super-human’s presence as they entered the Engineering’s main room. Scott was at the warp core controls, waving hectically at them. “Quick, quick!” he shouted. The carriers had barely stopped when the Scotsman began connecting the torpedo drives to the generators. “Read-out!” he demanded.

“Phase 1 and 2 are configured; energy levels near normal for generator input,” Khan answered; his eyes were fixed on the display of the phase modulator.

Scott nodded. “Carol?”

“Same here,” she replied.

“Right! Pavel, check the generator!” He connected the second torpedo to the generators while Chekov stepped beside Keenser standing at the warp controls. “I need read-outs during energy transfer from both torpedoes and the generators!” Scott ordered.

“Affirmative!” the former dictator called out, but there was no reply from Carol Marcus. Lifting his gaze, he glanced at her. “Dr. Marcus?”

Scott looked over his shoulder at the young woman, who stared at Khan. Frustrated he snapped, “Lass, this is no time for grudges! Just forget everything for a moment, or we’re history!”

Carol knew that Scotty was right, and so was Khan! There were more pressing problems in front of them. Banishing the memories to the back of her mind, she bent over the second torpedo – all her resolve focused now on her job. “Ready, Gomery,” she said.
“Right! Let’s begin! If there is the slightest fluctuation, tell me immediately. I don’t want the Klingons to come and find that we’ve done their work for them!”

Khan only nodded, ignoring his mate’s inner turmoil that he felt through their shared bond. He realized should the Klingons attack the moment they arrived, there would be no opportunity to say good-bye to his beloved, or die by his side.

No, if all was lost, he would return to the bridge. If death finally caught him here, then it would not catch him alone. He would have the comforting presence of his other half – his Jim!

But now was no time to think of death. It was time to fight. Except now his enemy was time, and that could only be fought with his mind and his speed. If Scott and he were able to get damn warp core to work in time, he would have the chance to live another day – and to find warmth, passion and love in Jim’s arms again.

ST***ST

“ETA?” It felt like an eternity had gone by since he had asked that question, yet Spock informed him that only a minute and a half had passed. Good God, the dread was nearly unbearable – his positive attitude was about to let him down. But this was about to become a no-win and no-run situation if the warp drive didn’t come online in the next few minutes.

Jim had hoped that the Klingon cousins schemed on their own to attack the Enterprise and disrupted the ceasefire. But there was no doubt now that the conference was a trap to lull the Federation into a false sense of security. The arrival of an entire Klingon squadron told Kirk all he needed to know.

“Captain, the long range sensors have identified the nearest vessels. One of them is the J’Ethl.” Spock looked straight at Kirk. “Kor’s ship.”

Kirk snorted. “The fleet commander of the Borderland in the flesh. There. We have our answer as to whether the ceasefire was a trap.” He shook his head. “Dammit!” He hailed Engineering. “Scotty, I need you to tell me that we’ll be ready for warp in one minute!”

“I’m sorry, sir; the energy transfer’s still in process, and we still need two minutes ter initiate the warp core.”
“We’re running out of time, Scotty!” Kirk tried not to raise his voice in frustration and failed.

“I'm goin’ as fast as I can, Jim! I’m no wizard!” That Scotty called him by his given name on duty was a sure sign of the stress he was under.

Jim only nodded and cut off the link. Sorrow overwhelmed him for an instant; he remembered that Nien and he parted without saying good-bye. Now it was too late. If this were the day they both would die, they would die without the comfort of each other. And Kirk didn’t know what scared him more. The prospect of dying again or dying alone…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaal rrright – I already warned you that you’ll get a nasty cliffhanger at this chapter’s end again. Sorry, but I love to be evil in this way (*snicker*).

To give you some hints what you can expect within the next chapter would rob you of all thrills, therefore I’ll keep my mouth sealed. You really have to wait what will come next.

Despite this evil ‘cliffy’ I hope you liked the new chapter – including Khan becoming a part of the bridge crew, Carol being confronted with him again and getting another proof how well Jim, Nien and Spock can work together if given a chance.

I know that many of you are maybe off for a vacation or are simply very busy, but I really would love to learn about your thoughts and your reactions to this turn of events. Therefore: Please review.

Have a nice rest of the week

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I’m terribly sorry that the new update needed so long, but my beta had a lot to do during Halloween and she finds the most spare-time during the weekend. But I think the outcome worth the waiting, because you’re going to face another rollercoaster.

Thank you so very much for all the kudos in comments; I’m utterly happy that this story keeps your interest like this.

And now off to the universe in the 23rd century.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 48 – Shocking news

The *Excalibur* headed quickly towards Federation space. Styles received the reports of the damage and losses with a stoic face; inwardly he was furious. That had been far too close. Yes, the staged attack needed to appear as authentic as possible, yet the dead and injured crew members and the ship’s damage was real!

“Captain, our frequencies are open again,” Li called. “I’ve sent the prepared message to Headquarters to inform Command.”

Lawrence nodded. Time for the next show. “Good, Lieutenant. Put me - all frequencies!” he ordered, and he took a deep breath from the still stinking air, as the comms office signaled him to speak.

“To all Federation ships around Borderland. Attention, this is Captain Styles of the *Excalibur* speaking. Our mission to bring the delegation to the conference with the Klingons for peace talks failed. We were attacked in the Borderland by three Klingon birds-of-prey and forced to fight. Ship’s condition is critical, the delegation was killed is dead. We need help. Leaving Borderland. Will pass checkpoint Midriran in 4.826 hours. Anyone in range of this transmission, please answer.”
He didn’t need to wait for long, as the warm but obviously shocked voice of Commodore Wesley sounded from the speakers. “Excalibur, this is the Lexington under the command of Robert Wesley. Captain Styles, say again; use this frequency! It’s secure.”

Li didn’t need an invitation from his captain to adjust the transmission. A moment later, a very concerned Commodore was on the screen. For a moment, he simply took in the Excalibur’s bridge and the disheveled appearance of its officers, and then he set his jaw. “Captain Styles, did I understand you correctly? You were attacked by Klingons in Borderland? Renegades or…”

“I’m sorry, Commodore. They were not renegades, and they weren’t acting alone.” He swallowed. “The J’Ethl belongs to a strike group, and…”

“KOR?!” Bob’s voice betrayed his complete bewilderment.

Styles nodded grimly. “In person – he even spoke with Admiral Barnett, before…” He gulped. “The admirals and the delegation were evacuated after Kor gave us an ultimatum for surrender. They… They didn’t make it.”

Silence. With wide eyes, Wesley stared at the freshly promoted captain in horror, before he whispered, “They are all dead?” After Styles only nodded, Bob needed a few seconds to regain control, and then his hands balled into fists. “Tell me exactly what happened!”

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise, Jim watched the tactical layout of the approaching Klingon fleet. Less than three minutes separated the enemy from his ship.

“Captain, they are hailing us,” Uhura reported suddenly. “The transmission isn't great, but we can get them.”

“Understood,” Jim said quietly, assuming what lay ahead. Kor would demand their surrender, Jim wouldn’t give in, and the Enterprise would be destroyed. Or Kor would demand that he and Spock deliver themselves to him in exchange for the crew’s survival like he had at Turkana. If the second option happened, Kirk would go. He’d spare Khan and Spock’s that much if he could. If there was a sacrifice to be made it would be him and only him. Not his bonded and not his brother! Still, imagining them in the Klingons’ hands sent a wave of terror through him that he quickly suppressed.
He needed to have a cool head. Everyone – his crew, his friends, his family! They all depended on him now.

Bracing himself, he left the helm and walked the center of the bridge. “Put them on the screen, Lieutenant,” he ordered; his voice was firm.

The view changed to a flickering image of none other than Kor, son of Rynar. The Klingon lord’s dark eyes instantly fixed the young captain; his expression was neutral.

“Captain Kirk, I see you made it back to your ship.”

“Lord Kor,” Jim replied, before coming straight to the point. “The attack of your ships on mine is an act against the declared ceasefire. We demand an explanation. And then you will leave Federation space immediately or…”

“I must interrupt you, Captain,” Kor said; an odd kind of satisfaction flashed on his face. “First, you are in no position to demand anything. Our scanners say that your ship is without warp; your phaser banks are nearly empty, and your shields are useless. And even if your ship were capable of a fight, we outnumber you and so do not see you as a threat.” He bent forwards; his gaze intensified. “You are helpless, Kirk.”

Jim allowed himself a cold smile. “You thought so on Turkana, and you had the tables turned on you, didn’t you?”

Kor’s nostrils flared. “Yes – thanks to your special friend. By the way, where is he?”

“Where you can’t reach him,” Kirk stated hard; having no problem lying. But it really wasn’t a lie, was it? No one was getting to Nien without going through Kirk first, and he’d be damned if a Klingon hand got near him.

“I doubt that,” the Klingon answered; interference from the nearby magnetic field made the transmission flicker. “Our scanners were able to follow that little deception you worked on the MeQ’Lw. It was simple, effective, brutal – the handwriting of the Qli-jagh.”

“You underestimate us humans, Kor. Corner us and we just fight harder.”
The fleet-commander nodded. “I know. You won the contest. Two of our vessels against your starship, yet you won. The battle was worthy of your reputation, Kirk. You never give up; you fight ‘til the bitter end. We have this in common.”

Jim gritted his teeth. “Thanks for the compliment, I think, Commander. But I want an explanation for the attacks and I want to know what you are doing here!”

Kor smiled. It was a real smile that even reached his eyes. “Cocky as the king of spades. Is that how the saying goes on your planet?”

“You are surprisingly familiar with our sayings,” Jim replied. Time! He had to buy Khan and Scotty time! Maybe they wouldn't have to lose anything – anyone if they could reactivate the warp drive at the last second. His hope – their hope – lay with the two very different yet similar men.

“Commodore Wesley told me a thing or two about your culture during our peace talks at Organia,” Kor stated, and Jim scoffed.

“Peace talks!? Like the one your Council accepted? All you wanted to do was throw dirt in our eyes. I just experienced the Klingon version of ‘peace talks’!”

The Klingon lord had frowned and cocked his head. “The attack against your ship was…a misunderstanding.”

“A misunderstanding?” Jim had gasped before he narrowed his eyes. “Tell that to the injured and dead!” he snarled.

Kor remained surprisingly calm. “Koval and Noy attacked you without my permission or the support of the Admiralty,” he said slowly. “That is the reason for our presence here.”

“Is it? Or did you come to finish us off after we destroyed your ships and took those new cloaking devices with it?” Kirk challenged.

Again Kor didn’t react as expected. Where other Klingons certainly would have given into their short-fused temper, the fleet commander stayed rational. “Calm down, Kirk. We have not come for
your destruction though I have wished for an opportunity to bring you to your doom. Your successful escape from Turkana gave me trouble.” He rubbed his beard. “Yet the declared ceasefire and the upcoming conference forbade me my revenge. I would lose face as you say, and this price I’m not willing to pay. Maybe there will be a time later when we two can have our match.”

Jim was smart enough not to find comfort in those words. He knew that this particular Klingon had tricks up his sleeve, but his intuition told him that Kor was telling the truth. If he had learned one thing during his captivity, it was that the last descendant of the Klingon Emperor had real honor. “So your presence in Federation space is not an act of aggression – so what is it?” Kirk asked; the venom had left his voice, but his eyes narrowed in suspicion. That moment, he felt his mate’s presence as the lift doors open. Calm spread through him, but he didn’t turn from the Klingon on the screen.

A bushy brow quirked up, and then Kor said slowly, “I was on patrol with my squadron. They did not show at our appointed time and place. I tried to contact them – without success. Then we intercepted their transmissions between one another. It was the last we heard from them. I realized that… That Koval and Noy must have been carried away by their desire for revenge. Under any other circumstances, I would not have moved one finger to your aid, but the orders of the High Council and the Admiralty are clear. The promise of a Klingon is difficult to procure and devastating to break. The ceasefire was declared for the duration of the conference, and we will abide. If we wish to end that ceasefire and continue this war, we will inform you of such!”

Jim took a deep breath slowly, not daring to get his hopes up that this all wasn’t part of a bigger ruse. “So, you’re saying that their attack…”

“They went rogue, Captain – as your special friend did when he came for you on Turkana!” Kor’s glance became piercing.

“Freeing a prisoner, a Starfleet officer, from enemy forces is hardly going rogue,” Jim deadpanned. “Besides, if he had with no care for the outcome, you can be sure your ‘headquarters’ on Turkana wouldn’t be standing, and there’d be a lot more dead.”

Kor scoffed, and then he pursed his lips thoughtfully for a moment, before he continued, “I read Koloth and Korax’s reports about your actions on Aldebaran and the space station and that of your – savior, is he? Perhaps justice is your motivation, but your friend’s motivation seems to be only you, Kirk. I ask myself how far he would go for you – and why.”

“As you have pointed out twice now, Commander: He and I are friends!” A smirk appeared on Kirk’s face. “In our culture friendship is loyalty and a willingness to risk your life for another. I don’t worry about a knife in my back when I wake up or when I walk through a dark corridor. I hear that’s how Klingons climb the ranks.”
Kor bared his teeth in a wolf-like grin. “A myth, Kirk.”

“I bet,” Jim replied with a hint of sarcasm.

Kor was approached from behind; another Klingon whispered in his ear.

“They have reached us, Captain,” murmured Spock.

“Warp drive ready on your command, Captain,” Kevin Riley added beneath his breath. His eyes were fixed on the display, firmly refusing to be distracted by what he'd just heard. Did he catch that right? This man, ‘Nien’, had freed Jim from a Klingon prison, and killed Klingons by himself to do it? How? You don't just walk into a Klingon building and break someone out! And why did the Klingon commander call him Jim’s ‘special friend’? What did that mean?

Kirk nodded at Kevin’s quiet words; he knew he could trust his Scottish Merlin and Nien to work one more miracle. He continued to watch Kor, who frowned. “Kirk, my science officer informed me that he has scanned seven Klingon life forms on your ship.”

“Yes, the survivors of the MeQ’Lw we beamed aboard.”

This time, Kor’s face darkened. “They surrendered?”

The young captain shook his head. “No, they wanted to go down with their ship, however, I considered that sacrifice a waste and brought them onboard. They’re in our brig being treated as we speak.

The Klingon's face turned thoughtful. “I know that Terrans regard the matter of death differently. In other words, you saved them despite the fact that they attacked and tried to kill you.” He snorted. “You are a riddle, Kirk!”

“Yeah, the admirals say the same thing,” Jim deadpanned.
Kor leaned back in his chair; his shoulders straightened. “I demand their surrender to my ship.”

Jim shrugged. “They are your people. And despite myself, I believe you. Know that this has been recorded. I'll turn it over to the admiralty, but I'm sure they'll see that Koval and Noy acted alone, and our cameras and microphones have recorded everything. It should be enough for our admiralty. We shouldn't need a statement from the survivors. You can have them.”

The fleet commander nodded. “Do not concern yourself with lowering what little remains of your shields, Kirk, our transport signal is strong enough to beam our people over. Inform your medical team to retreat so that we do not catch them by accident.” Mockery laced his tone, and Jim gave him one of his feigned, polite smiles that meant ‘fuck off’.

“I’m sure your transporter chief has learned at thing or two after my friend and I took leave of your hospitality back on Turkana - since he wasn't able to catch us. But thank you for the warning. I'll order the medical staff’s departure from the brig. Give us a minute.” He walked to his chair, threw Khan a brief glance, and gave the necessary commands.

The Augment watched Kor’s face darken again, yet he would have bet that the Klingon held some admiration for Jim. The way he glanced at the young captain spoke of respect. Of course, Jim had gained victory over Klingon assaults three times now and managed to escape a Klingon prison. In a twisted way, this was enough to gain Kor’s appreciation.

“You can beam your people over,” Jim said calmly to Kor, and several seconds later Security reported that the seven Klingons were no longer in the brig, while the Klingon lord received his own message that his people had arrived.

“Good Kirk, and now you should retreat because we are going to destroy the remains of the MeQ'Lw!” Kor lifted both bushy brows. “Shall I help you by putting some distance between the MeQ'Lw and you? Tow you with a tractor beam, or...?”

“We are completely operational, Kor,” Jim cut in with a sharp voice; a clear signal that the Klingon was about to cross a line that Kirk would not tolerate.

On the upper section of the bridge, Khan was torn between the urge to smirk and the urge to scowl at the Klingon, though he was out of the camera’s range. He felt Jim’s offense over their shared bond as he had Jim’s terror minutes ago. He ran to the bridge when he felt it, knowing there were few things that could elicit such anxiety within Jim Kirk. A mortal enemy – Klingons. And Nien feared that his beloved was about to do something very foolish like offering himself in exchange for the life of his crew. Hearing that the Klingons weren’t there for an attack filled him with relief, but it did
nothing to dissipate his anger as the older warrior taunted Jim. The strong protectiveness nearly all Augments possessed ate away at him. But he was forced to stand aside and to watch, knowing that he could be caught by the cameras if he intervened. Sooner or later the records would be out in the open, and he would be better off not seen in them. It would bring Jim trouble – big trouble! So the former dictator held himself back, even though his instincts wished he'd do otherwise.

Kor grinned again as he realized that he was rubbing off his opponent. “Compliments to your chief engineer, Kirk. He must be gifted in his field.” He bent forwards. “Ten minutes enough for you to retreat?”

“This is Starfleet’s flagship, Kor, not a wing-clipped bird!” Jim growled. “Ensign Riley, full impulse astern. Give Lord Kor room for target practice.” He glanced back at the screen. “And you have twenty minutes to leave Federation space, Fleet-Commander, otherwise I’m reporting an invasion to Starfleet Command.”

Another grin bared the Klingon’s teeth. “Spoken like a Klingon, Kirk. I’m looking forward to meeting you in battle one day. You and perhaps your ‘special friend’, too. You make a fierce pair to be reckoned with. Kor out!”

The image vanished, showing the asteroid field and the twelve birds-of-prey around the Enterprise. Even knowing that the fleet wasn’t a threat to his ship, Jim felt uncomfortable in this position.

Silently he and the others watched as two D5-cruisers pulverized the remains of the MeQ ’Lw; then, without any further transmission, the squadron heaved to and turned away. Seconds, they activated warp and disappeared, heading back to Borderland.

Only now did Jim allow himself to breathe in relief, before addressing Kevin. “Ensign Riley, set course to Risa, full speed – whatever that is at the moment!” He looked over at Khan, whose eyes looked over the cadet at the navigation station, before he felt his mate’s glance. Quirking an eyebrow at Khan, the captain nodded. Yes, this was the boy he once regarded – and maybe still did – as a little brother. Then Kirk became all captain again. “Nien, are you still needed in Engineering or could you…”

“… Take the helm for the remainder of shift? No problem, Jim. I think Mr. Scott and his staff can manage the rest.” The almost demure smile and the mirth in his voice took the arrogance out of his words.

Kirk grinned. “Right, Mr. Singh, to your station then.”
Spock lifted a brow. “Captain, I am obliged to inform you that despite Mr. Singh’s piloting skills, he is not a member of Starfleet, and only Starfleet personnel are allowed to man the bridge stations.”

Jim groaned. “Spock, Sulu is surgery; his reliefs are in med-bay, too, and gamma-shift is…”

“I understand that the pool of qualified personnel has been drastically reduced, yet…”

“Ha!” Kirk turned around to him, snapping his fingers. “I have a solution.” He was the only one who saw fleeting concern in the Vulcan’s eyes, and he smirked. “Starfleet regular 58b: ‘In times of emergency, a commanding officer or acting commanding officer may recruit civilian members possessing a required skillset to ensure continued function of the ship.’ Well, I think this qualifies, and Nien has proved several times that he is a damn good pilot, don’t you agree?”

His grin broadened as Spock suppressed a sigh. “Of all regulations, you remember that one,” he murmured under his breath – too quiet for Jim to hear, but Khan did and chuckled.

“Didn’t you know that human brains can recall information on an as needed basis? Saves space and processing time. Brain’s more efficient that way,” he taunted, looking at the first officer.

Spock glared back, but decided to ignore the Augment. He addressed Kirk instead, “Do I understand you correctly, Captain? You want to recruit Mr. Singh?” Before Jim could answer, the Vulcan continued. “I am sure that I need not remind you of Mr. Singh’s status.”

Jim still smirked. “Nien is still a free man, Spock, thanks to Bob. And we need him, and I’m the commanding officer.” His attention drew back to Khan. “You built the Vengeance, and you were a kind of general in your own time, right?” As Nien nodded, Jim’s grin widened. “Well, as far as I’m concerned, you’re qualified so I can recruit you.” He nodded at the helm. “Petty Officer Singh, please man your station. And visit the uniform shop after your shift. I’ll instruct them to outfit you with what you need.”

Spock’s eyes widened, yet he knew that he couldn’t change his captain’s mind. Jim’s decision was logical, but the Vulcan didn’t like it. Not because he still distrusted Khan; he knew now that the Augment would never again do anything that would cause Kirk pain. But he knew Jim was inviting trouble for himself with this unusual solution.

Khan looked to his mate, astonished. Had Jim just made him an official part of the crew? Yes! And
Nien vowed to himself he would not disappoint his beloved, his captain. “Aye, Captain,” he said; the words came surprisingly easy to him. Then he turned around to man the helm. He was well aware of Riley’s confused gazed and gave him a quick smile before turning to the half destroyed console. There was much to do to repair the mess!

That moment the intercom buzzed. “Engineerin’ ter bridge. Capt’n, we can give ya warp 1, but I would prefer we use impulse drive first until we’ve brought more order to the chaos down here. Is Mr. Singh still with ye?”

“Yes, Scotty, Petty Officer Singh just took up his new post at the helm,” Jim answered. He heard a gasp, followed by, “As the helmsman? What happened to Sulu?”

Kirk grimaced. “Sulu is in surgery. His station exploded in front of him and… Well, I’m still waiting for news from Bones.”

Montgomery cursed and said sadly, “Poor lad! Please keep me updated about him, Capt’n.”

“Of course, Scotty,” Jim sighed. As if he had nothing better to do than play messenger! But it was Sulu, and he was well loved by many including his captain.

“What about the helm?” the chief engineer wanted to know.

“Manual steering right now. All other automatic functions are running via the navigation station at the moment,” Khan called loud enough to be heard through the intercom.

“Can ye start the repairs, Mr. Singh?” Scotty replied loudly.

“I can. And I will list the tools and parts I require as soon as I do a complete assessment of the work required.”

“Right, ye can send it ter me and I will make sure ye get what ye need!” Then Scott’s voice softened. “Capt’n, any chance that ye can lend me Chekov for a while? The damn Klingons really messed up me girl and…”
“Ensign Chekov can lend you a hand, Scotty. His station is manned. How long do you think we’ll need to stay on impulse drive?”

A deep sigh came through the intercom. “Capt’n, if ye can live with us creepin’ through space fer two or three hours, ye’ll make me the happiest engineer alive.”

Jim had to laugh – a clear sign of his relief. “I didn’t know such a small thing would make you so happy, Scotty. You’ll have your two or three hours, but then we have to move. I believe Kor when he says this wasn’t another attempt to annex part of the Federation and that he’ll go back to Borderland, but I still want to inform Commodore Wesley as soon as possible about the incident – and as long as we’re stuck in this damn magnetic field, we can’t make any sub-space transmissions.”

“I understand, sir, and we’ll hurry, but I can't offer ye more just yet.”

“I know, Scotty,” Kirk reassured him. “You and your people pulled off another miracle bringing warp drive back online in time, even if we didn't need it. My compliments to the wizard, Scotty. Bridge out.” He looked at the two men in front of him. “Petty Officer Singh, full impulse. Ensign Riley, ETA to Risa space docks?”

Kevin had already calculated the time they would need and answered, “On impulse, sir?”

“No,” Jim grinned. “I don’t need to know how many years it will take. ETA at warp 1 and gimme one for warp 3. Scotty underestimates himself,” he winked.

Kevin suppressed a snicker and remained professional, even if his over-wrought nerves needed a work out. But now on the bridge was not the time. “At warp 1, we’ll reach Risa in 63 hours and 28 minutes, Captain – if we start now.”

Jim sighed and sat down. “Very well, then let us creep bit by bit.” Turning his chair, Kirk addressed his comms officer. “Uhura, as soon as we’re out of the Briar Patch’s magnetic field try to reach the Lexington. Even if Kor only came to help, I want to report the incident in person to Commodore Wesley.”

Nyota nodded. “Understood, Captain!”

“And I need a full report of the ship’s status.”
Bob Wesley sat in his chair; his arms were crossed in front of his chest. He felt cold and one look around him confirmed that his officers were in the same condition as him – shock. Wesley had listened to the full report of young Styles. He ordered the Hood II, nearest to them, to support the Excalibur as soon as she left Borderland. Then he made a sub-space transmission to the other ships of his squadron to inform them of the events. He got confirmation that they received information about the events and that they had not had similar experiences with one exception. The Enterprise didn’t answer. Losing them, losing Kirk scared Bob more than meeting the Klingons alone.

What if the Excalibur wasn’t the only ship that was attacked? What if other Klingon strike groups were hiding somewhere out there waiting to attack? But if so, why hadn’t Jim sent a distress call? Kirk could be reckless, but he wasn’t a fool. He never would face a hostile squadron alone! That would be suicide. But why wasn’t he answering?

Two and a half hour later, he received the message that the Excalibur had made it back to Federation space, leaving Borderland between Yridia and Midrian.

Minutes later Palmer’s called out, “Commodore, I have the Enterprise for you!”

A sigh of relief escaped Bob’s lips. “Finally! On the screen, Lieutenant!”

A moment later, the stars outside vanished and were replaced with the picture of a tousled Jim Kirk. Wesley stared at him and the surroundings behind the younger man. The Enterprise’s bridge was in disarray as if he'd been in a battle; they looked eerily like the Excalibur during the last transmission. Before Kirk could say anything, Wesley bent forwards.

“Jim, what happened?!” he demanded. “Why didn’t you answer our calls?”

Starfleet’s youngest captain sighed. “Well, we were in the Briar Patch and were only able to leave the area just now. The magnetic field hampers communication. But honestly, I'm glad we couldn't. It would have been the misunderstanding of the century and likely a restart of the hostilities.”
Bob frowned. “What misunderstanding?” He gestured towards the screen. “Your bridge looks like a tornado went through it, and you don’t look much better.”

Aboard the *Enterprise*, Jim was seated in his own chair and looked at a very pale Bob Wesley. The bags beneath his eyes made it look as though he hadn’t slept in days. Something was troubling the commodore, no doubt about it, and Kirk hated to add to what was surely bad news.

He took a deep breath. “We were attacked by two Klingon vessels…”

“You too?” Bob almost yelled.

“Yeah. It turned out that it was the same two commanders from Turkana. But I found out they were acting on their own – I am sure it wasn’t an effort to restart the war by the Klingon admiralty. I need you to know that first, before…” Jim interrupted himself as Wesley’s words sunk in. “Wait. What do you mean ‘you too’?” he asked in alarm.

Wesley visibly fought for control. “You haven’t heard?”

Kirk frowned. “What should I have heard? We were cut off from any sub-space transmissions, so I’m a bit clueless at the moment. What are you talking about.”

With rising dread he watched his mentor take a deep, calming breath; Bob’s face became hard. “Jim, the whole fleet is on red alert. There was an attack on the *Excalibur*, inside Borderland.”

Kirk went rigid. “What? Who was it? Orion pirates?”

Bob shook his head. “No, Jim. Klingons!” Gasps sounded through the bridge; everyone knew what that meant. “Three birds-of-prey attacked the *Excalibur*. She made it out, barely. I sent a message to every ship to warn them that the ceasefire was a trap. A sub-space transfer will inform Command within the hour.”

Jim was white as a sheet. “The peace talks… They’re not happening, then?”

“After that murderous stunt?” Wesley answered bitterly. “We suffered serious losses, Jim. Styles did

Bob looked calmly at him. “Lawrence Robert Styles – I’m sure you know him.”

“Yeah, I do,” Jim groaned. “Pompous, arrogant asshole with…”

“Jim!” The commodore’s voice became very firm. “I know you’ve been rivals since the Academy, but you’re talking about another commanding officer, so contain yourself!”

“Sorry,” the young captain grumbled with little sincerity. “So, what about Styles; what’s he doing there? I thought Captain Heldrom…”

“Captain Heldrom and his first officer were involved in a traffic accident on Earth the morning the Excalibur departed. Both are gravely injured and a replacement was needed. Styles’ promotion as a captain was overdue and so Barnett decided to put him in charge of the mission.” He pursed his lips. “Styles is young, only three years older than you Jim, and he was confronted with a situation no one could foresee. He did the only thing possible in that situation. He evacuated the delegation and the admirals to a nearby moon with breathable atmosphere.” He took a deep breath. “They didn’t make it.”

Frozen, Kirk could only stare. “They’re all…?”

“Dead – yes.” Bob confirmed aboard the Lexington, feeling bile rise in his throat. “Styles tried to distract the attackers from the evac shuttle, but one of the birds separated and attacked the shuttles. One was destroyed before it could reach the moon, the second one was too damaged to pass safely through the atmosphere. The whole delegation and…” He stopped as another realization hit him. If the Enterprise had been unaware of the disaster, then… Oh God, he didn’t want to do what was now his duty, but it was unavoidable.

Bracing himself, he asked quietly, “Jim, is Commander Spock on duty?”

From the Enterprise’s bridge, Jim watched his superior’s face turn even more serious, yet there was another expression – sorrow.
Before Kirk could answer, his first officer replied, “I am here, Commodore.” The Vulcan left his station and stepped beside the captain’s chair.

Wesley saw the bandage around the young Vulcan’s head and his tousled appearance. He’d been through so much already. He hated adding psychological pain to Spock’s already physical pain. Bob swallowed; then his voice became soft – almost gentle. “Mr. Spock, I… I regret to inform you that… Ambassador Sarek belonged to that delegation.”

This time, the gasps in the control center were even louder; the bridge officers stared wide-eyed at the Vulcan.

“I’m so very sorry,” Bob murmured, and clearly he was!

Uhura was out of her chair in an instant. Stifling a cry, she clapped a hand over her lips. Sarek – dead! The father of the man she loved more than life was gone. Again fate had struck and ripped another pain of loss in Spock. First his mother, then his people, and now his father. Nyota felt tears welling; they blurred her sight, and Spock's image wavered.

Jim looked up at his T’hy’la, horror written all over his face and in his eyes. And then he comprehended the full meaning of what it meant for Spock. It hit him with the force of a ship at warp. Spock – his best friend, his soul’s brother – had not only lost his people, but also both parents in just two years! He never had real parents, even with Winona Kirk still alive. But Jim knew in his bones what it meant to belong to someone in flesh and blood like a child to its parents. Anguish, compassion, and the fierce urge to protect roiled and fought with each other inside him. Without thinking, he reached out and closed one hand around the long, warm fingers of the Vulcan, trying to project many thoughts at once as his mind went out to his friend. ‘I hurt with you, Spock!’ his soul cried out. ‘I am so, so sorry for your loss. If I could change it – God, I would go through hell to spare you this pain. I’m here, T’hy’la, I’m here – you’re not alone. I’m with you in this…’

Spock stared, unblinking at the screen, trying to understand what Commodore Wesley had just told him. Sarek, his father, had been a part of the delegation? The same delegation that had been killed? Killed because the peace negotiation had been a trap to weaken the Federation? Sarek, son of Skon, kin to the matriarch T’Pau. His skill as a diplomat brought so many planets to peace, and now he was gone. Ripped from his life as his wife had been. What of the universe without him? What of Spock? He was an orphan now. Torn from his family – his planet.

The first officer had always tried to control his emotions – emotions that all Vulcan had, just suppressed. Several times he had failed to stay his emotions – as his mother fell to her death in front of his eyes, as Jim challenged him, and as Jim died behind the security door of the warp chamber. He
also had been overwhelmed by his emotions, but in a way that he could view that as positive where Nyota and Jim were concerned. Even McCoy, whose sparring kept him on his toes – he enjoyed it though he would never admit it.

Spock allowed himself to go back to the moment the light in Jim’s eyes dimmed and his T’hy’la took his last breath. He thought of missed chances then, and he did now too. Sure, his father and he had been on good terms when they parted two years ago, yet there were topics left unspoken between them. And now it was too late. His father, the man he always respected and loved, had been taken away from him forever. There was not even the possibility of saving his soul and mind, his katra, as all Vulcan katras had once been saved. All who went before were saved in the Hall of Eternity in Mount Seleya. That place perished along with Vulcan.

There would be no eternal remains of Sarek of Vulcan. His soul, everything he was, was lost forever! And perhaps it would be of all Vulcans for a long time to come. They were homeless with no Hall of Eternity now...

A sharp sword pierced Spock’s inner being; it glided hot through his veins and…

And a cool hand was wrapped around his fingers, soothing the flames of loss and anger in him. Comfort and understanding, compassion and fraternity broke through his mental shields and calmed the torrent of unwelcome emotions that threatened to suffocate him, though his face didn’t show it. He didn’t need to look down to know whose touch brought him relief and the strength he needed to maintain his composure.

Jim!

He remembered the last time he was confronted with such a personal loss. Back then he and Kirk had been rivals – nearly enemies, before they were forced together to stop Nero. Now that same man was by his side – loyal and strong as a rock in a stormy sea. Now Jim Kirk was his anchor – his closest friend, his T’hy’la. And Kirk’s presence inside of him and beside him allowed him to ride out his storm until the waters calmed.

Still, he avoided looking at Jim. He knew that the depth of feeling in those eyes would have undone him, and he would not compromise himself by displaying his feelings now. Not in front of the commodore and the eyes of the crew. He owed that much his father, who had witnessed the last time Spock’s all too human rage had taken control. He would honor his father and his Vulcan heritage by staying calm, even if his soul longed to weep.

The reaction of the bridge at Wesley’s words had surprised Khan. He was repairing the helm with
the tools and parts Scotty had sent up a little more than an hour ago. He was crouched beneath the console, but he heard the gasps and sat up. Half curious, half confused, his gaze fell on a very shocked Jim who looked with pain in his eyes at his first officer. Spock's face had become alarmingly pale. Behind the command team, Uhura had bolted up from her chair – one slender hand pressed to her mouth; her eyes shined. What was…?

Bob’s voice strained with emotion, and the Augment turned to the main screen. “My sincerest condolences, Mr. Spock. I grieve with thee,” He used the traditional words.

Spock was about to clasp his hands on his back, but Jim’s fingers around his own prevented it. And he didn’t have the strength to unmoor from the rock that steadied him. So he straightened his shoulders and looked straight into Wesley’s eyes. “Thank you, Commodore,” he said – his own voice hoarse.

Jim squeezed the Vulcan’s hand again and held on as he looked back at the screen, pushing aside the confusion he felt from Khan through their bond for the moment. “When did it happen?” he asked quietly, and Bob took another deep breath.

“Twenty minutes ago, Styles arrived in Federation space, but we already had his message. The attack was about three hours ago. Klingons blocked their transmissions and only after he escaped could he send a distress call.” He shook his head. “That the Excalibur still exists is a miracle. Styles sent me a full report – the ship is a mess.”

Cocking his head, Kirk frowned. “So the attack was three hours ago? That was about the same time we were attacked.” He pressed his lips in a thin line, before he murmured. “And here I really believed they were working on their own. That the Klingons – not that they wanted them, but accepted the notion of the peace talks were true. And they go and…” He shook his head.

Bob snorted bitterly. “Yeah, I know what you mean. I never thought that Kor, of all Klingon warlords, would pull this.”

Jim sat up in his chair. “Kor?” he asked perplexed. Khan rose and sat down at the helm’s chair. His bewilderment mirrored Kirk's own. Something was strange – wrong here!

With a grimace Wesley nodded. “Yes, Kor! I thought I knew him. Now it appears I was mistaken; that doesn’t happen often. Anyway, he led the attack against the Excalibur then…”
“Kor attacked Styles three hours ago?” Jim’s voice broke.

The reaction of his superior spoke for itself. “I think that’s what I just said. What’s the matter, Jim?” His asking glance wandered to Spock, who seemed to come out of the shock he’d been trying unsuccessfully to hide. The Vulcan stared down at his captain and then back at the screen with both brows raised.

Jim bent forwards. “Bob, where exactly took the assault against the Excalibur place?”

Wesley blinked. “Near Yaraka. Its moon, Yaska, was where Styles evacuated the delegation for and…”

Waving both hands in the air, Kirk cut him off. “Wait, wait, wait! Lemme get this straight? Three hours ago Lord Kor attacked the Excalibur near Yaraka? That can’t be!”

This time the commodore frowned, irritated. “That's exactly what happened, Jim. Why do you doubt it?”

Kirk’s voice became stern. “Because three hours ago he showed up at the Briar Patch when he found out two of his commanders went rogue. He came to try to prevent an incident that would stop diplomacy before it even started.” He saw astonishment appear on his superior officer’s face and added, “That means Kor was able to travel within, say, ten – fifteen minutes to get from Yaraka to the Briar Patch to help us against his own!” He snorted. “Klingon technology may have made a few advancements, but that's a bit much, isn't it? And his actions with me and with Styles – they don't match up. That doesn't make sense, don't you agree?”

This time Wesley bent forwards in his chair, fixing his protégée. “Are you trying to tell me that Kor was with you – came to help you, while…”

“While Styles is reporting that Kor killed our delegation that same minute two parsecs away. Impossible, right?”

Bob blinked again, trying to comprehend what Kirk told him. “Then one of you two have to be mistaken.”

“My thoughts exactly. But I and my bridge crew recognized Kor during the visual transmission.
They all saw him four weeks ago – at Turkana. And I've had the pleasure of facing him three times as I ‘enjoyed’ his hospitality.”

Very slowly Wesley nodded. “Tell me exactly what happened,” he ordered; remembering that he said these words just hours ago to Styles.

Jim sighed. “We were on the other side of the Briar Patch when we were attacked. The Klingons, cousins, who tortured me on Turkana, commanded the assault. We were able to fight and to finish them off, then Kor and his squadron arrived. Conveniently twenty minutes after the battle started. I spoke with him, I saw him, and he saw me. He said he had intercepted transmissions between the cousins and that's how he found out they were going to attack the *Enterprise*. He has his orders – to keep the ceasefire – and so he said he entered Federation space to come to our aid; very much against his desires, but he expressed that he was bound by Klingon honor. I suppose I should be thankful. Anyway, he destroyed the remnants of the last bird-of-prey and flew back to Borderland. And according to Styles, he did all this while attacking the *Excalibur* hours away from us!”

Bob swallowed. “But Jim, I saw the *Excalibur*’s read-outs. I got Styles’ report. There's not much room for doubt that Kor led the attack against them. Hell, Richard Barnett talked to Kor during the attack, and we can clearly see the ship's markings; it's the *J'Ethl*!”

“Then one of us is either mistaken, or one of us is lying,” the young captain concluded. “Barnett talked to Kor but didn’t see him, right?”

“Perhaps, but you watch your accusations.” As Wesley made an affirming gesture for Jim to continue, Spock rose to speak.

“Even if the true identity of the Klingon, who was involved in the assault on the *Excalibur*, is in question, the chances that we met the real Kor are much higher. Altering a voice is far less difficult and falsifying a visual transmission when the individual well-known.” His voice sounded calm and strong. Only Jim and Nyota (who both knew Spock all too well) and Khan’s enhanced hearing recognized the slight tremble. “I was on the bridge when acting Captain Sulu spoke with the Fleet Commander on Turkana; I studied Kor’s file in our data banks after he took Captain Kirk captive. Given the events past and the data available, I am certain that we talked to the real Kor three hours and forty-eight minutes ago.”

“In other words, Styles was misled – he and all the others.” Bob rubbed his neck. “But why? Who were those bastards? Renegades? Traitors? Maybe there is a revolt or some kind of coup going on in the Klingon Empire because of the peace talks. That’s the only explanation I can think of for why the Klingons in question tried to pass himself off as Kor.”

“Let him be the one to take the fall – lose his honor,” Jim nodded slowly. “I agree although I suppose
there’s the chance that someone has a personal vendetta against Kor too. The attack would derail the talks and depose Kor.”

Kirk went silent as he thought hard about everything he'd learned. Something wasn’t quite right here. Kor told him that Klingons didn’t give their word lightly, but when they did, keeping it was a matter of honor. “He didn’t want to lose face, that's why he came to our aid,” he murmured. Only as he heard Wesley’s “What are you going on about?” he realized that he had spoken aloud.

“Well, Kor said that he usually wouldn’t have lifted a finger to help, but the Empire made a promise; breaking it would dishonor them. That was the reason Kor acted at all. We know how much the Klingons value their pride. Whoever tried to stop the upcoming negations brought dishonor to the Empire and disgrace upon himself. This… It just isn't the Klingon way.”

“Apparently those two commanders didn’t give a damn about their honor, judging from the state of your ship,” the commodore deadpanned. “And that goes for the squadron that attacked the Excalibur. Otherwise, our most important admirals and the delegation would still be alive.”

“True!” Jim announced; his thoughts were in turmoil. None of it made sense. A Klingon fleet commander rescues the Enterprise as another Federation ship is attacked two parsecs threatening the ceasefire and killing the most important diplomats and admirals of the Federation. It was a ruse, but whose? Something was very, very wrong here – and he couldn’t put a finger on it. The assault, the evacuation that led to so many deaths, a Klingon possibly faking Kor's identity… The young captain frowned as another thought struck him. “Bob, when the Excalibur was in the middle of an attack, why would Styles order and evacuation of the delegation and the admirals?” he asked slowly.

“Kirk, you gotta know the regulation!” Wesley groaned. “It’s standard protocol that during war time the highest ranking staff officers have to be taken to safety no matter the cost. The same goes for a delegation. Styles did what the rules demand and…”

“Bullshit – don’t accuse me of not knowing regulation! I know what they say and I know he values every damn paragraph of those regulations more than life itself, but to start an evacuation during a battle is… crazy! Insane! He and his ship are still flying, and the admirals and the delegation are dead! They didn't have... They weren't protected! They weren't kept safe! They were shot out into space to die!”

“Stand down, Captain! He ordered the evacuation during a lull in the fire. I have the bridge records, Jim. Barnett and Morrow didn’t want Styles facing the action alone because it's his first command. He insisted that they try to get to safety. They gave in, and evac’d with the diplomats. The rest you know.”
“So, the Klingons weren’t even distracted when he launched the shuttles? They had plenty of time to watch the hangar open and the shuttles depart?” Jim stared wide-eyed at Wesley. “No wonder it all went to hell! How could Styles send them out without distracting the Klingons first?”

“He did, as I already told you, Jim. He fired at the Klingons as the shuttles launched, but the Klingons – they were more experienced and were able to pull one over on him.” He shook his head. “He blames himself, but I don’t think he should and I told him as much. He did nothing technically wrong, and I’m certain the admiralty will see that after they review the records.” He sighed. “I spoke with Styles, and he was upset. We all are, believe me. We are all mourning.” He watched the Vulcan lift a brow and winced in sympathy. “Yeah, I know, it’s not comparable to your grief, after all you lost your father.”

At the commodore’s words, Khan looked at the first officer again; comprehension flooded him. This Ambassador Sarek had been Spock’s father! No wonder. Sadness and protective feelings poured from Jim, and Uhura strained to comfort even as she fought against tears. The Vulcan’s hurt struck them hard because he was dear to them.

Nien had neither a father nor a father figure. It had always been his brothers and sisters who had taken care of him, and one guard who treated him as a human when he was a child. It did not last when the child became a young man. In the end, even this man tried to kill him. Khan knew then with whom his loyalty would lie – his own. But he also understood, in a theoretical sense, what the parent-child bond ought to be. It was displayed in the eyes of the Vulcan who now mourned his own parent. Spock was indeed grieving, though he tried to wear a mask over his grief, but the mask couldn't cover his eyes. They spoke volumes.

Jim rose and stepped beside Spock. His instincts to support his friend with his presence were too strong to ignore them. Going straight to the next topic, he tried to distract the Vulcan. “Bob, have the Klingons been contacted since the assault?”

Wesley shrugged. “I haven't made the attempt yet and with the distance between here and Earth, I figure Command’s just hearing about it now. It'll be up to the President to contact the Empire. Until I get further orders, all ships near the former Neutral Zone are on red alert. Seeing that you’re on your way to Risa and far enough away from any hot spots, you stay on yellow alert. I’ll contact you as soon as I hear more.”

Kirk nodded, glad that they were only on yellow. It meant their shifts would remain as normal, and his crew could get the off-time and rest they needed. They needed it to recover, to grieve, and to repair and move on again. McCoy had called him two hours ago and told him that Sulu was out of surgery. He would make it, but nine crew members hadn’t been so lucky. More condolences. Jim would have to write to the families soon – and he really, really hated it.
“Right,” he murmured. “I send you my full report within the next hour.”

“Alright – be quick about it, I have to report the incident to Command, but I want to have details first. Especially concerning Kor!”

Kirk sighed, and then he frowned. “Bob, we both agree that something is very wrong here. We need to find out which one of us actually faced Kor and what happened before Command is informed of anything. May I make a suggestion?” As Wesley nodded, the younger man continued, “Send me the records from the *Excalibur* – the actual attack and the conversation between Barnett and Kor. We’ll compare it with our voice records. That way we can…”

The commodore rolled his eyes. “Do you think my comms officer so incapable?”

“Of course not. Palmer's a good man, but Uhura has the best hearing when it comes to intonation and accents – nuances someone else would miss. If someone altered their voice to sound like Kor, they still wouldn’t be able to copy those things exactly. Uhura could review it faster than any computer can assess the data.”

Bob looked at him long and hard. Jim didn’t waver and returned the stare. Finally, Wesley sighed and made an affirming gesture. “Sure, what's one more set of ears. I'll send you the report – for your eyes and Lieutenant Uhura’s only so to speak! The *Excalibur*’s records are top secret. If Command finds out that I gave you a copy, we’re both are in trouble. You know how they are.”

“Right, sorry. Of course it is,” Jim said surprised.

“Our most important admirals and ambassadors were killed along with the vice president of the Federation. Of course it's top secret!” Wesley chided. “So keep it to yourself.”

“Aye, sir! I'll send you my report as quickly as possible and inform you with whatever he finds on those *Excalibur* records.”

The commodore nodded. “Very well, I’ll wait for the results before I inform Command. Take care, Jim.” His gaze found the Vulcan again. “Mr. Spock,” he greeted softly again, and the *Enterprise’s* first officer dipped his head. “Commodore,” he answered. The screen flicked off, then returned to its normal visage of space and the sparkling light of the stars.
For several seconds no one moved, then Jim pushed all thoughts of duty aside for a moment to turn towards his Vulcan friend. “Spock,” he said quietly. “I… I can’t tell you, how sorry I am. I…” He was at a loss for words as he met those deep brown eyes; he saw poorly veiled anguish in them. By instinct to comfort his soul-brother, he reached out and put a comforting hand on Spock’s stiff. “If you want to be alone – take some time.”

“I’m still on duty, Captain,” Spock interrupted him. His voice was hoarse.

Kirk shook his head. “You haven’t had a break all shift, and until Bob sends whatever he decides to share, you’re... Just take some time for yourself, right?”

He saw the Vulcan hesitate, and so he gently turned him towards the turbolift. Then he saw Uhura, who looked pleadingly at him, and nodded at her. Words weren’t necessary; Nyota knew that she was dismissed to be with Spock, and as the first officer headed to the lift, she wordlessly followed him.

Pressing his lips together, Jim planted his fists on his hips and lowered his head; his heart and soul went out to his friend who had to grieve another painful loss. If only there was even the slightest survival. Maybe Sarek made it. Vulcans were strong – tenacious! Yet these thoughts were wishes, not logic. He knew this! And he knew Spock’s voice in his head when he heard hit. At least that gave him reason to smile.

Taking a deep breath, he looked at the junior officer at the comms. “Shipside transmission, Ensign!” he ordered, and as the young man nodded Jim raised his voice, “Attention, crew, this is the Captain speaking. We just learned there has been another Klingon assault, this time in Borderland. The Excalibur is mourning her losses, and we mourn along with her. Among her casualties are some of our admirals and the delegation. The fleet is on red alert. Per Commodore Wesley's orders, we are on yellow alert while in-transit to the next space-dock. Shifts will remain as normal, but remain on stand-by.” He locked eyes with Khan, in whose eyes he read understanding. He sucked in a deep breath. “That is all. Kirk out!”

He nodded at the comms station and was about to sit down when Bones’ voice came through the speakers at his armrest.

“McCoy to bridge. Jim, what the hell happened out there? Is the ceasefire over?”

Kirk pulled a face. “I don’t know, Bones. Even Bob can’t answer that. That depends on the decision of the Council and the president. We’ll have to have patience for the next twenty hours or so – and we have to keep our eyes and ears wide open. How is Sulu?”
“I put him in an induced coma after surgery; he'll recover. Neil Rowlen and Antony Taylor will make it, too, like all the others I got into my medbay alive. Oh, by the way, if you ready to let your first officer outta here for half an hour, then send him down to me. He…”

Kirk couldn’t help himself, and he flinched. “Spock isn’t here,” he interrupted Leonard. “And don’t bother to trying to hail him. He…”

“Jim, in case you haven’t noticed, the man's been injured and he has a concussion. He really should…”

“Bones, I think a cut and a concussion are the least of his problems now,” Jim interrupted the grumpy CMO again, whose mood was worse than usual after the injuries and death he'd tended to these last hours. Before McCoy could ask, the young captain added quietly, “Sarek is dead.”

A sharp intake of breath and silence was the only response Jim got from Bones for nearly a minute. Then he whispered, “Spock’s father… He's dead?”

“Yes,” Jim nodded, even if Leonard couldn’t see him. “I gave Spock and Uhura a break. Spock needs time for himself now after this new blow. That's more important than…”

“Yeah, I understand,” McCoy murmured. “His thick skull's taken some punches. But I suppose his meditating thing's as good as a hypo for now.” He sighed, before quietly cursing under his breath. “Damn, our hobgoblin's been on the receiving end of the worst this universe has to offer. I wonder how he's kept it together at all.”

“He isn’t alone, Bones, that's how he's keeping to together. He has Nyota, you, me – and the rest of this crew. Just play nice for a few days…”

“What do you think I am, Jim?!” McCoy groused. “I know damn well what it's like to lose a father, Spock is still raw from his mother's death. I'll have the kid gloves on.” Then he calmed down. “What happened to Sarek? How did he…?”

“He belonged to the delegation that… That was killed in the attack on the Excalibur,” Jim told him quietly.
“Jesus!”

Kirk didn’t need to see his friend's face to know that the CMO closed his eyes in respect and sadness. Sighing he ordered, “Stand-by until you hear from me. I’ll come down later and tell you everything. Kirk out!” He switched off the intercom and rubbed his face tiredly. Then he felt eyes on him – Allistor, the two junior officers at the comms and science stations, Kevin and, of course, Khan.

“Seems our hopes for peace were a bit premature,” he said to no one in particular, before rubbing his eyes. “Right, I'll be in my quarters writing Commodore Wesley's report. Chekov…” He hesitated when he remembered that Pavel was in Engineering and looked around. Junior officers in any direction he looked. He couldn’t leave the bridge to one of them while on yellow alert. His gaze found Allistor, who was busy with communicating with Scotty – cursing beneath his breath. Allistor was a good engineer, but he wasn't qualified. Spock was out. Scotty was needed in Engineering with their young Russian wiz. Fourth in command was McCoy, but his presence was very much necessary in medbay. And Uhura and Sulu first choices after Spock and Scotty; they weren’t available now.

He ought to be able to give Nien the con. The man had been a general in his time and had gathered all the knowledge and experience 23rd-century technology had to offer. He ought to be able to give Nien the con. He's earned that level of trust. But Jim knew it wasn't the time – not the time to be impulsive. Not when it would lead him to jail and leave his mate exposed to Starfleet and the Federation. So he was stuck on the bridge for now.

Sighing, he went to the science station where the junior officer quickly made room for him. Sitting down on the chair that usually Spock occupied, he began with his work, hoping that it would lead to some results…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, I know this was sad with Sarek, and Spock will grieve in silence, yet Jim and the others will not let him down. He’s not alone like he was as a child; his lover and his soul-brother are there for him. And which way is the best to find some emotional distance after such a shock? Yeah, distraction and work.

In the next chapter our heroes will pick Styles’ report to pieces and will find out some very interesting things. Parallel the president of the UFP will learn about the incident in Borderland and makes a fatal decision regarding the new interims Chief of Command.
I hope you loved the new chapter and I’m so looking forward to get your comments. (I’ll answer them sooner, promised, but my Dad’s accident put me off the line for a few days – therefore sorry for the late replies).

Have a nice rest of Sunday and good start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you once again for all the comments and kudos, and especially another big ‘thanks’ for all your well-wishes concerning my dad. He is doing better by now, yet headache and some problems to move whenever the back-muscles are needed remain. We hope he will be fully okay around Christmas.

You are certainly curious what comes now after the two attacks and how Spock will doing after learning of Sarek’s death. Well, here you go – and you certainly will face another, little rollercoaster.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 49 – Something is very wrong here

This time, Uhura controlled herself as the lift doors closed, and she rode at Spock’s side down to deck 5, unhappily recalling the time two years ago when she accompanied the man she loved on the same lift down to their quarters. He had just lost his mother and his entire home world. She had wrapped him in her arms to offer comfort then; now she knew that he preferred such gestures only in the isolation of their quarters. Nevertheless, she could feel the pain in his soul and heart like a piercing dagger; the utter anguish that tore at his self-control that he tried to stay was palpable to her. She looked up at him. His face was a stoic mask; his lips were pressed into a thin line, and his eyes stared ahead as if boring a hole through the wall in front of him. He was holding onto his composure, but only barely. And she didn’t dare say anything that could break the thin veneer shielding him.

As the lift reached deck 5, Jim Kirk’s firm voice sounded through the intercoms ship wide, explaining what happened and that the fleet was back on red alert. On the way to their quarters, the two officers met several crew members. Some addressed Spock, asking him what was going on. Most never got the chance. They were either stopped by Uhura’s fierce look or even fiercer voice as she ordered them to ‘shut up’.

Finally, the door of their quarters closed behind them, and Nyota quietly ordered the lights down to sixty percent; she raised the temperature. Their cabin was always warmer than the rest of the crews'
cabins; it was comfortable for her and Spock. But it wasn't enough now. Nyota knew that her lover was freezing inside; he needed the warmth of former Vulcan and now New Vulcan.

Then she turned around and looked at him. Their eyes met, and as she saw the sorrow beginning to break his expression – darkening his eyes – she reached out to him.

He couldn't hold his control any longer – not with her. He closed the small distance to Uhura and let himself be wrapped in her slender, yet surprisingly strong arms. His forehead rested on one of her small shoulders. His eyes burned; his throat was too tight, and his breath was uneven. And then he wept.

Nyota felt his tears soak through her uniform, and her heart went out to the man she loved. This was only the third time she'd seen him cry. The first time was in the quiet of their quarters following his mother’s death. The second time she could only watch him; then she stood by him as he gathered himself and went after the man whose actions took Jim Kirk's life. And she also remembered holding him those nights after – the nightmares. And his personal isolation as he assessed his perceived failures. Even his meditations were affected. She could only pray that this time wouldn’t be as bad as the last one.

Pressing Spock close, she drew soothing circles on his back. It was all she could do. Just hold him and wait out his storm.

The first thing he became aware of was cold – icy, merciless – cold and dark. He shivered when he felt it. He trembled badly enough that his teeth chattered. And then it came – the pain. Hot searing pain in his left side and arm – burning and sharp like a glowing, red knife had torn through flesh and bone.

A moan sounded in his ears, and moments later he realized that it was his own. Disoriented, he glanced around, his usually keen eyes tried to pierce the darkness around him, but the only thing he could make out were the shining specks far above him. Then he realized something more. Wind. It tore at his clothes and whipped through his hair for some seconds only to calm itself again, but it was enough to clear the cobwebs from his mind.

He remembered the journey to the conference, the Klingon attack, the evacuation, the assault on their shuttle, the crash…
Sarek of Vulcan blinked several times and tried to remember where he was – what had happened. A painful groan from his left distracted him. Lifting his head was an effort he only mastered with sheer will power, yet master it he did. The first thing he recognized in the dark was the fact that their vessel had been nearly eviscerated. He sat on a seat nearly torn completely from the floor, yet the safety belt held him firmly in place. Above him, the ceiling was gone; the small pricks of the light he saw belonged to the night sky.

He heard a tormented moan, and Sarek saw the golden uniform with broad stripes, streaked dark and wet. Then something brushed his mind. Not something, but someone. Someone obviously in pain and scared. His eyes found another pair of eyes – large and dark, set in a heart shaped beautiful, but bruised face.

“Lady Morganth?” he asked – well, he wanted to ask, but all that came from his lips was a croak.

The Betazoid replied with her mind – able to understand his inquiry. He felt her fearful response and at once tried to transmit comfort and calm to her, knowing that the young woman was in shock and needed help.

Then a quiet curse sounded from somewhere in front of him; he recognized the voice. Trying again to formulate an intelligible word, he attempted to speak. “Admiral Nogura?” More a whisper than anything else, yet the staff officer must have heard him.

He groaned in response, “Sarek?”

“Yes,” the Vulcan answered before he reached for the safety belt, gritting his teeth against the searing pain that shot through his left side. Forcing his self-control into place, he was finally able to loosen the seatbelt. His fingers brushed against something soft – Sokal’s robe. Carefully he lifted his right hand and felt for his assistant’s pulse. Relief flooded him as he felt a faint but regular pulse – the indication of life as blood pumped through the younger man’s body. He was alive!

“Are you hurt, Ambassador?” Nogura sounded hoarse. And cold – his teeth chattered as he spoke.

“I am not sure,” Sarek replied. “You?”

“I feel like the morning after my 50th birthday – in other words, terrible, but I’ll live.”
Nogura heard the rustle of clothes nearby. “Richard, do you hear me?” Nogura tried to wake his friend and colleague with a slap. “Richard!”

Sarek tried to move and suppressed a shout; his left side felt as if it were on fire.

“Don’t move, Ambassador Sarek!” The warm, female voice belonged to Ania Morganth, who had recovered from her shock. “You have a nasty wound in your side.”

“Dammit!” Nogura spat as he hit something solid. “The comms are out, and the drive is out, too. If those damn Klingon traitors destroyed the Excalibur, we’re stranded here!”

“You mean, we…”

Ania was interrupted by Sarek, who suddenly ordered a quiet but strong “Silence!”

Nogura knew Sarek enough to realize that the Vulcan must have heard something that he and the Betazoid obviously did not. He kept his mouth shut. There was, indeed, a buzzing, getting louder. An engine. Whatever it was powering, was getting closer.

“Thank the Lord, a shuttle!” the admiral sighed. “Styles made it, and he’s coming to pick us up.”

Sarek pursed his lips as he tried to breathe as slowly and carefully as possible. Several ribs were broken; there was no doubt about that. And even his Vulcan meditation techniques would not be able to shield him from the pain the injury caused. “Why would they not beam us up?” he queried.

Nogura, caught between the ruined navigation console and his seat, snorted. “They probably don’t have the power. They probably had to send a shut…” He stopped. “That isn’t one of our shuttles. The engines are too loud – too big…”

Sarek forced his legs to obey his will and rose – carefully so as not to step on Harry Morrow, who lay beside his seat. Bending down, he took a deep breath and felt for Morrow’s pulse. Still alive. “If this is not one of Starfleet’s shuttles there are two most likely possibilities: Klingons or Orions.”

“Don’t paint the devil on the wall just yet,” Nogura murmured.
Outside of the destroyed shuttle, the noise of the engine became louder, swirling up dust and dirt into a storm that found its way into the vessel. Nogura and Sarek coughed; the Betazoid ambassador pressed one of her sleeves in front of her nose and mouth. Then the engines were cut and replaced by the sound of hydraulics.

“Whoever they are – I have a bad feeling,” Nogura said softly. And as illogical as it sounded, Sarek shared the sentiment.

Voices drew nearer, speaking a strange, guttural language. “Those are not Klingons,” the Vulcan stated quietly, and Nogura nodded with a grim expression on his bruised face.

“I know – Orions!” He glanced around. “Can you reach one of the weapon drawers, Ambassador?”

“No – and even if I could reach our weapons, it would be unwise to attack the Orions.”

“What? We’re as good as dead and…”

“I do not think so,” Sarek interrupted him. “If they wanted us dead, all they would have to do was to send a torpedo or a phaser blast in our direction, but they decided to land and to come to us. Logical deduction – they want us alive.”

Somehow Nogura was able to turn his head in the Vulcan’s direction. “Alive? Why, for God’s sa…” He stopped as someone began to climb along the hull from the outside. Seconds later, four large shapes appeared at the edge of the overhead that had been ripped open in the crash. Their hand-held lights illuminated their green faces; they pointed their phasers directly at the incapacitated occupants.

“Still a few alive, I see,” one of them rasped. “You made the right conclusion regarding the sensor information, N’thalag,” he continued to someone at his side. “You found the shuttle and survivors.”

Nogura cleared his throat. “Good day, gentlemen. It’s a relief to see you. We’ve had an accident and are in need of assistance.”

“Are you?” the voices growled.
The staff officer lifted a brow. “Obviously. Would you please be so kind as to…”

Harsh laughter stopped him. “How polite these admirals can be – even to us. Especially when they are knee-deep in rising water with no way out.” The light of one lamp wandered through the shuttle. “Ha, the Vulcan is up too. Practically invincible, these guys! And what a shining beauty we have here?” The light blinded Ania, who had to turn her face away. “And a second beauty beside her – hopefully alive, too. Women always fetch a good price.”

Nogura stared wide-eyed at the Orion. “You have no idea with whom you’re dealing here. We are…”

“… Goods, nothing more. I’m certain the Romulans will pay a lot to get their hands on not one but a few Starfleet admirals, and I know a few men who will pay even more for the beauties here. Or maybe they want a Vulcan to play with.” He turned around. “J’akkha, make ready to bring our guests aboard. And tell that far too expensive shaman he’s needed. Some of the ladies and gentlemen here are injured, and we need them well before we can sell them.”

The Orion looked at his superior. “D’nyrrs, didn’t Klokh called us to finish them off if we found survivors?”

Nogura frowned. He couldn’t see any of the Orions clearly because despite their hand-held lights their faces were barely recognizable in the semi-darkness. Yet the admiral had heard this name before. D’nyrrs – slaver and dealer for everything that was declared as illegal. Sweet Lord, he knew exactly what that meant for his companions and him. And who was this Klokh the other Orion referred to? Why did this Klokh called D’nyrrs to kill eventually survivals? Klokh sounded Klingon. Was he an inferior of Kor – or did he work alone? Was the assault of the Excalibur in the end not a betrayal of the Klingon Empire, but the deed of some renegades?

His thoughts were interrupted, as D’nyrrs’ voice growled, “He asked me to finish off the problem if we found any live ones, yes.” He chuckled. “And that is exactly what I am about to do. Why kill them when we can sell them?” The pirate looked down at the people in the shuttle again. “It isn’t like anyone is going to hear from them ever again!”

“WHAT?” Robertson stared in horror at Admiral Luengo, who had just contacted him – and tore him away from his dinner. He wasn't thinking of that now, and he would not for the rest of the
evening

“Yes, Mr. President, it’s true,” he said quietly; his face showed the perfect mixture of shock and anger. “We just received a transmission from the *Excalibur*. They were attacked by Klingons in Borderland. She took heavy damage. An evacuation of the delegation including Mrs. Whitman failed; the Klingons destroyed the shuttles. There were no survivors. Same goes for the admirals that accompanied them.”

Robertson, who had stood at his desk, sat heavily down; he was pale as a sheet. “Sweet Lord!” he whispered. “Have all the admirals…”

“Yes, as protocol demands, they were evacuated, and that led… That’s what killed them. Admirals Barnett, Nogura, Shepard, Komack, and Morrow have been killed, sir, as was every member of the delegation.” He gulped. “That leaves us in a terrible position! If the Klingons decide to strike now, we’re not able to… We can’t counter the way we need to.” He moistened his lips. “I’ve informed Admirals Cartwright, Shelton, Anderson, and Norton. A meeting between the Council and you is inevitable – you’re the Chief now.”

“I know,” Robertson murmured. Traditionally, the president of the United Federation of Planets was also the highest ranking member of Starfleet. The duties were delegated to those with appropriate experience. But right now he was in charge, and there was no one to fall back on. The deaths of the diplomats ripped holes in the Federation that he would have to close. So many decisions. He knew that he would have to choose one of the remaining admirals to be the interim Chief in Command until a more permanent selection could be made.

“Order all available admirals to the conference,” Robertson ordered. “We have to choose an interim Chief in Command so that we can act.”

Luengo nodded. “I already sent messages to all staff officers.” He lowered his head. “Mr. President, I’m sorry that my department didn’t see this coming. None of my agents reported any suspicious activities in Borderland, or along the former Neutral Zone. We should have learned about this trap in time to plan. I take responsibility, sir, and will resign my post. I…”

“Nonsense, Admiral! We need all of our staff officers – especially now. No one believed that the Klingons would be that… deceptive.”

Luengo took a deep breath. “Sir, when I think of those we lost… Mrs. Whitman, the ambassadors, my colleagues…” He shook his head and looked up again; pain shone in his eyes. At least Robertson took the expression reflected as such.
He felt his throat tightening. “There will be time to mourn, Admiral, but right now we have to act. What about the *Excalibur*?”

“She was enroute when the comms officer sent the message, and I also got a short report from Commodore Wesley. I don’t have any further information, and the distance between Earth and Borderland prevent a direct sub-space transmission. But if she made it, we'll know soon.” He took another deep breath. “Orders, Mr. President?”

“Yes, I want a copy of the message, and please inform all staff officers that they will be meeting with the Council and me in five hours. Who is in charge of Starfleet at the moment – besides me, that is?”

“Richard didn’t promote anyone to the position, Mr. President. We all thought that he would be available if needed, and…”

“Then you’re in charge ‘til the conference,José. I know about the accusations against you; they’re secondary as far as I'm concerned. We have more important things to worry about.”

Luengo looked at him with feigned gratitude. “Thank you for your trust, Mr. President. I won’t disappoint you. I'll send you the *Excalibur’s* message and any information I have.”

“Yes, please – and keep me updated. Robertson out!” He cut the link, and for a long moment he allowed himself to hide his face in his hands; shock and sorrow rose in him hot and blinding. Batari, Richard, Harry, James, Sarek… They all were gone; killed by the double-tongued bastards who so proudly spoke of honor, but didn't have a spark of it in them. Then he forced himself to push the pain aside. Their enemies had weakened them with their betrayal, and if he wanted to keep the Federation safe, he had to concentrate on his duties and only his duties.

He commed his other secretary. “Judie? Defense Alert! Inform all available ministers and Council members, Federation Code 1. Meeting in five hours!” He waited until his secretary responded in the affirmative, albeit with bewilderment in her voice, then he cut the line. He rose and looked out of the window. It was dark and stormy in Paris; the Eiffel Tower a dim light in the distance. He prayed that it wasn’t an omen of things to come – that the light was not so far away.

But it was – the dark would be with them for longer.
Aboard the **Enterprise**, the crew members still standing were busy repairing the ship or helping to bring order to the chaos the battle had left behind. Down in Engineering, Scotty, Chekov, Allistor and Keenser did one miracle after the other. “Like the pixies of his Scottish homeland,” one of the junior officers had joked as he watched his superior repair a console, race to another station to lend a hand, and return several seconds later only to head off to another emergency.

Scotty wished he could fly like one of those pixies. He had his eyes and ears everywhere, inwardly cursing the Klingons into the next century. The **Enterprise** had been whole only three days and already she was hurt again. He loathed this.

“Singh to Mr. Scott!” The velvet baritone interrupted Montgomery’s musings.

Sighing, he activated the intercom. “Scott here!”

“Mr. Scott, I need another phaser cutter, three meters of cable, and five diodes,” the Augment said, and the Scotsman rolled his eyes. “I’ll tell yer wish to Santa Claus the next time I see him,” he grumbled.

“Though Christmas is only six weeks away, I don’t think Jim wants to wait that long before his Grey Lady gets her steering back,” Khan deadpanned with his own dry wit, and Scott had to chuckle.

“Aye! I’ll send the items up ter ye.”

“Thank you, Mr. Scott. Singh out!”

Montgomery snorted and shook his head. “From accused space terrorist ter a hero and a petty officer on Starfleet’s flagship bridge in a few weeks. Now that’s a career!” He turned around to order the needed parts and tools, only to see that everyone in reach was busy. Groaning, he selected the required items himself, put them into a box and waved to one of the technicians. “Sam! Bring this ter the bridge ter Mr. Singh!” he said, handing the box over.

“Mr. Singh?” The man was at a loss as to who his superior meant.

Montgomery rolled his eyes again. “Petty-officer Singh, our helmsman at the moment. Ye know him
Sam could have slapped his own forehead. “Sorry sir, of course I know him. I’m on my way.” In truth he wasn’t too delighted with the chore. He had his own job to do, but an order was order. He watched Scotty go, turned around, and almost collided with another man in dressed in a security uniform.

“Lieutenant, sorry!” he said, but the officer held him back.

“Did I hear you right, crewman? This box is meant for the bridge?”

Sam nodded. “Yes, sir – for Mr. Singh.”

Lieutenant Nureaux smiled quickly. “Give me the box. I’m on my way to the bridge to give the captain my report. I’ll deliver it for you.”

Sam beamed at him. “Thank you, sir; that’s very kind.”

“No problem. You have better things to do than play delivery boy!” He winked at him, took the box and left Engineering.

Two minutes later, Nureaux stepped on the bridge; his heart pounded with anticipation. The civilian he’d been searching for, for days went by the name Singh; he was on the bridge. Singh – Khan Noonien Singh. This was no coincidence; he was sure of it. He found the half open helm console and the man who bent over it; he took a sharp breath. Was this the escaped Augment?

His eyes flicked over the scene quickly. He saw Kirk sitting at the science station, concentrating on something on his PADD.

Nureaux walked down the few steps to the lower part of the bridge, schooling his features. “Mr. Singh?” he asked calmly, and suppressed any reaction as the man in question turned around. He looked straight into green-blue eyes slender, chiseled face. ‘It’s him!’ he thought. ‘It’s really him! He’s here, on the Enterprise, on the bridge of all places! Kirk, this will end you!’ “Sir, Mr. Scott sends this with his regards.” He said out loud. He offered the super-human the box. The augment took it with in his elegant hands.
“Thank you, Lieutenant,” he said, his voice deep and accented as Nureaux had heard it in the recording he received from Luengo.

“My pleasure, sir,” the Frenchman replied politely, forcing a smile at Riley. He turned away to leave the bridge only to find himself the focus of a pair of stern, blue eyes. “Captain,” he greeted and nodded.

Jim frowned a little bit. “Lieutenant Nureaux? Something the matter? What are you doing up here?” he asked.

Philip shook his head. “No, sir. I went to Engineering to lend a hand. Since it looks like the technicians are needed there, I offered myself as delivery boy to bring your parts.”

Kirk lifted his brow and then nodded. “That's team spirit. Very good, Lieutenant. As you were! And thank you.”

“Thank you, sir!” With a quick salute, Philip left the bridge and headed down to his quarters. He had to inform Luengo and then plan phase two of his mission. He needed to determine how many crew members were involved in hiding the wanted man in their midst. He also needed to learn more about Kirk’s intentions regarding the Augment. If Luengo was right and Kirk wanted to use the creature for his own purposes, he needed to know Kirk’s plans.

Two minutes later he stepped into his quarters, locked the door, and went straight to the place where he hid the small transmitter, ciphered with the new code that was unknown to all but the SBI. His message was short, but its impact would be great. “Just met the Augment aboard, phase two of the mission begins now!”

ST***ST

While the fateful message made its way to Earth, Jim sat still at Spock’s station. He had sent his report to Bob ten minutes ago and was now checking the list of the injured and the fallen crew members. Every name hurt him – showed him that he hadn’t been able to keep the women and men in his care safe. God, sometimes he hated his job! He hated losing people in his charge; he hated seeing a dear friend grieve and another fight for his life in medbay. Above all, he hated this war!

All of suddenly he felt a warm breath waft gently through his soul, and as he glanced over his shoulder
he met Nien’s understanding eyes. The realization of just how close they had become these last weeks – that he, indeed, had linked souls with his lover – was comforting, but also strange. He would never be alone again; the time of his solitude had come to an end, finally, for both of them. Khan wasn’t a lonely stranger in a strange land anymore, stranded in a time that wasn’t his. Khan had found his other half, an anchor that bound him to a world he could make his own. And to know that his man was so strong, but vulnerable – willing to have him; it filled the young captain with pride and gratitude as well as a good measure of tenderness.

He smiled softly at his Augment, whose hair was in disarray – barely tamed since the former dictator had combed his fingers through it countless times during the last hours. Khan looked wilder like this, but more human too. Jim loved this look on him as much as he did the put together one – just like he loved everything about this man. A steady rock in the churning waters that Jim had been treading since he was a boy.

The moment of warm comfort was interrupted as the junior officer at the comms station looked at his captain. “Sir, I'm receiving a transmission from Commodore Wesley.”

Kirk nodded. “Finally. Put it through, Ensign.”

Several seconds later the terminal he occupied showed the newest message, and Kirk took a headset to listen to the audio records from the Excalibur’s bridge. He took Wesley’s order concerning the records seriously. Opening the file, Jim watched and listened to records, then re-played it – and again, and again.

Something was wrong here, and not only with the Klingon who pretended to be Kor. Frowning, Kirk watched and listened to the recording a fourth time, and then it hit him.

“Oh God!” he whispered. “Either Styles is the biggest idiot in all of Starfleet, or this was intentional!” Copying the recording onto a holodrive, he activated the intercom again. “Kirk to Engineering. Mr. Scott?”

“Scott here, Capt’n.”

“Scotty, please be in Mr. Spock’s quarters in ten minutes. Oh, and send Chekov to the bridge to take the con.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” Scott affirmed, sounding none too happy.
Jim was about to cut the connection when another thought struck him. “Oh, and Scotty? I don’t think you heard. Sarek was among the victims in the Borderland assault.”

“Spock’s father?” Montgomery asked. When he heard Kirk’s affirming grunt, he exploded. A rush of wild curses sounded through the intercom, “If I get the bloody bastard who’s responsible for the ambassador’s death, I’ll kick his ass into the ground and send him ter his maker! As if the lad hasn’t suffered enough, losin’ his planet and his mother! No, now he has to grieve his father, too. God damned, cursed Klingons! I’d feed them ter Nessie if I could!” Another rush of Scotch Gaelic obscenities followed, and then the line went dead.

Jim sighed. On the one hand it touched him how much Spock’s personal loss affected his comrades and friends; on the other hand, Kirk would have been happier if the other officers didn’t have a reason for their compassion.

He turned around. “Nien?” he addressed the Augment, not caring for formalities just now. “Would you please come down to Spock’s quarters in ten minutes? I need your opinion in a matter that I need to discuss with our specialists. I just don’t want too many visitors to drop in unexpectedly before he’s ready for it.”

Khan lifted both brows, understanding his mate’s need to protect the Vulcan. “Of course. Just tell me the location of his quarters and I’ll be there.”

Jim gave him the deck and quarter number, and then he looked at Kevin. “Ensign Riley, you’ve got the bridge until Ensign Chekov shows up to…”

“I am here, Keptin!” Pavel strolled out of the lift, looking to the entire world as if he had just crawled straight out of an engine. His uniform was dotted with spots of whatever fluids he’d encountered; a long, dark stripe smeared over his left cheek, and his hair looked like it was combed by a tornado.

Kirk smiled at the sight but kept his mouth shut. His crew was giving their all to put the Enterprise right again. “Chekov – two jobs. Take the helm from Mr. Singh in ten minutes and you’ve got the con.”

Promptly, the young Russian’s stood straight and chirped proudly. “Aye, aye, Keptin!”

Nodding at Khan and the two ensigns, Jim left the bridge, rode the lift down to deck 5, and walked
down the corridors. Then he rang Spock and Uhura’s door and waited.

More than half a minute had passed before the door slipped open to reveal Uhura – still in uniform, her eyes puffy, her nose sniffling. Jim quickly put a reassuring hand on her shoulder and winced inwardly as he felt the wetness there. Spock’s tears; no doubt.

“I’m sorry to disturb you two,” he said quietly, “but I think there’s something wrong with Styles’ report. I need your help sorting things out. Both of you.”

He saw movement in the attached, dimly lit room Spock used to meditate, and then his gaze found his friend. The Vulcan wore Starfleet black now. He had dark green rings around his eyes, and he was so pale, but he seemed to be perfectly calm – a mask. Jim knew him well enough. He sensed the turmoil and anguish in his Vulcan friend. He’d seen it before, but he’d never felt it – not like this and he hoped he wouldn’t again. He’d much rather the comfortable feeling of his brother in the back of his mind. He remembered that he had felt Spock’s arrival at 6-S several days ago even before the Vulcan stepped on the bridge and he remembered the comfort he felt knowing those he loved most were nearby. He gave little thought to the fact that he felt Spock so far away – before they were even in the same room. He was snapped from his thoughts as he felt his T’hy’la fight for control when he saw Kirk. Kirk grieved for him and felt grief. It was a peculiar dichotomy. His mind drifted again. Why was Spock felt so acutely now – was it the degree of the Vulcan’s pain? Was it his new bond with Khan? He would ask Nien later about it.

“Spock,” he said gently, slipping behind Uhura. Instantly, the heat of the room hit him with force, but he didn’t show it. It was obvious why the temperature was so high. The grieving Vulcan needed the comfort of his lost home. Stepping close to his first officer but just outside of his personal space, Jim took a deep breath. “I’m really sorry that I have to be here, but…”

“There is no need to apologize, Jim,” Spock said; he clasped his hands behind his back looking at his captain and friend. “The fleet is on red alert, and the ship has been badly damaged. Usually, my place at this time is on the bridge. That you have allowed me time to meditate during my shift is generous of you.”

Kirk shook his head. “Your shift's been over for two hours, and there are so many volunteers working outside of their hours, I think they’re stepping on each other’s feet. So there is no need for you to be anywhere but right here, especially now.” He suppressed his impulse to touch the Vulcan with a comforting gesture he would have given a human friend. And he also swallowed the urge to ask Spock how he was doing. That his T’hy’la was mourning was obvious despite his stoic features. “I need your help.” He looked over his shoulders. “And yours, Uhura.” He watched the young woman nod and continued, “I got the records of the Excalibur, and there are a few details that make me suspicious. I asked Scotty and Nien to join us in a few minutes. I need Scotty for the tech stuff, and I need yours and Nien's mind. You both are logical and have perceptions and experience that I don't. I need it now, and I've never been so grateful for that – at least, I've never told you so. I hope
you know that I am.”

Spock lifted a brow while Uhura sighed something that sounded very much like ‘Prince Charming’. Then Nyota turned around. “I’ll make some tea,” she said, giving the two friends time alone.

Kirk looked to the Vulcan, but before he could speak, Spock murmured quietly, “I am well enough, Jim; do not be concerned.”

“Bullshit!” the young captain deadpanned. “I don’t have to be a telepath to know you are definitely not ‘well enough’, and that’s a good thing.”

The first officer cocked his head. “How so?”

“Because a wound has to bleed to heal properly. If you ignore it or suppress something this big for too long, it'll burn you up. I know, I've been there – and so have you. All the frustration, the fear, the sorrow – it becomes anger, and it makes you reckless. I would seek out physical pain to block the mental pain back before I attended the Academy. I didn't know what it was then. But after I let it out, after I shared it with someone who cared – Bones, then with you and now with Nien, I was able to make peace with myself – all of it, and understand what was going on.” This time, he reached out and stroked Spock's arm to comfort his soul-brother. “Accept that you’re grieving, give into it – alone or with Nyota; then you can heal.”

Spock had listened intently. He knew that Jim meant well, yet his friend wasn’t familiar with Vulcan ways.

Something must have given his thoughts away because Jim added under his breath, “And don’t try to hide behind your Vulcan wall of logic, Spock. Grief is logical when losing someone dear. Grief allows processing. I thought that’s what meditation was about too. And, you’re half human. Give this half the chance to do what it must.”

Lowering his gaze, Spock nodded slowly, realizing the truth in his friend’s comforting words. “I understand your perspective, Jim, and... And I appreciate your concern. I am still not used to receiving so much compassion and concern, yet... I am grateful that humans take the time to express the sentiment.”

Jim smiled. “There you go.” He put one hand on Spock’s shoulder. “Just don’t forget, you’re not alone! You have Uhura, but you also have me. You are my brother. You mean the world to us and
we’re here for you, not matter what. The same goes for Bones and Scotty. They're a bit like you, I
think.” He grinned as he received an almost offended glare from his T’hy’la, and he explained,
“They hide their sympathy and friendship behind a lot of grumbling, and in Bone’s case even
taxunting, but both had a fit when they heard about your loss. They’re with you, too – ready to get the
bastards who killed… Well, who…” Kirk didn’t want to say it, but Spock understood.

Feeling something stir in his chest and mind, he mirrored Jim’s gesture by placing a hand on the

Then the buzzer sounded, and the two friends stepped away from each other. “Enter!” Spock called,
and the door slipped open to reveal Scott and Khan. Both stepped in; Spock, Jim, and Uhura noticed
the curious glances both men threw around. The furniture was of officers’ standard with Vulcan and
African touches. Artifacts and instruments had their place in here and together, like the pair
themselves, they held a unique yet undeniable beauty.

Then Montgomery headed straight to the Vulcan; his clear eyes shone with compassion. “Mr. Spock,
Jim told me what happened ter yer father. I’m very sorry ter hear! My condolences. If there is
somethin’ I can do fer ye, just let me know, aye?”

The first officer lowered his head. “Thank you, Mr. Scott. Your condolences are welcome.”

Khan glanced at the alien man who had been an enemy once. But the men have forced themselves to
come to terms with each other for the benefit of the young man that was both their brother and
beloved. And the three have shown themselves to be a remarkable team in times of recent crisis.
Sympathy was not only a question of civility; it was necessary to overcome the last of the distrust
between Spock and Khan.

Following the chief engineer, the Augment walked to the Vulcan, too. “Mr. Spock,” he said calmly
and returned the firm glance of the first officer. It didn’t slip his attentions that the whites of Spock’s
eyes were bloodshot – faintly tinted green, Khan realized. Vulcans had emotions that ran very deep,
yet they not only controlled those emotions, they hid them! He questioned the logic of it as he
remembered the vicious intensity of Spock’s anger a year ago. Has it only been a year? For a man
who had slept three hundred years, last year seemed a lifetime ago.

Khan chose his words carefully; the former dictator reaching for his diplomacy. “I never had parents
in the common sense, yet I know what it is to lose family. The highest walls we built around
ourselves to shield us from harm cannot prevent the pain comes with such a blow. And so I
understand what your father’s death means to you – especially in the face of your recent losses.
Please accept my sincere condolences.”
For several seconds, Spock only stared at him, and then he realized that the super-human’s statement was honest, and he bowed his head. “Thank you, Mr. Singh,” he replied. He rose his head and their eyes locked. Their expression lacked its usual stoniness toward one another, and Nien felt a wave of relief from his mate. He knew that Jim had acknowledged this small peace offering the Augment had made.

“Right,” Kirk said softly. “As much as I hate to bring up business, time is against us.” He looked at Spock. “May I use your terminal?”

“Of course, Captain,” the Vulcan nodded, gesturing towards his desk.

Jim sat down, and the others gathered around him. “I’m sure I don’t have to point out that this little meeting never happened. Only Uhura and I have any knowledge of the contents of what I’m about to show you. If I’m right about this… That’s why I’m here, for a sanity check – then Uhura and I need to contact Bob, but in private.”

He put the media into the slot and activated it. Silently, they watched the footage of the Excalibur’s recordings. They saw the Klingons appear. Jim ordered, “Computer stop! Back ten seconds – stop!”

The screen showed a bird-of-prey, J’Ethl clearly seen on the throat of the bird. But the vessel was… wrong! “That’s is a D4 bird-of-prey!” Jim said. “And Kor’s ship is a D6! I checked myself!” Quickly, he obtained the records they had made several hours ago which showed the Klingon flagship.

“A D6!” Scott confirmed while Kirk ordered the records from Turkana from the data banks showing the same ship.

“There is the proof!” Jim’s fist landed on the desk top. “We spoke with the real Kor; that other bastard was a fake! But that’s not all. I compared the launching of the shuttles to the timing of Styles’ distraction maneuver. He tried occupying the Klingons after the hangar opened and after the shuttles launched. Look here!”

He fast-forwarded the records and turned the image, then started the voce data recording. They heard the conversation of the Excalibur’s bridge crew was to hear and simultaneously watched the hanger open for shuttle departure. The video counter showed that Kirk was right.

“Mr. Wilson, prepare for evasive maneuvers. Mr. Kramer, I want a concentrated blast at the
“Klingons. I want the Excalibur firing with everything she has on my command.” Styles said. “Shuttle bay, ready the shuttles for launch!”

“Aye, sir!” another voice confirmed. “The men and women are all aboard!”

“Right.” A short pause.

“Sir, shuttle-bay doors are open,” they heard. “Shuttles are launching now.”

“Kramer, fire phaser bank 5.” Styles shouted.

“Sir? Phaser bank 5 is not fully functional.”

Again, a short silence, then, “That’s right, Mr. Kramer. The Klingons will think us done for, and when they make to follow the shuttles, we open fire with all we have. It'll take them by surprise.”

“Sir, the shuttles are gone,” someone informed Styles, who answered, “Right! Mr. Kramer, now!”

Jim paused the records and looked up at his friends. “There! That's what I mean. Styles reported to Bob that he sent the shuttles out the same moment he opened fire on the Klingons to distract them.” He pointed at the other part of the screen that showed the shuttle bay. “There! The hangar was already wide open. The shuttles had already launched and were outside of the Excalibur when Styles fired on the Klingons.” He glanced up at Scotty. “How long do the hangar doors need to open completely?”

The Scotsman frowned. “Well, the Excalibur and the Enterprise are Constitution class ships, but the Excalibur is older and so is her technology. We need one minute and fourteen seconds at most to release the air pressure and switch off the gravity field; then the doors can open. The doors take fifty-eight seconds to open completely, and then guiding her out takes anywhere from fifteen to thirty seconds depending on the pilot. Double that last part for two shuttles so...”

“Three minutes and twelve seconds to complete the process, at best, Captain.”

“Thank ye, Spock, I coulda managed that bit a math,” Scott groaned.
“Alright gentlemen. What matters is the Klingons likely had a minute to watch the doors open and thirty seconds to a minute as the shuttles departed.” Jim looked from one to another. “Fuck – the Klingons had enough time to grab a coffee while they waited. What was he thinking?”

“So, Styles should have started the diversion away from the shuttles sooner,” Uhura mused. “And because he delayed it, the Klingons saw through it for what it was – an evacuation, and they attacked.”

“What I don’t get is the fact that Styles ordered an open fire from a depleted phaser bank,” Scotty murmured. “I know one of the bridge crew asked him about it and he said he wanted ter give the Klingons a false impression – pretend the Excalibur was weaker than she was, but it makes no sense.”

Khan nodded. “I know what you mean. If I want to mislead an enemy with a surprise attack, then I would hit him with all the capabilities at my disposal.” He pointed at the screen. “This Styles even said that, but he started the attack with his least effective weapon.”

“I have to agree with Mr. Singh,” Spock cut in. “This proceeding was highly illogical.”

“And this isn’t the only ‘illogical’ decision Styles’ made,” Kirk growled. “He made cadet mistakes, but he’s been out of the Academy for five years for crying out loud. And he’s got three years in space under his belt – as bridge officer! He’s knows strategy; he should’ve been – different! I’ll show you what I mean!”

He fast-forwarded the records again and stopped. “Here's the audio record from the bridge during the battle. Just listen!”

“Captain, the J’Ethl chases the shuttles,” a voice said.

“Mr. Kramer, fire with everything we have! Mr. Wilson, ready for turning the ship. We have to protect the shuttles.”

“Shields at nine percent; the phaser banks are empty. Torpedo shaft 4 is the only one functioning, and we've got more hull breaches!” Lieutenant Li reported. “Sir, there is also…”
“Were you able to send the message to HQ?”

“They're still blocking the frequencies.”

“Right, Commander,” he addressed the science officer. “Ready to deploy message buoy. Course, Earth. All energy to the starboard deflectors, Mr. Wilson. Get under the Klingons and bank hard to starboard; then head for the shuttles. Maybe we can prevent…”

“Captain, they're firing on the shuttles!”

“Can we see it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“One of the shuttles has been destroyed!” someone yelled.

“Incoming!” another officer warned.

Jim stopped the audio again and looked up. “Styles received information that the fake Kor was after the shuttles, but he asked if the message to Command had been sent. This message, regarding the assault, is more important to him than the survival of the evacuees. And another thing, one of his officers reported that they were out of munitions. At the beginning of the diversion, just two minutes ago, they had still four fully operational phaser banks and torpedoes left. In other words, he's saying they shot all they had in that short amount of time. It must have been a serious light show out there. And yet the three Klingon vessels were not destroyed – hell, they got out with barely a scratch. Otherwise they wouldn't have been able to chase Excalibur. They were hit, right, but not seriously despite the fire power that a Constitution class ship has. A first-year cadet couldn't screw it up that badly!”

“You think they missed the target on purpose,” Khan brought Jim’s train of thought to a point, and the young captain nodded.

“There is no other explanation! If I had to distract three hostile vessels from chasing down two of our shuttles, I not only would have opened fire before the shuttles left the ship, I would have ordered my helmsman and navigator to target the enemy before I even opened the damn shuttle bay doors. I would have hit one or two ships so that they wouldn't have a chance at the shuttles. Styles did no
such thing."

“You assume that he attacked the Klingons, but did so with the intent to cause minimal damage,” Spock said slowly, crossing his arms in front of his chest. “I take it you know what you are implying, Jim!?”

Kirk nodded grimly. “Yeah, I do. I don’t want to accuse Styles too quickly, but this all… It’s more than weird; it’s too much to be a coincidence!”

“And why didn’t he send torpedoes after the Klingon?” Scott wondered. “If you can see ’em you can target ’em. Even if you couldn't, he could’ve set the torpedoes on a course to follow ’em or their emissions signature. That would’ve kept the Klingons busy enough so that the shuttle could make it to the moon.”

Jim stared at him wide-eyed. “You’re right, Scotty. I didn't see that before.” He shook his head. “But I found something else, too. See if you see what I see.” He ordered the computer to continue the records.

“Sir, we don't stand a chance against them – not in the condition the ship's in.”

“The second shuttle!” Fury sounded in Styles’ voice.

“They are as good as dead. If we go back, the two D4-cruisers will follow us and that will be the end of the shuttle – and us, when the Klingons have three vessels again. If we don't go back, the second shuttle will be lost. Sir, as much as it pains me, we’ve got to run – return to the Federation and to inform Headquarters about what happened here. We…”

“Sir, the last shuttle reached Yaska and…” Kirk heard an audible gasp. “I lost the signal, sir. Captain, it’s destroyed. It has to be. I’m sorry, sir.”

“Wilson, set course for the Federation. Quickest way out of Borderland, maximum warp.”

“Aye, sir!”
“Lieutenant Li, record for the ship’s log: Evacuation shuttle destroyed, star-date 2059.11.23-1340.5. Lost signal of second evacuation shuttle. Mission canceled to return to Federation space.”

The engines in the background howled, clearly indicating the amount of damage that the *Excalibur* had sustained.

“Are they following us?” Styles voice again.

“Yeah, but we’re not being targeted. Obviously they can’t while they’re at warp. The D4’s are old. The tech just wasn’t there yet.”

“Well, at least we have that! Is there a signal from the second shuttle?”

“No, sir, we last heard from them over two minutes ago as they were entering Yaska’s atmosphere. The sensors aren’t reading her now.”


“Klingon vessels that old can’t fire during warp, so why did they follow the *Excalibur* at all?” Scott asked no one in particular.

“Yes, and why did Styles wait so long to ask about a signal from the second shuttle? They warped two minutes before he asked. Of course there’d be no signal. They were too far away from Yaska. Even if the second shuttle made it, they’d never know that way. Besides, Yaska’s atmosphere causes static interference because of its magnet field!” Uhura said. She chewed her lip in thought.

“It’s as if he wanted ter make sure that everyone knew how concerned he was about the shuttle and that he tried everythin’ he could ter save the evacuees,” Scotty pondered.

Jim nodded slowly, liking this less and less with each passing second. If he thought something was off before – his crew convinced him of it now.

Khan frowned; he rose to speak his mind on the matter. “As far as I understood, the *Excalibur* was
running out of power. Her shields were depleted; she was without missiles, and without the required energy in the phaser banks, yet she was still able to leave the area at warp?” He looked at Scott. “You have excellent hearing when it comes to those engines. What do you think she was doing?”

Montgomery tilted his head. “I could be mistaken but her engines sound like she was up ter warp 3 or 4.”

“At that speed it would have taken three or four hours to get back to Federation space.” Jim nodded. “For a near crippled ship, not bad, huh?”

“It seems the facts you were told and what we see here do not fit,” Nien summed up.

“My thoughts exactly,” Jim agreed.

“I think there's more,” Nyota thought aloud and bent over Kirk’s shoulder. “Captain, re-play the part where one of his officers told him that the second shuttle was destroyed.”

Doing as he was asked, Jim backed up the recording and again he and the others listened to the conversation on the bridge. Carefully they took in every exchange, and then Nyota looked up at her lover. “Do you see what's missing?”

Spock had lifted both brows. “The shuttle was still in sensor range when its signal was lost, yet Styles did not order a scan of the area where it likely impacted the moon.”

“Further,” the Augment mused. “This officer said ‘it had to be destroyed’, not ‘it has been destroyed’. Past perfect verb form, not present perfect. Its use seems to indicate the speaker is unsure of the certainty of his statement.”

“You think perhaps the second shuttle wasn't destroyed?” Scott asked aghast. “But – that would mean that Styles let them down – delivered them to the Klingons.”

“On the other hand, the third Klingon ship went after the Excalibur with the two others. If the Klingons wanted the evacuees dead, which is most likely, then they would have gone to the surface to finish off any survivors,” Khan suggested.
“Or they wanted the Excalibur out of the area. If there were survivors, the Klingons would have plenty of time to finish them off as you said – or take hostages. Maybe that was their intention from the beginning,” Scotty mused.

“Well they did destroy one of the shuttles, so I don’t think they wanted hostages,” Uhura murmured.

“The first shuttle was destroyed; we know that,” Jim began to voice his own thoughts. “The second one was damaged – perhaps too badly to make it through the atmosphere. But shuttle shields are strong, and its power can be boosted as needed in certain sections. Admiral Barnett started his carrier as a pilot. Admiral Nogura was an engineer; they both would’ve known that. Barnett might’ve been able to put that shuttle safely down. So what are the chances that he did and that there are survivors?” He looked at the Vulcan. “Spock?”

“18.5294 percent, Captain.” came the instantly reply.

Scotty glanced at him, his expression soft. “Spock,” he addressed the Vulcan as a friend, “I know that hope is the last thing we want to leave us, but…”

“This has nothing to do with hope, Mr. Scott. We do not know which shuttle transported my father which places his chance of survival at 4.8367 percent. That is not hope – an illogical emotion; it is fact. My assumption that perhaps the second shuttle wasn’t destroyed in the atmosphere results in the lack of Captain Style’s examination and his science officer’s uncertain statement regarding the shuttle’s status.”

The chief engineer sighed. “Even if there was the slightest, tiniest, chance that the shuttle made it through the atmosphere, she certainly wasn’t maneuverable anymore. The crash that would have followed…” He didn’t finish the sentence and made a vague gesture with his hand; his gaze filled with regret as he looked at Spock.

Jim pursed his lips, pondering everything he heard within the last minutes. Spock was right; there was no real proof that the vessel had been destroyed.

Jim propped his chin in his hand. ‘Still some hope is left!’ he thought; the infamous Kirk stubborn streak was alive and well. If there was any chance at all that those passengers survived and the Klingons decided not to check, then he would move heaven and earth – he’d walk through hell and smile to find and recover them. Maybe, if fate wasn’t too cruel, Sarek would be there; he'd be okay. More wishes – not logic. Logic said four percent; Spock said four percent. But Spock and Jim worked because they were different – complements. And Jim lived in that four percent – the improbable. He wanted it now – prayed for it and for his T’hy’la, who was always loyal; always by his side. He's suffered more than his share in this life. Jim was not about to allow the universe and fate inflict more anguish on his friend! Not if he could prevent it.
He knew that he couldn’t enter Borderland without Command’s permission, and they would never allow such a suicidal mission – even with evidence that the admirals and delegation were still alive. Jim would do it, but ignoring orders based on speculation and four percent would certainly cost him his command this time. On the other hand, if Sarek…

Jim’s thoughts were interrupted when he felt a gentle pull on the bond he shared with Nien, and he looked up in those pale green-blue eyes. His beloved was up to something; he could tell. “What?” he asked.

“Mr. Spock said that there is a chance that there are survivors from the second shuttle.”

Jim snorted bitterly. “Yeah, but at the moment I can’t see a way of getting to them without having, not only the Klingons and the Orions, but also Command calling for my head. You know how it goes – no order for a mission, no mission.”

Khan cocked his head. “Who says that the Enterprise has to go? A Starfleet vessel – her flagship – would draw far too much attention. But a neutral vessel – a private one might have success.”

Jim leaned back, frowning. “What do you mean?”

His piercing gaze was still fixed on the former dictator who lifted both brows in a wordless suggestion. Kirk got the hint. “The Shadow?” he blurted out. Khan nodded with a smile.

“The last time we talked, Galven told me that he wants to use the ceasefire to gather information about his brother; he was abducted. I am almost certain that he and the others are roaming through Borderland right now with the help of the SDD. Perhaps they could be persuaded to make a side trip to Yaraka’s moon to search for the shuttle – or its remains.”

For several seconds, the captain could only stare at his lover; then a smile broadened on his face. “Nien, you’re a genius!”

“I know,” came the wry answer. The response made the others chuckle – except for Spock. For a moment the mood lifted, and then the melancholy settled in again.
“Can you reach Galven?” the Augment addressed Uhura. “We changed the frequency last time we spoke; I will give it to you.”

The young Bantu woman looked at him for the first time without suspicion. Quite the opposite. She almost beamed at him, happy at even the slim chance that might not have mourn at all. And if The Shadow could get there, perhaps his chances would increase. “With pleasure!” she answered.

At her side, Spock was the picture of calm, but Kirk thought he could see something – determination and hope. He shot a grin at the Vulcan.

“And what about the mess in front of us, Jim? Ye certainly canna contact the commodore and throw this at 'im as it is,” Scott said.

“No, I know that,” the captain confirmed. “We need to be careful now because I don’t think that Styles acted alone. This will be investigated by the admirals that are left. Oh God that sucks to say – and they're smart. But if Styles has help from one of them, and I'm not counting that out – I don't think he would've done it otherwise – we're in a bad way. Maybe he had orders.”

“Orders?” Uhura glanced with big eyes at him. “You mean he had orders to get rid of the delegation and the admirals? Why? How? Klingons attacked the Excalibur! Show me a Klingon who would accept orders from Starfleet!”

Jim lifted both hands. “I know, I know it sounds crazy. Styles may be an arrogant bastard, but I don't think he's – well, stupid. And I don't think he'd pull something like this on his own. The question is, why would he do it? Or better yet – who or what does he think is worth risking his career and his freedom for. What is worth killing for?"

“I know what you think – Section 31,” Nyota said and fixed her captain and friend with a firm glance. “You’re obsessed with them still, Jim, don’t you see that?”

“Yeah, well who else would want this? This attack is poised to end the peace talks before they even start. Who wanted the war in the first place?”

“Marcus wanted the war to strengthen his position and turn Starfleet into a military organization. But Marcus is dead and…”
“And Section 31 still has its sympathizers. What happened to Nien this year is proof as are those two assholes who allowed the abuse at the lab – a lab that doesn’t officially exist!”

“Alright, I understand. But Scotty's right, you need more than we have here when you go to Wesley,” Uhura replied, showing once more her brilliance. “You need ironclad evidence if you want Wesley to listen and then do anything about it. If – and this is a really big ‘if’ – we’re dealing with Section 31 here, then you’re going up against an organization that has infiltrated Command, politicians, maybe even the Federation Council. If Section 31 still exists and is powerful enough to do something like this –“ her finger pointed at the screen “– then you're going to need all the help you can get. You need irrefutable evidence get Wesley on your side – our side. Without him – without that – if it is Section 31 and they find out, he and we are in danger.”

Silence spread through the quarters; Jim looked thoughtfully at his comms officer and friend. It was Khan who broke the quiet.

“She is right!” he said calmly and met his mate’s asking glance. “I agree with you that Styles cannot be working alone. If his actions were a ruse, then must be in league with others. And if it is Section 31 then we must be on our guard. If they have the slightest suspicion that it's you who figured them out, then you and your crew are in danger. Wesley and his crew too. If you are going public with this, you need more than conjecture. What we have is good, but it is not conclusive, and it could be altered. Consider London and my so-called mass murder. You will need protection. And you are going to need powerful people who will listen to you and believe you. We need evidence before we act or your ship and your crew – their lives will be put in jeopardy by their own people.” He took a deep breath. “I believe, though, it would not be the first time, correct?”

Jim had listened very closely – to Uhura and Nien. And he didn’t need to look at Spock or Scotty to know that they shared the opinion. And he did too. They needed evidence before they could act. And they needed Wesley’s support – again. That much was certain.

“Right!” he said slowly. “You two have a point, I’m not denying that. We have to do something, and we have to do it fast. We’re running out of time. If the ceasefire is called off by the Federation when the official Klingon government isn’t at fault… Well, they’ll be offended for the next two centuries, and we’ll be at war with them for at least that long. I don’t want to take this risk.”

Spock lifted a brow. “When the commodore informs Command that Styles has been misled by his Klingon attacker – that Commander Kor came to our aid during that time. The discrepancies will have to be investigated before the Council can come to a decision. Such things need time, yet given the importance of the circumstances and the urgency regarding the upcoming peace talks… I calculate that it will take approximately three days. In this time, we must find the actors in the background and reveal them.” His dark eyes found Kirk’s bright ones. “Do you think this is feasible, Captain?”
Jim grinned. “Bet on it, Spock!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, of course Jim, Nien, Spock and Co. had to realize that something was very wrong with Styles' first mission – at least from the point of view of the ‘good guys’. And once again they all built a brilliant team – Section 31 be careful, they are on your heels! And who thought that I really would let Sarek die has been thoroughly wrong. Of course I couldn’t let one of the most important secondary characters of the ST-universe die (and give Spock more anguish, even if his heartache gave me a good possibility to add some sentiments into the story). But he and the others aren’t out of danger and this whole situation will lead to a lot of more trouble.

In the next chapter you’ll learn more of the spy aboard, while Riley gets another good scene. And there will be new more trouble.

I hope you liked the new chapter and I’m really looking forward to get some reactions from you.

Have a nice rest of the Sunday and a good start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Spies

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

And again I can only say how sorry I am that the next update needed even more time than before. By dear beta-reader Rhiannon was sick for more than two weeks and runs out of time now before Christmas. But, at least, there is the next chapter now. I can promise you some sweet scenes, some things that may elicit your anger (with Section 31, not with me), some action – and in the end another mean cliff-hanger.

Thank you so much for still keeping up with this story, for the comments and the kudos.

Have fun,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 50 – Spies

Wesley looked at Jim from the screen at Spock’s terminal and rubbed his face. “I’d say that’s pretty ironclad evidence that it was Kor who saved your ass, and with it the ceasefire. So the bastard who hit the Excalibur is some kind of renegade most likely. The question is why did the unknown Klingon pretend to be Kor? Why attack this particular ship obviously transitting peacefully?”

Jim, who had hailed Bob just minutes ago, told him as much as he dared to for now, and he pondered Wesley’s’ question. “When Kor took Turkana, he didn't kill; he wasn't cruel – no more so than usual. Kept his promises so far as I could see. Maybe he's made some enemies. They don't all think the Klingon Council is doing the right thing coming to the table. He is responsible for Borderland – and therefore also for the Excalibur. If he went against his Admiralty and the Klingon Council – he'd be done for; it would end him. Whoever attacked the Excalibur wanted to kill two birds with one stone. It takes out Kor, and it effectively ends the ceasefire.”

Bob frowned. “You think there's going to be a coup attempt in the Empire, and whoever is masterminding that is trying to bring us into it?” He groaned. “Superb! What are we, pawns?”

“Only if we allow it,” Kirk said firmly. “Bob, inform Command and the Federation Council that the
assault wasn't sanctioned by the Klingons. It's internal, and we will continue to honor the ceasefire while they investigate. That will buy us time to do some investigating of our own.”

This time, the Commodore lifted both brows. “Investigate what exactly, Jim? Styles was duped, and some coward asshole used Kor’s name keep the war going. This is…”

“Bob, I don’t think this Klingon, whoever he is, is working on his own. This is the start of something very big. And the way it all went – with the Excalibur and the Klingons… It was just - odd.”

That got Wesley’s full attention. “What do you mean, Jim? If we're on the subject of 'odd', there are some ‘odd’, details in your report. The Enterprise was able to restore a part of her main power using the torpedo drives? And the play with the asteroids to take out the second Klingon ship? Jim, this sounds a lot like someone we both know. You left him out of your report even though he was involved.”

Kirk’s face was pure innocence. “You saying you don't think I could pull that off, Bob?”

“Dammit, Jim, do I have to say it or are you going to admit that he was part of the fight?”

Jim flushed, and Bob threw his hands up. “So much for keeping him on the down low! Don’t tell me he was on the bridge too.”

“He was – to help Allistor install the new connections with the SDD. He saw the flickering on the screen so that we could ready battle stations just before those bastards attacked us. Sulu was injured, almost died when his side of the helm exploded. Nien took his place and steered us away from near collision with an asteroid.”

“Don't tell me anymore, Jim!” Bob interrupted him and rubbed his tired eyes. “Hell, Jim, your report has a few holes, but the important stuff is there. As soon as Command investigates the incident more closely, though, you'll be under pressure to offer some explanation for them.” He sighed deeply. “So, ‘Nien’ saved the day again?”

“Well, we built a damn good team,” Jim admitted with a smile and Bob groaned. “And a team is what we need to bring light in this darkness the assault on the Excalibur left behind,” Kirk added, bending forward. “There is something going on here – something that involves the Klingons partly, but us too, I think,” he said quietly, coming back to the topic.
Wesley frowned again. “What do you mean with ‘us’?”

Jim crossed his arms in front of his chest. “First Captain Heldrom and his first officer have a traffic accident that prevents them from taking command of their ship, and a new captain is rushed into the chair. Then they were attacked in Borderland by someone who isn’t who he pretended to be. Styles evacs the delegation and the admirals at the worst possible time and that led to their death. Don’t get me wrong here, I'm not accusing Styles of anything, yet, but this mess is leaving a bad taste in my mouth.”

“Meaning?” the staff officer prompted carefully.

Again Kirk pursed his lips. He wanted to say what he was thinking – that maybe Section 31 had its dirty hands in the game again – yet he knew better than to voice his assumption or anything else he and the others had found out. “Well, I don’t know. The chain of events is weird, that’s all.” He looked pointedly at his superior, who only frowned harder. Wesley couldn’t or didn’t want to understand him. And it was too risky to voice his thoughts via transmission. What was the old saying? The enemy is always listening?

Jim sighed. “But I think if someone can figure out what’s going on here, it’s you – and Command.” He caught the baffled expression on Wesley’s face and for a moment he pondered if he really should go for it – ask for a meeting. It could backfire, but Jim Kirk was not known for avoiding risk. And so he made up his mind. “Bob, how far away you are?”

Again Wesley didn’t know what to make of his protégés, and so he slowly replied, “We are between Risa and Rigel. Why?”

Kirk put on his time-tested look of contrite innocence. “Well, we took some serious hits; we need help. The shipyard at Risa informed us that they didn't have all the parts we needed since they did that work for us after the battle at Aldebaran. Maybe you can help us out?”

Instinctively Bob realized that this was a half-truth. Why did Jim need an excuse to talk privately? What was going on here? One look at his protégé told him that he was right. Kirk had something to say, and a sub-space transmission wasn't secure enough. What, for God’s sake, was the boy up this time? On the other hand, Wesley knew that Jim didn't get worked up for nothing. For Jim to want a private meeting that would take over a day to get to was serious. But one thing about the younger man was true – he always knew when something wasn’t right.

“I could alter our course to rendezvous with you. If the ceasefire is over, we need every ship ready – especially our flagship. So it’s important that you're battle-ready as soon as possible.”
Jim smiled gratefully. “Thanks, Bob. When can we meet?”

“One moment!” Bob turned to the side and activated his intercom; Jim saw that he was in his quarters. He talked quickly with his first officer, then turned his attention to the screen again. “Rendezvous in approximately fifty-three hours.”

“Great!” Kirk beamed at him. “I’ll have my navigator contact yours to set a course.”

“All right,” Bob nodded; then he cocked his head again. “Jim,” he began slowly. “Is there something you want to tell me?”

“No, not... You have my report, and I gave you the real Kor. Everything else has to be investigated.” And Wesley saw that look that told him Jim was, indeed, up to more, but he couldn’t speak openly now.

“Right. I’ll inform Command about the discrepancies and that our delegation and the admirals may have been killed by renegades rather than a Klingon conspiracy. President Robertson is a reasonable man. He will consider this new information before he makes his next move. You could learn a thing or two from him.” Now it was Bob who eyed Kirk, who was wise to just nod.

“Okay. Good night, Bob.”

“Ha, as if I could get any sleep with this mess! Night, Jim!” With a final nod, he cut the link, and Jim let out his held breath.

Nyota glared at him. “So, the space dock at Risa ran out of parts? I somehow managed to miss that message.”

Jim grinned at her. “Uhura, I’m sure you can get a hold of them and confirm that.” He batted his eyes at her, and the young Bantu woman threw up her hands.

“You’re impossible, Jim, do you know that?”
“Yes,” he answered with the wide-eyed, almost sweet expression of a little boy begging for candy. Growling in frustration, she turned around, saw Khan’s amused face, and flipped a thumb over her shoulder. “How do you put up with him?” she asked bluntly.

“Since I am – better, I am able to tolerate and resolve nearly any challenge presented in the manner of my choosing,” he added wryly, “Nearly. The captain challenges me where I fall short. At one time I thought that area a weakness. Jim has taught me otherwise, I find I no longer wish to ‘fall short’ as it were. There is more to me, and he knows how to find it, and so I put up with him. And will continue to do so as long as he will have me. In turn I believe I am of benefit to him which benefits you, does it not?”

“I suppose it does,” she said thoughtfully, impressed with his answer.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Love you too, honey!” he commented dryly.

An equally dry, “I know!” followed.

Spock felt the highly illogical and very human urge to grimace, yet he controlled himself, while beside him, Scott stared at his captain and the Augment, before he chuckled. “Just look. Teasing each other like love-birds do – and this after their rough start.” He shook his head. “Universe and its mysteries – they never cease to amaze me.”

“And this from someone who wants to feed the Klingons to an old legend lake monster,” Jim snickered, then he turned serious again. “Right, we’ve got fifty hours to get real proof that Styles is playing a seriously dirty game, and that there is even more of Starfleet involved!”

“Or the Klingons have rebels in their own lines,” Uhura said, looking firmly at him. “Don’t fixate too much on Section 31, Jim! You need to stay neutral. That'll get results, but you have to be open to all possibilities.”

“Yes, Mom,” Jim sighed, and he hailed the bridge. Ensign Miller was at the comms station; he quickly connected the captain with the commander of the space docks at Risa. Jim managed to talk the poor Commander in circles until he confirmed that the many repairs done on Starfleet vessels after the battle for Aldebaran had depleted the stores of repair parts.

“That went better than I thought it would,” Kirk smiled. “And now we need to reach Galven.”

Uhura groaned and walked to the door. “I’ll inform you as soon as I have him or one of his people on
the line.” She vanished and Jim took a seat together with Nien, Spock and Scotty in the living area; all four men discussed how they would continue.

It wasn’t long before Uhura hailed them and patched Galven through. To their surprise, the gang was not in Borderland. Or they had been, but then they met some Orions by accident and the pirates attacked them. The militia ships were well-known among the outlaws and their Klingon allies. Galven and Ritek barely made it into Federation space before the two pirate vessels and three birds-of-prey could atomize them. Now they were heading back to Aldebaran. Diego would have his work cut out for him when they arrived.

Galven promised to keep his ears open and he’d borrow one of Diego’s ships to check on Yaska as soon as possible. If they could install the SDD aboard one of the Chilean’s vessels, they would return to Borderland and look for the downed shuttle. Galven and Ritek promised them – after both groused and cursed the ‘two-faced Klingons’, accompanied by ‘we told you so.’

It wasn’t much – but it could mean everything. The Shadow would need two days likely to get to Yaska. By then any rescue might only serve to recover the dead. At least Jim would have the feeling that he had done something, and a miracle wasn’t so out there. He was due one – so was Spock. On the other hand, Kirk was, despite his optimism, a realist. He knew that the chances were low. Yet one look at the normally expressionless face of his Vulcan friend and he knew that wouldn’t stop until he knew for sure. He would do everything to help Spock find his father – alive or not.

Afterwards, Jim and Khan left Spock’s and Uhura’s quarters to go to their own – Jim’s. They met a few crew members in the corridor; Jim tried to lift the mood, offering comfort. He sighed in relief as the door of his quarters closed behind him and Nien.

Without hesitation, the Augment went to the replicator and ordered a light meal for each of them, cutting off Jim’s protest with a firm “You have to eat to regain your strength. And before you deny it, you are exhausted – bodily and mentally. Do not try to tell me otherwise.”

Kirk rolled his eyes. “You’re worse than Bones!”

“This I’m taking as a compliment.” He placed the first tray in front of Jim at the table and got his own, before he sat down. For a short while, they ate in silence, and then Kirk couldn’t help but return to the most important topic at hand.

“What do you think about all this?” he asked quietly, and the Augment took a very deep breath.
“The truth? Someone is indeed playing most foul, but we do not yet know the game. We still need to know that much before you confront your superiors. You’re going to have a hard time convincing Wesley of your theories, not to mention Starfleet Command. And that bears its own risk, because if you are correct, and Section 31 is involved, your life is in danger – yours and your friends.” He watched Jim nod slowly and cocked his head. “How well do you know this Styles?”

Kirk scoffed. “We shared some classes, but not many, because he was two years ahead of me. Some command officer training lectures. I saw him in the auditorium when I was promoted to captain of the Enterprise, and he was still only a lieutenant commander. First of all, he is an arrogant asshole who thinks the whole world’s been waiting for him, and that Starfleet and the Federation would fall apart if it weren’t for him. Second, when I got the Enterprise, I thought the anger was going to rip him apart. I heard from some classmates who were on Enterprise – after Nero, that Styles had hoped to get her.” He shrugged.

“In other words, Wesley was right when he said you two are rivals.”

Jim sighed. “Not really. I mean we have nothing to do with each other. The dislike is mutual, but it’s not so much a rivalry. He comes from a pretty renowned family – long military history and all that, and …”

“And you are a farm boy from Iowa…”

“Hey!”

“… who dared to save the day over and again, while he tries to garner a modicum of respect, climbing the ladder behind you – in your shadow.” Khan chuckled quietly. “It rather sounds like envy to me.”

“Maybe,” Jim admitted. “But I don’t think it has anything to do with the attack on the Excalibur.” He stopped as the doorbell chimed, and frowning he called, “Enter!”

Bones stepped in, carrying a bottle of brandy. “If Muhammad doesn’t come to the mountain, the mountain must come to Muhammad – if you don’t come to medbay, then I’m comin’ to you.” He glanced at the two lovers. “Bon appetite, gentlemen, don’t worry about me.” He put the bottle on the table. “Don’t get up, Jim, I know where the glasses are.”

Kirk continued to eat. “What’s up, Bones?” he wanted to know, as McCoy returned with three
“Funny, that's exactly what I wanted to ask you. The corridors are rife with rumors about what happened to the *Excalibur* – Klingons, the whole bit. And you told me two hours ago that Sarek is dead. You said you'd come and explain everything. Did I just happen to miss your visit?”

Kirk folded his napkin. “No. It's gonna take a while, Bones.”

The CMO shrugged. “I've got time now. Geoffrey's in charge. All my patients are well-cared for and can do without me for a while.” He poured three fingers in each of the glasses and offered one to Kirk and one to Khan. “So, go on!”

“Fine,” Jim grumbled. “But you’re not going to like this!” he warned his friend, who lifted both brows.

“I had a feeling you'd say that,” he deadpanned; he sat down and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

His eyes widened, as Jim filled him in.

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Suppressing a yawn, Kevin Riley strolled down the corridor towards his quarters. He felt tired – exhausted even. His first time on the main bridge – and it had to be in the middle of a battle. What a start! He had always known that he'd chosen a job that could be dangerous – and more so since Nero, but he didn't hesitate to join. Still war up close – no one got over that very quickly, especially someone with Riley’s past. Kevin wondered how Jim put up with it all. His captain and friend seemed so strong – was so strong, so self-confident during the crisis; it made the young Irishman admire his superior even more.

And he was proud of himself – that Jim had trusted him with the *Enterprise*. It had been the first time that he navigated a starship – the flagship! Yet Kevin had reacted and worked as if he was born to it. Maybe because he didn't have time to think linearly, analytically. He was thrown into the deep end of the pool, and forced to react as though his life depended on it – it did. And he did exactly as he had been trained to do. Despite the danger and the horror around him, it had felt good to steer a spacecraft as large as the *Enterprise* through it all. Even damaged, she reacted to his touch – perhaps a bit sluggish due to her state. He felt the effort she made when the helm controls were switched to
his station, and the man at Mr. Sulu's station worked to repair her.

Kevin was interested in the man. He'd never really noticed him. Only after he met the dark haired male on the bridge did he become curious. He had to be a member of the engineering staff red coveralls and genius and all, yet Commander Spock’s protest as Jim wanted the other man as an official helmsman confused Kevin. That the man had been made a petty officer proved that he was a civilian – therefore the mysterious civilian who was working on the new tech. But why was the first officer so wary of the additional crewmember? This man, Nien Singh, was obviously well-known by the bridge crew and even familiar with Jim. So, why Spock’s protest? To recruit Singh was only logical.

Kevin stopped in the middle of the next step. Jim had said that Singh had been a ‘general’ in his time and that he had been made a commander under Marcus, the former Chief in Command who fell from grace, as far as Riley knew. What was the meaning of all this?

For a moment he pondered going to Jim to ask him, then he remembered that thought they were still friends, Jim was also his commanding officer. No one went to the captain unannounced, disturbing him late in the evening because of mere curiosity over something the captain ordered.

“Good evening, Kevin!”

Startled Riley whirled around and came face to face with Philip Nureaux.

“Lieutenant!” he gasped. “Jesus, you almost gave me a heart attack!”

Nureaux laughed quietly. “I’m sorry. Today – that sort of thing stays with you, doesn’t it?”

Kevin shrugged. “Well, I knew what I was getting into when I signed up. But a battle this soon... That was something!”

Philip nodded. “I know what you mean. The first time will haunt you for a while; I’m glad that we’ve got Captain Kirk for a CO. His reputation speaks for itself, and after seeing him in action today – I think we’ll be okay no matter what we come up against.” They continued their way. “And I heard you did a damn good job yourself. Congratulations! First time on the bridge and with that! Not easy, especially with the more experienced officers out of commission. I heard Lieutenant Sulu was injured?”

The young Irishman nodded. “Yeah, unfortunate to say the least. I didn't work much with him, but I
did with Ensign Chekov and he told me about Sulu. They are good friends and Sulu seems to be a
real nice guy.” He shook his head. “He was hurt when his console exploded.”

Nureaux sighed. “And right in the middle of the action. Good thing Mr. Singh was able to jump in.”

Kevin chuckled. “Yeah, he had the idea to divert energy from the available torpedo drives to get the
warp drive working again. And I heard he came up with the plan to use the asteroids like billiard
balls to damage the second Klingon ship.” He snorted in amusement, but also admiration. “And then
he got the helm console working again. The man is a genius, no doubt about it.”

‘You have no idea what kind of ‘genius’ this creature is,’ Philip thought, while he answered casually,
“Well, as far as I heard he’s a civilian working on some new tech here.” He looked with an
expression of youthful curiosity at Kevin. “Do you know what he’s tinkering with?”

“No, but there are some rumors that it was him who built the device that makes it impossible for a
ship to pick up a warp signature. It saved the ship during the Battle of Aldebaran, as I heard.”

“Oh yeah!” Nureaux agreed. “I’d love to talk to him about it. My specialty at the Academy was
Enhanced Sensor Technology. Maybe he can give me some advice for post-Academy work.”

“Why not? He seems pretty aloof, but not rude. Maybe if you ask him, he'd agree to help you with
your work.”

“Do you know where his quarters are?”

Kevin shook his head. “No, no clue. I only just met him today. But he seems to be a close friend of
the captain. They’re on a first-name basis, even on the bridge. Maybe he can tell you where it is.”

Philip beamed at him. “Good idea.” He stopped at the turn. “Have a good night, Kevin.”

“Thanks – the same to you, sir!” Riley smiled and watched the lieutenant walk towards his quarters.
Then Kevin continued his way; the short meeting with Nureaux confused him. As they traveled from
Earth to 6-S, the lieutenant had been distant and seemed to dislike any private conversations; now he
talked to him as if they had known each other for years and were good buddies.
'Odd guy – maybe he has moods,' the young Irishman shrugged inwardly before he stepped into his quarters, more than ready for a sonic-shower, dinner and then a long, decent sleep.

José Luengo stared at the message from the Lexington. It was late at night, and he and the other staff officers based on Earth were still at the hastily convened conference. During the much-needed break, they gathered their thoughts and chased exhaustion away with far too much coffee when the transmission from Commodore Wesley appeared on their terminals.

The cup of coffee nearly fell from Luengo's hand onto the desk; his widened eyes stared at the message in disbelief – a report from Commodore Wesley of the Lexington. And it wasn’t only Command that received the message, no, it was transferred and patched through to the desk of everyone in attendance. Unthinkable – the Commodore should not have a direct line to the president of the Federation. There were protocols for such things. For a moment Luengo didn’t know if the commodore had gone mad or just given to display the impropriety of a man playing above his station. Unfortunately, his anger didn't change the fact that beside him Robertson stared wide-eyed at the message; and now most of the Council was aware of it.

Luengo needed to change his plans; the decision to call off the ceasefire would be reversed. This much the admiral could tell.

Again, he listened closely to Wesley’s voice in his head-set. He took the news far less enthusiastically than the other ladies and gentlemen present around him – except for Norton.

The Excalibur hadn’t been attacked by Klingon Fleet Commander Kor, well-known to the admiralty and the Federation Council. The ship was attacked by unknown Klingons who only pretended to be led by the last descendant of the Klingon Emperor. The real Kor had been involved in a separate assault of a Starfleet ship, not as the aggressor but as benevolent aid! Kor had come to a Starfleet ship's aid to stop two rogue Klingon commanders.

And which ship had the honor of being saved by Kor more than two parsecs away from the place where the Excalibur was attacked? Of course the Enterprise! Who else would interfere with Luengo’s carefully considered plan, even if the whole thing was a coincidence? Kirk! Of all the captains to get mixed up in this!

Damn this boy-captain to hell and back! Not only did it have to be Kor who showed up in the middle of the fight between the Enterprise and the renegade Klingons. No, of course Kirk had to muddy up the waters and involve Wesley, who sounded far too relieved that the Klingons might have actually
kept their word and the ceasefire! One look around the room proved that most of the Council still at their terminals shared Wesley’s opinion; they must talk to the Klingons about the incident before Starfleet could take action.

The links in the chain of Luengo’s plan were about to come apart – because of Kirk! Because of the unbelievable luck of this infuriating farm boy!

It was time to get rid him once and for all!

His gaze found Norton, who hid his anger behind a tight expression, yet as they exchanged a glance, Albert pressed his lips together.

Other council members who had left the large conference table were called back for more discussions from their colleagues and the officers present. The president looked at Luengo. “Do I understand the commodore correctly? The *Excalibur* was attacked by another Klingon pretending to be Fleet Commander Kor?”

“Impossible! He's got to be mistaken. We all listened to Captain Styles’ report!” one of the council members called.

“But Kor came to the aid of the *Enterprise* more than two parsecs away! You heard Commodore Wesley! They compared the voice records, and Kirk identified the Klingon’s ship as a D6 – Kor’s ship. The one that attacked the *Excalibur* was a bird-of-prey and two old D4s. Not that I could tell them apart, but it’s obvious that the real Kor was in contact with the *Enterprise* while the assault on our delegation and admirals took place.”

“Or the whole thing is one big pretense make us think we’re safe,” the first man replied.

“And what about this new cloaking device the *Enterprise* was confronted with? It somehow cloaks the emissions of the Klingon vessels! Bad enough they are invisible!” The female Council members looked at the others. “This is a new level of danger for us.”

“Yes, however, we have a new defense – the SDD.” Cartwright threw in, earning him a confused glance from Luengo.

With that, the topic of the SDD came to the table, and staff officers and Council members were
relieved that Starfleet would have the new technology to protect her ships. This was the first time Luengo and Norton had heard of the sensor disturbing device, and both were baffled – especially José. Who of his employees had been sleeping on the job that the SBI missed this? He should have known about this device before it came to Cartwright’s attention, yet Jonathan was familiar with the thing long before the SBI and had already transferred the payment for the prototype and technical manuals to the unknown constructor.

Unbelievable – offensive even! He would have a whole staff researching the project as soon as he was back at HQ, and he would find out something about this mysterious designer who came up with the simple but brilliant idea to make Federation ships invisible to sensors.

Then the discussion of how to proceed continued. Most were of the opinion that diplomacy should continue. Luengo joined the discussion, and moved to counter-strike. He pointed out that both assaults gave the Federation every right to declare the ceasefire null and void. The Federation, he said, must protect herself before the Klingons struck again. The death of the most important admirals left them vulnerable, and the Klingons could take advantage – especially if the most powerful of them were calling for blood.

Yet the discrepancies in the two reports made the Council members wary. None wanted to be the one to wrongly accuse the Klingon Empire. The chance for peace would be forfeit for decades, and no one wanted to be responsible for that.

In the end diplomacy won.

Robertson would send his counterpart in the Empire a personal message demanding answers, while Starfleet was ordered to remain on stand-by. Every ship near the Klingon Empire should be on yellow alert, and all captains would be ordered to avoid any confrontation – no engagement of hostilities.

The last point on the agenda concerned the interim Chief in Command. Luengo's time in service as a staff officer exceeded his peers. He was resourceful and trusted for the most part. Sixty-eight percent of the Council agreed to give him the enormous responsibility. However, his involvement with Section 31 wasn’t forgotten by all members, and they accounted for the missing votes. Though he received the promotion, many voices made it very clear that he was still under scrutiny and they expected a hearing when the crisis was over.

‘Fools – the lot of ’em!’ José thought, as he rose from his chair. The conference was over, and it was almost morning. Everyone was tired – many were quite irritated.
None more than Luengo and Norton.

They had been seconds away from setting the next step of the plan into motion. Then Wesley's report appeared. It would prevent Luengo from taking his preferred action. But now he was named interim Chief in Command. So Luengo would take the lead with Robertson in planning the Federation’s next moves. It allowed Luengo free rein in many matters and gave him more power – power he would use.

As he and the other admirals left the briefing room, José and Norton bid their colleagues good night. Truly a mockery, none of them could go home for sleep. The men walked to one of the building’s cafeterias.

“Ugh, he'll drive me to drink,” Luengo growled beneath his breath. “We were one step away from success and then this!” He shook his head. “The Enterprise! Of course, it had to be Kirk to screw it all up!”

Albert sighed. “In this case, it isn’t his fault. The incident with the Klingon assault on the Enterprise and Kor was bad luck.”

“Si – but it was lucky for that hillbilly!” He grimaced and checked his PADD as he stepped with Norton into the next lift to ride to the cafeteria on the third floor. He frowned. His secretary had sent him four messages; they seemed important, but one message was an automatically patched through to his personal terminal. It was from Nureaux. Feeling anticipation, Luengo quickly read the message and then deleted it. A grin spread across his face as they left the lift a short time later.

“What’s up?” Norton asked, seeing the almost joyful face of his colleague.

“Nureaux sent a message,” José answered quietly, while they walked down the hallway. “Khan is aboard the Enterprise.”

Albert stopped within his next step. “He is?”

Luengo nodded. “Yes – and Nureaux is about to make the next move in our little game. All he needs is access to Kirk’s stateroom to install the little gifts I gave him, and then we’ll learn what that hayseed is really up to – he and the creature.”
Norton pressed his lips into a frown, “Isn’t it time to stop Kirk finally? We know the Augment is with him.”

“I want to know what Kirk's plans are, and I’ve only got two or three days to find them out.”

Albert blinked in confusion. “Why two or three days?”

A chuckle escaped Luengo. “Because Kirk will get an order soon that will the beginning of the end for him. We need a reason to arrest him – one even Robertson, and the Council will be forced to accept. Insubordination and knowingly endangering the Federation are reasons enough.” They reached the empty cafeteria and headed for a table, not waiting for the tired looking waitress to show them to one. “What are you planning?” Albert asked curiously; José chuckled quietly while his eyes wandered over the slowly waking city.

“If the Augment means anything to Kirk, he won't be able to carry it out. He'll be forced into insubordination – and then we’ll have him. Just wait. In a few days Kirk, his officers, and the creature will be in our hands!”

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise, the alpha and beta shift were fast asleep when the conference in Paris ended. The men and women aboard had worked hard to get the ship functioning again, and everyone was exhausted. Well, almost everyone. Spock and Khan rested, but neither man was tired – they could have gone on, yet they stayed with their lovers to give and to seek comfort – even if the Vulcan would never admit such a thing.

The same would have gone for Nien at one time if he allowed himself a lover at all. Now he could not deny that he felt solace having Jim so close. He would simply listen to his breath and heartbeat. He knew that he had been close to losing his beloved yesterday – again! The danger of the battle in which Jim could have been mortally injured; the threat of losing him to the Klingons if they had demanded Kirk in exchange for the crew’s survival. None of it came to pass – Kor had made no such demand, but it had been a close call. Khan loathed it. He hated that his mate’s life bared itself to so much risk. He yearned for the war’s end because then a good measure of the continuous danger his beloved exposed himself to would be over.

Kirk didn’t know that Nien was awake after nearly an entire night of fierce, almost desperate love-making as soon as they hit the bed. Each needed to feel each other in the most intimate way. Afterward, Khan was unable to sleep, yet he didn’t move a muscle for fear of disturbing the much-needed rest of his mate (though the captain's nightmares were not so kind). Khan had anticipated
them. Confronted with his two tormentors again would affect the strong, sensitive captain. Concentrating on their shared bond, the Augment managed to calm his mate with his presence, gentle murmurs, and feather-light strokes. Kirk never woke. He settled back into a peaceful slumber, nestling closer to the enhanced man who held him in a protective embrace.

The alarm clock finally tore Jim out of his sleep, but the captain had no desire to leave the warm shelter of his mate’s arms and the coziness of their shared bed. Neither man had a choice in the matter. Now a petty officer, the former dictator was scheduled for regular duty, and because it would be easier for all the bridge officers, Kirk had put Nien on alpha shift with him.

This time the young captain sent his lover to the shower and then gave him directions to the uniform store. There was no way around the fact that Nien would have to wear a uniform while at the helm of the Enterprise. None too happy, Khan obeyed to his beloved’s requirement and left the captain’s quarters while Jim hopped under the sonic shower.

After finishing his morning routine, he checked his terminal for reports and waited for the Augment to return. They’d walk together to the officer’s mess for breakfast. He didn’t have to wait for long. He heard a noise from the door that slipped open; Khan entered. Jim’s eyes widened he saw his mate in command gold – with striped sleeves and insignia of a petty officer.

Kirk had to grin. “Definitely your color,” he said, and the super-human rolled his eyes.

“I never thought that I would wear a Starfleet uniform again – and by my own free will.” He shook his head and stepped closer. “The things I am willing to do for you…”

Jim smiled lovingly and reached out. He felt the tender possessiveness emanate from the strong, warm fingers laced in his. “And not only for me but the whole ship – even for Spock.” He squeezed Nien’s hand. “I don't think I've said it yet,” he mused quietly. “Thank you for your help yesterday on the bridge, and in Engineering.”

The former dictator shrugged. “You and those dear to you were in danger. I told you that I will stand up for your family because they belong to you.”

Cocking his head, Kirk’s gaze roamed over the slender face of his beloved. “That’s not the only reason. I saw sympathy in your eyes when you heard about Spock; I heard the understanding in your condolences.”
Khan sighed. “I know very well the pain the loss of a family member inflicts. Mr. Spock and I may have our differences, but it would be deliberately ignorant of me to be blind to the anguish he has been through.” He pursed his lips. “Perhaps I understand his sorrow better than most because we have both lost our people; we are – endangered, I suppose you could say.”

Jim nodded. “Yeah – I guess you do have that in common, and neither of you deserve it.” His thumb circled gently over the back of Khan's hand. “But there's hope that Sarek is alive.”

“If there are survivors from that second shuttle, Galven will find them,” Khan stated calmly. “He is an expert at slipping through the tightest net toward his gain – just like someone I know, too,” he teased; he stole a kiss from his mate and turned to leave.

Smirking widely, Jim followed him.

Neither man was aware of the pair of eyes that peeked around from the next corner and saw them leaving the captain’s quarters.

Biting his lips, Nureaux watched the two men walking away – side by side, chatting as if it were the most normal thing in the world for a Starfleet captain to hide a fugitive, a synthetically produced creature.

Philip pursed his lips, thinking. He hadn’t discovered the Augment's quarters, but obviously he visited Kirk regularly. This could be a chance to kill two birds with one stone. He needed access to Kirk’s quarters and silently thanked Luengo for the little ‘souvenirs’ he was gifted along with the high-tech transmitter.

Several minutes later he took a PADD out of a hidden compartment in his quarters. The PADD was smaller yet far more capable than civilians could buy or that Starfleet issued its personnel. Sitting down at his desk, he used the code Luengo gave him and connected the PADD with the Enterprise’s databanks.

Spock sat at his station, lost in thought. He had excused himself from Uhura after she woke and had gone to the bridge, even though there was more than an hour before his shift would start. He didn’t visit the officer’s mess for breakfast because he was not hungry. His mind was far too occupied with the many problems at hand, and those thoughts roiled his guts. Illogical, he knew, but his humanity
took center-stage now.

Reaching the bridge, Spock had nodded politely at the members of gamma shift. He signaled Lieutenant de Rose to remain in the captain’s chair, and had used the quiet of the early hour and the familiar noises around him to think over all they had discovered about the ‘Excalibur affair’, as Mr. Scott now referred to it.

He knew that Jim was convinced of Section 31’s involvement. Even if the Vulcan kept his thoughts about it to himself, he secretly agreed with Kirk.

Styles had made mistakes that beginners would make. Never would they be found in a well-trained commanding officer. The discrepancies between the other captain’s report and reality minimal, but Jim had recognized them – Jim, Scott, Uhura, Khan and himself. Betrayal by Styles was unclear, but the Vulcan had his own theory. The victims were the most important diplomats – a loss for the Federation, but not essential for the maintenance of her. They were replaceable, should the peace talks stop before they even begun. A weak Starfleet could cause the Federation to fall apart. Members would lose confidence and begin pulling away. Killing the fleet’s most important admirals would be suicide, yet that is exactly what had been done. Why? Who would garner the advantage?

The Klingons, of course; but Spock could not imagine a Starfleet officer conspiring against the fleet. Yet there had been the traitor on Aldebaran; his motive had been revenge. Styles had no reason for a vendetta. He had been promoted to captain and had gotten his first command on a Constitution class cruiser. That command that could have resulted in peace between the Federation and the Klingons, but it went wrong – or perhaps not?

Spock stared at the databank display while his thoughts followed a hypothetical chain of events. So, who would gain something from the admirals’ death besides the Klingons, and what must be done now? Starfleet needed a new Chief in Command as soon as possible. Morrow and Nogura were in line after Barnett. Next in line would have been Shepard and Komack. They all had been declared dead.

So, who had the experience the he or she might become the Chief in Command? Who was powerful enough to buy a young captain for their own interests, and who could pull enough strings to make all those things happen to lead to the assault on the Excalibur now commanded by a newly promoted, inexperienced captain?

If this was truly the outcome of a carefully considered plan, then was Styles’ presence aboard a part of it? Captain Heldrom and his first officer’s accident the morning of their departure had indeed left a bad taste, as Jim described it, because there hadn’t been time enough to choose a suitable replacement for the captain. Barnett had been forced to take what he could get, and in this case, Styles was the conveniently available choice.
The pieces fit neatly – Heldrom’s accident, the sudden promotion of a young officer who was hungry for his own command. Perhaps that officer's failure may have been intended to continue the war.

To manage all these details, you would have to know a lot of people. The right people for such a task were required for this kind of treachery (if there was a treachery).

There was only one department that could do it all: The SBI.

The SBI had its spies, and its people in the background who did jobs others would be thrown to jail for. The SBI frequently flaunted the law though always maintained plausible deniability as intelligence gathering had done for a thousand years. And pushing someone into power for a goal? Plausible. Sacrificing the most important admirals in Starfleet to lead the organization toward the goal of a continuation of war – the chief of SBI would be the best candidate for such a task.

And who was this man? José Luengo – the very same man who did nothing to help a Starfleet Captain, Jim, when he had been taken prisoner by the Klingons. A sympathizer of Section 31. And the man who allowed Norton to deliver Khan to the labs, where the Augment had suffered illegal tests for months.

Luengo and Norton had been in custody and were about to face the Council for what they did, this much Spock knew. But the war had preserved them from a hearing thus far. Luengo was now on duty under observation as was standard protocol in such cases, however he still had plenty of leeway to act freely.

The Vulcan was far from accusing the Chief of SBI of conspiracy, murder, and perhaps more, but something his T'hy'la called a ‘gut-feeling’ latched onto him.

If he wanted to investigate and obtain a satisfactory result, he had to start at the beginning. And what event preceded the delegation’s death? Heldrom’s traffic accident.

‘Early in the morning…’ Wesley had said, and given the scheduled launch of the *Excalibur* that morning, Heldrom and his first officer must have been on their way very early – the perfect time if you didn't want witnesses. Wesley also mentioned that both men lived in Sausalito on the other side of the San Francisco Bay. The town was – even after all its centuries of existence and its proximity to the large city – calm and little, and therefore the chance that someone was in the streets at this early hour had been small.
But the information about Heldrom’s living place was not available – it was found in the captain’s files, and no one had access to those except for staff officers and the personnel office. Spock was not a ‘no one’. He played a computer like a violin in the hands of a virtuoso. If Khan had managed to get access to Starfleet’s best-secured databanks, then Spock could do it, too.

Activating his terminal, he quickly altered the identification codes to prevent anyone in HQ from following his trail. Before he could go further something caught his attention. Users – he couldn't see them, but he could see data usage levels – someone gained access to the databank. About a third of the crew, if not more, used the databanks regularly, so that was not unusual. But Spock thought he had seen an indication of a login trying to access data – not in the library, but to the ship’s base functioning systems.

The hint of a frown creased his forehead as he tried to follow the trail of ship’s logins and code to determine who tried to hack into the Enterprise’s system. He didn’t find a trace – absolutely nothing – and that made him suspicious.

Shutting everything out around him, he concentrated on the task. He didn't even hear alpha shift arrive. Only when he felt a familiar presence beside him – two, to be precise – did he look up and into the inquisitive faces of Jim Kirk and Nyota Uhura.

“And here I thought Vulcans could hear grass grow,” his captain teased. “Guess I was wrong. So once again, good morning, Spock.”

“Good morning, sir. I interpret your choice of words to mean that you have greeted me already?”

“He did,” Nyota nodded, clearly amused. “That must be a hell of an interesting problem you’re working on.”

“Indeed,” the Vulcan nodded before he addressed Kirk in his business-like manner. “Captain, there has been unauthorized access to the databanks; the ship’s systems seem to have been compromised.”

Jim was in captain’s mode. “Source?”

“Unidentified, sir. It seems someone is quite skilled in computer code.”
“Better than you? Never!” Jim shook his head. “Try to find out who it was, Spock, and what data they actually got their hands on.”

“Yes, sir!” The first officer nodded and turned his attention back to his task.

Kirk and Uhura exchanged a quick, cautious glance, and then Jim went to his seat. He greeted a tired looking Pavel Chekov and watched Nien, who took the helm again, checking the coordinates. Then he began to tinker with the wrecked helm console.

ST***ST

The morning went by uneventfully. Spock tried to find out more about the unauthorized access to the databanks; Scott and his staff were still busy with repairs, and McCoy reported via intercom that Sulu was out of the coma. A wave of relief went through the bridge crew. Jim was busy with brooding about the ‘Excalibur affair’.

Several decks below, Philip Nureaux waited for the perfect moment to initiate the next step of his mission; his superior, though, kept him busy the whole morning. During a short lunch in the mess, he learned that Kirk had called a meeting of the department chiefs in briefing room 3 at 1400. This would be the best chance he would ever get.

While his own superior went to deck 8 to join the meeting, Nureaux took action. After biding his time for half an hour, he finally muttered to a colleague that he was bringing a report down to the weapons bay. He rode the turbolift to deck 5 and walked down the corridor toward the captain’s quarters.

Looking around, he saw no one much to his relief. Then he fixed his attention on the lock. Slipping on a pair of gloves, he quickly punched the medical over-ride code into the panel, and the door opened. He took a calming breath. It worked! Luengo had provided him with a device that made it possible to override the security of the databanks so that he could gather any data he needed for his mission without getting caught. Learning the CMO’s emergency code had been no problem after he hacked successfully into the ship’s systems, and he was quite proud that he came up with the simple plan.

The emergency override code allowed him instant access to any room even if it was locked. Now it gave him the chance to bug the captain’s quarters. It was a passive receiver and any noise in the stateroom would be recorded. The transmitter was shielded so that it could send a signal out undetected. Nureaux was certain that he would soon learn Kirk’s and the creature’s true intentions; he’d soon have information for Luengo.
Cautiously he stepped in and listened to the door close before he ordered the lights to 25 percent and looked around.

The captain’s quarters were larger than his own, but not much. Kirk could have had a larger stateroom, yet he seemed to be satisfied with this smaller one. To his left Nureaux saw Kirk’s desk – a desk that spoke of a heavy workload. Straight ahead was the living area, and to his right was the sleeping area with a wardrobe, shelves, nightstand and the usual bed that…

There was something odd about the bed, and Nureaux only recognized after the second glance. There were two pillows. Frowning, Philip went closer and examined the bed. Yes, it was definitely made for two persons, and both pillows showed use. So, Kirk at the very least had someone spend the night – or did he share his quarters with someone else? Was he in a relationship? A relationship between the commanding officer and another officer wasn’t so long as favoritism was avoided – though it was far from encouraged. Knowing Kirk, he could give a damn about what Command thought. But who could it be?

Out of curiosity, Nureaux stepped into the bathroom, and there he saw further evidence that Kirk was intimate with someone on the ship. Two towels, two toothbrushes, two shavers, and two…

Shaver?

Philip stared at the men’s’ little devices. A woman's electric razor was different; this was definitely not one.

‘He’s in a relationship with a man!’ he thought bewildered. ‘But Kirk is a playboy! Hell, even I know how he flirted and fucked around in the Academy! And now he is with a male? Who?’

A grin spread over his face. He would learn soon enough who shared Kirk’s bed; the bug would give him all the answers he needed.

Looking around, he tried to select the best places to hide them.
Uhura had given her status report to Kirk via PADD transmission and remained in charge on the bridge, as the senior officers left for the briefing. It was only her, two junior officers, Pavel Chekov and Khan on the bridge with her. She realized she wasn't uncomfortable around the Augment anymore – even with Kirk unable to keep an eye on him – well, both eyes and hands as it were!

She smiled inwardly. Even if she was still irritated with the former dictator for all that happened last year, she had come to understand him – what drove him to do what he did. Her compassionate heart had given up the hatred she had felt for him then. And it was so damn cute to watch the usually stern and cold super-human get all soft and mushy where Jim Kirk was involved. The two were made for each other. She caught herself hoping that everything would turn out alright for the Augment because she didn’t want to see a heartbroken Jim Kirk. If anyone deserved happiness, her friend – that impossible captain did. And, if she was honest with herself, she also wanted Khan to be happy finally too.

She watched the former dictator and Chekov quietly discussing repairs while deep in thought.

“Lieutenant?” someone asked. She was interrupted by the junior science officer, and she looked over her shoulder at him.

“Yes, Ensign Jefferson?”

“Ma’am, the computer’s reporting a medical code override,” he said, glancing from the science station to her.

Uhura pressed her lips together. “Well, M’Benga must have been called for an emergency.”

“I apologize for interrupting you, Ma’am, but it’s Dr. McCoy’s personal emergency code, and it’s from the captain’s quarters.”

That got her full attention. Quickly leaving the center chair, she walked to him and looked at the display where he pointed. “That's odd!” she murmured. “The captain and Dr. McCoy are both in the meeting. Even if the captain didn't feel well, why would he go to his quarters when he knows the doctor would override the lock and drag him to medbay anyway?”

“What about the unauthorized access to the databanks this morning?” Khan threw in; his eyes fixed hers for a moment.
She nodded as she made the connection immediately. “Bridge to briefing room 3. Captain, are you there?”

A second later, Kirk’s tenor sounded through the speakers. “Of course, I’m here, Lieutenant? What’s the matter?”

Uhura’s frown deepened. “Is Dr. McCoy with you, too, sir?”

“I’m here, Uhura,” Bones called. “What’s up?”

Before Nyota could answer she heard Khan say to Chekov, “Take the helm!” Then the Augment stormed to the lift and vanished before she could utter another word. The young Bantu woman groaned inwardly. It seemed remaining at his post on shift was something the ‘General’ hadn’t acclimated to yet.

Nyota felt her adrenalin level rising. “Captain, someone just entered your quarters using Dr. McCoy’s override code.”

“WHAT?” Kirk sounded shocked and enraged.

“Captain, the hacker this morning…” Spock’s voice was cut off by Jim shouting,

“Uhura, alert Security! But not ship wide, please. Whoever’s in my stateroom shouldn’t know that we know.”

Nyota’s glance found the abandoned helm. “Sir, I don’t think that's an option. Mr. Singh is already on his way down to your quarters.”

She heard Kirk cursing, and then the connection was cut.

ST*##ST

Nine decks below, Jim Kirk ran to the door of briefing-room 3; Spock, McCoy, Giotto and even Scotty were hot on his heels. They went to the next lift and rode it up to deck 5 where the race began
anew. Kirk’s thoughts were in turmoil. Whoever entered his quarters was up to something –
something illegal – maybe authorized by someone who had their own motives. Section 31. And if
they were after Khan, then his beloved was in danger the second he walked through captain’s door.

Spock stayed beside Jim as they stormed down the corridor and rounded the corner leading to Jim’s
room. They saw the open door; Spock sped up, using his Vulcan strength to close the distance to the
door far quicker than his human companions.

Then Jim heard something that made his blood run cold. The unmistakably sound of a phaser blast,
followed by an outcry - the cry of his mate!

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, an evil – evil! – cliffhanger again. And this just before Christmas. I know I can be
very mean (laugh).

Yes, even aboard his own ship Jim isn’t safe from the investigations of Section 31. He
and his friends are stepping more and more into deep water – as will Bob.

In the next chapter you will learn what’s going on with Nureaux and the aftermaths of it.
More I don’t want to tell you. I hope that I can publish the next chapter before New
Year, but I can’t promise anything.

Please leave some comments, and once again I’m sorry that the new update lasted this
long.

I wish you all now a Merry Christmas,

Hopefully Santa is nice to you and leaves some gifts,

Love you all

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

I hope you had a beautiful Christmas-time and that those, who live in the flooded areas like in North-England, Scotland or Paraguay (and neighbor countries) are well. The news about the heavy rains is really troublesome and I pray to the Lord that this mess will come to an end soon.

As promised you get now the next chapter of the story. A big thank-you to Nurse Darry, who picked up the slack concerning beta-reading, because Rhiannon is very, very busy in the moment. The last update ended with a cliff-hanger and I’m certain that a lot of you burns to know what happens next.

Have fun with the update. Thank you so very, very much for all the comments and the kudos,

Have a nice New Year’s Eve – and hopefully not such a big hangover a day later (*snicker*),

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 51 – A puzzle almost solved

Philip Nureaux stood on the seat of a chair while he stretched himself to reach the cover of the room’s environmental systems. The little bugging device was a high-tech device that would catch every sound even when placed behind a ventilation louver. At the same moment, he heard the door open and startled, looked to the entrance expecting to face Kirk, who had come back earlier than anticipated from the meeting.

The man who entered wore command gold, yes, but it wasn’t Kirk. Nureaux took a sharp breath as he recognized the Augment, who halted abruptly. The pale, unholy bright eyes fixed on Nureaux’s left hand in which he held the bug – and then the creature strode towards him.

Acting on pure instinct, Philip let fall the screwdriver with which he’d been using to open the cover
of the ventilator, jumped off the chair, and kicked it with all his strength in the super-human’s direction. It stopped the creature for a second, which was enough for the well-trained security officer to grip the standard phaser any Redshirt wore aboard and to pull it out.

Khan had gone rigid for a second as he recognized the young lieutenant from yesterday who’d brought him the required spare parts from Mr. Scott. His behavior had been – tense, strange. And to see him now, here in Jim’s quarters where he certainly had no right to be, he knew with utterly certainty that the man was dangerous. And then Khan saw what he held in his left hand: something that really looked like a little wiretap. And with this observation, the last clue fell into place with brilliant clarity. ‘A spy from Section 31’ shot through Nien’s mind and with a mixture of fury and icy calmness as he approached the enemy.

The younger man reacted quickly. In the next moment he was off the chair and said furniture flew in Khan’s direction. The Augment all but punched the chair out the air with a balled fist – a movement he didn’t need more than a second for, but this was exactly the time his opponent needed to gain the advantage.

He saw the phaser in the lieutenant’s hand and the soft blue light of a stunning blast hit him before he could dodge out of the way. It didn’t paralyze him like it would have done to any other human – or even Vulcan – but it slowed him down.

Nureaux knew that he had been discovered – that the creature had realized what was going on. Fear and hate made him act, and without thought, he fired at the super-human. The Augment was quick, but not quick enough. The blast hit him squarely in the chest and with a shout, he stumbled backwards – only to catch himself.

Philip raged. This animal was really a demon in human form if he could resist a phaser blast – a demon whose action had killed members of his family. Nureaux might be going down, but he would take the creature with him! Again he shot, and again, and again rapidly, yet the Augment remained on his feet. But his knees buckled and he stumbled back against one of the armchairs. At the fifth shot, his legs gave out – but he remained conscious. And then Nureaux realized why. Per protocol, all phasers aboard were set to stun, not to kill. Without hesitation Philip fumbled for the switch on his weapon and set it to kill.

Khan fought against the effects the stunning blasts which although mild, had incapacitated him despite his augmented nature. As with the last time he’d been shot repeatedly by a phaser on stun – on the garbage transporter when Uhura had fired at him – his body could compensate for a great part of the energy which might have paralyzed his nerves, yet he needed time – and even his resistance knew limits.

He felt his legs giving out and found himself on the floor; his nerves vibrating with pain, his muscles
arching with the strain of staying functional. Baring his teeth, he looked up at his opponent, asking himself how it happened that he now found himself in such a humiliating position, then saw how the younger man had hastily tried to re-set his phaser. Khan knew that he was seconds away from death. He tensed his muscles, which screamed in protest, ready to jump up and to attack – and then saw sudden movement and black and blue in front of him, blocking his sight.

Spock had reached the captain’s quarters and needed no more than a second to understand what was happening – Khan on the ground, stunned, and one of the new lieutenants fumbling with a phaser, his intentions clear. Not wasting precious time, the Vulcan jumped over the Augment and in a blink of an eye was facing the young Terran, who stared wide-eyed at him before he raised his weapon – pointing it directly at the first officer. Spock acted without another thought. Knocking the weapon forcefully away with his right hand, his left hand found and pinched the bundle of nerves in the man’s shoulder. For a moment the human’s face became a grimace of pain, then he fell to the ground in a heap; unmoving.

Still fighting against the effect of the stuns, Khan looked up at the Vulcan, who smoothed down his shirt before he turned around and glanced down at him. There was it again – for the tiniest moment, Nien could see the ancient fierceness in the Vulcan’s eyes before the self-control was perfectly back in place. And then it dawned on Khan that Spock had saved his life! As much as it hurt his pride, the Augment was very much aware of the fact that he wouldn’t have come out of this situation alive if it hadn’t been for the Vulcan.

“Are you all right, Mr. Singh?” the first officer asked, but before the former dictator could answer, a frightful “NIEN!” drove his attention away. A second later Kirk knelt down beside him, the familiar scent of his mate washed over the Augment. He could sense the dread and the shock in Jim through their shared bond and saw it in his wide eyes, which were dark with fear. Kirk’s hands gripped his shoulders, then one arm slipped around Khan’s waist – both supporting and hugging him.

“I’m all right, Jim,” Nien said hoarsely, straining to be understood as his throat muscles still refused to work properly; every movement hurt. “Calm down, Pyära, I’m okay.” That wasn’t completely true, but he’d felt a tremor of worry course through Kirk’s body.

Jim heard the words, felt Nien’s breath and heartbeat against his own chest – his beloved was okay! Yet he needed several moments to regain some control. His own heart beat frantically, coldness crept through his veins, fear tightened his throat. As he heard the phaser blasts and Khan’s cry from within the cabin, he’d thought he’d come too late to save his soul-mate, his bonding-partner. Yet here they were, both crouching on the floor and alive.

Spock watched his friend for a moment, heard the others entering the quarters and stepped forwards to shield his T’hy’la and Khan from prying eyes. McCoy knew of the two, the others did not, and the Vulcan understood that Jim wanted to keep it that way.
“Mr. Singh is unhurt,” he said, an observation that might have stopped Scotty and Giotto, but not Leonard McCoy.

“I’ll be the judge of that, if you don’t mind,” he groused, slipped past the Vulcan, and crouched down beside the two lovebirds. Carefully he laid a hand on Kirk’s back and murmured, “Jim, let me have a look at Khan, please.”

Slowly the young captain moved away slightly from the Augment, yet one of his hands remained on Nien’s arm, almost clinging to the material of Khan’s sleeve. His blue eyes brimmed with overcome fright and worry, while their gaze roamed over the slender face of the super-human who appeared even paler than usual.

“He tried to stun me,” Khan rasped. “Obviously he didn’t know I’m immune to it.”

Giotto frowned. This man was immune to phaser stuns? Impossible – yet there the petty officer sat, very much awake despite the shots he’d sustained.

“’Immune’ my ass,” Bones grumbled, checking Khan’s pulse in the old fashioned way by putting two fingers at his wrist. “Your pulse is far too slow and your eyes are glassy. Are you in pain?”


Bones nodded – and groaned as Jim was instantly all over Nien again. “Calm down, kid, these side effects are more than normal, so stop freaking out!” He met the wide eyes of his friend and recognized the old fear in the blue depths – the fear of being left behind. Softly he placed a comforting hand on Kirk’s shoulder. “Don’t fret, Jim, Khan goes nowhere without you.”

Giotto – professionally ignoring Kirk’s emotional outburst – had rounded the captain, the petty officer and the CMO, and stared down at his unconscious inferior. Wrath darkened his usual calm and friendly open face. “Philip Nureaux!” he said as he caught Spock’s asking glance. Spock remembered the name. At the same moment several Redshirts arrived, but Giotto ordered them to wait outside while the first officer bent over Nureaux and took the phaser from the lieutenant’s hand.

One look at its adjustment was enough to make Spock realize how close Khan and he had come to facing death, then he showed the weapon to Giotto, who gasped. “Sweet Lord, it’s set to kill!”
“He was adjusting the phaser as I arrived here,” the Vulcan nodded.

Jim looked over at them and paled even more. If Spock had come only one second later, then...

He felt the long, strong fingers of his mate cupping one of his cheeks and forcing his face to turn around towards him. “Your Vulcan brother came just in time, Jim,” Nien said quietly. “Nothing happened – I’m all right.”

Kirk didn’t know if it was the carefully-chosen words or the calm tone Khan used, but suddenly he snapped back to his usual far more controlled and stronger self. “Just in time?” he echoed; fury began to cloud his eyes. “A second or two later and I would have lost you!” He squeezed Khan’s fingers and rose – slowly, powerful, like a predator ready to strike. He straightened his frame to its full height, while his blazing gaze found the unmoving lieutenant. “He was about to kill you, Nien! And I’ll be damned if I let something like this go unpunished!”

Giotto had bent over Nureaux, too, and took something from his left hand. Arching both grey brows, he cursed and offered it to Spock, whose reaction was more controlled but similar (except for the swearing).

“A bugging device, Captain,” he reported, as he held the little device in his own hand, inspecting it. “And certainly not a standard one – rather a high-tech piece of equipment with a wide range transmitter, adjusted to a special frequency. And I am certain that Uhura will find that the frequency is jammed too.”

Kirk stepped over to them and glared down at the bug like it was the cause of all trauma of the last hours, which effectively, it was. “Heritage?” he asked briskly, and Spock lifted a brow.

“Unknown, sir, but given the circumstances we have already discussed, I would say that is a logical assumption.”

“You’re not alone in this assumption,” Jim growled. “Can you find out more by examining it?”

“I think so, sir,” the Vulcan nodded. “It hasn’t been activated until now, but I’m certain as soon as I switch it on, it will be possible to find its counterpart in the lieutenant’s quarters.”
“Right!” Jim glanced at Giotto, who was a little bit at loss, yet still felt ashamed he’d not caught this sooner.

“Captain, he is one of my men. I… I hadn’t the slightest clue that he… I don’t know what…”

Jim laid a calming hand on his security chief’s shoulder. “This isn’t your fault, Giotto. We had a cuckoo’s egg in the middle of our nest without recognizing it, that’s all.” His fierce gaze found the unconscious form of Nureaux again. “I think I know who he works for, but first we have to find out as much about him and if he’s working alone or not. Gather all new crew members together who arrived with him. Turn his quarters upside-down, but be careful. If you find something suspicious, don’t remove it, call Mr. Spock or me. We could unknowingly alert his superiors if we tamper with something.” He saw the confusion in Giotto’s face but didn’t explain further.

Kirk turned to his chief engineer. “Scotty, is it technically possible to shield Nureaux’ quarters from any kind of transmissions?”

“You mean in the event he has his own coded and activated transmitter activated?” Montgomery already knew to what Kirk was up to – and what it all meant. Section 31 was on their heels. The damned shadow department really did still exist and was still spying on them! “I think I can come up with something, Captain.”

“Good!” Jim looked back at Khan. “Did Nureaux say anything when you got here?”

The former dictator shook his head. “No. He was…shocked. Then before I could do anything more than move in his direction, he’d already attacked me.” Khan rubbed his temples to calm the pounding in his skull – he hated headaches!

“Anything else?” Jim wanted to know, his voice utterly professional, yet there was a soft tone to it.

“Hatred,” Khan answered before looking up again and he let his hands fall. “There was naked hatred in his gaze as he fired at me – the kind of fury that is meant personally.”

Kirk frowned and glanced at Spock, who understood him before Jim could give his order. “I will check Lieutenant Nureaux’s file for any connections between him, family members, and the events of last year.” He clasped his hands behind his back. “It also seems expedient to search your quarters for more bugging devices.” His eyes took on that intense expression without actually showing any emotion. “If you will allow, I will do it myself.”
And again there was no necessity for the two friends to use words to make each other understand. Jim knew why Spock had offered to search in person for further bugs inside the rooms. Khan practically lived here, and there were dozens of clues that Kirk was sharing his quarters with him in the most intimate way. There was no need for any outsider to learn of the true nature of the captain’s relationship with the Augment.

“Thank you, Mr. Spock, I appreciate your service,” he answered, before he addressed Giotto.
“Security shall also check all briefing rooms. It’s possible that Nureaux left more little ears there.”

The Chief of Security frowned. “You’ve a suspicion as to why he tried to spy on you, and that this is not only limited to your quarters, sir?”

Kirk nodded grimly. “Yes, I have. But it’s too early to know for sure. Just begin with the checks, start with briefing room four and five. Mr. Spock and I will interview all new crew members about Nureaux, and I really don’t want to have anyone who is really responsible for this shit eavesdropping on us.”

“Aye, Captain.” Giotto instructed several of his team while Scotty looked confusedly at Kirk. Why would Spock volunteer to search Kirk’s private rooms for any further wiretaps? Giotto’s men were experts in that area, so why was Jim almost relieved that the Vulcan had offered his services? Curiously he watched his captain, who turned around towards Khan and McCoy.

“Bones, take Nien to med bay and check him.” He lifted a hand as the Augment began to protest.
“You got hit with half a dozen stuns, you’re in pain, and you look like today’s lunch is about to leave you the wrong way. Let Bones help you, Nien – please.”

The last word worked. “If it calms you, by all my means, I go with the good doctor,” the superhuman sighed; smiling the tiniest bit as he saw relief on his beloved’s face.

Scotty frowned. Yes, Kirk always worried over his crew and especially for his friends, yet his concern seemed…extreme. Rubbing his neck, Montgomery shoved this all to the back of his head to think later and looked around. Where could further bugs be hidden? In the sleeping area? His gaze fell to the bed, roamed over the pillows and bedclothes, and then to the nightstand. Maybe there, or…

He was distracted as McCoy rose. “Right, I’ll escort our Mr. Superman to med bay.” He smirked down at Khan, who frowned in disapproval at the nickname. “Just stay where you are,” Bones said
kindly, then walked to Nureaux and began to examine him. A dark blue shadow had begun to appear on the lieutenant’s right arm where Spock had hit him, and Leonard didn’t need a med scanner to know the cause: a broken bone, if not two. Looking up at Spock, he whistled. “Just have a look, you went berserk again. I knew you had it in you.”

Consternated, the Vulcan lifted a brow. “I did not ‘go berserk’, Doctor. I merely tried to stay alive as Lieutenant Nureaux pointed the newly adjusted phaser at me.” He heard Kirk’s sharp intake of breath and looked at him. Spock’s dark eyes shone softly. “Do not worry, Captain, the lieutenant was not aware of Vulcan speed.”

Jim felt his stomach turning. He had been a moment away from losing both his bond-mate and his soul-brother. “God, I could kill that bastard,” he whispered.

“Understandable, yet I advise you not to act in your current emotional state, Captain. Questioning Nureaux is possibly the only of learning more about our enemies – and who is really behind this.”

“You still have doubts?” Kirk scoffed. “Of course this all goes back to Section 31!”

“I agree, Captain, yet we have no knowledge of the new leaders’ identities, only assumptions. Nureaux’s knowledge is perhaps our only source of proof – proof we are going the need if we want to counter this threat at all.”

Jim snorted in frustration. Of course he couldn’t – and wouldn’t – kill Nureaux. Yet he was glad that the bastard had received one of Spock’s really hard blows.

“Giotto, take Nureaux to the brig –”

“He has to be treated first, Jim,” McCoy interrupted him, and as he caught the still furious gaze of his friend, he added, “I’ve got to set his broken arm – when he’s awake, of course.”

Jim couldn’t help himself, he had to chuckle. “I always knew that you had a sadistic side, Bones.” He’d lost count of all the times the doctor had hypo’d him.

“I agree again,” Spock said wryly. He clasped his hands behind his back again, as McCoy shot him one of his typical glares.
“Just wait for your next checkup, Spock. Then you’re going to regret that comment!”

“I always regret depending on your medical abilities, Doctor. I am almost excepting that one day you will attempt to heal someone by dancing around the med-bed in a fur, swinging a wand, and howling unrecognizable ancient shaman songs.”

Giotto stared with large eyes at the two eternal opponents, while Scotty snickered to himself. Clearly Khan felt less in control than usual, as he began to laugh quietly – feeling the tension leaving him. The sight of an outraged, flushing CMO lost for words and who looked murderously at the stoic Vulcan, whose face was far too innocent, was too much fun to ignore.

At Nien’s obvious amusement, Jim felt himself begin to relax as well. Then his gaze found Spock. For a second he saw something close to a wink in the Vulcan’s eye, and realized that his friend had used a very old trick to lift the dark mood: humor. Even though Spock would swear Vulcans didn’t understand humor.

Closing the short distance to his first officer, Jim smiled at him. “Thank you, Spock,” he whispered, and the Vulcan bowed his head slightly, knowing what his T’yl’la really meant – his way of lifting the mood and more importantly, saving the super-human. “You are welcome, Captain.”

Khan felt the pain leaving his body and carefully tried to rise. An instant later Jim was at his side to help him, yet it was Spock who pulled him easily to his feet. Augment and Vulcan looked at each other for a long moment, then Nien straightened his shoulders. “I owe you my life, Mr. Spock. Thank you! I hope I can repay you the favor one day.”

The words were simple, but serious, that much was obvious. And to Jim’s surprise, as he’d just done with Jim, Spock didn’t reject Khan’s gratitude with his typical stoicism, pointing out that it was illogical to thank someone for doing his duty. Instead of giving this expected, yet frustrating response, the Vulcan only nodded slowly and answered in a hushed voice, too quiet to be heard by Scott or Giotto, “Repayment is not necessary. You are Jim’s mate. Your fates are tied to each other. If you die I would lose my soul-brother and the Enterprise would lose her captain. Both would be unacceptable.”

Khan curtly bowed his head, respecting the Vulcan’s point of view. If he’d been in Spock’s place, he wouldn’t have reacted any differently. And this thought was…a little bit unnerving!

McCoy walked by them and stomped to the intercom, calling med bay to order an anti-grav stretcher
for Nureaux, while Giotto called for his squad to come in. Bones finished his call to med bay and moved to Khan. “I don’t care if you do feel better, you’re coming with me – for Jim’s sake.”

Suppressing the urge to roll his eyes, Nien nodded. And if he were honest with himself, he’d admit that McCoy’s support as the CMO took his arm was indeed welcome. He still felt a little wobbly on his feet – something he loathed.

“Please excuse us,” Bones said. “I have to return to my hut to mix up a new potion. And hopefully my fur is dry after I had to wash it following yesterday’s fire dance, otherwise I won’t be able to use my witchcraft and voodoo!”

Spock looked at him unmoving before he addressed Khan. “If you are in need of another rescue, please just inform the captain or me.”

With a “Hrumpf!” McCoy left his friend’s quarters with deeply amused Augment at his side.

ST***ST

Uhura faced a real challenge half an hour later as Spock gave her the only bugging device that had been in Kirk’s quarters with the order to discover how it had been manufactured, its frequencies and operating systems. It was a completely new technology she’d never seen before and it was even difficult to open, yet it would eventually succumb because when Nyota set her mind to something, she didn’t quit.

While Giotto and one of his men began to rummage through Nureaux’s quarters, other members of Security checked briefing rooms 4 and 5, but found nothing. In the meantime, the order for every new crew member to come to the two briefing rooms spread through the ship, while Jim went to med bay to learn of Nien’s condition. “I told you I’m fine now,” was Khan’s only comment after McCoy declared him fit for duty. Kirk rolled his eyes and took the Augment into his arms the moment Bones left the examination room to give them some privacy.

Wrapping each other in a tight embrace they stood there, surrounded by medical instruments, medbeds and CTC equipment, and neither of them gave a damn that they were in med bay.

“I thought I’d lost you,” Jim whispered; feeling a tremor running through his body. “As I heard the phaser and your shout…” He tightened his arms around his mate, who nuzzled the side of his head with his nose.
“Don’t worry, Pyāra. You know how quick I am – and I have to admit that your Vulcan friend has his advantages. He didn’t doubt me for one second but defended me against an official member of Starfleet.” He kissed Jim’s golden shock of hair. “I think he’s opening up to me.”

“Yes,” Kirk mumbled, pressing his face against the Augment’s throat. “He knows how much you mean to me, and he’s trying his best to come to terms with us together.”

In the past, Khan would have snorted at that. He didn’t need someone to ‘come to terms’. He was superior, maybe even to the Vulcan. But this was now. Now there were only a few things which were important to Khan: Jim, and therefore Jim’s family, his own family – his brothers and sisters. And, Khan realized, he was content with his life aboard this ship. If his crew had been free, he could relish in this new life – a life that eventually even allowed for a place for a stoic, infuriating Vulcan.

Nien sighed and tightened his hold around Kirk for a moment, then released him. He saw the love in his mate’s eyes, felt the devotion in Jim, but also the tingling remains of the shock, bent forwards and their lips met in a first soft, then fiery kiss they had to end far too soon. Duty called, even if they both wanted nothing more than to vanish for an hour or two and give in to the rising passion in them.

Leaning forehead against forehead, they looked deeply into each other’s eyes, until Jim whispered, “This evening, 2000 hours, my quarters – dinner, and then BED.”

Khan chuckled. “Always so impatient.”

“Says the even more impatient one,” Jim grinned. “Last time you groped me through my trousers before I was even able to strip out of them.”

“And it turned you on even more,” the Augment growled seductively.

Jim felt a certain part of his anatomy hardening and quickly stepped back. “Yes – and you can do it again. But right now I have to interview the new crew members. Maybe you…”

“…can offer our brilliant communication’s expert some help in finding out more about Nureaux’s toys?” Nien smirked. “My pleasure.”
Side by side they left the examination room and Jim made – like the day before – a short visit to Sulu’s bedside. The helmsman was still in a coma but, as Dr. M’Benga pointed out, they would wake him within the next 24 hours. Jim sighed sadly as he saw the scars on his friend’s face. Yes, they would fade within a few weeks, as soon as the synthetic skin was completely incorporated by the body, and would melded with the natural skin. Yet to see Hikaru like this made Jim wince.

“He’ll come through it,” Nien’s deep voice rumpled beside him offering comfort once more. “He is strong, and thanks to today’s medical technologies, he’ll be back to his handsome self too.”

Kirk took a deep breath of the air that smelled far too much like disinfection. “I know – but it hurts to see him lying here like this. He’s my friend – he was the one who was with me on the drill Nero used to help destroy Vulcan. We’d met earlier at the Academy and had a few classed together, but I didn’t really know him very well then. After the Nero incident, during our first year-mission we became friends – we all did, the whole alpha shift. We…” Jim searched for the right words, then he said the only thing that described what they were to each other. “We became family.”

Khan nodded and laid one hand on his beloved’s shoulder, blue eyes looking back at him. “I know, Pyāra,” he whispered. “I know.”

They left the intensive care area of med bay and returned to the main room. They passed by Bones, who was bent over one of the injured crew members that still crowded the medical department. “About time,” he grumbled. “I was going to alert a search party for you two.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “We were visiting…”

“This is a med bay, not a cheap hotel room,” McCoy interrupted him grumpily, still thinking the two had just been making out in the examination room since he’d left them.

Kirk flushed at these blunt words, looked hastily down on the patient – who was out cold – and shot Bones a glare. “For the record, Doc, we were with Sulu. That’s all!”

Leonard lifted both brows. “Sure thing, Jim. That’s the reason why your hair is even more tousled than usual and your both lips are looking like Uhura’s lent you some lip gloss.”

This time Kirk groaned. “Sometimes you’re worse than Spock in pointing out the obvious.”
“I’ll take that as a compliment of my observational skills then, Jim”

Jim only grimaced and left med bay together with Nien, who only chuckled quietly to himself. Jim Kirk and his staff were all brilliant in their own ways – geniuses even – and yet they often behaved like overgrown children. And the craziest thing was that Nien had begun to cherish that.

ST***ST

As soon as Kirk was informed that the two briefing rooms were clear of devices, Jim and Spock started the crew interviews. Khan returned to the bridge and offered his help to Uhura, who accepted it.

At least calmed that his mate hadn’t suffered any after-effects of the attack, and that Nureaux hadn’t left more ‘bugs’ around the ship, Jim concentrated on the interviews. An hour later, he and Spock had met with nearly all new crew members and their reports all suggested similar points – like the fact that Nureaux had mostly kept himself away from them during their transfer to the Enterprise and that he seemed quite introverted. Some also said that they’d known him from the Academy, but that since the Vengeance disaster, he’d changed a lot. Yet others remembered that he’d always had a rather high opinion of himself while at the Academy, and that he’d wanted to work for the SBI one day.

The SBI…

Spock decided to stay silent about his earlier assumptions, which now became more and more a reality. He would speak about all this later with Jim. They’d interviewed cadets and the other new crew in two different rooms, and therefore Jim faced Riley alone.

“Captain!” Riley saluted as he stepped into the room, and Kirk returned the greeting, before he gestured to one of the empty chairs. “Have a seat, please,” he said. “By now, I’m certain the news has already made the rounds about why I’m questioning the new crew members.” He opened the discussion casually, knowing that he could use a far more familiar tone with the young Irishman.

“Aye, Nureaux broke into your quarters and attacked two officers,” Kevin nodded. “And now you and Mr. Spock are investigating. Or rather, you’re trying to find out the reasons why.”

Jim nodded and took a deep breath. “What do you know of Nureaux?”
“Not much,” Riley shrugged. “During most of our travelling, he stayed away from us cadets and even from the older Starfleet members. It was only when we go here that he started acting like the highest-ranking officer of our group, which is indeed what he was.”

“Did you ever talk with him?”

Again Kevin shook his head. “Not more than was necessary.” Then he frowned. “Except for yesterday.”

Riley pursed shortly his lips. “When I was on the bridge and he brought Mr. Singh the spare parts he needed, he winked at me. Well, and later – after shift finished – we met in the hallway of the crew quarters. He almost chatted with me, something he’d never done before – like we were buddies or something. He even called me by my first name.”

Kirk tensed. “Why yesterday?”

Riley pursed shortly his lips. “When I was on the bridge and he brought Mr. Singh the spare parts he needed, he winked at me. Well, and later – after shift finished – we met in the hallway of the crew quarters. He almost chatted with me, something he’d never done before – like we were buddies or something. He even called me by my first name.”

Jim felt his anticipation rising. “What did you talk about?”

“Of the battle, of course, and then about Lieutenant Sulu – and how lucky it was that Mr. Singh was on the bridge to take the helm.” He hesitated and thought more closely about the short talk. “Then he asked me what I knew about the project Mr. Singh is working on and where his quarters are.”

Kirk’s tension shot up with a stab in his stomach. “Did he tell you why he wanted that information?”

Kevin grimaced. “He said he wanted to ask Mr. Singh’s advice about some kind of technical work on sensors.”

Now really on alert, the captain bent forwards. “Sensors? How did he come up with that?”

Riley scratched his head. “During our talk I mentioned how Mr. Singh had come up with something that helped fix the failing warp drive, and I heard something about a piece of equipment that disturbs sensors.”

Jim narrowed his eyes. “And you didn’t think it odd that he – a security officer – with an education
placement is so concerned about sensors?"

The ensign shook his head. “No, not really. Pavel likes studying transporter technology, and he’s a navigator. I’m interested in communications. So, why not a security officer who’s interested in engineering?”

For a moment Kirk lowered his head, resigned. “You’re right,” he murmured. “You wouldn’t be suspicious, but now you are, aren’t you?” He looked up again. “As far as I understood, Nureaux avoided any private contact with other cadets. He only opened up to you?”

Kevin thought about it for a moment. “Yeah, that’s weird. Maybe he got wind that you and I know each other and tried to get information about you by talking with me?”

“That could be the case…maybe it is the case!” Jim nodded, his mind quickly assimilating all he had learned.

Kevin sighed. “Seeing what Nureaux did today, this odd buddy-talk makes sense now. I should have been more suspicious, but we all were wrung out after the battle. It had been the first battle for us, you know.”

Jim sighed. “Yeah. And, by the way, you did a damned fine job up there.” He flipped a thumb to the ceiling, referring to the bridge.

“Thanks!” Riley bit his lips. He had many questions, and now seemed to be a good time to ask them. “Permission to speak openly, sir?”

“Off the record?” Jim asked, and as Kevin nodded, Kirk leant back. “Permission granted. What’s up, Kevin?”

“It’s about Mr. Singh…and you,” he said slowly, not wavering as his older friend’s gaze became cautious. “Mr. Singh is obviously the civilian crewman that many of the other crew members are talking about. He’s brilliant, and as far as I understand, saved the ship as the gravity went crazy, and we were about to crash against that bloody asteroid during the Klingons’ attack yesterday. Pavel told me about it. Yet Mr. Spock seems to be very…tense when it comes to Mr. Singh, and he said that Mr. Singh’s ‘status’ made it impossible for you to recruit him, so you named him a petty officer.”
Jim figured that wasn’t everything, and although he became anxious about where Kevin was going with this. But for once, he wisely kept quiet and let Kevin voice his thoughts. The young man took a deep breath before continuing. “You call Mr. Singh by his given name and are...protection of him. There’s a rumor going around that you were pretty freaked out about Mr. Singh catching Nureaux in your quarters and that Nureaux threatened him.” His dark eyes fixed his friend. “And there is also a rumor that Nureaux shot him – with a phaser set on stun, yet Mr. Singh wasn’t knocked out. That’s...extraordinary, to say the least. But something’s not right here, Jim.” He took another deep breath as he watched his old friend tense up more and more as he went on. “Don’t get me wrong. I don’t want to pry, but...I can’t help but wonder...”

For several moments Kirk held the younger man’s gaze, then he took a very deep breath. “Kevin, the whole topic is...complicated. Too much knowledge about all this could be dangerous for you.”

It was the wrong thing to say. Immediately the young Irishman cocked his head and replied carefully, “We have both faced danger in the past, Jim, yet neither of us backed down, even when we just kids. This assault of your quarters, your obvious urge to keep Mr. Singh’s presence aboard a secret to anyone outside of the Enterprise, and most even inside her... That’s going to be impossible now that Security is searching for bugs in the ship. This all is connected, isn’t it?” When Kirk didn’t answer, Kevin bent forwards. “Jim, if you’re in trouble, just tell me. I’ll never let you down, I swear! If you need help – support...I’m there for you.”

Kirk nibbled at his bottom lip and finally made up his mind. He knew that he could trust Riley, that the young man belonged to the select group of whom he could be certain not to betray him. “Kev, only a few people know the whole truth and it needs to remain that way. Not because I’m worried about my safety, but for others’, yours.”

Riley lifted both brows. “So you are in trouble!” he stated. “Because of Mr. Singh and his presence aboard?”

“More or less. But mainly because there are those within the Federation who would violate the true purpose of Starfleet; who have no scruples about killing their own people, and who remain in the shadows until the time is right for them to come out of their rat holes to take over the command. I know them; they’ve done it before. And they’d do it again.” He fixed the young Irishman. “Don’t you understand, Kev? If I would tell you everything, you’ll become a liability for them, too. Staying aboard this ship during the war is dangerous enough. There’s no need to add more danger to your life by sharing something with you that would put you in the line of fire, just for the sake of ship’s gossip. It’s already enough that the senior officers risk their necks for all the shit going on.”

Nodding slowly, Riley accepted Jim’s decision. “All right. I know I can’t change your mind. But if you need help, if there’s anything I can do for you, please let me know. Yeah, I’m only a cadet in my second year, and you’ve had experiences others can barely imagine, yet I know how easy it is for you to find yourself in serious trouble!” he said with a teasing smirk that was returned with one of
Kirk’s most innocent smiles. “So, if there’s anything I can do to support you, just let me know,” Kevin added.

Jim felt touched. They hadn’t seen each other in more than twelve years, yet several things hadn’t changed: like the trust and the loyalty they held for the other one. Grinning at the younger man, Kirk replied, “Maybe there will come a time when I’ll need to come back on that offer. And then I’ll tell you everything. But right now, I need to try to keep you away from the danger that I and Mr. Singh are already in.”

Kevin raised his eyebrows.

Kirk knew he’d already said too much and that he should keep quiet, yet the words left his mouth without his doing. “Nien is on the run until he can face a fair trial, something he’s been denied until now. Almost all of these traitors within Starfleet and the Federation want him eliminated because he knows everything about them. So they’ll stop at nothing to keep him silent, especially since he’s no further use to them.”

“And Nureaux works for these guys? Are we talking a big conspiracy here, like what happened last year? This all about that odd shadow department everyone knows about but no one talks about, isn’t it?” Kevin concluded correctly, then whistled as Kirk only lifted both brows. “Wow, you’re in deep shit, Jim. And I don’t even know the whole story.” He hesitated. “But maybe you can answer me one more thing. Something private.”

“Shoot.”

“Mr. Singh and you are close friends, aren’t you?” As Kirk only nodded, mirth appeared in Kevin’s eyes. “Just how close is ‘close’?” Fascinated, he saw a faint blush rising in his older friend’s cheeks. “Ah, I get it, although I never imagined you went for the same gender,” he snickered. “Well, why not?” He cocked his head again. “And the crew doesn’t know about you two.” It was a statement, not a question, yet Jim felt bound to answer.

“Of course they don’t know. It’s probably not a good idea for them to know that their captain is in a relationship with someone who isn’t even officially aboard, and who roams the ship as a petty officer who never gets mentioned in the logs.”

Promptly Kevin began to laugh. “That’s so you!” he teased, then he winked at Kirk. “Your secret is safe with me, Jim. This talk never happened.”
"Thanks, Kev. I would really appreciate if you didn’t let on about our relationship in front of anyone. Spock, Dr. McCoy and Lieutenant Uhura know, no one else, so…” He flipped his hand.

"Sure thing, Jim," Riley smirked, then he shook his head. "You do realize that this is something for my romantic Irish soul, don’t you?"

Kirk began to chuckle again. "Yeah, I know. Do you still believe in fairies?"

Kevin shrugged. "Well, not exactly, yet it would kill one of them if I ever speak those fatal words out aloud."

This time Jim burst out laughing. "You stopped believing in them, yet you’re afraid to ‘kill’ one of them? You know that’s crazy, right?"

"I’m Irish, what do you expect?" Riley grinned, spreading his arms.

Before Jim could give a reply to that statement, one that would most likely have caused Spock to lecture him about illogic, the intercom buzzed. "Kirk here," Jim answered.

"Giotto here, sir. We’ve found something interesting in Nureaux’s quarters. I think you and Commander Spock should have a look at it."

"I’m on my way," Kirk said, cut off the connection, and rose. "Sorry, Kev, duty calls."

"No problem, Jim, I’m back on duty too." He followed his captain and friend out of the small briefing room.

"Expect to be transferred to the main bridge schedule tomorrow," Jim advised him. "I’ll talk with Chekov and make sure he familiarizes you with the full duties of an ensign." He caught Riley’s perplexed gaze and added, "As I said, you did a good job and stayed absolutely professional in the moments of highest stress. I need officers like that I can rely on – and whom I can trust." He snickered as the younger man stared with gaping at him. "Don’t catch flies, Kev. Until later!" He walked away and ran into Spock at the next corner, who Giotto had also informed. Together they strode down the hallway to the next lift, both curious as to what the Chief of Security had found.
The icy blue eyes in the green face stared at the nine shapes held against their will in the little room. D’nyrrs pursed his lips as his attention first fixed on the two Vulcans, of whom the older seemed to be suffering more than the younger one, even if his injuries weren’t fatal. His breath heaved from time to time, and even his stoic façade couldn’t completely hide the pain he clearly felt. Then the Orion’s gaze wandered to the two women, both bruised and tousled, yet still beauties who remained surprisingly calm. D’nyrrs smiled. He would get a very good price for them. Maybe even more, as for the four admirals who never tired of demanding to speak to the Syndicate whenever they were provided with food.

D’nyrrs knew that the elder one of the two dark-skinned Terrans was very valuable – especially to the Romulans. To have the head of Starfleet in their hands would certainly be a welcome surprise for the Romulans, and D’nyrrs expected their offer within the next two or three days. His contact had already spoken with his Romulan counterpart, and although the decision was up to the Romulan Senate, the Orion knew that they wouldn’t pass up such a chance.

Beside the head of Starfleet there were the three other admirals, of which one – who went by the name of Komack – was seriously injured, yet he still lived; last but not least because of the doctor D’nyrrs had forced to work for him. If everything went as he thought it would, there would be an auction in a few days – one the Syndicate wasn’t aware of which would bring him enough money to live for the rest of his life in the lap of luxury. He’d even get Credits – or Dilithium – for the Tellarit who had survived, and the young Andorian they had recovered from beneath his superior’s dead body.

Yes, life was good for D’nyrrs at the moment. And as his second in command stepped to his side and D’nyrrs ordered him to inform all ‘businessmen’ with an interest in buying the ‘goods’, the Orion even smiled. Soon he would be rich – very rich! And he certainly wouldn’t share anything with Klokh! If he had done what that idiot had demanded, the captives would have been dead now – absolutely useless to him. But because he was cleverer than the Klingon, he’d make the deal of his life soon! Very soon! Yes – life was good!

“We found the receiver and the transmitter just here, sir,” Giotto said and pointed to the bottom of Nureaux’s night stand which had been loosened and could be removed with two easy movements. “Our scanner showed absolutely nothing, just as Lieutenant Uhura was able to activate the bugging device we discovered in your quarters, sir. The receiver and recorder are completely offline, therefore we needed some time to find it – and latter only by accident because of Jack’s wariness.” He nodded to one of the Redshirts. “He removed the books off the nightstand and saw the bottom moving a little bit. It had been dismantled and laid loosely over the socket – a really perfect hiding place, if you ask me.”
Jim glared at the two small devices. “Why didn’t our scanners find them? At least they would have reacted to the metal.”

“I think they have their own shield, sir.” He lifted his scanner and let it hover over the open bottom of the nightstand. “See, no read-outs.”

“May I, Mr. Giotto?” Spock asked and took the scanner from the other man, adjusting it. And all of sudden the read-out reacted. “I already assumed something like this. They have their own power source which provides them with the needed energy for the transmissions and the shields. It produces a very high frequency that is far above the limit of human hearing.”

“But you heard it?” Jim asked, baffled and received a ‘Vulcan brow’ for it.

“I felt a slight pressure in my ears which indicated the use of a power source atypical for everything else aboard.” Spock adjusted the scanner anew. “Fascinating. The transmitter is switched off and it appears that this can be used for sending subspace messages to Lieutenant Nureaux’s…handler,” he said for lack of a better word. “The other one is a receiver with a small recorder, certainly made to record anything the bugging device in your quarters would have caught if Nureaux had successfully installed it.”

A deep frown appeared on Jim’s forehead, while he desperately tried not to think of what Nureaux and Section 31 would have heard regarding his private life with Nien! The mere thought that there could have been traitors to the Federation sitting at a table and listening to the pillow talk (and more!) emanating from his quarters made Kirk blush, despite his attempt to suppress his imagination.

Spock seemed to realize what he – Jim – was thinking and quickly continued, “Captain, I do not believe there is sufficient risk in removing the devices to examine them.”

“Do it,” Kirk nodded. “I want to be informed of the results as soon as you get any.”

“Of course, sir. Uhura contacted me a few minutes ago. She and Mr. Singh have successfully opened the bugging device and are almost done with the analysis. We should have the results shortly.”

“Very good,” Jim acknowledged.
“There is more, sirs,” Giotto addressed his two superiors. “We also found Mr. Nureaux’s PADD and another one that isn’t Starfleet issue. We tried to access it, but it’s encrypted with a code I’ve never seen before.” He looked at Spock. “Maybe you, Commander…”

“Of course, I shall attempt to gain entry,” the Vulcan interrupted him calmly, accepting the electronic device.

At the same moment the intercom whistled again. “McCoy to Kirk.”

Turning to the intercom panel Jim accepted the hail. “Kirk here.”

“Jim, I’ve been told that Nureaux just woke up. I’m on my way to treat him. Do you want to join me for a little talk?”

“With pleasure,” the young captain growled. “We’ll meet in the brig, Kirk out.” He glanced at Spock. “Do you want to come with me?”

“That won’t be necessary, Captain. I have a hypothesis about this whole matter, and I am certain that you will be able to provide me with the rest of the evidence afterwards. In the meantime, I shall begin with the examination of Mr. Nureaux’s other devices here. Time is of the essence now, and I suggest we act quickly to all the facts available when Commodore Wesley meets with us.”

Jim nodded. “Right, Mr. Spock, I’ll see you later.” He looked at Giotto and Jack Allison. “Good work, gentlemen. At ease.”

He left and headed for the brig, where he met Bones three minutes later. The CMO stood beside the guard at the safety console, ignored the furious glare of Nureaux and talked to the officer on duty. “Ah, Jim!” he acknowledged his friend’s arrival. “If looks could kill, no doctor – or shaman to use Spock’s thoughts on highly-specialized medical personnel – would be able to save me. Or you, because he looks like he wants to tear your throat out.” He nodded towards the lieutenant, in whose eyes loathing and contempt burned.

“I’ll survive,” Kirk stated coldly, trying to tame his wrath as he remembered that the captive had tried to murder his best friend and his mate! “Let us in, Ensign, and switch off the speakers. Privacy is still granted on this ship, even if this bastard violated mine,” he ordered the duty officer, and several seconds later, the two senior officers entered the cell. The force field was immediately raised again and the red light on a panel showed that no word that would be spoken inside could be heard.
Nureaux sat on the small cot and glared at McCoy. “I don’t need your help, Doctor.”

“You’ve got a broken arm that has to be treated, so you do need my help,” Bones answered sharply. “And your pride will not prevent me from doing my duty, even if I would prefer treating a Klingon!”

“Yes, treating an official enemy of the Federation with utter care and giving them shelter seems to be a habit aboard this ship.” Nureaux’ gaze wandered to Kirk. “Isn’t that right, Captain?”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to make jokes, Lieutenant,” Kirk answered with a calmness he didn’t feel. “You’re accused of the attempted murder of First Officer Commander Spock and Petty Officer Singh. Furthermore you’ll be charged with burglary, espionage, and…”

“I would rather call it acquiring evidence of your obvious treachery, Captain: offering shelter to a wanted terrorist, concealing him from the authorities, and using him for your own purposes is enough to send you to jail for the next eighty years!”

“My own purposes? What’s that supposed to mean? I certainly would never force a man into stasis or use him as a lab rat, until –”

“No, you’d rather use him for your own plans, Captain. What did you offer this creature to keep it in check? Maybe your –”

“STOP calling him a ‘creature’!” Jim shouted. “He is more of a man than you’ll ever be, because –”

“Because he warms your bed?” Nureaux sneered, and chuckled as Kirk’s eyes widened. Smiling in triumph, Philip rose from the cot. “Your reaction just proves what I’d already suspected when I saw the two pillows and bedclothes and found the two razors – clearly both used by men.” He shook his head in disgust. “You should be ashamed – you, the Federation’s newest hero, fucking an inhuman being who killed thousands of innocent people as it steered Starfleet’s newest ship into San Francisco!”

Jim felt fury rising in him like he’d seldom felt before – a deadly, icy fury that laid a red hue over his vision. The very same kind of fury that had befallen him last year after Pike’s death.
McCoy saw the utter rage sparkling in his friend’s eyes and quickly cut in. “You shouldn’t talk about things you know nothing about, Lieutenant!” he said firmly. “The Vengeance’s whole guidance system was down and Khan managed to steer her away from the Academy’s buildings, which would have suffered the full impact otherwise. As tragic as the crash into San Francisco’s financial district and the death of many victims is, this accident wasn’t Khan’s fault – he saved thousands of children and students!”

“A lie!” Nureaux hissed. “You really belie that this monster –”

Mr. Singh may have been born in a lab as a result of DNA experiments to perfect the human race, but that is hardly his fault!” McCoy interrupted him sharply. “You don’t have to have been born from a test tube to be a monster, Lieutenant. In my short time out in space I’ve seen and met enough monsters to tell the difference! They come in different shapes – as enemies who enjoy torturing captives, as hitmen who did their best to blow a whole space station out of orbit down on a city, or in the shape of a fleet that wanted to eliminate a planet’s whole population because they have business with us. And I’d certainly call a fleet admiral who attacked and sacrificed his own people to further a personal purpose a ‘monster’!”

“Are you really comparing the Augment with Admiral Marcus?” Nureaux challenged, ignoring McCoy’s previous tirade.

“No, I wouldn’t, not even in my worst dreams – because Khan defended himself, while Marcus didn’t shrink from blackmail, murder, torture, and utter cruelty; things I hope you’ll never consider no matter what the reason. Your treachery is bad enough!”

“Cruelty? What this beast did –”

“Mr. Singh only tried to protect his crew – like any good captain should,” McCoy snapped, only realizing now how much he was standing up for the former dictator. Good God, if somebody had told him he’d be saying something like that last year he’d have called them insane.

Nureaux snorted mockingly. “A good captain like Kirk, who certainly puts his Augment-pet’s welfare above his crew’s?”

“‘Kirk’ is here!” Jim snarled, holding his composure barely in check. “And to say it bluntly, I don’t give a shit what you think of Mr. Singh, because he – the savior of Tammeron and New Aberdeen – demands far more respect than little wannabe-Judases like you.” Before Nureaux could respond,
Kirk continued, “That you tried to spy on me is perhaps something I could personally forgive, but that you tried to murder not only Mr. Singh but also Commander Spock, the first officer of this ship, is something that will land you to jail.”

Nureaux frowned. “I didn’t attempt to kill Commander Spock, even if he deserves the death penalty for conspiring together with you and –”

“You aimed a phaser at him that was set to kill!” Jim almost roared. “And you would have shot him he’d hadn’t have been quicker than you!”

“I wanted to shoot this Frankenstein’s monster, not –”

“So you admit attempting to murder Mr. Singh?” Kirk hissed. “And you also would have killed Spock!”

“I certainly admit nothing to someone low enough to ally himself with that creature against Starfleet and the Federation. I’m not –”

“Conspiracy against Starfleet and the Federation?” Jim thought he’d misheard Nureaux, then a flush of pure anger colored his face. “That’s saying something coming from you – a chess piece in the dirty game Section 31 is playing at the moment.”

“Section 31?” Nureaux stared at him, baffled.

“Yeah, the bunch of traitors who were responsible for that whole disaster last year and who tried to provoke a war between us and the Klingons – which was very successful in the end, now that we’ve lost so many people in this ‘war’!” Kirk growled. “Don’t tell me that you haven’t heard of Section 31. I believe that even less than –”

“I don’t get my orders from Section 31!” Philip protested, and something in his voice told Jim that the lieutenant was telling the truth.

“I believe Mr. Nureaux’ statement, Captain.” Spock seemed to come from nowhere as he stepped into the cell, the moment the force-field had lowered again briefly. “He received his instructions from the SBI – the only department that has access to any information concerning the former Section 31, including Mr. Singh, both his actions in the past and present.” He lifted his right hand which held the
‘You broke the code?’ Jim asked, feeling a part of his rage leaving him at the calming presence of his T’hy’la.

‘Yes, it was not difficult; it is based on Code 9 – an enhancement, no doubt, yet not a problem for Lieutenant Uhura and me. The files are very interesting, Captain.’ He switched on the PADD and showed Kirk what he had meant.

There were pictures of Khan, obviously aboard the secret space station Scotty had found last year. But there was more – things Jim had feared and now found confirmed: he and Khan fighting Kor and his comrades in the bar on Aldebaren; he and Khan on the hyper-bike, being caught in a speed-trap; he and Khan with his cap on at the space harbor, crossing the hangar to reach the transporter room to beam aboard the space station…

‘Holy shit,’ Jim whispered.

Spock nodded. ‘Not exactly the words I would have used, but I agree as to their meaning. I also was able to identify the user who copied these pictures and videos onto the PADD: The SBI.’ He switched off the device. ‘With that information, Uhura and Khan found the classification of the bugging device and the transmitter we confiscated. I researched its specifications and found that they are only produced and used by one department within the whole of Starfleet.’

‘The SBI,’ Jim concluded; feeling sick. ‘So, does this mean that the SBI is working together with Section 31 – or that they are…one and the same?’

‘Not affirmed, Captain, yet there is an 89.6 percent chance that at least some high-ranking officer within the SBI has a separate agenda within Starfleet, or even may have begun the process of building another shadow department – maybe indeed another Section 31.’

‘And Barnett, Nogura, and the others would’ve been in their way,’ Jim whispered; feeling horror rising as his assumptions became more and more a harsh reality.

A loud ‘Ouch!’ followed by curses drew the command team’s attention back to Nureaux, who was rubbing his right arm, while he glared daggers at McCoy. ‘Is that how you treat injured personnel?’ he hissed.
“I set your broken bones, boy. That’s usually painful,” Leonard answered clipped.

“Ever heard of anesthesia?” Philip snapped, and gasped as the CMO nonchalantly gave him anything-but-gentle hypo.

“I need all my painkillers to treat the real crew after yesterday’s attack. Thank your traitor-buddies for that. After all they wanted this blasted war!” He roughly gripped Nureaux’ right wrist, ignored the outcry, and stabilized his arm with a firm fixed dressing.

“You should lose any doctor’s accreditation you might have! If you had any to start with,” Philip groused.

“Be glad that I treated you using modern-day techniques, and not trying to remember my voodoo-shaman training,” McCoy deadpanned – giving Spock ‘the look’.

Jim watched the lieutenant and felt deep loathing rising in him once more. “So, you let yourself be taken in by a group the Federation Council has declared an underground criminal organization and –”

“And you’re fucking a wanted terrorist and harboring him on your ship. We’re not so far apart from each other, Kirk!” Nureaux taunted.

Jim moved forwards, shaking Spock’s hand away as the Vulcan tried to hold him back. In a second, Kirk had the lieutenant by the front of his shirt and pushed him hard against the next wall, lifting Nureaux off his feet in the process.

“You and I are farther apart from each other than one end of the galaxy to the other because I would never break the oath I gave to serve and to protect the Federation! And I certainly would never lower myself to work for a bunch of murderers, traitors, and power-hungry people who subvert Starfleet and try to change her into an army with just one purpose: growth through violence! You and your friends are everything any man and woman in Starfleet should despise, because you’re about to destroy the essence of the Federation. Peace, legality, democracy! I’d rather ram the Enterprise into the next moon before I’d watch everything we’ve built in the last two hundred years fall apart because of some bastards mistake responsibility with might!”

The lieutenant’s face was red by now, while he struggled and finally kicked out, but Kirk’s grip on him didn’t waver for a second.
“They’ll still get you, Kirk!” he wheezed. “They warned me about you, your Vulcan puppet, and the crazy officers who follow you no matter what order you give. You’ll all pay and –”

Jim had had enough and threw Nureaux through the cell, where he crashed into the force field. An electric shock passed through him and he cried out before rolling himself away, staring dizzily at Kirk. The man possessed strength which was – inhuman. He met the blazing eyes of the captain and braced himself for a further attack.

“Jim!” McCoy’s warning and stern voice cut through the fury that coursed through Kirk’s whole being, but it was the strong, warm hand on his upper arm that stopped him from approaching Nureaux again. A calm steadiness breathed through him as Spock lowered his mental shields and allowed his mind to brush against Jim’s – soothing the enraged human like nothing could have done except for Nien.

“Jim,” Spock said quietly. “Stop! He is not worth even your rage.”

The deep, quiet voice of his friend had the expected effect on the young captain. Taking a deep breath, he let go of the anger while he glanced at his T’hy’la. The dark eyes shone with understanding, but also with a silent warning. To mistreat a captive was a crime – one Jim would have to face consequences for if he continued like this.

Pressing his lips into a thin line, Kirk straightened himself, which Spock took as the signal that it was safe to let him go; Jim was in control again.

Nureaux rose – slowly and clearly shaken by his commanding officer’s outburst, yet he couldn’t stop himself from sneering, “What has this creature offered you beside sex, Captain? Some of his supercells so that you have the strength of –”

“Rage can have profound effects on someone. Just look in the next mirror,” Kirk replied sharply. “And if you think I’ll touch you again, you’re seriously mistaken because I won’t dirty my hands with trash like you!”

“You’re the only one who touches trash, Kirk, every time you give yourself to that synthetic beast!”

Again the captain’s eyes began to almost glow, and Spock found it necessary to intervene anew. “Lieutenant Nureaux lost family because of the Vengeance’s crash,” he told Kirk. “His file was
locked, but I found my way into Command’s database and found the original file. He lost a cousin in Starfleet, Ensign Louis Nureaux.” His gaze found the man who almost murdered him. “I am certain that revenge was his motivation in accepting the job with the SBI – or the one the conspirators gave him.”

“Revenge,” Jim spat. “An eye for and eye, a tooth for a tooth – I’ve enough of that bullshit! To fight violence with more violence is the beginning of the end.”

“And the reason you choked me?” Nureaux taunted

Kirk only scoffed. “That was for threatening my friends – a warning. So do yourself a favor and stay down until I can hand you over to the court.”

He strode forwards and gave the duty ensign a signal to lower the force field.

Nureaux began to laugh. “That’s it? No questions about my orders, my superiors? No demands of –”

Jim stopped and turned around. “Don’t think I’m ready to play your little games, Nureaux. Would you really give me the names of those who are behind this?” As Philip only glared back at him, Kirk nodded. “I thought so.” He left the cell, Spock and McCoy on his heels. “Ensign, standard treatment, but no visitors. If someone wants to see him, inform me immediately.”

The man saluted. “Aye, sir!”

The three friends left the brig, knowing that they had scraped away a little bit more from the conspiracy-laden iceberg that drifted alongside them. The SBI was behind the whole thing – the only question was exactly who and where they were.

And there was one other thing nagging on Jim’s subconscious. Nureaux’s threat that the Enterprise’s officers would soon ‘pay’ for everything. The SBI – or Section 31 – was up to something involving him, Nien, his friends, and his ship. And he hadn’t the slightest clue what that was.

He would learn it soon enough…
Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Spock can scare you when he really becomes angry the way he was in the two re-boot films, yet Jim is scarier when he’s utterly pissed off. The universe has to learn not to threat his friends or he becomes quite the madman (in a positive way).

At least our friends found some proofs for their assumptions concerning the SBI and Section 31, the spy is out of the way and Kevin learned a little bit of Jim’s love-secret. Latter will be important soon.

I hope you liked the new chapter, including the action and the humor – and, like always, I’m looking so forward to your comments.

In the next update Luengo closes up the trap for Jim and his friends, not knowing that he provokes a storm with his plan that can backfire. I don’t want to reveal too much, only one detail: Jim and Khan learn of the whereabouts of the other Augments – and both as well as Spock and the others realize that now the real fight for survival will begin.

Have a nice rest of the week,

Until next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Happy New Year to all of you and I hope you got a good start into the first week of work. Thank you so much for all the comments you left and I’m happy that you loved the last chapter so much.

Well, the new one will hold some surprises for our heroes and you. As already revealed in the epilogue of the last installment, Luengo & Co are laying out the trap for Jim, Nien and the others, what will lead to another part of the adventure and is going to peak in the big show-down. You also will learn more about the captive’s planned fate and you’ll meet M'Rek, the Klingon Chancellor again.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 52 – There is no choice given

After their visit to the brig, Spock led Kirk and McCoy to his that he shared with Uhura, which was also safe from any bugs, as the Vulcan and she had personally checked it over. Only then did he tell them of his own thoughts concerning Section 31 – that he had already anticipated that the SBI was behind everything. Last but not least, Admiral Luengo’s involvement in Khan’s forced stay in the secret labs and Luengo’s resistance to offering any help as Jim had been taken prisoner by the Klingons had given Spock the idea.

The three friends discussed the whole situation, yet they knew that they were running out of time. They would meet Wesley tomorrow and until then, they had to find ironclad proof of what was going on. Even if the commodore believed their assumptions without it, his hands would be tied.

And there was still the threat that Section 31 would take action against Kirk and the others soon, and that manifest itself in many ways – from an open attack to a deadly trap.

As the friends finally separated, it was already evening and Jim felt tired out. Checking in one last
time with the bridge, he went to his quarters, ready to fall into bed, even though he doubted that he’d be able to sleep.

He stepped into his quarters – trying to suppress the memory that this bastard of Nureaux had gone through his personal things – and stopped dead in his tracks. The light was at seventy-five percent, soft music played, the table was set for two including a candle, and the pleasant smell of lemongrass lay in the air. Nien waited for him, clad in his Indic clothes and bare feet.


“I heard you had a rough day.”

Jim snorted gently. “And yours wasn’t any better – after all, it was you who was threatened with a phaser.”

“Yes, but you were threatened by your own emotions.” Nien closed the distance between them and cupped his beloved’s face with both hands. “I sensed your fury, your loathing – your utter rage while you were down in the brig. I know that there are only a few things which can elicit such an outraged reaction from you, among them an offense and threat towards one of your family – or me.”

Kirk looked up in those fathomless blue-green eyes, full of understanding and soothing comfort, and let himself sink against the Augment. He felt those long strong arms wrap around him and sighed with the first peace in what felt like hours. Had been hours. Leaning his head in the crook of Nien’s neck, he closed his eyes and let the physical and mental warmth wash over him before he murmured, “That goddamned bastard talked as if you were…a thing. And there was so much hatred. He lost a cousin in the Vengeance’s crash and…” He took another deep breath and Khan’s scent calmed him even more. “Spock checked his file. It was altered, the real one was in Command’s database and he hacked in. Spock thinks that the SBI is behind everything – that it’s about to re-build Section 31. Only they have access to all the data they need, have their own people which officially don’t even exist, and are strong enough to pull the strings they need to succeed.”

Khan pursed his lips, ignoring the short sting deep inside as he realized that once again, a stranger directed murderous attention towards him because of what happened last year – even if he was innocent in the matter of the crash. “It makes sense; I have to agree with Mr. Spock,” he said slowly. “Intelligence, secret services, agents – they always work in the shadows, steering events, people, and even whole governments. And the devices and transmitters are used by the SBI, as Lieutenant Uhura affirmed. All evidence points at the SBI, yet we’ve no proof.”

Jim groaned and stepped back. “I’m almost sure that Bob is going to believe me, but you’re right.
Without any proof, he can’t act. And how should he act without giving himself and us away? If the SBI is behind this whole mess, then how should we proceed without giving ourselves away?”

Khan cocked his head. “Section 31 – or whatever it’s called now – already knows that it’s about to be revealed, otherwise Nureaux wouldn’t have gotten the order to spy on you and –”

“And on you, too!” Jim rubbed his neck. “Spock broke the code of Nureaux’s PADD. There are very clear photos and records of us on Aldebaran – in the bar, in the space port, on the hyperbike…” He shook his head. “Command – or at least the SBI – knows that we two are working together and assumes correctly that you’re aboard.”

“Then it’s only a matter of time until they try to get us,” the former dictator mused, before he added, “Lieutenant Uhura found out that Nureaux had already sent a subspace message via the high-tech transmitter that was found in his quarters. She tried to reconstruct it to learn its content.”

A snort escaped Kirk. “I think I already know what it says: that you’re on the Enterprise. Nureaux was on the bridge yesterday and saw you – recognized you. Of course he informed his superiors of his first little success by finding you here.” He shook his head. “Dammit! If Barnett was still alive and in charge, I would bring him in on this. He’s one of those men you can trust, but now we’re going to need a miracle.” He rubbed his eyes. God, he was sick of this all!

“A miracle? Well, I don’t believe in miracles but I believe it’s about time you have something to eat and to relax afterwards,” the super-human said sternly and gestured towards the table. “Sit down; I’ve already programed the replicator.”

Without protest, Jim did as he was told. He was too tired and still too stirred up to refuse. “What’s on the menu?” he asked and caught a mischievous smile from his mate, while Nien stood at the device.

“One of your favorites,” Khan answered. “Unhealthy with far too much fat, yet after the unpleasant events of the last two days, an exception is in order.” He took the tray the replicator delivered, returned to the table – and Jim’s eyes widened in utter surprise, as he caught sight of a double-cheeseburger, tomatoes, pickles, onions, a lot of mayonnaise and ketchup, and a portion of French fries.

“Bones would hypo me into the next week if he saw this,” he said with the happiness of a child at Christmas.
“Then we should keep this our secret,” Khan chuckled and sat down, too. He had ordered the same for himself, yet he wasn’t too thrilled about it. Still, sharing the same meal symbolized closeness, and he was willing to give the ‘American finger-food’ (as he called it), a try. After the first bite he had to admit that it wasn’t all bad. By the third bite, he realized why so many people might love this stuff. Spicy, sour, yet a little bit sweet, salty because of the fried potatoes... Yes, he had eaten worse!

“You should try it, big bro. I know you’re going to love it!” Joaquin’s cheerful voice sounded in his memories, while the young Israeli beamed at him – mouth smeared with ketchup and mayonnaise. They had been in New Delhi at the time, shortly before Khan had become ruler of India, and later of the whole of Asia. Joaquin had been only thirteen and...

“You like it?”

The gentle tenor was different from his little brother’s voice, and the eyes which looked at him expectantly were blue and not hazel, yet the excitement and the grin were the same. And just like all those years – no, centuries! – ago, Khan couldn’t resist the cheerfulness.

“Yes, it’s…unexpected-tasting.”

Jim began to laugh. “Oh my god, you sound like Spock!”

Khan grimaced. “I really can’t imagine him eating something like this – too unhealthy and far too much flesh.”

Kirk still snickered. “Yeah, he would raise both brows and glare at me with that expression that tells me I’m absolutely nuts.”

“Sometimes his assumptions concerning his crew mates are correct,” Khan teased and scowled as a napkin came flying his way. He caught it a second before it collided with his face.

Jim grinned broadly at him and pointed at the napkin. “Don’t be shocked, honey. I’m ‘nuts’, as you stated a second ago.”

He ducked as the napkin was thrown back at him and burst out laughing as a second cloth came flying towards him immediately afterwards. Catching it, he lifted his hand with it as if he wanted to send it back, then he smirked and placed it in his lap. “Is that correct behavior for a king?” he
snickered, and Nien’s eyes widened.

“You started this childish game,” he said, and Kirk chuckled even more.

“I’m only a mere human and ‘nuts’, but you’re supposed to be the superior here, so…”

He didn’t get further as the Augment rose and was in front of the captain in the blink of an eye, pulling him to his feet. Before Jim could even begin to protest, he was lifted up and thrown over one strong shoulder, carried away like a sack of potatoes.

“Hey, this is manhandling your commanding officer!” Jim called, feeling lightheaded from dangling upside down – and getting a very good view of Khan’s slender backside.

“Those who behave like a child shall be handled like a child,” Nien stated with a low drawl. A second before he could dump Kirk onto the bed the younger man’s hands gripped his ass and began to knead it. Nien groaned as long-suppressed desire instantly flared up. Alas, this crazy boy-man would be his doom one day. Growling something in his native tongue, he all but hurled Kirk onto the bunk. Jim began to laugh, barely catching his breath. The Augment was over him in an instant, and before Jim could react, Khan stripped him of the golden uniform tunic.

“So impatient?” Kirk teased again – and gasped as those long strong fingers grasped his black undershirt material and ripped it apart.

If Jim was aroused before, he now felt pure fire raging through his whole being as he met Nien’s fierce gaze, and saw the naked hunger on the slender, pale face. The sudden animalistic side of his mate made him almost come right there and then. Without thinking, he reached for Khan and pulled him towards him; their mouths came together in a wild battle of teeth and tongues.

Dinner was forgotten – the whole mess of the last two days was forgotten. Nothing else mattered more except the sheer need to feel and to become one once more.

For one sane moment, Jim thought that maybe fate did mean well and that it was lucky Nureaux had been stopped before he installed the bug. The noises escaping Nien and him would have made any listener blush. Then all clear thought left the young captain completely as he gave in to his burning passion and to the man who was able to elicit it…
The little spacecraft flew at Warp 3 through the area called the Borderland between Tarlac and Turkana, heading towards Yaraka. Aboard it was early afternoon, by ship’s time and in concert with New Aberdeen on Aldebaran, yet the Rigelian at the comms station yawed as if it were late at night.

Ritek rubbed his neck to stay awake, though he had good reason to be as tired as he was. Diego, Galven, and he had dismantled the SDD from the Shadow and reinstalled it in the Santo Domingo – a small spacecraft Diego de la Vega-Martinez had repaired in his workshop four years ago but which had never been collected. Only several months later Diego had learned that the owner had died in an accident and as no-one had claimed the Santo Domingo, Diego had kept it as repayment for his work. But he rarely used it. It was small, could hold no more than eight humans, and maximum speed was Warp 4. In addition, the replicator could only produce food for a week. It was a short-distance shuttle, nothing special – and therefore perfect for the gang’s new mission.

The Shadow and her sister ship were too well-known by the Orions and the Klingons by now, and the same went for Diego’s larger ship. After the stunt they pulled at Turkana it would have been suicide to use one of them in the Borderland again. The previous days had proved that, after Galven, Ritek, and the others barely escaped the Klingon patrol. Yet they’d have to go deep into hostile territory if they wanted to have the tiniest chance of discovering if any of the delegation or the admirals had survived. And, also, Galven hadn’t given up hope of find out something about his brother.

But the success of the mission also depended on their ability to stay hidden, hence they needed the SDD – and to dismount and re-install it had taken time. Time they didn’t have, and therefore the three men had worked through the night to attach Khan’s ‘baby’ to the Santo Domingo.

Now Ritek sat at the comms station and listened to the transmissions coming through the commonly-used frequencies, eavesdropping on smugglers, pirates, dealers, and even some Klingons, yet there was no mention of the missing officers and diplomats.

Galven rose from his command chair and walked towards him. “Anything?” he asked for what felt like the tenth time within the last hour.

“Nothing – just like three minutes ago when you asked me,” Ritek groaned. “I’ve learned all about forbidden love affairs, smuggled drugs, black market prices, but nothing about stranded Starfleet personnel and diplomats.” He looked up at the Tellarit. “I think we’ve no other choice than to visit Yaraka’s moon in person.”
Galven nodded. He’d already assumed as much. “Right, let us have a closer look there – even if I really don’t like it. We should also –”

“Wait a moment!” Ritek interrupted him and adjusted the receiver of the comms station. “I caught something. There is someone inviting others to a ‘special auction’.”

Frowning, the Tellarit braced himself with a hoof-like hand on the console. “What kind of ‘special auction’?”

Again Ritek listened closely before he shook his head. “There is no elaboration, but those who are being contacted seem to understand what this guy is talking about.” He lowered his head-set. “Aren’t there rumors about the Klingon commander of the Borderland forbidding a slave-trade?”

Galven nodded slowly. “You mean this guy is calling for a slave auction and is avoiding being explicit because he fears the Klingons would interference?”

“Maybe,” the Rigelian replied slowly. “I’ll try to get some information off those who are interested in the auction and use one of their identities to ask the vendor some questions.”

“A good idea!” the Tellarit oinked. “Just don’t get caught.”

“I’m a bloody beginner?”

“Sometimes!”

At the helm Jeff rolled his eyes as a new verbal battle between the two unlike beings broke out.

ST***ST***ST

M’Rek, Chancellor of the Klingon High Council, stared with narrowed eyes at the screen of his terminal, the image of the Federation President Robertson frozen after the Klingon had ordered the computer to stop the message he’d just received.
Disbelieving, he stared into the semi-darkness of his private quarters, trying to digest what he’d just heard and learned. The Federation delegation had been killed within the Borderland by three Klingon vessels who were commanded by someone impersonating Kor, son of R’yan. And, at the same time, another Kor had gone after two commanders who’d gone rogue and attacked the Enterprise?

What in Kahless’ name was going on here? Was this a Federation trick so they could cancel the upcoming conference without losing face – a conference they themselves had requested? And if so, why was the Federation no longer interested in peace talks? Had it found a new kind of super-weapon with which it thought to force the Klingons to their knees? Or did Robertson speak the truth and there were ‘two’ Kors out there – one hunting a vessel that travelled under a white flag, while the other one tried to support Kirk, of all people!? It didn’t matter – what mattered was the fact that someone had humiliated the whole Empire by violating the ceasefire and attacking a Starfleet ship that carried diplomats and several admirals. What mattered was that there were obviously people within his own circles who’d thought his word didn’t hold any valuable anymore!

He knew that several members of the High Council didn’t agree with his decision to accept the offer of peace talks, yet it was unthinkable that some of them would rebel against his order and dishonor the Empire in this way. It was almost laughable that particularly Kor should be this one of them!

But an inner voice told him that the Federation president wasn’t lying in his message, and that there had been several incidents which forced Robertson to contact him with this news.

M’Rek cursed. Ten members of the Council were already at Azure Nebular, their subordinates preparing everything for the conference. The Federation’s delegation had been expected within the next few hours. But instead of a meeting, there would be nothing – only new riddles to be solved. Against his will, the Klingon chancellor came to understand why his Federation counterpart demanded answers. If the situation were the other way around, he would do the same – by the Black Fleet; he would demand satisfaction by attacking instantly, yet the Federation avoided violence again. Robertson was clearly outraged, but remained polite in his transmission – polite but stern. Again understandable!

Robertson had also given him an ultimatum. Within five days, the Klingons had to give some plausible explanation or the war would continue. And according to the president’s remarks, the Federation already knew of the new cloaking device, and had their own way to make its ships invisible. If the aggression continued, it would reach new levels, this much M’Rek knew. Even his Klingon pride didn’t blind him to the prospect of upcoming bloodshed that would outdo anything in recorded history.

He didn’t like the latter option. Yes, to fight and die in battle was honorable, yet there wouldn’t be much honor in governing if the Federation and the Klingons battled against each other until there was nothing left to fight for.
M'Rek needed answers – as quickly as possible.

Bending forwards, he hailed his assistant and demanded a full report of Kor’s last activities.

“Of all his activities, Milord?” Kless’H asked carefully after hearing his superior’s order.

“Yes, all activities!” M'Rek barked. “When he left Turkana, where he went, when and if he flew into Federation territory, with whom he spoke to on and off his ship, when he woke up – Kahless, even when he went to bed! I need a full report – preferable yesterday! And then I want information about those two commanders who obviously belonged to his fleet, and clearly went insane! And then get me Lord K’Ral from Intelligence. I want to know who the idiot was who pretended to be Kor. And quickly, Kless’H!”

His assistant nodded hastily. “As you wish, Milord!” The screen went dark again and M'Rek leant back in his chair. Someone was fooling around here – not only with the Federation, but also with the honor of the Klingon Empire! He would learn the truth, and those who were responsible for bringing disgrace to the High Council and to him would pay dearly!

ST***ST***ST

“Admiral, Admiral Norton is here for you,” Luengo’s secretary reported. It was early morning in San Francisco, and despite the late time of year, the skies were blue and the sun promised a day without the fog this town was famous for.

“Thank you,” Luengo answered, and watched Albert enter his office.

“You wanted to talk to me?” he asked, and José nodded.

“Yes, please have a seat.” He pointed at one of the two visitor’s chairs on the other side of his desk – his new desk in Barnett’s former office! He waited until Norton had made himself comfortable, then he began to speak.

“I may have to alter my position, and the same goes for you. The fact that the assault on the Excalibur didn’t bring about the results we wanted has disrupted our plan immensely. It really is
irritating that our Klingon allies pretended to be someone who’d supported the Enterprise at the same time somewhere else…but this could play directly in our hands. I’ve already said that the Klingons seem to have internal differences that would make another attempted conference far too dangerous for us.”

He motioned for Norton to come around the desk and to step beside him. “I obtained a copy of Robertson’s message to the Klingons.” He opened the transmission and let Albert watch it before he switched the terminal off and looked up at him. “We’ve five days to sort everything to our favor.”

“How?” Albert prompted and sat down again.

“We’ll have to intercept the transmission of the Klingon chancellor so that the ultimatum will pass without a result. Then the Council will have no other choice than to believe that the Klingons are indeed gearing up for another strike and that the ceasefire was nothing more than a trap. Then they’ll have to agree that we have to strengthen Starfleet to protect our borders. Command will finally be taking the military path.” He took a deep breath. “And because of the lack of staff officers, they’ll name me Chief in Command permanently. Then I – we – will have a free hand to do anything that is necessary to keep the Federation safe, to reconquer our annexed areas, and to enlarge our territory.”

Norton nodded slowly. “For the latter we need the biological weapon and…”

“I know!” José interrupted him. “We have to tighten the schedule and make the needed arrangements sooner than intended – meaning, we have to lay out our trap for Kirk and the Augment now!”

“What’s about Nureaux?”

“I don’t know. I got his last and only message more than thirty hours ago. It could mean that he wasn’t able to install the bugs in Kirk’s quarters, or that he hasn’t found out anything useful to us until now. Nevertheless, I’ll initiate the next step of the plan. The Enterprise will be given a new mission – the one that will force Kirk to reveal where his true loyalties lie, and which will end him. And which will give the Augment back to your scientists.”

“It’s about time. Dashwood and Conelly are about to panic because the last experiments weren’t nearly as satisfying like the former ones. They need the Augment’s blood soon – especially if we want to be ready for the next level of battle within a few days.”

Luengo sighed. “Scientists are always impatient and in a panic as soon as something is off schedule.
As far as I understood what Dashwood was saying, the biological weapon is as good as finished, and Khan’s blood cells are only needed to start the serial production.” He smoothed his moustache. “And in case something’s happened to him that prevents Dashwood from getting more of his blood on a regular basis, you should select some of Khan’s fellow Augments to do the job.” He lifted a hand as Norton began to protest. “I know, I know, Khan’s blood has the perfect cells that Dashwood and Conelly need, yet should he not survive, their using another Augment is better than nothing. When Kirk has been arrested and the creature is back in stasis, Styles will deliver further five or six Augments to Dashwood.”

Norton sighed. “Dashwood could have had those Augments much sooner, if…”

“If I hadn’t have been under close observation during the last few weeks which tied my hands, as you certainly know. I couldn’t smuggle any of them away from Gamma 12 without arousing any more suspicion than I already have. I know we lost several weeks in the process, but this time we had to play it safe, or someone would have got wind of everything. Now’s the best chance to get some of Khan’s people and him. Dashwood will have enough time afterwards to finish the project. The new sensor disturbing device in combination with the biological agents will force the Klingons’ surrender in no time.”

“The SDD – did you find out who invented it?” Albert asked, and Luengo grimaced.

“No. There are three men who go by the name on the patent. One is a farmer on one of our colonies who’s happily growing whatever he’s growing in his fields; he’s no engineer. The second is almost a hundred years old and lives in a nursing home on Risa, and the third one is not a man but a boy, only seven years old.” He shook his head. “It’s as if our tinkerer didn’t exist until a few weeks ago.”

“Maybe it’s a pseudonym?” Albert suggested, and José snorted.

“I’d bet my shirt on it, but sooner or later he’ll have to reveal his true identity – at least when he wants to sell the thing for mass production.” He took a deep breath. “You’ll see, with the SDD and the biological agent, we’ll quickly achieve a victory over the Klingons.”

Norton nodded slowly, then he frowned. “You want to send Styles to arrest Kirk?”

“Styles has proven to be trustworthy. He did a damn good job out there, and even kept the losses as small as possible. I have great hopes for him that he’ll turn out to be one of our best captains, who really deserves command of the Enterprise. What sweeter victory can I offer him than arresting Kirk and his team, and sitting down afterwards in the center chair of our flag ship?”
This time Albert had to chuckle. “Little gifts keep friends – is that how the old saying goes?” He cocked his head. “Is the Excalibur even able to manage the confrontation you’ve in mind?”

“There will be no confrontation. Kirk and his staff will be locked away before they know what’s hit them, and the same goes for Khan. Styles will have not much trouble fulfilling his order. You’ll see.”

The alpha shift aboard the Enterprise started at 08:00 like it did every day, and like every morning since Jim and Nien had become bond-mates, both really had trouble getting out of bed – especially after the intense lovemaking they’d indulged in the evening before. They had fallen asleep afterwards – tangled in the messy sheets, enveloping each other, heartbeats thumping in union.

The morning came far too quickly, and after the chronometer reminded them that only half an hour remained until the shift began, they left the bed, had a quick breakfast from the replicator, cleaned up some of the mess, and went then to the bridge, where Kirk quickly fell into the daily routine. He first got a status report of the ship in general and from the different departments, then took care of any problem that needed his attention which occurred overnight, and afterwards worked on his own reports, using the PADD while sitting in the center seat.

The morning went by like this uneventfully, but half an hour after lunch, all that changed. Suddenly the ship began to vibrate and the engines became louder. Jim was about to call Engineering as Scotty had already hailed him and told him that he had to reduce speed to warp 3 because the damaged engines were ‘about ter become cranky’.

The reduced speed would delay their rendezvous with the Lexington for more than five hours – 5.26 hours to be exact, as Spock pointed out – and knowing that there was nothing else he could do, Kirk asked Uhura to inform Wesley that the Enterprise would be late.

Nyota did as instructed, received a response from her colleague Palmer from the Lexington and turned around to Kirk. “Captain, Commodore Wesley wants to speak with you.”

Jim sighed. ‘I hope he doesn’t want to cancel the meeting now. I have to speak in private with him, no matter what.’ Aloud he said, “On the screen, Lieutenant.”

A moment later the familiar face of Bob Wesley appeared on the large screen – a face that was still
pale, and the bags beneath his tired eyes were even darker than last time Kirk had seen him. “Hello Jim,” he greeted and Kirk answered in the same friendly way.

“You must be psychic, Jim, I was about to hail you,” Bob began. “I’ve got new orders from Command concerning several of our outposts and research facilities near the Borderland and the new Neutral Zone. It seems Command is very worried that the broken ceasefire within the Borderland is indeed a signal that the Klingons are preparing for another strike – now, when Starfleet is weakened with most of its important admirals gone. They fear that the enemy could conquer more territory now and that they’ll also annex these facilities. Therefore we have to evacuate the researching stations and bring the personnel and their experiments to safety.”

Kirk frowned. “Is there any evidence of increased Klingon activity that would require such extreme measures?”

The commodore shrugged. “Not to my knowledge, but who knows what Intelligence has discovered. The SBI is very active, as you know.”

Jim felt a certain tingle in the back of his consciousness as the name of Starfleet’s Intelligence was mentioned. “So, we’re ordered to play the evacuee vessel again?” he asked, and Bob nodded with a grimace.

“Yeah, you are. I was given strict orders about which ships would take care of which facility. In my squadron only three vessels are involved: The Hood II, the Potemkin II, and the Enterprise. I already acknowledged the orders and sent a message that the Lexington would rendezvous with you in one hour to support you with spare parts and other supplies after your battle in the Briar Patch.” He cocked his head. “Lieutenant Uhura informed me that you’re going to be late?”

The young captain nodded. “Yeah, we had to reduce the speed, otherwise the engines would have gone. We’ll be at the meeting point around 20:10. Sorry, Bob, I can’t risk a complete malfunction of the warp drive.”

“I understand.” Bob said. “I don’t think that will affect the safety of the facility you’re supposed to be evacuating. Personally, I think Command is overreacting, but on the other hand, I really can’t blame them. We’re still in the dark about the Klingon’s real intentions, and caution now is certainly wise. Yet destroying our research stations is a something I’d have expected when the Klingons had already begun an attack. But maybe this kind of strategy is typical for someone who led the SBI until now. You’d have to think like that if you spy on other people for a living.”

Jim went rigid. “What do you mean? The order came from the SBI?” From the corner of his eyes he
saw Spock tensing up as well.

Wesley’s eyes widened. “You don’t know?”

The tiny voice in Jim’s head began to become louder. “What should I know?”

“José Luengo has been named Interim Chief in Command for now.”

“What?” Kirk bent forwards, clearly not believing his own ears.

“I’m right here, Jim,” Wesley said darkly and before his protégée could voice something that could condemn him should those words somehow reach the wrong people, Bob quickly added, “He is the most experienced staff officer left at the moment, so the Council had no other choice than to promote him.” He fixed Kirk with a very firm gaze, willing the younger man to keep his mouth shut – and Jim got the hint. They could talk about this later when they met in person.

“Right – logic,” Jim only said, then he forced himself to relax and to lean back. “So, about this order…”

“I’ll send it to you. Please ready a status report when we meet, because I have to let Command know of our schedule, and when you and the two other ships should be done with the evacuation.”


“Well,” Bob nodded, “until later, Jim.” The connection was closed and Jim looked up to Spock, who remained unmoved externally, like always, but there was a short flicker in his eyes that told Kirk that his Vulcan friend was as alarmed as he was. Luengo of all people was now in charge of the whole of Starfleet – this was not a mess, this was a nightmare! And it would greatly reduce the chances of getting a fair trial for Nien and for himself too, because as sure as the sun rose in the east (on Earth), Command would accuse him of aiding and abetting Khan.

“Captain, I’ve got the order from Command for you,” Uhura reported.

“On screen,” the young captain answered. Bob hadn’t said that the whole thing was top secret so he
would receive the order openly on the bridge.

The screen now showed a lieutenant in the grey uniform of ground staff, his insignia defining him as one of the higher-ranking desk-jockeys.

The man began with a general explanation for the upcoming mission and finished with explicit orders for the captains. The Enterprise was the last ship to be addressed, and the lieutenant’s words changed the tiny warning voice in the back of Jim’s head into a full-on alert.

“To James T. Kirk, Captain of the USS Enterprise. You’re ordered to evacuate Gamma 12, near Celes, coordinates will follow. Staff number twenty-five, and their accompanying material is classified Priority One, Top Secret. Afterwards, facilitate the complete destruction of Gamma 12, including eight containers with closed experimental material, twelve high security boxes containing dangerous chemical residue, and seventy-two tubes with biological test objects.”

Khan, still at the helm, whirled around in his chair – face paling rapidly at the mention of that certain number in connection with the word ‘tubes’.

Unaffected by this reaction the transmission continued, “The cargo marked for demolition is stacked in a high security area, and will be sealed after the station’s personnel has checked it, so your involvement in its preparation isn’t necessary. I repeat: destroy the whole station, including all tubes! The evacuees will be expected on Earth 1.5 days later. Order given by Admiral José Luengo, Interim Chief in Command.”

The transmission ended and the screen once again showed the endless depths of the galaxy. For a long moment, Jim stared at the velvet darkness of the universe, while he felt his own dread mingling with his mate’s rising shock and fear.

Seventy-two tubes…

Biological test objects…

That could only mean one thing. They had finally found Nien’s crew – and he, Jim Kirk, had been ordered to *kill* them.

He felt sick. Yes, he would never – never! – do such a thing. The fact that Command had truly given
him such an order gave him insight into which direction Starfleet would sink if Luengo – if Section 31 – weren’t stopped. Marcus had made it clear that a life didn’t count much, and could be sacrificed without hesitation if it served a ‘higher’ purpose. Luengo seemed to follow the same ideology, if one could call such an inhuman thought ‘ideology’ at all.

“I consulted the computer after we were given the coordinates of the station’s location,” Spock’s calm voice interrupted Jim’s whirling thoughts. “Officially it is declared an unmanned outpost with strong transmitters for sub-space communication. But, as it seems in truth it is…

“A high security facility,” Kirk ended the Vulcan’s sentence with a flat voice. “A facility that holds stuff the Council or Command have declared as ‘very dangerous’ – among this all, seventy-two tubes.” His glance fell on Nien again. The Augment’s face was ashen, something close to panic and despair brimmed in his eyes.

Khan began to tremble without realizing it. Again, he had been forced to listen to an order that would mean the death of his brothers and sisters – just like fifteen months ago at the secret station near Jupiter. For a moment a sharp stab of pain pierced his chest, while his stomach was turning.

No!

Not again!

They couldn’t order his people’s death! Not now – not after he’d finally learned where they were! They couldn’t… They couldn’t kill them!

For a moment he saw torpedoes racing through the deadly silent and dark space, hitting buildings on an asteroid. Flames raging through the facility, reaching the high security area… The cryotubes burning, his brothers and sisters screaming…

Joaquin, Otto, Katie, Rodriguez, Pablo… They perished, their minds calling for him before there was nothing left of them except for ashes that soared through the merciless nothingness of space.

Khan shuddered and forced his mind – his superior mind – away from those images. Jim would never allow something like this to happen! He wouldn’t permit it to happen or even have a part in it! Yet the sheer prospect that his family could still die in the flames and explosions made his stomach turn and sent ice water through his veins.
Alas, he had witnessed the very same thing aboard the Vengeance, thinking his crew had died with the detonations of the torpedoes. And now exactly this kind of death had been ordered.

He felt nausea, while cold sweat broke out on his forehead and ran down his back. All his augmented brilliance, all the clear logic within his brain couldn’t stop this reaction – he was, after all, human.

Jim saw Khan’s chest heaving and how his hands closed around the repaired arm rests of the helm’s chair until the material almost cracked. To see his beloved like this – and to feel his growing panic and anguish –felt like a sword that had plunged into his soul.

He would put a stop on it – now!

Straightening his shoulders, he rose. His gaze found Uhura, who looked at him with large searching eyes – clearly startled but also angry, exactly like Chekov. Both realized what those tubes had to contain. Then Kirk’s eyes met Spock’s and a wordless understanding passed between the two soul-brothers, before Jim took a very, very deep breath. His decision could – and certainly would – cost him his command, but he had no other choice. Luengo gave him no other choice!

“Uhura, confirm receipt of the order to Starfleet Command,” he said slowly, watching his beloved go rigid. He slowly lifted one reassuring hand, signalizing Khan to remain calm. “And then ask Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott to meet me in briefing room two in the next three minutes.” His gaze became intense as it was fixed on Khan. “Nien, you and Spock are with me. Please switch the helm to navigation.” He turned and strode towards the lift; the Augment was instantly at his heels while Spock walked with large steps towards them. “Uhura, you’ve got the bridge,” Kirk said and stepped into the lift, his friend and bond-mate following him.

The doors had barely closed as Nien started to speak. “My people are there! There is no doubt! I…”

Jim reached out and placed his right index finger on Khan’s lips, while his other hand rested gently on the Augment’s right shoulder. “Ssssh, calm down, Nien. I agree that these tubes are holding your crew. But now we know where they are and can finally act!” He let his finger slip away and cupped his beloved’s cheek – trying to soothe him as he felt how cold the Augment’s skin had become, the clear proof of deep fright. “Don’t worry, nothing will happen to them. I swear.” Kirk whispered.

“And what are you going to do, Captain?” Spock asked quietly, feeling slightly uncomfortable with the open display of tenderness of his friend towards the Augment.
Jim looked over his shoulder at him, fierce determination burning in his eyes. “I’ll get them out!” he stated forcefully. Then the lift stopped and the doors slid open. With brisk steps Kirk walked out, Khan and Spock framed him while he strode through the hallway. Half a minute later they entered briefing room two and Jim, who felt the dread rolling in strong waves from his soul-mate, gestured to one of the chairs. “Take a seat, Nien, and for God’s sake, calm down! I will not allow any harm to come to your brothers and sisters. I’ll protect them like you protect my family – ‘til my dying breath.”

He nodded to Spock who sat down beside the Augment, ready to use his own link with Jim to mentally reach out to Khan to prevent him from losing control if necessary. One didn’t have to be a touch-telepath to realize the stress the super-human was experiencing at the moment. And given the experiences of the past, the Vulcan was aware that the traumatized Augment might simply snap again.

Jim walked to the replicator and ordered an Indic chai tea, a Vulcan mint tea, black tea, and two coffees. As he returned with the tray, the door opened, and McCoy and Scotty stepped in.

“What’s up, Jim?” Bones asked while he sat down, accepting the offered coffee from his friend. His gaze found Khan and he frowned as he saw the emotional turmoil plainly written on the Augment’s face.

Placing the other cups on the table, Kirk took a deep breath before he began. “We got a new order - to evacuate Gamma 12 and destroy it afterwards. Officially, Gamma 12 is an unmanned outpost, in truth it’s a high security lab facility that holds, among other things seventy-two tubes with ‘biological test objects’, as Command calls them.”

McCoy’s eyes widened, while Scotty frowned.

“Seventy-two tubes, sir? That sounds familiar!”

“Correct, Mr. Scott,” Spock answered instead of Jim. “We have every reason to believe that these tubes are the cryotubes containing Mr. Singh’s crew.”

Bones gasped. “They want us to collect Khan’s crew and…”

“No, Bones, you misunderstood! Command wants us to evacuate the twenty-five people who are serving on the facility at the moment, and then to destroy everything else.” His gaze wandered again to the Augment. “Including Nien’s family.”
Silence.

For several seconds the CMO and the chief engineer could only gape at Kirk, then Leonard exploded. “That’s impossible! They can’t… Dammit, Jim, they want us to murder seventy-two people in their sleep? Are they insane?”

“That sounds familiar too, doesn’t it?” Kirk gritted out bitterly. “And it’s no wonder that this is familiar, because behind this order stands none other than Admiral Luengo – former Chief of the SBI, certainly re-founder of Section 31, and now even Interim Chief in Command.”

“They made this bastard Chief in Command?” Bones groused outraged. “Is the Council out of its mind? This guy was in custody – hell, he should have faced trial by now, and then…”

“Due to the deaths of the most senior admirals, the selection of experienced staff officers was reduced drastically, Doctor. With the threat of the ceasefire’s ending, the Council’s uppermost concern was to ensure the safety of the Federation and Starfleet is needed – a functional Starfleet, which means that the murdered admirals have to be replaced as soon as possible,” Spock explained.

“That’s still no reason to promote someone accused of conspiracy and who has no moral problem handing a man over to a bunch of crazy scientists to abuse as a lab rat!” Leonard gritted out, then tried to control himself. His gaze found Kirk. “This whole thing might be a trap,” he said. “They’ve already sent a spy aboard, and I’d bet my last hypo that they know about Khan’s presence here. Not least of all because of the damn recordings they’ve got of you two from Aldebaran. This blasted order is a trap, and nothing else!”

The young captain grimaced. “I know, Bones. Luengo knows about Nien and me working together, and now he’s found a way to lure Nien to a place where he and Section 31 can finally get a hold of him. And where they can arrest me because for insubordination and harboring a wanted criminal.” He looked at Khan, whose eyes betrayed how miserable he felt.

“Then we have to be cleverer than they are,” Leonard hissed. “There has to be a way to stop the murder of seventy-two men and women, and…”

“You forget, Doctor, that the former Interim Chief in Command, Admiral Allistor, denied Mr. Singh and his people human status,” the first officer pointed out. “Therefore Luengo has not technically ordered ‘murder’.”
“Allistor?” Khan asked alarmed, his voice hoarse.

“Our Allistor doesn’t resemble the dead admiral,” Scotty explained. “Not one bit – and, by the way, our Allistor would rather rip off an arm than order harm anyone.” He bent forwards. “So, what are you going to do, Jim – concerning this order, I mean?”

Kirk rose. “I’ll refuse to obey it – at least one detail of it.”

Spock crossed his arms in front of his chest, already knowing what his T’hy’la planned. “You want to bring the cryotubes aboard,” he stated and the young captain nodded.

“Yes, I will. And only then will I blow that damned facility to pieces.”

“And afterwards, Jim?” Bones spoke up again. “We can’t just wake them up and hide them among the crew. This will go wrong, and you know it.” He looked at Khan. “You both know it.”

“We could bring the whole thing to court,” Montgomery cut in. “Mr. Singh and his people have a right to…”

“Didn’t you hear, Scotty?” Kirk snapped, before he began to pace along the conference table. “Nien and his people have been stripped off any human rights because Allistor declared them to be non-human.”

“I’ve never heard such a bullshit before!” the Scotsman ranted. “Of course Mr. Singh is human. What else should he be?” He looked at the stiff Augment. “Just because some idiots messed with your genes before you were born doesn’t change the fact that you’re a person!”

“Ethics are not the issue here, Mr. Scott,” Spock said calmly.

“That’s a completely new one from you!” McCoy was worked up now. “Especially since you Vulcans are always pointing out ‘how much every life counts’ and go on about ethics, but now…”
“Doctor, in this case a discussion about ethics would be a waste of time, as at the moment Mr. Singh’s status – and that of his people – cannot be changed.”

“And what are the Augments then? Their own race? Maybe not human, but a separate species?”

Jim, who had listened to the verbal combat, stopped his pacing and looked down at McCoy. “What did you just say, Bones?”

The CMO blinked irritated. “What do you mean? That in Command’s eyes the Augments are their own race, or…” He stopped, as Jim’s face began to change from deep worry to beaming revelation.

“Bones, you’re a genius!” Jim whooped, was at Leonard’s chair in two quick steps, grabbed his face, and bent down towards his forehead, but McCoy jerked back.

“Don’t you dare, Jim!”

Kirk only laughed. “That’s the solution, Bones! That’s the way out I was searching for!” He let go of McCoy, smiled at a very confused Khan, and looked finally at Spock, who lifted a brow.

“Fascinating, Captain, yet I’m curious how you want to make this work.”

Jim promptly grinned. “You know what I’m planning?”

“Of course – it is the only logical possibility left.”

“Rrrright,” McCoy grumbled. “And after you two finish displaying another incredible show of non-verbal understanding maybe one of you would be so kind as to enlighten those of us who aren’t a part of your little brotherhood. As I sure as hell am not able to get with this Vulcan mojo-mental thing, even if a certain Vulcan accused me of being an ancient druid! In other words, I can’t read your minds, and am utterly lost here!”

Despite everything, Khan felt amusement rising in him as Spock looked at the CMO though the other man was a fascinating example of an unknown chemical compound. “Doctor, if your rambling was meant to demonstrate the obviousness of the captain’s plan, then why did you just ask? We all
know that you are sometimes slow to grasp something clearly spelled out, yet even you should be able to realize the solution to which Jim is referring.”

McCoy flushed in irritation. “Why, you damn hobgoblin, can’t you just…”

“Bones, Spock, STOP it!” Jim cut in impatiently, and rolled his eyes. “Heavens, sometimes I wonder how old you two are!” This earned him indignant glares from both men, and he shook his head.

“I’m certainly not ‘slow’, Jim, but even I don’t know what you’re up to,” Khan said quietly, and Kirk looked gently at him.

“That Command stripped you and your people of human status made you into your own race, your own species, even, just as Bones said. And there are no other Augments left other than you and your crew. Since Luengo has ordered you all to be killed, he’s condoning…” He didn’t end the sentence but looked expectantly at his mate, yet it was Scotty, who completed the thought.

“Genocide!”

Jim nodded. “Exactly.”

Khan frowned. “But in Command’s eyes we are not even people – persons, as Mr. Scott pointed out. Therefore…”

“Spock, what’s the definition of an intelligent race?”

“Any sentient life form that can think distinctly, uses a method or methods of communication, and a culture, independent of base molecular elements, appearance, and heritage,” the Vulcan replied. “That counts for pre-warp cultures as well as cultures with advanced technical knowledge.” He looked at Khan. “This definition fits very well to you and your people.”

“Therefore you’re your own race – and Luengo ordered genocide by killing you all,” Jim addressed the Augment. “And this fact gives you the right to ask for asylum on any planet that belongs to the Federation.”
Thunderstruck Khan looked at him, while McCoy scratched his head.

“Jim, isn’t there a Starfleet order that legalized such a destructive process and…”

“You’re referring to Starfleet General Order number 24. ‘If a commanding officer deems that a planet has been culturally contaminated to a point where correction is no longer viable and said culture now poses a direct threat to Starfleet personnel or Federation civilians, he may order the destruction of a planet’s surface to occur with a time limit set upon invocation.’ That’s hardly the case here, Bones. Seventy-two sleeping men and women are barely a threat to the Federation, and their heritage is no reason to order genocide.”

“So, you’re saying that Luengo over-stepped his authority,” Bones mused and Kirk nodded while beginning to pace again.

“Luengo is violating fundamental rights and the Charter of the Federation’s Foundation Document stating ‘We, the lifeforms of the United Federation of Planets determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to reaffirm faith in the fundamental rights of sentient beings, in the dignity and worth of all lifeforms, in the equal rights of members of planetary systems large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of interstellar law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of living on all worlds’.”

Jim stopped and glanced at his friends and his mate. “Do you understand? Luengo broke the law concerning that statement the Federation and her authorities have ordained to avoid war – yet Section 31 provoked one and prevented peace talks by killing the own delegation.” He lifted a hand as Spock tried to interrupt. “I know, Spock, for latter we’ve still no proof of, but it’s only a question of time until we find those who are truly responsible for this mess.”

He continued to pace. “Second, the Charter guarantees ‘fundamental rights for sentient being in the dignity and worth of all lifeforms’. Well, you can say what you want about Augments, but you can’t deny that they are sentient living beings with a culture – just look at the whole bonding-thing – and who are clearly, highly intelligent. And, by the way, no-one can deny that they’re rooted in the Terran race, therefore Allistor had no right to strip them of any humanity that’s resulted in the situation we’re in now. And one more thing – if Nien and his crew are the only survivors of their race, then they belong to an endangered species, which means they warrant special protection and support. This is also supported in law – a law Luengo broke to by giving this order.”

His blue eyes found the ocean-colored ones of his mate. “You, Nien, have every right in the world to ask for asylum for yourself and your people because you’ve been threatened with torture and death by a recognized authority that oversteps its boundaries. And that you never faced a proper trial, but were sentenced nonetheless, is just another reason in the long list for why you and you people need
to find safety in the refuge of another planet.”

For a long moment utter silence hung in the air, then Bones pursed his lips. “Absolutely logical, Jim.”

Kirk smirked at him.

“I have to agree, Captain. You argument allows for no other course of action – from your point of view. Luengo will argue otherwise.”

“Yes, but the law speak for itself, Spock, and is clearly on Nien’s side.” He looked at the Augment in whose eyes new hope had begun to sparkle. “I know that this will not let you off the hook from what happened last year, yet that trial would concern only you, not your people. They’ve done nothing to be walked all over like they are being now, and above all, there is absolutely no reason to sentence them to death – something that has been virtually outlawed within the Federation. Yet Luengo knowingly did just that by giving this particular order. If your people don’t have cause to claim asylum, then I don’t know who else would.”

Khan gulped. For several minutes everything had seemed to fall apart – that the chance to get his family back and them being able to live a life of freedom had been lost. Now the golden light of new hope shimmered on the dark horizon – golden like the first rays of sun in Jim’s apartment on that fateful morning all those weeks ago; golden like the young captain’s appearance, and his heart. “You think this is indeed a way to give my people the possibility of living in peace?” he whispered, and Jim nodded, a tender smile curling his lips.

“Yes, I do.”

“That sounds like a really good idea,” Scott cut in. “But first we have to recover Khan’s people and bring them to safety.”

“Yes, and concerning that first step I’ve a plan,” Kirk confirmed.

“You want to beam them out,” Spock stated simply, and Jim nodded.

“As far as I understood they’re in a high security hold which will probably also be shielded. Therefore we’ll need to switch off those shields before we can beam them aboard.” He looked at
Scotty. “And for that, I’ll need you. But please think this through before answering. If you do this, you’ll certainly have to face a court martial – as Spock and I already are.”

Montgomery frowned, irritated. “Ya don’t think I’ll abandon you now, Jim, do ya? I’ve learned my lesson with ye, and I’ll never let me friends down, certainly not when they need me most! Of course I’ll have a look at the generators and bring down the shields!” He glanced at Khan. “We Scots know exactly how it is to be hunted like we’re no more than animals, and been forced to watch our families dyin’ because some people think they’ve a right ter kill us. And I dunno let that happen ter yer sleepin’ people.” He cocked his head and fixed the Augment with a stare. ‘Don’t get me wrong, lad, at first I really wanted to kick yer ass after the mess you made last year, but everythin’ has changed now. And, above all, ye’re part of the crew – part of this ship. Ter hell with Luengo and his daft orders, I’m with ya and Jim!”

Khan felt a hint of the tension leaving him that had held him in its icy grip. “Thank you, Mr. Scott,” he said quietly, gratitude mirrored in his eyes. Then new dread returned, as Spock addressed his friend.

“And to where would you bring Mr. Singh and his people, Captain? Which planet would grant them asylum?”

Jimgroaned. “That’s one of the details I’m still working on.”

“Admit it, these details you’re ‘still working on’ are ninety percent of the whole plan,” Bones grumbled, and Kirk sighed.

“Just give me some time, Bones! I just learned I’m supposed to be used as a tool for genocide fifteen minutes ago, so don’t expect me to come up with something thoroughly planned through just now! And since when have I ever had a full plan sorted out before acting?”

“Mr. Spock is right, Jim,” Khan said quietly, feeling hope dying away again. Theory and practice were two very different things. “As soon as the government of any planet learns about our history, they will be more than wary – especially after the incident a century ago you told me of. And they don’t want to get on the wrong side of the Federation Council or Starfleet in this case. Whether you like it or not, Luengo has a lot of power now, and he’s already pulled enough strings to make changes to his liking. The chance that another planet is willing to pick a fight with the Chief in Command is really low.”

The first officer bent forwards and folded his hands on the table. “I agree with Mr. Singh, Captain. Most planets’ governments will not take the risk – not during a war. And many cultures are quick to
form prejudices, especially if Luengo coaches them. To follow the UMK-principle as we Vulcans do is, for many other cultures, barely an option when it holds an unknown factor they cannot calculate. And it is a fact that we cannot say how the other Augments will react after they wake up – and how they want to integrate into any Federation culture. If at all.”

Khan took a deep breath. “We fled Earth to find peace. If peace is offered we will happily accept.” He moistened his lips. “I admit that several of us are going to have problems coping with things in the beginning, but all of us are open to honesty and logic. If my people are treated well they will give no one trouble. Rather the opposite, because they all – we all – were tired of battle and hate. That is why we boarded the Botany Bay, hoping for a better future.”

Jim looked at him, full of understanding – and then it hit him again. His eyes widened anew, which didn’t slip McCoy’s attention.

“What you’re up to now, Jim? And don’t give me that innocent look, kid. I know that expression far too well by now,” he said, pointing nonchalantly at Kirk.

“Guilty as charged, Bones,” the young captain smiled, before he bent towards the terminal at the desk and activated the intercom. “Kirk to bridge. Uhura?”

“Yes, Captain?” came the instant reply.

“Could we reach New Vulcan with a direct transmission from our current position?”

For a moment there was no answer, while Spock, McCoy and Scotty reacted in their own way as they realized what Jim’s intentions were. The Vulcan lifted both brows, McCoy’s eyes were about to pop out of their sockets, and Scott shook his head, speechless.

“I think so, Captain,” Nyota said carefully.

Kirk grinned. “Good, please try to hail them. I need to urgently speak to someone we know very well.”

“Captain, I just checked the time. It’s night in New ShiKar and…”
“Trust me, Lieutenant, he won’t mind. He told me once that he’d always have an open ear for me, so I’m sure he’ll forgive me for catching him in dreamland.”

“Vulcans don’t dream,” Bones commented wryly.

Spock allowed himself to look at the ceiling in a sudden gesture of exasperation, while Uhura’s voice deadpanned, “If you honestly believe that, Doctor, then you also must think that the stork still delivers babies.”

“Well, that would fit your boyfriend’s opinion that I’m a shaman!” McCoy called.

“Okay, enough,” Kirk almost sighed. “Uhura, please try to get him on the line and patch him through to briefing room three.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” The link went dead and McCoy glared at Jim.

“Why don’t you want to call him from here?”

Kirk only snorted, “Because I want to talk with him without any silly interruptions or comments!” He rubbed his neck, while Spock looked at him.

“Do you believe he will agree to your plan? You know that he has had his own history with –”

“Spock,” Jim cut in softly. “You’ve learned all that really happened to Nien and what is planned for his people. Would you deny him a chance for justice and his people a chance for survival?”

The first officer again crossed his arms in front of his chest and it was obvious that it wasn’t easy for him to answer. Nevertheless, he simply said, “No, I wouldn’t.”

“There you go,” Jim smiled.

Khan stared at him – disbelieving and nervous. “Do I understand you correctly, Pyāra? You want the Vulcans to give us asylum?” When Kirk only nodded, he was speechless for a moment, before
whispering, “And why would they do that?”

“Because it’s the right thing to do,” Jim replied calmly. “And I know someone who can help us – someone who has a lot of influence on the Vulcan High Council. And, he’s a very old friend of mine.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Surprise, surprise! I bet you haven’t seen this one coming. Of course you know who Jim is calling and therefore I don’t reveal a secret that you’re going to meet ‘Prime Spock’ within the following chapters. And, believe me, this is going to be a lot of fun, but also refers to very emotional stuff.

And for all who want to beat Luengo into the next week for his cruel plan: Be my guest (laugh).

I hope you liked who the story proceeds now, including the new twists and Jim’s thoughts how to get the Augments to safety (and how the law will work for them).

In the next chapter, as already said, you’ll meet Prime Spock, and Jim will need all his wits to convince him of agreeing to Kirk’s hell of a plan.

I’m looking forward to your feedbacks,

Have a nice rest of the week

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers,

And once again sorry for the delayed update but at the beginning of a year there is always a lot to do besides the ordinary work and time runs short.

Thank you so much for the many feedbacks and I'm glad that you still like this story so much.

As the most of you already assumed, in this chapter a beloved ‘old’ character will appear – Prime Spock. I planned to have him in this story from the beginning, and I so looked forward to have him eventually in the third movie, too, yet Leonard Nimoy’s passing took this possibility from us all forever.

The following chapter – and Prime Spock’s whole appearances in the rest of the story – is not only a necessity for the story-line, but is also a payment of homage to Leonard Nimoy and his immortal portrait of Mr. Spock. I hope that I caught his characteristic correct, because the old Spock differs a little bit from the man we met first within the first three seasons almost fifty years ago. Yet there are several things which haven’t and will never change – for example his deep friendship with Jim and his affections for him which always influenced his decisions (*smile*).

I hope you’re going to enjoy the new chapter.

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 53 – A hell of plan, part 1

The nights on the planet that was now charted as New Vulcan were equally as long and cold as the nights on the former homeworld of the Vulcans. Additionally, temperatures climbed almost to the same levels as in the deserts of their now-destroyed planet during the day. From a distance, New Vulcan even looked similar to its predecessor – russet red with a beautiful play of sand and grey colors, yet there were a few though important differences.

One of those differences was the lack of the sister-planet T’Rukh. Having the same rotation as Vulcan, she’d always been on the same side of the planet; bathing the landscape in bright silver light.
every night. But instead of the mighty neighbor, only two small moons circled New Vulcan.

The first and foremost difference on the planet itself was the existence of larger bodies of water – two oceans and several lakes twice the size of the Aral Sea in Russia, partly connected by rivers. The coasts and riversides were rife with vegetation, while the rest of the planet’s surface was covered with sand and tall rocky mountains, all in every-sand colored hue possible. The whole planet resembled a large desert with several oases; giving a glimpse how the original Vulcan must have appeared thousands of years before its destruction.

The second difference was the lack of settlements. There was only one until now – a town that had been constructed in a new record time within a year, and was situated on the shores of the largest fresh-water lake. The city – New Shi’Kahr – was home for the fewer-than-ten thousand Vulcans who had survived their homeworld’s destruction, as well as for the more-than-six thousand Vulcans who had returned from the colonies to help rebuild their species.

Sky scrapers were in the center of the town and where most of the population lived, but lower buildings occupied the waterfront and at the other edges of the city – built in the functional yet aesthetically pleasing style typical of the Vulcans. The New Academy of Science, as well as the hospital was near the space harbor, while the High Vulcan council and other government buildings could be found on the other side of the town, not far from the rising mountains. Streets and bridges connected the homes, yards, with trees offered as places to find rest. Several restaurants had opened, as well as a library that was attached to the primary school and college.

The town was young, there was no doubt the moment you laid eyes on it, yet it would grow. It would never be able to replace the original Shi’Kahr – the capital of Vulcan – yet it was a new start. With Vulcan many ancient and important places had been destroyed: Mount Seleya, the holy mountain were once Surak himself founded the new culture of logic and peace, and where the immortal katras (souls) of thousands of Vulcans had been held – utterly lost with the holocaust. The ancient part of the Vulcan Academy of Science, which housed documents written by Surak himself, lost too, just like the cloisters in which the Kolinahr was taught – the removal of all remaining emotions.

So many things had perished that many Vulcans barely coped with the losses – despite all rationality and logic. Those who lost their bond-mates suffered the most, not a few had even died because from the mental shock. Others mourned their children, their parents, their uncles and aunts. And the knowledge that the loss of the katras of their ancestors had torn open wounds none of the survivors had ever anticipated. The remaining population had been in shock for months, and never before had so many physicians been needed to attend one race. Yet, Vulcans were strong – both in body and spirit. Those who didn’t die after the holocaust regained their mental stability with a lot of meditation and mind-melds with their closest relatives.

But the man who laid wide awake in the darkened bedroom of the small townhouse near the
government buildings had no relative who could help him to overcome the losses. Well, fact was not completely accurate, as his father had survived the catastrophe, and even the chief of his clan could offer support, yet he refused it. Not because of pride or lack of trust, but because of completely different circumstances. It simply was not right that his own father was younger than this son, and that said son was only a little younger than the matriarch – his own grandmother. Furthermore he could not turn to his younger self who followed more-or-less the same path he had all those decades ago, as he himself was still young, still stubborn as hell; his place among people who meant the world to him.

Time travel…

Whether intended or not, it always bore the risk of changing the past – and exactly that had happened in the most terrible way with his appearance in this timeline. Not exactly due to his entry into this alternative past; it had been Nero who had destroyed Vulcan and had been about to do the same to Earth, but Nero had done it seeking revenge – revenge taken on him, Spock.

This vengeance had set off a completely different timeline, yet the universe always tried to recover itself. Several things were inevitable – just like the man’s younger self finding himself aboard a certain starship where he got together with his captain. A few events were inevitable, like their close friendship – like the tight comradeship of the whole bridge crew.

Spock of Vulcan rolled onto his other side and briefly looked at the chronometer on his nightstand even if he didn’t need it to tell him what time was. Like all Vulcans, his time sense was extraordinary.

“I don’t need a chronometer when you’re with me,” his T’hy’la had once said, with a large amused smile on his face, hazel eyes shining with fondness. Jim had always found the right words and the right tone of voice with which to tease without any mockery – showing him the special way the deep friendship and even love he had held for him.

Jim Kirk…

His Jim Kirk, not the younger self of this timeline. Yet they were one and the same, even with the different eye color, because here James Kirk’s eyes were bluer than Terran skies – the result of being born in space near a worm whole, and its strong magnetism. And this Jim Kirk had been even younger than Spock’s soul-brother when he had taken command of the Enterprise, yet this was the first step in the repair of the timeline.

It had been joy and anguish in one to meet again the younger vision of his long-dead T’hy’la on
Delta Vega – to see Jim after all the lost years, and to touch his mind. A mind that was similarly vivid, strong, and warm, yet it had suffered differently. His Jim had had a protected childhood and was raised in Iowa with his parents and his brother – this Jim had lost his father the moment he’d been born and his mother had never coped with it; handling her sons (and especially Jim) in a way that had to have hurt the little boy beyond imagining. Spock hadn’t seen many memories during his meld with the young Jim; he had been in rather a hurry to make the human understand what was happening, yet he had caught glimpses of Kirk’s childhood, and it had pained the old Vulcan. This Jim would have a longer way to rise to become the man he ought to be, but he was about to take that first step in becoming that great individual. He was already a hero, but his true way had not started until then.

From the outside, Spock heard a night bird through the open window, and its call echoed through the dark bedroom.

Spock sighed. He was used to having less sleep since becoming a diplomat, and especially after his unwanted travel from the future back into a past he thought he was long done with, but this night seemed to find no end. He was…restless, something very rare for a Vulcan. Something had been nagging him for days now and he couldn’t put a finger on its source. Jim would have called it a ‘gut-feeling’, but Vulcans didn’t have them – well, they shouldn’t have them, yet Spock was half-human and he simply knew that his unrest was a result of his Terran roots. He had long ago come to terms with both sides of his being; he even embraced both parts of his heritage – something Jim had taught him.

The sudden buzzing of his terminal in the attached room almost startled him and he quickly sat up. “Lights, fifty percent,” he ordered the computer, and slipped out of bed. His bare feet made no sound as he walked over the equally bare floor into the next room, and saw the signal indicating an incoming message. Who would call him at this time? It had to be something very important, otherwise the Interstellar Communication Center, whose emblem he could see on the screen, wouldn’t have contacted him this late.

Age could wear down even Vulcans, and he stiffly sat down at his desk and activated the screen. “Selek here,” Spock said, using the pseudonym under which he was known on New Vulcan. No, Vulcans couldn’t lie – at most times – yet this had been one of the few necessities, to use a twisted truth to hide the real truth. Only a handful of people knew who he really was – Spock, son of Sarek and Amanda Grayson.

It would have led to too many questions and confusion – even to turmoil – if the public were aware of his true identity. He knew too much of the future; his presence had changed this present, and therefore the future that should have been. And even the logical Vulcans weren’t free of prejudice when it came to future actions. He had experienced it as a child, yet his decision to stay anonymous then hadn’t resulted in upheaval. In his opinion, he deserved nothing less than obscurity after his arrival in the year 2258 led to the destruction of Vulcan. No, his agreement to T’Pau’s and Sarek’s suggestion to give himself a new name resulted from pure logic.
His technical knowledge was that of many decades yet to come. This know-how could, and was supporting to build a new home for the survival of Vulcan, and Spock threw himself into this challenge like he had rarely done before. Guilt was illogical so long as there was no intent, yet Spock was – after all – half-human, and the agonizing guilt he had felt the first weeks after the holocaust had almost eaten him alive. That was, until he forgot about it briefly, turning his attention to his surroundings in the area near San Francisco where the last of the living Vulcans had taken refuge for some months, and had come face to face with Sarek.

To see his father alive and healthy – as healthy as a Vulcan suffering from a severed bond could be – had been another shock for Spock. He hadn’t been near Vulcan when his father had died in his timeline. Jean-Luc Picard, captain of another Enterprise, had brought him the sad message of Sarek’s passing. Picard had even risked being taken captive by the Romulans to bring Spock the news, because the Vulcan had stayed on Romulus when his father had died. Spock had mourned his father, even though he had had his differences with him. Meeting him now again had further torn open old wounds.

Sarek was no one to be fooled easily and within seconds he had realized that the other older Vulcan was his own son. Maybe Spock’s presence had given his father the strength to carry on – the human part of him hoped it was. Even though Amanda had not been a telepath, her bond with her husband had been strong, and Sarek suffered immensely from the sudden loss. Helping Spock might have been the reason the ambassador had been able to overcome the continuing aftermath from the shock.

Many days later, Spock had helped direct where to search for a new planet, one that could offer their drastically reduced race shelter, and what was needed to build a new colony. And Sarek had suggested that Spock should take the lead on the project. At first the former Starfleet officer and ambassador had refused, but Sarek could be very convincing when he had set his mind to something. Contacting one of the few surviving Elders – T’Pau – had sealed the deal.

The old matriarch had looked at Spock for several seconds before the truth hit her with a force that almost sent her reeling. She all but ordered a mind-meld and learned of everything. In her own way she gave him absolution, almost soothing his inner torment by telling him gently that everything that happened wasn’t his fault – that there had been nothing he could have done. Afterwards she agreed that Spock would be the best candidate to master the giant challenge that lay ahead for them all. His double-sided heritage was an advantage now, because he saw solutions and ways to find answers pure Vulcans could not because their strict logic hindered them.

His pseudonym was that of a son of faraway relatives which all had been killed in the catastrophe. So the old Spock became Selek, High Minister of New Vulcan – of which T’Pau and Sarek were also responsible. His enhanced knowledge would and had helped to build the colony in a surprisingly short time, and he founded the Confederation of Surak made up all Vulcan colonies and the new homeworld. The half-Vulcan who faced rejection and even mockery when he was still nothing more than a mere boy was now one of the mightiest men within the Federation – something
he never wanted to be.

“Life goes sometimes weird ways,” Jim Kirk had said several days after he’d got back the Enterprise after V’Ger, and never before had Spock agreed more with him than the day the surviving members of the High Council and the Elders chose him as the new High Minister.

This all had given him a soft aura of peace, yet his soul would never be free of the turmoil and horror he’d faced as he was forced to watch his homeworld torn into pieces. Even over the long distance to Delta Vega he’d thought he heard the death-screams of the other Vulcans; their katras reaching out for help and comfort in the second of death. He had experienced something likewise during the first five-year-mission of the Enterprise as the Intrepid – a Starfleet cruiser manned by Vulcans – had been destroyed. But this time the mental cries had been a thousand times stronger; bringing him almost to his knees. And he still dreamed of it.

All this was contributed to the aging Vulcan’s insomnia. Sometimes even meditations didn’t help – as it had in the last days. Something held him on the tip of his toes. That someone wanted to contact him in the middle of the night was only another piece of the puzzle that lay in front of him.

As the screen came to life, he looked at the aesthetically pleasing, even beautiful face of T’Nay, a young Vulcan female from one of the outer colonies. She had also mourned losses within her own family, yet her bonding-partner and her children were still alive and lived now on New Vulcan – a blessing for the threatened race.

“High Minister Selek, I apologize for disturbing you so late, but we were hailed by the USS Enterprise requesting an immediate and direct transmission to you. Captain Kirk would like to speak with you, code Priority One.” Usually not even a senior staff officer would have dared disturb the High Minister at this time of night, but the Federation was at war. And after all, Kirk’s role in the mess with Nero and the fact that his actions had saved the Vulcan survivors warranted him some advantages. Most Vulcans knew his name and who he was – the savior of their race’s remains – and therefore Jim had several privileges within New Vulcan’s new High Council that Federation diplomats and politicians could only dream of.

Spock lifted an ice-grey brow. If Jim – this time-line’s Jim – tried to reach him with such urgency something had to be truly out of order. Spock had promised himself that he wouldn’t interfere with his younger self and the other officers on the Enterprise. He wished for them to find their own way, and he made certain that they knew that he stood by this decision. Yet he could not and never would deny Jim support if he really needed it. He may be an altered younger version of his T’hy’la, yet the comfortable fondness still remained and had bloomed anew after he’d met his lost soul-brother again.

“Please put him through,” he answered, feeling his heartbeat quickening and anticipation running through his whole being – illogical but undeniable.
A moment later the picture on the screen changed and he looked directly at the Terran. The eye color was still wrong, but it was the same face he was so familiar with, only younger. And something else, something new that Spock realized instantly: Jim looked tired, worn down but nonetheless alert. He was pale and almost thin and his gaze held a desperate determination Spock knew all too well.

Maybe this was another reason for Spock’s inability to find rest and sleep within the last few days. Maybe he had felt that something was wrong with Jim – which would mean that despite the twist in the time-line, there was still a bond between himself and the young captain. The link between them had always been strong after it had been forged. It even had reached his mind during his last test of the Kolinahr, and called him back to the Enterprise when the ship was the Federation’s last hope to stop the strange cloud that had destroyed so many planets and vessels on its way to Earth. The entity that was later known as V’Ger. So this same link still existed here. Maybe he wasn’t that alone in this time as he’d thought to be.

“Hello, my old friend,” he said softly, and a gentle wave of joy he would have denied to feel decades ago breathed over him, as he watched those youthful, well-known features relaxing with relief.

“Hello, Spock.”

As soon as Uhura called him into briefing room 2 and told him that she had a weak but functional connection with the Interstellar Communication Center on New Vulcan, Kirk strode to the door. Calling “Behave while I’m away, guys!” over his shoulder he left the conference room, and heard something that sounded very much like “Yes, Mom,” from McCoy. Rolling his eyes, Jim almost ran to briefing room 3, where he had to wait for more than two minutes until the screen finally came to life. His heart missed a beat as he looked at the Vulcan who appeared.

His hair and eye-brows were ice-grey and white, numerous deep wrinkles were etched into his face, yet Jim would have recognized these features and those warm brown eyes anywhere. Like always during the few times he had been in contact with the older self of his first officer and friend, Jim felt a wave of protectiveness and fondness, coupled with wonder and joy. The mind meld hadn’t been that pleasurable – to be honest, it had shaken him deeply – yet during the mental connection he had felt so much warmth, and even love, that out of nowhere he trusted the old Spock within seconds and without any hesitation.

This hadn’t changed, and as he heard the Vulcan’s familiar voice, rough from age, he couldn’t help but smile.
“Hello, Spock.” Kirk returned the gentle greeting and took a moment to let his gaze roam over the other man’s form. He saw the dark, casual tunic and remembered what Uhura had told him about the time in New Shi’Kahr. “I’m sorry to disturb you at night,” he said a little bit sheepishly.

“There is no need to apologize, Jim. As far as I understand your reason to hail me is urgent.”

Kirk nodded. “Yeah, it is.” He gulped. Now that he had the old Spock – Prime Spock, as he called him in secret – on the line, he didn’t know how to begin. “Well, I… Uh… I need your help.”

The typical gesture in which the Vulcan cocked his head took away a part of Jim’s uncertainty. “If it is within my power to help you, I will of course give you my support, Jim. Never doubt this.” The voice held even more warmth, and Kirk moistened his lips.

“You see… it’s not really me who needs help but… a friend and his family.” He felt his mouth going dry; the speech he had prepared somehow lost in the suddenly almost-black hole where his mind used to be. “Spock… The other Spock, told me of his brief contact with you last year during the crisis with Section 31 and Khan.” He rubbed his neck. “Well, I’m calling you because of Khan.”

He saw the weathered face become more firm. “Jim,” the old Vulcan answered softly. “As I told you and my younger counterpart, I will never reveal anything of the future to give you a chance to have your own one.”

“Yet you gave Spock advice regarding Khan,” Kirk pointed out and was baffled to hear the older vision of his friend sigh; the sound utterly human.

“You were in danger and…I do have some vulnerabilities. You are one of them,” Spock confessed and Jim felt heat rising to his cheeks.

“Uh… thank you, I think.”

“Are you in danger now, Jim? And if so, what has Khan to do with it? As far as I know he is in cryosleep and…”

“How do you know that?” The young captain looked at him with large eyes. “Even most Council
members don’t know about his existence.” He caught a short curling of Spock’s lips and rolled his
eyes again. “Yeah, I know, you’ve got your sources and can certainly hack into every computer
system we use at the moment, after all you’re familiar with the systems decades to come. Our
computers must be like a trip to a museum for you.”

The edges of the Vulcan’s eyes crinkled ever so slightly. “During my voyages with ‘my’ Jim I saw a
computer that really would belong in a museum today – large enough to take up and entire wall, with
magnetic tapes and sounds you would not believe. These systems today are…nostalgic, that is all.”

Jim chuckled. “I bet they are.” He pushed back the lock of hair that had begun to grow and often fell
over his forehead now. “Well, regarding my call… This is about Khan, yes, but…certainly in a
complete different way than you can imagine.”

Spock allowed himself a little frown. “What do you mean, Jim? Did he escape?”

Kirk took a deep breath. “Yes, but not from cryosleep as you think. He escaped from a secret lab
where he was kept and abused.”

That took Spock by surprise. “I do not understand,” he said, as astonished as a Vulcan could be.

Jim nodded slowly. “I’m certain that’s confusing to you. I was bowled over when I learned the truth.
They put Khan back into cryosleep, yes, but then smuggled him to a secret lab in Nevada, held him
in stasis most of the time and… They used him for experiments and tests, Spock. A few times he was
even awake enough to know what was happening to him and to feel… how his body tried to adjust
to the maladies they injected him with to regain antidotes, not caring for the agony he had to put up
with during these tests.”

Disbelief and something close to loath shimmered in Spock’s eyes. “That is…illegal and utterly
inhuman,” he said slowly. “No one, not even Khan, deserves that. Who were ‘they’ – and how did
you gain this knowledge?”

Jim bent forwards. “Spock, is your terminal secure?”

The Vulcan High Minister watched him warily, already assuming that his old friend had stumbled
once again into one of those dreadful adventures which would accompany him his entire life. “Yes it
is. I programmed it myself.”
Kirk was relieved to hear that he could speak freely with Spock. “Riiight. ’They’ are Section 31 which still exists – hidden and only regrouping now. I learned from everything from Nien himself and got proof later from some of the admirals and scientists who’d thought it to be a good idea to use Nien’s enhanced biology for their own purposes.”

“Nien’?” Spock echoed in alarm, almost knowing to whom Jim was referring.

“Nien – as in Noonien, a shortened vision,” the young captain explained carefully, eyeing the older self of his friend, whose eyes widened. “It is what I call him. Now, at least.”

Then one brow lifted. “Do I understand you correctly? You and Khan…have reached a sort of consensus?”

“Yes,” Jim confirmed. “I know it sounds crazy – insane even, but after you know about everything that’s happened, you certainly will understand.” He smiled ruefully. “But I’ve got to warn you: this’ll take a little while.”

Spock leant back in his chair, his stiff frame betraying his inner alertness. “I have time, old friend,” was all he said, and then he began to listen – and even if he had thought that was nothing that could shock him anymore, he had been wrong…

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Caviw listened to the strong, hard and very clear-sounding language that came from the speakers. She did know several languages, but Romulan wasn’t one of them.

Ritek, who sat at the comm station, balled his fists and shook his head after the discussion they had intercepted came to an end. Switching off the frequency they’d been able to establish, he took a deep breath before turning around and glancing up at the Caitian. “There is no doubt,” he said slowly. “Orion slave traders have offered four Starfleet staff officers to the Romulans.” Caviw gasped, while he continued. “The offer was made two days ago and this was confirmation that the Romulans will send two of their own officers as well as some guys from their secret service to ‘test the goods’, as they put it.” He pressed his lips together into a thin line, before he added, “There was also talk about some more ‘interesting’ slaves, among them two Vulcans, and it seems the Romulans are ready to buy them too.”

“There is talk of the Romulans experimenting with Vulcans because of their stronger telepathic
abilities, but that’s just rumor, nothing more,” one of the bridge crew murmured. “Maybe it’s true.”

“Two Vulcans…” Caviw placed her fists against slender hips and cocked her head. “Didn’t Jim tell us that the father of his first officer had been among the diplomats who’d been killed?”

“Ambassador Sarek, yes,” Ritek nodded. “One of the most important and finest diplomats the Federation has. I saw a report about him last year. His successes are countless. If he is one of those two Vulcans caught by the Orions, then the Romulans would get their hands on a very important man indeed.”

“They won’t!” the Caitian growled. “We shall prevent it!” She bent over Ritek and opened another frequency. “Santo Domingo to landing party. Galven?”

“Galven here,” came the reply several moments later; the Tellarit was slightly out of breath. Caviw looked at the screen, where the surface of Yaska shimmered where they had landed half an hour ago. Galven, Jeff, and four other members of The Shadow had been out there since then, examining the shuttle debris the Santo Domingo’s sensors had found when they reached the moon. The destroyed vessel could be seen at the right edge of the screen, illuminated by Yaraka’s sun that hung like a large disk at the dark sky.

“Ritek intercepted a transmission between Orion traders and the Romulans. Guess what they offered the pointy ears?” She didn’t wait for Galven to answer this and continued, “Four Starfleet staff officers and two Vulcans. Does that ring a bell?”

A tirade of snorting and squeaking noises came over the speaker, followed by words in Standard. “That fits with what we found here. The shuttle is a mess, and missing its roof. We found four bodies, but nothing more. Jeff found copper-based blood – Vulcan – and human blood, yet there is no trace of any passengers who’d have it in their veins. And we found something more: footprints in the dust and sand around the shuttle, and the traces of another vessel that must have landed nearby and launched again. I’d bet my last shirt that those Orions took the survivors and are now trying to sell them.”

“So, there are indeed survivors, exactly as Khan and Jim assumed,” Ritek murmured, sighing. “I think it’s about time to contact the Enterprise.”

“Do it,” Galven ordered. “We’re on our way back to you – and then we should leave this icy place as soon as possible. I really don’t want to get caught by the green-skins as well!”
It was silent in briefing room 3. Jim had ended his tale, leaving out only a few delicate details, such as Khan and he being bond-mates now, let alone “a couple” – or the fact that Nien had visited him in his San Francisco apartment. Jim also skipped telling the old Vulcan that Khan had not only been abused as a lab rat, but had also been violated in the most intimate way. But everything else concerning the Augment and Section 31 he’d laid open. If Kirk wanted Spock’s support in this whole matter, he had to reveal everything.

The wrinkled face of the High Minister was now paler than usual; his gaze was lost somewhere between the desktop and the screen and a frown was edged into his mouth and forehead. For more than a minute the old Vulcan didn’t say anything, yet Jim could see the turmoil deep in those familiar dark eyes. Even though Kirk didn’t know how the encounter with Khan had ended in the other reality, he felt it must have been bad – or at least worse than in this reality. Which was saying a lot, considering how things had played out here. His Spock had told him that his older self had mentioned something about how that to gain victory over Khan, the highest price had been paid, and Jim could only assume what this price had been. Yet, although that had come to pass in this time line, too, everything was different – and the nature of his relationship with Nien during all the recent events had changed to the opposite of enmity.

Finally, after a small eternity, Spock took a very deep breath and looked up; their eyes met over the distance of many parsecs. “I had not known what happened to Khan in this universe,” he said quietly. “I only learned that he had been woken by the head of Starfleet, Admiral Marcus, who founded a secret department and that its purpose had backfired. I believed Khan to be a part of it – the actions of Section 31 displayed spoke of his influence. As it seems, I was misinformed.”

“As we all were,” Jim nodded. “Yes, Khan went too far – he snapped under the pressure – but that wasn’t his fault. Not really. Watching four of his crew being killed almost broke him, then the torture, and then finally witnessing Marcus ordering the Augments killed. Nien had no reason to doubt that his family was dead, murdered in their sleep. Or worse. It was too much for him.” He lowered his head. “I can understand him. If someone killed you… I mean both of you, or Bones, or Scotty – Uhura, Pavel, Hikaru…” He shuddered. “I would lose it, too.”

The High Minister sighed again. “You and Khan are very similar, yet where you are the light, he is the darkness – at least in my timeline. In yours, you have managed to win him over, and to gain a very strong, brilliant, and fiercely loyal ally as it seems.” He glanced away. “In my universe he was all of those, too, but he was never your ally, and finally your mortal enemy. He…lost his mind in seeking revenge against you. He even…sacrificed his crew in attempting to kill you.”

Jim’s eyes widened. “He sacrificed…” He shook his head. “Nien would never willingly sacrifice one of his family to fulfill his own wishes.”
“And yet he was ready to die along with you, leaving his ‘family’, as you call them, to their fate,” Spock pointed out.

“That’s… is different,” the young captain murmured. “I’m family to him too.”

The Vulcan cocked his head again. “Because Dr. McCoy used some of Khan’s blood to revive you – to bring you back from the dead?”

“That… In the beginning, yes,” Jim admitted. “And then…we grew closer.”

“’Closer’?” Confusion began to shimmer in Spock’s eyes again. “Please explain.”

Kirk needed all his self-control to prevent himself from blushing. “As you already assumed at the start of our talk, we’re friends now. He’s saved my life several times, he’s protected my ship and my crew when he shared the SDD, and he saved us all only two days ago during the battle. He trusts me with his own life, with the lives of his family, and he sought out comfort from me after I learned more about his past – his whole past. He’s becoming adjusted to my crew, and he and Scotty already make bets on things, and he and Bones are trying to out-best each other to mother-hen me. Not unlike your younger self does,” he added with a teasing tone to his voice before becoming serious again. “And he is ready to face a real court, a real Federation trial, yet all he wants is his crew to be safe. That Luengo ordered their death is…”

“Barbaric. It would be genocide, as you have already correctly noted,” the High Minister nodded, then took another deep breath. “Jim,” began quietly. “I do understand that you want to help the Augments. In this timeline they have done nothing to deserve being held captive in cryosleep or even to be sentenced to death. I also can respect that you supported Khan and shielded him, yet I have to warn you. Khan is still Khan – a former king of a large area of Earth. He is someone who was created to be superior and to win, no matter the cost. As long as he gets what he wants he might cooperate, but if not, then he will use other methods – and would not hesitate to walk over any number of dead bodies to achieve his goals.”

Jim shook his head. “No, Spock, he wouldn’t, not anymore. He’s changed – a lot. Even Spock – the other Spock – admitted this. And believe me, the two of them had a very rough start, yet they have managed to come to terms with one another. Nien knows that Spock, Bones, and the others in my crew are my family, and that was and still is reason enough for him to support them, because for him is nothing more important than family.” He rubbed his neck. “All he wants is for his own to live somewhere in peace – to know that they’re safe and sheltered. He loves them dearly, and after that order came… Spock, he is desperate. Desperate enough to forget his sometimes-silly pride and to ask for asylum – to beg anybody ready to listen to give his people a chance. They are people, Spock.
Although designed, they are still human – with feelings, longings, loves, and dreams. They have souls which suffer or soar. I see it every time Nien laughs, listens, talks, or fights. There is so much depth in his heart, I really can’t understand how others can’t realize it. For Luengo, Norton, and Section 31 – especially for those scientists – he’s nothing more than a piece of flesh they can use for experiments. For them he isn’t even a person but a creature, a prisoner with a number, yet he is more human than many others I know. And his people are no different.

“He told me about them, of the newly married couple, Katie and Otto, of his little brother Joaquin – he’s only 20, for god’s sake – of Rodriguez, Pablo, Chang and all the others. He told me of his best friend Kabir who’d sacrificed himself to give Nien and the others a chance to escape from New Delhi. He told me of a maid he tried to save together with other servants, but had to watch how she was killed and literally butchered by his enemies because she dared to be loyal to him. He told me of the days in the labs when he was a child, of the freedom he experienced after he and the others had fled… There is so much to him, I don’t know where to start and where to end. It is utterly wrong to deny him and his people the simplest basic needs like a place to live – to live at all!

“And there’s more. Today Section 31 fears the Augments, tomorrow it could be the Vulcans, or the Rigelians because they are telepaths – or other races who are stronger at some things we Terrans aren’t. The Federation was founded as a harbor for a peaceful co-existence of different races despite their appearances, their special abilities, and their strengths and weaknesses. What Section 31 began now will lead to the destruction of the Federation. You fear someone, strip him of any basic rights and lock him away – maybe he can serve as a blood donor or something. We want to show strength? Just let us start a war. We are explorers? Just let us build a fleet of war ships in secret and change the explorers into soldiers. This all had begun under Marcus. And Luengo is trying to carry it on, walking indeed over dead bodies. Literally. I’ve got every reason to believe that the Excalibur wasn’t attacked from average Klingons but that this whole thing was a farce to get rid of those admirals who would never allow the return of Section 31. The death of the diplomats was a sacrifice they simply couldn’t prevent, that’s all.”

Spock had listened to the passionate and almost imploring speech Jim had given – revealing more between the lines than he had thought. The way the young Terran spoke about the man who had been his deadliest enemy in another timeline indicated to Spock that Jim Kirk and Khan Noonien Singh had grown indeed into close friends. The fury as Kirk told him of the violence Khan had endured, the compassion as he spoke of the Augments Marcus killed, the warmth as Jim mentioned the way Khan had saved and protected him… The Vulcan sensed that there was more than the words spoken, yet he wasn’t ready to assume more in this relationship. A relationship that brought Jim Kirk to him, Spock, as a spokesman, and even a representative. Jim had effectively begged him to take action – to offer the Augments shelter and to grant them asylum – something High Minister Selek would have to discuss first with the Vulcan High Council before he could say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. But given his position and influence, the council members would decide as he indicated.

But before he could relate this to Jim, Kirk spoke of an assumption that was more than daring. Section 31 could have had a hand in the incident in Borderland? Of course Spock knew of the attack and the resulting deaths of the whole delegation, including the admirals and further officers from the Excalibur. This bad news had been delivered to the three Vulcan members of the Federation council
within an hour after President Robertson had received it.

Spock had needed a moment to stomach this information, because he was very aware of the fact that Sarek belonged to that delegation! And if the delegation had been killed, then so had his father…

A sharp stab of pain had gone through his whole being. He had mourned the loss of his father only several years ago, and he had tried to become less attached to Sarek in this time-line, knowing it would be wrong to pursue a relationship. Yet he could not deny that his human side had been glad to have a second chance to be and to work with Sarek, even if their relationship was odd; after all, he was older than his father. Nonetheless, he had hoped to have some years to enjoy his father’s company whenever Sarek stayed on New Vulcan. To learn that not only his mother, but his father now had found death long before their time should have come, pained him.

“I know of the demise of the admirals and the diplomats, Jim. After all I am personally effected because of Sarek’s death.” He cocked his head. “And you have proof that Section 31 is responsible for them perishing?” he asked quietly, and watched those blue eyes widening.

Jim realized that not only his Spock, but also the old Vulcan had lost his father. Officially. In secret Kirk hadn’t give up faith that there were some survivors and that Sarek was perhaps among them. But this didn’t change the fact that just now Sarek of Vulcan had been declared dead, and as he saw a flicker of pain in those dark eyes on the screen, he felt bad all over again. To see his own Spock mourning had been heart-wrenching, to watch the old Vulcan now suffering too made Jim cringe. And he felt like an asshole for having not shown more tact as he mentioned the Excalibur.

“Shit – that came out the wrong way,” Kirk murmured. “I’m… I’m sorry, Spock. I should have referred to this topic more sensitively, seeing as Sarek was part of the delegation.” He gulped. “I’m sorry, my friend,” he repeated; compassion and own sorrow was plainly written on his face. “I mourn with you – yet I hope that there maybe are some survivors. As I tried to explain, I’ve every reason to believe that Styles – the captain of the Excalibur – played a dirty game. There are discrepancies in his report, and in the audio records from the Excalibur’s bridge, which also hint that maybe the second of the two shuttles wasn’t destroyed.”

A slow frown appeared on the wrinkled forehead of the old Vulcan. “You are saying that there is still the possibility that some members of the delegation survived – and Starfleet has done nothing to recover them?”

“Starfleet is now in the hands of Luengo – the man I assume to be the new head of Section 31. The death of the admirals paved the way for him to become the Chief in Command. At the moment he’s only the acting head, yet when he succeeds in winning this war – and he will ensure that that happens no matter what the cost – the Council will certainly promote him permanently to the position. Therefore, he really can’t have even one of the survivors found.”
“Why do you believe that Luengo is the new head of Section 31?” Spock asked. “If this organization really still exists, then –”

“There are so many reasons I barely know where to start.” Jim took a deep breath, before he revealed the next part of what he was convinced of being the deed of Section 31. Spock listened very closely, interrupted here and there to obtain more details and also filed all the information as the young captain explained his own assumptions, as well as those of the other Spock, Khan, Dr. McCoy, and Mr. Scott.

As Kirk came to the end, the High Minister nodded slowly. “These are very serious charges, Jim. Without proof you will be fighting a battle you can’t win.”

“Yeah, I know – yet I don’t believe in no-win-scenarios. Everything depends on the chance that some of the delegation survived…”

Jim felt his Spock’s presence just a second before his friend’s deep voice said from behind, “There are survivors.”

Kirk turned around. The door closed behind the first officer, who quickly closed the distance to the conference table. Looking at his older counterpart, the younger one bowed his head politely. “Mr. Spock,” he greeted.

“Mr. Spock,” the other Vulcan replied and Jim groaned,

“Jesus, you do know how creepy this is?” Two identical lifted brows and the same confused look were directed at him and he sighed, before he simply chuckled and shook his head. “That’s crazy,” he whispered, and both Vulcans thought it better to skip an answer. Then Kirk became serious again. “So, what’s up, Spock? You said there were survivors? Has Galven…”

“Mr. Ritek contacted us several minutes ago and as you were occupied with another transmission, I answered The Shadow’s hail. They found the second shuttle that crashed on Yaska, just as you anticipated. Mr. Galven also found four dead bodies, no more, but also blood traces, among them Vulcan and Terran.”

“Were they taken captive?” ‘Selek’ concluded and his younger self nodded.
“Obviously. There were not only traces of another spacecraft nearby and footprints leading to the destroyed shuttle and back again. Mr. Ritek also intercepted a transmission between an Orion slave trader and the Romulans.”

“The Romulans?” Jim’s voice was pitched as high as a dog whistle, while his eyes widened. “Let me guess, the Orions offered them our Federation citizens.”

“Your assumption is correct, Captain,” his first officer affirmed. “They spoke of four staff officers and two Vulcans, in which the Romulans also have an interest.”

“The telepathy tests,” the older Spock murmured. “But those took place approximately twelve years later.”

“So the Romulans experimented with Vulcans in your timeline, too?” Jim asked, and as ‘Selek’ nodded, he groaned again. “Great! Not only they will get their hands on four of our admirals, but also one of our most important diplomats who just happens to be your father!” He rubbed his face. “God dammit, we’ve to stop this insanity – now!”

“If circumstances were different I would suggest that you contact Command and update them on the survivors, but given the possibility that the interim Chief in Command himself instigated the current situation, it seems to be up to us to ‘deal with this’, as you would say,” the younger Spock addressed his captain.

“And I can’t act on it, because I’ve got this damned order concerning Gamma 12. I wouldn’t give a shit about this order if Nien’s people weren’t depending on me. If I don’t destroy Gamma 12, another captain will and he wouldn’t beam them out first, but would kill them. No doubt about it.” Jim’s hands balled into fists. “This is so fucked up!”

The younger Spock looked at the older Spock. “Has Jim already asked for your support concerning the Augments?”

“Yes, he has, even if he had not become as…explicit until now.” ‘Selek’ glanced at Kirk. “You want to pave the way for Khan to find a home for his people here on New Vulcan and for this you need my support.”

Jim smiled sheepishly. “Yeah,” he confirmed. “As soon as I have the other Augments on board and
Luengo learns that I...took his order to evacuate the facility too seriously, he’ll try to hunt us down. There is no doubt about it. Marcus had been ready to sacrifice the Enterprise for his plans, his assumed successor has certainly even fewer scruples if he really is the one responsible for the Excalibur’s assault. We need to get Nien and his family to a planet that grants them asylum as quickly as possible. We have a few days at best for that, and New Vulcan is four and half days away from Gamma 12. With the SDD activated, Starfleet will not be able to locate us, but Luengo is clever. He’ll assume that I’ll race to New Vulcan because he knows your true identity and that I will certainly turn to you for help. We have to be very, very quick – and at the same time, we have to recover the survivors of the delegation. I can be counted on to achieve a lot, but to be in two places at the same time is something even I can’t manage.” He shook his head.

“You told me about this civilian crew who aided first Khan and now you as well,” ‘Selek’ mused. “And they are already in Borderland. Maybe they can be of further help.”

“The Orion pirates know of them. They know that a Tellarit, a Caitian, a Rigelian, and several humans belong to the little militia. But Galven and the others would put themselves at enormous risk if they try to recover the survivors.”

“And, additionally Mr. Ritek informed me that they are not aware of the location of this slave ‘market’.”

“Market?” Jim echoed and the Vulcan at his side nodded.

“There will be an auction. Apparently there are other survivors which are to be sold into slavery.”

Kirk closed his eyes. “Dammit to hell!” he whispered, then he took a deep breath. “We have to act! Maybe Bob carry off this rescue, while we continue to obey the orders we were given.”

Jim had already told ‘Selek’ that Bob Wesley knew of Khan’s presence aboard, and that the commodore even supported the Augment by making arrangements for a patent of the new device, while simultaneously ensuring that Command learned of this new technology and bought it. That Bob Wesley had decided to help Khan was not unimportant to the High Minister. He knew the commodore from his own timeline and had always held a high regard for him. If Wesley was ready to protect Khan then – indeed – several fundamental things had changed.

Therefore the old Vulcan nodded slowly. “If someone is able to recover the survivors besides yourself, it could be Bob Wesley. You will have to involve him in this particular matter too, Jim.”
Kirk sighed. “I know. And I also have to trust him with my plan to rescue Nien’s people and take them to safety.” He looked the older Spock in the eye. “Please, don’t deny them a chance to live,” he said softly. “You are the only one I can think of to turn to. Life is sacred to Vulcans – the life of every life form, genetically altered or not. Your people and the Augments share an almost similar fate. You and they have much in common, and not only the demise of the most of your peoples. The Augments are highly intelligent, logical, controlled and utterly loyal to their family members and their friends – and to those who help them.

“Nien told me that there are two architects among his people, and nine engineers, including himself. There are also three doctors. I’m certain that they will repay your hospitality by helping you to extend New Shi’Kahr – by supporting your colony. But this is not the only reason why I think New Vulcan would be the perfect place for them to settle. They are utterly new to this century. They will certainly be confused at first and the calm demeanor of the Vulcans could help them to come to terms with everything. Augments are proud, yes, but they respect equal intelligence, and even enjoy it. Nien does and some of his stories tell me that his is a typical attribute of his people – to learn and to grow. Both sides could benefit with such an arrangement.”

‘Selek’ lifted again one brow; something close to amusement sparkled in his eyes. “You thought this through thoroughly while discussing it with me,” he stated, knowing Jim Kirk too well to even think that the young man had wasted a thought on his arguments before he hailed him.

“Yes,” Jim nodded. He was aware that he couldn’t fool Spock – either Spock, actually.

“What will become of you?” the High Minister asked. “Even if Commodore Wesley can recover the survivors of the delegation and you can prove Luengo’s guilt, you still will face court for sheltering Khan and for insubordination.”

“I know,” the young captain sighed. “And I’ll state for the record that my officers were only following my orders.” He ignored that the younger Spock grew stiff at his side. “There is still General Order 26 that states that Starfleet personnel can’t be held responsible for the actions of their superiors, and that they won’t share any disciplinary measures because of it. Therefore…”

“You forgot the part in which said persons can be called responsible if they had an active part in such an infringement,” his first officer interrupted him. “And in this endeavor, that is indeed the case.” He lifted a hand as Kirk wanted to protest. “We are all in this too, Jim – Dr. McCoy, Mr. Scott and I. If you take the General Order literally, the whole bridge crew would face trial, not to mention those who identified Khan and did not alert Command.”

Jim looked unhappily at him. “I really didn’t want to get you all in trouble, Spock. I…”
“I know, Jim. It was our own choice to support you and your ‘friendship’ with Mr. Singh, particularly after learning of everything that happened to him, and how he saved you, repeatedly, under the most deadly circumstances. In my experience, most Starfleet members I have encountered have a strong sense of justice and this sense simply encouraged us to decide as we did. It is not your fault that we are at this point now.” Spock’s voice was gentle and reassuring – almost comforting. And ‘Selek’ smiled inwardly to himself as he realized how close his counterpart and young Jim Kirk had become. The universe tried to mend the rip of the timeline manipulation – at least in this matter.

“Thanks,” Kirk murmured, grateful for the utter loyalty his T’hy’la displayed once again. Then his attention returned to the old Vulcan. For a long moment they only looked at one another – Jim pleadingly, ‘Selek’ thoughtfully. And like to many times before in another universe, Spock was not able to refuse his soul-brother anything – especially when the topic was so important to him. Sighing, he gave in.

“Very well, against my better judgment I will speak with the other members of the High Council,” he said – and was rewarded with a wide, brilliant smile, full of relief and joy.

“Thank you, Spock,” Jim said and all of his heart echoed in his voice. “Thank you so very, very much.”

“I can’t promise you anything, Jim, but I will try my best,” ‘Selek’ tried to calm Kirk, but for naught. Jim beamed at him with such shining eyes that the old Vulcan couldn’t find it in himself to douse this joy by stating facts such as the possibility that the Council wouldn’t give its permission for the Augments to set a foot on New Vulcan.

“Be careful, old friend. If this order is indeed a trap for you – and all evidence points to this – then they’ll be waiting for you at Gamma 12.”

“Yes, I have to outsmart them – not an easy task but nothing I haven’t done before with Marcus.”

“And note how well that turned out,” his Spock murmured, clasping his hands behind his back and looking very innocent. Kirk glared at him.

“Rrrright,” Jim grumbled. “Leave it to you to remind me.”

On the screen, ‘Selek’ was the living example of an amused Vulcan. Alas, how much this all reminded him of the thousands of times and more he and his Jim had teased each other.
The Enterprise’s captain pouted for a second longer, then turned his attention back to the High Minister. “As I said, I’ll take complete responsibility, maybe facing trial with Nien together. There is no way on Earth that they can make a case in separate courts because both our cases are completely tied together. I’ll try to keep my friends and the rest of the crew out of the whole mess, but maybe they could stay on New Vulcan until any trial is finished. Starfleet has no authority on your planet, not even a star base. So no one could arrest them.”

“Captain, do you really think Dr. McCoy, Mr. Scott, Nyota, nor I would hide on New Vulcan while you faced trial?” Spock sounded as baffled as a Vulcan could be.

“It would be the only logical thing to do,” Jim answered, and saw irritation glittering in his friend’s eyes.

“The logical thing for a coward to do,” the first officer said with a low growl in his voice. “None of us is going to let you down.”

“First you have to make it safely to New Vulcan and ensure that the survivors are recovered – the admirals could vouch for you, Jim. Above all, you must gain proof of Luengo’s treason,” ‘Selek’ interrupted the quarrel. “And if I understood you correctly, you have only four or five days to do so.” He bent forwards again. “Maybe I can be of further help. Whatever Luengo intend concerning you, he needs active support, meaning he has to stay in contact with his fellow conspirators for his plan to work. I may have a way to ‘overhear’ some of these conversations. If I find anything important or damning, I will contact you.”

“Spock!” Jim cried, mock-scandalized. “Are you about to spy on the Chief in Command?” He shook his head. “Tsk, tsk, and that from a former officer, ambassador, and now leader of a whole planet.” His eyes sparkled with mischief and warmth.

“You were the only one who could bring out the worst of me – and still can,” ‘Selek’ almost sighed; the fondness in his tone took away the harshness of his words.

“I know what you mean,” his younger counterpart deadpanned, keeping his face absolutely expressionless, yet Jim saw straight through him.

“I’ll get you for this, Mister!” he threatened playfully, then turned serious again.
“You asked me to be careful,” he addressed the old Vulcan. “But the same goes for you. If Luengo or one of his henchmen catches you spying on them, they’ll find a way to eliminate the threat either politically, or literally. Please promise me you’ll be careful. I’m very grateful for your help but I don’t want to endanger you more than I already have when I asked for your support concerning Nien and his people.”

The younger Spock shifted uncomfortably as he saw the open affection on his older counterpart’s face at those words. “Do not worry, old friend. I did my share of spying during my active years in Starfleet and, as you have already pointed out, the computer security systems of this time are ‘old hat’ to me. As soon as I obtain some answers I will contact you.” He lifted his right hand and his fingers parted in the Vulcan greeting. “Long life and peace, my friend.”

Jim mirrored the gesture, less elegantly, but he managed. “The same for you, my friend. Take care of yourself.”

Then the two Vulcans greeted each other in a similar way, before the transmission was ended. Jim took a deep breath and rubbed his eyes. “Another hurdle overcome,” he murmured, “but I have this bad feeling that we will all be pushed to our limits before everything is over.”

Spock didn’t answer, not because of his ‘gut-feeling’ but because his logical mind told him the same.

A minute later they entered briefing room 2 where Khan, McCoy, and Scotty had been discussing the recovery of the delegation’s survivors, when Spock had answered Ritek’s hail. All three stopped as the commanding team stepped in, yet Jim only had eyes for the Augment who looked with a mixture of fear and hope at him.

“He supports us,” Jim said, and watched how Khan closed his eyes for a moment. He not only saw, but also felt his mate’s relief, and had to control himself not to go to him and to gather him in his arms.

McCoy shook his head and snorted. “Of course he does – after all it’s you who asked for his help.” His gaze wandered to Spock. “And our hobgoblin never ceases to hurl your ass out of the hot water you maneuver yourself into over and over again.”

The first officer simply lifted a brow and gave the CMO one of those glares which were indignant but simultaneously expressionless.
“Who is ‘he’?” Nien asked, looking up again and straight at Jim. “Neither Mr. Spock nor the others would give me an answer, but I think I should know who’s going to help my family to safety.”

Kirk nodded. “Of course you should know. ‘He’ is High Minister Selek. Besides the Elda T’Pau, the most important person on New Vulcan. I told him everything, and even though he’s not exactly thrilled with my request, he promised his help. He’ll speak with the members of the Vulcan High Council, and if they agree to harbor you and your people, you can apply for asylum. I think we can expect an answer within a day. Selek knows that we’re running out of time, and he’ll help facilitate a speedy decision.” He sat down. “In the meantime, we need to work out details of this plan for saving Nien’s people, to avoid the trap Command set up for us, and also have to find a way to prevent Sarek, another Vulcan, and four of our admirals to fall into Romulan hands. Not forgetting the other survivors who are about to be sold in the slavery market.” He looked around while Spock took his seat beside him. “So, gentlemen, any suggestions?”

ST***ST

One strong index finger punched the button that closed the connection with enough violence to almost break it. A tirade of guttural words echoed through the room, before a chair was pushed back, a solid shape rose, and a fist landed on the desktop with enough force to make the terminal shake.

Kor, son of Rynar needed to remember every technique for self-control to force back his rage.

How dare they?!

How dare they accuse him of disobedience and dishonorable behavior – because that’s what this was, an accusation! It was a demand for an exact report to the Klingon Council, and M’Rek wanted it in person immediately! He had kept the Empire’s word concerning the ceasefire, and had been ready to kill the renegade commanders and their crews in defense of the Enterprise – Kirk’s ship of all ships! He’d been itching to open the fire on the heavy cruiser himself, but never, under any circumstances, would he bring shame on his people by breaking a promise – a promise that had been made between the two highest men of the Empire and the Federation!

Just think! Asking him if he really had attacked the Excalibur – a vessel that traveled under a white flag, as the Earther’s saying went – had been like a slap in the face. As if he would launch an assault on a diplomatic spacecraft and destroy evacuation shuttles with the whole delegation aboard! Whoever had done this wasn’t even worth dying in battle and gaining a place among the Black Fleet. Whoever this traitor was, who even dared to use his name to commit this shameful crime, would die painfully and without honor. He was going to take care of that, personally.
The transmission from K’Thar, one of the ministers, had caught Kor by surprise and had awoken his upmost fury. For several moments he even thought the Federation might have come up with this nonsense in order to cancel the conference in a very cowardly way. Or maybe it was some of the generals who weren’t content with the agreed ceasefire and tried to lure him into a trap. But after K’Thar, who had been a friend of Kor’s father, had shown him Robertson’s message, there was no doubt that this wasn’t all a very bad joke. Someone had killed the Federation’s delegation – someone who’d pretended to be him.

It was really an odd twist of fate that he – Kor – had been away from Borderland to support another Starfleet vessel when the attack against the Excalibur occurred. Otherwise they’d be back at war already. Not that he would mind. He was a warrior, and if there was a war to win, he would battle to the bitter end. But to be back in combat just because the opponent had been led to believe the Klingon Empire had broken a ceasefire was something Kor would loathe. The thought made him tremble with wrath.

He bent forwards and contacted the officer of duty on the bridge. “Klasz!” he barked, and his hail was immediately answered.

“Yes, M’lord?”

“Set course to Yaska, moon of Yaraka, maximum speed! Calculate ETA!”

“Twelve hours and thirty two minutes, M’lord,” came the information only seconds later.

“Right, maximum warp! Kor out!” He cut off the link and took a seat behind his desk again. He would have to make the report now and he would tell the Council exactly what he’d done within the last three days! And afterwards he would be on the hunt – on the hunt for this imposter who had attacked and insulted his honor!

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, my dear readers, the way is settled for our friends – a way full of danger. And I can
promise that there will be a lot of action and hurt until the big show-down comes to an end.

I really love to write ‘Prime’ Spock into this story; his experiences, his acceptance of his two sides and his affection for Jim that had grown during a whole life-time, will be of important matter soon. It also is fun to have the ‘old’ Spock back during writing. The Spock of the new time-line is different; more emotional if you could say this about a Vulcan, more twisted inwardly but also more open towards risks in personal ways. Right, he is younger than his counterpart during the first five-year-mission and he suffered great losses what changed him a lot, therefore I have two different characters I can ‘play’ with.

There are many authors who also chose ‘Selek’ for Spock’s new identity in the new time-line; a pseudonym he also used in the old time-line as he met his younger self at Vulcan. It sounds logical that he uses this name again in a like-wise situation and I had this idea from the beginning, too, so please don’t flame me.

In the next chapter Wesley will learn of everything and he has to act – acting in a way he never dreamed of (*snicker*). You also will meet Barnett and the others again, our boys have a cuddle-session and dear Wesley will face an old acquaintance again.

I hope you liked the new installment as well as the explanations around Prime Spock’s new position and his talk with Jim and his younger self. As always I’m really curious what you think about it.

Until soon,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Once again I can only apologize for the late update, but I had to edit the chapter several times and then my dear beta-reader was away in family-business. Yet I hope that the waiting worth it and that you’re going to love the new chapter.

Thank you so very, very much for all the kudos and reviews; I love you, guys.

Have fun with the new installment,

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 54 – A hell of a plan, part 2

The Enterprise and the Lexington met at the agreed coordinates at 19:58 ship’s time, and Wesley instantly ordered the spare parts and medical supplies needed should be beamed over using the cargo transporter. He himself arrived at the Enterprise several minutes later, using transporter room 1. He wasn’t surprised to find Jim already waiting for him but he was surprised to meet Dr. McCoy in briefing room 2 and also Khan, who wore…command gold.

Wesley’s widened eyes hung for a moment at the rank on the Augment’s tunic, while he returned the respectful greetings, only then turning back to Kirk. “Don’t tell me you’ve promoted Mr. Singh to petty officer,” he said, before quickly addressing the former dictator. “No offense meant, Mr. Singh.”

“None taken, Commodore,” Khan answered.

“Well, I’m running out of helmsmen and Nien is an excellent pilot. Yet I can’t fill the post with a civilian, especially on the main bridge, so I used Starfleet regulation 58b to…” Kirk stopped himself as Wesley groaned loudly and closed his eyes.
Taking a deep breath Bob opened his eyes again a few seconds later, took the offered seat, and glared at his protégée. “One day you will be the death of me,” he growled. “How am I going to explain that you promoted a wanted man to a petty officer, only because…”

“I followed the regulations, Bob, you can’t deny it.”

“No, you bent them – again!” Wesley shook his head. “And I have a feeling that the space-dock at Rigel would have been able to repair your ship if I’d ask them.”

Jim smiled sheepishly and sat down opposite him. “I’ve got to speak to you in private, Bob – concerning this whole mess with the Excalibur and…other things.”

Warily, Wesley cocked his head. “What other things? You already told me about the discrepancies in Styles’ report and…”

“I didn’t tell you everything because I’m afraid that we were overheard. I caught a spy on my ship, and I can’t be sure that there aren’t more of them.”

“Spy?” Wesley thought he hadn’t understood his young friend correctly. “What spy?”

“A spy from Section 31 –”

Bob opened his mouth to interrupt, but Jim continued firmly.

“– who got his orders from the SBI to install a bug in my quarters, and who tried to kill Nien and Spock when they caught him!”

“To kill…?” The commodore was shocked, from his face that was plain to see, while he stared at the Augment, asking himself in the same moment where the Vulcan was. Usually Spock never left Kirk’s side, especially on an occasion like this one.

“Yes, out of revenge because he lost a cousin and a friend in the crash of the Vengeance,” Jim explained. “He wanted to kill the man he was told was responsible for the catastrophe. And he was about to shoot Spock because he intervened and protected Nien.”
Wesley’s mouth was hanging open now, before he closed it with an audible snap, and looked at Khan. “You caught this man in Jim’s quarters?”

“Yes. I was on the bridge when Lieutenant Uhura received the message that someone used Dr. McCoy’s override code to enter the captain’s private rooms. I knew that Dr. McCoy was in a briefing with Jim and Mr. Spock at the time, and therefore couldn’t be the person who forced his way into Jim’s quarters. I got there in time, caught the man installing a listening device, and challenged him, but he attacked me instantly, trying to stun me first but soon switched the phaser’s settings. I have Mr. Spock to thank that I wasn’t shot.”

Bob blinked several times. “He tried to stun you?”

“Nien is immune to phaser stuns – well, sort of. He felt nausea afterwards,” Jim explained, and Wesley nodded. “I understand.” He obviously did not, but gave this detail a rest and moved on to the next topic. “And why do you think Section 31 is behind all this? If the SBI ordered –”

“Because I have every reason to believe that Luengo is the new head of the Section 31 that still exists.” Kirk fixed his gaze at a thunderstruck Bob Wesley. “And I also think that he is responsible for the assault on the Excalibur.”

This time Wesley gasped. “Are you crazy?” he blurted out. “You accuse the interim Chief in Command to…”

“He’s only been promoted to that because all the other admirals who would have come before him in the chain of command are dead – or so Luengo thinks.”

For another ten seconds Bob stared at him, before he whispered, “Do you know what you’re saying here?”

“Yes,” Kirk replied calmly. “I’m speaking of conspiracy – a very big one. One we’ve to stop.”

Bob combed his fingers through his grey hair. “Jim, I do understand that this whole incident smells fishy, but…” He stopped himself as the door opened and Spock entered.
The Vulcan bowed slightly his head. “Commodore Wesley,” he greeted, before he said to Kirk, “Most of the supplies have been brought aboard, Captain.”

“Thanks, Spock.”

Bob used the little pause to collect himself before he addressed the first officer. He rose politely. “Mr. Spock, I already gave you my condolences, but please allow me to personally tell you how sorry I’m for your loss.”

A dark eyebrow was lifted. “Thank you for your sympathy, Commodore, but that isn’t necessary. My father is alive.”

Again Wesley’s jaw almost hit the floor.

“And so are his assistant and several other survivors, among them four of our admirals,” Spock added.

The Commodore stared at him, then at Jim – and finally at McCoy. “Please tell me they’ve got space sickness!” He said, pointing nonchalant at the Enterprise’s command-team.

“I can assure you, sir, that both are enjoying good health,” the CMO answered with a sigh.

“This is no joke, Commodore,” Khan cut in. “We received a message from The Shadow. They checked the surface of Yaska and found the second shuttle – destroyed but intact enough to protect its passengers. Four are dead, the rest had vanished, yet Galven found evidence of another space craft that landed nearby, and footprints which led back and forth between the two vessels.”

“There were also traces of blood in the shuttle – Terran, Vulcan, Andorian, Tellarit, Risean, and Betazoid.” Spock informed the speechless Wesley, who sank back into his chair.

“And Ritek intercepted a transmission between some Orion slave traders and the Romulans, who want to buy four Federation staff officers and two Vulcans,” Jim added. “There was also the mention of more ‘interesting slaves’. Given the Betazoids’ sexuality, I think I know what those bastards were talking about!” He straightened his shoulders. “There is no doubt that some members of the delegation survived and are now in the hands of Orion salvers.” He pursed his lips briefly. “I would go after them by myself, but I’ve got an order from Luengo to evacuate the personnel on Gamma 12
“WHAT?” Bob’s eyes were about to pop out his head. “Mr. Singh’s people are there?”

“I got a manifest of the facility, including the top secret stuff – among it all ‘seventy-two tubes with biological test subjects’. Seventy-two tubes, Bob – and there are seventy-two remaining cryotubes with Khan’s family inside them. Gamma 12 is listed as an unmanned transmissions post; in truth it’s a high security facility, two and a half days away from Earth on a godforsaken little moon – the perfect place to lock the Augments away!”

“Luengo knows about my presence aboard,” Khan threw in. “Mr. Spock was able to decode the spy’s PADD which holds pictures and records of Jim and me during our mission on Aldebaran.”

“And Lieutenant Uhura has reconstructed the message Lieutenant Nureaux – the spy – sent in secret. It refers to Mr. Singh’s presence here. The receiver was somewhere in Headquarters, a private terminal with no official ID number, as far as I could determine,” Spock explained. “Incidentally, the lieutenant’s PADD is not standard, but an innovative device used by the SBI – exactly like the listening device and the secret transmitter Security found in Nureaux’ quarters.”

Bob felt a headache coming on and glanced back at Kirk. “So they have you their sights. Shit, Jim, you are a hell of a lot of trouble! Even if the SBI has nothing to do with Section 31, they can get you because you covered for Mr. Singh.”

“I know, Bob. I knew the risk, yet I wouldn’t change one thing given the chance.” Kirk’s jaw was set, firm determination burnt in his eyes. “And I’m convinced that the SBI – Luengo – is responsible for the current situation! Not only the mess with the Excalibur, but also by planting the spy on my ship. Nureaux’ statements and reactions at the hearing leave no doubt about it.”

Wesley frowned. “So, because the SBI found out that you hid Khan on the Enterprise and sent someone to check it out, you think that Luengo is behind the assault of the…”

“There are only a few people who know about Mr. Singh’s existence at all,” Spock cut in. “Admirals Barnett and Komack, the President of the UFP, Admirals Luengo and Norton, and a handful of Council members. Barnett and Komack have been officially declared dead, and, incidentally, if they had known of Captain Kirk harboring Mr. Singh, they would have acted completely differently than the SBI. The President and the Council members cannot have sent Lieutenant Nureaux or could have provided him with the information I found on his PADD. All evidence leads to someone with power who works at the legal limit – Admiral Luengo. A Vulcan does not make wagers, but if I were human, I would put money that the personal computer in HQ Nureaux sent his message to belongs to
Before Wesley could reply, Jim followed on from Spock’s speech.

“Think, Bob! Luengo had knowledge of Nien’s transfer to the secret labs and did nothing to stop it, which is effectively illegal. He supported the scientists and Norton, who are obviously part of or work for Section 31. One of the scientists even worked for Marcus at the secret Jupiter station; Nien recognized him.”

Khan simply nodded as Wesley looked questioningly at him, glad that Jim chose not to mention the other circumstances in which he knew of this ‘scientist’, his rapist.

“Barnett put Luengo into custody for it, but Luengo went free as the war started,” the young captain continued. “He has power to pull enough strings to reap the advantages of the last days’ events. Those admirals who’d accused him and took him into custody are officially dead, and he is now the Chief of Command – interim, yes, but the only remaining step to promote him permanently is just a question of time. And then Section 31 will once again rise with all its power, and once again making its own laws.”

“You are accusing Luengo of murder,” Wesley stated carefully, and Jim made another affirming gesture.

“Yes, but the executioner was someone else.” He bent forwards and activated the terminal. “We found out several very interesting things in Styles’ report – things, which prove that he had absolutely no interest in saving the evacuees, even sending them to their deaths. This is the reason why I wanted to speak with you in private – because I really didn’t want to discuss this stuff via subspace!”

For the next quarter hour, Bob listened to Styles’ report which he’d already heard three or four times. But previously, he hadn’t been aware of the little but important discrepancies within the newly-promoted captain’s words and actions. Without Spock or Jim pointing out those details, he wouldn’t have recognized them for what they were. Next he watched the recorded transmission between Ritek and Spock that had taken place several hours ago, and he didn’t know if he should be relieved or even more horrified that there were indeed survivors, which were as good as lost now. And at last he listened to the theory that the order given concerning Gamma 12 was a trap for Jim and his crew – a trap that had been set by the SBI.

Wesley felt cold, even if the cup of hot coffee McCoy had fetched for them all – aside for Spock – warmed his fingers. “If you’re right with all these assumptions and accusations, then why doesn’t
Luengo simply arrest you, Jim?” he asked quietly. “Mr. Singh’s presence aboard is reason enough to…”

“This is one of the things I have no real answer for. All I can think of is that Luengo’s scientists-henchmen want Nien back, too, and so they’re luring us both into a trap. They know Nien will come to Gamma 12 knowing his family is there, and he will put up no resistance if the lives of his crew are at stake. I’m sure they’ll wait to see what we’ll do before acting. If I don’t follow the order to the letter, they can not only get me for harboring a fugitive, but also for insubordination. I and my senior officers would be stripped of our command and rank, the Enterprise would be given to someone else loyal to Luengo, and our flag ship will go down as a casualty of battle in the ‘glorious war’ Section 31 wants in order to control the power they’ll need to win.”

Bob rubbed his forehead. “Still Luengo could send two ships and arrest you. So why –”

“Jim brought Section 31 down once – and he would do it again, given the chance,” Bones thought aloud. “At any trial, he’d tell the truth. And even if Luengo denies everything, there would certainly be council members who would investigate on their own. Luengo knows this. And he knows that Jim is Barnett’s man – that he loathed Section 31’s methods, and will fight them till the end. I personally think that they don’t even want to arrest Jim, but kill him. They’d have that chance when he reaches Gamma 12 and doesn’t obey the order. Fight – and then BANG.”

Kirk rolled his eyes. “Bones, don’t you think you’re being a little melodramatic?”

“And don’t you think you’re not taking this whole thing seriously enough?” the CMO shot back. For a moment they glared at each other, before Leonard continued, “Right, let’s pretend for a moment they’ll play nice. Luring you into a trap which will send you to prison for ages is a very good solution to their problem, but they’ll need an official reason for it. The Federation loves you and public wouldn’t take it well if Command takes your rank and your ship away. They won’t be able to explain to the media that you’re going to court because of Khan, because he doesn’t even exist officially. And Luengo can’t show his true colors in public; his plans have to stay secret, as well as the existence of Section 31. Therefore they’ll need to be another reason to arrest you they can give the media – insubordination.”

Spock lifted both brows this time. “That is a remarkable deduction, Doctor. I am surprised in a positive manner that you were able to deduce that.”

“Thanks,” McCoy replied sarcastically. “That coming from you is a compliment.”

“I do not make compliments, Doctor, I simply state facts. Yet I ask myself why you do not follow a
Bones rolled his eyes. “Because you’re the living computer on board!”

“Guys,” Jim warned them sternly. “We don’t have time for this.”

Bob Wesley had used the short quarrel between the first officer and CMO to ruminate on his own thoughts. From Kirk’s point of view everything made sense – more sense than he liked to admit.

The chief of the SBI – a traitor? Luengo had arranged everything to become the head of Starfleet? And this all to bring back Section 31? As unbelievable as this sounded – as horrible as this would be – it made sense! In fact, it was the only way everything that had happened in the last days made any sense.

“We need proof, Jim,” he murmured, not realizing that he was ready to believe and to support his protégée. “You know this. If we show up with this wild theory before the Council and –”

“The surviving delegates could certainly give enough evidence to finish Luengo and the others,” the young captain interrupted him. “And if Luengo ordered genocide that would be the final nail in his coffin. That’s something the Council would not tolerate. Or even believe to begin with; there’s absolutely no reason for him to order the Augments’ death – the death of a whole race.”

“A whole race?” Wesley asked; confused.

“Allistor stripped Nien and his people of all human rights and declared them ‘non-human’. Therefore they are their own race – and to order all their deaths is genocide,” Jim explained, his tone hard. “Luengo isn’t going to take any risks with the Augments escaping, and I’m sure his scientists would be satisfied with getting Khan back in their hands. So, he gave the command to destroy several high security facilities in order to lay a trail – the wrong trail – for anyone who might investigate such an unusual order – an order the Council is certainly not informed about.”

“What do you want to do concerning Mr. Singh’s people?” Bob asked, and Jim took a deep breath.

“I’ll beam them out before I destroy Gamma 12, and take them to New Vulcan, where Nien will ask for asylum until he can face a real trial. Luengo’s order of genocide gives Nien and his crew a right to asylum on every planet in the Federation. They’ll be safe there until we can get their case heard in
Wesley frowned. “And the Vulcans agreed to this?”

Jim nodded. “I spoke with High Minister Selek and was able to convince him to support my request. I expect a positive answer from the Vulcan High Council within the next few hours.”

“You spoke with Selek? Just like that?” Again, the commodore stared at his protégée, baffled.

“Yeah – we’re…uh…old friends.” Jim nodded with a grin.

“‘Old friends’, Bob echoed, shaking his head, while Spock looked at the ceiling and McCoy only grimaced. Khan frowned. What was it about New Vulcan’s leading minister that had the senior officers reacting like this every time Jim mentioned him and their friendship?

Bob had caught himself again. “Right, you fly to Gamma 12, avoid the trap – I don’t know how you’re going to do it, but you’ll find a way, I guess. Then you’ll give the Augments a ride to New Vulcan and place them under Selek’s protection. I assume you’ll use the SDD to speed through Federation space without being noticed, because – believe me, son – half of Starfleet will be at your heels as soon as you leave Gamma 12 with the augments aboard, without being arrested.” He put the cup back on the table and crossed his under arms on the table surface. “And what shall I do in the meantime?” He pointed a finger nonchalantly at the younger man. “You’ve something in store for me, don’t tell me otherwise!”

“I thought that would be obvious?” Jim was all surprised innocence. “You save the admirals and the diplomats.”

Wesley only glared at him. “Of course – how could I have not known?” He narrowed his eyes. “Pray tell me how the Lexington is supposed to travel through the Borderland without being caught by the Orions or those Klingon renegades, find the location of this slave market of which even the Syndicate has no knowledge, and recover the captives and make it back to the Federation alive?”

“Maybe the Lexington distracts them and you fly with The Shadow to the rescue,” Jim suggested. “I’m certain Galven will support you.”

“Of course, it’s so simple.” Bob’s voice dripped with sarcasm. “Me, this little militia-gang made up
of civilians, and you against Starfleet Command and the rest of the world – sounds easy!”

“We are not fighting Starfleet Command, we’re taking on the traitors who have no scruples about killing his own staff officers and any diplomat that gets in his way,” Jim said hard. “They’re about to destroy everything that makes up the essence of the fleet – of the whole Federation. We’ve got to stop them before it’s too late!” He cocked his head. “Or don’t you believe me that we’re facing a conspiracy here and –”

“I DO believe you – that’s the whole point,” Bob groused. “Everything makes sense – and to tell you the truth, it scares the hell out of me!” He made a gesture towards the wall and therefore to space. “How do you want to avoid the trap they set for you? You haven’t the slightest clue what this trap even looks like, what they’ve planned! How –”

“I’ll think of something. The SDD will help us a lot. I don’t think that they’ll be waiting for us at the facility, but nearby, because they don’t want to risk an open battle. The Enterprise is the strongest ship in the fleet and I’m well-known for my…unorthodox strategies. They won’t take any risks and will wait somewhere out of sight. If they think I play by the rules and am happy to obey the order they’ll have to wait for new instructions, and that gives me time – time for you and me.” He bent forwards. “Bob, it’s very important that you recover our people. Not only to convict Section 31, but the mere thought of four of our admirals and Spock’s father being in Romulan hands makes me sick thinking about what might lay ahead for them.”

“I can give you the private frequency of Galven,” Khan said. “You can contact him directly and speak with him. Ritek promised during the last transmission that they’ll try to find out, where this market shall take place. They intercepted even the Romulans, they certainly will be successful with eavesdropping the slave traders, too.”

“And then?” Wesley threw his hands up. “The Orions may be nothing more than pirates and rascals, but they have damn good tech. Hell, we needed their permission to cross the Borderland as the Enterprise was off to Turkana to take the evacuees aboard. There is no way in hell that they fail to notice the Lexington.”

Khan bent forward. “Their sensors will not be able to locate you if I give you the exact instructions on how to build another SDD.” He met the widening eyes of the commodore and continued, “I know that officially only one proto-type exists – that aboard the Enterprise – and Command bought it. There are certainly dozens of regulations which forbid you to install a further device before it’s licensed by Command, but this is an emergency. And I don’t think your admirals would mind that you…misinterpreted orders if you could save their necks this way.”

Wesley stared at him, then at Jim and Spock and back, before he shook his head. “The air aboard this ship must be responsible for the fact that everyone who stays here for any length of time thinks he
“But this is the only chance, Bob,” Jim said with determination. “Nien is right! You’re travelling deep into enemy territory. Without the SDD, the risk that they’ll get you is—”

“Eighty-nine point three four nine two eight percent, considering the Orion’s technical standards, not to mention the official Klingons stationed there.” Spock said helpfully. “With the support of the SDD, the possibility of success lies at 67.68391 percent.”

“A cakewalk then!” Wesley taunted, massaging his temples.

His oath and his honor forced him to do anything to recover the survivors of the delegation and to ward off any harm that could potentially befall Starfleet and the Federation. Kirk’s, Spock’s, and Khan’s thoughts about the reasons for Section 31 acting like it had were logical. Marcus had tried to provoke a war with the Klingons to increase his own power and because he was convinced that only a strong military-based Federation had a future. Luengo must think likewise if he broke the ceasefire; making it look like the Klingons were the ones who went against the agreement. If it hadn’t been for the discrepancy over the attacking Klingon commander, they’d already be back at war. There was no doubt about it.

“You know the risks we’re taking here, don’t you, Jim? Not only could we both stripped of our ranks and commands, we could be accused of treason, which would land us in prison for the next eight decades, or incur the death penalty!”

“I know – but we’ve got no other choice,” Jim said softly, fixing a stare at the older man. “We are at the point where we have to make a decision – to blindly follow any order given by someone who rails against everything the Federation stands for, or to do what’s right.” He held Bob’s gaze and asked gently, “Are you with me?”

“Do I have another choice?” Wesley murmured almost bitterly. “To deny you my support would mean the death of the survivors and possibly Mr. Singh’s people too. It would mean that in the end, the Federation as it stands would be dying.” He shook his head. “I only hope a few of the survivors have realized that they were tricked and realized they’d be led to almost certain death by one of our own, otherwise the tables could be turned very quickly and it will be us who are counting the nails of our coffins.”

“Styles’ report is full of mistakes, which speaks for itself. And I’m certain that one or another of the admirals has understood by now that they’re victims of this treachery. They’re held captive, but they’re not stupid. Hopefully, they’ve managed to learn a thing or two from their captors.”
“All evidence points to a connection between the Klingon renegades and the Orion slave traders,” Spock added. “The Orions had to have known of the Excalibur’s assault, otherwise they would not have been in the vicinity. They could not have learned any other way about the shuttle crash and that had an opportunity to take the survivors captive.”

Wesley nodded slowly. “Logical,” he commented, then he lowered his head. He knew that he had reached the point where he had to make a decision that could lead to scenario he’d never dreamed of even in his worst nightmares. Sweet Lord, this whole mess was a nightmare!

“Right,” he said slowly. “I’ll try to recover our people and talk to the surviving admirals. I don’t know if they’ll believe me or not – or if they’ve learned of the dark truth behind the Excalibur being attacked at all. Dammit, I can barely believe it, even with the clear evidence of Styles’ report. Contacting the Council with these accusations could be for naught, if Luengo really is behind everything. He’ll learn of it faster than I could give the Council a full report. He controls everything and his people are trained to be the best Intelligence members in the whole Federation. I only hope Luengo didn’t learn of your talk with Selek and –”

“He didn’t. Selek coded the line and there’s no better computer specialist in this quadrant or the next.”

Bob glanced at Jim and rolled his eyes. “I’ve heard that he is damned good with computers, but you put him on a pedestal, son!”

“He deserves it,” Kirk smiled, before he turned serious again. “So, when will you start and –”

“The moment we part and I obtain the instructions on how to build the SDD, I’ll be off to the rescue, as they say. I have to come up with an idea about what to tell Command if they contact me within the next days – or what I’m doing in the Borderland should Intelligence learn of the Lexington’s presence there.”

“You’ll think of something, I’m sure,” Jim smirked.

Bob rolled his eyes and rose and the others followed his example, at least as far as the standing was concerned. Extending his hand to Kirk he said, “I would suggest that we stay in contact, but in this case, silence would be the better part of valor. Only hail me if something goes wrong; I’ll do the same. If Luengo learns of my mission, and I really can recover the delegation, it will be in his best interest to hinder our return to the Federation.”
“I understand.” Jim said and shook his mentor’s hand. “Please be careful, Bob. The Orions are sneaky and spiteful.”

“Don’t remind me! I haven’t the slightest clue how to proceed, but I have to do something.” He looked at Khan. “You’ll send all relevant information to my chief engineer?”

“Yes, including a report of the modifications Mr. Scott made. I’ll have everything available within the next half hour.”

“Thank you,” Bob said and took a deep breath; he felt miserable. “What is Mr. Galven’s private frequency?”

The former dictator gave him the information and shook the commodore’s hand afterwards. “Once again, thank you for your support,” he said, and Bob grimaced.

“I’m already too far gone to step back now. Either we all come out of this unscathed, or we’ll go down, but at least in a blaze of glory.” He also shook McCoy’s hand before his fingers parted into the Vulcan greeting. “I’ll do everything in my power to recover Ambassador Sarek, Mr. Spock. You have my word.”

The first officer bowed. “I am honored to have your support, Commodore. Our clan will be grateful for your endeavor, even if it should be end without success. Long life and safety, Commodore.”

“The same goes for you, Mr. Spock.” He turned to leave. “Jim, please accompany me to the transporter room. I have to exchange a few words in private with you.”

“Of course.” Kirk hurried to say and left the briefing room with Bob.

McCoy rubbed his neck. “I don’t know how you see this whole thing, but for my part I have to admit that we’re in really – really – deep water!”

“I am certain that like most Terrans, you have learned to swim,” Spock deadpanned – and Khan felt the urge to chuckle. How could someone say that Vulcans had no sense of humor? This one did! With an “Excuse me, gentlemen,” he also left the room to return to his quarters and to prepare the
documents for the Lexington’s chief engineer. He knew that he had thrown away part of his plans for a further deal with Starfleet Command, but he had no other choice.

Wesley was right; they were in this together now. They had to combine their entire strike power and strategic abilities in order to place their enemies in checkmate. And if he had to contribute his share, so be it.

Barnett awoke to loud voices – both male and both obviously very enraged. Raising himself up on his right elbow and ignoring the protest of three broken ribs, he listened to the two men in verbal combat, recognizing one as the Orion leader who had taken him captive along with Batari Whitman, Ania Morganth, Sarek, and his assistant Sokal, Gav, and the Risan ambassador. He couldn’t understand what they were talking about – their voices were muffled by the closed door of the primitive prison the surviving delegation members were held in – yet Richard knew that he and the others were the reason for the verbal fight on the other side of the door.

Pulling the thin blanket higher, the admiral suppressed a shiver. It was very cold here and he doubted that none of them would be back to a healthy appearance by the time the slave market took place.

Thinking of the whole turn of events, he almost laughed at the irony of their fate. They had survived an attack by the Klingons and a shuttle-crash, only to soon be sold at a slavery market. Most Orions lived from selling illegal goods, and D’nyrrs was no exception. He belonged to a group of one of the most wanted Orion pirates and slavers, and he was well-known for his greed, and all attempts to talk to him had been for naught. Even Barnett’s assurances that the Federation would certainly pay ransom didn’t catch the pirate’s attention – as if their capture wasn’t just a matter of money. And regarding the fact that D’nyrrs valued money like others worshiped gods, the Orion’s refusal gave the admirals a lot to think about.

After they had recovered a little from their ordeal, not least of all thanks to the treatment of an Andorian doctor who seemed to be an unwilling part of the gang – the admirals had discussed recent events. It was more than obvious that D’nyrrs had captured them against some agreement with a man names Klokh – a Klingon name, no doubt. Said Klingon had sent the Orion to kill the survivors, yet D’nyrrs didn’t do as he was told – something the still-living delegation members should be grateful for, but for the most part weren’t. The four staff officers knew that the slavers were about to sell them to the Romulans, and none of the admirals could suppress the dread that flooded them at the mere thought. And, as it seemed, the Romulans were also interested in Sarek and his assistant.

Starfleet Intelligence assumed for a while now that the Romulans were running illegal tests on captured Vulcans with regards to their telepathy, yet there hadn’t been any proof, only thin leads. Yet those rumors seemed to be true, and Barnett shuddered at the thought what would lay ahead for
Sarek and Sokal, should they fell into Romulan hands.

Barnett sat up carefully as the voices grew louder and all of a sudden he realized that the strong accent of the second male was the typical guttural vocals of a Klingon speaking Federation Standard. Maybe it was this Klokh the Orion spoke of. Tensed he listened, tried to understand what the two men were speaking about.

Beside him Nogura stirred. “What’s wrong, Richard?” he whispered, but before Barnett could answer, Sarek’s quiet baritone murmured from the neighbor cell, “I would appreciate if the two gentlemen would be silent. I have been following this ‘discussion’ for quite some time now and I want to learn as much as possible of our captors.”

Instantly both admirals shut up. After all, the Vulcan’s hearing was several times more acute than theirs.

And then the voices drew nearer and the two staff officers were able to understand the spoken – rather, hollered – words.

“We had an agreement, D’nyrrs! An agreement with this Starfleet-human! No survivors! I told you to finish off any possible living weaklings, not to take captives and to sell them to satisfy your inner greedy pig. What this Starfleet admiral will pay us is several times more than you can ever earn with them!”

“Don’t you get it? No one knows that they are alive! The Romulans are paying a good price for the officers and the two Vulcans. And I’ve other customers who are very interested in the two females. We get the money from this Starfleet traitor and from my customers. Double the money – even for you, Klokh!”

“The man in the bar said –”

“He said that this admiral will reward us with more afterwards, because he needs allies in the Borderland – yes, yes, I know. But I tell you this – when this business is over, I don’t think we’ll hear much more from this guy – especially not when the war comes to an end someday.” Steps were heard as someone began to pace. “I insist on this business with the Romulans and –”

“And I hope you’ve got everything under control!” the Klingon voice snarled. “If only one of them – only one – gets a chance to tell this tale, we’re done for! They’ll be after us – the Federation and the
Empire.

The Orion snorted. “They will be busy with each other soon – after all, we given them a reason to end the ceasefire and –”

“Don’t expect the Federation to be aggressive enough to end the ceasefire – if they haven’t done it until now, they will not within the next days. Talking – that’s what they do with the Empire. Yet the Empire will try to find out what really happened,” the Klingon growled.

“See – and if you have to run, you’ll need money – money I got for us both because I look farther, as my nose is large. This deal will reward us with enough money to last us for the rest of our lives!” The Orion calmed down a little. “Look, the auction will be in two days, then everything will be over. I suggest you and your warriors stay here.”

“Why?”

“Because you Klingons are excellent guards –”

“Don’t compliment me, D’nyrrs. This will not assuage my anger that you went against our plan!”

“– and if something goes wrong during the auction, you guys can take care of it,” the Orion continued as if he hadn’t heard Klokh.

“Where are the prisoners?”

“Down there – unconscious most of the time. The crash must have injured them more than I thought. I got a doctor to examine them and give them first aid, the rest is up to the them.”

The steps came nearer, and quickly Barnett lay back, closing his eyes as did Nogura. They heard someone entering the small hallway that led to the cells they’d been held captive in since the first day, and now the steps stopped. A suppressed curse in Klingon echoed through the cold air, followed by, “The Vulcan doesn’t look good. If you really want the Romulans to buy him, you should take care that he and the younger one are kept warmer. These pointy ears are very sensitive when it comes to low temperatures.” Again the Klingon walked a few paces, stopping at another cell. For a moment there was silence, then, “They are really beauties. You’ll get a high price for them, no doubt.” Then the Klingon drew nearer to the cell where the four admirals lay, and a harsh
chuckle escaped him. “Only several months ago I would have given everything to have some high-ranking Starfleet officer like this at my mercy, bringing them to the High Council as trophies. But now…” He walked away again.

“So, you’ll stay until…” began the Orion and the Klingon hissed, “Do I have another choice, you fool? I’ll make certain that our deal with this admiral will not fail because of your greed!” They left the hallway. “And the next time we agree to something like this, you’d better keep your word. Otherwise I don’t see any reason to continue our…”

The voice faded away, and Barnett dared to open his eyes. Beside him Nogura sat up; in the pale glow of the small light outside his usually almond-shaped eyes were large as saucers.

“Did I get that right?” he whispered. “One of our admirals hired these pirates and renegades to kill the delegation? Who? Why, for God’s sake?”

“And they want to sell us to the Romulans,” Komack murmured, his voice tense with pain. He had suffered the most of all of them, but was more conscious now, and had also listened to the conversation. “I have to admit that the prospect scares me.”

“Obviously someone in the admiralty wants us out of the way – for whatever reason – and these pirates got the order to kill us, but one of them decided to get greedy and took us captive to sell us,” Richard whispered. “The attack against the Excalibur was well-planned. Styles is inexperienced. Someone in Starfleet must have given this information to the pirates and –”

“You are right,” Sarek’s low voice drifted over to them. “As I said, gentlemen, I eavesdropped on D’nyrrs and Klokh for quite a time before you became aware of their presence. They knew indeed that the Excalibur was under the command of a young captain who had taken command for the first time.”

“Sweet lord, why?” Richard groaned, fury and shock going through him. “Who of us wants us dead – us four, and the whole delegation? Who would gain an advantage from it? The Federation would be weakened beyond imagination. Until our positions are filled and Starfleet recovers from this blow, the Klingons could overrun us.”

“Maybe that’s the whole plan,” Komack murmured. “And, don’t forget, Richard, Thomas is already dead. Five admirals are already out of the way, and whoever this other ‘admiral’ is that the pirate spoke of, now has a free hand to act as he or she wants. While we are lying here waiting to be sold into slavery – or, in our case, to be tortured for information – the Klingons may launch a major strike against the Federation because some bastard we all know and trust betrayed us to the enemy!” He
coughed and closed his eyes as coldness and pain spread through him again.

“The Klingons hadn’t begun another attack against the Federation until now. They are still talking to each other, which is a good sign,” Nogura murmured.

“Yes, but the question is, for how long?” Barnett rubbed his stubbly jaw. “We have to find a way to escape. Maybe we all can’t escape, but if one of us manages to leave this godforsaken place and informs Robertson, then maybe not all is lost.”

“And how do we make that happen?” Morrow whispered from the other side of the cell, his injured vocal cords made it difficult to understand him. “It’s thought that no one has been able to escape from an Orion slave trader until now.”

“For everything there is a first time,” Sarek whispered just over his breath. “I have always thought hope to be illogical. Maybe now is a good time to alter that opinion, because that is all that is left for us: hope.”

Barnett lowered his head. “That coming from a Vulcan tells me that we’re at a dead end.”

ST***ST***ST

“And how do you hope to find them in time?” Bob Wesley sat in his quarters having contacted The Shadow. He looked at Galven on the screen, who cocked his head while his snout twitched.

“There are not many routes the Romulans can take to enter Borderland without being caught by Federation or Klingon scouts. They have either to cross a whole parsec of Federation territory or detour through the Klingon area. Both sides won’t be too delighted if they have Romulan visitors, therefore our ‘dear neighbors’ have to be very careful. Given the fact that Klingon technology isn’t as highly developed as that of the Federation, I think the Romulans would rather take the risk with them than with any Starfleet vessels on patrol. And, by the way, during their last contact, the Orion trader agreed for the meeting with the Romulans to take place between the Celendi Nebula and Verix. I think he’ll take his guests aboard and bring them to the secret place where the auction will happen. If we intercept them and watch them, we can follow and learn the exact location of the ‘market’.”

Bob pursed his lips. “You can move through the Borderland without being caught. I take it you have an SDD too?”
“Yes, Khan’s first prototype of that nice little device. Neither the Orions nor the Romulans will know that we’re nearby watching them.”

“Verix has been annexed by the Klingons. They will watch out and –”

“Commodore, be both know that the Romulans first bought and then stole Klingon technology and ships. They only have to use a Klingon spacecraft and none of those dragonheads will be any wiser.”

Galven bent forwards. “This is the only chance to find out of the whereabouts of your officer colleagues and the delegation. If this chance passes by without being taken, they are lost.”

“I know. I’ll try to reach you within the next ten hours. We’ll skirt the Borderland and enter it near Midrian, flying a direct course to Verix. As soon as you have any new information, please contact me. I’ll give you my private frequency.”

The Tellarit oinked something in his language before he grumbled, “To cross two thirds of the Borderland in your big shiny white ship is a risk – even with the SDD Khan gave you.”

“I know, but if we want to free the captives we’ll need to strike with a full force. Orions are not known for letting go of their slaves easily, but a Constitution class cruiser in their orbit should encourage them to stay put. Do you know if the Syndicate knows what really happened?”

“No. As far as I can calculate, this slaver is acting on his own – operating outside the Syndicate, but I’ve no proof of that. Maybe we’ll find out more, then you can demand support from the Syndicate.”

“Yes, support from the Orion Syndicate – and Easter and Christmas will be celebrated on the same day from now on!” Bob scoffed and sighed inwardly, as the Tellarit looked really confused at him.

“I beg your pardon?” Galven asked, and Wesley shrugged.

“An old Earth saying, never mind.” He reached for the button to cut off the connection. “We’ll see you in less than sixteen hours, Galven. Wesley out!” He let himself fall against the back of his chair and groaned. He had told his officers that they were off on a secret mission about which he was bound to secrecy, and only his senior officers – Palmer, Sonik, Carry, the chief engineer, and Marceaux, his first officer – knew the truth. He had talked with them after his return from the Enterprise, before Carry had begun to build and install the SDD. At first they were disbelieving, but after he had laid bare certain facts, they had to accept that there was someone at HQ who had tried to
use the war to climb up the career ladder, and to re-activate a forbidden department which had little
to do with the ideals of the Federation.

Bob would need their support during the mission, this much he knew for certain, and after the four
gave their word to stand with him, he felt relieved. ‘Not only Jim has friends he can rely on, I’ve got
them too,’ he thought while he looked into nothingness.

He couldn’t know that he would not only need the support of his friends soon, but also that of
someone who was officially an enemy of the Federation.

ST***ST***ST

After Bob left the Enterprise – not without giving Jim a final word of advice and to demand his
promise to ‘not overdo it at Gamma 12’ – he met with Scotty and Spock again. They discussed how
they would deal with the facility; went through the different scenarios they could face and which
technical obstacles they could expect. Khan joined them an hour later after making sure that the
Lexington’s chief engineer was able to rebuild and install the SDD. Jim had asked for his presence
and Nien’s old-fashioned, yet mostly novel strategies from three hundred years ago helped them
think up the most unorthodox ways to bring the mission to a successful end.

It had been almost midnight when Kirk and Khan bid the others good night and returned to the
captain’s quarters.

Jim fell into bed like a stone, groaning as his back muscles protested against the many hours he’d
spent sitting at conference tables that day. He listened to the sonic shower in the hygiene cell and
smiled with half-closed eyes as Nien stepped into the main room only several minutes later, wearing
nothing but a pair sleeping pants. Outwardly the Augment appeared calm and casual, yet Kirk felt
the tension in his mate’s mind and soul.

It wasn’t surprising – not really. The day after tomorrow they would arrive at the place where the
other super-humans were being held, and their lives depended on Jim’s plan. There were so many
things that could go wrong. One little slip, one moment of negligence, one second of carelessness
and Nien’s family could die. And what if Scotty couldn’t switch off the security field that certainly
surrounded the place? What if they were already expected at Gamma 12, facing several Starfleet
vessels? What if they couldn’t escape? What if Nien’s crew wasn’t even at Gamma 12 and the
evidence of them there was just another part of the trap? As much as Jim was an optimist, he simply
knew that the risk of losing this time was high.

Yet he wasn’t ready to show any of the worries which moved him. Nien needed him strong now,
and he would be dammed if he added more concern to the Augment by being nervous.
“Everything all right?” he asked quietly as Khan crawled under the sheets beside him.

“No,” the former dictator said softly. “But there is nothing you or I can do about it at the moment. I’m…” He searched for the right words and Jim smiled,

“You’re anxious about the upcoming rescue of your family.” He lifted his arm and offered Khan his shoulder as a pillow – offering comfort and shelter. And, forgetting his pride for once, the Augment rolled over and snuggled into him, almost sighing as Jim’s arms wrapped around him.

“Yes,” Nien admitted. “But as I said, there is absolutely nothing we can change about it.”

Kirk nodded. As much as he loved the passionate nights they’d recently shared, he knew the next hours weren’t meant to be spent making love. They were both too tense, and simple proximity to one another offered the best comfort they both needed.

“We’ll make it,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to Nien’s forehead, before he rubbed his nose against the midnight-dark hair which had grown within the last weeks. The warmth of the Augment’s body slipped into his own, made him relax just a little bit. “You’ll see, in two days we’ll have your family aboard and on our way to New Vulcan. They’ll be finally safe.”

“Hope leaves us last,” Khan whispered.

“Yes, and sometimes its light is the only thing that pushes us to succeed in the end,” Jim murmured, tightening his hold around his mate in a comforting manner.

“I know,” came the quiet reply. “The light of hope can take many forms. For several weeks now it’s worn your face.” He reached out and cupped Jim’s cheek with one hand, his thumb drawing gentle circles on the captain’s smooth skin. “This is new for me. In early times the only hope I could cling to was the determination to win and to keep my brothers and sisters safe – or to rescue them.”

Kirk ordered the lights down to twenty percent, before his attention became utterly fixed on his mate. “You fear failure, don’t you?”

Khan untangled himself from Jim and rose into a sitting position. It wasn’t easy for him to admit
something like that, yet he nodded slowly. “Yes,” he murmured. “I think I was too often confronted with the prospect of losing them forever, and Gamma 12 will be no different.” He lowered his head. “And even more, this time I also could lose the only light I have really ever had in my life.” His gaze found Jim’s. “You.”

Deeply touched, the young captain rose into a sitting position as well and wrapped an arm around his mate. He realized that Khan had tried to shield his turmoil from him, but without success. Their bond was too strong for it. Concentrating on the shimmering mental link between them, Jim tried to project comfort, strength, and love towards the man at his side, while he laid his chin on Nien’s bare shoulder. “You will neither lose me, nor your family,” he whispered. “We’ll free them and I will not rest until they have found a safe place to live in peace and freedom. And I certainly will move heaven and Earth to see that you leave any trial as a free man.” He snaked his other arm around the Augment, holding him gently and securely. “Don’t give up hope, baby. And don’t doubt yourself about your abilities to keep them safe. You are as stubborn as I am.”

“At least you can admit it, you mule,” Khan murmured, trying to lift the mood. And, to his relief, Jim took the bait.

“One of us has to have a little self-awareness,” he teased, before he let himself sink back onto the mattress and pulled Khan with him. “Come here, honey. Try to sleep at least a little bit.”

The super-human sighed again, accepted Kirk’s request, and pillowed his head once again on Jim’s shoulder. Yet sleep didn’t find them easily.

ST***ST***ST

At 01:32 ship’s time, the *Lexington* left Federation territory and entered the Borderland. Bob Wesley had slept a few hours so as to be on the bridge when they arrived. Marceaux, Palmer, and Sonik stood with him, looking out the viewscreen. Bob was tired, because the little nap he’d taken had been anything but restful. Yes, the SDD was working flawlessly – the *Enterprise* had a good engineer, as he’d said himself – and all sensors were adjusted to maximum range, yet the commodore felt unease. Who wouldn’t, given the fact that he was racing deep into a territory in which he was unsure still belonged to the part of the agreed ceasefire, and also that his mission was unofficial, and Command hadn’t the slightest clue about it. And finally, he was about to take on slave traders, renegade Klingons, and Romulans without any backup. It was really no surprise that Bob hadn’t found the rest his body and mind required.

Half an hour after he returned to the bridge, he faced a situation that proved his gut feelings could be relied upon. They were heading straight towards Verix, and passed by the Yaraka system. Not wasting the opportunity, Wesley ordered impulse speed, and to make a long range scan of Yaska. The scanners reported just the metallic items at the coordinates Galven had given him. And then it
happened. From one second to the next, five Birds-of-Prey materialized and surrounded him, their weapons ready to fire.

Wesley felt the blood leaving his face, while sirens blared red alert through the Lexington. Battle stations were manned by the gamma shift while alpha shift jumped out of beds and got ready instantly. Bob cursed. They had been caught!

“Commodore, the sensors identified the J’Ethl among the vessels,” the science officer reported, and Wesley didn’t know if he should be relieved or not.

The J’Ethl – Kor’s ship!

“Well,” Bob growled. “Now we’ll learn firsthand if Kor is really the aggressor, or if Jim Kirk is right and our Klingon friend is still supporting the Empire’s declaration of a ceasefire.” He cleared his throat. “Scan the weaponry and why, for God’s sake, did we not register any ion trails before they switched off their cloaking devices.” He pursed his lips. *Maybe we just saw an example for this damned modified cloaking technique Jim spoke of.*

Bob took a deep breath as his mind calculated the chances of escaping the Klingon squadron and to bring the mission to a successful end. Even without consulting Sonik, he knew the result was zero. Yes, they had the SDD, but their presence in the Borderland had been noted, and if the Klingons didn’t finish them off, the Orions would. He had no right to be here, let alone starting a fight.

He couldn’t open fire at the Klingons. It would have meant instant war – the ceasefire would come to an end and the Federation and the Empire were back to battling; exactly what Section 31 wanted. But he, Bob Wesley, wouldn’t give them that.

Yet he needed to find a way to continue his journey and to save the surviving members of the delegation. But seeing the five Klingon ships surrounding the, he knew that the mission was about to come to an end before it had even begun.

And there was more. If he were forced to battle Kor, this incident would be reported to the Empire and to the Federation. Command. Luengo! – Luengo would learn of his mission. They would ask questions. Command knew that Wesley had met with the Enterprise only several hours ago, and then went ‘rogue’ and flew to the Borderland – to the Yaraka system, or so it seemed. Luengo was no fool. He would put two and two together quickly and would figure out why Wesley was here – because of Jim Kirk; because Kirk had put him up to the whole thing. Then Luengo would ask himself why Kirk wanted Wesley to enter the Borderland at all. Which would certainly lead to the conclusion that there were several clues left from the faked assault by the Excalibur. They would not
arrest Kirk, they would kill him.

And what about the peace talks? They’d also suffer as a result if this were all discovered. The Federation Council demanded answers from the Klingons concerning the attack by the *Excalibur*, therefore the Empire already knew what had happened here in the Borderland. They certainly had already asked Kor for details. His presence here at Yaraka showed Wesley that the Klingon lord had tried to investigate on his own – attempting to save his honor as a warrior, and protect the status of his whole clan.

Maybe Bob could use this unexpected meeting to his advantage.

Kor was responsible for overseeing the Borderland. The Orions had allied themselves with the Klingons and used them for ‘protection’, which meant they were under Klingon control now. Kor could visit any planet within the Borderland without being bothered by the Orions; hell, he could demand answers from the Syndicate and intervene wherever he wanted. If Wesley could convince Kor that they had one and the same goal concerning the *Excalibur* incident and that they would have the best chance of success by working together, he would have the Klingon fleet commander’s support while being here.

It was risky, Bob knew this. Yet Kor was the only Klingon he had come near to trusting. They may be on different sides, but they were both honorable warriors who respected each other. They had come to terms during the conferences on Organia. Kor had even shown some understanding and even sympathy as he, Bob, had asked for mercy on Kirk’s behalf. Kor was one of those men who thought first and acted afterwards. If Kor was still this kind of man – a rare Klingon – he would be interested in revealing the truth. He would accept cooperation with Wesley – maybe only to show Starfleet that a Klingon could stand loyal to his word, but this little detail didn’t matter. With Kor’s help, Wesley could move freely through the Borderland and could free the captives. Hell, Kor could maybe even lend him a hand, only to prove that the Klingons hadn’t anything to do with the cowardly attack!

The question was how to win over Kor? How to convince him that they needed to rely on each other here and now? And how could he manage to speak with him privately? It was impossible to talk to him openly from bridge to bridge. Bob trusted his officers, but there were other members of the bridge crew on duty at the moment. And even if he didn’t want to believe it, the chances that one or two of them belonged to Section 31 was high. Good God, what had become of Starfleet!?

“Commodore, they’re hailing us.” Palmer interrupted the thoughts which raced through his mind at warp speed.

Wesley took a deep breath. He knew that the next few minutes would make or break this opportunity.
“On screen.”

The stars and vessels disappeared and made room for the dark features of Fleet Commander Kor. Their eyes locked instantly, both watching each other for a moment. The last time they had talked, it was about Jim Kirk, as Bob tried asked Kor to show mercy to the young man. Now they were eye to eye again – despite the fact that there were several hundred kilometers between them.

“Commodore Wesley,” Kor began, his voice dark and rough with the Klingon accent. “It’s a surprise to see you here in the middle of this nothingness. Have your instruments malfunctioned or does the Federation require some information it doesn’t want to outright ask us?”

This was a very polite way of saying ‘are you spying?’, and as Bob saw the open mockery in Kor’s gaze, he knew that the Klingon was up to one of his favorite games: challenging and being challenged.

“Our instruments are working flawlessly, thank you for asking,” he answered dryly. “And regarding the information you refer to, I simply want to know what actual business you’re running. That of Boy Scout coming out to meet our ship, or that of a pirate, commandeering our delegation’s vessel?”

The Klingon lord frowned. “Boy Scout?” he asked with a growl.

“A title of honor that usually belonged to people who don’t fear to go into unknown territory to explore, and they’ve also sworn to end every day with a good deed,” Bob explained casually. “That would be you protecting the Enterprise.” He bent forwards. “Or have you become a pirate who attacks our diplomatic ship and kills our delegation?”

For a moment Kor’s mouth hung open, then his face flushed darkly with even more fury. In an instant he was out of his chair. “HOW DARE YOU to think I was responsible for the crimes of this imposter! HOW DARE YOU accuse me of breaking the ceasefire, forgetting my honor!” He pointed one strong index finger at him. “But you, Wesley, you came here…”

“That is the official version in the report by the Excalibur’s captain, Lord Kor. That’s what the records show, which were made during your attack. The J’Ethl was involved – we’ve clear proof of it.”

The Klingon was obviously rendered speechless, then a deep frown appeared on his forehead; his
eyes burnt with fire. “A lie!” he pressed out finally, gritting his teeth. “That is a dirty, spiteful lie! Tell me how I could be parsecs away to save this boy-captain’s ass while attacking one of your other vessels here!”

“Well, it still remains to be proved which one of the commanding officers at the two incidents was the real you. I guess your Council has already demand answers from you?” As Kor only stared at him, he continued, “That explains your presence here. The suspect always returns to the scene of his crime.”

“I’m not a criminal, Wesley. I have not invaded a territory that doesn’t belong to the Empire!”

Bob knew that what Kor was referring to was the Lexington’s presence, but nonetheless he turned the tables. This was a good opportunity to steer the conversation in the direction he wanted. “You didn’t?” he asked. “So you admit that it wasn’t you who came to the Enterprise’s aid?”

“WHAT?” The Klingon went rigid.

Wesley smiled at him. “You said yourself that you haven’t ‘invaded’ non-Klingon territory – which belongs to the area around the Briar Patch. Yet, if you’ve really had come to the Enterprise’s aid, you had to enter Federation space, which means travelling into non-Klingon territory you just stated you didn’t do. So, which one of these stories is the truth?”

Kor pressed his fists into his hips and bent forwards. “Don’t split hairs, Wesley! You’re trying to mask the fact that you’re here without permission of our allies, sneaking in like a thief in the night, testing new sensor techniques and hoping you don’t get caught – invading an area we’ve been asked to protect. So…”

He stopped as the commodore began to laugh. “’To protect’? I know what this ‘protection’ really is. You’ve taken over here, Kor. The Orions are barely the masters of their own house anymore.”

“You’re going too far, Wesley! We’ve not annexed the Borderland, we’re here on the Orion’s behest – to protect them against you weaklings from Starfleet! This is my duty and I will fulfill it!”

Bob leant back in his chair, appearing utterly relaxed. “So, you are responsible for the safety of the Borderland – to ensure that everything runs smoothly here.” As Kor didn’t answer, he added, “Well, that makes you also responsible for the assault by the Excalibur. And if you tell me you weren’t involved in said incident, then someone else was – and you failed to carry out your duty!”
“Do you try to offend me, Wesley?” Kor snarled, his face fire-red by now. “If so, you’re doing a damned good job, as you Earthers say! I was off saving your boy –”

“Captain Kirk didn’t need any help. He fought off your ships all on his own, yet you entered Federation space without being called.” He straightened again. “That I’m calling invasion!”

“And your visit here is the same,” the Klingon lord hissed.

“We have the right to investigate the deaths of our delegates!” Wesley said fervently.

“And we have the right to protect our allies,” replied equal sternly.

Bob smiled inwardly. He had Kor right where he needed him. “Look,” he began in a more diplomatic tone. “We’re accusing each other without having any real proof. I would like to invite you aboard the Lexington and –”

This time it was he who stopped, because Kor laughed without any trace of humor. “Do you think me a fool, Wesley? It was you who invaded our ally’s space without permission. This could be considered an act of war, but for the fact that obviously someone is trying to play us off against each other, I’ll refrain from destroying your ship. Whoever is responsible for this shall not be victorious – we are better than that!” He bent forwards even, his face seemed to press at the screen.

“You’ll beam over to my ship – alone and unarmed. And you will bring documentation with you: this alleged record that purports to show my ship attacking the Excalibur, and Kirk’s report that he’s certainly given you concerning the incident in the Briar Patch.”

Wesley chuckled. “If you think I’ll give you Starfleet data delivered on a silver platter, then –”

“The records and you, Wesley – in three minutes, or the Lexington is history!” He cocked his head. “And don’t try anything foolish, Commodore, like going into warp. We’ve you on our screens and in our sights, and even this new technique that makes your ship unreadable to our sensors will not save you. Kor out!”

The view on the screen changed, showing only stars and the five Klingon vessels.
Commander Marceaux looked uncomfortably at his superior. “What now, sir?”

Wesley turned to him. “I don’t think I have any choice than to accept the invitation. Summon the visual records of the Excalibur’s assault and of the incident with the Enterprise in the Briar Patch. But no more. I won’t give Kor free access to Starfleet reports.”

His first officer nodded, while Bob rose. “Right, ladies and gentlemen, I’m going to accept Lord Kor’s nice invitation. You’ll stay here and do nothing until you hear from me. If something goes wrong, state that Command doesn’t know anything about our presence here, and that the investigation was initiated by me alone. It’s of the highest priority that the Klingons don’t think that Starfleet tried to provoke them by sending us here. These peace talks need to start, no matter the cost.”

He climbed the two steps to the upper part of the bridge. “Lieutenant Palmer, prepare a message for Command. In case I don’t return, inform them of what happened here.” He looked sternly at his comms officer, who nodded. They had agreed to tell Command, and therefore Luengo, a half-truth if the Lexington faced trouble within the Borderland, or had been caught in another conflict. As long as Jim Kirk was free to make the attempt to reach New Vulcan in one piece, there was still hope that Section 31 could get torn down. But this would only be possible if Luengo didn’t learn that Kirk was on to him.


“Sir,” Jean Marceaux stepped beside him and offered him a data chip. “The records.”

“Thanks,” Bob smiled and pocketed it. “So, all, until later.”

Jean held him back one last time. “Bob, what if this goes wrong?” he whispered and Wesley took a deep breath. “I guess then you’re to make an attempt to flee – and tell my wife and daughter that I love them.” He squeezed his friend’s arm and left without looking back.

TBC…
Yeah, you knew that I would bring Kor back into the game – and I already promised you that he will have a bigger part in the outcome. In the original time-line it was always Jim vs. Kor – two men who were warriors but also honorable individuals who would love to battle against each other. Bob resembles Jim in many ways and therefore I thought that Kor and Wesley would make a good ‘pair’. What really comes out of those two sitting together is something you’re going to learn within the next chapter.

And there will be more, because Kor already knows/guesses something about our two boys, Wesley has no cue of. And Prime Spock will learn something similar concerning Jim and Khan by pure accident…

I hope you loved the new chapter and – like always – I’m very curious what you think of it. Once again sorry for the delayed update and the next chapter will come sooner. Promised!

Have a nice start into the next week.

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers.

Yes, again it lasted a little bit longer until you’re able to read now the next chapter, and for this I’m sorry, but – as you certainly know – very often time is something you need desperately but it slips through your fingers. But I think you’re going to love the next chapter.

Thank you so much for the feedbacks; I’ll answer them soon.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 55 – Two lovebirds revealed

Aboard the Enterprise no one could know that their sister ship was in deep trouble. But even without this knowledge, the night was abruptly interrupted for Kirk and Khan around the same time Wesley beamed aboard the Klingon flag ship. Jim was convinced that he hadn’t been in dreamland for more than an hour when the terminal at his desk sprang alive and the hailing signal sounded, “Bridge to Captain Kirk.”

“Good God, what now?” the young man groaned, sitting up and ordering the light to fifty percent. The chronometer on his nightstand told him that he had managed to sleep two hours. Great! He’d appear on the bridge the next morning with smaller, more bloodshot eyes than a Rigelian mouse.

Beside him Khan was wide awake within seconds and lifted his head. “If the bridge calls you at this time it must be urgent,” he simply said and Jim rolled his eyes.

“No shit, Sherlock; I’d never have realized that without you.” He received a short mockingly grin from his mate as he slipped out of bed and padded to his desk. Not activating the screen, he answered the call, “Kirk here.”
“I’m sorry to disturb you, Captain, but I’ve High Minister Selek of New Vulcan on the line for you. He says it’s very important.” The ensign’s voice couldn’t hide the curiosity the man obviously felt.

“Thanks, Ensign, please patch him through,” Jim said and activated the screen, forgetting the fact he’d slept without a shirt.

The screen brightened and showed the aged face of the Vulcan whose younger self was his first officer and dear friend. One icy brow was lifted, as ‘Selek’ took in Jim’s appearance before saying, “I am sorry to wake you in the middle of the night, Jim, but I promised to inform you as soon as I had spoken to the Vulcan High Council.”

In the bed, Khan went rigid. The voice he heard had spoken slowly and was laced with the roughness of age, yet his keen hearing recognized the almost-familiar baritone nonetheless. Disbelieving, he sat up. With large eyes, he stared at his soul-mate, who sat at the desk and talked with the so-called Vulcan ‘high minister’. With one smooth movement, Khan was out of the bed.

“No problem, old friend,” Kirk answered at that moment. “You certainly know from experience that commanding officers call themselves lucky if they get a full night of fitful sleep.”

“Indeed, I remember those nights well,” Old Spock answered. His dark eyes were warm. “Yet I know that humans require sleep on a regular basis, but given the current situation, I did not consider the time before contacting you. I have spoken with the Council members and…” His gaze wandered to something behind Jim, and his face became utterly neutral. “Good evening, Mr. Singh.”

Kirk turned around and saw his beloved standing behind him – eyes wide, mouth open, face slack in shock.

Khan stared at the Vulcan on the screen. The hair was grey and white, time had etched deep wrinkles into his features, and his voice was laced with age, yet the Augment had no doubt at whom he was looking. “Mr. Spock…” he whispered.

‘Selek’ took a deep long breath and nodded slowly. “Indeed, Mr. Singh,” he affirmed. “I am Spock.”

Khan suddenly had the very human wish to sit down while he tried to comprehend what he was seeing. “How… How is this possible?” As he got no answer – the Vulcan on the screen only cocked his head – Khan’s brilliant mind went through all possible answers before he murmured, “Time travel.”
“Yes – but not intended. It occurred as a result of a worm hole,” Jim answered quietly, looking up at his lover. He knew that he had to tell him the truth now. “Spock is stranded here – well, his older self is.”

Nien forced himself to tear his gaze away from the screen and directed it straight at Kirk. “Selek – an old friend,” he almost accused, and Jim smiled sheepishly.

“Yeah,” he said softly.

Khan snorted. “I suppose he really is an ‘old friend’.”

Jim sighed, feeling a tiny wave of irritation coming from his beloved. “Sorry that I couldn’t tell you about him sooner. It’s complicated and… Well, Spock and other Vulcan Elders decided that it would be for the best to hide his true identity. Too many questions, too much risk that someone gets the stupid idea to use his knowledge of the future.”

The former dictator nodded, yet he still needed a moment to come to terms with that news.

The High Minister watched the two humans carefully. He had been patched through to Jim’s quarters in the middle of the night, and Kirk sat at his desk bare-chested. Khan was clad only in pants. Sleeping pants! Spock took in the way the two stood close together, how Jim glanced at the Augment with gentleness and trust, and how Khan looked back at him, before the superhuman’s face grew soft in a way Spock had never seen it before.

The Augment was different from the enhanced man he had met those many decades ago. Despite the short hair, there were other changes – not least in his behavior. Fascinated, ‘Selek’ watched how Khan placed a hand gently on Kirk’s shoulder, squeezing it in silent understanding, before Jim covered those long pale fingers with his own.

Spock couldn’t hide a frown as he took in the obvious familiarity between the two, their proximity to one another, and the way they’d locked eyes with each other. Both were half-naked, clad only in sleeping pants (at least Khan was). Plus, the super-human was in Jim’s quarters, at night! Should it be that…?

Impossible! Jim had only had eyes for women – well, his Jim had, even if none of his love affairs had lasted long enough to be considered a true relationship. Maybe his Jim had missed something
this Jim had got a taste of with Khan? Spock felt an all-too-human surge of curiosity, which he decided to indulge.

“Jim.” He addressed the young captain carefully. “Is there something you want to tell me?” He met those sky blue eyes again, full of an innocence he knew the owner did not possess; Spock knew him well enough to easily see through the façade. “Forgive me, but is there something you forgot to mention when you told me about Mr. Singh and your…‘friendship’?”

This time Jim wasn’t able to control his reaction and blushed fiercely red, while Khan bent slightly forwards and placed himself the tiniest bit in front of Kirk; protective instincts kicking in.

Spock didn’t need more proof than those reactions. The rare display of surprise spread almost unguarded over his aged face. “You two are…lovers.” he simply stated, and as Jim’s cheeks burnt and the Augment lifted both brows in a challenging manner, the old Vulcan sighed. “This is why I constantly ask myself how many things have changed because of my failure in the future.”

Jim gulped. He felt caught – just like a schoolboy when his teacher found him playing with a PADD instead of following the lesson. “Spock,” he began almost shyly. “I… I didn’t want you to find out about us like this.”

Promptly a stern Vulcan brow was lifted. “So you did intend to inform me about this relationship at all?”

Kirk’s eyes became large. “Of course I would have told you…sooner or later. I simply didn’t want you to believe I had asked for your support only because Nien and I…well…”

“Share a bed?” Spock helped him out wryly.

“You would have thought I was just being emotional and…”

“And what is new about that fact, Jim?” ‘Selek’ deadpanned. “‘A man full of emotions’ I once said. You have almost always followed your heart, Jim, and that made you the man you were – what makes you the man you are. You do what you think is right – and the determination to protect others is a large part of you. Yet I confess that I’m surprised to find you and Mr. Singh being a couple.”

“Because we’re both men?” Kirk asked baffled, which earned him an almost exasperated glare.
“No, because you two were ought to be mortal enemies.”

Jim shrugged. “Well, we didn’t get off to a very good start, but what is the saying? ‘It’s a thin line between love and hate.’”

This statement seemed to shock ‘Selek’ even more. “Love, Jim?”

Kirk took a deep breath and laced his fingers with Nien’s again. “Yes, love,” he stated quietly but firmly.

The older Spock watched them for a moment longer, before nodding slowly. “I understand – and that tells me that I have made the right decision in these last hours.” His eyes moved up and fixed to those of the Augment. “I called to inform you that the Vulcan High Council has given permission for you and your people to come to New Vulcan. Even given Terran history, there is no doubt about the fact that your race is at risk of genocide in the current political climate, and so we offer you temporary refuge. We will, however, demand statements from you before we can grant your people true permanent asylum.”

Carefully Khan cocked his head. “But we would be safe on New Vulcan during that time?”

“Yes, the moment you reach New Vulcan, no harm will befall you or your people, nor will we allow Starfleet or any other authority to take you or your crew captive. You will be protected until such time the Council has ruled on your requirements for asylum. There is a chance that they may decide that your people can stay but that you would need to answer to Federation authorities for any outstanding crimes. Yet, regarding yourself, the Council will first hear you out – after all, you were first a victim before becoming a criminal. It is not in Vulcan nature to pre-judge, so you will have an opportunity to recount these activities as you see fit. Is this acceptable?”

Khan felt a strong wave of relief wash over him. His people would be safe – for now. Neither Section 31 nor anyone else would be a threat to them so long as they remained on New Vulcan. He didn’t care what happened to him. If the Vulcans decided that he – as a wanted man – should leave, he would. As long as his family were safe, he would face the music. “That is indeed acceptable, Mr. Spock. Thank you,” he said, gratitude plainly reflected in his eyes.

Jim moistened his lips. “Spock, Nien is ready to face a real court, but this will only be possible if –”
“If Section 31 is eliminated once and for all, yes.” ‘Selek’ interrupted him. “I updated the Council on what was happening at the moment, but not all of it. I will need more proof before I can alert our Council and the Federation. Yet, regarding Mr. Singh – as long as the possibility remains that he will not be treated correctly and continues to be stripped of his human rights despite the fact that he is a human, we would insist he leaves the colony, so long as he obeys the law of the land. Life is sacred to us. We will not send someone to his death – or worse – because an illegal organization demands it.”

“Thanks, Spock,” Jim breathed, happy and relieved.

The old Vulcan nodded again, before suddenly bending forwards and fixing the Augment with an intense glance that was both calm, yet hard. “I will ask, demand, one thing of you, Mr. Singh. After your arrival we will talk. I met you in alternative timeline and found you to be a man who would do whatever necessary to reach his goal without any scruples. Jim says that he loves you and your actions show me that you have feelings for him in return. Yet I would like complete reassurance that your intentions towards him are trustworthy and honorable.”

Khan’s eyes widened, while Jim groaned. “Good God, Spock, what are you, my father?” He pointed at Nien. “Should he ask you for my hand in marriage?” It was meant as a joke, but Spock being Spock took it seriously.

“Does he want to marry you?”

Jim almost choked while the Augment glared at the old Vulcan challengingly. “Sir,” he began facetiously. “I would have informed you sooner had I known about you and your obvious protectiveness of Jim that appears to supersede even that of your younger self. You are too late, Mr. Spock; Jim and I are already mated.”

“‘Mated’?” the High Minister echoed. “Please explain.”

A loud groan escaped Kirk, before he shot the super-human a glare. “Thank you very much, Nien. I really wanted to tell him this in person and not via subspace!”

“I thought it better to reveal everything so that your soul-‘father’ doesn’t think we’ve held back anything this serious on purpose.” He shot ‘Selek’ a glance, who simply ignored it, but asked,

“What do you mean by ‘mated’? I presume you refer to more than just…bedroom activities.”
Jim would have chuckled at the tight face the old Vulcan made, but he was anything but amused. Sighing, he rubbed his neck. “Spock, what Nien means by being mated is that our souls are linked, as is usual between his people when they bond. And before you ask, no, Nien hasn’t and doesn’t influence me in any way; I’m all myself – just ask Spock – ungh, the other Spock, I mean.” He began to smile his boyish grin. “And if you like, you can check my mind when we arrive at New Vulcan, too. I won’t complain.”

‘Selek’ fixed him with one of those glances that probably made cadets run. “This I will do, Jim, be certain of it.” His gaze found Khan’s. “Will you allow me to do the same with you?”

The former dictator tensed. The memories of the mind-meld the younger Spock had tried to force upon him during their struggle in San Francisco were still fresh, and anything but pleasant. Yet he knew that this was one of those choices he couldn’t avoid. He not only needed the old Vulcan to trust him in order to make things easier concerning asylum, but also knew that ‘Selek’ meant a lot to Jim. Maybe the High Minister was now the second father to Jim since Admiral Pike’s death. Even if the prospect of a mind-meld made the Augment shudder, there could be no way around it. “If you wish,” he said coolly.

Jim shook his head, grimacing at the High Minister. “See, you are a bigger mother-hen than my Spock.”

‘Selek’ moved his attention away from the super-human to the young captain. “He will learn to ‘mother-hen’ you even more and due to these reckless adventures you constantly throw yourself into,” he stated dryly.

“Yeah, I got it. I should be more careful – but tell that to universe or fate or whatever for all the situations I seem to find myself in. You of all people should know I can’t just stand by and watch disaster unfold.” He smirked. “And, by the way, Nien has also signed up for the job of a body guard, so don’t worry.”

This time both grey brows were lifted. “I do hope you speak of Mr. Singh’s abilities to protect you from harm, rather than his ‘guarding’ your body in…” He fell silent but his gaze shifted to what little he could see of the room behind the two men.

Perplexed, Kirk stared at him while Khan couldn’t help himself: he had to laugh. “And there’s the proof of what I’ve always suspected.” He looked first at Spock and then to Jim. “He does have a sense of humor.”
‘Selek’ nodded slowly at the Augment through the view screen. “Sometimes humor is the better part of courage, as an old friend once told me.” His gaze switched shortly to Jim and then back again. “It is settled. Your people shall find refuge here. After a fair Federation hearing, we will decide about official asylum.” He took another deep breath and turned his attention back to Kirk.

“Jim, I’ve already begun to investigate Command’s database and have set up a program that will delete any evidence I was there during such research. But it needs time to be installed in Headquarters’ main computer. If the process continues at the current speed, I shall be able to search their databanks for the required records and files in 7.83 standard hours. Given your current situation, and seeing the risk you will be taking when you arrive at Gamma 12, I suggest that you send me Styles’ report and the data concerning the spy’s PADD which Lieutenant Uhura was able to obtain. Should your mission at Gamma 12 fail, at least I will have all the data you have already collected and can use it and any I gather to inform the Council – and to aid you and Mr. Singh.”

“You’re offering to be our back-up?” Khan asked, and ‘Selek’ nodded.

“Of course. Intelligence is usually an underhanded game, and Section 31 will, as you say, play all its cards. Keeping proof against its methods in a secure place will be important for our success, and indeed, survival.”

Jim smiled at him. “Thank you, Spock. Your help is priceless.”

For a moment the old Vulcan’s expression became gentle. “You are welcome, Jim. Please send me all data you have via this link. It is secure.” He cocked his head. “And then I would suggest that you two gentlemen return to sleep. I have come to understand that humans can increase their potential after a good night’s sleep.”

This time Kirk had to laugh, while Khan grimaced. “Yes, Dad,” Jim joked, and he could have sworn that the lips of ‘Selek’ curved up ever so slightly.

“Good night, Jim, Mr. Singh,” he said simply.

“Good night, old friend,” Jim replied, followed by Khan’s “Good night, High Minister.”

Then Kirk began to gather all the data he had acquired from the database, including Styles’ reports and readied it for transmission to New Vulcan. But even with Spock Prime’s support, he remained nervous, knowing that everything depended on the successful end of the tomorrow’s mission.
Nien assisted him, pointing out details they had discussed in the last two days had slipped the
captain’s mind already. Augments, it seemed, had the same eidetic memory as Vulcans. Then they
transmitted everything to ‘Selek’’s private terminal.

Afterwards, both men returned to bed, but even lying in each other’s arms they wasn’t enough to
enable them to relax enough to rest. Khan was especially tense and Jim didn’t need to prod their
bond to feel his mate’s confusion and worry, which obviously wasn’t just connected to the upcoming
recovery of the other super-humans.

“What’s up?” Jim finally asked, as the minutes ticked by and after they had both spent some time
staring into the darkness.

The former dictator hesitated a moment before he murmured, “I’m…confused about the older version
of Mr. Spock. He said he ‘knew’ me only as an enemy, but I’m positive that I’ve never met ‘Selek’
before. He comes from the future, so he only can be referring to the incidents which occurred last
year. I’m not your enemy anymore but your soul-mate, yet he was utterly surprised about this fact,
and even wants to mind-meld with me to learn if I still harbor any ‘ill-will’ towards you like ‘I’ did in
his timeline. This makes no sense, unless there’s a possibility that we’re living in another present,
another timeline, in which many things have changed – such as us changing from ‘mortal enemies’
into lovers.”

Jim sighed. Nien and his brilliant mind! On the other hand, Kirk was almost proud of how easily his
beloved had come to the right conclusions. And Khan had a right to know the truth – after all, he had
to place his trust, and therefore the life of his crew, in Spock Prime’s hands.

“Spock – the older one – comes from the future, more than a century ahead. A supernova destroyed
Romulus before Spock could take action to prevent it. He was on his way to Romulus with a new
scientific means to prevent the catastrophe, but he arrived too late. A Romulan miner who survived
the catastrophe, held Spock responsible for the loss of Romulus, and hunted him – seeking revenge.
But both were pulled into a worm-whole that the supernova had become. The Romulan ship was
pulled through first and was spat out the other end around our time.”

Khan frowned, his mind already connecting everything he had learned during his unwilling stay with
Section 31. “Nero!”

Jim took a deep breath. “Yeah, Nero. He arrived here in the year 2233 – on the exact day I was born,
and exactly at the point where the USS *Kelvin* was on patrol. The captain of the Kelvin scanned the
ship and made some very interesting technical discoveries which the evacuees of the ship took away
with them, after the Romulan vessel attacked the *Kelvin*. During this attack, the captain and his senior
officers were killed, and my father remained aboard to keep the Romulans busy while the crew escaped. During all this, I was born. My father steered the Kelvin into the Romulan vessel, saving the crew – among them my mom, me, and Keenser. Mom told me later that she was able to tell Dad about me just a minute before he died.” He moistened his lips. “When I was growing up, I think I was the only child on Earth who hated his own birthday.” He felt Khan pulling him closer and snuggled up to the warm inviting body beside him.

“Spock was pulled into the worm-hole a little later than Nero had been, and arrived years later.”

“Twenty-two fifty-seven.” The former dictator nodded slowly. “And Nero’s arrival had already changed everything, as he had destroyed the Kelvin, and killed your father in the process.” This time it was Kirk who nodded. “Which left you without him, and gave Starfleet a hint of the future technology, which, as you know, changed even more of this time line.”

“Exactly,” Kirk sighed. “Nero hid all those years until Spock arrived, took him captive, marooned him on Delta Vega, which was near enough to Vulcan for a front-row seat to its destruction, and forcing Spock to watch. Nero wanted him to suffer the same way he had – with the big difference that the supernova had been a natural disaster, while the destruction of Vulcan was an act of war and unspeakable cruelty. Only around ten thousand Vulcans survived, and a few more already living in the outer colonies.” Jim shook his head. “During our hunt for Nero, Spock and I had a fight that ended with me being marooned on Delta Vega for mutiny. He’d become acting-captain of the Enterprise after Nero took Pike captive.”

“What?” Khan stiffened, and Kirk couldn’t suppress a smirk.

“Yeah, one thing you and I both learned the hard way about dealing with Spock: never piss him off. Believe me, I know a thing or two about it. After I returned to the Enterprise with Spock Prime’s help, I...emotionally compromised him – a fancy way of saying I pissed him off – and found myself half chocked to death because he lost it. Can’t blame him for it, I really did say some nasty things I deeply regret, but his older self gave me instructions to do it, and to take over command. ‘Selek’ was convinced that we only stood a chance against Nero if I were captain of the Enterprise. And when ‘my’ Spock and I worked together. We did, and we’re a damn good team – still are.”

He rubbed his thinly-stubbled cheek on Khan’s bare shoulder. “On Delta Vega, Spock Prime saved me from a very big, scary lobster-monster that wanted me for a snack. He recognized me, mind-melded with me, and I learned a lot about the other timeline – and got the proof that the old Vulcan hadn’t lost his mind, but spoke the truth when he told me who he was and where he came from.” He glanced up into the darkness, feeling Nien’s breath dancing over his face. “By the way, you can thank him for being able to hop from Earth to Qo’noS using transwarp beaming. Scotty and Keenser had been stationed at the outpost on Delta Vega. Scotty had been experimenting with the device – which is what I think landed him there in the first place. Spock gave him the final formula for it so he could beam Scotty and me back to the Enterprise. Keenser followed later.”
“And this ‘Old Spock’ became Selek.” Khan nodded slowly. Then he took a deep breath. “I wonder what happened to us both in his time-line – how we met and why I remained your enemy, despite my attraction and my desire for you. I felt it the moment I laid eyes on you.”

Jim lifted his head and pressed a kiss to the warm shoulder beneath him. “I don’t know – and I’m not sure I want to know. Sometimes knowledge isn’t…” He stopped. “Am I making sense at all?”

He heard the soft chuckle from his soul-mate. “Yes and no – like always when you’re tired.” Nien’s warm hand cupped Kirk’s cheek and pressed his head back to his shoulder. “Try to sleep, Pyāra. There’s still four hours left until you need to be duty and you need to rest.”

“You’re telling me I need my beauty sleep?” Jim grumbled, and the former dictator sighed.

“You are always handsome – even tired, grumpy, and full of sarcasm,” he teased.

“Look, who’s talking,” Jim mumbled, then snuggled even closer and closed his eyes. Sleep found him more easily now, but Khan remained awake the rest of the night thinking of what he’d learned about the alternate time-line, and ignoring the unpleasant prospect of the mind-meld ‘Selek’ had demanded of him. He wasn’t worried about failing this test; his love for Jim was true and shone brightly like nothing else in his mind. Yet he’d already had experience with this kind of Vulcan telepathy and wasn’t excited to face it again. But if this was the price he had to pay to gain his family’s safety and to convince the old Vulcan that he was no threat to Jim and to the Enterprise, he was willing to pay it.

He couldn’t know that the price would be far higher – for himself and others…

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At the same time Jim and Khan were speaking with the older vision of Spock, Bob Wesley was beamed aboard the J’Ethl. Everything was a little bit larger than human standard, he noticed. The light was dimmer and contained a red-orange hue, and the smell… Well, Bob knew that the smell from the Klingons’ perspiration made many humans uncomfortable, and being aboard one of their ships increased the smell many times.

Yet this wasn’t all that made the commodore wary. Four Klingon guards stood at the transporter console and aimed disruptors at him – a very unpleasant welcome. But Bob knew how to deal with
this race. Placing his fists at his waist, he cocked his head. “Very impressive – four Klingon
disruptors against one unarmed human. You fear us more than I thought,” he mocked, which earned
him scowls – and a snide remark from the door,

“This is our way to honor your arrival, Commodore. The danger an enemy represents, dictates the
number of necessary guards!” Kor left the shadows and stepped into the light.

Wesley lifted his right fist and hit it against his own chest. “N’unqneH, Lord Kor, qaleghqa’neS,” he
said, and his throat hurt after uttering the harsh Klingon words. Saying ‘Hello, I’m honored to see
you again.’ is really much easier to voice than speaking this ridiculous language,’ he thought.

Kor pursed his lips and returned the gesture with the words, “Yl’el (welcome), Commodore.” He was
obviously pleased. “It seems you haven’t forgotten simple civility. After your accusation moments
ago, I thought the war has clouded your mind.”

“We’re both warriors, and as such, we follow not only the basic rules of etiquette, but also of honor,”
Bob replied, leaving the transporter pad. “Accusations only exist to be investigated. I shall act
afterwards as honor demands.”

The fleet commander nodded. “Truly spoken, yet I demand explanations, Wesley – many
explanations!” The dark eyes of the Klingon were hard as granite.

“As I require explanations from you,” Wesley answered, before his gaze became very intense.
“Perhaps we should speak somewhere more private?” he suggested, his tone strong.

“Private?” Kor echoed, confused.

“Under only four eyes, so to speak,” Bob said. “Just you and I; what I have to tell you is for your
ears only.”

“Do you try to trick us, Human?” one of the guards spat, whose insignia indicated he was a higher-
ranking officer – maybe Kor’s first officer as far as Bob could tell. “Do you think we would leave
you alone with Lord Kor so that you could have the chance –”

“I don’t think Lord Kor needs any help in dealing with an unarmed human,” Bob interrupted him
icily. “Your suggestion is an offence of your superior’s skills!”
He saw the Klingon officer tense and returned his gaze to the fleet commander, who looked almost amused. “You know us very well, Wesley,” he commented under his breath, before he turned to one of the younger guards. “Examine him, and then accompany us to my quarters.”

Bob spread his arms and let the young Klingon fulfill his duty, not putting up any resistance. Of course the guard found the data chip and as he showed to Kor, Wesley explained calmly, “You wanted records – they are on this chip. Yet I would prefer that we look at them together. Maybe we can both learn about the truth then.”

Kor eyed the data chip and nodded finally. “I agree.” He made a gesture and the guard gave back the little chip to Bob. “Follow me,” the fleet commander ordered, and left the transporter room; Wesley and the young guard were on his heels.

They went down a hallway, rode a lift for two decks, and stepped out only seconds later into a large but spartan quarters. Kor gave the younger man an order, and the guard remained outside; the fleet commander and Wesley were alone.

Kor rounded on him and stopped in front of him, his eyes scanned the commodore’s face. “Why do I have the feeling that you are just exactly where you want to be from the beginning?” he asked, and Bob allowed himself a half-smile.

“Because you are right. I have to speak with you – alone, without your crew or mine overhearing.” He caught the Klingon’s confused frown and gestured towards the wall. “Is this room bug-proofed?”

“Do I look like a beginner?” Kor grumbled and Bob shook his head.

“No, but treachery often comes in the form those we thought we could trust.”

“Treachery – in the noble Federation?” Kor mocked, and Wesley took a deep breath – something he regretted a moment later. Klingons’ odor was really anything but pleasant for human noses! Yet this was the least of his concerns at the moment. He had reached a crossroads that could mean life or death, victory or defeat – not only for himself and his crew, but for the whole Federation too. And yet he had no other choice than to seek out support from the supposed enemy – an enemy who were more honorable it seemed than the own commanding staff.

Shortly, Bob pressed his lips in a thin line, then he straightened his shoulders. He had already made
his decision and there was no going back now. After this talk, he would be on his way to rescue the rest of the delegation which would save Starfleet and the Federation in the end, or the Klingons would take the chance to forget their honor and overrun a weakened UFP – and the outcome depended solely on the man in front of him. If he was wrong about Kor, then everything would be lost – if he was right about this particular Klingon, there would be another chance for peace.

“What I’m telling you now is more than…dangerous,” he said slowly. “Command may regard me as a traitor afterwards, and in that case I am going to face death penalty – or I could save my planet and maybe yours, too.”

_That_ caught Kor’s attention utterly. Frowning, he observed his guest but saw nothing else than plain earnestness in the human’s face. He made an inviting gesture towards his desk. “Sit,” he said, and took his own chair on the other side, folding his strong hands on the desk’s surface.

Bob sat down too, and for a long moment he tried to find the right words. How to begin? How much did he have to reveal to win Kor over and to make him understand that not only the Federation, but also the Klingon Empire was at stake? How to open a talk that could mean the downfall of his home but also could turn out to be the Federation’s rescue?

“I accused you of being responsible for the attack on the _Excalibur_ in one way or another, and therefore the deaths of our delegation, including some important admirals.” He fixed his gaze on Kor. “I know now that these accusations are wrong. Yes, Klingon vessels attacked, yet they have to be renegades, because no Empire-loyal Klingon, let alone the descendant of the last Klingon emperor, would accept _orders_ from a Starfleet officer.”

The frown on Kor’s smooth forehead deepened even more. “Explain!” he ordered curtly, and Wesley took another deep breath.

“There are…officers and other Starfleet members who don’t agree with the way of peace – or even with the reason for Starfleet’s original foundation: to explore space and to protect our borders, but not to be aggressors. Those people see in everyone, even in the own allies, potential enemies, and even don’t trust their own shadows, so to speak.”

“Sounds a lot like how we think – or the Romulans,” Kor commented wryly, and Wesley grimaced.

“Yeah, but I don’t think that neither the Imperial Klingon Fleet nor the Romulans would tolerate any of their officers founding their own little club, using resources for their own war games, and infiltrate their own fleet, Intelligence, and even their own government to prepare a coup.”
The frown on Kor’s forehead deepened. “A coup?” he asked, not trusting his ears. “Within the Federation?”

Bob nodded. “Yes – not a violent one; a so-called ‘soft revolution’. It would mean they could create new terms which would force the government to change politics to their liking. For this reason, they staged the attack on the *Excalibur*, hiring outlaws to do it – maybe even Klingon renegades who disagree with their own Council’s decision concerning the peace talks. This would also explain why one of the attackers painted your ship’s name on the hull of his own spacecraft and pretended to be you during an audio transmission.”

Kor visibly paled beneath his dark skin. “You are saying –”

“You’ve traitors in your own ranks, Kor – just as I have. The records the *Excalibur* made from the attack show three Klingon Birds-of-Prey, and one of them wore your ship’s name – bright and plain to see for the cameras. I admit, I was tricked at the beginning after I received the records, but thank the Lord there’s another captain within my ranks who had the ‘pleasure’ of meeting you several weeks ago, and he realized the tiny differences between your ship and the attacking vessel.”

“Aye, Jim Kirk recognized the details which were incorrect, not only concerning the attacking ships, but also the discrepancies in the records of the *Excalibur’s log.*” He bent forwards. “Our delegation was evacuated in a break in battle for one reason only – to get the higher ranks off the ship and kill them, because they were about to discover the conspiracy, and would have taken action within the next days. And that the diplomats were among the victims played straight into the conspirators’ hands. They’d kill two birds with one stone, literally. Their elimination of the admirals and the deaths of the diplomats brought uproar to the Federation. Everyone assumes the Klingons are responsible for the incident, and that will force the president and the Council to act, which is exactly what the conspirators want.”

Blinking in outrage and confusion, the fleet commander demanded, “And you’ve proof of this?”

Wesley sighed. “I don’t think the proof I have currently is enough to convict the Council, but I’m working on changing that.” He gestured to the data disk. “The first of the evidence is in those records.”

Kor picked up the item and put it into the slot of an external terminal which was connected to his
own. As the Klingon caught the confused expression of the human, he grumbled. “Your computers are not compatible with ours, so I need a medium in which to reformat it.”

Bob couldn’t help himself; he smirked. “Clever!”

Switching on the terminal, Kor waved Wesley around the desk to join him. In the next minutes they watched the two reports. Kor stopped them here and there to ask questions Bob answered willingly. After a quarter of an hour, the fleet commander leant back in his chair and Wesley took his own seat. Fixing his gaze on the commodore, Kor finally said, “You have a big problem in Starfleet.”

“You can say that again,” Wesley grimaced. “If everything goes as the conspirators would want them to, the alpha and beta quadrants will be wallowing in blood for years to come.”

“War is no crime to us Klingons; it’s a chance to protect our borders and increase our territory,” Kor mused, and the commodore cocked his head.

“But to be provoked into war with false motives only to be a pawn in someone else’s power-play is a violation of any true warrior’s honor.”

The Klingon bared his teeth thoughtfully. “You are right. We are not pieces in your traitors’ chess game. Yet here we are. I to find the imposter who pretended to be me while committing crimes against the Empire, and you…to investigate in the same direction?” The sentence ended in a question, while Kor’s eyes bore into those of Wesley.

Bob sighed. “Yes and no.” He watched his ‘host’ frowning and knew that he couldn’t delay the real reason for his presence any longer. “I have every reason to believe that some of the members of the delegation survived the attack and the subsequent crash of their shuttle. And I’m here to recover them.”

Kor nodded slowly. “Without Starfleet Command’s permission, or even its knowledge, because otherwise the conspirators would try to stop you –”

“– or would send assassins to finish the job the hired killer didn’t,” Wesley affirmed.

Again the Klingon watched him warily before he cocked his head. “And you know of the survivors how?” he asked.
“We’ve ears even here,” Bob replied carefully, but Kor interrupted him.

“To use Terran slang: bullshit! If Starfleet Command had spies here they would have known about the survivors and would have tried to kill them in secret, just as you already assumed. Therefore, you have ‘ears’ here, Bob Wesley, not Starfleet Command, and you were on your way to meet with your so-called ‘ears’, maybe to get support. So I ask again: who told you about the survivors?”

For several seconds the Commodore didn’t answer, then realized that he to tell Kor the truth if he wanted him on side. If he succeeded, Kor would learn about The Shadow sooner or later. Better to lay all the cards on the table; Klingons hated being left in the dark. They felt betrayed very easily.

“The Shadow intercepted –”

Kor bared his teeth. “This handful of civilians who give us so much trouble here and there?” As Wesley made an affirming gesture, the Klingon growled before scoffing, “Why am I not surprised? These troublemakers show up whenever you don’t count on them to.” He made a noise deep in his throat that sounded almost like a human sigh before he continued, “And this gang of outlaws discovered that some of the members of the delegation survived?”

“Yes. One of the two shuttles with the evacuees wasn’t destroyed but –”

“ – but crashed on Yaska. I know. I found the remains of it – with several dead bodies.” As he caught Wesley’s surprised gaze, he grumbled. “It was my duty to investigate the incident, as you already pointed out.”

“Let me guess, you found blood traces of races whose bodies weren’t in the shuttle.”

Kor nodded hesitantly. “Yes – human, Vulcan, Andorian, Tellarit…” He pursed his lips. “So, you think they were taken captive?”

“Yes. The Shadow intercepted transmissions between the slavers who kidnapped our people and the Romulans,” he said, and Kor went rigid.

“Romulans?”
“Yes,” Wesley growled. “The Shadow overheard the discussion between the slavers and the Romulans in which they offered our surviving admirals and two Vulcans to the Romulans. They also spoke of other ‘new and interesting slaves’ who will be sold at a market whose location is still unknown – certainly the other survivors from our delegation.”

Kor’s sharp teeth bit into his bottom lip while his mind was already busy with planning his next action. He had forbidden slavery in the Borderland, yet the Orions didn’t obey him. This demanded his attention, even if the ‘goods’ were damned Starfleet admirals! Then his thoughts returned to his guest, and for the first time he realized how tense yet incredibly calm Bob Wesley was. The commodore was on a hostile ship, telling the enemy about a conspiracy within his own fleet – and was as casual as if he were speaking with a close friend.

And then it hit Kor – Wesley was indeed exactly where he wanted to be – here, on Kor’s ship, because…

“You are here because you want my support,” he stated, astonished.

Bob allowed himself a small smile. “To tell you the truth, I was almost relieved when I recognized your ship. We both have the same goal – to identify and get the imposter who pretended to be you, and who attacked our ship. I have information that can help you, and –”

“And in my company you could move freely through the Borderland which would be impossible, even with this new technique you’re using, because sensors may not locate you, but you would be visible – that’s how we saw and surrounded the Excalibur.” He bent forwards. “Speaking of that technique, how –”

“Kor, I will not tell you anything about that, just as you’d certainly not want to explain how it is that our sensors didn’t catch the ion trails of your drives before your ships rematerialized – a phenomena that Kirk witnessed too, by the way, when your two commanders assaulted the Enterprise.” He also bent forwards, fixing his eyes on the fleet-commodore. “Let me make a suggestion. We both don’t talk about the technical enhancements our science and engineering departments have obviously made, and rather concentrate on finding the pirates who acted in your name, and on recovering our survivors.”

“We two – together?” Kor pressed and Wesley nodded sternly.

“It’s logical, don’t you agree? We are still under a ceasefire and more-or-less in neutral territory. We
both have the same goal; we are both bound by oaths and duty to prevent harm befalling our homes. So why not support each other?”

The fleet commander took a deep breath. “You are aware that with the information you just gave me, I could inform our fleet and the Federation would be ours within a few days?”

Bob had expected such words and was ready for them. “Yes, but I’m also aware of the fact that I’m speaking to a true warrior, a warrior with honor, otherwise I would have never told you anything of this, Kor. And, by the way, if the Empire wanted to overrun the Federation, the major strike would be already in process. Our president demanded explanations for the deaths of our diplomats and admirals, therefore the Klingon High Council knows that Starfleet is weakened because of the losses of her most important staff officers, yet your people stand true to their word and are even trying to discover what really happened.” He cocked his head again. “I don’t want to say it, but your Council has more honor than I gave it credit for – an honor the conspirators should take as an example but they won’t.”

Kor stared at him, before he threw his head back and began to laugh. “I know what you’re doing, Wesley. You’re trying to compliment me, yet your words contain an almost uncomfortable truth. We’ve both been thrown into the same mess because of our oaths and honor, yet we are still on opposite sides. But that still didn’t keep you from asking me for support.” He laid both strong hands on the desktop, looking for all the world like the cat that had got the cream. “Tell me, Bob Wesley, why should I care what is happening within Starfleet? Why should I care if the Federation is on the way to destroy herself? Why should I waste my time to save a few of her officers and diplomats? Because we were played? If anything, we could take the opportunity to get revenge for it now.”

“And yet you won’t because you’ve been personally compromised by the traitors and by the imposter who’s trying to destroy your credibility and name in the Council.” Bob laid his hands on the desktop, too. “We need each other to avert further danger to our homes and our families – something we vowed to do.”

The Klingon lord examined the human in front of him before he slowly replied, “I’ve learned that humans use so-called ‘white lies’ to trick opponents to gain advantages. I have also faced a behavior you Terrans call ‘bluffing’ before, yet my gut tells me that you’re speaking the truth – that you’re convinced of this all.”

Bob nodded sternly. “I am,” he said firmly, before he gestured towards the data disk. “These reports tell another story than what’s seen at first glance. And there is more evidence. Spies on our ships, cra –”

“Spies? Is this why you wrangled your way onto my ship by offending me first-hand?” Kor demanded and as Wesley smiled sheepishly and murmured a “sorry about that.” The Klingon began
to laugh again. “You trust me more than your own people?”

“I do trust most of my crew and my senior officers, mind you, but I can’t be certain that the conspirators didn’t place anyone on my ship before this whole mess even began.”

The fleet commander leant back again and took a deep breath, nodding slowly in understanding. “To take care is not the way of the coward but that of a wise man,” he said. “And I’m almost willing to believe you.”


“Could be faked,” Kor interrupted him, but as he saw the real anger in the human’s dark eyes, he lifted a calming hand – a gesture he had seen many times during the conferences on Organia. “I’m not accusing you that you try to lure me into a trap. Yet I need a proof that I can really believe, even trust you.”

Wesley groaned. “If you ask me now about fleet activities, new engineering protocols, or…”

“No, nothing like that, Wesley. I would not demand you betray your own oath as proof of your honesty. That would be highly counterproductive.” He glanced hard at the commodore. “Tell me about the Augment.”

That caught Bob by surprise. “‘Augment’?” he echoed, before his mind began to reel. He couldn’t tell Kor about Khan. That would be too dangerous. “There are no Augments, as you certainly know, and –”

“Don’t play dumb with me!” Kor interrupted him. “If you want me to believe anything of this conspiracy you’re telling me about, then you should stick to the truth! The Qli-jagh, the dark warrior, who was on Qo’noS last year is no normal human and no Vulcan either! He slipped unnoticed into my headquarters on Turkana to recover Kirk, instantly killed seven Klingon warriors, ran through the jungle like a tarte, hurled a Klingon warrior through the air like he weighed no more than a feather, seems to know the enemy’s next move before it even begins, and reacts quicker than the eye is able to follow. This man is an Augment!” He brought his index finger directly under Bob’s nose. “Don’t deny it. This man is genetically enhanced and after all I’ve just learned about these conspirators in Starfleet, the Qli-jagh is certainly one of many, many enhanced warriors they breed to fight against us and to –”
“You’re wrong,” the commodore interrupted him. “This man wasn’t bred from this shadow department the conspirators founded.”

“Of course not,” Kor snapped. “This shadow department, if I recall your tale correctly, has existed for only a short period of time, yet this man is an adult. Unless the Federation found a way to speed up human maturation, he must have been bred about three of your decades ago.” Enraged he glared at Wesley. “So much to the Federation’s assurances that there would never be another Augment program and –”

“We haven’t experimented with human genetic enhancement for more than two hundred and sixty years, Kor. The incident in the last century –”

“– was maybe the first stage of new tests?” The fleet commander bent forwards. “And the Qli-jagh is the perfect outcome of it!”

Wesley groaned. Was he really going to be forced to tell Kor about Khan and his history? As it seemed, there was no other way to gain the fleet commander’s trust, and therefore his support to prevent the whole mess becoming an interstellar catastrophe.

“The dark warrior, as you call him, is no product of new genetic experiments – not from the last century and certainly not from this one.”

“So, where does he come from?” Kor probed and Wesley sighed, sounding suddenly very tired. God, would he really have to reveal Khan’s true heritage? One look into those dark, piercing eyes in which the sparks of real anger shimmered, and he knew he didn’t have another choice.

“The ‘dark warrior’, is indeed…enhanced.”

Kor snorted, which meant nothing more than ‘told you so’.

“He was the perfect outcome of those tests – three centuries ago on my planet,” Bob gritted out, cursing inwardly before taking a deep breath. “In the middle of the 20th century scientists experimented with genetics, trying to contain illness. Then they got the idea to breed super-humans; people with extremely high intelligence, quicker, stronger… They could bring peace to our planet which was about to be torn into pieces. Not literary, mind you, but within the continents. Two world wars had shaken up all countries, the aftermaths of which displaced many people.”
“I know a little bit of Earther history. There were three wars within one century, as I recall,” Kor thought aloud and Wesley nodded curtly.

“Yes, two world wars and later the Eugenics Wars, which I’ll come to now. The super-humans were supposed to put an end to all the crises – and they did, but differently than planned. Many of them tried to gain supreme power – some of them succeeded. And a few of them kept the peace within their borders, and did what they were created to do. But there were other Augments, and their reigns were not so peaceful. Some of them even killed normal humans because they regarded them as inferior – animals which had to be eliminated. The human race rebelled, and thus came the Eugenic Wars. And as a result, it quickly didn’t matter to many humans who those Augments were who had their welfare at heart and those who tried to destroy them. They attacked all Augments and their loyal fellows, killing everyone in the process. It was pure butchery.”

Kor listened intensely. “I’ve heard about this third war, too. Though fewer in number, you humans put us Klingons almost to shame with your cruelness in the wars during those decades,” he grumbled. “But what has this to do with the Qli-jagh? Those Augments were created three of your centuries ago and –”

“And he is one of them,” Bob let the cat out of the bag. He saw Kor’s eyes widen and explained, “He fled, together with his family in a crude sleeper ship, using tubes with a kind of stasis field that kept them alive. I think he’d anticipated that the computer would wake them a few decades later, but something went wrong. Three centuries later, a Starfleet ship found his vessel by accident. The highest-ranking officer aboard realized who these people were and woke their leader.” He pressed his lips into a short line. “Learning that he faced one of the Augments with a more peaceful past, he decided to use the super-human’s intelligence for his own purposes, and forced him into service. That…went very wrong, too.”

Kor crossed his long arms in front of his broad chest. “Let me guess: The whole mess last year on Qo’noS is the outcome of that.”

Wesley pinched the bridge of his nose. “Yes,” he breathed, before he moistened his lips. “This conspiracy I told you about had already been expanded last year by other staff officers. The Council and we all thought that we’d eliminated the problem, but now it turns out that several traitors remained undiscovered and free. This has been a new attempt to continue where last year the others failed.”

Kor snorted. “I’m not surprised. Such a conspiracy that you spoke of would need to be planned carefully and needs time – years even.” He bared his teeth again. “And the Qli-jagh became a part of the conspirators’ plan?”
Again the commodore couldn’t do anything else than nod. “Yeah, but not of his own free will. When he realized what the officer in charge was up to, he denied support, but was forced to obey as said officer threatened his family – even killed some of them. Finally, the Augment-leader was able to flee and hide. Nonetheless, the officer continued with his plans. He…wanted war between the Empire and us, and he did everything he could to initiate it.”

Kor’s face betrayed his bafflement. “He wanted war? Why? You humans avoid war at any cost.”

Again Wesley sighed. “He wanted to establish his supremacy and that of his fellows by being needed during a time of war. He had the point of view that the Federation had to discard her history of peace because the ‘bad neighbor’ – the Klingon Empire – would attack sooner or later. To prove himself to be right, he planned to strike first to provoke you. But his involvement should never become public knowledge or even come to the knowledge of the Council. Like this, your expected counter-offensive would have made it look as though you had begun the battle and war would have resulted.”

He watched Kor scowl, while fury glistened in the Klingon’s eyes – something Bob could understand too. “What a…devious, cowardly trick!” he hissed, and Wesley made an affirming gesture.

“I agree. But it never came to that in the end. One of his agents went rogue and fled to Qo’noS. This was the chance for him to go ahead with his plan. He sent the Enterprise to your planet to –”

“– to catch a criminal who was a threat to us, as Kirk pointed out during his stay on Turkana,” Kor growled. “The outcome of which is well known: three ship’s crews dead –”

“– instead of an open attack against Qo’noS, as Kirk was ordered to carry out,” Bob cut in, rendering Kor speechless before the Klingon’s face flushed red with rage.

“Kirk was ordered –”

“To kill the criminal by firing torpedoes at the abandoned area of your homeworld where the fugitive was hiding. Kirk didn’t obey this order as he became aware what he was really ought to do – attack an unsuspecting planet – not with one, but with over seventy torpedoes.”

Kor paled. “More than seventy torpedoes? It… It would have torn Qo’noS apart!” he gasped, eyes widening in shock.
Wesley nodded slowly. “Yes, a planetary catastrophe would have occurred. And there would have been no doubt who had attacked you, because the conspirators had sabotaged the Enterprise’s warp core which stranded her in Klingon territory. You would have every right to regard this as an act of war, and no doubt would have attacked the Federation, exactly as the conspirators had intended. The traitors would have made it look as though everything were Kirk’s fault – a young captain who’d broken under the pressure of command, and because the criminal had killed his mentor before he’d fled. Yet war would have broken out. And the conspirators would have appeared as the saviors of the Federation; prepared for everything already. The head of them would have been lauded as the great hero in the end – an end that would have meant thousands, tens of thousands of dead Federation citizens – and Klingons, decimated planets, and a shift of the power balance in the Alpha and Beta quadrants.”

Kor’s hands were balled into fists, strong enough to turn his knuckles to a sick pale yellow. “We would have been nothing more than pieces in a chess game these traitors set up,” he hissed, furious. “Is this the usual human way to battle?”

“No, as you certainly know by now,” Bob said firmly, though gently. “These people are scum, not worth the paper their names are written on. Yet they did and do again have their collective finger poised on the proverbial trigger, and they’ll play anyone – our admiralty, and captains, the Federation Council, your council, you, me… Just as they tried to do last year.”

“But their attempt failed,” the fleet commander reminded him harshly, and Wesley smiled without humor.

“Yes, because the young captain who’d been chosen to be their instrument of destruction listened to his conscience and tried to capture the criminal himself. He smuggled himself onto Qo’noS to arrest him. The man defended himself, then your squadron showed up and challenged Kirk to a battle.”

“And then the Qli-jagh, who had come to hide, appeared to support Kirk – just as he has since then,” Kor stated with another growl. “Kirk told me that said criminal and the dark warrior were two different people, yet the dark warrior is well-trained and skilled as an assassin – a perfect agent for such a shadow department. Maybe they are indeed one and the same person? You said he was forced into the traitors’ service, but fled successfully. Maybe it was he who turned against his superiors because he didn’t want to play their game any longer?”

Wesley knew that he had to be very careful now. Khan should never be connected to events last year – neither in public nor in secret. Even – especially – not here and now. Therefore, Bob knew he had to use the same white lie Jim had told him and which would confirm Kor’s comments. “The dark warrior fled, true, but his escape and the agent’s flight didn’t happen at the same time. The agent turned rogue later and perhaps followed the Augment to team up with him, yet it never came to that,”
he said – using the fact that several days spanned Khan’s attack against the London archive and his escape. “The Augment fled to Qo’noS, hoping that his tormentors wouldn’t follow him. He hid on your homeworld in an abandoned area where he met later Jim Kirk, who was hunting the criminal. The Augment didn’t know that Kirk and his companions belonged to Starfleet, because they wore civilian clothes and didn’t use a Starfleet spacecraft. All he saw were a few young human people who were attacked by your squadron. Blood is thicker than water, so he intervened to their advantage. When he learned that they were indeed Starfleet personnel, he fled again and vanished.”

Kor watched him, eyes glistening. “And he didn’t know who he helped? And vanished?” He snorted. “Well, that covers what Kirk told me about this ominous stranger who came to his aid on Qo’noS, only to disappear and not be seen again until four weeks ago on Turkana. Yet there is one small, maybe unimportant detail I simply cannot grasp.” Pure irony dripped from his voice before he almost snarled. “How, if this Augment and Kirk didn’t know each other, and Kirk hadn’t seen him since the bloodshed on Qo’noS, as he told me, was it possible for them to have become lovers in the meantime? Because that’s the real reason the Augment has risked his neck ever since to recover Kirk and protect him with the fierceness of a warrigul-mother shielding her whelps!”

Bob stared at him thunderstruck. Had he understood Kor correctly? Lovers? Kirk and Khan were lovers? That was – crazy! Insane even! He cleared his throat and forced his vocal cords to work. “I beg your pardon?” he asked, tone obviously disbelieving.

Something close to curiosity began to shimmer in the Klingon’s dark eyes. “They are lovers,” he repeated, taking in the human’s astonished face.

Wesley continued to look at him – utterly confused. “No,” he finally said.

Kor lifted both brows. “Yes, they are.”

“Never!” Bob shook his head. “Impossible!”

Kor felt amusement rising in him at the human’s clear denial, and his lips curled into a smirk. “You didn’t know what your ‘boy’ was up to?” he asked with a mocking tone in his voice.

Finally Wesley realized that Kor wasn’t pulling his leg and began to laugh. “Jim Kirk and Khan – lovers?” He tried to control himself, but couldn’t stop the chuckles which escaped him. “Kor, you’re very much mistaken. Kirk and another man sharing a bed?” Again he had to stifle a guffaw. “You really don’t know much about Jim Kirk. He’s Starfleet’s biggest Casanova – a ladies’ man, through and through. There isn’t a woman safe from his flirting and charm attacks. I think he’d even bat his eyes at the Vice President, given half the chance. But take Khan to his bed? Never!”
Kor leant back and his strong fingers drummed on his arm rests – not in irritation but in a sort of triumph. And a moment later it was clear why. “And here, Wesley, you are mistaken. Kirk and… Khan is his name?” He watched the commodore sobering up and grinned wolfishly. “Nice to learn his true name finally.” He cocked his head, enjoying the next words. “Those two are very close – lovers! I’ve got proof on visual recordings. And Koloth told me before he was called back to the Empire that the Qli-jagh – Khan – had only one goal on Aldebaran: to keep Kirk safe. He was always near him – too near – and stopped his fight when Kirk’s life was at stake, telling Korax he’d let him go if he spared Kirk.” He watched the dumfounded expression on Wesley’s face and continued after a short dramatic pause, “Kirk is his weakness; he’s even ready to sacrifice himself for him. And I’m almost certain that the dark warrior was also aboard the Enterprise when I came to your boy’s aid in the Briar Patch. The way the Enterprise fought off our two renegades bore Khan’s stamp.”

“So much for keeping quiet about Khan’s presence aboard Kirk’s ship,” Wesley thought, frustrated. On the outside he remained casual. “They’d become friends; that much I knew, but to think that they’re lovers is…”

“The truth!”

“Kor,” Wesley began anew. “Kirk is, as I’ve already said, a Casano – well, someone who –”

“I know who this Casanova of yours was, and what it means to be called that, Wesley. After all, it was you who gave me some of that classical Terran literature files when we left Organia. I do understand that Kirk had been after every pretty female – maybe that’s why he’s found true love with a man in the end.” He bent forwards. “I have proof. Here, look for yourself!” He activated his terminal and barked some orders before he turned the screen around, giving them both a chance to watch the scene unfold.

The record, Wesley noted, was taken from a bird’s eye view and showed two figures running over a dark field. Strong spotlights caught their flight, voices demanded their surrender, wind and engine noise told of other space crafts’ arrival. Kor zoomed the screen and half-anxious, half-curious Bob realized that he saw Jim’s and Khan’s attempt to escape their Klingon pursuers. Both stopped and looked around; Kirk was barely holding himself upright, the Augment strong and in utterly-protective mode – ready to battle to the last breathe anyone who would try to approach. With dread, Wesley watched Jim’s shoulders sagging in defeat; the young captain clearly realized that there was no way out. And then it happened. Both men looked at each other before they closed the distance between themselves in wordless agreement. Khan pulled the younger man into an embrace – a gesture Kirk responded to instantly. The beginning of anguish showed upon the super-human’s face as he leant his head against Jim’s, and as his lips moved, it became obvious that Kirk tightened his arms around him. Both clung to each other like a lifeline – as if it were the last time, and that pained them both beyond imagination.
Kor stopped the recording and leant back, looking half-satisfied, half-amused. Shock was plainly written across his ‘guest’s’ face. “You really didn’t know,” he mused, and Bob dumbly shook his head. “But you must agree now that they are not just simple allies – or friends,” the Klingon pressed and met Wesley’s gaze finally. For several moments they only looked at each other, then groaning, the commodore let himself fall against the backrest of the chair.

There was no denying it. That embrace had nothing to do with friendship. Jim and Khan were – indeed – lovers! It all made sense now – Kirk’s incredible protective instincts regarding the Augment, his pain as Bob suggested that Khan should leave the Enterprise and hide until everything had settled; Khan’s willingness to support and shield Kirk whenever necessary. Hell, it even explained why the super-human had been ready to die along with Jim. They were lovers – and given the latest incident and how far Kirk was ready to go for the Augment, it became clear that this was more than one of Jim’s fleeting affairs. He was ready to sacrifice his career and his command for the Augment – and Khan was ready to face court, risking a life sentence, only to have a very small chance to live a life of freedom, maybe beside Jim.

God, this was exactly what Wesley did not right now – a big, heart-wrenching love story between his best captain and protégée, and a wanted man who had to be brought to trial, hoping for leniency after running amok a year ago.

Kor examined Wesley’s reaction and his lips curled in even deeper amusement. “Sorry if I’ve added more problems to your already fully-laden shoulders!”

Bob glared at him. “I’d believe your sympathy was more sincere if you’d stop grinning!” he groused – and the Klingon laughed quietly.

“You said Kirk is a kind of son to you. You should give him a proper dressing down; maybe he’d behave afterwards.”

“Too late for that. He’s already grown up – well, at least on the outside,” Bob grumbled. Oh, he would give Jim an earful as soon as he saw him again. Jesus, it wasn’t as if he didn’t approve of relationships of the same gender. He’d even thank the Lord that Jim Kirk, of all the playboys, finally found a match and settled down with her (or him, in this case). But this was the stupidest thing Kirk could have done – falling in love with a criminal. And, above all, not telling him about it. Did Jim really think something like this could stay hidden for long?

Kor cocked his head. “He’s put you into a nasty position, your ‘boy’, hasn’t he?”
“Not really,” Wesley murmured. “It only changes some…private matters.” He sighed and straightened his posture. “So, they’re lovers – all right. Does this influence our topic at all?”

“No,” Kor admitted, “it only affirms what I’d guessed, and that’s always satisfying.” He switched off the terminal. “And I expect you’ll keep this affair a secret to protect your boy and his lover.” He cocked his head. “You love to play dangerous games, don’t you? Your presence aboard my ship proves it.”

“I’ve no other choice,” Bob said uncomfortably.

“No, you really have no other choice, seeing that you’re desperate enough to ask me for support.”

Wesley took another deep breath. “Do I have it?”

Kor pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Is there the tiniest chance that you may learn about this secret location where the slavery market will take place? Otherwise our cooperation would not make any sense.”

This choice of words gave Bob new hope. “Yes, I have a plan – but its success will depend on your readiness to help.”

Again the Klingon watched him for a longer time, then he made up his mind. “I know that this can lead to a lot of trouble – not only for you, but also for me and my inferiors, but danger is the spice of life.” He straightened his shoulders. “Count me in – if only to proof to our councils that there are still honorable warriors left who do not need to play foul to gain victory.”

Bob allowed himself to breathe through – and as he caught Kor’s smirking expression he rolled his eyes. What had he gotten himself into…?

TBC…
Yes, this is a very good question: What had Bob gotten himself into? Well, at least in a lot of trouble, chaos and craziness. But the same goes for our boys.

In the next chapter the cooperation between Bob and Kor will start – with a few surprises. Spock Prime finds out something very interesting and, of course, can’t stop himself from supporting Jim with everything possible. Then the Enterprise will reach Gamma 12, where Jim comes face to face with someone he knows from the Academy – trouble is inevitable.

I hope you loved the new installment and I’m very – very – curios what you think of this whole progress.

Love

Yours Starflight
Obstacles

Chapter Notes

Hallo, my dear readers!

Thank you so very much for all the feedback. I’m glad that you love the two storylines so much – Bob and Kor, and Jim/Nien/Prime Spock. Especially latter holds a lot of explosive potential and I’m already looking forward to let every one of them (including today’s Spock) go through a lot until… Well, you’ve to wait if there will be a happy ending or not.

The new chapter starts exactly there where the old one stopped – with Wesley and Kor figuring out of their ‘alliance’ and a plan how to proceed. Prime Spock will be in this chapter, too, and then the Enterprise approaches the high security facility…

I hope you’ll have some fun.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 56 – Obstacles

Wesley coughed as the sharp Romulan Ale burned in his throat. Kor sat at the other side of his desk and grinned, while he sipped at his glass of blue spirit. “Nothing for soft tongues,” he mocked and Bob shot him a glare.

“After speaking Klingon an hour ago, my throat is sore, that’s all,” he rejoined and the fleet commander chuckled.

“You mean, after your attempt at speaking my language!” He leant back. “So, let me repeat your plan: we’re heading towards Verix to meet with this mud-digger and his friends, hoping that the Romulans have shown up and lead us to the secret location of the slave market. There you want to recover your people, while I hope to catch the imposter. Afterwards, you leave the Borderland and speed back to the Federation to bring the traitors to justice – hopefully with the help of your rescued admirals who will eventually believe your accusations against the conspirators.” He pursed his lips. “So much ‘hope’ – it’s incredible what you’re up for it. Humans are crazy. This I’ve known for quite a time, yet you’re certainly the most daring person I’ve ever met – besides Kirk.”
Bob smirked. “Thanks for the compliment,” he replied, before he turned serious again. “Kor, it’s really very easy. Five of your ships and the *Lexington* have enough force to –”

“Wesley, we can’t arrive at this damn market, beam down with a whole fighting team, and get your people out. The Orions may be nothing more than damned pirates, but they’re clever and careful. If there are more than two ships – above all a Federation ship, together with Klingon vessels – nearing this secret place, the whole sale will be cancelled. I don’t like to admit this, but their sensing techniques are brilliant. We will not be able to come near the place without alerting them.”

“The *Lexington* can’t be located and –”

“But she can be seen,” the Klingon interrupted him sternly. “That’s how I found you – and so will the Orions.” He set the glass on the desk top. “We’ll have a chance if we can smuggle ourselves into their lines, strike out and then in the erupting chaos, call my ships for support.” He bent forwards. “I not only want to catch the imposter and his accomplices, I also want to arrest the Orion slavers who caught your people and, if possible, also the Romulans who invaded the Borderland.”

Bob cocked his head. “Take one of your ships. You have the cloaking device and this new technology which covers your ion trails. With that, we could –”

“Only the newest Imperial ships have this equipment, which would give the Orions an indication that a Bird-of-Prey in their orbit can’t belong to a renegade. And, by the way, my ships are all well-known. As soon as we switch off the cloaking device to beam down to the planet – or asteroid or wherever the market takes place – they’ll know who is coming and everything will be lost.” He leant back again. “No, we have to come up with a better plan.”

Wesley stared at him, while two ideas flitted through mind. There was a chance to sneak up on the market in secret, yet it would mean that he had to give Kor back something the Klingons certainly had already surrendered and what was now booty for the Federation. On the other hand, it hadn’t been Starfleet who took said ‘item’, and therefore he wouldn’t break any Starfleet rules if he took this step.

Sighing, he ended his inner dilemma by following his gut feeling. “I think I have a solution to our problem.” He returned Kor’s asking glance and took another sip before he continued. “If an older Klingon spacecraft – a small one – nears this secret place, we could pretend to be slavers or traders. The Orions wouldn’t be alerted and –”

“Of what ‘older, smaller vessel’ do you speak?” the Klingon lord interrupted him, and Wesley fixed him with a stare.
“The D’Ghor.” He saw Kor’s eyes widening and added, “I know where she is and she is unmanned. We could use her to follow the Romulans and slavers, striking back with the imposter’s own weapons by masking our true identities with a false one.”

“The D’Ghor?” Kor stared at him. “She was lost to this blasted militia and attacked our fleet at Tammeron. Not that I’d agreed with that strike. To attack a neutral planet and attempting to destroy it wholesale is not the way of an honorable warrior, yet the D’Ghor had a part in it, and is officially lost to us. Even moreso, she belongs now to the enemy.”

Sighing, Bob straightened his shoulders. “Well, maybe it would give you bonus points with your Council if you could retake her. She won’t be a threat anymore to you – after all a Trojan horse is always a threat.”

“A what?” The fleet-commander was lost here and Wesley quickly explained what this reference meant and why. Afterwards, Kor grinned. “A clever plan, no doubt. And you’ll try to do something similar by smuggling us behind enemy lines and attack from within.” He smiled. “I like this idea.” Then he sobered up. “And afterwards? I will not allow you to keep her and –”

“You don’t have to,” Wesley groaned. “The Shadow and I use her to get at the market, then we inform you, and you can strike with full force as soon as we’ve taken care of the chaos within the market. We free our people, you arrest whomever you like to make an example, and afterwards you can keep the D’Ghor.” He reached out, offering Kor his hand. “Do we have a deal?”

For a tiny moment the fleet commander hesitated, then he accepted Bob’s hand. “Deal!” he used Terran slang. Both shook each other’s hand, before Kor rose. “Where is she?”

The commodore leant back in his chair; barely able to hide his glee. “She is only a kilometer or so away from your headquarters on Turkana – southern area near the high plateau where Turkana City lies.” He saw Kor’s jaw almost hitting the floor and schooled his own features to stop the grin that was about to break across on his face. Ah, sometimes spitefulness was really sweet.

“She – she is on Turkana? She’s been there…since when??” the Klingon burst out, disbelieving.

It became really difficult to hide his smirk now, as Wesley answered, “Khan arrived with her to recover Jim Kirk. Only he didn’t make it back to the D’Ghor and had to leave her behind. She is cloaked.”
Kor took a very, very deep breath. “Cloaked! Without the engines running, only auxiliary power therefore – there will be no chance of finding her without the correct location before the auxiliary power runs out of energy.”

Wesley couldn’t help himself anymore. He grinned. “Well, I think I can make a call or two and find out her exact coordinates and how to override the security Khan certainly will have installed. In the meantime we should leave for Turkana to get the D’Ghor as soon as possible. We could be at Turkana in six hours, take her and leave for Verix. The Romulans might not arrive until then and The Shadow might know the location of the market by now. Otherwise we’re playing ‘dead man’ nearby and follow the slavers as soon as they show up.”

Kor crossed his arms in front of his chest. “You’ve thought it all out, haven’t you?”

“Like every good commander should – but to whom am I’m telling this? After all, you think everything thoroughly through before you act, too.”

The Klingon lord snored. “Yes, but Kahless should have warned me about you crazy humans – he should have sent me a dream to warn me of you and Kirk.” An amused glistening in his eyes took away some of the harshness in these words.

“Well, I’m taking that as a compliment,” Bob said, bowing politely his head.

Promptly Kor laughed. “Klingons only compliment enemies when they’re strong – this much you know already. You’ve learned a lot about us!”

Wesley pursed shortly his lips. “I’m still your enemy?”

Kor didn’t answer for a moment longer, before slowly saying, “This will determined in the next days – yet I daresay you in person are not my enemy.” He pressed his fist against his chest – the Klingon salute. “Return to your ship and contact the dark warrior. But I warn you, only this one time. No tricks! I would hate to be forced to destroy your ship and to kill you.”

Bob nodded. “The same goes for you. I respect you and I hope that we will part as allies, not as enemies in a few days.”
The talk was over now and several minutes later Wesley stepped onto the bridge of the *Lexington*; his officers greeted him with relieved smiles. Taking a deep breath, he decided to tell them a kind of half-truth for now, his most trusted senior officers and friends would learn of the whole plan later.

“It seems the assault on the *Excalibur* was carried out by Klingon renegades together with Orion pirates. Lord Kor was on to something. He had an idea who the aggressors were and where to find them. As a signal that the Klingon High Council is interested in investigating the incident and that they stay true to the agreed ceasefire, Lord Kor has asked if we’d like to accompany him in catching those who killed our diplomats and admirals. They’re hiding, but Kor has every reason to learn of their whereabouts within the next few hours. Until then, we’ll travel with him deeper into the Borderland and meet with The Shadow, who have agreed to share some information with us.” He looked from one to another. “Understand this people – this mission is top secret!” His gaze flickered quickly “There is evidence that the Romulans have a hand in this whole thing, too, so no transmissions to anyone. The risk that we’re intercepted is too high.” He glanced at his comms officer, who understood the real meaning of the next order. “Palmer, absolute observation of all frequencies and shield all transmissions Priority One – in case someone in our crew thinks he or she has to make a call home to tell their family happy holidays or something equally non-urgent at the moment.”

There came snickers of laughter from the bridge crew, but Palmer knew exactly what Wesley was telling him: make sure that any spy from Section 31 – should there be one – sequestered aboard the ship couldn’t send a message to Command. This mission was out of the ordinary, and if they really wanted to have a chance to convict the traitors with the help of the survivors, no one should know of their little private trip.

“Aye, sir!” Palmer nodded and smiled and Bob, who stood beside him, quickly clasped his upper arm. As Wesley let go and turned his attention to Sonik, Palmer felt something fall into his lap from the spot where a moment ago the commodore’s hand had lingered. It was a small piece of paper that said only one thing: ‘After I leave bridge, contact the *Enterprise* in secret and patch Kirk through my quarters; make sure the frequency is secure.’

Palmer cleared his throat – a signal to Wesley that he’d got the message – then he returned to do his job of giving orders to other departments, while Sonik programmed the course.

A minute later something happened which no one within the Klingon Empire or the Federation would have thought possible. A heavy Starfleet cruiser and five Birds-of-Prey flew side-by-side through space without deflector shields raised or weapons at the ready – just as if they were on a friendly Sunday stroll together through the park…

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ST***ST***ST
Of course Jim Kirk wasn’t exactly thrilled to be torn out of sleep only an hour after his and Khan’s talk with Prime Spock had ended. And he was even less thrilled to learn that Bob and Kor had agreed for work together. Yes, there was no denying that Wesley would need all the help he could get to recover the survivors of the delegation and to make it safely back to Federation territory, but to rely on a Klingon – even an honorable one – was in Kirk’s eyes, nothing but insanity. Yes, Kor had proved that he took the ceasefire seriously enough to even aid Kirk and the Enterprise, and that the fleet commander had investigated the incident with the Excalibur showed to Jim that Kor was indeed interested in the truth. Yet the warlord was and would remain a Klingon. As long as the ceasefire lasted, Bob would be safe with Kor, but what if the Klingon Empire decided to go back to its belligerent ways? To seize the Lexington and take Bob as a captive – maybe also the surviving admirals and diplomats – to bring them to the High Council? It would increase Kor’s reputation exponentially. Jim doubted that the Klingon would let them go.

But all those arguments hadn’t changed Bob’s mind to work with Kor – couldn’t change it. The deal was made and the Lexington was already on her way to Turkana, accompanied by a part of Kor’s squadron, and the Klingon lord in person.

Afterwards, Bob needed to speak with Khan – and it gave him the idea about how to proof of Kor’s assumption concerning the two men. Innocently Wesley asked his protégée to patch him through to Khan’s quarters. But he heard the Augment’s voice in the background saying that there was no need to; he was already present in Kirk’s quarters, the commodore used all his acting skills to appear unaware of the intimate relationship between the two men. It was the dead of night and Kirk and Khan had been pulled from sleep – obviously sharing not only one quarters, but also one and the same bed. Great! The two really were having an affair (and maybe even something deeper) and Bob would give both an earful in person later. Not because they had developed romantic feelings for each other – there was no power in the universe that could stop love – but that he had to learn about the whole thing from Kor! That had been the height of…weirdness.

Jim, who had thrown on a shirt before he accepted the hail, was glad that Nien had chosen to put on a tunic, too. The Augment stepped beside him and reluctantly told the commodore where exactly to find the D’Ghor, and how to override the security measures he’d programmed and activated before leaving the spacecraft to recover Jim nearly four weeks ago. After all, an SDD was installed aboard, and if the Klingons got their hands on it, the technology would no longer interest Starfleet Command.

Wesley understood the super-human’s reluctance to divulge this information and assured him that Kor wouldn’t get the SDD. Bob had insisted that he and Sonik would fly the D’Ghor from Turkana to Vendix, and then to the secret place the slavery market was taking place. Only after the successful recover of the hostages Kor would get the scout ship back – a little detail the Klingon lord hadn’t liked but had agreed to. Otherwise he would have had to wait weeks before the power unit had been completely depleted and the cloaking device finally faltered. Kor didn’t indicate that he assumed something was aboard he shouldn’t see; he simply agreed to the terms and gave his permission for Wesley’s to board the D’Ghor after they’d located her.
This turn of events didn’t sit well with Khan, but he knew that neither Wesley nor he himself had any other choice. Giving the commodore the required information, he only could hope that Wesley was clever enough to buy some time and to uninstall the SDD before the Klingons again took possession of their vessel – and he also hoped Kor would stay true to his word, not tricking Wesley by seizing the D’Ghor during the mission.

Exchanging a few more words of worry and wishes for good luck, they finally ended the transmission, and Jim looked at the darkened screen. There wouldn’t be any more chances to speak with Bob until the Lexington was back in Federation space and at Earth. They were on their own from now on, and would only meet again after the Enterprise reached New Vulcan and if they – and Bob – were successful. If they met again at all!

Tiredly Jim rose and looked longingly at his bed. “What do you think? Are we going to get any rest at all tonight?”

Khan snorted. “Maybe it’ll be some comfort to you that Wesley won’t be able to sleep, either. Not only because his ship has a Klingon escort, but also because your mentor certainly will now have a lot to think about – last but not least, about us.”

Red eyes, puffy from tiredness, looked up at him. “’Us’?” Jim repeated and the Augment sighed.

“He called us in the middle of the night and we’re both in your quarters, clearly having been sleeping.” He motioned to their clothing and ran a hand through Jim’s tousled hair. “What, do you think, will he conclude from that?”

Kirk stared at him, at Khan’s soft hair falling around his face, free from its normal more severe and secured style. He remembered their recent conversation with Spock Prime. Then it dawned on him. “Oh…” he whispered and the former dictator nodded with an amused expression. “Yes, ‘oh!’” He teased. “The good commodore certainly will put one and one together correctly. He is anything but stupid.” He returned to the bed. “You coming?”

Anxiously Jim rose from his desk chair. “You think, he knows now…?” He met Nien’s amused gaze and let his head sink. “Shit.”

The Augment chuckled. “Calm down, James. Wesley is a caring man. He won’t tear your head off because you couldn’t resist such an attractive and alluring creature as I.”
Jim sobered instantly and his eyes widened. “Vain bastard!”

Khan grinned and wriggled his eye brows suggestively. “And you love it, don’t y –”

He didn’t get any further as Jim raced towards the bed and hurled himself onto him, attacking Khan’s mouth with fierce, hot kisses. Sighing, the super-human wrapped long arms around his mate and let himself fall back onto the bed, pulling Kirk along with him. And for the next half hour all thoughts of the upcoming rescue mission, battles, and too-knowing commodores were forgotten.

ST***ST***ST

“Your companion will be who?” Tellarites normally had high voices – at least to human ears – but Galven’s squeaking would be able to call dogs. His little eyes were wide open, his snout twitched, and the thick hair that covered his head and jaw seemed to puff out as though he’d touched a live wire.

On the main screen was the reason for his shocked outburst – a very tired-looking Commodore Robert Wesley, who just had told him that he would not come alone to their meeting point, but with Klingons in tow. And no mere Klingons, no, it was the commander responsible for the whole Borderland sector, Lord Kor.

“Mr. Galven, there is no need to get excited. Lord Kor and I have an agreement. He’s helping us recover our survivors, and in exchange he gets back the D’Ghor, and clears his name. Yet we still need your help to begin the mission. I called you to assure you that you and your friends will be safe; Lord Kor guarantees your freedom. After we’ve rescued our survivors, you can accompany us back to the Federation – without any reprisals.”

“And you believe him?” Ritek demanded, who stood beside Galven’s captain chair, not caring for once that they almost disagreed on simply everything.

“I have his word of honor,” Wesley replied calmly. “I know Kor – he can be trusted when he makes a promise. You will not have to fear any deceitfulness, or even revenge from either him or his warriors. We are all in the same boat now. He wants to catch the imposter who used his name while attacking the Excalibur, and we want our people back. Both our goals are tied together, so it’s only logical to work together.”

Galven scratched his snout. “I don’t like this,” he oinked. “I don’t like that the tiniest bit!”
Wesley suppressed a sigh. “Sometimes you have to howl with the wolves – and sometimes those wolves can only succeed when hunting together. You are one of those wolves now, Mr. Galven. We need to rescue our people. Not only because there are some important diplomats and admirals among them, but mostly because of the barbaric fate that awaits them, should we fail.” He bent forwards slightly. “By the way, there were two Tellarites aboard the shuttle, one survived. You certainly want to help one of your own people, don’t you?”

A mixture of snort and grumble escaped Galven, while behind him Caviw cleared her throat. “Commodore, we’ll stay and help you.” She ignored Galven’s aborted protest about the fact that he was in charge on the ship, and continued firmly, “We promised Khan and Jim that we’d help them, and when the admirals are back in Federation territory, they can quickly clean up the mess this Section 31 has made – and they’ll be grateful enough to be forgiving, and maybe even grateful to our two lovebirds. So –”

“'Our two lovebirds?’ Bob echoed. ‘Don’t tell me you knew about them, too!’

Caviw cocked her head, while her tail straightened and laid itself upon her right shoulder. “Of course I knew about them. They are mates! Khan wears the mark of claim Jim left upon him, and the other way around.” She giggled, which was more of a hissing sound than anything else when she saw the blush that crept into the commodore’s cheeks. “They are so cute together,” she added. “I could cuddle them just for the sweet love they hold for each other.”

Jeff, who had ridden himself of the bandages two days ago saw how the Starfleet officer suddenly wore an almost painful expression and realized why. “You weren’t told about them,” he stated and Bob rolled his eyes.

“No, I wasn’t! I had to hear from Kor to learn that my own protégée has been having a secret love affair with a wanted man!”

“Not an ‘affair’,” Caviw corrected with a purr. “They are mates – properly and undeniably mates. They have claimed each other, and their souls are bonded.” She sighed longingly. “Isn’t that romantic?”

Bob looked as if he had bitten into a lemon. “Yes, very,” he deadpanned, voice laden with sarcasm. “But I’m sure they’re not ‘soul-mates’, like you imply. That’s only possible between Vulcans or –”

“Oh, it’s pretty much the same principle,” Caviw smiled, showing pointed teeth. “Augments appear
to bond the same way. You should have seen them when Khan recovered Jim and how he took care of him – or how they much they fretted over each other whenever they think the other was hurt or in danger. It’s so sweet!”

By now, all the males glared at her, of which she finally took notice, and pouting, stepped back. “You non-Caitians are so unromantic!” she muttered, and Galven oinked something in his native tongue before addressing Wesley again.

“So, we’re to work together with this Kor – after all that has happened. I see only one explanation for this: either you or I is crazy.”

“Well, Fortuna favors the fools – meaning sometime only the crazy plans succeed. Are you still in?”

Galven glared at him, then he looked up at the others, who all nodded. Moaning, he replied, “Yes, we are still in. We expect you at the agreed rendezvous point and make sure to listen for the Romulans!”

Bob grinned at him. “That’s is the spirit!”

The Tellarite grimaced. “Yes, a crazy one!” Galven shook his head. “When will you be here with your new friends?”

“We’re half an hour away from Turkana. From there we’ll retrieve the D’Ghor, and set course for Verix afterwards. If everything goes to plan, we’ll catch up with you in approximately five hours.”

“Right – at least I’ve enough time to write out my will,” the Tellarite grunted. “See ya. Shadow out!” Leaning back in his chair, Galven glared at the main screen which now showed the stars again. “This is insane! Absolutely and utterly insane!”

ST***ST***ST

Dark eyes framed by deep wrinkles, took in the many and incredibly quick-changing symbols and imagines on the screen – a tempo a human wouldn’t have been able to follow. Yet for a Vulcan, even an old one, the speed was not a problem. Fully concentrating on what the screen showed him,
‘Selek’ did not allow any distractions from his surroundings. He knew that one of his assistants was busy in the next room and prepared a light lunch for them both, but Spock had no time to eat or to drink anything, even if his aged body demanded nourishment far more regularly than it had in his early years all those decades ago. And just as when aboard his Enterprise, Spock did not rest or even give himself a break when there was a danger at hand – especially if said danger concerned his T’hy’la. There had been many occasions in which the Vulcan had pushed himself to his limits, and even over them, never thinking of himself for one moment until Jim and the ship were safe again.

Exactly like the case was now – even in this different timeline. But several things were still destined to happen – Jim Kirk would always do what he thought to be right, never quit, and tried to do the impossible, which had usually put his own Jim, as well as his young counterpart, at great risk. The old Vulcan knew exactly how those Terrans like Luengo and his fellows operated. They would stop at nothing to reach their goal. And between them and their well-thought out plan there stood only a young captain and his loyal friends, an Augment-turned-lover, and a commodore whose plan seemed to be to trust said young captain, and to act on his strategies.

The odds of Jim’s plan being successful were low, to say the least. Spock did not even want to calculate them. ‘Sometimes it’s better to not be informed about everything. Only then you can act freely without fear what something could go wrong,” *his* Jim had once said, and ‘Selek’ had to admit that this was exactly such a situation to which Kirk had referred.

Three hours ago Spock’s computer had informed him about the successful installation of the spying program within Starfleet Headquarters. Since then, the old Vulcan freely roamed through a database which should have been one of the most protected in the Federation. For the era, the technical knowledge of security systems was extremely good, but still didn’t match the standard of the time Spock came from. Yet he was very careful as he hacked into the SBI terminal, checked sent and received transmissions, copied files, and deleted any trails he might have left. In addition, he tried to find out to whose terminal the spy aboard the *Enterprise* had sent his message concerning Khan. There was no ID from said computer, no evidences except for Jim’s and young Spock’s assumption that it had to be Luengo’s private one. And finally ‘Selek’ found the evidence that proved Kirk’s gut-feeling had been right once again: there was no doubt that the terminal belonged Luengo. He quickly copied all data he thought important before he withdrawing.

He read and listened to the transmissions between HQ and the ships in space, concentrating only on those which concerned the vessels near the former Neutral Zone, and specifically to Wesley’s squadron to which the *Enterprise* belonged. And then he found it – proof that Jim had been right about Gamma 12 and that the whole thing was a trap. And he also learned who was waiting for the *Enterprise* there!

Spock knew that he had still several hours until the *Enterprise* would reach Gamma 12, so he continued to gather as much information as possible. He found links which led him from the SBI to the science departments, and to the terminal of Admiral Barnett, where fate intervened once again. More-or-less by accident, the Vulcan stumbled on the protocol of the conference which had been held shortly after the Battle for Tammeron. One thing caught his eye: biological weapons of the
Klingons. Spock knew that Klingon scientists were developing biological or chemical agents, yet the Empire’s intelligence regarding the science was not that good. More curious than anything else, Spock studied the protocol, then both brows vanished beneath his hair-line as he saw the ‘biological agent’ Admirals Luengo and Norton were so nervous about. The Vulcan recognized it was based on Rigelian Fever, and even realized the augmented structures within the cells. But the structure he was studying would never – could never – be a biological agent! The augmented part came from blood (certainly without consent), the source of which Spock had a very good idea, and the pathogen of the Rigelian Fever was correct too. But, the connection and the whole structure were inefficient. The cell would not able to do more than knock out a child for less than half a minute – yet, it was declared as a highly toxic biological weapon the Klingons were almost ready to use.

Spock leant back in his chair and stared at the screen. The whole charade was cleverly done. Someone who was not completely familiar and even more experienced with this kind of science could easily be fooled into thinking this was a real threat. Norton belonged to the science departments of Starfleet and it certainly would have been easy for him to create such a phony agent. But from the surface, the science was flawless. The fact that they had obviously used Khan’s blood plasma or cells to tinker with the Rigelian Fever pathogen gave the Vulcan the chills. If someone with more skill and intelligence were seriously working on the best way to create an incurable deadly disease, then there could be millions of victims. And it was not the Klingons who were about to develop such a devastating weapon, but those scientists under the command of Norton and Luengo. Spock suddenly realized that not only was Jim Kirk in danger of being killed in the next few hours, but also that the war could take a terrible – horrible! – turn if those scientists got Khan back into their clutches.

Determined, the High Minister copied that file too and withdrew completely from HQ’s database, deleting all traces, and also the spying program. Only then did he shut off his own terminal and contact the communication center, demanding an immediate connection with the Enterprise.

He didn’t have to wait long. It was midday aboard the starship, and Kirk (who had taken the beta-shift today after the long night), was in his quarters doing some hated paperwork. Spock remembered all too well how much Jim loathed any desk job, and felt a hint of amusement as the screen showed the young captain, hair tousled from combing his fingers through it far too often and with visible relief on the still-boyish face.

“Spock! You’re saving me from all these records which are about to kill me!” he sighed, which made the old Vulcan lift a brow in even more amusement.

“If you turned down the energy output of your terminal, the risk of deadly electric shock would be zero,” he replied wryly. That got him the expected reaction: Kirk laughed, his blue eyes sparkling with mirth.

“What can I do for you, old friend?” he asked.
“Turn the Enterprise around and get away from Gamma 12,” ‘Selek’ instructed, before becoming serious again. “Jim, I was able to gather some very interesting data from within Starfleet Headquarters. The Excalibur is waiting for you near Gamma 12, playing ‘dead’ out of sight, behind several asteroids. She is on her way to the facility on silent running, and she is not alone. Two other ships are on an intercept course and will reach the facility 3.293 hours before the Enterprise arrives. They all are instructed to wait to see what you are going to do before they surround you. Captain Styles has been ordered to arrest you, my younger counterpart, Dr. McCoy, and Mr. Singh the moment you trying to obtain the tubes labeled ‘biological test products’, accusing you of insubordination, theft and mutiny. You will be convicted of such following a very short and very contrived tribunal.”

Jim stared with wide eyes at him. “‘Mutiny’?” Kirk asked disbelieving. “Whoever gave them that crazy idea?”

“It is logical, Jim. You are about to free seventy-two enhanced warriors –”

“They are not –”

“– and Luengo will use this as a reason to accuse you of planning a strike against Command with the help of the Augments,” Spock finished, fixing Kirk with a stern gaze. The captain stared flabbergasted at him. “Jim, if you do not have a plan that will work absolutely flawlessly and which guarantees your escape before Luengo’s men catch you, then –”

The young captain lifted a hand. “How much earlier will the team travelling to Gamma 12 arrive before us?”

“Three point two nine hours – excuse me, two nine one hours now,” ‘Selek’ answered.

Jim nodded grimly, bent forwards and activated the intercom. “Kirk to Engineering. Scotty?”

A moment later Montgomery’s voice sounded, “Scott here, Cap’n.”

“Scotty, you need to add some more coals to the fire to speed up our Grey Lady. We have to reach Gamma 12 five hours sooner than planned.”
“What?” The Scotsman sounded almost shocked. “Jim, I’m happy that we’re able to travel at warp 3.5. We shouldn’t –”

“We have to, or we’ll face three of our own ships with crazy captains who think Luengo is the new center of the universe and following his insane orders like little puppies. Warp 6, Scotty! Somehow you have to manage it!”

A painful groan was heard. “Jim, the best I can offer now would be warp 5, maybe 5.5 when all the spare parts are installed. Any more won’t be possible or the Enterprise will be shred into pieces.”

“Warp 5.5 then, Scotty – and I’ll count on you to increase that as soon as we have Nien’s people on board and are off to New Vulcan.”

Silence, then, “Ye like ter call me yer ‘Miracle Worker’ but I’m not a wizard! Warp 6 or 7 for almost four days will ruin the engines after all they suffered till now.”

“They will hold, Scotty. Our Grey Lady won’t let us down. And at New Vulcan you’ll have all the time in the world to repair her.” He rubbed his temple. “Just try, Scotty, or we all land in prison.”

“Aye, I got that! I’ll do what I can – Keenser too. And if you’d allow Khan to give the helm to someone else and come down to lend a hand, that would be even better.”

“Permission granted, Scotty. Spock has the conn at the moment. I have a transmission coming through, so please call him and tell him that he needs to call one of the older cadets to try his or her hand at piloting the ship. Nien will report to Engineering.”

“Aye, Cap’n.” Before the intercom switched off, the captain and the Vulcan on the screen heard something that sounded “That man is absolutely crazy!”, then the link went dead.

The High Minister lifted a brow in amusement yet again before he turned his attention back to Kirk. “There is more, Jim.”

“Isn’t there always?” the young captain groaned, and braced his under arms on the desk. “I’m listening.”
“I was able to… read some transcripts of earlier meetings when Admiral Barnett was still in charge.”

“You hacked into them, you mean,” Jim corrected with a big grin on his face.

The old Vulcan almost sighed. “Usually it was Dr. McCoy’s job to point out the obvious.” He saw Kirk’s smirk widen and continued, “I have every reason to believe that Admiral Norton and his science department are experimenting with a lethal pathogen, based on Rigelian Fever.” He watched Kirk sober up and grew pale. “They used a faked sample to convince the other admirals that the Klingons are up to such a thing, but I believe in truth they are the ones who are experimenting and testing this weapon.”

Jim gulped. “What makes you think that?” he asked quietly.

“Because I found traces of Mr. Singh’s enhanced cells in the counterfeit pathogen, and the way his DNA was inserted into the pathogen’s core was perfect – meaning this was a result of a successful experiment.” He watched Kirk becoming white as a sheet and continued softly, “You told me that Mr. Singh was held captive in a lab in Nevada, the whereabouts of which are not publically known – a secret institution. If I remember correctly in my timeline, it was a high-security laboratory in which deadly diseases were studied and attempts at neutralization made. I do not think this has changed in this timeline, though the lab is not only used for its original purpose, but that these scientists are doing more – illegal experiments in the development of biological weapons. That would also explain why they held Mr. Singh in stasis and injected him with viruses – not only to manufacture antidotes using his enhanced immune system, but also to test how much his cells are able to fight off. They are using Mr. Singh’s DNA to breed a pathogen that is immune to the antidotes.”

“They’ve turned the tables,” Jim whispered. “They haven’t been trying to heal people but to kill them by using a disease enhanced by Nien’s cells.” He closed his eyes. “God, what monsters they are! And we call the Klingons ‘beasts’.”

‘Selek’ nodded slowly. “I need to gather further information, but I am certain that I will have enough data soon. Should the worst happen – that you don’t escape from Gamma 12 – I shall personally report everything to the president and only his most-trusted Councilors. But it would prove easier if you and Commodore Wesley were successful within the next days.”

“Yeah, I really want to live a few days more,” Kirk grumbled, before he reached for the switch to cut off the transmission. He hesitated. “Spock? Please be careful. If Section 31 has no scruples about developing deadly diseases with no cure, and the will to use it against the Klingons, they could kill the whole race in the process, and they will not stop at murdering you, too. Be careful, okay?”
“I am always careful, Jim,” the Vulcan High Minister said, and Kirk grimaced.

“Yeah, sure. If you were only half as daring as ‘my’ Spock is, then your Jim Kirk must have gotten grey hairs very early!”

Two ice-colored Vulcan brows were raised. “Jim, I assure you that my own behavior and that of my younger counterpart follows strict tenets of logic and –”

“Spock, in six weeks it’ll be Christmas, and that’s the time for fairy tales,” Kirk interrupted him with short-lived humor. “Admit it, you two would forget how to spell ‘careful’ if you were up to something.”

The old Vulcan sighed. “Maybe your influence is strong enough to affect even Vulcans.”

“You’d better believe it!” Jim grinned, before the seriousness of the situation kicked in again. “Be careful, okay? I don’t want to lose you.”

Warmth shone in Spock’s eyes – a warmth he reserved only for his T’hy’la; his own Jim Kirk, and now for his friend’s younger counterpart, who had become more and more the man he ought to be. “Nevertheless, nature will take its toll one day, Jim,” he said gently.

“Yes, but you’ve still got a few decades to go I’m sure, and I really want to dance at your two-hundredth birthday party – even if you Vulcans don’t celebrate birthdays,” he added quickly, remembering something Uhura told him half a year ago when Spock was astonished that Jim had brought him a gift on the day of his birth.

“Knowing you, you will simply ignore that fact and ‘throw a party’ anyway, as the human saying goes.”

Kirk laughed quietly. “You can bet on that. Until later, my friend. I’ll contact you as soon as we’re on our way to New Vulcan.”

‘Selek’ nodded slowly. “I look forward to getting that message from you, Jim. And to repeat your request: please be careful.”
The connection was broken as the High Minister switched off the screen and Kirk needed a minute to stomach the information he’d got. Then he stood – his stance and his expression firm with grim determination.

Section 31 abused Nien to get the enhanced structure for a new biological weapon? Luengo wanted to fight dirty? This he could do – but he would have to deal with Jim first. And Kirk wasn’t above playing dirty, too. He had grown up like this – fighting with everything he had, giving his all, right or wrong. And concerning Norton and his scientists… Should they ever cross paths in person, Bones would have a hell of a job patching them up. There were a few things Jim Kirk would never tolerate and what Section 31 was doing topped even everything he had fought against until now.

Contacting Spock on the bridge, Jim called him down to his quarters. He not only had to inform his first officer of the new plans, but they also had to come up with new ideas with regards to the upcoming recovery of Nien’s crew, and their escape before engaging in combat with their own ships.

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At the same time the Vulcan High Minister contacted Jim, the unusual allies reached Turkana. Bob, Sonik, and four red-shirts beamed down to the planet’s surface near to Turkana City as Kor and five of his men materialized a few meters away from them.

Looking at the mighty ridge on which Turkana City was placed, Bob pursed his lips. He knew the D’Ghor being nearby meant that Khan had climbed up the crag to reach the town, and later had hurled himself down into the abyss, using a parachute and holding an injured and weakened Jim Kirk. Wesley recognized the spot at which the two men had been surrounded by their Klingon pursuers, and for a moment felt searing rage as he realized the horror his protégée must have experienced during those minutes – freedom, in reach after hours of torture, but now facing a much worse fate.

A movement beside him tore the commodore from his morbid thoughts. Kor stepped beside him and his dark eyes followed the Terran’s gaze. “I never imagined that a human could be so strong – that Kirk would make it so far,” he said slowly. “The warriors I sent after him and his rescuer told me later that he ran through the jungle, fought with warriguls and pursuers, and even once protected the Augment.” He looked at Bob. “He is strong, your scion.”

Wesley pressed his lips into a thin line before he finally said with badly hidden anger, “If you have only the tiniest chance to escape a living hell, your strength increases exponentially. You’ve only got two choices: life or death. In face of such a choice, you outdo yourself.”
The fleet commander nodded slowly. “He certainly did – and not only during his flight.” He took a deep breath. “I was ready to show him mercy. He was strong and brave during his captivity, and as I was informed that he didn’t break under Noy’s and Koval’s threats, I went to the cellars to deliver him from pain by giving him a quick death. I was also ready to send his dead body back to the Federation so that his family had a grave to visit. I know that humans have different rites than we have.”

Wesley looked with widening eyes at him. “You wanted to…?” he began, baffled.

Kor nodded curtly. “Yes, I was ready to follow your request – for the sake of our times together at Organia. And because the boy had… What was that word? Guts?”

Wesley had to smile. “Yes, we say ‘he has guts’ when someone is very brave.” His eyes were fixed on the strong Klingon. “You showed some compassion, and for that I’m grateful. Even if it would have meant Jim’s death, it would have been merciful, therefore – thank you.”

The Klingon lord grumbled something in his own tongue before he said in Standard, “You risked a lot by contacting me in private despite that our realms are at war – were even in active battle at the time. I know you as a courageous man, and that you were ready to beg me, an enemy, for mercy for your protégée’s life showed me how much he means to you. We Klingons are proud warriors and we never plead for mercy – at least not for ourselves. But also we have very tight family bonds, and every family member is important to us. So I could understand what you were going through. Warriors should respect each other, whether enemy or friend, because we all are linked by pride and honor. Therefore, I was ready to accept your request – from one warlord to another.” He snorted. “Only your boy had already fled, rescued by his Augment lover. This I didn’t see coming.” He smirked, a wolfish grin. “Just as I didn’t see we two becoming allies to stop these dishonorable bastards trying to use the war to their own private agenda and benefit, pulling valuable warriors into the dirt.” He chuckled. “The galaxy is a crazy place, no doubt about it.”

Bob returned the smile. “I agree. While yours and my council are worrying how to formulate any kind of meaningful discussion, we two are standing here and are about to kick some pirate and Romulan ass, doing the real job.” He glanced back at the large gorge. “This guy who betrayed Kirk to you…”

“He’d been in our service for a few days, then, after the first…‘trade ships’ reached Turkana, he again vanished.” Kor made a grimaced. “Saved his sorry ass, because I’d already let my inferiors know that I wouldn’t mourn him if something unexpected should happen to him. I loathe traitors!”

“Then we are again on the same page,” Wesley nodded, before he turned his attention away from the town and towards the edge of the jungle.
A minute later they reached to location of which Khan had informed Bob. One of the Klingons even strode into the cloaked spacecraft as he walked too far, earning himself guffaws from his comrades, an irritated glare from his superior, and barely hidden amusement of the Starfleet members. Wesley had no difficulty in overriding the security code with the help of his tricorder, using the data Khan had given him, and then they boarded the D’Ghor. Kor came with them and made a quick check of the spacecraft before leaving them to return to his own ship.

Fifteen minutes later they were on their way to Verix, and three hours after launching, they were already hiding near the planet among the other Klingon ships based there in orbit. The Klingon commander of the ‘colony’ had been informed that Kor would arrive with a few ships and a Starfleet cruiser – none of them readable by any sensors. Here they would stay until the Romulans made their presence known by contacting the traders near Verix, yet they still had an eight-hour wait until Palmer – and Ritek – caught the expected transmission. The sensors located an old D2-Klingon ship that was cloaked, but was given away by its ion trails. It was listed as a neutral trading ship from a legal Klingon colony, yet the words which were spoken during the transmission weren’t in Klingon, but in a higher Romulan standard.

Bob had used the time to lie down and to sleep awhile – not knowing that the quarters he’d chosen were the same Khan had used during his stay aboard. But he was awake in a second as he got the call from the bridge that The Shadow had overheard the expected transmission. A minute later, Wesley was in the command center and took the captain’s chair, ordering Sonik to pick up the ion trails of the fake ‘Klingon’ ship, and to follow it. On the main view screen, he saw Kor’s ships and the Lexington spring to life, too. And then they were on their way to the unknown hideout of the Orion pirates where the survivors of the delegation were to be sold into slavery – five cloaked D6 Birds-of-Prey, The Shadow’s Santa Dominica, the Lexington, and the scout – all ships unreadable by sensors because of their different, yet useful enhanced technology.

“Let’s begin this crazy dance,” Wesley whispered while his hands tightened around the armrests, grim determination on his face.

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“This is absolutely and utterly crazy!” Leonard McCoy balanced himself on his toes while he stood beside the center seat on the bridge, staring at the main screen which showed the asteroid on which Gamma 12 was built.

Scotty had worked one more miracle – last but not least with Khan’s and Keenser’s help. During the latter part of the shift, they had been able to increase the warp core’s output to enable the Enterprise to speed up to Warp 4.8, even if all control lamps were ‘blinkin’ like a damn Christmas-tree’, as Scotty had put it.
It was later now, and Jim had been in medbay when he got the report that they were about to reach the station. Kirk had been happy to learn that Sulu had woken up, and the captain had visited him as soon as was possible. The helmsman was still weak and had trouble remembering what had happened when part of his console had exploded during the battle a few days ago, but McCoy assured everyone that Hikaru would recover soon and even would be back to his handsome appearance after a further surgery. As Kirk reported the news about Sulu’s improved condition to the command crew, he had seen broad smiles everywhere – except for on Spock, of course. But the Vulcan’s gaze had turned softer and his comment of “This is very satisfying news” was a kind of ‘whoop’ for a Vulcan.

Jim smiled, too, and not only because of Sulu’s good news. He was grateful that all of his friends had decided to deny themselves some well-earned sleep and supported him in this not-so-legal mission. Chekov was at the navigation station, but was ready to go to the transporter room to use his incredible skills and knowledge of transporter techniques to steal the Augments right out from under Styles’ nose. Bones had readied bio-scanners and med-scanners to locate and later to check on the Augments and their condition; his staff had declared its support too. Spock was still at the science station, but he and Scott would beam to the facility together with Kirk and Khan as soon as the way was free for them.

Most of the senior officers had no reason to risk their careers let alone their lives for the former dictator, yet they would do it – because it was the right thing to do. And for the man in command gold who had already given his life once for them and would do it again if necessary. And they did it for the Augment, too, who had faced pain and terror beyond imagination.

Even Spock, who would deny till he was green in the face that he was able to feel something like compassion, wanted to spare the super-human any more anguish. And of course this had nothing to do about feeling guilty for his trick of last year which had contributed to that anguish. After all, ‘guilty’ was an emotion, yet Spock knew all too well the agony someone went through while watching his family – his entire race – being killed. Khan had been through that experience not once, but two times, and Spock wanted to prevent the enhanced man having to endure that a third time. Even he, a Vulcan, would break at such a thing. Therefore, the first officer would do anything in his power to aid in the recovery of the other Augments.

Several hours ago, Jim had urged Khan to get some sleep, or to eat something at least, but to no avail. Nien hadn’t been able to lie down or eat more than one bite, and Jim completely understood what drove his beloved: fear, worry, joy, and so much uncertainty. How often had Khan thought he’d finally got his family to safety, only to lose them again? Twice he even believed them dead. How often had he hoped to be able to finally offer them some peace and a chance to live a life in safety? Jim knew that these hopes hadn’t just begun with the launch of the Botany Bay more than two hundred and sixty years ago, but with the day as the barely-grown Noonien Singh had fled from the labs and vanished with his brothers and sisters in the turbulent world of Asia. Jim was very aware of the fact that it would shatter Nien utterly if something went wrong now – and therefore was tense like never before.
While the uncommon allies in the Borderland secretly followed the slaver and the Romulans, the *Enterprise* was about to reach the facility 5.2 hours earlier than scheduled, which meant that the *Excalibur* and the force Luengo had sent were still more than two hours away.

The tension on the bridge had grown thick within the last few minutes. The CMO turned his glance away from the screen and looked down at his friend and captain. “You really think you can simply waltz in there, send the scientists and security up to the base, and search for Khan’s crew while Scotty overrides their security measures?”

“Yes, something like that,” Jim nodded.

“Crazy – I already said it!” Leonard grumbled.

Kirk groaned. “Bones, the *Excalibur* and the two other ships are still out there! We’ve got more than two hours to finish this mission. That’s enough time –”

“Do I have to tell how many things could go wrong?”

Jim looked at the overly-straight posture of his mate, who had taken the helm again, and shot McCoy a glare. “No, you don’t have to, but we’re in a better position at the moment than we’d thought we’d be, so enough of your pessimism.” His look pointed at Khan and then back to the CMO, who finally got the message and snapped his mouth shut. At the same moment the Augment went rigid and gasped quietly.

Khan felt something – a soft tugging at the edge of his consciousness, familiar and so terribly missed for over a year now. He turned his perception inward, heard the faint wordless whispers deep in his soul, the soft brushes of other beings – so dear, so loved! A lump rose in his throat as he felt the presence of his brothers and sisters becoming stronger and stronger as the distance between them and he melted with every second the *Enterprise* raced nearer to Gamma 12.

“Nien?” Jim’s soft voice brought him back to the present, yet Khan couldn’t prevent the shiver that slid beneath his skin.

“They are here,” he said hoarsely, before he turned his chair around. He looked straight at his mate, trembling without realizing it. “They are here – I can sense them,” he whispered in awe, while his pulse sped up. For a moment, his sight became blurry and he hastily blinked the moisture from his
eyes; not only had his heart and soul felt it, but his whole body reacted to the growing proximity to
his family.

Jim’s gaze was fixed on Nien and took in the Augment’s widened damp eyes, which spoke of the
wild emotions which had flared up within Khan. It washed over their mental link and hit Kirk with
shocking strength: joy, relief, and hope. So much hope! It was overwhelming in its intensity, and Jim
found himself shiver with the sheer power of it.

“We’ll get them,” he said quietly, happy that at least this was part of the trap that would succeed.
Nien’s family was here and Jim wouldn’t rest until he had the men and women aboard. He smiled at
Khan, who nodded while gulping. Then Jim turned and addressed Uhura, who had taken over the
gamma shift, too. “Hail Gamma 12, Lieutenant and tell them that they should be ready to be beamed
over.”

“Aye, Captain,” Nyota replied professionally, yet she smiled a little bit. You didn’t need to be soul-
bonded to the enhanced man to recognize the storm of joy and relief that coursed within him.
“Captain, I have the commander of Gamma 12 on the line. He wants to speak with you,” she
reported a moment later, and Kirk suppressed a sigh.

“On the screen, Lieutenant.”

The picture of the asteroid vanished and was replaced by the face of a man about the same age as
Kirk. He was broader than the captain, had bright green eyes, short ash-blond hair, and a cynical
expression around a hard mouth. He wore the grey uniform of ground personnel; the red stripe at his
collar revealed him as a member of the Elite Security Unit that was answerable only to Starfleet
Command.

Yet what shocked Kirk wasn’t the fact that the commander of a high-security scientific facility
belonged to the top unit of the red-shirts, but rather the identity of said commander. “Sean
Finnegan?” he burst out, not trusting his eyes.

The man on the screen gave him a slow grin full of mockery. “In flesh and person, Captain Kirk.”
He shook his head. “You, and your being a captain – the universe never fails to surprise me. I never
thought that we would meet again under these circumstances.” He bent forwards and looked into the
camera with a piercing glare. “I still owe you one for the last little incident in the Academy’s
commissary, Jimmy-boy. What was it you put into my coffee? Chili?”

Kirk had caught himself and schooled his features, masking his shock of seeing the face an old
schoolmate who’d been the worst bully of the whole Academy, and who had turned the lives of the
students – and especially Jim’s – into a living hell. “Among other things – a small payback for your cowardly ambush on the campus the prior evening which gave my doctor a lot of patching up to do. Again,” he replied coolly.

“Oh, come on, Jimmy-boy.” The commander feigned sympathy. “You always loved a good old bar-brawl. And after starting one only three days before and leaving me to be caught by the authorities, you should have anticipated a little revenge.”

“A bar-brawl you started by hitting on a girl you didn’t even care about who was with her fiancé.” Jim pretended to think about it for a second, before he continued, “Oh, wait, that wasn’t it. Sorry, my mistake. Of course, you took care of the poor lad by knocking him out and by trying to carry the young lady away like a sack of potatoes.” He leant back in his chair. “I may have grown up on a farm, but at least I have enough manners to leave an engaged woman alone – or to defend her against a bastard like you!”

“Tsk, tsk, Captain, such words are improper for a man in your position. To offend another officer is –”

“I’m only stating facts, Commander, nothing more!” Jim interrupted him icily. “I don’t understand how someone could promote you into this corps, but then again, the task they’ve given you speaks for itself. How exciting is it to sit on a rock in deep space and watch over some old documents and tubes?”

Finnegan’s face hardened. “You have no clue what I really watch over – or maybe you do?” There was something furtive in his eyes which made the young captain wary. ‘He’s been informed and instructed by Section 31!’ shot through his mind. ‘He knows what I’m really up to.’ He smiled inwardly. ‘Right, let the games begin!’

Aloud he replied, “Of course I know what you have the honor of watching over. I got a list from Command, and as it seems there are only a few things Command regards as important enough to save, while everything else is to be sent into the abyss.” He bent forwards again. “So, get the scientists, your crew, and yourself ready to be beamed up and –”

“Jimmy, you’re five hours early, so we aren’t –”

“We are 5.1493 hours ahead of the estimated schedule, Commander,” Spock cut in while he rose and stepped to the other side of the command chair. “And regarding Command’s thoughtfulness, you were certainly informed that our time of arrival might possibly be earlier, dependent on our drives’ repair status.” Spock’s face was always (more or less) expressionless, and his deep voice was always
calm, and words well-enunciated. But just now, the Vulcan tone was stony and his voice icy enough to rival the temperature at the North Pole. His eyes – usually a warm dark brown – were black and hard as obsidian, while he stood tall beside the captain’s chair.

On the other side, McCoy had straightened his own posture, expression and glance firm. Both men resembled two bodyguards, flanking their captain and friend with a mute message: don’t come near him!

Nien sensed the tension and the deep dislike Jim held for the man on the screen, and after their first exchange, the Augment realized that the two younger men were rivals – old school rivals. That wouldn’t make this endeavor any easier, rather the opposite.

Finnegan looked at the Vulcan and snorted, “Commander Spock – from a junior tutor to a first officer. Nice career,” he taunted, before he returned his attention to Jim. “As I tried to tell you before your second in command forgot protocol and interrupted me, we expected you later and are not finished packing up the base. Therefore –”

“I’ll send some people down to help you pack the bigger equipment you seemed to have brought with you. Understandable that you might need a lot of suitcases and packing crates. Security uniforms – even those of the elite unit – aren’t as stylish as a tux given the high society parties which are thrown every week on this little outpost here,” Kirk mocked. Inwardly he knew exactly what Finnegan was up to – he was trying to buy time. Oh yes, the old bully was an executive toy of Section 31, no doubt about it.

Deep frown lines appeared on Finnegan’s forehead. “You’ve become cynical, Jimmy-boy. Maybe that’s all that’s left after –” He stopped and turned around, while in the background another voice sounded. Sean rolled his eyes. “Yes, Doctor, it’s the Enterprise. They’re earlier than expected –” He stopped as someone stepped beside him and bent down into the range of the cameras. It was a man in his fifties, with red-brown hair that showed the first hints of silver, a small moustache, and clear, challenging eyes.

“Captain Kirk? I’m Doctor Anthony Green, Chief Scientist on Gamma 12. We were informed that you’d up our staff, valuable documents and test objects, and would destroy the station afterwards. May I voice my open protest against these measures? Gamma 12 is –”

“Doctor, I’m sorry to interrupt you,” Jim cut in, quickly lifting a hand. “But the decision to evacuate and to destroy Gamma 12 was made by Starfleet Command, not by me. I’m only following orders.”

“Those orders are foolish and would spell disaster, Captain. We are not just here keeping an eye on
scientific waste or scrap paper, we’re also guarding experimental results, testing them for important outcomes which could be valuable someday to the Federation. To destroy it all –”

Jim felt the rising tension and rage in Khan, and felt himself becoming sick at the awareness that maybe these Dr. Frankensteins were experimenting on the unconscious Augments. To prevent any outburst from his mate and taking no risk of showing his own deep disgust, Kirk interrupted the doctor again – sternly and harshly. “You are free to voice your protest to the Council in due time, Doctor, but right now I must insist that you and your colleagues prepare to be beamed over. I have no time to waste, Doctor, and need to return you to Earth before I can travel back to where my ship is really needed. We are still at war, the ceasefire could end at any minute. Therefore Starfleet’s flagship will be needed on the line, not as a passenger cruiser.” He straightened his shape. “Please lower your shields. I’ll come down with my science officer, a technician and a security detail to ensure that everything is in order, then we’ll return to the ship – preferable within the next half hour, so please hurry up.”

Green was anything than satisfied with Jim’s cold statements and even commanding tone he used, but he knew that he couldn’t change the situation. “I’ll give you the coordinates where to beam to, and give order to lower the shields. Gamma 12 out.”

A second later the screen showed the asteroid and the stars again. Jim didn’t realize that his hands had balled into tight fists before he rose and looked at Uhura. “Transfer the coordinates to the transporter room.” He glanced at Khan. “Nien, it’s time to change your shirt,” he said and the Augment nodded.

Bending down, Khan retrieved a security department uniform top from under the console, pulled off the gold one he wore, and slipped into the red one. He and Jim had come up with the idea during the morning. It would have raised too much suspicion if someone in command gold besides Kirk appeared on the station, whereas a security officer would be expected on such a mission.

Jim smiled, satisfied, before he smoothed down his own shirt. “Spock, Bones, Nien – with me. Uhura? You’ve got the conn. Chekov, call someone to cover navigation. I want you in charge of Transporter Room 1. As soon as we’ve found Nien’s people, we need to get them out as quickly as possible – and I trust you the most for this job.”

The young Russian blushed and threw a quick uncertain glance at Spock, who returned the gaze calmly and lifted a brow. “Your skill at enhanced transporter technics are excellent, Ensign,” he said quietly. “I’ve no doubt that you will fulfill the task with brilliance.”

Something close to relief washed over Pavel’s face. He still felt guilty that he hadn’t been able to beam Spock’s mother aboard in time before Vulcan was destroyed. The Vulcan had told him not one, but three times that these feelings of guilt were illogical and that he held not the slightest grudge
against the young human. Yet Chekov knew that he could have done better. He had beamed up Kirk
and Sulu when they were in free-fall, and caught them in time, just before they were smashed against
the planet’s surface. He wished that he could have done the same for Lady Amanda.

Quickly, he contacted Riley and saw from the corner of his eye how the captain tensed up, and
looked at him with widening eyes. “Mr. Chekov, did you just call Kevin Riley?”

“Yes, Keptin,” Pavel nodded. “He had ze day off and told me zat he would be glad to help if I’d
need him zis evening.”

Jim frowned. “Did you tell him why we’re here?”

“Of course, Keptin. I told him zat we have to evacuate a security facility and zat you might need me
in ze transporter room. So he offered to –”

Kirk made curt gesture, half-snorting, half-grinning. Of course Pavel Chekov had already assumed
that he would be needed for his transporter skills, and of course would choose someone to take his
station during those minutes off-schedule. All this – the changed shifts, the privately chosen
substitutes, the whole mission – broke so much protocol and so many general orders that every staff
officer in Starfleet Command would probably faint if it ever came to light, but Jim was grateful for
the fierce loyalty his friends showed once more in their actions.

“Well done, Whizzy,” he said, inadvertently creating a new nickname for Chekov, who snickered.
Then Jim headed for the turbolift, where Spock, Bones, and Nien already waited for Pavel and him.
A moment later they were on their way to the transporter room. None of them knew what the next
two hours would bring…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, who had anticipated that the one Jim knew from his time at the Academy could be
Finnegan? I absolutely loved the episode in which this really mean guy with the manner
of a spoiled child challenges our Jim over and over again, until Kirk simply surrenders
to the long-time desire for a pay-back (and both are combating that even Spock can only
shake his head – lol). I had to bring this character in the story, and as you certainly
assume: He’ll be trouble. A hell of trouble!

I also loved to write the scenes between Bob and Kor, and – of course – of Prime Spock. He is an excellent computer-expert and has the knowledge of future programming. It’s no wonder that he’s able to even hack into today’s Starfleet data-bank (and that Spock not always played by the rules is well-known, *snicker*).

In the next chapter the recovery of the Augments begins – and it’s another kind of battle Jim and Nien are used to until now. I don’t want to reveal too much, but they’re going to face a bundle of hindrances while they’re running out of time.

I hope you loved the new chapter and – as always – I’m absolutely curios what you think of it.

Have a nice rest of the weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
The Set Up

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Yes, this is already a new installment. Nurse Darry is outdoing herself with beta-reading (thank you so much, Darry!) and therefore you can already read the next chapter.

Finally our friends have found the other Augments, but nothing goes ever as planned. More I didn’t want to reveal.

Thank you for all the feedback,

Have fun with the new chapter

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 57 – The Set Up

The Enterprise team, consisting of Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Khan, Scott, Giotto, and six further security personnel, had barely materialized on Gamma 12 before they faced a sour-looking Dr. Green, two other scientists (given their white clothing), and a sneering Sean Finnegan, wearing the dark Elite Security uniform, accompanied by six of his own people.

Kirk straightened his posture and, ignoring Finnegan completely, offered his hand to Anthony Green. “James Kirk,” he said, introducing himself before gesturing towards his companions. “Commander Spock, my science and first officer, Dr. McCoy, my CMO, Commander Scott, my chief engineer and Lieutenant Commander Giotto with a few of his staff.”

Green nodded shortly. “Gentlemen, welcome to Gamma 12 – even if the pleasure will be short-lived. In two or three hours, this asteroid will not exist anymore.”

Jim gave him one of his ‘diplomatic smiles’, as McCoy called this polite and pleasing expression on his friend’s face that didn’t reach his eyes. “I’m certain that we’ll make it sooner, Doctor. As I already explained, I’m in hurry.”
“And why is this so, Jimmy-boy?” Finnegan cut in. “Do you have your own businesses to attend to?”

“If you mean Starfleet business, yes,” Kirk replied icily. “And as for you, Commander, it’s Captain Kirk, and nothing else. Have I made myself clear?”

Sean stared at him and was taken aback at the icy glare of the younger man, then realized he had no other choice than to obey. “Aye, sir.”

Jim nodded. “At ease, Commander.” With that, he turned away, but Finnegan stopped him one more time. “Sir, one question. Why do you have your CMO with you? None of us is ill and –”

Kirk turned around sharply. “‘Every person who has lived for more than ten days in isolation has to be medically checked before he or she is allowed to board a Starfleet vessel’ – Order 68b, Commander. First year stuff at the Academy. But maybe you were too distracted with planning new pranks than listening to the instructor.” He briskly turned away, giving Finnegan the cold shoulder.

McCoy stepped forwards, addressing Green. “Where can I run a short medical check on you and all the other people aboard?” Yes, regulations suggested such a measurement but it wasn’t absolutely necessary. Yet this procedure gave Bones the best chance to scan for the Augments in secret and to check them before they were beamed aboard.

The scientist sighed. “Would the mess hall be all right? It’s not that large but nearby and we all fit into it.”

Bones nodded. “This would be perfect. Please inform your colleagues that they need to gather there in five minutes.”

Green nodded and went to the intercom.

Kirk had listened to the short exchange before addressing Scotty now. “Commander, please check where best we can target three or four of detonators which will ensure the destruction begins in the inner station. Then our ship’s phasers will not have so much work to take care of the rest. I think one in Engineering and one in the lab would be a good start.” He glared shortly at Finnegan. “I’m certain that Commander Finnegan will show you around. And, by the way, make certain that the shields are all down so that I don’t have to waste valuable phaser-energy to blow the station to bits.”
Sean went rigid. “The shields have to stay up until all specified items are safely aboard your ship and –”

“And how shall I beam them up and the explosives down with the shields in place?” Jim snapped. “We scanned the sector before we arrived. No Klingons in sensor range, so don’t fret about someone trying to rob your valuable stuff. The shields will remain down so that we can do our work. End of discussion!”

He looked at the Vulcan, missing how Finnegan’s hand touched a small switch on his belt. “Mr. Spock, as soon as Dr. McCoy is done with Dr. Green, ask him to accompany you to the science area so that he can show you what I’m about to take on board my ship. I won’t take any –” He didn’t get further as suddenly an alert blared.

“What the hell?!” Kirk gasped, while Finnegan’s communicator chirped.

“Yes?” Sean snapped the moment he opened the little device.

“Commander, we have an emergency in Engineering. It seems generator 2 is giving us new trouble.”

Jim exchanged a quick glance with Spock and Scotty, while Green asked, “One of our generators isn’t working perfectly?” He stared at Finnegan. “I wasn’t informed about that.”

Sean inwardly rolled his eyes. “We thought we had everything under control and didn’t want to worry you. After all, those problems first occurred only two days ago and the station will be evacuated soon. But now –”

“Commander!” the voice from the communicator called. “The emergency program was automatically activated. All shields are up.”

At the same moment Kirk’s own communicator signaled an incoming call. “Kirk here!”

“Chekov here. Keptin, our sensors tell zat ze shields are up again. I cannot beam anyone or anyzing aboard!”
Jim’s gaze hung at Finnegan – a bad feeling awoke in him. “We’re working on the problem, Mr. Chekov. Remain on stand-by!”

“Aye, Keptin!”

Kirk let his communicator sink to his side and stared hard at Finnegan. First the scientists weren’t finished packing their stuff – and they had had more than three days to do so. And now there was a malfunction with one of the generators that prevented Kirk from evacuating the station in the next few hours – hours during which the *Excalibur* would come nearer and eventually arrive before Kirk was done at Gamma 12. There was a certain gleam in Finnegan’s eyes. Jim had no doubt now. This delay – both delays – had been caused by his old school-rival. And that could mean only one thing. Finnegan knew Kirk’s true intentions. And how did Finnegan know? Luengo and Section 31. Sean had been instructed by them to hold Kirk at bay until the *Excalibur* arrived and Styles could arrest the Enterprise’s senior officers. And Finnegan would *love* watching the whole procedure.

Well, Jim wasn’t one to give in quietly – he *never* quit!

“As it seems, you have a problem here, Commander,” he said almost casually. “It’s really fortunate that I brought along one of the best engineers in the whole fleet.” He turned around towards his officers. “Scotty, please be so kind as to help the boys with this generator. I’m certain that a real engineer will have the problem solved in a very short time.”

The Scotsman nodded, but Finnegan raised his voice. “I’m not allowed to let anyone into the control room of the facility. Therefore –”

“Lad, this station will be shred ter pieces in one or two hours,” Montgomery interrupted him kindly. “There’s really no reason ter play Fort Knox here.”

“’Fort Knox’?” Green asked confused, and Kirk rolled his eyes. “The former gold depository of the United States before the Federation was founded,” he informed the scientist, while he listened with one ear to the rising discussion between his chief engineer and Finnegan.

“I have my orders, Commander Scott, and you will not lead me into insubordination. My men will sort the problem and –”

“I think ye didn’t understand the capt’n,” Scotty interrupted him impatiently. “We’ve absolute no
time ter waste because we’re needed at the Neutral Zone. But first we have ter give ye a ride ter Earth, so we’re in hurry! I’ll look at what I can do fer yer generator and then –”

“I’ll not allow you to –”

“Stop!” Jim had had enough! “I’m not only the highest ranking officer here, but also responsible for the evacuation. Therefore, I’m in charge and I order you, Commander Finnegan, to show Mr. Scott to Engineering and let him fix the problem you obviously weren’t able to within the last two days!” He raised his voice as Finnegan was about to protest. “That’s an order!”

For a long moment both men stared at each other, and while Jim’s eyes were most piercing, those of Sean could barely hide the hate. “If you insist,” the Irishman growled.


Sean seemed to be ready to explode. “Yes, sir!” he saluted, face flushed, and walked stiffly out of the room, Scotty on his heels.

Jim took a deep breath. God, how much did he loathe this guy! Feeling a soothing emotional wave radiating from Nien, he calmed down and gave his mate a short smile. He sensed the incredible tension within the Augment, yet Khan had found some time and strength to comfort him. ‘He’s a miracle,’ Jim thought, with a wave of love directed back, before he addressed his CMO.

“Doctor, please check Dr. Green first so that he can accompany Mr. Spock to the hold with the cargo we’ve to take aboard. I want to learn exactly what we’re bringing on board my ship.”

Green cleared his throat. “Captain, I can assure you that there is nothing dangerous within the containers, but –”

Kirk turned towards him. “This is a high-security facility for God’s sake! You’re officially declared as an unmanned transmission station, yet you stock stuff obviously dangerous enough that Command would rather see everything destroyed than taking the risk that it could fall into Klingon hands. So don’t tell me there’s ‘nothing dangerous’, because that’s a load of bullshit. You will inform me in detail what you’re transporting to the Enterprise’s cargo bay, or you and the others will be evacuated without the damned stuff! Your choice!” Kirk said sharply; his blue eyes narrowed to dangerous gleaming slits.
Green frowned. “You are certainly familiar enough with General Orders that no staff officer has the right to demand data about top secret in –”

“I’m the captain of the Enterprise, and as such I have every right to decide what concerns the safety of my ship,” Jim interrupted him with a hard tone. “Even the president wouldn’t have a say in it – and you’re not even a politician. So show my science officer what we’re beaming up.” His voice could have cut stone. “That’s an order!”

The scientist was clearly irritated, but nodded hesitantly.

Spock bowed his head towards a very angry Kirk. “I will escort Dr. McCoy and Dr. Green to the mess hall, then check the containers, Captain,” he said and looked at the scientist. “Please show us the way, Doctor.”

The man nodded. “Follow me, Commander, Doctor.” The three men left.

Jim caught his Vulcan friend’s gaze before the door closed behind him, and knew that Spock would use the opportunity to search for the high security wing and the Augments – despite Finnegan and his elite troop. Well, Jim and his friends would thwart Finnegan’s and Section 31’s plans!

Determined, Kirk turned around. “Giotto, take your men and make certain that all personnel are ready to be beamed over within the next thirty minutes. I’m certain that Scotty will have solved the problem by then. And if someone forgot to pack his undies, then it’s his problem!”

His security chief grinned. “Aye, sir!”

Jim nodded. “Officer Singh, you stay with me.” he said and addressed one of the last four remaining Securities of the station. “I want to have a quick general view of the rooms – collecting information on where best to fire. Please show us around, Ensign!”

The young man hesitated, but one quick look in Kirk’s icy eyes and he gulped before nodding. He was only twenty three and the hero of the Federation stood in front of him. Of course he would show the captain around. With a “Please follow me, sir,” he headed out of the room. Kirk and Khan followed him.
A quarter of an hour later most of the scientists were summoned to the mess hall where McCoy
cHECKED them using his med-scanner, not only to examine them but also to scan the area for reduced
life-signs. He had had the Augments aboard last year and had gathered a lot of data about them – for
example, their bio-signals were reduced to a level no ordinary scanner would be able to locate. But if
one knew what to search for, they could be located. Bones had adjusted his med-scanner in this
manner, yet he found nothing. Wherever Khan’s crew was being held the room had to be shielded,
because that was the only explanation for why the CMO hadn’t received the expected signals.

Smiling at one of the Security guards, he hailed Kirk ten minutes later. “Jim? I’ve checked them all.
My med-scanner is satisfied with all the data on the scientists and the security personnel,” he drawled
causally – meaning ‘the people are healthy, but my instruments don’t register the Augments’. And
Jim knew exactly the reason for it: the cryotubes were indeed in a shielded section of the facility –
shaids which were still raised because of the emergency program kicking in after the ‘malfunction’
of one of the generators. Kirk had to admit Finnegan was clever.

“Understood, Doc. I’m still on my tour of the place with Officer Singh. Please report to Mr. Spock
so that he knows the evacuation can begin as soon as Mr. Scott has found the problem with the
generator.”

Bones smiled inwardly. Kirk’s answer meant ‘Nien and I are continuing our search, Spock will be
on standby’.

“Aye, Captain,” Leonard replied, and changed the frequency of his communicator. “McCoy to
Spock.”

“Spock here,” came the instant reply.

“The captain says you should begin the evacuation after Mr. Scott is done with his work. The people
are all okay.”

“Where is the captain?”

“Still looking through the station, checking the layout for the planned destruction.”

He could just imagine how the Vulcan lifted a brow as he analyzed the coded message that meant
‘The Augments haven’t been found yet’. 
“Affirmative, Doctor. Spock out.”

What had sounded like a usual exchange of reports and orders was, in truth, the beginning of Step Two of the plan.

In the meantime, Scott was busy in Engineering. The station’s power was fed by two generators, of which one was responsible for the power supply to the cargo holds and deflector shields. And it was this one which was giving the Scotsman trouble, as Spock called him and told him that McCoy was done with checking the scientists and the security personnel, and that they were ready to beam them aboard the Enterprise as soon as the shields were down. In other words, the CMO hadn’t been able to locate the Augments by scanner. The logical deduction was that the hold containing them was indeed shielded, just as Jim and Khan had thought. And that meant if Scotty wasn’t able to solve the problem soon, they’d be caught by the Excalibur. Also, the Augments would be unable to be located, and therefore couldn’t be rescued – something the Scotsman wouldn’t accept. Despite anything Khan had done (in anger or desperation or not), his people were innocent. Scotty wouldn’t watch seventy-two men and women die, no matter what! His humanity and his Scottish soul wouldn’t allow it.

In other words, it was about time to take drastic measures.

Montgomery looked over his shoulder at the generator on which two technicians were working, while Finnegan leaned against a wall, arms crossed in front of his chest, and glaring daggers at the chief engineer. Scotty gave him one of his sunny smiles and rose from his seat.

He had checked everything through on the computer and the control units at the console. It was as if the generator had been robbed of its switch-off function – as if that part of the program had never existed. And for Scotty that stunk of sabotage.

‘Ye want ter keep us here ‘til Section 31’s lackey – Styles – is here? Not with me here, ye don’t, lad. Ye’ve ter rise earlier in the mornin’ to outsmart me!’ he thought and neared the generator, feeling Finnegan’s gaze on his back. Standing in front of the device, he planted his fists against his waist and cocked his head.

“Ye want ter keep us here ‘til Section 31’s lackey – Styles – is here? Not with me here, ye don’t, lad. Ye’ve ter rise earlier in the mornin’ to outsmart me!’ he thought and neared the generator, feeling Finnegan’s gaze on his back. Standing in front of the device, he planted his fists against his waist and cocked his head.

“Ye want ter keep us here ‘til Section 31’s lackey – Styles – is here? Not with me here, ye don’t, lad. Ye’ve ter rise earlier in the mornin’ to outsmart me!’ he thought and neared the generator, feeling Finnegan’s gaze on his back. Standing in front of the device, he planted his fists against his waist and cocked his head.

“The blasted thing simply doesn’t understand our orders,” one of the technicians said, confused. Scotty was convinced that the young man hadn’t a clue what was going on. He wasn’t the type of man who would work for a shadow department which worked on the wrong side of legal.
“Yes, that detail has been deleted from the program. The self-diagnostic the security system runs every hour found the malfunction and activated the emergency program that is in operation now and canna be stopped ‘til the error has been removed. The problem is that ter re-program the generator, you’ve ter shut it down which is impossible because of the active emergency program. The cat bites its own tail, so ter say.”

The other technician looked at him. “What should we do?”

Scott’s gaze wandered over the cable connections between this generator, the second one, and the main power unit that supplied the stored energy to the station and the shield functions. An absolutely crazy idea formed in his head. He glanced back at Finnegan, who still stared at him as if he wished a hole would open in the ground to swallow Scott whole, and smiled. “I’ve ter check somethin’ first,” Montgomery answered, giving a half-truth to make the security chief believe that the problem was still quite a big one – which wasn’t the case. In truth, the solution was very simple.

Scotty pressed himself between the two generators and slipped behind the one which was giving them trouble. Murmuring about an irrelevant connection to mask his true intentions, he crouched down, opened a part of the cover, and smiled inwardly. He could see many cables, relays, and valves but one connection was the only important one, and Scott searched for it for half a minute before he found it. Bingo! This would be easier than he’d thought.

Reaching into the device, his right hand closed around the thick cable and he pulled with all his might. At first it didn’t move, but Scotty could be stubborn as a mule – just like his friend and captain – and not giving in ‘ter a damn buzzin’ bucket’ he pulled and dragged until the cable gave way. Sparks flew through the air, energy overloads and shorts popped and hissed – and Montgomery jumped back at the very last second, as a small flame shot from the interrupted connection. Then the generator made a sound like an angry lion before its control lamps died. The lights in the station at the other side of the wall began to light up like a Christmas tree and alerts blared through the room. Yet Scott only grinned in triumph as he left the small space and returned to join the other technicians.

One of them was already at the console, the other waited for Scott, while Finnegan snarled, “What have you done!?” It was more of a demand than a question.

Casually Scotty picked away a bit of broken plastic from his sleeve, and brushed over his uniform top, while he shrugged, “I pulled the plug!”

“You did what?” Sean raged and Montgomery gave him another sunny, very innocent smile.

“I pulled the plug out of the socket – or rather, I cut the connection between the generator and the
dispenser unit that feeds power ter the shields.” He pulled out his communicator and really – really! – wished Kirk could see the guy’s face right now. Scotty knew that Jim would love the dumfounded, shocked, and stupid expression on his old school rival’s visage!

“Scott ter Kirk!” he hailed is captain and a few seconds later received a response.

“Kirk here!”

“Cap’n, the problem’s solved; the shields are down.”

“Bravo, Scotty! What was the malfunction?”

“An error in the program. I shortened the repair by cuttin’ the connection between the generator and the dispenser unit. Brutal, but an easy fix.”

He heard Kirk chuckling while in the background, an amused snort from a deep baritone voice could be heard. Of course Khan would go with Kirk. Those two were really inseparable now!

“Good job, Mr. Scott. Please accompany the technicians to the agreed meeting point for beaming. Kirk out!”

Scott pocketed the communicator and headed for the door. “Gentlemen, ye heard the captain. Off ye go.”

Finnegan still stared at the chief engineer. He had anticipated that Scott would find a solution to the problem, but not that quickly! Dammit, this turn of events left him in a bad situation. One look at his chronometer showed that he had bought only 35 minutes time for the Excalibur – too little. Far too little! Swearing inwardly, he followed the others, damming the Scotsman into the next year.

With Generator 2 being down, all security shields were offline now – and therefore also the shields around the whole area where the cryotubes with the human test subjects were placed. It was just as well that the hall which held the tubes was encased with a scan-proof material. No tricorder would be able to locate the tubes, and Sean was certain that Kirk would try that first.
For a moment Finnegan recalled the personal message he received three days prior from none other than Admiral Luengo, interim Chief in Command:

‘Kirk has gone rogue; success has gone to his head. He plans to ally himself with the Augments in your hold, and will try to free them, but we need to catch him red-handed to have proof of his intentions for the Council and the court material. I’ve already taken measures. The Excalibur is on her way for your enforcement, and shall be arrive earlier than the Enterprise. If not, it’s your duty to buy time until Captain Styles arrives there to arrest Kirk. Commander, it’s on you if more than seventy Augments end up roaming freely through the galaxy, trying to take over the Federation with Kirk as their supporter. If Kirk arrives before Styles can reach you, do anything in your power to hinder him from freeing the Augments. You have my permission to use all necessary force to stop him. I repeat: all necessary force. Whatever the outcome, you don’t have to fear any penalty, but you’ve to understand that this message has to stay to secret. Luengo out.’

Well, Kirk had arrived earlier than Styles – approximately two hours earlier, to be precise. More than a half hour had gone by now, yet the whole evacuation couldn’t last more than another half hour, then everything would be too late. The Excalibur would find only the destroyed remains of the asteroid and the facility after her arrival, and Kirk would have escaped.

No! Not with him – Sean Finnegan! He had gotten a task from the highest-ranking officer of Command and of the organization that would save the Federation in the end.

He had to find another way to keep the Enterprise – and especially Kirk – busy here until reinforcements arrived. And he would need help. Two of his men were utterly loyal; this much he knew. He had to inform them of what was really going on, and then they would act!

ST***ST

While Scotty, McCoy, and Spock were busy, Kirk and Khan roamed the facility, led by two members of the station’s security team. Jim pretended to only be interested in the locations which would lead to the most effective destruction when a torpedo detonated there, but in truth, his concentration was fixed on the super-human.

Nien walked beside him, acting as if his only concern was his captain’s safety, but his whole being – his mind, his heart, and soul– reached out for his family. He could sense them, could hear the mental whispers inside his mind, yet he was unsure where they were. The energetic waves of the facility’s many interior shields tickled his skin, wriggled along his nerves, and confused his usually-infallible instincts.
As the two security officers were about to open another airlock which led to one of the labs, Jim bent towards his mate. “Do you still feel them?” he whispered. “Can you sense where they are?”

“I am aware of their presence, yet the energy fluctuations of the shields are –”

He stopped suddenly as the uncomfortable prickle along his nerves faded away, and he was overwhelmed with the strong presence of his family. Even before Kirk’s communicator signaled an incoming hail, and Scott told them about the successful lowering of the shields, the Augment knew the reason for the lack of irritating tickling. Joy spread through his whole being, yet he needed to remain level-headed. Usually this would have been no problem for him, but after the last two years during which he’d desperately tried to free his brothers and sisters, his calmness melted away as he felt his people for the first time in more than fifteen months.

“They are nearby,” he murmured after Jim ended the quick talk with Scott. Closing his eyes Khan concentrated on the quiet whispers at the edge of his consciousness. “They are somewhere in that direction.” He pointed to the right and Jim smiled at him.

“Okay, just let’s start the evacuation, and while everyone is busy, we’ll go get your crew.” He cleared his throat and called to security team, “Gentlemen, I’ve seen enough. Let’s regroup with the others. The generator has been fixed, and the evacuation can begin now.”

“Aye, Captain!” one of his companions acknowledged, before the man added. “Sir, there is also the hangar with the two long-distance shuttles. I don’t know what Command exactly ordered, but maybe they can be saved?”

Jim cocked his head and nodded after a moment. “You’re right. There is absolutely no reason to destroy them. That would be a waste of resources. Where’s the hangar?”

The man pointed to the left. “Down this corridor, second right, then you reach the shuttle bay. Its doors are in the ceiling.”

“Okay,” Jim affirmed, an idea already formed in his head. “Ensign,” he turned his attention to the youngest man in the little team, “Go to the hangar and prepare anything there to leave. I’ll send some men over to fly the shuttles out. Head for the Enterprise, and park them in our hangar. My second engineer will pilot you.”

While the man started down the hallway to obey the order, the others began to return to the mess.
hall. Jim contacted the ship and informed Allistor of the new situation concerning the shuttles. Kirk had free hand in this matter. Command hadn’t given him any clue as what to do with the crafts, and as he thought more carefully about them, he got a very good idea of how they could benefit him.

Only three minutes later they met the others. Kirk clapped a grinning Scotty on the shoulder and hid a smirk as he saw Finnegan’s sour face. ‘Gotcha, you damned bastard!’ he thought; feeling childish satisfaction in triumphing once again over his old school rival.

Spock had already ordered the Enterprise to beam up the first two containers, and with them four of the scientists left the facility too. Green bounced between the remaining containers and luggage like a hobgoblin, demanding an affirmation that the cargo had arrived safely after its transportation – and was driving Kyle, who was serving as the cargo transporter engineer, up the wall.

Jim watched the chaos for a short time, before he addressed Finnegan. “Commander, I was informed that Gamma 12 has two long distance shuttles.”

Sean glared warily at him. “That is correct.”

“Okay. To save Command any more cost, they can be evacuated too. One of your men is already preparing the hangar. Please take four of your subordinates to the bay and fly the shuttles to the Enterprise. Commander Allistor, my second engineer, is already informed, and expects you at our hangar. Please follow his instructions concerning the landing and storing of the shuttles.”

Finnegan stared at him. He had found no opportunity yet to speak with the two most trusted men he would need to stop Kirk. And now this! Preempted! Kirk had blocked him! With this duty Finnegan would be away from the station and unable to cause further delay in order to benefit the Excalibur.

Well, perhaps not everything was lost! Another plan was already forming in the Irishman’s wicked mind. ‘You think you’re so clever, Jimmbo, but you aren’t!’ he thought. Outside, he remained calm while he saluted. “Aye, Captain. I trust that your team will take responsibility for the safety of the scientists?”


“Aye, sir?”
“You’re in charge of the security department here. Commander Finnegan is leaving us to take the station’s two shuttles to the _Enterprise._”

Giotto nodded. “Affirmative, Captain.” He saluted towards Finnegan, who returned the politeness with a casual gesture, then returned to his duty.

Sean looked at Kirk. “See you,” he said, and Jim spared himself another next round of gut-wrenching anger as he simply ignored that improper salute. He watched Finnegan and some of his men leaving the mess and breathed a long sigh. Thank the Lord he’d got that pest out of the way.

His glance found Spock’s, who lifted one of his brows in question, and nodded. That was the signal Khan had waited for. He walked over to the Vulcan, and together with McCoy, they left the mess hall. The doors closed and shut out the chaotic noise of the evacuation, and the nervous demands of Dr. Green.

Kirk watched his two friends and his mate leave, and crossed his fingers that they would gain access to the high security area without too much trouble, then returned his attention to the evacuation. During the next ten minutes ten more people and the half of the cargo beamed aboard the _Enterprise._ But the other half of the cargo, all the personal effects, nine securities personnel, eight scientists, two Red Shirts, Giotto and Mr. Scott were still within the facility. Jim’s communicator beeped.

Kirk was about to groan, knowing instinctively that this meant nothing good. “Kirk here,” he answered the hail after putting some distance between himself and the remaining men.

“Jim, there’s a little problem,” Bones’ voice whispered. “We’ve found the area, but the door that lead to it is coded. There’s no emergency handle to open it manually, no outer lock to remove – Spock’s already checked it. The display for the code is completely integrated with the bulkhead, and attempting to remove it by force – with a phaser or something like that – a failsafe will flood the whole area with gas which would render us unconscious, or even dead within seconds – even Khan. At least that’s the warning that flashes on the display when you try to destroy the damn thing.”

Kirk cursed. They had thought about everything, but not of this. Turning around to hide his anger, Jim murmured, “Can Spock or Khan decode it?”

“They’re already working on it, but can you imagine how many combinations there are to check before stumbling on the correct code?”
Now a real groan escaped Kirk. No, he didn’t need Spock’s exactly calculated odds for a success to become depressed… Yet he still wasn’t going to give up.

“The shields are all lowered. Can’t we just beam the cryotubes up?”

This time it was Spock who answered with a hushed voice, “Negative, Jim. Mr. Chekov has already tried that. The bay that holds Mr. Singh’s crew is encased with a material that does not allow for any transporter signal or scan of the area. We must open the lock and to bring every single cryotube outside the room so that they can be beamed up.”

Jim felt a headache approaching. “I’m coming to you,” he said quietly. “Where’s the bay located?”

Spock quickly gave directions and Kirk ended the communication. He turned around to Scotty. “Message from the Enterprise. Transporter Rooms 2 and 3 are functional again.”

Montgomery nodded, understanding the true message: problems with beaming up the cryotubes. Dammit! As it seemed luck just wasn’t with them today!

“Thanks for the information, Cap’n.” he said, and Jim nodded.

“I’ll just check that things are running smoothly in the hangar, Commander. Please make certain that everything is beamed up without further delay.”

Scotty made an affirming gesture and watched Kirk leave the room, while behind him, several more people were beamed away. He really, really hoped that Jim and the others would be successful. He didn’t want to think about what would happen in general – and especially with Khan – if the Excalibur arrived before the Augments were safely aboard the Enterprise.

Jim ran down several hallways, his mind busy with trying to find solutions to this new problem. He rounded a corner and saw his mate, Spock, and McCoy in front of a large two-door entranceway. Khan stood in front of the display while Spock glanced over his shoulder. Bones looked nervously at Kirk and walked over to him.

“Whatever they used to construct it, the stuff is scan-proof. I can’t receive any signals from Khan’s crew, yet our superman is absolutely certain that his people are behind this damned door!” Bones informed Kirk.
Jim took a deep breath. “Then he’ll be right. I told you about the mental connections between Augments. If he senses their presence on the other side of that door, they’re in there.”

McCoy pursed his lips. “So… I’m asking myself why Khan couldn’t recognize that the torpedoes Spock sent to the Vengeance didn’t hold the other Augments.”

“Because I sensed their presence from aboard your ship,” Nien said over his shoulder. “The Enterprise was in close proximity to the Vengeance, and I had no chance to differentiate. As the weapons exploded, both ships were hurled away. The growing distance and the pain from the injuries I’d sustained, prevented me from sensing their still-living spirits.” His ocean-colored eyes were hooded at the memories. Then they cleared. “The code is made up of six numbers, do you agree, Mr. Spock?” he asked, driving his full attention back towards the actual problem.

“Affirmative,” the Vulcan nodded. He linked two tricorders to the lock and tested both for their function, before saying, “I suggest that you try the first half of combination and I shall attempt to discover the code among the second half of possibilities.”

“Agreed,” Khan murmured and then both – Jim and Bones – watched with rising tension, how the two other men started a program that would scroll through every possible combination, testing any code that fit.

McCoy took Kirk’s arm. “Do you have the slightest clue how long it will take to find the damned code?”

Jim shook his head. “No, not really – but it could be too late by then.”

Khan didn’t listen to the quite discussion between his mate and the CMO. He even ignored the Vulcan at his side while his quick fingers worked the tricorder. This wasn’t the first time that he had needed to hack a code in order to save his people. For a moment, he became distracted as he remembered the first (and last) time the lives of other Augments depended on his ability to juggle numbers. It had been back in his time, in a locked area of the labs in New Delhi, after he and his friends had been victorious over the soldiers who had held them at their base to train them to be killers. The men had returned to the labs to recover the younger super-humans – some of whom had been mere children, yet the chief of the labs ordered their deaths after he’s learned that the Augment-teenagers had escaped and was about to storm the place they had been tormented all those years. It had been Khan who finally hacked the code that had locked the door leading to the area where the children were held – and were dying. He and the others had been able to save only four of them; one was Joaquin.
And exactly like all those decades – centuries! – ago, his little brother’s life was at risk again, and dependent on his ability to crack a code and to open a bloody door!

Jim stood near him, loathing that he was damned to do nothing other than watch and hope. Suddenly, he and the others heard a soft roar from afar and a gentle tremor ran through the floor. The two shuttles had started, and if he analyzed the remaining noises, the hangar doors were closing again. Well, at least Finnegan had taken the orders seriously. Even if the rest of the station was protected by air-locks it always was a risk when a hangar was open. Only one thing made Jim frown. Why had it taken so long for the shuttles to be prepped? Still, it didn’t pay to rush anything when preparing a craft for the vacuum of space when separated from the usual Starfleet protocols on the station.

Jim’s attention returned to his two friends and his mate. Khan’s fingers almost flew over the keys, his concentration had returned to the job at hand and had shut out everything else. He didn’t even notice when Jim hailed Scott and asked the engineer about the evacuation’s progress. Half of the station’s inhabitants and all of the cargo were now aboard the ship, yet the other half and personal effects still had to be beamed up. Kirk thanked Montgomery and closed his communicator just as Khan burst out, “I GOT IT!”

Surprised, Jim and Bones turned around towards the Augment. Several lights were blinking on the door, and a hissing sound proved that the hydraulic doors were opening. Spock lifted a brow.

“My respects, Mr. Singh. This was formidable."

At any other time, Khan would have loved to give a fitting response to this comment, but not now! For a moment he thought his heart would stop for real as the doors slid apart and he could see with the help of the automatically-activated lights the many shapes of the human-length tubes. Then his heartbeat quickened to the pace of a galloping horse, while an intense mixture of joy, relief, and something close to redemption rose in him.

There they were! His brothers and sister – his family! Finally he’d found them. Finally they were in reach. Finally he would be re-united with them. Finally he could take them to safety.

He didn’t even realize that his sight blurred for several seconds as his body functions reacted to his overwhelming emotions in an all-too-human way. Tears rose in his eyes and his throat tightened – not in anguish, but in awe. And then Jim was beside him and wrapped an arm around him, pulling him close for a moment.
“We made it! You made it!” Kirk whispered and was unable to hold himself back. In his mind he saw Nien in the apartment back in San Francisco – the moment as the Augment had learned from him that his family wasn’t dead, that they were still alive, and hidden somewhere in their endless sleep. In his mind’s eye Jim watched how the strong and proud super-human had been on his knees, his shoulders trembling, tears of relief and overwhelming agony streaking down his far-too-hollow and pale cheeks. But only now, in these seconds, as he first laid eyes on the cryotubes again, Kirk could sense how Khan now began to feel a bit of the peace he had missed, even when the two of them were together. His mate’s feelings sang over the bond like a siren’s call, and even the presence of the whole admiralty wouldn’t have stopped him from pressing a kiss to his beloved’s cheek. For a blink of an eye, Khan gave in, leaning into Jim and relaxing. Then he straightened his frame as the fighter within him awoke once more.

His family was here, yes, but far from being safe. They had to act quickly to take them away, up to the Enterprise and out of harm’s reach.

Tightening his hold on Kirk one last time, he let go of the younger man, and hurried into the large room; McCoy on his heels in an instant, med-scanner in hand. Khan stopped at the first cryotube and looked into the viewport. “Juan,” he murmured, a smile gracing his handsome face. Bones made a quick scan and nodded.

“He’s all right,” he said and saw how the former dictator visibly relaxed. “I suggest that we beam them all over to the Enterprise as quickly as possible and I’ll check on them afterwards.”

Khan nodded. “I agree.” His gaze wandered over the tube for one moment more. He was overwhelmed with the knowledge that he was re-united with his crew.

Leonard realized that Khan – enhanced or not – had become numb with relief, and so took over command.

“Okay, guys,” he called and pointed at Spock and Kirk. “There’re several ladies and gentlemen here who have booked a cruise on our ship. Let’s help them prepare for boarding.” He maneuvered around the first cryotube, loosened the brake of its carrier, and began to roll it out of the hold. “What’s the matter with you boys?” he asked, looking at Kirk and a blinking Spock. “We’re in hurry, aren’t we? So don’t expect me to write you an invitation. Get the damned job done! And Jim? Inform Chekov we’re ready to beaming them up,” McCoy added over his shoulder, as he bypassed them.

Kirk gaped at him for a second longer before rolling his eyes and grumbling, “Aye, aye, Captain McCoy.”
Bones grinned while Khan pushed the second cryotube outside of the hall. Kirk and Spock had walked into the large room hall and gathered the next two tubes, which Nien quickly peeked into to learn who lay within. He drank in any sight of another beloved face. His heart-rate would have alerted McCoy – or maybe not, after all, joy and fear could have the same effect on anyone, genetically engineered or not.

Watching Khan hurrying back into the hall, Leonard cocked his head while a thought struck him. These people had to be checked through, yes, and as soon as possible. But how long had these cryotubes been in use now? How often had they been moved? Where they still working perfectly? Were their inhabitants actually safe?

As Kirk reached him with the next tube, Bones held him back. “Jim, I think it’s the best that I store them all in the facility next to Medbay. If some of the tubes should fail, I can quickly put its occupant in stasis that way.”

Jim thought about that for a moment, and nodded. “A good idea.”

The CMO smiled, went to the corner of the opposite wall to make room for the next tubes and hailed Chekov. Quietly, he ordered him to stop the transport for a moment, before he called M’Benga, who’d been informed the mission too – after all, he did know who Khan really was. Quickly, McCoy told is colleague to switch the quarantine area from the hold the Augments were originally going to be beamed into to the new location, then talked with Pavel again, who would beam the tubes directly into the room next to Medbay. Satisfied, Leonard grinned at Kirk as the younger man pushed the next cryotube out.

From then on, the four men were busy with bringing Khan’s sleeping crew out of the scan-proof area, while Chekov beamed them in pairs up to the Enterprise and directly into the room adjoining Medbay. Yet it was a battle against time – and time was running out…

ST***ST***ST

“ETA to Gamma 12?” Styles’ voice sounded sharp. He usually spoke in a firm, almost arrogant tone, but now his tension was plain to see and to hear. Except for his two supporters on the bridge, no one knew details about the new mission they’d got. Those senior officers who had served for longer under Captain Heldron assumed it was nothing good. Since Styles had taken command of the Excalibur, something had been amiss. And after the death of the delegation, the older crew members couldn’t help but have a feeling that they had missed something very important. Yet the young man in the center seat was the captain and his orders were law.
“Forty-five minutes, sir,” the navigator Kramer answered. “Leaving warp in forty-four minutes.”

Styles only nodded and turned around to the science station. “Any sign of the Enterprise?” he asked, and the man looked surprised at him.

“The Enterprise, sir? Has she been ordered to Gamma 12 too?” He recognized how other officers on the bridge looked in surprised at their captain, too – well, most of them did.

Styles raised both brows. “I wouldn’t have asked, otherwise, Commander.” He caught a piercing glance from First Officer Thammerson and added, “I think it’s about time to fill you in our true mission.” He took a deep breath and said, “I had a message from the interim Chief in Command that Kirk has gone rogue. Intelligence has found out that he’s been using the Enterprise for his own purposes for quite some time now, but has masked it by obeying orders, up until several days ago. Intelligence has also revealed that Kirk is about to get hold of some dangerous material stored on Gamma 12, and intends to use it. Our orders are to stop him, take him and his senior officers into custody, and to return to Earth.”

He saw, how Li and Kramer looked with at each other with disbelieving expressions. “Kirk…went rogue?” the comms officer asked, dumbstruck. “I’m sorry, sir, but I just can’t imagine something like that. He –”

“His fame has gone to his head. He’d always thought himself to be the best and that rules were not made for him, but this time he’s overdone it. He also has a fugitive aboard and has given him refuge – an individual who is a wanted terrorist who has been on the run from the authorities for weeks now. Kirk is hiding him; Intelligence has proof of this. This terrorist is genetically enhanced – bred to be a fighter, and who now serves Kirk. Letting them roam free is considered a danger to the Federation. Therefore, we’re authorized to capture them – dead or alive, alive if possible. In addition, I expect reinforcement from two further ships.”

He ignored the shocked faces of the other officers and addressed his helmsman, “Wilson, leave warp at the very last moment. Commander!” he looked back at his science officer. “Scan the whole area around Gamma 12 for evidence of the Enterprise – and I want to be informed immediately as soon as you find something!”

At his station, Lieutenant Li stared at one of the displays, lost in thought. Kirk had gone rogue? The Federation’s newest hero – the man who saved Earth, won battles others would have lost, escaped Klingons and prevented that whole space station crash into a planet’s capitol city? That was as unlikely as the whole mess over the dead delegation. Li was no novice or fool. He had realized that his inexperienced captain had made mistakes during the battle within the Borderland – giving commands in the wrong order. But this was Styles’ first command, and mistakes were expected.
And it hadn’t slipped his attention that Thammerson and Wilson hadn’t been surprised at Styles’ demands about the Enterprise’s status, or his revelation concerning Kirk. They clearly already knew about these orders. Yes, it wasn’t unusual for a first officer to be informed about secret orders, but a helmsman? Wilson was only a lieutenant and new aboard, and…

And that was when it hit Li. Both men, Thammerson and Wilson, were aboard the Excalibur for the first time, exactly like Styles. Captain and first officer replaced the usual command team, Wilson had been ordered aboard after Darrison, the previous helmsman, had been transferred – the latter not at his own request.

Li watched them and saw how Wilson threw a quick glance over his shoulder at Styles. ‘As if they were communicating with each other – as if they know more but were keeping quiet about it. What the hell is going on here?’

The comms officer turned away to ensure Styles and Thammerson were unaware of his musings, yet his mind continued to race. The three acted like a well-synchronized team – but still, a team that worked outside the rest of the crew.

Something was wrong here. Li simply felt it. Something was very wrong here!

ST***ST***ST

The four men on Gamma 12 had worked for almost a quarter of an hour now, and while Jim was getting out of breath, Bones sweated like a horse after a race, Spock and Khan didn’t show any signs of tiredness. Jim returned into the cargo hall and saw Bones leaning against one of the remaining tubes, wiping his forehead and rolling his shoulders. As he caught Kirk’s questioning glance, he growled, “I’m older than you, kid, and also don’t have super-cells in me, so don’t give me that look!”

Kirk rolled his eyes. “You should go to the gym more often, Bones. It helps to build muscles and –”

“I’m a doctor, not an Olympic champion.”

Kirk loosened the brake of the next holder and began to push the cryotube. “Isn’t it you who’s always saying that sports are healthy?” he teased in McCoy’s direction, and snickered as he caught the CMO’s grimace. “It’s always the same with the doctors – ordering the patient to drink water, and drinking brandy all alone by themselves!”
“Don’t think I’ll offer you any during your next visit!” Leonard threatened. “You’ll get a hypo instead!”

Spock stepped to another tube and lifted both brows. “I suggest that both you gentlemen skip this illogical discussion and concentrate your strength on steady breathing. It helps the body functions to keep level during physical efforts.”

McCoy glared at him. “As you say, Doctor Spock!” he taunted.

Khan shook his head in quiet amusement. Those three! His gaze wandered over the remaining tubes. Fifty-eight members of his crew were already aboard – among them Katie, Otto, and Paolo – yet he still hadn’t found Joaquin. Everything in him urged him to go from tube to tube to look for his younger brother, but they were running out of time and –

“Nien, is this Joaquin?” Jim’s call distracted him.

Spock lifted a brow as he got another look at how quickly the super-human could move. In a blur of red and black, the former dictator vanished deeper into the hall, and looked down at the tube Jim was pointing at.

Khan felt how his heart almost missed a beat before another wave of utter relief and joy flooded him. There, beneath the widow in the middle of the icy mist he recognized the boyish face of the youth who was his ‘little brother’. Reaching out a tentative hand, he touched the window; a soft tremor ran through his body. “Yes,” he whispered, “this is Joaquin.”

McCoy had followed him, pulled out his med-scanner and checked the bio-signals. “He’s okay,” he said, smiling quickly at Khan before looking down at the young man – and went rigid. He knew this face. He recognized it from fifteen months ago, when he removed one of the Augments from his cryotube and put him into a stasis-chamber to make room for Jim’s dead body. He had hoped that Spock would be able to catch Khan and that the Augment’s super-blood would work its miracle on the captain as it had on the Tribble. He really didn’t want to think about how it had been Khan’s ‘younger brother’ he’d removed from the cryotube, risking the boy’s life in doing so. He hadn’t had another choice at that moment, though; he’d chosen this one because he was young and strong. Even if McCoy had known the special connection between the two super-humans, he couldn’t have cared less at this time. Jim’s life was more important than that of the genetically enhanced being.

Now everything was different. He not only had come to respect Khan, he was starting to take a
liking to the Augment. To think that the man had been a breath away from losing someone he held most dear pained Bones, and he was glad that the young super-human had weathered everything quite well.

Spock stepped to them. “Do you wish to move this cryotube next?” he asked.

Nien’s gaze still hung on the beloved face before he visibly forced his eyes away, and he nodded. “Yes.” His voice was unusual hoarse. Finally! Finally he could take the boy – barely a man – to safety; this one, who was his closest family member aside from Jim now. He couldn’t wait for the moment the cryotube would be beamed aboard and he would be notified of its safe arrival.

With utter care Khan pushed it outside, followed by Spock with another tube, while Jim and McCoy used the moment to give themselves a little break. The second Nien reached for the communicator to give Chekov the next signal, his keen ears heard something. A soft creaking noise, as though someone was tiptoeing. He concentrated, then became aware of heartbeats – quicker than usual, yet steady. And they came from around the next corner…

Khan’s gaze searched the shadows and then he saw movement. Two shapes raised their right arms. Acting on pure instinct, the former dictator gripped Spock’s tunic and dragged the Vulcan along with himself to the floor. In the same moment, a phaser blast raced above them and vanished into the hold.

Then several things happened at once. Khan heard Jim’s and McCoy’s shocked outcry, while he rolled himself away from the Vulcan, who slid with the speed and the grace of a cat behind one of the two cryotubes, reaching for his phaser. The Augment felt along the bond for Jim and sensed his mate’s surprise and anger, but no harm. At the same moment, Nien saw how one of the attackers had aimed again – this time straight at one of the cryotubes, and terrified, Khan recognized that it was Joaquin’s. With shout of horror he hurled himself against the cryotube and shoved it aside, exposing himself to the phaser fire.

Long fingers too strong to be human encircled his ankle and Khan toppled over. He landed hard on the floor but the shot missed him by an inch, grazed the tube and vanished into the hold. For a blink of an eye, Vulcan and Augment looked at each other – one owed the other one his life; and in Khan’s case he had been saved by Spock for the second time now. A moment later, Spock’s phaser sang out and sent stunning blasts at the attackers, keeping them busy so that Khan was able to find new cover.

In the hold, Jim was anything but idle. Hailing the Enterprise, he demanded the bridge, tensing as Uhura told him she would have a look at the scanners herself. Of course she didn’t trust a junior science officer to look out for her captain, her lover, and the others. And with Chekov – who could eventually replace the Vulcan when he’d finished his duties in Transporter Room 1, she was the only senior officer left who had a clue about scanners and their readouts.
“There are three bio-signs in the hallway straight ahead of you,” she said, while she stood at the science station. “They’re moving down the corridor.”

Jim growled. How was it possible that they missed not one, but three people? “Tell Chekov or Kyle to beam them up and straight into the brig!”

“Aye, Captain!”

Pulling out his phaser Kirk raced towards the door, ready to support Khan and Spock, but as he reached them the crossfire had already stopped.

“They’re running away!” Khan hissed; his eyes were narrowed into small glittering slits, his whole stance belying his being in complete warrior-mode now, ready to attack anyone who dared to come near his little brother and the other Augment – or Jim.

Bones had closed the distance to them, bio-scanner in hand. “They’re off to the right and –”

At the same moment, Chekov’s voice sounded through Jim’s communicator. “Keptin, I scanned ze area, but ze bastards vanished before I could locate zem.”

“They vanished?” Kirk asked in disbelief, while he saw from the corner of his eye how Nien bent over the cryotube that held Joaquin and checked the high-tech sleeping-coffin thoroughly. The super-human’s elegant fingers were trembling and betrayed his anxiety over something bad happening to the tube and endangering his little brother.

“Da – as if zey walked zrough a door. Zhey’re zree and –”

“There are several areas on this base which are scan-proofed,” Spock reminding them, rising. “They may have retreated to one of those.”

“In other words they know the station better than we do and we can’t afford to become trapped.” Jim himself felt a wave of anxiety. “Pavel,” he spoke urgently into his communicator. “Check how many men were aboard the shuttles which arrived from Gamma 12. I have a feeling that three people may be missing – including Finnegan.”
“Aye, Keptin!”

Jim looked at the others. “You continue to bring the tubes out here. I’ll go after these cowards and –”

“Captain, I must protest,” Spock said insistently and Jim groaned.

“However you want to shield me from harm, Spock, we don’t have time for that. I’m going on my own, end of story! I’m certain that one of the bastards is Finnegan – and the two of us have an old score to settle. So –”

“There’re three of them, Jim and you’ll be alone!” Khan interrupted him, tension, fury, and fear giving his voice a sharp note. “Spock is right. You –”

“Keep on with the rescue. If I need help, I let you know.” He raced down the corridor, not caring that Spock and Khan called after him.

The Vulcan lifted both brows and his lips pressed into a thin line for a moment, while Khan cursed.

“God dammit!” Bones groused. “We can’t let him go alone. Finnegan is a sadistic bastard and he hates Jim to the core. If he gets a chance to hurt him, then –”

“It will not come to that, Doctor,” Spock interrupted him sternly, while he took out his communicator and hailed Giotto. Quickly he filled in the Chief of Security and demanded reinforcements for Kirk, before looking at Khan and McCoy. “I’ll back up the captain,” he declared, and the Augment nodded in approval.

“Go! Dr. McCoy and I will take care of the remaining tubes. There are only fourteen left and we’ll bring them out in no time.”

The first officer didn’t bother with a reply but raced down the hallway. Something Jim would call a gut-feeling told him that his T’hy’la would need him.
Jim hastened down the corridor, phaser in hand and tense as a bow ready to send an arrow flying. He knew that it had to be Finnegan. He had underestimated the bastard! He knew it even before Chekov called him seconds ago and told him that the shuttles had arrived with two men in one and three men in the second. Therefore three people were missing – and Kirk knew exactly who was among them.

He cursed. He didn’t doubt that Finnegan would try everything he could to stop him and to buy time for Styles. The cowardly attack was proof enough of that.

Suddenly, he heard quiet footsteps behind him and whirling around, he raised his weapon – only to let his arm sink to his side. Frowning, he stared at his Vulcan friend. “Spock,” he whispered harshly. “Didn’t I order you to –”

“You did not give me a direct order, Captain – and, additionally, may I turn your attention to the fact that we are on a private mission? Insubordination would hardly be a crime in this instance.”

Kirk glared at him. “Don’t give me that shit, Spock. Every hand is needed back there.” He pointed with one finger into the direction the Vulcan had come from. “We –”

He didn’t get further as Spock suddenly gripped him and pushed him into the wall, shielding him with his body. Two phaser blasts hissed behind the first officer’s back, but before the Vulcan could react, other phasers answered.

Jim turned his head as far as possible and recognized Giotto and some of his men running down the corridor and shooting at those who had dared to attack their superiors. Kirk didn’t need to ask who had alerted the Red Shirts. It was far too obvious Spock’s doing.

“Spread out!” Giotto called. “Get those bastards!”

He stopped beside the command team that had stepped back from the wall. “Captain, Commander, are you all right?”

Jim gave Spock a quick glance. “Thanks for pushing me out of harm’s way,” he said quietly, “but we two are not done yet!” Then he looked at Giotto. He didn’t know if he should be angry or not. He didn’t want to involve his crew in this private rescue mission and the whole mess that would
follow, but he wasn’t a fool. He alone against three well-trained elite security personnel was a crazy notion at best, if not suicidal. He was very aware of the risk that Finnegan presented. If the Irishman got the chance to kill him, he would do it. “Thanks, Lieutenant Commander, we’re all right,” he answered.

“What’s going on, sir? Mr. Spock told me that some of the station’s security have decided to put up a fight and –”

“Exactly. Try to arrest them and get them to the Enterprise’s brig. We –”

New phaser fire was heard and Kirk, Spock and Giotto followed the sound instantly. As they rounded a corner they saw that the Enterprise’s Red Shirts were involved in a shootout with the others who hid behind some containers in a smaller cargo hold.

Jim contacted his ship again and Uhura’s quick scan of the area confirmed his assumption. The room ahead of them was one of those which were scan-proof, just like the one Nien’s family had been held in. In other words, there was no way to beam Finnegan and his men out. They’d have to be subdued in the old-fashioned way.

Giotto turned towards him. “Captain, we’ll get these guys. Please, sir, stay back.” Worry was written all over his features. He held his captain in high regard and liked the young man very much. He wouldn’t allow anything untoward to befall him if he could prevent it.

Spock nodded. “I agree with Mr. Giotto, sir.” He lowered his voice. “We have cornered them, so they can’t escape. May I suggest that you return to Mr. Singh and help him remove the last of the cryotubes from the hall?”

Jim hesitated. Spock was right. Three phaser blasts were shot from the inside of the room, Finnegan and his men were trapped. It wasn’t necessary for Kirk to continue the hunt – the hunt was over. Still…

“Giotto and the others have no clue what this all is about. I should –”

“Giotto is loyal and discreet. He did not ask any questions during your emotional outburst after Mr. Singh was attacked in your quarters. He will follow your orders and get Mr. Finnegan and the others to the brig, no matter what they tell him.”
“Hmm, at last one of my officers obeys me,” Kirk grumbled and Spock allowed himself a little sigh. Both friends looked at each other and then Jim gave in. Everything in him urged him back to Nien, and after one last glance around, Kirk nodded, momentarily brushing Spock’s upper arm in silent gratitude, then hurried down the corridor – back to Khan and McCoy.

He rounded the corner – and something hard as steel punched him straight in the belly. Stars exploded in front of his eyes and whirled around him, while darkness began to surround him…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, I told you that nothing goes ever like it is planned – and that Finnegan would have another trump up his sleeve was to be expected. I know, another cliffy of the bad sort isn’t very nice, but I can cheer you up. Before I go on holiday at Good Friday next week the next chapter will be posted, so you don’t have to wait too long until you learn what’s going to happens now.

I hope you liked the last chapter and I really, really curious what you think of it, so… (looking at the comment-button, *snicker*).

Have a nice weekend

Love

Yours Starflight
Recklessness, thy name is Jim Kirk

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Just as promised you’ll already get now the next chapter as a kind of ‘Easter-Egg’. I know that the last cliffhanger was evil, and I just didn’t want you let ‘hang’ on the cliff any longer (*smile*).

Well, because of said ‘cliffy’ I don’t want to reveal too much what’s happening now, and I hope you’re going to enjoy the next chapter. There will be – besides a lot of action – a lot of fun, too (fitting for Eastern and the beginning of spring).

I wish you all “Happy Eastern”,

Thanks for the feedback,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 58 – Recklessness, thy name is Jim Kirk

Jim fought for breath, while he clung to his belly and fought against the black shadows which loomed around him, ready to take his conscious away, something he couldn’t allow. He realized that he’d been attacked, and before he could react, someone kicked him against the shoulder, sending him a meter away.

Acting on pure instinct, Kirk rolled himself into a ball and forced himself to move. The slithering stopped; his phaser skidded over the floor out of reach. Raising his head he saw two polished boots step into his range of his blurred vision, and wasn’t surprised to find, as his gaze wandered upwards, the tall, bull-like shape of Finnegan grinning down on him.

“Surprised, Jimmy-boy?” Finnegan taunted. “Thought your lap-dogs had surrounded me with the others? Three phaser blasts, three people, that’s that?” He laughed. “My boys are well trained. They can fire with both hands, which tricked those poor excuses for security into believing they cornered us all.” He shook his head with a mockingly sneer. “And my boys are hiding in a scan-proof room, so no one will be able to get any information from a tricorder, so won’t know how may are really hiding there. It really wasn’t difficult to fool your Red Shirts.”
Jim had used the few seconds to regain some strength and sat slowly up. “Clever, Sean – like always,” he said, rubbing his belly.

“I was always the cleverer one of us, Jimbo,” Sean taunted, using the pet name he’d given Kirk three years ago. It was the one Jim loathed the most. “You thought you could roam around here, freeing the Augments and flying away with them?” He smirked. “We got you, Jimbo! We’re quicker and better than you, and if you’re really as smart as everyone says you are, then you should surrender before I have to hurt you and your friends.”

Jim felt like a cadet again, being taken by surprise like this. Dammit! Finnegan always had some nasty tricks up his sleeve. Kirk had known that. He should have anticipated something like this, yet he stumbled straight into the trap. Stupid idiot! And above all, Finnegan had the nerve to demand his surrender?

**Surrender?**

This word didn’t belong in Jim’s lexicon! Nope!

“You got me good,” he mumbled and tried to rise to his feet, but swayed badly enough to fall back, letting out a painful yelp.

Finnegan began to laugh. “The great captain and gets weak at the knees after only one little punch. You’ve become soft, Jimbo. Three years ago you could take a lot more.” He bent down to pull him on his feet.

Jim had always been quick, but since he’d been brought back from death by Khan’s blood and the recent booster injection he’d had from his mate, his speed was beyond anything Finnegan could imagine. The moment the Irishman bent down, Kirk’s left hand shot up and his fingers closed around Sean’s right wrist like an iron handcuff. At the same time, the captain’s right foot flew up and hit the man’s left side.

Finnegan shouted in surprise and he tried to wriggle out of Kirk’s grip, but to no avail. Jim’s fingers closed merciless around his wrist while Kirk forced Finnegan’s arm away. At the same time, his right hand clawed into Sean’s uniform top, and using his right foot, he hurled the larger man over himself.

Sean landed with a grunt on the floor, belly first. Jim threw himself onto his back, pushed his elbow
into Finnegan’s shoulder and reached out for his opponent’s hair – only to find himself being pushed away, as the taller Irishman bucked upwards.

In the next moment the combat turned harsher, brutal even, as Finnegan kicked with all his might at Kirk’s hip and sent the younger man flying. Ignoring the pain, Jim raised himself up; both grabbed at each other – eyes shone with fury, teeth bared, fists ready to strike…

“Just try it, Jimbo!” Finnegan snarled. “When I’m done with you, I’ll take down your friends. They’re traitors too, and –”

Kirk attacked. Using a series of kicks and punches that he’d learned from Spock when the Vulcan had taught him *ashumi* (a Vulcan fighting sport), he managed to get onto Finnegan’s back, and landed a hard blow there. But the Irishman rebounded surprisingly well. Okay, so the guy had always had more muscles than brains! The latter was Jim’s specialty. Quickly strategizing while being confronted with something else pushed him to his highest limits – a situation he pretty much loved. He was at best when he was challenged like this.

Realizing that he had to stop Finnegan from knocking him out – a risk that truly existed – and assaulting Nien, Spock, and Bones, there was only one thing Kirk could do in the moment. He whirled around and ran away.

Finnegan, quickly recovering from the attack, stared perplexedly after him. “What…?” he began and Jim looked back over his shoulder, stopped and challenged,

“Already tired, Finnegan? Or did that little demonstration of real fighting hurt you? Poor boy, shall I call your Mommy and –”

That was enough. The Irishman’s face flushed deep red, and with a roar, he raced forwards. Jim began to run, leading the furious man away from his friends.

ST***ST

In the other area Scott had joined Khan and McCoy. The evacuation was finished, all former habitants were aboard as was their personal effects. Hearing a phaser fire from afar as he hastened down the hallways, Scott had been tempted to come to Kirk’s aid, but he knew that Jim, Spock, and Giotto were more than capable of handling the situation. Instead, he went straight to the CMO and the Augment. During the next three minutes, the engineer was busy bringing the last of the cryotubes
out of the cargo bay. Only five remained, as all of sudden, Khan stopped dead in his tracks.

The super-human went rigid and blinked, as if he were listening to something only he could hear, while he paled dramatically. Bones got a bad feeling – this time twice as strong as usual. “What’s up?” he asked in alarm.

“Jim!” Khan whispered hoarsely and fingered the side of his neck where the invisible the mark still remained and now itched. Jim was in danger. Nien felt it with every fiber of his being. Acting reflexively, he raced forwards, only to stop several steps later.

He balled his fists. He sensed fury, dread, and pain from Jim, and its intensity almost robbed him of breath, while the mark itched even more. He wanted to run to his mate as quickly as possible, knowing that Kirk’s life could be at stake – again! Yet two souls were fighting in him. One part urged him to come to his beloved’s aid and to stop at nothing, the other part longed to stay with his remaining family members. Torn between the two choices – and hearing Jim’s angry and also painful mental cries – he gulped. His gaze found McCoy and he made a decision. One he had thought he would never be able to make, yet here he was. His heart won the fight he never thought possible at all.

“Jim needs my help. I… I entrust you with the lives of my brothers and sisters here.” He pointed at the remaining tubes; a touching mixture of anguish, fury, and despair lay in his eyes. “Please, protect them!” It was the first time he’d ever entrusted anyone outside of his family with the safety of his crew – the first time he’d trusted a mere human like this besides Jim.

Bones realized what it had to cost Khan to ask this of him – how desperate the Augment must be to see no other way than to almost beg for his help. Leonard knew how it feel inside of Khan, how two hearts beat in his chest. He nodded – grimly and firmly. “I’ll protect them with my life if it comes to that.”

Scotty didn’t know what was happening, all he knew was that Kirk seemed to be in trouble (again), and Khan had obviously ‘felt’ it somehow, and wanted to go to the young man. Glancing at the distressed Augment, he said, “I’ll protect them too, lad. Just go!”

Khan nodded, and after a last glance at the remaining cryotubes and a short prayer to any higher beings he’d never believed in till now, he raced down the hallway; all his senses reaching out for his mate.

He didn’t need a tricorder to locate Jim. The feeling of his beloved’s presence grew in intensity the nearer he drew to him. Rounding a corner, he ran down the corridor and then into the next – and the
next. The whole time he was sensing emotional turmoil and pain. Jim was being attacked and he was hurt – something that filled Khan with utter rage, while his protective instincts flared like a fire out of control.

Another movement to his right caught his attention, and he saw Spock storming towards him. One look in those far-too-human brown eyes and the former dictator knew that the ancient Vulcan element had been awakened in the first officer – a part that was as deadly as a le-matya of his destroyed homeworld.

Both men shared only a quick glance; words weren’t necessary. Without hesitation, they teamed up, despite the old grudge that hadn’t completely dissipated, even though saving each other’s lives had made it easier for each of them to respect the other. Now they had no problem working hand in hand – as it was for Jim. For the boy-captain, who wore responsibility on his strong but human shoulders, something a young man his age shouldn’t always have to do. They both sensed Jim’s distress and would come to the rescue. Later, Khan would consider the fact that the Vulcan had felt Kirk’s emotions clearly enough to make him act on them.

They ran side by side through a door that was actually an airlock, and stopped dead in their tracks. They were in the shuttle-bay Jim had spoken of, and said captain was wrestling with a large, bull-like figure on a staircase that led to the hangar control room on a higher level. Both men were locked in a fierce fight, yet Khan and Spock identified Kirk’s opponent instantly: Finnegan.

Both saw how a brutal blow was delivered to Jim’s head, but the young captain ducked at the very last moment, and Finnegan’s fist only grazed him, yet Kirk swayed. And Khan knew it was only the famous stubbornness that held his mate on his feet. In the next second, Jim countered the attack and both fighters tumbled down the stairs, still fighting.

Spock raised his phaser. “Commander Finnegan, cease this altercation and surrender!” He didn’t really shout, yet his voice was a loud thunderclap that distracted the Irishman for a brief moment when he looked over at the two newcomers.

Jim used the lull and landed a punch to Finnegan’s jaw which made the commander lose his balance, but he gripped for Kirk’s tunic and pulled him down with him. Both men fell hard onto the stairs, and – never stopping – rose again and struggled their way up the stairs to the small platform in front of the control room.

“You always need a back-up, Jimmy-boy, don’t you?” Finnegan taunted. “How is it that you won this up-tight asshole of a Vulcan for yourself?”
Jim gave him a grim smirk; ignoring his sore belly, hip, and temple. “Spock prefers the company of intelligent people, no musclemen with a pea-brain!”

Finnegan feinted with his fist, and as Kirk bent to avoid the pretend-blow, Sean raced up the stairs, Jim hard on his heels.

“Commander Finnegan, STOP THIS INSTANT!” Spock all but shouted now with iciness in his voice that would have frozen over even Hell.

Khan wasn’t ready to watch his mate being mistreated for a second more. The combination of rage and protective instincts made him race towards the staircase, while in the background he heard the Spock’s loud voice that betrayed the officer’s rising fury. A very – very! – pissed-off Vulcan could be really eerie; this much Nien had learned.

Spock lifted his phaser and aimed at Finnegan again, but Kirk blocked the shot as he reached his opponent, shoved him, and both men landed on the platform. The Vulcan began to run towards the staircase, too, while his gaze found the super-human who’d just reached the stairway.

Not wasting any precious time, the Augment tensed his muscles and hurled himself into the air. His right hand shot forwards and clasped one of the support struts that held the staircase to the platform. Quick and graceful as a feline, he pulled himself upwards, climbing at a ridiculous speed towards the platform where both opponents were exchanging blows and kicks.

If Finnegan had spared only one glance at the approaching man, he might have stopped all hostility and would surrendered. Khan’s pale blue-green eyes shone with an unholy fire and full of promise of death; his lips were curled into a dangerous snarl which transformed his usually-handsome face into an almost ugly grimace of fury and hate. No one laid hand on his mate!

Spock watched the Augment’s efforts to reach Kirk and Finnegan for a brief moment and realized that – with three men in the fray, the chances of stunning the Irishman without harming one of them were practically zero. Feeling a very un-Vulcan flare of irritation, he fingered for his communicator to hail the Enterprise. At the same moment, Khan pulled himself over the railing and Finnegan got the first glimpse of the ‘Red Shirt’.

“Cavalry arrives, Jimbo,” he taunted, not realizing the murderous expression on the approaching man’s face.
Kirk felt Nien’s presence and turned his head in surprise, only to find himself gripped and shoved brutally against the super-human. Khan caught Jim around the waist and steadied him, before placing himself between the captain and his opponent.

Finnegan lifted both fists, thinking he would have no problem with the smaller man. “Come on, buddy, show me what you learned at the Academy. Try to help your little captain before I send him to where he belongs: To his maker –”

He didn’t get further. Khan lunged at the elite soldier, and Finnegan barely had time to raise his arms in defense as several blows rained down on him, forcing the air out of his lungs and making him stumble backwards. A rib cracked and Finnegan howled in pain and rage.

“Spock to Enterprise!” the first officer called into the communicator, while he hurried towards the platform. He held no sympathy for Finnegan, but he assumed that Khan would tear the man apart if he couldn’t be stopped. The Vulcan had seen the expression the Augment now wore a year ago – during their near-deadly battle on the trash transporter. And Spock knew the former dictator well enough to realize that Khan would make absolutely certain that Finnegan wouldn’t get another chance to harm Jim Kirk – meaning, if it came down to it, Khan would kill the Elite Security officer.

Sean had never received such blows. The other man had the strengths of a Vulcan, if not more, and the quickness with which his opponent moved was simply inhuman!

He fell to the floor and kicked out, hitting the ‘Red Shirt’ in the belly and pushing him away, but his enemy landed on his feet like a cat and started a counter-attack. That was…impossible. And while Finnegan managed to rise before his opponent was above him again, he began to understand just who – or what – he faced: an Augment. Kirk hadn’t come alone to get the other Augments but had brought one of the creatures with him who had obviously slipped the SBI’s clutches. It had to be this enhanced warrior Luengo talked of in his transmission.

Avoiding the next attack, Sean whirled around and put two steps’ distance between himself and the engineered man. “Just look,” he sneered, “Frankenstein’s monster tries to protect the little boy. Isn’t that swee –?”

Blazing light raced towards him and out of instinct, he ducked, escaping the stun of Spock’s phaser by a hair’s breadth. “You should have had some target practice, Vulcan, instead of boring your students to death with –”

Again, he wasn’t able to finish his sentence because Khan was on him for the second time, gripping him, lifted him into the air as if he weighed nothing, and hurled him away. Finnegan screamed as he
crashed against the rail and fell onto the metallic floor, but using his training, he was able to make a grab for his phaser, even while falling. Landing hard on his left side, he lifted the weapon, switched its adjustment, and pointed it at the Augment.

Khan had the nasty feeling of déjà vu, only now the Vulcan had no chance to save him. And even as Nien tensed his muscles, he knew he’d be too slow this time.

What happened next was like watching a scene in slow motion.

Jim, who hadn’t found a chance to intervene in the fight between Khan and Finnegan for the last moments, had used the time to take a few much-needed deep breaths. But in doing so, he realized that his former school rival was capable of doing more than just fight dirty. He saw how Finnegan brought his phaser to bear, set the adjustment to kill, and aimed at Nien. The whole universe seemed to stop.

Just like the moment two days ago when he had heard the phaser fire sounding from his quarters, and Khan’s outcry…

For a second that felt like an eternity, utter horror and helplessness gripped the young captain in the face of losing the other half of his heart, his soul – of losing the very essence of what had changed his life into something warmer and brighter than the sun. Then he acted without a thought. Like an automaton, he threw himself straight into the line of fire; Khan’s pet name on his lips. He saw the widening eyes of his soul-mate, read the rising terror in Nien’s eyes, heard Spock yelling his name from afar, but the Vulcan’s voice was drowned out in the buzzing of the phaser blast – he reached Khan and pushed him down, while incredible heat spread across his back.

Everything vanished into a blur. The walls, the floor, the hangar, even Khan’s shocked and desperate face beneath him melted into nothingness…

ST***ST

In the other area, Scotty and Bones were done with bringing the remaining tubes out of the scan-proof room. Giving Chekov a signal, both men beamed aboard along with the tubes, and left the transporter pads, before Pavel beamed the two cryotubes directly to the room next to Medbay.

“Is everyzing all right?” he asked worried, and Scotty walked to him with a grim face.
“I’ve nae clue, laddie. There’s trouble with some guys from the station and Jim’s in the middle of it! Khan went mad suddenly, and hurried ter the cap’n’s rescue, but I’ve nae idea what’s goin’ on, and –.”

“Spock to Enterprise.” the Vulcan’s somehow troubled-sounding voice came from the speaker on the transporter controls.

“Chekov here, sir!” Pavel answered, while Scott stepped beside him.

“Ensign, in front of me, approximately ten meters away and seven meters above, the captain and Mr. Singh are fighting with Commander Finnegan,” Spock said, and Scotty quickly scanned the area. He found three life signs, which moved in a far too short of range and far too quickly to beam up. Yet this was exactly what Spock went on to order, “Locate them and beam them up. Take care as Commander Finnegan may – JIM, NO!” To hear the Vulcan’s sudden cry almost freeze the blood of the three officers. But before Bones – who suddenly felt as if the rug had been pulled away from beneath his feet – could demand information, Pavel had already found a solution for the problem and had started the beaming process. Three figures appeared within a cloud of silver and golden light on the transporter platform.

McCoy recognized with absolute certainness that one of the men had raised an arm and held a weapon. Following instinct, Montgomery pulled out his own phaser, aimed at the figure which had transformed into Finnegan, and pulled the trigger. Hit by full stun, the Irishman fell to the floor with a loud thud, the phaser slipping from his hand.

Then silence spread through the transporter room, interrupted only by the sharp gasp that escaped Bones as he realized the two men who lay beside Finnegan hadn’t moved. Kirk lay atop Khan as if he was pinning the Augment to the ground, while Khan had wrapped an arm around the younger man’s lower half, the other arm raised as though trying to block someone or something. But it wasn’t the fact that the two must have been on the ground during what was obviously a fight that had arrested the doctor’s attention, but Khan’s terrified expression.

McCoy took a moment to realize that Jim was breathing. Actually, both men were panting and tousled. Jim’s shirt was torn and showed traces of grit; a black stripe marred the material at his back. As it appeared, Spock hadn’t underestimated the urgency in which he’d wanted Scotty to beam them up.

“Enterprise!” Spock’s concerned voice sounded again. “Do you have the captain and –”

Scott interrupted the first officer. “I got all three, sir. Finnegan is stunned.”
Scotty was certain that Spock’s voice betrayed even more worry, as he asked “Is the captain all ri –?”

The Vulcan’s question was interrupted by an angry outburst by the Augment, who suddenly sat up, which forced Jim into an upright position, literally straddling the super-human. “HAVE YOU LOST YOUR BLOODY MIND?” Khan’s furious tone gave Scotty new chills while beside him, Chekov, and even Bones, gaped dumbstruck at the pair on the transporter pad. “CARE TO TELL ME WHAT THAT NONESENSE WAS ALL ABOUT?” Nien shouted, enraged.

As Khan had been forced to watch how Jim jumped into the line of fire and saw the phaser blast flash behind the younger man’s back, his last sane thought had been that he had lost his soul-mate – had lost the one who had transformed him from a creature bred in a lab into a human with a real soul. The shock – the utter anguish – in those few seconds had rendered him helpless until he’d suddenly realized that they had been transported somewhere else, and that the dead weight of Kirk on top of him was anything but ‘dead’. He could sense Jim’s presence in his mind, could feel the human’s heartbeat, and his quick breath. For a moment, Khan was dizzy with relief; relief that needed a valve to blow off the pent-up dread in a most typical way: it morphed into fury.

So, so reckless!!!

This damned, reckless, stupid, crazy CHILD had almost killed himself to protect him. To protect Khan, who didn’t need protection, but needed this blasted KID at his side like he needed air to breathe!

There were no words that could describe the swirl of emotions that ricocheted around the Augment’s soul just now.

Jim, overcoming his shock, began to realize that he was still alive, and looked confusedly at the face of a very angry Khan. Then it dawned at him what his lover was talking about and snapped, “That ‘nonsense’ was ME shoving YOU out of HARM’S WAY!”

“You hurled yourself in the way of a phaser that was SET TO KILL!” Khan all but roared, his usually pale face turning red with ire. “HAVE YOU GOT A DEATH WISH?”

“Mr. Scott, what is happening up there?” Spock sounded as confused and irritated as a Vulcan was capable of.
“Well, I donna know exactly,” the engineer answered, a little baffled, staring with wide eyes at the two men. “It seems the cap’n and Khan are havin’ an argume –”

“THAT SHOT COULD HAVE KILLED YOU, JIM! DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND? What are they teaching at this DAMNED ACADEMY?” The Augment continued his furious tirade, not caring that he was – technically – yelling at his commanding officer.

“Thanks for pointing out the obvious, Mr. Super-Brain. And for the record, in case you’d forgotten, A PHASER SET TO KILL CAN KILL YOU TOO!” Jim wasn’t any quieter than Khan now. His cheeks had flushed with the effort of shouting while crouching on the floor.

“What the hell happened down there?” McCoy had overcome his surprise and he balled his fists. Hands on hips, he asked himself if he’d fallen asleep and if this was all some sort of crazy dream.

“That is NO reason to RISK YOUR LIFE!” Khan raged, ignoring the CMO completely.

Jim bent forwards, fixing the super-human with a heated gaze. “Who I risk my life for is MY DECISION!”

“That was no decision; that was ONE OF YOUR DAMNED MINDLESS IMPULSES which you should be able TO CONTROL!”

“Oh, look who’s talking!” Kirk snarled. “You are all instinct and impulses whenever –”

“I can take RISKS because I AM QUICKER AND STRONGER. If you –”

“WELL, IN CASE YOU HADN’T NOTICED, MISTER, THIS TIME YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO SLOW!”

Scott folded his arms in front of his chest. He knew that under different circumstances, Khan would have landed in the brig for behavior towards a superior like this, but if there was one thing Montgomery had learned, it was that there was nothing ‘usual’ about Jim Kirk, especially where Khan was concerned. And, as this whole part of the mission had not been part of the plan, he wasn’t witnessing insubordination between a captain and his crewman, but a quarrel between two…friends?
Amused, he looked back at McCoy. “I canna help myself, but they sound t’me like an old married couple, donna ye think, Doctor?” he asked with a smirk, not realizing he’d made nearly the same joke as Diego had weeks ago.

“I HAD EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL, JAMES, AND –”

“NO, you DIDN’T! Finnegan wanted to KILL you and –”

“He wanted you dead, too, or why – do you think – he was about TO BEAT YOU INTO A BLOODY PULP SO THAT I WAS FORCED TO INTERVENE!?”

Bones, who took from the shouting that Jim had – again – faced a deadly situation he’d only survived due to incredible luck, also crossed his arms in front of his chest and watched his friend and the super-human with a mixture of irritation and amusement. Yes, he had felt icy fear when Spock all but screamed Jim’s name, but now, seeing Kirk alive (and being lectured) in front of him, calmed his nerves enough to wake some of the black humor in him – his own kind of ‘valve’. He turned with a nod towards the engineer. “I have to agree, Scotty. Had their silver wedding anniversary ten years back and –”

The shouting had quieted, and McCoy stopped his mocking reply as he saw Scotty’s jaw drop. As McCoy looked back at Kirk and the Augment, he rolled his eyes. Meanwhile, Scotty’s looked as though they would pop out of their sockets.

It wasn’t clear who’d made the first move, but both men were now locked in a fierce embrace and kissing the daylights out of each other – and not caring that they weren’t alone.

“Oh for God’s sake… Jim…” McCoy groaned, asking himself if the younger man would ever learn some decency.

Scott stared agog at the two ex-nemeses, still crouched on the transporter pad and kissing each other like there was no tomorrow. Ahaaa, so that’s what’s been going on! He should have known! There had been so many signs… And then he remembered Chekov’s presence and looked at the young ensign, whose face was comparable to a fully-ripe tomato. “Um, boys – not in front of the kid!” he called, and quickly slapped a hand over Pavel’s eyes.

It was impossible to know if the two lovers really hadn’t heard anything, or only if they just ignored him, because neither of them made a move to break the kiss. Jim had cupped Khan’s head with one
hand, while his other arm was firmly locked around the older man’s strong shoulder, melting against him like butter in the sun. The effects of the adrenalin from his fight with Finnegan and the fear he’d felt as his former classmate had lifted a phaser aimed straight at the Augment’s chest, were still circling through him. He hadn’t been thinking at all as he shoved Khan out of the blast’s way. Only now, as his lover held him close and let his hands wander over his body and through his hair, some relief was setting in.

He felt a burning sensation coming from his back that – for once – had nothing to do with the flames of passion Nien was able to stoke in him with a single touch, but Jim didn’t mind. It was impossible for him to stop now. He needed to feel the super-human’s warmth, the beating of his heart against his own, the dance of his hot breath on his face, while the wicked tongue challenged him to one of their duels. That was more important than the pain.

Khan was the first to break the kiss – if only for a few seconds. “Don’t you dare risk your life for me again,” he whispered sharply, while the echoes of the shock still whispered in his soul. He had almost lost Jim – again!

“I can’t promise you that, baby,” Kirk murmured tenderly, and let his fingers glide through Khan’s tousled but silky strands. “Because I already made you another promise: to always have your back…” He smiled, acknowledging the irony. “Even at the expense of my own.” Jim captured the sinful mouth with his own again, earning a longing groan from the Augment, whose anger vanished into thin air – mostly.

McCoy sighed when it became obvious that neither of the two men was about to stop anytime in the near future. “Jim… Khan! For God’s sake, you are in public!” He massaged his temples to soothe an approaching headache as both lovers continued to be ignore the world around them.

Jim sensed the almost desperate urge of the older man to hold and touch him, and realized at the edge of his mind that Khan must have been terribly afraid for him – afraid to lose him! If Nien had felt only the half the terror Jim had at the moment Finnegan had aimed his weapon, Khan had been through hell. They both simply had to be with each other now; they needed proof that the other was still alive, that they weren’t badly injured, that they’d escaped a deadly situation only seconds ago. It was overwhelming, and…

“JAMES TIBERIUS KIRK!”

The young captain went rigid. Yup, he was really in deep trouble if he was being called by his full name, and Bones’ voice promised nothing good. For a second he could feel Khan’s soft lips beneath his own, then he opened his eyes – and reality crashed down on him.
Lighted walls, grey polished floor, transporter pads, steps with blue light, a gentle buzz in the background…

Oh…

Turning his head, his gaze found a stern-looking McCoy. A baffled Scotty stood behind the glass wall of the transporter control with a hand clapped over Chekov’s eyes. The young ensign was struggling to remove it.

“Mr. Scott, I am of age so please remove zat hand!” Pavel was clearly irritated now; he yanked the Scotsman’s hand away, glaring at him.

Bones wore the most irritated expression Jim had seen in a long time, before the ship’s doctor snapped, “Jesus Christ, you two, get a grip! And not just on each other! Get a room!” He stopped his tirade and looked around. “But not the damned transporter room! And, for your information, there are still people on the station waiting to beam up, so get off that platform!” Like the super-human, he didn’t care that he was lecturing his captain.

Jim had the modesty to blush while Khan only smirked – something that angered the CMO even more. “Oh, wipe this smug expression off your face! You’re not a whit better than Jim!” He received a raised eyebrow from the Augment and added, “And don’t give me that shit about ‘better at everything’. Right now you’re both being ridiculous! The captain of Starfleet’s flagship and a man who ruled a quarter of Earth, snogging in public like horny teenagers! Ugh!”

At that moment the door to the transporter room opened and an alarmed Spock stormed in. His night-dark eyes widened ever so slightly as he caught sight of his captain straddling the Augment, who seemed to be torn between anger and amusement. To his left, an outraged McCoy stood, while at the transporter control, a very red-faced Pavel Chekov and grinning Montgomery Scott stared at the platform. What was going on here?

Bones glanced at the Vulcan. “Are you a magician? How did you get aboard while these two idiots were blocking the transporter?”

“Mr. Kyle beamed me up using the cargo transporter,” the first officer answered, not taking his eyes off his T’hy’la. Jim was alive. Finnegan, who lay unconscious nearby, hadn’t killed him. Spock had sensed Jim’s presence in his mind even after Kirk, Khan, and Finnegan had been beamed away, yet not all the tension had left the Vulcan, even when he heard his captain and the Augment shouting at each other through the open communicator. The risk that Jim had been injured by the phaser blast still existed, and only now, as Spock saw his friend in front of him, did relief flood his whole being.
Vulcan or not, there were things they still could be overwhelmed by, and relief belonged to those emotions which even two thousand years of tight control couldn’t stop from being experienced. Spock hadn’t noticed that he’d closed his eyes for a moment, but snapped them open again as he heard Jim’s cheerful call, “Ah, Spock, just in time, as always!”

Kirk untangled himself from the super-human, batting the slender, strong hand away as it lingered a moment too long and far too obviously at his hip. Rising he continued, “I think we should beam up Giotto and the others, and… Ouch!” He reached around to grab at his back and heard Khan growling something in his mother tongue, before the Augment was on his feet in one quick movement. A deep frown marred his features. Without bothering to ask, he turned Jim around and eyed his back. “Oh – for Shiva’s sake! I KNEW IT!” he snarled.

“Don’t tell me…” Bones didn’t even finish the sentence as he saw the former dictator’s dark expression. He took the several steps up to the transporter platform and to Jim’s side. “Sweet Lord, KID! You did it again!” he gasped, which made Spock race to Kirk’s side, while the two other officers moved closer too.

“Nothing serious, Bones, only… OUCH! Be careful, dammit!”

McCoy had pulled the torn shirt on Jim’s back aside to have a closer look at the damage. “You ‘only’ have a burn that went straight through your clothes! Don’t tell me that you didn’t notice that sooner!” he groused. “For God’s sake, Jim, and here you promised be to be more careful from now on – or did I misunderstand you the last time you were in Medbay healing from space exposure?”

“I AM careful, Bones, but don’t ask me to step back and to watch if a member of my crew – one of my friends, or my mate – is in mortal danger!”

Pavel and Scott gasped. Mate?

Bones only growled in annoyance before he turned Kirk around again and took his jaw carefully between thumb and index-finger, looking carefully at the younger man’s temple. “And a nice lump is growing on here too. No wonder you’re acting crazy.”

“This man – Finnegan – punched and kicked him several times,” Khan reported with a stern calmness he didn’t feel, looking expectantly at the CMO. “Jim needs your professional help.”

“You’re not helping here!” Kirk hissed.
The Augment simply replied, “Yes, I am! And if you knew what’s good for you, you wouldn’t argue with me this time! I heard your promise too, you know! You even **vowed** to me to be less reckless, and now look at the mess you’ve gotten yourself into. Again, as I have to point out!” Khan’s anger was born out of very deep worry. Jim realized this, which was maybe the only reason why he indeed, did shut up for once. He glanced at Spock for support, but his *T’hy’la* only pressed his lips into a thin line and arched one brow. Jim knew enough about his first officer to understand that this was the Vulcan equivalent of a very serious rebuke. The human version would have needed a whole lot more words, but this was just as effective.

Apparently, McCoy and Khan weren’t done yet with their old-fashioned scolding.

Leonard rubbed his forehead, obviously exasperated. “How is it that I **always** have to patch you up when you come back from an away mission?”

“He tries to escape trouble, but trouble is faster,” Nien explained with an exquisite mixture of anger and black humor. Jim was very tempted to stick his tongue out at him, but after what they had done only a minute earlier, he bit back this urge.

“Well, this time, it even outran you!” he replied charmingly instead, and went for the door. “All right, Chekov, beam our boys and Finnegan’s sidekicks up – the latter maybe directly into the brig! Scotty, lock Finnegan away too. No visitors. The charges are attacking commanding officers, and attempted murder. Spock, how much time do we have left until the *Excalibur* arrives?”

“According to Minister Selek’s data and the time taken between our arrival and now, the *Excalibur* will be in sensor range within the next twelve minutes.”

“You forgot to mention the seconds,” McCoy taunted, and the Vulcan did roll his eyes at this comment.

“Because I lack exact data, Doctor,” he answered, almost indignantly.

Khan shook his head – how did Jim put up with those two combatants? He glanced at his beloved, who only sighed, before he said, “Nien, you’re with me. Spock, Bones, you too – and stop that eternal bickering. I swear, you two are about to drive me nuts!”

“No chance, Jim, you are already n –” McCoy stopped himself at the last moment as he received a warning glance from his friend. Yeah, they were mostly in private and Scotty and Chekov were
friends, but there were things you just don’t say to your superior officer in public. That Jim had accepted Bones’ outburst – and Khan’s – minutes ago was more than any other captain certainly would have tolerated. Yet, as already stated, Jim Kirk never did ‘usual’.

Smiling innocently at Kirk, McCoy followed his friend to the door, Spock and Khan at their heels.

Scott grinned broadly, his eyes never leaving his captain and the super-human. As far as he understood it, Kirk had once again risked his neck and came away victorious. But that wasn’t the only reason why the Scotsman chuckled inwardly, despite the worry he had felt for his friend only minutes ago. So, Kirk and Khan were a couple? Well, he should have known – at least when the super-human almost exploded with anger, born of concern for Kirk’s health; even his life. That reaction should have been the last notation in a long list of evidence, and Scotty could slap himself for not having recognized the whole thing sooner.

It was so obvious to him now – the way the two always stayed close to one another, how they interacted, the looks they exchanged, the tone of their voices when they spoke, the way they took care of each other… Or, as he’d caught them in Engineering, holding hands. This all had practically screamed ‘love-birds’, and Scotty had racked his brain over what was going on between the two. Even worse, his subconscious had already suggested the answer over and over again, but he had ignored it, thinking that his captain was just a lady’s man. That was obviously not the case. Well, once again, in a universe with Jim Kirk in it, nothing was impossible! He should have learned that two years ago!

Smirking, Scotty beamed Finnegan directly into the brig, and headed for the door of the transporter room, while Chekov called Giotto who had, indeed, overpowered the two other elite soldiers and was ready to return to the ship with his Red Shirts.

Outside of the transporter room Kirk had strolled towards the turbo lift but was stopped by McCoy, who called, “Where do you think you’re going?”

Bewildered the young captain turned around. “To the bridge. We have to –”

“Oh no, my friend. First you have a rendezvous with a bio-bed and some medical attention.”

“But –”

“No ‘buts’!” Leonard was serious now; there was no doubt about it.
Jim sighed. “Bones, look, a few bruises and a scratch on the back are really no –”

“Captain, I have to agree with Doctor McCoy. Some of those bruises are indeed in need of treatment,” Spock interrupted him almost softly, examining his friend from his tousled hair to the toes of his boots and back. Jim really looked beaten up.

“Spock, you know I find it eerie when you agree with me,” Bones murmured, and Kirk rolled his eyes. Rather the universe stop to exist than these two quit their verbal banter.

“As much as I am touched by your concern, guys –” He was cut off by Khan’s hand on his forearm.

“Jim, your first officer and Doctor McCoy are right. You have been scorched by a full phaser blast and this man beat and kicked you mercilessly. You should get yourself checked out.”

Kirk groaned and threw him a scowl. “Oh no, not you too!” He looked at his lover, who only gave him one of his piercing glares.

Scott, who’d left the Transporter Room and caught the final words, thought it a very good idea to voice his own worry regarding his captain and friend’s state. “Ye really should let the doctor have a closer look at ye, Jim. This Finnegan guy got ye good.”

Kirk couldn’t believe his ears, while he stared from one man to the other. “Whoa, whoa, hold on a minute! Do I get this right? You four all agree on something?” As he only received unwavering stares, he threw up both hands. “Hallelujah! I declare today a holiday!”

With those words he continued his way to the turbo lift. Or rather, he tried. But a strong arm wrapped around his waist and stopped him, while he heard McCoy’s voice several meters away, “Jim, Medbay is in the opposite direction!”

Looking over his shoulder, he saw the stern face of Khan directly behind him. The super-human held him in an iron grip, while Bones pointed a thumb over his shoulder towards the other end of the hallway. “This… This is mutiny!” Jim accused, to which McCoy only smiled.

“No, it’s doctor’s orders. Don’t make me turn this into an official medical command as the ship’s
Jim growled – a sound that would even have made a tiger wary – but McCoy didn’t yield. “I hate it when you do this!” Kirk snarled, turned around, and pushed Khan’s arm away – a little more roughly than necessary – and stomped towards Leonard.

“Spock, target that damned station and blast it into pieces. I wanted to do it by myself, but sadly this witch-doctor is using some heavy measurement to force me into his stupid hut!”

The Vulcan lifted a brow. “Aye, sir.” It was really not clear what the first officer affirmed – the order or Jim’s attempt at cursing Bones.

‘*If looks could kill...,*’ McCoy thought with some amusement, as Kirk’s heated glare hit him. Then he couldn’t help himself, and patted him on the shoulder as soon as Jim passed him, and teased, “Good boy!”

“Don’t you dare,” Jim gritted out, scowling angrily at the doctor, who only smiled before he glanced at Khan.

“The same goes for you, Mr. Singh!”

Khan lifted both brows, surprised. “I wasn’t almost shot, Doctor, and –”

“Medical checkups for all crew members after they’re involved combat – that’s in the manual. And as far as I know, Jim recruited you, *Petty Officer* Singh. And maybe, just maybe, your other half will be less of an infant about receiving treatment if you’re there, so follow me.”

For a moment Khan was lost for words, then he caught Spock’s expression. The Augment knew that Vulcans were incapable of something like malicious joy – at least they claimed to be – but for just a moment, he thought he’d seen just that in Spock’s eyes.

Kirk grinned, suddenly in a very much better mood as he wasn’t going to be the only one McCoy would manhandle with damn check-ups and possibly even hypos! “Well, Nien, ‘cling together, swing together’! That hasn’t changed in the last three centuries!”
Khan lifted both brows. “I know, Jim – after all, we’ve been doing exactly that for quite some time now,” he all but purred with an ambiguous undertone in his voice.

Promptly, Scotty started to cough and McCoy let his head sink with a groan. Both men had obviously understood that the Augment had taken the idiom literally, and had changed it into a sexual innuendo. Of course Jim had understood that too, and turned several shades of red.

It was now Spock’s turn to lift a brow. These reactions were…not comprehensible. As far as he understood the phrase Jim had used, it referred to a situation in which comrades were caught and faced a punishment together. So, if (rightly) perceiving the doctor’s check-ups as ‘punishment’, the captain’s use of the idiom was accurate. However Khan’s retort wasn’t understandable in this context, nor was the reactions of the others. He decided to ask Nyota about it. Maybe she could explain to him any alternative meaning.

In the meantime, Leonard rubbed his face in frustration. “Sweet Lord, you’re both…impossible!” He glared at Khan with his best ‘doctor-stare’ and pointed nonchalantly at him, then down the corridor. “You – Medbay! Jim – you too!” He turned to leave, but hesitated as the Augment made no move to follow him. Bones decided to use an old trick. The lure. “And here I thought you wouldn’t waste a second to rush to the Medbay,” he said, shaking his head in mock-bafflement.

“Pray tell me why I should do such a thing, when my crew is…”

“…In the Medbay!” Bones cut in, taking the super-human by surprise, if only for a second.

“They were beamed to Medbay?”

McCoy shrugged. “Of course. I want to check if they’re all right, before…” He stopped as Khan took two large steps towards him, graceful and determined, like a lion on the prowl.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” he all but hissed.

“You didn’t ask,” Bones shrugged, unimpressed. He had learned to look through Khan’s sometimes-unusual behavior, knowing that it was nothing more than a masquerade to hide his true emotions, or the fact that, under certain circumstances, he was just a big softy.

Nien passed Jim, gripped him firmly but gently by the upper arm, and pulled him along with him.
“Come on! We wasted enough time with this senseless bickering. You need a check-up and I need to see my family.”

“Hey!” Kirk protested, and tried to wriggle free, which was – of course – impossible. “Who’s the captain here? Who gives the orders?”

“Just now? Commander Spock is, as long as you’re off-duty due to medical reasons. So hurry up! The sooner McCoy is convinced that your newest course of recklessness didn’t push you even closer to an early grave, the sooner you can take back the conn.”

Scott looked after them, grinning from ear to ear. “A’the risk of havin’ an outraged cap’n and’n infuriated Augment a’my throat, I have t’say, I think those two are ‘dorable.” He received a bug-eyed stare (McCoy) and a bewildered glance (Spock). Chuckling he shook his head.

“Adorable’?” Leonard echoed, and Montgomery laughed quietly.

“Aye! I musta bea blind not t’realize it sooner. They’r smitten wi’ each other. Ya were wise t’tell them them t’get a room, Doctor, or th’sparks flyin’ between them will set th’ whole ship aflame.”

At that moment Chekov, Giotto, his men, and the two captured security personnel left the Transporter Room. Finnegan’s men glared daggers at the senior officers, and one called, “You will pay for this. Command has accused you of treason and theft – as it seems they’re right. You all will face court material for this and rot in prison!”

Spock lifted a brow again. “I would advise you to stay silent, Lieutenant, because anything you say now can and will be used against you. Commander Finnegan is accused of attempted murder. You, on the other hand, only followed his orders. At the moment, you are not yet charged with anything further. This could change if you continue to threaten and to offend the captain and the senior officers of the Enterprise.” He nodded at Giotto. “Take them to the brig, but put them in a separate cell from either Commander Finnegan or Lieutenant Nureaux. No visitors.”

The Chief of Security nodded. “Aye, sir!” He didn’t ask what was going on – after all, these two guys said their superior had received orders from Starfleet Command to arrest Captain Kirk, something Giotto couldn’t believe. He knew that something odd was going on and was very aware of the fact that it had to do with Petty Officer Singh. This man was involved with everything that had happened within the last few days, if not longer. That Singh was the mysterious Sunrise was another detail he’d recently realized, and that the man was immune to phaser stuns was a fact he still had to get his head around. And now, as the command team, the CMO, and the Petty Officer separated themselves from the evacuation process only to be caught in an attack by Starfleet’s Elite Security.
Giotto was anything but stupid. And there had been many interesting, and even inexplicable events occurring recently: the spy aboard and his intent to install a bug in the captain’s quarters, the strange behavior of the command team on Gamma 12, the quarrel between Kirk and Finnegan, Security’s accusations against Kirk and his senior officers, the inhuman strength and quick mind of Singh…

Deep down Giotto knew the answer to all this. He simply knew that there was a rift between Command and Captain Kirk. He believed the two Elite Security members were convinced of what they had accused Kirk of, and that he and the others should be put into custody by the order of command. It fitted very well with having a spy aboard, discounting the fact that the man had been caught.

And Giotto simply knew that Singh wasn’t a casual human. If it wouldn’t sound crazy he’d say that the man was enhanced – maybe an Augment. But even if Singh was a super-human, he wasn’t a threat to the ship; otherwise Kirk would have intervened.

And there were other things the Chief of Security didn’t scrutinize too closely and just followed orders without second thoughts: He trusted his captain – and the Vulcan first officer. If Spock, whose ‘love’ for regulations was well known, was okay with everything that had happened, then Giotto wouldn’t doubt it, would support his superiors with everything he was and had.

Without hesitation, he instructed his men to bring the captives to the brig. Scotty watched them leave, winked at Spock, and led a still-baffled Chekov along with him.

The Vulcan saw how Chekov bent his head towards Scott and whispered something too quiet for even Spock’s keen hearing to catch. Montgomery began to laugh. “Laddie, aren’t ye a little too young for those kinds a’ questions?” Whistling, and clearly in a sunny mood, the Scotsman walked towards the turbo lift and pulled Pavel with him.

Spock followed them, utterly confused about the last two minutes. Humans. He assumed that he would never come to understand them completely.

ST***ST***ST

“Leaving warp in sixty seconds,” Kramer, the navigator of the Excalibur reported.

Styles sat in the center seat, had placed his arms casually on the armrests, and had put one leg over
the other. His whole stance showed victory with a hue of arrogance. “Any sign of the Enterprise?” he asked his science officer, who watched the sensors.

“None, sir.”

Styles smiled. ‘We got here first – and we’ll wait for you when you arrive, Kirk. And then we’ll catch you red-handed, trying to take the Augments for your own purposes. You, your friends, and this creature at your side will have no chance. We…”

“Sir!” The science-officer whirled around. “Sir, our sensors are scanning a huge explosion.”

The captain went rigid and turned his chair. “Coordinates?”

The man held his face expressionless. “Gamma 12, Captain.” He ran another scan and said, “A lot of debris consisting of different materials – stone, metal, plastic, glass…” He straightened his shape as he looked back at his commanding officer. “Gamma 12 has been destroyed, sir.”

Rising to his feet, Styles stared at the main screen, just as Kramer reported, “Leaving warp, Captain. Gamma 12 ahead!”

The Excalibur dropped into impulse drive, engines more slowly propelling her forwards now.

“Maximum magnification!” Styles ordered, while his mouth became dry. Had Kirk been quicker or had the station been under attack by the Klingons? “Any warp signatures?” he asked his science officer, who shook his head.

“None, Captain.”

“Maximum manification, Captain,” Wilson reported from the helm.

The whole bridge crew looked with widening eyes at the floating debris which had, up until a short time ago, been one of Starfleet’s highest security facilities. And nearby was…
The *Enterprise*!

Styles whirled around towards the science station. “You said there weren’t any traces…”

“There aren’t, Captain! Just have a look!”

Right, you didn’t have to tell this Lawrence a second time. With large, angry steps he closed the distance to the station, almost pushing the officer out of his way, and looked at the readouts. Checking the scanners, he saw that they ran smoothly, yet they didn’t catch the other ship.

“Captain, I’ve intercepted a message from the *Enterprise*!” Li caught his attention.

“On speakers!” Styles all but barked.

He listened to the melodious female voice of the *Enterprise*’s comms officer, who said, “*Starfleet Command, this is the USS Enterprise. Given order fulfilled, Gamma 12 has been destroyed. Bringing the evacuees to safety. Enterprise out.*”

Styles felt his jaw drop and quickly closed his mouth, before he gritted out, “Li, hail them!”

The comms officer nodded. “*Excalibur to Enterprise, please come in!*”

No answer.

“Try again,” Styles all but growled, his usually-pale face flushed with anger. His gaze wandered back to the main screen.

Li sighed inwardly and repeated the hail. This time they got an answer – one that rendered the captain speechless for a moment. “*Excalibur, this is Enterprise. As you can see, we have completed our mission; there is no need for aid. However, we do appreciate your offer of help. Enterprise out.*”

Styles saw the ship’s nacelles begin to glow – the ship was about to go into warp.
Hitting the comms button on his chair’s armrest he barked, “Kirk, this is Styles! Don’t you dare go into warp now! I’m here to arrest you, and if you don’t surrender now, you certainly will never breathe fresh air again, not to mention sitting in the center chair…”

He was interrupted by a deep, calm, yet cold baritone voice that came from the speakers. “Captain Styles, this is Commander Spock, acting-captain of the USS Enterprise. I regret to inform you that Captain Kirk has been injured and is presently in Medbay. Therefore, he cannot answer whatever private joke this comment has to be. But I will pass him your greetings. Good day, Captain Styles. Enterprise out.”

In the same moment, the flagship seemed to collect itself, then leapt into warp – vanishing from the screen.

Styles stared with an open mouth at the field of debris and the empty spot the Enterprise had been only seconds before. Then he whirled around towards the science station. “What’s their course, Commander?” he snarled.

“I’m sorry, Captain, but the sensors didn’t catch anything from the Enterprise – no signature, no movement, no emissions – nothing!”

Turning around again Styles balled his hands into fists.

Escaped!

Kirk had escaped – certainly with the Augments aboard. And they had no clue to where it was off to…

“Captain, sensors have picked up two other vessels approaching – certainly the enforcement you were expecting?” the science officer interrupted Styles’ outraged musings.

“Shall I contact them, sir?” Li asked, and Styles closed his eyes in frustration.

“I don’t think that is necessary anymore!” he growled. “Standard greeting, that’s all, Lieutenant,” he ordered, and Li nodded.
With an expressionless face, the comms officer followed the order, yet inwardly he was deeply amused by Commander Spock’s clever move to protect his own captain. If anyone ever again told him that Vulcans had no sense of humor, he had the proof to dispute the assumption. This Vulcan had a sense of humor – no doubt about it!

ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise, Uhura looked over her shoulder at her lover after she’d cut the link to the Excalibur; fighting against the wide grin that was about to break across her face. At navigation, Riley chuckled soundless. Beside him, this time at the helm, Chekov smirked enough that the edges of his mouth were about to touch his ears.

Spock’s way of interrupting and stopping Styles’ accusations had been very effectual – and funny. To call the other captain’s commands a ‘private joke’ had been a smart move, but to tell Styles politely that he, Spock, would pass greetings to Jim on his behalf was almost cheeky – something none of them would have given the Vulcan credit for.

Peeking over his shoulder, Pavel couldn’t help but chuckle as he saw the stoic, almost-bored expression of the first officer, who sat in the captain’s chair and watched the screen. For a moment, their eyes met, and Spock lifted a brow, Chekov smirked even more and winked at him – a daring thing given the large difference in their ranks. But for once, Spock understood this human reaction, and for a moment, he allowed the left edge of his mouth to wrinkle, while a satisfied spark shone in his eyes. Then the emotionless Vulcan mask fell back in place.

And Pavel Chekov knew that despite all other generalizations about Vulcans, at least this one liked challenges. And may had a sense of humor after all.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yes, we all know that Spock does possess a hidden, sweet little kind of humor. Everyone who remembers Leonard Nimoy on this role and his way to ‘not-smile’ while he did smile (sort of) knows to what I refer. Spock is really a very special kind of person and I bet my last shirt that his human heritage-part has a big saying in his even bigger soft heart (and Zach does a very good job in giving this role a new twist).
Well, our friends made it, but they’re not out of danger. Far from it. And everything depends on Wesley now.

In the next chapters Bob and Kor are starting their big show of alliance. Both men are super in their own way and together they’re a kind of natural force, yet the Orion pirates are anything but stupid.

I hope you loved the new chapter and, as always, I’m dying to read your reactions to it.

I wish you all “Happy Eastern”.

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I hope you had beautiful Easter-holidays and that you could enjoy the first breath of spring. I’m back from my vacation and even if it was still cold at sea, I relished in every calm day and could even enjoy a lot of sunshine.

Thank you so very much for all the comments concerning the last chapter. I hope the next one will be to your satisfaction too.

Have fun
Love
Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 59 – Into the lion’s den

Keeping themselves outside of viewing range of the Lexington, the D’Ghor and Kor’s ships had to trust their scanners to follow the pirates and the old-fashioned Klingon vessel that carried the Romulans. They had passed Trialas and were heading towards some small planetoids now.

Bob still sat at the D’Ghor’s helm, and you wouldn’t have recognized him as a Starfleet officer if you saw him now. He wore weathered civilian clothes, had skipped shaving since the day, and his hair was in disarray. Palmer occupied the seat beside him, looking equally mussed. Wesley had decided that Palmer should accompany him because slavers would be suspicious of Sonik. There could not and would never be Vulcan customers for slaves; therefore, Sonik’s presence would have given them away – something Sonik pointed out to Wesley. Therefore, Palmer was the only senior officer of the Lexington aboard the D’Ghor. Ten Redshirts, also clad in civilian attitudes, as well as Jake Silverhawk, the Chief of Security, were the acting crew, yet there were more.

Kor was with them, together with four of his warriors. And the Klingons looked even more feral than the humans. Without their armor, their hair undone, soiled faces and hands, they appeared as though they came right off a pirating job – Kor’s intention. Whoever dared use his name for the attack against the Excalibur had to know him, and if he wanted to catch this traitor, he had to be indistinguishable from any other Klingon.
The Klingon’s dark eyes settled on the third man in the seat beside the captain – Ritek, the Rigelian. He had offered his service because he spoke not only Standard, Vulcan, and the two most prevalent Klingon dialects, but also Orion and Romulan. Understanding the latter languages was necessary if he was going to be their ticket to the market. Because as soon as they contacted the slavers, they had to play their roles perfectly – including voicing their feigned intentions in the correct tongue with the correct vernacular.

Galven had been against Ritek’s little trip. As much as they quarreled with each other, they respected and even liked one another. The Tellarit feared for his friend’s life, but Ritek could be stubborn as a mule if he wanted to do something. And in this case, he wanted to help – not only the captives but also Kirk, Khan and the others, whose freedom depended on the rescue of the admirals. He promised Galven he’d take a look all of the captives for a Tellarit among them other than the ambassador. He would free them, knowing that his friend hadn’t given up hope of finding his brother.

Even if Kor had agreed to let the militia slip away, he suggested to Galven that they leave the Borderland. But the gang had refused. The *Santo Domingo* stayed with the *Lexington* and waited for Ritek to return; only then they would exit the area.

“What a small asteroid belt,” Palmer reported, and Wesley bent over the scanners. Asteroids don’t have an atmosphere able to sustain life, yet the sensors were receiving just that – life signs. And that there were ships – warp-drives deactivated, but life support systems online. The D’Ghor’s scanners caught all of it.

“A secret station?” Wesley questioned, and Kor stepped beside him, watching the read-outs for a moment.

“It seems so,” he murmured. “Yet there is no proof. Maybe they are using shields to hide.”

Bob nodded. “This would explain why neither of us was able to find this station before now.” He programmed the sensors again. “I’ll scan the area again and let the computer calculate if the signals could be a sign of a station. And don’t forget the ships nearby. I think we found the market.” He glanced at Palmer. “How far away is our fleet?”

The lieutenant looked at his superior. “One-half parsec, sir.”

“The fleet?” Kor had echoed before he smirked. “If you want to integrate the *Lexington* into my squadron, be my guest.”
Wesley rolled his eyes and grumbled something the Klingon couldn’t understand; Kor just grinned more. Shaking his head, Bob reduced speed as the sensors scanned the area again. “There is an energy fluctuation on asteroid 15F-23-J-38,” he murmured. “It’s powerful enough to be a shield-generator. And our Romulan friend is heading this way.” He looked up at Kor. “That’s the market! I’m certain of it.”

The Klingon bared his teeth, bent over Ritek and activated a frequency. His harsh language sounded through the bridge as he directed his commanders. Then he nodded at Wesley, who also hailed his own ship; using a secure frequency. “Commander Marceaux, the dance is about to begin!” he said and heard the chuckle of his first officer.

“Understood, sir. Oh, by the way, we received a message from the Enterprise. They've completed the first part of the mission. They are on their way to the evacuee off-load point now.”

Bob sighed silently in relief, realizing instantly what Jim meant in his choice of words. He made it! Kirk had the sleeping Augments aboard and was on his way to New Vulcan.

The first part of this crazy plan had worked!

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“Thanks, Doc,” Jim smiled at M’Benga and hopped off the bio-bed reaching for his ruined shirt. He had sent McCoy with Khan to the adjacent room to check on the Augments while M’Benga treated his bruises and the burn on his back. Thanks to some hypos. Kirk discovered that they didn’t have to sting. After Geoffrey’s delicate touch, he was almost pain-free, and he felt refreshed. Slipping into a new shirt, he smiled quickly at M’Benga and was about to leave the examination room when the intercom whistled, and Spock’s voice called his name. Jim stepped up to the nearest intercom in the medbay and listened to his Vulcan friend’s report concerning Gamma 12’s destruction.

“No sign of the Excalibur?” he asked, and he could almost see Spock lifting a brow, as the first officer answered,

“She contacted us three minutes ago, sir, but I informed Captain Styles that his support isn’t necessary.” There was a second of hesitation, before he continued, “I also let him know that you were unable to respond to his jest regarding your arrest because you are in medbay. I also assured him I would give you his regards – though I am not convinced of its authenticity. I am not certain, but I believe he was irritated though I did not have the time to investigate that possibility. We are on course to New Vulcan.”
Kirk stared at the intercom as if the device could explain to him how a Vulcan developed a sense of humor; then Jim began to laugh. “Mr. Spock, it’s always a pleasure and a load off my mind when you’re in charge. You handle the most unsettling situations with logic and grace.”

“Thank you, sir. May I ask how you are?”

“M’Benga gave me some hypos and treated the burn with synthetic skin. I’m fit for duty, but first, I want to check on our… guests.”

Spock knew that Jim and Khan needed a moment to themselves after the successful rescue of the other Augments. Even if the Vulcan pretended to misunderstand feelings, he could imagine the emotional state of the former dictator. For more than two years, the enhanced man had searched for his crew, his family as he called them, and tried to recover them. To have them now, safe with him – as safe as possible anyhow – had to affect the super-human significantly. As impulsive Jim Kirk was, at the moment, he was an anchor for Khan (as he had been before). Spock was even satisfied that his captain and friend would stay with the super-human for now. It would calm down the emotional turmoil that Khan was susceptible to.

Jim had a soothing effect on anxious people. He could quickly sympathize and comfort them – a characteristic that had many advantages. Spock had been on the receiving end of Kirk’s compassion several times, and even if he would never admit it, he had found peace and strength in his T’hy’la’s behavior. Khan would be no exception because of his bond with Jim.

And there was one more thing. Kirk had escaped death by a hair's breadth again! Spock was confident that Khan’s furious outburst in the transporter room was due to this fact – anger was born from concern. Spock also had found this harder to control lately. He felt the same relief after finding Jim alive. Having his bond-mate with him now would soothe the unsettled Augment as Spock’s knowledge of Kirk’s safety calmed him. And a calm Augment was easier to handle than a riled one.

“Take your time, Captain; everything is in order.”

“Right – Kirk out,” Jim replied before he switched off the intercom and smoothed his ruined shirt. Nodding at M’Benga, who was disinfecting the bio-bed, Jim left the room and walked quietly to the central area only dimly illuminated because aboard it was still ‘night’. He took a quick look at Sulu, who still was in intensive care, and smiled as he saw his friend sleeping peacefully while the scars began to vanish. Satisfied he’d have Hikaru back in a few days, Kirk headed for the attached room that held Nien’s people.
At first, he couldn’t see anything besides the cryotubes. They were everywhere, side-by-side like sardines in a can. Then he saw Bones coming towards him, smiling. “Every one of them is all right,” he said. “All bio signals are within normal parameters for people in cryosleep.” He closed his medical tricorder and whispered after he reached Kirk, “Thank the Lord. I don’t want to think about what would happen if one of the cryotubes had failed and your sweetheart were forced to grieve another loss.”

Jim nodded and looked at the dark figure standing between two tubes. Nien had removed the red shirt and wore only the black Starfleet undershirt that seemed to melt into the black trousers. Their eyes met. Of course, Khan had heard the CMO’s words. Kirk gave him a reassuring smile before he addressed Bones. “I’m glad to hear it. Spock reported that we missed the *Excalibur* by a few seconds. He had chatted with Styles before the *Enterprise* was off. We’re on our way to New Vulcan now.”

McCoy grinned. “You made it – again!” He shook his head, chuckling. “I want to have a closer look at the contract you made with Lady Luck. It’s unbelievable how often you jump head-first into the fray and end up on top.” He clapped a hand on Jim’s shoulder. “What did Geoffrey have to say about your intimate meeting with a phaser?”

Kirk shrugged. “He treated me; that’s all.” An evil smile played suddenly around his lips. “But his treatment enlightened me, my dear friend.” As he caught Bones’ asking glance, he explained, “Hypos don’t have to hurt, you know! And I would really appreciate it if you would give me the next one as nicely as M’Benga did!”

Promptly Leonard snorted. “Don’t count on it, Jim. Your fear of hypos might be the only ace I got to remind you not to jump head-first into the nearest disaster!” He saw the mischievous spark in Kirk’s eyes and groaned, “I know, the prospect of being hypoed wouldn't stop you from doing what you think you have to do.”

“So, you also can be gentler the next time,” Kirk triumphed; he winked at McCoy and headed towards Khan, who only had one ear to the banter. Bones watched his friend wrap his arms around the Augment from behind. He turned away from them to give them some privacy, and tactfully left the room.

Jim felt how tense Nien was, and his hands moved in soothing circles over the superhuman’s taut abdomen. Laying his chin on Khan’s left shoulder, he looked down on the inhabitant of the cryotube in front of them. Beneath the icy mist that clung in crystals to the little observation window, Kirk saw a young and beautiful female with dark hair fanned out just to her shoulders. Her expression was utterly peaceful. Her delicate features looked innocent as a child’s; her appearance was more alluring, however. ‘Sleeping Beauty!’ it shot through his mind. ‘*Never has this title fit anyone so well, though unlike the fairy-tale, she’s been asleep nearly three centuries.’"
Nien had told him so much about the other Augments; Jim instantly knew who he was looking at. And he was right.

“This is Katie,” Nien murmured before he gestured towards the next cryotube. “Otto is in that one. Dr. McCoy assures me that both are in good health – just like Pablo, Rodriguez, Chang, Paolo, Janine, and Joaquin.” He took a deep breath. “I love all of them – every single person that found shelter on your ship. They are all my brothers and sisters, dear to me as no one else could be, except for you. But…” He was for loss at words, but Jim knew what Khan wanted to say.

“But those – the one's you named. They hold a special place in your heart. A place no one else can go,” he voiced this little secret gently.

Khan laid his head against Jim’s temple. “You are right. They are special to me. Very special. But there is only one who is in this 'place in my heart’, as you say.” He turned in Jim’s embrace and snaked his arms around the younger man. “You!” He took another deep breath, coming to the topic that burned on his tongue since they left Gamma 12. “Time stopped as I saw you throw yourself in the path of the phaser’s blast – when I felt you fall against me.” He cupped one of Jim’s cheeks with a long slender hand. “I must repeat what Dr. McCoy and I referred to in the transporter room. You promised me you would be more careful, yet…”

“Nien, you said the world seemed to stop for you at that moment,” Kirk interrupted him softly and waited until the Augment nodded slowly. Only then did he continue, “The same happened to me when Finnegan aimed at your chest, phaser set to ‘kill’. Time stopped, the world around me vanished. The only thing I could hear was my heart pounding. And I felt only one thing – fear. Deep all-consuming fear of losing you. You told me once that your life would be nothing more than a numb existence without me. I know what you mean by that because your death would leave me – empty. A shell until death which would probably come sooner without you. That’s why I threw myself at you. I knew that shot could hit me. You think I was about to sacrifice myself for you? I was, but not for the reason you think. I did it out of selfishness because I know I couldn’t handle your death. Love does, I suppose – I mean I’m learning. Love is selfish in a way.” He smiled gently. “Anyway, I've lost count how often you put yourself between me and something dangerous, bad, whatever. And I’m sure it's for the same reason.”

Khan lowered his head and bit his lips. It was uncertainty, Jim had rarely seen in his lover. For a long moment the super-human didn’t reply, then he lifted his gaze again and nodded slowly. “I understand,” he said quietly. “It is something we both have to do – to act when the other one is at risk. It’s what makes us leaders – taking responsibility for others to the very last breath.” He chuckled ruefully. “Joaquin once shouted at me that it was selfish of me to risk my life as I came to his aid after an earthquake. He accused me of being mad to give my life for him and letting our people down, because they needed me, too.” He snorted. “I was angry at that time; angry with a fourteen year old boy who didn’t care who I was and only let off some steam because he feared for me. Yet he spoke with wisdom – a wisdom I only begin to grasp now. Love is selfish, you are right, but without it we
wouldn’t do the half of what we are ready to do for those we hold most dear.”

Jim pursed his lips. “And so we’re back at the beginning. We both will not stop from protecting each other, and we will face anything. And afterwards we’ll be angry about it. Though I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t shout at me in front of my officers the next time I have to hurl your ass out of danger.” He glared pointing at Khan. “Right, Scotty is my friend just like Bones and Spock, and Pavel…”

“I apologize for my behavior in the transporter room, James,” the super-human cut in very seriously. “Even if chastising you was called for, I should have controlled myself until we were in private. It is not my intention to undermine your authority, or to embarrass you in front of your officers. My horses bolted off, as we say in India, and for this I am sorry.”

Grimacing Kirk cocked his head. “The horses bolted off – nice idiom. In your case it was a herd.”

Khan didn’t reply this time and only looked with a mixture of calm innocence and slight amusement at him. Jim rolled his eyes. “Right, forget it.” He chuckled again. “At least Scotty knows about us now – and Pavel. Heavens, I think we gave the kid a little heart attack.”

Nien began to smile. “Young Chekov is far smarter as you give him credit for, Jim. He is not only highly intelligent, but he also has the heart in the right place. And, I don’t think we could have masked our relationship in front of your other friends much longer. Everyone can see how you ogle me, even on the bridge, and…”

“I don’t ogle!” Jim protested and this time, Khan had to laugh.

“So, gazing and batong your eyelashes at me isn’t ogling?” He smirked. “But it’s all right. I caught myself several times doing the same.” He rested his forehead against Kirk’s; their eyes locked and they seemed to drown in the other one’s love and warmth that shone there. For a long moment, both were silent, and the mood shifted from playfulness to gentle seriousness before Nien murmured, “I never believed in kismet, yet it can only be fate that brought us two together. I love you with everything I am. And now, with you and my people here – near me again – I can taste a piece of happiness. Genuine and real happiness.” His eyes became damp; gratefulness and redemption mirrored in his ocean-colored depths. “I have them back,” he whispered barely under his breath.

Finally, he was reunited with his people. Finally, they were safe! Finally, he could feel their presence in his mind, faintly – more a shadow than anything else, but he heard the familiar whisper of their souls again. He didn’t have to fear for their lives anymore. Yes, they still had to reach New Vulcan where they really would be safe, yet the next three days offered no problems like they had already
faced. No one could locate the Enterprise; no one knew where she was going. Of course, there was still the chance that Section 31 would make the right conclusions, but Old Spock was watching Luengo from afar and would warn Jim and the others if Section 31 was up to something. The chance that the Enterprise would reach New Vulcan was high, and Khan allowed himself to relax for the first time since he learned of his people’s whereabouts.

And for all this he had to thank Jim Kirk – the young captain who had risked everything to help him and who would have to pay the price for it too. Even if the other admirals and the surviving diplomats could be recovered, Nien knew that Jim would face court martial, which could strip him off his rank and his command. And yet this crazy, glorious boy-captain had supported him. There were no words to describe what Khan was feeling now.

“I don’t know how to thank you for what you have done for my family and me,” he whispered. “I’m no dreamer. I know that your career will end as soon as we reach New Vulcan, and the authorities get a hold of you. You’re going to lose everything you worked so hard for, yet you didn’t hesitate to throw this all away for me.” He moistened his lips. “I know, I should have stopped you, but I couldn’t. Accepting your help was certainly the most selfish thing I ever did because I knew where it would lead for you, yet I found myself unable to turn down your offer. You were the only hope of survival for my people, and therefore, I had to accept your sacrifice.” He tightened his hold around Jim’s frame. “You have no idea how grateful I am.”

Jim gulped; his throat had tightened during the little speech. Letting one hand wander over Nien’s slender back upwards to the Augment’s dark hair, he tenderly combed through the midnight-colored strands, while he replied, “This shouldn’t be on your conscience, Nien. There is no need for it. I always do what I think is right, and if this means to go against the so-called authorities – Section 31 in this case – then I’ll do it. Don’t think I helped you recover your people only because we are bonded – together. I would have done it anyway because it’s the right thing to do!

“And don’t think about me ending my career. I told you aboard the space station as the Klingon ship fired at us – given the choice of living in space or staying with you I would choose you – I still would choose you! Yes, I love my ship, and I love to travel through space, but that’s not all there is to life. As beautiful as the Enterprise is, she is ‘only’ a ship – strong, mighty, a shining grey lady in the never ending night of space. She is made of steel. She offers me shelter and a home, but she is lifeless. The life comes with her crew – life comes with you, Nien!” He moved his head slowly and gave his bond-mate a soft kiss, before he added, “Looking back at the past weeks I wouldn’t change one detail. Not one single thing.” He pursed his lips and mischief began to shimmer in his eyes. “Well, maybe I would try to prevent the bacon from being burned in the pan back in our little cabin, or to save the red wine we spilled on the floor, but…”

Khan laughed quietly and pulled him into a strong embrace, knowing that Jim tried to change the melancholy mood into something more cheerfully. “You are impossible, James!” he chuckled and sighed in contentment as Kirk tightened his hold on him.
For a long moment, both remained like this – locked in each other’s arms and relishing in the proximity, then they relaxed. Jim rather felt than heard Khan’s deep sigh, telling him more than anything else. Happiness didn’t need words.

“It’s starting,” Barnett murmured, as he heard the rising activity from afar. Even though he and the others were held in an area that seemed to be beneath the main rooms, the noises were apparent. And all captives knew what that meant: The slave market would start soon.

Batari Whitman and Ania Morganth looked at each other; dread filled them despite the brave mask they had put on these last days. Both women had been only threatened, their bruises healed, yet they were very aware of the fact that this wasn’t an act of humanity but calculation. Healthy slaves earned more money; that was all.

One cell beside them, Sarek only lifted a brow while Sokal’s hands twitched. The ambassador couldn’t blame the younger man for this slip of control. They both knew what lay ahead for them and that they were going to face mental torture – a prospect that even filled a Vulcan with anxiety. Yes, there was still the possibility that both of them could stop their heartbeat and choose suicide, yet Sarek wasn’t ready to give up. Ending life was the very last choice he would make – there must be another.

After Amanda’s death he had thought that there was nothing worth living for, then he had realized that despite Spock’s chosen way – joining Starfleet, his son would need him. Of course Spock would deny such a thing, yet Sarek was foremost a father and therefore knew his son far too well. Yes, the ambassador was aware of the fact that his son likely received the message of his supposed death and it distressed him that Spock was facing another loss, but on the other hand there was still a small link between them. Maybe his son sensed that he wasn’t dead as the official statement surely said, and would come to his and the others rescue.

Hope – a very illogical hope, as Sarek had to admit, but if there was one thing he had learned in the last two years concerning his son and the far too young and impulsive, headstrong and genuine captain of the Enterprise, then it was that those two weren’t easily fooled and didn’t shrink back from challenge if there was something that had to be done. If Spock sensed his father’s presence in his mind, he would inform his captain, and then Sarek would bet ‘his last shirt’ that the Enterprise would come to set things right. If Kirk saw the tiniest chance to save some of the delegation, he would do it – hopefully without informing Starfleet Command. Whoever was responsible for the betrayal the admirals and the diplomats had fallen prey to, belonged to Command. And this one would not like to hear that members of the delegation could be still alive. This much Sarek had concluded from the words their captors had exchanged two nights ago.
His gaze wandered to Sokal whose face was the expressionless mask Vulcans were famous for, but Sarek knew that deep inside his assistant was as worried as they all were. The time in which help could arrive was counting down. If Sarek had been human, he would admit that the tightening of his stomach hadn’t anything to do with being hungry.

In another cell, Gav was pacing, grousing and grumbling under his breath. The Andorian ambassador watched him, but it was evident that he wasn’t about to give up hope.

And so was the feeling among the admirals; Barnett and Nogura clung to hope with stubbornness. Maybe they could negotiate with the Romulans, but the officers knew that option was likely nonexistent. They were declared dead by now, this much was certain, and so the Romulans had no reason to fear any consequences from the Federation if they got some admirals in their hands and pressed them for information. Rather the opposite. The Romulans must be happy to have such an opportunity.

All of sudden the door at the end of the hallways opened and heavy steps came nearer. The dim light revealed D’nyrrs in the company of four other Orions and five Vulcanoids wearing civilian clothes. Their posture and their arrogance gave them away – Romulan officers. And as their glances fell on the four Starfleet officers that D’nyrrs pointed to, Barnett knew that he was looking death in the face.

Ritek’s voice sounded harsh and strange while he talked in the Orion tongue to the man who had hailed them just a minute ago. Wesley didn’t speak this language, yet he tried to understand what was going on by listening to the Rigelian’s tones – impossible because Orion accentuated syllables differently than English or Federation Standard. The commodore’s gaze flickered back to the main screen that showed a giant asteroid among smaller ones – and around it four spacecraft. The old Klingon ship they followed was there, too, as well as vessels of different origins yet all heavily armed as the scanners had told them.

Kor stood between Wesley and Palmer, both long arms crossed over his broad chest. That he didn’t like the situation was plain to see on his tanned face decorated with a sneer that bared his teeth.

Ritek looked over his shoulder at Wesley and nodded with a wink, contrasting with his sudden roars and shouts. All on the small bridge stared wide-eyed at him as he growled and snarled at his at the man beside him, listened again and hissed something. Then his voice returned to normal and sounded almost kindly all of sudden. After several more words he cut off the transmission and turned around with a very satisfied expression on his face.
“Well?” Bob demanded as the Regulian made no move to speak.

Chuckling Ritek only said, “We have permission to beam down. They’ll lift their shields in the next four minutes, so be ready to go to the transporter room.”

Kor frowned deeply. “And what is this outburst about?” he asked; astonished.

Again Ritek grinned. “How should I say it? They were irritated that they didn’t know about Franklyn Lancaster’s arrival.” He nodded at a confused Wesley.

“I'm who?” Bob asked, but it was Palmer, who answered him,

“Franklyn Lancaster, a successful ‘businessman’ in the Borderland and several other areas that have a crime problem. He deals in anything you can think of – from stolen uniforms to torpedoes. Intel assumes that he also has a hand in slavery, so his appearance here is logical.”

“And I should be this guy?” Wesley was thunderstruck.

“Knew, you would have it in you,” Kor grumbled.

Ritek began to snicker. “I once saw a picture of him on the news. He does resemble you a little bit. Just try to be an arrogant, icy bastard for once and the guys down there will be fooled for sure.”

Palmer hid a grin as he saw the baffled expression of his superior. Then he caught Kor’s wide smirk and quickly turned around; otherwise, he would have betrayed his amusement.

Wesley glared at the wide smiling Ritek. “In other words, you gave us the identity of an illegal dealer who has taken interest in the offered captives and…”

“And after I convinced them that you’ll be angry and will talk with some influential people at the Syndicate if you don’t get the permission for the transporter, they agreed. It seems the guy who is responsible for this market fears the Syndicate – maybe he’s dealing without their knowledge. As far as I’m informed, the Syndicate gets a kind of tax from every deal that is made within the Borderland and can become quite irritated if they discover a business that isn't cutting them in.” He leaned back
in his chair. “I think our friends down there are afraid that we are about to spill their little secret market to the Syndicate. Well, shall we inform the Syndicate afterwards?”

Bob was tempted to close his eyes and to groan. Civilians! Sometimes he asked himself if they all were crazy.

Kor snorted. “When we’re done with them, the Syndicate will not find anyone to punish,” he growled, bent over Ritek, and opened a frequency to contact his ships.

Afterwards, Wesley did the same said one sentence, “Marceaux, let the dance begin!”

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Mercilessly, the sun beat down on New ShiKhar and drove even the most heat-adapted Vulcans into buildings and shadows which offered some shelter. The construction work at the city’s edge had stopped, and a lot of energy was needed to cool the computer centers and the hospital rooms. But there were enough inhabitants who endured the searing heat and walked the streets because they had duties which didn’t allow for delay. Yet ‘Selek’ was surprised as one of his secretaries, Stymm, called for his attention and told him about a rare visitor. Yes, Vulcans were used to heat, but age did demand a toll, and his visitor was old in every sense of the word.

Rising, Spock lifted his hand in the Vulcan greeting as his visitor stepped into his office and lowered his head in deep respect. “T’Pau, thy visit honors me,” he used the traditional words towards his clan’s Old Mother and uncrowned matriarch of Vulcan and New Vulcan now.

“Thy greetings are welcome, Grandson,” T’Pau replied and walked towards his desk. Her hair was still black, despite her age, but the deep wrinkles in her face betrayed her many years. The long robe rustled softly as she sat down on the offered chair. She leaned a long stick, the symbol of her status, against the desk. Behind her, two of her assistants greeted ‘Selek’, too, before they closed the doors and remained outside.

Offering the old Vulcaness a cool tea, Spock waited patiently for her to refer to the reason for her appearance, even if he already knew why she was here. He was right.

“I read your message and talked to some members of the High Council,” T’Pau began without any prologue. “I’m familiar with Earth history and therefore, know several things about these so-called ‘Augments’.” Her dark eyes bore into his. “Do you think it wise to offer them shelter?” Before
Spock could reply something, she lifted a hand to stop him and added, “I do understand that there are only a few left and that they are in distress, but you cannot deny that there is a certain risk in welcoming them in our colony.”

Spock chose his next words with absolute care; knowing that he had to win his grandmother – who was only a few years older than himself now – if the Augments should get a chance at asylum on New Vulcan. “The Augments bear only a little risk for us compared to what will happen to the whole Federation and so us as well, should the recent Interim Chief of Command of Starfleet succeed in his plan. He needs the Augments, and especially their leader, for tools.”

That got T’Pau’s interest. Lifting a brow, she watched the face of her grandson, who was as weathered as she – a very interesting yet strange experience every time they met. “You gave evidence in your message that something is ‘amiss’ within Starfleet Command, and that not only the Augment leader but also your younger counterpart and James Kirk are in danger. Now you talk about a ‘great risk’ for the whole Federation. Explain!”

The High Minister took a deep breath – a human gesture he allowed himself, even in T’Pau’s presence. He wasn’t the uncertain young man from decades ago anymore. He had made his inner peace with his two halves – one thing that didn’t give him trouble in this new timeline.

“Grandmother,” he addressed her, choosing this private title with the full intent of showing her that the next minutes should remain private. “I have specific information that Admiral Luengo plans a holocaust of the Klingon Empire using biological weapons – weapons he needs augmented cells for. He has already taken them from Khan, the Augment leader.” He watched with fascination as T’Pau’s face paled – the strongest reaction he ever saw from her. “And he needs more of them. But this is not all. James Kirk found evidence that members of the delegation that were declared dead are still alive. I believe it is more than evidence – it is proof.”

The old Vulcaness tensed. “Sarek?” she asked, feeling a stirring deep in her soul as the mother in her began to reach for something she thought she had lost over the years – hope.

Spock nodded. “Vulcan blood was found in an evacuation shuttle, but no bodies. Sarek and his assistant Sokal are still alive. There would be no reason to move bodies, and if they have been taken alive, it is for a reason.”

For a moment, T’Pau closed her eyes and her face relaxed in relief that washed over her conscious; then she was in control again. “Knowing you, this is not all you have to reveal,” she said. ‘Selek’ felt a hint of amusement.
“You are correct,” he replied. “The attack on the Excalibur was not a betrayal by the Klingons, but was initiated by Section 31 – and all indications point to Luengo as the new leader of Section 31.”

For a Vulcan, T’Pau showed much shock on her face. Her eyes widened, and she took a sharp breath and her posture stiffened. “This would mean that Luengo murdered the delegation and the admirals.” She bent forwards slightly. “Do you have any proof, Grandson?” she asked; her voice was not more than a whisper.

Spock nodded and turned the screen on his desk around. “I have the records from the Enterprise and the Excalibur. I have saved copies from Luengo’s private terminal and much more. Please, convince yourself.” He opened the files and T’Pau began to watch and listen…

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When Spock’s affirmation that the mission had been completed reached Headquarters, it elicited a few very different reactions. Luengo was in a meeting with Norton, Cartwright, and four Council members when the message reached his terminal. He didn’t even feel his jaw drop as he read the transmission – a transmission the Vulcan shouldn’t have made at all. He, Kirk and the others should be stuck in the Excalibur’s brig by now, but this was not the case. Obviously, Styles hadn’t been able to arrest Kirk and his sidekicks – or retrieve the Augment.

Norton, who sat across the table, bit his lips in anger as he too made the right conclusion. The Enterprise’s command team, the other senior officers, and the genetically enhanced creature were still free, and…

“What does that mean, Gamma 12 was destroyed?” Alan Hudson, a middle-aged Terran from one of the Earth colonies, asked thunderstruck. His colleagues, who were also members of the Council, looked expectantly at Luengo, too.

José felt caught. The destruction of some high-security facilities hadn’t been balloted with the Council, and Luengo knew how sensitively these politicians reacted to military operations of greater consequences without being consulted first.

Taking a deep breath, he answered, “According to the newest intelligence developments, we have reason to suspect the Klingons will attack soon. They will use a weakened Starfleet to gain more Federation territory. Gamma 12 along with three other high-security facilities were in the area which could be captured by our enemies next. Therefore, I ordered its evacuation and destruction – an unpleasant but necessary step.”
“And when did you plan to inform us about this ‘step’, Admiral?” Hudson asked. “You just blew millions of tax credits into space – a cost I don’t dare calculate. At least, you could have informed us before…”

“There was no time, as you are certainly aware,” Luengo interrupted him. “We expect the attack in the next days and…”

“Days? This hasn’t been reported to us, either.”

Both men stared at each other, before Luengo slowly and icily replied, “The President was informed of a possible strike. He decided it was not important enough to make a broadcast of the current situation only to stroke the ego of some politicians!”

Hudson went rigid. “The Council is the government of the Federation, Admiral, and…”

“And consent of delegates of the Federation’s members – politicians, who are no strategically trained soldiers and therefore not able to act quickly or correctly to protect the Federation. This part is up to Starfleet – to me in this case! And I will not waste any more time with this discussion. The high-security facilities were destroyed so that they would not fall into enemy’s hand which could have led to a catastrophe! The inhabitants are evacuated and with them the most sensitive and important materials. Facilities, as expensive as they are to build, can be replaced, but material from tests, developments and science can be a weapon in the enemy’s hand. You’d agree with me that the safety of the Federation is our highest concern, not money – not that the war already consumed millions of credits, as we all know.” He fixed Hudson for a second before addressing the other admirals. “Okay, Ladies and Gentlemen, let us proceed with the agenda!”

Alan Hudson pressed his lips into a thin line. This wasn’t over for him – far from it. Luengo had overstepped his bounds, and the man knew it, for God’s sake! The admiral knew that he had no right to make such a decision, yet he bent the rules. And, as Hudson admitted, he wasn’t convinced that the president was informed about the destruction of those facilities. He would ask him at the next opportunity – hopefully soon.

ST***ST***ST

Bob looked around and had to gather every bit of his usually tight control not to show the disgust that shook him the moment the transporter beam let him free. The station in which the market would take place was, to say the least, the perfect mixture of chaos, bad hygiene, overcrowding, bad air,
and suffering. His gaze instantly fell on some captives being pushed into a hallway at the end of the large room he had been beamed into. Many of them were unable to move. Voices sounded from everywhere, and the atmosphere reeked with the smell of dirt, sweat, cheap perfume and alcohol.

Beside him, Palmer materialized together with Jake Silverhawk and two Redshirts, Kor, and four Klingon warriors who also belonged to those who ‘suffered’ the appearances of the gene-experiments a century ago.

They were expected by none other than else than D’nyrrs and four large Orions armed to the teeth – his bodyguards, no doubt about it.

“Franklyn Lancaster?” the pirate asked, and Bob stared icily at him.

“Do you greet all of your potential customers as you did my ship a minute ago?” he asked coolly.

D’nyrrs pursed his lips – the Orion way of showing embarrassment. “I have to apologize for my security officer, Mr. Lancaster. The man got strict orders concerning this… market. He was overzealous. It’s an honor to bid you welcome. For some time we tried to gain your interest but you always refused. We were a little bit surprised by your sudden arrival.”

Wesley lifted both brows and put on an arrogant face. “I’m not used to asking for permission to contact potential business partners, Mister…?”

“D’nyrrs, sir, at your service!” The Orion even bowed. It would have looked comical if the situation weren’t so somber.

D’nrrys! Of course Wesley had heard about him and he knew that there was a big bounty on the man’s head. All the better if this particular individual were arrested – or eliminated otherwise at the end of the mission. Yet Bob had to be careful. If D’nyrrs tried to win Lancaster as a customer, the Terran dealer had to know about the Orion.

He drawled, “I’m aware of your name, but I get tongue-tied trying to say it.” Bob casually flipped a hand. “Now I know how it is pronounced, Mr. Dnirs, and…”

“D’nyrrs,” the slaver corrected but closed his mouth as ‘Lancaster’ gave him a hard glare.
“Well, Mr. Dnirrrrs,” Bob accentuated the name throatily, “I’m interested in some people who are professional looking – able to take on hospitality tasks.”

The Orion began to beam. “I’m happy to hear this, sir. We have excellent goods to sell this time – including two female beauties and…”

“Do I look like an ordinary slaver, Dnaarrr?” Wesley interrupted him, pronouncing the name incorrectly on purpose. “I could buy beauties around the galaxy without risking the authorities’ intervention. Most women would come to me by their own free will, won’t they?” he asked Palmer over his shoulder, who struggled to keep a straight face.

“Sure thing, boss!” he nodded and bit his lips to prevent the smirk that threatened to betray his amusement as he caught the baffled gaze of his superior.

Kor rolled his eyes inwardly. ‘Boss’ – what a cliché! Humans! Sometimes they were so simple-minded! Clearing his throat, he stepped beside Wesley. “You speak of ‘us’. To whom do you refer?” he asked and found himself in the center of D’nyrrs’ interest.

“And you are…?” the Orion asked, irritated that his talk with ‘Lancaster’ was interrupted.

“Ibrahim – my partner in this particular business!” Wesley answered instead of Kor. “And who is your partner you apparently refer to when you say ‘us’? I heard rumors of you working together with a Klingon and…”

“Klokh is my partner, yes. It’s sometimes advantageous to have a Klingon on your side.”

Wesley smiled without any humor. “I know what you mean,” he said; watching D’nyrrs, as the Orion looked Kor up and down once more. To his relief, the slaver didn’t seem to realize that it wasn’t a human he faced.

“Which slaves are you interested in?” the Orion addressed the Klingon lord, who stayed calm. “There is rumor that you caught a Vulcan,” he replied. “I’ve need of him!”

“Is that so?” D’nyrrs shook his head. “Then I’m sorry to tell you that the two Vulcans unavailable.”
“Really?” Wesley cut in. “So you run a secret market within the secret market? You sell the most illicit goods before you offer the rest?” He shook his head. “My friend, this is against the rule – a rule of the Syndicate. I may have to report you.”

D’nyrrs face became dark – not with shame, but with anger. “Mr. Lancaster, as much as I appreciate counting you among my customers…”

“You don’t yet, Dneers. You aren’t able to offer what you promised – interesting slaves. Well, I’m beginning to regret making this trip at all and…”

The Orion quickly made a step into his direction. “There are a few items more attractive to a buyer than the two Vulcans or the two female beauties. A Tellarit, an Andorian, a…”

“Interesting, but I also need some experienced males who’ll be able to serve my house,” Wesley said, knowing now that at least some of the ambassadors had survived – and, hopefully, among them the Vice-president and maybe the Betazoid woman as well.

D’nyrrs nodded eagerly. “No problem, sir, I have about fifty slaves, among them some men who certainly will be to your satisfaction.”

Fifty slaves – fifty captives! Good God, Wesley had calculated recovering a dozen survivors of the delegation, not four times that amount. However, he knew he couldn’t leave those poor souls to their fate. He had to recover them, too – as soon as the Lexington and the other ships arrived, of course. Until then he had to learn the station’s layout and the location of the captives.

“I see we understand each other,” he drawled and nodded down the hallway. “Just let me have a look at them.”

“The auction has already begun,” D’nyrrs said, “but I assure you that you’ll find some slaves to your liking. Please follow me.” He turned around and walked away, his four bodyguards at his side.

Wesley and Kor exchanged a quick gaze; both grim, both hiding their loathing, yet Bob felt anxiety. If Sarek and the other Vulcan – maybe his assistant – were already sold, then the Romulans had them in their power and likely the admirals, too. And this also meant that they were out of reach for them as soon as the Romulans beamed the captives to their ship.
Kor seemed to think the same, because he fell behind the little group as they headed down the hallway, took his communicator and contacted the D’Ghor, murmuring some orders and listening to the answers, before he snapped the device close and closed the distance to Wesley again. “No one has been beamed on or off the other ship,” he whispered under his breath to the commodore. “That means your admirals and the Vulcans must be down on this station.”

Wesley allowed himself a sigh of relief, before he murmured, “We have to find them, and take action. If everything is about to go to hell, we need to act before our ships are here.” He glanced at Kor. “This could be a suicide mission. Are you ready for this?”

“Are you trying to offend? I have a traitor to catch!” Kor grumbled and bared his teeth in a grin. He loved challenges!

“How could this happen?!” Luengo’s face was dark, revealing his barely controlled fury. On the screen of his office terminal, a very contrite Styles looked back at him.

“I am sorry, Admiral, but the Enterprise had already completed the evacuation and destroyed Gamma 12 by the time we arrived. I…”

“The Enterprise was not operating at full capacity according to Commodore Wesley’s last report! Hell, he had to rendezvous with them to transfer parts before Kirk could continue. His engineer may be a good technician, but he’s no wizard! The Enterprise couldn’t fly full speed, but you were still too late. Did you stop for shore leave before you traveled to Gamma 12?” The last sentence was accompanied by a sneer, and Styles’ face flushed.

“Sir, I can assure you that we traveled at maximum speed – as fast as we could after the battle in the Borderland – warp six. You told me the Enterprise could only get up to warp three. We should’ve gotten there first. I don’t know what tricks Kirk pulled out of his sleeve. The fact is that the Enterprise is on her way to Earth – with the evacuees.”

“The question is how many evacuees?” José growled. “I doubt that Kirk blew the station into pieces with the Augments still in it. Sure as hell he has them aboard.” He leaned backward in his chair. “Are you confident that he’s headed towards Earth? He may be nothing more than a reckless farmboy, but I don’t take him to be a complete fool. He has to know what awaits him if he nears Headquarters. There is no way he’d risk arrest or captivity of his Augment friend.”
The young captain on the screen took a deep breath. “Sir, we weren’t able to ascertain the Enterprise’s exact heading, in fact, we were unable to locate her until we had a visual. Our sensors didn’t read her.”

“Which is no miracle, because she has this prototype of sensor disturbing device linked to her systems. There is no way to find her now.” He balled one hand into a fist. “Couldn’t you have tried to stop her?”

Shaking his head, Styles replied, “She went to warp before I could take action.”

Luengo gritted his teeth. “Did you speak with Kirk?”

Styles snorted. “I hailed the Enterprise, thinking I would speak with Kirk, but his Vulcan officer was on the line. Told me that he didn’t need our ‘support’ and when I informed him that I was there to arrest Kirk he told me off – said that Kirk was in med-bay and couldn’t respond to my ‘joke’, as he called it.” He shook his head. “I swear this guy was pulling my leg!”

This time, the admiral frowned. “Kirk was in the medbay? So he was injured while evacuating Gamma 12?” He pursed his lips and looked at the wall without really seeing it. “This is the last bit of evidence I needed. Finnegan was instructed to stop Kirk if he should try to recover the cryotubes with the Augments – my backup plan if you failed.” He snorted. “I accounted for trouble. Kirk is smart, I have to give him that, but I hoped that elite security team would be enough to get him, but Finnegan failed, too. A shame! I trusted in his abilities – as I did in yours, Captain!” he addressed Styles again.

Lawrence took a deep breath, as an idea struck him. “Sir, the message Spock sent said that they would bring the evacuees to ‘safety’. Vulcans cannot lie, but maybe he avoided the truth by choosing his words. What if the Enterprise doesn’t head towards Earth but to another destination – perhaps to bring the Augments to another planet where they'd be ‘safe’?”

Luengo stared at him. “There is some truth to your considerations,” he murmured. “Kirk would be crazy to return to Earth, but where can he go? No member of the Federation would offer shelter to a mutinying Starfleet captain who has dangerous super-humans and a terrorist onboard.”

Styles nodded. “You are right, sir, yet Kirk must have a plan. The question is, what is it?”
“This is, indeed, the question,” the admiral nodded. “Try to intercept all transmissions from the *Enterprise*. Kirk has to contact this someone. I know he will use secure frequencies, but even then we might get a clue. Inform me when you find something. Luengo out!” He cut off the connection before he cursed vehemently. How often would he be getting run-around by this damn Iowa boy? How often would Kirk be a step ahead? He should’ve been ages ago? How was it possible that he outdid the well-chosen people who were instructed to capture him at any cost – him, and this blasted, enhanced creature Kirk seemed to call a friend now? Maybe the latter was the answer. Khan was brilliant, and there was no doubt that he supported Kirk. Of course, he did, after all, he wanted to free his crew – something that apparently just happened. Together those two could – and already had – managed a lot.

But they had no place to go to – no place to hide. There wasn’t a place anywhere in the whole galaxy Section 31 wouldn’t find and catch them! And no Federation member would help them. So, what was Kirk up now? Knowing the cowboy, he had some plans in his crazy head, but what? Where was the *Enterprise* going in now?

“Dammit, if I had known that she was able to travel so quickly, I would have sent other ships to intercept her! And Wesley told me to…” He stopped.

Wesley!

He was the last who had spoken with Kirk in person!

Kirk was Wesley’s protégée and…

Why did this leave a bad taste in his mouth?

What if the commodore knew about Kirk’s intentions and covered for him? Wesley had known about the SDD and had kept quiet until it was working aboard the *Enterprise*! Wesley had been on the *Enterprise* after the Battle for Aldebaran – maybe he knew about Khan!

‘A conspiracy!’ Luengo thought. ‘What if *they're conspireing together against Command – against me? What if…’ He stopped his own thoughts, bent forwards hastily, and activated the intercom. “Lieutenant!” he barked at his secretary. “Hail the *Lexington*. I want to talk with Commodore Wesley in person now!”

“Aye, sir!” came the reply and then Luengo couldn’t do anything other than wait. Several minutes
later his secretary reported, “Admiral, the _Lexington_ isn't answering. She is too far out of range for a direct transmission.”

Feeling his blood pressure increasing, José stayed as controlled as possible, “Then send a subspace transmission. Wesley will report to me personally regarding his rendezvous with the _Enterprise_ and her status as well as his meeting with Kirk. Make it a priority one!”

If his secretary was confused about a simple priority one report, she didn’t show it. She only affirmed his order and cut the link.

Luengo took a deep breath to calm himself, but this time his anger got the better of him. Rising he went to the large sideboard and poured himself a brandy, cursing Kirk to hell.

_**ST***ST***ST*

The auction-room was large – and loud. There were more than forty customers and their companions who talked and sometimes shouted at each other or the auctioneer whenever he presented a so-called slave. Bob watched two teenagers being sold to a creature with far more tentacles he could to count, saw a family torn apart and sold to different ‘masters’, and he saw captives forced to work for the slavers – never looking up – just miserable – reduced to barely living beings – broken and despained.

It demanded all of Wesley’s self-control to remain uncaring on the outside; inwardly his blood boiled.

Kor stayed beside him and one quick look showed Wesley that the Klingon was as disgusted as he was. Klingons may be brutal in battle, but they lived up to a strict code of honor. What was happening here, went against anything a Klingon could tolerate. In this case, the Federation and the Klingons had the same opinion.

“Sir,” Palmer whispered, “I got Romulan and Vulcan life signs.” He looked shortly at his tricorder he hid in a bag cinched to his waist. “Fifty-five meters from here to our right. They’re moving towards a corridor – likely to be beamed up. There are also six human bio signals and four Orions.”

Bob nodded and silenced Palmer. “We have to act – now! How long before our ships arrive?”

The lieutenant looked at his chronometer. “Twenty minutes at best, sir.”
Wesley bit his lips. Their allied fleet could arrive too late, but he had no other choice. If they didn’t interfere now the admirals and the two Vulcans would be lost.

Determined he turned towards his Klingon ally, who was still beside him. “Kor, we have to…” He stopped as he realized that the fleet commander wasn’t listening but was glaring daggers at something or someone to his right. Wesley followed his gaze and saw other Klingons near the selling stage. One of them was a tall man with long, filthy hair, typical Klingon ridges on his forehead. He wore an older version of the Klingon commander uniform and stood proudly among the others, long arms folded in front of his chest.

“Klokh?” Wesley mused; Kor growled his affirmation deep in his throat.

“I never met him, but I recognize his visage from holophotos. He was forced out of the Imperial Fleet because of dishonor and failure. And this creature dared to use my name and my reputation to break the Empire’s given word. I’ll have his head before the next hour passes. I swear this on the honor of my ancestors!”

The commodore took this threat very seriously. When a Klingon made a vow on the behalf of his ancestors, then he had to fulfill it, or he wouldn’t get his place in the Black Fleet after death. This much Wesley knew.

“Right,” he muttered. “As soon as we have freed the captives, he’s all yours!”

Kor turned his head sharply towards him. “I don’t need your permission, Wesley!” he hissed. For a moment, both men stared at each other before the fleet commander continued harshly, “You want to take action now? Even before our ships are here? Well, let’s go!” He stepped forward the moment a young woman was brought to the stage – a real beauty with honey-blond, long hair, impossibly dark eyes, and a heart-shaped face any male would love to cradle between his hands. Kor hesitated a moment – he was not immune to beauty despite the race. His gaze wandered over her barely hidden form, hung for seconds at the creamy smooth skin that flashed through the torn clothes she wore, and he felt a certain stirring deep in him – hunger and anger.

He wasn’t someone who melted with compassion at any moment, but to think that this incredible, dashing creature would end with some loathsome master to fulfill his sexual lust woke his fury.

Then an idea struck him. They needed a distraction, and he wanted to spare this lovely female from slavery. There was a way to reach both goals.
“A Hundred Credits!” he called, pointing at the woman.

Wesley groaned as he realized that Kor was about to create a distraction he hadn’t coordinated. Then he glanced at the woman and gasped. He had never met her, but he knew her face from the holophotos he got from the delegation members. The poor thing that was about to be sold into slavery was none other than Lady Ania Morganth of the Third House of Betazed!

“One hundred and fifty!” a guy with a long beard called, and Kor upped the bid fifty Credits more, adding an insult towards the customer.

“What did you just call me?” the man shouted back.

Kor repeated with a sneer, “A pervert boy that cannot get his dick up. That lass over there needs a real man!” He looked at Wesley, who had stepped beside him. “Were those the correct terms?” he whispered, a little bit uncertain whether he chose the right words for the profanity he had intended. Federation Standard was so complicated, especially the Terran idioms!

Bob sighed. Hearing a Klingon using such language was weird. “Yeah, you got it right,” he murmured.

The man had begun to push through the crowd. “I’ll show you who the real man is, you vagabond! Have you looked in a mirror lately? You…”

Kor turned around towards Palmer. “Did you just call me a jerk?” he yelled.

The comms officer stared wide-eyed at him. “I wouldn’t…” he began quietly, but the Klingon didn’t let him finish. “I am stupid as a sack of beans? Boy, I will mop the ground with you!”

“Hey, he didn’t say anything!” another customer cut in; he received a punch from Kor that brought him to his knees. “Stay out of it!” the Klingon roared and found himself confronted with two of the man’s companions.

Within seconds, a brawl began exactly as Kor had intended. “Try to find your admirals and the Vulcans, I will give them something to do here,” he hissed to Wesley, before he and his warriors
hurled themselves into the fight.

For just a second, Bob hesitated, 'crazy Klingon!' he thought. Then he ordered, “Palmer, try to get Lady Morganth over there!” He took the bag with the tricorder from the lieutenant and continued, “She can tell you where the others are. Mr. Silverhawk, his men and I will recover our admirals!” He was off before his officer could reply.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, now we’re in the middle of Bob’s rescue-mission – and it will be a ride through hell for all of them. And that’s not all. Within the next chapter Jim realizes that he needs more than luck to reach New Vulcan – after all his enemies are anything but stupid. In the meantime Bob, Kor and the others are trying to gain victory, but they’ve to learn that the slavers and their allies are more dangerous than thought. In other words: The action will continue.

I hope you liked the last chapter and, as always, I’m curious what you’re going to say about it (*snicker*).

Have a good start into the next week,

Until later

Love

Yours Starflight
**Chapter Notes**

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so much for all your feedback. It never quits to amaze me how much you all are still taken with the story. Sorry, if it lasted a little bit longer until the next update, but my dear beta-readers have a lot to do with my long chapters (*smile*).

The last chapter ended in the middle of big action and so the new one will begin exactly with the same.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Chapter 60 – Breadcrumbs**

The brawl in the auction room got out of control within seconds. Everyone seemed to be against everyone else, insults and fists were thrown, fights turned dirty; the turmoil appeared to be everywhere.

Shoving people out of his way, punching, kicking and snarling, Wesley fought his way through the madness erupting around him. From all around them shouts sounded, fists flew, furniture was used as weapons. How he and the others made it out of the chaos was beyond him, but all of sudden they were in an abandoned hallway. They watched local security race towards the auction room and took off. Looking at the tricorder, he ran down the corridor, his men at his side while he reached for his communicator.

“Wesley to Ritek. Beam our men down to our coordinates!”

“Yes, sir!” the Rigelian answered. “I just have to convince the idiot in comm central again to lower the shields.”

“Hurry up!” Wesley growled, and he closed the communicator. Again he looked at the tricorder. The
read-out showed him that the Romulans and their captives had stopped – likely distracted by the noise of the fight. “Phasers!” Bob ordered and rounded a corner. “Hide them until we’re close enough so that our friends over there don’t get wary!”

They passed a crossway and turned down another corridor when they came eye to eye with four Orions, two humans – not from Earth it looked like, and the five Romulans. And between them…

Wesley stopped and rage burned in his chest as he took in the bloodied and exhausted men in front of him instantly recognizing Barnett, Nogura, Morrow and a more severely injured Komack, as well as a very pale Sarek and another Vulcan male.

One of the Romulans went for his weapon and stepped forwards. “What’s going on?” he demanded in gruffly accented but fluent Standard.

“Some of the guys back there went crazy,” Bob answered and flipped a thumb over his shoulder and closing the distance to the other group. He saw Barnett’s head snapped up as he heard his voice, and continued with a drawl, “They’re fighting about some insults – We don't need that. We're leaving!”

One of the Orions raised his voice and Wesley realized that it was one of D’nyrrs’ bodyguards. “You’re leaving already, Mr. Lancaster – because of a fight?”

“Lancaster?” one of the two humanoids asked thunderstruck. Then he gestured towards Wesley. “This guy is supposed to be Franklyn Lancaster? I know Lancaster – and this man isn’t him!”

Before anyone could react, Wesley raised his hidden phaser and shot the moment the Romulans took out their weapons. Phaser blasts raced through the air – Wesley's mens' were set to stun, the enemy, pointedly, was not. They shot with deadly energy. One of the Lexington’s Redshirts was hit, another shot almost grazed Wesley, then chaos erupted as the captives ended with their passive role and attacked their captors.

Barnett had no idea from where Bob Wesley came from – or how. All he knew was the fact that the commodore was here – that help had arrived at the very last minute. He would be damned if he were going to stand aside and watched others fight for him and his companions. With a shout of fury, he threw himself against one of the Romulans, taking him by surprise. He succeeded in making him fall. Beside him, Morrow and Nogura took action, too. So did Sokal, while Sarek tried to shield Komack using his knowledge of Ashumi to battle a dumbfounded Romulan. This was their very last chance for escape, and none of them would waste it.
The Romulans were very well trained soldiers and the four Orions and two humans could fight too, but Wesley and his companions, as well as the captives, battled with the rage of righteousness, and even the peaceful Vulcan was not immune.

With cold calculation, Sokal attacked one of the Romulans and despite his weakened condition, he was able to break his enemy’s grip and rendered him helpless with a nerve pinch. Beside him, he heard bones splitter and saw Sarek break one of the other Romulan’s arms; changing *Ashumi* into something brutal and protecting Komack like this. The hostile soldier screamed in pain but was cut off by a stun blast. Sarek turned around and ducked at the last moment as one of the Orions tried to strike him. In the next moment, a dark-skinned hand clamped around the pirate’s wrist while one arm wound around the Orion’s throat.

Barnett avoided the elbow; the green-skinned man pushed backwards to fight him off before he rammed one knee into the Orion’s lower back. The next moment, Wesley was at his side and shot the slaver directly in the chest not caring if the stun blast proved fatal at that range.

That same second, lights flickered all around – the Redshirts had arrived. Wesley and the others had the battle under control, but with the added help of Security, the fight was over quickly. The Redshirts did their job as they were trained – quick, efficient, cool, and merciless. Silverhawk fought with the last remaining Orion and overpowered him; the ancient blood of his Indian ancestors ran hot through his veins, showing the enemy exactly what he thought of them. In the meantime, Wesley tried to protect the admirals and the two Vulcans who held their ground very well, but they were at their physical limits.

Finally, the Romulans, the Orions, and the others lay unconscious on the floor – some hurt, others only knocked out by the stun blasts.

Adrenaline continued to race through Wesley as he turned towards the freed captives. Silverhawk supported Komack, who seemed ready to pass out, and Bob cursed quietly under his breath. He hadn’t thought of bringing his CMO with him.

“Admirals, Ambassador Sarek, Mr. Sokal” Bob wheezed, “are you all right?”

“Yes and no,” Richard answered. “Some of us are in urgent need of medical attention.” He straightened his posture, grimacing as the nights spent on a hard floor, the lack of nutritious food and the bruises he received during the shuttle’s crash made themselves known.

Sarek tried to control his erratic heartbeat, while he felt the threatening pressure in his side grow. The last days of deprivation, the cold in the prison and the injuries were about to demand their toll –
especially with his particular problems regarding his heart. He forced the demands of his body once more to submit to the will of his mind and took a deep breath while his gaze was fixed on the human male with the grey hair who seemed to be in his late forties or early fifties. He had seen this face before, but couldn’t put a name to it at the moment; it was unimportant. The man was a Starfleet captain and had arrived with his crew for the rescue at the last minute. For just a second, the Vulcan felt a hint of disappointment that it wasn’t Spock – or Kirk – who had shown up, yet Sarek was confident that the recovery mission was initiated by the pair.

Then the question of the man’s identity was answered as Morrow panted, “Sweet Lord, Wesley, I have no clue how you found us, but you came right on time.”

“Yeah, I had to gather some support first.” He let his eyes roam once more about the admirals and two Vulcans. All were dirty, beard-stubbled and pale. Their legs seem ready to quit, yet all six stood there with a fighting spirit and a great measure of stubbornness.


“Where are they?” Wesley interrupted him. “We have to find them, but first we beam you up and…”

Sirens began to blare, and all of the sudden several Orions stormed around the corner; weapons drawn, led by D’nyrrs. Obviously their cover had been blown.

“SHIT! They found out about us!” Wesley cursed. “Take cover!” he shouted and pushed the others backwards. The slavers opened fire instantly and three security men fell before the others returned the phaser blasts, stopping the approaching enemies. But this wouldn’t hold them for long.

Fleeing down the hallway, trying to keep their pursuers at bay with as many phaser shots as possible, the Lexington personnel and the freed captives finally reached a large compartment that held boxes, containers and tubes – smuggled goods – no doubt about it. Using the cargo as shield, they took cover there and continued their attempts to hold D’nyrrs and the others at distance.

“Silverhawk, contact Ritek. He has to beam up the admirals and…”

“We’re fighting with you!” Barnett growled, pulling the trigger again as he saw an Orion daring to leave his cover. He hit home, and the pirate crumbled to the floor unconscious.
Wesley pressed his lips together. “Right, but I suggest that Admiral Komack, Ambassador Sarek, and Mr. Sokal be beamed up. The admiral is in no condition…”

“Sir, I’ve got Ritek on the line, but he can’t beam anyone. The shields are raised again after Orion scouts hit the -” Silverhawk interrupted him, and Bob cursed before he returned to support the others holding off their pursuers. They all knew that their capture was only a matter of time.

ST***ST

The quarrel in the auction room continued with raging force. Kor and his four warriors had fought their way to the stage while chaos exploded around them. With some respect, the Klingon lord realized that Wesley’s comm officer, Palmer, held his ground near them, delivering punches and kicks with quick and precise movements. Who had thought that a man whose job was talking could fight like this?

Kor’s keen hearing caught a furious female voice and looking up to the stage he saw the blond beauty kicking the auctioneer where it hurt most before she head-butted him and clawed her nails into his face. ‘What a wildcat! She is fiercer than a warrigul-mother!’ the fleet commander thought and grinned. If one of these half-broken creatures he saw in the cages behind the stage had earned freedom, then it was this warrior-lady.

He avoided a fist, delivered a powerful blow to his attacker’s jaw. And then he saw how the woman gained victory over her captor, running towards the stage’s edge. Without wasting a moment, he waved at her and shouted, “Lady, come down here!”

The bottomless, dark eyes found his and for a second she hesitated, then he opened one arm to offer her a safe place to land in if she would dare jump down from the stage – and he smirked as she hurled herself directly towards him. He caught her easily; her slender frame seemed to weigh nothing. For a moment she was pressed to his body from head to toe, then she tried to wriggle free.

“At ease, vlghro’oy (kitten), I’ll protect you,” he said.

“Don’t think I don’t recognize you as the swine who bid on me!” she snarled – and Kor couldn’t help himself faced by so much temper in such a demure figure. He had to laugh.

“Only to get you out here and…”
“And straight into your bed!” she hissed.

Someone slammed into Kor’s back and he whirled around shoving the woman behind him in the process to shield her. The fight with the man who dared to attack him was short – very short – yet it was enough for the female to make an attempt to flee. His hand shot out and caught her wrist. With a yell of fury and fear, she lifted her free hand and balled it into a fist. He avoided it by catching it, too. “Listen, little one, I’m not up for any games!” he said, pulling her to the side of the stage away from the activity. Bringing some distance between himself and the melee, he finally stopped, before he addressed her again. “I’m here to free you and the other captives. It would speed the mission if you quit this nonsense and tell me where to find them.”

Again caught in a steel-like grip of merciless, strong fingers – Ania glared at the man who first bid for her. Then she saw as he threw insults of sexual nature towards another bidder. Now he claimed to be her rescuer? She looked closer at him, took in his tanned skin, almond-shaped eyes, the mustache that looked wild but was clean and then she caught the slightly sharp smell of the man. And then strength – two or three times that of a human.

‘Klingon!’ it shot through her mind. ‘He’s a Klingon!’ Her sixth sense reached out to him. She felt the fire of the battle deep in him, some controlled desire towards her and above all she sensed the truth of his statements. He was indeed here to rescue the captives.

Whatever possessed this Klingon to help, she didn’t mind. The admirals and the two Vulcans had been taken away already. Batari would be next and then the other ambassadors as well as other women, teens, and the captured crew of a seized business vessel. Support from outside was needed now!

“A few of them are in a cage behind the stage, among them a friend of mine. The others are held in cells two levels below.”

Kor nodded. “Thanks, vlghro’oy.” He saw two of his warriors moving closer, hesitated a moment – and made up his mind. Pulling her close, he quickly bent down and pressed his lips against those soft ones of the young woman. He always had a thing for this human gesture of affection and passion, this sharing of each other’s breath – the essence of life. He felt his blood heat with something more than battle-spirit, then he lifted his head again. Regrettably, there was no time for more.

“How DARE you!?” Ania gasped when he broke the kiss.

“A little thank you for helping you,” he answered with a broad grin. “Don’t worry, little one, you will not be left behind. I’ll take you to safety when this is all over.” He turned her around and pushed
her towards K’Nas, one of the warriors. “Take care that nothing happens to her. The others come with me!”

He made a high, shrill noise with his lips that was instantly answered by the two warriors embroiled in the brawl. Within seconds, they reached his side, but they weren’t the only ones who had heard the tell-tale Klingon whistle that called out to warriors when no other communication was possible.

Kor and his three men had barely turned around when a large figure stepped into their path accompanied by seven other males. The fleet commander bared his teeth in rising hate as his gaze found Klokh, who stared back at him. The pirate shouted in surprise, “It’s you!”

A predatory smile appeared on Kor’s face. “Yes, it’s me – your reflection – or perhaps you are mine. How else could it mean that you are me?” He stepped towards the renegade and reached for the dagger he wore hidden beneath his civilian jacket. “You violated my name using it for your deeds. You betrayed the Empire, breaking its word by pretending to be a soldier of our fleet and committed crimes! You fled instead of choosing death. You are a coward – not worthy to be called a Klingon. I could shoot you where you stand, yet this is personal. I demand satisfaction!”

Klokh only sneered. “You are done for, Kor! The Empire thinks you’ve gone mad, breaking a standing order and attacking a delegation vessel. You’re as good as dead, literally, because D’nyrrs found out about you and your human friends, and there is no doubt why you’re here! They are already surrounded, and your little ship above our station will be blown to pieces in a few minutes. It’s over Kor. You should have thought twice before…”

He didn’t get any further, as the last descendant of the Klingon Emperor attacked. Klokh’s comrades tried to intervene, but Kor’s warriors drew their disruptors and aimed at them; hindering their actions at gunpoint.

Palmer finally reached the Klingons and the Betazoid, addressing her instantly, “Lady Morganth, are you all right?” Ania stared at him, confused, angry and afraid. It was plainly written on her face, and he laid a calming hand on her shoulder. “Starfleet, Lieutenant Andrew Palmer from the USS Lexington,” he introduced himself. “We are here to free you and the others.”

Ania’s eyes widened, before the noise of the two battling Klingons distracted her. “But…” she began, pointing at Kor and the lieutenant sighed, “My captain, Commodore Wesley, teamed up with Fleet Commander Kor to catch the slavers and to recover you.” He nodded at the Klingon, who still watched over the young woman, and pulled her aside. “Milady, we have to get to the other captives now, or…”
At that moment, Klokh made a gurgling sound and fell on his knees. Kor jumped back; his dagger was buried deep into the renegade’s chest, piercing one of his three hearts – a fatal wound. He wouldn’t survive.

Klokh’s companions roared in fury and raced forwards to attack, but found their end as Kor’s warriors opened fire at them – disruptors set to ‘kill’. Within seconds, there was nothing left of them.

Ania stared horrified at the scene. Of course, she had heard of the Klingon weapons’ effect, yet she had never seen the disastrous outcome of a disruptor shot. She felt sick, and she had needed all control to strengthen her inner shields as the terror of the dying renegades pounded her empathic sensibilities.

Kor turned around, not caring what happened to the traitors. “Quick now! If Klokh knew about us, I’m certain D’nyrrs knows of our masquerade too.” He looked at Palmer. “Try to reach Wesley and warn him. Then come with us. We must free the other captives.” He glanced at Ania. “Can you handle a weapon?” he asked.

The young Betazoid gulped. “I think so.”

“Right, vlghro’oy.” He bent down and took Klokh’s disruptor from the dead Klingon’s belt and offered it to Lady Morganth. ”Here, but don’t play with it. You could burn your tender fingers!”

He grinned as she scoffed at him, then he whirled around and ran backstage; turning his back to the still continuing brawl behind him. His warriors followed him as did Palmer, who hastily spoke via communicator with Wesley, learning of the trap the others found themselves in.

Behind the stage, several guards stood nervously near the cages and had drawn their weapons – ready to fire at any moment. Kor slowed and lifted both hands as he found himself instantly in the snipers crosshairs as soon as he turned the corner.

“At ease, my friends, we’re here on D’nyrrs’ orders as reinforcement,” he lied easily, and one of the guards frowned, “I don’t know you! Who are you?”

“You don’t know me?” Kor faked shock. “Really? Well, maybe you’re right!” He raised his disruptor and fired; his warriors followed his example. Three of the guards were dead instantly, one was injured, two was stunned by Ania and Palmer. The rest took off, running for dear life. But not all. Several of the enslaved servants stared wide-eyed at the little group, lifted their hands and simply
sat down.

“Don’t move or you’ll die!” Kor barked, and the four men and two women nodded hastily in obedience.

“Fleet Commander, Commodore Wesley, and the others are trapped in a cargo hold. They can’t beam up because the shields are up again after the D’Ghor was attacked and…” Palmer didn’t get further as the Klingon spat some words that needed no translation and pressed his lips tightly together while he waved towards his subordinates to open the cage.

“Then we should hurry before Wesley’s ass is fried,” he grumbled. “Blasted humans, always in hot water and waiting for someone to save the day! Wesley is no better than Kirk in this matter!”

He watched one of the warriors destroy the lock of the cage, and the captives stormed out as soon as the door was open. Then he frowned as the blond beauty practically hurled herself against a younger Terran woman with tanned skin, long dark hair, and handsome features; embracing each other as if they feared the other one would vanish into the air. ‘She spoke of a friend – well, that’s obviously this woman,’ he thought, before he snapped, “Quick, ladies! I would be loath to leave you behind!”

Palmer and the other Klingons picked up the weapons from the fallen guards and handed them to the freed captives. Everyone, even those who were injured, accepted the phasers instantly; grim determination spread over their faces. Suddenly one of the slaves, who sat on the ground, raised his voice and addressed Kor, “Sir, we don’t want to stay in captivity any longer. We will fight with you if you permit.”

The fleet commander turned towards them. “You’ve supported those bastards here and…”

“Sir, they enslaved us. We've been here for more than four years now, beaten and punished for any disobedience. But they’ve not broken us. We want to be free again.”

Palmer stepped forwards. “Can one of you show us the way to the other captives?”

The man nodded. “Yes, sir, but we need to hurry. The alert was given which means that the guards will be increased and…”

All of sudden the ground began to shake, and the light flickered. From somewhere explosions
sounded, followed by more shaking. Several of the freed captives and even Palmer fell, the Klingons remained on their feet but swore loudly.

Kor grinned; his teeth flashed in the lights returning to life, his eyes gleamed with the excitement of battle. “I think, our people can take the guards here!” he grinned and tried to hail his ship. His assumption was right – the little allied fleet had arrived, and the fight had broken out the moment the alerted Orion vessels had emerged from behind the asteroids. The Orion scouts were small, but they were well-armed and quick – a challenge for the larger ships. And Kor felt torn between the wish to be aboard his ship to lead the battle and to stay here and to get revenge on the slavers for the mess he found himself in.

ST***ST***ST

Jim had returned to the bridge and shrugged as he caught Uhura’s and Kevin’s startled gazes because of his appearance. His hair was in utter disarray, his golden tunic still showed traces of the fight, his left eye began to color as did the bump on his temple, and he limped a little bit. He beamed at them.

“Don’t freak; I’m all right.”

Uhura only snorted and gave him one of her special glares meaning ‘You can tell this to anyone, but you won’t fool me!’

Kevin only lifted both brows and looked him up and down while Chekov, who was back at the helm, shook his head slowly in disbelief. “Beamed up while a phaser blast grazed him and beaten up by elite security, but he is ‘fine’.”

“You said something, Ensign Chekov?” Jim asked, and Pavel shook his head quickly, “No, sir!”

“I thought so,” Kirk smiled; he walked down to the center chair Spock instantly vacated and sat down. The Vulcan didn’t return to his station but remained beside him, looking at him critically. Jim rolled his eyes. “Please, stop before you start, Spock. I’ve been mother-henned enough just in the last hour!”

“I didn’t say anything, Captain,” the Vulcan replied almost indignant.

“Yeah, but your thoughts were so loud I could hear them in Engineering,” Jim grumbled. Promptly, one elegant brow was lifted while Spock gave him the glance, and Kirk chuckled quietly to himself. “So, status?” Jim went back to duty and his first officer clasped his hands behind his back.
“We’re travelling at warp 5, but Mr. Scott advised the bridge to reduce speed as soon as possible to warp 4.5 until the next necessary repairs are done. He asked for support from Mr. Singh in this matter. The Excalibur didn’t follow us, and I made certain that we headed in another direction the moment we fell into warp and then corrected our course once I was certain we couldn't be tracked. I remember Lawrence Styles from some classes I instructed. He is very clever and…” Spock watched Kirk grimace, and chided softly beneath his breath, “Just because you despise him, Jim, doesn’t mean that he is stupid.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Kirk muttered. “So, you set another course in case he puts two and two together and looks in the direction we took before we vanished. Good job, Spock – as always!” He smiled up at his T’hy’la, who bowed his head in acceptance of his friend’s praise.

“Yet it could be that this was not enough to stall Command,” the Vulcan continued, and murmured quietly enough only for Jim to hear, “We have to continue to buy time. We will arrive at New Vulcan in four days, eight hours and seventeen minutes if continue at warp 4.5. In three days, twenty-two hours and thirty-nine minutes if Mr. Scott and Mr. Singh can repair the engines to a satisfactory status what would allow us to travel at warp 5.5 or warp 6. That may be all the time Luengo needs to take action, especially if he correctly determines our destination.”

Jim nodded slowly, biting his lips. “We’ve got the keep them off our trail – but how? The SDD prevents us from being scanned, but if something happened to it, it would mean that anyone looking for us could locate us and determine our heading.” He bit his lips and glanced at the main screen without actually seeing it. “Breadcrumbs,” he suddenly murmured, what made Spock raising both brows this time.

“Sir?” he asked confused.

“Breadcrumbs,” Jim repeated, grinning up at him. “We’re setting up a fabricated course – misleading them so that they continue to head in the wrong direction using breadcrumbs.”

His friend gave him an uneasy glance – as uneasy as a Vulcan could. “Captain, has Dr. McCoy declared you fit for duty?” he asked quietly and with some concern.

Kirk only chuckled while Kevin Riley snickered to himself as he realized what his captain and friend were up. “Maybe this Styles will end up at a witch's house. Would serve him right if he got his ass cooked!”
Spock was clearly at a loss now. “I fail to see how some bread and a mystical building can…”

“Ever heard of the fairytale ‘Hansel and Gretel’, Mr. Spock?” Jim smirked.

“An old Russian fairytale,” Chekov chirped in, earning him a stifled groan from Uhura, a disbelieving look from Kevin, and a grimace from Kirk.

“The story is a classic fairytale written by the Grimm brothers at the beginning of Earth's 19th century,” Spock began to correct the navigator's words. “I recall they started in 1806 writing down folk stories they sampled during…”

Jim lifted a hand. “Yes, that's what I mean. The story's about a brother and a sister abandoned in a forest by their father because of the step-mother. The boy, Hansel, overheard them and prepared. The first time they found home again because the boy left little stones on the path they walked. The second time he had no chance to collect the stones and used breadcrumbs from his food to mark the path they walked, but after they were abandoned again, they only could follow the breadcrumbs for a little while because birds had eaten the rest. So, the two children got lost, found a cottage where an old woman lived, who was a witch. Long story short, Gretel outsmarted the witch; she and Hansel escaped. Eventually, they found out that the stepmother was dead, and their father welcomed them back with open arms.”

“A rather cruel and unsettling story to tell little children,” Spock deadpanned and Jim thought he saw a hint of revulsion in his friend's far too human eyes.

“Yeah. The thing is these stories are supposed to teach kids to obey their parents and learn right and wrong – consequences – that kind of stuff. But that's beside the point. What I had in mind when I mentioned the breadcrumbs is that we should lead Styles and Section 31 in the wrong direction and let them find nothing. It'll buy us time.”

“And what will those ‘breadcrumbs’ be, sir?” Chekov dared to ask over his shoulder, but it wasn’t Kirk who answered him.

“Telemetry probes fed with the Enterprise’s warp signature,” Spock said, grasping the meaning of the metaphor and changing it into engineering lexicon.

Jim beamed at him. “I knew you'd get me. We send two or three of them into another direction and program them to transmit the signals with a timed delay. I'm certain Styles'll scan the whole parsec to
find us, and when he gets the read-outs he’ll follow us – or the probe in this case.”

Spock cocked his head. “You will only be able to fool him only once, Captain.”

“Not when we send another probe with another signal – a faked transmission for example.”

Uhura had left her station and leaned against the handrail; a mischievous smile played around her soft lips. “I can program them with a recording you make, Captain. For example, you can call, I don't know, make someone up. Tell them you're on your way; drop a random planet in and give Section 31 the wrong idea about our destination. I also can program the computer with a recorded voice to be the other ‘person’ on the line. Styles and Section 31 will think we’re heading in a complete different direction.”

Kirk lifted a thumb. “You got me too, Uhura! The first probe will lure Styles into one direction only for him to find that we tricked him. The transmission from the next probe comes from a completely different distance and bearing, and so he'll believe he got us. He’ll fly in that direction and buy us even more time. At the same time – it'll keep Luengo and Section 31 busy trying to figure out where we actually are. By then we should be at New Vulcan. Khan and his people will find safe haven and…” He stopped as he caught Spock’s intense glare that moved towards Riley – the only officer on the bridge who didn’t know about the ‘private’ mission they effected at Gamma 12. Because of the ship’s late hour, the bridge wasn’t fully staffed and only Uhura, Spock, Chekov and Kirk were in the command center along with Riley.

Kevin knew why Jim suddenly stopped and turned around. Knowing only part of the truth, he said quietly, “Permission to speak openly, Captain?”

Kirk nodded slowly, realizing that it was too late to keep Riley out of it.

“You told me about Mr. Singh and Section 31 two days ago. You also mentioned that there’d be trouble because you back Mr. Singh, and after all I've seen these last days – and last hours – I conclude that the real problem starts now because of what happened on Gamma 12 that led to an emergency transport of you and Mr. Singh. Hell, you almost got shot down there – by Starfleet’s own elite security. And you beamed up a lot with the cargo transporter after the scientists were brought aboard. My console monitored the energy use. And now you're talking about Mr. Singh’s people. Let me guess; they were aboard the station, but not as staff members. The onboard computer isn't recording another other bio-signals besides those of the few evacuees from the station, but his people are here. That means they have to be in a kind of stasis. And so they must've been prisoners in this high-security facility. Why? If you hadn't have evacuated them – I'm guessing without permission – they would be dead now. Ergo, Command wants them dead. Starfleet doesn’t kill people – not like that anyhow. And again mentioned Section 31, not ‘Command’. I've heard of them – lots of us have. I think I've pretty well figured out on my own what they are capable of, sir.”
Jim stared at his younger friend; baffled and a little bit alarmed. Did Kevin just put all that together on his own?

Riley took a deep breath and continued, “And now the actual situation we’re in – the reason we are going to New Vulcan for safe haven is because you recovered those people; something those guys in the 31 don’t want to happen. We’re not running from Styles and the Excalibur, but from Section 31 who can suddenly give orders. Maybe because there is no one checking them? Our most important admirals have been declared dead, so this Section 31 has free reign. And the first thing they did was order you to practically murder Mr. Singh’s people. Why? Murder is a crime, even in uniform.”

He cocked his head and fixed his captain’s eyes with his own. “And why do you call them ‘Mr. Singh’s people’? I’m not sure if you’re aware that you do it, but if I’m reading between the lines correctly, it’s because they are different like Mr. Singh is different. The rumor is that Nureaux tried to stun him but failed despite hitting him several times. I know it could’ve been exaggerated, but even one should’ve put him down. And the gravity increase in the nebula, saving the ship by getting to the helm in time and steering the Enterprise away. Pavel told me about it after it become the number one topic talked about around the ship.”

Chekov ducked his head as he received a quick glare from his commanding officer. Unaffected by the small display, Kevin said, “All the things Mr. Singh did – they are things no normal human could do. So the implication is clear: He’s enhanced, isn’t he? And that’s the reason why Section 31 is after him – after him and keeping his people – because they are like him – enhanced – augmented.”

Silence filled the bridge, only interrupted by the soft noises of the computers and monitors. Jim looked for several long seconds at his younger friend, then he sighed and rubbed his neck. Dammit! He should have known that Kevin would see through everything. The young Irishman was smart – and he had already learned a lot about what was going on aboard that didn’t exactly meet with standard protocol. Honestly, it wasn’t really a question of if Riley would figure it all out, but when! And Jim realized that it would be better now to tell Riley everything.

“You are right,” he said softly. “Nien is an Augment – so are his people that we just saved from being murdered in their sleep.”

Kevin blinked. To have a theory and getting that theory confirmed were two different things. “How is it possible?” he asked confused. “There aren’t any Augments left.”

“And here is where you wrong, Mr. Riley,” Spock cut in. “Mr. Singh is an Augment; he comes from Earth’s past.”
Riley’s brown eyes widened and in the next minutes Jim revealed the story of Khan in the shortest form possible. He spared the young man the details, yet he chose his words carefully to make his point – and to win Kevin over.

He shouldn’t have feared his younger friend’s sense of justice and compassion. After he finished the tale, Kevin was pale as a sheet; he stared at him for a long moment and whispered, “My God, why did no one help him in the first place?”

“Because humans often fear their own creations,” Spock answered quietly. “And in their fear they forget what is right and wrong, thinking the end will justify any means.”

“You’re talking about Section 31,” Riley mused, and Jim took a deep breath.

“They’re back, Kev – Section 31 is already back at work; still hidden yet somehow out in the open too – we haven't figured it all out yet. You were right too when you mentioned that there is no one who can stop them, because our most admirals have been declared dead – but they aren’t.” Kirk had made up his mind. He would have to share this particular secret with Riley, too. It was not only logical to reveal the whole truth in this matter, but he also followed his gut-feeling. An inner voice whispered that he was going to need all the help he could get – even a twenty years old cadet in his second year at the Academy.

Clearly and concisely he told Kevin of the delegation’s real fate and that Wesley was in Borderland to save the survivors; they were Jim and the Enterprise's only hope of being saved from Section 31’s pursuit.

Kevin listened with wide eyes, and Kirk had barely finished when the young Irishman blurted out, “Shit, Jim, you’re really in hot water!” For a second, it had slipped his mind that he was still on the bridge, still on duty, and that it wasn’t prudent to call your commanding officer by his first name (except when you are a certain CMO). He didn't worry about that, though. His friend and his friend’s lover were threatened by a shadow department that would murder, for God’s sake. Proper titles paled compared to the circumstances. And that's why Jim let it slide.

He nodded slowly. “And so are you if it comes out that you’re involved. Do you understand now why I wanted to keep you out of this?”

Kevin made an affirming gesture, and he straightened his posture. “I understand your motivation – not only towards me but also towards Mr. Singh and his people.” His voice turned surprisingly stern
for a mere cadet, yet in this moments, Riley was more. He was not only a student, but he was also Jim Kirk’s friend. “I already told you that you’ll have my support if you need it – you still have it. I’m by your side, Jim, no matter what. And not just because you saved my life back on Tarsus IV.”

Spock was aware of this part of Jim’s childhood, but Uhura and Chekov were not. They gasped in shock. They hadn’t known about this particular facet of their friend and captain's past. Both pairs of eyes were set on the blond figure in the center seat. Tarsus IV! Everyone knew what happened there, but no one thought that Jim Kirk had been in the colony during that dark time young Riley was apparently referring to. And given the ensign’s words, it was clear that Jim had belonged to those who fought back against the terror and genocide that had taken place on the planet. And they realized something else. This horror had happened more thirteen years ago – Jim Kirk had been a mere boy at this time.

Kevin ignored the reaction of his two officer-colleagues, while he continued, “I don’t look up to you because of your selfless deeds during those weeks, but because you did then what you’re doing now – the right thing! You did and still do what is right, no matter what. And it is right to protect those sleeping people, Augments or not. You are about to save a race, one that is even threatened even worse than the Vulcans – my apologies, Commander Spock,” he added towards the Vulcan, who bowed his head in acceptance; after all Riley’s statement was correct.

“You fight for those who cannot fight back – who need help and who would have no chance if it weren’t for you,” Riley continued. “It’s this courage I was drawn to even as a little boy all those years ago. Some things never change in the universe and this is one of those things. I’m with you, Jim. And if Starfleet thinks it can mess with people because they they're afraid of a particular race, then I’ve signed up for the wrong club. Different races are the essence of the Federation!” He offered a smile towards the older man. “So let's do it – let's set up the deception for Captain Styles. I may be nothing more than a second-year cadet, but I’ll do everything in my power and knowledge to assist you and the others, Captain!”

Jim felt his throat tightening and his vision blurring for just a second. He knew that his friends were loyal to him, and he had known the same quality in Kevin, but to hear it – to see the grim determination of the younger man’s face sent a wave of warmth and gratitude through him. There were no other words possible, “Thank you, Kev! I’ll try to keep you out of it when I face court martial, but…”

“I’m already in it, Jim, and I’m ready to give the judges a piece of my mind.” He smirked. “Don’t forget the Irish temper…”

“And the Irish stubbornness,” Kirk added with a chuckle.

“Ain't that the pot calling the kettle black,” Riley grinned. “Don’t forget, Jim, you ancestors were
Irish or Scottish too – Kirk.” He began to laugh. “Even if your name means ‘church’ I don’t’ think those guys in Section 31 think of you as very holy right about now.”

“They never have,” Jim mirrored the laughter; his eyes sparkled. Then he became serious again. “I appreciate your loyalty, Kev, but think it through before you make your decision. I gave the same chance to the others; there is no reason I shouldn’t give it you, too.”

The young man smiled. “I already made my decision, Jim. I’m with you – and Mr. Singh. What he did last year – it wasn’t his fault. Not really. We both know you can be pushed beyond your limits, and we know the outcome when that happens. He deserves a second chance, and so do his people who are innocent. Perhaps they didn’t always do right back then, but that is the past. And after all, we all make mistakes. There is no reason to hold them accountable now, because they didn’t know better and had no one to turn to for advice. As far as I understood they belonged to the peaceful Augments – those, who tried to help the world and not to take it over. I’m with them, too. I signed up in Starfleet because I wanted to have a chance to help make this universe a safe place to live. I didn’t know about the sinister things which went and still are going on, but this only encourages me. It’s up to people like you to make the world a better place, and I’m honored to belong to your crew.”

Uhura watched the young, passionate man and her captain. She saw Jim gulp, obviously deeply touched. She smiled. This was the incredible thing with James Kirk. He always managed to get through to people, to pull them to his side and to change a catastrophe into a victory. Even if she wasn’t sure that the outcome of this mess they all were in would be good this time, she would stay with him – like Spock and McCoy, like the other senior officers, like this young Irishman over there.

Spock watched his T’hy’la and the young cadet, too. Kevin Riley was a promising student, able to think logically and imbued with great intelligence, but also with compassion and a strong sense of justice – just the kind of man Starfleet needed to become what it was in earlier times. And, if he dared to admit it, Riley’s loyalty towards Jim woke a warmth deep in him. It was illogical to favor someone because he was a friend of a friend, but in this case, Spock became aware of the rising protectiveness he developed for the young man – just like he felt towards Chekov. Both were still so young, and already wise beyond their years. It was very satisfying to work with such humans at the threshold of adulthood.

Now that Mr. Riley can be added as one of our supporters, I suggest that we prepare the probes, Captain,” he came back to the most important topic. “The sooner they are on their way to misdirect Mr. Styles, the better the chances of a positive outcome.

Jim nodded. “You’re right, Spock. Please begin the preparations.” He glanced over his shoulder at Uhura. “Lieutenant, you mentioned a falsified conversation between an unknown and me?” As he saw her beginning smirk, he raised, “Well, I’m at your service for your little radio show.”
Nyota began to chuckle. “It will be my pleasure, Captain.”

The moment the ground began to shake with the loud explosions, Wesley felt a wave of relief knowing that the *Lexington* and Kor’s ships had arrived. Their opponents became uncertain for a short time, some of them running away; the others remained and opened fire again more fiercely than before. They faced well-trained Starfleet staff officers weakened as they were because of the last days experiences; the admirals fought with grim determination too stubborn to give in.

Again the ground shook, and the lights flickered; screams were heard. All of the sudden, swirling columns of light appeared behind the Orions. Wesley couldn’t stifle a shout of triumph as he recognized three dozen Redshirts from his ship instantly attacking the pirates.

Silverhawk left his cover and barked commands, making sure that at least ten of his men secured and protected the admirals and the two Vulcans.

Bob pulled out his communicator and contacted the *Lexington*. Yes, there was a battle going on above their heads, but Sonik maneuvered the ship between the birds-of-preys so that the Starfleet cruiser was able to lower its shields for a few seconds. Without hesitation, Wesley ordered Komack, Sarek and Sokal beamed directly to medbay. The Vulcan Ambassador wanted to protest, but he and the two other men found themselves caught in a transporter beam and materialized seconds later aboard the *Lexington* where they were taken into the care of the CMO while the ship continued combat.

In the meantime, down on the asteroid, D’nyrrs and his companions stood no chance against Starfleet’s Redshirts. Most of them were dead or stunned within a minute, and only Wesley’s strict order to get D’nyrrs alive prevented the pirate from falling prey to the security team's fury as they saw their commanding officer in danger.

Two minutes later the whole thing was over, and those Orions who were still alive were arrested. D’nyrrs, who was one of the three Orions who was still conscious, was held by two tall security personnel, and spitting brimstone and gall. His yellow eyes glared with hatred at Bob, who closed the distance towards him, while the other redshirts secured the area.

“Franklyn Lancaster – my ass!” D’nyrrs growled, and the *Lexington*’s captain straightened his posture.
“May I introduce myself? Commodore Robert Wesley from Starfleet. You’re arrested and accused of kidnapping, piracy, slave-dealing, murder and conspiracy against the United Federation of Planets and Starfleet.”

“Murder?” the giant Orion snarled. “I didn’t kill anyone! Klokh killed your other officers and the diplomats as he was ordered to do!”

Barnett, who bled from a cut on his temple, limped towards the little group and stared enraged at D’nyrrs. “Who gave you the order to open fire at a diplomatic vessel and…”

“As far as I know the man has been promoted within Starfleet – maybe even took the chief’s place. Ask him, human! I think he can give you the better answer!” the slaver spat.

Barnett froze and stared questioningly at Wesley, who ignored his superior for a moment. “Get him to the brig!” he ordered the Redshirts. “He’s a witness for the court martial!”

The Orion captives and some of the Redshirts had just beamed up when Richard addressed Bob while Morrow and Nogura closed the distance to them. “Bob, what is going on here? Did I hear that right? My successor is responsible for…”

New explosions were heard as well as steps coming their way. Wesley didn’t need to read a tricorder to know that potential customers of this ‘market’ were trying to flee. “Line up, prepare for stun! No one leaves!” he shouted, reaching for his phaser. “Admirals, find cover!” he said over his shoulder, bracing himself for the next fight to come.

Against his request, the three staff officers took the offered weapons from the Redshirts and prepared to get involved in the upcoming battle. “We have to be quick,” Morrow murmured. “There are still a lot of captives we need to release and…”

D’nyrrs’s customers rounded the corner and stopped dead in their tracks as they came face to face with two lines of Starfleet security officers and personnel with weapons drawn. Those behind them crashed in those who had stopped, and many tumbled to the ground.

“Fire!” Bob barked, and stun blasts were shot at the ‘businessmen’ and their companions. Most fell unconscious; others turned around and tried to escape.
“Follow them!” Wesley screamed. “We have to take down this market once and for all!”

ST***ST

Galven spit furious curses while he tried to hold the *Santo Domingo* on its course. He watched the *Lexington* on the screen as it seemed to seek shelter among the Klingon vessels for a very short time only to return moments later to the battle, taking out two Orion scouts.

“They lowered their shields for a moment,” Jeff called, who sat at the navigation and also watched the scanners. “I think they beamed the captives up – or at least some of them.”

“Hopefully, those admirals and the Vulcans are among them,” Galven gritted out. “Without the brass, our two lover-boys will be in a lot of hot water!”

“Two Orions vessels off the starboard bow!” Jeff called. A second later the small vessel shook under the impact of a blast.

“Ayomatic control system damage report!” Caviw hissed. “Dammit, life support at fifteen percent shields down to thirty-two percent, containment field at…”

“I don’t want to hear it!” the Tellarit oinked furiously. “Diego is going to kill us if we lose his ship and…”

“If they continue to fire at us like this, it won't be Diego that kills us!” one of the other members shouted and pointed to the screen to the right.

“Avoid that!” Caviw screamed as she saw a torpedo nearing their ship. Galven may be a brave fighter, but his reflexes weren’t that good – not like Khan, who certainly would have reacted in time. Again the ship shook, and something exploded in the stern. The automatic control system blared warnings, but one was most alarming. The containment field of the warp core was about to fail.

“Goddammit, we have to give up the ship and to evacuate!” Jeff groused.

Caviw was already hailing the *Lexington*, telling them what was about to happen. Hearing the calm
voice of the Starfleet cruiser’s first officer Marceaux was somehow soothing, his words were not.

“Right, how long until your warp core is going to say ‘good-bye’?”

“Four minutes, fifty-five seconds,” Caviw answered, watching the station read-outs.

“Right, fly near the asteroid and beam down. We’ve damaged their shields enough so that a transporter’ll work. Before you go, set a course right through to the middle of the Orions... Maybe the collapse of your warp core and the explosion will get rid of the Orions once and for all.”

“In other words, the *Santo Domingo* becomes a weapon – and our friend will fry our asses for losing his ship! Superb plan!” Galven squeaked.

“Well, you have the slavers to thank for it,” Marceaux answered. “We’ll distract the Orions so that you can lower your shields and beam down before they realize what’s going on. And don’t forget to set the course! We’ll warn the Klingons and the *D’Ghor* of what is going to happen. How long will you need for the evacuation?”

“Two minutes,” Galven oinked.

“Understood. We’ll busy the pirates for three minutes; then everything has to happen. Keep your heads up, guys, and hopefully, we’ll see you soon!”

The transmission was cut off, and the Tellarit rose with a mixture of anger and determination. “All right, Jeff, bring us as close to the asteroid as possible and program the new course.” He glanced around. “Lady, gentlemen, let us leave the ship before it becomes unpleasant.”

They raced to the small transporter room, while a computer voice in the background began to count down the time until the warp core would collapse. There was the possibility of getting rid of the warp core by sending it through the emergency path into space and away from the ship, but the *Santo Domingo* was unable to do that. All The Shadow could do was abandon the ship and to beam to safety – if you could call it ‘safety’. They were about to materialize in the middle of a slave market that was being taken down by Starfleet and Klingons.

Jeff was the last who reached the transporter room and nodded at Galven, “The course is set. We have thirty seconds to beam down.”
The Tellarit had already programmed the transporter and had sent the first group down on the asteroid – among them Caviw. Now it was up to them to follow their friends. Jumping on the pads together with the last remaining members, they felt the beam capture them. The transporter room vanished and moments later they found themselves in a larger hall that held an empty cage and several dead Orions, while nearby they heard the ruckus of battle.

“Over there!” Caviw pointed to their left and Galven saw several Klingons and freed captives vanish through a door.

“After them!” he decided. “Maybe we can protect the freed slaves. I don’t trust Klingons to play bodyguard!”

ST***ST

Palmer and Kor followed the few freed captives and the servants down the flights of stairs, weapons drawn, and bodies tense. Finally, they reached the lower level and came face to face with the Orions, who were quick to open fire the second they saw the strangers and captives – captives that should have been sold by now.

Kor pulled Ania behind him and backed around the corner, hailing his ship in the process demanding reinforcements only to learn that his squadron, the D’Gor, and the Lexington had withdrawn because The Shadow’s ship had lost its containment field and was about to explode – in the middle of the Orion scouts!

If everything went smoothly, they would gain victory over their enemies within minutes – and even if the Orions realized what was about to hit them, Kor didn’t doubt that his warriors and Wesley’s ship would overpower them shortly. His second-in-command was a very skilled officer, and the same could be said about the Starfleet commander who had now the conn aboard the Lexington.

He trusted his second-in-command to do what was necessary to gain victory in both battles – the one in space and down in the station. He wouldn't be disappointed. His ship was in the middle of the other birds-of-prey's while they retreated to gain some distance between themselves and coming explosion. The acting captain used this break to lower the shields and to beam down more warriors. A minute later they re-materialized in shimmering columns behind the Orion’s, attacking them instantly.

But the arriving Klingons weren’t the only reinforcements to strengthen Kor and Palmer. For a long
moment, the fleet commander stood staring agape at the short Tellarit and the other warriors – all different races, who came down the stairs firing at the Orion guards.

‘They sent their doomed ship into the Orion squadron and beamed down. They came firing. They are smart; I have to give them that!’ he thought.

K’tar, his Chief of Security, walked towards him, fighting off more Orion guards. “Milord, report from our ships. The vessel of The Shadow exploded and took nine Orion scouts with it as well as two ‘customers’ ships. Now we and the Lexington are about to finish off the rest.”

“Well done!” Kor nodded and shot a blast towards another Orion; he was dead even before he vanished into air. The fight was short; it ended with seven dead Orions and victorious Klingons.

It was obvious that the Klingons could handle the few remaining guards. Jeff, Galven, Caviw and several members of their militia used the time to open the prisoner cells, helping those who were too weak to walk on their own. The leader of The Shadow oinked in surprise as he was addressed in his language from one of the cells. He faced another Tellarit, who stood behind the energized barrier shuffling his feet impatiently.

“Quick!” Gav oinked impatiently. “In the name of the Holy Mud, stop staring like a fool and get me out!”

Galven’s snout twitched. “A nice way to greet your rescuer!”

Gav growled in his throat. “Do you think we have time for pleasantries? There are Klingons down the hall and…”

“Really? I haven’t realized that – especially since I came with them!” Galven snapped, rolling his eyes in an almost human way.

The ambassador shrank back. “You came…” His little eyes widened. “Traitor, scallywag, blackguard, mud-despiser! How dare you to ally yourself with…”

“STOP SQUEALING, you piglet,” Caviw hissed, “or we let you rot in there!”
Gav shied back for a moment, looking with widened eyes at the enraged catlike woman.

The fight had come to an end, and Kor jogged down the corridor. “Why the delay?” he demanded. “Get the captives out and then return to the chamber behind the stage. As soon as the battle in space has stopped, you’ll be beamed up to the *Lexington* or my ships!”

He stopped beside Galven, who glared furiously at another Tellarit in one of the cells. The prisoner straightened his posture so that he nearly reached the Klingon lord’s shoulder and oinked, “I’m Gav, ambassador of Tellar! I have the assurance from your government of safe travel, and therefore, I demand that you release us instantly!”

“SHUT UP!” Galven exploded, and a tirade of squealing and oinking noises followed rapidly until the diplomat just gaped at him; then he snapped his mouth shut and turned demonstratively around, giving Galven the cold shoulder.

“Well, at least he is silent!” Galven grumbled.

Kor didn’t know if he should be furious, offended, or amused by the display, so he decided on none. “Let him out and take care that he is beamed up to the *Lexington*. I don’t want to have an ungrateful oinking dwarf with no manners aboard my ship!” he growled and moved the others to hurry!

It took barely any more to release the remaining diplomats that it did to think about it. And then they made for the rest of the captives held in two other corridors. It turned out that it was an advantage to have the formerly enslaved servant as a guide. Without him, they would have wasted more time trying to find all of the captives.

Galven and Caviw accompanied them, as well as Jeff and four other humans. To see them among the Klingons was a relief to the slaves who didn’t know if they were about to jump out of frying pan into the fire as their tiny chambers were unlocked. The Klingons shooed them out.

Galven helped two women, and Caviw was about to take care of them when all of sudden a hoarse oink was heard, “Galven?”

The fighter turned around. He knew this voice, even hoarse and broken as it sounded. “Galtan?” he asked, not daring to hope.
One of the Klingon officers led another Tellarit into the hallway, pushing him carefully forward as he saw how thin and weak the slave was. Yet those little eyes lit up when they found the stout frame of Galven, whose jaw dropped.

“Galtan?” he repeated, taking in the sight in front of him. There, beside a tall Klingon, swaying on his feet with weathered hair and a scar over his snout stood his brother – weak, dirty and tired, but it was HIM!

With an oinking shout of pure joy, Galven raced forwards, not caring that another Klingon had to jump out of his way, or he would have been run into the ground. He ignored Caviw’s questions and everything else around him. He only saw his brother that he had never given up on. Then he was in front of him; he pulled him into a strong embrace.

It was as though strings had been cut from a puppet. Galtan lost his balance and practically fell into the arms of his younger brother; and then both could only cling to each other.

Caviw raced to them; her own eyes moistened. Then she caught the baffled face of the Klingon who had led Galtan out of his prison and explained, “They are brothers. Galtan was kidnapped half a year ago by Orion pirates. Galven never quit searching for him.”

Klingons proudly boast that they only care for honor and a good battle. But truly they shared a common trait with nearly all encountered races – a sense of family. No Klingon would let down one member of their own clan, and so the warrior almost smiled as he answered, “He fought for the impossible as he searched for is brother in Borderland and the nearby parsecs. He didn’t shrink back from a fight for him. Your friend is an honorable man, and I hope he and his brother have many years before them.” He pressed one fist against his chest and walked away.

Caviw grinned. It seemed Klingons were hard on the outside, but perhaps a few were soft inside.

She stepped to the Tellarit brothers and laid a hand on Galven’s shoulder. “I hate to interrupt you two, but we’re not safe yet.”

Galven looked up at her, and so did Galtan. “I know you,” the older of the two brothers squealed, and the Caitian woman nodded. “Yes, you met me at your brother’s workshop a year ago. I’m Caviw and belong to your brother’s little club called ‘The Shadow’.”

“The Shadow?” Galtan was at lost.
“A long story,” Galven said. “And I think we’ll have a lot of time to talk when this is over.” He wrapped one arm around his brother and led him down the hallway; Caviw placed herself in front of them, ready to protect them, but her she had nothing to fear. The Klingons took their job very seriously, and for once the Caitian was grateful for the stern execution of Klingon duty.

They climbed the stairs back to the upper levels and finally reached the hall behind the stage. The fight in the auction room was still going on, but things had changed. They all could hear the phaser blasts; commands were shouted in Standard and Klingon, and Caviw was relieved to hear Wesley’s voice.

The fight wasn’t over yet, and the Caitian hoped that in the end Starfleet and Kor would win…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, as a few of you guessed Galven did indeed find his brother (I’ve a soft spot for happy endings; smile). Yet the whole mission isn’t over or won – for all of them, including Jim and his friends. Yes, he got a good idea with the ‘breadcrumbs’ is about to leave for Styles to pick up, but will it work?

In the next chapter the admirals will learn who is supporting Wesley (and I can promise you some funny moments when Barnett & Co. see Kor for the first time, *snicker*). There will be also a little bit more flirting of our Klingon with Ania and you maybe can already imagine the shock when he learns, who she is for real (*laugh*). And then comes the moment in which the admirals will learn about the reason for the whole mess they and the other diplomats found themselves in – and who Sunrise is.

In other words: The whole action still isn’t over.

I hope you liked the new chapter and, as always, I’m curious what you think of it.

Have a nice Sunday

Love

Yours Starflight
Many surprises

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so very, very much for all the comments and kudos. I’m really happy that you love the parallel part of the story – Wesley’s attempt to save the survivals of the delegation – so much. Concerning this event you’ll read the utterly showdown within this chapter, what also shows how smoothly an alliance can run when it’s made by the right men. Kor and Wesley are really a self-explanatory fighting-team. And the dear admirals will learn things which will shake their foundations.

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 61 – Many surprises

After Kor was confident that his third-in-command had the last part of the recovery mission – freeing the enslaved servants – under control, he and Palmer returned with two dozen warriors to the auction room. It was about time to save the commodore’s ass. They had to cross the auction room and to get at Wesley’s opponents’ rear line, but as they reached the room behind the stage, they realized that the combat had changed. Phaser blasts sang through the air, and Kor recognized Wesley’s voice from the other side of the hall.

‘Escaped trouble by himself only to run into more – typical humans!’ he thought, not without amusement. Then the grim warrior in him returned. Giving his warriors a signal, he took his disruptor and raced towards the stage. He didn’t spare one glance at Klokh’s dead body as he passed him and made himself ready to join the battle again.

ST***ST

The Starfleet members pursued the dealers and their companions down the hallways. The dealers weren’t afraid to open fire. Other ‘business partners’ of D’nyrrs tried to contact their vessels, but most of them were not successful because their ships were either destroyed or too damaged to respond. So they did the only thing they could; they ran.
Down the corridor, Wesley, the admirals, and the Red-Shirts met the unconscious Romulans again which were still sprawled on the floor. Without wasting a second, Bob hailed the Lexington and ordered Marceaux to beam the Romulans to the brig as soon as the battle in space was over and it was safe to lower the deflector shields. Then he ordered two Red-Shirts to secure the Romulans with manacles and shackles and watched them before he raced down the hallway again, asking for a report of ship’s status.

Marceaux told Bob calmly that most of the vessels, which had started from the asteroid’s surface, had been destroyed. There were still some Orion spacecrafts which had drawn nearer from their original positions, but the explosion of The Shadow’s vessel had decimated them. Kor’s ships were taking care of the rest now.

“What about Galven and the others?” Bob asked worriedly.

“They beamed down on the asteroid after they set a course right into the middle of the enemy. Our sensors read that they are with you somewhere in the station.”

“Good,” Bob sighed while still following the Red-Shirts “So the surprise attack was successful?”

“Yes, sir. They didn’t know what hit them as the Fleet Commander's cloaked ships materialized, and we reached this place without being scanned first. It seems, sir, your plan worked well.”

Bob grinned. “Well, no risk, no fun. Try to eliminate as many opponents as possible, but spare this station the hits if you can so this thing burst into pieces or worse yet – we damage something we need like life support. We still have to free the other captives, so we’ll need some more time down here. Keep me updated. Wesley out!”

He closed his communicator and saw that the Red-Shirts had come to a halt, ducking and aiming at something in front of them. Silverhawk didn’t waste any time talking and pulled Wesley and Barnett backward. Two other Red-Shirts were busy pushing Nogura and Morrow to safety.

And then Wesley realized why Silverhawk and his men acted as they were. They were about to re-enter the auction room. Chaos erupted completely just then. Orion slavers, their customers, and others barricaded themselves behind toppled tables, firing at the Red-Shirts with stolen phasers and disruptors. The Starfleet officers and Starfleet security were forced to withdraw back into the hallway for cover. Otherwise, they would have run into enemy fire.
“Blast it!” Harry Morrow barked. “We’ve got to cross this compartment to reach the stairs to the lower levels, where the other captives are held. Some of them are in a cage behind the stage, among them Lady Morganth and Mrs. Whitman. Ambassador Gav and the others were still in the cells when we were forced out.”

“GOD DAMMIT! From where did they come!?” Nogura’s outburst drowned out Morrow and the noises of the fight in front of them. He pointed ahead to the stage, where…

…Where approx. two dozen Klingons appeared; heavily armored and armed with disruptors.

“Dear Lord, it's the end!” Richard whispered and looked at Wesley, who… Who began to grin and gave a shout of delight. “Yes, the end of these damn slavers!” he laughed.

Before Barnett could ask him if he had lost his mind, the Klingons opened fire – on the slavers and dealers. Some of the warriors parted and made room for the stout, vigorous yet tall figure that still wore civilian clothes but couldn’t be mistaken for anyone else.

Barnett’s eyes were about to pop out of his head as he recognized the man in the middle of the Klingon fighters. “KOR!” he gasped and whirled around to a smirking Wesley. “This is Fleet Commander Kor!” he repeated; pointing at the warlord. “What is HE doing here?”

“Helping us,” Bob answered and turned towards the three astonished admirals. “Kor and I built an alliance to get you and the others out – and to stop the imposter who attacked the Excalibur.”

“You teamed up with…?” Nogura couldn’t even finish the sentence; he was too thunderstruck.

“Kor didn’t attack the Excalibur. Someone, in essence, stole his identity. Kor is as interested in the truth as we are, so we decided to work together,” Bob told them quickly. “But the story is rather long, Admirals, so I suggest that we save the tale for later when we’re back aboard the Lexington, and concentrate on freeing the rest of the captives – and staying alive!” His attention turned towards his Chief of Security. “Lieutenant Silverhawk, line up again. We and the Klingons will trap those bastards in the cross-fire!”

“Aye, sir!”
What followed now was a scene worthy of an old Western movie, in which the bandits entrenched themselves in a saloon while the sheriff’s brave men battled them from the outside. Later, Wesley would describe it with the words, “The mobsters were surrounded. They shot like mad without much success while we and our allies, the Klingons, overpowered them with strategy and skill.”

Kor ordered his men down from the stage and rushed the enemy, driving them towards Starfleet’s Red-Shirts. A few Klingons broke through the hostile line and joined the Lexington’s security personnel, accepting Silverhawk’s orders as if they were given by Kor himself. Well, Kor had ordered them to obey the ‘Starfleet man’s’ commands.

In this manner, they caused their opponents to retreat; many of the slavers and dealers lay stunned or dead on the ground. Moans and shouts filled the air mixed with the thick smell of sweat and blood. Some of D’nyrrs’ men and potential customers were able to withdraw, and they headed towards another hallway, firing at the Starfleet members and their allies with their weapons switched to kill.

Bob saw a flash from the corner of his eye. At the same moment, strong, tanned fingers gripped his jacket and pulled him aside; a phaser blast hit the wall behind him and left a glowing trail of ashes in the metal. Wesley looked up and saw the dark, grinning face of Kor, to whom he obviously owed his life.

“You have to be quicker on your feet, Wesley,” Kor taunted. “I cannot always save your neck.”

“Well, if you ever get tired of serving in the Imperial Fleet, I can offer you a job in Starfleet Security,” Bob replied dryly.

The Fleet Commander had chuckled before they both, Nogura and a very surprised Barnett, ducked back into the corridor to avoid further phaser blasts. Morrow cursed from behind of them, ducking too.

“Did you find the other captives, Kor?” Wesley raised his voice to be heard amidst the loud tumult several meters away.

Feeling the Admirals’ eyes upon him, he answered, “Yes, they are behind the stage, waiting to be beamed up. But our ships up there –” He pointed with one thumb to the roof, “– are still busy with the Orions and their ‘business partners’ and can’t lower their shields at the moment. Otherwise, I would have already beamed the ladies and gentlemen up.” He peeked around the corner and stiffened. “Wesley,” he said with a growl in his voice that woke Bob’s attention.
“Yes?”

“ Didn’t you say you wanted to repay the man who betrayed Kirk to us?”

Wesley felt the sharp sting of fury. “Is he here?” he demanded, closing the short distance to Kor.

The Klingon narrowed his eyes and pointed out a human male in his late thirties. “There he is! As I told you, he vanished from Turkana the moment the first cargo vessels were permitted. It seemed he got a new job. If you want to avenge your boy, your opportunity is now.”

Even if taking revenge was a big ‘no-no’ in Starfleet, Wesley felt adrenalin coursing through his body. Wrath unfurled in his belly. Gripping his phaser, Bob turned towards the three Red-Shirts near him. “Follow me!” he snarled. “We’ve got some arresting to do!”

Without hesitation, the Commodore and the three Security personnel left their cover and headed towards the fleeing man, who was accompanied by two Orions and a Regulian. The man and the Orions quickly discovered that they were hunted and shot at the four Starfleet members, but to no avail. While Red-Shirts and five Klingons covered Wesley’s back, the staff officer and his companions returned fire. One of the Orions went down, as did the Regulian. Then the man who was responsible for so much pain Jim Kirk had been exposed to, tried to run away again – and Wesley hurled himself at him.

Matthew Armstrong realized that he was in hot water. Not only because Starfleet had arrived together with Klingons – weren’t they still at war with each other? But as he tried to flee he became aware of a man in his late forties or early fifties who was obviously the commanding officer of the Starfleet troop. This officer was hunting him! Brimstone and gall rose as he became angrier. Did this guy have nothing better to do than pursue him?

All of sudden someone crashed into him, and he was tackled to the floor. Armstrong turned around, recognizing the officer who punched him with such force. He saw the utter fury in his opponent’s dark eyes as he received another blow; then he began to fight back.

For a short time, both men struggled – Armstrong with the unscrupulousness of someone stripped of his humanity and sense of right and wrong, Wesley with the righteous wrath of someone about to avenge someone dear. Revenge was a taboo in Starfleet, yet Wesley wanted to arrest the man, but if his opponent fought back, he had to defend himself. And who could accuse him of abuse if he only attempted to overpower the man and so used a bit more force than strictly necessary? This was nothing more than a bid to capture a traitor – officially. Unofficially, Wesley felt great satisfaction every time a blow hit home.
Then two Red-Shirts were with him; they grabbed for Armstrong’s arms and secured him while a third offered his commanding officer a supporting hand to rise. Wesley practically skipped to beat the shit out of the man who betrayed Kirk to the Klingons; the Red-Shirts pulled his opponent to his feet.

Bob couldn’t hide a grim grin as he saw blood trickle from the man’s nose down over his jaw while the bruises began to blossom around his eye. Well, no one could take back the thrashing this guy received – a little payback for what Jim had been put through!

“You are accused of conspiracy against the United Federation of Planets and betrayal of Starfleet personnel to a hostile military force during wartime! You are also accused of illegal slave trade, procurement, and working for a criminal organization.”

Armstrong spat on the floor and gasped when one of the Red-Shirts pulled his arms back until they ached. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, man! I never met you before and…”

“No, you’ve never met me – but you’ve met one of my captains, and you had nothing better to do than tipping off the enemy as to his whereabouts for revenge because he protected your wife – more than you were willing to do!” Wesley snapped.

Armstrong threw his head back and laughed. “That boy intervened when he should have stayed away. As the Klingons arrived, he was captured – not my problem. If he is foolish enough to…”

“You walked to the Klingon governor of Turkana and betrayed James Kirk – his presence planet-side and his hideout! Don’t deny it! Lord Kor himself told me – the very same Klingon you informed about Kirk.”

Matthew glared at him and sneered, “You can arrest me all you want, but it won’t bring Kirk back from the dead. So…”

“Second error, my friend,” Wesley growled. “Captain Kirk is alive and safe aboard his ship – no thanks to you! But your little speech implicates you.” He glanced at the Security. “Arrest him and beam him to our brig! I’m sure court martial will teach him a lesson or two!”

He turned around and left, fearing his control would slip again – that he might do something to the guy that he would regret later.
The scene had become quieter in the meantime. Bob saw that the fighting had come to an end. The slavers and pirates putting up any resistance were mercilessly killed by the Klingons, and those who surrendered or were too injured to do anything were taken prisoner.

The Admirals headed towards Wesley; Kor followed them – apparently content with the outcome. Barnett watched a human male as he was handcuffed by two Red-Shirts. He looked back at a tousled Wesley and frowned, “I appreciate the personal touch there, Bob, but pray to tell, why did you beat that man into the ground?”

“He was the one who betrayed Kirk to us,” Kor answered in Wesley's stead. He found himself the new object of the Admiral's attention.

“You betrayed a traitor?”

Kor smiled a dangerous, crocodile grin. “You always love the betrayal, but never the betrayer! Kirk showed a lot of courage and was as strong as one of us. That man over there is a coward – and cowards have no place among warriors.” He smirked at Wesley. “You avenged your chosen son.”

“I arrested a guy who resisted arrest. That’s all.”

Barnett rolled his eyes and dropped the topic. They all knew the real reason for Wesley beating the crap out of the man. ‘Chosen son’ – an interesting interpretation of Bob's relationship with his protégée. Perhaps it was worth some considering, but not now. There were far more important matters at hand.

He looked Wesley up and down for a moment before he softly said. “You saved us. I can hardly wait to hear the whole story from you.”

The commodore smiled tiredly and wiped his sweaty forehead. “You’ll be shocked to hear it, sir.” He turned his attention to the Klingon. “Thank you, Kor. We succeeded only because of your support.”

“You didn't fight to badly yourself, Wesley – for a human,” he added with a smirk. Then he turned towards Barnett, who also turned his full attention finally to the unexpected assistance.
“Fleet Commander Kor, son of Ryan,” the Klingon introduced himself, pressing one balled fist against his chest.

“Admiral Richard Barnett, Chief in Command of Starfleet,” the admiral replied respectfully before he offered his hand to Kor. “I don’t know how it happened that you and Commodore Wesley teamed up or why you risked your men and yourself to come to our aid, but I want to voice my sincerest gratitude.”

Kor, familiar with the human gesture of greeting, took the offered hand. “Commodore Wesley and I shared a common interest: To find out the truth about the attack against the Excalibur. You lost lives; I lost my reputation. To use a Vulcan phrase – teaming up was logical.” He let go of the hand and added sharply, “And it was also a necessity to prove to the Federation that Klingons keep their word. We did not violate the ceasefire, and it will remain that way until the conference takes place or our governments jointly decide another course of action.”

Nogura and Morrow reached them, and Richard introduced them to Kor, too, before he said, “We overheard a discussion between our captors and learned that you weren’t responsible for the attack. And Commodore Wesley confirmed it. I’m glad that…”

“Kor came to the aid of the Enterprise when the imposter attacked the Excalibur using his identity,” Wesley cut in. He met the, again, astonished looks of his three superiors and added, “This had been proved, yet his government demands an explanation of the incident – the reason we met by accident at Yaska, the moon you were stranded on. We talked, realized that our goals were much the same, and built an alliance.” He looked at Kor. “We arrested D’nyrrs. What about Klokh?”

“He’s dead,” Kor growled, “killed by my dagger. My honor has been restored.” His glance found Barnett’s again. “I hoped that we two would meet under different circumstances. Battling the highest ranking officer of a hostile force is always an honor, but I must admit that the prospect of speaking with you outside of an offensive does pique my curiosity. I have met several fine officers among Starfleet, including Commodore Wesley here. He displayed courage, choosing to beam aboard my ship to win me over, only to save you and the survivors of the delegation. You should honor him, Admiral Barnett. If all commanding officers in your fleet were like Wesley – or even Kirk, who is as well, honorable and brave – the war might have been prevented.”

Barnett tried to hide his surprise at this little speech but failed – not least due to his exhaustion. It was Morrow who quipped, “Speaking of our fellow prisoners. Have they been all freed?”

Kor nodded and pointed towards the stage, but let his arm sink as he realized that a few of the former captives were heading his way. “No new injuries, and regarding the servants who had been enslaved, it’s up to you if you take them or not. I have no interest in them.”
“Oh my God!” Wesley burst out suddenly; his eyes widened. Following his gaze, the three admirals and Kor turned around and saw a Tellarit supporting another dressed in the shabby clothes of the enslaved servants. He was alarmingly thin, but beamed like a human child on Christmas morning. He was surrounded by a Caitian woman and humans.

Nogura lifted both brows. “What the hell…”

They watched as the Caitian woman pulled both Tellarits in her arms quickly followed by some Terrans in civilian clothing who carried weapons. And it made loud and clear ‘click’ in Barnett’s mind.

“Is this The Shadow?” he asked flabbergasted.

Bob nodded with a smile. “Yes, it was The Shadow who found your trail, Admiral; we have to thank them for that and so much more.” He beamed and nodded in the direction of the two Tellarits. “And it seems Galven has found his lost brother. Another story with a happy end.” The members of the militia made a lot of noise now, laughing and whooping. Every one of them shared Galven’s joy.

“Sweet!” Ania had reached the staff officers with Batari at her side.

Kor turned towards her and grinned, “Not as sweet as you, Beauty!”

The Betazoid woman stared at him and sensed that the adrenalin – if that’s what Klingons had – was still circulating in him after the battle fight, but also his growing lust as he stared at her. “Awww look – a Klingon with a thing for poetry,” she taunted with an extra sweet smile.

Chuckling Kor stepped beside her and wrapped one arm around her petite frame. “You bring the best out of me, vlghro’oy!” he said. Then he glanced at Batari. “And with another beauty nearby, any warrior would feel satisfied, especially after a great battle that led to their rescue.”

Morrow gaped at him. Was the fleet commander flirting with Lady Morganth and Mrs. Whitman? Wesley groaned and decided to take the wind out of the Klingon lord’s sails. “Kor, may I introduce Lady Ania Morganth to you, First Daughter of the Third House and Ambassador of Betazed.”
Kor froze, then his eyes widened as he looked down at the small woman who looked challengingly back at him. “This is…”

“The ambassador of Betazoid, yes,” Wesley nodded. “And the ‘other beauty’ is Mrs. Batari Whitman, Vice President of the United Federation of Planets.”

The Malaysian woman smiled at the Klingon who gaped at her. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Milord,” she said charmingly and felt – despite her exhaustion and the fear she endured these last days – amusement rising in her as she watched the blood flow into the fleet commander’s cheeks.

Morrow and Nogura chuckled quietly while Barnett couldn’t help but grin at the view. A blushing Klingon! The universe never ceased to surprise him…

Jim smiled tiredly as he all but stumbled into his quarters after the most important work was done. Spock had offered to take the conn for the rest of the gamma shift – an offer Jim accepted gladly. He was tired, but happy as a cuddled and well-fed puppy. Well, he hadn’t been cuddled, nor had he eaten much in the last thirty-six hours, but he was very satisfied with the current situation. Spock and Chekov had programmed a probe that was already on its way on an entirely different course than the Enterprise. In three hours, it would begin sending the Enterprise’s regular warp signatures, and then the transmission would switch to the ion trail of a ship at impulse speed to emulate a ship suddenly unable to travel at warp speed. It would lure Styles to the probe, no doubt about it.

As soon as the probe was launched, Jim and Uhura sent a message to New Vulcan telling ‘Selek’ about the successful recovery. They also had prepared the records which would be transmitted by the second probe that would be launched in eighteen hours toward the Tholian Area that also lay in a different direction than their current heading toward New Vulcan. It wouldn’t fool Section 31 for long, but it would give Jim and the others the head start they needed to reach New Vulcan before Luengo figured it out. The crew was sure Luengo would move heaven and Earth to catch them.

And because Jim feared that Luengo would be on their trail far too soon, he ordered Uhura to send the elder Spock a message about their successful mission in secret. He thought of something to say that only elder Spock would understand. It wasn’t hard considering their strange relationship. When he was satisfied with the transmission, he left the bridge.

Yawning and stretching his body, Kirk got rid of his clothes and hit the shower. Nien was still in the room attached to medbay, watching his family closely. Jim had spoken with him several minutes ago, and even if Khan had offered to accompany him to their quarters – you couldn’t call Kirk’s private
room anything but now – Jim had seen that the Augment’s heart wasn’t in it. And he sympathized with his bond mate. Nien had been separated from his loved ones for more than two years, and asleep beside them hundreds of years longer. He had thought them twice to be dead, had seen their helpless forms in danger far too often. If he didn’t want to leave them now, even if they were safe, Jim could understand. But he missed Nien’s presence as he slipped under the covers several minutes later. He was used to feeling Khan’s warm, strong body beside him and sleeping alone now was unsettling.

Nevertheless, Kirk fell into dreamland almost as soon as his head hit the pillow, and he didn’t even wake when half an hour later Khan entered the quarters and prepared himself for bed. He wasn’t tired – an Augment required less sleep than a usual human – but he had felt Jim’s longing for his presence over their shared bond. After he had made certain that his family was safe, he had headed for Engineering to talk with a tired looking Scott. They discussed some enhancements with Keenser, who was surprisingly talkative. Then he finally walked to Jim’s and his quarters. Stripping, he joined his beloved under the sheets and gathered his bonded carefully in his arms, earning himself a grumble before Jim snuggled closer to him and continued to sleep.

Listening to the deep, slow breathes, Khan felt himself relax – content and at peace with his mate as he sensed the presence of his family in his mind. The hole left weeping in his subconscious for so long was finally filled.

Without realizing it, Khan dozed off, hoping that their luck would continue.

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On the asteroid in the Borderland, the Orion slave market had been cleared out. The pirates were dead or arrested; only a few of them and their customers had been able to flee.

It was a little longer before all the enslaved people who hid around the station were found and taken care of. While Jim Kirk was sleeping in his lover's arms, the freed captives were already in the care of the Lexington’s CMO, Dr. Daniela Albereth. And her staff had their hands full. There were the injuries from the delegation members. Traumatic injuries and poorly healed wounds that other prisoners endured for months and sometimes even years without proper, or any treatment. And there were the bruises and injuries the crew members had sustained during the battle to free them. The medbay was crowded as were the adjoining rooms, and it would remain like that for quite some time.

Despite their bruises, Barnett, Nogura, and Morrow stayed with Wesley in the station on the asteroid, as did Mrs. Whitman and Lady Morganth. They wanted to oversee the arrests. Several medical staff members had beamed down to treat those in urgent need of care before they could be transported. Wesley and Kor were satisfied as the Terran and Klingon staff worked hand-in-hand and treated members of the other one’s crew. ‘Allies ′til the last moment of parting,’ Barnett thought, still
shocked to see one of his staff officers and a Klingon fleet commander standing together and talking as though they were friends. Well, maybe this was the best way to end this war once and for all.

Finally, all survivors had been beamed up – the freed captives and former slaves to the *Lexington*, and the captured Orions and Romulans to Kor’s ships. Kor intended to bring them to the Empire because the Orions had violated the alliance contract and the Romulans had passed through Klingon territory without permission. Depending on the Chancellor’s mood, the Romulans would be handled as spies – not a very good prospect for them, but Wesley could care less. What Romulan Intelligence would have done to the admirals and the two Vulcans were far worse.

“All prisoners are in our brig, Milord,” K’tar reported, pressing his fist to his chest. Kor returned the greeting and exchanged a few words with his underling before he turned his attention back to Wesley, who listened to his own Chief of Security’s report. Afterward, the two men faced each other.

“I think the time for good-bye has finally come,” Bob said quietly.

Kor nodded. “Yes. I’ll return to the Empire and will give M’Rek a full report.”

Wesley frowned. “A full report?”

The Klingon lord understood what Bob was referring to and shrugged. “Well, it could be that the details will slip my mind – the Dark Warrior’s actual name or his heritage. But I think it would be wise to explain what happened within Starfleet Command. The concept of conspiracy isn’t foreign to us. There were several similar attempts in our Empire during the last decades. Maybe this shows the responsible politicians that we’re not so different as we thought – and that there are still officers within Starfleet who value truth and honor as we do.”

Wesley smiled at him. “I’m confident that you’ll find the right words. If you weren't such a damn good officer, I would suggest you begin a career as a diplomat.”

Kor gasped. “The Black Fleet take me first! As much as I enjoy a good verbal joust, the use of my mind and my fists are my primary nature.” He turned around as he heard steps nearing and looked calmly at the three admirals and the two women.

“Fleet Commander Kor, it was a pleasure and an honor to meet you in person,” Barnett said with a firm, but soft voice. “I must admit, I was shocked aboard the *Excalibur* when it appeared that the
attack was orchestrated by you. I began to doubt my knowledge of Klingon ways. I must say, I’m relieved to learn now that I wasn’t mistaken concerning you and Klingon integrity.” He offered his hand again. “My colleagues and the survivors of the delegation are in your debt, Milord, and would be pleased to meet you again – maybe during the conference.”

Kor closed his strong fingers around the more fragile human ones. “I’m looking forward to meet you again too, Admiral. Though it’s better if the chiefs discuss the important matters rather than a bunch of warriors.” He let go of the hand and glanced at Batari and Ania. With his commander's decorum intact and free of the battle's adrenalin rush, he reached for Whitman’s hand and gave it a kiss; perfectly aware of human politeness. “I hope you’ll join the next meeting. I’m confident that our Chancellor would love to discuss terms with you.”

Lady Morganth almost rolled her eyes but felt amusement as well when Kor dropped Batari’s hand and reached for hers. “The same goes for you, Milady,” he said. “I’d hoped that you would bring some radiance in the dim light of my ship. I pray I have the pleasure of seeing you again – hopefully soon.”

Wesley closed his eyes while Barnett tried to stay serious, but the edges of his mouth twitched. Both were aware of the flirtatious nature of Kor’s statement.

Ania smiled up at Kor; mischief sparkled in her eyes. “And I will not hesitate to tell of Klingon gallantry and charm. This is a side of your people we somehow missed until now.”

“In every fierce warrior resides a longing and appreciation for the true, beautiful, and good, Milady. Farewell until we meet again,” Kor replied, feeling, to his horror, heat rising in his cheeks. Thank Kahless none of his crew was nearby.

Bob realized that the Betazoid watched Kor from beneath her long lashes; interest shone in her eyes. Perhaps she wasn’t so reluctant to meet the Klingon lord again. Wesley almost coughed as he tried to stifle his laughter. If the two continued to dance around each other like this, the conference would take a fascinating turn – if the meeting took place at all now. The commodore figured it would if their current string of successes held out.

Kor heard the strange noises Wesley made and turned swiftly around to him. “My dear Wesley,” he said, and alarms began to ring in Bob's head. “Before we depart, there is a little thing we both must do,” the Klingon continued, and as he caught the confused expression on the human’s face, he added, “The D’Ghor!”

“Ah yes,” Wesley nodded. “Of course.” He raised his voice and shouted through the corridor
towards the members of The Shadow, “MR. GALVEN?”

Galven, who hadn’t separated himself from the other Tellarit for more than a minute, looked up, said something to his friends, and jogged with short, hard steps towards the little group. His eyes roamed over the three admirals and the two ladies. He bowed towards them and glanced up to Wesley. “Yes, Commodore?”

“Mr. Galven, it’s about time that we give the D’Ghor back to Fleet Commander Kor. As far as I know, Mr. Ritek was the only one who remained aboard. Is everything ready for delivery?”

The Tellarit grinned at him. “Yes, everything is ready.” He looked at Kor. “I never thought I would say this to a Klingon, but you guys are handy when it comes to combat, and you’re on our side for a change. The way your warriors handled the Orions was remarkable!”

Kor lifted both bushy brows. “And I never thought I would congratulate the leader of the gang that gave us trouble. You didn’t fight too badly – for non-Klingons.” He pressed his fist against his chest. “May your way be an honorable one.” He turned to leave but hesitated one little moment. “Oh, and by the way: I granted you free leave of the Borderland. That doesn’t mean that I’ll show you the same mercy if you ever return. At least as long as we’re officially allies of the Orions.”

Galven shrugged. “I found my brother – that’s all I wanted. And at the moment, you have none of my people captive, so there is no reason for us to return. There is a little problem though.”

Kor turned back towards him. “What problem?”

“The Santa Domingo is only atoms if you remember. If the good Commodore here doesn’t give us a ride, we’re stranded here.”

Bob rolled his eyes. “Be my guest. But I have to inform you that we can’t drop you on an outpost or planet in Federation area. We have to hurry now, as you well know.”

Galven nodded slowly. “You think the White Tiger will be in trouble?” he asked. Wesley needed a moment to realize whom the Tellarit was talking about.

“Yes, I think so – he and the others.”
Promptly, Galven straightened his stout frame. “Then we have even more reason to accompany you. I promised the lad to be there for him if he needs help, and I always keep my word!”

This time, Bob sighed deeply. “I knew you would say that.”

Barnett frowned in confusion. “Bob, care to explain what’s going on here?”

Wesley smiled almost sheepishly. “It's a long story that I have to tell you and the others. But first, I have to give Fleet Commander Kor his ship back. I suggest you beam to the Lexington now. The main work down here is done, and the Klingons will do the rest. After all, this so-called market is in their ally's territory.” He bowed his head politely. “Please excuse me for a moment.” He walked with Kor several meters away, before he pulled out his communicator and contacted Ritek. Eight more Klingons stepped beside them, and seconds later they vanished in the transporter beam.

Morrow closed the short distance to Barnett. “What the hell is going on here?”

“This, my friend, is a question I want answered!” He signaled Silverhawk to come closer and asked him to hail the Lexington. Wesley was right about one thing. It was about time to beam up.

Kor looked around. The D’Ghor was damaged from the battle, yet she was intact, and the Rigelian, Ritek had used the time between the end of the fight and now to clean up. A Klingon would never do this, yet Kor appreciated the respect this action showed.

“Everything to your satisfaction?” Wesley asked, and Kor nodded.

“Everything is fine,” he replied. “We have our ship back and you, your admirals, and delegation members.” He turned towards Bob and offered him his hand. “I hope to meet you again, Wesley – then maybe we can share a few drinks. I don’t want to face you in battle as I would regret killing you.”

“Well, then don’t – and besides, I'm not so easily killed,” Bob replied jokingly and accepted the hand before he became serious again. “Yet I think the time of our standing on opposite sides ought to
come to an end. In several days, this nightmare will come to an end, and Starfleet Command will be back in the capable hands of Admiral Barnett.”

“It is good you can still hope, yet much hangs in the balance.” He hesitated a moment, then he added, “Tell Kirk I’m still angry that he managed to escape, yet I’ve come to know him as an honorable warrior. Maybe we can compete in the future.”

Bob knew of the Klingon culture enough to realize that Kor was complimenting Jim, and smiled. “I will pass him your message.” He opened his communicator and hailed the Lexington. “Transporter room, has everyone been beamed back?”

The answer came instantly. “Aye, sir, all crew members, survivors of the delegation and freed captives. Also the members of The Shadow are aboard. I await your instruction.”

“Remain on stand-by. Wait for my signal to beam Mr. Ritek and me aboard!” Wesley ordered; he got the affirmation and looked at Kor one last time. “Honor and success, Milord!”

“Honor and success, Commodore!” the fleet commander replied; he nodded at Ritek and then Bob gave the signal to beam them away. They vanished in the golden, sparkling light of the transporter.

Kor took a deep breath – it smelled strange here. It was about time that the good Klingon scent was restored in the spacecraft. But first, there was something more important to see about.

“Kerth, come with me!” he ordered. He left the bridge and headed to Engineering. The D’Ghor had this new sensor disturbing mechanism attached to her systems. Kor had seen this device in action, had gotten the read-outs on the bridge as they neared the asteroid – and he was eager to have a closer look at it! He was almost disappointed that Wesley hadn’t thought about this detail – a detail that was a critical and about to be analyzed and neutralized.

He stepped into Engineering, headed into the direction where he had seen the device during his inspection after they retrieved the scout from Turkana, and stopped dead in his tracks. There, where the strange device had been mounted – there was only hanging wires and exposed mounts.

“WESLEEEEEY!” he roared, then his flaring anger changed into amusement! Of course the human had thought about this little detail. He should have known that. Underestimating Robert Wesley was a mistake.
Kor pressed his fists into his waist and glared at the empty spot, then the voice of one of his officers sounded from the bridge, informing him that the *Lexington* had passed by and increased to warp speed.

And once again Kor gave into his amusement, this time, mingled with respect. Bending his head, he roared with laughter. “Wesley, you clever… This time you got me, but we’ll see each other again!” He caught the confused glance of his companion, shook his head and left Engineering. ‘Til next time, Commodore!’

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Barnett waited for Wesley in the transporter room. A Red-Shirt accompanied Ritek, who suffered from several bruises and a burn, to medbay. Bob headed to the bridge; he learned from the admiral that the others and the two women were in medbay, too.

They reached command central, and Bob instantly ordered their course to Earth, maximum warp. Sonik nodded and set the controls for warp six, having set that course already hours ago.

Barnett took a deep breath making his chest ache where three ribs were broken, but he couldn’t go to medbay to be treated just yet. There were too many important things he had to do first. “We’ll go home,” he said, but there was no relief in his eyes; only wariness. He knew what lay ahead for him and the others. They had to arrest the traitor who wanted them dead, and to do this they had to arrive on Earth without alerting him or her, or they’d risk the traitor vanishing or worse – the traitor may try to destroy the *Lexington*. If this man or woman – maybe alien – had been able to hire pirates to assault the *Excalibur*, he or she could do something similar again to eliminate the *Lexington* and everyone aboard.

Bob nodded in silence understanding; then Commander Marceaux stepped towards them. After greeting the admiral respectfully, he reported, “Sir, we've received a message from the *Enterprise* to Starfleet Command, but Lieutenant Uhura transmitted it to us for our information.”

Wesley felt tension rising. “And?” he prompted, inwardly praying the young officer had made it!

“It says, ‘Starfleet Command, this is the USS Enterprise. Given order fulfilled, Gamma 12 has been destroyed. Bringing the evacuees to safety. Enterprise out.’

Barnett’s eyes widened. “Gamma 12 was destroyed – by the *Enterprise*?” His voice was a little too
Bob nodded again. “Yes, Command gave the order to destroy four of our high security facilities – a precaution, because the SBI fears that a Klingon attack is imminent.”

“But… Kor is responsible for this area here – and he helped us!” the Chief in Command stated utterly thunderstruck. “And to destroy four of our high-security facilities… That’s insane! The amount of data, material, and equipment lost…” He stopped, as something gnawed at the edges of his mind. He was one of the very few people who knew that the Augments were held in Gamma 12 and…

He felt his face pale. They may be genetically engineered, but these people were *humans!* And whoever gave the order had practically *murdered* them. Did Kirk know? Who gave the order? Who was responsible for all of this? How was it that Bob was here? How was it that The Shadow had searched for them? Why had Wesley come alone, needing to ally himself with Kor to end the rescue mission successfully instead of bringing half of Starfleet with him? Was Command in the hands of a madman, or what?

Barnett looked sternly at Wesley. “Bob, as much as I appreciate the efforts of you and the others in saving our lives, I want answers – now!”

Bob sighed. “I understand, sir. Please accompany me to my quarters. Commander Marceaux, you’ve the conn. Look out for slavers, but with the SDD functioning, we should be invisible to their sensors. Hail me if our scanners pick anything up out of the ordinary.”

“Aye, sir!” Marceaux nodded, then Wesley made an inviting gesture to the turbo lift. “After you, Admiral!” He looked over his shoulder. “Lieutenant, hail the other admirals in medbay, as well as Mrs. Whitman and ask them to join us, if their health allows it.”

The comms officer nodded. “Aye, aye, sir!”

The lift doors had barely closed, when Barnett blurted out, “You have the SDD installed onboard?”

“Yes, Mr. Brendon gave the plans to me when he learned about the upcoming recovery mission.”

“So he knows what’s going on here? That there is – a conspiracy within Starfleet? A civilian?”
Richard was startled – and it wouldn’t be the last time in the next hour.

Wesley sighed. “Yes, he knows. To tell you the truth, he is one of the bright minds who figured out the conspiracy by identifying the implicating details of the attack against the *Excalibur*.”

The turbo lift came to halt and they stepped out on deck five. Barnett stared almost horrified at Bob. “You are telling me that a civilian not employed or contracted by Starfleet has access not only to internal Starfleet information but details? Top secret information?”

“No, he has no access – he was there and was able to connect the dots faster than we could and without the bias. He got the signs right leading us to the only conclusion that truly makes sense. But I think we should discuss this with the Morrow and Nogura, and of course with Mrs. Whitman.” They entered the captain’s quarters, and Wesley added quietly. “Sir, you and the others may be here – rescued, but you’re not safe yet. None of us are, because of one fact – Section 31 has picked up where they left off – and now the head of 31 is in charge of Starfleet Command.”

The color left Barnett’s face. “You’re saying that Command is now tainted by Section 31 up to the top officers?”

Bob nodded as he offered the admiral a chair in the living room. “Yes, sir – and the man in charge is more clever than Marcus was and more dangerous. He planned everything to ensure his position in the fleet.”

Wesley ordered three cups of hot, steaming coffee from the replicator and two green teas. Seconds later, Batari Whitman, Nogura, and Morrow arrived. Komack had to remain in medbay. He was out cold and being prepped for surgery.

Barnett told them quickly what he had learned from Wesley up to now, and Morrow whispered astonished, “So it’s true, what we heard between one of the pirates and their Klingon ally. One of our own was responsible for the attack against the *Excalibur*, and... And he wants all of us dead.” He swallowed. “Do you know who this man is, Bob?”

The Commodore took a deep breath. “All evidence points to the Interim Chief of Command – José Luengo.”

Batari made an odd sound in her throat; Morrow’s jaw hit almost the floor, and Nogura’s eyes widened. Barnett gasped before he blurted out, “Interim Chief of... But Luengo was under
investigation! He's accused of….”

“Sorry, sir, but all accusations against him are on ice for now,” Wesley interrupted him softly. “After our most important admirals, you, were declared dead, Starfleet was impaired, and Federation territory was in danger of being annexed by the Klingons because Starfleet was too incompetent to carry out her duty without her leading staff officers. Luengo is the head of the SBI, and he's got the most time in Starfleet service. He was the logical choice. Being the chief of Starfleet Intelligence gave him all the advantage he needed to reshuffle the deck to his advantage. The traffic accident that Captain Heldron and his first officer were involved in just hours before the Excalibur’s launch bears the hallmarks of Section 31 from a year ago – and it was most certainly initiated by Luengo. He is the only one with enough power within and out of Starfleet to pull the strings needed to make certain that a captain of his choice would command the Excalibur and did as he ordered.”

The three staff officers were frighteningly pale; Nogura sipped at his tea, trying to hide his shock. Whitman whispered, “Do you know what you’re saying, Commodore?”

Wesley nodded and looked at her. She was ashen beneath her tanned skin; wrinkles had buried themselves around her tired eyes and her usually soft lips. “I asked Kirk the same question,” he murmured, “And he said conspiracy – a big one. One we have to stop.” He watched the other three men and added, “Styles is part of it too.”

“Styles?” Nogura whispered. “He belongs to…? Good god!”

“Kirk?” Whitman asked. “James Kirk of the Enterprise? What does this have to do with him?”

“He was one of a small group of people who found out about the conspiracy,” Bob informed her and the others. “Kor came to his aid near Briar Patch at the same time the Excalibur was attacked by a Klingon, pretending to be Kor. Pure coincidence, no doubt, one Luengo couldn’t calculate, yet this little detail thwarted Luengo’s plans. The fact that Kor obviously couldn’t be in two places at once made the Council suspicious, and they demanded an investigation before a decision could be made concerning the cease-fire. The president ordered a red alert for the fleet but kept the ceasefire in place. He demanded answers from M'Rek which led to Kor and I meeting at Yaska – coincidence, too.”

“And what does Kirk have to do with it – I’ll ask again?”

“Kirk reported that Kor came to his assistance about the time Kor had attacked the Excalibur. I knew both reports couldn't be true,” Bob answered Nogura’s question. “I sent the records from the Excalibur’s bridge to Kirk, and his investigation showed the grave errors Styles made during the battle – errors not even a novice would make, never mind a well-trained officer ready for his first command.”
Barnett frowned. “An unusual move – passing off the investigation to Captain Kirk.”

“Kirk has an incredible staff. Lieutenant Uhura is a xeno-linguist specialist – the best in the fleet. She identified the accents of ‘Kor’ who spoke with you – this Klokh that Kor killed – and the real Kor. Mr. Scott is an engineer, unlike the world has ever seen. It was him who found out that a ship as crippled as the Excalibur purported, can’t travel at warp three for an extended period of time, yet this was exactly what she did after you were left behind and Styles fled – straight to Federation territory. And even more confusing is the fact that the Klingons damaged the Excalibur, yes, but they didn’t destroy her or even make the attempt to. Another unbelievable fact is that the Excalibur wasted nearly all of her phaser energy and most of her torpedoes without destroying one bird-of-prey. All three Klingon ships were still fully functional as the Excalibur ran down her weapon stores. Pretty impossible, don’t you agree?”

“Styles missed on purpose – or his helmsman, I mean?” Nogura asked baffled.

“Yes, apparently,” Wesley affirmed.

Barnett blinked. “What do you mean exactly with this all, Bob? Styles is…”

“Styles acted on Luengo’s command. All you witnessed on the Excalibur’s bridge during the battle, Admiral Barnett, Styles’ concern for your safety, his surprise at meeting the Klingons in Borderland despite the declared cease fire, his orders – it was all one big show! Styles is Luengo’s man – young and inexperienced but eager to climb the ladder – and without scruples. He was the perfect candidate to execute Luengo’s plan to get rid of the admirals who’d never allow Section 31 the comeback he envisions.” Wesley glanced from one admiral to the next. “Styles played a dirty game. He knew about the attack, and he sent you and the others out to certain death.”

“He followed protocol,” Morrow murmured and sounded almost helpless in his troubled state. “To evacuate…”

“Yes, sir, I know the protocol, but to send the shuttles out without distracting the enemy is a death sentence for the people in the shuttles. He did everything protocol demanded, but he did it either too late or in the wrong order – little details which led to his success. Well, almost, seeing that at least you and some of the ambassadors have survived. The way Styles acted was carefully calculated – brilliant even. I would congratulate him for his cleverness if it weren’t so sad that he is ruthless enough to kill his superiors and those who were under his protection just to gain position.”
Morrow moistened his lips. “Do you have proof of all this? Please don’t get me wrong. I believe you that you’re convinced of what you’re telling us, but…”

“The records from the Excalibur’s bridge gave Styles away. It wasn’t just Kirk and his officers that came to this conclusion; I realized it after I saw the details too. I’ll show you; please follow me.” He stood and walked to his desk, the three admirals and the vice-president on his heels. Opening the files, Wesley showed them exactly what he had explained, stopping the records here and there to point out Styles’ deliberate errors.

As they returned to the living room, the three admirals and Whitman were silent for a little while – too shocked to say anything. Finally, Barnett collected himself and murmured, “I have to admit that I concur with yours and Kirk’s theory, Bob. Styles betrayed us – tried everything to get us killed.” He gulped. “This shakes me to the core. We had breakfast with Styles only a few hours earlier and…” He shook his head. “If Kirk hadn’t figured out what was going on, we’d be in Romulan hands and…” He made a fleeting gesture with his left hand.

“My God, what is it all for?” Morrow whispered. “Why… why the attempt to kill us?” He looked at Richard. “If Luengo is really the one behind this – and I agree with Bob that all evidence points to Luengo – then why? And the ambassadors and…”

“Because it was the only way to kill the ceasefire. Starfleet was weakened because of our demise and agreeable replacements for us had to be found and promoted as quickly as possible – in this case, Luengo,” Barnett grasped the idea. “The war would have continued – more fiercely than before if it weren’t for the incredible coincidence of Kor coming to the aid of the Enterprise while the Excalibur was under attack by the imposter. Starfleet needed to be strong, and the only way it seemed is with Section 31 to return to the forefront, this time as the savior. Remember, Marcus was of the same opinion that Starfleet should be a military organization rather than dedicated to exploration. He lived for this idea and formed Section 31 with that in mind. He still has fellows – and Luengo is among them. I realized that possibility when he allowed the Augment, Khan, to be handed over to the labs.” He glanced back at Wesley. “And how you ended up with Kor as your ally – and with another SDD installed aboard the Lexington?”

“What?” Nogura gasped. “You have the SDD aboard?”

“What is a SDD?” Batari cut in, and it was Nogura, who filled her in before the commodore answered the admiral’s question with a little smile.

“Yes, we have a SDD aboard. Mr. Brendon gave the plans to me when he learned of my upcoming mission to recover you,” he said calmly. And then he began to explain how he met Kor and how they teamed up to fulfill their missions which were intricately connected. He also told about the deal concerning the D’Ghor and that he pulled the SDD out before he returned the scout to the Klingons.
His listeners’ expressions changed from mortified to surprised, from shock to confusion, from relief to tension again. Bob knew that it was hard for them to hear all of the surrounding circumstances – to realize that not only their lives but also the life of Starfleet depended on two enemies becoming allies – overcoming hostility and prejudice. They built a team that prevented the war from starting again.

And then he finally came to the end. The three staff officers were silent again, and Batari shook her head slowly. “You have to think this through, gentlemen. The war is only at a standstill now because leaders from opposed sides worked together. I know the Council will throw up their hands just hearing that one of our Commodores was chatting with a Klingon warlord aboard his ship – making an ally out of an enemy. But perhaps you have to be a little crazy to overcome the insanity around you.” She glanced at Wesley. “What you did, Commodore, was great politicking at the highest level possible with an excellent outcome. Congratulations. I think the president will be very pleased as soon as he learns about this.”

“What I don’t get is why the D’Ghor was hidden on Turkana and how she got the SDD at all,” Morrow murmured, again confused. “I read your report, Bob, that she was seized by The Shadow and bought our fleet time to reach Tammeron before the Klingons could destroy the planet. How did she end up on Turkana?”

“The Shadow had an active part in recovering Kirk when he was held captive by Kor,” Barnett thought aloud. “Really, it was this guy, Sunrise, who saved Kirk, and of course he needed the SDD to reach Turkana without being caught. So he…” He stopped, and his eyes widened, as the thought made almost audible ‘click’ in his mind. “Sunrise… Don’t tell me – Evan Brendon is Sunrise!”

“Sunrise – this mysterious man who played a part in the rescue of Kirk, Tammeron, and Aldebaran?” Batari asked. Morrow nodded curtly as Wesley smiled sheepishly. “Yes, sir, Sunrise is the designer of the SDD,” he admitted. “And he is indeed aboard the Enterprise.”

Barnett let his head sink. “I should have known! This Sunrise is a dare devil and a brilliant strategist. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be able to do what he did. It only fits that he is the one who developed the SDD.” He looked back at Wesley. “You could have told me that when you introduced the concept of the SDD to me.”

“I apologize, sir, but Sunrise is very strict when it comes to his identity. The name Evan Brendon is a pseudonym, too.”

“Why I’m not surprised?” Richard groaned, shaking his head.

“Right, Sunrise is still Mr. Unknown, but what I want to know is how we’re going to proceed when
we reach Earth,” Nogura mused. “We have to stop Luengo before he causes even more damage, although I don’t think he’ll let us just walk in and arrest him.”

“I agree!” Whitman said. “We have to inform the President and the Council in advance. Luengo has to be stopped and if President Robertson knows about it he can…”

“Ma’am, Luengo has ears everywhere,” Bob interrupted her gently. “His department has the best in Intelligence. There is truly nothing he will miss. He will learn too soon that his plan has failed – that you and the admirals are still alive. It will force him to act. And regarding his ruthlessness, I fear that the attempt to arrest him would end in blood. We must to operate in secret, and we have to protect Kirk and his crew because he and Sunrise have all the necessary evidence that a tribunal will need to lock Luengo and his associates away for the rest of the lives.”

Barnett tensed. “Does Luengo know that Kirk is hot on his heels?”

Again Bob nodded. “Yes, Luengo is very aware of the fact that Kirk saw through him. And he has to stop him before Kirk can tell everything to the Council.”

“Where is Kirk now?” Nogura asked, apparently concerned.

“He is on his way to New Vulcan. The Vulcans have accepted his request for assistance. I mean they’re giving Sunrise and… other people asylum. Selek of Vulcan knows everything and promised to back us.”

“Selek gave Sunrise asylum?” Barnett asked. “Why?” He bent forwards. “What is it that this guy has to hide behind phony names and requests asylum from the Vulcans? Did he kidnap the Queen of England, or what?”

Wesley couldn’t help himself; he had to smile at this suggestion. “No, sir, not the Queen of England – and not even her crown jewels as a certain Vulcan we all know has assured me, as I asked him something similar.” He collected himself for the revelation that lay ahead of him. “Sunrise is a wanted man,” he admitted, “one, who hadn’t gotten a fair trial and is therefore on the run. But this is not the reason why Section 31 wants him. Luengo knows who Sunrise is and that he is aboard the Enterprise. Sunrise is a threat to Section 31, but together with Kirk, the two are Luengo’s worst nightmare. The order to destroy the high-security facilities was a trap to catch them both – only Jim was too clever and escaped.”
Four very puzzled faces looked at him. “Why does Luengo want to capture this Sunrise? Hell, if this man is a criminal then that’s a matter for the police, not SBI – or whatever’s left of the SBI now. What’s so important about him besides the fact that he not only saved Kirk, and the whole population of Tammeron, and helped during the Aldebaran crisis? What does all that have to do with the authorities? And why try to capture Kirk and Sunrise by ordering the destruction of four of our high-security facilities – especially Gamma 12?”

“Because Gamma 12 held something Kirk would never destroy knowingly – or better said, he’d never kill knowingly.” He looked straight into Barnett’s eyes, which widened.

“You know what Gamma 12 had inside?” Richard whispered, flabbergasted.

“Yes – and I’m more than relieved that Kirk was able to recover them before he dutifully destroyed the facility.”

“May I ask what you two are talking about?” Nogura cut in.

Richard sighed. “You and the others don’t know about it because it’s top secret. And that you, Bob, have it all figured out – it almost gives me a headache, but on the other hand it seems that your and Kirk’s knowledge saved seventy-two people who would have been murdered otherwise.” He shook his head. “I don’t want to think what Khan would have done if the Enterprise had atomized the facility with his people still inside. They are Augments, sure, but they are still sensitive, living beings!”

“One moment, please!” Morrow cut in. “What do you mean with ‘Augments’? And who is Khan?”

“Yes, I want to know about this, too!” Batari said while Noruga frowned, clearly puzzled.

Barnett sighed quietly. “Ma’am, Heihachiro, Harry, I know that you weren’t informed of the true backgrounds that led to the attack against the London archive and Daystrom.” They stared at him and he continued, “Commander John Harrison – the rogue agent responsible for Daystrom – never existed. And he also wasn’t killed during the incident either. It was a cover name Marcus came up with. In truth, this man was Khan Noonien Singh, an Augment from the twentieth century. Marcus found in an old sleeper ship from that time. He pressed Khan into service – into Section 31’s service! – and eventually all hell broke loose.”

The Malaysian woman stared at him. “Khan… Noonien Singh?” she asked, baffled.
“Yes,” Richard said. “You’ve heard of him?”

“O…of course. I’m very interested in the history of Asia. He – he was incredible.”

Wesley smiled inwardly. ‘That description fits!’ he thought, realizing that he maybe had found an ally in the vice-president concerning Khan.

“One moment,” Nogura said, horrified. “You are telling us that Alexander found sleeping, three hundred-year-old Augments and used one of them for his purpose? He pressed one of them into service? How?”

“By threatening his crew’s – his family’s lives. Marcus blackmailed him – ran tests on him which were nothing less than torture. Khan snapped – and ran amok,” Wesley said. He explained in the next minutes what happened to the former dictator while he was held by Section 31. Barnett, who was the only one except for Bob, who knew about Khan and his people, listened carefully and felt sick to his stomach as he learned the details regarding the enhanced man. The three other shell-shocked listeners were silent during the commodore’s tale.

After Wesley had finished, they stared at him, paled, horrified, enraged. But it was Barnett, who finally murmured, “There are details I had no knowledge of, and I ask myself how it is it you know them.” He glanced quickly at Harry and Heihachiro, as he said, “By the way, Khan fled four months ago. He wasn’t brought to Gamma 12 like the rest of his crew, but to the LSH lab in Nevada – without my knowledge. Norton was responsible for it, and Luengo ignored the Council’s decision concerning Khan, allowing the LSH to use him as a lab-rat.” He glanced back at Wesley. “As you see, not even the admirals or even the vice-president was informed about this – but you know more about Khan than I ever will. How?”

“And why was Kirk ordered to kill the other Augments?” Nogura asked the next logical question.

Wesley took another, much needed deep breath. “Ma’am, Gentlemen, what I’m going to tell you now will certainly startle, maybe even outrage you, but please hear me out. Only then will you be able to understand everything completely.”

The Chief in Command exchanged a quick glance with the two other admirals. “Why do I have this feeling that this is another thing we’re not going to like?”
“Because life experience has taught you well, Richard,” Wesley replied.

“And this little compliment has me on alert, Bob,” Barnett deadpanned while Nogura and Morrow bent forwards in an instinctive reaction to a secret about to be spilled.

The commodore steeled himself. “Well, to say it plainly, I met Khan several days ago.” He saw the alarmed expression on each face. “And I know where he is and what he has done since his escape…”

ST###ST

Outside the captain’s quarters a yeoman passed by carrying a tray with refreshments for the two ambassadors who had been dismissed from medbay and were resting in their guest quarters. The young woman nearly jumped two feet as she heard a shrill shout loud enough to pierce even the sound proof bulkheads.

“Sunrise is KHAN?”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Poor admirals. Frist they were attacked, stranded, kidnapped, sold, rescued in the last minute and now they’ve to learn that one of the most wanted men within the Federation is the secret hero at Jim Kirk’s side. Laugh, this had to shatter any officer’s control. And they don’t even know the whole story, what will begin to make them doubt their minds – or their belief of right and wrong.

Sorry that there was only a small part concerning Jim and Khan, but the rescue of the surviving delegation members is very important for our boys and their friends.

In the next chapter the admirals will learn of the rest, and Batari Whitman will go to The Shadow to learn more about the man who once ruled her homeland three centuries ago. The trap Jim set up for Styles begins to work, you’ll meet Sulu again and then… Well, then one of Khan’s crew will be endangered. More I don’t want to reveal.
I hope you liked the new chapter, including Wesley’s and Kor’s interacting, the ‘blushing Klingon’, and the talk at the end.

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Brothers in arms

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear Readers!

I’m so, so happy to have gotten all those lovely reviews and kudos. Thank you so much; I’m going to answer them during the evening (German time), but just right now I’m off to my shop and afterwards we (my family and I) still have to fix the garden. The weather is warm and beautiful in the moment, and we’ve to take the given chances to change this green jungle into something more civilian (laugh).

But I didn’t want you to wait longer for the next chapter dear Rhiannon went through to smooth out my errors. Be warned, the second part of the chapter will be the beginning of a next round of ‘biting fingernails in anxiety’.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 62 – Brothers in arms

“Sir, the long range sensors are picking up the warp signature of the Enterprise,” the Excalibur’s science officer Commander Ben Taylor reported. His eyes stared at the readouts of the sensors he had adjusted to scan for the Enterprise’s warp signature since the flagship disappeared.

Styles had first asked the course the cruiser could have taken given the direction that the discus segment had pointed to before the ship went into warp, but without any results. Taylor knew that his captain was pressed to find Kirk as soon as possible. Command wanted to get hold of the Enterprise and her officers for whatever reason. Taylor, as most other senior officers, didn’t believe that Kirk, of all people, went rogue, yet none of them dared to voice these thoughts. The mood aboard the Excalibur had drastically changed since the assault within Borderland and especially since they received the order to seize the Enterprise.

Styles hadn’t said much after he went to his quarters to contact Command; he returned a quarter hour later to the bridge tense, pale and furious. You didn’t have to be a genius to figure out that Styles was taking this turn of events personally, and Taylor asked himself what had happened between his new captain and Kirk that Styles was so intent on catching him.
The order to scan for any warp signature hadn’t made sense to Taylor, after all, the Enterprise had a new testing device aboard that prevented any sensor from reading her. Styles had informed him and his first officer of it of only reluctantly, but it had been necessary to fulfill the mission. Now it seemed his commander had been right to adjust the scanners. The readouts were clear. The Enterprise was running at warp 3 only a parsec away from them, almost out of the long range scanners. Apparently, this new device had been switched off or had a malfunction. Whichever it was, in the end, it didn’t matter. The Excalibur had found the trail of her sister ship and Ben knew that Styles would be after Kirk like a bloodhound.

“Send the coordinates to the navigation stations!” Styles ordered sharply. “Kramer set course for interception! ETA?”

“Given our current capable speed of warp 6, we’ll reach her in 8 hours and 52 minutes, sir,” Kramer answered.

‘That long!’ it shot through Lawrence mind. ‘Dammit!’

He pressed the button in his armrest. “Bridge to Engineering. We need more speed!”

“Sir, you know the status of our engines. Warp 6 is the max I can provide you with.”

Lawrence gritted his teeth. He was aware of the engines’ condition. That they were able to travel at warp 6 at all was almost a miracle. The Klingons had done a good job getting the big show going – almost too good given the ship’s current status. “Right. Do whatever you can to get more from the engines. Bridge out.” He turned around to Li. “Lieutenant, report to Command, Admiral Luengo in person: Enterprise warp signature indicated by scanners; commencing pursuit; will rendezvous nine hours.”

Li nodded and made the transmission ready, asking himself once again what the hell was going on here.

Styles leaned back in his chair. ‘Whatever went wrong on your ship, Kirk, you’re no longer invisible. I’ll get you! And then even your Augment friend will not be able to protect you – or himself!’

ST***ST***ST
Jim stirred as the intercom sounded and Spock’s deep voice called for him. Groaning, the young captain tried to open his eyes – an immense and futile effort. Moving was almost impossible. There were simply too many places in and on his body where it hurt, and he felt as if he had slept only a few minutes. Again the Vulcan hailed him, and Kirk blinked into the darkness only to sense a movement beside him and a comfortable warmth that he was only now aware of – because it was gone. Several moments later he heard another familiar voice – a similar baritone but with a rich overtones.

“Khan here. Mr. Spock, the captain is not available at the moment. REM sleep prevents him from waking.”

On the bridge, the first officer lifted a brow. He knew that humans required periods of deep sleep to restore energy and that they sometimes were unable to wake fully when they were in the REM phase. The human in Spock also felt something else – understanding and sympathy. Jim had not slept in over thirty hours, had been under a lot of stress, and his body sustained injury from the hand-to-hand combat with Finnegan. It was logical to let him rest, even if Kirk had ordered that he be informed the moment the probe began its transmission.

He answered, “Mr. Singh, please notify the captain after he wakes that the first probe began transmitting the Enterprise’s warp signature fifteen minutes and forty-three seconds ago. We have already intercepted a transmission from the Excalibur to Headquarters. The captain’s plan worked, Captain Styles is on his way after the probe.”

Khan smiled. Jim had explained the plan of laying out a misleading trail when he came to the compartment where the other Augments lay sleeping before he went to bed. Nien had approved the bright idea – an idea so typical for his bond-mate. Hearing that the plan had been successfully enacted and meant safety for the Enterprise while they raced to New Vulcan was calming.

“I’m glad that the mouse is going after the cheese. I’ll tell Jim after he wakes up, Mr. Spock. Khan out.” The Augment switched off the intercom and returned to Jim’s side. For a moment, his gaze lingered on the golden figure he could see only because of his enhanced sight. Then he slipped back under the blankets. “Did you understand what Spock said?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

An unintelligible murmur was heard, and Nien wasn’t aware of the tender smile that spread over his features. Pressing a kiss on Jim’s bare shoulder he settled back into a comfortable position beside his beloved and wrapped an arm around him while his mind was already busy calculating their new options as well as thinking about how to increase the ship’s speed.
At the same time, Wesley sipped at his second cup of coffee while Barnett had poured himself a Saurian Brandy. Morrow and Nogura nursed their own glasses of alcohol — not exactly typical behavior for men in their position, but technically they were no longer officers of the fleet since they had been declared dead. They were in no shape for duty anyhow so no one could blame them. Even Batari Whitman had accepted a glass of whiskey, feeling a particular need for a drink.

Richard stared into the dark, golden fluid in his glass as Bob’s words rung in his mind. All that happened last year and the month before the disaster with Section 31 sounded like some sort of half spy, half horror book.

He had always known that Alexander Marcus was more ambitious than was good for him — that he would to do anything to reach his goals — at the expense of anyone. Barnett never thought that Marcus would stoop to torture and murder though. Marcus proved that when he opened fire on the Enterprise in an attempt to murder her crew, but what he had done to Khan and his people was beyond imagination. Despite everything the Augment had done afterward, Barnett could not deny that he felt sympathy, maybe even empathy for the engineered man. He could understand why Kirk had decided to help the superhuman, yet the command team of the Enterprise, the most senior officers, and even Bob Wesley had not only bent but completely decimated dozens of laws to a degree that made him dizzy.

Batari Whitman’s thoughts went into an entirely different direction. She hadn’t known the real reason for the attack against the London Archive and Daystrom last year. She didn’t know about the Augment’s existence until today. She assumed that the files concerning Khan were locked away and belonged to those documents she only would gain access to if she were to take the president’s place. Hearing that a real Augment from nearly three hundred years ago was partly responsible for the mess — and a victim of it — had rendered her speechless while Commodore Wesley revealed everything to her and the three admirals.

And above all, it wasn’t a casual Augment — if you could call a superhuman ‘casual’ at all. No, she had read about him in books. She always had a thing for history and therefore she had, of course, stumbled over this man’s actions before and during the Eugenic Wars.

Whitman pursed her lips the murmured, “Khan Noonien Singh – incredible that this man not only still lives, but has become one of today’s war’s heroes.” She found herself in the focus of the four men and added, “In Earth’s history his role is a positive one. He closed the gap between wealthy and poor and he stopped the crimes in Asia. Murder and rape had been a daily occurrence in these countries, and he put a stop to it. He built schools for children, enacted fair pay systems, and protected his borders when other Augments rebelled.” She took a deep breath. “Out of all the Augments, he and his allies were among the most peaceful ones, though most stories from that time were lost in the chaos of the Eugenic Wars and later in World War III.” She smiled. “I must admit that I’m looking forward to meeting him in person.”
Barnett’s jaw dropped for the uncounted time within the last two hours. “You… you admire him!” he blurted out; forgetting to whom he was speaking.

Batari lifted one elegant brow. “This surprises you? He was a colorful character that Asia loved. At least this is what the literature says; how history has captured him. And now he’s steering the outcome of the war in our favor, trying to help and to protect those who are in need – just like he did back in his first time.” She looked from one man to another. “Don’t you see, Gentlemen? If it weren’t for Khan, Tammeron would have been destroyed, and the Aldebaran system would have been annexed. The Klingons would have never agreed to a ceasefire and a peace conference if they had gained victory in those two battles – battles whose outcome were steered by Khan and The Shadow.” She glanced at Wesley. “And without him, one of our finest and most promising captains would be dead now – tortured to death by the Klingons. Kirk is still very young, yes, but he's done things in his two years of command that other captains take a lifetime to achieve. The Federation – Starfleet! – needs a man like him.”

“Yes, this boy must have a deal with lady luck herself for him to come out alive from the situations he gets himself into. And Khan did fight alongside with us, even from the shadows, yet he is one of the most wanted men in the whole Federation. And Kirk hid him! That… that is beyond believable!” Barnett murmured.

“Yes, and if Kirk hadn’t gone above and beyond and worked with Khan, the Federation would be one step away from complete failure and all-out war,” Whiteman said sternly. “None of you, gentlemen, can deny that Kirk and Khan have played a significant part in the bringing this conflict to, perhaps its end. And I mean that we all are still among the living and free because of them and Commodore Wesley here. Last but not least, we all owe them our lives – and if we stop Luengo soon, Starfleet and the whole Federation can thank those two for standing up to Section 31 and saving the fundamental rights of all members of the Federation.” She cocked her head. “I don’t know how you Admirals regard this, but in my opinion, those two and the rest of the Enterprise crew, as well as Commodore Wesley, deserve a medal, not court martial.” She looked down at her lap. “Yet I know that it may be unavoidable.”

Richard nodded slowly; regret shone in his eyes. “I understand what you mean, Mrs. Whitman. I have no other choice than to suspend Kirk from duty – at least until his and Khan’s cases are settled,” he murmured. “Khan did kill several people last year; that has been brought before the court. Yes, I agree that we all owe him – and Kirk – a lot. Without them, we would be still at war with the Klingons. But they bent and even broke laws. Khan by his deeds last year, Kirk by covering for him these last weeks. I hate to say this, but they’re in hot water.” His gaze found Wesley. “As are you, Bob.”

The commodore made an affirming gesture. “I know, Richard. Believe me, I know, but after I learned the truth about Khan – how much and how horribly he was wronged and then denied a just and fair trial, I had to act. Not only because my crew and I owe him our lives, but because the fundamental principle of the Federation requires it. We…”
“Still you didn't report a fugitive to Command, Bob. You said you learned Sunrise’s identity after the Battle of Aldebaran when you met him in the Enterprise’s medbay. The order was clear. Immediately arrest Khan Noonien Singh. But what did you do? You let him stay aboard the Enterprise and even kept his presence a secret. You covered for him, just like Kirk did.” Richard bent forwards. “Bob, this is crazy at best. You not only disobeyed an order but…”

“But I followed protocol, just like Kirk,” Wesley cut in. He saw the others frowning and explained, “Order 9, Gentlemen. I followed Order 9. ‘A commander of a Starfleet vessel or installation, military or auxiliary, may grant political asylum to any individual without first being given express permission to do so by a representative of the Federation government. However, that decision can be overturned by a superior officer or representative of the Federation pending a review of circumstances.’” He looked in gaping faces while Batari hid a smirk. Wesley shrugged, “Well, Kirk followed Order 9 and I, as his ‘superior officer’ did the same after I learned all the facts. Khan is under my personal protection, I have that right, and we all know it. And I’m certain, Gentlemen, that you agree with me here. Khan needs political asylum because he was stripped of his rights, abused, and is right now being hunted by our people for it to start all over again – or worse. And this time without the kangaroo court.”

“Bob, I am not Marcus – or Allistor,” Barnett said slowly. “I wouldn't deny this man a fair trial.”

Wesley lifted both brows. “Yes, I’m aware of this – as Kirk is. And that's the only reason why Khan is willing to deliver himself to the authorities after this mess is over. He trusts Jim, and he trusts me thanks to Jim. That's the only reason he agreed to this. He's giving you a second chance to prove that the Federation and Starfleet is not led by a mass of power hungry beings who don't care about the dignity that ought to be afforded all lives. In return, he deserves a second chance at a real trial and the ability to bring charges against those who hurt him and his people.”

“The charges he is going to press against Starfleet are dead serious,” Whitman murmured. “Slavery, torture, unlawful experimentation on sentient beings, blackmail, murder of four of his crew members…” She shook her head. “It’s shocking that mankind is still that barbaric!”

Wesley nodded. “Yes, as barbaric as they always have been, apparently. And the motives are still the same – fear of the unknown and greed. There is a man tortured, stripped off his human rights – even the rights we afford every civilization with which we have contact. He's endured more suffering from humans than any being ought to because he's different – he's human, but different. So what! He has the same feelings, the same longings, the same yearning for love and peace as any of us. This century has done nothing else but abuse Mr. Singh for something that isn’t even his fault – his genetics. The least I, or any other man with a little sense of honor, could do was to give him the opportunity for real justice. And for this, he needed and still needs my protection – something I found unable to deny him. Not after he saved millions of lives on Tammeron and Aldebaran.”
Barnett sighed deeply and leaned back in his chair; rubbing his neck. “I understand this all, Bob,” he whispered. “God, I know. And this puts me between a rock and a hard place.”

The commodore couldn’t help himself. He had to chuckle at that. “Yeah, I know what you mean.”

Nogura, always one to think technically and practically, grimaced, “Your protection also had us pay him a significant sum for his development.”

Bob looked firmly at the Asian admiral. “Yes, and he delivered the device to us – not one but two of them. The one that saved you and the others.” He cocked his head. “And, by the way, how can he retain decent lawyers without one Credit in the pocket?”

“You do realize that you are financially supporting a criminal so that he can press charges against your own people?” Morrow asked slowly, and Wesley lifted both brows.

“He’ll press charges against Section 31 and those people who did all those cruel things to him and his people. You, Richard, Heihachiro – all those men and women who serve Starfleet legally don’t have to fear anything. Not from Khan or the law. And the man doesn’t own more than the dirt under his fingernails. How is he supposed to find good lawyers without a bank account? Public defenders are not known for being the best lawyers around. To help him sell his invention – an invention that is imperative to the safety of the fleet in these times – was the least I could do.”

“Even given all the good he did these past few weeks, he is still a criminal. I was at Daystrom, Bob,” Morrow murmured. “I saw him in action. He is…”

“He is a fighter, yes; we all are. We all were forced to kill once to fulfill our duties. I don’t want to support what he did, but please remember that he is a general who fought against a hostile army that held his family hostage – killed them, or so he was forced to believe. Yes, he has to face justice for this, and he even wants to – but with all the rights that belong to any human facing court martial. Luengo’s order to kill the other Augments turns the tables. Khan and his people were declared as non-human, yet they are emotional beings – people! And these two facts put together means that they are their own species now. And Starfleet Command ordered genocide without any reason citing the falsehood that seventy-two sleeping men and women a ‘deadly threat’ for the Federation. This puts them in a position to…”

“…To lobby for political asylum – on New Vulcan!” Barnett summed up the situation. He stared at Wesley. “Let me guess; this was Kirk’s idea.”
Bob only shrugged, smiling slightly. “Yes, he realized the way out of Luengo's order to kill Khan’s people. And it was also him who came up with the idea to ask for help from New Vulcan.”

“Oh course!” Barnett groaned. “Of course, Kirk would think of New Vulcan first, and of course, Selek didn’t turn his request down!” He rubbed his temples. “What I fear is that Luengo will get the same idea. Kirk needs someone he can trust unconditionally. He has nowhere else to turn except to Selek.”

Wesley pursed his lips shortly. “I have to admit; I am still surprised that High Minister Selek puts up with this at all. Jim told me he ‘called’ Selek and asked him for help – just like he would call a buddy. I have no clue how he managed to win Selek, but…”

“You don’t know who Selek is, do you?” Richard asked, and caught the puzzled gaze; he decided that it was about time to get Wesley on the same page. Obviously, this was the hour of revealing deep secrets. “Bob, Nero wasn’t the only one who was sucked into a black hole and catapulted into the past. Two years ago another little ship arrived in our time, piloted by someone Nero had waited for to carry out his revenge. A certain Vulcan, who wasn’t – and isn’t! – unknown to us. He had to change his identity to prevent curious minds from trying to coerce him into giving up the secrets of the future. And he felt a call to help the surviving Vulcans with his advanced skills without giving away too much.” He took a deep breath as he revealed, “High Minister Selek is none other than Spock of Vulcan, son of Sarek.”

The commodore’s jaw almost hit the floor. “Selek is…” He stared thunderstruck at his friend and superior officer, before he blurted out, “Selek is SPOCK?”

Barnett had to chuckle. Bob’s expression was priceless. “More or less,” Richard answered. “Selek is about a hundred and fifty years older, but he had served as first officer and science officer on the Enterprise in his timeline too. And he was a very close friend of James Kirk’s – and still is.” Richard grimaced. “He would never refuse to help Kirk if he needs it – just like the Vulcan’s younger counterpart. Every time I read the logs and reports from the Enterprise, I figure that these two have only succeeded and survived because one of them looked out, fought for, or gambled for the other one’s safety. Maybe I read too many adventure novels.” He chuckled for a moment. “These two are like brothers – in both timelines. It’s no wonder that ‘Selek’ was ready to help Kirk.”

Wesley let himself sink back into his chair, clearly baffled. His gaze found Whitman, who explained softly, “Only the president, a few council members, and some admirals are informed, Commodore. And those who know Mr. Selek’s true identity were ordered to keep silent.”

“Unbelievable!” Bob whispered. “And I was at a loss how Jim was able to get Selek’s help. Selek is Spock.” He snorted. “No, it’s no wonder that Kirk is going to New Vulcan. If there is one man in the whole universe who would move heaven and earth to keep Kirk safe, then it’s Spock. And Khan!”
“Yes, this much I understood in the chaos,” Richard nodded, “even if I still don’t understand how it came that the Augment is hell bent on protecting Kirk – the reason why he raced to Turkana and fought at Kirk’s side. These two were enemies, mortal enemies given their history, and now Kirk is risking his career and decades of prison – even his life to helping the superhuman. I mean, after I heard what happened to Khan, I agree that he should have a fair shot at a real trial, but…” He stopped and frowned. “Wait a sec! After Khan had fled and Kirk and his two friends were in my office Jim sort of freaked out as he learned that Khan had been used as a lab rat. I begin to ask myself what this extreme reaction caused.”

Bob had his own speculations concerning the beginning of this odd friendship – lover relationship, to be precise – but he didn’t want to get Jim into even more trouble by revealing the intimate circumstances surrounding them. So he said carefully, “Jim has an unyielding sense of justice. When I learned of Khan’s fate I was shocked and outraged – and I had only met the man a few minutes earlier for the first time. I’m not surprised that Kirk acted as he did.”

“Yeah, his temper is fierce as an unbroken stallion,” Barnett sighed. “I realized it the moment he first stepped into my office after he got in some trouble at the Academy – four days after his arrival.” He shook his head. “I always knew that he would be one of the most troublesome, but also most promising officers Starfleet would have. It’s his tendency to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, and his interpretation of our rules that drive me to despair.” He glared at Wesley. “It seems he learned about that from you!”

Bob shrugged one shoulder. “Rules were made by the people for the people, and not by one dictator to control the masses. We know not everyone or everything fits into the purview of our laws. This is a whole new case. If we clung only to rules and never changed, humans would still be screaming ‘demon’ every time we had contact with an alien, or we’d still have laws against intermarriage between the races. Humankind grows, Richard, with every new turn, discovery, and with every new experience – and the laws and rules have to adjust. Khan’s case shows us that we are still far from being perfect – that greed and cruelty are still a part of us, despite all our attempts to delete them. If we stick to protocols and deny this man and his people a fair chance, we’ll lose a bit of the humanity that we’ve fought so hard to gain.”

Nogura and Barnett nodded slowly, realizing that this was a new crossroad. Their choices would not only decide the Augments’ fate, but also the fate of Starfleet and the Federation's future.

Bob sensed that he was winning this little pre-trial and bent forwards, looking intently from one to another. ‘Give him the chance to answer your questions, to speak his mind and tell you everything from his point of view. And give Jim Kirk and his senior staff the same opportunity. Starfleet captains are not just chosen because they are book smart and can cite protocols and rule of law. They are also chosen for their ability to make the right decisions for the given situation far away from
home – and by their ability to act on their conscience. Aboard the Enterprise, there are many men and women who were involved in the mess last year. Not one of them reported Khan to Command, not even Carol Marcus, who had a very personal reason to do so and see Khan arrested – she kept silent, too. The whole crew is ready to give him a chance – over thousand men and women! The Shadow – an illegal militia – illegal if they are found out that is, calls him ‘their friend’ and fights for him. They decided to stay aboard the Lexington to help him if he needed them – and they know exactly who he is. This says a lot and has to count for something.”

Barnett pursed his lips and glanced at Batari. “Ma’am, what is your opinion on this case? I may be the highest ranking admiral in the fleet, but President Robertson, Vice President – you – are my superiors. What do you suggest I do now?”

Whitman took a deep breath. “With all I learned in the last hour, I agree with Commodore Wesley. Mankind has moved on – we outgrew prejudice and also fear the unknown. If Starfleet furloughs Captain Kirk and his staff until his hearing, then I have to obey, but I don’t think he and his officers should be taken into custody. If he gives you his word not to flee, he will remain free. The same goes for Mr. Singh. The man has shown honor and sincerity, and we do owe him. To show him the regard he deserves by trusting him now is perhaps the beginning of a new start.”

Richard seemed relieved that this decision had been made for him. There were two hearts beating in his chest – the one of the officer who had to obey protocol and the one that was pure human – compassionate. “All right,” he agreed, “but everything depends on the next days. We have to stop Luengo and…”

“Have you informed Kirk about our successful recovery?” Nogura asked, and Bob shook his head.

“No. He’s out of range for a direct subspace transmission by now, and sending him a time delayed message is too risky. Luengo is likely listening in on all frequencies. We don’t want him to discover our own little mission here before it’s too late for him to do anything about it. I came to an agreement with Kirk; I’ll contact him as soon as we’ve reached Earth and you, sir, are in charge again.”

“He spoke with High Minister Selek, as you said,” Morrow mused. “This too could have been intercepted and…”

“Jim said that the frequency Selek used is secure. He’d know, I suppose, since he knows the tech of the future and has used it before to speak with Kirk without being intercepted.”

“So, Kirk does not know that you’ve succeeded in freeing us?” Barnett was obviously uncomfortable with this fact.
“No, he doesn't. He's heading for New Vulcan to bring Khan and his people to safety, and is awaiting your orders – under Selek’s protection.”

Richard pursed his lips. “I’m not so sure if the ‘safe harbor’ is really that safe if Luengo figures out the Enterprise’s whereabouts. We should find a way to let Kirk know…”

The doorbell chimed and interrupted him.

“Come in!” Wesley called and gave the order for the computer to open the door.

Marceaux stepped in and bowed his head politely. “Vice President, Admirals, Commodore – I’m sorry to interrupt the meeting, but we’ve received a transmission from Command – from Admiral Luengo directly. He wants a detailed report from you about your meeting aboard the Enterprise and what you and Captain Kirk spoke about. He also wants to know why we’re out of range for a direct subspace transmission and why you haven’t reported that the Lexington is outside of her patrol area.”

Bob glanced towards the living area; the other four had tensed up. Barnett rose and stared wide-eyed at the two men near the door. He cursed, “Dammit! He knows that you’re up to something, Bob – you and Kirk!”

Wesley nodded; groaning inwardly. That would make it even harder to arrive on Earth unnoticed to surprise Luengo and his fellows.

“Sir,” Marceaux cut in, “may I make a suggestion?” As Wesley made an encouraging gesture, he went on, “You said we should be prepared in case Section 31 gets wind of the fact that we’re no longer on our patrol. And I think I have a solution.” He took a deep breath. “That we’re out of range for a direct hailing is because of a malfunction in the warp drive – something we discovered too late. Regrettably, you were badly hurt by the explosion in Engineering and can’t, therefore, answer. We only now have restored navigation ability and warp 1, but we didn’t send a distress signal or a report sooner because we realized that we’d drifted into the Borderland and feared that Orion pirates would intercept it and attack us.”

Barnett lifted both brows with a hint of amusement. “You suggest lying to the Chief in Command, Commander Marceaux?”

“I propose that, yes, and I'm not afraid to fake report to the man who seized his title by attempted
murder. The false transmission will give us time, sir. We need approximately four days to reach Earth – four days of radio silence that Command will not accept if we don’t give them a plausible explanation. And it lets the Commodore off the hook as far as answering Luengo at all.”

Bob began to chuckle. “I’m always glad that you are on our side!”

Barnett frowned thoughtfully. “Luengo is no fool. He’ll realize that something isn’t right with your report.”

“I think not, sir. I plan to attach falsified log entries to the transmission which will mention our near catastrophe yesterday. Luengo can’t do anything without checking the story first. And in the meantime, we can take action, hopefully before Luengo realizes where Kirk is heading. Oh, and I sent a copy to all admirals to prevent Luengo from taking any unilateral action concerning us.” He cocked his head. “Do you find this acceptable, Admiral?”

Barnett exchanged a look with Whitman and the other two admirals before he made a decision. “Right, Commander, send this transmission. Again we have to fight a battle with a foe we cannot hope to beat – time.” Then his eyes widened, before a little smile appeared on his face. “Oh, and you should send it on several frequencies and add a line to your message – one Kirk can intercept and figure out that the first part of his crazy plan has worked. For example, that the Lexington was able to escape Borderland and that the crew is safe. Knowing Kirk, he will understand the meaning!”

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“Mr. Spock, a transmission from the Lexington on all frequencies,” Lieutenant Albers, third comms officer, reported and turned around to the Vulcan, who was still in the center seat. Beta shift had already begun, but Kirk hadn’t shown up – something Spock almost anticipated. Jim had been alarmingly exhausted when he left bridge six hours ago. Even if the first officer would vehemently deny allowing emotions to show, he felt glad that his T’hy’la found the rest he needed. So Spock didn’t wake him to take over for beta shift but continued to command the Enterprise as acting captain.

He rose and stepped to the comms station, where he listened with a headset to the transmission and read the attached log-book parts which spoke of a terrible incident aboard the Lexington. For just a second, the Vulcan believed that everything had gone wrong in Borderland, that his father and the others were doomed now. Then he heard a sentence that told him otherwise; he could read between the lines. ‘We escaped some Orion slavers at the last minute, and the crew aboard is safe again.’

Such a simple line in a report to Starfleet Command – but it told something Spock had hoped for. ‘…”
escaped approaching Orion slavers... ‘That meant that they were already on their way back to the Federation area, and ‘... the crew aboard is safe again...’ referred to the recovered delegation. Spock was sure of it, and a wave of relief washed over him even his Vulcan control couldn’t suppress. They made it! His father was rescued – and with him several diplomats as well as some of the admirals. He only hoped, as illogical as ‘hope’ was, that Barnett belonged to the survivors. The only one who could order the whole fleet to oppose the Interim Chief of Command was the legal Chief of Command. Any officer, any crewman and any cadet who didn’t belong to Section 31 wouldn’t question Barnett’s orders. If the Lexington reached Earth intact with Barnett alive, Luengo and Section 31 would be done for!

“Please copy this transmission to the captain’s desk, Lieutenant.” With that, he gave the headset back and contacted Scott, who had been on duty for two hours only to learn that Khan was also back in Engineering, tinkering with the engines to improve their output. The Vulcan lifted a brow at this. He knew that Scott had asked Jim to release Khan from bridge duty to support him in Engineering. That obviously happened without Kirk’s order and while Jim was asleep. The Augment had gone to Engineering alone, knowing that his skills were needed there most. Well, even if it bothered Spock, he had to admit that the superhuman was a good addition to the ship.

After asking Scott to the bridge, Spock left the conn to the chief engineer and headed straight for the captain’s quarters, not daring to give Jim the good news via intercom. Ninety-four percent of the crew still believed the delegation and the admirals were dead, and it had to remain like this until Section 31 was eliminated.

He waited a bit and was about to activate the door buzzer a second time when the doors opened revealing a very sleepy and tousled Jim Kirk. He had dressed in haste, seeing that his clothes clung crookedly to his slim hips.

“Spock? Is somethin' wrong with our ship?” he slurred before he hid a huge yawn behind one hand.

Spock was surprised to feel a hint of fondness and protectiveness rising in him. In his current state, Jim Kirk resembled a grown boy rather than the fine Starfleet captain he was. It showed, again, how young Kirk still was.

“No, sir, the ship is running flawlessly. I apologize for waking you, but I have something important to tell you.”

Jim got the hint and stepped aside. “Come in,” he murmured and waited until his friend was inside and the doors closed. Then his glance fell back on the bed and he frowned. He could have sworn that Khan had been sleeping beside him these last hours, but there was no trace of the Augment. Confused, Jim scratched his head bringing his short, golden strands into an even bigger mess.
Spock had followed Kirk’s asking look towards the sleeping area and figured out instantly what confused his friend. “If you are wondering where Mr. Singh is located, he is in Engineering and helping Mr. Scott and Mr. Keenser in their attempt to improve our speed.”

Jim smiled. “Yeah, that sounds like him. I just thought he was here a little while ago.”

“He was, Captain, I spoke with him after the probe began sending the Enterprise’s warp signature. Did Mr. Singh inform you about the success of your plan? The Excalibur is on her way to intercept the probe.”

Kirk frowned. “Yeah, there was something he told me, but…” He shook his head and yawned again. “Sorry, Spock, I’m still tired.”

“Understandable, Jim,” the Vulcan replied softly. “And I apologize again for waking you, but I thought you wanted to be informed as soon as we received a message from the Lexington.”

That captured Kirk’s full attention, and then he was awake. “And?” he prompted, tension rising in him.

“It was a transmission to the Headquarters. The Lexington reported a malfunction in their warp core that resulted in many injuries among the crew, including Commodore Wesley, who was hurt so badly that he was unable to answer Admiral Luengo’s questions – whatever they were.” He saw Jim paling and lifted a reassuring hand quickly. “There was also another line that leads me to believe the transmission was a fake to prevent the commodore from reporting anything untoward. As well, I believe his mission was a success. All surviving members of the delegation were recovered and the Lexington will leave the Borderland.”

“You think so?” Jim asked; hope mirrored in his eyes.

Spock nodded. “Yes. A copy of the message has been sent to your terminal.”

Kirk all but raced to his desk, switched on his terminal and listened to the transmission. A big, large grin spread over his features, while he balled a fist in triumph. “Yeah! I knew Wesley would make it! Thank you, Lady Luck!”
“And Commodore Wesley’s skills,” Spock deadpanned, finding himself the focus of a very happy Jim Kirk.

“So, everything is running smoothly now,” Jim grinned. “The probe is still transmitting our warp signature?”

“Yes, and given the sensor read-outs, the _Excalibur_ is still following it. Your plan is working.”

Kirk rubbed his hands. “Well, I'll call this a good start to my day.” His gaze found the chronometer on the nightstand. “Ugh, whatever. It’s already 1800! I never oversleep!” He frowned and glanced slowly up to his friend. “Spock, don’t tell me that you’re still on duty!”

“I am, sir, and…”

“Give me ten minutes and then I’m on the bridge. And I don’t want to see you until beta shift tomorrow, understand? You need to rest, too.” He lifted a hand as the Vulcan opened his mouth to protest. “Don’t tell me about Vulcan superiority and that they need less sleep. I know that you’re tired Spock, and you have all right in the world to have a break.”

The first officer almost sighed. “Jim, as much as I appreciate your concern, it is for naught. I will meditate later which refreshes me more than ten hours of sleep. With your permission, I’ll return to alpha shift tomorrow. Even with the SDD we are not ‘off the hook’, as you humans say. And as unsettling as it is to say, our transit through Federation space is now dangerous for us. At least as long as Section 31 is in charge of Starfleet. I prefer to be the most time on duty till we reach New Vulcan and you, Mr. Singh, and his people are safe.”

Jim watched him a moment and realized that it would take more effort to convince Spock to leave the bridge than to give in and allow him to remain awake a little bit longer. “Don’t you trust your own staff?” he teased, and this time the Vulcan did sigh.

“I am very aware of the satisfactory abilities of my department, and I have no doubt that Mr. Scott can take my place as your first officer for the length of a shift, yet I would appreciate it if I were assigned watch for the majority of the trip to New Vulcan.”

Without a second thought, Jim reached out and laid a hand on Spock’s shoulder, squeezing it gently. He knew that Vulcans didn’t like to be touched, but he had realized over a year ago that Spock didn’t mind being touched by him. They were _T’hyl’las_ – brothers in soul – and had melded several
times. Physical closeness wasn’t uncomfortable for them anymore.

“Thanks, Spock. I’m grateful to have you at my side during these difficult times.” He stepped away. “Just give me a few minutes and then I’ll be on the bridge.”

“Do not forget to eat!” the Vulcan reminded him and Kirk rolled his eyes.

“Yes, Father!” he called over his shoulder before he vanished into the bathroom. He wouldn't see the edges of Spock’s mouth curl upwards ever so slightly. For a second, amusement sparkled in the dark eyes of the Vulcan.

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Galven swallowed the last bite and washed it down with a large sip of wine. Beside him, his brother, Ritek, Caviw, Jeff and the others sat comfortably on chairs and the small sofa in the guest quarters that the two Tellarits inhabited during their travel aboard the Lexington. Jeff still looked like hell; Ritek returned an hour ago from medbay, and even Caviw wore some traces of the fight they all had been through. But the mood was light – almost happy.

They made it! They had recovered the survivors of the delegation, and they were on their way to Earth to help Khan should it be necessary. They saved Galtan, too! Galven had almost lost all hope of finding his brother, and now he sat beside him. Galtan was far too thin with a haunted look in his eyes; he was uncharacteristically quiet but alive! Galven could have embraced the whole world, happy as he was.

Suddenly the door buzzer sounded and as he oinked “Come in!” the doors slipped open to reveal one of the female captives they had recovered.

“I hope I am not disturbing you,” she said with a warm, pleasant voice, as she stepped in.

Instantly, the males rose. “Of course not, Ma’am. Please have a seat!” Ritek said while Jeff stared at her and gasped, “You are Batari Whitman, the vice president.”

The woman bowed her head with a smile. “Yes, I am, but please don’t be unsettled because of my political position. I’m here for a private matter.” She took a seat and smiled at the colorful group of people to whom she owed so much. “First, I want to thank you all for what you did for my
colleagues and me. I’m just coming from a briefing with Commodore Wesley, and I know the big part you had in our recovery. I’m in your debt, and I’ll take care that the president is informed of your heroism.”

“You’re welcome,” Jeff said politely.

“We couldn’t let you down,” Ritek grumbled. “You and the admirals are needed in the Federation, yes, but even if you and the others weren’t, we would have tried to help you. No one should be subjected to slavery.”

Batari nodded. “Yes, even if a secret department of Starfleet has no problem with slavery, as I’m sure you know.”

Caviw cocked her head. “You’re talking about what happened to Khan, right?”

Whitman sighed. “Yes, I am.” She felt the tension rise in the room, and added, “And before you go all defiant, please calm down. Khan belongs to the history of the area where I was born. In his time, he did a lot of good – as he has done here, after the destruction he caused last year.”

The Caitian woman watched her; her tail twitched. She smelled no fear or aggression from the other female, and so she concluded, “You are here to learn more of him – of his person and why he did what he did over these last months.”

With another smile, Batari bent forwards. “Yes, you are right. Khan will face court martial soon, and I think he is going to need support. Tell me about him, what moved and still moves him so that I can draw a picture of him.”

The others exchanged gazes with each other, but it was Galtan who rose to speak. “I heard only wild stories from you, but you lost me somehow between you, Galven, leaving Tellar and then coming to my rescue. I have heard of this Terran man, Khan; of the Federation’s new hero, Kirk, and the strikes against the Klingons only to team up with them later…” He shook his head. “I do want to learn what really happened – in the right order, please.”

Ritek stepped to the replicator. “Ma’am, this will take a while. May I offer you a drink?”

The vice president gave him one of her calm smiles. “Chai would be nice.” She waited until the
Rigelian served her the cup with steaming tea, then she leaned back, ready to listen to another long story.

Galven cleared his throat. “Well, everything began with the Orion attack against that outpost…” he began to tell how he and the others met the man they had come to know as ‘Drythen’. In reality a kind of king from Earth’s earlier epoch…

Leonard McCoy patted Sulu’s left arm in comfort. “Cheer up, Lieutenant. As soon as the last injuries have healed, we can talk about cosmetic surgery. These scars you got don’t have to stay like that – in fact I can make them completely disappear.”

It was 2100 ship time, and Bones had made one last round through medbay before he headed to his quarters. He only had found sleep later in the morning and had rested for six hours – not much given that he had stayed awake the whole night before, trying to help his crazy best friend recover Khan’s people. He had realized that Sulu had woken up completely and had removed the last bandages from his face. The synthetic skin that covered the left cheek and temple had grafted with the flesh beneath, yet there were traces of what the young man had been through – something McCoy planned to change soon.

Hikaru smiled tiredly up to him. “I’m not vain, Doctor, but if you could do some magic with my face, I wouldn’t mind.” He gestured towards the mirror Leonard had given him on his request, and Sulu couldn’t deny that he had been shocked to see himself. A good part of his hair was gone – burnt off, but McCoy already assured him that it would grow back soon. Then there were the scars along and even beneath the synthetic skin which deformed his normally smooth face. The same went for his throat and his left arm. He knew that he should call himself lucky that he was still alive, yet to think that he would look like this for the rest of his life made his stomach sink.

Bones skipped his usually grumpy behavior. He knew exactly when one of his patients needed understanding and comfort, and so he sat down on the bed’s edge and said gently, “I think I can fix the scars on your face and the rest of your body in the next two weeks. Afterward, you will be still a little bit sore, but painkillers will help you to cope with it. The chance that you'll be back to your old self is about hundred percent – and I’m telling you because of my experience, and not because I let Spock calculate it.”

Sulu had to chuckle at this. “I miss duty – I miss being on the bridge,” he murmured. “I slept most of the time since the battle, and I heard from Pavel that it was Khan who saved the ship by taking over the helm and steering the Enterprise away from some big asteroid, but I’ve got no clue what happened the rest of the time. Pavel wants to spare me any concern; the same goes for the captain. Hell, even Khan, who visited me with Kirk, didn’t say anything – and as far as I understand, that guy
played one of his Augment tricks again to save our necks.”

“Yes, he has become very attached to the ship and even to the senior officers. Heck, even Keenser talks to him – really talks, I mean,” Bones joked. Then he turned serious again. “You missed a lot, Hikaru, but Jim and Chekov are right not to tell you too much. You need to rest. You can’t worry about all we went through and will or you’ll delay your recovery.” He rose again. “So enjoy your vacation and…”

“Vacation? In medbay?” Sulu lifted his head carefully. “You’re not serious, are you?”

Leonard began to smirk. “Well, a lot of time to rest, no unsettling events, quiet, healthy food – it sounds like a vacation.”

“Yeah – for old men, but certainly not for me!”

“As far as I know, your idea of a vacation means sports, hand-to-hand combat, and tiring yourself out training for marathons,” a female voice from the door of the room said teasingly.

Both men looked around and saw Carol Marcus standing in the entrance.

“Hi, Dr. Marcus,” Sulu beamed at her. “I’m happy to have any visitor who can tear him or herself away from duty long enough to see me.”

“Oh, you’re already that much better?” the young woman laughed and stepped beside McCoy. “I’m off duty, and so are you, given your schedule. May I ask for your company at the mess hall for dinner?”

Leonard felt warmth rising in him, and as he looked in her large eyes, his heart beat quickened. “Y-y-y-yes, of course!” he stuttered, and Sulu began to smirk.

‘Just have a look! The doc and our weapons lady! Who’d thought that?’ Aloud, he said, “Don’t waste any time with a poor bloke who can’t enjoy the company of a beautiful lady until he looks human again.” He sounded very dramatic, and promptly the CMO and weapon officer began to laugh.
“Don’t be sad, Hikaru. Knowing Len, he’ll make you look good soon.” She linked her arm in McCoy’s. “You’re coming?”

“Of course,” Bones smiled. “This is the first nice evening since we left…” He didn’t get any further; all of sudden an alert sounded through medbay – medical alert.

“Oh, for God’s sake!” the Leonard snarled; he untangled his arm from Carol’s and raced to his office. “What is it now? Can’t a man have a nice dinner for once?” He had rounded his desk and looked at his terminal – and then all color left his face.

“Sweet Lord – NO!” He gripped his med kit and stormed out of his office, down the main hall of medbay, and stopped at the door that led to the attached room where the cryotubes were located. He punched in the code; the sealed entrance opened and he rushed into the room, not realizing that Carol had followed him.

The young woman stopped dead in her tracks as she saw the dozens of tubes, recognizing them instantly. “What…?” she whispered, shocked.

Bones looked hectically around him, saw the alarm light at one of the cryotubes flashing, and closed the distance to it in no time. ‘A malfunction! That damn box is about to quit working?’ he thought with anxiety.

His heart hammered in his chest as he glanced down on the sleeping Augment whose life was at stake should the cryotube fail. He gasped as he saw the very young face, then he swore loudly.

Joaquin – Khan’s little brother!

Frantically, McCoy checked the main function panel of the cryotubes as best he could, but he couldn’t find the error. He saw the ice within the tube condense into droplets, and the young Augment began to shiver slightly.

“Doctor, what happened?” Nurse Barbara hastened into the room, not surprised at all to see the tubes – after all she had helped store and link them to the med system to monitor their function.

“Prepare a stasis chamber!” he called over his shoulder. “Quick!” His attention returned to the problem at hand. He knew how to open that cryotube. He had done it last year as he moved a young
superhuman to the stasis chamber so he could get Jim Kirk into the tube, but as he activated the opening mechanism, it didn’t work. He tried again, but the only result he got was some beeping noises.

“God dammit!” he shouted.

Carol closed the distance to him. Her deep frown showed her confusion and irritation. “Those are Khan’s people!” she said flatly, and McCoy nodded.

“Yes, they were hidden on Gamma 12 – the same facility Jim was ordered to destroy. With the Augments still in the facility’s hold! We got them out and…” He punched the cryotube in frustration. “Holy shit, it’s not opening, and the boy is trapped in there – dying!”

He left the tube and stormed to the next intercom. “Mr. Singh to medbay! Emergency!” he hailed ship wide; his voice betrayed his stress. Of all the Augments, it had to be that boy who was about to die from a tube malfunction – now, three days away from safety! “Mr. Singh to medbay, please! Urgent!” He had shouted before he raced back to his office, activating his terminal. “Computer, priority one for all turbo lift cabins for Petty Officer Singh, approved by Dr. Leonard McCoy, CMO, code red 5287!”

“Affirmative,” answered the female computer voice.

“Bones, what the hell is going on?” Jim Kirk’s unsettled tenor sounded through the speaker, but McCoy had no time to answer him properly.

“One of the cryotubes is about to fail. Get Khan down here this instant!” he yelled back. He left his office again, ran to one of the stationary fire extinguishers, and took the hammer that hung beside it.

“He’ll come from Engineering,” Kirk answered. “I’m on my way, too!” The link was cut off, but Bones could care less. He had a far bigger task at hand. He returned to the hold and strode with large, determined steps back to the tube. Carol bent over it. “I can’t open it, either. Even the emergency button is blocked – melted, to be precise.”

“Yeah, down on Gamma 12 one of Finnegan’s assholes shot at Spock and Khan, grazing that tube in the process with a phaser blast.” He pulled Carol aside and lifted the emergency hammer; ready to punch it down on the observation window. “Let us pray that the boy will survive, or Khan’ll go crazy!”
The young woman glanced at him. “I know that he regards his crew as his fam-…”

“That boy is more than just a member of Khan’s beloved crew. He’s his younger brother!” McCoy growled, and he slammed the hammer down. But the glass held. “And I don’t want to think what will happen if the boy dies!”

ST***ST

“Warp 6!” Scott beamed from ear to ear. “We made it! Our lady is the best!”

Khan rolled his eyes. Yes, he was an engineer too, and he loved to tinker, explore, and develop new ways to improve tech, but he would never regard a ship as sentient. This is what he had witnessed with this crazy Scot – and with Jim, it was the same. In earlier times, he had frowned at such a childish behavior; now he thought it cute.

“At least it shortens our travel time, so…” Khan stopped.

Something was wrong.

Something was very, very wrong!

He felt it with every fiber of his being. There was something tugging at his conscious – an urgent attempt to reach him. Alarmed, he listened to the inner bond he shared with Jim, but the link was bright and warm, without anything that could explain this rising feeling of fear and…

“Mr. Singh to medbay! Emergency!” McCoy’s voice sounded from all speakers in Engineering – and Nien felt his knees go weak as he recognized the desperate cry deep in his mind – recognizing who was calling for him.

“Joaquin!” he croaked, and he wasn’t aware that Scott had wrapped a supporting arm around his waist.
“Lad, what’s up?” Montgomery asked worriedly.

“Mr. Singh to medbay please! Urgent!” the CMO repeated, even louder this time.

It was all Khan needed to come back to his senses. He almost shoved Scott aside and began to run in a whirl of black and gold. He reached the next turbo lift and stepped in. “Medbay!” he almost screamed and even in his near panic state he became aware of the fact that the cabin moved quicker than usual. And the whole way up to deck 5, it didn’t slow down for once, as was often the case if cabins were about to cross paths. He couldn’t know that all cabins had come to a halt or had moved out of his own cabin’s way as soon as he had stated his destiny – the system granted him the priority one ride McCoy had ordered.

He reached medbay in forty-four seconds, left the lift, sprinted the short way down the hallway, and headed straight to the attached room where he knew his people were. He didn’t care that he almost ran over a nurse. His attention was fixed on the CMO, who hammered against one of the cryotubes – obviously trying to shatter the window. He didn’t even recognize the other person with McCoy. With several large steps, he reached the doctor, who just reached back to repeat his attempt to destroy the observation window – a waste of strength because the double-armored glass wasn’t to shatter by mere human strength.

Khan’s right hand reached out quick as a flash, caught the startled CMO’s wrist in his hand, and pushed McCoy aside.

“The tube is failing,” the CMO informed him sharply, thinking that Khan was about to hinder him from opening the cryotube forcefully, but the superhuman had already seen the alert lights and knew what they meant. Hastily, he took the hammer from McCoy. One look through the small window affirmed what he was feeling – Joaquin was dying. His lips were already blue and his whole frame, as far as it was visible, was convulsing.

With all his might, Khan rained down a blow; the hammer left a net of cracks in the window. Again he struck, even more powerfully than before. With a crashing sound, the window shattered open – clean, fresh air began to fill the vacuum of the cryotube. But still the young Israeli was shaking and gagging.

The former dictator’s glance found the buttons and security levers which should allow him to open the tube manually. New fear gripped him as he saw that they were not functioning. Hurling the hammer away, he gripped the frame of the observation window he just had destroyed with both hands; sharp edges and splinters bit into his palm and fingers, broke the skin, and made his blood flow, yet he didn’t stop. The pain didn’t even reach his brain. His whole being was fixed on the task to save his beloved little brother.
His muscles, his sinews, his ligaments – everything screamed in protest as he tried to remove the cover. Metal groaned, hinges creaked, but he didn’t give in. He had to get Joaquin out of this damn tube, or it would be his coffin. And the thought of that was agony…

ST***ST

The moment Jim heard Bones’ ship wide hail for Nien, he knew that something had gone wrong.

Terribly wrong!

In the same second, he felt it – cold dread from his mate, growing with every second. Pushing the button on his armrest, he called medbay and the short answer he was able to elicit from Bones told him everything. One of Nien’s family was at risk. One of the cryotubes was about to fail – just like those twelve before Marcus found the Botany Bay.

Kirk sensed the rising fear and despair of his beloved, and he knew that Nien indeed felt that one of his family was about to die. If this was an indication of what Khan had been through when Marcus killed four of the Augments in Nien’s presence, then any question about why the superhuman had snapped was unnecessary. Jim thought he would suffocate with the anguish that spread through his mate, and without wasting precious time, he was on his feet and racing to the turbolift.

“Lieutenant Albers, you got the conn!” he called just before the doors of the cabin closed behind him, and then he counted every second until the turbolift reached its destination.

His legs carried him quickly to the compartment with the cryotubes, only to see Nien hammering down on one of them while a wave of panic seemed to wash from him to Kirk. A splintering noise told Jim that Khan had successfully destroyed a part of the cover, but he instinctively knew that it wasn’t enough.

The young captain didn’t know how he closed the distance to his beloved in just a blink of an eye; then he looked down on the superhuman in the cryotube. He recognized him instantly – Joaquin. And the boyish Augment, even unconscious, fought for his life while trapped in a tube designed to save him.

Kirk saw how Nien’s fingers closed around the shattered frame, and pulled. Blood seeped from his hands, and dripped down onto the far too young and innocent face of Khan’s ‘little brother’. Jim didn’t think; he acted. Reaching out, he closed his hands around the observation window’s frame to
pull at the cover of the tube. He wouldn’t allow Joaquin to die! He wouldn’t allow his bond-mate would go through the anguish of another loss! Without caring for his own safety, he began to pull.

Khan moaned as his shoulders and neck, recently healed from their injuries aboard the space harbor of Aldebaran, began to burn, yet he would never – ever! – let Joaquin down. He pulled and dragged, even more powerfully than at the anchor of the trapped ship in the space harbor. This was not about saving those he didn’t know; this was about his family – his beloved younger brother. And his fear of losing him turned him frantic in his attempts to save him.

All of sudden, he felt a familiar presence at his side, and then two warm hands brushed his, before they were placed beside his fingers – pulling the cover along with him.

Sweat broke from every pore of his body; he heard a shout of frustration beside him – and then the locks couldn’t withstand the combined strength of an Augment and a human whose cells had been enhanced, as well.

The cover nearly flew open; bits were hurled around, and Bones grabbed for Carol – shielding her with his body. Beside him Khan and Jim stumbled for a moment, then the former dictator regained his footing, dove into the open cryotube despite the escaping icy cold and gathered the still trembling form of the young man into his arms.

Bones was back in doctor mode in a second. “Barbara!” he yelled. “Is the stasis chamber ready?”

The nurse only nodded. “Yes!” she shouted back; she looked at Khan and gestured to him, “Follow me!”

You didn’t have to tell him twice. He seemed to fly over the floor, pressing his little brother’s far too cold and shuddering body to his chest; not caring that he was, again, praying to anyone who could hear him to spare Joaquin. McCoy was on his heels, shouting orders to his staff. Seconds later, the young Augment was lowered into the stasis chamber, and Khan stepped back – his face paler than usual, his eyes wide and dark with fear.

Bones hit the button to start the stasis sequence and watched the sensors, monitoring the young man’s state.
Jim stepped beside Nien and for a long moment, his gaze fixed on the slender, boyish form he could see through the observation chamber, still stasis blue. Then he felt pain in his hands and glanced down. His fingers and palms were bleeding, but so were Khan’s he realized a moment later. He knew there was no power in the universe that would make the Augment care for himself – and Jim had no urge to worry about his own wounds. Nien’s fright came in thick, cold waves over their bond and had progressed since the moment Kirk felt them only two minutes ago on the bridge.

He closed the small distance to Khan and wrapped his arms around him; he couldn't give a damn if someone from Bones’ staff saw them now. “He’ll make it,” he whispered, praying to the Lord that everything would be all right with Joaquin Weiss. “He’s strong – as you are. And he is not alone. He’ll make it!”

Khan didn’t answer. His mouth was dry, and he had ice in his veins. “What’s your opinion, doctor?” he asked, his voice hoarse.

Leonard didn’t know how to tell him. This was one of those situations he hated the most – telling someone bad news. “I don’t know,” he said honestly. “If he were an average human, he'd already be dead. The shock of coming out of cryosleep so quickly should kill any of us.” He gulped. “But he is strong – and young. There’s still hope…” He didn’t end the sentence, but it told Khan enough.

Nien’s throat tightened; his heart beat in merciless, cruel punches in his chest. “What are his chances?” he whispered, and McCoy’s answer made him want to scream, “I’m not Spock. I can’t calculate it accurately but… But I think – I’m sorry – one in ten.”

Bones watched how those bright piercing eyes became dull and moist. Following an impulse, he reached out and squeezed Khan’s shoulder. “I don't have that much experience with Augments. Maybe his chances are better.” He let his hand sink while his gaze returned to the boy in the stasis chamber. “If he survives tonight night, he might live.” He lowered his head. “Only the morning will tell…”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Ha, who had thought that the ‘Augment in trouble’ could be Joaquin – or had guessed what kind of trouble said Augment could be in? Yes, several story-lines are converging
now, even those details which happened during STiD (McCoy ordering one of the Augments to be put into stasis to have a cryotube free for Jim). And, of course, our dear Bones feels guilty now, even if he hadn’t another chance.

Guilt is something neither Wesley, nor Luengo are feeling, but both out of different reasons. Why Bob is convinced that it was right was he did concerning Khan giving a second chance and putting him into his protection. Luengo soon will do what so many true dictators are up to if they find themselves tightened into a corner: They lash out. And Luengo will be up to the same within the next chapters.

Referring to the upcoming chapters: The next one will be a dark one and a real rollercoaster, so be beware (smile).

I hope the new update was to your liking, and for all who likes that one of our heroes has to suffer here and there: Jim, his friends and Nien have just stepped at the threshold of Hell’s Kitchen.

Nevertheless have a nice weekend,

Love

Your Starflight
Joaquin

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Like always I want to thank you for all the feedback. I know that the new chapter ended at a very nasty point, and I have to admit that there will be many cliff-hangers in the future (he-he-he).

Who always wondered how Khan and Joaquin met and why these two have such a strong connection will get my answer/explanation/fantasy within this new chapter. And there is more – for example how much Jim and Spock have grown closer as T’hy’li.

A little warning – this chapter is very sensitive but also contains very hard stuff, yet I do hope that you are going to like it.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 63 – Joaquin

Carol leaned against the door frame and watched Leonard treat Jim Kirk’s hands. The medbay had become quiet again, except for the soft sounds of the electronic devices, the gentle buzz of the stasis chamber, and McCoy’s fussing.

“You two were lucky. What'd you think? Shards of glass make good for good leverage? You could have cut an artery, you know!” His glare moved from Khan, whose hands still required treatment, to Jim and back again.

Kirk glared up at him. “How can you say that? The kid was dying in there! Joaquin would be dead now if we hadn’t gotten him out in time. Hell, he might still not make it!” He glanced at Nien. The words had barely left his lips before he cursed himself for pointing out something so painful for his mate should it come true. “Sorry,” he whispered, and Khan nodded, knowing what Jim meant. Then the Augment looked back at the stasis chamber and didn’t even react as the CMO cleaned the cuts on his fingers and palms, removed splinters, and bandaged his hands finally.

“Captain? What happened?” On silent feet, Spock had entered medbay without anyone hearing him
the superhuman was not even aware of the Vulcan’s approach.

Startled, Jim and Carol turned around while McCoy looked up from his task, realizing that Khan was watching the first officer out of the corner of his eye.

Kirk’s eyes widened as he took in his friend’s appearance. It was rare that Spock wore something other than his uniform and only a few times had Jim seen him in his black meditation robe that he wore now. Beneath it, the first officer wore a pair of simple black pants and light shoes. He must had come directly from his and Uhura’s quarters, alerted by Bones’ ship-wide hail for Khan.

Before the captain could answer the question, the Vulcan’s gaze fell upon the activated stasis chamber; he stepped closer. One look through the observation window told him enough. “Joaquin,” he whispered and turned his attention to Khan. “His cryotube failed.” he stated the obvious, and Nien took a deep breath before he nodded.

“Good thing I monitor every cryotube,” Leonard grumbled. “The medical observation system alerted me when the kid’s tube readings went haywire.” He straightened his shoulders and rolled them to release some of the tension. “The emergency button was melted and…”

“During the gun battle at the facility this cryotube was grazed by a phaser blast,” Spock said; his gaze was still fixed on Khan, who pressed his lips together before he added to the Vulcan’s explanation,

“I pushed the tube out of the way, still…” He made a quick movement with his bandaged hand and became silent again.

McCoy returned to the monitor and watched the readouts. “His condition had been stable up until now. We’re working to get him back to that point. BPM, 5 per minute…”

“The wake cycle wasn’t started properly,” the Augment cut in. “Usually, the procedure lasts several hours in which the body is slowly warmed, and the metabolism restarts. That was not the case and Joaquin… He is in shock right now.” He had to force out the next words. “There is no way to tell if he will survive or not.” He swallowed. “I can still feel his presence, but it is weak.”

Jim bent forwards and laid a hand on his back, ignoring the sting in his fingers and palm. “Don’t give up hope, Love. As long as his heart is beating, death hasn’t won.”
Carol stared at them. ‘Love’? Did she hear that right? Disbelieving, she watched how the superhuman looked at the young captain with a mixture of gratitude and warmth that was far too intense for mere friends. ‘Did this mean...? Were those two...? No! Not Jim Kirk – Starfleet’s number one Casanova! What had he said when he explained Khan’s presence aboard days ago? That they had become close?’ The idea of them as a couple occurred to her then, but only for a second. Then she pushed that thought away, thinking it too strange. But the display in front of her told her she was right. Still, it seemed so far-fetched.

Bones saw her widening eyes, took in the way Jim and Khan stood together, and cleared his throat to distract them. “You’re more familiar with the cryosleep technology, Mr. Singh. Can you explain to me exactly how the waking process is initiated and what it does to the body? Maybe we can reproduce it with the stasis chamber and Joaquin will wake up as he should.”

It was a small chance, but Khan clutched at it like a drowning man. “Yes, I can tell you that, Doctor.” He began to tell McCoy everything he knew about the process. It was a process he had developed himself when he constructed the cryotubes.

In the meantime, Carol closed the distance to Kirk and Spock, who looked at her as she drew nearer. Her glance flicked for a second to the superhuman, and she was about to question her captain about what was going on between him and Khan, but decided against it when she saw the worry in the Augment’s face, “He's concerned about the young man.”

Jim nodded. “Yes,” he replied softly. “Joaquin is his younger brother.”

“Len said something like that,” Carol stated in a small voice. “But Khan would worry for any one of them.”

Kirk cocked his head. “Yes, everyone is dear to him, but he told me that he practically raised Joaquin. There is a special connection between them – a deeper link, I guess, than with the rest.” He lowered his head. “God, I don’t want to imagine what it would do to him if that kid doesn’t survive.”

Carol nodded slowly, not in affirmation of Kirk’s statement, but in recognition of the grave concern and hidden love she could read in his tone and his eyes. Moistening her lips, she glanced over her shoulder back toward the door that led to the attached room and finally dared to voice a few of her thoughts. “Len told me that Khan’s crew was hidden on Gamma 12 and that you recovered them before you destroyed the facility.”

Kirk only looked at her tensely. He knew that the topic was a problem for Carol. “Yes,” he simply stated.
“Command knew that the Augments were there, still they ordered you to…?” She shook her head disbelievingly. “But that would be murder. I don’t understand…”

“Carol,” Jim interrupted her softly. “Please don’t get me wrong, but the less you know, the less danger for you. So please don’t ask me anymore.”

That got her full attention. “‘Danger’, Jim? In danger from whom? From Command?”

“Not from Command, Doctor – at least not from the Starfleet Command you know. Several changes occurred which were enough to give to alter our current mission,” Spock explained without revealing too much.

Still Marcus was a very smart woman and read between the lines. “What do you mean with ‘the Starfleet Command I know’? I know our most prominent admirals are dead, and so new men and women have to replace them, but this is still…”

“Carol, Section 31 is back, and is in charge of Command now,” Kirk interrupted her. “The order to kill Nien’s crew came from them – and it was meant as a trap to catch him and me, but we were quicker than them.”

Shocked, Carol looked at him, then at Spock, who only lifted a brow, and finally to Khan and Leonard, who were still talking with hushed voices, and then back at Jim. “You recovered them without Command’s knowing,” she mused, and her bright mind made the next conclusion. “You have to bring them somewhere where they are out of Command’s reach – or Section 31, I guess, if they really are in power.” She crossed her arms in front of her chest. “We’re not on our way to Earth!” she confidently stated, and Kirk groaned.

“As I already told you, Carol, it is better for you not to know too much. I’ll have to face consequences for what I’m doing now, and I don’t want to pull you into this mess, too. If you have no clue what is going on here, you can’t be charged with anything. After all, you are only obeying your captain’s orders. As long as it stays that way, they can’t press any charges against you.”

Her expression became stern. “You forget one little detail, Jim. I know Khan face-to-face, and I know he’s here aboard, and I didn’t tell Command about it. I am already in that ‘mess’. ” She took a deep breath and stole a sideway glance at the Augment leader. “Are you sure that you know what you’re doing here, Jim? Don’t get me wrong; I don’t doubt you as captain. You’ve already proved several times that you a damn good commanding officer, but are you aware of what you’re about to
set free? The Augments…”

“They’re people like you and me, Carol,” Kirk cut in before she could voice any prejudice based on Khan's actions a year ago. “And they did nothing to deserve cryosleep forever or, even worse, murder. A few more stripes on the sleeves don’t make that crime okay – and it was a crime when Luengo ordered their death without any reason. As a Starfleet captain, I carry responsibility not only for my crew but also for the fundamental rights and ideology of the Federation – That's what's at stake now. As Section 31, Allistor and now Luengo stripped the Augments off their rights and declared them non-human; they de facto made them a separate race. And Luengo ordered their genocide – one of the worst crimes possible. If I don’t intervene now, I not only betray my humanity but also the ideals of the real Starfleet and the Federation – something I vowed to protect with my life.”

For a long moment, Carol looked him into his eyes, then she nodded slowly. “I understand,” she murmured. “Do I assume correctly that we’re going to a place that will offer Khan and his people asylum?” Kirk remained silent, so she continued, “I appreciate that you want to protect me, Jim, but I’m already in one hundred percent. The crew is. I only hope that the authorities are going to see this the way you do, or you’re going to lose everything you've worked for so hard.”

“If that's the price for maintaining the Federation’s ideals and the Augments’ safety, then it’s a price I’m willing to pay. I don’t belong to those men and women who put their careers above everything – above their humanity.” Jim’s expression revealed his determination; his voice was hard.

Again, she eyed him carefully before replying, “Your reasons are sound, Jim. I just hope a court martial doesn’t figure out your other motive for helping Khan. I don’t think they’d think much of your noble reasons if they knew your connection to him.” Her glance shifted back to the former dictator for a second, and she murmured. “Maybe you and your ‘Love’ should keep your hands off each other once the authority steps in.” She saw the shock spreading over Kirk’s features and nodded politely at her superior officers. “Captain, Commander, good night.” She turned and left before Jim could regain his composure.

Then he turned to Spock, “How does she know…?”

“Obviously, your emotional reaction towards Khan these past days, and especially in the last few minutes, told Dr. Marcus everything she needed to know to come to the correct conclusion, Captain,” the Vulcan replied wryly. Then his attention fixed on the bandaged hands of his T'hy'la. “Are you in pain, Jim?” he wanted to know; his voice turned gentle.

With another sigh, Kirk shrugged. “A little bit, maybe. It’s nothing serious. Bones treated it and gave me a shot. I'll be able to use my hands again in a few days.” He began to smirk. “Well, maybe sooner given the shot of super-blood, Nien gave me during our escape from Turkana.”
“Don’t count on it,” Spock advised him, before his eyes moved quickly to the still very tense form of the former dictator, before he murmured, “You should stay with him here, Jim. He needs you, maybe even more than before.”

Surprised Kirk lifted both brows. “How do you know?” He frowned. “How did you know in the first place that something wasn’t right here? Because of Bones’ ship-wide hail?”

The Vulcan didn’t reply at first, and Jim thought he wouldn’t get an answer to his questions, but then Spock murmured, “I was meditating as Dr. McCoy hailed Mr. Singh. It was your increasing… tension and trepidation that reached me in meditation. I thought that my presence might be required and went to medbay where I…I sensed you were. The rest you know.”

Jim pursed his lips. “But I don’t get it. I mean, we both know when one of us was in trouble, and we reacted on it, but for a while now I've simply… felt your presence, often before you step into a room. Okay, earlier I didn’t – and you startled me, but that was an exception.”

Spock looked thoughtfully at him. “I know what you mean. Our link has… deepened for some reason. And I think that reason is Mr. Singh.” He crossed his arms on his back. “Since you bonded with him the link between us two has… amplified. It could be that the mental abilities of Mr. Singh has opened your mind – increased your capacity to experience our bond. You are more sensitive to our connection.”

Jim blinked dumbfounded. “You mean, Nien’s and my bond is like a catalyst for telepathy?”

“No, your telepathic abilities are about zero…”

“Thanks!” Kirk grumbled.

But he was ignored by the Vulcan, who continued, “… But you do have a brilliant mind and a burning soul. This makes you a prime candidate for the ability to forge and maintain mental links. You reflect everything.”

“'Reflect'?“ Jim was a little bit alarmed. “Does it mean that you feel what I feel? Like when Nien and I… I mean, when we two… well…Dammit, sex Spock! That?” The young captain’s face had flushed, and he was stuttering. It apparently amused Spock despite his Vulcan ancestry.
“Don’t worry, Jim, I’ve strengthened my mental shields and block out everything, unless you are trying to reach me, consciously or subconsciously. I’m safe from any feelings you and Mr. Singh experience in your intimacies.”

To Jim’s fascination, he watched the pointy tips ears and the high cheekbones of his friend flush green, and he knew that Spock was indeed blushing. ‘Dear God, could he be more innocent? I bet my last shirt that he and Uhura don’t even hold hands in bed, yet he flushes like a maiden by the mention of sex!’

He cleared his throat and for a moment, an awkward silence hung in the air between them. Then Spock spoke again. “I will return to my quarters and change for duty. Afterward…”

“Whoa, whoa, stop Spock! You’re off duty for the rest of beta and gamma shift.”

“Jim!” The Vulcan sounded as if he were chastising a child for the same infraction he’d heard about often. “You’re injured and…”

“I command this ship with my mind and my voice, Spock, not with my hands!”

“Yes, but you’re still in pain – and you are needed here.” His voice softened. “Khan is your bonding-partner. Your presence gives him strength and a safe place to regain composure. I may not understand much regarding human emotion, but I do know that Mr. Singh is about to be pushed to his mental limits, and the distance to this limit is shorter given recent events. Your place is with him at the moment, not on the bridge.”

Jim took a deep breath. Spock was not only speaking with his logical, Vulcan mind but also from his heart – a heart full of warmth and gentleness. And Spock was right. Kirk wanted nothing more than to remain at Nien’s side for the rest of the night, watching over the boy with him, but he was on duty. “Spock, you’ve worked more than three shifts in a row. You need to rest.”

“As I already told you many times, Jim, I do not require so much sleep – or ‘rest’ – as humans. I’m perfectly fine; do not concern yourself in this matter.” This time, it was him who reached out to make physical contact. Placing a reassuring hand on Kirk’s shoulder, he added softly, “If we Vulcans understand one thing about emotion, then it is the urge of a bonded partner to be with his mate in trying times. We are not free from the need to protect and a craving to offer mental shelter. Stay with Khan here; I’ll take the conn.”
He let his arm sink and turned to go.

“Spock!”

Jim’s voice stopped him one last time, and as he glanced over his shoulder, he met the warm and grateful gaze of his soul-brother.

“Thank you!” Kirk whispered, and for the tiniest moment, the Vulcan’s lips seemed to curl.

“You’re welcome, Jim.”

Then he was gone, and only now did Kirk realize that Bones and Nien had ended their discussion. Feeling their eyes upon him, he turned around, met their very thoughtful expressions, and spread both arms. “What?”

“I’ll be damned, but if there is still anybody in the universe who doesn’t realize how much that hobgoblin cares for you, then that ignoramus should have his head checked!”

Jim felt warmth rising in him. “Spock is a good friend – just like you, Bones.”

“Yeah, I'll remind you of that the next time you’re cursing like a sailor when I give you a hypo – which is, by the way, mostly your fault!” He added with an accusing finger pointing at Jim.

The young captain rolled his eyes; then he became serious again. “And?” he wanted to know, nodding at the stasis chamber. “Any ideas?”

McCoy slipped back into CMO mode. “Khan and I agree that we have to keep the boy in stasis for several hours so that his body can stabilize before we can initiate the wake procedure.” He looked at the Augment, whose pale features looked almost hollow. “If Joaquin stabilizes in the next hours he’ll make it. Otherwise…” He fell silent again, and Jim bit his lips. Then he closed the distance to Nien and wrapped an arm around him.
“I’m certain he somehow feels your proximity just like I did when I was asleep on Aldebaran. Your presence will help him in this fight; he’s not fighting on his own now. He’s fighting with his brother.” He tightened his hold on Khan. “And I’ll stay with you – we both will watch over him. I’m sure that this will give him strength.”

The former dictator looked at him, and Jim felt a pang deep in his chest as he saw the lingering fear deep in those ocean-colored eyes. Pulling Khan closer to him, he pressed a kiss to his temple, felt the cold skin beneath his lips and tried to send warmth and comfort over their shared bond.

Bones watched them while dread pulsed through him. He had a certain feeling it wasn't just the phaser blast that was responsible for the cryotube’s malfunction. Maybe it was just the straw that broke the camel's back. The tube wasn't supposed to function for so long and maybe it wasn't supposed to work twice – this was the tube that McCoy opened last year to place Jim’s dead body into it while he had put the young Augment into stasis. Maybe the tube couldn't work correctly because of that, and it was pure luck that the boy was still alive. If this was the case, Leonard knew that he would blame himself for the rest of his life if anything happened to Joaquin – a very unpleasant and nasty prospect.

And so he had another reason, a secret one, to pray that Joaquin Weiss would survive this night. Leaving the two love birds, he quickly stopped by Sulu’s sick bed, and because Hikaru was still awake and curious about the turmoil this last half hour, he quickly told him about everything that happened, giving the helmsman a lot to think about. Finally, Bones walked to his office and began to read every report concerning stasis that he could find in the data bank.

ST***ST***ST

The screen on Luengo’s desk at home sprang to life when it pinged and alerted him to an incoming message. It was almost midnight, and he had arrived at his apartment three hours ago. They hadn’t heard anything from the Lexington or from the Excalibur until now, and José was more than impatient.

So it was no wonder that he was up from his sofa and at his desk in no time. He saw the SBI emblem on the screen and knew that his office was calling. “Luengo here!” he answered, and the screen showed one of his secretaries.

“I apologize for disturbing you this late at night, Admiral, but we received the expected reply from the Lexington, sir, priority one.”

“Put it through, Lieutenant, and remain on stand-by!”
“Aye, aye, sir!” The face of the young man vanished and was replaced with the face of the Lexington’s first officer, who looked tousled – like a man who hadn’t slept in some time. Something was wrong out there; this much was evident. Baffled, surprised, but also wary, Luengo listened to Commander Marceaux's report, and his jaw nearly dropped to the desktop as he learned about the malfunction in the warp core and the explosion.

“Oh, that comes in handy, doesn’t it?” he growled, and he opened the attached files sure that this was an attempt by Wesley to get out of answering in person. His eyes flew over the log book, and he took a deep breath. The records were impeccable. The times and locations were correct; the reports of the different departments, including the medical records, left no room for doubt. There had been an accident aboard the Lexington, and as far as the report was concerned, Wesley was lucky to be alive – if he survived the next days that is.

“Dammit!” Luengo cursed. ‘He could have given me what I needed. He could have told me what Kirk is up to – where he’s going! I’m confident that this infuriating farm boy slipped up during his talk with Wesley – or that those two are in on it together!’ José thought angrily. ‘Now I can only wait to see if Styles does find the Enterprise. Otherwise, this cursed cowboy will be harder to find than a needle in a haystack!’

Calming down, he hailed his secretary again. “Lieutenant, send copies of the report to the other admirals. It seems we need to promote an interim commodore for the squadron near Borderland.”

“Sir, the report was already sent to every desk and PADD of command staff. They are all informed now.”

Luengo stared wide-eyed at the young man. “What?” he gasped.

His secretary looked almost apologizing at him. “They all got the transmission. Commander Marceaux made certain everyone was included.”

The admiral’s thoughts raced at this knowledge. Marceaux had sent his report to all staff officers? Why for God’s sake? That was not protocol and… And maybe this was the man’s way of telling them that he needed help. Luengo didn’t know much about Marceaux, only that he has served on the Lexington for several years and that his record was flawless, but he was only a commander. He was not prepared to command a whole squadron – least of all a squadron near enemy territory in the middle of a ceasefire that hung by a thread.
“Lieutenant, inform the staff. Briefing – 0800 – my office! Luengo out!” He switched off the connection even before his secretary could confirm his order, and leaned back in his chair. So, gathering information from Wesley about the whereabouts of Kirk was out of the question now. Everything depended on Styles, and an inner voice told him that he wouldn’t get the report from the Excalibur in a manner he ought to expect.

He would be right…

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise, gamma shift was on duty, and the ship’s clock said it was 0135. The corridors were empty, and beta-shift was in bed now. This didn’t apply to an exhausted CMO and the two men who sat side-by-side near the stasis-chamber on visitor chairs.

Scott had stopped by after his shift ended, anticipating what had happened and worrying for Khan. His visit had been good for Nien; it showed that the Scotsman cared for him, and once again he couldn’t suppress the small wonder he felt being so welcome in Jim’s inner circle – that other humans besides his beloved regarded him as human; as one of them now.

Silence had settled once again over medbay, and the night went on slowly for the two men. Every minute that ticked by seemed a lifetime. They couldn’t do anything other than wait. Wait for Joaquin to stabilize, wait for the moment in which it would be safe to initiate the waking process. If that moment would came at all.

‘… The morning will tell,’ McCoy had said. The morning… Not so long ago a morning had shown Khan a new way – back there in San Francisco in Jim’s apartment. That morning had brought the first rays of hope. Now the coming morning could so quickly hurl him back into the darkness he had thought he escaped.

Joaquin – his little brother…

His pale face was even more ashen in the blue light of the stasis. He looked dead, not asleep with his body functions in near stasis as the monitor reported. If it weren’t the faint whisper deep in Nien’s soul, he wouldn’t have believed the medical readouts at all. While Khan hoped with everything he had that Joaquin would stabilize, part of him expected to hear the scream of the med scanner indicating the young Augment’s final and forever death.
McCoy was right. Only the next hours would tell if Joaquin would live or die. And so Nien sat beside the stasis chamber – for hours now, unaware of anything else going on around him except for Jim’s presence at his side – a warm, strong, steady anchor to his troubled mind. His whole being was fixed on the enhanced boy, calling to him, pleading with him. ‘Don’t give up! Don’t die! I cannot lose you too! Please be strong! I’m here! I’m not going anywhere! I’m with you – always!’

This was not the first time he feared for his younger brother’s life, and it was not even the first time that he sat beside Joaquin’s sickbed, hoping – yes, and even praying that the boy would make it. Back in India all those years – no, centuries ago! – they had faced situations even an Augment was threatened by. Not only in the months before the Eugenic Wars, but also during monsoons and earthquakes. One time Joaquin had gone missing after an earthquake. Another time, he and some other Augments had been caught in a tidal wave after an unrelenting monsoon. That moment Khan felt, for the first time, how strong his bond was with Joaquin. The memories of searching for him and finding him finally – half drown, injured, barely alive – were seared in his memories.

It was their first meeting that had linked him forever to the boy who haunted every hour spent awake and asleep. Seeing him like this now was nearly more than he could bear.

Khan shivered. It wasn’t because of the temperature that was set to a comfortable level. The chills that ran through him came from his soul. Maybe this situation that he found himself in again was one time too many that he feared for the life of one of his most dear ones.

An arm wrapped around him; it interrupted the sinister spiral his mind was following without even realizing it. Warmth and comfort seeped through the cold darkness that had gripped him – the golden light of understanding and love.

“He’ll make it,” Jim whispered for the thousandth time. He had sensed the abyss his bond-mate was drifting toward. “He is as strong as you are. And he feels you here, just like I feel you even before I see you. You’ll see; he’ll make it.”

Khan tore himself away from the dark shadows which had begun to surround him, shuddering as he became aware of how close he had been losing himself in dread, fury, and sorrow once again. He was so tired of this; so unbelievably tired of fearing for his family. Since he had been no more than a boy, a teen, he has fought for them in one way or another. Even with the end in sight now, he felt his strength slipping away from him.

“This isn’t the first time I have seen him fight for his life, but now there is nothing I can do except wait,” he murmured; his usually deep baritone was nothing more than a hoarse whisper. “He was injured before, but I was able to treat him. Now…” He shook his head. “Now I can only hope that the tech I once developed to give us all a chance of survival will not be responsible for his death and that the technology of today will be able to save him.” He lowered his head. “I cannot even reach out and touch him – and he is a touchy one, just like you,” he added with a sad smile.
And Jim began to understand how deep Nien’s love for his younger brother ran. Joaquin was indeed precious to Khan – someone he had taken care of for many years. Kirk knew that at least Nien, and his friends too, were bred with genes designed to guard and protect, serve one. And he also knew that Nien not only was able to love so deeply, but he needed someone to love. There was hunger in him for human intimacy many people wouldn’t be able to grasp, but Jim understood it. He had craved real love – the intimacy of family all his life. He had yearned for it since he was able to lace his shoes, and that hole – that need had only begun to dissipate when he found friendship, first with Bones and then with Spock, but something had always been missing. Until now, until he and Nien had grown close – bonded.

Khan loved Joaquin in a wholly different way than he loved Jim. This much Kirk could tell, yet the super-human’s feelings were equally as profound and intense. To watch Nien suffer from the all-consuming fear of losing the boy who held a father's heart, hurt Jim more than he had thought possible.

“Even if you can’t touch him,” the young captain murmured, “he knows that you’re here and will fight death for you because he doesn’t want you to mourn. It’s what that gave me strength after came back from dying – after I became aware that I didn't die and that my friends were with me. Several times I wanted it – the peace that came with dyin’, yet I knew I had to battle the dark from getting me because I wanted to spare my friends that pain again. And when I think about Joaquin’s connection to you that is so much older than mine and Spock's, older than my friendship with Bones... I’m confident that he’ll kick death in the ass and wake up just to make you smile.”

Nien turned his gaze away from the light shimmer of the observation window and looked at Jim. Once again he was surprised how much Jim understood him and his people. For a moment, he couldn’t believe that there was someone like Kirk in his life. Someone, who was truly his, accepted and even appreciated the differences between the humans and the Augments.

Gratitude filled him like so often as soon when this young man acted on his behalf; then he lowered his gaze again. His glance wandered to the observation window of the stasis chamber, and his heart sank as he watched the deathly pale features of his younger brother. What he would not give to see Joaquin smiling at him!

That smile – it had captured him from the beginning because it had meant that the little boy trusted him and was about to overcome the horrors he had faced in the labs.

“I raised him, you know,” he told Kirk quietly. “We were able to save a few children of the ‘new generation’, as they were called, and they all were taken care of, but it was different with Joaquin. Even young as he was, he realized that I saved his life, and he clung to me after our escape from the labs. And I couldn’t find it in my heart to push him away or to separate from him. I was only
seventeen, yet I found the parental role easy after it became clear that neither of us two wanted to leave the other. I was father and older brother for him, and I was repaid with the unconditional love of a toddler, who was convinced that nothing could happen to him as long as I was near.”

Jim watched the many emotions flash across Nien’s eyes as the Augment looked into nothing – caught in his memories.

“You told me that you and your friends escaped the labs in New Delhi and took younger Augments with you – Joaquin. I didn’t understand how threatened they were.”

A bitter frown played around Khan’s lips. “They wanted to kill us all – not only us, the teens, but also the youngest ones.” He shook his head. “It was the day I was forced to kill for the first time.”

Jim’s gaze roamed over him. “You told me a lot about your past, but almost nothing about that day you and the others were able to escape. I think it’s still traumatic for you, isn’t it?” As he caught Khan’s pained expression, he squeezed his beloved’s shoulders, ignoring again the sting of the injuries he got while opening Joaquin’s cryotube. “Do you want to share those memories?” he asked, and he met the haunted gaze of those sea-colored eyes he loved so much. “Don’t get me wrong. I don’t want to cross a line. After all, this has to be very personal for you. But you already shared a part of your past, and I said I will listen whenever you want to talk about the time before you became the leader of your territory. And I have a gut feeling that the fear of losing Joaquin is tormenting you so bad that it's all coming back.” He pressed a kiss to Nien’s unusually cold cheek. “So if it helps you, you have me. You always have me.”

The Augment looked at him; his gaze hung on the soft, masculine features of the young commanding officer while he felt the compassion, the warmth, and the fierce will of his mate. No one who looked at Jim Kirk only once would assume the young man’s sensitivity or brilliance, or the empathy that Jim had proved he was capable of over and over again.

Sighing, the superhuman began quietly, “I told you already about my family – about their appearance, heritage, and relationships. Some of them are ‘only’ good friends. With few others, I share a familial bond because they are a part of my past – my childhood.” He moistened his lips. “This past… is not a happy one. It… It would change your conception of the world – of Earth’s history. Are you sure you still want to hear it?”

Jim shoved his chair even closer to Khan’s without rising and pulled him into an embrace. “I don’t care if it contradicts the books. History books are written by history’s victors, but there is always another side to the story. I’ve learned a lot about the last decades of the twentieth century, thanks to you, and I know that the so-called ‘liberators’ were criminals in their own right. The same goes for the scientists experimenting with genetics without scruple or care for the hundreds of men and women who had to live their lives in survival mode without freedom. It formed an abyss between
them and the rest of the human race that peeked in the Eugenic Wars.” He raised his free hand and cupped Nien’s cheek in it for a moment, missing the feel of smooth skin under his fingers now bandaged. “Tell me what happened, baby. I’ll be the last one to judge you for trying to stay alive and free.”

Once again the display of tolerance and trust touched Khan; then he made up his mind. The haunting memories had become more present in the last hours – almost as if they had only happened yesterday. It was suffocating him. Maybe the old saying ‘a shared sorrow is halved’ was indeed true.

And, to his astonishment, he heard himself speak.

“We had been taken under the wing of a special military section. I was seventeen, Paolo nineteen. We two, along with several other augmented males and females were trained to be elite soldiers whose purpose would be to end the fighting in Afghanistan. Others of us were prepared to end the battles in distant parts of the world by bringing down those who supported area wars.” He pressed his lips together before he continued. “We were created to bring peace – and peace didn’t mean murder. Paolo, Otto, Katie, Kabir, Johanna, Francoise, I… we all found ourselves facing a dilemma. We were forced to fight, but even if savagery was – is in our DNA, we prefer peace. Then we realized that our creators and the dictators of the countries where our labs had been built only wanted to use us to fight their battles to regain leadership and increase their territory. And they were already combating with each other who should be the dictator of dictators.” Khan chuckled at himself as he said it. Without realizing it, he bent nearer towards Jim, leaning into him now.

“We recognized that we were nothing more than tools to them, with no rights. They would kill us as soon as they didn’t need us anymore. We decided to rebel. We plotted in secret, used every given chance to contact other Augment groups in other countries, and we planned to rise up together so that our tormentors wouldn’t be able to warn each other. From the beginning, it was also clear that we had to free our brothers and sisters still in the labs – most of them younger than we.” He shook his head. “It worked – somehow.”

He lowered his head and felt Jim tighten his arm around his shoulder again – a gesture of comfort that soothed a little bit of the tumult of Khan’s emotions.

“We knew that there were ‘new’ children – their DNA made less aggressive, but we had not seen much of them. Our creators said they didn’t want our ‘influence’. They were the ‘new generation’, more malleable. But it did not stop the bastards from threatening them when we rebelled and broke free. One of those children, they wanted to kill too, was Joaquin.”

He felt Jim’s other hand stroking his arm in a calming manner and as he looked at his mate, he realized the image wavered. But this time, he didn’t care that tears threatened to fall. “We had planned everything. We had observed our watcher’s habits, their schedules, and their weak points at
the secret military bases and in the labs. We reconed all escape routes and planned our distraction maneuvers and emergency plans. And of course, we wanted to take the ‘new generation’ with us. Leaving them in the labs was not an option, even if they were not meant to be all that we were.” He bit his lips. “But despite all our planning, it did not go as well as we had hoped.”

Jim faced him, and his heart hurt for his lover as he saw the anguish in those green-blue depths. He didn’t want Nien to suffer these bad memories, but he knew sometimes it was better to talk through the pain. And maybe it would help Khan to overcome his fear concerning Joaquin if they talked. “They figured you out,” he assumed, and the superhuman nodded.

“Not really. Our first strike on the base was successful, but some soldiers were able to alert the scientists in the lab in New Delhi, and when we arrived there they were well prepared. They only let us get as far as they did because they wanted to know who led the Augments – us. They assumed Paolo and me, but they lacked proof.” He snorted. “They got it soon enough. And that was their cue to cut down not only us but the youngest of the children.” A shiver ran down his spine as the images, voices, and the smell of antiseptic and blood fought toward the forefront of his mind…

The alert rang in their ears as the two boys on the cusp of manhood raced down the corridor, glad that they had successfully barricaded the door that held their pursuers at bay. They had tricked many of the guards and simply locked them in. The other teen Augments used every escape route they had mapped to leave the labs behind them – the only ‘home’ the most of them had ever known.

The seventeen-year-old boy, who would later be known as ‘Khan’, and his older compatriot, Paolo, had stayed behind to distract the rest of guards and to give a few other teen Augments a helping hand as they attempted to save the few toddlers and young children of the ‘new generation’. Noonien knew that the chance of success for him and Paolo was minute at best. When they had gotten free of the military facility that was burning now, they realized that they had lost almost the half of their friends – shot down like wild animals by their coaches and the security staff. Nevertheless, they gained victory, but freeing those who were still in the lab was a risk now because their plan demanded all the Augments, and their numbers had been severely depleted. Still Noonien, Paolo, and the others had decided to save the younger Augments. They would not let them suffer any longer!

“Noo, behind you!”

It was only because of the older teen’s shout that Noonien reacted in time and let himself drop to the floor. The bullet that was fired missed him by a hair’s breadth.

With his heart beating wildly, Noonien looked up at the man who had stepped out of the side
corridor and tried to shoot him. He was shocked to see Jay Krishna, one of the guards he had known since he could think – one of the men who he had thought of as having sympathy for the children that the scientists had bred in their labs. “Jay...” he whispered, and as he realized the determination in the man’s eyes, a sharp pain stabbed his chest. No physical wound was inflicted, but a mental one. Krishna was not a friend, but someone who meant him harm – just like the others.

“Don’t think I didn’t know that you were behind this,” the man yelled, referring to the other escaped Augments kicking off their little revolution half an hour ago. “I always knew that you were a rebel, Singh, and now you're going to die like one!”

Still not ready to face the truth, it hurt too much, the Indian boy rose slowly so as not to provoke the man. “Jay, we don’t want to hurt anyone. We only want to be free like all the other humans...”

“You and the others are not humans; you're abortions. Letting you roam free would mean the end of the human race!” He lifted his rifle Paolo stepped between them.

Raising both hands in a calming gesture, the nineteen year old boy said gently, “Jay, you’ve known Noo for seventeen years now. You’ve watched him grow up, helped him when the tests went bad. How can you say something like that after all you’ve witnessed over these past years? You know that we are no monsters – that we have feelings like you. Noo has never done anything to you that would explain your backstabbing him now.” “Don’t give me that shit, kid! We all know what you freaks are up to. You want to infest the world - rule it. It’s in your DNA.”

“And that’s our fault?” Paolo snapped, hoping that the most of his friends had escaped by now. “The likes of you made us what we are – not because you engineered DNA, but because you treated us like lab rats – animals – with no right even to our own lives. Since I was sent from Rome to New Delhi three years ago, all I ever got was distrust, loathing, and humiliating tests. And when I tried to protect the younger ones from you sadists, I was punished – just like Noo. We did the only decent thing there was to do – what any real human would do.” He shook his head. “Our creators ran tests on children, shot them, hurt them, even abused them, trained them to kill and accept that they would face violent death as well. Tell, me who are the monsters here from your moral, human point of view?”

There was a wavering in Krishna’s eyes, quick as it was, it gave the two boys new hope that they might have reached something in the man. In the same moment, shots sounded from nearby followed by screams and shouts torn from far too young throats – adults.

Noonien and Paolo whirled around, gasping while behind them Jay cursed. “It should never have gotten this far,” he murmured, looking at the younger of the two teens – hesitating to execute his order to kill the ringleaders. The young Italian Augment was right. He had watched Noonien grow up and had offered comfort from time to time. It is hard to continually remember that these ‘kids’
weren’t humans – not really. Still, they were children.

Again shots rang out; then the barricaded door banged with a metallic echo against the wall and heavy steps drew nearer. The other guards were coming!

Krishna met the incredible blue-green eyes of the slender, raven-haired boy he’d known for more than a decade.

“Jay?” It wasn’t the first time Noonien was ready to beg, but until now he only had done it for the others – for his friends. But at this moment, he pleaded for Paolo and himself. His enhanced hearing told him that their pursuers were not more than a few seconds away from beating down the door, and with them would come death.

Slow – almost too slow – Krishna let his rifle drop; his heart hurt. “Go,” he whispered with defeat in his eyes. “Run, Singh! From now on there will be nothing else for you – only running. Maybe it would have been more merciful if I had shot you.” With those words, he vanished back into the side corridor, and Noonien felt a wave of relief wash over him. Not only was he was still alive, but he hadn’t been wrong about Jay at all. The man had compassion left in him.

“Come on; we have to hurry!” Paolo didn’t wait for a reply. He grabbed the younger boy’s wrist and began to run. Noonien stayed at his side. Together they stormed down the hallway, and Paolo punched the security code into the keyboard on the door that would lead them to freedom.

They locked the door behind them, and Noonien quickly changed the code. He had watched guards doing this from afar. It was easier than he thought, and on the other side, the guards collided with the door. They were trying to break it down. The two boys grinned at each other.

Then they heard more footsteps, light ones, and as they turned around Sina, an Indian Augment girl, hastened towards them; Kabir, one of Noonien’s closest friends, was at her side.

“Noo, Salim and Imran escaped with their groups, but we cannot get to the new generation. The guards have closed all security doors, and the codes were changed!” she called even before she reached him.

“And I don’t think they did it to protect the toddlers,” Kabir nodded; his dark eyes burnt with fury. “They called Doctor Hakim, and we saw him with two assistants walking to the main cells – Kiron among them. And they carried the kit with them.”
Noonien had gone rigid. Kiron. The man had forced himself upon him several times, using his weakness after medical tests to strip him down for his perverted pleasure. Augments were stronger than humans and even as a teenager Noonien’s strength surpassed those of mere adult humans by two or three times. But even he was unable to escape iron handcuffs – a fact that had shown him that there existed cruelties in the world which were even more twisted and sick than what he endured in the labs or during the survival tests.

Paolo, who had his encounters with the assistant Kiron too, balled his fists. But his attention was directed at something else. “Hakim had his kit with him? Why? If you weren’t able to reach the youngest ones, they couldn’t have been harmed in the rescue.”

“Noo, Paolo!” Otto, a German Augment brought to the New Delhi labs for special tests only five weeks ago, stormed towards them. His English was strongly accented indicating his distress. “Richard and I eavesdropped on the communications between the labs and Hakim. They’ve been ordered to kill all of us if we are found – including the new generation.”

“What?” Horror rose in Noonien. “They… they are only five or six years old.”

“We’ll get them!” Paolo snarled. “We’ll get them if we have to tear down the walls! We need weapons and... Noo, where are you going?”

The Indian boy was already on his way. “There is no time to obtain weapons and blow the doors. There are some poisons left, deadly even for us, and I think I know exactly, how Hakim will follow the order!”

“Didn’t you hear me?” Sina shouted. “They. Changed. The. Codes! We...”

“I can crack it!” he yelled back and raced down the next hallway. From somewhere smoke began to pervade the air and fire alarms added to the blaring sirens. The others followed him, but they only made it to the next edge, then five guards barred their way – weapons ready to fire.

What came then, young Noonien would never forget. It was the third time this night that he took a life – and he was shocked that he didn’t care. One second the man aimed at him; the next moment his neck snapped beneath Noonien’s fingers, and his cold eyes had turned lifeless. Taking the automatic rifle, the boy shot the other guards, ignoring the burning pain in his left shoulder as one bullet hit him. The fight was short, and half a minute later they continued on their way to the area where the ‘new generation’ was held.
Twice they had to face the enemy again – the guards couldn’t be called anything else now. Both times the few teen Augments garnered the victory. But they knew that they had to hurry. It was only a matter of minutes now until it would be too late for the toddlers. Military from outside of New Delhi would arrive – using weapons even an Augment wouldn’t be able to withstand.

Securing their surroundings, Paolo, Kabir and the others built a circle Noonien, as he concentrated on the keyboard to crack the code. The lives of the small children hung over his head like the sword of Damocles; still he remained calm – almost cold. Panicking would do no good.

With dizzying speed, he tested the combinations, stored the already tried ones in his mind, and attempted the next ones. He needed scarcely more than a minute before he found the code; the door unlocked. From somewhere an explosion was heard. Their pursuers had blown up the door that Noonien had locked with a new code just a few minutes ago.

“Be careful, I can hear more guards on the other side!” Paolo had warned before he grabbed his rifle, aimed at the door, and kicked the entry open. Instantly a volley of bullets rang out from the corridor, but the teens were out of harm’s way and acted when the shots stopped. With the grace and strength of predator cats, they jumped into the hallway, rolled over and opened fire as soon as they were on their feet. The battle training finally paid off. The fact that children of their own ‘race’ were in danger made the young Augments merciless.

The fight began again, and Noonien heard Sina scream in pain. One look over his shoulder showed him that she was hit in the left thigh before she doubled over. One of the guards aimed at her and Noonien shot without a thought, hitting the man square in the chest. “Kabir, stay with her and patch her up!” he ordered. “The others are coming with me. Otto, secure the door and follow us then.” His gaze found Kabir’s again. “We will return with the children soon!” he promised and strode down the hallway. Without realizing it, he had taken command and even Paolo, who was older than him, obeyed.

Noonien had never been in this section of the labs. Several doors led to the small ward divided into cells in which the toddler.

Gesturing to his friends, they rushed forwards. Only two remaining security men tried to stop them, but without success. Within seconds, they lay dead on the floor. None of the teen Augments cared for the lives of their tormentors anymore.

One door opened, and a shocked Doctor Hakim stared at them; then he lifted a hand. “Boys, just calm down!” he said kindly – a tone they all knew very well. It was the calm before the storm. “I know that you are angry, and maybe we should discuss more freedoms for you, but...”
“Too late, Hakim, we are already free!” Noonien interrupted him; his blue-green eyes flashed with loathing, hate and determination. “And the children will grow up free too!” He went for the scientist. “Lead us to them!”

Hakim fixed him in his sights. “There is no way that you’ll be able to raise children, Singh. You can barely take care of yourself, never-mind children. It’s better for them to die in peace instead of…” He closed his mouth as Noonien punched the muzzle of the rifle hard against the man’s ribcage.

“Where. Are. The. Children?” he gritted out; his voice a snarl that a tiger would run from.

The same moment he heard the high-pitched voices of children – terrified children. Without wasting another second, he lifted the weapon and walloped the scientist in the temple, rendering him unconscious. Paolo, Otto, and Richard were already running towards the noises in the adjacent room, and moments later a new fight broke out. Noonien closed the distance to them and felt Katie’s presence in his back.

He stopped dead in his tracks as he saw the reason for the turmoil. Five children, not older than four or five, lay on the ground – their unseeing eyes wide open and gray with death’s shadow. A sixth child convulsed in pain on one of the beds, clutching its stomach and throat, but its movements were slowing down. Katie pushed him aside and ran to the little girl who curled into a ball, shaking in pain. Noonien simply knew that the child was lost – and rage exploded deep in his being.

These bastards called him and his friends ‘monsters’ but they had no scruples about poisoning and killing six little children. A red haze of wrath veiled his sight and with a roar, he hurled himself into the fight. He grabbed for the next scientist who just avoided an attack by Paolo and lifted the man into the air. Snarling in hate, he shook the man before he hurled him against the wall with enough force to break dozens of bones – including his skull. Noonien was above the scientist in one quick movement and snapped his neck being driven by the need for vengeance.

Behind him, the three other teens fought with the rest of the scientists and guards, and Noonien was about to join them when he heard a noise from the next room. He looked up and saw a movement behind the security door made of bullet-proof, frosted glass. He recognized the shape – Kiron! And then he heard something else – wrestling and the high, fearful voice of another child.

There was still one of the younger ones alive! And Kiron was about to kill that little one, too.

What went then through Noonien’s soul and heart wasn’t comparable to anything he’d experienced
before. He didn’t know how he managed to shatter the thick armored glass. The only thing he
realized was that he was in the next room and that Kiron looked at him, sneering. He held an
injector in his right hand while he bent over an empty examination table, but now he straightened up
and grinned. “What’s up, Singh? Ready for one last go?” he asked, wriggling his eyes brows.

Glass crunched beneath the young man’s shoes as he walked with slow, predatory steps towards his
cruelst tormentor – the man who had added even more pain to the hell he had lived in for so long.
The same man who robbed him of his innocence in the most brutal way possible. The same man
who most certainly was responsible for the dead Augment children in this section, and who was
about to kill another toddler.

“Come here, pretty boy!” Kiron taunted. “I’ve got something for you!” He lifted the injector and
Noonien knew exactly that its content was deadly – even for him. It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered
anymore, only the deep searing fury fed by too many nights full of pain and humiliation. Growling
deep in his throat, he made a step towards Kiron, not even thinking of raising the rifle. He
remembered this man’s rough, dirty hands upon him and how these cruel fingers clutched his most
sensitive parts with careless glee. Those hands which had throttled him, touched him, forced him...

And then something else pierced the red fog of rage that had wrapped him in a cocoon – the quiet,
fearful whimper of a tiny voice.

The child...

There was still a child in this room.

Kiron began to laugh. “Always trying to be the strong one – the hero, aren’t you, Singh? Always
thinking you have to protect the other creatures, but you never were in a position to succeed; you
aren’t in any position to change what lies ahead for you and the others. When I’m done with you, the
little shit-arse and the other little freak next door will share your fate.” He gestured with his head to
the other side of the examination table. “And afterward, your other friends will find their end. A
shame, we had a good time and...”

He didn’t get any further; something in the Indian boy snapped. Without hesitation, Noonien flung
the weapon away and was on Kiron, who raised the injector. The needle never got closer to
Noonien; he grabbed his enemy’s wrist and twisted it. The sickening crack of breaking bones and
tearing flesh was only drowned out by the man’s scream as the injector fell to the floor. And then the
boy’s hands were around his throat crushing the man's trachea. He didn’t feel Kiron’s weak
attempts to get free or beat him. The last thing the man saw were the pale eyes of the young
Augment which burned with the flames of hate; his young voice went deep with a snarl. “You should
have left me alone!”
Then Kiron’s frame went limp and with loathing, Noonien dropped the dead body to the floor.

Silence…

Around him was silence, only from afar sirens were still howling, and here and there shots cut through the air. He heard his friends’ voices next door, yet he couldn’t join them. There was still the child in here – somewhere hiding. He could hear the little heart beating like the hooves of a galloping horse and the quick, harsh breaths which betrayed more of the fear that still lingered in the room. The barely hidden sounds of misery tore the teen Augment out of the red haze still holding him in a fiery grip.

Wiping his bloody hands on Kiron’s clothes, he straightened up again and listened carefully to the suppressed sobs. “Where are you?” he called quietly; his voice still rough from the powerful affect that ruled him until seconds ago. For a moment, the breaths stopped then sped up again. They showed Noonien the way. Rounding the examination table, he looked around and finally saw a small bundle hiding between a shelf, the wall, and the table. Dark hair, little drawn up knees, and a shaking frame clad in white-blue lab coveralls was all he could see.

“Hey,” Noonien murmured, while he watched the child. “Are you hurt?”

Slowly the little head raised, and Noonien looked straight into large, dark eyes wet with tears. Beneath the fear lay an unusual mix of confusion and hope. Tiny lips were trembling, and barely controlled sobs wracked the small body, yet the child didn’t make any further sounds. Something in his gaze caught Noonien; something tugged at him like a moth to a flame. Without a thought, he crouched down in front of the toddler, not caring that he and the others were running out of time.

“Are you hurt?” he asked again. He reached out and pulled the small, bare arms away from the knees, searching them frantically for any prick that would tell him that this child would die, too. But to his immense relief, he saw nothing. Holding one small wrist in his hand, he carefully reached out with the other hand and stroked over the boy’s tousled, dark hair. “Are you okay?” he whispered this time in English, realizing that the child didn’t understand him. Apparently, he was born outside of India.

That got him a reaction as the child nodded his head in a tiny, barely recognizable gesture.

“Right!” Noonien breathed and felt a wave of relief as he continued to pat the lad. At least there was one good sign. Then he remembered where he was and that they all were far from safe. “We have to
go,” he continued in English and put both hands on the small boy’s waist to lift him, but the child shrank back. “You do not have to be afraid,” the teen Augment murmured; his voice now turning its deep baritone was gentle and comforting. “I am here to help you. No one will harm you, I promise.” He bent forwards again and, to his surprise, the boy allowed him to lift him without further protest. For a long moment, large dark eyes watched him warily and with flickering fear. Noonien pulled the toddler closer to him. The child went stiff, but only for a second; then his tiny fingers buried themselves in the teen’s sleeves, still watching him warily but curious. As Noonien walked towards the door, the boy turned his head, and a whimper escaped him as he looked down at Kiron. He pressed himself closer to Noonien, clinging to him like a lifeline while he pressed his face against the teen’s throat.

“Do not be afraid,” the young Augment murmured, realizing that the child, so young as he was, had been aware of what the man was up to; that he was about to be killed. “He cannot hurt you – never again. You are safe now,” Noonien crooned, drawing soothing circles with one hand on the boy’s back.

Paolo appeared on the doorstep, his face grim. “Jenny found a little Asian girl, maybe five or six and Richard recovered four more from the room next door, but the other children are…” He couldn’t finish the sentence; grief and fury mirrored in his eyes.

Noonien felt another storm of rage flaring up in him, but controlled himself instantly as the toddler in his arms made a sound of misery. The child calmed down the moment Noonien did, which confused the Indian boy before he pushed everything to the back of his mind. There would be time to think about this later.

Glancing around one last time, he saw a file on the examination table and stepped closer. The name ‘Joaquin Weiss’ was written on it, and holding the boy only with one arm, Noonien quickly opened the documents, realizing that the file was about his little protégée. Immediately he took the record, and he pressed the child close to himself. Then he gestured towards Paolo to take his rifle. He walked with large, brisk steps back into the hallway leaving the two rooms of death and blood behind. Jenny, a young American Augment, stood there holding a trembling little Asian girl in her arms. Richard had gathered another little girl and three small boys around him.

“They’re all that is left,” Jenny whispered; fury and pain were liquid in her large blue eyes.

“Noo, Paolo, Otto – hurry up!” Kabir screamed from the entrance, and the other teen Augments picked up the children before they ran. Their keen ears had caught the roar of the approaching helicopters and from somewhere voices barked instructions.

Circling those who carried the children and around Kabir, who held Sina in his arms, the young Augments raced towards the last remaining escape. Later none of them would be able to tell, in
detail, how they managed to flee before the soldiers stormed the labs – or how they were able to leave without a trace, vanishing in the crowded city of New Delhi. Hours after those fateful events, they all found shelter in an empty flat in the middle of downtown – injured, shocked, traumatized, but alive…

“I studied the file that I had taken with me, learning a few things about the little boy who wouldn't let me go – even hours later. Even in sleep, he clung to me, and I allowed it. Somehow, his presence soothed me and helped me to sort out the events of the day.”

Khan’s gaze fell on the observation window and the ashen gray form of Joaquin. “He came from the labs of Jerusalem and was chosen to be part of the aggression study that tested the effects of drugs on aggression levels. They wanted to learn if he and the other children of the ‘next generation’ could tame their emotions.” He shook his head while his fingers twitched. “He was traumatized and didn’t speak for weeks. He understood English perfectly well, but he didn’t use it. And he became my little shadow. The Chinese girl, Lin, overcame her trauma within a few days, but Joaquin refused to cooperate.” A smile tugged at Nien’s mouth. “Every night he came to my makeshift bed and climbed into it. There was no way to make him stay in his own; he always came to me. And I allowed it. A week later, I took him with me and tucked him in before I lay down to sleep, too. He only ate when I ate, and he followed me around like a puppy – always there, always silent. But I saw the beginnings of change in his eyes. Where during the first days only fear and awareness was in his eyes, finally I saw curiosity – and calmness. He didn’t speak for seven weeks. I remember distinctly the day he finally did, and how happy I was. The others already teased us – called us Siamese twins, but I didn’t care. Joaquin had wriggled himself into my heart, and there he has remained.”

“And so you raised him,” Jim whispered, and the former dictator nodded.

“Yes, I did – first in our shelter, and later in my palace. There were months when I couldn’t take care for him, but we had gained the respect of the inhabitants that we helped against criminals and area despots. An older woman, Shani, had lost all her six of children in a mine accident. She took Lin and Joaquin in; other older couples adopted the four other children. We supported them where they needed it, and they took care of the younger ones. But Shani was more than just help to us. She was a very loving woman and did not care that scientists had experimented with us – make us what and how we are. That's how we explained ourselves to her. She didn't even have the education to understand DNA's function.” He sighed. “She was like a mother to Joaquin and Lin, and later to other younger ones that we saved from a lab in London.” At the last word, a cloud darkened his features for a moment. The English metropolis held some bad memories not only from the twenty-third century, but the twentieth as well. “The children loved her, and as they grew, they continued to hold her in high regard, despite the fact that she wasn’t as intelligent as they. But she was warm-hearted and kind – something wholly new to the children. And for us, too.” His gaze became distant, and Jim guessed how the story would end.

“What happened to her?”
“She fell victim to one of the first assaults in… One year before we fled Earth,” Nien murmured; sorrow showed on his pallid face. “Joaquin and the others missed her terribly, but soon their grief was overshadowed by the brutality of the Eugenic Wars.” His features softened again, as he looked at his younger ‘brother’. “He was so relieved when we reached the Botany Bay without being caught and killed. Like all the others, he knew the risk we were about to take. Two of my people offered themselves for the testing phase of cryosleep. It worked; they woke after four weeks. This gave us hope to try the impossible. Joaquin was the last I put to sleep. He knew that I feared for us all, and his last words were ‘Until later, big bro’.”

Khan closed his eyes when they began to burn again. “There was still the significant risk that none of us would wake up ever again, but Joaquin was always the cheerful one – after he overcame the horrors of the labs. His complete trust calmed me as I programmed my cryotube, climbed in, and closed it after the successful start of the Botany Bay and her start away from Earth – it was empowering.” He swallowed. “We made it – except for the twelve whose cryotubes failed and the four Marcus killed. And now I may lose another one of my family – my little Joaquin.” He shook his head; his voice was about to fail him. “I… I cannot, Jim!” he whispered. “I cannot lose him!”

“You won’t,” Kirk murmured, wrapping his other arm around his shivering mate; he held him close. His hands stroked soothingly through raven-colored strands, and he rubbed his hands calmly over the powerful, lean back. Without hesitating, he pressed a kiss on Nien’s tousled hair before he leaned his head against it. “He’ll wake up again, honey! He will not leave you. We both will not leave you – ever!”

His gaze wandered once again to the stasis chamber and the boyish face bathed in blue light. ‘Wake up, Joaquin. Your ‘big bro’ needs you. He needs you to live, to join this life with him, to become part of this new century, too. Don’t give up, child. A whole new world awaits you!’ he thought, hoping his silent words would somehow reach the young Augment.

Hidden from Jim and Khan, two other men had listened to the whole story and watched them now.

ST***ST

Hikaru Sulu had somehow managed to rise when he woke up and heard his captain’s hushed voice nearby. It was night on the ship, yet Kirk was up and obviously at Khan’s side – not a good sign given the little information Sulu received from McCoy. It seemed that one of Khan’s crew, now aboard the Enterprise, was in danger. And the helmsman had a good idea what would happen if the other Augment died.

On quiet feet, weak-kneed, and a little bit dizzy, Sulu walked into the main compartment of medbay; curiosity, but also concern prompted him. As he drew nearer, he recognized Khan’s deep voice, and he stopped as he realized that the Augment was speaking of his past – of the day he and the others
escaped the science labs where they had been bred.

With mounting dread and compassion, but also with shock and outrage, he listened to the tale, barely believing the events of three centuries ago. It was almost unfathomable that people would play with the fire as they did, messing with human DNA. And then they feared and hated the results, laying all the blame for the events on the Augments. Murder was the nastiest of crimes, but killing little children was another level of despicable. Was it any wonder that so many Augments had snapped and tried to gain the upper hand over their former tormentors and the rest of humankind? Not one of the enhanced men and women had experienced anything but cruelty from those who bred them. It was rather a miracle that Augments were able to show compassion and love at all.

Sulu continued to listen. He felt himself caught in the tale Khan told, and only when he felt a hand on his shoulder, stopping him, did he realize that he was about to walk straight into the room where Khan and Kirk sat. He turned his head to see McCoy beside him – pale, with eyes red from exhaustion, but he was tense. To his surprise, the CMO spared him any embarrassment and didn’t order him back to bed. With shocked fascination, McCoy followed Khan’s story, too; both officers began to understand the superhuman a little better than they did before.

As the former dictator came to the end of his tale, his voice caught as he expressed his fear of losing his ‘little brother’. Sulu couldn’t help himself and stepped nearer. His gaze found his captain and the Augment sitting side-by-side – and more. Kirk had wrapped Khan in a tight embrace and… kissed his hair? Then Hikaru heard Jim call the Augment ‘honey’. He watched the enhanced man not only accept the tender comfort, but he clung to Kirk who held him even closer.

An audible ‘click’ sounded in Sulu’s mind. He turned his attention away from the two men and looked at McCoy, who only nodded, shrugged, and finally made an inviting gesture towards the separate room where Hikaru was staying, signaling that he ought to return to bed.

Sulu obeyed – confusion churning and full of questions that he wouldn’t get answers to this night…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

I often thought about the idea, how the Augments escaped their ‘watchers’ – their guards, their coaches, their tormentors. That they would plan the whole thing was out of question and that it hadn’t happened without violence is understandable too, yet there had to be certain events that ‘formed’ them for what came later: Hate or protectiveness, peace or war. I imagined how Khan met Joaquin for the first time and why they got so
close to each other – why Khan is Joaquin’s ‘older brother’. I know that the prospect of these scientists killing the ‘new generation’ of Augments sounds horrible and behind comprehension, but then I became aware of the cruel fact that the Augments were nothing else than lab-rats in the eyes of their creators – non-human creatures and therefore without any rights (even without the rights of being alive after they fulfilled their services or could become a danger).

When you look in labs today there are still experiments on living beings and there are over and over again reports of illegal experiments even on humans – reports which vanish within a few days to be never be read-able ever again. Gene Roddenberry knew or thought about those things long before we were able to de-code the human DNA, yet he created with his ‘Augments’ the brutal outcome of what happens when scientists are playing God in a role that doesn’t fit.

In my story Khan is more a victim than everything else and he went a long way from being a caged youth in labs to the superhuman warrior with a new-found heard and soul like he is now. You all got glimpses or short episodes from his past, but never the key-experience that transformed the enhanced teen into the fighter we all know. I hope that you, despite all the violence and cruelty, are liking my vision of the day he and the others escaped their tormentors and how he and Joaquin met for the first time.

The next chapter will bring the decision about Joaquin’s fate, Luengo and Norton are going to realize that they are about to be in deep water if they don’t act soon, and then… Well, you’ll have to wait ‘til the next update.

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so much for the feedback. I can imagine what the background-story of Khan and the others during their escape from the labs as teens has done to you – or how he and Joaquin met for the first time. I think, the way the scientists and guards from those labs acted and never saw humans in the Augments, was a kind of self-defense, because otherwise they would have been never able to breed, rise and tested them like they had to. I know, that’s no excuse; rather a proof to what humans are capable of. And those men and women’s point of view and regards concerning the Augments hasn’t come to an end in the 23rd century, as you will learn in the new chapter.

I’m sure you’ll be outraged again in the end, but I also can promise some sweet and loveable scenes, combined with some humor and compassion.

Therefore I didn’t want to waste any more words.

Have fun

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 64 – Anxious hours

Carol Marcus lay awake in her quarters; staring at the dark ceiling like she had done so very often within the last two weeks. She simply couldn’t believe what she had witnessed this evening: Jim and Khan were a couple! There was no doubt about it. Hell, Kirk had more or less admitted it as he didn’t protest at her suggestion, which had been unmistakable.

She had known that Jim Kirk was a man with a strong sexuality, yet he had the reputation of being a lady’s man. Sweet Lord, she knew four girls who had had the pleasure to share his bed once or twice, and she had watched him flirting a lot, but to think now that he was together with a man was simply unbelieving.

And not with a casual man. No, of course not. Jim Kirk did never ‘casual’. No, he was together with Khan of all people. The two were a couple – more even, Carol was certain that both were in love with each other. The way they acted while the younger Augment’s life was at stake spoke volumes. Kirk had called Khan ‘baby’ and ‘honey’, and the superhuman had not broken his neck for being titled like this. Rather the opposite. Khan had leant into Kirk, seeking comfort – displaying a
weakness like this that was so out of place it had to be real, because even Khan couldn’t put on a
show like that, even with his actor abilities. The two were so familiar with each other that it would
have been cute to watch them, if not one of them would be a wanted man on the run. And even
more, Leonard seemed to know about them and was obviously okay with this insanity!

How could he? Jim Kirk was not only risking his career, but also his freedom for the Augment-
leader – and this not only because he wanted real justice for the tormented man, but also because
they were lovers.

Carol rubbed her face.

And as if this whole mess wasn’t fucked-up enough, no, Kirk had taken Khan’s crew aboard. Right,
she understood that their lives had been at stake – that Luengo had given the order to kill them what
wasn’t right in her opinion – yet to take them away to some unknown planet where they would be
re-awakened was crazy at best. 72 superhumans – 73 with Khan – would roaming the galaxy could
only end in a catastrophe! How could Jim be so careless? Yes, love makes blind – the old saying was
right – but Kirk was a damn Starfleet captain! He wore one of the greatest responsibilities on his
shoulders, not only for his crew and his ship, but also for the whole Federation. How could he risk
the inner stability and peace like this by setting so many Augments free? Augments, which were
party certainly condemned on Earth for crimes during the Eugenic Wars!

“You’ve lost your mind, Jim Kirk,” she whispered. “Khan realized and caught you at your biggest
weakness and lulled you in. He tricked you into believing him – into helping him to recover his
crew. And with this boy maybe surviving we’ve not one but two Augments walking free around
aboard.” She closed her eyes. “God, we’ll all regret this sooner or later!”

Sleep didn’t find her easily in this night.

ST***ST***ST

“Captain, we’re closing the distance to the Enterprise within the next ten minutes!” The voice of
Commander Ben Taylor tore Lawrence Styles out of his sleep. With a groan he sat up; realizing that
he had fallen asleep at his desk. An unpleasant tugging and burning in his shoulders and back
punished him for the unusual place to take a nap.

He had gone to his quarter at 2300 board-time; instructing to call him as soon as they would be close
to the Enterprise what was expected to be around 0300 – later than originally thought, because Kirk
seemed to have ordered a zigzag-course that was not easy to follow. The bastard knows that without
a working SDD he is readable and tries an old trick to escape any purchasers. Wrong thought,
farm-boy, I’ll get you!” had been Lawrence’s reaction to this all.

But as he glanced now on the chronometer at his nightstand he saw that it was already 0425. And only now they were closing up at the Enterprise? Dammit! He had hoped to have Kirk, his senior officers and that creature in his brig by now!

“I’m on my way,” he said and cursed after he shut off the link and rose; feeling every bone of his body, while his neck and back gave him hell. To sleep at the desk wasn’t really the best you can do. “Shall the devil take you, Kirk! All this because of you!”

Five minutes later he appeared on the bridge. Only Taylor and Wilson, the helmsman, were present from the alpha-shift, following Styles’ earlier order. He wanted to have the chief of the science department on the sensors and one of Luengo’s men at the helm when the Excalibur would reach the Enterprise. Kirk was famous for his tricks and Styles didn’t want to take any risk with the treacherous other captain.

“Distance?” he demanded without and greeting.

“Eighty thousand three hundred kilometer, sir,” Taylor reported from his science station; feeling uncomfortable. He and Li agreed in their awareness that something was absolutely wrong here!

“Right! Tortinio?” Lawrence snapped at the young comms officer. “Prepare to call the alpha-shift to bridge on my command.” The he returned his attention back to the main screen. “Maximum zoom!” he demanded and stemmed his fists in the hips; waiting for the sight of the Enterprise.

Nothing!

There was nothing except for the depths of space and the shimmer of the surrounding star systems.

Styles frowned and turned toward the science station. “Do our scanners still read them?”

“Yes, Captain, the source of the warp signature is straight ahead,” Ben affirmed.

Confused Lawrence glared at Wilson. “Are the camera correct adjusted, Lieutenant?”
“Aye, sir, view straight ahead.”

“And are we on the correct course?”

“Again affirmative, sir!”

Even if it changed nothing Styles walked closer to the main screen; his eyes roamed over the picture. “Where is he?” he whispered “Where is Kirk?”

Taylor bent again over his scanner and watched the readouts. “Sir, the warp signature is absolutely identical with that of the Enterprise – and we’ve closed distance to her to thirty two thousand kilometer. We have to see her.”

“Yes,” Styles growled. “And pray to tell where she is?”

“Captain, my sensors are catching something – an object where the Enterprise should be,” Wilson reported; watching his own scanners which were programmed for the shapes of other vessels or objects they came along.

“What is it?”

Wilson frowned and turned slowly around. “I don’t know, sir, but it isn’t a starship of the size of a Constitution cruiser.”

“I have it my viewer now, Captain,” Taylor called.

“On the screen!” Styles demanded; a very bad gut-feeling awoke in him.

The view on the screen changed and showed – a small, longish metallic object that raced with warp 3 through space.
“A… a telemetry-probe?” Styles gasped; recognizing the object instantly. He whirled around to Taylor. “What the heck…” he began, baffled and outraged.

“I scan it through, sir,” Ben said. “It’s a standard telemetry-probe and given its identity-number it belongs… to the Enterprise.” He straightened his shape and glanced down at Styles. “It’s the source of the warp-signature – programmed to send it.”

“What?” Lawrence’s voice was far too high, while he looked with wide eyes at his science officer, before he sharply turned back towards the screen. “We followed a probe the whole time?”

“Captain,” Ensign Tortinio called from his communication station. “I receive an audio signal from the probe. It was activated as Commander Taylor made the full-scan of it.”

“On the speakers!” Lawrence snapped.

“Hi Lawrence,” the cheerful tenor of James Kirk sounded through the bridge. “Hope you don’t mind the little April-joke. I know, it’s too early for that, but – hey – I always was quicker than you. Don’t take your anger out at your crew; that would be bad form. Merry Christmas and till next time. Kirk out.”

The transmission ended and there was nothing to hear on the bridge except for the static from the speakers, the soft noises of the stations’ computers and the ragged breath of Styles. His face was deep red and his whole frame trembled with shame and fury.

Tricked!

James Kirk had tricked him again – and he stood here now like a fool.

“Shot this damn probe into pieces!” he gritted out between clenched teeth, before he slowly turned towards Tortinio. “And then try to get Admiral Luengo in the line. Patch him through to my quarters, scrambled line!”

Without another glance he left the command center; his whole being burnt with humiliation. He even thought he would feel the mocking glances of the other officers on his back as he stepped into the turbo-lift. He made it to his quarters before his control slipped. The door had barely closed as he balled his fists, threw his head back into the neck and then his scream echoed from the walls.
“KIIIIIIIRK!”

ST***ST***ST

“Oh – God dammit!” Bones had the certain feeling that his back muscles were tearing apart, while his neck thought it would be a good idea to change into a broom-stick – a very thick broom-stick with no chance of bending it. The same time his shoulders joined the little rebellion and sent little flashed straight through his forehead and temples.

Jesus, he of all people should know it better than to fall asleep at the desk – a desk covered with data chips, print outs and several sheets of hand-written notes he had worked on for it seemed an eternity. His tired gaze found the chronometer at the wall. It showed 0418 ship’s time.

Dammit again! He should have watched the boy’s bio-signals instead of falling asleep! Nervous he glanced at the screen that showed the readouts of the stasis chamber and sighed in relief as he saw that Joaquin’s state had stabilized. The chances for the boy’s survival were good.

Groaning like his own grandfather McCoy raised – also with the grace of his father’s old man – and tapped out of his office down the main area and into the room where the stasis chamber was. His gaze immediately found the two figures hunched on the chairs – Jim with his head on Khan’s shoulder and obviously asleep, the superhuman looked with an unreadable expression at the figure behind the observation glass, but turned around as he heard McCoy’s quiet footsteps.

Leonard hesitated for a second as he took in the ashen-grey, small face and saw the barely hidden fright in the Augment’s eyes. He could understand to what Khan had been through within the last hours. Uncertainty was always worse than anything else and to fear permanently for someone dear was pure hell. McCoy knew of what he thought. He had been through this in the two weeks he fought for Jim’s life after their first encounter with the genetically engineered man.

Nodding at Khan he stifled a yawn, while he closed the distance to the screen and took a long critical look at the newest readouts – they showed the same like the records at his terminal. Feeling Khan’s glance almost burning at his back he drove his attention back to the Augment and grinned, “His state has stabilized. His biosignals are within the standard parameter of someone being in stasis, heartbeat at 8 per minute, pulse and breath are regular.” He saw the superhuman’s eyes widening with something that was more than hope, and smiled, “I think he’ll make it.”

For a long moment Khan didn’t react at all. How often had he sat at the bed of one of his family
members, not knowing if the enhanced healing process of their race would be enough to save his brother or sister? And this wasn’t the first time he watched over Joaquin when the boy was injured. Yet every time was one too much; every time he had blamed himself – asking himself if there hadn’t been anything he could have done to prevent this. He would never get used to the fear that roamed through him when one of his own was sick or at mortal risk.

After sitting here for hours, McCoy’s words were like a balm for him – a redemption for his troubled soul. A sigh escaped him that sounded far too much like a suppressed sob, before the former dictator closed his eyes in nameless relief.

Reacting on pure instinct and driven by the deep rooted sympathy he held for almost anyone, Bones reached out and placed a hand on the strong shoulder and squeezed it; a gesture of understanding and comfort.

Jim stirred, mumbled something and began to blink, even if Khan hadn’t moved much at all. Fascinated Leonard heard his friend mumbling a “Whatisis?” and realized that Kirk must have felt his lover’s emotions which woke him up. And not for the first time the CMO asked himself how strong this mental bond really was – and how it would feel to be linked to someone like this.

He met Jim’s glassy, tired eyes and explained, “As it seems the boy is over the worst.”

That was enough to chase the rests of dreamland away and Kirk straightened his shape. “Really? He… OUCH!” With a grown he gripped for his neck, only to moan again as his arms began to protest, while his back told him in its own unmistakable way what it meant to sleep like this.

McCoy chuckled. “Well, I think it’s about time to stand a few hypos and…”

“Not for me!” Jim growled instantly and lifted a defiant hand.

Bones rolled his eyes. “Infant!” Then he watched Khan rising and stepping to the stasis chamber, and for a long moment both officers fell silent – not wanting to disturb the Augment.

Nien’s gaze didn’t waver one second away from the boyish features in front of him.

Safe!
Joaquin was about to survive the incident!

His little brother wouldn’t die – not now! And not in the near future!

From one to the other second he felt exhaust – exhaust like rarely before. His bright, calculating mind realized immediately that the sudden tiredness was resulting from the enormous tension within the last hours, yet his soul and heart didn’t care.

An arm was wrapped around him and a yaw was placed on his left shoulder, while warm breath danced over his cheek. “Knew he would kick the Grim Reaper in the ass to remain with you,” Jim whispered and pressed a lovingly kiss against Nien’s still cold cheek.

Khan nodded slowly, barely trusting his own voice as he murmured, “Yes.”

McCoy stepped beside them and also watched the young Augment, illuminated by the blue stasis-field. “I think we should give his body an hour more to get used to the heightening functions before we initiate the wakening-process.” He glanced at Khan. “What’s your opinion?”

“I agree,” the Augment answered hoarsely; fighting down the impulse to demand an earlier beginning of the process. He longed to see those big brown eyes opening again and to hear the cheerful voice that always had been able to lift his sometimes dark moods. He had waited so long for this to happen, a few hours more wouldn’t hurt, yet it would require all his control.

Jim looked at him as he felt and even saw the battle of eagerness and logic Nien was going through. ‘So much like Spock, yet they are so different,’ he thought; rubbing his mate’s back with his still bandaged hand.

The wakening process began an hour later. McCoy had called Dr. N’Halloo to assist him. The Andorian physician was a specialist for stasis-procedures and also knew about Khan’s true heritage and of his crew’s presence aboard. Together they initiated the process, watched by Khan with hawk-eyes. Even tired as he was Jim remained with them; not even thinking of leaving his mate to face the next hours alone. Kirk was no doctor, but even he knew about the critical phases within the whole procedure. Like a solid rock in a stormy sea he stood beside Nien; his sheer presence was enough to give the Augment again the hold he needed – enhanced genes or not.

McCoy had calculated five or six hours until Joaquin’s body would be adjusted to the standard
functions of his body – if everything ran smooth, that’s it. And the CMO and Dr. N’Halro were more than perplex as after three hours and fifty two minutes the readouts told them that the young Augment’s body functions worked flawless and in the usual parameters.

Watching the screen at the stasis chamber’s terminal Bones pursed his lips, while Khan stepped beside him. “How long has it lasted for you as Marcus woke you up?” Leonard asked quietly and the superhuman took a deep breath.

“I’m not sure. I regained conscious, found Marcus and two other men looking down at me, reassuring me that I was ‘safe’ and the next time I woke up with my mind in place but with still arching muscles, it was eight or nine hours later – given what Marcus said, but who can tell if he stuck to the truth?” He rubbed his neck. “I’ve to admit that I have no real experiences given the period of time we need to regain full function. Two of my friends agreed to some tests I did, but they remained only for two weeks in cryosleep before I re-woke them. Joaquin was about 264 years in cryosleep. I lack of data to tell you how long he will need to regain full conscious and body functions.”

Bones grimaced. “You sound like Spock.”

“Mr. Singh prefers to speak in rational ways, Doctor. Of course you’ve problems with understanding that!” the deep voice of the first officer sounded from the door.

Jim, who had dozen off again on his chair, lifted his head and looked sleepily at his Vulcan friend. “Spock, s’everything right?” he mumbled, and found himself in the focus of the brown eyes, which softened.

“Yes, Captain. Alpha-shift has begun and Mr. Scott has the conn.” Then he turned towards McCoy. “Do you think it’s safe for Mr. Weiss to be removed from the stasis chamber?”

Bones nodded. “Yeah, I think so. BARBARA!” he yelled, what startled Kirk enough to become fully awake, while Spock winced.

“Doctor! That was unnecessary!” the Vulcan stated with a hint of irritation in his voice; his sensible hearing still ringed from the CMO’s shout.

A Rigelian nurse stepped at the threshold. “Barbara is still off duty, Doctor. May I assist you?” she asked kindly and Leonard sighed. “Yes, Chayrha, is the second private room prepared?”
The nurse nodded. “Yes, sir. The bio-bed is connected with your terminal, thermo blankets are ready and I also placed two chairs in the room.” She gave her captain a knowing glance, who simply smiled at her – too tired to care for professional behavior.

“Thanks,” McCoy murmured, then he turned towards Khan. “I think you prefer that it will be you, who carries the boy into his new life?”

Nien nodded. “Thanks,” he whispered, his whole being was filled with wariness but also joy.

Bones took a deep breath too. “Right, now it counts!” he murmured and began to lower the stasis field, while the chamber was filled with more fresh air.

“Body temperature at 36.5, heart rate at 58,” N’Halro reported the readouts. “Breath normal.”

Bones nodded. “Initiate the stasis’ shut-off now,” he said; his fingers rushed over the touch screen that controlled the stasis-system. “Ready for opening in 60 seconds.”

It was the longest minute of Khan’s life – or so he thought. He barely dared to breath, his whole body was tensed like bow ready to let an arrow fly. New fear flowed his heart and soul; knowing that this was the most critical part now.

The countdown seemed to be madding slowly. Every time the Augment looked at the display he thought at least a minute must have gone by, in truth the countdown had lessened only by a few seconds. Then his gaze stayed fixed on his little brother, willing him to hold on.

“Countdown zero, ready to open stasis chamber,” McCoy said and with a small hiss the large tube’s hatch opened.

“Body function still normal,” the Andorian told them, then he smiled. “You did it, Len.”

“Let us better say that the boy did it by not giving up.” He made an inviting gesture towards Khan. “Mr. Singh, if you want.”
For a long moment the superhuman didn’t move; almost paralyzed with the knowledge that Joaquin was well and would wake up soon. Heck, he didn’t even dared to reach out and to touch him like he had longed to do for so long, then his mind began to work properly again, and stepping beside the chamber he bent down and lifted the boy on his arms despite his bandaged hands. He still felt a little bit too cold and only now Khan saw that Joaquin’s hair had grown by an inch or two, otherwise he was like he perfectly remembered him.

Pressing the young man to his chest and relishing in feeling Joaquin’s weight he couldn’t do anything else than leaning his face against the pale, cool cheek and to take a deep breath of the familiar, painful missed scent, before he looked up again at McCoy. “Thank you,” he whispered, and the Augment in him winced at the croaking sound that was his voice all of sudden.

Leonard smiled at him; understanding fully what the superhuman had to feel now. “You’re welcome,” he said; feeling almost lightheaded that the young man was still alive, what made him aware of the immense guilt that had plagued him since the moment Joaquin’s cryotube failed. There was no proof if the malfunction really resulted in his opening the tube last year. It also could be basing on the phaser blast that grazed the cryotube during the incident on Gamma 12, yet McCoy simply had this gut-feeling that the whole mess within the last hours was partly his fault – a fault that could have easily cost the boy’s life.

He cleared his throat and gestured towards the door. “Come on, I’ll show you where you can tug him in.” He was about to leave but as he heard no footsteps behind him, he turned around again – and felt deeply touched, as he watched Khan stopping in front of Kirk and heard him whispering, “Jim, may I introduce my little brother to you?”

The CMO wasn’t the only one, who was moved by this gesture. Kirk felt the same as he reached out and let his wrapped fingers glide through the brown, shoulder long hair of the boy who was at the threshold of manhood. “Hi there,” he murmured to the sleeping young superhuman. “You have no clue what your big bro went through to get you back. And there I thought I was trouble at your age,” he added with a soft chuckle. Then he lifted his gaze and the two men looked at each other – relieved, happy and even with a little bit wonder in their eyes.

Then Jim stepped aside and made room for the former dictator, who quickly strode to the door and followed McCoy into the main area; Kirk and Spock were instantly at their heels.

A minute later Khan lowered Joaquin to the bio-bed in a small private room that was usually reserved for the senior officers or important guests should something happening to them. Feeling like the seventeen old teen from all those years again, Nien gripped for the thermo blanket and spread it over his little brother; tugging him in like he did after their flight from the labs in New Delhi. Reaching out, he stroked through the thick brown hair lovingly; swallowing a rising lump in his throat as he listened to the even breath of the younger one.
McCoy watched the monitor above the bed and smiled reassuringly at the Augment. “He is still stable, but deeply asleep. That’s good. His body has come to terms with the changes now.” He turned around to give Khan some privacy, who had sat down on the bed’s edge and was still stroking the boy’s head and cheeks. ‘Shall somebody tell me ever again Augments are unfeeling creatures! This man is so full of love I wonder that he doesn’t simply explode with it.’

His gaze found his two friends, of whom one looked like he was ready to drop to the floor to snore like a bear in winter-rest, while the other one watched the two superhumans with mere fascination.

“Rrrright,” Bones stated and fixed Kirk was his best doctor-stare. “Two possibilities, Captain. You go to your quarters and will sleep for the next ten hours…”

“Beta-shift starts in less than eight hours and…”

“Or,” McCoy continued like he hadn’t heard Jim at all, “I ask Spock to nerve-pin you and put you in bed somewhere in medbay, keeping you asleep until I’m satisfied that you’re rested enough.”

Kirk gaped at him. “Do you think it wise to threaten your commanding officer?”

“Do you think it wise to command a starship in a serious crisis with barely open eyes and a mump mind that is one step away to get lost in Morpheus’ Realm?” Leonard countered; lifting both brows.

Jim stemmed his hands in his waist – and cursed a moment later as his fingers and palms promptly began to sting. Glaring daggers at McCoy he replied arrogantly, “Spock would never do such a thing!”

“If your health depends on it, he would,” Bones retorted dryly. “Alternative I can also hypo you, but…”

“None of this will be necessary, Doctor,” Spock cut in; feeling obliged to step into that little discussion. “The captain knows that his ship needs him refreshed and will not be unreasonable.”

Kirk stared wide eyed at him. “You know that this is a mean trick?”
“I fail to see the reason for that statement, Captain. You are a reasonable man, aren’t you?”

“Yeah – and I’m the queen of England,” Bones snorted, but shut up as he received even three glares this time.

“Jim,” Khan said softly, before the discussion could continue. “Dr. McCoy and Mr. Spock are right. Lie down and find some sleep. Joaquin will not wake within the next hours and the Enterprise needs her captain.” He nodded towards the chairs. “And to sleep on one of them again will do your back and neck no good. Not that I mind to give you a massage, but it’s better when there is no healing reason to spoil you.” He winked at him, what made Jim smile, Bones groan and Spock sighing soundlessly.

“’kay,” Kirk murmured and glanced at McCoy. “You wake me if something changes here, Bones. And this not a requirement, but an order!” he added firmly.

“Aye, Captain,” the CMO answered like a good officer should – and Jim couldn’t help but felt a little bit teased. Then he glanced at Spock. “The same goes for you, my friend. Off to your quarters and find some rest. And this is an order, too!”

The Vulcan only lifted his two brows now and clasped his hands on his back. “You don’t have to worry for me, Captain. As I already told you several times by now Vulcans don’t…”

“Oh, but I’m only a simple human, Mr. Spock, and I do worry for you – and for me, too, because I think Uhura is going to scratch my eyes out if I don’t insist of you finding some rest and to share some spare time with her.”

For a moment Spock only glanced at him, before Jim got another dose of Vulcan, officially not existing yet very present humor. “Even if I witnessed some tendency of battle-will in Lieutenant Uhura I don’t think she would be furious enough to inflict any harm on you, Captain.”

In the background Khan laughed quietly; feeling the heavy weight lifting more and more from his shoulders. McCoy shook his head in amusement. “Don’t underestimate our language-genius, Spock!” he teased. “The lioness always fights for her mate, despite the strengths of the opponent.”

“A very colorful metaphor, Doctor McCoy, but to speak in the same way: There are already two lions aboard – one even wears this feline’s name – and they have all hands full with keeping each
other out of harm’s way. I don’t think that Lieutenant Uhura dares to come between them only to protect a le-matya.”

“A le-matya?” Bones asked perplex. “Don’t tell me she calls you that in private!”

Spock was far above an answer, but Kirk burst out laughing, while he winked at a very amused Khan, whose face began to lose some of its ashen color.

“That was really too much information,” Leonard grumbled. “Jim, I need you sign my requirement for a shore leave. I’ve some schooling in veterinarian medicine to do. As a CMO I’ve to be fit to treat all crew-members, even lions and Vulcan predators.”

“I suggest against such a step, Doctor;” Spock prepared his comeback. “Given your usual way of handling patients you wouldn’t survive the treatment of a lion – or a le-matya – longer than a half minute.”

McCoy’s yaw almost hit the floor and for once he was speechless.

“Good day Doctor,” the Vulcan said with a hint of arrogance and before the CMO could regain his composure, the first officer vanished after a greeting nod at Jim and Khan.

Kirk laughed even more. “God may prevent you two from bickering,” he snickered after he regained some control.

McCoy only glared at him, before he firmly pointed towards the door. “Good night, Jim, and I don’t want to see your ass in medbay within the next ten hours!”

“Unless something changes with Joaquin’s state!” Kirk reminded him; feeling a rush of protectiveness concerning the young Augment.

“I call you if something happens,” Khan said quietly, before he hesitated. “I’m in beta-shift, too, Jim, but…”

“Your place is here beside your little brother, Nien. I don’t want that the boy gets a whole culture
shock when he wakes up without anyone familiar near him. You’re off duty until Joaquin has adjusted towards his surrounding at least a little bit.” He looked to Leonard. “Good work, Bones. Thank you! I’m really glad that you were able to save the boy. Night.”

He turned to leave, but Nien’s voice held him back for one more moment. “Jim?” As he met the sky-blue eyes of his mate, he smiled gently, “Thank you for staying. You cannot grasp what that meant for me.”

A glance full of tender love and an “I think I do, honey. Good night,” was the gentle reply, then Kirk left medbay, only to realize that Spock had waited outside for him. Together they strolled down the hallway.

“Given my calculations the Excalibur must have reached the probe by now,” the Vulcan said, and Jim began to grin.

“Yeah, I would love to see Styles’ face when he gets my message as soon as the Excalibur’s sensors have scanned the probe thoroughly.” He smirked broadly. “I guess he felt his leg pulled.”

“I agree,” Spock nodded. He had been present as Jim recorded the message that was programmed along with the altering course and the transmission of the Enterprise’s warp signature in the probe. “I think the chance to count him to your friends has even lessened.”

Kirk laughed out again. He really loved the dry humor Spock displayed from time to time. “I would give a whole month salary if I could witness his reaction – or that of Luengo as soon as he learns of the little trick.” He looked at his first officer. “Is the second probe ready?”

“Yes, it’s ready to be sent out at your command.”

Pursing his lips Jim mused, “I think we should let them stuck in the dark a little bit longer, before we give them the next track. Do you think sending the probe out tomorrow at alpha-shift beginning would be good?”

“I lack of exact data to calculate the best outcome of the next step, but given Luengo’s reactions until now, I think we shouldn’t let him think too much about our destiny. His is very intelligent as you know.”
Jim nodded. “Hm, then this evening – at 2000?”

“There is nothing that speaks against it, Captain,” the Vulcan replied, before both men stopped at the crossway where their paths would separate. Kirk smiled affectionate at his T’hy’la. “Thank you for taking my shift, Spock,” Jim said quietly. “I appreciate this gesture very much. You were right; Nien needed me there with him during these difficult hours.”

The brown eyes betrayed once more that the Vulcan had more emotions he was ready to admit. “You both needed this,” he voiced the unspoken truth. Then he bowed his head. “Good night, Jim.”

“Good night, Spock,” Kirk replied, squeezed the Vulcan’s arm for a moment and continued his way to his quarters; stifling a yawn. Several minutes later he fell into bed like a stone; hoping that Joaquin would wake up soon.

ST***ST***ST

“Kirk did WHAT?” Norton stared disbelieving at Luengo, who sat at his desk in the Headquarters and nodded grimly.

“He sent out a probe that faked the Enterprise’s warp-signature and Styles promptly tumbled in his trap. Not that I can blame him. No-one could have anticipated the truth. I read the report and had a look at the scanner readouts Styles transferred to me. There was no way in hell to tell a difference between the telemetry-probe’s transmission and a real warp-signature.” He gripped for his cup of coffee. “Kirk is clever, I have to give him that!” He took a sip before he added, “I tried to hail him, but the Enterprise doesn’t answer. Kirk knows that he’s being hunted and will not break the silence until he is there where he heads for – wherever this may be.”

Albert leant back on the visitor chair. “In other words, we have absolutely no clue where Kirk is now.”

José nipped at his coffee. “Exactly! I’ve sent a new code to every ship in the fleet and ordered them to look out for the Enterprise and to scan the sub-space for any transmissions which could be sent from her. Kirk must have a destiny – a place he races to and where he can hide Khan and his crew; maybe even himself and his senior officers.”

Frowning Norton cocked his head. “How was the reaction? I mean, Kirk is popular and he made a lot of friends among the fleet within the last year.”
“I told them that Kirk has gone rough – that he snapped after all he has been through within the last weeks. I don’t care if they buy it or not. They have to follow my order, end of story. At least the Council is very worried concerning our flag-ship being in the hand of a man who turned mad after his captivity in Klingon hands and the incidents on Aldebaran. They have no reason to distrust me.”

Albert pursed shortly his lips. “Are you sure?”

The Chief in Command sighed. No, he wasn’t sure, but he would never admit it. “There are everywhere critical people, even among the Council. I told them that I want to get Kirk to help him – to make certain that he gets the medical treatment he needs to overcome the traumata he fell prey to.” He bent forwards. “And maybe he really has turned crazy to support this creature – to befriend it even. And his senior officers even support him. Well, they had a choice: Kirk or Starfleet. They chose Kirk, so their fate is sealed.” He placed the cup back on the desk. “As much as I regret to take this step, but as soon as we learn about the Enterprise’s whereabouts Starfleet is going to be in need for a new flagship.”

Norton took a deep breath. “You want to destroy her,” he stated and Luengo grimaced.

“Not the solution I had originally in mind, but I see no other way anymore. We can’t take the risk that Kirk really escapes and stirs up the Council against me – us! Maybe we get the chance to size the Enterprise so that your scientists have the chance to get Khan back, but if not they have to deal with the fact that they have to re-produce his cells synthetically, because he will die along with his new friend Kirk and all the others.”

Albert sighed heavily, before he murmured, “To destroy the Enterprise, you first have to find her.”

Luengo rolled his eyes. “I know – and I’m working on it!” He rose from his chair. “Starfleet Intelligence is the best equipped and technical most enhanced intelligence in the alpha- and beta-quadrant. Not even the Romulans are better, and that tells something given their excellent spies. The devil himself would have his way with us, if there isn’t a possibility to find our own flagship!”

ST***ST***ST

He felt cold, even if he realized that he was tugged into something warm and comforting. He smelled air – not fresh one but climatic cleaned air. The next he became aware of were silent sounds of devices, some beeping nearby, soft steps in another room and quite murmurs, muffled by walls.
Where was he? What happened? Where was…

His confused mind stopped to rattle those questions as he felt a familiar, strong presence.

He tried to open his eyes but, as he realized, his body didn’t obey him like he was used to. Only after the third attempt his lids fluttered and he groaned as light bombarded his sensible optic nerves.

In the next moment two warm, slender hands caught his in an all too known way, while a deep baritone whispered his name.

Joaquin…

Yes, this was his name. And the man who called him was…

“Noo?” he croaked out, his mouth too dry and his vocal chords too unused for a long time to bring out something clear.

Khan felt a wave of overjoyed relief as he saw how his little brother’s eyelids moved, while he heard this silly nick-name his closest brothers and sisters had never skipped to use in private. His eyes began to burn with unshed tears as he bent over Joaquin, cupped the boy’s cheek with one, still bandaged hand and gave into the impulse to press a kiss on the still cool forehead. He sensed the family-link between them brimming with new life, felt the confusion but blind trust of the younger Augment and gulped down another lump in his throat.

And then, finally, Joaquin opened his eyes – glassy, bewildered, teary because of the brightness around him.

“Computer, reduce light on 30 percent!” the former dictator ordered and the lights were immediately dimmed.

“Better?” he murmured; not stopping to stroke Joaquin’s cheek.
A slow nod was the answer, accompanied by more confusion – a perfect normal reaction, as Khan knew all too well. “Take your time,” he said softly. “You’ve slept very long and your body has to adjust to its normal functions.”

Again Joaquin could only nod. Questions lurked at the edge of his mind, but he was too groggy to even formulate them, let alone to voice them. He saw the beloved face of his older brother above him. He also realized that Noo looked different a little bit, but he couldn’t put a finger on it.

Sleep was calling him, luring him, whispered with seducing comfort at him, and he gave into it; simply knowing that as long as Noonien was with him he was safe.

Khan watched how the boy’s eyes closed again, before Joaquin snuggled deeper into the blankets – his face utterly relaxed and peaceful. This was a healthy sleep, this much Nien could tell, even without having a further look at the readouts at the monitor above the biobed.

Smiling and thanking inwardly everyone who maybe was indeed there, he watched his little brother, before he rose to tell McCoy about the short time Joaquin had been awake.

ST***ST

The day went on quickly. At the late midday McCoy had removed the bandages from Khan’s hand which were as good as healed by now. Afterwards he had convinced the superhuman to get something to eat in the next close mess hall, and afterwards the former dictator had begun to examine the failed cryotube – worrying that the same mistake that initiated the malfunction could repeat itself at one of the other tubes.

Scotty offered his help, as he checked the state of an ensign of his department, who had tumbled down a ladder from a Jeffrey tube and was treated in medbay. Khan accepted the Scotsman’s offer, not only because he didn’t want to irritate the man he had come to respect, but also because four eyes always saw more than two. That went even for Augments, and even if he was the constructor of the cryotubes, Scott’s knowledge of today’s technics was a welcome support.

McCoy felt nervous while the two men disassembled the cryotube; expecting every minute to face an enraged superhuman, but nothing like this happened. Rather the opposite. Scotty took some parts with him to investigate them more and Khan returned to Joaquin’s bed, waiting for the boy to wake up.

Jim, who had taken the conn in time as beta-shift begun, checked in with medbay shortly to learn how Joaquin was doing. In the meantime Bones removed the bandages from his hands and realized
to his astonishment that the healing process was in full progress. As it seems Khan’s doping-cocktail was still working little miracles at the captain.

Kirk was glad to learn that the boy had already woken up once, even if he fell asleep within a minute again. This first waking up was a very good signal and Jim looked forward to receive the expected call, telling him that the young Augment was responsive.

Afterwards he had a little run-in with Dr. Green, who demanded explanations for the arresting of Finnegan and three other Elite Securities. As it seemed the scientist had tried three times to visit Finnegan, but any access to the brig had been denied. Jim told him with some flat words that those four men were accused of attempt murder of three Enterprise-officers and that he would hand them over to the authorities.

Jim really intended latter, but it wouldn’t be Starfleet Command he would deliver his prisoners to, but the Vulcan Authorities. Nurreaux was still in custody like Finnegan and the others, and every one of them had tried to murder Kirk, Spock or Khan. Kirk had a very good assumption how ‘Selek’ would react to that. Knowing ‘Prime Spock’ he would switch into full protective-mood and would take care that none of the four men would come near Jim and his friends ever again. Not for the first time Jim asked himself how anyone could believe that Vulcans were without feelings. Both Spocks controlled their emotions very well, but they existed! And, God alone knew why, he – Jim Kirk – was on the receiving end of both Vulcans’ affection.

After having a rather heated discussion with Green, Kirk finally made it to the bridge, glad that at least Chekov was still in beta-shift. He did trust the other officers too, but the main-bridge crew was built by his friends, and regarding the given situation Jim felt saver with at least one of them on the bridge during every shift.

The afternoon went by without any difficulties. The junior comms officer told him that there were a lot of transmissions on the regular Starfleet frequencies, but everyone was scrambled – obviously with a new code. Jim ordered him to record the transmissions and to pipe them down to Uhura’s terminal. He was certain that Nyota would be able to crack the new code sooner or later. Yet the whole thing made him wary. He knew that Command was on his heels and he assumed that his little trick with the probe had angered Luengo even more. They had to be even more careful now, because protocol gave some serious orders in the case of a renegade-captain and his crew. If Luengo ticked like Marcus did, it was only a question of time until every vessel of the fleet would be instructed to stop them at any price – not a pleasant prospect. Jim really didn’t want to battle with one of the own ships and he prayed that it wouldn’t come to that.

“Are you sure?” Khan stared at Scott; horrified.
The engineer looked down at the cryotube he just examined, and nodded grimly. “Aye! It’s the same like with the others. The tubes have been opened several times – and ye dunno need ter be a genius ter figure out, why.” He pointed at Joaquin’s cryotube. “His was opened only once – a year ago or so – but with the exception of four others every tube-program has been interrupted several times.” He lifted his tricorder. “I linked it to the tubes’ program and let it check every single record of them. There’s no doubt. These bastards opened them, and I dunno want ter think of the reasons.” He pressed his lips shortly into a thin line; waiting for Khan’s reaction.

He hadn’t to wait very long. Turning white in fury and with glistening eyes the Augment whirled around and headed for the exit; snarling a “Come with me!” over his shoulder.

These monsters!

These blasted, dammed monsters!

They had experimented with his crew – with his family!

They had abused his sleeping brothers and sisters for their own purpose!

He had to know what had been done to them. And there was only one way to find out. “Doctor McCoy!” he almost thundered through the medbay, storming towards the CMO’s office.

Bones sat at his desk and looked up; having all of sudden a sinking feeling in his stomach as he heard Khan’s enraged shout. ‘Here we go!’ he thought; gulping.

The same moment the former dictator stepped into his office; a not lesser enraged Scotty on his heels.

“Doctor, I ask you to make a complete check on every one of my crew!” the superhuman demanded; his eyes burned with wrath; his long hands were balled into tight fists; his breath heaved.

Bones frowned. The whole crew? But he only opened…
“I checked the whole program of the cryotube,” Scotty explained. “The phaser blast is responsible for an overloadin’ of the tube’s system in which the boy slept, and so it shut down. If ye two and the cap’n hadn’t interference in time the boy wouldn’t have made it. But there is more. The program recorded the function of the tube and it was interrupted once – approx. a year ago. And the same happened to all the other tubes, most of them were opened many times.” He watched a very tensed McCoy. “Maybe ye should check the boy through again, Doctor. He was, like the others, in the hands of Section 31 within the last two years and I really fear that these bastards ran some tests on him and the others. That would be the only explanation why his tube and the other’s tubes were opened at all.”

Nien trembled with rage; his eyes shot daggers while he addressed Leonard. “Please check Joaquin utterly through – especially his immune system. They used me to gather new antidotes by injecting me with maladies. I fear they did the same to Joaquin and the others.”

McCoy knew that he couldn’t delay the truth any longer. Taking a deep breath he looked at Scott. “Have all tubes been opened?”

“Yes,” Montgomery nodded. “A few of them only once – like that of the boy last year. The others…”

Bones lifted a hand and interrupted the engineer, before he looked straight at Khan. “I’ll check all of your people through and I require your assistance, because you know the best how the cryotubes work. I don’t want to cause any further problems.” He watched the superhuman nodding shortly, and braced himself for what would have to be said now. “Concerning Joaquin: Don’t fear that one of the scientists laid hand at him,” he continued quietly. “This wasn’t the case.” He looked from one man to the other; one blinked in confusion, the other one seemed ready to snap any moment. He took another deep breath, straightened his shoulders and revealed, “I opened Mr. Weiss’ cryotube.”

Scott looked with big eyes at him. “Ye did…? Why?”

Khan didn’t say anything, but McCoy had the uncomfortable feeling to face an angry tiger ready to strike – a very angry tiger!

“As they brought Jim’s dead body into medbay a few minutes later the dead Tribble I gave Mr. Singh’s blood came back to life. There I knew that we maybe had a chance to retrieve Jim, but for that his brain functions had to be kept stable. Stasis alone wouldn’t have done it, because stasis only works on living beings. But cryosleep means the body is frozen and so…” He took another deep breath. “And so I opened one of the cryotubes, put its habitant into stasis and replaced him with Jim’s body. It was the only way to keep his body fit for a revival until Spock would return, hopefully with you, Mr. Singh.” He moistened his lips. “I hadn’t much time to choose whom I would put into stasis. I saw that there was a young, strong man, knew that he had the best chance and so… my choice was
made.” He looked Khan straight into the eyes. “I’m sorry that you came close to lose your brother yesterday, but…”

Nien lifted a hand and stopped McCoy’s words. He had the very illogical urge to sit down and so he did – using the visitor chair. For several long seconds he didn’t say anything; the prospect of almost losing Joaquin even a year ago made him sick, but it also gave him the chills out of another reason. If the CMO hadn’t reacted like he did, he – Khan – would have never experienced the deep love of Jim Kirk. He had never come to know the young man like he did now; had never been cherished like he was within the last weeks.

“The life of one dear to me in wager with the life of another man who holds my heart,” he whispered, and closed his eyes. “Why I’m not surprised!? As if I could get anything from life without paying a high price for it!”

“Joaquin lives,” Bones pointed out. “And he is healthy and will be on his feet soon.”

“Yes,” Nien murmured and looked up at McCoy. “And thanks to you I’ve not only my little brother back, but can also call a young man with the most compassionate, warmest and biggest heart possible my mate. Yet I almost lost both – and it would have been my fault, because I got into froth.”

Scotty sympathetically reached out and laid a hand on the Augment’s shoulder. “That wasn’t yer fault, lad. Not really. Yeah, ye should work at yer control sometimes, but given the circumstances at this time everythin’ had ter go down the river. Jim’s alive and happy ter have ye in his life, yer little brother will awake soon and I’m sure that he’ll fit into that world easily. And, by the way, the good doctor wouldn’t have risked the boy’s life if he wasn’t convinced that the stasis worked for him. So, everytin’ turned out well in the end and only that counts.”

“Thanks, Scotty, yet I’ve a damn bad conscious,” Leonard murmured. “A doctor should never treat one life for another, or risk one life to save another’s. It’s contradict with a doctor’s ethic to prefer a patient, yet as I realized that there was a tiny chance to recover Jim I simply followed my instincts.” He glanced back at Khan, who watched him calmly. “You’ve any right in the world to be cross with me, yet…”

“Yet if you hadn’t acted on your friendship with Jim I would be still a lonely fighter against the whole galaxy; maybe even worse than before. It was Jim who gave me back my humanity – my soul – and for this I’ll be entirely grateful.” He rose. “I should be angry with you – not only for risking Joaquin’s life, but also not saying anything about it, yet I find myself unable to be really irritated with you, and that says something.” He shook his head and snorted, “Jim made me soft, but… it feels somehow right.” His glance found McCoy again. “At least you answered my question from more than a year ago in your own way.”
“Which question?” Bones asked quietly.

“If there is anything you wouldn’t do for your family,” Khan repeated those fateful words from the time he had been in custody aboard the Enterprise. “Jim is a kind of younger brother for you – family. And there is nothing you wouldn’t do for him, Mr. Spock or the others.”

Leonard flushed. “Well, I understand now what you meant all those months ago.” He took a deep breath. “Yet my personal feelings almost elicited another sorrowful situation.” His eyes looked straight at the Augment. “I didn’t know until two days ago that the young man I replaced Jim with was your little brother you talked of so much. I only recognized him on Gamma 12 – and it gave me quite the shock. I double-checked him but as I saw that everything ran smoothly I saw no reason to alert you. I linked every Augment to the control system and monitored them, only to be shocked as I realized that it was no-one else tube than Joaquin’s that began to fail.” He rubbed his neck. “I’m damn glad that he made it. I would have never forgiven myself, but…”

“The malfunction of the boy’s cryotube wasn’t yer fault, Leonard,” Scotty said softly. “It was the damn phaser blast, and nothin’ else. I simply informed Mr. Singh of what I found out because I thought Section 31 had used the boy as a lab-rat, too, and feared for his health. But until the cryotube quit its work the boy was never in danger.”

“At least something!” McCoy sighed, then he hesitated. His gaze found Khan. “If it is all right with you I think it would be the best if we open every tube for a minute and check everyone through with a med-tricorder – searching for injection-tracks and take a skin example. It isn’t possible to draw blood in their frozen state, but the skin cells will tell me everything I need to know about their condition. This is the easiest way to find out what exactly has been done to them. You give me their names and I compile patient files for them, recording everything I find or not find. If some of them are going to have problems after waking up I can prepare a treatment before they regain conscious, and hopefully they won’t face any malaise. You’ve my full support in this matter.”

Khan nodded slowly. “Thank you, Doctor,” he said; calming finally down a little bit.

“I also suggest that Spock should assist us, too. He may be no physician, but he’s a damn good scientist and very well-trained in recognizing pathogens of every kind. To check 72 cell-examples needs time – and we’ll reach New Vulcan in three days. So…”

“Ye mean, if the engines didn’t crap out,” Scott grumbled. “I swear, they’re howlin’ louder and louder by every hour.”
“I could offer you some patches, but I don’t think that will do the trick,” Bones dared to joke; relieved that the superhuman hadn’t snapped. As much as Khan seemed to be distant, controlled and superior, McCoy simply knew how hot the Augment’s temper boiled beneath the cool mask.

Scott had to laugh at that suggestion and felt how the tension in the room began to melt away. He glanced at Khan, who watched the CMO with a knowing look.

“If you have a bad conscious, Doctor, I can understand it, but calm down. I know you did the only thing possible at that time – and Joaquin is doing well so far, as does Jim.” Khan heard himself stating; confused that he indeed felt not real anger towards the CMO. Maybe because everything that happened saved Jim’s life, maybe because he – Khan – wouldn’t have reacted differently if would have been in McCoy’s position. How could he condemn someone who simply acted likewise?

“Okay,” Scotty nodded. “I suggest that we first have a nice dinner and afterwards we’ve a new task! You two with the sleeping beauties over there -” He shoved his thump over his shoulder, pointing at the attached room. “-and I with my babies.”

The same moment Khan felt a stirring deep in his mind and turned around. His instincts recognized what happened: Joaquin was waking up…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, at least one good thing – Joaquin is okay so far, yet he will face some real shocks (okay; just imagine waking up 264 in the future…). And I thought that it would be ‘logical’ for the scientists and Section 31 to run tests on the Augments as long as those were in the bastards’ hands. I know, this is another hard thing to imagine, but people who tick like Green or Dashwood don’t see any wrong in their deeds.

I always asked myself after STiD, whom Bones took out of cryosleep into stasis to replace Jim’s body with the guy. And really is dramatic that it could be Khan’s ‘little brother’ – a step that risked him, but on the other hand lay the foundation for the great love Nien found in Jim.

Well, and Luengo is about to realize to where Jim is off… I can promise you a lot of suspense within the next chapter, but in the following one everything will be about Joaquin and the discovery of Green running experiments on the other Augments. But
this will not be all. We also switch back to the Lexington, where something takes place you also know from the original time-line, only that this here occurred earlier because of the horrible stress the certain person, I don’t want to reveal to you just now, went through.

I hope you liked the new chapter.

Have a nice week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so very much for the feedback and to those, who are new to the story: Welcome! The story nears the utterly showdown and I can already promise a terrible rollercoaster you all have to endure soon (*evil smile*). A little taste of it comes within the new chapter, yet I hope you will enjoy it.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 65 – Horrible truth

Khan reached the little private room the moment Joaquin sighed and opened his eyes. He sped to the bed’s side and sat down, bending over his little brother. McCoy, who had followed him, stopped beside him and watched the monitor, but stayed out of the younger Augment’s field of vision. He wanted to give the two superhumans some privacy first before he made himself known.

For several moments, Joaquin looked uncomprehendingly at Khan, apparently as confused as the first time he saw him; then recognition appeared in his eyes. Moistening his lips, he needed two attempts before he was able to whisper, “Hi there, big bro.”

Khan only realized now how tense he was as another immense wave of relief washed over him. There had been the risk that the long cryosleep had damaged Joaquin’s brain or even his mind, but Nien’s fright had been for naught. The younger Augment was disoriented and would need some time before he was back to full strength, but there was no doubt that he endured the long, icy sleep without harm.

Reaching out, he combed his fingers through the thick, brown hair. “Hello, little brother,” he murmured back; wonder and joy squeezed his heart as he was able to speak again with Joaquin after all this time – after all the fear, despair and fighting he had been through to save him along with the rest of his family.
Joaquin watched the older man hovering above him, took in the familiar features, warm, loving, sea-colored eyes, the dark hair and…

“You cut your hair,” he frowned, and Khan had to chuckle. The first real sentence the boy was able to manage was about his hair. Typical Joaquin!

“Yes, it fits today’s hairstyle,” he commented dryly.

Joaquin rolled his eyes; becoming more awake with every passing second. “That hairstyle was in back in ancient Rome,” he teased, and Khan felt real amusement beginning that he’d missed over the last twenty-four hours - far too long for him.

“We are anywhere but ancient times,” he said and saw the expected curiosity sparkling in the dark eyes of his little brother while McCoy suppressed a chuckle nearby.

“The cryotubes worked,” Joaquin whispered. “You woke me, so yours worked. Are we really in the year 2020 like you wanted?”

Nien took a deep breath. “Joaquin, there are many things I have to tell you.” He saw and felt the rising anxiety in the younger Augment and continued quickly. “The automatic systems set to activate the waking process of my cryotube failed. We slept far longer than we planned to. We…”

The boy lifted his head carefully. “The others?” he asked worriedly while he took his first glance over his surroundings. He saw metallic walls, lighted devices, and heard a distant, soft buzzing like that of a machine. “Where are we?” he whispered, realizing that this looked far too strange for a room constructed by humans just twenty-four years after the Botany Bay’s start. Even if humankind had advanced, this couldn’t be their development. Then his eyes found the figure near his bed.

It was a man approximately the same age as Noo, wearing black trousers and boots with a light blue, short-sleeve tunic. His short, thick hair was a mixture of brown hues; his eyes were the same, and a kind smile played around his lips.

“Who are you?” Joaquin asked, feeling caution surging in him. This was not one of his brothers!
The strange male stepped nearer; his posture and expression communicated kindness. “Good evening, young man,” he greeted. “Nice to see you finally awake. Your big brother nearly drove me up the wall these last hours.”

Joaquin stared wide-eyed at him. The man was an unmodified human, this much he could tell, but the way he spoke about Khan was unbelievable. No one dared talk to him like that apart from his brothers and sisters. He quickly glanced at his leader and brother, and to his astonishment saw only a mixture of amusement and exasperation on his face.

The man extended his hand. “And for your question, I’m Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise. Welcome aboard and to the living, Mr. Weiss.”

Hesitantly and cautiously, Joaquin accepted the offered hand, saw his brother smile, and knew that he made the right move. For reasons unknown, Noo was relaxed in this man’s presence. Then it hit him. “Chief Medical Officer?” he asked and tensed up. “This is a military ship?”

Bones smiled. “The Enterprise is designed for exploration and fitted with weaponry in case it encounters or transits hostile areas. But we are in a safe zone now.”

Joaquin frowned. “We are at sea?” He lifted his head again. “But, I don't feel anything – no rocking.” He glanced back at Khan. “Where are the others?”

The slender, warm hand of his older brother cupped his cheek again, and the calming gesture was enough to slow his racing heart.

“The others are all right so far,” Khan crooned, avoiding the painful topic of the eight failed cryotubes and the four Augments who died at Marcus's hands. “And, as I said, we slept far longer than intended.” He took a deep breath and fixed the boy with a firm yet soft glance. “We slept for 264 years.” He watched Joaquin’s eyes widening in alarm, and added carefully, “We are in the year 2260 now, and we are aboard a spaceship – technically a Federation Starship.”

“S-s-s-spaceship?” the young Augment stuttered; his bright mind shut down for a moment with the shock of sudden knowledge. “2260?” His voice cracked.

“Yes,” Nien nodded and tried to calm his little brother down by rubbing his shoulders and chest soothingly. The monitor above the biobed sounded as the sensors registered the increased heartbeat of the young Israeli superhuman. “Many things have changed.”
Weiss gulped. “A spaceship!” he breathed. “264 years asleep!”

“Yes, a little bit longer than Sleeping Beauty,” McCoy smiled while he checked the monitor above the biobed again. Then he pursed his lips before addressing Joaquin. “How do you feel, Mr. Weiss? Any head- or stomachache, nausea, dizziness?”

The young Augment hesitated and exchanged a quick look with Khan. He wasn’t sure how much he could trust the mere human, but as he saw the encouraging nod his brother gave him, he began to understand that the doctor held Noo’s trust – something almost confusing given the fact that Khan never trusted a mere human quickly.

“I’m a little bit dizzy, and there is a pressure in my temples. And… I’m cold,” he admitted, and McCoy nodded; his expression told him that he had anticipated this if he hasn't already known it.

“That’s perfectly normal, even for an Augment,” he said kindly. “The circulatory and nervous systems have to adjust to the new environment.” He glanced at Khan. “Mr. Singh, after we recovered you and Jim from the space station at Aldebaran, how long did you feel cold until the effects wore off?”

Nien’s memory was precise as always. “After you released us from the infrared chamber, I continued to experience chills for twenty-two hours.”

“Right. And given the circumstances of Mr. Weiss being in cryosleep for a very long time, I expect that he will continue to feel chilly for two, maybe three days.” He smiled down at the young superhuman. “At least you'll be warm on New Vulcan. They have an average temperature of thirty-two degrees during the day – sometimes up to forty-five. And during the night, you need to sleep in a parka – it's ridiculous. One day in New Vulcan’s sun and you'll wish for the North Pole.”

Joaquin heard the humor in the doctor’s voice, yet the names he used were all foreign to him. “What is New Vulcan – or this Alabada?”

“Aldebaran, a human colony in the beta quadrant. They produce the best whiskey outside of Scotland.”

“Nothin’ compares to authentic Scottish single malt!” Another male voice stated. Scotty looked curiously at the young man, who was nothing more than a boy, and as their eyes met, Montgomery
nodded at him. “Hello, young man, nice ter see ye awake finally.” He glanced at Khan. “I’m down in Engineerin’. Tell me if ye need anythin’ else.”

“I will do so. Thank you once again for your support, Mr. Scott,” Khan replied.

The Scotsman smiled at him, and waved a Joaquin, “See ye, lad when you’re more awake,” then left.

“Who was that?” Weiss asked astonished.

“That was Scotty, our Chief Engineer. A big tinkerer, just like your brother here,” Bones deadpanned. Catching Joaquin’s thunderstruck gaze at these words, he bent over the bed, invading Khan’s personal space. “May I, Mr. Singh?” he asked, and the older Augment rose to make room for him. “Of course, Doctor.”

Bones smiled at Joaquin. “Sorry son, this will be cold, but I have to check your muscles.” He removed the thermal blanket, and instantly the boy shivered. “I know,” Leonard said soothingly. “I’ll put it back in a few seconds. Can you lift your legs?”

Confused, Joaquin did as he was asked and realized to his astonishment that the movement was difficult. McCoy sighed and spread the blanket over him again, tucking him in as though he were a toddler. “I thought so. The dehydration must be dealt with, and you’ve lost muscle mass. No wonder you have trouble moving, but given a little bit time, fluid, food and some easy training, and you’ll back to your normal level of strength soon.”

“Thanks – I think,” Joaquin murmured, suppressing a yawn.

“Are you hungry or thirsty?” Leonard questioned further. “You brother eats us out of house and home when he is healing, so I figured you might be able to eat a bite or two.”

Brown eyes looked confusedly at him, then at Khan, and finally back again. “We… We do need nourishment when our body has been stressed, but how do you know?”

McCoy smiled at him. “Your brother was quite the example when I had to treat him.” He lifted a calming hand quickly as he saw alarm on the boy’s face. “He’s all right and safe – just like you and the others are, so don’t worry. So once again, are you hungry?”
Joaquin shook his head. “Not at the moment.”

“Mmm-hm,” Leonard nodded. “Your body probably has to catch up with your brain. Your stomach will be growling soon.” He winked at Joaquin, who was even more perplexed now. This human was obviously neither afraid of his kind, nor did he radiate hostility. This physician simply treated him like he would do with anyone else – and this was odd.

McCoy went towards the wall. “I think it’s about time to inform Jim.”

“Yes, please call him, Doctor,” Khan nodded, even if he felt his bondmate’s tension and awareness of what was happening here. “I promised to inform him as soon as Joaquin woke.”

Weiss watched the CMO walking to one of the devices on the walls and whispered, “Jim. He’s a just a human too, right?” To his surprise, he saw his older brother smiling a very odd smile; a spark gleamed for a second in his ocean-colored eyes.

“Yes, he’s very human!”

In the background, the doctor muttered something that sounded very much like “Don’t scare the boy with details,” before he activated the strange device. “Medbay to bridge. Jim?”

“Yes,” came the instant reply from a warm, smooth tenor sounding through the speakers. “Is Joaquin okay? I sensed distress, and – and happiness, like, at the same time.”

“You two are spooky; you know that?” McCoy groaned. Mental bonds, empathy, telepathy – he would have to ask Spock some important questions about it all at some point. As far as he understood the Vulcan bond was very similar. “To answer your question, yes, our young guest is awake and has many questions. Can you come down, or are you too busy?”

“The second probe was sent a few minutes ago, so – yeah – I can spare some time. I’ll be down in a moment, Kirk out.”

Leonard turned around again. “He’s very interested in meeting you finally. Spent the whole night here with Khan beside your bed, you know.”
Joaquin frowned and looked confused at Noo, who sighed, “Your cryotube failed, and we got you out at the last second. We – I! – I thought I would lose you,” he finished in a whisper.

Seeing the memories of fear and anguish lurking in his brother’s eyes, Joaquin reached a comforting hand out and placed it on Khan’s arm. “But you didn’t,” he murmured, feeling a chill running down his spine as he realized that he had been on the brink of death. “You got me out – like always.”

Khan’s long warm fingers cupped that of the younger superhuman. “Yes, but it was a close call,” he said hoarsely – and Joaquin took the first real look at his older brother. Khan had aged – not much, but still there were lines in his face which hadn’t been there when they boarded the *Botany Bay*. There was a haunted expression behind his eyes, and Joaquin could sense another change in the older man – a steely bitterness that was unfamiliar. And there was only one explanation that explained Noo’s familiarity with the crew. “You’ve been awake a while, haven’t you?” he asked quietly, and baffled, he saw his brother shifting his posture almost nervously.

“Yes,” came the quiet answer.

Joaquin frowned again. It had been agreed that Khan would wake Otto and Paolo first, then the others. But obviously, this had not happened. “How long?” he wanted to know.

The former dictator didn’t reply first. Only after several very long seconds did he admit, “More than two years.”

Again Joaquin’s eyes went wide. “You… You've been awake for *more than two years*?” He was thunderstruck. “But why didn’t you…?”

“Because there were several obstacles that had to be overcome first,” Khan interrupted, not looking at him. He didn’t want to frighten Joaquin; the boy had barely woken up. What this century had done to him and the others was not something he ought to discuss with his little brother so soon. Things had changed now – drastically, because of Jim Kirk’s far too big and human heart – and Khan wanted the other Augment to come to terms with this new world before he would tell him of the dark side that still existed in this time.

Steps came nearer and McCoy, who had listened to the short conversation, tried to cheer up the two superhumans. “Ah, there comes the most important person aboard. Without him nothing would run right; no one would know what to do and…”
“I’ll remember that next time you try to mother-hen me, Bones!” The same smooth tenor Joaquin had heard through the speakers spoke teasingly from the entrance. Then a man stepped into the room clad in clothes similar to the CMO, only his tunic was gold and had long sleeves with two and a half stripes on it. He was somewhere in his mid-twenties, Weiss mused, had blond hair, striking blue eyes and handsome features. His body was lean and well-built with broad shoulders and a slim waist. His movements were strong and confident; he had an aura of pride, self-confidence, but he also exuded kindness.

This man was used to commanding, this much Joaquin realized instantly, and so he wasn’t surprised that Noo said with a surprisingly soft voice, “Joaquin, may I introduce you to Captain James T. Kirk, commanding officer of the USS Enterprise – mine and all our savior.”

Kirk felt his cheeks heating, as he rolled his eyes at Khan. “Don’t go overboard,” he chided warmly, then he offered his hand to the young Augment on the biobed. “Hi, Joaquin. You have no clue how glad I am to meet you finally. You gave us quite a scare, and it’s been a long twenty hours or so.”

Weiss glanced at the captain’s fingers and saw the injuries. He took the extended hand carefully. “I already heard that – that the Grim Reaper was aiming for me.”

“Yeah, but when he realized that you have an overprotective big brother and a stubborn CMO as your protectors, he grabbed his scythe and took his leave.”

Joaquin chuckled at that, then he bit his lips and glanced at McCoy. “You had a big part in saving me?”

“The biggest,” Khan confirmed, while Bones shrugged, “Hey, I’m a doctor. It’s my job to fix people. And, I hate seeing people all upset.” He nodded towards Nien. “I couldn’t let your brother down, you know.”

Moistening his lips, the young Augment nodded, but Bones read another sign in this gesture. “Thirsty?” he asked.

“Yes,” Joaquin murmured. “Very.”

“Right!” McCoy stepped to the replicator. “Computer, a glass water, half a liter, 20 degrees.” A soft noise sounded, then a small door lifted, and the CMO took a glass water from the shelf. Weiss gaped
at him. “What…?” he stammered and looked wide-eyed at Khan.

“That’s a replicator – very useful when you’re deep in space for months or even years,” he explained. “It does not taste bad, but fresh, cooked meals are still superior.”

“Miss my steak already?” Jim teased while he made room for McCoy, who bent over Joaquin, helped him to sit up, and offered him the glass.

“Slow down, son. Your stomach has to relearn what it's there for, so drink slowly,” he advised, smiling as he caught the grateful glance of the young superhuman. ‘He’s far more affable than Khan – well, he hasn’t been through all the shit his big bro had to face. No wonder that they behave differently.’

Joaquin had emptied half of the glass before he gestured he'd had enough – the CMO’s warning still in his mind. He didn’t want to throw up all over his brother’s lap. He lay back again and turned his attention to the blond man. “So, this here is a… a spaceship, Captain?”

“It’s called a starship,” Kirk corrected him kindly. “And you can call me Jim if you like. Your brother and I are close friends…”

Bones began to cough but was ignored.

“…and he told me a lot about you. I’m glad to meet you at last.”

“Thanks,” the young Augment murmured. Then he glanced around in the room. “So, this is a sickbay?”

“Only one of the private rooms. The central area is next to this compartment, also several labs and some rooms with special machines and instruments which are needed to treat badly injured crew members,” Bones told him. “But this is only one part of this level in the discus segment. Crew quarters and one of the transporter rooms are here, too.”

“One level?” Weiss blinked at him. “And how many are there?”
“Far too many for me,” Leonard sighed. “Even with the enhanced lift system, you need seven minutes to reach the bridge if you’re at the farthest point aft.”

“And it’s a discus? So UFOs do look like flying saucers?” he asked, growing more tired by the minute, but he felt new excitement rising in him.

Bones had to smile at the display of youthful curiosity. “Yes and no. The discus is mounted to a kind of big throat that ends with a long body, from which two nacelles spread out like wings – if you use your imagination.”

Jim began to snicker, and he glanced at Khan, “I can hear Scotty already complaining over the comparison.”

“Yes, that would lead to a much longer lecture.” Nien grinned. “And it would be up to you to end it.”

“Have mercy. When Scotty has a chance to talk about technology and engineering, especially the stuff he came up with, you’ll never get him to stop.” Kirk cocked his head. “Just like you. I swear when I hear you two talk tech, it makes my head spin.”

“And here I thought I made your head spin for a very different reason.”

“Bo-oys!” McCoy moaned, and he was rewarded with two wide smirks.

Joaquin watched the three men in wonder. Never before had he seen his brother so relaxed and utterly comfortable in a presence of someone who didn’t belong to their family. But Noo and Kirk were so much at ease with each other; Joaquin didn’t know what to make of it. They seemed to know each other very well, even teased each other! That was completely new! It was a side of Khan he never saw.

Jim felt the young Augment’s gaze upon him, and he turned his attention back to him. “As soon as you’re well, I’ll show you around – make a ship tour with you if you like,” he offered. “There is a lot you have to learn…”

“That I believe without a doubt,” Weiss murmured a little bit overwhelmed.
“… and none of us will mind answering your questions,” Jim continued kindly. Then he watched as Joaquin yawned and smiled at Bones, “I think our young guest is in need of another round of sleep.”

“I slept long enough,” Weiss protested, only to stifle another yawn.

“Jesus, please not another Mr. I’m-fine-even-if-I’m-carrying-my-head-in-my-hand! You two are bad enough,” McCoy groaned, pointing nonchalantly at Kirk and Khan.

Joaquin gasped and was even more astonished as his brother began to chuckle while the captain – Jim! – began to snicker, looking rather like an overgrown boy than like a commanding officer.

“Admit it, Bones, you wouldn't have it any other way,” Kirk grinned.

“‘Bones’?” Weiss blinked several times. “An odd nickname for a doctor.”

The CMO sighed very dramatically. “I was divorced; my former wife got everything save a skeleton that was in my office. I told that to this guy over there...,” he gestured towards Kirk, “and he promptly gave me that nickname.”

“Funny,” Joaquin commented. Then he looked at Khan. “Did he give you a nickname, too?”

“Yes, indeed,” the former dictator deadpanned. “‘Nien’ is not much of an improvement over ‘Bones’, but you know the Americans. They have to shorten names or to change them completely. Otherwise, they are not happy,” Khan mocked, giving Kirk a gentle glance.

“Nien?” Joaquin asked, baffled again. “He calls you Nien? That is strange!”

“Not any stranger than you calling me ‘Noo’,” Khan looked at Jim again. “He couldn’t pronounce my name at first and called me that as a child,” he explained. “It stuck.”

“Thank God no one calls me ‘Jimmy’ anymore,” Kirk sighed. He lifted a threatening finger as Khan promptly opened his mouth. “Don’t you dare!” he growled, but the Augment only chuckled again and mouthed the child's moniker without actually saying it. Jim groaned and closed his eyes.
“You are teasing each other, aren’t you?” The boy’s glance hung on the former dictator. “What else have I missed?”

“Far too much for your tender soul,” Bones grumbled and thrust his hands into his waist. “Right, you two, stop crowding my medbay. The boy needs rest, and you two should hit the mess hall and get something in you. You both have lost too much weight, and before we’re stranded on New Vulcan with nothing else to eat but salad and vegetables, you should demolish as much meat as you can.”

“And that is healthy, Doctor?” Khan asked.

“For once – yes!” He gestured towards the door. “Out with you two and don’t come back without having dinner first. I’ll ask Spock if you ate something.”

“I don’t need a nanny,” Jim protested.

“You first officer wouldn’t mind taking that job, too, given your penchant for danger.” He smiled kindly at the two lovers. Rolling his eyes, Kirk turned to go, muttering something about bossy CMOs. Khan bent over Joaquin one last time. “Stay here and try to get some sleep. You are safe here, and I will be back soon.”

That convinced Joaquin more than anything else. “Don’t worry. I’m a big boy now, and it isn’t like I could go anywhere, the way I feel – like my muscles are mush.”

Concerned, Jim glanced back over his shoulder at Bones, who only said, “He has to rebuild muscle mass, that’s all.”

“Well, we’ve got three sports and rec decks aboard. I’m certain you’ll find something suitable,” he told Weiss, smiling again. “Good night,” he said, and he watched Khan press a kiss to the boy’s forehead before the former dictator followed him.

Together they left the medbay. Jim felt relief, but still he sensed an uncomfortable tension deep in his mate’s soul. Remembering the fury that had flown in hot waves over their link, Kirk looked questioningly at his beloved.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. When he saw Nien’s frown, he added, “You were angry just before - before you were – happy about Joaquin waking up. So, what’s up?”
Khan took a deep breath. No, there was indeed nothing he could hide from Jim anymore.

“Not here,” he murmured, and Kirk knew instinctively that the topic, whatever it was, had to be very sensitive.

“Right. Let’s go to our quarters. The replicator can shut up our stomachs, too.”

After they reached the captain’s quarters and Jim programmed something for their dinner, Khan finally told him what he and Scott had found out. As he learned of Bones’ own roll in the matter of the previously opened cryotubes, he was astonished. He didn’t know if he should lecture McCoy or not. Right, he was only back among the living because of Leonard’s decision to put him into Joaquin’s cryotube, yet he did understand that the CMO’s conduct wasn’t really in conformity with the Hippocratic Oath.

Deciding to speak with Bones later in private about it, he listened to Khan’s tale, learning what really had enflamed his mate’s rage. Kirk was shocked – furious even – and called Spock to his quarters. Of course the Vulcan’s face remained stoic as he listened to Khan’s explanations, yet Jim knew him well enough to recognize that the gleam in Spock’s eyes was suppressed anger. To abuse sentient beings for experiments was a crime, yes, but to do so while they were asleep and unaware of what was happening to them, breached all ethics. The Vulcan felt something close to disgust.

He didn’t hesitate to offer his support for the upcoming investigation. Without emotional involvement, he looked ahead. “If Dr. Green and his colleagues acted on Admiral Norton’s and therefore Section 31’s order, which would make sense, they must have kept records of the experiments’ results, seeing as they were ready to sacrifice Mr. Singh’s people.” The Vulcan’s stiff posture betrayed his tension. “Mr. Singh was held captive in the LSH lab for a certain purpose and after his escape, Section 31 likely continued its research by choosing an alternate path – namely using his crew for their experiments.”

“They searched for cures for disease,” Khan growled. “I know exactly how the worst of Earth’s and other planets’ diseases make you feel, as I was forced to endure the pain of each and every symptom. I can understand this – my utility and even would have offered some of my blood for their research if I had been asked, but they decided to experiment with me without asking – just like Marcus did.”

“That’s not all,” Jim murmured, feeling sick to the core. “They’re not just looking for cures.” He looked Nien straight in the eyes. “Selek hacked into Command’s data bank and checked Luengo’s terminal. Yes, they tried to extract antibodies from your blood after they infected you with different diseases, but they’re also trying to develop a disease based on Rigelian Fever. They want the pathogen to be immune to any cure or antidote in order to use it in a biological strike against the
Klingons – and your immune system is the foundation.”

Khan stared at him flabbergasted; then he paled dramatically and closed his eyes, whispering something beneath his breath in his Indic tongue.

Jim didn’t need a translation. He could sense how his beloved felt, and even Spock showed a hint of understanding and sympathy. The Augments had been bred to bring peace into the world, and now their enhanced biology was about to be used as a weapon of mass destruction. The thought unnerved even him.

“How far are they in the proceeding?” Nien whispered; fury and terror radiated off him. Even if he had learned to loathe the most Klingons, the thought of them falling prey to a holocaust with the help of his cells made him nauseous.

Kirk took a deep breath. “As far as Selek was able to find out the pathogen is still in development. And to top it all, Norton presented the other admirals with a kind of predecessor to the pathogen, blaming the Klingons for its existence. Luengo is planning a first strike in secret with this holocaust weapon – all the more reason to stop him.” He bent forwards and laid a hand on Nien’s shoulder. “I didn’t want to burden you with this right now, but after you and Scotty found out that Green and his bastards had to have opened the cryotubes several times, I’m sure about what they’re up to. If there is any clear evidence that their experiments went in that direction, we’ve got more evidence to get them to court.”

Khan nodded slowly. “I understand,” he said quietly. “But right now my concern remains the damage those men might have caused my brothers and sisters.” He glanced at Spock who still sat on the second armchair. “I want to examine them as soon as possible and…”

“You will have my full support, Mr. Singh,” the Vulcan interrupted him calmly. “I suggest that you and Jim finish your dinner and then we can meet in the hold attached to medbay. Dr. McCoy will be there, too. I advise that our acquired knowledge of Dr. Green’s work remain in this room and medbay. As long as Dr. Green thinks it safe, he will not take drastic action such as destroying records.”

“I agree,” Kirk affirmed, then his glance softened as he watched Nien. Ashen grey, barely able to hide his anxiety and wrath, he somehow appeared so vulnerable. Jim needed all his control not to gather him into his arms. He wouldn’t in front of Spock who always felt awkward by openly displayed emotions. So he waited until his Vulcan friend left after an agreement on how to proceed with the investigation, and only then Jim rose, rounded the table, bent down and wrapped Khan into a firm embrace.
For almost a minute the Augment remained stiff, clearly fighting for self-control, yet Jim didn’t give in. He knew that Nien was about to reach his limits – again. Fear for his people’s survival, and then their fight together to recover them, afterwards his fear for his little brother and now this! For a moment, Kirk imagined how he would feel if he learned that some sick bastards had run experiments on his friends and had used his blood to create a kind of super weapon designed to bring death to billions of people. He would go mad for sure. And he didn’t need to reach over their shared link to sense Nien’s misery and fury.

Concentrating only on warm and gentle emotions, he tried to calm down his beloved. Finally, after a long minute, Khan gave in and sank against him. His long fingers clung to Jim’s tunic, holding onto him like a lifeline.

“When will all this end?” he whispered. “When will my people be safe – free of the fear of being used as lab rats and being treated worse than animals? We are humans, too! Why do they think we do not merit any rights merely because we were not born of a woman’s womb?”

They were rhetorical questions, yet Jim felt the need to answer them. “It will end the moment Section 31 falls – the moment public learns what happened to you and what these bastards intended. Most people today are moral. Section 31 in no way represents the people of Earth. The public will be outraged when they hear what happened to you and your family, and how you’ve been used.” He pressed a kiss to the midnight dark strands and nuzzled the soft hair. “It will stop when we reach New Vulcan. You and your family will be safe there. Selek will not allow any harm come to them. And as soon as Bob returns with Barnett and the others, Luengo and his followers will be done for.” He felt Nien stirring and gave him room to move. Those blue-green eyes looked up at him, and cupping one of those pale, angular cheeks, Jim whispered, “It will stop, Nien, I promise. I will not rest until your people gain the human rights and the freedoms they deserve. And I also will not rest until you walk away from court martial as a free man.” He leaned his forehead against his mate’s. “We made it this far, we’ll walk the rest of the way together, too, baby. I won’t give in, no matter what, and I think the same goes for you.”

Khan looked into those sky-blue eyes, felt the love radiating from this golden young man who held him protectively in his arms – arms so many times weaker than his own, yet they bore a strength that made him feel safe and comforted.

“Yes,” he whispered. “The same goes for me.” He leaned upwards and caught Jim’s lips with his. It wasn’t a kiss of passion and lust, but a kiss full of warm love and solace. And despite his fear of what he, McCoy, and Spock would find out in the next hours, Nien felt, for just a moment, at ease again.
“Luengo has ordered what?” Richard Barnett stood at the bridge of the Lexington and glanced between Palmers and Wesley, clearly not believing his own ears.

“He had ordered every Starfleet vessel be on the look-out for the Enterprise and to report to him immediately when she’s spotted. Every squadron leader has to be ready to take action against her, meaning they must demand Kirk’s surrender or destroy the ship. The official statement is that Kirk has gone rouge – that he lost his mind and has turned against the Federation.” Bob looked over at the large screen that showed quickly passing stars while the heavy cruiser raced towards Earth at warp 6.

“Sweet Lord!” Richard whispered. “We’ve got to warn Kirk.”

“Believe me,” Wesley sighed, “he already knows. Aside from Palmers, there is no better communications officer in the whole fleet than Lieutenant Uhura. She’ll listen to everything that goes on outside of the Enterprise, and I’m certain that she’ll crack the encryption in time to inform Jim of the new order concerning him and the ship. Hailing Kirk now and forcing him to break radio silence is too risky.”

“This whole damn mission is one big risk,” the Chief in Command growled. “When will we reach Earth?”

Wesley grimaced. “In approximately two days and… Lieutenant?” he addressed his navigator. “How long till we’re home?”

“Two days, four hours, thirty-nine minutes, sir!” came the reply.

“And sixteen seconds now, Commodore!” Sonik added, and Bob suppressed a groan. If Spock was only a little bit like Sonik, then Wesley asked himself, not for the first time, how Jim had been able to befriend his first officer at all.

“Dammit! The Enterprise could be already spotted and…” Richard was interrupted by the hailing signal.

“Medbay to bridge! Commodore?” the female CMO’s voice called, sounding tense.

Bob bent over the comms console and activated the link. “Wesley here!”
“Albereth here. It’s about Ambassador Sarek. I think you should come down here quickly, Bob.”

Alarmed, Bob and Richard exchanged a look; then the commodore straightened up. “I’m on my way, Wesley out.” He turned towards Marceaux. “You’ve got the conn – and prepare a reply for Command that confirms the new order. I don’t want Luengo to get even more wary concerning us than he already is.”

He quickly walked to the turbolift, Barnett on his heels. A short time later they arrived in medbay, where they saw Sarek lying on one of the biobeds, Sokal stood nearby and looked as unsettled as a Vulcan was able. Beside him, Batari Whitman had wrapped her arms around herself and her dark eyes shone with worry. Daniela Albereth checked the monitor above the biobed once again as a nurse hurried towards her, bringing her some supplies she had demanded.

“Daniela?” Wesley called and quickly closed the distance to her and her patient. “What’s the matter?” He glanced down on Sarek and gasped. The ambassador was ashen grey with an unhealthy, yellow hue. His breath was uneven and heavy, yet he turned his head slowly when the two staff officers arrived, but he seemed to be unable to say anything.

“It’s his heart,” Dr. Albereth said, not taking her attention away from the monitor. “A CHD – a congenital heart defect is making itself known. Mr. Sokal informed me that Ambassador Sarek has experienced symptoms before, but… well… ignored them.” She pointed at several readouts. “Now it’s acute. Thank the Lord Mrs. Whitman was with him when he had the seizure. If he hadn’t been brought to medbay immediately, I’d be writing a death certificate right now.” She looked at the two staff officers. “I can stabilize him for two or three days, but that’s the maximum I can delay the surgery. Otherwise…” She didn’t finish the sentence, but that wasn’t necessary. The meaning hung heavily in the room.

A little bit shocked, Barnett stared at the Vulcan he’d known for a long time now, while Bob took a deep breath. “Can you do it – the surgery, I mean?” he asked. “You’re familiar with Vulcan biology, so…”

“I would have no problem operating on him, Bob,” the physician interrupted him and cocked her head so that her dark brown, shoulder length hair with first traces of silver in it waved around her slightly angular face. “My problem is his blood. The ambassador has an extremely rare blood type – T-negative.”

Wesley frowned. “I’m no expert, but as far as I know this is indeed a very rare blood type.” He turned his eyes towards Sokal. “Do you have…”
The Vulcan shook his head. “No, sir. I have another blood type, and T-negative isn’t compatible with any other type.”

“Sonik doesn’t have T-negative either,” Albereth said, “and there is no way on Earth that I can compensate for the blood loss that will occur during surgery. Plasma won’t do. And I’ve checked our data bank. As far as I was able to find out only a hand full Vulcans with this blood type have survived the… holocaust.”

“That’s the reason why the ambassador always took blood provisions with him when he traveled,” Sokal explained, “but it was still stocked aboard the Excalibur when we were evacuated.”

“Dammit!” Bob groused, and he combed his right hand through his thick, grey hair. “Does the university hospital in San Francisco stock T-negative?”

“Maybe – but I can’t contact them and ask,” Daniela answered. “As you told me, the SBI – or whatever’s left of it – has its ears everywhere, and if I asked for a Vulcan blood type that Mr. Sonik doesn’t have, then they will know that something is, indeed, out of place here aboard.” She rubbed her neck. “I see no other choice than to head to New Vulcan at the highest speed possible, or I’ll have to fill out that damn death certification soon. And, by the way, as far as I know the same blood type is passed from father to son. Commander Spock must therefore have the same blood type as the ambassador – and the Enterprise will soon be at New Vulcan. Even if there is no single Vulcan on the planet who has T-negative, at least Spock will be able to share his blood with his father.”

Bob bit his lips while Barnett let his head sink. “Dammit!” he growled. “And we’re running out of time! When Luengo figures out that we’re on New Vulcan, he’ll do something. I just don’t know what.”

In the settling silence, Sarek’s whisper was plain to hear, as he murmured, “It would be illogical to risk the mission only for me. Section 31 has to be stopped. The Federation’s existence depends on it!”

“I intend to keep the promise I gave your son,” Wesley said sternly. “I vowed to bring you to him.”

“And I don’t want to lose a friend like you!” Barnett nodded and added quickly before the older Vulcan could protest, “And speaking of the Federation, you are one of her most skilled diplomats, and your talents will be needed as soon as the peace talks with the Klingons start up again. Your death would leave a hole that no one could fill for at least a decade.”
“If the president is not informed of Luengo’s and the SBI’s true nature, and intention, my son, Kirk and all the others will be as good as dead – and that goes for all who do not share Section 31’s intentions,” Sarek choked and coughed; a green trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth.

“Leave Luengo to me!” Whitman said, and she stepped forward before turning towards Bob. “Commodore, the *Lexington* has long range shuttles?”

“Yes, as the squadron’s flagship, we have a long range shuttle in the hangar.”

“Right. As far as I understand, we have to take action in secret. We need to approach Earth without being caught by Section 31. Luengo shouldn’t get the tiniest hint that we are still alive. A strike, and there must be many done in secret. Only then can we be sure we’ve taken out every shadow department once and for all. A shuttle stands a better chance of arriving at Earth undiscovered, or at least, it can be done under the radar much better than a Constitution class ship, don’t you agree?”

Barnett licked his lips. “This is risky, Ma’am,” he mused. “You shouldn’t go alone.”

She nodded. “Yes, I would appreciate it if one or two admirals would accompany me.”

“I'll send Commander Marceaux as well with you, Ma’am,” Wesley cut in, “as well as Lieutenant Silverhawk and four Red Shirts.” He cocked his head. “At least you’ll have a little protection than should it come to that.”

“Thank you,” Batari smiled. “It’s the twelfth of November today, and Robertson has birthday in two days, on the fourteenth. He’ll be at home in the morning, like always. I’ll wait there for him, and I’ll tell him everything that happened.” Her gaze became stern. “And you, Commodore, will bring Sarek to New Vulcan – and you must take care that Kirk and the others will be safe there. I heard Luengo say he’ll find out where Kirk is headed – and he will not shrink back from anything in his quest to eliminate him, Khan, and the others. But even Luengo will think twice before he attacks two Constitution-class cruisers!”

Wesley took a deep breath. “I don’t like this,” he murmured, and the vice president laid a slender hand on his arm.

“I know, Commodore, and I appreciate your concern for my safety, but Sarek is right. The Federation, as we know it, is at stake. Luengo and Section 31 have to be stopped, and we can kill
two birds with one stone when I go to Earth and you to New Vulcan.”

“It is logical,” Sokal said slowly, and Batari gave him a broad smile.

“I knew that you would agree,” she replied. ‘And it’ll save your boss’s neck,’ she added in her thoughts.

“Right,” Wesley sighed. “I’ll give the order to prepare the long range shuttle.”

“You should change the name and ID in case Mrs. Whitman runs into a patrol or has to identify herself when we’re nearing Earth,” Barnett suggested. “That wouldn’t be the case if I were still leading Starfleet Command, but given the fact that a nut job guy like Luengo is, we have to plan for anything.”

“An excellent idea, Richard, I second that.” He looked at Sarek, whose eyes were still glassy but gazed intently at him now. “You’ll see, Ambassador, in two and a half days we’ll be at New Vulcan, and you’ll be all right.”

Sarek moistened his lips. “There is no need to comfort me, Commodore, though I appreciate your good will.” He closed his eyes. “I will do my best to stay alive until then. After all, my son is waiting for me.”

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise, most of the senior officers were still working. Uhura tried to decode the transmissions her colleagues had captured, putting all her pride and sweat in getting a result. She wasn’t named best in her class for nothing, and the commendations she had received spoke for themselves. If there was anyone who would be able to crack the new encryption, it was her.

Jim knew that he couldn’t help her or his two closest friends and his beloved during their trials now. So he carefully added every new detail to the report he planned to give Barnett or – should Bob fail to free them – to the president in person, maybe with elder Spock’s help. Luengo had to be stopped, no matter what.

In the meantime Khan, Spock, and McCoy opened every tube to take skin examples and allow Bones to scan the Augments properly. Dr. M’Benga and Nurse Barbara assisted them; they labeled
and compiled the files with the most relevant data on every superhuman. Their first task kept them busy until late after midnight, and then they began to examine the skin samples for clues as to what had been done to the men and women.

Several times, Khan checked on Joaquin, who was in a deep sleep. No wonder given the circumstances his body had been through, yet all the new facts he had learned about had been overwhelming, too. And this was only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. McCoy, who checked his young patient too, knew that the boy had to be taught carefully about all the changes which happened since he was sent to dreamland more than 260 years ago – especially concerning the other species. It was one thing to read about aliens, or to watch some fictional creatures in a movie, but meeting them for real... Yes, Joaquin was an Augment, and so his intelligence would help him to cope with everything quickly, yet he was also still so very young and had fewer experiences than Khan or the other superhumans. And Bones was hell bent on helping the boy as much as possible.

Khan decided to remain in medbay overnight – not only to assist the two physicians and Spock in their investigation but also to stay near Joaquin. The boy should not be alone in this strange world that was utterly alien to him.

Jim, who stopped by at 0100 at night, understood Nien’s decision fully. Khan not only had to get the results of his family’s examination, but he would be needed should Joaquin wake up during the night. Kirk imagined himself waking up more than two hundred years in the future and shuddered. He already understood space travel, but the rest of it... He would be nervous first. No doubt about it.

When morning came, most of the results were in hand. McCoy and M’Benga had switched places twice during the night, catching a little bit sleep at least, but both were bone tired – contrary to Khan and Spock. Each looked as neat as a pin and worked quietly side-by-side at the microscopes and the science terminal when Jim entered medbay at 0700 ship time. Seeing his T’hy’la and his mate working in perfect harmony warmed him, and he couldn’t hide a smile when they finally became aware of his presence and looked over at him.

“You two are a good team,” he muttered after they greeted each other, and Spock lifted a brow.

“Mr. Singh’s knowledge of biological science, combined with his analytical mind, is a sound basis for a fruitful cooperation. I have to admit that this is a pleasant experience.”

Kirk began to grin. “Wow, that’s a big compliment coming from you.”

Again, a Vulcan brow traveled upwards. “I only state facts, Captain.”
Nien, who sat at one of the research tables studying something through an electron microscope, looked up at the two friends. “It’s the first time I have worked with a Vulcan, and I also have to admit that concentrating only on the topic – being a complement to another mind like this is… refreshing.”

“Well, don’t ask me for flowers if you two get married,” Jim commented wryly, smirking for a second as he caught two bewildered gazes.

“If I correctly recall your revelation only a few days ago, Jim, you two are already married, and I do not believe Khan is a bigamist based on current evidence.” A grumbling voice sounded behind him. “And if Spock and Uhura ever should exchange rings – or whatever they do on New Vulcan – kiss the bride or whatever – you should definitely be on Spock’s short list of best men.” McCoy entered the lab, looking like hell – bloodshot eyes, hair in utter disarray and pale as a sheet.

“Bones!” Jim exclaimed. “Jesus, what happened to you?”

“You dear hobgoblin and your beloved spouse have happened to me, keeping me up almost the whole night – again, as I have to point out,” Leonard growled.

“Didn’t Dr. M’Benga relieve you during the evening, Doctor?” Spock asked, ignoring the jibe. He looked the CMO up and down. McCoy was worn out.

“Yeah, and two hours are not enough for a beauty sleep.”

“One would not improve your appearance, in my opinion,” the Vulcan commented dryly. Instantly, Bones was ripped from his exhaustion – just as Spock intended.

“What does that mean, huh?”

Quickly Jim lifted both hands. “Gentlemen, please it’s too early – and it’s before breakfast!” He looked back at Spock and Khan. “What did you find out?”

“We found out a lot,” Bones muttered before he addressed all of them. “I got the latest results just now.” His gaze found a tensed Khan. “Thirty-two of your people have antibodies for one disease or
another. What's interesting is that these diseases aren't native to Earth. Other Augments have traces of different pharmaceutical cocktails in their system that are most definitely not available. I've only seen some of them mentioned in medical journals."

Jim’s eyes widened. “So… these bastards actually ran experiments on them?”

He looked at Khan, whose eyes betrayed his rage, then to Spock whose eyes held a hint of loathing, and finally to Bones, who looked ready to hit someone. “Yes, and the last experiments were done only two or three weeks ago” Leonard gritted out. “Three of the Augments even have antibodies for Rigelian Fever. Spock told me what his older counterpart found out from hacking into Luengo’s terminal. Obviously, they tried to replace Khan as a supplier of the antibody, but none of the ladies and gentlemen over there resemble his, um, perfection. So Green stopped some of the testing it seems – very much to the fortune of Mr. Singh’s crew. They are all healthy, but some of them will feel the effects of the illness after waking up – nothing life threatening though.” He shook his head; his fists were balled. “Pray that Green doesn't cross my path anytime soon, or I'll throw my ethos out the next airlock and give him a pounding he’ll never forget!”

Jim sat down heavily on one of the chairs, trying to stomach the fact that his worst fears turned out to be true – mostly. The Council had sentenced the Augments to cryosleep, safely stashed somewhere away from Earth. The sentence was inhuman enough in his eyes. After all the Augments hadn’t committed any crime and had no chance to defend themselves – another gift of the former Chief in Command before Barnett took the lead. Learning now that those sleeping men and women, who lay vulnerable and defenseless in their tubes, had been abused and used in experiments made his blood boil.

He glanced at Spock, whose perfect self-control was the only thing keeping him calm at the moment. “Have all the samples been examined?”

The Vulcan nodded. “Yes, Captain. They are all cataloged. Besides Mr. Weiss, only four Augments have no antibodies meaning…”

“Meaning Joaquin, Silvia, Carlos and Romina are the only four who weren't used as lab rats,” Khan whispered; his face was white with wrath.

“All right,” Kirk said slowly, rising again. He felt Nien’s eyes resting on him, demanding he act – and act he would! There was an icy fury in his glance that made McCoy wary. Khan watched his mate once again become the warrior no one should underestimate. Spock became aware that his friend was about to take action. Action against those who had dared hurt an innocent people – people he had come to love through Khan.
“Spock, take twelve Red Shirts and Giotto and ransack Green and his colleagues' stuff. Check their baggage, their belongings, everything! Maybe they tried to save something – the antibodies – anything. I don't care if you have to strip them naked to do it,” Jim ordered. “And I don’t care what the regulation says about it today. Green and his Frankensteins committed an atrocity first. If they were ready to sacrifice Nien’s crew, then they must have tried to salvage something from those tests. I want them secured – as proof of their inhuman deeds!”

Spock nodded slowly. “Dr. Green will protest – and maybe deny us access to the records he possesses.”

“Oh, he certainly will, and if he gives you trouble, you have my permission – no, my order! Throw him and his collaborators in the brig. Regarding the Federation Laws of Human Rights, he’s guilty on all counts as far as I'm concerned. If he doesn’t cooperate, he’ll spend the last two days of the journey with Finnegan and the others in a tiny room – with a big window instead of a wall and a not-so-nice view!”

The Vulcan lifted a brow, knowing that this was not an empty threat. And, as he had to admit, he could understand his friend’s fury and that of the enhanced man beside him.

“Affirmative, Captain, please excuse me,” he said; he nodded at the three humans and left the labs.

Jim only realized that he was trembling with rage when he felt Bones’ soothing hand on his shoulder, accompanied by the words, “Jim, I’m just as angry as you are, but please calm down. You'll gain nothing if you lose your head now.”

Kirk turned his head; his eyes were cold as a night on Delta Vega, yet a fire burnt in them that made the CMO almost flinch. “You can be sure, Bones, I won't lose my cool. But these bastards will pay for what they did to these men and women. Not just Green and his colleagues, but also Dashwood, Conelly and his people, and Norton and Luengo. They won’t know what hit them; I promise!”

He took a deep breath to calm his raging nerves before he exchanged a glance with Nien, repeating his vow silently with one long promising look.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Oh-oh, Jim has always temper, but when he is enraged like this even I would try to avoid him (or maybe not, *grin*). Dashwood and Green and their colleagues really know no limits in their hunger for knowledge and in their wish to learn how far they can proceed. Thank the Lord there are also other scientists, which belong to the ‘good guys’, like Spock and Bones, the engineers who develop new technologies, etc.

In the next chapter Spock will show that even he, as a Vulcan, can be pissed-off (namely with Green, *snicker*). You’ll read more of Joaquin, who is going to face his first ‘alien’ and makes some friends – and, yes, Luengo realizes to where Jim has to be heading, because New Vulcan is the only place he and the others can find shelter. In other words, be ready for the travel of the rollercoaster I spoke of in the beginning.

I hope you liked the new chapter, and that you are going to like ‘my’ Joaquin.

‘Til next time,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi my dear readers!

I’m very sorry for the delay, but dear Darry had to mourn about a loss and dear Rhiannon has a lot of to do, too. I promise that the next chapter will come sooner and that the new one now will make up for everything.

Well… Maybe this new chapter (and parts of the following ones) are sadder to read than originally thought.

I had this sweet idea that it would be Chekov and Riley, who would befriend Joaquin – seeing that all three are of the same age and all three are geniuses in their own ways. I wrote this chapter already seven weeks ago, and almost imagines Anton Yelchin taking care of Joaquin in his cheerful, sweet, boyish, innocent way.

And now this great actor, who gave as new imagination of Pavel Chekov, is gone – taken away from us (and his family and friends) forever.

I can’t express the shock I had as I read of his death in the web. I still can’t believe it and really hurts to think that he will never come back again. Many of his colleagues wrote / told of his great talents as an actor and of his sweet heart and open mind.

It’s not my style to dedicate a chapter or a story to somebody, but in this special case I want to do it.

I dedicate this chapter – and the following ones – to Anton Yelchin, who gave the character of Pavel Chekov a new striking, beautiful, sweet, brilliant new trait. In the original serial he also belonged to the ‘Kirk-Team’ and had his scenes, but in the reboot-universe he held a special significance – because of Anton’s brilliant portrait of this character.

Words can’t tell how deep the mourning is and they also can’t give any comfort for those, who were close to him.

There is only one thing left to say: Rest in peace – and you’ll not be forgotten.

Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes
“I protest! How dare you to go through my personal belongings!” Dr. Anthony Green tried to stop the Red Shirt who had pulled out his clothes from the wardrobe, but was held back by Lieutenant Commander Giotto.

“Doctor, I advise you not to intervene. Let us do our job and -”

“This is intolerable!” Green exclaimed, whirling around towards Spock. “I demand that you order them to stop! How dare you invade my privacy! I demand an explanation for this insolence. Where is Kirk? I want to speak with him immediately!”

Impassively, the Vulcan looked at him, hands clasped behind his back. “Captain Kirk ordered this investigation, Doctor Green, for a very good reason. All evidence points to the fact that you and your colleagues ran illegal experiments on humans without their consent and even their awareness. You willingly risked their lives by infecting them with deadly diseases and left them to certain death as you kept silent about their presence on Gamma 12 after our arrival. If it had not been for the information we had regarding their presence, which led to their rescue, they would be dead now.” He watched the human’s face turn from angry red to ashen grey, and continued with a stony expression while Giotto and his four men looked wide-eyed at him. “You and your colleagues violated one of the most important laws of the Federation – the Sanctity of Life and Human Rights,” Spock continued to address the scientist. “Your experiments are comparable with attempted murder and, as such, you will all face trial.”

Green found his voice again. “How do you…” He took a deep breath. “From whom did you get this information?” He shook his head. “It doesn’t matter in the end. Listen, Commander, you’re very mistaken if you think these creatures in the tubes are humans. They are -”

“Augments from the twentieth century, launched from Earth in 1996, put into cryosleep by their leader Khan Noonien Singh,” Spock said unmoving, feeling the gazes of Giotto and Security resting on him, too. “They are living, breathing, sentient beings of human heritage – men and women who suffered in your labs, helplessly delivered to the cruelty of you and your colleagues. They may not have been born in a way considered natural at the time, yet they are human, and you exposed them to suffering and pain – risking their lives.”

Giotto moistened his lips. Augments… Petty Officer Singh was an Augment. His assumptions had been right after all. The man’s ability to resist phaser stuns and every unusual thing he’d done since he was aboard weren’t miracles any longer. Augments weren’t called ‘super’-humans for nothing. And, to Giotto’s surprise, he felt no resentment towards the enhanced man. No, his rising anger was directed at Green and his colleagues, who hadn’t moved one finger to save the Augments’ lives. Giotto paled as he realized the whole extent of the last mission. The Enterprise had been ordered to kill those men and women! Yes, they were enhanced, but they were people, for God’s sake. And they were only alive now because Kirk disobeyed the order. Giotto had never thought it possible, but he was glad for his captain’s insubordination.
Green was unaware of the security chief’s rising anger. “It’s obvious that you know about them and this madman that all of Starfleet is after,” Anthony said to Spock, “yet you defend these monsters, even their leader. They -”

“I know Mr. Singh, Doctor. You met him, too. He accompanied Captain Kirk and myself down to Gamma 12 – and to use a Terran phrase, you can consider yourself lucky that Mr. Singh only learned about what you did to his crew last night – the people he calls his family. Otherwise, I think not even Captain Kirk would have been able to stop him for making you pay.”

“He and his colleagues really ran tests on Mr. Singh’s people?” Giotto cut in, horrified.

“Dr. McCoy, Mr. Singh, and I examined the Augments last night. Except for a few, all show evidence of biological experimentation,” the first officer affirmed.

Giotto felt sick. That was…unbelievable! In earlier centuries on Earth something like that happened, but now – in the Federation? It was beyond imagination. The Chief of Security couldn’t help himself and put aside his usual professional behavior for once, as he whispered in Green’s direction, “Swine!”

Anthony looked at him. “Don’t judge me too early, Lieutenant Commander. I had orders from the highest ranking staff officers – and you all will rot in prison as soon as we reach Earth! These creatures weren’t needed anymore, and as long as they live, they present a danger to the Federation.” He glanced back at Spock. “I never thought I’d have to say this to a Vulcan, but you’re insane if you think these beasts are humans! They -”

“They are humans – different from you and the others, but still human,” Spock cut in icily. “I would quote a formidable poet from your planet, Dr. Green: ‘Spirits that I’ve cited, my commands ignore’. Scientists like you tinkered with human DNA and bred children in labs, raised them with the purpose that they would do the dirty work. One thing you and your predecessors didn’t consider is that you can’t poach creation without paying a price. Children grow, they learn, and they choose their own paths. Children need shelter, closeness, understanding, and comfort. This all was denied the Augments. They were treated like things, not like the humans they were, and still are. Humankind has evolved within the last centuries, but regrettably there are still those who cling to the old ways and believe that laws are not meant for them, because of a higher agenda. And those people have to be stopped.”

Green stared at him thunderstruck and enraged. “I know that a year ago the Enterprise was involved in the mess with the Augments and their leader – a wanted terrorist. I’m surprised that you, a Vulcan, would defend the mass murderer who brought danger to this ship and -”
“I do not defend Mr. Singh’s deeds, but his human rights that you and your fellows have stripped him and his people of.”

“Human rights – of this creature?” Anthony almost screeched. “I was told what he did last year. He…”

“The cat is always shocked when the mouse fights back, and bites sharply in revenge,” Spock replied coldly. “If you inflict enough pain and sorrow on someone, do not be surprised if he or she strikes back. You and your colleagues are accused of serious crimes – slavery, torture, illegal experimentation on sentient beings, and more. It would be best for you if you cooperate now.”

“Cooperate? What the hell does that mean?” the scientist snapped.

The first officer stood even straighter than usual. “The logical thing for you to have done when you learned that Gamma 12 would be destroyed, was to save as many records of your experiments as possible. Tell me where these reports and documents are, or I will be forced to order Security not only to tear apart your quarters to find them, but any cargo we salvage as well.”

“What?” Green gasped. “You are insane!”

“Your decision please, Doctor,” Spock repeated unmoved. As the scientist only stared at him, he addressed Giotto, “Lieutenant Commander, secure everything you find here and in the quarters of the others, including their accompanying security team. I will assist you with the containers. Everything will be catalogued and any personal belongings will be returned to Dr. Green and the others after delivering them to the authorities.”

“Aye, sir!” the chief affirmed, nodding at one of his staff who left the quarters to pass Spock’s order to the waiting Red Shirts outside.

“This is theft!” the scientist raged. “These documents are top secret, and you’ll sit in prison for decades for stealing them!”

“I beg to differ, Doctor. I am not stealing them, I am securing them for the authorities’ investigation.”
“I demand to speak with Captain Kirk!” Green snarled, and felt a new wave of fury as the Vulcan remained stoically still.

“Believe me, Doctor, you would prefer speaking to me rather than the Captain. Abuse as you and your colleagues have inflicted are against all known codes of morality, and Captain Kirk is a man of high morals. You do not want to face him right now.” His gaze penetrated Anthony. “I ask you once again for your cooperation, Doctor.”

“Do your worst!” Green spat. “None of us will cooperate with you!”

“As you wish, Doctor,” the first officer replied with infuriating calmness, ignoring the murderous daggers the scientist glared at him. Rather, Spock used the opportunity to take a shot in the dark, “Do you think Admiral Norton is going to help you?”

“I don’t need the help of Norton, Vulcan! I have the highest support possible.”

Spock dared another suggestion. “I cannot imagine that the President of the Federation agreed to your research.”

Green chuckled bitterly. “As if the president is the highest authority. He is nothing without the Council, and within it, I have friends who already support me in this matter. And concerning Starfleet: everything depends on the Chief in Command – and Luengo will tear all your heads off when he learns of this!”

If Spock were a full human he would have smiled in triumph, but being a Vulcan he only allowed himself a small flush of satisfaction at Green’s admission and the further information that Council members were involved, too – something he had already anticipated. The whole matter held far too high a position to not be known by some Council member who was certainly supporting them.

“I doubt that it will be the captain’s or my head that will roll, Doctor,” Spock returned with a hint of that arrogance that infuriated McCoy on a regular basis. “Even Georges Danton met the same fate that he had doomed the whole French aristocracy to. He was beheaded – accused of treachery against the French Revolution he initiated. You see, Doctor, who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind.”

“Mr. Spock?” Giotto called, taking something out of the desk. “I think you’ll find this interesting.” He lifted a case sealed with the Federation symbol. Green gasped again, while Spock simply lifted
both brows. Accepting the offered case, he broke the seal and opened the cover. Papers, disks, hand-written blotters, and more were revealed. The Vulcan needed no more than a few close looks at the old-fashioned written reports to know that he had found what he’d been searching for. And something very close to anger and loathing rose in him, which he quickly suppressed.

“I will take this with me for closer inspection,” he said, closing the cover again. “Dr. Green, you are to be put under a curfew order until the end of our journey. The same goes for your colleagues and your security team.”

Anthony gritted his teeth. “You will regret this, Commander!” he hissed.

“That remains to be seen, who of us will regret something in the end.” Just as before, Spock’s expression resembled stone. “You can use the replicator and the library computer for entertainment, communication will be cut off although a link from the bridge will be maintained. You are not allowed to leave your quarters. Should you decide to disobey, the guards outside will be forced to take you to the brig. Have I made myself clear?”

Green was about to explode, but knew that he hadn’t any other choice. “Do what you think you have to do,” he growled, while in the background Giotto secured the communication terminal and shut off any link that might give Green the chance to send a message.

Spock only nodded, then left the quarters. He heard protests and arguing coming from the adjacent quarters through the open doors, and sighed inwardly. It seemed he had to point out to every single scientist of Gamma 12 that they were now in custody. And he also would have to take care of the potential danger the elite security team represented for Jim and the others…

ST***ST***ST

“Captain, I’ve received a signal from a parsec just outside of the Tholian Empire,” Li said while he turned his chair towards Styles. Since he’d found out that James Kirk had tricked him, the captain’s mood had been dark at best. During the whole day yesterday he had sat on his chair and brooded, and this morning wasn’t any better. No one dared to address him if it wasn’t absolutely necessary, and therefore Li almost expected a sharp answer, but it seemed Styles had finally caught himself again.

Lawrence looked up at him. “What signal, Lieutenant?”
"A subspace transmission, sir – on the frequency of the Enterprise."

That caught Styles’ attention. Quickly he rose and walked towards the comms station. “Can you intercept it?”

“Yes, sir,” Li answered and a moment later Jim Kirk’s tenor sounded from the speakers,

“Enterprise to R6. Mr. Buckson, please come in!”

A moment later another male voice sounded, “Buckson here. Hello Jim. Nice to hear that you made it so far.”

“Yes, it was a close call. We’ll arrive at your coordinates in six hours, twenty five minutes. Is everything prepared?”

“Yeah, everything is ready for you. I’m looking forward to seeing you again, old friend. Have a good trip until then.”

“Thanks, Fox, I owe you one. Enterprise out.”

Li let his headset sink to the console. “That’s all, sir,” he said and Styles bent over him.

“Can you locate the source of who Kirk was talking to?” he demanded.

Li tried his best, but shook his head after several attempts. “Sorry, Captain. The transmission is scrambled. Kirk used Code 9, yes, but the transmission way almost impossible to…” He hesitated. “But I can you give the coordinates from where the Enterprise hailed R6 – whatever planet that is.”

“Transfer them to the navigation console,” Styles ordered, “And then contact Command and pipe it into my ready room.” He whirled around. “Change course towards the Enterprise’s last position!” he growled, balling his hands into fists. “This time I’ll get you, Kirk!”
Jim felt grim satisfaction as he heard that Green and his colleagues were now in custody, only confined to quarters because of their status. He didn’t know exactly what they’d done to Nien’s crew, even if Spock and Bones had explained it to him, but it was enough to make him rage. And Khan, who was with them during the short briefing, burnt in hot yet icy fury he’d somehow managed to control.

Especially as he sensed Joaquin awakening and quickly he returned to medbay. He came just in time to watch his little brother rouse.

Joaquin felt refreshed, but still he sensed that his body wasn’t as fit as his mind was. He smiled as he saw Noo bending over him. After reassuring his brother that he indeed was fitter than the day before, he told the same to McCoy, who made a short visit soon afterwards, checked vital signals, and ordered breakfast, which an orderly brought in a few minutes later.

Weiss began to eat and was practically devouring his food, very much like someone else Khan knew and loved. And, as he realized, he was calming down because of Joaquin’s presence. Yet he caught the boy looking questioningly at him several times, and he knew that his inner tumult echoed over their shared family link, but he wasn’t ready to tell his little brother of the darkness they’d all had to endure during the last two years. First he wanted Joaquin to learn of today’s news without prior knowledge, because Nien knew now that the Federation was a political installation and the Israeli Augment would have to stomach enough without the anguish of learning what had happened to his family.

They ate quickly, but before Khan was able to begin to tell Joaquin a little of the new world they all found themselves in now, he was distracted as he heard the heavy, sure steps of Scott coming nearer. He rose to greet the engineer, who hesitated at the room’s threshold, not knowing if he should disturb the boy on the biobed.

“Good morning, Mr. Scott,” Nien nodded at the Scotsman, who took this as an invitation to enter.

“Good mornin’, Mr. Singh,” he replied as he closed the distance to the two Augments.

“Good mornin’ ter ya too, young man,” he greeted the younger of the two superhumans. “I’m Montgomery Scott, the chief engineer. Nice ter meet ya!” Grinning, he offered his hand that Joaquin accepted.

“Irish?” he asked, and Scotty shook his head.
“Na, I’m Scottish.”

“Well, silly question of me – given your name,” Weiss smiled, having already learned that the tone aboard was one of comradery.

Scotty laughed. “Aye, the name reveals a lot.” He cocked his head. “And how are ye doin’, lad? Yer brother had a hard night concernin’ yer health. He was worried ter say the least”

“I’m fine, thank you,” Joaquin answered, asking himself if the whole ship knew about him and his brush with death.

Scott grinned at him before he turned serious again and addressed Khan. “I wanted ter ask ye if ye can spare some time for Engineerin’. Our lady is havin’ some trouble with the damn generator again. Keenser’s an idea about it, but I wanted yer opinion, too.”

Khan nodded at him. “No problem, Mr. Scott, I’m coming with you.” He glanced at Joaquin. “Will you be alright if I leave?”

Weiss looked from one man to the other, astonished once again at how comfortable another mere human was around his elder brother. He also marveled at how easily Noo behaved towards the engineer. Joaquin knew that Khan was an engineer at heart and tinkering with engines 260 years ahead of their own time had to be a challenge even Noonien Singh couldn’t resist. He simply smiled, “Yeah, go play with your machines. But don’t cripple the ship. I don't think the captain would be too delighted.”

Promptly, Scott laughed as he caught Khan rolling his eyes. It was obvious how close those two were, and he was glad that they were reunited. After exchanging quick greetings, the two older men left medbay.

ST***ST

Kirk had switched his shift with Scotty so that the engineer was free to work with Khan in Engineering. His blood was still boiling because of what he had learned this morning, but he did his best to hide his mood though his brooding was often interrupted.
Uhura’s triumphant “Ha, got you!” from the comms station got Jim’s attention. Turning his seat, he glanced at the young Bantu woman who looked over her shoulder at him with a barely hidden grin. “Captain, I cracked the code!”

In the blink of an eye, Jim was beside her, realizing that Spock had left his station too; he hovered on Uhura’s other side. Curiosity – it was certainly one of the few weaknesses even a Vulcan would and could not deny.

Without another word, Uhura gave them each a headset and pressed a button. Jim paled as he heard the order provided by, none other than, Luengo. Every vessel of Starfleet had to report immediately to the HQ if they encountered or tracked down the Enterprise. Every heavy cruiser not patrolling the former Neutral Zone was ordered to look for them and should try to stop them – and if it came to it – use force.

“How old is the order?” Jim asked with a dry mouth, and Nyota took a deep breath.

“Fifteen hours and thirty-eight minutes.” She rubbed her neck.

Jim pressed his lips into a thin line. “Dammit!” he murmured. “They declared open season on us. Luengo isn't taking any risks that we’ll escape and present his misdeeds to the Council.” He glanced at Spock. “What do you think? How long until Styles catches onto our little audio show?”

“Given the position the Excalibur had to reach to scan our first probe and the speed of the second probe and the delays due to subspace transmission, the chances that Captain Styles has already intercepted your feigned communication is 92.39% percent, Captain,” Spock answered.

“Hmph, as soon as Styles informs Luengo about it I’m certain that several of our ships will be ordered towards the Tholian Empire.” Jim mused.

“If Captain Styles or Admiral Luengo do not see through the ruse, Captain. Even if I doubt that Captain Styles will discover the second ‘bread-crum’ as you called it, Luengo will not be fooled so easily. The SBI has the most advanced equipment an Intelligence Department could desire, and the chance that they will discover our deception soon is high…”

“Please, don’t Spock!” Jim sighed. “Just let me believe that we can get them to chase the trail a little bit longer.”
Promptly, a Vulcán brow was lifted. “Keeping silent about a fact won’t change the fact.” Deep blue
eyes met his and with an inward sigh, he skipped the next comment. Humans! Sometimes he thought
he would never solve the riddle they presented him.

More than 260 years asleep – and everything around him was a riddle. And what was he doing
instead of solving them – instead of exploring this new world had woken up in? He was lying in
bed! Almost two hours ago Noo had left with the funny Scotsman, and in the meantime, McCoy and
another doctor, an African man – Dr. M’Benga, had visited him. The CMO had even brought him
some books from his private quarters for entertainment before he left to catch up on some sleep as he
told him. But it didn’t quench the boy’s curiosity.

But it wasn’t just his new surroundings that busied his mind. Joaquin had a certain gut-feeling about
the ship doctor’s exhaustion. Noo’s controlled fury, he could easily sense over their bond, and a
depressed feeling had settled in overnight in medbay – as if they had found out something was or
went wrong. And Joaquin feared that it had to do with his brothers and sisters.

Sighing, he took one of the other books – a photo book about Earth today. Many things had changed
– cities, borders, villages… Many things were still the same. The novels the CMO seemed to prefer
weren’t exactly to Weiss’ taste. Yes, they were interesting, but they didn’t quench his thirst for
knowledge. And the area outside his room was tempting; it lured him to explore at least a little bit of
his new surroundings.

A spaceship!

He was aboard a real spaceship where artificial gravity wasn’t fiction, but reality. He wanted to see a
little bit more of all this. And he wanted to test his muscles. Yes, he understood the doctor’s caution
concerning his depleted muscle mass and that his body had to adjust to its functioning state, but
Joaquin was an Augment, and his physiology was designed to regenerate quickly – adjust faster to
achieve homeostasis. Surely he could risk a few steps to have a peek outside of the room.

Pulling the blanket away, he swung his legs over the bed’s edge, ignoring the tingling he felt in them
and the cold that still seemed to cling to every fiber of his being. Ever so carefully, he inched forward
until his feet touched the cool ground. He felt a soft vibrating, too faint for human awareness, yet his
augmented senses recognized it. He knew that this was because of the engines, and more curiosity
sparked in him. Taking a deep breath, he raised, supporting himself on the mattress. It worked,
somehow, yet the fiery tingling in his legs intensified, but stubbornly he tried a first step – and
another.
And that was the moment his body told him in an unmistakable way that the mind may be strong, but
the body would have the last word. With a stifled yelp, he fell to the floor as his legs gave out. His
muscles and nerves were still adjusting to taking over their usual functions. Swearing under his
breath, he looked up. Door and bed were too far away to reach either of them, and he hated the fact
that he now had to call for help. Dammit! Noo would give him an ear full!

Then he heard quick steps that came nearer and as he glanced up he saw two young men, maybe his
age, who stopped at the door, looking at him with widened eyes.

“ST***ST

“You’ll see, Hikaru loves to get visitors! He’s bored half out his mind by now, I’m sure. I told him
about you, and he’s curious!” Pavel Chekov chirped enthusiastically as he walked down the hallway
together with Kevin Riley, heading for medbay.

“I’m just a second-year cadet; he’s a lieutenant and already the first pilot of Starfleet’s flagship,”
Kevin murmured, but Pavel simply laughed.

“Hikaru is only six years older than we are, and he’s a funny guy. He’s an excellent friend, and I think
you’re going to like him.” They stepped into medbay. “Maybe…” He cut himself off as he heard a
stifled yelp followed by a thud that was unmistakably the sound of a body hitting the floor.

Instantly alerted, both men raced towards the noise and stopped dead in their tracks when they
reached one of the private rooms and saw that someone had obviously overestimated himself trying
to leave the bed too soon. The young man looked up to them. Almost shoulder-length brown hair
framed a pale, yet toned face; big brown eyes glanced sheepishly at them.

“Hey, you okay?” Pavel asked and entered with Kevin on his heels.

“Yes, I, uh, slipped,” Joaquin murmured, embarrassed to be caught in such a situation.

Chekov bent over him and offered him a hand. “Here, let me help you,” he said, and Weiss had no
choice but to accept the support. At least Noo or one of the two physicians wouldn’t see him like
this. He tried to rise, but his legs had their own idea and began to buckle when he had barely
regained footing.

Kevin instantly realized what was wrong. He closed the distance to his friend, and together they
steadied the stranger before helping him back to bed. With a groan of relief, Joaquin sunk onto the
mattress and instantly covered himself with the blanket.

“Thanks,” he sighed, shivering from the cold still felt. “You spared me a lot of trouble.”

Chekov grinned at him. “Nah, Dr. McCoy can be grumpy, but he won’t behead someone for leaving sickbed – normally. Ozerwise our keptin would have lost his head a dozen times and more,” he joked.

Weiss grimaced. “I was thinking of my older brother rather than the good doctor,” he murmured. That woke the other two males’ curiosity.

“Your brozer serves aboard, too?” Pavel asked. He received a confused frown.

“I don’t think that Noo serves really. I think he’s rather… Rather a sort of passenger, who likes to help out the chief engineer when needed.”

“’Noo’?” Kevin asked; a little bit at a loss.

Chekov cocked his head. He was certain that he had never seen him aboard and… And then it hit him with the force of a ship blasting into warp. ‘Noo’ like in ‘Noonien’ – and if ‘Noo’ was Khan and the ‘older brother’ of this young man, then this meant…

“You belong to Khan’s crew, don’t you?” he asked.

Joaquin looked warily at him and nodded. “Yes,” he affirmed. “I… I was woken up yesterday because my tube was failing.” He waited, expecting the two other males to withdraw any second with a lame excuse because of his heritage. To his astonishment, the contrary was the case.

“Oh shit,” Kevin commented and looked at Pavel. “That was the reason Dr. McCoy hailed Mr. Singh.” He glanced back at the young Augment. “How are you?”

“Other than my legs being too stupid to obey me, and feeling like I’m sitting nude at the North Pole, I feel great,” Joaquin deadpanned. Both men laughed at his wry answer, and the one who spoke with a heavy accent drew nearer.
“Zat we cannot allow,” Pavel said and addressed Kevin, “Go and fetch anozer thermal blanket.” Riley nodded and vanished quickly. Chekov tugged the blanket tighter around the young superhuman. “What’s your name?” he asked.

Joaquin, still perplexed that neither of the two humans seemed to have a problem with his presence, answered, “Sorry. I must have lost my manners somewhere back a few decades. I’m Joaquin Weiss.”

The navigator grinned at him. “Nice to meet you. I’m Pavel Andreievich Chekov.”

“And I’m Kevin Riley,” the Irishman introduced himself as he spread a second blanket over Joaquin that he had taken from another biobed nearby.

“Nice to meet you two,” Weiss said, and it wasn’t only a polite phrase. Here were to mere humans who knew what he was, and they treated him just like he was one of them – just like the doctor and Jim did. If this was a taste of what to expect from the twenty-third century, then he was glad that the Botany Bay had traveled so long through space. “You’re Russian, aren’t you?” he asked Pavel, who nodded with a boyish smile.

“Da. I’m coming from near St. Petersburg and…”

“You mean Leningrad,” Joaquin cut in confused, and Chekov began to grin.

“You’re not up-to-date, my friend. Leningrad was named St. Petersburg at ze beginning of ze twentieth century. But I zink zat’s a tiny detail you missed.”

“Yeah. It’s really strange to wake up more than 260 years in the future,” Joaquin admitted, and Pavel nodded.

“I would be panicking – seriously,” Kevin smirked, feeling surprisingly at ease in the presence of the young Augment. Well, he respected Mr. Singh profoundly, so it wasn’t difficult to be open towards this other superhuman.

“So,” Weiss began hesitantly to ask. “You two are members of the ship’s crew?”
“Yes,” Chekov nodded. “I’m the first navigator, and Kevin is in his second year of Starfleet Academy.”

“You’re the first navigator?” He looked closer at Chekov. “You can’t be older than I am – I mean without all the years I slept.” He cocked his head. “Don’t get me wrong, but aren’t you a little young for such a job?”

Pavel shrugged cheerfully. “I’m nineteen, yes. I got a scholarship for the Academy and graduated two years ago. Then the mess with the Narada happened, and I was forced to take over navigation. When the Enterprise was given to Captain Kirk, he insisted on having me at the navigation station.”

Confused, Joaquin scratched his head, totally at a loss now. “Okay, I don’t know what the ‘Narada’ is – was, but is it normal today that even officer candidates have such important duties?”

“Usually not, but after the mess two years ago when we lost almost half of the fleet and nearly all students of the third and fourth semester, Starfleet’s in need of recruits. The captain was only twenty-five when he got the Enterprise – pretty young himself for that job, but he’s a genius!” Pavel grinned.

“You lost half of the fleet? Why? And what’s Starfleet?” Joaquin asked, more curious now than ever before.

“Khan or the captain haven’t explained?” Pavel was thunderstruck for a moment. As Weiss only shook his head, Chekov took a deep breath. “All right. We’ll give you a crash course in history.” He sat down on one of the visitor chairs just like Kevin did.

“In the middle of the twenty-first century, an engineer called Zefram Cochrane developed the warp drive – a drive that makes it possible to travel at light-speed – multiple times. That caught the attention of the Vulcans and…”

“Warp drive?” Weiss was clearly at a loss now. “Vulcans?”

“The Vulcans are a humanoid species from the star system Eridani 40 about sixteen light years from Earth,” Kevin explained. “They were, as Pavel said, the first aliens we had contact with. They are very peaceful and follow a strict code of logic. They claim to have no emotions, but that’s a big lie – even if they claim to be unable to lie which is a lie itself.”
Joaquin stared at him disbelieving, before he yelled, “There are real aliens?”

Kevin snickered, “Yes, there are real aliens. Many, many kinds. Almost exactly hundred years ago, in 2161 actually, we formed an alliance with several species under the ‘United Federation of Planets’. Kinda like the old United Nations, I suppose. Earth belongs to it; we're one of the founders along with a few other cultures, mainly the Vulcans though.” He smiled at the other young man who had paled even more. “Don’t worry; most are really nice guys. Well, they may differ from what you read in science fiction novels, but the most have a human appearance, maybe with some small differences, but nothing too dramatic.”

The same moment steps came nearer, and a male voice said, “Is everything all right, Mr. Weiss?” Dr. N’Halro, who had been alerted by the loud squeak, stopped at the threshold looking surprised at the little gathering. “What’s going on here?”

Joaquin’s eyes were about to pop out of his head as he took in the thin humanoid with blue skin, white hair and… antennae? Then his sensitive nose caught a strange scent – not unpleasant, but utterly unknown. And it came from the newcomer who was…

An alien!

This was no mask, but a real living, breathing alien! And even if his enhanced mind was constructed to adjust quickly to any situation, this time, Joaquin felt his breath hitch and a mixture of disbelief and shock ran through him.

Pavel’s soulful eyes found the young Augment and acting on pure instinct he rose, stepped beside the bed, and squeezed Joaquin’s shoulder to reassure him, “Don’t fret. N’Halro is our zird CMO – one of ze good guys.”

N’Halro knew exactly why the enhanced human gaped with palpable anxiety at him. ‘I have to be the first non-human he meets,’ he thought. ‘No wonder he is shocked.’

Moving slowly to lessen any threat the Augment might read in his approach, the Andorian stepped nearer and looked at the monitor of the biobed. “Too high pulse, body temperature still too low, blood pressure increasing…” He glanced at Joaquin with pitch black eyes. “I think I’m the reason for your vitals; Am I not?”
Still perplexed, Joaquin stared at the alien, gulping as he became acutely aware that this wasn’t a crazy dream, but real. There stood a creature from another planet talking with him like this was the most normal thing in the world. Well, maybe it was the most normal thing in the world – in this world!

Pavel slapped him on the back. “Come on; N’Halro is a good man. You don’t have to be afraid of him.” He pointed at the doctor. “He is from ze planet Andorra zat belongs to ze Federation, too. He’s one of a few non-humans who are serving aboard.”

“There… There are more aliens on this ship?” Weiss gasped.

Before one of the two ensigns could answer, a familiar deep baritone was sounded through the speakers, “Khan to medbay!”

N’Halro sighed and walked to the intercom. “Medbay, N’Harlo here.”

A short pause, then, “Where is Dr. McCoy?”

“He’s dead to the world on the couch in his office, catching up on some sleep, as is Dr. M’Benga. Is something the matter, sir?”

“Have one of the human nurses check on Mr. Weiss. I sensed distress from him and…”

“I’m here with him, sir and I think his distress is because of my… appearance,” the Andorian answered, watching the young superhuman over his shoulder.

Pavel thought it his duty to smooth the situation. Quickly, he stepped beside the third CMO and said, “Mr. Singh, Pavel Chekov here. Joaquin is a little bit shocked, but ozwerise he’s all right. Don’t worry, Kevin, Dr. N’Halro and I are already explaining everyzing to him.”

“Everything?” There was a certain tense undertone in the Augment’s voice and Pavel instinctively knew to what Khan was referring.

“About alien races, ze last two and a half century, ze Federation – zat kind of stuff.”
Again, for a moment there was silence before the former dictator said. “I will be with you in a few minutes. Khan out!”

N’Halro cut off the intercom while Chekov returned to the biobed, smiling. “He’s a mozer hen, your big brozer.”

“Yes, he always has been,” Joaquin murmured, still eyeing the blue-skinned alien warily.

“What’s going on here?” A very tousled Leonard McCoy with bloodshot eyes appeared at the threshold. “My terminal lit up like a Christmas tree because of the boy and…” His gaze fell on N’Halro, and he stopped dead in his tracks. “Oh!” he breathed, realizing why Khan’s little brother was stressed enough to elicit an alert from his biobed.

“No reason to get all worked up, kid,” Bones said as kindly as he could in his exhausted state; he quickly closed the distance to the little group and placed a hand on N’Halro’s arm. “I know this has to be a shock for you,” he addressed Joaquin, “but you see, we humans are not alone in the universe. Dr. N’Halro is an Andorian. He’s quite sensitive and gentle. An outstanding crew member all around. You don’t have to be afraid of him.”

Joaquin nodded with a dry mouth; still staring at the alien. Then he felt the others’ concerned looks resting upon him and his humor sprang alive – his personal defense mechanism when he faced an uncomfortable situation. “You’re right, Pavel. The aliens here are not like in old science fiction novels. In the books, they have antennas, too, but they were always green.”

Bones felt a grin tugging at his mouth, looking through Weiss’ attempt to adjust to the changes using humor – Jim did that, too. “If you’re looking for a green alien, you’ll have to wait for our first officer. You may not see it right away, but he has a green tint because his blood is green.”

Weiss gulped. “The first officer is an alien, too?”

“Yes. His name is Spock, and he is a Vulcan – well, half Vulcan. His mother was from Earth.”

Joaquin’ eyes widened again. “Vulcan and Andorian. So, how many alien races are there?”
“Oh, even Spock doesn’t know that, and he is our walking, talking onboard library computer,” Bones answered. “Alone in the Federation, there are dozens different species and some of them are represented aboard. N’Halro and Spock for example, but there are some other offworlders. There is Keenser, a nice little guy whose face resembles an oyster; he isn’t exactly the chatty type, so don’t mind him if you get only one or two words out of him. But he’s a damn good engineer. Then we have the Rigeliands; one of my nurses comes from Rigel. There are also many crew members who weren’t born on Earth, but on one of Earth’s colonies.”

“Earth colonies?” Joaquin gaped.

“Yes,” another deep voice said from the entrance. “Mankind spread through the galaxy as explorers, mixed with aliens, built colonies, and peacefully, for the most part, coexist with other species.” Khan entered the room, looked from one man to another, took in the whole situation, and sighed deeply. He had wanted to prepare Joaquin for this century before he met his first alien. It seemed he was too late for that. His gaze was fixed on his brother as he asked, “Are you alright?”

Joaquin nodded hesitatingly. “Yeah, I think so.” He moistened his lips, glanced once again at the alien who stood casually among the others and took a deep breath. “So – the whole galaxy is one big friendly neighborhood?” That sounded too good to be true!

“That would be nice,” McCoy sighed, “but what’s the old saying? You can’t live in peace if your neighbor doesn’t want to. There are other beings that follow their own way and have their own opinion on how to extend their might and expand their territory. On the one hand, we have the Romulans, distantly related to the Vulcans, but where the Vulcans are peaceful and follow their path of logic, the Romulans are warriors and cannot understand that the Federation has absolutely no interest in attacking them. They are more distrustful than my uncle’s old dachshund, and that’s saying something. Then we have the Klingons, who think there is no greater honor than to fight and die in war. And there are also the Tholians. We’ve never even seen them in person, but they tried to imprison our ship in a web of energy while we waited for some dimensional reality shift to get Jim back aboard – please don’t ask me to explain that one. We thought we’d lost him; only Spock didn’t give up hope. He waited for his theory to work itself out. Good thing he’s so stubborn. Jim was still alive, and we beamed him back. And we learned that the Tholians are fiercely protective of their territory and don’t tolerate intruders. We barely escaped.”

Khan looked with a hint of worry at McCoy. “Jim went missing?”

“Yeah, just – gone. He was out in space in a suit and running out of oxygen, but Spock didn’t quit. I think he somehow sensed that Jim was still alive. Vulcan bond, you know.”

Nien nodded. “Yes, I’m quite aware that Jim and Mr. Spock share a telepathic link.” His voice was neutral and Bones realized that there was no hint of the old jealousy he had seen from the Augment
whenever the close friendship of his beloved and the Vulcan was displayed or mentioned. It seemed Khan had accepted the unusual bond between captain and first officer.

“Telepathic?” Obviously, Joaquin began to calm down, and his nervousness was changing into curiosity. “And what is this ‘beam’? I’ve heard it twice now.”

“Vulcans are touch telepaths, so touching them is a big no-no,” Kevin said. “They can practically read your mind then or at least get a load of your emotions they would have to deal with; it’s not very pleasant for them. So it’s very impolite to touch them.” He frowned. “Jim does it all the time though with Mr. Spock,” he thought aloud; frowning.

“Yeah, those two are a special pair, that’s for sure,” Bones chuckled.

“And ‘beaming’ is a kind of transporter,” Chekov began to answer Joaquin’s second questions. “It’s an enhanced technology that transports you within a few seconds from one place to the other, for example from this ship down on a planet.” Eagerness was in his voice. Transporter technology was, after all, his passion.

Weiss’ eyes went wide again. “How so?”

McCoy addressed Khan. “I think we should let them alone. Mr. Riley and Mr. Chekov will answer all the questions your brother has and…” He stopped as he saw the beaming faces of the ensigns, and lifted a pointing finger at Pavel. “But don’t give the boy your Russian version of history, Mr. Chekov! The turbolift is not a Russian invention, and Klingon soap is still Klingon – not made by old granny in Moscow, end of story!” he warned.

Pavel rolled his eyes. “I will behave, Doctor.”

“And, by the way, the turbo drive of today’s lift system was developed by an Irishman,” Kevin cut in.

“What?” That disbelieving shout came from the two doctors and Pavel together, while Khan sighed quietly, already assuming the worst. It seemed Ensign Riley also harbored the tendency to make sure that his own home got the laud it might not truly deserve.

“Irish pride!” another male voice said from the door and affirmed Khan’s assumption. “The turbo
system was developed by a Rigelian named Anzoos,”

McCoy whirled around. “Sulu! Heavens, you should be still in bed!”

Chekov hurried towards his friend. “Ze doctor is right, Hikaru. You shouldn’t be up!”

Sulu grimaced. “My back is giving me hell, and I’m bored almost to death!” he replied, while he ambled towards the bed. “Hi, I’m Hikaru Sulu,” he introduced himself, offering his hand; Joaquin accepted as he told the Japanese his name. His gaze wandered over the scars which marred the Asian man’s face and his upper left side. “What happened to you?” he asked. “That looks painful.”

“Not anymore. Today’s painkillers really do the trick,” Sulu said kindly. “The helm console exploded, and I was too slow to move out of the way. That’s all.” He sat down in the visitor chair. “And when our good doctor is done with me in a few days I will no longer resemble a zombie.”

“Yes, but only if your fever doesn’t return, so be a good boy and go back to bed!”

“Just a few minutes, Doctor.” He smiled up at the CMO. “And given the fact that I’m the highest ranking officer in this room, it’s my responsibility that Mr. Weiss learns the real history and not the chaos those two are going to tell him.” He pointed wryly at the two ensigns, who instantly protested.

Joaquin felt amusement rising in him. He looked up at his brother who smirked slightly and began to chuckle. “Is the mood aboard this ship always so – jovial?” he asked, and it was Chekov, who answered, “Yes – except when we’re kicking some Klingon ass or duty is more difficult than usual.”

McCoy gave N’Halro and Khan a signal and the three left the room; Chekov’s cheerful voice followed them. “I think it’s the best if your brother remains with some boys his own age,” Leonard said to the former dictator. “He’ll adjust more easily to the new world he woke up in. You should tell him what happened to you and why we are really rushing to exile ourselves. I have a bad feeling that not everything will run smoothly, even on New Vulcan.”

Khan nodded gravely, not looking forward to revealing to Joaquin that this ‘new world’ still wore many of the old faces they had hoped to escape all those centuries ago.

ST***ST***ST
“Kirk is going to the Tholian Realm?” Albert Norton blinked in confusion at José Luengo, who sat at his desk. The skies outside were bright and clear for once, and many people walked the pavements during that afternoon in San Francisco. Luengo had just returned from a briefing about the next steps to secure the Federation’s borders, while Robertson waited for M’Rek’s statement concerning the incident with the Excalibur.

Robertson would never see the statement!

Luengo had taken care of it. The communications center would transfer any message for the president to José’s terminal first – a measure of security he told his subordinates, to prevent any spy or malware transmission to the president’s terminal. M’Rek hadn’t answered until now, this much Luengo knew, and even if the Klingon Councilor responded, Robertson would never know. In a few days, the president and the Council would have to declare the ceasefire ended, and he – José Luengo – would be promoted officially to Chief in Command.

And until then, they had to catch Kirk, his friends, and the Augment – the Augments, as Luengo assumed. Styles’ most recent message received late that morning had woken new hope in him. They were finally on the Enterprise’s trail, but the coordinates Lawrence had given confused him, and heeding a gut-feeling, he had ordered a complete analysis of the transmission between the Enterprise and this mysterious man Styles had recorded and sent him. Something wasn’t right here; Luengo felt it in his bones.

“The transmission the Excalibur intercepted was sent from a position near the Tholian area. Given the distance between the former Gamma 12 and the most likely location of the Enterprise based on her current top speed, it would fit, but… I think Styles is about to fall for one of Kirk’s tricks again. R6 – I have never heard of such a planet or colony. There isn't even an asteroid with the name. I checked the databank.”

“A pseudonym maybe?” Norton suggested, and the other admiral shrugged.

“It could be. Kirk and his alley, whoever he is, have to be very careful, this much they know. So it could be possible that they are using some pseudonym in case they were intercepted. I also checked the name, Fox Buckson. There are no known identities in the data bank with this name – just like the mysterious scientist who developed the SDD. And there is something else.” Luengo bent forwards. “Styles could only track down the Enterprise’s position; he couldn't get the position for the ship or the planet that Kirk hailed. It’s one-sided.”

Albert frowned. “You mean you think the transmission was faked?”
“Yes, I think so. Styles is already heading to the coordinates of the Enterprise now, but I don’t believe that this will lead him to Kirk. I rather think…”

The intercom at his desk buzzed; irritated, he opened the link. “Luengo here!”

“Admiral; Stones here,” the Chief of Security replied. “Admiral, I reviewed the transmission. I also isolated each speaker and scanned background noise. The noise is identical on both sides of the exchange.”

Norton and Luengo exchanged a glance. “You're saying that Kirk and this ominous Fox Buckson were in the same room transmitting?’’

“Yes, sir, there is no doubt. And the noise is typical background noise of a starship – Lieutenant G’Rialta is sure that it’s the sound of the warp drive of a Constitution cruiser.”

José narrowed his eyes. “Thank you, Commander, good work!” He cut off the connection and let himself sink back in his chair. “This goddam farm boy's playing cat and mouse with us; luring Styles through the half the Alpha Quadrant! And in the meantime, Kirk's speeding to an unknown place where he thinks he'll be safe! And we're running out of time!” His fist landed on the desktop, and a Spanish curse escaped him.

Norton crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Kirk his very smart – and very clever! I have to admit that!” He looked back at Luengo. “But he has no evidence against us! He doesn't have the slightest clue that the attack against the Excalibur was your order.”

“He already found out that there were two ‘Kor’s’ – the reason why we still have a ceasefire in place while Robertson waits for M’Rek’s statement. Otherwise, we'd already be back at war. And with this SDD we stand a better chance than ever before of destroying the Klingon fleet, even without the new biological weapon, though this part of the plan is still in play. I know Kirk. He is like a terrier – if he grabs onto something, you can’t wrestle him away from it. He's had the taste of blood, and with Khan at his side – these two are a force to be reckoned with; we cannot underestimate them – not least because Khan saw us interacting with Alexander more than once. He knows that we both belonged to Section 31. If the Council learns of this, we’re done for.”

His gaze shifted to the wall where a large screen showed the news from different planets and colonies, but also the position of the squadrons, patrols and single ships of the fleet. “So where is Kirk off to? Where can he find someplace willing to give him asylum? What options are left for him
– now, after the whole fleet has been alerted to his going rogue? Where can he hide – and not only himself and his friends, but also Khan and the other Augments he sure as hell recovered from Gamma 12?"

Norton pursed his lips. "Kirk has made a lot of friends in the last two years – especially during his first mission and now in this the war."

"Yes, but there is a difference between a friend and friend willing to get arrested for you. I'd guess that there are no government members insane enough to offer him and six dozen superhumans shelter!" He shook his head.

"So, he has to go to somebody he can trust completely," Albert mused. "Someone, who will back him up no matter the circumstances."

Luengo snorted. "That description fits all of the senior officers of the Enterprise – especially for the CMO and Spock! I dare say there is nothing they wouldn't do for him or that they haven't done for him, seeing as they've already covered for him concerning this creature." He shook his head.

"McCoy and Kirk attended the Academy together – hell, they shared a room the whole time, but that a Vulcan like Spock is involved in something criminal only because of some silly friendship is…"

He stopped his pacing and tirading; his eyes widened as a particular thought struck him. His gaze found the large screen and hung on the star map of the Federation. The former and new borders were marked with different colors, and near Earth, a planet had been marked as destroyed – Vulcan. The admiral’s glance rushed over the detailed map and found another planet more than twenty-four light years away from Earth – New Vulcan.

And the insight hit Luengo with the force of a hypertruck.

"Spock…" He whispered and closed his eyes. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, why didn't I think of that sooner? I'm... I'm an utter idiot!" He stepped towards the wall and the map. "I am such a fool. The answer is so clear, and I was too blind to see it!"

Norton had left his chair, too, and walked towards his ally in the conspiracy. "What are you talking about?" he asked baffled. "Do you know where Kirk is heading?"

"Yes, and the answer is so easy even a child could figure it out!" José whirled around. "There is only one person in the whole universe Kirk trusts completely – not only with his life but also with the
lives of his crew, including that of this creature and the other beasts.”

“And who is that?” Norton wanted to know.

“Spock of Vulcan!” Luengo stated. “If there is one being Kirk knows he can rely on without any doubt, then it’s Spock! Heavens, there are stories about their friendship today – rumors that they have and will again risk their lives for each other. In all their decades together they must have become inseparable!”

Albert cocked his head, clearly confused and even a little bit worried about his colleague’s state of mind now. Maybe the stress was catching up with him. “José, I admit that Kirk and Spock seemed to have developed a close friendship; it may be the only reason why the Vulcan supports Kirk right now. But they’ve known each other for a little more than two years now – not for decades. And Spock is aboard the Enterprise. Why would you say Kirk is going to him if…”

“Ah, you don’t know!” Luengo interrupted him, chuckling. “No, of course not. There are only a few who are aware of this little detail.” He looked Albert straight into the eyes. “What I’m telling you now will never leave this room! High Minister Selek of New Vulcan is none other than Spock, Kirk’s first officer. It’s Spock from the future!” He watched Norton’s face going slack with shock.

“Selek is… But… HOW?” Albert demanded, astonished.

Luengo grimaced. “Selek and Spock are one and the same person. He came from the same timeline as Nero. He just came through that wormhole a little later than that Romulan bastard. He became ‘Selek’ after the whole mess – a security measure that I welcomed back then because his knowledge of the future could be dangerous if our enemies discovered his true identity. T’Pau herself suggested it, and Sarek agreed to it as did the future Spock.” He began to pace again. “I talked to him once, and he affirmed that in his timeline, he was the first officer of the Enterprise, too. He served under Kirk, knew him for more than forty years as well as most of the senior officers who are also aboard today – only in his time. And the way he spoke of ‘his’ Kirk showed me that they shared a profound friendship – just like his younger counterpart and the Enterprise’s captain now. If Kirk needs his help, and he damn well needs any support he can get at the moment, then Selek, aka Spock, will take him under his protective wing without a second thought.”

Albert had sat down on the visitor chair again still baffled beyond his imagination. “And so now you think Kirk is heading to New Vulcan?”

“He has no other place to go to,” the Chief in Command nodded. “There is only one man in the whole galaxy who has the power and is in the position to protect him and his crew. And no one in
the Council would dare force Selek of New Vulcan to turn over a fugitive. For that matter, we can't exactly force the Vulcans to do it either.

“But the Augment is a very dangerous creature as are the other superhumans. Khan killed dozens of people last year. The Vulcan High Council would never…”

“I guess that farm boy came up with a great sad story about how the poor lab-bred bastard was wronged by Section 31. You told me yourself once that Alexander and especially Nathan Conelly brought the Augment to his knees during testing, and I bet my last shirt that Khan told Kirk that story to provoke his compassion. And the stupid naïve boy fell for it resulting in today’s situation. Kirk is using this to appeal to the Vulcans’ sense of morality concerning respect for all life forms! And, of course, the old Spock bought it all and offered them asylum!”


José snorted. “There is only one possibility left. We have to get Kirk before he reaches New Vulcan.” He returned to the map. “His ship has warp 3, maybe 4 at best after the last battle with the Klingon renegades – that incident in which Kor was unfortunately involved too. So Kirk can reach New Vulcan in three days at the earliest.” He quickly strode to his desk. “Lieutenant,” he barked into the intercom. “Hail the Excalibur and get me Styles, priority one! He is to be in his ready room or his quarters when I hear from him. And then contact Commander Stones. He has to make sure that 250 Elite Securities are on standby for boarding!” He didn’t wait for confirmation, but cut the link. Then he looked at Norton.

“Call Professor Dashwood and Dr. Conelly. Tell them if they want to have their lab rat back, they need to pack their bags and be ready to board in the next eight hours. The same goes for you. I ordered the Excalibur to New Vulcan. There are other ships nearby, but I don’t trust their commanders to carry out the duty I’m giving them. Styles is already dependent on me, and he’s got a grudge against Kirk. He wouldn’t mind taking down the Enterprise. I’ll order him to rendezvous with you, then try to intercept the Enterprise. Stop Kirk! No matter what, stop him before he gets to Selek!”

“And what if the Enterprise does get to New Vulcan before we catch up with her?” Norton asked. “We can't attack Kirk on the planet’s surface. The Vulcans…”

“That's why I'm sending Security with you. Seize the Enterprise and get Kirk, even if he is on New Vulcan. And make certain the scientists get the creature so that they can finally finish their damn job! I don't care how you do it, just DO it! When we prepare the final strike against the Klingons, we need the biological weapon – and we have to silence Kirk and his friends! Find a way. If there is no other option, take him by force. Make it look like his precious new friend, Khan, is responsible for it – that he went berserk again. Maybe this will open the Vulcan Elders’ eyes. I have complete trust in
your abilities!” He took a deep breath and his gaze pierced Norton to the core as Luengo added, “We have to get them, or everything we’ve worked for so hard for will be lost!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I already warned you that Luengo would figure out soon to where Jim is off to. And more! Especially the last given orders to get Jim at any costs and to imprison Khan no matter what, will make hell breaking lose.

In the next chapter you’ll learn more of what is going on aboard the Lexington, while Joaquin learns of his brother’s fate – and of his bonding with Jim (*snicker*). There is a lot to stomach for him, but thank the Lord he isn’t alone.

I hope you liked the last chapter. As I said in the beginning, I imagined that Pavel and Kevin could be optimal friends for Joaquin and now, re-reading the chapter, it’s really difficult given the actual circumstances. Chekov will have more scenes (in chapters which are also done for some time now) and will become very important soon, together with Sulu, Riley and Keenser – but I don’t want to reveal too much, so you just have to remain patient.

I wish you all a nice rest of the week and a peaceful weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Thank you once again for all the feedback. I’m glad that you like the beginning friendship between Joaquin, Pavel and Kevin so much. I think you’re going to love the new chapter then, because there are a lot of sweet and funny scenes concerning our youngest Augment, but also Jim, Nien and Spock. They all are going to learn a lot in the chapter. You also will meet Barnett and the others again, but also the ‘bad guys’ I’m certain you’re going to hate more and more.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 67 – Something wicked this way comes

“So, all cryotubes are working now, right?” Joaquin looked expectantly at Khan, who had returned to the private room only a minute ago. It an hour before the start of beta shift and Weiss’ head buzzed with all the information he got from Chekov and Riley during the morning. Sulu also stayed for longer than allowed by the CMO. He added the historical details to the others’ tales. Joaquin quickly realized that the officers were highly intelligent as well as a wonderfully formed sense of humor and empathy. He enjoyed their presence and in the end the four men even shared a lunch during which the three officers had gotten a very expressive demonstration of Augment appetite. Joaquin, finally able to eat something more, had devoured three plates of different kinds of pasta, a meal none of the physicians minded. After all, pasta was still the great energizer it always was. Humans hadn’t changed that much, and it seemed the augmented ones worked about the same way. Afterward he had felt tired and fallen asleep, only waking up just before his older brother arrived.

“Yes, don’t worry,” Nien answered quietly. “Our brothers and sisters are all safe.”

“And Suzette?” the young Augment asked tentatively.
Khan frowned. “Suzette?”

“Yes, Suzette Ling! Is she all right?”

The bright eyes of his leader and brother watched him thoughtfully; then the former dictator cocked his head. Khan didn’t need telepathy to feel Joaquin’s tension and a particular suspicion began to rise in him. “Joaquin,” he said carefully. “Is there something you have forgotten to tell me?”

The young superhuman felt his cheeks heating. “Well… I… There was no right moment… We…”

Nien fought a smirk as he heard his brother stuttering and watched him blushing furiously. “So, you and Suzette were… dating before we launched?” he asked casually.

Joaquin shook his head quickly. “No. No, no – I wanted to, but the war was closing in and… Well, we realized that we hadn’t seen each other as just siblings a few weeks before… before we fled New Delhi.” He bit his lips. “There was so much you had to take care of; I didn’t want to bother you. And then I wanted to speak with you before we boarded the Botany Bay, but…” He shrugged, feeling his face heating even more. He and Noo never had any secrets between them. This was maybe the first time that Joaquin had neglected to tell his brother something that serious.

Khan lifted both brows. “Have you kissed?”

That question took Weiss by surprise. “What?”

“I asked if you two have already kissed – or have you only held hands? That would be a shame. Suzette is a nice girl.”

Joaquin stared at Khan. “You… you’re okay with – with us?”

The former dictator sat down on the bed’s edge grinning now. “Why should I be against you two? Yes, you were raised as siblings – after all, Suzette is one of the few children Paolo, Kabir and I were able to save from the labs together with you – but that does not mean that I would forbid you two becoming a couple.”
Weiss sighed in relief and beamed at his brother as the older Augment reached out and ruffled through Joaquin’s thick hair. “Little fool!” Khan murmured, “as if I would begrudge you to find a mate! Ling is brilliant, a warm and kind young woman. You two would fit very well together.”

Joaquin smiled at him sheepishly. “Sorry,” he murmured. “I didn’t distrust you, I only… I didn’t know how you would react.”

“Have I denied Katie and Otto their love?”

“No, but they are older than Suzette and me.”

“Yes, you two are still very young, but love doesn’t know any limits,” Nien answered, knowing that he was referring to Jim and himself too at this moment. “I only can advise you to give yourself and her some time before you make the last step, but this decision is up to you and her, of course. I think it will be easier for you and her to be together after we reach New Vulcan. I trust Mr. Chekov and the others have talked to you about the events of the last centuries?”

“Yeah – especially about this crazy Nero alien who destroyed Vulcan and attacked Earth. Jim and this Mr. Spock had a big part in defeating the guy?”

“They did!” Khan nodded, and Joaquin grimaced. “They also told me about the war with the Klingons and of the uncertainty of the current ceasefire – and how you and Jim kicked some ass during the war. You saved the population of an entire planet; then you and the captain prevented a space station from dropping onto an Earth colony. And several days ago you stopped the ship from crashing into an asteroid. Brother, I knew you were good, but that’s incredible! And that’s not even all of it! You’ve become quite the hero here. There is just so much; my head is still swimming.”

The last statement earned him a sympathetic chuckle from his brother. “This I can easily believe. It was difficult for me too, after I woke up and realized that I had slept for more than two and a half centuries.”

Something in Noo’s voice caught Weiss’ attention. There was an undertone of grave seriousness that alerted him. “What happened?” he asked gently, and he watched how his brother took a deep breath. “Neither Pavel nor Kevin, nor Mr. Sulu wanted to tell me about you despite these past weeks you’ve been working with the captain now. But you’ve awake for more than two years, you said. So what has been going on?”
“A lot has happened, but that’s a story for later. You have gotten enough news for one day. Right now you should concentrate on restoring your strength and…”

“Hey, how are you two doing?” Jim Kirk entered the room, smiling widely at them both. McCoy, still tired but at least no longer that deathly pale like before, was on his heels.

“Hello, Cap… Jim,” Joaquin corrected himself quickly. “Doctor! Thanks for asking. I think I’m better now.”

“Even after having to stomach everything Mr. Chekov, Mr. Riley, and Mr. Sulu told him about the last centuries,” Khan deadpanned.

Kirk smirked. “Yeah, Bones already said that they gave him a crash course in history. I only hope that all that stuff didn’t scare you. If you have any further questions, don’t hesitate to ask. None of us will mind,” Jim continued kindly. “Dr. McCoy will show you how to use our library data bank so that you can catch up with history while you recover, but you can always ask him or me if there are questions the computer can’t answer. You need to get used to so much, and I can imagine that most of it will confuse or even trouble you at first. So ask right away. Nien is already familiar with everything – mostly, and if there are still questions – ask members or us of the medical staff.” He hesitated and glanced at McCoy. “Uh, Kevin told me that N’Halro stumbled in this room by accident. How…?”

Bones smiled reassuringly at him, while he interrupted, “It went surprisingly well.” He glanced at Joaquin. “You have an open spirit, young man.”

Weiss smiled a little bit. “Well, screaming like a girl wouldn’t change anything.”

Jim began to laugh. “Don’t let Lieutenant Uhura hear you. She may look barely grown up, and you might think you have to protect her, but in the end, it’s the other way around.”

“Yes, don’t mess with her ‘boys’, or she will become a lioness you do not want to anger,” Khan nodded.

Kirk smirked at him. “Aw, come on, Nien, she’s taken you under her protective wings, too.”

“Yes, after she gave me a lecture regarding what she would do to me if I hurt you.”
“Yes, that was quite a speech and quite the sight when she stepped up to you.”

Bones cocked his head curiously. “When did that happen?”

“A few days ago. Uhura caught us in a cabin lift and used the opportunity to…”

“She caught you two?” McCoy watched Jim blush the faintest bit, while Khan only smirked. McCoy groaned, “Jesus, don’t tell me you two were making out in the damn turbolift!”

“‘Making out’?” Joaquin gaped at his brother and the captain.

“Hey, it’s not my problem if he’s so damn irresistible!” Jim defended himself, pointing nonchalantly at the still grinning Augment leader.

“You really have no modesty, kid, do you?” Bones continued his exasperating tirade. “And here I thought in the transporter room was the first time you two couldn’t get your hands off each other in public.”

“They can’t get their hands off each other? What…?” Again Joaquin was ignored as Kirk protested,

“Bones, the turbolift is not exactly ‘in public’ and in the transporter room, I was so fucking happy that Nien was out of danger that…”

“You two put on such a show that even a nun would have been turned on! Hell, I think even Spock would have been if he’d seen you both!”

“What’s wrong with acting on your relief when you realize you and the love of your life had escaped a deadly situation?” Jim sounded very innocent.

“Jim, you two were on the damn transporter platform kissing the daylights out of each other! Hell, Chekov almost fainted and Scotty…”
“You two are TOGETHER?”

Joaquin’s outburst finally caught the three other men’s attention. Thunderstruck, he looked at his brother who flushed the tiniest bit. “Yes, we are,” Khan said calmly.

Weiss pointed at him, then at Jim, and back again. “You two are a couple?”

Khan’s gaze didn’t waver. “Yes.”

For several seconds, Joaquin didn’t reach, then he threw his head in the neck, whooped, and began to applaud. “FINALLY! Finally, someone got to you!” He started to laugh; joy written all over his face. “Finally, you found someone for you! Alas, I thought that this would never happen!” He grinned at a highly amused Kirk, who had closed the small distance to Khan and placed a hand on his shoulder that was instantly and tenderly covered by the Augment’s long fingers. “I don’t know how you managed to get my brother, but be sure you won’t easily get rid of him.”

“Oh, it was the other way around,” Jim snickered. “Your brother got me after we had a rough start. I wanted to tear his head off once, and now…”

“And now he would tear off the head of anyone who dares come near your brother,” McCoy smiled. “The two have already given us gray hair, but they are so damn adorable together I swear they could melt stone.”

“Careful, Doctor, or I will contemplate an official bonding ceremony where you stand as best man,” Nien mocked.

“As I said, I’ll throw a party if you two want it, even if the reason for it already happened.”

“One moment!” Joaquin watched his brother and the captain carefully. “You two are… bonded?”

Khan took a deep breath. “Yes, we are,” he affirmed. “We marked each other and bonded with all consequences due us.” He glanced up shortly at Jim, before he told his brother seriously, “I love him.”
Joaquin’s eyes began to brim with unshed tears, while he looked at Kirk. “And you?”

“Nien is my other half – the love of my life,” Jim stated quietly, but with such warmth in his voice that the young superhuman’s throat tightened in a mixture of happiness and affection. He reached out and laced his fingers in Nien’s free hand. “I’m so glad for you,” he whispered. “It was so hard to watch you doing everything alone, carrying all the responsibilities with no one to share it with – no one to find comfort in. I know you always wear a mask of bravado, but even you need someone in your life. I’m… I’m so happy for you!”

“Thank you,” Khan murmured, clearly at a loss for words. He had known that his little brother would be glad about this news, but this kind of reaction took him almost by surprise. Almost – after all, he knew how cheerful and emotional Joaquin was.

Weiss still beamed at him, then he reached out towards Jim, and as the captain placed his hand in that of the young Augment, the boy grinned, “I may be the youngest of us, but I’m also the closest one to Noo. And you are his bonded partner, so… Welcome to the family, Jim.”

A little bit unnerved Kirk felt his throat tightening as he squeezed Joaquin’s hand. “Thank you,” he murmured. “Nien and I share a lot of same characteristics, and one of them is the fact that we regard our crew as our family. My senior officers are family to me, too – Dr. McCoy here, Mr. Scott you already met and my first officer Spock. And then there are also Pavel and Sulu you met today, too, and Uhura. And I know Kevin Riley since I was a teen, and he and I were in the same position as you and Nien were. They are my closest friends – like brothers and sisters. And I want to welcome you among them.”

He felt a wave of happiness from his mate, while the big innocent eyes of Joaquin widened with almost childish glee – showing again how young he was.

McCoy watched his best friend and the two Augments – and just for a few seconds, the world was all right again.

Silent footsteps came nearer and then a deep baritone called, “Captain?”

Jim turned his head. “Over here, Spock! Please come in.” He looked back at Joaquin. “After you already saw N’Halro I think you’ll be okay by meeting your second ‘alien’?”

“Your first officer?” Weiss asked.
Jim nodded, “Yes, and my friend.”

“Ah, the one you have the telepathic link with as Dr. McCoy and Noo mentioned,” Joaquin mused.

“That’s correct,” a deep but surprisingly smooth baritone sounded from the door.

Joaquin tensed up, while his eyes moved to the new-comer. Tall and very slender, straight posture, a pale, angular face with a strange tone deep in the skin, shining black and obviously smooth hair, deep brown and somehow human eyes and… pointed ears!

“An elf?” the young Augment asked astonished.

“Rather a hobgoblin,” McCoy murmured beneath his breath but was ignored by Spock, whose attention was fixed on the enhanced boy.

“I’m aware of the fact that I do resemble some mystical creatures from Terran legends of Europe, but be assured that I’m not from a fairy realm,” Spock said.

Jim instantly realized the soft attempt at humor that obviously should help Joaquin to overcome the culture shock he certainly was still going through and smiled gratefully at his T’yh’la. “You know, I just can’t imagine you with bow and arrow.”

“Even if we had something equal in Vulcan history, I also can’t imagine using them,” Spock deadpanned.

Joaquin watched the alien man in front of him and remembered what Pavel, Kevin, and Sulu had told him of what happened two years ago. This man had lost his planet and nearly his whole race. Weiss did understand what that meant – after all he had been forced to watch other Augments being killed and even if Noo hadn’t told him much until now he simply knew that they two and their still frozen brothers and sisters had to be the last of their kind. So the Augments and the Vulcans shared one and the same fate: There were only a few of them left.

“I don’t know if I’m breaking some taboo and if so I’m sorry, but… I heard what happened to your planet and your mother,” he said quietly. “My sincerest condolences, Mr. Spock. I’ve been told that
your people control their emotions, but I think that no one can live through what you experienced and remained untouched. So, uh – I’m sorry for the losses experienced of your people and your family.”

The strange man lifted a brow which gave his motionless face an expression of surprise; then he bowed his head – too late to hide the short flash of pain in his eyes. “To voice sympathy with those who have endured significant loss is no taboo, not even in my culture, Mr. Weiss. Your words are welcome. Thank you in the name of my people and my clan.”

Joaquin swallowed. His highly tuned senses felt the anguish that was hidden deep beneath a strong shield, yet it didn’t escape the young superhuman’s attention. This alien man was still suffering, and Weiss felt a wave of compassion rising in him. He felt another gaze resting upon him, and as he turned his head, he caught Kirk looking at him with an expression of gratitude on the Vulcan’s behalf. These two males indeed were close friends, no doubt.

Spock watched the augmented boy for a moment longer, and his telepathic skills could sense the mental strength emanating from Joaquin Weiss in soft, warm waves. Obviously, the young superhuman was sensitive, and it would be fascinating to scan his brain activity. Then his attention went back to the reason for his search for Kirk.

“Captain, Dr. M’Benga and I checked out the contents of the cargo container. I think you’ll be interested in the results.” He glanced shortly at Khan. “I also require your opinion on several matters.”

Instantly the former dictator knew what the Vulcan had tried to tell him – that they had discovered more results of the experiments, but he didn’t want to talk about it in front of Joaquin – a kind of consideration Khan wouldn’t have thought to give Spock credit for, but he was grateful for it.

“I’m at your service,” he said, looking pointedly at the first officer who understood the gaze for what it was.

At that moment, the intercom sprang to life. “Bridge to Captain Kirk!”

Jim sighed and went to the wall to answer the hail. The doctor looked to Spock with an asking glance. The Vulcan only shook his head, showing the CMO that he would not talk about the results now.
“Kirk here!”

“Captain, the sensors picked up a warp signature approaching rapidly,” Scott reported. Exchanging a worried look with his Vulcan friend, Jim took a deep breath. “Spock, Khan and I are on our way. Kirk out.” He stormed towards the door; Spock and Nien followed him instantly. And the young captain didn’t need to look back to know that a pair of big brown, worried eyes were gazing at him, too.

ST***ST***ST

“Promise me you’ll be careful!” Lady Ania Morganth glanced worriedly at her friend Batari Whitman, who stood in the hangar of the *Lexington*. Behind her, the long range shuttle had been prepared for launching; its ID number was altered. For good measure, the chief engineer had even added some traces of wear on the vessel’s hull and had altered all onboard codes. Whoever scanned the spacecraft wouldn’t recognize its origins on first or second sight.

Batari smiled at her, yet she couldn’t fool her Betazoid friend. Not only because Ania easily saw through her thanks to her telepathic abilities, but the concern the vice president felt was seen in her eyes. “Are you sure you don’t want to come with us? The *Lexington* may fly straight into trouble and…”

“As Commodore Wesley and Admiral Barnett pointed out, there isn’t a safe place for us at the moment – neither on the *Lexington* nor on Earth as long as this group Section 31 exists. The rescued prisoners and slaves, the other diplomats and I are much safer aboard this ship than accompanying you to Earth. It’s not a walk in the park that lies ahead of you, my friend.”

Promptly, Whitman smiled when she heard the human phrase coming from her friend, but she turned serious again very quickly. “Yet there is the chance that you too will face trouble. I don’t think Luengo will quit easily, and Richard is right. It’s likely Section 31 will figure out where Kirk is going. Luengo will not take it well if he hears that the *Lexington*, who is supposed to be limping to Rigel for repairs, is really at New Vulcan.”

“And it is just as likely that you and the admirals will stop Luengo before he can take any action. You are only a day and a half from Earth and…”

“Admiral Barnett – Wesley!” The shipwide hail interrupted her. “Admiral Barnett. It’s an emergency!”
The two women glanced at each other, then their attention was driven away as Richard, who had been at the ramp of the shuttle talking with Morrow and Nogura, jogged to the next intercom. Quickly, Whitman followed him and as she heard his shocked “What?” she knew that something was terribly wrong.

“What happened?” she demanded barely she’d reached him. He switched off the intercom; his face betrayed his fury.

“Luengo put two and two together and knows that Kirk’s going to New Vulcan.”

The vice president paled. “Did Lieutenant Palmer intercept a transmission or…”

“No, Styles dutifully reported to his squadron’s flagship, the Lexington, that he was ordered to Earth at maximum warp. To Earth, not back to Earth, which is a hint that he has to rendezvous with another ship. And Palmer intercepted a transmission several hours ago between Kirk and a guy who doesn’t exist. I’m certain that Kirk faked it to lead them in the wrong direction, but this time, Section 31 didn’t buy it. Luengo finally realized the only way out for Kirk and wants to stop the Enterprise now before she reaches her destination. The whole fleet is on alert concerning her, but Styles is maybe the only one who will follow Luengo’s order. And I hate to think what that could mean for Kirk.” He rubbed his jaw. “Kirk will be safe on New Vulcan; this much is certain. But Luengo can’t allow him to reach Selek. I have the real bad feeling that the SBI will not hesitate to attack the Enterprise. Marcus already did it; Luengo is not a bit better than him.”

Batari watched him. “What can we do now? We have to protect Kirk and the others.”

Richard nodded grimly. “We have to change our plans. If Luengo sends Styles to attack the Enterprise, and maybe another ship too, there is only one person who can stop them – me. Styles got the Excalibur’s command only a short time ago. His most senior officers are very loyal to Captain Heldron and belong to the good old generation of real Starfleet officers. They will believe me when I tell them that the news about my death was a little bit overstated rather than someone else – Styles saying that I’m a fraud – and they will obey me.” He looked down at the small Malaysian woman. “But this would mean that I can’t come with you, ma’am. My priority…”

“Your priority is the United Federation of Planets and Starfleet. Both are threatened by evil men and women within our lines. They only can be convicted with Kirk and Khan’s help. Therefore, their survival is paramount, and only you can do it. Try to catch up with the Enterprise before she and everyone aboard falls prey to Luengo’s lust for power.” She straightened up. “Admiral Morrow and Admiral Nogura will accompany me. Three of us are enough to make the president and the council see what’s happening, and to make them take the necessary action.”
Barnett sighed. “I don’t like this,” he murmured, “but…”

“The president is the real head of Starfleet. He’ll take over for you until you return to Earth. Morrow and Nogura are going to support him in taking the right measures. As soon as Starfleet Command is freed of this Judas and his fellows, we’ll contact you.” She laid a hand on his arm. “Everything will turn out all right, just wait and see. And, if something should happen to us, then we still have you and the diplomats to contact the president and tell him the truth. Splitting up like this is probably the best solution just right now.”

Reluctantly, Barnett nodded, took a deep breath, and headed towards Nogura and Morrow, who looked expectantly at him. Batari returned to Ania and quickly explained the new situation to her. “It seems the Lexington will be forced into a battle in the end,” she finished. “Are you sure that you still want to remain aboard?”

The Betazoid made an affirming gesture. “Yes, I am. Both paths lead to danger, and should you not make it to Earth or the president, at least my colleagues and I can act afterward and contact the Federation Council. Separating is the best solution now. And, by the way, this Section 31 doesn’t know that the Lexington is here, in the middle of Federation space. Therefore, these traitors will not have time to act against the ship.”

“Hopefully!”

“Hopefully!” Ania affirmed. Both watched Wesley come running into the shuttle bay and talking hectically with the three admirals. “I think, you’ll be in a hurry,” she addressed Batari and embraced her. “Watch out for yourself, will you? And I’m looking forward to meeting you in several days on Earth with the whole dark situation in the past.”

The vice president returned the embrace, knowing that she couldn’t hide her worry from her friend. “Be careful yourself, all right?”

Ania nodded – but both could not assume what lay ahead for them all.

ST***ST***ST

The warp signature Scott had picked up was revealed to be a slow traveling freighter whose inadequate sensors hadn’t scanned the Enterprise – likely couldn’t even if she didn’t have the SDD. The danger of being spied was reduced, yet the little incident was no guarantee that they would reach
New Vulcan without being spotted.

Afterward, the command team, McCoy, and Khan had a short briefing concerning what the first officer had found in the containers – blood samples and test tubes labeled with the names of pathogens, and all likely connected to Nien’s crew. Spock pointed out that he would have to run several tests on all the samples to find out exactly at what Green and the others were doing, but they all had a pretty good idea about it.

Khan took the helm again during beta shift, serving duty together with Chekov, who was at the science station watched by Spock, and Kevin Riley at the navigation. Scott went down to Engineering ready for another double shift. The engines had become louder during the day, and Montgomery whined that there would come a time soon when only a good share of affection could keep the warp drive in one piece – a prophecy that had elicited another discussion between him and the first officer about logic; much to the bridge crew’s amusement.

McCoy, still in need of a very long sleep, used the time before dinner to teach Joaquin how to use the library computer and also help him in the medbay gym where the young Augment began to train his muscles. Within a quarter hour, he had increased his muscle function enough to make the first uneasy steps which became more and more confident after another quarter hour. Bones was not merely surprised; he was thunderstruck. Never before he had seen something like this and the readouts of his med scanner excited him like a child finding gifts under a Christmas tree. He had witnessed Khan’s healing abilities only two weeks ago as well as Jim’s injuries vanishing far quicker than is usually possible, but seeing muscle mass grow by the minute was awesome.

Finally, after almost an hour, Bones called time and sent Joaquin back to bed. The young Augment looked exhausted, but his eyes shone with joy, and as he accepted the CMO’s support crossing medbay back to his bed, Leonard realized how different the boy was from his older brother. Where Khan was proud and mostly arrogant, Weiss was open, a little bit shy, and he had no problem accepting a helping hand. He also didn’t insist on the whole ‘superior-inferior nonsense’ as Bones called it. By now, though, even the former dictator had changed his tune, thanks to his love for Jim. And it seemed Joaquin’s character didn’t contain the sometimes haughty manners Singh had displayed in earlier times. Bones was very curious how the Augment-boy would proceed over the next day and a half that remained of their trip to New Vulcan.

Despite his protest, Joaquin respected the CMO’s instruction to go to sleep early, and he didn’t even realize how quickly he’d done just that when he slipped back into Morpheus’ realm. And as Khan looked for him after beta shift ended, he found his younger brother deeply asleep with a peaceful expression on his still boyish face what made him look impossibly younger.

Joaquin felt his presence and woke up for several seconds, glancing at him with hooded eyes.
“Just go back to sleep,” Nien whispered, touching the boy’s cheek gently. “Everything is fine. Shall I stay?”

Even only half awake, the young superhuman shook his head slowly. “I’m okay,” he mumbled. “Go to Jim.”

Khan smiled. He had known that Joaquin would be delighted to learn that he – ‘Noo’ – had found a mate, but the easiness with which the younger one accepted that change in his life was almost breathtaking. Weiss had learned so many new things a mere human would never be able to handle in such a short period. Even with an augmented mind, it had to be difficult for Joaquin to be confronted with everything the twenty-third century offered, yet Nien didn’t sense any distress from his brother, only weariness and peace. He was glad for the latter. He knew that Joaquin would be shaken as soon as he learned of his – Khan’s – fate before he and Jim became mates. He didn’t look forward to the next day, yet he knew it was inevitable.

He returned to Jim’s and his quarters, being aware of the fact that he had used the guest quarters he could call his own only a few times – and never during night. He preferred to be close to his beloved – to wrap himself around the lean, strong, yet so fragile body of the young captain. And he also loved it the other way around. To tell the truth, he wasn’t used to being the one cuddled, yet he felt utterly relaxed and even happy when lying in Jim’s arms.

As he stepped into the captain’s quarters, he found a dinner prepared for two. Even though it was past 2200, Jim had waited for him, and feeling gentle warmth rising in him of this thoughtfulness, Nien gladly accepted a glass of wine and ate the meal contentedly. They discussed the success of the ruse that had been left for Styles, talked about Joaquin, and finally about their upcoming arrival on New Vulcan and how to proceed from there.

It was past midnight as the two lovers made it to bed, holding each other with incredible familiarity. Jim sensed that a part of his bond mate was still tense.

“What is it?” he asked quietly into the darkness.

“What is what?” Nien replied; his voice a deep rumble.

“You’re not relaxed, baby. Something’s bothering you. Is it about our arrival at New Vulcan?”

For a long moment, Khan didn’t answer before he murmured. “No, not completely. Tomorrow…”
I’m going to tell Joaquin what happened last year. I know that it will unsettle him – shock him, maybe even enrage him. He is very protective of me, despite his age twelve years my junior. He’s curious about this new world, and I think he likes young Chekov and your protégée Riley. I fear that the things that happened to me will damage his hope for the new future he expects here.” He took a deep breath. “Yet I have to reveal everything to him. He’d find out anyway when I go to court martial. It would be wrong to keep something that important from him, but…” He pressed his lips into a thin line and felt Jim’s hold around him tighten.

“Do you want me to come with you?”

Nien brushed his lips over Jim’s forehead. “Thanks, Pyāra, but this is something I have to face alone. I am also going to tell him what happened since I escaped the labs – how we two found each other and who I am here in the moment. And what our situation is now. I know he will understand, yet I hate the thought of disturbing him like this.”

Kirk slipped one calf over the long legs of his bedmate – a protective gesture. “I’m sure you’ll find the right words, but I do understand the dilemma you’re in. You want to spare him the worst of it, yet you can’t keep them a secret because of what lies ahead for us all.” He stretched his neck and kissed his beloved’s cheek. “My offer still stands. If you think it will be better if I’m there at any time for it, call me, and I’m there. I like Joaquin, and I don’t want him to become afraid of the new world he woke up in. Every period has its bad guys and in this decade, it’s Section 31. If he realizes this, then he will come to terms with all the rest of it in a few days – especially on New Vulcan. And Kevin and Chekov will cheer him up, too. Those two already managed that today; they’ll do it again.”

Khan appreciated his beloved’s attempt to soothe his nerves. Jim Kirk – ever the optimist. And maybe his bond mate was right again. Joaquin did come to terms with what he’d been faced with so far, perhaps this would be the same case tomorrow, yet Nien doubted it. His brother would be upset of the demise of twelve members of their family, of whom four had been brutally murdered. Joaquin would also be horrified and furious of what had been done to him, Khan, yet the Augment leader hoped that the younger one would calm quickly. Maybe Jim’s idea to join the discussion at some point wasn’t that bad. In fact, it sounded better and better as often as he thought it through. No, he was no coward. He always fought his battles alone and was used to facing the most displeasing situations without hesitation, yet the prospect of upsetting Joaquin put him on edge – that and the fact that he had to go through this hell of memories again. Yes, maybe Jim’s presence would be a balm for him and his brother.

Sighing, he caught himself snuggling into the captain’s embrace, but he didn’t mind. Everything – every incident, every way he had chosen or had been forced to take – was coming together. It would come to a head in the next days. Even his enhanced mind couldn’t cope with that without becoming anxious. So finding comfort in his beloved’s arms was exactly what he needed right now. Alas, what had become of the independent, strong leader of his people?
A human being with a human soul and a human heart – something your creators never thought possible, but they hadn’t calculated the one detail that changes everything - Love,’ an inner voice whispered. Yes, Jim’s love had changed him from a synthetically bred creature into a whole person. For just a moment, he remembered a traditional fairytale that existed in different versions in almost every culture – the tale of ‘Beauty and the Beast’. Beauty was most certainly Jim, not only because of his handsomeness but for the beauty of his heart. And he, Khan… Yes, in the eyes of the most people he was a beast, a monster, yet he had become human because of the love given him by the man at his side.

Tightening his hold on Jim he murmured, “Maybe your idea of accompanying me is not… Not that bad.”

Kirk, almost half asleep, chuckled, “It’s a brilliant idea!” He could almost hear Nien rolling his eyes. “Don’t deny it!”

“Of course not. You are the genius here,” he commented wryly.

Again Jim snickered. “And don’t forget it!”

For more than a minute both were silent, before Khan grumbled, “Vain man!”

“Mm-hm,” came the sleepy reply. “Love you, too.”

The former dictator smiled, buried his face in crook of Jim’s neck, smelled the familiar scent, and closed his eyes. It wasn’t long before he drifted into a fitful sleep.

ST***ST***ST

“It’s just past midnight; I had to pack everything we’re going to need in a hurry and then you have the nerve to ask me why I need all this?” Professor Matthew Dashwood had stuck his fists on his hips and glared at the Security Chief of the Exeter, who kept his professional calm.

“I’m responsible for the security of the ship, Professor, and therefore, I have to ask you about the cargo you want to bring aboard.” He pointed at several boxes of different sizes. And none of them could be called small.
“This is our equipment for the task we got from Admiral Luengo,” Doctor Nathan Conelly cut in; his frown betrayed his irritation. “Our mission is top secret and essential to the outcome of the war. If you have any questions, contact the head of Starfleet himself, but don’t waste our time!”

Lieutenant Ovasu, a man in his thirties with roots in Tanzania, took a deep breath. First, the ship had been ordered to launch in six hours. Six hours – nothing difficult given the fact that the space dock above Earth had been on yellow alert for weeks, and so all vessels had to be ready for flight on command. But there were 250 elite security members and only 80 available, and getting those scientists aboard who had arrived only a quarter hour ago with their so-called equipment and following getting them to follow any protocol was a challenge.

To his relief, he saw one of the brass entering the cargo transporter. “Admiral Norton!” he saluted, and Albert looked at the three men.

“Is there a problem? Why aren’t you aboard?” he asked sharply, addressing both scientists at that moment.

“Because this young man here insists on knowing exactly what we’re taking with us, despite the fact that our mission is top secret,” Dashwood complained.

Norton lifted both brows. “The lieutenant is doing his job, that’s all, but in this case, it isn’t necessary.” He glanced at Ovasu. “I take full responsibility, Lieutenant. Please beam the cargo over. We have to leave as quickly as possible so that we aren’t late to our rendezvous with the Excalibur.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” the Security Chief affirmed, relieved that the decision and therefore the responsibility had been taken off his shoulders.

Conelly and Dashwood watched the boxes disappear in the golden light of the transporter, delighted that at last there was some proceeding in their task.

Both men couldn’t believe their ears at first when they got the call from Norton, telling them to pack everything they needed to restrain prisoner 3158-17-215 again because HQ knew where the creature was. Finally, they could continue their research to perfect the biological agent they had already developed. They were nearly ready to proceed to serial production. They were aware of the fact that putting the prisoner back into even low-level cryosleep might make it impossible to wake him ever again, but there was no need to have him conscious. His blood was all they had a need for.
They assembled everything they thought would be of use or would be needed to get hold of the Augment. They discussed several matters with their colleagues at the LSH lab in Nevada and then traveled to the space dock. They were outraged to learn that the fugitive had been hiding aboard the Enterprise for some time now, and called Kirk ‘crazy’ for trusting ‘that thing’.

“I knew he was not in his right mind when he berated us in Barnett’s office,” Dashwood said to Nathan as they were on their way to the space dock, and Conelly nodded. It would be satisfying to see the arrogant young captain arrested – and Nathan also looked very forward to the moment the Augment would be back in his care.

He would never, with not a single uttered syllable, reveal that his interest in prisoner 3158-17-215 was not only of a scientific nature but was something more. He had never forgotten these minutes he had dominated the weakened enhanced man, who was too handsome for his own good. There had never been a chance for a repeat afterward, not even when the Augment had been held in the LSH lab, but maybe there was a chance now to have a last go with him before they froze him again in cryosleep for all time.

At least that was what Conelly hoped for, as he followed Dashwood, Norton, and the Security Chief through the night-calm corridors of the space dock.

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The next morning Kirk and Khan had agreed to talk with Joaquin in the privacy of the room he has occupied for the last two days. Its surroundings were familiar to him, and maybe that would help him calm down after he heard it all. Weiss already knew that something big lay ahead when his brother and the captain entered the room. After an exchange of greetings and asking how Joaquin was feeling, Jim gave the order not to disturb them and closed the door.

Joaquin knew his brother and leader as nobody else did – except Jim Kirk, and so he wasn’t surprised when the older man sat down on one of the two visitor chairs and began with no preamble, “As I am sure you have guessed, there is a reason why I was unable to wake you and the others shortly after my cryosleep ended. It was not the automatic system that woke me, but the former head of Starfleet, Admiral Alexander Marcus. And he did it because he realized who I was. I was told he needed my help. I later realized he needed me to start and win an unjust war. And with that, I was resigned, for a time, to hell. And I vowed to protect you from just that.”

For the next quarter hour, Khan told his younger brother everything. He spared him nothing, except the details that only his bond mate knew. Joaquin grew paler by the minute. And when he learned of the murder of the four other Augments, tears streamed down his face; he didn’t care that he and his
brother weren’t alone. He also wept for those whose cryotubes failed. He had loved them all, and being young, those wounds of loss hit him hard. But that was not all. As he realized what happened to ‘Noo’ – that his brother, of all Augments, lost control due to the unbearable pain he had been put through, both physically and mentally, his heart pounded loudly in his ears – so much so that the monitor above his bed gave an alert. Fury and sorrow raged in him. Even as Khan rose, sat down on the bed’s edge, and pulled him in his arms, he raged.

Jim, who had been silent the whole time, quickly informed Bones via intercom that everything was all right, knowing that McCoy was still monitoring the young man’s condition and would be alarmed by the alert transferred to his terminal.

Only now aware of Kirk’s presence again, Joaquin looked over Khan’s shoulder at him, and the accusation and anguish in his eyes made Jim cringe inwardly.

“I didn’t know about Marcus’ real intention at that time – no one did. He played us all. He was ready to sacrifice every single soul – every Augment, me, my entire crew, including his daughter, to attain the goal he had set.” Kirk said quietly. “And he used your brother’s rage taken out on the city – on Starfleet to fool me into…” Kirk dropped his head; he couldn’t say it. “…into doing his goddamn dirty work – and his work was dirty. God help me, I almost did too. I almost attacked an unsuspecting planet to kill a ‘criminal’ with no chance of defending himself.” He was in the focus of both Augments now and added with a sheepish smile. “I have to admit that at first I was tempted to do what Marcus told me; your brother’s assault took my mentor from me – the only man I could ever call a father – but a good friend talked me out of my desire for revenge. For that I am grateful. I don’t think I could live with the blood of seventy-two innocent people on my hand – and hundreds of thousands of Klingons too. Those weapons, with you in them, would have caused a climatic catastrophe.” He took a deep breath and his gaze softened as he glanced at Khan. “And I would have never known how it is to be loved by Nien – the best thing ever happen to me.”

Joaquin swallowed and sniffled, still deeply troubled. “After you were sent out to – to kill Noo, what happened?” he asked quietly, knowing instinctively that the captain had no part in his brother’s misery. He simply couldn’t imagine it.

Both men told him of the following days, how they worked together for a short time only to fight on different sides again after distrust won out them. Weiss was confused and unnerved as he learned of Kirk’s temporary death because of radioactive poisoning and how the CMO brought him back. Khan didn’t reveal much about his combat with Spock, only that the Vulcan had been able to overpower him. He didn’t want that his little brother to hold any prejudice about Spock. The half-Vulcan and his elder self would soon be among the only people standing between them and Section 31. As much as it hurt Khan’s pride, he and his family needed the Vulcans. And seeing as Spock was the son of one of the greatest ambassadors in the Federation, the former dictator simply knew that the half-Vulcan also had a high position within Vulcan society. It would not be wise to cross him as Joaquin in his youthful recklessness would be apt to do if he learned of the first officer’s brutality in subduing ‘Noo’.
Then came the next part of the story – Khan’s captivity in the hands of the scientists. And afterward, finally, came the good part – the calm amidst the storm. Together, the men told him about Khan’s escape and search for Kirk – for revenge. That night, they said, the night Khan found Kirk, became one of the best if not one of the most important nights in the lives of them both.

Joaquin calmed more as both men told him of the last months – how they longed for each other in secret, how Khan became a member of The Shadow, how they met again and how they finally became lovers. Weiss squirmed visibly as Jim told him of his imprisonment on Turkana and how he was tortured, only be saved by Nien, who had come to his tormentors like an avenging angel of death. What happened on Aldebaran, Joaquin already knew – at least a part of the two men’s deeds to prevent a Klingon strike from successfully taking place. But Khan and Kirk’s private moments were new to him. And as Nien and Jim exchanged a few memories concerning their more pleasurable and humorous moments on the planet, the enhanced boy’s nerves finally settled.

Of course he was upset to learn how close he had come, once again, to losing his older brother before Khan and Kirk had been saved by the Enterprise at the very last second, but he grinned as he imagined the CMO’s shocked gaze as McCoy, then unaware of the relationship, saw the two men holding – grasping each other.

Then came the last portion of their story, that one that leads to their current situation. Again, Joaquin thought he was listening to a spy thriller. And it seemed this Luengo was even worse than Marcus, attacking an own ship to eliminate the staff officers and diplomats who would stop him if they’d known of his betrayal. To use war as a means to an end was nothing new – not in any time. But this was a new dimension of war. Here, it was not necessarily the people of a few countries that would suffer for the war, but the population of entire planets! Even if Joaquin needed time to come to terms with the knowledge of real aliens, his enhanced mind (and his gentle heart) grasped that the lives of billions of sentient beings could be at stake if this shadow department succeeded in its intentions. Kirk had also told him that Section 31 was about to develop a biological agent – with Noo’s cells! – and that the first minister of the planet New Vulcan had found out that this weapon was about to be used against the Klingons.

Using biological (or chemical) weapons was, in Joaquin’s opinion, the lowest form of war. And the fact that the blood of his beloved brother was misused to build something so monstrous as a pathogen designed to eliminate millions of lives with no hope of treatment because of the augmented cell structure, woke hot rage in the boy.

These men were right – Noo and Jim: Section 31 had to be stopped.

And for that Joaquin was even ready to pray – for their success, for a fair trial, for anything that would save his family and allow his brother to keep his love. He deserved that.
He could understand why Noo cracked; why he ran amok and killed. The best he could hope for was that the court would accept those reasons – understand them. That, though, would not have saved Noo in the twentieth century. He hoped it wasn’t such a long shot now. Jim comforted him stating that the circumstances which had led to the disaster would be regarded. Nevertheless, Noo would need a hell of a good lawyer if he was going to leave court without a sentence of life in prison or worse. Maybe all that Noo did afterward during the war would be a credit to him in the eyes of those who hold his life in their hands. That, and maybe the fact that the hero of this time, Jim Kirk, and Starfleet’s Commodore Wesley would speak on his behalf.

Jim and Noo had told him about Commodore Wesley, who was about to recover the surviving members of the delegation. This man had to be very special if he gave Noo such a chance and even protected him. Joaquin was young but not naïve. He knew that most humans feared the Augments and perhaps this would not change. Due to last year’s events, people would still be wary of the enhanced men and women. Prejudice was easy, maybe easier than acceptance. On the other hand, mankind of today had to be very tolerant if they lived side by side with aliens. Maybe humans had changed. Pavel and Kevin were an example of this ray of hope, just like Dr. McCoy and especially Jim Kirk, but then the people on this ship seemed to be extraordinary, even for the 23rd century.

“So,” he finally said after his brother and the captain had ended their tale, “we’re hoping for asylum on New Vulcan and hoping that the commodore was able to rescue some ‘good’ admirals and a few diplomats. And we also hope that they’ll be able to stop this Section 31 and to remove Admiral – Luengo was it? – and his fellows from their position. And we also hope that Noo will face a fair court martial and leave it a free man because of everything that had been done to him and because of what he’s done since he’s met you.” He glanced at the two men. “There are too many ‘hopes’ for my taste.”

He couldn’t know that he voiced almost the same thing as a certain Klingon lord did only three days ago. Hope was indeed a very complex and a very uncertain concept. It, like love, if loved enough, could move even mountains.

“I know how it sounds,” Jim sighed, “but believe me, today, I think he can get the justice he deserves. And your brother has the right to bring charges against his tormentors, even if they are high ranking admirals.”

“And what if Luengo finds out where we’re heading? What if the commodore isn’t able to recover the admirals and diplomats? Would we be safe on New Vulcan?”

“Selek is the High Minister of one of the most important planets in the Federation,” Kirk replied thoughtfully. “Even Luengo won’t dare go against him. Selek’s opinion is highly regarded within the Council. The same is true of the Vulcan Elders. Luengo will be inviting disaster to himself if he
attacks refugees on an independent planet, especially if said planet is New Vulcan. The Vulcans are officially declared an ‘endangered species’. They are under the special protection of the Federation. Even Luengo wouldn’t be stupid enough to go up openly against them or their Elders.”

“Hopefully,” Joaquin sighed. He glanced at his brother. “You said these ‘Elders’ want to speak with you – decide if they will give you shelter too. What if they determine that your presence would be too much trouble for them? Then…”

“It is illogical to measure one’s worth by the amount of ‘trouble’ one might bring. Life in any form is sacred to Vulcans, and we will not deliver someone up to an unknown fate – certainly not death. Ever. Certainly not because some illegitimate members of a forbidden organization demand it!”

Startled, all three looked up; not one of them had heard the door open. They had been too busy with their thoughts and the discussion to be aware of their surroundings. That spoke volumes with Khan in the room.

Spock lifted a brow as he looked at the augmented boy sitting on the biobed wrapped into blankets and pale as a sheet, as the human phrase went. Apparently, Jim and Khan had told the youngest member of Khan’s crew everything that happened since the former dictator had been woken by Marcus. Sensing Joaquin’s dread he added softly, “You and the rest of your friends and family will be safe on New Vulcan. These circumstances demand giving you and the others shelter and perhaps official asylum. Section 31’s decision to strip the Augments off their rights as humans on Earth essentially created them as a defacto species, and it follows then that Luengo’s order is equivalent to genocide – a crime that will be severely punished by the Federation. My people will protect you and the others, so do not fear for them or yourself.” His gaze found Khan. “Or for your brother. After all, that Section 31 has done to include attempted murder of Khan which puts his life in danger, the Elders will give him the refuge he merits.”

The former dictator looked directly into those dark, all too human eyes of the Vulcan and pursed his lips. “Are you sure?” he asked, and Spock nodded.

“I know Selek; he will pledge on your behalf. That is half the battle as the human phrase goes.” He cocked his head. “And when you tell our clan’s Old Woman of your circumstances, there will be no one in the government who would decide against her, no matter their individual considerations.”

Nien blinked in confusion and glanced at Jim, who also frowned. “What does your clan’s Old Woman have to do with this?” he asked bewildered. “Why do you think she…”

“Selek sent me a message last night. He allowed me the option of telling you about it or not. Given
the situation, I decided to tell you about our clan’s Old Woman’s demand to speak with you and Mr. Singh.” He clasped his hands on his back. “I already anticipated that T’Pau would intervene with a desire to speak with Mr. Singh and you, Captain, so my grandmother’s request is not a surprise for me.”

Kirk stared at him and groaned finally, “Superb! Of all the Elders it’s, T’Pau who wants… T’Pau is your GRANDMOTHER!” His usually warm tenor was high-pitched, and the two Augments winced.

With almost infuriating calm, Spock lifted his brow. “She is my father’s mother, so the term grandmother is correct. But I admit that I am perplexed at your reaction.”

“May I ask what’s going on here? This is a medbay, not a nuthouse!” Bones stood in the entrance, fists on his waist, and an irritated expression on his face.

Before anybody else could answer, Jim pointed at Spock and almost shouted, “T’Pau is his grandmother!”

Promptly the CMO’s arms fell to his sides, and he gaped at the first officer, who only lifted a brow. “Is there a problem with T’Pau being my father’s mother, gentlemen?”

“Spock!” Jim gasped. “T’Pau is… She is the matriarch of Vulcan – the chief of all Elders. She… She’s a kind of queen, her clan’s roots go straight to Surak himself and…” He stopped; his eyes were about to pop out of his head. “That means that you’re like a prince!” Again his voice sounded like a young boy at the threshold of manhood.

This time, the Vulcan did roll his eyes and even sighed. “Jim, the title, Prince, does not rightly convey my position, or that of my clan, in Vulcan culture. Please do not be shocked. I…”

“You… You never told me that you’re royalty!” Kirk wheezed.

Again the first officer showed the typical patience an adult would show a little child with. “Because my family’s status within my culture does not matter concerning Starfleet, Jim.”

Even if Khan was very aware of the serious situation he would face with this old matriarch, he couldn’t deny that the others’ reaction amused him. “Your blood is green - but you're also a Blue blood – a noble, if I may. Commander, again I am in your debt and grateful for your status whatever
it may be,” he commented wryly; a smirk played around his lips. His beloved’s expression was a sight to behold. As he glanced at the CMO, he half anticipated having to call M’Benga at any moment.

“Dear Lord. His anatomy is confusing enough; now you tell me his blood changes color!” McCoy grumbled after a few more seconds of stunned silence. Cocking his head and looking at the first officer, he easily found his taunting manner – his own deflector shield. “Right, now I finally understand your behavior and that stick up your backside. That comes with being royalty, I guess. But don’t think I’m going to call you ‘Your Highness’!”

Jim was regaining his composure, too, and he rubbed his temples with another groan. “Bones!” he sighed exasperated.

“Doctor, the day you use your famous Southern charm on me is the day I will genuinely be concerned for your mental state,” the Vulcan retorted dryly.

“Spock!” Kirk shook with a chuckle.

“Concern, Spock? Isn’t that an emotion?” the CMO mocked.

“It is rather an expression of the fact that ethically the superior minded out to care for those who carry the burden of disadvantage.”

McCoy put his hands on his waist again. “And what kind of disadvantage do I have in your expert opinion?”

“Besides the human weakness of irrationality, you also talk too much, and your thought process is so specious that I am surprised each time you live through a day.”

Bones gaped at him, while Jim let his head sink. “Gentlemen!” He almost pleaded. “Do you think your behavior will help Joaquin come to terms with…” He stopped, as he heard soft laughter and as he glanced at Nien’s little brother, he saw the mirth dancing in his big brown eyes which shifted towards Khan.

“Are they always like this?”
“This is nothing,” Nien replied with amusement written all over his face.

“They remind me of Otto and Paolo.”

“Yes, only worse,” Khan nodded, grinning as he watched the CMO and the Vulcan glaring at each other. “And the funniest thing is, those two are friends, but neither of them will accept it – or admit to it.”

Promptly CMO and science officer fixed Khan with a piercing glare, and Joaquin laughed even harder. “Yeah, you’re right. They’re worse than Otto and Paolo!”

“And there I thought those two were unique,” Jim chuckled.

“Oh, they are – the bantering between Otto and Paolo is a little different,” Nien reassured him before he became serious again to address the Vulcan. “Mr. Spock, you said that your planet’s matriarch wants to speak with Jim and me. Is this a part of the hearing your Elders are demanding?”

The first officer shook his head. “Regard it as more of a private discussion, Mr. Singh – and a favor. If you can convince Lady T’Pau of all that you already have convinced me of, I don’t think that there will be a hearing of the Elders at all.”

Khan nodded slowly, realizing the importance of the upcoming situation. “Then I should be glad that we two have overcome our differences.”

Spock lifted a brow. “Be assured, Mr. Singh, T’Pau will not and does not judge or make her decisions based on her personal feelings. Our relationship, no matter its status, would not influence her decision.”

“And I do not know if this should settle me or not,” the Augment sighed; then he felt Joaquin’s questioning eyes resting on him and he gave him a short, warm smile. “Do not worry, chōtā bhaiya (Hindi for ‘little brother’), Mr. Spock and I… are still coming to terms with each other after all the misunderstandings of last year.”

Joaquin frowned, then he nodded. “I understand.” He glanced back at his brother. “So, you said that Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy are in denial concerning their obvious friendship, yet you neglected to mention that the same goes for you.” As he caught the baffled gaze of ‘Noo’, he grinned. “You and
Mr. Spock tease each other, and you told me only minutes ago how often you and he had worked together over the last few days. So ‘coming to terms’ isn’t the best description of your relationship, because you’re already a step ahead.”

Khan stared wide-eyed at him while Spock blinked for several seconds and Jim tried unsuccessfully to hide a grin.

“And now there’s another genius to wear me down,” McCoy sighed before he glanced at his two friends and the former dictator. “As if you three aren’t making me gray with your brain power as it is.”

“Did I understand Dr. McCoy correctly, Captain? Did he just call me a genius?” Spock asked, trying to change the topic because first he needed to focus on the meaning behind Joaquin’s words before he could act on it.

Jim smirked and jumped onto that train, too. “Yes, he did,” he nodded. “And didn’t you just say that the moment Bones used his Southern charm on you, you’d begin to doubt his sanity?”

“Yes, I did,” the first officer nodded firmly. “It is not good for the ship if the CMO should be out of his mind. I believe the good doctor was merely stating a fact when he called me a genius rather wasting his non-existent charm on me, Captain,” the Vulcan replied.

“Carry on like this, gentlemen, and you get a particular mark on your sick cards for your next general examination. Believe me; I can make it a very unpleasant experience,” Leonard growled.

“Then there will be no difference in the results of the last general examinations,” Spock retorted, and Joaquin had to laugh again; the tension and shock left him for now, yet the sorrow would return soon when he would ponder all that he had learned. For now, he was glad for the distraction.

He glanced up at Khan, who had closed his eyes in feigned exasperation.

“How do you put up with them?” Nien asked a chuckling Kirk, who shrugged,

“Our original mission was to seek out new life forms and new civilizations. And I started with those two. Believe me, if you manage to survive their bickering you won’t be afraid to face much else.”
The Augment leader smirked at his mate. “In other words, you fight to survive daily. No wonder that even a full blown Klingon attack does not bother you.”

“Yeah!” Kirk grinned.

Bones stared at the two love birds and addressed Spock. “Did Jim say we are worse than Klingons?”

“I think so, Doctor,” Spock nodded, clasping his hands on his back. “And in this particular instance, I almost feel offended.”

“As well you should!” Leonard growled; then both men looked at a laughing Jim Kirk as Khan simply sighed, “And just like that they stick together again.”

Joaquin smiled feeling his mood lift now despite everything he learned in the last hours. The images of his older brother joking with the others and the way Jim looked at ‘Noo’ warmed him. For just a moment he could forget the lurking danger in the shadows or what happened to the man who had raised him. For a while, he felt carefree again.

He couldn’t know that his worry was a foreshadowing of the lurking danger that would become life-threatening all too soon.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, the danger is closing up on our friends more and more, and soon they all will learn for the calmer days they had to leave behind. In the next chapter our three young troublemakers will make… well, some trouble. But not only they will give Jim a headache, the Enterprise’s machines will do just the same. Then there will be a hot – hot! – scene between our two lovers, Uhura and Spock will have some sweet moments and you’ll read about Styles again.

I hope the last chapter was a nice, humorous distraction for you before the hard stuff begins.
For all American reader: Have fun at the Independence Day!

Until next time

Love

Yours Starflight
The last night?

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Thank you so much for the comments. Even if the last chapter was one of the more calm ones, in the background the big trouble his growing. And how big the upcoming mess is going to be is shown in the new update now. Our friends’ enemies are hell-bent to eliminate the danger Kirk, Khan and the others representing – and, of course, our lovebirds and their friends know that danger is closing up…

And what would you do, knowing that there could be no tomorrow? Well, enjoying each other for the maybe last time. This goes for Jim and Nien, but also for our second sweet couple, Spock and Uhura. So, the new chapter will be HOT!

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 68 – The Last Night?

While the Enterprise headed towards New Vulcan, the Lexington tried to catch up with her. The long range shuttle carrying Batari Whitman, Nogura, Morrow, Commander Marceuax and a handful of Red Shirts were on their way to Earth. The Excalibur raced through space to rendezvous with the Exeter. Styles was nervous, and his attempts to hide it weren’t very successful. The bridge crew sensed and saw it, yet no one acknowledged it.

Lawrence had good cause to be nervous – Luengo. The interim Chief of Command had made it very, very clear that he was disappointed in Styles and that could be dangerous. Not that the young captain feared for his safety, but he knew that his jump up the career ladder was because of Luengo’s intervention, and he could lose his command very quickly if he didn’t deliver what the admiral demanded – Kirk’s head on a silver platter.

Kirk…

Three times the American had tricked him. Three times he had been made a fool. Now Kirk mocked
him with this message from the probe they followed, making him think it was the Enterprise. Thankfully, Styles had become suspicious when he heard the odd transmission between Kirk and this other man at the edge of the Tholian space; he had alerted Luengo. The SBI and the Security Department had analyzed the recording within a few hours and revealed it as another one of Kirk’s tricks. Damn him!

And then came the new order to rendezvous with the Exeter and take Admiral Norton and a few scientists aboard. Then they would try to intercept the Enterprise on her way to New Vulcan.

Styles had almost groaned when he received new order, realizing that he had been blind. Of course, Kirk would seek shelter on New Vulcan. He was held in high regard by the Vulcans since his silly stunt on their dying planet that saved the Elders, several members of the council as well as Sarek of Vulcan, who seemed to be a kind of uncrowned king in Styles’ eyes – and more than ten thousand others. Kirk’s break-neck action that cost the Romulan, Nero, the driller which bought time for the evacuation vessels to evacuate as many as Vulcans as possible. It had been a heroic deed. Lawrence was not so ignorant that he couldn't admit this, but he recognized that it gave Kirk an advantage. The cowboy was that advantage now. The Vulcans would give him shelter; Styles was sure of it. And if Luengo and Section 31 wanted to end this cat-and-mouse game with Kirk, they had to get him before he reached his pointy-eared friends.

The captain glared at the main screen that showed the stars as they raced through space at warp six. It sounded simple – intercept the Enterprise and prevent her from reaching New Vulcan. Styles was very aware of the fact that nothing at this order was ‘simple’. The Enterprise was invisible to the sensors. If they couldn’t see her, she's slip away. And even if they were lucky enough to spot her, then there was still the challenge of getting Kirk to surrender. Lawrence knew the other captain well enough to know that he didn’t quit easily. And given all that was at stake for Kirk, he would fight – for himself, for his friends as well as for the enhanced creature and its fellows.

Only a few days ago Styles had been forced to watch his ship suffer because of the fake attack on their Klingon allies. His visit to medbay had shown him, in the most brutal way, the cost of Section 31’s decision to get rid of the delegation. More than twenty men and women of his crew were dead, more than eighty were injured and still healing. And they all suffered because he, Lawrence Styles, had agreed to this dirty game. On the other hand, he had no other choice after learning from Luengo and Norton what was about to come. Stepping back from the order would have meant his downfall – maybe even worse. So he had gone through with the plan, but this didn’t mean that he liked it. And the prospect of battling the flagship was anything but pleasant, thought he would do it.

Because, again, he had no other choice.

Luengo had him in his claws now, but the admiral was also his protection. If Kirk blew up the carefully developed plans of the interim Chief of Command, then he – Styles – would land in prison too. And he would rather send Kirk and his Augment pet straight to the hell than face a court martial.
After Noo and the three officers had left the private room in medbay, Joaquin was once again alone with his thoughts, which went in circles. He was still deeply shocked at the cruelty shown to his brother and the rest of his family, but especially towards Khan. The augmented boy could only imagine what his leader had been through, how he suffered the pain, both mental and physical. Joaquin knew he would have developed an intense hatred towards everyone in Starfleet if it weren’t for Jim Kirk and his friends – or Pavel, Kevin and Mr. Sulu.

Their acceptance of him and Noo, their friendly jokes, and the way they built their own kind of family – it reminded him of his brothers and sisters. And regarding Jim Kirk? Joaquin had been happy for Noo to have finally found a mate, but learning what the captain did for Khan and the others filled the young Israeli with gratitude beyond comprehension. Without a doubt, Kirk would soon face a hell of a lot of trouble because of his decision to give ‘Nien’ a second chance, yet he did it without hesitation after he learned of Khan’s past. Jim had a reason to hate Khan, and he did in the beginning. Now both loved each other with an intensity that made Joaquin wonder if there truly was something like kismet in the universe.

He knew that both men had endured torture and sorrow, but both were healing – because of each other. Weiss had only seen them together for a few hours, but it was enough to tell him that his older brother had indeed found his soulmate. And the utter trust the younger officers held for their captain – the familiarity between the command team that was based on sincere trust too – made Joaquin hope that in the end, everything would turn out well. At least he allowed himself to have some faith and…

“Hey, that lost in thought?”

He glanced up and looked directly into the grinning faces of Pavel Chekov and Kevin Riley. Obviously, his expression gave his thoughts away because the sunny smile vanished from Chekov as he came nearer. “Oh, ze keptin, and Khan told you of ze more nasty zings that happened.”

Joaquin sighed and nodded, while he watched Chekov carefully. “You joined this mission last year, too, didn’t you?”

“Da,” Pavel grimaced and gestured towards Riley to take a visitor chair that he’d placed at the edge of the bed. “I didn’t meet your brozer zen in person, because I had to replace Mr. Scott in Engineering. I tried to hold ze Enterprise togezer after she was crippled first by ze sabotage of Section 31 and later after ze battle with Admiral Marcus, but I had a good idea what was going on.”

Weiss bit his lips. “Where you there when... when Jim…”
“Fixed ze warp core?” Pavel ended the question, giving Joaquin a pointing look – and Weiss understood. Kevin Riley didn’t know that his commander and childhood friend died and was brought back by Khan’s blood. It seemed this was a secret, and he could think of a reason or two why this was a sagacious decision. If other people, especially members of Section 31, learned that Kirk had augmented cells, then… No, Joaquin didn’t dare to think of the outcome.

So he made an affirming gesture and said, “Noo told me how Jim went into the chamber to fix the drive manually. That was a hell of a risk, wasn't it?”

“Damn right!” Kevin grumbled. “You can’t enter the warp core chamber without substantial protection against radioactivity. You wouldn’t survive it.”

“I thought so,” the young Israeli sighed, and Pavel took a deep breath.

“Yes, I was zere at ze time, and… We all feared for ze keptin,” he said carefully, glad that the Augment boy got the hint. Then he smiled again. “But ze keptin is like a cat. He has nine lives.”

“Hopefully, Mr. Spock is keeping track of which life he's on given Jim’s tendency to leap head first into the situations,” Riley grumbled.

“I zink Khan has taken over zat job,” Pavel snickered, and as Kevin began to chuckle, too, Joaquin realized that those two were aware of his brother and Kirk.

“So… Does the whole ship know of my brother and Jim being…?”

“Net!” Pavel shook his head quickly. “But zer have been rumors recently. Two of our technicians overheard as ze keptin asked our chief cook to have ze officer mess for himself and zen ze keptin was seen returning from ze space station loaded with stuff to cook. And a few crew members saw Khan heading for ze officer’s mess ze same evening and vanishing inside, but officially ze mess was closed. And ze next morning some ozers saw the cook take dishes away from ze table by ze big view window to clean. So…” He spread his hands and grinned.

“They had a date,” Joaquin assumed, and as he saw the two others nodding, he giggled. “As far as I know, Noo never had a real date! Business dinner sometimes with pretty ladies or something like that, but an actual date…” He smirked. “I told him once that love would catch him by surprise one day, but he didn’t believe me. And now…” He pursed his lips. “You said, ‘view window’. So you
can look out into space for real?"

“Yes, of course. Well, at the moment we’re traveling at warp 5.8, and so the stars are nothing more than strips of light, but you can look out into space if you like,” Riley replied.

As Pavel and Kevin saw the excitement on the young man's face, they looked at each other, nodded in agreement, and then Chekov glanced back at Joaquin. “Do you feel fit enough for a little trip? We could take a walk to ze officer’s mess and back again, and…”

Weiss’ face lit up like a Christmas tree before he pulled the blankets away. “I’m dying to see more of the ship,” he said; he pushed his thoughts into his subconscious for now.

“Well, we can't have that,” Riley grinned. He walked to the replicator. “Give me your size and I'll program a neutral pair of coveralls for you. I think we would arouse too much curiosity if you walk around in a medbay gown.”

“So, this replicator can not only produce food, but also clothes?” Joaquin’s eyes were wide as saucers, then he shook his head. Alas, there was still a lot he would have to learn about this century.

Ten minutes later three young men left medbay in secret, and for the first time, Joaquin felt really thrown into a strange, new world. The hallways and the many doors – leading to quarters and different departments – resembled the stages of many TV shows and movies he had watched before the war broke out, yet everything differed from fiction. Mostly because this here was real! There was indeed even a soft buzzing he could sense in the floor and that had to come from the engines. There was indeed synthetically-cleaned air by systems he had still to learn of, and the people here didn’t wear costumes but real uniforms.

Strolling through the hallways, they entered one of the turbolifts and Joaquin raised both brows in surprise as the lift began to move vertically and horizontally. He felt the gravity of the turbo drive and, even though the ride only lasted less than thirty seconds, he got an idea how of how large the starship had to be.

A minute later they reached the officer’s mess, and with big eyes Joaquin looked around him. As it was mid-morning and there was more than an hour before lunch would be served, the room was more-or-less vacant. Two servicemen were setting the tables and a very enticing smell wafted from an open door of an attached room. The furniture was elegant, yet functional and the atmosphere was warm and spoke of comradeship.
“Come on,” Chekov urged. “We take a quick peek outside and zen we’re showing you around a little more.” They walked to one of the large windows which were now covered. Typing in his officer code, Pavel ordered the blinds to rise, just the slightest bit. “Sorry, more I can’t open wizout alerting ze bridge. During warp ze larger view windows should be covered.”

Joaquin frowned. “You won’t get in trouble because of me, will you?” he asked, feeling to his surprise that this question wasn’t out of politeness but borne out of real concern for the other young man, who beamed at him.

“I won’t,” the navigator assured him. And so Weiss moved towards the small gap and looked out.

Endlessness, and a darkness that wasn’t so dark at all… There were flashes and stripes of light, and only after several seconds he realized that these had to be planets and solar systems. The ship was travelling so fast that they bypassed whole star systems like this?

“No, but during warp we’re in subspace,” Kevin said, making Joaquin aware that he had spoken his question aloud. “In real space you would see star nebulas, stars, and planets, asteroids, and so on. That’s possible when we’re using impulse engines, but as soon as we enter warp, we’re in subspace.”

Joaquin turned towards him, his heart hammering in his chest in excitement. “So Einstein’s theories have been proved?”

Both other young men grinned at him and nodded. “Da!” Pavel said. “Are you interested in astrophysics?”

The augmented boy made an affirming gesture. “Yes, very! Noo is a formidable engineer and I like to tinker too, but theoretical physics of any kind are my hobby.”

Both ensigns exchanged a look. “Well, then you should stick close to Mr. Spock and Mr. Scott,” Kevin snickered. “Commander Spock is the best science officer in the whole fleet, despite his age, and he’s already written articles which are subjects at the most respected universities. And Mr. Scott…”

Pavel smirked. “Yes, Mr. Scott is a special man – and a damned good teacher. I learned a lot from him during my first year away – enough to take over his duties during his temporary absence. Your brozer developed a special defensive device zat disturbs sensors and made us unreadable for ozer ships. He and Mr. Scott tinkered a lot to perfect it and to integrate it into our systems. If you like to tinker too, I zink you should visit Engineering.”

Kevin cleared his throat. “Engineering is in a high security area,” he reminded his friend, who grimaced.

Pavel rolled his eyes. “I know. We should ask ze keptin first and…”

The intercom whistled and then the unmistakable voice of an obviously very irritated CMO called, “Medbay to Mr. Weiss!”

Kevin and Pavel exchanged a glance. Uh-oh!

Joaquin’s eyes widened. That sounded like trouble.

“Mr. Weiss, please report to medbay!” came the next hail and Pavel walked quickly to the next terminal.

“Chekov to medbay. Dr. McCoy? Mr. Weiss is wiz me and…”

“Pavel Chekov! Of course you’re behind this unauthorized little field trip!” Bones groused. “The boy isn’t fit enough to be running through the ship! Where are you?”

“We’re in ze officer’s mess and…”

“Hold the line a moment, I’m bein’ hailed,” McCoy interrupted him and then the three young men heard Kirk’s clear tenor in the background asking what was going on.

“Mr. Weiss is taking a little jaunt through the ship together with Mr. Moscow, Jim,” the CMO reported indignantly. “They’re in the officer’s mess now and…”
“Khan and I will pick him up, don’t trouble yourself with leaving medbay, Bones. Kirk out!” The captain’s voice said, then McCoy was heard more clearly again.

“Did you hear that, Chekov? You two stay where you are, Jim is on his way. And I expect Mr. Weiss to report to medbay afterwards. Pronto! McCoy out!”

Chekov rubbed his neck. Dammit, now he certainly would get into trouble. His gaze found Kevin. “I haven’t mentioned you. Just go and…”

“Nope, I don’t leave my friends on principle!” the Irishman answered; straightening.

“Well… I encouraged you two to show me around, so it’s me who is responsible,” Joaquin sighed, but stopped as he caught two stern glares.

“We took you, so it’s us who are responsible,” Kevin said. “And knowing Jim he won’t tear our heads off. Right, extra shifts are possible, but…”

The door opened to reveal Kirk and Khan side by side. Promptly the three guilty troublemakers stepped closer to each other and remained shoulder to shoulder; Joaquin between the two ensigns.

“It was my fault, Jim,” Weiss began. “I asked them to -”

“We offered to show him the view,” Chekov cut in. “Zerefore we’re ze ones who -”

“Would the gentlemen be so kind to shut up?” Kirk growled, looking from one to another. And he didn’t need to spare a glance at his mate to know that Nien was glaring at them, too.

Khan’s gaze pierced that of his little brother, who ducked his head. “As far as I remember Dr. McCoy has not released you from medbay. So what you are doing here?” he demanded firmly.

“I… I wanted to look around and…”
Please don’t scold him, Mr. Singh. It was Kevin and me who talked him into leaving,” Pavel cut in, gulping as he found himself at the center of attention.

Khan frowned. Yes, he appreciated that the two ensigns had taken Joaquin under their wing, but he also knew that the forbidden outing had brought trouble to Jim and McCoy – and that should not have happened. “Even so, Joaquin can make his own decisions – the right ones, but he did not,” he replied. “You worried Dr. McCoy and his staff unnecessarily, and forced Jim and myself to leave our jobs to catch up with you. This is not behavior I will tolerate – not in the current circumstances.”

All three looked sheepishly at their commanders, and Jim felt amusement rise in him. There they stood – three young men who seemed to be thrown back to their teens, looking at him guiltily, hoping ‘Dad’ wouldn’t scold them too much. Placing his hands on his hips, he glared at Chekov and Riley. “Joaquin is not familiar with the protocol aboard, but you two should have known better than to send the whole of medbay on alert and me with it. What should I do with you two now?”

Weiss smiled tentatively at him. “Well, you offered to show me around as soon as I was ready to leave medbay, yet you and Noo have many important things to do. And seeing that I was feeling well and strong enough for a longer walk, these two could relieve you by continuing the tour through the ship – after I check in with Dr. McCoy, of course.”

Kirk gaped at him. “Do I understand you correctly? You think I’ll let you three continue this stroll and…”

“It would be logical,” Joaquin interrupted him with a tentatively smile, “given the fact that you’re very busy and certainly needed more on the bridge than walking around with me – as much as I’m honored by your earlier offer. But…”

“We should reward you after the mess you three made?” Khan interrupted him; astonished.

Joaquin gave him one of his time-tested puppy dog looks – something Jim didn’t miss. Inwardly he was laughing. How often had he disobeyed the rules, and done what he’d wanted instead of listening to others? How often had he been in this exact position? He had lost count. He cleared his throat to give an answer he didn’t want to voice but had to, and…

… And something changed. Jim felt a soft jerk go through his ship while the engines were clearly heard now – something that made alarm bells ring in his head like mad. He exchanged a worried glance with Nien and was about to rush to the next intercom, when Scott’s urgent voice sounded through the whole Enterprise, “Engineerin’ ter Capt’n Kirk!”
At the same moment the engines became quieter again, and Kirk didn’t need to ask to know that they had reduced speed. With a few large steps, he was at the intercom. “Kirk here!”

“Sir, we had ter reduce speed down ter warp 4.5, or Engineerin’ will turn into a sauna. Three of the generators are overheated and the coolin’ system is at its limit.”

“I’m coming down, Scotty.”

“Right. Permission ter call Chekov and Khan ter Engineerin’? I need any hand here and…”

“I’m with the captain, Mr. Scott. I’m coming down, too,” Nien called.

“Me too, Mr. Scott!” Chekov yelled – and ducked again as Kirk shot him a sharp glance.

“We’ll be down in a few. Kirk out,” Jim said and switched off the terminal, before pointing a finger at Chekov. “This doesn’t let you off the hook, Pavel, understood?”

“Aye, Keptin!” the young Russian nodded, and then they were on their way to Engineering – Kevin and Joaquin on their heels. Kirk discussed the current problem with Khan – a problem that could turn into a catastrophe if they became stranded out here, still more than a day away from New Vulcan. Nien was very aware of the danger and so both men didn’t even realize that they weren’t riding the lift alone but also with Chekov. Riley and Weiss.

As the turbolift reached its destination, the two lovers raced along the small hallway and entered Engineering, the three young men still close behind them. Scott was kneeling at the cooling system, shouting orders to his staff. Fog hovered in the air, alert lights blinked, and an unpleasant smell hit the nostrils.

“Scotty!” Jim shouted before barely reaching the Scotsman, who looked grimly up at him.

“There! Now we can count the cost! I told you that after everythin’ the Enterprise has been through she’s reached her limit! Travellin’ days at warp 5.8 was…”
“Report, Mr. Scott!” Kirk interrupted him, having no time for his friends rambling.

Montgomery gave him a nasty glare before he gritted out, “Generators one, four, and six are shut off now; the coolin’ system has malfunctions in the three tanks; warp core capacity is down to 42.4 percent! I advise we reduce speed to warp two and…”

Jim bent forwards and lowered his voice. “We have to reach New Vulcan yesterday, Scotty, tomorrow at the latest! We’re too near Earth, and if Luengo has any intelligence, he’s certainly about to, or already has put two and two together and knows where we’re heading. Hell, a whole squadron can already be out there, waiting for us. If we don’t…”

Scott rose from his kneeling position in front of a terminal and looked seriously at his commanding officer. “Jim, I do know how much is ridin’ on our Grey Lady’s speed, but the engines are only held together by ropes and glue now, so ter speak – and said glue is about ter melt! Literally. I don’t have ter tell you what happens if the next generators pack it in. Then we have to shut down the warp drive which means we would be left with only impulse drive. And then we’d reach New Vulcan when we’re a hundred years old.” He straightened and his voice was intense. “Sir, as your chief engineer – and your friend – I must advise you to reduce speed – or the Enterprise’ll blow up around us.”

Kirk bit his lip; his helplessness in this moment made him angry, yet he knew that he hadn’t any other choice. His voice betrayed his inner turmoil as he growled, “Reduce speed to warp two.”

Scotty sighed in relief, before he turned around and yelled, “Allistor, take her down to warp two!” Then he glanced back at his captain. “I’m sorry, Jim, but this is the only option in the moment. We’ll work on it and…”

“Maybe it’s the changes in the generator input and output,” Khan cut in. “We adjusted the cooling system to the new generator levels, but maybe it wasn’t enough – or the cooling system is about to fail because it’s reached its limit.”

Montgomery nodded. “Aye, I thought the same. Want ter join me?”

Nien lifted a brow, resembling Spock very much in that moment. “Of course.” He saw how Scott suddenly looked confused over his shoulder and became finally aware of Joaquin’s presence. Turning around, he saw that his younger brother stared around wide-eyed before something close to shock crossed his boyish features. Following his gaze, Khan recognized Keenser who was crouched, working on one of the tanks which held the coolant.
Feeling his leader’s attention on him, Weiss looked straight at Khan. “That’s...that’s a child!” he blurted out, pointing at the Royalan.

Only now did Jim realize that Kevin and Joaquin had followed them and glanced in the direction where the young Augment was gesturing – and had to grin, despite the situation.

“That’s Keenser, he’s an adult,” he added after a beat. “He’s even one of the tallest of his race.”

Joaquin blinked in surprise. Keenser – the name Dr. McCoy had mentioned. He... He looked like an oyster with a human-like body, but...

He was distracted by Chekov at his side, who addressed the chief engineer, “Mr. Scott, may I check ze working generators?”

The Scotsman nodded. “Aye. Allistor was busy with it, go and support him, son.”

Pavel smiled quickly at Kevin and Joaquin. “Excuse me.” With that, he vanished into the large room of not-so-controlled chaos.

“I will examine the malfunctioning generators,” Khan said. “Maybe they can be brought back online, though not with full potential they had originally.” He glanced away from Scott and fixed his little brother with one of his famous piercing stares. “Shouldn’t you be in medbay by now?”

“But...”

“I’ll take him to Dr. McCoy. Maybe the doc will allow a little trip out afterwards,” Kevin offered.

Kirk nodded before Khan could make a decision. “Right you two – and Kev? Don’t forget to report to duty on time!”

“Of course not!” The Irishman said. He gripped the young Augment’s upper arm, and pulled him towards the entrance. “Come on, let the boys tinker with their toys,” he whispered, forgetting the sharp hearing of the superhumans.
Khan went rigid. ‘Boys’? ‘Tinker with their toys’? Always the same, the young. That was something that hadn’t changed, even in the twenty-third century!

Following Scott to the generators, he left Jim who rubbed his neck. Hopefully this mess in Engineering wouldn’t get them into serious trouble – trouble in form of a sister-ship, or something like that, finding them.

ST***ST***ST

Professor Dashwood knew that the issue was necessary to get the prisoner back and to finish his work. This was the second night he didn’t get much sleep because the Exeter and the Excalibur had met just minutes ago. He, Conelly, Norton and his elite security team were leaving the scout ship and were transported to the heavier cruiser. They materialized in the Excalibur’s transporter room where the young captain, Styles, as far as Dashwood knew, expected them. The Englishman greeted the man with the utmost respect before welcoming the scientists aboard.

Politely, Dashwood refused the offer to be shown to his quarters; first, he had to watch over the transport of the cryotube and his equipment before he would retreat to his quarters for sleep. Conelly stayed by his side the next hour. At the Excalibur’s slight shiver before she went into warp, the scientists finally went to their guest quarters, hoping to catch up with the Enterprise soon.

For Norton and Styles, there’d be no rest this night. Both officers sat in the captain’s quarters where no one could disturb or overhear them. On the admiral’s order, Styles had set course to New Vulcan, racing at warp three which meant they would reach the planet the next evening if they continued their journey without interruption.

“How do you plan on catching Kirk before he reaches New Vulcan if his ship is invisible to our sensors?” Lawrence addressed the largest of their problems, as he saw it after he gave Norton a full report of the last days.

“This is a topic I discussed with Admiral Luengo, too. To tell you the truth, I have no idea how to find Kirk before he reaches his destination. We calculated his course given his start point at Gamma 12 if he goes directly to New Vulcan. But it’s harder to calculate his arrival. Kirk’s last report told us that he is only able to get his ship up to warp 3, but given the fact that he was at Gamma 12 earlier than thought indicates that the Enterprise is maybe able to travel at warp four or 4.5 at best given the damage she took during the battle with the Klingon renegades at the nebula. So it’s likely she hasn’t passed the position that I have in mind for us. As soon as we reach that point, we go cold mic and play dead. All systems are to be reduced to their minimum – no communication, no drives, and no sensor activities that could be scanned by the Enterprise. We have to be damn careful. Spock is a
talented science officer, and their comms officer is just as good. Knowing them and Kirk, they will have open eyes and ears as they get closer to New Vulcan. At the same time, your comms officer will intercept all normal space and subspace transmissions in and out of New Vulcan.”

Styles nodded slowly. “What if Kirk manages to reach New Vulcan before we get him?”

Norton took a deep breath. “I hope that it doesn’t come to that. Otherwise, my orders are clear. Get him and the Augment, no matter what. And I really don’t like the thought of taking action against Selek – even if that means eliminating another kind of danger.”

This time, Lawrence frowned. “What kind of danger could Selek be? And why are you so sure that’s him who is offering asylum to Kirk?”

The admiral sighed, watched the young captain, and finally said, “I think you should know the truth, Lawrence. And I also believe that you’re going to need a brandy.”

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the Enterprise, nobody could anticipate that their opponents were that close – that the way to New Vulcan would not be clear. Scotty, Khan, and the other engineers had made the impossible, possible again. The cooling system was at its limits, as were the generators. Number 6 was still shut down; two others were back online at just forty-eight percent capacity. The ship was running at warp 3.8 – the maximum they could risk.

Jim sat in his quarters and listened to the unusually loud engines. His ship was moaning, this much was certain, yet his Grey Lady still didn’t let him down. He knew how foolish it was to think the vessel was – human? Sentient? But he couldn’t help it. And somehow the Enterprise continued to soldier on, despite all the odds against her.

Then something caught his attention, and even before the doors opened he knew that Nien had arrived. The Augment looked tired – a rarity given his enhancement, but the last days had taken an emotional toll on him.

“He is sleeping,” Khan murmured as he crossed the threshold and stepped into the bedroom where Kirk sat on the bed, a closed book in front of him.
Jim smiled at his beloved. “No wonder. He learned so much in just a day. So, he’s comfortable in his quarters?”

The Augment nodded with an amused expression. “Yes, even if his first encounter with the replicator was… troublesome. Are you in need of any cups or glasses?” At Kirk’s asking glance, he smirked, “The boy ordered too slowly at first, and so the replicator presented him with an empty cup and then a cup of tea – four times. The same happened with the glasses of water and juice. If the officer’s mess or the rec room needs any dishes, they can find them in his quarters.”

Jim began to laugh; his blue eyes shone with mirth, but also sympathy. Joaquin had so much still to learn. Imagining it all from Joaquin's point of view sent Kirk’s head spinning. He had grown up with all this technology, but Joaquin… He was glad that the boy was healthy enough to leave McCoy’s direct care and able to gather his first real experience of space and all this time had to offer – awake.

Leonard had checked Joaquin over after his little trip, only to find that the walk had been good for Weiss. Giving him some stern advice, he released him from medbay and showed him to his assigned quarters – the very same that had been offered to Khan. The former dictator had only used them for a few hours; he’d never actually slept there. “Your brother moved in with Jim quicker than I thought possible. Guess I didn't give Jim enough credit,” the CMO had chuckled. “I thought I would see them creeping through the hallways to get to each other, but they decided for a direct move. Now they share the captain’s quarters. If Command hears about that...” He had trailed off and grinned before introducing the young Augment to the technical equipment inside and how to use it all.

Kevin had accompanied them and had remained with Joaquin until he had to excuse himself for duty – only to return half an hour later to explain that Kirk had sent him down to keep Weiss company. Another cadet had been ordered to the navigation console, sweating like a horse – it was his first time on the bridge. And so like this, the two young men had enjoyed the afternoon and evening until Pavel joined them for dinner before heading to the bridge for the second half of his shift; the first half, he had spent in Engineering.

Khan had only learned of this after he left Engineering, and he was grateful once again for the thoughtfulness of his mate. He felt better knowing that Joaquin wasn’t alone and had agreeable company.

Concluding the three young men’s’ chat, he sent his brother to bed. Of course, that had elicited some protest, but the truth of Joaquin’s exhaustion came out the moment he stretched out on the mattress. Within a few minutes he was deeply asleep, and knowing the boy was safe, Khan headed to his captain’s quarters.

Jim reached out to him and warmth spread from his hand right to his heart as long, strong fingers entwined with his. He met Nien’s blue-green eyes and saw shining tenderness there.
“Thank you for taking such good care of Joaquin,” Khan murmured. “He is not your responsibility, yet you have taken him under your wing just like you did me.”

Kirk smiled gently. “He’s a guest on my ship; therefore he is my responsibility. And, by the way, he is the brother of my heart’s absolute desire,” Kirk cooed these words – needlessly perhaps, but they had the intended effect; Khan gave a hint of a smile. “And he is new to this world. Of course, I'll help him as much as I can, even if it means my bridge crew is a bit understaffed.” He began to chuckle. “Poor Taylor. He was wrung out after his nav duties. It was his first time on the bridge. I think he’ll be a fine officer one day, but first, he needs to learn to be more self-confident.”

“The first time is often the most difficult,” Khan answered, and he sat down beside Kirk. For a long moment, neither of them spoke a word; then their gazes moved to their joined hands – a symbol that spoke of more than merely their relationship. Together – just like this they would face Selek and T’Pau tomorrow. They would stand together at the Vulcan High Council. And they'd face anything Starfleet or the Federation saw fit to throw at them – together. Nothing would be able to rip them apart – not now, and not ever again.

“I sent an article about T’Pau to your PADD,” Jim said, and Khan nodded slowly.

“I read it during a short break. She’s an interesting woman. Strong, stern, powerful, wise.” He began to chuckle. “The only one who refused a seat at the Federation Council! That tells me more than anything else. It is not power and might she seeks. Her concern lies with her people, with Surak’s way, and what is right or wrong, yet she couldn’t prevent her home world’s destruction. Now she and a handful of others have to make certain that her race survives. She is in the same position as I. And I understand that she first wants to test me before she decides on the future of my people. If I were in her place, I would act likewise.” He cocked his head. “So, Spock’s grandmother, huh? I do not know if this is a good thing or not.”

“As Spock told you, it wouldn’t matter if you and he maintained your differences. T’Pau is above that. It’s the Vulcan way. But…” He took a deep breath. “I only met her once. She was with the Elders that we were able to save before Vulcan imploded. She is an impressive woman. Reminds me of steel, really. Sharp, Vulcan steel – and just as intractable. She will not bend and she will not give anything away.” He looked straight at Nien. “Be yourself, don’t hide anything, and treat her with respect. I think that'll give you the best chance with her.”

Khan made an affirming gesture, before he softly murmured, “As I first saw her picture, I was,” he paused for a moment, “… almost shocked. She resembles Shani very much – the woman who took care of Joaquin and the other younger Augments after our flight from the labs.” He saw the surprise on Jim’s face, and sighed, “I hope this will not cause me to let my guard down when I ought not to.”
“You’ll manage it – just like you always do,” Jim assured him, squeezing his fingers. Then his gaze shifted to the wall – not looking at anything in particular. “I only hope that we make it to New Vulcan without any more problems. With that five hour delay now, we won't reach Selek until tomorrow evening.”

“Have you informed him?”

Kirk shook his head. “No. I don’t want to send anymore transmission – even if Old Spock is even better than my Spock when it comes to computer tech and hacking or whatever he does. The SBI isn’t stupid. We’ve been lucky so far, but I don’t want to depend on Lady Luck too much.” He smiled at Nien. “We’ll need her help soon enough.”

Khan chuckled. “You do know that I don’t believe in higher beings, don't you?”

“Yeah, that's why you call on Brahma and Shiva,” Jim winked at him. A moment later he found himself pressed onto the bed – the Augment above him.

“Yeah, and it’s your fault. You drive me to near madness with your crazy plans and your big heart,” the superhuman growled with feigned anger.

Snickering, Kirk wrapped his arms around his mate’s slim waist, not buying the other man’s show for one second. “Is that all that drives you crazy about me?” he teased. And he saw the fire flare up in those ocean-colored eyes.

“No,” Khan whispered, “and you know it.” He lowered his head and his lips brushed over Jim’s, before they claimed that clever mouth in a searing kiss.

Instantly, the warmth in the captain’s heart and body began to heat up. Snaking a calf around the long legs of the Augment, and slipping his hands under Khan’s clothes to stroke over his strong back, Jim returned the kiss with all the longing that had grown these last three nights. Yes, he completely understood why Nien had stayed at his brother’s side the first night after Joaquin woke, yet he had missed the warm and safe presence of his beloved in his bed. Even if they didn’t make love, they were used to that. But just now, sleep wasn’t what on either of their minds. They hadn’t been together in days – half an eternity their souls and bodies thought.

The kiss quickly became an intimate, erotic duel of tongues and teeth; hands sneaked beneath clothes, and searched out the warm soft skin rippling over muscles beneath. Their groins pressed
together despite the trousers – rubbing, seeking friction and pleasure.

They didn’t need more than a minute to get rid of every piece of clothing they wore, and both groaned in relief and desire as they finally felt each other skin to skin again. Hot breathe danced, raising goosebumps; open-mouthed kisses were pressed on throats. Teeth nipped at little bits of flesh; hands teased and fondled. The more they felt each other’s skin against their own, the more their hunger grew.

Jim’s fingers fondled the delicate skin of his mate's scrotum and Nien gasped; his cock pulsed with anticipation. Whispering his beloved’s name, the Augment managed somehow to rise on his knees to escape the talented hands. He bent down and took the younger man into his mouth, relishing the sounds that escaped Jim and his taste that was so purely his Pyāra. He felt Kirk trembling beneath him, felt his hands gripping for his shoulders, and he listened to the deep, lusty growl brimming in Jim’s chest as he licked and sucked at the hard dick under silk-soft skin.

“All, please!” Kirk whispered, not knowing whether he was pleading for this sweet torment to end or begging for more. Khan understood it to be the latter and he had Jim writhing in seconds. Holding him steady by placing his hands on the captain’s hips, he continued to tease and to stimulate the younger man, interrupting the erotic attacks every time he felt his mate coming close to climax – edging him relentlessly.

Jim was in heaven – or hell. He wasn’t so sure which. All he knew was that Nien was driving him crazy – insane with desire! Helplessly, he tried to buck into Khan's sinfully hot mouth, but the Augment’s strong hands held him down. It was up to Khan whether Jim would finally get to come or not. As Nien drew him close to the heights for the fifth time without sending him over the edge, Kirk was almost sobbing. God, this man would be the end of him. And the crazy thing was that Jim didn’t care. He would risk everything to have this, to have Nien, with him until the end of his life.

He heard himself pleading again; then he moaned in delight when all of sudden one long finger entered him – wet with salvia. It was his downfall, the moment Nien touched the little bundle of nerves deep in him. And he pressed his tongue into the small slit in Kirk’s glans, using his teeth carefully to give him even more pleasure. This peak of sweet torture was too much. Jim came with the force of a storm, shouting his release and pleasure into the room. The world whirled around him – seemed to be only made of pricks and rays of light as he spent himself in his lover’s mouth.

All too willingly, Khan swallowed, loving the musk-sweet taste of his soulmate. He glanced through long lashes over the heaving, golden chest, shimmering with sweat, and felt himself smile as he saw the utter rapture on the flushed, boyish face – the young man who held his heart and soul. It was confusing – this mixture of power he had over Jim and the pleasure he found in giving his beloved this joy.

Jim lay spent on the mattress, trying to catch his breath. He was flying in the blissful nothingness of
aftermath. Warm, wet lips found his and he could taste himself mixed with Nien’s taste while he felt his lover’s hard heat, pressing against his side. Opening his eyes, his gaze was caught in the fierce glance of those ocean-deep eyes above him, and he knew that it was now his turn to give his mate pleasure.

Rolling them gently over, Kirk slipped a hand between their bodies, and he gripped Khan’s cock carefully and closed his fingers around it – stroking it slowly with gentle strength. A deep-throated moan was the result, accompanied by a shiver. Nien lifted his head and buried his face in the crook of Jim’s shoulder, nipping at the sensitive spot that bore his mark. He heard Jim gasp and smiled wickedly into the soft, warm skin. Feeling the pulse beneath his lips quickening again, a certain stirring at his hips gave away the captain’s new sense of arousal.

His free hand found his beloved’s reawakened cock and he mirrored Jim’s fondling, eliciting another groan from the younger man. It didn’t last long before both were close. Nien relished in being cocooned between his mate and the soft sheets beneath him. He felt sheltered – cherished and loved. Licking once more over the invisible mark, he lifted his head and whispered in Kirk’s ear, “Take me.”

Jim’s half-closed eyes widened. Only two times had he been offered this – at first in their little hideout at the Silver Bayou, and later as they truly bonded. He instinctively knew that Nien still had to heal from what had been done to him first by the guard while he was a child, and later by Conelly. Looking down on the beautiful face with the impossibly high cheekbones, his skin flushed with lust; he murmured, “You’re sure, love?”

Nien nodded. “Yes,” he replied softly. “I want to feel you in me – to be utterly yours.” His hand cupped Kirk’s heated cheek. “This night will be the last one for us for a long time and… And I want to be it for us, something to remember and draw from.” He pulled Jim’s face down. “Take me, as I will you later.”

Their lips met in another deep – at first sensual then more fierce – kiss. Kirk reached over the Augment to the nightstand, opened a drawer, and took out the lube he’d stored there. He fumbled with the fastening until it opened, swearing under his breath because Khan used the opportunity to rub his length against Jim’s, while those long, experienced fingers kneaded the captain’s butt.

Feeling pure fire racing through his veins, Kirk was finally able to open the bottle and oil the fingers of his right hand. He somehow managed to place the bottle back on the nightstand, fighting for any rational thought as his mate was driving him crazy with want.

Bending down he nipped gently at those sinful lips. Jim murmured, “I’ll be careful.”
Nien only smiled; words weren’t necessary. And then a loud groan was torn from his throat, as one of Kirk’s fingers entered him slowly. For a second he tensed up; old memories lurked like ghosts in his subconscious, but they vanished into nothingness as his heart and soul told him that this was perfectly right. The ghosts faded and were replaced quickly. This was his bondmate, the man he trusted as he did no one else, and relaxing, he allowed the daring finger to slip deeper. It stroked against the very spot where James’ name was branded inside him for all eternity. Electricity seemed to zing from his mark through his whole being, changing his blood to lava. It sent all rational thought away allowing him only one thing – feel.

Jim added a second and finally a third finger – gentle, yet firm; preparing him for what would happen next. And as he finally withdrew, a sigh of relief and pure pleasure escaped Khan's lips. This was not an act of surrender, but the glorious knowledge that he belonged to someone! Wrapping both arms around the younger man, he bucked against him, pleading wordlessly for more – and Jim loved to obey.

To be in his beloved again, to feel those hot, silken walls closing around him was pure heaven for the young captain. Nien’s cock, hard and pulsing with heat, rubbed between their bodies as Kirk began to move – slowly at first. But then he increased his speed as he sensed that his mate had adjusted to him. Bracing himself on his elbows, he buried his fingers in midnight black strands of the Augment’s hair. Blue eyes caught green-blue ones, and at that moment something connected between them – deepened, and their bond strengthened. Suddenly neither knew where one man began or where the other ended. Not only were their bodies united, but their souls also shared these moments, too.

Reality seemed to skip away as their entire beings were bathed in warmth and golden light. Their mouths met; tongues stroked each other, and breath was shared. Love poured from every pore of their joined bodies. Their passion climbed higher and higher, spiraling to the stars – and finally burst.

Time had no meaning for them – neither during their ecstasy nor afterward. Wrapped around each other, they soared through the warm calm of their own oblivion – utterly spent and satisfied. After minutes – hours? – Jim slipped out of his beloved’s body. He felt for one of the blankets and pulled it over them both. Nien murmured something in his native tongue as he slipped a leg around Kirk and held him close. Their hearts continued to beat in unison as their pulse slowed. Sighing in contentment and too tired to do anything else, both men drifted into a deep, fitful, and peaceful sleep.

In their shared quarters, Uhura watched her lover, who sat on the mat in front of the meditation stone. The gleam of the little flames bathed his stern features in an orange light, and it was evident that Spock hadn’t reached the relaxing state of meditation that was so important for Vulcans – maybe even more important than sleep. Nyota knew that the mantra, ‘Vulcans have no feelings’ was a big lie (despite the claim that they cannot). They had emotions stronger than any human could imagine or bear. Maybe those feelings were too mighty for the Vulcans to contain, the very reason why they
first learned to control and finally to suppress them. Those emotions burned like wildfires deep in their subconscious, and only meditation could soothe the Vulcan soul – the *katra*. Uhura was not only a superb xenolinguist; she found that studying language forced a confrontation with the culture of the people whose language she learned. And after she began a relationship with Spock, she studied the Vulcan culture as much as she could.

Spock, realizing what she did, appreciated it at first. And it was evident to Nyota that he took pleasure in her efforts. He even broke a Vulcan social taboo or two by speaking with her about subjects no outworlder was privy to. Yet the Vulcan knew that his father once did the same before he married Amanda. And Spock’s intention concerning this brilliant, beautiful, incredible human woman resembled Sarek’s plans all those years ago when he brought Amanda to his home and confronted T’Pau with his decision to make Amanda Grayson his wife. The ambassador once called the decision ‘logical’. More than three decades later, he admitted to his son that he chose to marry Amanda because he *loved* her. And what was Spock felt for the young woman on the bed, he dared to call ‘love’ too.

So, why not make the next step and bring her home like his father once did Amanda? Spock knew that his father must still be aboard the *Lexington*. The chances of seeing him soon were slight; the *Lexington* was headed for Earth where the fight against Section 31 would begin. Yet the Vulcan was determined to use the next opportunity to introduce Nyota properly to his father and his clan.

As was tradition, he had been engaged as a young boy to the daughter of another high ranking clan official, yet the wedding wouldn’t take place before his first Time. *Pon farr*. The Time of blood madness – insanity, when the urge to mate drowned a Vulcan's lucidity. The Time demanded the consummation of a bond, or the blood fever would kill the Vulcan male. Spock knew that it was only a matter of months before his first *pon farr* took him. Most full Vulcans had already suffered their first Time by his age, yet the first officer had a ‘gut-feeling’ that he wouldn’t be spared the madness though he was half human. His spouse, T’Pring, died with Vulcan. He had checked it officially, even though he felt their weak bond ripped apart as the planet imploded. That bond could only be severed by death. Therefore he would need to search for a bond partner soon – if he hadn’t already had Uhura.

With the threat of his impending *pon farr*, it was only logical to introduce her to his family – or the remains of his clan, to be precise. Yet he was uncertain what his father's reaction might be. Or T’Pau's.

T’Pau... Another reason Spock’s could not find rest enough to slip into a fitful mediation.

Though T’Pau was his grandmother, the old matriarch was unlike the grandmother types of human relations. Spock had watched grandmothers together with their grandchildren on Earth. T’Pau’s behavior towards him was nothing like grandparent handling of grandchildren among humans. She had never been unkind to him, but she had never been kind either. If anything, she expected even
more from him than from the other children of their clan – a clan that had been founded by Surak more two thousand years ago.

Her indication that she was ready to meet Khan and scrutinize the Augment’s intention in person surprised Spock at first. Then he realized that his older self had likely pushed for it, which meant that T’Pau listened to him – valued his opinion. Spock would have never thought it possible. But perhaps he had failed to separate himself from ‘Selek’. ‘Selek’ was only a few years younger than T’Pau; he’d gained much wisdom during his life, while he – Spock – was still young and still feeling out his place in the universe. T’Pau would listen to ‘Selek’ – it was logical given his position as the Vulcan High Minister. She pushed for him to take the position two years ago. The first officer was aware of the danger that came with this meeting. T’Pau would examine Khan thoroughly, in ways the superhuman could not imagine. And everything depended on her in the end. Not just the fate of Khan and the other Augments’, but Jim's, Uhura's, Dr. McCoy's and all the other officers who had dared this bold act of near mutiny against Starfleet. Spock respected T’Pau. On the other hand, there was always an awareness from childhood that he perhaps feared the old woman. He did not like the prospect that his friends’ and his future depended on her.

And that was the third topic that took residence in the Vulcan’s thoughts.

They all were a step away from a crossroad that would lead them either to freedom or to prison – and prison was the optimistic option when it came to the penalty for their actions. As acting captain, while Kirk had been in medbay after his rescue from the space station at Aldebaran, it had been up to Spock to arrest Khan and to inform Starfleet Command that had been still under Barnett’s leadership at that time, but the Vulcan hadn’t done it; thereby disobeying a direct order. He didn’t believe in luck, but he would need it if the judges sentenced him to prison. Jim, by covering for Khan like he did, would face graver consequences if the judges were henchmen of Section 31 and Luengo. If Barnett took charge, the outcome might be less grim. But there was no guarantee that the rescued admirals and Commodore Wesley would reach the president to inform him of Luengo’s true intent so that they could remove the treacherous admiral and his fellows from their positions.

Spock, always ready to calculate the odds of success or failure, stopped himself from doing so this time. And he blamed his human half – illogical as that was, for he was not two people, but one person. Perhaps Jim had influenced him as only T’hy’la could. Because his friend loved to point out that sometimes it was better to face a situation without knowing too much in order to stay open to possibilities you wouldn’t think of otherwise. Humans had a strange logic, but sometimes it worked. And it never ceased to surprise him that an illogical emotion was often as successful as logic – hope.

He had to admit, he had heeded his emotions concerning his father. After Commodore Wesley had told him of the delegation’s death, and as such, Sarek’s demise, Spock had been almost overwhelmed with grief – only to find it replaced with one of the strangest feelings he had ever encountered. Hope. There had been a slight chance that some of the delegation hadn’t met a cruel death, and Spock had been more or less (but not illogically) certain that his father belonged to the survivors. He had been convinced of it even before they received Mr. Galven’s information about the Vulcan blood in the crashed shuttle where, pointedly, no Vulcan was found.
He never had a strong link with his father as other children had with their parents. Only a few times did they share their minds in his youth, and after Spock went to the Starfleet Academy against his father’s wishes, he hadn’t had contact with Sarek – until the moment Vulcan was destroyed. Yet a part of Spock hoped that his conviction of his father’s survival was not illogical, but the result of a stronger link since his mother’s death.

All of sudden, his thoughts turned to the stronger bond he now shared with Jim. Since his T’hy’la had bonded with Khan, the link between Kirk and himself had grown. Even Jim felt it, and Spock knew from experience that his brother’s psi abilities were practically zero. Something had changed after Jim and Khan bonded. Spock remembered McCoy telling him that Jim’s brain activity had increased, likely due to the blood serum Khan had injected the captain with during their flight from Turkana. The drug had worn off by now, this much was certain, but their T’hy’la bond was stronger and Jim was healing quicker than ever. The black eye and the other bruises he had gotten from Finnegan were already gone – a clear sign that his cells remained augmented. And Spock was not sure whether this was a positive or negative attribute to Jim's physiology.

Suddenly the Vulcan felt a familiar presence beside him and then a slender, cool hand was placed on his shoulder. Turning his head, he looked straight into Uhura’s large, dark eyes.

“No matter how much you consider and catalogue the events of all that has happened and might happen, you can’t steer the future completely or prevent the events that will inevitably take place.”

Spock lifted a brow, surprised that his lover understood the reason for his musing. “Am I that transparent?” he asked quietly, and Nyota shook her head with a gentle chuckle. “No, but I do know you a little bit by now.”

The Vulcan took a deep breath. “I think ‘a little bit’ is an understatement, my dear. There is no one who can read me as you can.”

Uhura smiled. “Oh, I can think of someone who has read the same book I have.” As she caught the slight confusion on his face, she revealed, “Jim Kirk.”

“Oh!” The Vulcan nodded. “Yes, he has become quite adept at understanding me, but given Jim’s intelligence combined with his sensibilities and compassion, I am not surprised.”

Promptly, the young woman began to laugh. “I bet you hadn't thought of that turn of events since you first met him in the Academy – after he cheated your test.”
Spock lifted a brow. “Indeed,” he affirmed, and he watched Nyota become serious again.

“Shee? All the factual information available still can't perfectly predict an outcome.” She squeezed his shoulder and added softly, “So stop brooding and come to bed. I don’t think that you’ll be able to mediate tonight.”

The Vulcan pursed his lips and looked into the meditation flame, but he realized that Uhura was right. He couldn't find the calm he needed to enter the meditative state. He sighed soundlessly. “You are right,” he murmured, and he reached forwards to douse the flames with the little cup of water that stood beside the stone. “Yet it would have been better if my mind and my thoughts were clear, fresh – before, to use a human phrase, all hell breaks loose.”

Uhura cocked her head; her hair fell over her shoulder and down her back like a silken curtain. “Mediation is not only to purify your mind, but it relaxes your body too, doesn't it?” she asked, and again the first officer lifted a brow.

“I’m sure you are familiar with the reason for our habit of meditation.”

She only smiled lovingly. “Well, I do know another way for you to reach a state of relaxation.” This time, he didn’t understand her, as the confusion in his dark eyes told her. She offered him her hand, and he accepted the gesture that, for Vulcans, held even greater meaning than for humans. Softly she pulled him to his feet. Folding her pinky and ring finger, she brushed her middle and index fingers against his – the Vulcan equivalent of a kiss.

Given the sensitivity of Vulcan hands, the gesture sent tiny flames up Spock’s arm and elicited a soft gasp from him. Realizing finally what she was referring to, he cocked his head in question. As he saw the passion flaring up in her eyes, accompanied by her inviting smile, he felt a stirring in him – a stirring that a Vulcan, before his first Time, did not experience. But he was only half Vulcan.

And he realized one thing more. Tomorrow they would be on New Vulcan, and they would remain there, likely, for quite some time before facing court martial. The chance that they would be sent to prison or a penalty colony – separated – was a real threat. Tonight might be their last chance to be intimate together as they had been over the past two years. And Spock wanted to bathe in the warmth and love of Nyota before duty, and an uncertain future took them away from one another.

Following a very human urge, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed where he lowered her onto the sheets. She had barely touched him before he let his meditation robe drop to the floor.
Instantly, her arms wrapped around him, and as he quite enjoyed the human way of kissing, he bent down and caught her soft lips with his, forgetting the Vulcan way just a little while…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I had to write some hot, sweet, passionate scenes – after all Nien and Jim hadn’t had each other for quite a time, and even a Vulcan isn’t immune against a siren’s call.

In the next chapter, the admirals and Whiteman will reach Earth – and realize that Section 31 has already begun to spread its control all over the planet. And while the little landing party tries to reach the president, the Enterprise reaches New Vulcan. There will be a reencounter with Prime Spock…

I hope you liked the last chapter and I’m really curious about your reactions – like always.

For all who have already summer vacation: Have fun – and maybe you find some time to leave feedback? (*smile*).

Till next time,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Sorry for the delay, but there are summer-holidays by now and that means vacation (absence) or to work double shift for those who are on vacation. Yet I’m really happy that my two beta-readers always manage to spare some time to correct my rogue writing.

Thank you so much for the feedback and that you like the little parallel storyline of Joaquin, Pavel and Kevin. Those three will have some very important actions soon.

As told, our friends are about to reach New Vulcan. And the admirals and Whitman are trying to get to the president of the UFP. And there will be a reunion with a certain character of the ST-universe.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 69 – Ambushed

“Nearing Earth,” Commander Marceaux reported to Batari Whitman, Morrow, and Nogura. They sat in the small control center of the large long-range shuttle on small bunks (which also served as sofas) and ate an early breakfast. Four Redshirts were on their seats, eating too. “Reaching Earth in fourteen minutes,” Ensign Dempsey at the helm added.

The two admirals and the vice president looked up. It was 06:43 ship’s time and Batari was already unsettled. Not because of the danger of discovery that grew with every minute they neared their destination, but because time was running short. She knew that she had only a little time in which she could get the president inside his private home; afterwards it would be impossible for the next ten hours or so to reach him in person. Not as long as she had to stay hidden.

“Can we increase speed?” she asked not for the first time, and the Lexington’s first officer sighed.

“Ma’am, we’re racing at warp 4.3 – the absolute maximum for a shuttle. Our engineer would scream
bloody murder if he knew what we’ve demanded of the engines. And, we’re going to have to drop out of warp soon. Therefore…” He spread his hands and Batari nodded.

“I know, Commander.”

Several minutes later. Dempsey turned around again. “We’ve been hailed, sir,” he said to no one in particular.

“On speaker!” Nogura ordered, and then they heard the familiar standard transmission from the space dock.

“Unknown vessel, this is Starfleet Flight Control from Space Dock One. You’re nearing Earth, Identify yourself.”

Dempsey took a deep breath. They had agreed that he should do the talking because there was little danger that his voice would be recognized. “Space Dock One, this is the Ancestor. We’re traders, from Rigel to deliver orders of our goods. I’ll send you our manifest, if you want.”

“Are you docking in space or can you land at one of our space harbors on Earth?” the voice asked, and Dempsey replied in a friendly manner, “We’re able to land on the planet. Our destination is Paris Space Port. We’re delivering food for several hotels, restaurants, and the central market. I’ll send you the documents and request permission for landing.”

“Send the documents through this frequency and remain on stand-by. Turn into standard orbit and wait for further orders; the flight system will give you the exact coordinates for orbit.”

“Okay, Flight Control,” Dempsey drawled, leaving out standard answers protocol that demanded – after all, they were just traders. He glanced over his shoulder at his companions and had to hide a smile. No one would see that the two men beside the Asian woman were two of Starfleet’s most important admirals. Hell, even their colleagues would have to look twice to recognize them. Morrow had a beard, his hair was silver now, and he wore Rigel-style civilian clothes. The same went for Nogura; only he wore a blond wig with hair that reached his shoulders and had shaved his mustache. Batari Whitman wore simple blue jeans, a sweater, and a jacket. She had hidden her hair beneath an old-style baseball cap. Marceaux wore jeans, too, with a plaid flannel shirt and cowboy boots. Dempsey didn’t want to think about the efforts the clothing store on the Lexington went through to replicate the garments.
The four Redshirts and he wore similar clothes; it hadn’t been necessary for them to drastically change their hair or to hide behind false beards. Sometimes being a nameless, faceless corporal was an advantage. “You’ll see, sirs. We’ll set down in Paris in a few minutes. I don’t think we’ll have too much trouble. Trading vessels from Rigel are as regular as the tide.”

He was mistaken. They had to wait for more than an hour after sending the electronic documents (counterfeited perfectly by Marceaux and Palmers) before they got the permission to head for Paris Space Port. They’d barely landed when they received another hail to be ready for Customs Control.

Barnett gaped. Since when was there a Customs Control? Was that another insane order from Luengo?

Dempsey, quick-minded as he was, switched off the comms so that the receiver would be informed that the line was closed. “That'll buy us some time,” the officer murmured and looked at Marceaux, the two admirals, and Whitman, while he opened the door. With a hiss, the seal gave away, and cold, damp air filled the little vessel. “Quick now,” he said and smiled, as Barnett clapped him on the shoulder.

“Well done!” Richard murmured before he followed Marceaux, who left the shuttle first. Morrow and Batari Whitman were on his heels and then came their four accompanying security personnel.

“Good luck!” Dempsey whispered and returned to the control room, preparing himself for trouble that he would use to buy the others even more time. Sitting down to the controls, he opened the frequency and drawled, “Who’s calling us?”

Instantly a hard voice snarled, “This is Lieutenant Antoine Leraure of Federation Customs. You’ve been ordered to wait for our inspection and…”

“Sorry, mon ami, but I haven’t heard anything since we landed. So what’s up with all this customs nonsense all of sudden?”

He looked out of the cockpit window and saw a hovercar racing closer; the alert light on its top and its colors gave it away as a customs vessel. A further glance showed him that the landing party was already out of sight. They must have disappeared into the normal foot traffic. He sighed knowing perfectly well that the customs inspector would be anything but delighted to find the shuttle already relieved of its ‘goods’. And the trouble would certainly increase the moment said inspector realized that the ‘trade ship’ was actually a Starfleet long-range shuttle.
Leaning back in his seat, Dempsey listened to the man on the other end, who told him about the new security measures concerning all space vessels that land in Paris where the Federation Council resides.

Dempsey rubbed his neck as he watched the hovercar stopped beside the ‘Ancestor’, realizing that this ominous Section 31 (he had been informed of during the flight from the Lexington to Earth) was already taking control even over civilian authorities like customs. And the fact that everyone who entered Paris was watched reminded him of his history classes where he learned of another time, more than three hundred years ago, when another leader in Europe controlled every step of the people.

Steps drew nearer and then four men in uniform entered the shuttle. Sighing, Dempsey rose, facing the trouble that awaited him.

**ST***ST***ST**

While the shuttle was still in orbit above Earth a few parsecs away, another vessel was in a hurry – and its crew was determined not to be spied and caught. Just that was about to happen.

“Bridge to Captain Kirk!”

Spock’s voice tore Jim out of his blissful dreams, and for a moment he looked into the darkness of his quarters disoriented, but feeling the long arms of his mate around him. Then the trained Starfleet captain kicked in and wriggling out of Nien’s embrace he all but jumped out of bed, pulling the tangled sheets with him.

“Lights – hundred percent!” he yelled, cursing as the sheets hindered his movements. “Dammit, get off!” he snapped at the material, kicking it away while hobbling to the desk.

“Spock to Captain Kirk! Urgent!” the Vulcan’s voice repeated at the moment Jim reached his desk and opened the channel to the bridge.

“Kirk here!” he answered knowingly – something was wrong. It was 0703 ship’s time, almost an hour before alpha shift started, yet his Vulcan friend was already on the bridge. And even if people said Spock’s voice never betrayed anything, Jim could hear the tension in the dark baritone of his first officer.
“Captain, our sensors caught sight of a ship that is closing in on our current course.”

Jim felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. “Could you identify it?”

“Yes, sir. It’s the *Excalibur.*”

Kirk’s gaze found Khan, who sat up on the bed, his face tense and his eyes alert. “Right,” Jim said slowly. “Alter course and lead us in a bow pattern around the approaching ship, then re-set course to New Vulcan. Is the SDD working?”

“Yes, Captain, we’re still invisible to all sensors, yet…”

“I know. Should we come into viewing range, we’re caught. Alter course now…”

“Already done, Captain,” Spock interrupted him.

“Good! I’m on my way. Kirk out!” He switched off the intercom and cursed again before turning around; he combed his fingers through his tousled hair. Khan had already left the bed and put the collected sheets into the drop that transported them down for the cleaning service.

“It was only a question of time before Luengo deduced our final destination,” the Augment said. “The presence of the *Excalibur* is proof of it.”

“Yes – and I’ll be damned if I let us get caught before we reach our destination!” He hastened to the bathroom. “You’re coming?” he called over his shoulder, and both men took a quick shower together – washing away all traces of their passionate and intense love-making last night.

They had been consumed in their hunger for the other one at least four times, and both felt a bit sore, but that was quickly forgotten. Skipping breakfast, they headed for the bridge and made it ten minutes after Spock’s call. Gamma shift was still on duty and Khan relieved the ensign at the helm while Spock informed Lieutenant Albers, who would have taken the helm during alpha shift that he had a day off. The Vulcan sighed inwardly. There was a good chance that Albers wouldn’t be needed for duty for many days.
Jim’s gaze hung on the main screen that showed the endless depth of space. “Any sight of the Excalibur?” he asked, realizing that out of no-where Uhura came to the bridge to relieve her colleague. He was glad for it. This was now the most critical phase until they reached New Vulcan and he didn’t want to draw any other crewmember into the mess the main crew of the bridge was already in.

“No, sir,” Spock answered, watching the sensor read-outs carefully. “There is her warp signature maintaining her heading, but we’re not close enough to be spotted.”

Jim nodded and glanced at Nyota. “Any transmissions?”

The young Bantu woman had pressed one delicate hand against her headset and listened closely before she shook his head. “Nothing, sir.”

Kirk rose unable to tame his nervousness. “Tactical view!” he ordered, and Khan quickly changed the image on the main screen that showed two points – the Enterprise and the Excalibur. Two bowed lines showed their past course and the current direction of the heavy cruisers. Jim breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the Excalibur would cross their course several minutes after the Enterprise had passed. There was no chance that the Excalibur could get a visual. Still the young captain didn’t want to chance bad luck.

He punched the intercom at his arm rest, “Bridge to Engineering.”

“Keenser!” came the reply and Kirk felt a small smile tugging at his mouth as he imagined the little alien reaching up for the intercom and calling upward.

“Mr. Keenser, is there any chance that we can do warp 4 for a few minutes?” It would take them away from the Excalibur quicker – something not only Jim wished for, but so did everyone on the bridge.

“Not happy, but, two minutes okay,” Keenser almost grumbled. “Not more!”

Jim chuckled inwardly. Any other captain would have ordered the Royalan to the bridge to give him a proper lecture about behavior towards a superior officer, but Kirk knew Keenser very well. This was no display of disrespect, but rather his way of speaking with everyone.
“That’s all I want, Mr. Keenser. Thank you.” Kirk switched off the intercom and sat down on the center seat again. “Mr. Singh, please increase speed to warp 4 for two minutes, then reduce back to current speed and set new direct course to New Vulcan.”

“Aye, Captain,” Nien affirmed.

The engines became instantly louder and almost howled. Jim counted to ten in his mind before he looked at the intercom in the armrest and…

“Scott ter bridge!”

“You needed twelve seconds to react, Scotty. Still in dreamland?” Jim teased his tech-crazy friend over the open channel.

“Capt’n, did ye give the order ter increase speed?” Montgomery’s voice was a mixture of bafflement and pain.

“Just for two minutes, Scotty, to avoid the Excalibur. She heading towards us.”

“The Exca… By Nessie’s flippers, so Luengo knows where we’re goin’. Shit! I’ll go down ter Engineering, see if I can provide ye with a little bit more speed for the next hour. Scott out!”

Jim grinned for a second – his crazy Scot was a very special man. Then his attention returned back to the situation at hand.

“Distance between the Enterprise and the Excalibur increasing,” Spock reported, still bending over the scanners.

“She alter her course?” Kirk wanted to know.

“Negative! The ship is maintaining her heading.” The Vulcan straightened up and looked at his captain and friend. “They did not know that we were near.”
Jim sighed again – this time audibly. “That was a close call!” he murmured.

“They know – or they have correctly guessed our destination,” Khan muttered, watching the helm’s read-outs.

“Yes, we have to be extremely careful when we approach New Vulcan. As soon as you and your people are under the Vulcans’ care, the danger will be over for you.”

He couldn’t know how wrong he was.

The residence of the current President of the United Federation of Planets was outside of Paris in Versailles, approximately 23 km away from the French capital. Nestled in the soft green hills with their valleys and woods, it was one of the most visited places on Earth. The royal castle had often been copied from other rulers, but was still unique in its completion. Famous and mighty people had built their houses here for more than six centuries; many of them survived the three World Wars and the Eugenics Wars. The architecture styles were as different as were the epochs they were from, yet everything fit as well as a pleasant harmony and melody.

But the eight people who left the hover-bus at the market had no eyes for the beauty of the little town. Harry Morrow all but dragged Nogura with him while Batari Whitman kept on the men’s heels, Marceaux at her side.

They had needed more than four hours to reach this place, not daring to use an official transporter after they realized that Starfleet Security and Elite Security seemed to be everywhere. “Eerie,” Nogura had said, and voiced what he read on many faces of the civilians around them. Having no other choice, the eight people took the metro to La Defence in the west of Paris and used an overland hoverbus to travel to Versailles, pretending to be tourists.

They had lost time, this much was for sure. It was time they didn't have!

“This way!” Batari murmured and walked quickly down the pavement.

“I still don’t know how you plan on sneaking into the villa,” Harry whispered. “The president’s residence is one of the most secure buildings and…”
“It’s Robertson’s birthday today, and he usually celebrates it with his closest friends privately – especially now while we are technically still at war. He may be at his headquarters office at the moment, but Susan will be at home supervising the preparations for dinner. We’ll go to the side entrance, and hopefully, I can contact one of the employees I know – maybe even Burton Hamilton. He is Robertson’s butler.” They walked down the street, struggling to remain calm so as not to draw attention to themselves.

Ten minutes later they entered a street and saw the high garden wall with its secured entrance and a guard house. No visitor could pass without being noticed. They passed by the entrance; then Batari turned right around the property, seeing another smaller lattice gate where several people were unloading a hypertruck bringing food. Cameras followed every movement of the group, yet Whitman didn’t hesitate to stop in front of the side entrance to address one of the attendants.

“Is Mr. Burt Hamilton present?” she asked for the president’s butler, and the man frowned at her.

“Who wants to know?”

“Sally Anderson, his daughter Anna's friend,” Batari lied, using the name of, indeed, Anna’s friend. “We…”

She didn’t get any further; the next second, security came running towards her and her companions.

Morrow rolled his eyes. “Sometimes I think we’re training the security a little too well!” he groaned, while he lifted his hands just like the others were doing.

The commander of the security team spoke quickly over his headset. “Williams, secure the villa and make sure that Mrs. Robertson stays away from this part of the estate. We caught some burglars here!”

“Capt’n, I may be riskin’ ye everlastin’ wrath, but if we fly a minute longer at 4.8, all the stories about our dear Enterprise will begin with ‘Once upon a time’!” Scott had raised his voice to be heard over the howling engines.
Jim groaned and dropped his head for a moment, knowing that his chief engineer didn’t overstate the situation. He felt the eyes of the bridge crew resting upon him and sighed, “All right, Scotty, I got it.” He looked up again and straight at Khan. “Lower speed to warp 3, Mr. Singh and…”

“Warp 2.5 is the absolute maximum, Capt’n!” Montgomery cut in, sounding more stern than Nogura giving Kirk a lecture.

“Right!” Jim growled. “Warp 2.5 is it then!”

Nien nodded and reduced the speed. “New ETA to New Vulcan – 32.837 minutes.”

“Precisely!” Spock affirmed, and Uhura, who had breathed a sigh of relief as the noise lessened, hid a grin. She knew that Spock wouldn’t like to hear it, but she had to admit that he and Khan had a lot in common!

“We’re only half an hour away from New Vulcan?” Jim beamed. “Well, that sounds better!” He punched the intercom button at his armrest. “Kirk to McCoy!”

The private hail told Bones enough. “Yeah, Jim, what’s up?”

“Make ready to come to the transporter room in half an hour. We’re beaming down to New Vulcan as soon as we arrive. Are the cryotubes ready to be evacuated to the planet?”

“I checked them thoroughly an hour ago. Everything is perfectly fine. Oh, and I did a last med check on Mr. Weiss. The boy shouldn’t stress himself over the next two or three days, but otherwise, he’s in perfect health. He’s with Mr. Riley in the guest quarters at the moment, packing a few things he got from the uniform shop he’s going to need on the planet.”

“Thanks, Bones,” Jim said; smiling to himself.

“My thanks, as well, Doctor!” Khan called over his shoulder.

The doctor answered in kind, “You’re welcome, Mr. Singh. See you guys in the transporter room in half an hour. McCoy out!”
Kirk leaned back in his chair, knowing that his time aboard this ship was rapidly nearing its end. The chances of his returning to the center seat were small at best – as soon as he beamed down to New Vulcan, and he felt a knot forming in his belly. He loved his ship; he loved his crew – his friends! And he loved his job, yet he wouldn’t change anything given the chance.

His gaze wandered to Spock, who bent over his sensors, and he got a bad feeling – not for the first time. He had hoped that his friends would stand by his side during this whole mess, but knowing that they were actually willing to throw away their career and even had the prospect of being sentenced and imprisoned for who knows how long, made him gulp. He’d never wanted them in trouble because of him – because of their loyalty and friendship, but it was too late to go back now. The moment they decided to support him by not giving Khan away, they crossed a bridge that led them away from everything they had worked for so hard.

Jim knew that Spock had a less-than-ideal childhood on Vulcan. Vulcans often looked down on him – well, did! Now every one of their raced counted, even the ‘half-breed’ who had saved the Elders and stopped the madman who destroyed their home world. Jim was aware of the fact that the Vulcans, despite their logic and their regard for IDIC had treated his T’hy’la with thinly-veiled loathing, and now Spock was willing to give up his career in Starfleet just to help a friend – something that could be described as emotional. Jim could guess how Vulcans would react to that.

And there was Uhura. She was with them in this, and being Spock’s girlfriend, she…

Kirk frowned. If Spock went with him into exile, Jim would give him and Nyota a chance to stay together! It was the least he could do. “Uhura?” he addressed his communication officer, and the young woman turned around in her seat.

“Yes, Captain?”

“Have you packed?” As he caught her confused gaze, he added, “I don’t know if we'll be coming back to the Enterprise after we beam down to New Vulcan, so I suggest you pack your stuff.”

Nyota frowned. “You want me to join the landing party?”

Jim took a deep breath. “That’s up to you. Sooner or later we’ll get visitors from Starfleet. Since you are involved with Spock, no one will believe that you weren’t involved in this. On New Vulcan, I think you’d be safer.”
He met Spock’s gaze and saw the gratitude shimmering in those dark eyes before the Vulcan looked at Uhura. “The captain’s offer is logical,” he said. “I would appreciate your company.”

Blushing the tiniest bit, Nyota smiled at him, hearing his concern and affection between the lines. “Thank you,” she answered quietly. “But who's going to be here at the comms station? I’m…”

“Nyota, as soon as we’re on New Vulcan and beam down, we can regard ourselves as suspended,” Jim voiced the unpleasant truth. “Call the next comms officer to the bridge after our arrival to New Vulcan. I will leave instruction that you’re coming with me by orders and that your relief has absolutely no clue why you’re part of the landing party. That should keep her safe.” He smiled at her. “But first, you’ll have to contact Selek when we get to our destination.”

“And I’ll have to answer Vulcan Flight Control,” Uhura added, but Kirk shook his head.

“They won’t know we’re there because of the SDD. And it’s better this way. I don’t want to involve even more people in this mess.”

More than twenty minutes later, a sun system could be seen on the main screen that had adjusted the distortions of subspace for better viewing. Khan had to admit that he felt relieved as he saw his people’s future home – or, better to say, the place where they would be finally safe.

“Ready to drop out of warp,” Jim instructed. “Full impulse drive!”

“Aye, Captain,” Khan affirmed businesslike as he was when serving on the bridge. His long fingers sped over the controls, and a moment later the Enterprise left subspace. That same second, the lights on the bridge began to waver before they blacked out and the alerts sounded.

“What the hell?” Jim gasped. “Computer, auxiliary lights!” he ordered, but the lights were on again even before he finished his sentence. “What happened?” he demanded, addressing Allistor, who manned the engineering station.

The second engineer knew that his commanding officer was asking him; he didn't need to see him to know that. “Malfunction of the warp drive, Captain. Generator one and four are non-functional; compensators at their max, cooling system overheated, and deflector shields are offline. We’re running on auxiliary power now.”
Jim cursed and was about to hail Engineering when Scott’s voice sounded through the speaker, “Scott ter Capt’n Kirk!”

Rolling his eyes, the young captain answered the hail. “Yeah, I got the report from Allistor, Scotty. We’re limping to New Vulcan now.”

“Limpin’? Jim, if I were Dr. McCoy, I would say that only an emergency surgery’d save this patient! I'm looking at a hell of work before she’s ready to race through space again!”

Jim pinched his nose. “I know, Scotty, and the Vulcans will get you everything you need.”

“Ha!” Montgomery huffed, “They’ve enough problems without supportin’ a starship – and, by the way, they don'na have a space dock. I have no clue how they’ll be able ter help us at all.”

“Is there enough energy left for the transporter to beam down Nien’s crew and us?”

Silence, then Scott growled, “We made it this far, and we’ll finish the job – even if I’ve ter summon every battery of every single PADD and have ter add the energy of our phasers ter feed the transporter. We’ll beam them down – an’ ye too, Jim! Just get us ter New Vulcan and I’ll work some more magic down here – some glue ter the engines ter hold them together. Scott out!”

Kirk rubbed his neck and glanced back at Allistor. “Is the SDD still working?”

The man checked the display. “The auxiliary system provides its power, sir. It’s still functioning.”

“At least that's good news.” He shook his head. His ship was in bad shape – dreadful shape – and they were about to leave it soon. Well, he would have loved to stay on New Vulcan for a few days, at least until Starfleet Command was hopefully back in the hands it belonged to, but things had changed. He was still the captain of the Enterprise and his ship needed him. As soon as the Augments were safe on the planet, including Nien, he – Jim Kirk – would return to help with the repairs. It was his duty to the crew and…

“Nearing New Vulcan,” Khan’s voice interrupted his thoughts and looking back at the main screen Jim saw the single red ball that began to fill out the screen.
“Uhura, hail Selek. Tell him that we’re ready to beam down in a few minutes and he’ll give us the coordinates. Mr. Chekov, standard orbit, Mr. Singh, reduce to one quarter impulse!” He leaned back into his chair, maybe for the last time. “Lady, Gentlemen, it’s been a pleasure and great honor to serve with you!”

ST***ST***ST

“Captain?” Commander Ben Taylor, science officer of the Excalibur turned around in his seat and looked at Styles. “Our sensors picked up a small fluctuation in subspace.”

Admiral Norton, who stood beside the center seat, frowned. “Source?”

The commander adjusted his scanners. “That’s not clear, sir. It was as if… a door was opened and closed again.” He pursed his lips shortly. “Sir, the long-range scanners are reading warp field particles – not much, but still…”

“Coordinates?” Styles demanded, feeling excitement filling him. Maybe the damn SDD Kirk had installed aboard his ship was failing and they could finally find the Enterprise.

“Coordinates 6.583-12.834 and…” He stopped as he realized the planet in the vicinity of those coordinates.

Wilson looked over his shoulder. “That’s near New Vulcan, sir.”

Styles and Norton had exchanged a glance before the captain hissed, “Dammit, he was right under our nose, and he got away! He’s already there, ready to hide like a coward behind Selek! Alter course, Mr. Wilson, set to New Vulcan. Lieutenant Kramer, maximum warp!” He glanced up at Norton. “Sir, I think Elite will get its action.”

The admiral nodded grimly, damning Kirk and his friends to hell and back. Intervention on New Vulcan was supposed to be a last resort only, but it was about to happen now. ‘You’ll pay for this, Kirk! You, your friends and your damn Augment pet’

ST***ST***ST
“Mr. President, I have your wife on the line. She says it’s urgent.”

Robertson frowned. Usually, Susan didn’t call him at his office, especially during such difficult times. There had to be an emergency. Otherwise, she would have waited for his return in the early evening to talk to him.

“Put her through, Judy,” he instructed his secretary, and a moment later his screen came alive, showing the striking features of his wife, Susan, framed by a golden-brown hair. “Susan, what’s the matter?”

“Harhan, some burglars tried to break into the villa. Lieutenant Dubois caught them, but you need to come home to answer some questions.”

Robertson stared at her. Burglars – well, that was nothing new. They had uninvited visitors two years ago. Dubois arrested them. So everything should be fine. But then why did Susan asked him to leave his office and to come home?”

“Sweetheart, is there something wrong?” he asked carefully, becoming very wary all of sudden. Was there a trap to…?

“Everything is in order, darling, but still, I would be glad if you could leave your desk for once.” She looked to something or someone out of the camera’s range and added. “Oh, Chu-Chu's coming back from the gardens – alone. I think I’ve got to look for Burt. Maybe she escaped him once again, and he's still looking for her.” She glanced back, smiling at him. “So, can you come?”

Harhan cocked his head. Chu-Chu was the little poodle he and his wife owned – and she was also the code word used when something was very, very wrong. That she ‘came back alone’ meant he had to return to the residence alone without informing anyone. And that his wife wanted to ‘look’ for his private butler indicated that this transmission was of secret nature.

Whatever was the cause of her concern, it had to do with him – and it was crucial!

“I’m on my way, Susan. See you in a few.” He switched off his terminal and rose. He trusted his wife enough to know that she didn’t call him – and with those words on a whim. She wouldn’t even do such a thing to surprise him for his birthday today, knowing that he had better things to do at the moment than having a party or greeting surprise guests. Something had happened – something that
demanded his immediate presence at home, and so home he would go.

He strode to the entrance and nodded at Judy and her four colleagues who worked in the office – sometimes around the clock, as Robertson considered. The time of day didn’t matter; he somehow reached always them if he contacted his office.

“Judy, I'm going home for today. Please cancel the date with Minister S’Hethelem and put him off to tomorrow afternoon. Just check my schedule to see when I have time enough to meet him.”

His secretary smiled at him. “Your wife planned a surprise?”

“Yes, naturally,” Robertson chuckled; he greeted the others and left. He knew that at least two of his bodyguards had to accompany him and sure as hell, they were waiting for him as he entered the transporter room. They saluted and stepped together with him onto the platform. The transporter chief entered the code that would allow him to transport someone directly to the private residence of the president. At the same time, one of his bodyguards informed the villa’s security of the president’s arrival.

Only a few seconds later, they materialized in the lobby, and nodding at the two men, Robertson walked away and entered the private area of the residence – without the bodyguards who knew only that they had nothing to do now until the first birthday guests arrived.

Or so they thought.

Harhan climbed the steps, walked down the hallway, and heard his wife and several other voices. Chu-Chu ran towards him and greeted him as if she hadn’t seen him for weeks. Lifting the little furry, black bundle into his arms, he followed the voices and entered the upstairs sitting room. Susan instantly rose and smiled in relief at him.

“There you are! That was quick,” she said.

Confused, Robertson looked at Lieutenant Dubois and four of his men, who lingered at the windows while on the sofa sat a woman and two men. Around them in various chairs sat several other men he didn’t know.

“Harhan, I think we've got guests you didn't expect,” Susan whispered, and Whitman rose, removing
her cap.

“Hello, Mr. President!” she greeted him – and Robertson thought the rug had been pulled away from beneath his feet.

“Batari?” he whispered, shocked – convinced for a moment he was seeing a ghost.

The two men in her company had risen, too. One removed a blond shoulder-length wig, the other one put off a false mustache and pointed to his hair, “Sorry, sir, I can't exactly take this off; the hair is dyed. Usually, I’m not that gray.”

Robertson opened his mouth, but no word came from his lips. Only after some attempts, which made him look like a fish out of the water, could he croak, “Harry? Heihachiro?”

“At your service, Mr. President!” Nogura answered, saluting almost casually as Morrow did.

Marceaux had watched the most powerful man of the Federation, and he realized that the man was about to faint. He intervened before something very humiliating could happen. “Commander Marceaux, first officer of the USS Lexington, Mr. President. Commodore Wesley sends his best wishes for your birthday, sir!”

The proper salute tore Robertson out of his shock, and he was grateful that his wife took his arm, led him to one of the armchairs and helped him to sit down. “Oh God,” Harhan murmured after another moment, feeling immense relief mixing with his confusion. “How… how is this possible? How did you escape? Why wasn't I informed? Does Luengo know…?”

“No, Mr. President, and we advise you to keep our presence a secret – especially from Luengo!” Morrow cut in, skipping protocol for once. He glanced at Susan. “Ma’am, I think it would be helpful if you would offer your husband a cognac – whiskey – something to that effect.” He glanced at his companions and the four house security personnel. “And I think the same will be necessary for the others.” He looked back at Robertson, who began to regain some composure, while Susan began to pour some glasses.

“How did you escape?” Harhan whispered. “Captain Styles reported that Klingons attacked your shuttle and…”
“We were attacked by Klingons, but they were renegades – renegades hired by Admiral Luengo,” Nogura said and sat down again, watching the president’s face paling even more.

“Luengo? He… he hired Klingons to…?” Robertson couldn’t finish the sentence. The shock of it was too big. “But why!?” he croaked as the two admirals nodded.

Harry took a deep breath. “The war between the Klingons and us has been used by certain people to increase their power – to position them take over Starfleet Command and to steer the war to their own advantage. I’m talking about Section 31. There was a remnant left over from – well, you remember. It was not fully eliminated, and they've grown, quite under the radar, over the last months. At its head is none other than Admiral Luengo, who hired the Klingons to kill those staff officers who wouldn’t allow Section 31’s return, so he could become the new Chief of Command – a rank he needed to better entrench Section 31 within Starfleet. Not officially, of course, but as a secret group so it could resume its work under the mask of the SBI and other science departments. He would have succeeded – if it hadn’t been for some bright minds who saw through Captain Styles’ report and recognized it for what it was: a fake.”

Robertson was ash gray now; he didn't doubt the admiral’s words – after all the sheer presence of Morrow, Nogura and Whitman (which were officially declared dead by Luengo) were proof enough. “Captain Styles…?” he whispered, already anticipating the answer Nogura would give his unfinished question.

“Yes, Styles is Luengo’s man. A few of us, including Richard Barnett and James Komack, as well as Sarek, Gav and a few other diplomats survived the shuttle crash that Styles didn't bother looking for. We were taken prisoners by Orion slavers and were about to be sold to the Romulans when Commodore Wesley and Fleet Commander Kor of the Imperial Fleet showed up and freed us at last possible second.”

“Kor, the Klingon warlord?” Harhan interrupted bewildered. “He was accused of being the one who attacked…”

“He was not near our position when the assault happened but was actually helping the Enterprise at the Briar Patch,” Morrow said, taking his seat again as Batari did. “Kor and Wesley met by accident in the Borderland, spoke with each other, built an alliance and saved us – clearing a secret slavery market in the process and killing the imposter who pretended to be Kor. Some of the imposters’ and the slavers' allies are in custody aboard the Lexington.”

Robertson accepted the drink gratefully that Susan offered him and emptied the glass with one big gulp. The cognac warmed his turning stomach, and taking a deep breath he asked, “So, Wesley found out about this conspiracy and…”
“It was Jim Kirk of the Enterprise who looked through the gossamer of lies Luengo wove. He presented Wesley the evidence. James, Richard, Harry and I eavesdropped on our kidnappers and learned that one of our own was responsible for the attack and our imprisonment. We only figured out later, after we were safe aboard the Lexington, who the Judas is.”

“Luengo!” Robertson murmured. “I should have assumed something like this after I learned of Luengo’s order to destroy four of our high-security facilities from some Council members – something Luengo forgot to inform me about in advance.” He moistened his lips, feeling sick to the core. “Where’s the Lexington now? Is Richard Barnett with you?”

“No, he stayed aboard the Lexington, which is heading towards New Vulcan; Kirk is too. Luengo knows that Kirk saw through him when he sent him to destroy the facility. Kirk knows the Excalibur is after him.”

“New Vulcan,” Harhan blinked baffled. “Why is he going there?”

“Selek!” was all Harry said, and Robertson nodded in understanding.

“Of course.” More, Robertson didn't dare say more about the old Vulcan, at least not in the presence of his wife and security. Selek's identity should stay a secret after all. He pressed his lips together then added, “I hope the Enterprise reaches New Vulcan before the Excalibur catches up with her. It would be a shame if two of our ships fought each other.”

Morrow grimaced. “Yes. I have no doubt that Styles would destroy the Enterprise given a chance. He and Kirk were rivals back at the Academy and as it seems the old grudges live on. To prevent the worst, Barnett remained with Wesley to stop Styles, who hopefully will listen to a direct order from the real Chief of Command. If not, maybe his officers will obey – they're old school and loyal to their former Captain Heldron.”

“By the way, Captain Heldron and his first officer weren’t injured in a traffic accident per se. All evidence points to a deliberate attack; it looks like the SBI – or, better to say, Section 31,” Batari threw in, and Harhan shook his head as if to clear his mind of this new shock.

“This… this is the biggest conspiracy within the Federation I ever heard about it. Marcus and Section 31 tried something similar last year, but Luengo’s succeeded – almost succeeded. At least now we know of his intentions.” Then he took a further deep breath and straightened his his. “I think it’s about time to do some cleaning up in the Headquarters!”
“Yes, sir, this is of highest priority – and Luengo should not learn of our presence on Earth before absolutely necessary.”

Robertson rose. “Damn right he won’t learn about you here – not until he sees you face-to-face. At that moment we’ll arrest him.” He turned to leave. “I have to make some calls and…”

“Mr. President, we must assume that some members of the council are also involved in this mess. Otherwise, Section 31 couldn’t have proceeded as it did,” Morrow stopped him, and Robertson nodded grimly.

“I’m aware of this. We will have to get to the root of the problem – Luengo. It’ll be like fighting a swarm of bees. You won't win unless you kill the queen. Only then will the animals will stop their fight. And that’s exactly what I’ve in mind. Get Luengo and his closest allies – and then we’ll catch the rest.” He cocked his head. “What about Commander Stones from Security Department. Is he loyal or one of Luengo’s men? What do you think?”

Morrow and Nogura exchanged a glance. “Ethan Stones is loyal to you, Mr. President, as well as to the laws and ethos of the Federation. I think it’s safe to take him into the boat,” Harry said. “And I also know that we’ll need his support when we return HQ and go to my former office without being stopped.”

“Right, then I’ll contact him first and order him to be on standby without informing Luengo. He has to accept a direct order from me.” With purposeful steps, Robertson strode to the door. “Batari, please stay with Susan and try to get some rest. Gentlemen, come with me! We’ve got to stop a Judas!”

ST***ST***ST

Scott stood at the transporter controls and watched Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Uhura and the two Augments stepping on the pads. Beside him, Pavel Chekov checked the coordinates one last time; then he glanced up – straight at a very nervous Weiss.

“Hey,” he said softly, and when he had Joaquin’s attention, he smiled encouragingly at him. “Zis beaming is nozing bad.”

“No,” McCoy snorted sarcastically. “Your whole body will only disassemble into atoms and…”
“Bones!” Jim snapped, who realized that the young superhuman was growing pale. “You also are afraid of shuttles, space travel and space itself, and you serve on a starship. So quit it before you terrify Jo even more.” He flicked a thump at Joaquin; using the shorten form of his name unintentional and for the first time. Khan, who stood beside him, rolled his eyes as he heard the nickname. Americans!

Weiss gulped. Khan had explained to him what this transporter did and that he had used it dozens of time now, yet Joaquin was unsettled. Very! Looking back at Pavel, he tried to replicate the Russian’s grin but failed miserably.

Chekov, of course, saw it and nodded at him. “Believe me; it’s nozing terrible. In a few seconds, you’re stepping for ze first time on a strange planet. Zat’s something to remember later.” He grew serious again. “Good luck!”

Jim and Nien exchanged a quick look, touched by the apparent growing comradeship between the two young men; then Kirk took a deep breath. Maybe there was the chance to return and to watch the repairs; maybe this was the last time he saw this quarters – the last time he'd be aboard his beloved ship. Moistening his lips, he straightened up to give the final order. “Energize!”

The golden light of the transporter surrounded them only to place them on the surface of New Vulcan a few seconds later.

The heat of the late afternoon was diminished a bit by the winds blowing off the large nearby lake, yet the temperature hit the human visitors with force. Even the two Augments had to adjust to it. But it wasn't just the temperature that was difficult. Khan and Joaquin instantly became aware of the greater force of gravity and Weiss swayed for a moment; his still weak muscles protested against the effort that was demanded of them.

Jim had been on New Vulcan twice and knew about the small and significant differences between this new home of Surak’s people as well as other planets; he would patiently wait until the dizziness passed. He heard Bones complaining under his breath, while Spock remained unaffected. One quick glance showed Kirk that Uhura bore the burning heat surprisingly well – but, she had grown up in Central Africa. Those years in San Francisco and later in space couldn’t eliminate the body’s memory.

Khan glanced around him. Behind him, the Vulcan government building rose into the skies, built in the traditional Vulcan style that allowed not more than three levels. Other larger buildings nearby were constructed in the same way as were some residences. Khan assumed that they belonged to the ministers, diplomats, and Elders, who had representing duties to business partners and government
members of other planets. The rest of the Vulcans lived in the skyscrapers and other larger buildings which had been built in haste to offer the people a place to live. That would change in several decades when time and healing wounds would allow for the establishment of their some of the former lifestyles.

Joaquin stayed close to him, looking wide-eyed around. Pavel was right about what he said earlier. When Joachin set foot on a planet that wasn’t Earth, an eerie yet curious feeling came over him. He caught the strange but pleasant scent in the air – desert but also plant life. The increased gravity did not bother him – not really – but the strange smells, the strange noises of machines, cars, and devices he couldn’t name, and the foreign architecture made him wary. He wasn’t afraid, but he felt uncertain.

Soft steps sounded from behind and quickly both Augments turned around. They and the others had materialized on a larger terrace, and now they saw a tall, slender figure leaving the building and coming nearer with elegant movements which nevertheless spoke of age. A brown Vulcan robe embroidered with golden Vulcan symbols billowed in the wind that also mussed the ice-grey hair.

Joaquin gaped as he stared at the old Vulcan who quickly approached them. Pavel and Kevin had shown him some pictures of Vulcans, yet this man resembled Spock in a way that was almost unbelievable. For a moment the young Augment thought that this could be Spock’s father before he remembered that the ambassador was on this other ship, the Lexington after he had been rescued by Jim’s superior officer and mentor. So this man couldn’t be Spock’s father, but maybe an uncle? Or his grandfather? They belonged to the same family; there was no doubt about it.

His attention was driven to Jim Kirk, who had seen the newcomer only seconds after the two Augments did. He pushed his way through his friends – a broad grin on his face. “Selek!” he called; his joy was clearly heard.

The old Vulcan was close now, and Khan was surprised to see a hint of a smile on the aged face. The dark eyes, surrounded by many wrinkles, shone with warmth as ‘Selek’ stopped a step away from Kirk. “It’s good to see you alive and healthy, old friend!”

Knowing that he was smiling like an idiot but unable to stop, Jim held himself back from throwing his arms around ‘Selek’. Like always, Old Spock made him feeling safe, protected, loved – just like coming home to a tender father. Maybe it was exactly like he regarded his T’y horrible older counterpart.

The Vulcan Elder seemed to recognize Jim’s struggle to control his emotions and without hesitation, he reached out, offering his hands to the young human. Instantly the strong, yet so fragile – and cool, fingers clasped his hands, and Selek felt his senses overflow with joy, relief, and love – the love of a son towards his father, or that of a younger brother towards his older sibling. He had been used to
these feelings coming from his Jim Kirk for decades. And it was no different than with this Jim Kirk. It was the respect of the young towards a beloved elder.

“Thank you for your support, Spock,” Jim murmured; addressing the Elder by his real name. “Without your help, we wouldn’t have made it to Gamma 12. I’m happy to be here, not only because we’re finally safe now, but really, I'm glad to see you again. How are you doing?”

“I am well, Jim, thank you,” the Vulcan High Minister said; the ghost of a smile on his lips increased. He knew that Kirk’s question hadn’t been merely a polite phrase – it had never been, neither with his Jim nor with this younger counterpart. He sensed caring in the captain that was meant for him, and even if he only could admit it to himself, it felt good to be so important to someone again.

“I trust your travel to New Vulcan was without difficulty?” he asked, and promptly Jim rolled his eyes while in the background he heard the familiar voice of a young Dr. McCoy groaning and a melodious female voice of another very dear friend from days past sighing, “As if anything would ever go smoothly.”

Selek’s dark eyes looked behind Jim, and instantly he found those of his younger counterpart, who had lifted a brow and greeted him in the Vulcan way. Leonard McCoy bowed, while Uhura raised her hand in the Vulcan greeting and formulated, in accent-free Vulcan standard, the traditional words. Besides the three officers, Selek’s gaze found two other human males – one familiar, the other one was a boy at the threshold of adulthood.

For a moment Selek’s gaze linked with that of the Augment leader and both males regarded each other warily. Then Jim chirped in, feeling the rising tension he wanted to prevent from growing. “Well, we had to avoid the Excalibur Luengo sent after us. Engineering is a mess, and the Enterprise more or less limped to New Vulcan over the last few hours – you should hear Scotty complaining. We had trouble with one of the cryotubes. Bones and Nien saved Joaquin at the very last minute. We had to keep eyes and ears open because Luengo sent the half fleet out to find us. We don’t even know where the Lexington is or whether Wesley was able to rescue the captured admirals and diplomats. Without Barnett or Nogura, we’re done for.” He spread his arms. “In other words, it was a normal trip given the chaos.”

“Affirmative,” Selek deadpanned. “This sounds like the typical days aboard the Enterprise I remember so well. Jim Kirk did not and still does not take the easy path.” There was a teasing undertone in his voice and Jim flushed a bit.

Stepping aside, he made room for Spock Prime to greet the others properly. Nodding at his younger counterpart and exchanging some words with him, Selek then greeted Uhura in an almost warm way, before he addressed the CMO. Something close to amusement sparkled in his eyes. “Leonard! It’s a pleasure to meet you again too, old friend.”
McCoy gaped at him for a moment, before he stuttered, “Does this mean that the hobgoblin and I were friends in your timeline, High Minister?”

“Bones!” Jim hissed, asking himself what had gotten into the CMO all of sudden. The nickname McCoy chose for Spock was something he barely tolerated in private, certainly not openly – least of all in Old Spock’s presence.

McCoy realized that he made a gaff and ducked his head. “Sorry, I mean…”

‘Selek’s’ eyes danced with silent laughter. “Yes, we were friends, despite our differences. The friendship was stimulating and strengthened us as a team. Each could support the other or Jim as needs arose. And, I have to admit, I enjoyed the banter we shared, ‘Bones’.”

Khan saw the younger Spock wince the slightest bit, and shook his head in amused understanding. “They are already friends, but do not acknowledge this,” he whispered under his breath, but the keen Vulcan hearing caught his words nevertheless. Both Spocks looked at him. Pursing his lips, he gave both a half amused, half challenging glance.

“Mr. Singh, welcome to New Vulcan,” ‘Selek’ addressed the Augment.

“High Minister Selek, it is a pleasure to meet you in person,” Khan replied; the politeness came easily to him. “Please accept my sincere gratitude at your offer of shelter for my family. We are in your debt.”

The old Vulcan bowed his head curtly. “Life is sacred for my people and me. Our chosen Way of Surak does not allow us to watch the endangering or killing of other beings passively. Genocide is a high crime – a crime that is strongly punished within the Federation. Admiral Luengo’s order concerning your people, Mr. Singh, forced me to act. Your people will be safe here.” His gaze found the boy at Khan’s side, who bit his lips and apparently did not know how to react.

Nien saw that Old Spock’s attention moved to Joaquin. He placed a hand on the younger Augment’s shoulder. “High Minister, may I introduce Joaquin Weiss to you – the youngest of my crew and my younger brother.”

Joaquin gulped as he met clear, knowing eyes and he bowed. After all, the Vulcan was the highest ranking politician on this planet, and he was the man who offered him, his brothers and sisters a safe
place to stay. “Sir,” he greeted quietly. He thought he was a flash of amusement in those brown eyes before ‘Selek’ nodded at him.

“Mr. Weiss, as far as I understood Jim’s report of events over the last days, it was your cryotube that failed. Therefore you have been awake in this time for only those few days. I know that this all must be very strange and unsettling for you, but be assured that no harm will come to you here on New Vulcan. Has Spock advised you in behavior among our people?”

Joaquin shook his head. “I only know that your people don’t like to be touched because they are touch telepaths and that they… They control their emotions. Pav… I mean Mr. Chekov and Mr. Riley told me a little bit of your history, but that’s all.”

‘Selek’ raised one eyebrow at the mentioned names and Jim explained, “Pavel and one of the cadets, Ensign Riley, have befriended Joaquin and helped him to settle in as much as possible in the four days he’s been awake.”

Spock Prime looked at him. “I know Kevin Riley – and I hope you have not had the displeasure of listening to his ‘Take me home, Kathleen’ rendition.” As he saw the confused expression on the human’s face, he changed the topic and glanced back at Joaquin. “In this case, Mr. Weiss, it would be good to stay close to your brother or me. Do not hesitate to ask me any questions. There are several taboos that I will inform you about soon; until then no offense will be taken if you slip here or there.”

The young Augment nodded slowly. “Thank you, sir.”

Jim reached out and laid a hand on the Elder’s arm. “Spock, I don’t want to push anything, and I know that T’Pau wants to speak with us first, but the *Excalibur* was only a few hours away from New Vulcan when we scanned her. I'm afraid Luengo knows that we’re here, and he sent her after us. I would feel better if Nien’s people could be beamed down as soon as possible. Even that pompous bastard, Styles, will not be stupid enough to take action against New Vulcan. He'll have to accept that the cryotubes are out of reach.”

“Your worries are understandable, Jim,” Selek said gravely. “T’Pau will not be available until the evening, yet I understand that the danger for Mr. Singh’s people has increased because of the *Excalibur*’s proximity.” He took a deep breath and Jim, who knew his Spock well enough to see behind the ‘Vulcan mask’ saw the wheels turning in ‘Selek’s’ head. Then the Elder made up his mind and looked straight at Khan. “Mr. Singh, a moment please!” he said and made an inviting gesture towards the edge of the terrace where several chairs were placed in the shadows.
Khan instinctively knew what would come now. It was the only logical thing the old Vulcan could do after it became clear they couldn’t wait for T’Pau to decide if he would get asylum. Should the *Excalibur* arrive at New Vulcan soon, he would be only safe from arrest if he was under Vulcan protection.

A sudden knot formed in the superhuman’s belly that he quickly suppressed as he felt Joaquin’s hand on his arm. Squeezing it gently, he gave the boy a quick, reassuring smile and followed Spock Prime.

Jim’s quiet “Nien?” seemed to fill him new strength – his mate’s concern for him was, like always, balm for his soul. Looking back over his shoulder, he replied softly, “Do not worry, Jim. I know what I agreed to do.”

Kirk bit his lips. He didn’t fear that Selek would deny Khan his support. As soon as Spock Prime had seen what happened to the superhuman, he would help him. But Jim knew that the first mind meld experience was unsettling at best, and his mate had been through so much already. Kirk knew as well, how reticent the other man was to expose himself. Selek would be careful, of this the young captain was confident, yet the next minutes would be unnerving for Nien – and Jim suffered with him.

In the shadows, both men stopped and faced each other. ‘Selek’ didn’t need to be a genius to be aware of the Augment’s nervousness. He also felt Jim’s unsettled gaze hanging on them both, and he sighed silently. Typical for James Kirk, he was independent and protective no matter when he lived. He always worried about his friends! And Khan had not only become Jim’s friend, but he was also his lover – even his mate. That was reason enough for the Elder to utter the next words, “I trust that Jim has given you the details concerning a mind meld?”

Khan felt his mouth going dry. “I already have my experiences with it,” he said calmly, yet there was an edge in his voice that made ‘Selek’ wary.

“It can be unpleasant if one of the two persons puts up resistance,” he said slowly.

“Do not worry, High Minister. After all, this time, I am asked in advance. I know that this mind meld is not an attack.”

That got ‘Selek’s’ attention. “A mind meld was forced on you?” Khan’s silence was answer enough, and Spock Prime’s eyes hardened. “That is counted as one of the highest crimes among my people. Who…” He stopped himself. There was only one Vulcan around Khan for some time now, and therefore the only logical answer to the question. “Spock,” he stated, and the Augment leader
nodded. This time, ‘Selek’ did sigh before he shook his head. “What he did, was…”

“…Was during our fight after the Vengeance crashed down into San Francisco’s harbor and he thought Jim dead. We both fought… dirty – he to avenge Jim; I to stay alive.”

‘Selek’ listened to words between the lines, unspoken but present. He cocked his head. “You have forgiven him.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement.

Khan pursed his lips. Always so direct – typical for this particular Vulcan, for the older and the younger vision. “Much has happened between us to inflict pain in body and soul. We have come to terms recently. Making peace with the events of the past is a step we are still taking, but I can understand why he did what he did. He snapped, as I had done before.”

The high minister watched him for a few moments before he slowly nodded. “So you will not bring charges against him?”

“I will not,” the former dictator said plainly. “It is in the past. Only the future concerns me now. Old grudges would be a hindrance. And he is Jim’s closest friend – his brother in soul and in arms. I would hurt Jim if I officially accused Spock of breaking a Vulcan law.” A smirk danced for a moment around his lips. “Not that your younger version has any problem bending a rule here or there.”

‘Selek’ lifted both brows. Oh yes, he remembered very well the occasions when he broke laws and regulations to protect Jim and his shipmates. And he also remembered the three times he forced a mind meld on someone – once again to protect his T’hy’la or the Federation. Forcing a meld was a crime. Using a mind meld as an attack was an even more serious crime. That Khan forgave his younger counterpart was interesting to the old Vulcan. As far as he understood Khan Noonien Singh, the Augment did not easily forgive, neither in ‘Selek’s’ own nor in this timeline; yet this was exactly what he did – for Jim. Again. The Elder suddenly knew that he did not have to doubt the Augment’s feelings for the young captain. They were as pure as his feelings towards Marla McGiver in ‘Selek’s’ timeline, yet he had to know the superhuman’s intentions concerning his people – that he would not seek his own goals at any cost. Not this time. This time, this Khan must count the cost. That cost would not be New Vulcan, and it would not be Jim. And he had to learn what happened to Khan after he had been woken up by Marcus. He was aware of the fact that Jim was convinced of what Khan told him, yet Spock knew far too well that the former dictator could deceive. There was no place for doubt if he was going to offer the Augment leader asylum.

“The mind meld is a strange experience for people who are psi-null, yet I’ve come to understand that you share a bond with Jim, which means that you must have some psi ability, even if it is not the same as mine. I advise you, put up no resistance. I will not probe too deeply, nor will I ever share with anyone else what I may see. You privacy is safe with me, and independent of my decisions.”
The Elder’s words were soft, yet firm, and Khan knew that the old Vulcan was trying to calm him. As much as Spock denied it, he – both versions of him – were very sensitive and aware of human feelings and their fears.

Taking another deep breath, he nodded slowly. “I will try, High Minister,” he said gravely, and Selek nodded.

Offering the Augment one of the chairs, he pulled another one out for himself and sat down in front of Khan. For a long moment the old Vulcan prepared himself, then he raised his left hand and pressed the tips of his fingers against the superhuman’s psi-points. “My mind to your mind,” he whispered. “My thoughts to your thoughts…”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, they finally made it to New Vulcan. And I know that there are a lot of readers who are thrilled to read more about Prime Spock.

I was in the new ST-movie today, and I really got tears in my eyes as two scenes referred to Leonard Nimoy’s last voyage. It’s so well-done – and I’m glad that they thought about this little but also very important interlude I don’t want to tell you now about to prevent mega-spoilers.

Back to the story: In the next chapter Old Spock gets some more surprises concerning the ‘old enemy’ that cost him once his life and Jim in the aftermath the Enterprise. But that will be not the only surprise – or shock, because Norton really won’t stop at everything. While Jim, Khan and the others thought / hoped to be safe on New Vulcan it becomes clear that Section 31 knows no limits. And they have no problems in using even pirate methods…

I hope you liked the new chapter, and – like always – I’m curious about your reaction.

Love

Yours Starflight
Dark clouds on the horizon

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so much for the feedback and I’m glad that you’re still so taken with the story. From now on you’ll experience a rollercoaster of the very extraordinary kind, so be warned.

At first ‘Selek’ will – of course – check Khan through and he sees more than he ever gambled for, yet the mind-meld will be a winning situation for them both. The Excalibur will reach New Vulcan and Norton shows exactly that he does indeed has no scruples at all! And you’re going to meet a Vulcan character some of you maybe know from the novel “The Vulcan Academy Murders” – therefore now a little disclaimer: Healer Sorel is not my creation but comes from above mentioned book.

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 70 – Dark clouds on the horizon

Spock, who went by the name Selek now, didn’t know what he should expect as his mind carefully entered that of the superhuman. He knew that Khan Noonien Singh was brilliant, highly intelligent, and had intense emotions, but he never thought he’d be confronted with such a strong mind, barely controlled, surprising psi-powers, and such deep and untamed feelings. Curiosity mingled with necessity, and slowly the Vulcan Elder probed deeper.

He almost gasped audibly, recognizing that the Augment’s feelings were as intense as those of a Vulcan. They were reined in now but Old Spock quickly realized that they lurked beneath this control like a tidal wave waiting to reach land before loosing its full power. And those emotions were a kaleidoscope of worry and joy, amusement and disgust, forgiveness and lust for vengeance, warmth and cold, dark and light – fury and love.

Love...
Love for his crew – his family – and love for Jim Kirk so strong and bright it almost blinded Selek.

No, this mind was nothing Spock Prime had expected from the man who had been, in his world, Jim’s deadliest enemy.

Nero had begun to cripple the timeline only three decades ago, therefore Khan wasn’t touched by the event until Admiral Marcus found him – ten years before the Enterprise would have met the Botany Bay. Yet Spock became quickly aware of the differences between the Khan he knew and the man who shared his mind with him now. Yes, Spock had never mind-melded with the Khan of his universe, yet he realized instantly that the Augment in this timeline had changed dramatically, and as the Vulcan caught glimpses of Khan’s memories from the time he awoke, he headed for them.

He felt resistance for a moment and sent out a first real thought:

‘Don’t fear or fight me, Mr. Singh. I’ll do you no harm, but you’ll hurt yourself if you try to block me out.’

Surprise. He could feel it – taste it almost. Then came the hesitantly answer. ‘I can hear you – in my head.’

Selek allowed himself a mental smile. ‘This is how a mind-meld works.’

‘So… This is a kind of conversation between two minds?’

‘Yes and no, because I can also see and feel what you once saw and felt.’ He sensed the alert deep in the Augment, and said soothingly, ‘I will not force you to reveal what you do not want to expose, but I ask you, permit me entrance. Only then can I…’

‘… can you see that I did not lie to Jim or you!’ Irritation, anxiety, and bitterness washed over Spock Prime at Khan’s words. ‘Very well, High Minister, then relive my past since my awakening.’

And with those words, Khan removed all barricades his mind and soul had built instinctively around the painful and humiliating experiences he had to endure.
Spock looked through Khan’s eyes up at an older human – Admiral Marcus, as he recognized – who stood beside Khan’s bed and looked down on him, smiling encouragingly. The first realization where he was and how much time had passed; then the first steps in the space vessel. Afterwards the time on the station near Jupiter. The learning of the new century, of the technology; then the confrontation between him and Marcus concerning the so-called threat of the Klingons – and then the hell began…

A hell that shocked Selek to the core.

He felt nausea rising in him, mixed with rare but existent Vulcan wrath and mingled with compassion. No one should endure what the superhuman had. It was inhuman, cruel – that kind of thing humans called evil!

Then Selek saw Jim through Khan’s eyes – a cocky young man, golden and warm like the sun, gentle like a summer breeze, tender like silk and velvet. There was anger in the beginning, forbidden lust, realization how much he/Khan desired this boyish man, but fate had put them on opposing sides.

Old Spock felt the beginning trust of the Augment as Jim Kirk didn’t deliver him to Marcus, but kept him safe. Then their flight through space, the moment as Kirk seemed to be lost, and Khan’s determination to save the captain from being smashed against the Vengeance’s hull. Then on the bridge – the fury and bitterness the moment the phaser blast set to stun hit him. Betrayal bloomed into rage – yet Khan held himself back as he punched Kirk. Something in him couldn’t harm the younger man like his furious mind wanted to.

Agony as he thought his people had died in the explosion – the burning hate, the blinding wish to bring destruction over those who killed his family by commanding the Vengeance to fly to Starfleet Headquarters. And then the shock as he realized that the ship wouldn’t make it but would crash into Sausalito, where the universities and schools were placed. Children! That word seemed to echo everywhere in the Augment’s mind, pierced the rage and woke other instincts in him. Then the desperate attempt to steer the ship. Contact with something solid on the ship’s underside, then the crash. The sight from the torn bridge down into the destroyed part of the city raised horror in the superhuman, yet his survival instincts were stronger.

The run through the city, Selek’s younger version on his heels; then the fight. The stoic Vulcan face gone, dark eyes shone with grief, pain and wrath. Khan’s punch hit home, Spock fell – and the Augment turned around and tried to flee again, sparing the man who was responsible for his crew’s (assumed) death. But the fight continued – the attack with a mind-meld Khan withstood. Spock’s attempt to use the Vulcan nerve-pinch on him which only ended in searing pain but was otherwise useless; then the breaking of arm bones, new pain. Any hesitation had vanished into raging fury and the desire to kill. Then a bell-like sound – Uhura, phaser drawn, trying to stun him. Spock’s new attacks – and the woman’s shout to save Kirk.
Kirk…

The last feelings were those of betrayal, lust, desperation, grief and endless exhaustion, then blackness…

Only to find himself caught in his cryotube – awake but not awake. New tests, pain and cold, fever and healing. New pain over and over again without any hope of an end…

Then the escape – the determination to take revenge.

An apartment with large windows, an oncoming thunderstorm outside…

A golden-skinned figure stepped out of another room, clad only in sweatpants – Jim Kirk.

Blue eyes widened with shock and anger, and the exchange of taunting words was exchanged. Then Khan’s icy fury took over. A wild struggle; blood on bowed, soft lips, and the smell of his own people. The urge to taste it, so strong; then suppressed lust flared up again. Gentle lips beneath his…

Selek tried to turn away from this part of Khan’s memories, after all, they were his most private ones, and Selek didn’t need the details, but he found that the Augment’s mind was suddenly filled with the events of this particular first night that he shared with Jim Kirk.

The golden body on the bed writhing in passion; his bonded hands became free. Then Kirk’s strong yet fragile arms wrapped around him – the feeling of being wanted for once…

A whisper, ‘Did no one tell you? Your crew is alive.’

Shock and relief hit home with brutal strength. His people were alive!

Emotions too much to handle; his legs gave out, and sobs racked his body.

The familiar biting scent of liquor…
A glass offered…

Jim crouched down beside him – showing compassion…

New lust…

Hours of passion made them forget the past…

A decision to make – his hand reached out to stroke the neck of the deeply asleep Jim Kirk – a soft brush of his fingers against the golden hair – a silent good-bye. A note placed on the pillow. ‘Til next time – Sunrise.’

A swaying boat on the sea – escape…

A space station with strange people. Pirate attack. Determination to protect a family whose mother wore a face of the past…

A Tellarit, a Caitian, a Rigelian... Fighting side by side... Exchange of jokes... Laughing... Acceptance finally…

A conversation with Jim via subspace transmission, and then the growing feelings between them. Khan’s fury when he learned of Kirk’s capture. His fight to free the man who somehow had become so important to him. Their escape. Recreation on Aldebaran and their time together. Lust turned into love; old grudges were spoken aloud. Wounds healed with forgiveness and understanding.

Then the fight on Aldebaran and in the space station – the moment they thought would be their last…

The Enterprise’s medbay. Instinct drew him to Jim’s bed, keeping him safe and warm…

Deepening love – the bond bloomed into a warm golden light…
Selek could feel it, taste it – so strong and true. There was only Khan’s desire to keep Jim and his people safe – and the desperate hope of peace for them all.

Peace – and not gained by using violence to force the goal. Violence was the last method he would use – if all other options had been exhausted, or when he had to fight to protect himself or those who were dear to him. Just like any other man would do.

No, Khan Noonien Singh had no ill intent. The superhuman was starved for friendship, stability, and peace.

And so there was only one decision possible for the Vulcan High Minister.

‘You and your people will be safe here,’ Spock Prime murmured, profoundly shaken by what he saw, heard, and felt. ‘You will get your second chance to find real justice and to gain the life you crave. I will see to that!’

Khan’s answer was a wave of relief, and Selek sensed the hidden exhaustion in the Augment again. Khan was emotional and physically exhausted, and the old Vulcan wondered how it was that the man hadn’t collapsed. ‘You’ll find peace on New Vulcan,’ he assured the superhuman softly. ‘Peace and time to heal.’

Again Khan didn’t answer with words, but Selek sensed gratitude mingled with hope. Ever so gently, the Vulcan Elder withdrew from the Augment’s mind to keep the confusion and disorientation to a minimum.

Nien was more shaken than he wanted to admit when he suddenly found himself alone again. He could still feel the Vulcan’s fingertips on his face after the contact was lost, and he thought he heard an echo of Spock Prime’s mind in his own. Blinking against the light of day, he saw the aged face mere inches away from his own, and for a moment an intense longing for that compassion and warmth once experienced filled him again; then he sobered up.

‘Selek’ had seen everything – the good and the bad things, the humiliation, the torment, but also his passion and love. The old Vulcan had witnessed everything he had been through over the last two years; he had shared his feelings and thoughts, but Khan didn’t feel violated or exposed. The man across from him knew him better than his people now, but it wasn’t awkward as it ought to have been. Nien felt rather relieved that there was nothing to hide anymore. Above all, he knew that ‘Spock Prime’ understood him. Even more important: his family would be beamed down and would find shelter here.
The realization drew him out of his reverie, and he swayed on the chair. Then weathered, slender, but still strong hands caught and steadied him.

“Do you require medical aid, Mr. Singh?”

Khan could be mistaken, but he would bet his last shirt that he heard concern in the Vulcan’s voice. “You are a softy, as they say?” he murmured before he could stop himself. Promptly one ice-grey brow was lifted, and Khan had to chuckle when he recognized the typical indignant yet stoic expression on ‘Selek’s’ face that he knew so well from his younger self.

“There is no need to offend,” Old Spock said, but he couldn’t fool Khan. The Augment had seen the flash of amusement in those dark, far too human eyes, and chuckling again he tried to rise – only to sway again. Obviously, his body had its own ideas of when it would be ready to function following the meld.

The next second, Jim was at his side; he wrapped a steadying arm around him. He could feel his beloved’s concern and murmured, “Don’t worry, I’m okay.”

“My ass,” Kirk snorted, throwing Selek a glare, who clasped his hands behind his back in his typical way and watched them with a ‘Spock-look’ – as if they were a science experiment.

“Mr. Singh, do all Augments possess telepathic or empathic ability?” he asked and was confronted with two very baffled faces. Sighing inwardly Selek added, ‘The bond between you and your family, Mr. Singh, implies certain mental abilities. And the bond between you and Jim is as strong as the bond between Vulcan bondmates, yet I know that Jim is psi-null.”

“Thanks! I’ve been told that” Kirk grumbled sarcastically, asking himself why Spock – both versions – insist on pointing it out over and over again.

“But still you both can sense each other – especially when one of you experiences strong emotions. I saw it in the mind-meld,” the Elder continued as if he hadn’t heard Jim’s comment.

“I do not know exactly how this bond works,” Khan admitted slowly. “There has been only one married couple among my crew and their marriage was only half a year old before we fled Earth. Both told me of experiences – feelings – that I now share with Jim. And there was this... This urge to mark each other.” At those words both humans flushed bright red, and ‘Selek’ allowed himself a
half-smile.

“Compatible souls call to each other, and the urge to ‘mark’ his or her mate is as old as time. It
doesn’t explain Mr. Singh’s mental powers, but I’m willing to explore them – if you would allow it.”

Khan cocked his head. “I’m curious, too; your aid would be welcome.”

“Oh, by the way, maybe I’m not as psi-null we thought,” Jim cut in, looking at the old Vulcan. “I
can feel Spock’s presence even before I can see him – stuff like that. And he feels when I’m under a
lot of stress or worked up about something” As he caught ‘Selek’s’ confused glance, he explained,
“It's only been since Khan and I bonded.”

Two ice-grey brows were raised again. “Fascinating!”

Khan rolled his eyes at this statement. “Even that is identical!” he murmured, then he took a deep
breath of the hot, dry air, feeling better with each passing second. “Since I have passed your test,
High Minister, I would appreciate it if we could proceed,” he said not unkindly, and ‘Selek’ nodded.

“Of course. I will show you and the others the place where your people will be hidden until the
danger passed. Then we will begin to wake them.” He caught the surprised gaze of the Augment at
those last words and knew the reason for this reaction. How many times had Khan heard that
promise and had it broken? Too often, that was for sure.

The others had silently watched everything. Joaquin had been confused as his brother followed the
old alien man who put his fingers on Khan’s face after they sat down and remained in this position
for quite a time. Bewildered, he asked what was happening. The young woman, who had
accompanied them onto the planet, explained to him what a mind-meld was. She had introduced
herself as Lieutenant Uhura when he met her in the transporter room for the first time. He
remembered that Noo had referred to her as a lioness. Well, she looked more like a female you want
to protect. At first. Her posture and her expression, including her eyes, spoke another language. This
woman was a fighter, no doubt, yet she was gentle. The way she explained what the old Vulcan and
Khan were doing was sensitive and soothing, but it didn’t push Joaquin’s concerns aside. And as his
brother, Jim and the high minister walked back towards them, Weiss couldn’t stop himself. He all but
dashed to his brother’s side. “Are you okay?” he asked, and Khan sighed.

“Yes, I’m okay.”
The soft beep of the med scanner distracted him, while McCoy stepped beside him and checked him over. “Why do you guys always say that even when you are practically carrying a severed body part?” he grumbled, shooting Jim, Khan and the younger Spock a glare.

“Because that’s what warriors do. And besides, it would not change your actions.” Nien deadpanned.

“It would make my job easier, dammit! Someone has to look after you, boys!” Bones growled, eliciting a snorting chuckle from Jim, an almost inaudible sigh from Spock, and a giggle from Uhura.

’Selk’ lifted a brow and let the memories of his own time on his Enterprise wash over his. He felt a mixture of relief and joy that at least some things were still the same. “Please follow me,” he said and made an inviting gesture towards the entrance of the building.

ST***ST***ST

“ETA to New Vulcan?” Norton’s voice sounded calm, yet there was a steeliness in it that increased the tension on the Excalibur.

“Two hours, forty-nine minutes,” the helmsman replied.

Li and Taylor exchanged a quick glance behind the admiral’s and the captain’s back. What was going on here? The Enterprise was already at New Vulcan, and her senior officers were certainly down on the planet, so what could Norton and Styles do to ‘get’ Kirk, as the captain put it? Kidnap him? Maybe by deploying the elite security team that had accompanied the admiral and those ominous scientists? What was Norton planning? How could he compel the Vulcans who had welcomed Kirk and take the captain and his officers by force?

No, even Norton and Styles wouldn’t do that, would they? It would violate the sovereignty of New Vulcan and result in unpleasant consequences. Every member of the Federation was sovereign, and New Vulcan was under special protection after the destruction of the Vulcans’ home planet. No Starfleet officer in his right mind would violate the autonomy of a free planet. Li could only hope that his commanding officer and the admiral wouldn’t get carried away by their obsession with the arrest of Kirk and his staff.

Taylor looked at the scanners on his station to Li’s left and pressed his lips into a thin line. He had an awful gut feeling that he and the other officers, who belonged to Captain Heldrom's original crew,
were really pawns in a game that shouldn’t exist. A game that included a staff officer on a manhunt. Maybe he was the one who removed Heldrom from the board! They were hunting Captain Kirk of the Enterprise, this much he knew; that was troubling enough. Kirk was a hero so far as he knew. More than hundred elite security and two scientists were part of the game too. And what was this mysterious coffin-like tube he saw in the med bay this morning? Whatever it was, he was sure the game was dirty, and it would come to a head on New Vulcan.

He had the unsettling thought that he and his crewmates would be forced to make a decision that would affect them all - maybe on their lives would depend on

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“How is Sarek doing?” Worried, Richard Barnett’s gaze rested on the very pale Vulcan who lay motionless on the biobed beneath the bio-blanket. The ambassador’s skin held an unhealthy yellow hue and shivers ran through his weak body despite the bio-blanket being set to proper Vulcan body temperature.

“Not well,” Daniela answered, watching the read-outs on the display above the biobed. “Mr. Sokal has mind melded twice to strengthen the ambassador, but I don’t know how many more times that will work. Sarek’s bio signals are becoming weaker by the hour. I’ve stabilized him as much as I can, but he’s experiencing palpitations, and his heart rate is dangerously low. I don’t have meds effective for Vulcans. His blood pressure is dropping even with the vasoconstrictors I’ve administered.” She rubbed her temples. “I’ll be glad when we reach New Vulcan.”

Barnett nodded slowly. “Me too, Doctor, me too!”

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Khan looked at him wide-eyed, astonished by the simple but brilliant decision ‘Selek’ made as he showed him and the others the safe place he chose for the Augments. It was in a natural cave beneath New Vulcan Academy and the hospital, accessible from both sides and now illuminated with several lights. Usually, that wouldn’t be a safe place at all – one scan with a starship’s sensors would show the big hole in the underground and the different metals – Vulcan pots and the tubes, but once again Old Spock’s knowledge about technology came in handy. He had enhanced two shield generators which would produce a deflector shield that could hide what was beneath it – what a trick! A unique program that made any sensor believe there was nothing but a big rock being scanned.

Jim stared disbelieving at the old Vulcan, while his Spock murmured his favorite word to express his excitement, “Fascinating!”
“You built a kind of new deflector shield that can deceive a sensor? Just like that?” Kirk was almost speechless.

The left corner of ‘Selek’s’ mouth quirked ever so slightly. “It is simple – in my own time, that is, Jim. Today, I needed to call in a favor from one of our technicians to get all the parts I needed to enhance the two generators.” He pointed at one of them. “They receive energy from three batteries, powerful enough to keep the shield up for more than four months should this be necessary. Personally, I hope that – how do humans put it? … that the storm will pass and the sea will calm sooner than that.” His gaze found Khan. “The sooner we begin waking your people the better. Human bodies were not designed to endure cryosleep for so long. If your family had not been augmented, I doubt any would have survived.”

Joaquin stood close to Khan and had wrapped both arms around himself. The heat outside had been tolerable for him, but here in the cave, the temperature was ten degrees. His body remembered far too well the frozen condition it had been in for almost two and a half centuries. “Are they still safe in the tubes?” he asked quietly, meeting the warm brown eyes of the Vulcan Elder.

“I am confident that Mr. Singh and Mr. Scott checked them thoroughly, and that Leonard is continuously monitoring them. If the tubes have been working up until now, then there is no reason why they will not continue to do so. Experience has taught me that it is better for the body to function on its own rather than remain frozen in any stasis.”

McCoy lifted both brows. “Did you study medicine in your, umm, time?” he asked carefully, aware of the fact that Joaquin didn’t know before now, who ‘Selek’ was for real.

“No, but… My Leonard taught me much during our time together – even if it was not his intention; I learned many things from him. There were many occasions I assisted him in medbay or he assisted me in the labs.”

Bones cocked his head. There was it again – this melancholy expression deep in the Vulcan’s eyes - the pain of grief. ‘Our other selves worked and lived together for decades,’ he thought. ‘It must be hard, awful even, to outlive the people closest to you.’

Silent steps drew nearer, and while Khan whirled around in alert, ‘Selek’ remained calm. Two Vulcans stepped into the cave, one old like the high minister, and the other one maybe the same age as Sarek. Jim was certain that he had seen one of them aboard the Enterprise two years ago, but couldn’t place him.
Selek introduced them as Elder Sanak and Healer Sorel, whose name apparently held meaning for McCoy. Out of instinct, the CMO smiled at the man for a moment before remembering that Vulcans had no sense for such things – at least that’s what they claimed. But contrary to the usual Vulcan behavior, Sorel’s face softened, and he quickly bowed his head.

“Dr. McCoy, it’s a pleasure to meet you. I trust Dr. M’Benga fairs well under your command?”

Jim and Spock exchanged a quick glance, while Bones answered, “Geoffrey is my most capable colleague, Healer Sorel. You taught him very well.”

The older Vulcan’s face remained calm, but Jim was sure he saw a slight gleam in his dark eyes. “He was an impressive student. Please send him my regards.”

“My pleasure, Healer. He didn’t know that you were back on New Vulcan. Otherwise, he certainly would have wanted to see you.”

Jim cocked his head. “Did I hear you right? Dr. M’Benga was your student, Healer Sorel?”

The older Vulcan nodded slowly. “Yes, he was. He came to Vulcan just over five years ago – a young medical student who wanted to learn more about our biology to help those Vulcans not living on their home planet. He was very promising, and so I took him under my wing, as you say on Earth. He graduated his studies with more than adequate result.”

“I’m glad that we have him aboard,” Kirk said. “Our travel is sometimes dangerous – especially during this blasted war now – and even though I try to keep my crew safe, Mr. Spock has been injured more than once. Dr. M’Benga helped him well and… Mr. Singh and Mr. Weiss here received his good treatment, too.” He nodded at the two Augments, who were instantly in the focus of the healer.

“High Minister Selek shared the secret of your heritage with me so that I may help your people should it become necessary,” Sorel addressed Khan. “I am familiar with medical stasis fields as I myself have enhanced the current generation of stasis chambers in the New Vulcan Academy. I do understand that the cold stasis you call cryosleep works differently; however, the principle is the same. So if you are in need of medical support, you may rely on me.”

Khan knew that the last words were not merely a polite phrase, but were meant earnestly. He was grateful for ‘Selek’s’ foresight in calling a healer in case something went wrong with the cryotubes.
After all that Nien had experienced in the last two years, Murphy’s Law seemed to be a reality!

“Thank you, Healer Sorel,” he answered and bowed his head. “Your support is most welcome.”

“Elder Sanak is one of our best engineers; our clans are related by marriage,” ‘Selek’ continued. “It was he who helped me get the parts to enhance the shield generators. He will control them during your work.”

Khan bowed towards Sanak, who watched him with barely hidden interest. “Selek told me why you and your people are requesting asylum on New Vulcan. And given the fact that you and the youngling are here, I can only surmise that refuge was granted.”

“Mr. Singh’s only wish is to see is people safe,” Spock Prime said. “I am convinced of it.”

‘In other words, I checked his mind,’ Jim thought, knowing that a mind-meld was never discussed in public.

Sanak nodded slowly, understanding the words between the lines without trouble. “Then welcome to New Vulcan, Mr. Singh. The same goes for you, young man,” he said to Joaquin, who blushed a little bit.

“Thank you, sir!”

Then the Elder looked at Jim and Spock. “Captain Kirk, Spock cha’ Sarek, I remember very well the day we last met; it was the last day of our home world. Because of you both, our culture and our people survived. We are in your debt. As far as I understood Selek, you two and your comrades are under threat of arrest because you are protecting Mr. Singh and his people – preventing a genocide from taking place. You can expose a conspiracy within Starfleet Command that cost the Federation’s delegation their lives. If you seek refuge here until the traitors are caught, you’ll have the protection of my clan. The same applies to your friends.”

Jim bowed his head. “Thank you very much, sir.”

“You honor us with your offer, Elder Sanak,” Spock replied in the traditional way.
‘Selek’ watched them with a warm sparkle in his eyes, then he addressed Jim. “You should begin with the evacuation. If Command assumes to where you were off, the Excalibur doesn’t need much time to reach New Vulcan.”

Jim nodded and flipped open his communicator, but the old Vulcan’s hand on his wrist stopped him. “Is the frequency scrambled?” he asked, and the captain grinned broadly at him. “I’ve got Uhura on my staff.” This was explanation enough as ‘Selek’s’ affirming gesture proved, and Jim lifted the communicator to his lips. “Kirk to Enterprise!”

“Enterprise, Scott here!” the voice of the chief engineer answered.

“Scotty, give my coordinates to the transporter room. I’m in the chamber where the cryotubes will be contained.”

“Aye, Capt’n. Chekov is already in the transporter room; I’m as good as on my way ter it. Dr. M’Benga and a few nurses have already brought some of the tubes ter the transporter room so that the beamin’ down can begin at your command. I'll pipe ya down ter Chekov.”

A moment later Pavel’s voice sounded, “Transporter room, Chekov here, Keptin!”

“Ensign, on my command start beaming those tubes down.” Jim exchanged a reassuring glance with a very tense Nien. Then he waved at the others to make room. Retreating to the wall, the men and the young woman waited. “Now, Chekov!”

“Aye, Keptin!”

Seconds later bell-like sounds were heard, accompanied by the golden sparkling light materializing into four cryotubes. With a few long strides, Khan was between them; Joaquin and McCoy were on his heels. They checked the functions thoroughly, and as Nien lifted a triumphant thumb in Jim’s direction, Kirk ordered Chekov to proceed.

Aboard the Enterprise, the hallways on deck 5 between medbay and transporter room were cleared on strict orders from the captain. Only M’Benga, H’alroh, two nurses, and Scott were there, moving the cryotubes, one by one, to the transporter room, where Chekov beamed them down.
All of sudden, Carol Marcus stepped into the otherwise empty corridor and watched the two doctors and nurses bringing more cryotubes down the way. “May I help?” she asked M’Benga, who stopped the moment he saw her coming.

“Dr. Marcus?” Geoffrey straightened his shape. “Per captain’s orders, these hallways have to stay clear to…”

“To hide the fact that Khan’s crew is being taken to the transporter room to beam them down. I know about them. After all, I was there when the cryotube of this young Augment failed. Joaquin is his name, isn’t it?”

Scott closed the distance to them and watched the weapons officer carefully. “Lass, Jim said that no one else other than us should…”

“Mr. Scott,” Carol interrupted him softly. “I know that Jim wants to protect me, but it’s a little bit too late for that. We’re at our destination where the cryotubes will be hidden – New Vulcan, isn’t it? And as far as I understood, in the last hours we've been chased by a ship belonging, for all intents and purposes, to Section 31. I've had my own experiences with that, and I fear the worst if Section 31 catches us. So I think we should hurry to get these people to safety before that ship arrives, don’t you agree?”

Before Montgomery could answer, Marcus added, “So let me help here. I know that these men and women have nothing to do with last year's events; they are innocent but endangered by Section 31. Hell, they were about to be killed. They'd be dead now if it hadn't been for Jim. So let's get them out of this ship before something happens.”

She stepped around the two men and headed for the room where the rest of the tubes were stored.

Scott and M’Benga glanced at each other, then shrugged. There was nothing they could do. Scotty had the conn so he could order Carol Marcus out, but every pair of hands was welcome here, and she did know about everything that was connected with Khan. So, why not let her help?

“Come on, we’ve no time to lose,” Scotty grumbled, and he began to push the cryotube from the hold towards the transporter room. Geoffrey did the same with the tube he had taken away.
“Captain, reaching New Vulcan in twenty-three minutes and forty-eight seconds,” Kramer reported, looking at the readouts of his navigation station.

“Reduce speed, sir?” Wilson asked, and Styles threw an asking glance at Norton, who stood beside him and the center seat.

“No, stay at warp until we reach the star system. If we drop out of subspace too soon, the Enterprise's sensors will detect us!” the admiral ordered. Then he addressed Styles again. “Captain, I will lead the boarding of the Enterprise. After we secure our flagship, I want you to accompany me down to New Vulcan.”

“Aye, sir!” Lawrence nodded; anticipation knotted in his belly.

Norton bent forwards and activated the intercom on the captain’s chair armrest. “Commander Nabusu?” he contacted the commanding officer of Elite Security.

The answer came instantly. “Nabusu here, Admiral.”

“Take ninety of your men; go to the transporter room, and the cargo transporter. Be ready to beam aboard the Enterprise on my command. Make certain that the Enterprise’s crew is detained. Use force only if you are resisted or feel you are in danger!”

“Understood, sir. We will hold the current shift at their stations and lock the others in their quarters. I already instructed the transporter chief where to beam the different groups. The Enterprise will be in range in a few minutes, Admiral.”

“Excellent – I’ll hold you to this promise, Commander. Norton out!” He turned around towards the comms station. “Lieutenant Li? On my command, hail the Enterprise on all frequencies. I hope Kirk will come to his senses before I have to make the last step.”

Li murmured, “Aye, sir!” but felt this nagging gut feeling deepen. They were about to board their flagship and to arrest a whole crew – a crew whose captain and staff officers were heroes during the war and even before. A crew that had a big part in Kirk’s formidable and noble deeds. This crew was known to be utterly loyal towards its captain.
This was wrong! Very – very wrong! But what could he do to stop the insanity that was about to break loose? If Norton beamed down to New Vulcan to arrest Kirk, he’d be violating Vulcan sovereignty! What were they supposed to do? There was no manual for this! His morality and good sense told him to intervene; the officer in him demanded obedience. He would face court martial if he tried to go against his commanding officer. On the other hand, wasn’t it his duty to act if a superior – or two in this case – were about to break the law? Starfleet had no authority over the civil government of Federation member planets. But that’s exactly what Norton and his goons were going to try exerting.

Li sighed soundlessly. He and his comrades that he had served with for years had a dilemma. Ought they blindly follow any order given, or should they do what a sane mind would dictate? He would be forced to make a decision soon, and the thought made his belly tighten.

Khan’s gaze wandered over the seventy-two cryotubes of which only one was empty. He, Kirk and Spock had agreed that it was too risky to leave the defective tube aboard the Enterprise. No one knew for certain if Bob Wesley had recovered any of the admirals. Should they fail to arrest Luengo and his fellows, it was better if Section 31 didn’t find proof of the Augments’ rescue from Gamma 12. M’Benga and his staff were still removing the devices in medbay that monitored Khan’s crew during the last days. Bones had taken all the data from the Augments’ personal files he and Khan made with him. Jim didn’t anticipate Styles hijacking the Enterprise, but better safe than sorry.

Now the last cryotubes were safely beamed down to New Vulcan, placed side by side – a view Khan saw last on Gamma 12 and aboard the Enterprise. He hoped with all his heart that this would be the last time he would have to see his them like this – closed, cold – his sleeping brothers and sisters inside, waiting to be woken up. His longing to speak with them again, hear their chattering, embrace them, and smell their familiar scent was so strong that he felt a lump building in his throat.

‘Soon!’ he thought. ‘Soon you all will be awake to live a life in freedom – even if only on New Vulcan.’

Jim stepped beside him, gave a still freezing Joaquin on Nien’s other side a small smile, and laced his fingers with Khan’s. “Finally, they are out of danger,” he whispered, feeling the intense emotions of his soulmate. “Whatever may come, here they are safe.”

Nien nodded slowly. “Yes – at least this promise I could keep.” For a moment, he gave into his yearning for closeness and leaned his head against Jim’s. One of Kirk’s arms went around the Augment’s waist, and he squeezed him gently. Then he became aware of Sorel’s thoughtful look resting on them and blushed as he saw the Vulcan healer lift a brow in understanding before assisting McCoy in checking the inhabitants of last cryotubes. Scott had beamed down too and was checking
Jim’s communicator beeped, cutting through the quiet and filling the room with tension. It could only be a hail from the Enterprise. Chekov would only contact them if something was up – certainly something wrong.

“Kirk here!” Jim answered.

“Chekov here, Keptin,” the young Russian said. For the time that Scott was on the planet’s surface, Chekhov had the conn. It made Jim proud and nervous at the same time. “Sir, our sensors picked up the signal of a ship dropping out of warp at the edge of the star system.”

Kirk felt the adrenalin pumping through his veins. “Identity?”

“It’s the Excalibur,” Pavel affirmed what they all had already known.

‘Selek’ lifted a brow. “We have to return to my office immediately!” he called. “The seat of government is banned, even to Starfleet!”

Jim nodded grimly and began to hurry towards one of the two entrances; the others except for ‘Selek’ and Sanak followed him while the two Elders started the generators, set-up the program, and raised the shields the moment the others were outside of the shield’s range. Then they raced to them with long, quick steps.

“Chekov, try to…”

“Keptin, we’re being hailed by zem on all frequencies.”

Kirk’s face betrayed his anger but also determination. “Let me listen to it!” he ordered, and then he
heard the slightly familiar voice of Lawrence Styles coming through the speakers on the *Enterprise*’s bridge.

“*Excalibur* to *Enterprise*! This is Captain Styles speaking. Respond *Enterprise*!”

“Should we answer or not, sir?” Pavel asked, nervousness plain in his voice.

‘Selek’ stepped beside Jim. “We need about ten minutes to reach the transporter room in the Vulcan Academy to beam back to the seat of government.”

Kirk nodded again, understanding what Prime Spock really meant. “Chekov, try to buy us some time – but do nothing, *absolutely nothing*, that will endanger my ship! We call you back as soon as we’re in High Minister Selek’s office.”

“Aye, Keptin! *Enterprise* out!”

They hurried back the way they had come more than two hours ago, towards the cellars of the New Vulcan Academy, using only the flashlights they had taken with them.

“Capt’n, shall I return to the ship?” Scotty wheezed behind Jim as they ran.

“No!” Kirk shook his head firmly. “You're my staff, so you're a wanted man, too. If the *Enterprise* is commanded by a junior officer with seemingly no part in this, Styles has no reason to take action against our ship, which will hopefully buy us more time.” They reached the bottom-most level and stepped into solidly built rooms. ‘Selek’ sealed the door behind them, and Sorel and Spock pushed furniture in front of it while Uhura began to erase all traces of the group. When she had barely finished, ‘Selek’ led them back upstairs into the Academy where they bid Sorel and Sanak farewell for now. Then they raced through the corridors towards the Academy’s transporter room, knowing that they attracted more attention than needed, yet not even ‘Selek’ gave a damn about that. They had to reach his office before the *Excalibur* arrived. The odds that Styles would simply beam up any human life form his sensors read was high which would mean that Jim and the others would fall into Section 31’s hands. The Vulcan High Minister would try to prevent that with everything he had.

‘Selek’ was and would always be one thing for the rest of his life: Jim Kirk’s first officer who valued the health and the safety of his friend more than his own!
“Ensign, they’re hailing us again!” The young man at the comms station glanced nervously over to Pavel Chekov, who was at the science station watching the sensors. Kevin Riley sat at the navigation station. Ensign Noschisnki, another cadet, was at the helm.

“Zey’ll be wizin beaming range in ze next minute,” Pavel mused. “Right, time to let ze show start.” He gave the comms officer a signal who opened a frequency and cleared his throat.

“Excalibur, zis is Ensign Pavel Chekov, acting keptin of ze Enterprise. Please repeat your message, but only on audio. Our communication system has a malfunction!”

For a long moment all was silent; then another voice, forceful in his authority, sounded through the speakers. “This is Admiral Albert Norton of Starfleet. Did I hear that right? An ensign has the conn on a flagship?”

Pavel’s face heated not in embarrassments, but in anger. “Keptin Kirk knows what he is doing, and if he trusts me wiz ze Enterprise in a standard orbit around a Federation member planet, then he has his reasons, Admiral, and I will honor them AND follow my orders!”

“Yes, I’m aware of his reasons, Ensign. Prepare to be seized…”

“What?”

“… and you would do yourself and the crew a favor if you would make a ship wide hail and tell them to remain where they are and to put up no resistance.”

Chekov gaped at the speakers, not trusting his ears. Then fury woke in him. “Seized, sir? You want to hijack us? And you call yourself an admiral of Starfleet?”

“Ensign…!”

Pavel didn’t let him finish; his outrage and his worry for his friends and the ship gave him the courage he needed. “As current acting keptin, I insist zat you first identify yourself before I give any
orders to our crew in your name!”

The same moment the alert system reported intruders and six shimmering columns appeared in the middle of the bridge. The columns formed into five elite security personnel and a man in the green and white ground staff uniform of an admiral.

Several of the bridge officers jumped from their seats, and one of them punched the intercom, calling for the Redshirts; he slumped down as a stun shot hit him. Elite Security had their phasers ready and aimed at the rest of the bridge crew.

Pavel cursed inwardly and straightened up, knowing that he had to play this game unwillingly – this pretense of ‘going along’. Crossing his arms in front of his chest, he first glared at the strange man in the admiral’s uniform; then he forced a surprised expression on his face and managed to relax. “I… I know you, sir! I saw you in HQ several times!” he burst out with surprise that quickly changed into feigned relief.

Norton glared at the young Russian man; he took in the boyish, almost happy face and realized that the ensign was no danger to him. “Ensign Chekov?” he demanded, and instantly Pavel snapped to attention and saluted.

“As Ensign Pavel Andreievich Chekov, Admiral, current acting keeping of the USS Enterprise.”

Norton looked around and saw that the other officers had followed Chekov’s example. His gaze found the men at the navigation and the helm stations, 'Heavens, more children!', and wandered back to the Russian. “At ease, Ensign!”

As he was trained, Pavel spread his legs a little bit and clasped his hands on his back in parade rest – a small act of defiance, but defiance all the same. He tried to mask his anger as he watched Elite Security take over station by station. This was indeed an enemy boarding and nothing else! He had to play along. As long he was free he maybe could wait for a chance to turn the tables – a crazy intention given his youth, his low experiences and the fact that the best-trained Securities of Starfleet were now in possession of the bridge, but a guy could still hope.

Norton stepped to the center seat and activated the intercom. “Attention, crew of the Enterprise. This is Admiral Albert Norton, Starfleet Command! I’ve taken over command of the Enterprise. Do not resist my security staff. The current shift will be replaced with my men and everyone – I repeat, everyone – must return to her or his quarters and await my further instructions. Anyone who leaves his or her quarters will be arrested for insubordination. Leading officers will remain in their departments until I can interview them. Further, I order staff officers to report via intercom to the
bridge now! Anyone refusing to deliver a status report will be declared a deserter and will face the consequences. Admiral Norton out!”

He sat down in the center seat making Pavel and Kevin’s blood boil, yet the friends knew that they had to act as if they didn’t care while they listened to incoming messages. Heads of the departments demanded an explanation; they would go answered for now.

Chekov stared at the admiral in Kirk’s seat and had to control himself. He knew that the man belonged to Section 31 and had no problem using drastic methods to protect the dirty secrets he and his fellows had. This much was clear; this smug bastard had to be stopped. The question was only: How?

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The moment the ship wide comm ended, the first of the elite security team were beamed into the most important of departments.

Allistor gasped as ten strangers in well-known special uniforms materialized in Engineering, instantly raising their weapons and aiming at those around them. A man stepped forward and called sharply, “Lieutenant Commander Montgomery Scott?”

Allistor gritted his teeth. That speech was from a pirate, not a Starfleet admiral, but then murdering and seizing ships seemed to be Luengo and his fellows’ leadership style. “Mr. Scott is not aboard!” he said, and he found himself in the focus of the commander he regarded as an enemy. “He’s on New Vulcan getting parts for the necessary repairs.”

“And you are?”

“Commander Jason Allistor, second engineer.”

The other man nodded. “Commander Nabusul!” he introduced himself. “You’re confined to quarters. My men will take over and…”

Allistor’s blood pressure began to rise dramatically. “Commander, in case it has slipped your otherwise remarkable attention, Engineering is a mess!” He pointed at the generators and the cooling systems and continued before the elite soldier could say anything, “Two generators have serious
failures, the cooling system is overheated, and only permanent fixes will prevent a collapse! Are your engineers able to take over our work? If not then it’s not a question of if the ship will blow up in our face, but when – maybe taking your ship with it!”

Nabusu stared at him, and both men seemed to pierce each other with their glares; then the lieutenant turned around dramatically and headed for the next intercom. Allistor listened as the intruder spoke with the admiral who had taken over the bridge with an impressive speech – bunch of lies though it was. After a minute the commander returned, annoyance plainly written on his face. “You may continue your work. Select a few of your best men and women; the rest will be confined to the switch room next door.” He lifted a hand as Allistor was about to protest. “These are Admiral Norton’s orders; you are obliged to follow them! And remember, you will be under observation, so don’t try anything stupid!”

Jason snorted. “If this is a legitimate operation then why should I try anything foolish – whatever you mean by that? But I wonder when Starfleet took to pirating!” He brushed past Nabusu, making certain to bump him none too gently and calling out some choice names under his breath. He knew he had to play the game for now.

No one saw the small figure on one of the pipes above the cooling tanks watching and listening to everything very carefully.

Keenser cocked his head; he was very aware that the Enterprise had fallen into the real enemy’s hand. And that enemy would stop at nothing. If Jim Kirk thought he would be safe on New Vulcan, then he was mistaken. Keenser heard the hidden fury and icy determination the admiral’s voice. The man would not hesitate to do what had to be done in his eyes – meaning he would even force entry to the places on New Vulcan where Kirk and his friends were.

Blinking twice, the little Royalan made up his mind. Jim Kirk would need his ship for backup soon. Of this Keenser was convinced. And these brutal looking men beneath him were threatening his home – the only home he’s had since he left his planet. And they manhandled his friends as they forced them into the attached room.

No, something had to be done! And not for the first time his tiny stature came in handy.

Making no sound, he rushed over the pipes until he reached a ventilation shaft. Quickly, he removed the grid, slipped into the shaft, and closed it again. He knew that he would need help with the plan forming in his mind – and he also knew exactly where he could get that help.
Dr. Geoffrey M’Benga knew that he had run out of time as he heard the ship wide hail. The devices which monitored the Augments’ bio signals had not been removed yet even though he, three nurses and Dr. Marcus had worked as quickly as possible. Signaling to them to follow him, he returned to the central area of medbay, the three nurses on his heels. The next moment five elite security personnel stormed into medbay, phasers ready. Hot anger rose in M’Benga at this sight, and he stepped in front of his startled staff.

“This is a medbay, not a shooting range for your training!” he barked. “Lower your weapons, Gentlemen! I’m sure you’re familiar with Starfleet protocol that forbids forced entrance in here!”

The leading officer had a lieutenant's stripes; he lifted both brows and answered curtly, “Starfleet protocol was suspended on Admiral Norton’s order until this ship is secure. Therefore…”

“Only the President of the Federation can suspend Starfleet protocol. Has President Robertson been informed of this act of piracy?” Geoffrey snapped, and to his indignation, the man in front of him only smiled smugly.

“You can be assured, Doctor, that the president has all information he needs.”

‘*In other words, he only gets the information Section 31 wants him to have!*’ M’Benga thought, but aloud he replied, “Then I’m confident that he still respects the immunity of a hospital or a medbay. We have several injured crewmembers here, including…”

“A nurse will watch them and sees to their needs; all others are to go to their quarters!”

Geoffrey crossed his arms in front of his chest. “No way! A doctor has to remain here because we have a coma patient to take care of!” His voice was louder than necessary, and he pointed to the private room where Sulu lay. “This man is senior staff and was critically injured during our last battle with Klingon renegades. His condition is still critical and…”

“And why is Dr. McCoy not here to watch him?” the lieutenant interrupted him. “I’ve seen of your CMO – and you are not him!”

“Dr. McCoy is on New Vulcan discussing Lieutenant Sulu’s condition with their healers and assessing the possibility of transferring him to the Vulcan University Hospital,” M’Benga lied through his teeth. He watched them roam through medbay, pushing a nurse out of their way who
stumbled against an empty biobed.

“Hey!” Geoffrey called. “Do you have your guys to act like some cliché from a bad cop movie, or is there the slightest possibility that you can behave like you’re Starfleet’s elite?” Two sharp glares hit him, but he didn’t care.

“Doctor, believe me, I take no pleasure in this mission,” the lieutenant said coolly, “but I have my orders, and you will not hinder my carrying them out. Show me the coma patient and if your presence is necessary, you and one of the nurses may stay. The others must remain in one of the nearby rooms until Admiral Norton decides what to do next.” He pointed at the private room. “After you, Doctor!”

They walked into the private room, and the lieutenant took a quick look at Sulu who lay motionless, breathing shallowly on the biobed. “Poor bastard!” the lieutenant murmured, while his gaze wandered over the Asian man’s scars which still covered his face and a part of his throat. “That looks painful.” He glanced back at M’Benga. “You may remain here, but I advise you not to…”

“Lieutenant?” The shout came from the other side of the medbay, and instantly Geoffrey knew the reason for it. The elite security team had found the last remaining devices in the room next door that had held the cryotubes. And that meant that he was about to get arrested because there was no way the intruders would believe that he didn’t know about it.

He threw a last glance at Sulu before following the lieutenant out of the room, cursing inwardly. They had barely left when Hikaru opened his eyes; his mind worked furiously to plan how he could use his ‘critical injury’ to his advantage.

Then he heard something else: Dr. Marcus’ voice. And what she said made his blood freeze and then boil with wrath.

“Finally, you’re here! Took you gentlemen long enough to catch up with us. Maybe it isn’t too late to get the monster that murdered my father…”

TBC…
Yeah, I promised you twists, action, sensible and harsh moments when the show-down begins. And here it is!!! The big show-down has started!

Riiiggghhhttt… All, please, calm down. I know that this is a mean cliff-hanger, but be certain, it gets WORSE (snicker).

The next chapter will tell of other heroes aboard the Enterprise, who know exactly that Kirk and his closest friends relay on them, while the traitors are weaving their net of lies and intrigues even more. And how far Norton and Section 31 are ready to go will even shock ‘Selek’ and the others…

I hope you liked the new chapter, and – as always – I’m curious about your reactions.

Have a nice start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so very, very much for the many reviews and kudos. I know that you’re all dying of curiosity to what the next chapters will lead, and I can already promise you that the new one is the beginning of an up and down of strong emotions, big messes and shocking measurements Section 31 (means, Norton in this case) is willing to take.

Therefore I don’t want to let you wait any longer.

Have fun with the new chapter

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 71 – Judas gives his kiss

On the bridge, the atmosphere was tense after Norton completed his little speech over the intercom. He now sat in the center seat as if the Enterprise belonged to him. He knew that Elite Security would need some time to secure the decks, and he would use the time to interview the ‘acting captain’. He looked at Chekov and waved at him nearer. Pavel obeyed with fake enthusiasm.

“Where is Captain Kirk?” Albert asked sharply.

Pavel felt his palms beginning to sweat, yet Jim Kirk trusted him to buy him and the others time – and this was exactly what he would do.

“Keptin Kirk is on ze planet, sir. May I ask what’s going on?”

“You may, but don’t expect an answer,” Norton replied coldly.
Chekov stood up straighter. “Sir, with all due respect, I was given ze conn, and as acting keptin I have ze right to ask a superior officer about details when he suddenly appears and takes over command using his rank and other more unusual methods. Do not get me wrong, Admiral, I don’t want to give you any trouble, but you boarded our ship as zough we were ze enemy, and restricted ze whole crew to quarters. I may be young but I know ze protocols. If I don’t demand an explanation from you, I would be neglecting my duty as acting keptin and my responsibility for ze crew.”

Norton’s gaze wandered over the too-young face of the ensign and he couldn’t help but feel respect rising in him for his brave behavior. And, of course, the ensign was right. In the position he had been placed, it was his right and his duty to demand answers. “Ensign, why is the Enterprise here at New Vulcan?”

Pavel knew that he had to be politically correct with his answer, so he replied, “Sir, all I have been told is zat we’re on a need-to-know mission, but I was not informed of ze details.”

“And this is why I can’t give you details, either. You need only know one thing: Captain Kirk and his senior staff are accused of several crimes and I’m here to arrest them.” He watched Chekov’s eyes go wide, and asked, “So, Kirk is on New Vulcan. And where is his first officer, Commander Spock?”

“He went wiz him, sir,” Pavel murmured, wracking his brain over what to do next.

“Of course,” Albert snorted. “And let me guess, the other senior officers accompanied him, too?”

“Chief Engineer Commander Scott left ze ship a short time ago to order spare parts in person. As you have certainly been informed, sir, we were in a battle last week and ze ship is in need of repair.”

“The chief engineer is ordering spare parts in person on planet?” Norton didn’t know if the young man was pulling his leg and knew damn well why Kirk had travelled to New Vulcan. Norton turned towards the science station. “Try to locate every human lifeform in New ShiKar!”

The man nodded while another security officer came over with a PADD to Norton who studied it quickly. “This is your personal file, Ensign. I recall now where I’ve come across your name before. You’re the Russian wonder kid. You’ve served under Kirk for two years now.” He looked up again. “Answer me one question, Ensign. What do you know about Khan?”

Pavel’s stomach flip-flopped, but on the outside he remained perfectly calm. “He was ze man who
was involved in the mess with *Vengeance* last year, sir.”

“Yes, exactly,” Norton said softly. “And do you want to tell me that you didn’t realize that he is or was on board for more than two weeks?”

Chekov frowned. “He was here…?”

“Ensign, don’t even try to fool to me! You were aboard last year and therefore have to know Khan. You can’t claim to have no knowledge of his presence aboard over the last few days!” Norton’s voice was sharp now, yet Pavel continued his act of a baffled, innocent boy.

“Sir, I’ve never seen Khan in person. I was ze acting chief engineer during ze mission, and down in Engineering ze entire time. But…”

“Are there any civilians aboard?” Albert interrupted him, sensing that the Russian knew more than he was letting on, and he was determined to find out as much as possible from this boy. It was only a question of time until the ensign gave himself away.

Pavel glanced at him and nodded. “Yes, sir, we had a civilian aboard. He was wiz ze keptin after we saved him at Aldebaran.”

Norton bent forwards. “And where is said civilian now, Ensign?”

Chekov shrugged. “I have no clue, Admiral. I only saw him once or twice, zat’s all.” He was very aware of the questioning looks of his comrades on the bridge, and hoped they’d all got the message to say absolutely nothing about ‘Petty Officer Singh’.

“Sir?” The man at the science station looked over at the captain’s chair. “There are more than five hundred human lifeforms in the township – engineers and relief workers, no doubt. I’ve also scanned approximately thirty humans in the hospital, and even more in the government building. Should we beam up all of them?”

Norton groaned inwardly. Yes, he knew that there were many non-Vulcans in New ShiKar to help the colony settle, but so many humans… It was enough to drive him crazy. “No, of course not! We would be brought up on charges of kidnapping.” Dammit, Kirk knew exactly how to hide in plain sight!
“Admiral!” the officer at the comms station called. “I have Commander Nabusu on the line. He’s in Engineering as ordered, and he says that there are serious problems with the engines.”

“Put him through!” Norton ordered and listened to his subordinate’s report with growing unease. Realizing that members of the original crew would be needed to keep the ship running, he commanded that some of them should continue with repairs, then he switched off the intercom and turned his attention back to Chekov.

“Where were we, Ensign? Ah yes, the civilian. You said you only saw him once or twice. Maybe you can describe him to me and…”

The intercom whistled. “Lubkemeier to Admiral Norton.”

Losing a little bit his patience, Albert activated the link. “Norton here!”

“Sir, I’m in the transporter room. All logs and protocols were effectively deleted. There is no way to know the last coordinates or who or what was beamed down.”

“Of course not,” Norton growled. “As if Kirk and the others were foolish enough to leave any trace.” He glanced back at Chekov. “Well, Ensign, I -”

“Admiral, a hail from medbay. It seems to be urgent!” Norton was interrupted for the fourth time. Growling quietly in his throat he nodded at the man at the comms station and a moment later another voice reported, “Sir, we’ve found the room where the cryotubes had been held. It’s an adjacent room where a large number of medical devices had been monitoring something. It’s linked to the CMO’s office.”

“Do you have the exact number?”

“No, sir, but we’ve got the statement of an officer who confirms that the tubes had been here.”

That was all Norton needed to know. “Arrest the CMO and…”
“He isn’t aboard, sir. His subordinate told me that McCoy is down at the Vulcan University Hospital. They needed treatment for a patient in a coma.”

Albert gritted his teeth. “So, the rats have abandoned the sinking ship,” he sneered. “Carry on, Lieutenant, and interview the whole medical staff. McCoy couldn’t have done this alone. I want those who supported him brought to the brig!”

“There’s one thing more, sir. The officer, who informed us about it is Dr. Carol Marcus.”

Albert’s eyes widened. Alexander Marcus’ daughter? At least she had kept some sense about her through this whole mess. “I’ll talk to her soon, then. Norton out!” He glanced at the man at the comms station again. “Something else?”

“Yes, sir, Reports from our troops. All decks are safe, the acting shift is detained at their stations, and the other crew members are locked in their quarters, or will be brought to them.”

Pavel’s mouth had gone dry. Carol Marcus had betrayed them! Damned Judas – after all Jim Kirk did for her! And here he had thought she belonged with them, part of the family the officers had become. The young navigator could understand that she perhaps never would forgive Khan for killing her father, but she had been informed about everything that had happened to the other Augments. She had given them away! Heartless bitch! Alas, Kirk trusted her – and she’d fed him and the others to the wolves!

And that was not all that gave Chekov the chills. The Elite Security hadn’t needed more than a few minutes to take over the whole Enterprise. Sweet Mother Russia, that was almost eerily fast. But at least Kirk and the others had reached the Vulcan capital and were safe.

“Lieutenant R’Lek’h to Admiral Norton,” a voice cut through the bridge.

“Norton here!” Albert replied, asking himself how many messages he was going to receive – revealing more and more of Kirk’s unbelievable deeds.

“Sir, I’m on deck three and just freed Professor Green and his staff. They were restricted to their quarters and -”

“Admiral Norton?” another voice called from the background – a very angry voice. “Admiral, Kirk
and his damned Vulcan stole all our documents concerning... Well, you know! They know about everything!

Albert sat stock still, yet he balled his fists. Shock and fury mixed together into a deadly cocktail of emotion in him. 'Kirk knows about the experiments and their true nature. He knows everything! I'll kill this damn farm boy!' he thought. 'I'll kill him and his cursed bunch of friends before he gets a chance to confess what he knows!' Then his attention was driven away as another hail reached him.

“Admiral, Lieutenant Huan. I’m in the brig and just released Lieutenant Nureaux and Commander Finnegan along with some of his men. I think you should come down here, sir. They have some very interesting things to tell you about Kirk and the creature.”

Pavel grew pale. Did Nureaux or Finnegan know about Kirk and Khan being a couple? That would be a catastrophe!

Norton took a deep breath. ‘Stay calm, Albert! You knew that you’d face a big mess that you’re in charge of cleaning up, so don’t freak out!’ he told himself, then rose. ‘Ensign Chekov,’ he addressed Pavel, who still hid his anxiety. ‘You and the bridge crew are confined to quarters, too, until I’m convinced that you had no part in this. Please follow Lieutenant T’Hoven over there.’ He pointed at the Andorian among the Elite Security who gripped his phaser tight.

At that moment, the Security man from the comms station called, “Admiral, we’re being hailed by Kirk.”

Norton smirked and nodded at another of his men. “Try to locate him!” he ordered and the man hurried to the science station. Then Albert straightened up. “Open channel.”

With rising dread, Kevin listened to everything that had been discussed over the last minutes. All he knew was that somehow he had to stop this insanity and help Jim! He watched how the security man’s fingers flew over the buttons on the comms station and was aware of the fact that there was only one chance to warn his captain and friend. The second Norton took a deep breath to answer Jim’s hail, he called, “Admiral, I’m sharing Ensign Chekov’s quarters. Are we confined together or separately?”

Norton stopped dead in his tracks and threw Riley a murderous glare. A deep growl escaped him as he was told that the hail was instantly dropped, and too short to locate Kirk’s position. “Bravo, young man!” he hissed. “You’ve just done Command a huge disservice and yourself no favors!”
Riley looked with large eyes at him. “I… I don’t understand, Admiral – sir!”

Turning fully around to Kevin, Norton asked slowly. “Do you really not understand, Mr…?”

“Ensign Kevin Riley, sir, cadet second year, classes in navigation, communication, astrophysics, command…”

Albert lifted a hand and snapped, “Enough! I don’t want to know your class schedule!” He studied the young man in front of him – and sighed in resignation. A second-year cadet – so green. “You should be taught when to keep silent, Cadet!” He nodded at T’Hoven. “Take the children to their quarters! The others are restricted as well! Dismissed!”

Seeing no other choice but to leave the bridge, Chekov and Riley stepped into the turbolift; the others and three security personnel followed them. The last thing Chekov heard was Norton’s voice, calling the Excalibur, “Norton to Captain Styles. Inform Commander Genrow that he and twenty of his men will report to the cargo transporter room. Be ready to beam down to New Vulcan to the seat of the government. I am forced to take a step I wish I didn't have to.”

“Aye, Admiral.”

“And I want you with me, so beam down as well. Oh, and ask Professor Dashwood and Dr. Conelly to join you. I’m certain they want to be present when we get their run-away test-subject back! Inform me when you and the men are ready to beam down!”

Then the lift doors closed and Chekov took a deep breath. Norton would do it – would more or less attack the Vulcan government to get Kirk, Khan, and the others! Pavel bit his lips. He had to do something! If he only knew, what!

**ST***ST***ST**

The moment Jim Kirk heard Kevin’s voice in the background asking the admiral if he would be restricted to quarters together with Chekov, the young captain knew that his worst fears had come true. Section 31 had taken over his ship!

He and the others had returned to the seat of government only a few minutes ago, where ‘Selek’ had led them to his office, command his secretary that no one was allowed to disturb them except for
T’Pau, who was expected in the next two or three hours. The air was cooler than it was outside, yet it was warm – for the humans almost too warm. The floor was covered with dark carpets which fit the functional, yet elegant wooden furniture bearing the Vulcan style though it was made from wood of other planets. Except for the furniture that had been taken to other Vulcan colonies before Vulcan was destroyed, no original Vulcan furniture existed.

The second Spock Prime heard the vaguely familiar voice addressing an admiral on the Enterprise’s bridge, he was beside Jim. He took the communicator from him, snapped it shut, threw it on the floor, and crushed it beneath his light boot. Now it was impossible to locate it and therefore Kirk’s exact location from aboard the Enterprise. This would buy them more time until Section 31 decided on more drastic methods to get hold of Jim Kirk and his friends.

Jim’s protesting “Hey!” was cut off by the younger Spock, who also had moved towards his captain but stopped now, “A very quick and logical action. Thank you, High Minister.”

‘Selek’ simply lifted a brow at him before he fixed Kirk with a steady gaze. “They still may not know where you are exactly, but whoever this admiral is above the planet, he is not among the ranks of the stupid. There are staff officers aware of my identity. Your enemy will put two and two together; he will find you in time. I will take you and the others the high-security section of the building until the danger is eliminated.”

Kirk shook his head furiously. “I can’t slip away and hide in the next mouse hole, Selek. They have my ship!” he snarled, and the Elder lifted both brows this time.

“Obviously.”

“Those bastards hijacked my ship! We have to do something!”

The familiar brown eyes, surrounded by wrinkles, looked gently at him. “What? There is no way for you to return to the Enterprise without being arrested. And caught, you are of no use to your crew.”

“Sitting here and waiting for them to take the next step isn't helping either,” Kirk replied with a growl before he began to pace.

The older Spock watched, the younger version of his T’hy’la with understanding. He knew all too well how deep his friend’s emotions ran, especially in situations like this one. Jim Kirk had a high level of tolerance, but when his ship or his friends – or both – were in danger any tolerance left him.
‘Selek’ remembered all the times he had tried to calm and reason with the captain in such situations, yet it had been Jim’s impulsiveness and his logic that brought victory in the end.

His gaze wandered to his younger self, and their eyes met over a distance of just three meters. For a second there was a profound understanding between them, fed by their concern for the young Terran who currently was doing his best to run a hole into the carpet. Then another thought struck ‘Selek’. “Jim, have you deleted the data you collected concerning the conspiracy, Styles’ deeds, and your personal logbook?” Urgency echoed in his voice.

Jim stopped and rolled his eyes. “Yes, and I did one better. I took everything with me.” He pulled a data chip from his trouser pocket and showed it the old Vulcan. “Here is everything – even a little bit more than I sent you a few days ago.”

“More data?” The High Minister cocked his head.

“We found documents and records in Green’s quarters concerning the illegal experiments he committed on Nien’s people.” He heard Joaquin behind him gasp and looked over his shoulder at the shocked Augment boy, who sat beside Uhura on the sofa. “I’m sorry, Jo, Nien and I wanted to spare you, but it seems, Section 31 is leaving us no choice.”

Uhura, who had learned of this new bit of information from Spock, laid a comforting hand on Joaquin’s shoulder, squeezing it in sympathy.

“They… they ran tests on us?” Weiss croaked.

“You are one of five exceptions,” McCoy muttered. “I checked you thoroughly same as I did your brothers and sisters. Except for four of ‘em, everyone will suffer a few side-effects, nothing dramatic though.” He glanced at Khan. “But it’s no excuse for what happened. I’ll move heaven and earth to get those bastards in prison for the rests of their lives!”

“Did you copy the examination results, Leonard?” Selek addressed him, and Bones nodded, still baffled at how easily the older vision of their first officer spoke with him. “Yes. I opened a personal file for every Augment with Khan’s help and made a set of copies that I gave to Jim.” He pointed at the chip in Kirk’s hand.

“To our regret, we weren’t able to take the original records and documents from Dr. Green with us,” Spock said, “but I scanned them and copied them, too.” He also took a data chip from his pocket. “I
think the copies will be proof enough of the scientists’ crimes.”

‘Selek’ pursed his lips. “Right, give them to me.”

Jim and Spock had exchanged a quick glance with each other before they handed over the data chips to the Vulcan Elder, who sat down at his desk and sealed them in a high-security envelope. He activated the intercom and called his secretary who arrived seconds later. “Bring this T’Pau!” he said, giving the envelope to the young Vulcan woman. “It is important that you hand it to her in person – and only her! Tell her that this comes from her grandson, and she will not ask any questions. If someone asks you what you are doing at New Gol, tell everyone that you have the day off and that you are interested in becoming a priestess.”

The woman stared at him. “High Minister, that would be a lie!”

“No, it’s an excuse – and it is the only way to protect yourself, our guests, me, and the Federation. I will explain everything later, T’May, but please go now! Use the side entrance and do not look back! I will try to contact you tomorrow.”

For a long moment, T’May looked at him, then she took the envelope and hid it beneath her robes. “You honor me with your trust, Elder,” she said and vanished; her long honey-brown hair trailed like silk behind her.

Joaquin looked after her. “They do look like elves!” he whispered under his breath, eliciting a soft, amused noise from Uhura.

Jim stepped to ‘Selek’ and watched him switch on his terminal and send the files away to someone whose identity he could not tell. And Kirk knew why Spock Prime was doing this. “You think Section 31 will try to force you to hand us over to them.”

The old Vulcan lifted a brow. “The chances are 19.65 to 1 - maybe 17.87.”

“And what is with the rest 1.78,” McCoy asked.

Selek looked up. “The Lexington may well have rescued all admirals. In that case, they can arrest Luengo and his fellows before the admiral in orbit decides on to take more drastic measures.”
“You’re an optimist!” Bones sighed sarcastically.

“No, I’m a realist,” Old Spock deadpanned. And Jim had the burning gut feeling that the Elder’s apprehensions were a foreshadowing.

ST***ST***ST

Commander Ethan Stones was an experienced man, but the situation he found himself in now was something he had never experienced or even imagined. Two hours ago, he had received a private call from none other than President Robertson, ordering him to go to Central Park in San Francisco and to wait at the café “Jelly Fish”. At first, he thought someone was joking with him, but when the president gave him his priority code that no one else could know and declared the highest security level, Stones got the feeling that something bad was going on.

Using all the tricks he had learned over the last years, he left HQ unseen and arrived just in time to the place. He followed a man whom he knew was the head of the president’s bodyguards.

What happened then was something out of a dream – a bad or a good one, Stones wasn’t that certain even now, an hour later. On the way around the little lake, he had met ghosts – or so he thought at first, but those ghosts were very real and very much alive. Never had he imagined he’d meet Admiral Barnett, Admiral Morrow and Admiral Nogura again – and in such outfits. On an open street, he would have passed them without recognizing them, but he realized quickly that they were indeed the superiors he believed to be dead. Robertson was with them, and Stones asked himself how many protocols the president had broken to come here without the security fuss he and others always had to endure when he left his residence. Only four of his bodyguards, the three admirals, four Redshirts, and the first officer of the Lexington were with him – most of them hidden in plain sight sitting on benches or walking.

What he learned then pulled the carpet from under his feet.

Luengo was a traitor, who only nearly succeeded in sending the delegation to certain death so that he could usurp Barnett’s position for himself and remove all those who could disrupt his plans. And if it wouldn’t have been for Kirk, his most trusted comrades and the Lexington, Luengo’s plan would have worked. And there was more. Of course, Stones knew about Section 31, and he had to admit that he had compared the leadership style of Luengo with that of Alexander Marcus during the crisis last year. But he was shocked to learn that Section 31 had risen again – and was about to take the war with the Klingons to another level.

Stones was a Starfleet officer through and through, and what Luengo did was more than betrayal. To
leave comrades was a taboo, intentionally sending them to death to gain personal advantages was something beyond backstabbing. And the thought that Luengo had used him, Stones, the whole time to secure his position woke fury in the commander.

There was no doubt where his loyalty lay – with Barnett and the others. He knew that the next hours would be very dangerous. Robertson and Barnett were right. They had to re-take HQ with one strike without Section 31 realizing what they were doing. And they had to do it soon.

Stones’s men and women were loyal, too. He could name those who maybe belonged to Section 31; they wouldn’t be part of the mission that was about to unfold. One hour after the commander met with the president, the three admirals, and the president’s personal security team, Stones entered HQ again – alone. He had to prepare everything before they could cut loose. He would make certain that this was the day on which Section 31 would be vanish – a day, Admiral Luengo would never forget!

ST***ST***ST

Sulu was still on the biobed listening to the turmoil in medbay. Of course, the discovery of evidence that Kirk had rescued the Augments would lead to trouble – and Dr. Marcus’ betrayal seemed to poison the atmosphere even more. He listened to the invaders interview Dr. M’Benga and the others, then arrest them and take them away – putting up resistance. In the end, Dr. N’Halro and a young nurse were allowed to remain in medbay to take care of the patients, but three of the invading security team would watch over them. One of them checked on him, then the light in his room was dimmed. With the door half-closed, Sulu heard the guard make a rude joke about his not so perfect face he had at the moment.

Sulu kept to his role as unconscious patient and listened intently to learn what would happen next, but except for some murmuring from the guards and the quiet noises of the medical devices, silence spread over medbay.

Maybe this was the only reason why Sulu heard the soft scratching at all. And it came not from the door, but from above him – to his right!?

Carefully, he blinked in that direction and his jaw dropped as he looked straight into the face of Keenser, who was crouched behind the grate covering the airshaft in the room. The little alien cocked his head before he carefully removed the grate.

Sulu was about to leave the bed, but remembered that the biobed would send an alert if its scanners didn’t receive input from the biobed’s occupant. Holding his breath, Hikaru watched as the Royalan held the grate in one hand, secured the strap of a tricorder, and jumped soundlessly down to the floor,
where he placed the grate against the wall. Then he hastened towards Sulu and pressed one wrinkled finger against his mouth; his big, pitch-black eyes roamed over Sulu’s face and then up to the display of the biobed. Without hesitation, the little alien activated the tricorder and took some readings from the helmsman before he ducked under the bed and began working on something.

“What are you doing?” Hikaru whispered, glancing over towards the door, half expecting to see Elite Security come running.

“Tricking,” came the short reply and Sulu groaned inwardly. Keenser and his one-word answers.

“What are you tricking?”

“Biobed!”

“The biobed?” Sulu looked back at the door, ready to drop back onto the mattress and to continue his role as coma patient, but no one neared the room.

All of the sudden, Keenser reappeared, grabbed Sulu’s right wrist, and began to pull on it. “Out!” he murmured.

Hikaru’s eyes widened. “The biobed will alert them when I…”

“Not anymore. Out!”

Sulu bit his lips, fixed the Royalan with a doubtful gaze, and when Keenser didn’t react, he gave up and swung his legs over the bed’s edge, slipping out of the blankets. The monitor above him still buzzed, echoing his heart beat – a heart beat the sensors shouldn’t be able to read anymore. Then Hikaru understood. Keenser’s tricorder was a medical tricorder, and the Royalan had recorded the human’s bio-signals that the tricorder now sent to the machines.

“You’re a genius!” the helmsman whispered, and he helped Keenser put some pillows beneath the blanket, and they hid the tricorder in the heap. At the first (and maybe second) look, none would realize that the ‘comatose man’ wasn’t in bed anymore.
“Quick!” Keenser murmured and raced back to the open shaft.

Sulu grimaced as he became aware of the only escape route he could take. Folding his hands into a hold, he waited until Keenser had put a foot into them and pushed the little alien over his head. Then he grabbed the grate and took the Royalan’s offered hand, who pulled him up with the surprising strength given his tiny frame. Slipping into the shaft and not losing the cover was an act Sulu was sure he couldn’t repeat. But somehow he managed it, and a minute later he crawled after Keenser through the inner workings of the Enterprise.

There was only one place on the ship where they could take action against the enemy successfully: The auxiliary room. If they could reach it without being caught, maybe they stood a chance to help Kirk and the others…

ST***ST

Pavel Chekov and Kevin Riley walked side by side down the hallway towards the Russian’s quarters. Lieutenant T’Hoven was behind them; his right hand rested on his phaser at his hip. The other members of the bridge crew had separated from them only moments ago, accompanied by other guards.

The ship was uncharacteristically silent, and a certain dark atmosphere loomed about her. The crew members who hadn’t been on duty were locked into their quarters, and Elite Security was patrolling the hallways. It reminded Pavel of an old prison he once visited in St. Petersburg, only that here the walls were made of steel and not of stone, and that the guards wore the uniform what ought to be an ally and not an enemy.

Chekov’s and Riley’s minds were working frantically. They had to do something – had to stop Norton from getting Kirk and the others, and prevent him from damaging the relationship between New Vulcan and Starfleet. The Vulcan High Council wouldn’t accept any activity that would threaten the seat of government – or the Vulcan High Minister, yet Pavel would wager that this wouldn’t stop Norton from harassing ‘Selek’. After all ‘Selek’ was an older version of Spock, and after Kirk and the Vulcan had tricked Section 31 over and over again, Norton had to be furious with them. Men like the admiral lashed out when it comes to a bruised ego. Pavel had a certain gut feeling that Norton would take out his wrath, not only on their Spock but also on the old one, if he got the chance.

They neared Chekov’s quarters, and Pavel knew that the chance to act was coming to an end. A simple, desperate plan formed in his mind – a silly one – one that could be seen in any B-movie. But maybe that’s why it would work.
They stopped in front of the door to his quarters, and he tapped in the code. The door opened, and Pavel gestured to Riley to step in first; he turned around. “Zanks for ze escort,” he grumbled before he followed Kevin. The door hadn’t fully closed when he bumped hard into the furniture and let out a painful cry, falling.

Kevin recognized immediately what Pavel was up to and called out his name in alarm.

That was enough for the Andorian to enter the room before he could lock it with an override code. Confused he looked down on the young Terran who lay on the floor. “What happened?” he demanded and made another step towards the two ensigns. It was enough for Kevin to take action.

A second later, he tackled T'Hoven taking him by surprise. Obviously, the lieutenant had never thought that the two ‘boys’ would make trouble. But this was a big mistake. Both young men were determined to fight against the enemy ‘til their last breath and buy their captain and friend some more time.

T'Hoven overcame his shock quickly and tensed his muscles as he tried to push Kevin away. He met with firm resistance. The lieutenant had worked with Terrans for quite some time, but none of them had ever told him of the Irish temper and Irish stubbornness. Though smaller than the Andorian, Riley put up a good fight; his fury gave him the strength he needed to busy the lieutenant for a short time – several seconds in which Pavel got back to his feet and raced to the sleeping area.

The carved statue of Czar Alexander that was on the sideboard was a gift from his parents after his graduation from Starfleet Academy. Thirty centimeters long, made of oak, and beautifully painted – it was a rarity, and it came in handy for the young Russian just now.

Rushing back to his friend still wrestling with the Andorian, he swung the statue like a sword and brought it down on T'Hoven’s head shouting a victorious shout in Russian. The lieutenant was felled like a tree and didn’t move again. Chekov stood above him – statue ready to use again.

Carefully and out of breath, Kevin bent over the lieutenant and searched for the Andorian’s pulse. He looked up at Pavel and grinned, “He's out cold!”

“Ha! Long live Czar Alexander!” Pavel smirked, then he laid the statue down and hurried to his wardrobe to grab some belts. “Help me bind him and to hide him in ze closet.” He pulled out a dark blue scarf. “Do you want to gag him, or should I do it?”
Kevin grinned. “You rendered him speechless so let me do the second half of it.”

Two minutes later T’Hoven was cored, gagged, and locked into the wardrobe.

“What now?” Riley asked quietly and felt a little nervous flutter in his belly as Chekov took his phaser and smirked at him, “Now we’re going to ze auxiliary room to get our ship back!”

ST***ST

Albert Norton looked at the two men in front of him – Lieutenant Nureaux with his right arm in a sling and a bruised Lieutenant Commander Finnegan. Behind them, the brig was full, but instead of the three Elite Security members from Finnegan’s group who had been in there, the cells were occupied with nearly the whole medical staff. Elite Security was still interviewing them in the cells but were receiving no answers at all.

“So neither of you managed to carry out orders, and you blame a corn-fed cowboy, a Vulcan and a creature more than 200 years old for your failure!” He shook his head, and Finnegan felt the urge to defend the lieutenant and himself.

“Sir, it’s not only because of Kirk. His staff is thick as thieves; their loyalty belongs utterly to him – not to Starfleet or the protocols. And unfortunately his staff is extremely clever and intelligent. They not only obey his orders, but they are also ready to give their lives for him. The Chief of Security aboard, Giotto or whatever his name is, didn’t even ask why he was attacked by Gamma 12’s security. He just opened fire on my men as if it was a routine – to fight with his own people. I tried to get Kirk – I had him in the hangar! And then, out of nowhere, this damn Vulcan and the Augment appeared, and they turned the tables. Kirk had no chance to call one of them on the communicator. We were in close combat the whole time, yet somehow this blasted Vulcan, and the creature seemed to know that he was in trouble. They came to his rescue.”

“Yes, Commander Spock and Khan seem to have a kind of radar when it comes to Kirk,” Philippe Nureaux affirmed.

“Kirk and Spock are close friends – and Vulcan’s do have some telepathic powers,” Norton mused. “Maybe this can be used to our advantage.”

“There is more, sir,” Nureaux said, lowering his voice as he caught the admiral’s asking glance. “Kirk and Khan are a couple.”
Silence!

For a few seconds, Norton was speechless; then he burst out, “They are a couple? Impossible! Kirk'll chase any skirt and…”

“I was in his quarters and saw the undeniable proof that he shares it with someone – a male someone. I assumed that it was Khan and confronted Kirk with my theory after I got arrested and he interviewed me. His reaction told me everything. He and the Augment are sexually involved with each other. There is no doubt.”

Norton stared at him while Finnegan sneered, “Jimmy-boy always had a thing for the exotic ones, but I never thought that he’d want a dick stuck up his ass.”

This time, the admiral gave him a sharp glare; this kind of language was unfit for an officer! Then his attention was driven back to Nureaux. “Are you sure? I have to be certain if this relationship is real before I can make use of it.”

“It is true,” Philippe answered. “When I confronted Kirk with it, McCoy was with him, and he wasn’t the tiniest bit surprised by my words.”

“Ah, that’s the reason why the Augment went berserk when I fought Kirk. I thought he would tear me apart – literally,” Finnegan grumbled.

“He could have done it,” Norton murmured. “Consider yourself lucky that you’re still alive.” He rubbed his jaw. “So, Kirk has taken Khan not only under his wing but into his bed as well. Well, this comes in handy. Should the Augment actually have feelings for Kirk, he will not endanger his life. If both are a pressure point for one another, I’ll have their surrender quicker than I thought.”

“Careful. They are men who know how to adjust to any situation and can act accordingly!”

The female voice came from behind him, and Norton turned around; his gaze hung on the young blond woman who stood between two Elite Security personnel. “Carol!” He began to smile. “I’m pleased that at least you weren’t taken by Kirk’s insane kind of morality – or his charms.”
The weapon officer snorted shortly. “He is an excellent officer and captain, but after he had come under the influence of that murderous bastard Augment, he went crazy.”

Albert closed the distance to her and looked into her hard eyes which hid a spark of fury. “So, can you affirm that Kirk and Khan…”

“… are rolling between the sheets? Yes, they can barely keep their hands off each other!” Disgust lay in her voice, and the admiral had to chuckle.

“There were the rumors that you and Kirk…”

Marcus shook her head. “I once thought there could be more between us, but I was mistaken. Jim seems to be done with collecting women. Now he's after men – or one enhanced man in particular who easily could break any bone in his body, which he already tried a year ago.”

Albert pursed his lips. Ah, hell had no fury compared to the wrath of a dumped woman! And this came in handy, too. “Well, Kirk loves danger,” he commented wryly.

The intercom buzzed. “Bridge to Admiral Norton.”

Albert went to the next terminal. “Norton here!”

“Sir, Captain Styles informed us that he, the scientists, and Commander Genrow with his men are ready to beam down.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant, I’m going to the transporter room. You have the conn until Commander T’Hoven returns to the bridge.”

“Aye, sir!”

Norton switched off the terminal and turned around. He met Carol’s fierce gaze as she asked, “May I come with you, Admiral? I want to be there when my father’s murderer is finally arrested!”
Albert’s mouth twitched the slightest bit. Nothing burnt hotter than a woman’s wish for vengeance. One thing gave him second thoughts. “Carol, I’ve known you since you were a little child, and sometimes it amused me that there was nothing that could stop you if you wanted something. I don’t think that has changed. So why did you not once try to contact and warn us about what was going on aboard?”

Marcus snorted. “Albert, only after Jim was chased by the Excalibur did I realize that something was clearly off, I learned about Khan’s crew only yesterday. The whole ship was monitored. Kirk would have found out instantly if I had tried to send a transmission to you. And how was I supposed to know that Section 31 still exists?”

Cocking his head, Norbert asked, “So Kirk knows about us?”

“He assumes that Section 31 is back, but he had no proof – nor had I. I know that my father overdid it last year, but I believe he had the right idea. This war will not stop until Starfleet shows her full power. And we don’t have time to chase a love-sick captain who abuses our flagship for his own mission of whimsy.”

Albert nodded slowly. “But you knew about Khan’s presence aboard.”

“Yes, I did. Jim talked with me about it, and after the bridge crew went along with his intention of giving the creature ‘a second chance’, I thought it wiser to play along and to wait for a chance to inform Starfleet Command. I didn’t get that chance, but thank the Lord this game of hide and seek is over now.” She lifted her chin. “May I accompany you, Albert?”

A smile spread over his face. “Of course.”

Neither Pavel Chekov, nor Kevin Riley would ever be able to tell, how they managed to creep through the corridors without being caught. They had to hide in abandoned rooms several times and one time they escaped a patrol by pure luck, climbing into a supply shaft, but finally – after what felt like eternity – they reached the emergency stairwell and rushed down to deck 8. And there the game started anew.

As they finally neared auxiliary, both were sweating and tense as a ready bow. They knew here lie the real trouble. There was no way that the room wasn’t watched, and they had to eliminate the
guards before they could take over auxiliary – without giving their enemies a chance to alert the main bridge.

Pressing themselves against the wall they peeked around the corner. And true as the sun rose in Earth’s east, there stood two Elite Security, both armed with phaser rifles.

Pavel and Kevin exchanged a glance, gulped, nodded at each other, took a deep breath – and stepped out into the open.

“And you zink Ana is going to date me?” Chekov asked eagerly, and Riley smirked at him.

“Hey, she only has eyes for you and…” Both stopped dead in their tracks, as the two Security personnel blocked their way and raised their weapons.

“Who are you?” one of them demanded. “What are you doing here?”

Both ensigns gave them a look of pure surprise and innocence. “We're beta shift and were asked to go to our quarters. Well, we're on our way and…”

Kevin didn’t get any further because the second Security snapped, “No one goes without an escort! Where is yours?”

“Escort?” Pavel pretended to think hard. “Why should…” He stopped and pointed at the door that was his and Kevin’s target. “Hey, zis is ze auxiliary!” He looked at Riley. “Are we not on deck five?”

Kevin slapped a hand against his forehead. “I told you that the computer in the lift didn’t understand you! Look, where you got us – and this is the third time this week!”

“Ze computer doez understand me!” Pavel gasped, speaking with a thicker accent than usual. “Zere muzt be a malfunction and…”

“How can the computer understand you with that crazy accent of yours?” Riley groused.
“I zpeak wiz an acczent? Are you daft?” Chekov shot back, frowning in feigned irritation.

Delivering a big show of frustration, Kevin addressed one of the security personnel, while he flicked a thumb at his friend. “Does he have an accent or not?”

Not really knowing what to make out of the oversized boys in front of them, the two guards blinked in confusion before one of them answered, “Accent or not, you both should be…”

“See!” Riley interrupted while glaring at Chekov. “He confirmed it; you have a wicked thick accent!” He turned back to the security man. “Do you have the slightest idea how often he’s us both into trouble because no computer aboard can understand his commands?” The man opened his mouth to respond, but Kevin continued as if he finally had found someone to bleed his heart out to.

“Last week we ended up in Engineering, the week before we reached our department five minutes late because the turbolift computer understood everything but where we wanted to go because this guy here is practically tongue-tied! Hell, one time we even landed on the bridge! Can you imagine the captain’s face?”

“Hey, we alzo…”

“I always tell him to let me do the talking in the turbolift, but no, the little czar here always has to blurt out the command, and we land God knows where. It's all too crazy and…”

Kevin went on, and both the security personnel thought of two solutions to the situation they were facing just now. Should they let the boy talk to them until they went insane, or ought they take them to their quarters to shut them up? Both looked at each other for a moment – and that was all Pavel needed. With Kevin keeping their attention, he slowly moved his arm behind his back, reaching for the phaser hidden beneath his tunic in the waistband of his trousers. The second the two guards glanced exasperated at each other, Pavel took action.

He had the phaser in his hand set to stun, and in the blink of an eye, the two men realized that something wasn’t right. The first of them fell to the ground, stunned. Kevin, who had no phaser since he was only a cadet hurled himself against the second man, grabbing the man’s weapon hand. For a moment they wrestled; then Pavel was beside them and kicked the man directly in the back of the knee. It was a mean attack, this much knew the navigator, but in this case, he had to do it. The success of their mission depended on the quick defeat of the last remaining security personnel.

The kick had its intended effect, even if it wasn’t the one that the ensigns hoped for. It was enough to
make the man stumble. Kevin jumped backward – making room for Chekov who instantly pulled the trigger of his phaser. The shot sent the man to the ground, where he lay beside his colleague unconscious.

Chekov and Riley listened carefully, but they heard no footsteps. The little fight hadn’t elicited any attention. Well, there were only slightly more than a hundred of the elite forces aboard, and the Enterprise was a large ship, which allowed for just a handful of them on each deck.

“Quick now!” Pavel whispered, and they both grabbed the two guards under their arms and pulled them toward the auxiliary room. The doors opened, and they dragged the heavy men inside; then Chekov quickly closed the door but didn’t seal them. That would have set off the alarm on the bridge, and if there was one thing they didn't need, it was discovery.

“Right,” Kevin wheezed. “And now?”

“We have to…”

Chekov stopped as he all of sudden saw a tall figure coming from the back of the auxiliary – another Elite Security, who aimed a phaser at them. “What are you doing here?” he demanded, raising his weapon. Then he saw his two comrades in dreamland and cursed. “Hands up and go over there!” he almost snarled. “No tricks or I’ll shoot you where you are!”

“Isn’t zat phaser set to stun?” Chekov asked, surprised at the cold-blooded way he acted. “Zis is against protocol, you know.”

The man narrowed his eyes and moved the phaser towards them, yet out of range. “I said go over there, and get your damn hands up, boys or your mothers will mourn you!”

Kevin knew that their plan was at stake and suppressing the growing dread he snapped, “Then you’ll have a big problem, Mister, because a Starfleet member who kills another member will face court martial!”

“As if I would get any trouble because of two traitor ensigns! I…” Whatever he had wanted to say would remain a secret forever, because out of nowhere a small figure fell down on him and clawed at his face. With a shout, he dropped his phaser and grabbed for his attacker, whose tiny yet strong fingers with sharp nails left bleeding stripes on his cheeks and jaw.
“No shooting!” a voice snarled at his ear. “Stupid human!”

Chekov and Riley hadn’t the faintest clue from where Keenser came from all of sudden, but one does not question a gift that falls from the sky. Pavel pulled his phaser out, yelled “Keenser! Down!” and the moment the little alien let himself fall, the navigator shot. The stun blast hit the man squarely and he sunk to the floor.

Keenser pushed himself from the ground and looked threateningly at the fallen Security man with his pitch-black eyes. Then he felt a warm, soft human hand on his shoulder and glanced up into Chekov’s face.

“Keenser, you’re awesome!”

That confused the Royalan completely. “You knocked out man,” he said – a little bit at a loss why the Terran would compliment him so.

Soft laughter from above their heads made Pavel and Kevin almost jump out of their skin; then they grinned as they recognized a smirking Sulu, who looked out of a supply shaft. Dirt streaked his outstretched hands.

“Hikaru! What you’re doing here?”

“How did you escape medbay?” Riley asked, beaming from ear to ear.

Chuckling Sulu pointed at Keenser. “He got me out – tricked the biobed with a mocked up tricorder. The med-scanner is monitoring its signals now.” He cocked his head. “Hey, what you two are waiting for? No one gonna catch a severely injured man who has to jump from this height?”

“Oh, poor Hikaru. Creeping all ze way from medbay to here in ze shafts, and zen he tries to make us cry in sympazy for him.” Still, he and Kevin rushed to the wall to help the helmsman down. Groaning, Sulu let himself drop and needed a moment to regain his footing as the two ensigns supported him. “Right,” he sighed. “Here we are. So, status?”

Pavel grimaced. “Admiral Norton wants to beam down to New Vulcan to get ze captain and ze others by force. I heard him talking to Captain Styles before Kevin and I had to leave ze bridge. Oh, and Carol Marcus…”
“… is a damn Judas, I know!” Sulu growled. “She was in medbay when the bastards stormed in – and she couldn’t tell them soon enough about Kirk’s ‘unbelievable actions against the Federation’.” He shook his head. “And I thought she was one of us, but she’s as blind and cowardly as her father was.”

He headed toward the science station he spoke and checked it. “Dammit, the transporter has already been activated. Whoever is coming or going, I can’t stop it now.” He glanced at his three comrades. “So, what’s your plan?”

Chekov cleared his throat. “Well, I zought we could use ze inner defense system to bring zose intruders to zeir knees.”

“The knock-out gas?” Kevin assumed, and the two other men grinned at him.

“Well, the only downside is that everyone aboard would go to sleep for a few hours – including the crew,” Sulu mused, but Pavel shrugged,

“Medbay will need a lot of his headache pills, but ozerwise ze the whole zing is harmless. Let us seal ze aircon and ze door. Zen it can’t reach us.”

Hikaru rolled his eyes. Pavel took so many things in stride, but he was still so young that it didn't surprise Sulu at all. “Right. First, we have to transfer the conn to the auxiliary room so that no one on the main bridge can cancel our commands. Kevin, take Pavel’s phaser and secure the door! Pavel, I need your help at the science station. Scan the area outside of auxiliary. I don’t want any surprises. Keenser, take the engineering station and make certain that the gas stays outside this room.” He sat down the navigation and weapons station. “Well, let the games begin!”

ST***ST***ST

‘Selek’ had sent all documents to three members of the High Vulcan Council – every transmission was encrypted with a code only they knew; then he deleted everything. As a precaution, he also alerted security, not taking the risk in case the admiral in orbit forced his way to the building – a situation Spock Prime never thought would come to pass. Yet Nero’s influence had not just altered the timeline; it poisoned the timeline.

You could cut the tension in the large office with a knife. ‘Selek’ ended his call to security. Jim Kirk
stood beside the old Vulcan’s desk and tried to calm his boiling anger. His Grey Lady and his crew were in the hands of Section 31. That was unacceptable – unbearable!

Spock Prime rose. “I’ll show you your rooms,” he said. “As long as Section 31 is in orbit you will be safe there. Afterward…”

Tumult sounded from the outside. The men whirled around, and Uhura quickly jumped from the sofa, stepping in front of Joaquin who rose as well. ‘Selek’ straightened up; he pulled Jim quickly back and shielded him with his body. His face became an unreadable, icy mask exactly like his younger counterpart, who drew beside him; placing himself in front of Kirk, too. The same moment the door opened revealing green-white admiral uniform accompanied by command gold. Elite Security dark blue-grey followed …

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, Section 31 and Norton are stopping at absolutely nothing – like it is so typical for people who are about to lose everything. And Norton and his fellows will go even further, just wait.

In the next chapter above mentioned disaster will take place, and I already warn you know about an emotional rollercoaster that blends out the other ones before. Everything peaks now into the big show-down and everyone (and every mission) is at stake now.

I hope you liked the last chapter and how, at least, four of Jim’s most loyal friends and subordinates trying to turn the table.

As always I’m very curious what you think about the whole thing.

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I know, I’m a little bit late with the next update and I’m sorry for that, but on the other hand, this chapter comes exactly with the big anniversary. 50 years Star Trek today! Sweet Lord, I think Gene Roddenberry never imagined what would become of the TV-serial he produced all those decades ago – that even 50 years later several special idioms, used in the episodes, belong to casual language today and that there would so many people around the world, who still love the universe he created. This I’m calling a success, but – hey – Star Trek is really special, as I know you all agree.

Therefore: CONGRATULATIONS, STAR TREK!!!!

Well, of to my story.

Thank you so much for the many, many reviews. I knew that the showdown will put you all on the edge of your seats, and I can promise that the peak hasn’t reached until now. Rather the opposite. The real nasty and nerve-robbing things are beginning now. And if Star Trek shows us one thing over and over again then the fact that friendship and love is the greatest good that sometimes demands sacrifices – and not one of the main characters (regardless which serial of ST) would hesitate to sacrifice himself or herself to protect the friends, the beloveds or the ship.

Well, I know in this connection it sounds almost fatal – and I warn everyone to be ready to face the beginning of the biggest rollercoaster possible.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 72 – Sacrifices

The moment Norton and his companions entered the office, phasers partly drawn, “Selek” pulled his shoulders back and stepped in front of his guests. “I do not remember you asking for a meeting with me, Admiral. Your barging into my office without permission is equitable with storming into the governmental offices of a Federation member.” His voice was strong and hard – it could have splintered ice. “Lower your weapons; surrender to our sentries and ask for a meeting with me, and I will not press charges against you and Starfleet Command.”
Albert Norton stared at him, then at the younger Spock, and back again. Incredible! One person in
two different versions and ages. It was…unbelievable! And it also made him aware of the fact that
“Selek” couldn’t be trusted. Not this time – not when his allies’ freedom and more was at stake.

“High Minister,” he said with an equally hard voice, “your people were informed that wanted
criminals are in this building, and that Starfleet has been forced to intervene to prevent worse from
happening.”

Old Spock lifted a brow and replied before a furious Kirk was able to say something, “There are no
criminals here, Admiral, only those who have asked for political asylum which was granted by the
Vulcan High Council.”

“You are saying a wanted terrorist who has killed high-ranking staff-officers, blown up a building in
London, and who crashed a large vessel into San Francisco isn’t a criminal?” This time it was
Norton who lifted both brows. “And there I thought Vulcans wouldn’t understand the concept of
black humor.”

Jim took a deep breath as he listened, his face flushed with even more anger. “You’re right, Admiral,
there are criminals, but they are not us. You and Styles could look in the mirror, and you’d find your
‘criminals’.”

“Shut up, Kirk. Your plans were exposed and have come to an end here and now!”

Jim felt his disgust increasing as he recognized the voice. Finnegan! If there had been any room for
doubt concerning the Enterprise, then this was the utter proof that his ship was indeed in Section
31’s hands.

“Finnegan!” he growled, while he felt his Spock stepping beside him, ready to support and to protect
him. “That you, who tried to murder a starship captain, support a criminal element like Luengo and
his fellows fits so well with your rotten character!” Jim threw into the Irishman’s face.

Sean had moved beside Norton and glared with hate-filled mockery at Kirk. “I had my orders to stop
you. It’s not my fault you chose to fight instead of surrendering. And, by the way, you had a back-up
like always. Your Vulcan pet and your Augment lover came to protect their little boy, so don’t whine
now because it got rough on Gamma 12!”

Jim ignored the fact that Finnegan – and therefore certainly Norton too – knew about Nien and him.
His fury was about to get the better of him, as he snarled, “You attacked Starfleet officers in an
ambush with the clear intention of killing them. That’s called attempted murder, and for that, justice
will freeze your ass for the next eighty years!”

“As I said: I had my orders!”

“As far as I remember you didn’t even demand we surrender before you attacked us with phasers set
to kill,” Spock said coldly; his eyes hid his own growing irritation well enough for those who
weren’t familiar with him. “This, indeed, fulfills the definition of attempted murder, Commander.”

“I knew the dangerous subject that was with you and is here now, too. I had to fulfill my orders
without endangering my men,” Sean shrugged.

“A kind word prevents the necessity of using weapons, boy,” McCoy snapped. “But thoroughly
thinking was never one of your strengths. Once a bully, always a bully.”

“Oh, shut your mouth, you quack. You always complain when someone messes with Jimmy-boy
here!”

“As entertaining as this is, we’ve absolutely no time for this happy reunion between former school
chums,” Norton taunted, before he addressed Spock Prime. “As I’ve already said, you are sheltering
rogue officers and a very dangerous individual that has already been sentenced to…”

“Mr. Singh,” “Selek” emphasized, “never faced a proper legal trial, and therefore any sentence is
also legally void.” He cocked his head and began a little speech, knowing that it was only a matter of
time until Vulcan security would overcome the intruders. For a brief moment he was reminded of
another situation when he’d been forced to buy time by carrying on a longer lecture until a stolen
cloaking device had been installed aboard the Enterprise. Kirk had been able to beam him away
from the Romulan ship before the execution took place. And something Jim Kirk called a gut-feeling
told Spock Prime that the danger here and now was no less great than all those decades ago back in
his own time-line.

“You allowed illegal tests to be run on Mr. Singh,” he began. “He was held in a semi-coma and his
augmented nature was abused for an indeterminate number of experiments. He never consented to
these, nor was he granted any say in the matter of their nature. As I have also learned, Mr. Singh
never had a truly legal trial, as a public defender was denied, as well as his right to give any
testimony after he had undergone torture and was forced to watch four of his crew members killed in
an attempt to blackmail him. Given all these facts, it is highly doubtful that Mr. Singh will be
granted a fair trial under the current leadership of Starfleet Command. Therefore, it is his life being at
stake that convinced the Vulcan High Council to offer him and his people political asylum. You certainly know that…”

Norton began to chuckle. “Let me guess, Kirk was full of tearful pleas to win you over to this insanity.” Before the Elder could reply, Albert raised his own phaser. “And it is obvious that you’ve already made up your mind, and that there is no way to talk some sense into you. Therefore you give me no other choice than to act. Please be so kind and step over there to the visitor lounge.” He pointed his phaser directly at Kirk’s face. “The same goes for you and your companion! Hands up and go over there!”

Three more of the Elite Securities aimed at them too, while Styles glared with blatant malice at Jim. “It seems this time I was quicker, Kirk! Don’t confront someone with an April’s fool joke if you’re not ready to be at the receiving and, too.”

“The difference being that I sent a harmless probe, but you on the other hand, charge into an official seat of government with phasers drawn, and threaten the sovereignty of a planet!” Jim snarled.

“Enough!” Norton cut in. “Hands up and get over there!”

Joaquin stared at the strange officers and soldiers with a dry mouth before he spared a short glance towards Khan. Hadn’t his brother and Jim said that they would be safe here on New Vulcan – that their enemies would not dare to take action against this special member of the Federation? As it seemed, they had miscalculated the readiness of their opponents to overstep boundaries.

Khan felt the rising anxiety in Joaquin, while his bondmate’s fury burnt hot over their shared link, mixed with fear for him and his friends. And, as Nien had to admit, he himself felt the first pang of dread as the Elite Securities aimed at them to lend weight to Norton’s order. With the Enterprise in the hands of Section 31 and New Vulcan’s seat of government more-or-less taken by the second in command of said organization, their chances had lowered immensely. At least his other brothers and sisters were safe – until now. There were only a few who knew about where they were hidden, and if there was one thing Khan was certain of, it was the fact that neither the Vulcans, nor Jim and his friends would ever give away this secret.

Kirk’s glare hung at the phasers aimed at them, and realizing that they had no other choice than to obey, he retreated – signaling to the others to follow his example.

‘Selek’s’ dark eyes were like granite as he glared at the intruders. “This will have unpleasant consequences for you, Admiral. And for you and your companions too, Captain. New Vulcan is an independent member of the United Federation of Planets, yet you force entry into its government
sanctuary with weapons and dare to make demands – you, a high-ranking officer of Starfleet Command. And as we know, you have overstepped your boundaries many times. Captain Kirk and his companions are under the protection of my government. Therefore even Starfleet has no right…”

“Civilian protocols are suspended if Starfleet officers are involved!” Albert interrupted him.

“Mr. Singh is a civilian,” the Elder stated, which earned him a mocking snort from Finnegan.

“You’re not up to date, High Minister. I learned first-hand from Lieutenant Murreaux that Kirk has made his sweetheart here a petty officer. Therefore, this creature does, indeed, belong to Starfleet.” He shook his head. “What they allow into the fleet these days is beyond me.”

“Mr. Singh was relieved from duty before he beamed down and is therefore a civilian,” Spock corrected calmly. “He was recruited because of an emergency situation aboard and was made a petty officer in the absence of enough officer’s, but still maintained his civilian rights. Therefore High Minister Selek is correct. Mr. Singh is not an official member of Starfleet and governed therefore only the civilian laws.”

“Prisoner 3158-17-215 isn’t acknowledged as human; it doesn’t matter by which laws he is governed,” Norton retorted icily. “And, by the way, if the Federation’s safety is in danger, it is my duty to carry out any actions to keep her safe.”

“Big words, Judas!” Jim hissed. His eyes shone with fire. He knew that he and the others were a step away from being imprisoned, and what that would mean for Nien was clear. “Tell me, Admiral, what are today’s thirty pieces of silver equivalent to? A seat in the Council? Higher salary? More authority? With Luengo in charge of Starfleet Command, the possibilities for him and you are almost endless!”

Norton frowned. “You are calling me a ‘Judas’? You, who is accused of conspiracy against the Federation?”

“What?” Kirk didn’t believe his ears, just like the others.

“Are you utterly nuts?” McCoy blurted out. “Jim risked his neck more than a dozen times for the Federation, and you dare to accuse him of…”
Irritated, Albert cut in, “You should hold your tongue, Doctor. Your role in this conspiracy is not as little as it seems.” His gaze found Kirk again. “You and your Augment friends were planning to take over the Federation. With our flagship as the base and seventy-three enhanced super-creatures, you think you have a chance for a revolution with Starfleet is weakened after the loss of our most important admirals and the Federation still at war with the Klingons.”

The accusations were jaw-dropping! Jim fought for breath as fury rose like bile in his mouth. “Aren’t you perverting the facts, Admiral?” he snarled. “It wasn’t me who arranged the attack against the Excalibur which gave Styles the chance to get rid of the men and women who would never allow traitors like you and Luengo to take over Command!”

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Kirk,” Lawrence drawled, obviously enjoying the scene, while Norton saw Luengo’s fear confirmed: Kirk knew of their deeds. That was a death-sentence, and he already knew how to inflict it.

“Didn’t you give Prisoner 3158-17-215 over there shelter, hiding him aboard your ship?” He pointed at a fierce glaring Khan, but addressed Kirk. “Didn’t you take the cryotubes with the Augments aboard, too, before you destroyed Gamma 12?”

“So you knew that they were kept imprisoned there and you still ordered their death?” Jim almost shouted. “You and Luengo made yourself guilty of attempted genocide!”

“Nonsense, the Augments are not people; they’re synthetically bred creatures.” Joaquin choked in the background, but kept silent as Uhura squeezed his arm hard. “Creatures you took aboard our flagship!” Norton continued. As Jim wanted to respond, he snapped, “Don’t deny it, Kirk! Selek affirmed it only a minute ago and we also found the installation of medical monitoring equipment in the hold next to medbay. And I have the statement of one of your crew members, who was sane enough to stay loyal to law and order!” He looked over his shoulder. “Isn’t this the case, my dear?”

Dr. Marcus, clad in the coveralls for an away mission, pushed herself through the men in front of her and stepped beside Norton.

“Carol!” Bones gasped, not trusting his eyes. “You?”

The weapon officer glanced with large, almost sad eyes at him. “I’m sorry, Leonard. I really like you and I didn’t want to hurt you, but you’re so blind in your friendship with Kirk that you lost any sense of right and wrong.” Her gaze hardened as she glanced at Khan. “This man is an ice cold killer who murdered my father, many good commanding officers and blew up almost a whole street only to get his revenge for being treated as what he is – an animal!” Her look found a flabbergasted Jim. “I tried
to talk sense into you, but you wouldn’t listen. I don’t know if Khan brain-washed you after saving you from the Klingons or if you really don’t care that he killed your own mentor along with the others, but one thing I know: This insanity has to stop! Here and now!”

Kirk knew that any discussion would be for naught as he saw her fierce eyes and the barely hidden fury on her face. “And there I thought you understood everything.”

“Oh, I understood everything, Jim. I still understand perfectly well what is going on here!”

“Enough!” Norton cut in again. “Captain Kirk, you and your crew here are under arrest, and…”

“Captain Kirk and his companions have requested political asylum that was granted,” ‘Selek’ interrupted him sharply, asking himself what was taking Vulcan Security so long to come to their aid. “I am certain you are familiar with this term and its consequences. Under this circumstance, even Starfleet Command has no right to demand a delivery or even try to force an arrest with weapons. I will repeat myself only once: Retreat and respect the law of the Federation!”

Norton couldn’t help himself and sneered, “Oh, I’m sure you’re very familiar with laws and protocols; you are famous for twisting them to your liking and talking others dizzy with your discourses. Kirk and your younger counterpart are doing a good job emulating you.”

The Elder cocked his head. “I do not know what you mean, Admiral.”

“Really?” Norton laughed without any humor. “So Vulcans can lie – or is it only you, the half-Vulcan, that can lie to my face.” His face hardened again. “You and I – and a lot of more people – do know who you really are. And that you are still completely loyal to Kirk – loyal enough to abuse your title to cover for him help him. Isn’t it true, Mr. Spock?”

Joaquin, who stood behind Uhura and McCoy, gasped again. The incredible resemblance between the Enterprise’s first officer and the old Vulcan had astonished him from the beginning. But if they really were one and the same person at different ages, it wasn’t a wonder anymore. But, how could something like this even be possible?

“You just broke another decree of the Federation Council, Admiral, namely concerning my person and identity,” the Elder replied calmly. “Your list of crimes grows. And be certain that I will personally see that you face court martial!” In the background more tumult was heard and the old Vulcan felt a wave of irritation waking in him that he instantly suppressed. “If just one of our people gets hurt because of your illegal actions, my government will press charges against Starfleet Command and you!”

“So, you’re trying to tell me that you would use official channels rather than a short cut? Asking your guests for help?” Norton taunted, seeing a chance to eliminate the problem of ‘Selek’ once and for all. “This will come in handy for you and New Vulcan, wouldn’t it? Your people are an endangered species now and with the Augments used as reinforcements you not only can strengthen your colony, you also can make more demands on the Federation, because no one wants six dozen
Augments free in Federation space. You and Kirk had a clever little plan running, but we exposed your intentions just in time to prevent it.”

“Are you accusing me of endangering the Federation intentionally?” This time it was ‘Selek’ who continued without giving the admiral a chance to reply. “If a head of a government is accused of such crimes, only the Federation Council can demand his or her dismissal – and this is also only possible after detailed investigation. Show me the Council’s order and the accepted results of an official investigation concerning my person, Admiral, and I will come with you!” As Norton stared at him, ‘Selek’ nodded. “We both know that your mission is not approved by the Council. I dare say that no Council member or the president knows that you are here and what you are doing – attempted kidnapping of a political asylum seeker and the head of government of a Federation member. Your actions, Admiral, are forcing me and my government to engage the Council and the president!”

Commander Genrow, who was in command Elite Security on the ground, frowned and looked at Norton. “You deployed this mission without the Council’s approval – or even their knowledge?”

“Mind your own business, Commander!” Albert snapped.

“Abiding by Federation law is my business, Admiral!”

Norton stared at him. “We are at war, Commander, and a conspiracy has already weakened the Federation and Starfleet. We are about to solve this problem, so…”

“The conspirator wants to reveal the conspiracy he and his friends plotted,” ‘Selek’ deadpanned. “It never ceases to amaze me how easily humans twist facts.”

“You’ll get a chance to tell your side at your trial, High Minister!” Norton growled.

“As we already discussed, Admiral, you do not have legitimate authorization to arrest me – not here on my planet, least of all in the seat of my own government.”

“And as I told you, the protocol is clear when it comes to threats to the Federation, and you, High Minister Selek, are accused of conspiracy against…”

“That’s the biggest load of bullshit I have ever heard!” McCoy flared up again, having had enough now. “Do you hear yourself, man? Are you accusing the Vulcan High Minister of crimes against the Federation? Now I get it. They don’t have police for their own people, but for offworlders like us. Jesus!”

Norton looked at him sourly. “Dr. McCoy, your part in this mess is enough to send you to prison for the rest of your life. You’re comments are only making it worse. So shut up!”

Bone’s face reddened in anger. “Like hell, I will! Am I accused of crimes too? Saving lives is a crime to you I suppose if it concerns people you don’t like or want to get rid of? You need a shrink!”

Norton didn’t answer him but looked at the others. “The same goes for Mr. Spock, Mr. Scott, and Miss Uhura.” His glance then found Joaquin. “And who are you, young man?”

Before the young Augment could answer, ‘Selek’ said, “Mr. Achim Blanch, an intern, as you say on Earth.”

Albert looked ‘Blanch’ up and down. “Found yourself a nice vacation job, boy – serving a man who aids and abets criminals! You’ll be interviewed, too. Maybe you heard or saw things that don’t mean anything to you, but does to me.”
Joaquin felt heat rising in his cheeks, and even though he caught Khan’s warning gaze, he snapped, “I may only be an intern,” he played along, “but one thing I know for sure, until he is convicted in a court of law, you have no right to calling High Minister Selek, Captain Kirk, or anyone else ‘criminals’.”

“Oh, God help us if you ever become a lawyer or a judge. Another bleeding heart shyster to defend the dregs of society!” Norton mocked and turned his attention away.

“And who should judge Captain Kirk and the others, Admiral?” Old Spock challenged. “You?”

Albert shook his head. “I have no time to discuss this with you, Selek. Where are the other Augments?”

It was almost eerie to watch both Vulcans take a deep breath, put on an almost bored expression and clasp their hands on their backs – at exactly at the same time. Norton growled. He knew that there was no way to force a Vulcan to say or to do something he didn’t want to. Albert’s gaze wandered over the others, and on every face, he saw the same stern and fierce expression. He sighed. “We’ll find them; your silence is only worsening your situation.” Again no one said a word. Rolling his eyes Norton glared at Khan. “Prisoner 3158-17-215 will be taken to…”

“Even a man like you can address a man by his rightful name, Admiral. People are not numbers,” the Elder interrupted him again.

“Your loyalty is misplaced and dangerous, High Minister,” Norton sneered.

Khan, who was tense as a tiger ready to pounce, had enough. “You are one to talk of ‘loyalty’. Yours and Luengo’s are derived from the paranoid delusions of Alexander Marcus and your own hunger for power. Your infatuation with the thought of power is enough to turn you and your fellows into murderers who willingly kill their own!”

This time, the admiral almost smiled as he glanced at the Augment. “Prisoner 3158-17-215, you've done a lot of damage since you woke up, including multiple murders. At least your existence is good for something and will serve the Federation by…”

“Don’t you dare to touch him! You will not abuse him or use him as a lab rat again!” Jim snarled, balling his fists, while Spock, Scott, and McCoy stepped as one, in front of Khan, shielding the surprised Augment.

“He was created in a lab, and that's exactly where he belongs,” Norton retorted wryly, ignoring Commander Genrow’s shocked expression. “Don’t you agree, Gentlemen?” Albert raised his voice. Dashwood and Conelly, who were waiting outside of the office between more guards, entered the room.

Jim stared first with wide eyes, and then he narrowed them, eyeing Conelly specifically. Pure hate bubbled to the surface as he realized that this was the man who had hurt his Nien in the cruelest way possible. He wanted to punch the man into a bloody pulp – rip him apart for what he did to his beloved, but right now there wasn’t the chance to make this bastard pay.

Khan also could only stare at Conelly. Painful memories nearly healed by Jim’s love and understanding emerged from the depths of his subconscious, and for a moment he felt a hint of nausea washing over him; then dread was overridden by hot burning fury. There, only a few meters away, stood his tormentor – the man who forced himself upon him and inflicted the most intimate and worst hurt possible. Khan had begun to control his dark side – begun to get a grip on his wrath, but in these seconds the urge to strangle the other man was almost overwhelming.
Nathan Conelly glanced at the Augment and suppressed a smile as he saw the shock and then the rage showing on the superhuman’s face. The Augment looked good – far better than during his stay with Section 31 or later in the LSH lab. And Conelly felt a new wave of greed as he watched the strong, slender frame, fierce eyes, and those expressive lips which were drawn back in a soundless snarl.

Dashwood watched the Augment and was taken aback when he saw him in casual civilian clothes standing between other people – people determined to protect him – as if he belonged to them. The view was unnerving and gave him a strange feeling. Obviously, the creature had found real friends in those men and the young woman – famous and excellent officers who had more or less mutinied against Starfleet to help him. Among them was the Federation’s newest hero who had saved Earth two years ago. Something was very wrong here. Something was out of place, but he couldn’t see what it was.

“You brought those men into the seat of our government? Men guilty of illegal experimentation on a sentient being? War criminals!?” ‘Selek’ fixed Norton with one of his piercing gazes. “I’m familiar with the concept of shame, and you, Admiral, lack it entirely!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking, Selek, but one thing I know. This discussion is over.” He looked at Genrow. “Commander, arrest High Minister Selek, Captain Kirk, and his officers and be careful with Prisoner 3158-17-215 so…”

Jim pulled Spock Prime back and pushed the older Vulcan behind himself as he ducked into a fighting stance – cursing, not for the first time, that he and the others had handed over their phasers as they had entered the building. “Over my dead body!” he almost thundered. “You will not take them!”

Norton cocked his head and closed the distance to Kirk, glaring daggers at him. “Over your dead body?” he repeated slowly, giving the young captain a flat smile. “That can be arranged!” He lifted his phaser and at that moment, ‘Selek’ gave a shout of alert and Uhura screamed; Albert had grabbed the captain’s wrist and pulled him towards himself, pressing the muzzle of his phaser to Jim’s temple. He twisted Jim’s arm brutally behind the captain’s back. “One move, Kirk, and you are dead!” he threatened. The officers and the two Augments took steps toward the admiral, ready to fight. But the sight of their friend and commanding officer being held at gunpoint stopped them. Neither Vulcan was surprised to hear Khan growling deep in his chest.

“I’ve been told that you and the Augment have begun – an intense relationship shall we say? He pretends to care about you; that is all. I don’t think he cares for you one bit, but let’s just check.” Norton asked and he felt the younger man tremble, not in fear but in rage.

“Don’t you dare!” Jim hissed, trying to wriggle free. Norton increased the pressure on his arm. “If anything happens to Nien, I’ll hunt you down like the animal you are, you sadistic bastard!”

“And that statement will bring you even more trouble, Kirk.”

“Do I look as if I care what you think of me – or Section 31?” Jim shot back; utter disgust was plainly heard in his voice.

Norton ignored him; his gaze fixed the fiery eyes of the Augment leader. “Step forwards and let Commander Finnegan put the manacles on you.”

“Admiral, this is going too far!” Commander Genrow protested, but he was ignored.

“Afterward, you’ll be beamed aboard the Excalibur;” Norton continued towards Khan, “where
measures will be taken to secure you and give you over to Professor Dashwood and Dr. Conelly so that they can finish their tasking. I advise you not to…"

“You can’t put Khan back into cryosleep!” McCoy snapped, looking to Dashwood. “His body has been frozen twice already. A third time might kill him!”

“It’s not our intention to put him back into cryosleep – at least not right away. Stasis will do for now.”

“Stasis is practically the same thing and it sure as hell won’t guarantee his survival!” Bones raged.

“His augmented nature will be robust enough to keep him alive until he isn’t needed anymore,” Conelly stated emotionlessly.

“You heartless bastard!” the CMO snarled. “We’re talking about a man’s life here!”

Genrow turned completely towards Norton. “Sir, is this true? Do you want to force a man to hand himself over to scientists who would run illegal tests on him with the prospect of his death? That’s illegal and crime!”

“Commander, one more word and you’ll face court martial!” Albert snarled.

“Like Kirk? Unless you decide to execute him without a trial,” Genrow barked almost challengingly. “I’m beginning to wonder if isn’t Captain Kirk who is right here and you are the one who should be accused of high crimes. I’ve already seen it with my own eyes, and I - !”

The Vulcan Elder saw the chance instantly. “Every man in this room who supports Admiral Norton’s in his intentions is an accessory to these crimes, including murder,” ‘Selek’ said, looking at every Elite Security man. He saw uncertainty in many eyes. Maybe he could manipulate them. At least Commander Genrow seemed to use his common sense.

Norton apparently looked through Old Spock and raised his voice again. “You will not be able to talk my men into insubordination, Selek, so skip it.” He glanced at Finnegan. “Commander Genrow is under arrest. Keep an eye on him!”

Several protested in murmurs. Obviously, security didn’t share Norton’s point of view, but he could care less. He glared back at a very pale and very enraged Khan. “Surrender or your lover will be the first to lose his life.”

Jim felt icy fear twisting his gut – not for himself, but for Nien. If his beloved delivered himself to Section 31, he would be lost! Dashwood and Conelly would put him into stasis, maybe even back into cryosleep, and would run their experiments on him only to let him die afterward. And even if by some miracle help arrived, it would be too late, because the moment stasis took Nien, there was, most certainly, no way he would ever wake up again.

The mere thought made Jim sick to the core and filled him with a fear he’d never felt before. Even when he entered the warp core chamber was his fear not so sharp as it was right now.

Ignoring the muzzle at his temple he tried to rise up to gain footing, but Norton had seen it coming and tightened his hold on him even more, nearly breaking his arm.

“Stop it, Kirk, or I will shoot you now!” His glance found Khan again. “You have ten seconds to make a decision. Refuse and he dies; surrender, and he’ll live to see court martial.”

Genrow narrowed his eyes. “Don’t you see that this is blackmail?” He addressed his men. “The
"admiral has lost his mind if he thinks this isn't criminal!"

“Shut your mouth, Genrow, or I will silence you!” Finnegan threatened, aiming his phaser at the commander.

“That shows more than enough!” Genrow growled. “Be assured that I will drag your ass to court martial, and the admiral’s, too!”

Khan had neither ears nor eyes for the two rival security men. He didn’t know which emotion ran stronger through his mind and heart – fury or fear. Seeing Jim threatened like this, sensing his mate’s soul in turmoil woke the dark side in him, and his protective instincts flared up like a firestorm. No one would hurt his Jim as long as he was able to take a breath! Never would he allow any harm befall his beloved – not when he could prevent it. There was no doubt that Norton would stay true to his threat; he would kill Jim in cold blood if he, Khan, wouldn’t surrender. He knew what lay ahead for him and the prospect of a repeat of all the days and weeks of semi-consciousness, dread, pain, and torment made him shiver, but he would accept that fate if it meant that Jim would live! And there was still the hope that Wesley had made it and that Barnett and the others would stop Luengo in the next hours. Jim would be safe then. What was his life compared to his Pyāra’s life? Jim came first, no matter what!

Khan was not one to develop tender feelings quickly, or give his heart freely. Besides his closest brothers and sisters, there had been only a few people he had taken a liking to, but Jim was something else. The young man had captured his whole being, was a part of his soul now, and if there was one man in this universe he would give anything for, it was Jim Kirk.

And if Section 31 had him and he put up no resistance, Norton would show less interest in Jim’s friends and Joaquin until, maybe, the tables turned in his favor. He sensed his younger brother’s shock and fear, and he only hoped that Joaquin wouldn’t give himself away by an overly powerful, tell-tale Augment reaction to the situation.

Jim and his eyes met, and he saw those sky-blue depths widening in realization, as Khan made a step forward.

“NO, Nien!” Kirk shouted and tried to wriggle free again, only to have the pressure on his arm increased – and something cracked. Pain shot through his shoulder that he ignored. The hurt in his heart and soul was ten times stronger.

“Seven seconds,” Norton counted icily, and Jim was about to go berserk.

“NO! There is no need for you to surrender, Nien; he’ll kill us one way or the other to keep us quiet. RUN!”

“Five seconds!”

Ice crept through the superhuman’s veins. Norton would shoot! He had gone so far already; there was no going back for the admiral now. And Jim would die! Khan couldn’t let this happen.

“I will not watch you be killed,” he whispered. “I will not witness your death – least of all because of me.”

“Two seconds!”

Jim tensed up; a shiver ran down his spine – half in mortal fear, half in terror for his beloved’s welfare. “No,” he whispered, knowing that couldn’t talk Nien out of his decision.
Pushing McCoy and Spock aside almost gently, Khan stepped forward; his whole being cringed at what would come next, while he offered two security men his hands.

“Just look; you do care!” Norton’s voice was full of mockery, as he bent forwards toward Kirk and taunted, “Your reputation of being good in bed must be true if even this subject feels obligated to protect you after a roll between the sheets.”

“Is there anything in the universe you don’t pull through the dirt?” Uhura hissed, wrapping and arm around Joaquin who was ready to throw himself against the two Elite Security who put the manacles on Khan; the electronic lock clicked closed with dreadful finality.

“Why?” Albert asked innocently. “It’s not me who is dirty enough to sleep even with that cre…”

Using the tiny moment of distraction, Jim threw his head back and hit Norton square in the nose. Something cracked for real this time and the admiral let out a shriek of pain. The same second ‘Selek’, who stood next to Kirk, moved like a flash despite his age and he grabbed the officer’s weapon hand – twisting it. A blast disengaged from Norton’s phaser and hit the opposite wall, leaving a burning mark there. An alert was given as the energy discharge caused the alarm system to go off.

Commander Genrow used his chance too and punched Finnegan as hard as he could – wrestling the other man’s phaser away. “Arrest the admiral!” he shouted.

Elite Security didn’t know, exactly, whom they should obey now. Everything was so much out of place; Norton was their highest ranking superior, who had just put Genrow under arrest. Four of them reacted as they were trained and then the others followed.

They forced the High Minister back with the others with phasers raised. A fifth and a sixth put some distance between Genrow and Finnegan, holding them back. ‘Selek’ lifted both hands. They knew that they could be accused of manhandling a sovereign of a befriended planet they stopped but kept him surrounded.

“That was unwise,” Norton gasped, covering his bleeding nose. Jim had escaped his grip, yet the young captain was now held by two other soldiers. His blue eyes shone with grim satisfaction.

“How does it feel?” he hissed. “And that's not even a fraction of the pain Nien has already been through and is going to face again.”

Norton nodded at Styles, who opened his communicator. “Styles to Excalibur! Be ready to beam the scientists, the prisoner, Commander Genrow, the guards and me up. Commander Genrow is under arrest.”

“Albert.” Carol cut in. She had been shielded during the incident by security. “May I accompany them?” She met his teary gaze and added with loathing in her voice, “I want to be there when this monster is frozen again.”

“Carol,” Jim almost pleaded, “you know the truth. All I told you were the facts. Don’t support those who are the real reason for this mess - all the pain you, the others, Nien and I went through last year.”

“The facts can be twisted, as you well know! I’m sorry, Jim, I like you, but this has to end!”

“Nien’s death won’t bring your father back, Carol! Killing him doesn’t undo what happened last year! For God’s sake, don’t…”
Marcus turned around. “Albert?” she asked.

One of the security personnel had given the admiral a handkerchief that he was pressing against his nose. He nodded again. “Right, I understand you.” Then he glanced at Finnegan. “You have command of Elite Security, for now, Commander. Don’t mess it up again.”

Finnegan saluted and glanced at the young woman. “Doctor Marcus, would you, please? The two gentlemen, too!”

Dashwood and Conelly stepped beside Carol while two guards flanked Genrow.

“One more thing,” Norton said, “Prisoner 3158-17-215, if you give us any trouble, Kirk will die instantly. Keep this in mind!”

“Sick bastard!” Uhura snarled; her gaze flickered to Khan who didn’t answer because there was no need for it. He would do nothing that would endanger his beloved bondmate.

His belly tightened into a hard knot that even his augmented mind could not prevent. These were his last minutes of consciousness; his final seconds with those he loved most. He wanted to turn to Joaquin, wanted to say goodbye, but it would have given the boy’s identity as an Augment away, and he would protect his little brother till the last breath. There was nothing else he could do but send warmth over their shared link before his eyes found Jim’s.

He saw the utter desperation in those sky-blue depths which had so often smiled at him and shone with love. He was grateful for every minute he had with this shining, golden young man – his rescuer in so many ways. There was so much he wanted to tell him, so much he wanted to show and to give him, but it was too late.

As Finnegan ordered, “Excalibur, energize!” Khan mouthed a mute ‘I love you’ to Jim, sending all the love and warmth he felt for his beloved over their shared bond, then the surroundings vanished. The last thing he heard were Jim’s desperate cry of his name; then New Vulcan faded around him…

Jim couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think clearly as the golden light of the transporter surrounded his soulmate. Nien’s name was torn from his lips in pain as the slender, tall figure vanished, and for a moment he thought he was dying again. Then the two security men who still held him, forced him backward to the others.

“Right!” Norton said, lowering his handkerchief. The middle of his face would shine in a dark rainbow of color soon. “And now back to another urgent matter. Where are the other Augments?”

“If ye think one of us will give them away ter watch them being killed, ye’re crazier than I thought!” Scott growled fiercely; his temper flared up even more in his compassion for his hurting friend and in fear for Khan’s life. During the last two weeks he had come to respect the former dictator and now he genuinely liked him.

“I think you will give me the answer I demand,” Norton replied arrogantly and aimed his phaser at Uhura’ left leg.

Spock was in front of Nyota with one quick motion, shielding her, while Bones gasped, “Are you insane? She’s pregnant!”

The first officer knew that this was the humans called ‘a white lie’, because he would have sensed if his future wife was carrying his child. And had he just referred to Uhura as ‘his future wife’ in his mind? Yes, he had!
“Well, that’s regrettable,” Norton shrugged. Finally, one of the other Elite Security team began to use his mind something other than order taking.

“Admiral, I have to admit that I’m beginning to question your methods! Aiming at an unarmed, pregnant woman and blackmailing others with threats of violence against her friends... It's criminal, sir!”

Albert stared at him, knowing that he was overstepping the boundaries even the most loyal security team, but he was running out of options. Luengo had made it very clear that he, Norton, had to return with Khan as a prisoner, Kirk preferably dead, his comrades arrested, and with the other Augments gone forever or frozen and for further experiments. He was facing an impasse because neither the officers nor ‘Selek’ would tell him where to find the Augments. And given the noises outside, he wasn’t only running out of options, he was also running out of time.

His glance had flickered over the officers and the old Vulcan before it rested on Kirk. “But maybe I can kill two birds with one stone.” He aimed at Jim – who was instantly pushed behind McCoy and the young man ‘Selek’ had introduced as an intern.

In the next moment, there was turmoil outside of the office in the hallway. At the same time the door opened and a sharp female voice demanded, “What is the meaning of this?”

Norton whirled around, phaser raised, and his eyes widened as he recognized the old Vulcaness who stood in the entrance and looked at him with granite-hard eyes.

Joaquin, who was more or less in shock as he had been forced to watch his brother get arrested and taken away to perhaps inevitable death, stared wide-eyed at the old woman. For a moment he thought he was seeing a ghost and one name echoed in his mind – ‘Shani’. Then he saw the pointed ears curved elegantly over the pinned-up dark hair and the slanted eyebrows. This wasn’t the old Indian woman who had raised him, Sue, and the other Augment children, but a Vulcan woman who resembled her. And instantly he felt protective of her, even as she created the impression of anything but vulnerable.

Not caring that a weapon was pointed at her, T’Pau stepped nearer; two large, Vulcan males flanked her.

“I repeat, what is the meaning of this? Is this the new decorum of leadership in Starfleet – disrespect of befriended planets by assaulting their government?” Her voice could have cut through stone.

“All due respect, Ma’am, but this is not your business!” Albert replied, feeling cornered as he faced the Vulcan matriarch.

“You are threatening my grandson, his T’hy’la and another member of my family in the seat of government where you forced entry. That makes it my business.” Ice would melt at the sight and sound of her now.

“And you are in no position to do anything about it,” Norton growled, but the sudden very quick expression of satisfaction on the matriarch’s face almost unnerved him – as did her words; she drew nearer.

“Admiral, your sinister dealings were revealed. Members of our Council were informed of your and Admiral Luengo's conspiracy. Proof of the faked attack against the Excalibur, its captain’s betrayal in sending the delegation to their death, and the genocide you ordered of Mr. Singh’s people have been saved. The same goes for the records and reports of the scientists of Gamma 12, which record the illegal tests run on the Augments.”
Norton paled drastically.

“And that’s not all,” ‘Selek’ added. “Professor Dashwood, Dr. Green, and their staff have the order the development of a biological weapon using Khan’s blood – the agent is to be used against the Klingons. I found the faked pathogen you presented to Admiral Barnett at the last meeting, as well as the reports of the real one on Luengo’s computer. I made copies of everything and gave them to our most influential Council members who will not hesitate to share them with the Federation Council and the President if anything goes wrong within these walls.” He lifted a brow and looked at the utterly shocked staff officer. “To use a human phrase, Admiral: Game over!”

Jim couldn’t stop the triumph showing on his face, as he hissed, “We caught you, Norton! You and Luengo! You wanted to kill the admirals who would keep Section 31 down. Luengo who couldn’t step into Barnett’s shoes fast enough. The attack on the Excalibur was staged to eliminate them. But surprise! Your plan failed, and the delegation wasn’t destroyed, and the delegation evacuated in that shuttle survived. Those survivors are on their way to HQ now to haul Luengo’s ass to prison.” He smirked grimly. “You’re done for!”

Albert stared at him. The admirals survived? There was evidence that revealed his and Luengo’s plot? This… This couldn’t be! He looked at ‘Selek’, who simply nodded, and then at T’Pau before he began to laugh. “You’re insane – all of you!”

The old Vulcaness, who stood only a meter away from him, lifted both brows. “I can assure you, Admiral, that we all are in the best of health.”

Lieutenant Alahmba, who was the highest ranking officer of the remaining Elite Security team after Finnegan had beamed aboard the Excalibur and with Genrow arrested, realized that he and the others had, indeed, been taking orders from a madman. Any remaining doubts concerning Kirk’s accusations vanished. Vulcans didn’t lie – least of all T’Pau! And when she said that she had proof of Norton and Luengo’s criminal deeds that she would share with the Federation Council, then he believed her.

Stepping forward, he said forcefully, “Admiral Norton, given the grave accusations against you and the confirmation of those accusations by two Vulcan Elders, I am forced to arrest you. Give me your weapon and surrender, or my men will see to it that you do!”

Norton laughed, knowing that he was facing defeat. Intolerable! Utterly unacceptable! He couldn’t allow this to happen. Still chuckling, he looked around – and the grabbed T’Pau, pressing his phaser to her temple. He had dared to do the same to Kirk, he didn’t hesitate to do the same to the ‘old hag’.

The Vulcans and humans made a step forwards, but he barked “STOP! Stop or she dies!”

ST***ST***ST

“It’s unbelievable that security hasn’t found my records and reports!” Dr. Green sat in one of the lounges on rec-deck 3. His colleagues were with him and two irritated young crew members – cadets – were serving them tea and coffee. It was obvious that the cadets didn’t like the situation and liked it even less as they were forced to act as gophers, but Green could care less. On one hand, he was satisfied that Command had finally shown up and had taken over the Enterprise, on the other hand, he was still furious that Kirk – or really his Vulcan first officer – had stolen his documents. There was not much he had been able to save from Gamma 12 regarding the tests and their results that he and the others had run on the Augments. And now what little remained were gone now, too.

“They are still searching.” His colleague suddenly and jumped up; his eyes wide in shock.
Following his gaze, Green let his cup of coffee drop, while three other scientists leaped out of the seats, swearing.

The two cadets turned around, too, and frowned when they saw white smoke coming from the ventilation duct; then a strange scent reached their noses and within a few moments, they felt nausea wash over them, followed by an incredible sleepiness. They hit the floor seconds later, just like Green and his colleagues.

And they weren’t the only ones. In the corridors, Elite Security had realized instantly what was going on, but there was no way out for them because the anesthetizing gas was everywhere. Some of them tried to give the alert, and a few of them even managed to reach an intercom to inform the bridge before they were rendered unconscious.

In quarters and departments all over the ship, Enterprise crew members dropped to the floors, too, or fell asleep at their stations.

On the bridge, the commanding officer realized what was going on, and ordered the computer to shut down the ventilation systems in command central, but he was not fast enough.

“Sir, all command protocols were transferred to auxiliary!” the lieutenant associate at the science station reported; then white fog filled the bridge. It was too late to hail Norton and inform him. Only a minute after the inner defense system was activated, only four people remained awake aboard the Enterprise. And those four individuals sat in the auxiliary room a discussing what they could do next to help their captain and friends.

“Can’t we just beam them up?” Kevin asked, and Pavel, who manned the science station, looked up.

“No way to tell where zey are. Zere are so many human and Vulcan bio-signals, it would be pure luck if we got zem. We might end up with a bunch of zose guards or some wery confused Vulcans.” He shook his head. “If I knew where High Minister Selek’ office was I could simply beam up anyone who is in zere, but wizout…”

“Even if we had their position, they would land in a transporter room full of sleeping gas,” Sulu cut in. “And unconscious they’re no help at all. And, then what should we do? The moment Norton learns that the Enterprise is no longer in the hands of his guerillas, he'll order the Excalibur to attack us. And the four cannot battle a starship on our own!” His gaze found Keenser, who crouched on the chair in front of the engineering station. “Did you switch off the warp drive to save the cooling system?”

Keenser nodded. “Maneuver nozzles only,” he grumbled.

Sulu made an affirming gesture. The maneuver nozzles were needed to keep the Enterprise in her current position.

Riley, who had a headset on his left ear, having switched to the comms station, lifted a hand. “Excuse me, Lieutenant, but I’m receiving a transmission.” He listened while the atmosphere in auxiliary became tense. “Shit!” Kevin cursed. “It’s Styles. He’s ordering the Enterprise to beam him and a prisoner up.”

“A prisoner? Who?” Sulu demanded, and Pavel murmured under his breath, “It’s gotta be Khan. Zey’re after him because of his super blood.”

“Styles is only mentioning only one name – Commander Genrow. He is under arrest.”

“The guy who was wiz ze admiral on ze bridge and was ordered to accompany him?” Chekov
cocked his head. “It seems some of ze guerillas are beginning to zink and realize zat somezing is very
wrong here!”

“Yes,” Hikaru nodded, “but that also means that they’ve caught Kirk, Khan, and the others. That
they are only beaming one prisoner – maybe Khan – up, tells me that they have other plans for our
friends.” He raced to the science station. “Look for two Vulcans and just a few human life forms
close together, Pavel. Selek and Spock will be with Kirk, so two Vulcan bio-signals near human
ones will give us their location. We’ve got to beam them up. It’s better that they end up unconscious
rather than killed down there.”

“We’ll have to fight sooner or later,” Kevin groaned. “Right, I’ll man navigation. Someone should
switch the impulse drive back online.” He punched some buttons and the auxiliary main screen
sprang to life. “I hate…” He stopped. “Guys?” he said, forgetting any professional decorum for the
moment. “Can someone please tell me that I'm not losing my mind?”

“Haven’t!” Keenser deadpanned, while Sulu and Chekov gasped as they looked at the screen. There,
behind the Excalibur, another ship dropped out of warp – and it wasn’t a Vulcan ship.

ST***ST***ST

“Sir, I caught a transmission between Captain Styles and the Excalibur,” Lieutenant Palmer reported
as he turned his chair around towards the center of the Lexington’s bridge. Wesley and Barnett, who
stood beside the captain’s chair, looked expectantly at him. “He has ordered them to beam him,
security, and a prisoner up.”

“To beam him up?” Barnett repeated. “From where?”

“I guess, from New Vulcan,” Wesley growled.

Richard’s eyes widened. “You think he took Kirk and the others by force, violating every protocol
regarding interplanetary diplomacy by assaulting the place where Kirk and the others found
asylum?” The sheer thought was horrible. A high ranking staff officer of Starfleet breaking one of
the most important laws of the Federation and infringing the sovereignty of a Federation member?
‘They have no scruples regarding the dignity of life! No problem committing murder! Norton and
Luengo will also not hesitate to break any law and all laws that will get them what they want!’ an
inner voice whispered, and he took a deep breath.

“Lieutenant Palmer,” he addressed the comms officer. “Try to contact Vulcan Security, but scramble
the transmission. Ask if they were alerted to - to some intruders wearing Starfleet uniforms. And then
get me T’Pau!”

Wesley frowned. “Shouldn’t we try to contact Selek? He…”

“Kirk was under Selek’s protection, yet it was of no use, as the transmission tells us. I'll bet Selek is
in the same trouble as Kirk and his friends are. And if there is one person involved who can help, it’s
T’Pau!”

Bob cocked his head. “I know that she holds a high position among the Elders, but why do you think
she is involved?”

“She’s the Head of the House of Surak – and Spock is her grandson.” Richard felt amusement rising
in him for just a moment as he watched the astonished face of Wesley; then Palmer’s call drove his
attention away.

“Admiral, I have Mr. Sirel on the line, head of New Vulcan’s security. He told me that there is an
emergency at the seat of government. Starfleet Elite Security forced entry and Admiral Norton, who is among them, told them that war criminals were trying to harm the High Minister.” He looked at the admiral and the commodore. “Mr. Sirel doesn’t believe this statement because T’Pau informed him a minute earlier that High Minister Selek contacted her via his secretary, fearing that Starfleet would disregard diplomatic protocols to get to the refugees.”

“Dammit!” Wesley cursed. “Norton! Luengo sent him to get Jim and the others! I knew that something was amiss when Styles was ordered to Earth.” He shook his head. “Norton must have lost his mind, attacking the Vulcan government.” He glanced at Palmer. “What about T’Pau?”

“I’m still trying to get an answer from her office, sir.”

“God dammit it!” Bob cursed again and rose; stepping towards the helm and navigation station. “ETA to New Vulcan?” he asked Sonik, who answered, “Two minutes, forty-three seconds, sir.”

The door of the turbolift opened, and Ania stepped out. “Permission to enter the bridge,” she said, looking at the two highest ranking officers beside the center seat.

Barnett and Wesley turned around, surprised. “Milady, this is hardly the right place for you as far as your safety is concerned. We are about to face serious trouble.”

Richard didn’t get further, as the Betazoid interrupted him gently, “Admiral, I sense grave turmoil surrounding two extremely troubled minds. One is on New Vulcan; the other one is somewhere nearby, but off the planet!” She pointed at the screen. “I sense dread, fury, and despair; it is growing. The one off planet has… He has mental abilities.”

Bob bit his lips. Given the transmission they caught and regarding his knowledge of Kirk’s and Khan’s relationship, he didn’t need to be a genius to figure out that it had to be the Augment who was brought aboard the *Excalibur*, while Jim was forced to stay behind. Wesley had no clue what happened down in ShiKar, but one thing was clear: He had to do something as quick as possible.

“Sir?” the science officer called. “Our scanners picked up the *Excalibur’s* signature – and the *Enterprise!*”

“They’ve switched off the SDD. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to read her,” Barnett murmured.

Bob nodded with a grim face. “Yes – and that gives me a bad feeling.” He raised his voice. “Mr. Sonik, ready to leave warp in thirty seconds.”

“That brings us damn close to New Vulcan,” the navigator murmured, which elicited a, “Ten thousand three hundred and nine kilometers above the atmosphere, to be precise,” from Sonik.

Wesley rolled his eyes but kept silent.

“The one off planet is… He is anxious but also determined,” Ania said slowly, deep in concentration. “And he worries so much, not for himself but someone else.”


“Definitely!”

“Khan,” the commodore murmured. “He worries for Jim. And I gotta a pretty good idea how Norton was able to force Khan away from New Vulcan. Nothing can make Khan do something he doesn’t want to, despite the fact that he’s being blackmailed. But he has two weak spots – his crew and Jim.”
Barnett rubbed his neck. “They became good friends, huh?”

This time, Wesley had to snort. “You’ve no idea.”

“Leaving warp,” Sonik reported, and they dropped out of subspace. Immediately they saw the two other Constitution class ships soaring side by side above the reddish atmosphere of New Vulcan.

“I got an answer from T’Pau’s office,” Palmer called. “I was told that she’s on her way to the seat of government. She left her office ten minutes ago in a hurry.”

Barnett and Wesley exchanged another glance. The Vulcan matriarch was practically running to the seat of government – it was a showdown! This sounded more than really bad! And maybe they were too late to intervene!

“I’m beaming down with some of your Redshirts!” Richard said when the Lexington entered standard orbit. “Whatever Norton is up to, I’m the only one who can stop him before he damages the relationship between Earth and New Vulcan for good!”

Bob nodded. “I’ll try to find out about the current status and distract Styles. He’s back on the Excalibur; maybe I can buy you some time before he takes action. The boy is in deep water and given his character; he can snap – something I want to prevent.”

“I agree!” Richard answered and left the bridge, while Palmer ordered ten Redshirts into the transporter room.

Wesley pressed his lips together before speaking. “Lieutenant, hail the Excalibur and the Enterprise!” he ordered. Then he looked up at Ania. “Milady, please stay outside of the camera’s range. Styles can’t learn about you and the others survivors just yet. This surprise can be used to our advantage later. I ask you to concentrate on him, though. I want to know what’s going on with him.”

The Betazoid nodded gracefully and quickly climbed the three stairs to the upper deck of the bridge stationing herself near the science station.

The same moment Palmer reported, “Sir, I have… It’s not the Enterprise; it’s the Excalibur for you on the line.”

“Right,” Bob growled. “On screen!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, with the arrival of the Lexington it seems as if the tables could be turned, but our friends are already in deep, deep water – with Khan in the hands of Section 31 again and separated from Jim and the others, and with Jim, Spock & Co. blackmailed by Norton. And, above all, Khan is running out of time, because Dashwood is going to put him back into stasis as soon as possible – means within the next minutes…

Yeah, I know, that was a mean cliffhanger (like always). But cheer up, the next one will be even nastier (*snicker*).
I don’t want to reveal more about what will come in the next chapter, only that you should be prepared for more action, despair and dread.

I hope you liked the new chapter and, as always, I’m curious about your reactions and thoughts.

Until next time

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I’m just back from the vacation and after two weeks of waiting I think it’s about time to publish the next chapter. I know how much on the edge you all are (*snicker*).

Thank you so much for all the nice comments and kudos, even if my cliffhangers are driving you all more or less crazy. And, to make it clear, there are more to come of these evil open endings.

It’s in the middle of the big showdown now, and therefore I don’t want to reveal too much concerning the new chapter. Just plunge into it and have fun.

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 73 – An old trick

As the landing party materialized aboard the *Excalibur*, Styles quickly left the platform and nodded at the four Security men, who had expected them. “Two of you accompany Commander Genrow to the brig,” he ordered. “Commander Finnegan, make certain that the other prisoner reaches medbay without trouble. I’ll come with you.”

Khan’s enhanced mind ran at full speed. If he couldn’t find a way out within the next two minutes, his life was forfeit. Usually he would try to fight, yet this would mean Jim’s death. It was obvious that Styles was waiting for him to make a wrong move – to give Norton a reason to kill Kirk. Nien had been put between a rock and a hard place, but a part of him hadn’t given up. He was escorted out of the transporter room and down the hallway, yet he felt dread rising with every step that drove him nearer to medbay.

The same moment the intercom sprang alive. “Bridge to Captain!”

Frowning Styles answered the call. “Styles here!”
“Li here, Captain. You’d better come to the bridge, sir.”

Lawrence blinked in surprise. “What’s the matter, Lieutenant?”

“We’ve got visitors, sir, and they want to speak with you.”

“Visitors?” Styles had absolutely no clue what the comms officer was talking about.

“Yes, sir. The Lexington just appeared and Commodore Wesley wants to speak with you.”

Khan and Commander Genrow may have been led further down the corridor, yet the Augment’s keen ears heard the exchange of words. The Lexington – help! – was here! Wesley had obviously changed his plans, and had headed directly to New Vulcan. Khan didn’t know if this had been a wise decision, given the fact that the rescued admirals had some very important and urgent spring cleaning in HQ to do. Yet he knew one thing: Wesley would intervene and hopefully prevent Norton from doing Jim any harm. And, maybe, there was the tiny chance for him, Khan, to escape the fate that lay ahead of him.

Nien wasn’t even aware that he’d tensed his muscles to use any opportunity to take action. Conelly, who saw it, frowned and addressed his colleague. “Do you have the sedative with you, Matthew?”

“Yes,” Dashwood nodded and took a hypospray out of his jacket.

Behind the next corner the group stopped and Dashwood stepped to Khan. Their eyes met – and then everything happened at once.

The moment the scientist raised the hypospray to the superhuman’s throat, Carol whirled around – in her hand was also a hypospray which she pressed against the closest Security’s neck, unloading half of it. She kicked the other Redshirt in the groin and grabbed his phaser, setting it to stun.

Genrow, who had come around to the fact that Kirk was right and Norton must have gone mad, didn’t ask why the young woman had suddenly switched sides. He saw his chance and acted. Wearing no handcuffs, he punched one of the guards square the jaw and attacked Finnegan, but the Augment also wasn’t idle.
Khan felt the sharp sting of the hypospray as some of the sedative entered his body; then he shoved the man as hard as he could with his bound hands, before he turned towards Conelly. Raising his right leg, he kicked his tormentor straight in the belly, and Nathan stumbled backwards – in Carol’s direction, who just had stunned two more guards. Using the phaser, she hit him on the temple, while Genrow had seized the phaser of one of the downed guards and stunned two others. The three Elite Security who had beamed up with them opened fire at Khan and the Commander, but while the latter simply ducked, Nien’s body absorbed the stun blasts. And then Carol was beside one of them and emptied the rest of her hyspospray into his throat, while Genrow stunned the second guard.

Finnegan cursed and fled, running down the hallway towards the next intercom. Dashwood, Conelly, and the last remaining Elite soldier followed him. Genrow sent phaser blasts after them, but only caught a security man, as Finnegan and the two scientists vanished around the next corner.

“Dammit!” Carol hissed, putting the hypospray back into the pocket of her coveralls where she had hidden it before. “We have to hurry before they alert the whole ship!”

“Yes, and more importantly before they inform Norton and he follows through with his threat to Jim!” Khan snarled; his eyes shone bright with fury – and fear for his soulmate.

Genrow pulled a remote from his former colleague’s pocket. “What next?”

“Auxiliary Control,” Khan rasped, feeling the sedative slowly creeping through his system. “From there we can take over the ship. The Lexington has arrived and I think Commodore Wesley could use some support from us.” There was a small beep as Genrow activated the remote, and Khan’s handcuffs opened.

While the commander pulled the heavy cuffs away, Khan’s eyes pierced Carol’s. “Pray tell me what this was all about?”

Marcus lifted both brows. “I assumed that Jim and you would eventually be backed into a corner; that Section 31 would stop at nothing to apprehend and silence Jim and his friends. As the Enterprise was boarded I took a strong sedative from medbay and pretended to be on Norton’s side. He’s known me since I was a child, and I knew he would believe me – after all, my father and I happily worked side-by-side for years without me really knowing what was going on.” She bent down and took a second phaser. “I will not forgive you his death, but Jim was right. You really have earned yourself a second chance.”
Genrow hadn’t the slightest idea what the two were talking about, but there was no time to ask for more information. “Quick now!” he whispered, handing the Augment a phaser. “We’ve got to…"

An alert went off and steps drew nearer. Obviously, the two scientists had already informed Styles.

Gripping his phaser, Genrow pressed himself against the wall to secure the corridor. “Go down to support shaft 4 and climb down to Deck 8. Auxiliary Control is there! Hurry, I’ll cover your backs!”

Khan didn’t try to talk Genrow out of it. There was no time for useless nobility – Jim’s life was still at stake and nothing, besides his family’s safety, mattered more to him. Nodding at the man, he ran down the hallway, Carol at his side. Listening carefully for anything, he threw a glance at the young woman’s direction. She had planned this from the beginning when the Enterprise was seized? This whole scene down on New Vulcan had been nothing more than one big act of theater? Deep respect woke in him for his now-dead enemy’s daughter. Even he hadn’t seen through her true intention.

He felt nausea washing over him and realized that Dashwood and Conelly must have changed the composition of the sedative because it had already begun affecting him. Pushing this unpleasant thought aside, he stopped in front of the supply shaft and stuffed the phaser in his waistband at his back.

“Usually I would say ‘ladies first’, but given the possibility that we could face some very irritated people on Deck 8, I’ll go first.” Not waiting for a reply Khan climbed into the shaft; Carol followed him without hesitation.

They descended the ladders in silence and reached Deck 8 a minute later. Khan, fighting a new wave of dizziness, glanced through the grate that blocked their way. Crew members raced down the hallways and Khan realized that they couldn’t continue until the corridor was less crowded. Fighting down the urge to take action and ignoring the increasing effect of the sedative, he remained in his squatting position – a tiger ready to strike…

ST***ST***ST

Captain Lawrence Styles sat down in his captain’s chair; his mind was in turmoil. What was the Lexington doing here? Shouldn’t she be near Borderland, limping to the next space dock to be repaired after those idiots had damaged her nearly beyond repair? And what about Wesley? Luengo had told Styles that the commodore had been badly injured in the incident, but the man who appeared on the screen looked neither sick nor injured. Rather the opposite. Wesley looked fit like a fiddle – a very grim fiddle given his expression.
“Commodore Wesley,” he greeted respectful. “I heard that you were injured in an incident your Engineering department had sustained. I’m glad to see that that report was…exaggerated.”

“Captain Styles,” Bob nodded curtly to him, his dark eyes were hard. “The last time I heard from you, you were ordered back to Earth by Admiral Luengo. Pray tell me what are you doing on New Vulcan?”

“A secret mission, Commodore. Certainly you understand that I can’t give you any details. I got my orders directly from Admiral Luengo.”

A hard line appeared around Wesley’s mouth. “Oh, I’m sure that you got your orders from him – exactly like the others concerning a past ‘secret mission’ that ended not so gloriously for those you were supposed to protect.” He didn’t give Styles time to respond. “Where is Admiral Norton?”

There was a twitch in Styles’ face, before he asked. “How do you know that Admiral Norton is here?”

“I don’t have to answer to you, Captain!” Wesley said sharply. “Is Admiral Norton on the planet?”

“Yes, he’s visiting the Vulcan government,” Styles replied carefully.

For a moment fury shone in Wesley’s eyes. “You chois[ed an interesting way to describe the assault down in New ShiKar.” In the background Lin and Taylor exchanged knowing glances. “Who is the prisoner you beamed aboard?”

The same moment Finnegan’s voice sounded through the speaker of the center seat’s armrest; overriding the transmission from the Lexington. “Finnegan to Bridge!”

Lawrence began to realize that a) the commodore seemed to know more than he should and b) that something bad must have happened, because Finnegan used the internal emergency frequency.

“One moment please, Commodore, I’m receiving an emergency call from one of our departments,” he said, still clinging to the polite façade he played so well.
Signaling to Li to cut off the audio transmission, he answered the hail. “Styles here!”

“Captain, the Augment has escaped.” Before Styles could express his flaring fury, Sean added, “Dr. Marcus betrayed us, sir. She’s still on Kirk’s side, and attacked my men with a sedative. Genrow helped her, as did the Augment.”

“Dashwood here, Captain!” another voice sounded. “I was able to inject the Augment with a little of the sedative I’d developed to incapacitate him. He didn’t get the full dose, but I think it will be enough to slow him down soon.”

Styles groaned and looked at Li. “Yellow alert!” Then he addressed the intercom again. “Get them, Finnegan. I don’t care what happens to Dr. Marcus or Genrow, but get them!”

“I’d love to make that bitch pay – and especially the creature. There’s still an outstanding score to settle between us for Gamma 12.”

Styles shook his head impatiently, even if Sean couldn’t see him. “The scientists need him alive, so don’t shoot him! Take as many men as you need, but find him and the two others!”

“Aye, sir. Finnegan out!”

Styles turned his attention back to the main screen and realized that Wesley had left the center seat on the Lexington’s bridge. The empty chair now took up the whole of the screen. Lawrence frowned. What was the meaning of that now? For a moment he was tempted to call Norton to inform him of the newest turn of events, but before he could come to a decision, Wesley was back online. For now he’d have to play along – and hopefully he would get the chance to report to Norton of the Augment’s attempted escape. It would mean Kirk’s end, and even if a tiny voice in the back of Styles’ mind protested against that dishonorable thought, he really looked forward to seeing his rival eliminated once and for all.

ST***ST***ST

Wesley had gone to the comms station as Palmer informed him that he had reached the Enterprise. The communications officer carefully watched his station to inform the commodore as soon as Styles opened the audio channel again. Bob used a headset and glanced at the little screen in front of him which showed the scarred face of none other than Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu, Kirk’s helmsman who
had been badly hurt during the last battle with the renegade Klingons. What was going on aboard the Enterprise that this man, who obviously belonged to bed in medbay, was hailing him? In addition, Sulu wasn’t on the main bridge. From behind him, it looked a lot like the auxiliary power room.

“Commodore Wesley,” the Asian man’s voice sounded through the headset. “Glad to see you, sir. You came just in time.”

“Lieutenant, what the hell is going on over there? If Kirk’s on New Vulcan then why are you…?”

“Sir, we were boarded by Admiral Norton and more than a hundred of the Elite Security Forces, who grounded the whole crew, arrested most of Dr. McCoy’s staff, and only allowed a few engineers to remain on duty. Ensign Chekov and Ensign Riley managed to escape as I did with Mr. Keenser’s help. We are in Auxiliary now and have activated the internal defense systems. We’ve put everyone to sleep with knock-out gas. Auxiliary is the only room that hasn’t been infiltrated by it.”

Wesley’s eyes widened. “Well done, Lieutenant,” he wheezed. “And you were boarded?” He just couldn’t believe it.

“Yes, in best pirate style,” Sulu said grimly.

“Commodore, Pavel Chekov speaking.” Beside the lieutenant the boyish face of the young navigator appeared. “Sir, before Mr. Riley and I were escorted from ze bridge, Admiral Norton ordered Captain Styles and ‘two scientists’ to be ready to beam down to New Vulcan to get ze keptin and zeir ‘test subject’ – meaning Khan. He also spoke of ze step he had to take now zat he never wanted to.”

“He assaulted the seat of government,” Wesley nodded. “Barnett is on his way down to prevent worse.”

The two young men grinned at him. “So Admiral Barnett made it – and he is here?” Sulu, pleased, asked and Bob made an affirming gesture.

“Yes – and hopefully the vice president and the other two admirals are hauling Luengo’s ass from his chair at this moment.”

“Commodore, Captain Styles has come back on audio,” Palmer murmured. “Ours is still switched
off.”

Wesley nodded and glanced at Sulu. “Hold the line, Lieutenant.” Then he set the headset down and walked to Ania. He didn’t need to ask her because she murmured,

“He is very nervous and angry. A little bit more pressure and not a little irritated. He feels caught, but doesn’t want to admit it. And he fears something he’s just learned of.”

Bob snorted. “And I think I know what that is – better to say, who he fears. Khan is always good for a surprise – just like Jim.” He returned to the center seat while signaling to Palmer to switch on the audio transmission as well.

“Is there some trouble aboard your ship, Captain Styles?” he asked, not able to keep the taunting tone from his voice. “Maybe a certain Augment is giving you a hard time?”

This time Lawrence’s expression gave him away, before he controlled himself again. “Augment, sir?”

Wesley stood taller. “Captain Styles, we both know what’s happening down on the planet and aboard your ship. I’ll beam over with some Security personnel. I advise you to put up no resistance and -”

“What are you talking about, Commodore? You sound like you wanted to arrest me.”

Bob gritted his teeth at facing so much impertinence. “Correct! You are under arrest, Styles! We know you’re a part of Luengo’s and Norton’s conspiracy and we know all about it. I also know that you kidnapped Khan, who has been granted asylum by the Vulcans – and that Norton is about to kill High Minister Selek, Kirk and his officers! The game is up, boy, and you -”

The transmission was interrupted and a second later Sonik called from the helm, “Sir, they are activating their shields.”

“I sense a lot of rage,” Ania said.
“He wants to *attack* us?” Palmer gasped disbelieving.

“I’ve no clue if this idiot is bluffing or serious,” Bob groused. “Red alert, shields up, battle stations. If Styles thinks he can outsmart me he has to get up much earlier in the morning!” He looked at Palmer. “Inform Admiral Barnett what’s going on here and .”

“Sir, the *Enterprise* has activated her impulse drive that is now on stand-by. She’s also raised her shields, sir,” Sonik reported as calmly as if he were talking about the weather.

Bob shook his head in amazement. “Sweet Lord, the *Enterprise* is only being manned by two novices, an injured helmsman and a little Royalan at the moment, and they want to *join* the fight? Kirk’s friends are as crazy as he is!”

“Sir, Admiral Barnett’s landing party doesn’t answer the hail,” Palmer reported, and Wesley took a deep breath to calm his fraying nerves. What the hell was going on down on New Vulcan?

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Albert Norton heard his speeding heart in his ears, overwhelmed by the situation he was about to lose. T’Pau didn’t put up any resistance, yet she was stiff as a stick, small and old as she was, Norton knew that she was at least as strong as he – maybe even stronger. Pressing the muzzle of his phaser harder against her temple, he let his flickering gaze drift over the others.

He knew that he wouldn’t get through this – that after this stunt he would face consequences even Luengo wouldn’t be able to protect him from. But he couldn’t think clearly anymore. All that mattered was that he had to get out of here – and with Selek, Kirk, and his friends – latter was better off dead, but this could be arranged later. And he would do anything to prevent defeat.

“Lieutenant Alahmba,” he barked at the current commanding officer of Elite Security, “Hail the *Excalibur* and…”

“You will hail no one, Lieutenant!” another male voice said from the entrance. A voice Norton had thought he would never hear again. He felt like he’d turned to a pillar of salt.

“Admiral Barnett!” Jim’s outburst of surprise and relief distracted Norton – and T’Pau, even old as she was, reacted. Elbowing Norton in the belly with as much strength as she could muster, he
wheezed and doubled over. The old Vulcaness freed herself with a determined jolt the moment Norton tried to grab her again.

This was all Jim needed. Quick and determined as a panther on the hunt he pushed Bones away, leaped forwards, and threw himself against Norton. Joaquin was at his side; his protective instincts drove him towards the old Vulcaness who resembled his foster mother so much. The second Kirk attacked Norton, Weiss reached T'Pau. “Down, Ma'am!” he yelled and pushed her to the floor, throwing himself above her to shield her.

T'Pau’s two companions rushed forwards, covering the two on the ground with their bodies, while the *Lexington*’s Redshirts took action, too.

Spock, Scott, and McCoy attacked the five of the Elite Security who were utterly confused about what had just happened, but they began to defend themselves as the *Enterprise* officers, taking no risk and went for them. Uhura also didn’t hold back and showed one of the soldiers that it was a big mistake to underestimate her petite, slender form.

Selek had no problem acting as well. For a moment, old memories came back – memories of the many situations he and Jim had fought side by side – and these old pictures gave him more strength than he thought possible. He punched one of the Security personnel in the jaw, and as the man whirled around with the momentum of his swinging ax, Selek nerved pinched him before he turned his attention towards Alahmba. For a moment they only looked at each other, then the human nodded, lifted both hands and raised his voice.

“Attention, Elite team; stand down!” he shouted, and the two Security men still on their feet, obeyed instantly. They were secured by Scott and Spock a moment later.

Kirk and Norton were still fighting each other – Jim with the fury of righteousness, and Albert with the wrath of a man used to getting his way but facing defeat now. Jim punched him with all his strength, showing no mercy as he hit the already broken nose again. His enemy reeled back, screaming in pain and while his knees gave out. Jim was on him like a flash. Forcing Norton’s arms back he snarled, “Surrender!”

The whole ordeal had only lasted not more than thirty seconds before it was over again. The second chief of the *Lexington*’s Security and one of his subordinates grabbed Norton, hauled him to his feet, and secured him between them relieving Kirk, who quickly looked around, checking his friends and Selek.

Joaquin saw that the danger was over and moved into a sitting position; looking concerned at the old
woman. “Are you okay, Ma’am?” he asked quietly. He couldn’t know it, but he was one of the very few people in the whole universe who ever saw T’Pau with a thunderstruck expression which she quickly schooled back into the stoic Vulcan mask as she recognized her lapse.

“I am well,” she said, observing the young human beside her. He was far too strong for a Terran and during the contact she also sensed a vivid mind that seemed to hold mental abilities. Without asking she knew that he was an Augment, too, yet there was not aggression in him – only confusion, distress and fear. “Thank you for your effort,” she added politely.

Weiss rose, saw the two other Vulcans looking at him with raised brows, and he offered the Vulcaness a helping hand. Hearing a gasp from one of her assistants, he remembered that it was a taboo on this planet to touch someone without permission, but he couldn’t draw back his hand in time because the long, slender, aged fingers of the woman wrapped around his own. Carefully, he helped her to her feet. He thought he sensed little electric shocks coming from her hand; confused, he frowned. Then the contact was broken. The Vulcaness looked at him the last time and drew her attention to the others.

Barnett bowed quickly in front of T’Pau and then ‘Selek’. “Milady, High Minister, my sincerest apologizes for the mess Admiral Norton made. At least none of your people were hurt.”

“This is a good message,” Spock Prime nodded tensely with suppressed anger in his eyes.

Richard’s attention was driven to the traitor, and his face darkened. “Albert Norton, in the name of the United Federation of Planets you are under arrest!” Barnett’s voice sounded strong and firm through the office. “You are accused of murder, more than twenty attempts at murder, conspiracy against Starfleet and the Federation, attempted genocide, ordering the development of illegal biological weapons, illegal testing, slavery, and assault on the New Vulcan seat of government…”

“Add threat of violence, the threat of murdering my comms officer, blackmail, hostage-taking of the Lady T’Pau, and kidnapping to the list!” Jim growled; his face flushed with rage. “And the seizure of my ship and taking my crew hostage, too!”

Barnett stared at him, shocked. “What?”

Joaquin went rigid as he heard the name of the old woman he protected. This was T’Pau – Spock’s grandmother and the matriarch of his clan – of New Vulcan? And he pushed her to the floor overstepping a taboo among the people here? Oops! Then his thought was driven back to the only thing that mattered to him. His brother! His gaze wandered to the dark-skinned man in his late forties who was the admiral, Noo, and Jim counted on.
Norton could only stare at Barnett. “How is it you’re still alive!” he demanded, realizing that neither T’Pau nor Kirk had bluffed when they told him that Luengo’s plan had failed completely. And he also knew that the game was, indeed, over.

“But there are still honorable women and men in the fleet, who stay true to their oaths and their comrades,” Barnett snapped; his face and voice betrayed his disgust towards the man he once called a friend.

A Redshirt pushed through the crowd to him then with a communicator in hand.

“Admiral, I have Commodore Wesley for you. He's been trying to reach us for a minute or so,” said Lieutenant Haong, one of the Lexington’s Redshirts who accompanied Barnett. He handed his superior the communicator and then they heard Bob’s voice,

“Admiral? Is everything all right down there? I was informed that Norton had assaulted the…”

“Norton is under arrest; Kirk and his officers are well, so are Mr. Selek and the Lady T’Pau, yet…”

“Bob!” Jim shouted, relieved to hear his friends and mentor’s voice. Maybe there was still hope for Khan. Hastily, he stepped beside Barnett and grabbed the admiral’s wrist to pull the communicator nearer to his mouth, ignoring his superior’s protesting snort at the rough handling. “Bob, they beamed Nien aboard the Excalibur a few minutes ago. Dashwood and Conelly are there now, too – and as much as I understood, they’ve got Nien’s cryotube with them. They blackmailed him into surrendering, or he’d have to watch me being killed by Norton. If they put him back in stasis or even cryosleep, then… You know that he will not survive it!”

Aboard the Lexington, Wesley raised both brows. If there had been only the tiniest doubt left about his protégée’s feelings for the Augment, they vanished completely. Kirk was half mad with worry for ‘Nien’. “I know,” Bob answered tensed, “but just right now I can’t do anything. The Excalibur has raised her shields and readied her weapons. We and the Enterprise are on red alert, but…”

“Section 31 has my ship, so you’re outnumbered!” Deep concern edged the young captian’s voice.

“Not anymore, Jim,” Bob replied. “Four of your boys were able to escape; they activated the inner defense systems and sent the intruders and the crew to bed so to speak.”
In New ShiKar the two Spocks lifted their left eyebrow in mild surprise, while Bones in the background groaned, “Superb! I don't have enough headache pills for this!”

Kirk ignored him. “My ship is no longer in Section 31’s hands? Who…”

“Sulu, Chekov, Keenser and an ensign who goes by the name Riley. They’re in Auxiliary right now; they took command of the Enterprise!” Wesley told him, and for a moment Jim felt a wave of relief and sighed deeply, while Scotty felt a hint of pride that Keenser was among them who kicked Section 31 in the ass.

“They’ll get a medal from me,” Jim stated. Then his attention turned back to the most important matter. He thought he could feel Nien’s dread like a faint echo in his mind, and it drove him almost crazy. “Bob, we’ve got to do something. If Nien learns that my life is no longer at stake, he will make an attempt to flee.”

“The handcuffs they put on him are too strong – even for him,” Bones grumbled, coming nearer. “They restrained him last year, remember?”

“And Carol Marcus betrayed us and beamed up with Styles, Khan, and the others. She wants nothing more than to see Khan suffer. That lowers the lad’s chances,” Scotty murmured, feeling miserable.

“God dammit, we’ve to get him out of there! I will not stand by and watch him sacrifice himself for nothing!” Jim looked ready to tear his hair out; his face was white as a sheet. If he could reach his beloved somehow, maybe over their shared link, he could make him realize that he – Kirk – was no longer in danger. But for that Jim would have to feel utterly calm and comfortable which was impossible at the moment.

“Kirk, calm down!” Barnett tried to reason with the young captain, surprised by the intense fear Kirk showed for the Augment’s health. Right, they had become good friends as he heard, but these reactions were a bit over the top. Kirk sounded as if his life would end if something should happen to Khan.

Jim ignored Barnett again and turned towards ‘Selek’ with desperation shimmering in his eyes. “Is the transporter here powerful enough to beam us up to the Excalibur?”
“Yes, but with her shields up you cannot beam into her,” Old Spock reminded him softly, compassion in his gaze.

Jim threw his head into the neck. Every second they wasted brought Nien closer to death. “Bob, can’t you order Styles to drop the shields?” he called.

A snort was heard, followed by the words, “He interrupted the transmission before he readied his ship for battle. He will not listen to me – or anyone now.”

“See, Kirk, you’re at a dead end concerning your Augment pet!” Norton sneered, and Jim had to use all his self-control not to punch the man again. Scott wasn’t that moderate and stepped beside the admiral, lifting his fist threateningly.

“One more word and yer broken nose won’t be the only thin’ that has ter be treated!”

Barnett shot him a warning glance, yet he could understand the engineer. He wanted to beat the shit out of Norton after all he and the others had been through, but, of course, he wouldn’t do such a thing.

Instead of giving into the temptation to punch the treacherous admiral, Richard simply said, “Well done, Albert, you delivered the inventor of the SDD to a few sick scientists, who have nothing better to do than herald his death the moment they put him into stasis or cryosleep. You did Starfleet and the whole Federation a big service!” he taunted.

Norton stared at him, thunderstruck. “Khan? Khan is the inventor of the SDD? He is this Evan Brendon?” His voice became shrill, and Barnett couldn’t help but giving him a mocking glare.

“Yes. And if you had used your mind for something other than plotting conspiracies and climbing the career ladder with as little effort as possible, you would have realized it days ago, you fool!” Right, Barnett himself hadn’t gotten the right idea about ‘Evan Brendon’ and it had been up to Wesley to tell him this fact, yet – afterward – Richard knew that he would have figured out himself given some time.

Jim didn’t listen to the two men. His mind worked furiously searching for a solution while he bit his lips. His eyes found the pleading ones of Joaquin, who still stood beside T’Pau trembling slightly.
Spock Prime watched the younger vision of his T’hy’la; then he went rigid. Memories of another near no-win-scenario from his timeline sprang to his mind – a situation that also involved Khan, not as an ally but as a deadly enemy. Jim had one of his unorthodox yet genius ideas that saved the day. And the same trick would do it again!

Telling something to one of T’Pau’s companions in Vulcan tongue, the man nodded and vanished; then ‘Selek’ addressed Barnett while he quickly stepped towards him. “Admiral, I need the Excalibur’s prefix code.”

Richard turned towards him; his eyes widened. “As a civilian, you shouldn’t even know about the prefix code’s existence.”

“We both know that I wasn’t always a civilian. And concerning the prefix code, I know how to get it for the Excalibur by using her registration number, but it would cost too much time – time Mr. Singh doesn’t have.”

Kirk was utterly thunderstruck. “What do you have in mind? You can only use the prefix code from one Starfleet ship to another,” he said to Selek, who simply lifted a brow.

“I know. I will beam aboard the Enterprise and force the Excalibur to lower her shields and switch off her weapons with the prefix code. Ask Mr. Sulu for the exact coordinates of Enterprise’s Auxiliary so that I can beam up, and tell him to be ready to drop the shields for this transport.”

Four Vulcan security personnel stepped into the room, and ‘Selek’ pointed at Norton. His voice was calm, yet icy as he ordered, “Take the admiral to preventive detention; four guards shall watch him.”

The guards took Norton between them, who spat at Barnett. “You haven’t won yet!”

“On the contrary, I think we have already won!”

Selek was already on his way from the office; Jim and the others were on his heels. Barnett followed him after a short, polite ‘farewell’ to T’Pau and then he called Wesley to inform him that six dozen Redshirts should make themselves ready to board the Excalibur. Until now Styles hadn’t done anything since raising the shields – he didn’t even answer the attempted hails. No one knew what was going on aboard the Excalibur – an unnerving situation.
The Starfleet officers, the young Augment, and the two Vulcans headed through the building; they heard several discussions in Standard but also in Vulcan, and some of them were heated. Obviously, Starfleet’s Elite Security had problems accepting orders from the Lexington’s Redshirts. That their mission turned out to be an illegal one and that some of their superiors were already arrested made them nervous.

Jim couldn’t care less. His mind was repeating over and over again one sentence like a mantra. ‘Hold on, Nien; I’m coming! Hold on!’ Scrambling the frequency of the communicator Scotty gave him, he hailed the Enterprise, while rushing through the corridors.

“Sulu here, Captain!” the helmsman’s voice sounded through the little device.

“Hikaru! Bold move, man! I’ll hug you guys when I’m back!” Kirk said, running around the next corner beside Selek.

“Oh, we’d happy wiz an added day of liberty, Keptin!” Pavel called from the background. Normally, Jim would have grinned at that, but not now.

“Consider it done, whiz kid!” he said, before he continued, “Sulu, give us the exact coordinates of the Enterprise’s Auxiliary and lower the shields on my signal. Selek is coming aboard. Give him anything he needs!”

“Aye, Captain. One moment, please!” Sulu affirmed, knowing, of course, who ‘Selek’ truly was.

They entered the Vulcan transporter room, and Jim waved Joaquin to his side. “Accompany Selek back to the Enterprise and…”

“Jim!” raged the young Augment, shocked. “You can’t send me away! Noo…”

“You are not trained for engagement today. You have never used a phaser nor do you know about the other weapons of this century. You would be in danger, and I can’t watch out for you, my companions and myself. You’ll be safe abo…”

Weiss shook his head wildly. “You can’t demand I sit back and watch other fighting for my brother’s life!”
Kirk groaned. “Listen, I know how you feel. I have experienced it too often, and I understand you, I do. But I also gave your brother my word – I swore to him that you’d be safe on my watch. I’ll do everything in my power to get him out. I’ll rather die than let him down, but I only can concentrate on the mission when I’m not distracted. I need you out of harm’s way.” He placed both hands on the boy’s shoulders; his gaze was stern, yet full of understanding. “Go with Selek. It will hurt Nien beyond imagination if something happens to you. He loves you so much. What do you think will happen to him if he lives but finds you were injured or, worse, killed? He already lost so many of those who are dear to him. Don’t make the list longer.” Urgently he glanced in those big, fearful brown eyes.

Joaquin bit his lips. Every fiber of his being urged him to go with the others, to fight for his brother – do anything to rescue him, yet his clear, logical mind realized that Jim was right. He had no clue about today’s weapons or how to fight aboard a starship, where any misdirected shot could mean the death for all if it pierced the hull.

“Jim is right. Come with me!” ‘Selek’ said from one of the transporter pads he had already stepped on before he glanced at Barnett. “Admiral, the code please!” It was a demand, not a request.

Barnett groaned. Giving a ship’s prefix code to a civilian was against Starfleet protocol, yet this was an emergency, and for such a situation the code had been created. “I’m coming with you.”

“Your presence will be needed aboard the *Excalibur,*” ‘Selek’ interrupted him sharply. “Even if Styles would disobey you, his officers and crew won’t as soon as they learn that you are alive – and therefore still the legal Chief in Command.” He turned towards Jim again. “I will hail you the moment I have overridden the *Excalibur*’s commands, and you can beam aboard.”

“Okay!” Kirk nodded, while he pushed Joaquin gently towards the transporter platform. “Quick. Every second we waste is a second less to save your brother.”


“We need our phasers,” Scott said, and ‘Selek’ made an affirming gesture.

“I already sent for them.”

“Captain?” Sulu’s voice sounded through Kirk’s communicator. “I have the exact coordinates. High
Minster Selek will materialize at the science station.”

The Elder lifted a brow. Having him materialize at the science station – even in that one in Auxiliary – was a sentimental gesture by Sulu. Spock Prime recognized and appreciated it. Humans! In earlier times they were a riddle, but not anymore. His Jim had taught him well.

The Vulcan at the transporter console listened to the coordinates and programmed them. Kirk looked at ‘Selek’, feeling once again deep warmth and gratitude towards the older vision of his T’hy’la. “Be careful,” he murmured.

‘Selek’ nodded, pushing aside the Vulcan denial of something so illogical than believing in fortuity. “Good luck, Jim!”

Barnett took a deep breath. “The code is 1-7-0-4-3,” he grumbled, knowing that an exchange of the Excalibur’s prefix code would be necessary.

Jim raised his communicator back to his mouth. “Sulu? Drop the shields – NOW!”

“Energize!” Spock Prime ordered the same moment, and he and the young Augment vanished in the golden light of the transporter.

Several Redshirts entered the transporter room led by another Vulcan. He carried five phasers that he handed the officers. The tension in the room was almost unbearable.

Barnett turned towards Kirk and his officers, glaring at them. “It seems I only saved your necks so that you can put them in danger again.” Then his glance found Jim. “To whom was the boy referring when he talked about his brother? Did Norton kidnap more people?”

“Joaquin meant Khan,” Jim explained quietly; his nerves were on edge now. “He is Khan’s younger brother.”

Richard gasped and pointed at the transporter platform. “You mean this boy is an Augment – one of Khan’s crew?”
“Yes,” the young captain nodded absently; his thoughts were only with Nien now.

“How many of his crew has been woken up?” Richard asked, shocked. And then he frowned as he received gruff glares from McCoy, Scott, and Uhura.

“Joaquin is the only one,” Bones grumbled. “And don’t worry, he’s one of the most gentle and nicest guys I've met in a long time.” He set his phaser to stun. “I hate using these damn things! They should be forbidden!”

Jim was pacing up and down like a caged tiger; every second seem too long for him – and passed too quickly for Nien…

Khan and Carol crouched behind the grate of the ventilation shaft. An eternity seemed to pass – an eternity in which the superhuman didn’t fear for himself, but for Jim. What if Styles had been able to inform Norton about the prisoners’ escape before Wesley could take action? What if Norton carried out his threat and shot…

No! Even with the distance, Nien was certain that he would have felt the bond ripping apart if Jim were killed. His beloved was still alive, and Khan even thought he could feel a hint of wrath and worry that was not his own. Jim was alive! This much he knew – and it gave him the strength to hold on.

Khan listened carefully for any noises in the hallway below him; when his keen hearing didn’t catch any steps nearby, he whispered, “All clear; follow me!” He released the grate, held it in one hand and slid out of the shaft. Jumping soundlessly to the ground, he helped Carol down, put the grate back and ran towards Auxiliary. He simply knew that even Wesley couldn't successfully complete the mission – not with the Enterprise in Section 31’s hands, and Kirk and the others held hostage.

They slowed down a few meters away from the door the moment they heard the internal alert change to red alert. Styles’ voice sounded from all speakers. “Battle stations, battle stations; all hands man your battle stations. This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill!”

Carol gasped. “He won’t attack the Lexington! He can't do this.”
Khan only snorted. “He can and he will,” he growled. “Styles has nothing to lose anymore and a lot to gain. He is cornered; he will stop at nothing. The latter is up to us.” He raised his phaser as he stepped into the range of the door’s sensors; Carol closed up to his side, holding her weapon.

The door opened, and three surprised faces looked at them. They were stunned even before the first hit.

“Quick now,” Khan ordered, and as Carol rushed to the controls, he destroyed the manual opening lever on the outside with the help of his phaser before he sealed the door, programming it with a new code. He felt the sedative’s effects stronger now as he began to sweat, and for a moment he had to concentrate to stay upright. Then he reached the engineering console to determine how to switch the command protocols to Auxiliary. He had developed a process for the Vengeance to do this in the shortest time possible, but the technology wasn’t aboard the *Excalibur*. He needed time to learn how to override the safety protocols – and then he and Carol whirled around as banging from the door was heard.

They knew exactly what that meant; Elite Security had arrived. For now, the door held them, but this would change if someone how to cut through it with phasers. And they would. Khan didn’t want to imagine what would happen then.

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‘Selek’ and Joaquin materialized in *Enterprise*’s Auxiliary, and the Vulcan was instantly bombarded with memories. Yes, the room looked different from the second bridge of his *Enterprise* all those decades ago – the enhanced technology of the future, Starfleet got images from the time after the Nerada appeared for the first time twenty-seven years prior. But many things were still the same.

His gaze found a wide grinning Chekov, a very young Kevin Riley, a curious looking Keenser and then Hikaru Sulu, whose face wore the still healing scars of the battle with the renegade Klingons. But Spock Prime was confident that McCoy would successfully remove these scars. After all, the good doctor was a genius in his department!

“High Minister Selek!” Sulu greeted him with a quick smile and a not too well done ta’al (the Vulcan greeting gesture) before he nodded in compassion at Joaquin. “Don’t fear, my friend. Jim will get your brother out!”

“I hope so,” the augmented boy whispered; he wrapped his arms around his slim frame, cursing the circumstances once again. He couldn’t do anything to help ‘Noo’.
In the meantime, ‘Selek’ hurried to the navigation console, where Chekov made instantly room for him. “Our shields are raised again, sir,” he reported dutifully as if reporting to the Vulcan’s younger self.

“Very good,” ‘Selek’ replied as he sat down. A moment later he was surrounded by four very curious young humans and one Royalan. “Gentlemen, this is knowledge you shouldn’t have before you receive captain stripes!” He made no move to send them away.

For two seconds his attention was directed at the faintly familiar instruments; then his long, aged fingers began to move quickly over the buttons.

Sulu frowned. “You're increasing the computer’s firewall.”

“Yes,” ‘Selek’ nodded without interrupting his work.

Chekov pursed his lips. “You’re trying to hack into ze Excalibur’s databank,” he stated surprised a moment later.

“Correct,” the Eldar affirmed, sounding very much like the Spock they knew.

“The prefix code!” Sulu gasped, as he realized what the old Vulcan was up to.

“The what?” Kevin asked confused.

“The prefix code. Only the admirals and the captains have them. Every ship has its own that can be used when a ship falls into enemy hands or some other catastrophe. After you the input of the code you can switch the other ship’s command protocols to your own console – as long as the enemy doesn’t use the code to get the control back.”

Fascinated Pavel, Kevin, Keenser, and Joaquin had listened to Sulu’s explanation and then watched ‘Selek’ punch something into the computer, using the spare keyboard on the right. “How is it you know the Excalibur’s prefix code?” Hikaru asked, baffled.
The Elder didn’t look up from his task, while he answered, “You should forget everything you see here, Mr. Sulu. The same goes for the other gentlemen. Admiral Barnett is upset enough that he had to give the code to me. He would be outraged if he learns that I had to share it with other officers and a civilian,” ‘Selek’ deadpanned, feeling something close to satisfaction when he got the access he needed. “Mr. Riley,” he addressed Kevin, who eyes widened. How did the Vulcan High Minster know him?

“Yes, sir?” he replied nervously.

“You are interested in communication, right?”

Kevin’s eyes were wide as saucers. “How do you know that…?”

‘Selek’ interrupted him. “Then you are familiar with the comms station – at least with its most important functions. Inform Captain Kirk that he and his companions will be ready to beam aboard the Excalibur in forty seconds.” He looked up at Pavel. “Mr. Chekov, man the science station and locate the coordinates for Captain Kirk; he needs to be beamed aboard the Excalibur. Given the fact that the scientists have Khan and want to put him into stasis, I assume that this will take place in or close to medbay in the case something goes wrong. Khan is vital to them – his blood that is. They will not risk his life. Give the captain the coordinates of deck 5 near medbay.”

“Aye, sir!” Pavel all but raced to the science station.

“Mr. Keenser, please go to the engineering station and watch the read-out of the warp core's security scanners. As far as I understood Mr. Scott, the Enterprise's main drive requires urgent repair, and I do not want any unpleasant surprises. Make sure that the deflector shields are at 90 percent at least.”

The Roylan nodded and climbed the stairs to the higher part of the bridge.

“Mr. Sulu, be ready to make a quick maneuver with the Enterprise to distract Styles. The busier he is when the captain beams aboard, the better!” It was so natural to give commands again – to refer to Jim Kirk as his captain; the only captain he's ever had!

“Aye, aye, sir!” Hikaru sat down beside him – and for a few moments, Old Spock was thrown back in time and, finally, at home again.
As Styles heard Wesley’s words about being arrested, he threw a glare in his first officer’s direction, and Thammerson was instantly at Li’s station to switch off the transmission. Taylor, next to Li at the science station rose, alerted, but his captain’s next orders made him gasp.

“Wilson, raise the shields. Red alert!” He punched the button on the left armrest of his chair. “Crew, battle stations; battle stations. All hands man your battle stations! This is not a drill! I repeat, this is not a drill!”

Kramer, the navigator and loyal to Captain Heldron, turned around in his seat. “You want to attack a ship from our fleet, Captain? The commander of this squadron?” he asked disbelievingly.

“Don’t you get it?” Styles snapped. “Kirk is not alone in this insanity. His back-up was Wesley, the whole time. Wesley’s first officer reported to Admiral Luengo that there was an explosion in the Lexington’s Engineering where the commodore was severely injured, and the ship was critically damaged. Did the man look wounded to you, Lieutenant – was the ship damaged? It was a lie to come to Kirk’s aid in secret and.”

“The admirals Luengo and Norton and you were accused of a conspiracy,” Li cut in, rising from his chair. “And I have to admit that there are a lot of strange things since you took command over the Excalibur, sir.”

Lawrence whirled around; eyes narrowed, face reddening in fury. “One more word, Lieutenant, and I’ll arrest you for mutiny.”

“It’s the staff officers’ duty to watch out for the good of the ship and make sure everyone follows Starfleet protocols and Federation laws. That includes the captain,” Taylor stated, rising too. “And as far as I understood, you overstepped the limits when you entered the Vulcan seat of government without permission and…”

“I’m on a secret mission assigned by Luengo,” Styles almost shouted. “Man your battle station, or you’ll face court martial for insubordination.”

Kramer abandoned his station as well. “The commodore mentioned that you kidnapped a man under New Vulcan’s official protection – the man who obviously just escaped Security and is wanted by those scientists. Arresting a refugee on an independent planet is…”
“This Augment is not a person; he's a synthetic creature bred in labs more than…”

Again Styles was interrupted, this time by Rhandrola, a Regulian at the second science station. “He is obviously a sentient life form and therefore a ‘person’, Captain. Even if he was bred in a lab, you have no right to assault New Vulcan and to abduct the man from…”

Styles turned back to his chair. “Security to bridge! Emergency!”

Kramer and Li began to move towards him, as Thammerson and Wilson, both men of Section 31, pulled out their hidden phaser. “Stop, or you’ll be shot!” the first officer growled.

“Phasers on the bridge!” Taylor raged. “That’s against protocol! The commodore is right! There is a conspiracy going on – at the highest ranks.” He pointed an accusing finger at Styles. “And you, Captain, and your two fellows belong to it!”

“How dare you!” Styles screamed in rage; his face flushed in wrath as he felt cornered once again.

Li lifted his chin. “This chasing Kirk, the order to attack the Enterprise, the Augment you, Norton and these scientists want so desperately, the death of our most important Admirals and the curious orders from Luengo since then… The rogue officers aren’t Kirk and his staff, but you! And Thammerson and Wilson, too!”

The Redshirts arrived, and Styles pointed sternly at the four officers who had dared to contradict him. “Arrest Taylor, Li, Kramer and Rhandrola for mutiny and…”

The same moment internal alert was given and still aiming at Taylor and Li, Thammerson waved at Wilson to check the Engineer station. The Redshirts looked at the first officer with confusion. Phasers weren’t allowed on the bridge.

“Captain,” the helmsman reported a moment later. “The door to Auxiliary has been sealed.”

“What?” Styles stormed towards him.
“Someone is switching control to Auxiliary and…”

Lawrence hit the next intercom button. “Styles to Finnegan. The fugitives are in Auxiliary. Get them at any cost – but spare the Augment!”

“Aye, sir!” came the instant reply.

“Captain,” Wilson called once more. “Sir, someone has access to our command controls.”

Styles paled dramatically. “Khan?” As he received a confused gaze from the helmsman, he added impatiently, “I mean the Augment!”

Wilson shook his head. “No, sir, someone has hacked into our system from outside the ship and…”

“The prefix code!” Lawrence whispered. “They’re using the prefix code to checkmate my ship.” He stormed to the helm. “Computer, this is Captain Lawrence Styles, override code…”

He didn’t get further as Thammerson called, “Captain! The Enterprise is moving!”

Styles looked at the screen and saw how the other starship heaved to and headed towards them. “Are they insane?” he shouted. “What the hell is going on there? Has Commander T’Hoven lost his mind?” He turned towards Li. “Hail them – now! Or I make certain that you’ll rot in prison until the end of your days.”

Li didn’t move one finger. “Hail them yourself, Captain!” he answered icily, ignoring the Redshirt who stopped beside him, but hesitated to arrest him. That something was very much out of order was more than clear. On the screen, the man could see the Lexington and he did know what the prefix code was and meant. Obviously, the commodore used it against the Excalibur. This was only allowed in cases of emergency when ships fell into the wrong hands. He glanced at Li who simply nodded with a grim expression in the direction of Styles. “The commodore accused him of having a part in a conspiracy and had him arrested,” he murmured under his breath. “But the captain didn’t obey him.”

A gasp from Wilson drove their attention back to the main screen.
“Are they trying to run us down, or what?” he yelled, pushed Kramer aside and sat down at the navigation console. “Sir, our shields are lowering and I can’t stop it!” Quickly he programmed an evasion maneuver only to curse a moment later. “God dammit, the warp and impulse drives are shut down. Someone deactivated them; I have no control over them!”

“Khan!” Styles growled. “Computer!” he called again, “this is Captain Lawrence Styles. I revoke the…” Again he was stopped – this time by Wilson.

“Captain, the Enterprise passed by us at a distance of only twenty meters.” He turned around in his chair. “If they wanted to run us down, they would have done it. And they also could have attacked us, but…”

“A distraction maneuver,” Styles whispered. “But why? T’Hoven should have taken command – or this lieutenant still has it, but both are from the Elite Security, and Norton gave them clear orders.” He frowned. “What the hell is going on here!?”

Rushing to the comms station, he activated the external transmission. “Styles to Norton! Come in, Admiral.”

No answer.

“Styles to Norton. Emergency!”

The same moment the invasion alarm sounded. Taylor, Li, and Kramer exchanged another glance. They had a pretty good idea who was boarding them: Wesley.

Styles had obviously the same idea because he activated the intercom for a ship wide hail. “Attention, crew, this the captain. We’ve been boarded by Starfleet personnel, led by traitors accused of high treason. Everyone that is not crew or Elite Security is an enemy. I demand that the ship be defended no matter the cost. Styles out!”

He closed the inner channel. “Computer, this is Captain Lawrence Styles. Seal the bridge!”

No answer.
Wilson checked the computer. “Sir, we have no control over ship's functions anymore. The command protocols have been switched to Auxiliary.”

“Cancel it!”

Wilson tried several adjustments and shook his head. “I can't! I mean... Captain. I can try to override it, but I need some time.”

“You’ll get it!” Lawrence glared at the Redshirts, who seemed to be irresolute to their task. “Secure the bridge, three of you watch the criminals.” He returned to his chair determined to do everything possible to turn the tables back in his favor.

The fight between the real Starfleet and Section 31 in this sector had begun…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, I did promise you more cliffhangers, and here you go. I know that this is certainly a hell of place to end this chapter, but be sure that there comes a lot of more action and twists. Therefore I will not reveal what comes in the next chapter, because it would give away too much.

For all of you who still believed in Carol: Yeah, you were right. Or those who thought her to be the big Judas: I got you (*smirk*). Yet the worst isn’t over by now; rather the opposite.

I hope you liked the new update and, as always, I’m curious what you think of it.

Have a nice rest of the week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

I’m so sorry for the delay, but Darry is out of the beta-reading-business for quit a time because of her new responsibilities concerning her job, and Rhiannon has also a lot to do. And, after I got the edited chapter, I was on a very short vacation at the Rhine-River. So you guys had to wait a little bit, but I hope the new chapter makes up for it. I can promise you the big action-show-down – and an evil cliffhanger in the end.

Thank you so very much for all the kudos and comments; I love you!!

Beware of the new chapter and here a little warning: This chapter contains brutal violence and is nothing for ‘tender hearts’.

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 74 – Human monsters

Aboard the *Lexington*, Lieutenant Palmer had barely closed the channel after Barnett had spoken with Wesley, when the commodore was already out of his seat. “Remain on red alert,” he ordered, “but be ready to lower the shields on my command.” He activated the intercom at his left armrest. “Security!”

“Lieutenant Hamilton here, sir,” reported Silverhawk’s substitute.

“Lieutenant, you and sixty Redshirts report to transporter rooms 1, 2, 3 and 5. Be ready to board the *Excalibur*. Captain Styles and certainly some of his officers are accused of conspiracy and murder. Our mission – to support Admiral Barnett in arresting Captain Styles, and to free a kidnapped refuge placed under New Vulcan’s protection. There is also Elite Security aboard the *Excalibur*, so try to reason with them, if there is no way that they accept reasoning, try to keep them at bay. Phasers to stun! Ten Redshirts to transporter room 1 to accompany me. Wesley out!”

He raced to the turbolift. “Ambassador, stay here!” he said as he passed by Ania, before he called over his shoulder, “Lieutenant Sonik, you have the conn!” A moment later the doors closed behind him, and he rode the lift down to deck 5. He all but ran towards his destination, and as he rounded the corner he not only saw Hamilton and fifteen Redshirts rushing towards him but also…
Bob rolled his eyes inwardly. He had no time for the militia.

“Commodore!” Galven called from afar, pushing his stout frame through the lines of the Redshirts. “Is this racket about the boys?”

Wesley didn’t need to ask to whom the Tellarit was referring to when he said ‘the boys’. “This is a Starfleet mission, Mr. Galven, so I ask you and your companions to stay back and to let us do our work,” he said more harshly than intended, while he accepted the phaser one of the Redshirts handed him.

Of course, that didn’t stop Galven or Ritek. “What’s going on here? We are at New Vulcan, and the whole ship is on alert. Red alert – that means immediate danger. And you are about to board the Excalibur. I heard this when I passed by the Security department. I’m short in body, but not in mind. Are the boys in danger?”

For a moment, Bob pressed his lips into a thin line, before he growled, “They are. And the longer you waste my time, the more danger they are in.”

Galven nodded. “Understand,” he said, and he stepped onto the first transporter pad. Ritek, Jeff, and Caviw followed, the other members of The Shadow remained where they were to beam over with the second party, leaving pads for Wesley and the first group of Redshirts.

Bob’s jaw almost hit the floor. “Mr. Galven…” he began but was interrupted from an irritated oinking, “I think we have no time to lose, Commodore. So please hurry!” Then the Tellarit drew an older phaser from his belt as his friends did.

“I don’t believe it!” Wesley growled; realizing that it was useless trying to talk some sense into them. Grumbling, he stepped onto the transporter platform. “But don’t expect me to take any responsibility for your welfare!” he snapped, and Galven only looked at him.
“We haven’t asked for it!”

“Commodore, the Excalibur’s shields are down!” the man at the transporter console called after he got the information from the bridge.

Within seconds, the remaining free pads were occupied by four Redshirts; all had their phasers ready, set to stun. The other eleven waited to follow soon.

Wesley took a deep breath. “Place us near medbay. If they want to put Khan into stasis or whatever, they’ll do it there.” He ignored the gasp and outraged reactions of The Shadow members. “The next group follows me, the one in transporter room 2 should be beamed into Engineering,” he continued, “the following in the weapons bay and…”

“Sir, information from Admiral Barnett. He's at the transporter near the bridge; Kirk is already aboard the Excalibur.”

‘Of course, Jim goes first, trying to save his man,’ Wesley thought, while he said aloud, “Right, the third and fourth groups are meant for Barnett’s enforcement. Energize!”

ST***ST***ST

At the same time as Wesley was in discussion with Galven, Kevin Riley hailed Kirk and told him to be ready to beam over to the Excalibur. Within a blink of an eye, Jim was on one of the transporter pads with Spock beside him, Bones, and a few Redshirts. Scotty and Uhura wanted to follow, but Jim quickly lifted the free hand, “Accompany Admiral Barnett and help him take the Excalibur’s bridge. Maybe you have to take over the one or other stations should more of Styles’ officers belong to the conspiracy.”

“Kirk…” Barnett tried to stop him and to get an own place on the transporter platform, but the young captain shook his head.

“Sir, we’re materializing on deck 5 near medbay. You should beam as close to the bridge as possible to arrest Styles before he does more damage. So, please, come with the second party.”

Barnett stared speechless at him. Who was the highest ranking officer here? Well, on the one hand, Kirk was right, but…
“Captain,” Kevin called through the communicator, “ready for beaming in five seconds, four, three, two…”

“Energize!” Jim ordered before Barnett could make up his mind. And the Vulcan at the controls immediately activated the transporter.

The room vanished, and moments later they found themselves in a corridor that resembled those of the Enterprise very much, yet there were tiny differences – after all, the Enterprise was newer than the Excalibur and had undergone two modifications over the last two years. Red lights gave alert; several crew members stared startled at the intruders.

Instantly, Jim felt Nien’s presence; he sensed the distress his beloved felt and took a deep breath to calm his rising nerves which were far too much on edge. ‘Love, I’m here! Hold on!’ he tried to send over their shared link; then his attention was driven to the several crew members of the Excalibur around him, who had stopped dead in their tracks at his sight. “At ease, Ladies and Gentlemen. We’re here on Command’s order,” he called, lifting one hand in a reassuring gesture.

The same moment the ship wide hail of Styles sounded through the speakers, “Attention, crew, this the captain. We are boarded by Starfleet personnel, led by traitors who are accused of high treason. Everyone, who doesn’t belong to the crew or the Elite Security, is an enemy. I demand that the ship be defended no matter the cost. Styles out!”

Kirk cursed inwardly as instantly several of the Excalibur’s crew withdrew and gave an alert, while five Redshirts reached for their phasers.

“Gentlemen, Captain Styles is officially arrested by none other than Admiral Barnett, who survived the attack in the Borderland!” he tried to reason with the Security. “Just wait a moment, and you’ll get the proof.”

That same moment, the typical noises of an incoming transport were heard, and that seemed to be enough for the Redshirt to take action. Jim groaned as he pulled the trigger like Spock and Bones did, stunning three of the Security personnel while Lexington’s few Redshirts, who had accompanied them, knocked their comrades out. But steps were drawing nearer, and Kirk rolled his eyes. He knew that it was inevitable; he’d have to force his way to medbay.

Behind him, Wesley materialized, but he wasn’t alone. With widening eyes, Jim recognized Galven and his friends as well as more Redshirts.
“I’m racing through half the Alpha quadrant to save your neck, and where do I find you, son? Of course! In the middle of trouble!” Bob grumbled, looking at Jim.

Galven’s reaction was a little bit different. He looked up at Jim with a mixture of a smirk and a scowl. “Told you that we'd come if you or the White Tiger needed a hand,” he oinked, then he squeaked, “BEHIND YOU!”

Several Elite Security rounded the corner and instantly opened fire. Any chance of stopping this growing insanity verbally was forfeit. A moment later Kirk, Wesley, and the others found themselves in combat with Starfleet’s special security department.

ST***ST

On the bridge, more internal alerts were given as fights broke out in different sections of the ship.

“Intruders on deck 5; Kirk and Wesley are among them,” Wilson reported. He had switched the main functions of the comms station to navigation. “Others are spotted in Engineering, in the weapons bay and…”

“They want to seize the Excalibur!” Styles growled. His mind knew that the game was over now, but his pride and his fear of arrest didn’t allow for thoughts of surrender.

The intercom whistled and then a vaguely familiar voice sounded through the speakers; robbing him of all hope that there might be an escape route.

“Captain Styles? This Admiral Richard Barnett, Chief in Command, Starfleet. I am aboard to arrest you and you men. You are accused of attempted murder, more than thirty counts of murder, conspiracy, membership in a forbidden organization, and so much more. Don’t resist or you'll face consequences. I’m coming to the bridge. Barnett out!”

If someone would have emptied a bucket of ice water over Styles he couldn’t have been more shocked. Barnett – alive? This was… impossible! But that was his voice, no doubt.

Taylor looked at the Security, seeing a chance to turn the tables. “You heard the admiral! You got
the wrong guys here. Arrest the captain!”

Lawrence whirled around. “He’s an imposter!” he yelled, clearly in denial now. “This is nothing more than another trick from Kirk and his friends to confuse you while they try to take over our ship!”

Li shook his head. “What, if you’re wrong, Captain? Let me compare this message against a record from our data bank with Admiral Barnett’s voice. Then you’ll have proof of an imposter or not.”

An index finger, shaking with rage, was pointed at him. “Shut up! SHUT UP or I’ll make you!”

“A death threat, Captain?” Li asked calmly. “I am certain everyone on this bridge, including the Redshirts, know that this crime forces on to relieve even a captain from command. You, sir, are emotionally compromised and unable to command any longer.”

“Enough!” Styles seemed to need all his power to gain back some self-control. “Security, watch the turbolift and the emergency exit. The moment someone tries to get on the bridge, open fire. Set phaser to kill.”

He didn’t wait for affirmation but activated the intercom again. “Attention, crew, this is the captain speaking. We have an imposter aboard pretending to be Admiral Barnett. He and his companions are accused of a conspiracy against Starfleet and the Federation. Wherever you meet this imposter: Don’t believe him. I repeat: Don’t believe him. Try to eliminate him. Bridge out!”

He sat down on his chair. “Status of the Enterprise?” he asked Wilson.

“She’s heaving by again, sir, and has activated her phaser banks, but she is not aiming at us.”

“What the hell is going on over there?” He heard faint whispers at his back and turned his chair around. “What are you doing there?!” he demanded furiously, as he saw Li sitting at his station and two of the Redshirts bending over him.

The comm officer turned towards Styles; his face and eyes were full of reproach. “I checked the ‘imposter’s’ voice with a recording of the admiral. There is no doubt. The man who spoke was Admiral Barnett!”
“You’re lying! You’re lying to save your sorry neck!” Styles’ face was alarmingly flushed now.

The Redshirt frowned. “Captain, I watched the process, and I’m trained in communication and information. Lieutenant Li’s check of the data was correct. The voice is Admiral Barnett’s!”

The tension on the bridge was thick enough to cut with a knife.

“Of course that is Barnett’s voice – cleverly recorded and manipulated by Kirk’s comms officer to fool you all! It’s not too difficult to splice sentences and words from Barnett’s speeches and put them together for a new message!” Lawrence’s eyes seem to burn. “And you damn fool fell for the trick!”

“The computer program would have recognized something like this, sir, my aural ability is excellent! The hail was live, and it came from deck 2!” Li snapped.

Styles’ fist landed on the armrest of his chair. “Liar!”

By accident, he had activated the intercom and he heard loud voices and fighting. Hissing in frustration, he deactivated the intercom, but it had been enough for the Redshirts to recognize the real situation. Stepping forwards, the man beside Li said, “Captain, I think it will be the best for you, Commander Thammerson, and Lieutenant Wilson to relinquish command and to surrender!” Instantly, the first officer pointed his phaser at him, and he added, “You’ll only make your situation worse.”

“No one will force me out of this chair!” Styles snarled. “Not as long as I can lift a finger to fight!” He glared at the Redshirts. “And those, who won’t obey my orders will face court martial for mutiny!”

But, to his horror, every single Redshirt crossed his arms in front of his chest, lifted his chin and stared silently at him. None of them would move one finger to ‘secure’ the bridge. And then all command protocols were offline – not even the turbolift was functional anymore. There wasn’t even a chance to override it…
Admiral Barnett swore beneath his breath as he heard Styles’ shipwide hail concerning Richard’s identity – calling him, the Chief in Command, an imposter who should be shot on sight was the final straw. This insolent boy was playing one of the dirtiest games Barnett had ever the displeasure of experiencing, and as several Redshirts of the \textit{Excalibur} entered the hallway on deck 2, where Barnett, Scott, Uhura, and several Security personnel of the \textit{Lexington} had materialized. He gritted his teeth. Stun blasts were exchanged; then Richard stepped forwards, ignoring Uhura’s startled “Admiral!” while she tried to hold him back.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” he raised his voice and stopped where he was, showing himself fully to the Redshirts. “I’ve been aboard this ship for several days. Is there the tiniest chance that one of you recognizes me?”

The blasts stopped more or less instantly while the Redshirts of the \textit{Excalibur} stared at him open-mouthed.

“Admiral…?” one of them stuttered, utterly shocked.

Barnett only nodded slowly.

Another Security pointed nonchalantly at him – not in disrespect, but in surprise. “It’s him! I belonged to the escort who showed him his quarters when he came aboard!”

“Sir! How did you survive?” another Redshirt, a petite female with fierce eyes, called in obvious joy.

Beside Barnett, Scott and Uhura took a deep breath of relief, yet they still watched the Security personnel in front of them warily. Maybe there were sympathizers of Section 31 among them.

The commanding officer of this Security’s group stepped forwards, putting his phaser away. “Admiral, I have to admit that I’m confused, but please accept my apology for attacking you. The captain said that you’re an imposter and…”

“Captain Styles is a tool of a larger conspiracy that has been going on for quite some time now,” Barnett interrupted him and looked at the men and women in red, who had first attacked him and his companions. But it wasn’t their fault. “Ladies and Gentlemen, you only followed your commanding officer’s orders. For that, no one can accuse you. None of you have to fear court martial for this as long as you are ready to follow my instructions now.”
“At your service, Admiral!” Sounded from several mouths and Barnett suppressed a smile.

“As I said, Captain Styles is officially arrested and accused of several grave crimes, yet he refuses to give up.” He pointed upwards. “This is going to be an ugly scenario.”

“We are with you, Admiral!” the leader of the Redshirts said. “Several weird things happened since the Klingon attack in Borderland, things I understand now given the new information. It’s not easy to go against one’s own captain, believe me, sir. My people and I have obeyed his orders without asking questions, yet in the last days the questions increased exponentially. And we are not the only ones who got wary. Something’s been off for days now, and I think it will be a relief for the crew when he is gone for good.”

Barnett nodded. “Obedience is the most important attribute in the fleet, yet it shouldn’t prevent anybody from using their mind. Hopefully there are men and women on the bridge who use their brain, too.”

They began to march towards the next turbolift, only to learn that the lift system was functional but no cabin would transport them to bridge. Scotty quickly checked it and grumbled, “Someone has isolated the bridge – and I’ll eat my hat if there is even one single station still working on the bridge.”

Barnett frowned. “Source?”

“I’m not certain, Admiral, but it could be that control was switched to Auxiliary.” He looked at his superior, who rolled his eyes. “Why do I have the feeling that a certain Augment has his hands in this?” He shook his head as he only saw the two Enterprise officers smirk. “Yes, I know, he has become a kind of friend to you.” He turned around. “Lieutenant, we’ve got to storm the bridge using the emergency ladder. Please follow me.”

ST***ST

Sean Finnegan stared furiously at the two technicians who had begun to batter the door, using phaser cutters which were more effective than phasers. After it had become clear that any attempt to override the code would be for nothing and that even the manual emergency lever was useless because it was melted, Finnegan was determined to get access by force, and the two technicians did their best to follow his order.

Sean trembled with rage. It was more than a humiliation that this damn augmented bastard was able
to keep him at bay – at least until now. Finnegan hadn’t forgotten the hand-to-hand combat he had with the superhuman at Gamma 12 – how this guy defeated him in seconds. And, above all, this creature had prevented him finally giving Kirk back what he has deserved since the Academy.

Yes, Finnegan knew that the pranks he loved to play at the Academy had been rough and that it had been childish, holding grudges against someone who simply paid him back and didn’t succumb to his demands like the most others did. Maybe Finnegan could have respected Kirk for his strong back and courage, but Kirk had exposed him to ridicule several times, and Sean would never forgive this. Finnegan looked like a fool. And now Gamma 12 – Norton had made it very clear that this was Sean’s last chance to correct his mistakes, and the Commander was determined to prove to the admiral that he was worth the Elite Security uniform and that he wouldn’t disappoint the brass again.

“Can’t you speed up, man?” he snapped at one of the technicians, but before the man could answer, Style’s ship wide hail was heard talking about the intruders and – moments later – of an imposter who claimed to be Barnett, the dead Chief in Command. Uncertain, the two technicians glanced at Finnegan who gritted his teeth. He knew exactly who was behind this: Kirk – as usual!

“Do you need an invitation?” he snarled. “Keep going – pronto!”

With increasing impatience he watched the laser cutter slide slowly – far too slowly – through the metal. And behind this damn door, the Augment was taking over control of the Excalibur. Dammit! He would show this enhanced bastard what it meant to mess with Starfleet – and he would make this bitch pay for betraying the admiral’s confidence!

ST***ST

“Phaser fire on deck 5, 7, 10 and in Engineering,” Carol said, while she watched the internal sensors. Khan bent over the Engineering console and switched the inner defense controls. The readouts of the displays seemed to dance in front of his eyes, and for a long moment his sight blurred; then his concentration forced the effects of the sedative one time more to submit his will.

“They’ll try…” He swallowed as his tongue seemed to be too heavy; then he began anew. “They’ll try to seize the Excalibur.” He activated the internals cameras and to put the view on the main screen. With a shaking hand, he wiped the sweat from his forehead, while he felt his heart frequency speeding up. “Jim is aboard,” he murmured. “I can sense his presence. Heesh not far away…” He heard that he began to slur and cleared his throat.

Carol looked over at him and frowned. Khan was deathly pale now and seemed to get worse with every passing minute. An inner voice in Carol’s mind whispered that only his stubbornness let him
“Jim is aboard?” she asked, but before Khan could answer they both smelled an unpleasant stench – that of melting metal.

Turning around, Nien frowned as he saw that a small strip on each side of the two-parted door glow red. For several minutes now the angry knockings and other attempts to break through the door had stopped – and the reason for it became very clear now. They would cut through the door to open it by force.

“Dammit!” the superhuman growled and turned his attention quickly back towards his console, closing his eyes as his surroundings began to swirl around him. Gritting his teeth, he fought against the sedative again. He couldn’t give in – not now when Jim was near and…

“Dr. Marcus to Captain Kirk!”

The young woman’s voice tore him out of the inner fight and frowning, he glanced up at her, realizing only now that she had stepped beside him and had activated the intercom. He wanted to ask her why she was calling Jim – any distraction during the fight endangered the young captain more, but to his astonishment, his tongue didn’t obey him. At least for several seconds, then Kirk’s clear, but very angry tenor seemed to give him new strength.

ST***ST

Three decks above Auxiliary, Jim Kirk was fighting side by side with Spock. Bones was behind them and kept their backs clear together with three Redshirts, yet Styles’ ship wide hail seemed to have come to fruition. In the opinion of the Excalibur’s Redshirts and Elite Security, Jim, Wesley and the others were enemies – rouge Starfleet members who had to be stopped. And thus they forced a combat upon them that was horrible given the fact that they all belonged to one and the same union.

Jim stunned another Redshirt and dared to look quickly over his shoulder, but Wesley was nowhere to be seen. They had been separated only a minute ago when others had arrived from an adjoining corridor and attacked them. Kirk hoped that Bob would be able to bring his opponents to their senses before the first deaths would have to be mourned.

Sending another opponent to dreamland, he felt a tugging at the bond he shared with Nien. His
beloved wasn’t well. Kirk thought he could sense Khan’s inner struggle, and the fear that maybe his mate was already being forced into stasis made him mad with worry and fury – and it made him careless.

“JIM!”

Before he realized what was going on so he could react, a strong, far too warm hand grabbed his collar and hauled him aside. A phaser beam hit the wall where he had stood only a second ago. The same moment Spock stunned the attacker; his narrowed, fierce eyes betrayed the ancient warrior that still lived deep in every Vulcan.

“Thanks,” Kirk wheezed while finding his feet again, steadied by his T’hy’la. More Security appeared, and Jim felt his control snap.

“GOD DAMMIT, CAN’T YOU JUST LISTEN FOR ONCE BEFORE YOU SHOOT?” he shouted, making two of them, indeed, hesitate for a moment, only to be forced to fight a moment later as Jim’s companion opened stun fire at them. For a moment shots were exchanged, then the attackers retreated around the next corner to find cover, and quickly Kirk and the others did the same in the opposite direction so as not to be a target. For a moment the cross fire stopped.

Jim felt a new wave of extreme discomfort coming from the bond and wiping his forehead he growled. “We’ve got to reach medbay. Nien is…”

The intercom whistled and a familiar female voice called, “Dr. Marcus to Captain Kirk.”

Jim and Spock exchanged a glance. “That woman has nerve calling me after her betrayal!” the young captain hissed and balled his free hand into a fist. Looking around, Kirk saw that the next intercom was only a step away and trusting his friends and the Redshirts to cover him, he closed the small distance and punched the button with a fist. “What do you want?” he snarled, feeling bitterness rising again at the memory of Carol’s betrayal.

But it wasn’t his treacherous weapon officer who answered, but a very familiar, deeply missed and beloved baritone. “Jim? It’s me. Dr. Marcus tricked everyone. She’s on our side. She helped me to escape.”

Kirk’s jaw almost hit the floor, while he looked at Spock with eyes big as saucers, who was the epitome of a surprised Vulcan, while Bones in the background began to grin widely.
“Jim!” Carol’s voice again. “We’re in Auxiliary, but they’re trying to break through, and we don’t stand a chance if they’re successful. Khan is getting weaker by the second. Dashwood injected him with a dose of sedative before I could act, and…”

“I’m not that weak!” the Augment protested, but it sounded hollow even for those who didn’t know him like Jim did.

“You can barely hold yourself on your feet,” Carol sounded impatient before she addressed Kirk again. “Jim, we’re trapped and if these bastards break through, then…”

Kirk had overcome his shock and new adrenalin pumped through his system, increased at the sound of his mate’s voice again and by the new situation. Nien had escaped but was near caught again. Nien needed him – and there would be nothing that would stop Kirk from getting to him.

“Hold on, love, I’m coming!” he shouted, closed the channel, and whirled around. “Deck 8 is where we’re going! Hurry!” he thundered and began to run towards the next turbolift, shooting stunning blast towards any movement that didn’t belong to his companions.

Spock was instantly beside him, while behind him McCoy cursed about ‘stupidity’, ‘recklessness’ and ‘fools in love’. Not caring about the danger he found himself in, Kirk tried to force his way to the next turbolift as new Elite personnel stormed into the hallway, cutting them off. Cursing Jim did the only thing that was left: he continued to fight.

ST***ST

In Auxiliary, the air began to reek even more, and the glow at the two sides of the door was accompanied by flying, blinding white sparks. It was only a question of one, maybe two minutes before the room would be taken by storm.

Khan bared his teeth in wrath and frustration. He knew that Jim was on his way; he could feel his bondmate’s fierce determination to get to him, but time was running out. He saw Carol take her phaser and ready herself, and all of sudden he became aware of one very important fact; he was needed alive. Dr. Marcus, on the contrary, was an inconvenient witness. Neither Styles nor Norton wanted her around to implicate them in their deeds. There was no doubt that Finnegan – or whoever was leading the Security which tried to break through the door – had clear orders concerning the young woman.
Coming to this conclusion, there was only one thing left he could do – especially after she aided him and Jim. Rising on unsteady feet, he crossed Auxiliary as quickly as his wobbling legs allowed, reached up, and tore the grate away that closed the supply shaft.

Carol was at his side in an instant and looked at the opening that would be their escape route. Khan pursed his lips; it would be unpleasant to crawl through this small shaft, but this was better than waiting for the hunters to corner their prey. Interlacing his fingers, he offered her the makeshift stirrup. Placing her right foot in his hands, Carol steadied herself on the Augment’s shoulders and found herself lifted a second later. She could feel how his arms and hands trembled and she asked herself how long he would be able to hold on like this; then any thoughts were chased away. Behind them, a loud banging was heard. Marcus didn’t need to look back to know that the cutting process had come to an end and that now several men began to knock the heavily damaged door down.

“Quick!” Khan hissed, knowing that the remaining time would be too short for him to escape, too. If he could replace the grate before his enemies arrived, he could state that he had been alone here, increasing the young woman’s chance to escape certain death.

The moment Carol’s upper half was in the shaft, he gave her a not too soft shove with both hands at her butt, eliciting a muffled protest from her that would have made him smirk under different circumstances, but not now. “Go!” he whispered urgently.

“What?” The shaft was too small to turn around, and so the weapons officer wanted to crawl back, but her feet were stopped by the superhuman’s hands.

“I said go! There is no time left for me to follow you. Be silent and try to reach Jim. Tell him that I am caught and that they will try to put me into stasis in medbay.”

“But…” Her voice was weak and betrayed her shock – something he couldn’t consider at the moment.

“Go. They will kill you if they find you,” he growled, placing the grate back. “They cannot risk that you reveal your knowledge to the Council. I am not in mortal danger, after all, they need me for their precious experiments.” Not waiting for an answer, he fixed the cover, took the phaser, and began to return to the engineering console the moment the door gave in. With a loud bang, one-half of it fell to the ground, and Auxiliary was swarmed with Redshirts and Elite Security.

Khan lifted his phaser and shot stun blasts at them, knowing that it would make him look better at
court martial if he didn’t kill them now – if there would be a chance for him to face trial at all.

Four of his opponents were hit, then the rest of them rushed towards him – in front of them was Finnegan. The Augment tried to stun him, too, but one of the Redshirts grabbed his weapon hand, and the shot missed. A second later Finnegan reached him and punched him hard enough that he would have been knocked out if he were a mere human. He only swayed; the sedative was making him even dizzier.

And then the men were on him. Khan fought back with everything he was and every bit of strength he could still muster, but to no use. Suddenly he found himself on the floor lying and then it began – the merciless kicks and the punches, accompanied by hateful curses and insults. Somehow he was able to cover his face with his arms but after a cruel kick into his side he tried to roll into a ball. His instincts fixed only on the task of protecting himself, but the movement exposed his back, and another brutal kick hit his left kidney, while someone stepped with all his might on Khan's left calf. He heard something break, felt pain erupting from his leg accompanied by merciless burning and stinging sensations everywhere he was attacked.

And the whole time only one thought lived in his heart and soul: ‘Hold on, Jim will come!’

Three decks above, Kirk tried desperately to break through the hostile lines. He, Spock, Bones, and their companions were cornered between two attacking groups and that they still weren’t stunned – or shot – was only because they didn’t stop shooting at their opponents.

He thought he heard Bob calling his name, and then – all of sudden – from the left side came support in the form of Galven and his friends. Squealing in hot anger, the Tellarit hurled himself against the Elite Security, running two down with his mass. Ritek and Caviw followed him, while Jeff and the other members of The Shadow fought side by side.

The distraction was enough for Kirk’s group to take action, and while Bones and two of the Lexington’s Redshirts kept the other side of attackers busy, Jim and Spock fired at the left side without stopping. Like this, they could reunite with The Shadow, and Galven gave Kirk a shove into the direction of the next turbolift.

“Go! We’ll keep your backs clear, lad,” he oinked, and Jim was more than happy to obey. With Spock and Bones at his side, two Redshirts of the Lexington, Ritek, and Caviw behind them, they raced down the hallway. From afar they heard more crossfire. Obviously, Wesley was still in combat with some eager Elite Security several corridors away.
All of sudden Jim sensed pain scorching over his bond with Nien strong enough to make him cry out. His knees buckled and again it was only Spock’s quick reaction that saved him from an unpleasant experience, as the Vulcan saw him stumbling and caught him before Kirk could fall.

“Captain! What’s the matter?” Worry edged in Spock’s voice, while he lowered his friend to the ground, kneeling down beside him.

“Jim?” Bones called, concerned.

Kirk gasped for breath, and McCoy was instantly at his side checking his pulse in the old-fashioned way because of the lack of any med-scanner. “Dammit, his pulse is at warp!” he grumbled before he addressed his friend sternly. “Jim, tell me what’s wrong!”

“Nien,” Kirk gritted out. “Something is happening to him.”

Ritek watched the three officers confused while Caviw bared her teeth. “He senses his mate’s distress.” She glanced at the Rigelian. “Khan is in danger.”

Spock ignored the two. He sensed the turmoil Kirk was in; he saw and felt him trembling, and without hesitation placed the fingertips of his right hand against Jim’s meld points. “My mind to your mind, we are one,” he whispered the traditional words to initiate a mind-meld. Instantly he sensed the painful burning that crept along the mating bond – a mating bond that indeed resembled that of Vulcans (as far as Spock could assess), yet it differed. But it was enough to show Spock that a telepathic but untrained mind like Jim’s couldn’t withstand such a storm.

There was only one solution – to shield his T’hy’la by building a mental wall that would contain the raging fire that leaked over the bond. But the moment the Vulcan prepared himself to help Jim, Kirk jerked back – ending the mind-meld abruptly. Both men groaned, and for a long moment, the first officer was disoriented because of the shock. Then he felt his captain’s weight in his arms, as light as it was for him, and found back in the present.

Kirk was heaving before he shook his head violently. “NO, Spock!” he rasped; having obviously realized his friend’s intention.

“Jim, you will further weaken if you do not let me help. You are not used to a mental bond and…”
Those sky blue eyes glared at him fiercely. “I’ve got some experience with our bond, Spock. And
my link to Nien may be the only thing that keeps him holding on. ‘In good and bad times’ – I haven’t
sworn it with words, but with my heart and soul.” He recognized only now that he was crouching on
the floor and Spock steadied him. With the force of his stubborn will, he began to rise. “Nien needs
me and…”

“And you need stabilizing medicine!” Bones snapped. “You’re close to a heart attack.”

“Dr. Marcus to Captain Kirk!”

Jim couldn’t deny this as Spock continued to support him by wrapping an arm around his waist and
steering him around McCoy towards the next intercom, while from afar the noises of the nearby
fighting became louder. Kirk’s hands shook wildly enough to miss the answer button twice, and it
was up to the Vulcan to activate the channel.

“Kirk here,” the captain wheezed, fearing the worst.

“Jim, I’m on deck seven,” Carol cried. “They broke through the door, and Khan forced me into the
supply shaft and sealed it before they stormed Auxiliary.” The young woman’s voice shook with
stress and emotions. “Jim, they… they beat him. They kicked him. I’m not sure how bad it is, but…
But there was so much blood. They dragged him away; I couldn’t do anything, and… Jim? JIM?”

But Kirk couldn’t answer anymore because he was already racing down the hallway towards
medbay, where he knew his beloved would be brought …

ST***ST

Styles paced on the bridge back and forth, glaring daggers at the ‘mutineers’ from time to time, but
mostly he was fixed on Wilson, who tried to override the computer orders which had switched the
command protocols to Auxiliary.

Only two minutes ago they had heard the ‘traitor’ Carol Marcus hailing ship wide for Kirk, and
Lawrence asked what kind of trickery his enemies were up to now. Again the intercom whistled; the
young woman’s voice called for Kirk again.
Styles had enough. “Dammit, is there no way to hear what they're saying?” he snapped at Li, who sat at his station with his arms crossed in front of his chest. He looked impassively at him.

“Am I allowed to speak now, Captain, or shall I prepare myself for death as you threatened only minutes ago if I didn’t shut up?”

The face of the young captain turned alarmingly red. “You don’t expect me to answer this question.”

“Yes, I do, Captain,” Li replied calmly; the tension on the bridge thickened.

Lawrence took a deep breath to get a grip on his rage. “Permission to answer the first question, Lieutenant,” he gritted out, imagining squeezing the life out of this infuriating bastard of a comms officer.

Li nodded. “As you wish, sir. As you certainly know, I have no control over the comms station anymore. The whole communication system has been switched to Auxiliary, and as long as this circuitry is activated, I can’t do anything.”

Styles didn’t know if Li was pulling his leg or not. But before he could reply, the intercom buzzed; this time, it was a direct hail, using the available emergency frequency. “Finnegan to Captain Styles.”

In a few steps, Lawrence was in his chair and he activated the intercom at the armrest. “Styles here!”

“Captain, we got the Augment. A few of my boys and I are bringing him to medbay now, using the ladderwells because the turbolift system is offline – that's what the engineering station shows. Johnson and N’ulgnes are trying to switch off the command protocols in Auxiliary, but the enhanced bastard has changed the codes. I can’t tell you when they’ll be able to override them.”

Again Styles gritted his teeth. “Proceed, Commander, good work. What about Dr. Marcus?”

“She wasn’t in Auxiliary, sir. We checked the entire compartment. I have no idea where she could be.”

“Forget about her for the moment and continue your work in Auxiliary. Styles out!” He rubbed his
“They got Khan – so far, so good. Maybe we can blackmail Kirk to…”

He didn’t get any further, as all of the sudden the emergency exit burst open and four Redshirts stormed onto the bridge. Instantly, their colleagues, who were still in command central, acted by attacking Thammerson and Wilson. Taylor leaped towards Styles, who whirled around and tried to punch the science officer, but to no avail. Taylor was quicker, ducked, and tackled his captain in the next second. Both men landed hard on the ground, where Taylor tried to immobilize Styles.

A moment later three Redshirts were there; one pulled Taylor away, and the two others helped Styles to his feet, securing him with a hard grip.

And then Lawrence’s eyes became wide as saucers as through the emergency exit a well-known person in admiral’s white and green stepped forward. “Barnett!” he whispered, while Taylor, Li, and the others beamed at the Chief in Command.

“Admiral on the bridge!” Taylor called dutifully, earning him a quick smile from his superior, before Barnett’s face turned into the darkest expression possible, while he walked towards Styles.

“Captain Lawrence Styles, you are hereby relieved of duty. In the name of the United Federation of Planets and in conformity with Starfleet protocols you are arrested. Every word you say can and will be used against you. You have the right to a lawyer that you may contact as soon as we reach the HQ because New Vulcan has no official office in Starfleet.”

Styles could only stare at him; knowing that the game was, indeed, over.

“How did you…”

He couldn’t finish his sentence because Richard made a sharp gesture with his right hand that silenced the treacherous captain instantly. He glanced around and saw that the Redshirts had secured two more officers. With an asking glance, he addressed the officer in the blue science tunic who had attacked Styles – normally an act of mutiny, but Richard evaluated it rather an act of necessity to prevent an open fight.

“Status, Commander…”?

“Commander Taylor, Admiral, science officer of the Excalibur. I have to report that currently all
command protocols are switched to Auxiliary, obviously done by the man named Khan, Captain Styles refers to as an Augment and a prisoner. He was caught only minutes ago again by Commander Finnegan and is being brought, as I heard in a discussion between the captain and the commander, to medbay. A Dr. Marcus is still on the run. Further, I have to report that Lieutenant Wilson and Commander Thammerson threatened the other officers with a phaser on the bridge as we heard your voice and began to ask questions concerning your identity. Lieutenant Li was threatened with death by the captain. I also have to report that Captain Styles ordered the attack on the Lexington after he broke up a talk with Commodore Wesley, accusing him of treachery and that he also ordered Elite Security to force entry into the Vulcan seat of government to kidnap the asylum seekers."

Barnett nodded. “You only confirm what I already knew – except for the identity of Captain Styles’ allies in his dirty game and that neither he nor his fellows threatened their own colleagues.” He glanced at Lawrence again. “Khan has been caught and Finnegan’s taking him to medbay?” he changed the subject, knowing that this was most important now if he and the others wanted to save the superhuman. As the captain kept silent, Richard sighed. “To refuse cooperation will worsen your situation, Mr. Styles, but knowing you, you’d rather try to break through a wall head first before you listen to reason.” He walked to the center seat and activated the intercom. “Barnett to Captain Kirk!”

No answer.

Once again Richard tried to reach one of his bravest captains who was also his biggest problem child, but again the hail wasn’t answered.

“Dammit, there is something very off!” he grumbled and turned towards the two Enterprise officers, which were helping their colleagues at their stations, trying to override the code to get the command protocols back.

“Mr. Scott,” Barnett called, and the Scotsman turned around.

“Aye, sir?”

“Try to find Kirk and tell him about the new situation his augmented friend is in. If I’m not mistaken, you’ll find our troublemaker on deck 5.”

Montgomery was already on his way towards the emergency exit. “Aye, sir!” he called over his shoulder and vanished, hoping that he could find his friend before he lost his mate.
Dr. Michael Burmaster was certain that he had never encountered such a shocking mess – and that he would never experience such a thing again. As the second CMO aboard the Excalibur he first had to deal with his superior’s and friend’s death as the shuttle with him, an admiral, and diplomats aboard were destroyed by the Klingons. Then there had been the many wounded crew members after the battle in Borderland, which still crowded his medbay. All this belonged to the trouble a physician of field medicine had to face when it came to battle. But until now these fights had been against the enemies of the Federation, renegades or Orion pirates – but never before he had to treat men and women of Starfleet because they fought each other.

It was hell!

People he knew for years were brought to him stunned or injured, but there were also strange faces in Starfleet red and grey; they belonged to same organization for God’s sake! And they fought in the corridors and on the decks everywhere, because one accused the other of treachery and the other way around. Burmaster didn’t know whom he should believe, as he heard the captain’s ship wide hails concerning a supposed imposter posing as Admiral Barnett. Then there were the ship wide calls of a woman trying to reach Captain Kirk twice, which woke his wariness even more. Kirk was the Federation’s newest hero, yet Styles had stated officially that the captain had gone rouge and that he had to be stopped – something Burmaster simply couldn’t imagine. He had met the young American captain one time, and you certainly could say a lot about him, but not that he would betray Starfleet or the Federation. The young man was filled up with so much loyalty and honor it had almost blinded the doctor and had shown him that even after the mess with Section 31 there were still men and women who had honor.

Section 31…

Burmaster had read the numbers of deaths and wounded people Section 31 had left in its tracks after it attacked the Enterprise more than a year ago, and Michael had hoped that he would never find himself in the situation his colleague aboard the flagship had faced, but fate had other plans for him. Just right now, as the door opened and more unmoving crew members were brought in, he realized again that this was as bad as it had been aboard the Enterprise fourteen months ago.

“Stunned crewmembers on the mattresses on the floor next door, injured ones to the free biobeds in room 2!” he ordered and walked through the beds as an arm shot out and stopped him.

“Doctor, when are you going to treat my stomach?”
Burmaster looked down at the scientist who had come aboard together with Admiral Norton. He didn’t know why but he instantly had disliked Conelly, exactly like his colleague Dashwood. There was arrogance and something shifty in them he couldn’t place a finger on; his instincts went on alert when one of them was present.

“I told you to lie down and to breathe steadily. You’ll have a few bruises; that’s all.”

“But…”

“Listen, man, there are injured people who need my help. I don't have to time to babysit!” he snapped and continued his way. More racket at the entrance made him turn around, and then his eyes widened in horror as he saw four Elite Security men dragging a bleeding man into medbay. He couldn’t even stand. Burmaster saw dark hair, smeared with blood, torn civilian clothes, and beneath those, bruises, cuts and more injuries which switched him instantly into full doctor-mode.

“Nurse!” he yelled. “Prepare surgery room 3 and… What are you doing?” Bewildered, he watched Security take the man into the next room where the scientists had stored their thing – a room of his sickbay he had been forbidden to enter by threat of court martial. And then he saw how Conelly, who just had whined about a kick he had received in his belly, rose and followed them with an expression that made every alert bell in the CMO ring.

Taking a med-kit, he stormed towards the next room, not caring for any order he had received concerning this part of his medbay!

He crossed the threshold and stopped dead in the tracks. Within the secured area was a tube large enough to hold a human body. A kind of tube he had never seen before, but he had a good guess concerning its purpose.

Dashwood was there, too, and he eyes the injured man warily. “You shouldn’t have slammed him like that,” he rebuked. “Even his augmented nature has its limits.”

“The bastard gave us a hard time, Professor. My boys had to defend themselves,” a voice drawled behind Burmaster, and as he looked over his shoulder, he came face to face with a commander of the Elite Security that he hadn’t seen until now. But one thing he recognized instantly: the trickster expression in those pale blue eyes and the arrogant smile on a brutal face.

“I understand,” Dashwood said, “but everything was for naught, if this imposter, Kirk, and the others
win. We’ll never be able to end our task, so there is no need to put the subject back into stasis.”

Finnegan frowned. “You wanted him for your experiments, and my boys and I risked a lot to fulfill your wish. Now end it!” He looked at his four subordinates. “Put that beast into its cage!” he ordered. “Even if the scientists have trouble completing their project, at least the world is free of the monster.”

Burmaster stared thunderstruck at the Commander and then at Dashwood. Did he get this right? This man was abused for… A painful keening sound drove Michael’s attention back to the injured person. He couldn’t believe what he saw; two of the guards began to tear the rest of his clothes away not caring that they were inflicting more pain on him.

Right. Enough was enough!

“Stop this instant!” Burmaster barked and began to close the distance. “This man needs medical att…”

A large hand landed on his shoulder. “Stay out of it, Doctor. You’ve got no say in…”

“This is my medbay, and here I have the command, so get your ass out of here, or I’ll remove you!” Michael thundered, not caring that the commander was more than a head taller than him.

“You don’t mean this,” Finnegan said, knowing that the CMO had, indeed, the command within this area.

“Yes, I do! Leave!” Burmaster snapped and pointed to the door.

“As you wish. Knowing the cowboy, he’s on his way to rescue his sweetheart. Maybe this is the chance to get rid of him once and for all.” He vanished, but even without him, the problem wasn’t solved for Burmaster. With quick steps, he was at the wounded man’s side, but before he could even take his med-scanner out, he was grabbed by another guard, while Dashwood snapped,

“You’ve have your orders, Doctor, so go back and patch up the crew as is your duty. This creature is not your concern!”
“‘Creature’?” Burmaster outraged. “This man is badly injured and has to be treated immediately, or…”

“He is enhanced, so don’t worry. He’ll survive like he has until now,” Matthew answered without even looking at the CMO.

Enhanced… ‘Augmented nature’ Dashwood had said before…

Burmaster’s gaze found the tube that seemed to be a kind of transportable stasis chamber, and he began to realize what this was all about. The man was augmented, maybe an experiment from these scientists and they used him for their purposes. That was… outrageous!

The man weakly lifted his head, and blue-green eyes full of agony met his. Michael listened to the ragged breath, smelled the blood, and saw the injuries – and didn’t care what this man was! Burmaster was a doctor at heart, and he didn't give a damn about heritage when it came to helping ill or wounded people. The moment the guards had stripped the man of all clothes and tried to lift him into the tube, Burmaster jerked free.

“STOP, or I’ll have your asses for attempted murder!” he snarled.

One of the guards aimed a phaser at him. “Retreat, Doctor, or your real patients will have to wait a little bit longer for help.”

“How DARE you! When I’m done with you and your colleagues, you’ll be guarding a trash transporter – after rotting in prison for decades!”

Khan didn’t understand much of the heated words being exchanged. There was only pain – searing, scorching, throbbing, and sickening pain. Somehow his mind was still able to analyze the injuries he suffered – that he had broken ribs, a fractured calf and arm, internal injuries. His lungs didn’t work as they should, there was a terrible pain where is liver was, and bruises and lacerations seemed to cover his whole body. The sedative had him in a firm grip now and changed any voice into a dull noise he could barely understand, and his surroundings were a blur.

There was one thing his senses took in very clearly. To add insult to injury, he could clearly see his cryotube only half a meter away jacked up – the very same tube that had once saved his life was now about to become his coffin. He knew that he would not wake up again as soon as he was put inside and either cryosleep or the stasis was activated. He would die – after more suffering, more pain, more
sorrow. And there was nothing that could change it.

The thought fed him for a moment with new strength, and he lifted his head – and effort that cost him, and he almost fell unconscious. His eyes found that of an unknown man, who looked at him with deep concern, rage, and shock. Concentrating on the voices around him, Khan realized that this man was a doctor and wanted to help him, but of course was hindered at taking action.

The torment, as the rest of his clothes were torn away from him, made him sick, and he gritted his teeth again the agony and humiliation. He refused to allow the despair that began to rise to break through, but it slipped through his stubbornness and pride, and made lump in his throat grow.

Jim…

He would come!

He had to come!

His Pyāra never gave up, he never quit! He hadn’t before, and he wouldn’t now. He would come and prevent the worst. As much as his augmented mind would have protested against such childish hope in earlier times, he now clung to it. Jim was his hope, his golden ray of sun in the darkness of the night – a darkness that loomed over him again and that would be chased away in several seconds. Khan was sure of it.

But as rough hands grabbed him and lifted him from the floor, he realized that this time Jim might come too late, and his agony laced with desperation. Fear clenched his stomach. Somehow he managed to wriggle, to push at his captors, but his weak attempts to break free were for naught. The sedative and grave injuries prevented him from fighting. Instinctively his mind went out to his mate and cried for help. Alas, in earlier times he had never feared death – only when members of his family were in danger. Then he had hoped and fought for an escape, but there had been times when the temptation of finally finding peace had been almost overwhelming. But not now.

His family was safe so far, yes, but life held so much more for him now. Where earlier he hadn’t cared if he survived or died in battle, he now had a reason to live. Brahma, he wanted to live! To live a life with Jim, to see his brothers and sisters adjusting to this new century, to explore space together with Jim, to grow old beside him… Even if that was wishful thinking, a part of him had been infected with Kirk’s everlasting optimism, and he clung to this bit of hope – hope that was about to be smashed by the despair that overwhelmed him. His enhanced mind went numb at the realization that everything would be over in a few seconds, and what remained was only the human, filled with mortal dread – and rising fury. His soul screamed frantically for his mate to come and to rescue him
from the fate that lay ahead – his mind shouted in wrath that he was about to be denied a life worth living.

He felt himself being lowered in the tube, saw the blurry face of Conelly bending over him, and tried to lift his arms to fight back, but his muscles did not obey him. Despite the burning injuries and the scorching rage, there suddenly seemed to be ice flowing through his veins – the ice of fear that was about to change into full blown panic. The hoarse, terrified “No!” that came from his lips was nothing more than a breath that went by unheard. And then the cover of the tube began to close…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Haven’t I told you that the show-down is full of very mean cliff-hangers? Well, I always keep my promises (*snicker*). It really was fun to write the fighting scenes, but I also loved to show how incredible close Jim and Khan have become – how strong their bond works. And Finnegan? I didn’t like the guy in the TOS-episode and I have to admit that I simply enjoyed making him the badass he seems to be – and to give Spock the chance to bring him down. Hm, and Jim getting all the blood and the blood-doping from Khan had to be for something good, even if Spock had to cover for him (again).
In the next chapter you’ll learn of Nien’s fate. More I really don’t want to reveal.
I hope you liked the new chapter and, like always, I’m curious of your thoughts.
Have a nice start into the next week,
Love
Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers,

Thank you so much for the many reviews and kudos. I’m happy that I don’t have to let you wait longer this time, and can update in ten days. I know how keyed up you are because of the current situation aboard the Excalibur – and what happened to Khan.

Concerning the whole 'body-temperature of Vulcans' please check the enlarged prologue at the beginning of the next story. I wanted to post it here, but it was too long and therefore I put it in the text before the chapter really begins.

But now back to the story.

The new chapter will be a roller coaster, too, and I think there are several moments you will want to cry or to beat the crap out a bad guy or two. Well, let me tell you, that is something a few of our friends are going to do.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

Just a little thing in advance. I knew that I would be caught-up in the whole Trek discussion concerning Vulcans' body temperature sooner or later, so here we go.

First: Neither Gene Roddenberry, nor Diane Duane – who wrote the most episodes and several very good novels concerning Vulcan and its habitants – mentioned Spock’s temperature (or that of his father, for example). Not once! The idea that it differs from ours is rooted in McCoy’s statements about Vulcan anatomy being different from human anatomy, and Vulcans have blood containing copper. There is also the moment McCoy teases Spock about the ‘ice-water’ in his veins. Well, I do understand this scene as nothing else than indeed ‘teasing’ – Bones refers to the old saying that someone is ‘cold-blooded’ because of the lack of emotions (or showing them).

The elevated body temperature of Vulcans compared to humans was first considered because of their home world’s high temperature and so Spock reacts differently to cold compared to humans.

I know that the book “Starfleet Medical References Manual” mentions that Vulcans have a lower
body temperature – approx. 32 °C. Yet there is no proof that this is correct and that a higher body temperature is incorrect. The same goes for the statement that this is canon. It is not.

The “Starfleet Medical References Manual” was first published in October 1977 and was never confirmed as ‘canon’ from Roddenberry and the TV-show- and movie makers. The book contains many mistakes. For example, concerning Klingons: the book states that Klingons have a higher body temperature, are 1.70 – 1.90 meters tall (they are often much taller) and life expectancy of 69 (females) and 89 (males) years. Well, in the TOS episode “Trouble with the tribbles” that was produced in 1967, the Klingon spy Darvin was revealed not only because of the tribble’s reaction towards him, but also because of the read-outs of McCoy’s med-scanner: “Too low body temperature, heartbeat like a drum”. And concerning Klingon life expectancy: Koloth, Kang and Kor – all three coming from TOS – met Captain Picard approximately 100 years after Kirk, Spock and Co. All three Klingons had aged, yes, but they were still healthy and at full strength. Therefore Klingons must have a life expectancy close to that of Vulcans.

I know that the makers of TNG used the book during production of the TV-show, yet they didn’t use it as a hard and fast rule. See the above mentioned example.

Back to Spock – or Vulcans in general.

Most mammals that live in deserts have a higher body temperature than humans. And this is logical, because the body would waste energy trying to stay cool. Desert fauna regulate their temperature by sending heat through exposed and specially designed areas of the skin, e.g. elephants through their ears. Vulcans don’t sweat but they radiate heat if they’ve been exposed to hot areas or after a very hard workout (according to T’Pol, ENT).

Cold-blooded fauna like snakes and lizards have a life-saving instinct to preserve them as outdoor temperature drops. Most of them sun bathe during the day and hide deep in the ground to stay warm during the day’s absence.

In ENT, we see T’Pol and Captain Archer visiting Vulcan, and while Archer begins to feel cold during the night in the desert, T’Pol seems to be unaffected – at least she doesn’t suffer like Archer. She even mentions that Vulcans have no problems dealing with several hours of cold. Spock shows the same resistance to cold during his unintentional stay on the planet Sarpeidon’s while McCoy nearly froze to death after a short period of time. Spock remained strong enough to take Bones to the shelter of a cave.

As well, there is only a certain range in which the body can cope in a temperature drop until it is life-threatening. Life forms with lower body temperatures have a very low tolerance to cold, unlike warm-blooded animals.
I believe that is enough evidence to support a higher core body temperature in Vulcans. If this is the case, it is a secret Roddenberry took with him on his final journey. The Trek fandom is torn when it comes to this detail, and I think it’s up to any hobby-author or fan to decide for himself or herself with which hypotheses they will stand behind. Unfortunately there is no test to date to confirm or deny the hypothesis.

I hope this explains, at least a little, Jim’s feeling a ‘warmer than human hand’ as Spock supports him, and why I believe that Vulcan body temperature is higher than human body temperature.

Chapter 75 – Love knows how to fight

In Auxiliary of the Enterprise, the atmosphere was tense. ‘Selek’ had gotten the affirmation from the technician in the New Vulcan seat of government that all legitimate Starfleet members had been beamed aboard the Excalibur, and Chekov had reported that the sensors caught energy discharges on several decks. It was clear that on the other ship fights had broken out – obviously, there were a lot of people who simply didn’t believe that Barnett was… well, Barnett. Otherwise, no Security or crew member in his or her sane mind would have put up resistance. The second explanation for the display of violence was that there were more members of Section 31 aboard than originally thought.

‘Selek’ s gaze wandered to Sulu, who sat beside him at the helm and had brought the Enterprise parallel to Excalibur, while on the other side, the Lexington loomed, ready to take action should the treacherous captain try something foolish like attempting to escape. It didn’t slip the old Vulcan’s attention when the Asian helmsman sat rigidly on his chair with his shirt soaked with sweat. He was anything but fit for duty, yet he was here – supporting his captain and friends even in his weak condition, just like the Sulu ‘Selek’ remembered so well. Always loyal, always ready to sacrifice himself for the ship and its crew, always present when he was most needed.

At the communications station, Kevin Riley bent over the displays and listened closely to every transmission that was sent, but since Kirk and the others had beamed aboard the Excalibur, there was silence. Spock Prime pursed his lips, remembering all too well the Kevin Riley of his own timeline, and for a moment he thought he heard the Irishman’s terrible rendition of ‘Take me home, Kathleen’. In hindsight, the whole situation had to hold some kind of humor, even if they all had been in grave danger in those hours. ‘Selek’ recalled the moment he admitted to Jim that he was ashamed of the friendship he felt for him, not realizing how much this hurt his T’hy’la. He hadn’t been ashamed of their relationship, but of the feelings which came with it – that he was feeling anything at all. A Vulcan had no emotions, or so he had believed, until he came aware of the fact that this was, indeed, a lie. Even his father had admitted to having feelings. The secret was to control them, not to suppress them – something he learned later. And later he and Jim had talked about those minutes in the briefing room, and – like always – Kirk had understood him; had already forgiven him long before.
‘Selek’ felt some very un-Vulcan nerves rising in him. Something was off, this much he could tell. Funny, in his own days aboard this ship, he always had been confused whenever his Jim did something based on a ‘gut-feeling’, now this odd instinct called out to him, too. Something was…

“Something isn’t right!”

Joaquin Weiss’ quiet voice cut into the heavy silence in Auxiliary that was previously only interrupted by the quiet sounds of the computers and sensors.

Pavel and Kevin looked at the young superhuman, and even Sulu turned his eyes away from the helm’s display and glanced over his shoulder. “What do you mean?” he asked, and Joaquin gulped,

“Noo… Something’s happening to him. He…” He stopped, and his eyes widened before he bent forward over with a harsh gasp. Pavel made a step into his direction, but ‘Selek’ called, “Stay at your station, Mr. Chekov. Mr. Sulu, I’ll switch the navigation to the helm.” Not waiting for an affirmation he did as he just said and was at Joaquin’s side a moment. “Mr. Weiss, what is it?” he asked softly, steadying the Augment-boy.

Joaquin had pressed his eyes shut and tried to regain his breath. He felt much distress coming from his older brother – dread, fear – and pain. So much pain. It burned like fire in Weiss.

“He is hurt,” he whispered. “Badly. And… And he’s so afraid.” He felt the strong, far too warm hands straightening him up and opened his eyes again. His gaze found that of the alien old man in front of him, who watched him with alarm but also sympathy. “He’s injured – gravely,” Joaquin choked out. “And he’s scared. I’ve never felt anything like this from him.”

“You sense your brother’s feelings?” Sulu asked, perplexed, but it was ‘Selek’, who answered him.

“The Augments have some mental powers – nothing dangerous, but given their Terran heritage, it’s extraordinary. Mr. Weiss and Mr. Singh seem to be linked by an extraordinarily strong family bond.”

“Like the captain and Mr. Singh after they became a couple?” Pavel offered.
Joaquin murmured, “They are bondmates. I think it’s normal for us to develop this kind of telepathy after marking and bonding one another. It was the same with Otto and Katie.”

His statement made the three officers gape at him in surprise; only Keenser simply nodded. He had sensed the strong bond between his captain and the augmented Terran for quite a time now.

Spock Prime cocked his head as he thought about Weiss’ statements concerning Khan’s condition. Hadn’t ‘Selek’ sensed trouble coming from young Jim only a minute ago? Was it because Khan was injured and Jim felt it over his mating-bond with the Augment leader? If so, Jim was certainly going half mad because of his far too human, loving heart – a circumstance that could be dangerous in the middle of combat.

‘Selek’ came to a decision – one he had made before in many not so different situations. And he had and always would deny them as emotional choices, yet they were always born out of worry for his T’hy’la – and this was now the case, too. “Mr. Keenser, activate the suction system to clear the air between here and deck 5. I will beam over.” He went to the wall at his left side and pressed a button. A door opened, revealing a small room that contained a phaser, oxygen bottles, spacesuits with helmets and gas masks.

Quickly, the old Vulcan picked up a gas mask and a phaser, but before he could fasten the mask he heard a soft noise behind him, followed by a hoarse, “I’ll go with you.”

Of course, underestimating a situation was one of the most typical characteristics of young humans. That went for augmented teens as well.

“No, Mr. Weiss. Given your lack of experiences in combat these days as well as your limited knowledge about this century, the risk that you’ll get hurt is…”

“I don’t care! I’m going with you!” Joaquin snapped. He stepped beside the High Minister and took a gas mask that he quickly fixed over his mouth and nose. “I may not know much about today’s technology, but I do think I can handle a weapon that can stun people. And how to act in proximate combat is something I learned when I was not older than seven or eight. I grew up with this shit!” He took a phaser and offered it ‘Selek’. “Put it on stun or whatever you call it, or I’ll have to try it, but don’t rant at me if it goes wrong.”

Spock Prime lifted a brow. He knew the stubborn way the chin was set and the flash in human eyes. At this moment, the young Augment resembled Jim Kirk, even if both men looked completely
different. And ‘Selek’ was keenly aware of another fact – a determined mind would not be stopped. This was something he had learned over the years at Jim’s side. It was a waste of time to discuss this, and so he gave in. Taking the phaser and setting it to stun, he said, “Very well, but you stay behind me, and when I instruct you to seek cover, then this will be exactly what you do! I do not want to tell your brother that you were injured on my watch!”

Joaquin put the phaser in his waistband. “You sound like Jim.”

“Maybe because we both seem to share the same point of view,” the old Vulcan replied wryly, then he fastened his gas mask, took an additional communicator and left the room, Weiss on his heels.

“The air isn’t clear yet, but the suction system is still working, sir!” Sulu called, and ‘Selek’ nodded.

“It will be enough to reach the transporter room. You have the con, Mr. Sulu, hold the Enterprise in position. If there is a change in the Excalibur’s course, call me on the Starfleet Standard Emergency Frequency.” He went to the door, not realizing that he was giving orders like the first officer he once was. “Hold your breath, gentlemen, Mr. Weiss and I will hurry, but it’s inevitable that some of the sleeping gas will come through the door upon our exit.”

He unsealed the door and vanished quickly. Joaquin slipped through it, too, and Spock Prime resealed the entrance from the outside immediately.

In Auxiliary, Sulu, Chekov, and Riley exchanged a glance. “And there I thought Vulcans were always in control, but Selek fell right back into his old ways, didn’t he?” Hikaru smirked.

“Da,” Pavel grinned. “Iz like he time traveled in place, becoming our first officer all over again. I had troubles not calling by his real name.”

Kevin frowned. “What do you mean with ‘becoming our first officer all over again’? And isn’t ‘Selek’ his true name?”

Sulu and Chekov exchanged a glance. Oops!

ST***ST
The fights aboard the *Excalibur* were still raging on several decks, while other sections were secured or the ship’s own Redshirts had been reasoned with. That, however, was not the case on deck 5.

Carol wasn’t quite finished with her report, as Jim Kirk took action, knowing that his mate was in immediate danger. Not caring for his own safety, he hurled himself head first into the fight that was ongoing between Galven, the rest of The Shadow, some Redshirts from the *Lexington*, and Norton’s men. As if pulled by invisible strings, he shot and punched his way through the quarrel, slapped hands and phasers away, shoved an Elite Security back with enough force to send the man into the next wall, and escaped grabbing hands with a speed that was head-spinning.

As before, Spock remained at his side, yet the Vulcan recognized with a hint of atypical nervousness, the inhuman strength his T’hy’la developed. Jim’s treatment with Khan’s blood more than a year ago had left physical changes in the young captain, and the blood concoction the Augment had given him during their flight from Turkana was still showing its effects. Jim Kirk wasn’t an Augment, but he wasn’t just a human anymore. This much became clearer to Spock, and so the Vulcan’s efforts weren’t expended by covering his friend’s back, but also in covering up the extraordinary power Kirk seemed to brim with – to prevent questions later which could lead to a minor catastrophe.

Jim didn’t even realize what Spock was doing or that he pushed his way through the combating crowd as if the Security men around him were nothing more than some untrained kids. His mind was focused on only one thing: get to Nien.

And then he felt it – the rising despair and wrath that leaked over their shared bond. It made him tremble, but also showed him the way. Jim sensed that he was getting closer to Khan; he shoved another Elite Security away and gasped as he heard the soundless cries for help deep in his soul. Nien was running out of time!

“KIRK!”

Finnegan appeared in front of him – seemed to materialize out of thin air. “You’re too late, Jimbo,” he sneered. “Your warming pan is about to be frozen and…” The rest went down in a shout of pain and shock, as Jim didn’t even slow down and crashed into him at full speed and with furious determination. Both men collided and went down to the floor where Kirk didn’t waste any precious seconds; he socked Sean on the jaw with enough strength to dislocate the bone. Finnegan howled like a beaten dog and slapped his hands over the lower part of his face, staring with teary eyes at his old school rival whose expression was murderous. The next moment Kirk was on his feet again and continued his way, not looking back.

Sean felt nausea with the pain, but instead of quitting it woke his ire even more. Rolling onto his stomach, he grabbed for his phaser, but he didn’t have a chance to draw it. He felt a warm, hard hand on his left shoulder; a stabbing pain shot through his whole systems and then the world turned black.
Spock straightened up after he was certain that the Vulcan nerve-pinch had served him well again, and followed Jim and McCoy towards the medbay. He heard the well-known voice of Barnett hailing ship-wide for Jim Kirk; the Vulcan wasted no time answering it for his captain, who obviously overheard or ignored the hail. The combat was left behind, yet Spock’s keen hearing didn’t miss Wesley’s roar,

“CEASE AND DESIST ALL COMBAT ACTION! THIS IS COMMODORE WESLEY. I ORDER YOU TO LAY DOWN YOUR WEAPONS. ALL OF YOU!”

Spock wasn’t certain if the attempt by the commodore to settle the fights by exercising his authority would be successful, but he had no time to watch the outcome. Kirk was already twenty meters away, and the Vulcan knew that his T’hy’la was going to need him.

Jim forced his legs to run even quicker as another wave of panic rushed over his link with Nien. Several people were in front of him who were about to enter medbay. Without slowing down, he pushed them out of his way not caring for their protests; he stormed into sickbay driven by the terrible fear for his beloved and by Nien’s blinding panic.

A furious male voice sounded from an attached room, accusing "You’re going to kill him!" Kirk dashed through the door. For a second, he was stopped dead in his tracks as his eyes and mind took so much at once. The air reeked of blood, there were Nien’s torn clothes on the floor, a cryotube stood only four meters away from where weak knocks sounded from, and Conelly was bent over it.

Conelly…

Something snapped in Jim, and with a roar he leaped at the scientist, shoving him against the tube. This bastard had raped his mate and now he was about to kill Nien. Kirk would have his head for it, no matter what!

Conelly cried out as the collision forced him hard against the cryotube; his left hip bone pressed one of the buttons – the movement of the cover stopped a hands breadth away from closing completely; it began to re-open. Two of Elite Security tried to intervene, but a kick from the young captain sent one flying; the other one collided with Dashwood who had rushed forwards to help his colleague. The third Security had trouble with Burmaster who used the unexpected chance to put up resistance against his captor. The fourth guard tried to assist his three colleagues at once – something even a well-trained Starfleet officer couldn’t manage.

Jim didn’t care what was going on around him. His attention lay only on Conelly who lifted his arms and fought back, but Kirk seemed to have the strength of three men. He blocked the attack, grabbed
Conelly’s collar and hauled Nathan away, head-butting him in the process. For a moment, the
scientist saw stars, then he raised his right knee hard and tried to hit his opponent were it hurt the
most – unusual for males using this trick, even in combat.

Jim avoided the attack and delivered a blow that swept the scientists off his feet. Conelly tumbled
backwards – straight at the cryotube that began to sway with the force of the impact. Pushing himself
away he attacked Kirk – and the shoving of the cryotube had a big side effect.

Khan’s mind had begun to shut down as the cover started to slide close and there was nothing left
than horror and a gut-wrenching fear – not for others, but this time for himself. Over! Everything
would be over in a few seconds without a way back! Desperately he tried to stop the cover but he
could barely lift his hands – never mind the strength he would have needed to bring the device to
halt. His base instincts took over and his fists hammered against the lid, yet his effort was nothing
more than some punches even a child could have withstood.

Then a shout, ringing with fury and threat echoed through the air, followed by a jerk against the tube.
In that moment, a part of Nien’s soul sensed the nearness of its mate. The cover stopped moving and
began to open again. Snarls and outcries were heard before the tube was shoved again and began to
roll aside. As if in slow motion, Khan saw the floor coming closer before the tube crashed on the
ground.

New pain shot through his body and cleared his mind long enough to make one thing clear – there
was a last chance to escape this coffin. Again his survival instincts kicked in and sent new adrenalin
through his system; it overcame the sedative effects long enough to allow his limbs to move. His left
arm burnt like hell; his left leg was useless. Every fiber of his body seemed to be on fire, but
somehow he managed to crawl out of the tube, using mainly his right arm and leg. His heart raced
and his raging breath echoed in his ears and drowned out the fighting noises around him.

Another sharp sting pierced his left side and from one of the other moment he had trouble breathing.
Yet it didn’t make him stop his attempt to get away from the tube that didn’t represent protection
anymore but only danger. The floor seemed to be made out of ice and heavy shivers shook him as he
attempted to crawl away from the cryotube; trying to suck air in his burning lungs.

He sensed the proximity of a stranger, felt a hand on his shoulder and with a shout he struck out his
right arm and sent the approaching human flying away, while his upper body – robbed of any
support – fell hard on the floor. The stabbing pain in his side increased and sickness tried to
overwhelm him, but he didn’t even recognize it, while new panic sized him at the realization of his
own helplessness. Away! He had to get away – that was all his mind was yelling at him…

Bones had entered the separate room of the medbay only seconds after Jim, together with Ritek and
two Lexington-Redshirts. Still hating to use a phaser, he didn’t hesitate now to stun one of the Elite
Securities who had been kicked away by Jim only a second earlier, while Ritek and the others did a quick work at the rest of their opponents.

Dashwood, intelligent enough to realize when he better had to quit, had raised his hands and had retreated to get not involved in the hand-to-hand combat that raged between his colleague and the infuriated young captain.

McCoy’s gaze grazed a man in the blue tunic of the medical staff, who stumbled away from the Elite Security Ritek had stunned. Then Leonard’s attention was driven to the cryotube that fell off the pedestals as the two enemies crashed against it. In horror Bones watched the bleeding, torn, nude man who crawled out of the tube and not wasting a moment, McCoy ran to him. He bent over Khan to help him, only to find himself sitting on his butt a meter away a second later. Dammit, even in his terrible condition the Augment could lash out like a tiger.

“Doctor, are you hurt?”

Spock – of course! Jim was right, McCoy decided. Their Vulcan was a big, big softie!

“Khan’s having a damn panic attack,” he wheezed and rose, watching appalled as the fallen superhuman crawled over the ground despite his grave injuries, leaving a wet, red track.

The strange medical officer on the other side of the room made a movement into Khan’s direction, but Bones stopped him with a loud, “NO! Don’t touch him!” There was no way Khan would accept anyone in close range now given his state of mind, only…

Leonard whirled around and saw Jim kneeling over Conelly, punching the man mercilessly. “JIM! Stop pummeling the bastard into a bloody pulp and take care of your mate! Khan’s having a panic attack!”

Spock didn’t wait until those words were registered by his enraged T’hy’la. With two steps he was at Kirk’s side, towering over him; he caught his friend’s wrists in a firm grip and said sternly, “Captain, STOP!” Ignoring Jim’s resistance, he pulled him to his feet and shook him for a moment, until the unnerving, savage look left Kirk’s gaze, and the blue eyes became focused again. “Jim, Khan needs you!” he repeated urgently, steadying his friend’s swaying body.

That was enough to tear Jim out of the red haze of hate that had begun to engulf him. His glance found the naked, bleeding, broken figure on the ground – and pure terror rose in him.
Slipping away from Spock, he dashed to his soulmate and knelt down in front of him, blocking Khan’s path. Not wasting a thought of his safety, again, Jim bent over the Augment and reached out to him with trembling fingers. A hoarse cry escaped the superhuman while he instinctively tried to push away the assumed threat, but Jim would have none of it. Trying to find an uninjured swath of skin on the beaten body, he softly touched him, and slowly, gently got close enough to bury his nose in the midnight dark strands caked in blood.

“Sh-sh-sh, honey, it’s me. I’m here, love, I’m here. Calm down, Nien, calm down. It’s me. I got you, baby, I got you. No one will hurt you. I’m here. Sh-sh-sh, you’re safe now,” he whispered. Any anger left him like water flushing away into an abyss and was replaced with shock, love and rising fright. God, why hadn’t he come sooner? Why had it taken him so long to get to his mate – to his husband? Who had done this to Nien? Why for God’s sake! Why this violence against him? Questions which weren’t important in the moment – not really. Only his beloved counted now, nothing else.

Khan’s mind had shut down completely again. The only thing that had made him move was the drive to escape – to stay alive, somehow! Someone blocked his way; he was trapped again – hands on his back – a voice at his ear – a smell…

A familiar smell – familiar hands – a familiar voice…

A voice that meant safety – protection – love.

Jim!

Jim was here!

He had come!

He would stop the agony – would make the pain go away.

His augmented senses slowly became aware of the warm breath on his neck, of the warm body that
enveloping him.

Safety…

Shelter…

That was what it meant!

He opened his mouth, tried to say something, but all that came over his blood-smeared lips was a whimper.

The sound broke Jim’s heart, and made his soul weep; it brought tears to his eyes. Bending lower down, he brushed his lips against the sweat-soaked temple of his beloved. Nien’s heaving, dry sobs woke new panic in Jim, and quickly he lifted his head to shout for Bones. But he was already there beside them cataloging the many injuries Khan suffered. Another man stepped beside them – the unknown medical officer who obviously belonged to the ship.

“Michael Burmaster, current CMO of the Excalibur,” he introduced himself, offering Bones a medscanner.

“Leonard McCoy, CMO of the Enterprise,” Bones replied, accepting the device. He ran it carefully above the superhuman’s body. “Sweet Lord,” he murmured as he read the results. “These animals should rot in hell!” He glanced up. “His left lung is pierced by one of a few broken ribs. He must have gotten this additional injury when the cryotube crashed onto the floor, given the fresh blood. I need a portable respirator. Quick!”

Michael nodded and already headed for the door. “I’ll get it and some stabilizer to…”

“Mr. Singh is an Augment,” Bones called after him, looking at to his colleague to check the man’s reaction. To his surprise, Burmaster only shrugged.

“I figured as much. What does his body need?”

McCoy sighed in relief. Finally, a colleague who took the work and the honor of a doctor as serious
as he did. “Get me…” A rush of Latin words followed which told Jim nothing, but Burmaster obviously understood because he stormed out of the room, yelling for a nurse.

Jim tried to calm his agitation. A pierced lung – what else had been done to his beloved? He lifted a hand and looked at it, shuddering inside as he saw that it was covered with blood – Nien’s blood! He felt his mate shivering and bent closer trying to warm him.

Khan was cold – so terribly cold. The floor, the air – his whole body shook with tremors, but there was also something warm and soft.

Jim…

Again his soul reached for his love and sensed the dread in Jim, but also the fierce determination to make it better for him. Khan gulped, and for a moment his mind was clear enough to show him that it was hard to breathe; that woke his survival instincts again. Acting on them, he clung tighter to the only being in this whole world that was able to save him.

Ritek closed the distance to them, shocked. “Holy moons,” he whispered as he took in his friend’s beaten form. “What have they done to you, mate!?”

Quick, pounding steps drew nearer, followed by a gasp. “Holy mother of God!”

Jim didn’t need to look over his shoulder to know who had arrived: Bob Wesley.

The commodore stepped nearer; his gaze aghast at the wounded man on the floor who weakly tried to wrap one arm around Kirk’s waist; he fought for every single breathe and was barely recognizable as the proud, handsome superhuman Bob met aboard the Enterprise.

Bones rose, stepped to the med-kit and began to rummage through it, searching for an antiseptic spray and dressing material. Some cuts and lacerations had to be treated immediately, or Khan would not be able to avoid infection – not in his state. And then the superhuman had to get to surgery – now!

Connelly had regained some composure and got to his feet; wiping away some blood from his mouth and nose – that was definitely broken given its angle. The area around one of his eyes began to swell, yet pure mockery glistened in his gaze, as he glared at the young captain who held the
Augment in a protective, tender embrace as best he could in this position.

“He’s a good fuck, isn’t he, Kirk?” Nathan taunted. “You should have heard him moan for me when…”

Jim’s head lifted and a promise of death began to shine in his eyes. Yet it wasn’t him who shut the scientist up.

Something exploded in McCoy at those words which made a light of one of the cruelest crimes possible. With a snarl, he whirled around and his fist connected with Conelly’s jaw. If it was pure luck or Bones’ anatomical knowledge, well, Nathan went to the ground like a fallen tree to not moving again.

“Doctor!” Wesley and Spock rebuked in union, and got promptly an ear full from the enraged CMO.

“This bastard didn’t deserve anything less after what he did. First this vile monster forced himself on Khan, abusing him in the most painful and humiliating way possible, and then he has the nerve to state that Khan enjoyed it. He’s lucky that I didn’t break his jaw for spitting out those lies! I can live with injuries inflicted in a battle, even if it is a waste, but I will never tolerate someone who stoops to rape and then, makes fun of it!”

Not realizing what he had revealed to an utterly shocked Ritek and Wesley, and an equally astonished Vulcan, he stomped back to Jim and Khan and knelt down beside them. “Mr. Singh,” he said gently, “it’s me, McCoy. I’m going to examine you and to treat some of your wounds. All right?”

There was no answer. Only Jim felt Nien tense and tried to get closer to him. “Sh-sh-sh, honey, it’s all right. Bones won't hurt you. Let him help you – I'm here, love. I’ll watch over you. I won't go anywhere. Promise! Just let Bones check you.” He kissed the tousled, sticky hair again, not caring who saw him.

“Okay,” McCoy murmured and took a deep breath, but before he could do anything, and outcry came from the door.

“Noo!”

Jim, still fixed on his mate, looked over his shoulder – and straight at a very pale Joaquin Weiss and a stiff ‘Selek’. “How did you get h-?” Kirk couldn’t finish his sentence because Joaquin rushed
towards them with a shout of anguish and knelt down beside Jim and Nien, his eyes wide and dark in horror.

Khan sensed a familiar presence, but the terror that echoed over the family link mixed with his own – what made him cringe. A soft hand touched his back – a familiar one and so he kept still, but the tension didn’t leave him.

Joaquin looked in utter shock at the torn figure on the ground. Blood – there was so much blood it made him dizzy with nausea. And it all came from his brother’s body! He sensed the pain Noo was in, sensed the deep fear his normally fearless brother and leader felt, and tears sprang to his eyes.

McCoy threw a short glance at Joaquin. “Calm down, son; I’ll do everything in my power to help your brother.”

“Dr. McCoy; Oxygen,” Burmaster called while he rushed back into the room. “The stabilizer will be finished in a minute.” He gave Bones the oxygen mask who placed it carefully over Khan’s mouth and nose – easier said than done, because the superhuman put up resistance, and only gave in as Jim coaxed him to hold still. At his nod, Michael switched on the device and McCoy could see Khan was calming down as his body was supplied with the needed oxygen.

“All right, next.” He glanced shortly up his colleague. “Watch his bio-signals. If his heart rate goes back over 90, tell me.”

Burmaster grunted an affirmation perplexed about the read outs the med-scanner delivered.

Ritek was still trembling with rage and filled with intense worry for his friend. He looked at the boy who sat beside Khan close to tears. ‘Brother’? Was this boy Khan’s brother? Then some of Khan’s crew had been woken up? Well, that was a surprise – and utterly unimportant in the moment. Khan’s condition and the sorrow of the boy were his only concern at the moment, and the Rigelian felt a wave of compassion.

McCoy had begun to treat the worst of the injuries; he cleaned a laceration carefully – and Khan cried out, starting to put up resistance again. Even Jim was almost unable to calm him. Nien’s brilliant, bright mind was shut off again – only his instincts were working now. Trying to soothe his frantic bondmate, Jim held him as close as he dared and crooned gentle nothings in his ear.

Bones used the distraction and quickly began to disinfecting the more severe wounds, but he knew
that this was only on the surface. The real injuries lay inside. “I have to operate, Jim, as soon as possible,” he said, hating to bring more misery to his friend and the Augment-boy with the facts he had to reveal now. “His liver is injured, his left lung is pierced by a broken rib; he has serious abdominal bruising – I think at least a ruptured spleen. His left arm and left leg are fractured. But it's the internal injuries - he's shutting down, not healing. Those bastards did this with intent to kill.”

Joaquin gasped again, while Wesley bent over Kirk and the Augment. “What are his chances?” he asked quietly, fearing the worst.

Bones continued his work, while he gritted out. “I’m not Spock. I can’t give you a number, but Khan’s chances are poor – and they’ll with every minute he’s not in surgery!”


“Thanks,” Leonard said before he raised his voice. “Mr. Singh, I'm giving you some stabilizers, so please don’t freak out. I only want to help you, okay?”

There was again no answer, but at least the Augment relaxed a little bit as Jim’s lips brushed over his temple.

McCoy administered the stabilizers, while he asked his colleague, “Is a surgery room free?”

Michael shook his head. “No. To tell the truth, my patients are lining up to get a free place there.”

“Superb – and our medbay is filled with sleeping gas,” Bones growled. “What’s about the Lexington?” he addressed Wesley without interrupting his task.

Bob frowned. “Of course, it's yours, but…” He hesitated before he suddenly crouched down beside the little group. “Jim,” he murmured, “as long as Khan is on a Starfleet ship he can be declared under arrest and it would be valid.” He gave his protégé, who looked at him with pain written all over his face, a pointed glare before he laid a hand on Kirk’s shoulder. “Maybe…”

“The New Vulcan Academy is affiliated with our hospital,” ‘Selek’ cut in, instantly knowing what the commodore suggested. “It has the most modern medical technology the Federation has to offer. I will call them to prepare for an emergency surgery under your command, Leonard.” He stepped to
Jim looked at McCoy worryingly. “Bones? Is Nien okay to be moved?”

“There more time we lose the closer I get to ‘no’, so let’s get him down to New Vulcan so that I can patch him up. I’m still amazed that he can breathe on his own, but I don’t think he will for very much longer.”

“All right, then let’s bring Nien to the transporter room.” Jim looked at Wesley. “Can we risk leaving medbay or are there more idiots waiting to shoot us out there?”

“I was able to reason with Elite Security and the Excalibur’s Redshirts. They’ve laid down their phasers, but I think they want to see Barnett in the flesh. I can’t fault them for that; they’re only doing their duty.”

“But can we get through them?” Kirk urged.

Wesley nodded. “I don’t think one of them is going to lift a hand against a severely injured man – or his doctor.”

“Okay,” McCoy nodded and glanced at the nurse. “Bring an antigrav stretcher – quick!”

The woman dashed away, and McCoy bent over the former dictator again. “Mr. Singh,” he said gently, “we’re going to put you on an antigrav stretcher to take you to surgery. This will hurt like hell, but we’ll be careful.” He didn’t know if the superhuman had understood him, but he trusted Jim and Joaquin to keep Khan calm.

Spock watched his T’hy’la. He saw the anguish in Jim’s eyes and the deeply rooted fear. He knew that over the bond the dread and pain echoed in each other’s mind and he wished Jim had allowed him to build a shield. It would prevent both from feeling the other one’s agony, but on the other hand, Khan needed to sense Jim – and the other way around. In good and in bad times – indeed!

McCoy glared at Dashwood, who crouched beside the still unconscious Conelly. “Dr. Marcus told us that you sedated Khan. And obviously the potion you mixed is like an anesthetic. What exactly
“Did you inject?” He saw Dashwood frowning and added, “I have to operate on him, and usually my patients aren’t awake during this time, so out with it!”

Dashwood only looked uncertain at the CMO. Bob exploded. “Listen, man, you’re in deep, deep shit and I’m about to put you not only on court martial, but you will answer to the Federation Court of Human Rights. And if you don’t want to spend the rest of your life in a penalty colony, you will answer Dr. McCoy truthfully, or, God help me, I’m going to lose it!”

The scientist gulped and addressed Bones, “We mixed a standard anesthesia with…” A flood of words followed and McCoy listened closely before he abruptly nodded.

“Right, that makes sense.”

The nurse returned with the needed equipment. The same moment another familiar voice called, “Capt’n? Are ye here?”

“Over here, Mr. Scott!” Spock answered, being aware of the fact that his friend had only eyes and ears for Khan at the moment.

The engineer entered and stopped with a shocked gasp. “Holy Mary! Don’t tell me this blood is all from Khan!”

“It is,” Spock deadpanned. “Mr. Singh owes his condition to those men over there,” he pointed at the still stunned Elite Security. He looked at Michael. “Dr. Burmaster, I want the clothes, and the hands of these men examined. I’m sure that the blood on their clothes is from Mr. Singh and that you also will find more traces of their display of violence against him. The same goes for Commander Finnegan; I assume he is the ringleader of this personal payback.”

“He came with the patient into medbay, telling the professor that he and his men had to defend himself,” Michael growled. “But given the Augment’s condition, he couldn’t put up a lot of resistance. Those injuries are all inflicted by brute force against a man that was unable to defend himself.”

“I anticipated this,” Spock nodded. “Dr. Marcus told us that Khan was sedated and was weakening rapidly. She also will confirm Mr. Finnegan’s aggression, but I want more evidence.”
Wesley looked at him. “Dr. Marcus witnessed this… this beating?”

“Yes. She is on our side and helped Mr. Singh to escape when he was first brought aboard the Excalibur. Only later was he caught in Auxiliary, after he had made certain that Dr. Marcus could flee through the support shafts,” the first officer replied calmly. Deep in his eyes shone something close to disgust. Vulcans despised violence, and what happened to Khan could wake loathing even in a Master of Gol. He saw the stretcher being brought into position beside the injured Augment and went to the little group where he gently pushed Joaquin aside to give Jim a helping hand.

“Well, then Finnegan’s ass will rot in prison until he’s old and wrinkled,” Bob growled. “What’s the status on the bridge, Mr. Scott?”

“Admiral Barnett has taken over the command, sir. He sent me to find out what’s going on here after Captain Kirk didn’t answer his hails.” He looked with compassion at his friend. “I feared something happened to Khan, but this…” He shook his head.

B Burmaster looked at him thunderstruck. “Admiral Barnett?!”

“Yes, he’s alive,” Scotty nodded, “and just arrested Styles and two of his officers, who are part of a conspiracy.”

Nien cried out just then as he was carefully lifted on the antigrav stretcher by Jim and Spock. The Augment began to roll his head and heaved despite the respirator, and Bones realized that the superhuman was shocking worse than he’d thought. “Khan, you’re safe,” he said firmly, but also softly. “No one will hurt you here, promise!”

Those blue-green eyes, glassy with pain, looked at him and then at Jim, pleading mutely to make the pain stop.

Bones couldn’t help himself; he patted the Augment’s right shoulder soothingly. “We'll get you down to New Vulcan and into surgery in no time!” he promised before addressing Kirk. “Jim, stay with him. You seem to be the only one who is able to keep him calm. Joaquin, stay at your brother’s other side, I’ll steer the stretcher. Spock, Scotty, make sure that we can get through the corridors with any problem. Ritek, watch our back. Commodore, maybe you can use your authority help us out. Off we go!” Not waiting for any affirmation, McCoy activated the antigrav drive and moved the stretcher quickly towards the door.
Burmaster called some of his nurses and instructed them to take the four stunned Elite Security personnel to the makeshift beds and Conelly back to his biobed and restrain him there. Then the CMO turned towards the Dashwood. “You’re waiting here until Admiral Barnett decides what to do with you.” He left the room and sealed it not caring for the professor’s protest. He watched his colleague and the others leaving medbay, and called “Good luck!” and then he turned towards his patients.

Outside, controlled chaos had taken place. The corridor was filled with Redshirts from both ships, some Elite Security, and other crew members. Wesley’s thundering voice that demanded room was instantly obeyed, yet many men and women looked at the troop warily.

“Oh… NO!” The hissing voice belonged to Caviw, who had supported the Lexington’s Redshirts together with Galven, Jeff and the other. Now they watched the surrendered troops with the eyes of hawks. That is before they caught sight of their friend.

With graceful, elegant steps she was at Jim’s side, while Galven oinked something in his native tongue and joined her. “Buddy – Holy Mud, what have they done to you?” His little eyes looked at the ashen gray Jim Kirk and one hoof-like hand was laid on the captain’s right arm. “Laddie…” he began helplessly, but found no words.

“We’re taking Nien down to the Vulcan hospital – for surgery,” Jim said hoarsely, and Galven nodded.

“Right, m’boy, we’ll cover your guy’s back!” He took a last, very worried glance at Khan and murmured, “Hold on, buddy! Please, hold on!”

Khan didn’t react – didn’t even acknowledge that he was addressed. He still felt so cold – icy-cold – dizzy and sick. He didn’t know what was going on; his keen orientation had left him completely. Only one thing was present in his numb mind that still fought the sedative: Jim and Joaquin’s presence.

Joaquin barely spared The Shadow gang a look. In his concern, he didn’t even recognize their strange appearance – after all he’d never seen a Tellarit or a Caitian before. Wordlessly he stayed on the other side of the antigrav stretcher holding ‘Noo’s’ left hand as Jim held his right hand, as they headed down the corridor.

Only Spock heard Galven’s furious words: “Whoever did this to Khan, they’ll pay. I’ll stomp them into the ground until nothing but their hair is left.”
“But only after I claw out their eyes!” Caviw snarled – and Spock was very aware of the fact that she meant her threat. Caitians were well-known for their close family- and mating-bonds. They also protected those who did not belong to their clan, but were nevertheless close to them. The Vulcan knew that The Shadow regarded Khan as their friend and that they had taken a liking to Jim Kirk. Seeing Khan closer to death than life, and the captain in such anguish because of it, had woken Caviw’s strong protection instincts.

A tousled figure that stepped towards them woke Spock’s attention, and he and Jim recognized Genrow, who looked like he had taken a walk through a jungle, yet his movements were strong.

Shocked, the commander stopped in his tracks when he saw Khan on the stretcher covered by a Vulcan robe. Behind him, ‘Selek’ walked purposefully down the corridor, talking quickly in his mother tongue to someone via a Starfleet communicator.

“Heavens,” Genrow murmured. “So they did catch him again.”

Jim had no time for the man, but Spock – always able to focus on several things at once – addressed him. “Commander Genrow, down the corridor is Commander Finnegan. I stunned him with a nerve pinch. Please make certain that he is brought to the brig. He’s accused of inflicting grievous bodily harm.”

“He’s already there, sir,” Genrow replied with a grim expression.

“Good work!” Wesley grumbled. “In medbay are four of his men and the two scientists, Conelly and Dashwood. Make certain that they’re guarded and after being treated by the CMO are brought to the brig, too.”

The commander saluted. “Aye, sir!”

Jim and the others didn't but continued their way. Half a minute later they stepped into the transporter room where Scotty quickly walked to the controls; he dismissed an ensign with a wave of his hand. McCoy maneuvered the stretcher onto one of the transporter pads while ‘Selek’, Jim, and Joaquin took their own places. Spock wanted to follow them, but Wesley, who had entered the transporter room only a second ago, held him back, “Mr. Spock, please remain here! I have an urgent matter to discuss with you.” He caught the alarmed gazes of the others and added, “A private one; it can't wait.”
Vulcans don’t get nervous – at least that’s what one would state. But right now Spock sensed an unsettling pressure in his gut. Looking at Jim, he got a short nod.

“Stay here, Spock – and take care of our ship, if Barnett allows it,” Jim said quietly, trusting his friend to make the right decisions.

Spock clasped his hands on his back. “Affirmative, Captain.” His glance softened. “Successful surgery increases Khan's survival, Jim. Khan is strong; optimism is logical.”

Jim felt a lump rising in his throat. Spock tried to comfort him – in his own, Vulcan way. Leave it to his T’hy’la to render him speechless.

Spock Prime adjusted his communicator. “Selek to bridge.”

“Bridge, Uhura here, sir!” answered the familiar, melodic voice.

“Miss Uhura, Healer Sorel from the New Vulcan University Hospital will contact you within the next minute to give you coordinates. Please transfer them without delay to transporter room 1.”

“Aye, sir.”

Before ‘Selek’ could close the communicator, another voice sounded through the little speaker. “High Minister Selek, Barnett here. What’s going on? Did I get it right? You’re aboard the Excalibur?”

The old Vulcan lifted a brow, knowing that this was a critical moment. Barnett shouldn’t know that Jim, Khan and the others were leaving the ship to beam to New Vulcan. Spock Prime would not concern Barnett, but Khan was a wanted man and the Elder wanted no risk the admiral insisting the Augment undergo surgery aboard a Starfleet ship. “It was only a short visit. I am returning to New Vulcan now, Admiral. I trust you have everything under control now?”

Inwardly, Jim had to smile at this for a second. Typical Spock – to distract from a topic he didn’t want to go discuss by referring to another matter.
“What?” Barnett was confused for a moment before he answered, “Of course everything under contr… Lieutenant, may I ask what are you doing?”

“Sending Mr. Selek the required coordinates, sir,” Uhura’s innocent voice was heard in the background. “He wants to return home, that’s all.”

“But… High Minister, may I ask what you were doing here in the first place?”

“You may,” ‘Selek’ answered dryly and closed the communicator.

Wesley almost groaned. It seemed the old Spock was worse than the young one.

“Good luck,” Ritek said to Jim. “Keep us updated, please.”

Kirk nodded tightly. “I will when time allows it,” he whispered.

“Got the coordinates from Uhura, sir!” the Scotsman reported and watched the controls. “I’ll beam you down.”

“Barnett to High Minister Selek!” the admiral’s voice sounded through the speakers, but he was ignored.

“Thank you, Mr. Scott, as always it’s a pleasure working with you,” the Elder said; then they vanished in the golden light of the transporter beam.

Wesley sighed and rubbed his neck. “Has any one of the gentlemen cared to count how many regulation have been ignored in the last few hours?”

Spock lifted a brow. “I only can give you data about the different loose interpretations of protocol my direct officer colleagues and I were forced to make, but I cannot speak for Admiral Norton, Captain Styles, and…”
“Spock!” Bob let his head drop into the neck; his gaze hung exasperated at the ceiling. “That was a rhetorical question – an attempt to bring to your mind that you are in a hell of a lot of trouble – and I am as well because I didn’t stop you, but…”

“…But gave the captain the hint about Mr. Singh’s presence aboard a Starfleet ship?” The Vulcan looked very innocently and returned the commodore’s piercing glare with a calm expression.

“Barnett to transporter room 1. Can someone explain to me, please, what the High Minister did aboard, and who beamed him down despite my attempt to reach him?”

Montgomery sighed – that promised trouble. Nevertheless he answered the hail. “Commander Scott here, sir, High Minister Selek was in hurry. An emergency, sir.”

“An emergency?” Richard’s voice held a hint of taunting. “According to the engineer's station on the bridge, not only him but four other people were beamed down. Care to tell me who went with Selek?”

Scott gulped and glanced at Wesley and Spock, obviously seeking help.

“Admiral, it’s Wesley,” Bob rose to speak. “Mr. Singh was gravely injured in an act of extreme violence inflicted by Commander Finnegan and his men. The medbay here is overcrowded and so he was beamed down to New Vulcan’s hospital together with Dr. McCoy, another young man and Selek.”

For a moment there was a pause, before Barnett growled, “And appropriately, Khan is out of Starfleet’s reach on New Vulcan. Clever – all of you!” Bob thought he could hear Richard shaking his head. “I hope the fifth man was Spock. I got information from your CMO. She’s beamed down with Sarek straight to the hospital and that healer – Soral – informed us that the surgery for Sarek is prepared.”

Spock had gone rigid the moment his father’s name was mentioned in connection with ‘CMO’, ‘hospital’ and ‘surgery’. “Admiral, I’m still aboard. What’s the matter with my father?” He became conscious of Scott and the ensign’s glances, but ignored them; he couldn’t deny the rising tension in him.

“Bob, you haven’t told him yet?” Barnett addressed Wesley, who answered, “Sorry, but there wasn’t time for it before now.”
“Rrright! Mr. Spock, your father has to be operated as soon as possible and you’re needed for the surgery, too. So get your ass at the next transporter pad and beam down, too. That would also kill two birds with one stone. I bet my last shirt that the fifth unnamed person, who was beamed down, was Jim Kirk and knowing you two, you want to go after him. So, off you go. Wesley'll explains everything about Sarek. Barnett out!”

For a second, the Vulcan was very close to calling himself speechless; then he was back to his controlled self – at least on the outside. Inwardly, he had to fight against increasing dread.

Wesley caught his questioning look and turned towards the ensign, Ritek, and Scotty. “Would you gentlemen please leave us alone for a moment?”

The three men nodded – Scott and Ritek more hesitantly, feeling concern for the young half-Vulcan who stood there stiffly. Then they vanished, and Wesley took a deep breath. “Mr. Spock, I’m sorry to tell you that your father suffered a severe heart attack almost three days ago. His assistant explained that Sarek has had cardiac trouble for quite some time now. Did you know this?”

The Vulcan shook his head slowly. “No, he never mentioned it. Not over the last two years while we were in contact. Before… Before ‘Vulcan’ we… We were not in regular contact.”

Understanding dawned in the commodore. ‘In other words, they didn’t speak with each other. Obviously, Sarek didn’t approve of his son’s choice to join Starfleet. I’m only surprised that he it didn’t go on longer with his son after Spock decided to remain in the fleet. Well, losing your home world, your family, and your wife can alter your perspective.’

Aloud he said, “His assistant told us that Sarek had heart trouble shortly before the delegation left the _Excalibur_ and that it has worsened since then. He is in our medbay and on life support. My CMO didn’t operate on him because we don’t have his blood type aboard – T-negative – yours.”

Spock instantly recognized to where the talk was heading to. “I am needed to donate blood for Sarek.”

Again Bob made an affirming gesture. “Yes. Your father is running out of time.”

“What about the _Enterprise_?” Spock’s question took the commodore by surprise, and so the first officer felt obliged to explain, “Don’t get me wrong, sir. My father is one of the few members of my
clan – my family – who survived the Vulcan holocaust. Yet I still carry responsibility not only to my relatives, but also to my duty as Starfleet officer and therefore for the Enterprise as her first officer. The entire command staff is about to be arrested – or suspended at best, yet the ship is in a critical state given the failed warp drive. That Admiral Barnett is… willing to let me aid my father under these circumstances is…”

“Circumstances?” Wesley almost sighed. Vulcans! How was it possible that a race that followed logic could under make such understatements? “If you're talk about the gamble you, Kirk, and the others played then let me tell you that this is secondary at the moment. Vice President Whiteman doesn’t risk her life for nothing. She agreed to fly to Earth in secret with a hand full of loyal men to stop Luengo so that we could race to New Vulcan to take your father to your hospital and to reach you so that you can help him.”

Spock wasn’t aware that he moistened his lips, suppressing the urge to run to his father’s side that grew stronger and stronger. He was Vulcan; the needs of the many outweighed his own – even his father’s. “I'm… I'm grateful for Mrs. Whiteman's and Admiral Barnett’s understanding, but I know that Selek has the same blood type, too. And the Enterprise needs me. I am not as expert as Mr. Scott, but I am familiar enough with the technology to make decisions concerning the second and third engineer’s requests. And Captain Kirk asked me to…”

“Jim didn’t know about Sarek; otherwise he would have never asked you to keep an eye on his gray lady.” Bob saw the surprise in the Vulcan’s eyes, and grumbled, “I know what he calls his ship – it’s cute if you ask me.” He took another deep breath, “Spock, I admire your willingness to think first of your duty to the ship, but your father is the priority – not only for the diplomatic corps and your clan but also for the Vulcan population. There have been enough losses and sacrifices these last two years – and you suffered enough, son. I’ll take command of the Enterprise, and if Mr. Scott gives me his word that he'll stay aboard, he'll be my XO. The ship'll have her command team and its chief engineer.”

Spock tried to remain calm on the outside, yet his shifting stance betrayed his nervousness. He knew that it wasn’t well-received among Vulcans – this emotion – or having fight against an urgent drive. But he thought he had lost his father once, and he didn’t want to experience these moments again before Sarek was old and gray; he thought they had time – years.

“Thank you for your understanding and kindness, Commodore, I’ll stay in contact!”

He quickly stepped to the transporter control to initiate a delayed transporter process, but Bob waved him away. “I'll use the coordinates Kirk was beamed to; I can manage a transfer,” he added as he saw the asking glance Spock gave him.

“Of course, sir,” the Vulcan answered and climbed on the transporter platform.
“I know you and your people don’t believe in luck, but good luck!”

Spock lifted a brow. “You would be surprised, Commodore; there are some Vulcan Elders who wish others ‘luck’,” he said, remembering the words his older counterpart had spoken to him in the hangar on Earth after Nero was defeated. At that time he had been confused by his older self’s statement – assuming that age and grief had worn down ‘Selek’s’ mind. Now he understood him – himself, so to speak. Jim had proved it over and over again. Sometimes ‘Lady Luck’ seemed to exist, because many outcomes over the last two years were beyond logic but still existed. Maybe now was such a situation that demanded this human ‘luck’ again.

The Enterprise’s first officer nodded politely at Wesley; then he was enveloped by the transporter light and returned to New Vulcan. His mind worked fiercely with three different topics: The life of his father, Jim Kirk’s own fight against the eventual death of his bond mate, and the current situation on Earth and in the Starfleet HQ.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, the main-danger may be over, but only what concerns the action of battle – well, the violence battle. I know that this was an emotional roller-coaster, yet I hope you enjoyed it nevertheless.

In the next chapter Barnett learns more of the true deeds of Section 31 and the others learn of Carol’s true intentions, while Bones tries everything to save Khan by surgery. But there are different ways to fight such a battle our dear CMO does, and the outcome can differ from the one wished for.

As always, I’m curious about your thoughts.

Have a nice start into the next week

Love

Yours Starflight
Jim Kirk and the others had barely materialized when they were hit by New Vulcan's relentless late afternoon heat. They were only a few meters away from the hospital entrance. Two Vulcans hastened towards them; one was known to Jim now – Healer Sorel, the very same man who watched out for Khan’s sleeping family and made certain that they were okay.

None of them asked a question, they simply took the antigrav stretcher from McCoy and headed back into the building; the others followed them – Jim and Joaquin never leaving Khan’s side for only a moment. As soon as they entered the hospital, the heat was replaced with warm, but now a more comfortable temperature as they rushed through the building.

Entering a lift, Sorel turned towards Bones. "Dr. McCoy, Selek told me that you wish to be chief surgeon. I offer you the support of my assistant Daniel Corrigan. He's still young, but very promising. I would assist you, too, but my service is needed for Sarek, who is prepared for surgery a few rooms away this moment."
Jim, who held Khan's right hand in a gentle grip, looked up worriedly. "Sarek?" he asked. "What about him?"

A Vulcan brow was lifted. "Captain, I'm certain you know of medical confidentiality."

"Healer Sorel, please don’t get me wrong, but just a minute ago my superior asked my first officer and friend to remain aboard because of an urgent, private matter. And now you mention Spock's father and that he is about to be operated, too. I'm already worried out of my mind for my mate's health," he nodded at Khan, "so please spare me a bit of concern for my T'hy'la, Spock, and tell me what's wrong with his father."

Sorel lifted a brow. Was the augment the young human's mate? Interesting! And he called Spock cha'Sarek his T'hy'la? That was even more interesting. Sorel gave Selek an asking glance which was answered with a nod, and so the healer said, "Sarek has to be operated because of a cardiac defect, but this kind of surgery needs…"

"…Needs a lot of blood," Bones murmured understanding. The lift reached its destination and the doors opened. "And given the fact that Vulcan fathers and sons share the same blood type and Spock's is quite rare, he's needed to give blood for his father – the 'private matter' Wesley wanted to talk about with him." He followed the others out of the lift. "Dammit! Can't just one thing be wrong at a time?"

They reached a double door, and Sorel pointed. "Daniel waits for you on the other side. Human blood reserves have been brought, too, but I don't think it will help Mr. Singh given his augmented nature."

"Noo and I have the same blood type," Joaquin cut in; his voice was hoarse with fear for his brother's life. "You can use me as a blood donor, Dr. McCoy."

"I don't like this," Bones grumbled. "You're still fighting the effects of your long cryosleep."

"I've regained my strength, Doctor. Just ask High Minister Selek. During our run from the transporter room to medbay on Excalibur, we met a few guys who still thought it their duty to take aim at any stranger aboard. The next time they will think twice before they attack at an older gentleman and someone they regard as a 'barely grown child'."

"What Mr. Weiss means is that his quick reactions spared me the unpleasantness of being stunned,"
the Elder said dryly; his eyes softened for a second as he caught the Augment boy’s gaze and saw Jim's grateful glance to Joaquin.

"Right, so Superman's little brother has joined the ‘I-don't-need-any-rest-club'," McCoy sighed. "But we will need more blood than you can give, son."

“At least it’s a start. Maybe it will help to filter human plasma for Mr. Singh's blood production,” Sorel said, then he turned to leave. "Please excuse me, I have a surgery to conduct." He left quickly, vanishing around the next corner within a few seconds.

The same moment a door opened, and an older Vulcaness stepped out. "Dr. McCoy?" As the human turned to her, she introduced herself, "Healer T'Ley. Dr. Corrigan and I will assist you." She stepped to the stretcher and looked down at Khan. For the tiniest moment, Jim saw a movement in her face; the result of the brutality that had caused the injuries touched even the Vulcan woman. Then she drove her attention back to Bones. "A sterile suite and sterile clothes are prepared for you. Please follow me." She grabbed for the handle of the stretcher and lifted both brows when she almost touched Jim's left hand that closed around the handle like a band of steel.

"Sir, you must wait here," she said.

Kirk felt Nien's hand tighten around his and shook his head. "I gave him my word that I'd watch over him. Get me a sterile gown; I will come with you."

"This is not possible."

"Khan is my mate – my bonded partner. And no one – no one! – will keep me away from him when he needs me!" Jim gritted out, cursing inwardly that they had to waste time because of Vulcan stubbornness – not realizing that he was as stubborn as a mule, too.

"Humans cannot bond as you imply, sir, and…"

Selek cut in. "T'Ley, Mr. Singh is an Augment, and he and Captain Kirk are indeed bonded as he implies. Mr. Singh is deeply traumatized and reacts very strongly to Captain Kirk's presence or absence. I advise you to let the captain join the surgery. The result will be more positive."

For a second, the Vulcaness pressed her lips into a thin line before she replied, "As you wish, Elder
Selek." She vanished behind the double doors where Bones was already preparing himself. Jim and Joaquin quickly followed her, steering the stretcher in front of them.

“Jim?”

Kirk glanced back at the older version of his first officer and the gentleness and sympathy he saw in those familiar, yet foreign brown eyes warmed him. "Have faith! Your presence always helped them who were – and are! – close to you."

The complete trust of the old Vulcan made young captain give a short smile; then the doors closed.

Inside of the anteroom, Jim gave Joaquin sterile coveralls, caps, gloves and covers for their shoes, while a nurse took away Selek's robe that still covered Khan. Jim watched his beloved shiver and sensed his growing dread. Closing the distance to him, he took his hand and bent over him.

"I'm here, Nien," he whispered and stroked through the sticky hair, glad that he hadn't put on the gloves until now. "I'm here, love. You're not alone. I'll stay with you – through the whole surgery. Don't worry, honey; I'll watch over you."

Glassy blue-green eyes looked at him, and slowly the Augment relaxed as McCoy gave instruction for the anesthesia. A young man in his late twenties, Daniel Corrigan, began to clean Khan's body, a procedure that made the superhuman tense. Jim's soothing voice and Joaquin's soft petting of his older brother's hair did the magic again. Khan remained still, yet it was evident that his mind was far from its usually brilliant functions.

Outside of the operating area, Selek looked through the view window into the operating room and waited. Several minutes later five figures, clad in surgery green, appeared. One of them, Jim, steered the stretcher. One glance showed the Elder that Khan was anesthetized. He watched the Augment leader be transferred onto the operating table. Jim stayed near his head, holding one of Khan's hands in his. Joaquin laid down on a biobed beside the operating table, offering his right arm for the blood transfusion.

Selek waited another moment, then he took a deep breath and turned away. He knew that he could do nothing for Khan, but maybe for Sarek. He remembered all too well the 'Journey to Babel' as he referred to the travel of the Enterprise to the conference place Babel in his timeline when his parents were aboard, and his father suffered from the same illness. It had happened more than eight years later than now, and he assumed that the happenings of the last two years had sped the process of the congenital heart defect.
His McCoy had risked a lot as he operated on the ambassador aboard the Enterprise during a battle. And he, Spock, had risked his life too when he agreed to be injected with a drug that increased the blood production in the body. That was the only way he had been able to donate enough blood to his father. But, as far as Selek knew, today the drug had barely gotten into the testing phase – it still had been at his time eight years later. Maybe he was now needed to give blood to Sarek again – together with his younger counterpart, who just stepped out of the turbolift, ashen gray.

Selek cocked his head in sympathy. He had not been on speaking terms with his father when this incident happened in his timeline, yet he remembered precisely how he had feared for his father’s life. And his younger counterpart had already lost so much and had thought for a few hours that he also had to mourn his father. Vulcans didn’t believe in higher beings, but just right now the Elder was almost ready to pray to the old Goddesses before Surak’s times that the surgery wouldn’t end in a disaster.

"Spock," he acknowledged the younger Vulcan's arrival with a short nod. "I assume you have learned of our father's illness and you are here to give him blood."

The first officer of the Enterprise lifted a brow, trying to reveal nothing of the concern that tore at his control – for both men who were important in his life: His father and his T’hy’la. "Correct." His gaze wandered to the double doors. "Are Jim and Khan…?"

"Khan is in the care of Leonard, Dr. Corrigan, and other physicians. Jim and Joaquin Weiss went with him – the youngling has the same blood type as Khan, and Leonard hopes that is enough to save Mr. Singh." He made an inviting gesture. "Follow me; I will lead you to the operating room where our father waits."

Spock nodded hesitantly. He could sense Jim's inner turmoil, felt his worry and fear, and wished for an opportunity to support his soul-brother and captain, but just now there was nothing he could do. For the moment they had to go their separate ways – Jim would stay with his mate and he, Spock, would aid the healers that would save his father's life.

A minute later, they arrived at the operating room. Through the view window, they could already see Sarek lying on the surgical table, and Selek pointed to the double doors.

“Prepare to join the surgery in a spare bed. I will follow you in a few minutes. I have some calls to make which certainly will give Vice-President Whitman and the others some support when they go against Admiral Luengo and Section 31.”
The younger Spock lifted a brow. “What do you have in mind?”

For a second something close to a hint of a smile curled the Elder's mouth. "An old friend once said 'Traitors always reveal themselves when they believe themselves cornered'. And I will give them exactly that idea."

“What traitors are you referring to?” Curiosity shimmered in the first officer’s eyes.

"Section 31 can't have acted all alone – not to this extent. They must have some back up from members of the Federation Council. And if we want to eradicate Section 31 and its supporter once and for all, we have to get them all!"

ST***ST***ST

"Ma'am, are you all right?” It wasn't the first time Palmer asked this question as he glanced with concern at Lady Ania Morganth who sat in the vacant center chair, pale as a table cloth. The Betazoid had started to sway about half an hour ago and had whispered the words ‘so much in pain' and ‘so much fear'. Palmer had been ready to call medbay, but Sonik who was still at the helm despite being acting captain, had prevented it. He understood quite well what was going on – that the ambassador's telepathic skills were assaulted by someone's turmoil. No physician could help her; this much the Vulcan knew.

Ania took a deep breath and blocked the strong emotions which had changed – they were more distant now, but still intense. "I'm all right, Lieutenant," she murmured, which was a transparent lie given her ashen face and her far too wide eyes. "They are still suffering but in different ways," she murmured and met Sonik's gaze.

The Vulcan lifted a brow, becoming aware of a soft tugging in his subconscious that startled his firm self-control. "Is it Commodore Wesley?" he heard himself asking before he could stop it. There was absolutely no logical reason to assume that something bad had befallen his superior, yet there was this nagging in him that could only to be described as worry. As a Vulcan, he shouldn't feel concern, especially when there was no real cause for it, yet he did.

"No," Ania answered quietly. "I'm familiar with the commodore's aura by now, and it's not his pain I sense. It's a combination – three persons are involved. Two are hurting emotionally – the third one because of injuries and deep dread and… exhaustion.” She shook her head; strong compassion brimmed in her dark eyes. "It changed a few minutes ago – felt further away – no longer in closer range, yet I can still sense them. One… one is becoming fainter?" Confusion sounded in her voice, and Palmer nodded slowly.
"I intercepted a call a few minutes ago from the Vulcan Academy Hospital; this time not hailing us concerning Ambassador Sarek, but the *Excalibur*. Coordinates were given to them. Someone – or several people – were expected at the hospital besides Sarek. Maybe those you sense were beamed down to receive treatment that couldn't be given aboard."

Sonik watched his fellow human officer. "A logical deduction, Lieutenant," he said before he returned his attention to the helm, holding the *Lexington* at starboard of the *Excalibur*, while the *Enterprise* flanked the other side of the ship whose captain was a traitor.

ST***ST***ST

Aboard the *Excalibur*, Barnett and the others tried to bring some order to the chaos after the fights – and Khan Noonien Singh's seizing of the ship's auxiliary compartment. It was incredible how skillfully the Augment had managed to change command computer protocols and codes to make certain that the main bridge couldn't regain full function anytime soon – a shrewd move given the fact that Styles was still in command and had to be stopped. After the captain and his two allies had been brought to the brig, Barnett, Uhura and Li, Taylor and the rest of senior officer staff tried to crack the new codes without much success.

Scott had returned to bridge only a minute ago, carefully avoiding Barnett, who was busy with checking the log book, receiving reports, and trying to bring some order to the chaos aboard.

Uhura saw her colleague and friend entering the command central, and she waved him towards her. Scotty had been in the transporter room when Barnett told Spock about the private problems with his father. If anyone could tell her what exactly was going on, then it was Montgomery. Her attempt to learn something from Barnett had been for naught – to be precise, the Chief in Command had first looked surprised at her, and then he rebuked her for being nosy. And Nyota, knowing that her relationship with Spock was unknown, thought it wiser to keep her mouth shut.

But not anymore. As Scotty stepped to her, she switched her headset function to Li, whom she had assisted up to now, and whispered, "Gomery, do you know what the matter is with Sarek?"

Scotty, realizing the private nature of her question given the intimate use of his name murmured, "They sent me out as Wesley talked ter Spock, but I could hear somethin’ before the doors closed. Sarek had a heart attack as a result’ of some heart problems he seems ter have had for a while now. Spock beamed down ter the hospital – no doubt ter donate blood. Even I know that such a surgery needs a lot of blood and given our Vulcan friend's rare blood type – McCoy complained about over and over again. I think they need Spock to operate."
Nyota's chocolate skin paled. "Sweet Lord – poor Spock. First, he lost his mother; then he thought his father dead, and now…"

"May I ask what is going on here?" Out of nowhere, Barnett stood beside him, giving both a stern glance. "Lieutenant, I thought I made myself clear that Ambassador Sarek's condition is not a topic for ship gossip."

"Spock is our friend, sir!" Scotty cut in, risking the admiral's anger again. "And he endured a lot durin' these last years – and durin' the last week when his father was declared dead. Of course, we're worryin' for him now."

Both men glanced at each other, and wonder of wonders, it was Barnett who finally lowered his look for a second. "I know that you consider Commander Spock a friend and I do understand your personal concern for him and his family, yet I must repeat myself: Sarek's illness is not meant for gossip! So keep silent about it!"

"Aye sir!" both answered in unison.

“Good,” Richard nodded. "And one thing more, Mr. Scott, I do appreciate officers who use their brain for more than following orders, and I admire the loyalty you and the other members of the Enterprise’s senior staff display towards your captain, but if I want to speak with someone aboard this ship, it isn't helpful when you beam that person away."

Montgomery sighed. "Aye, sir, I know I caused my own trouble listenin' ter Selek’s order instead ter yers. And ye can fry my ass in the next supernova if ye like, sir, but ter affirm Commodore Wesley’s statement several minutes ago: Khan’s life was and certainly still IS at stake. Ye should have seen the poor lad. That blasted bastard Finnegan and his fellas beat and kicked him mercilessly, before they dragged him up the emergency staircase ter medbay ter get him frozen in the damn tube! Jim prevented it at the very last minute, yet I dunna know if it wasn't still too late fer Khan. He's badly hurt, and his chances of survival are not good, despite his augmented nature."

“They… they tried to beat him to death?” Uhura gasped, deeply shocked.

"As far as I understood they had orders ter catch him alive, but that didn't stop them brutalizing him til he was barely recognizable,” Scott growled. “He can't even breathe on his own and panicked when McCoy began ter treat him. He's in shock, Leonard said, and only Jim and the kid – Joaquin – were able ter calm him down."
Nyota's heart went out to Kirk and Khan, knowing how much her friend and captain loved the Augment and that Khan's bad condition must worry Jim out of his mind. And her compassion was also for Khan. She had come to respect the superhuman in the last two weeks – even had begun to take a liking to him. Learning what had been done to him made her blood boil. Finnegan! Of course! This guy had been a bully like none other during her time at the Academy, and she knew that Kirk and he had some run-ins that turned nasty. She could be wrong, but she was almost sure that Finnegan only had brutalized Khan to take revenge on Jim.

She felt a lump rising in her throat. “Poor Jim!” she said quietly. “He must be mad with worry by now.” She had witnessed the barely controlled hysteria Kirk had suffered the few minutes on New Vulcan between the moment Khan had been kidnapped and brought aboard the Excelsibur until the second they were finally able to follow the former dictator. And Spock had told her about the mental link both men shared. Jim had to be filled with dread for his mate.

Barnett watched the two Enterprise officers carefully, but Uhura's comment confused him. Her first reaction concerning the bad news about the Augment’s condition was ‘poor Jim’ and ‘mad with worry’? Well, Kirk had shown concern for the superhuman – heck, the young captain had been frantic! That was more than ‘normal’ worry. And as he looked at the beautiful face of the Starfleet’s communications wonder-girl, and the crazy but genial Scotsman, and he knew that he missed something critical concerning the troublemaker and his new friend. But he couldn't put the finger on it.

Scott nodded as Uhura's words. "I think so. Jim was pale as a sheet. Hell, even Spock showed some concern. And all this because damn Finnegan thought it would be a nice payback fer Jim and Khan kickin' his ass at Gamma 12!"

"Mr. Scott," Barnett rose to speak. "Is there evidence that the harm inflicted on Khan was done under Finnegan's command?"

"The guys in medbay that Jim and the others sent to dreamland belonged ter Finnegan, who lay in the corridor outside, nerv-epinched by Mr. Spock, as I heard. Given Finnegan's character that I had the displeasure ter experience on Gamma 12, I bet my last shirt that he's responsible fer Khan's condition."

"This brat is rotten a bully!" Nyota felt her control slipping. "At the Academy, his only joy was tormenting or blackmailing the younger and weaker ones, and now he beat a man, who…"

"…Who was already sedated so that he could barely stand!" a female voice said from the turbolift.
Uhura’s eyes narrowed. “You!” she spat, glaring daggers at Carol Marcus while she stepped threateningly toward the other woman. "You have the nerve to come to the bridge and…"

Before Barnett could act, Scotty was already at Nyota's side and held her back with a soft grip. "Uhura, lass, calm down. Dr. Marcus tricked us all, includin’ Khan with the show she performed.” He returned Uhura’s disbelieving and still very angry glance, and added, “The capt’n told us and Commodore Wesley, while I was down in medbay. Dr. Marcus helped Khan ter escape after they were beamed aboard and…”

"… And he more or less forced me to flee as the Elite Security was about to break through Auxiliary entrance. He was confident that our pursuers would kill me, but he knew that he was needed alive, so he made me escape through a support shaft and stayed behind to cover me.” She bit her lips and wrapped her arms around herself. “I watched what they did to him, but I couldn’t do anything to help him. It… it was terrible. They didn't stop, even as he laid on the floor and tried to shield himself. They… they only went on and on, and… Finnegan… he kicked him over and over again.”

“So it was correct to put Finnegan and his men into custody for attempted murder!” Richard growled, feeling his blood beginning to boil with disgust and anger.

Only now Carol realized who stood there. "Admiral Barnett, sir!” She sighed. "Sir, it's a relief to see you alive and well again.”

The Chief in Command nodded shortly. "Thanks, Doctor Marcus. And did I get this right? You pretended to be on Norton's side but you…”

"I feared that Norton would stop at nothing and would even assault New Vulcan to get Jim, Khan, and the others. They know too much. He and Luengo had to silence them. As Norton seized the Enterprise, I was in medbay, dismounting the devices which had monitored the cryotubes of Khan's crew. I realized what was coming. I got the idea just hours before after we passed by the Excalibur and slipped away by a hair's breadth." She bowed her head. "I'm sorry that you all thought I'd betrayed you, but…”

“You did a damn good job,” Uhura all but grumbled. “I truly believed your show.”

"I tried to give you guys hints,” Carol defended herself, spreading her hands. "Remember what Jim said to me and my replies? I hoped he would get what I was really up to, but I think there was too much going on to let my answers sink through."
Nyota pursed her lips, as she remembered the few words Carol and Kirk exchanged in Selek’s office.

“And there I thought you understood everything.”

“Oh, I understood everything, Jim. I still understand perfectly well what is going on here!”

Yes, Carol had tried to tell him that she was very aware of the illegal actions Norton had taken. And there had been the short reply before Khan and the others were beamed aboard the Excalibur.

"Carol, you know the truth. All I told you were the facts. Don't support those who are the real reason for the mess and all the pain you, the others, Nien and I went through last year."

“Facts can be twisted, as you certainly know!”

Uhura sighed deeply. "Afterward your words make sense – an entirely different sense given the game you played."

"Yes. I admit it wasn't easy to read between the lines, but I didn't dare to say more. Norton is no fool.” She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry about what happened to Khan. I won't forgive him my father's death, but Jim is right. He has earned a second chance. I told Khan that much."

Barnett had listened to the talk and had crossed his arms in front of his chest. "I hear from all sides that Khan ‘has earned a second chance’. True, this war could've been much worse without him – especially on Turkana, at Aldebaran, and at Tammeron. I also learned from Wesley what had happened to him during his forced stay with Section 31, and I have to admit that this man has all the rights in the world to press charges against his tormentors. Yet I'm still thunderstruck that the entire senior staff of my flagship, including one of my most impressive commodores – even the Vulcans – are so eager to protect him.” He looked at Carol. “I would have expected that at least you would report him, but even you covered for him.”

“Have you ever met Khan in person, sir?” Scott asked, and as Barnett shook his head, Montgomery sighed, “Well, he’s special. Very special. He’s brilliant, utterly loyal ter those who hold his heart, has wits…”

"He's got a lot of tricks up his sleeve...," Uhura threw in, "genius ones!"
“He has proven himself to be a valuable and useful ally,” Carol nodded.

“He also uncovered a part of the conspiracy, together with the captain, Spock and Scotty,” Nyota added.

"And with yer help, too," Scotty smiled in her direction before he addressed Barnett again. "That we made it that far with such a mess of warp-drive is also to his credit. Working with him is pure pleasure."

Barnett pursed his lips and took a very deep breath. “I see. He somehow has wrapped you all around his little finger…”

“And the other way around,” Uhura deadpanned. “He gave us the construction of the SDD to protect ‘Jim's family', as he put it – meaning that he didn't care for us, but Jim really, and so us only by extension. He worked among the crew and has since dropped the whole 'I'm superior to you all' shit. He relaxed. He even joined us for meals in the officer's mess hall, joked with Scotty…”

"Got Keenser to speak more than four words – a novelty," Montgomery threw in with a chuckle.

"… and even relaxed in Spock's presence. That says a lot given their personal history with each other. Khan was about to find a place he felt at ease – it must have been heaven for an outcast like him to be finally accepted – belonging to a place and people.”

Barnett looked from one to the other one; then he stopped short. "Khan worked among the crew? But he is a civilian."

“Well, we were runnin’ out of helmsmen, ye know, and he's a damn good pilot," the chief engineer began reluctantly. "He saved the ship when it was about to be smashed on an asteroid when those damn Klingon idiots attacked us. Heard he fought the pressure due to a gravity malfunction and steered our ship away before it was plastered against a blasted, big piece of rock. Sulu was injured a minute before and so..."

“Don’t tell me Kirk allowed Khan at the Enterprise’s helm!” Richard gasped. "I know that he has no love for regulation, but even he should respect that no civilian…”
“Uh, the captain followed Regular 58b, and named Mr. Singh petty officer for a limited time,” Nyota said carefully.

“Mr. Singh was officially relieved from service before he beamed down on New Vulcan,” Scotty added helpfully.

Barnett was speechless for a second before he croaked. "But Khan is a convicted…"

"No, he isn't!" Uhura cut in. "He was never legally convicted because he didn't face legal trial."

“He is merely accused." Carol murmured.

For another moment Barnett was unable to say anything; then he snorted. "I don't know if I should commend you all for smart thinking, or if I should lock you all away to prevent Starfleet becoming a heap of self-appointed lawyers."

“Na, sir, this we leave ter the shysters,” Montgomery smiled.

"Mm-hm, and you all are going to need some very good 'shysters'," the Chief in Command grumbled and looked in the sheepish faces of the three Enterprise officers, as the intercom whistled.

"Wesley to bridge!" the commodore's voice sounded through the speakers, and Richard nodded towards Li to open an internal channel. "Barnett here!" he answered.

"Sir, Dr. Burmaster's assistant has examined Commander Finnegan and his men. The blood on their clothes and hands are from Khan – and there's more. Two of them have bruises on their knuckles and the sides of their hands as though they were in hand-to-hand combat. Finnegan's boots have fibers of the clothes Khan wore – those are secured now. They're quite torn and bloody."

Barnett nodded grimly. "Commander Finnegan and the four other men are arrested for attempted murder and will remain so. What about the other Elite Security?"

"They all have surrendered. They followed Norton's orders. Commander Genrow, their superior, was most helpful in clearing things up. I think it will be okay to let him continue his duty but under
observation. We have to wait for the statement from the Vulcan government concerning his actions
during Norton's assault on the seat of government."

“I agree,” Richard said. “Are all decks secured?”

"They all are, sir," Bob answered. "Most members of the crew are confused, but I got several
interesting statements concerning the last few days here aboard."

"Excellent. The crew is allowed to return to duty. Concerning the Enterprise… I think the boys over
there are going to need some helping hands – after all the current acting bridge crew is a hurt
lieutenant, two green cadets barely out of Academy, and a little Royalan."

An amused chuckle came through the speakers. "Yes, they're all quite young – and were able
to checkmate Starfleet's Elite Security! I think this will go down in Starfleet's history." Bob sobered.
"I'll beam aboard and take over command. Fifty of my Redshirts will accompany me to make sure
that the Elite Security on the Enterprise will surrender when they wake up. I talked to Lieutenant
Sulu a minute ago. They've begun to clean the air ship-wide, and it will be okay to beam aboard in
the next quarter hour. If you allow, I'll take Mr. Scott with me. The ship is in bad condition, and I
need our Scottish genius to fix her."

Barnett looked at a triumphantly smiling engineer. "You do know that the senior staff is suspended,
Bob? And the same goes more or less for you, too."

“Admiral, we already talked about it. You can’t arrest the whole crew because everyone covered for
Khan. Unlike to the Vengeance, the Enterprise cannot be flown by one man alone. We need every
man and woman should anything go wrong on Earth. I need the crew and some of the senior
officers. Mr. Scott is the best damn engineer in the whole fleet."

"… And Vice President Whitman told me she doesn't want to see Kirk and his people in custody and
that the whole incident should be handled more 'delicately', I know!" the Chief in Command
groaned. Then he turned towards Montgomery. “Do I have your word that you will make no attempt
to leave the Enterprise without my personal permission?”

“Aye, sir!” Scotty nodded. "Yet I ask fer yer permission to contact Capt'n Kirk and update him about
the ship. Knowin' him, he won't have a calm minute as long as he doesn't know what's goin' on his
Grey Lady."
Barnett stared at him – and gave in. If there was one thing you can state about Jim Kirk, then it was the fact that he loved his ship with a passion. "Right, I have nothing against you calling him. But I trust your honor that these calls are only strictly about the ship's status." He grimaced as he saw the other man's eyes widening. "Give me some credit here, Mr. Scott. The little speech you and your fellow officers just gave me concerning Kirk and Khan – and Spock – I know that there is no power in the universe that could prevent you from asking how they're doing."

Scotty beamed at him. “Thank ya, sir!”

Richard had a dozen things to say to that, but he skipped it – after all, the Enterprise’s cliquish staff officers were the reason for the many successes Kirk and his crew had had over the last two years, and also the reason that he, the other admirals, and a part of the delegation were still alive. “Right, then accompany Commodore Wesley. I want a full report of the Enterprise’s condition in two hours.”

“This will be done,” Wesley said, before he added, “Mr. Scott, please come down to transporter room 1. Wesley out!”

Richard watched the engineer leaving the bridge and pinched his nose as he felt a headache rising. God, what a mess! Then he turned his attention towards the two female Enterprise officers, who looked expectantly at him.

“Dr. Marcus, I expect your full report of the events of the last hours as soon as possible. The same goes for you, Lieutenant Uhura, before you return to the Enterprise and consider yourself restricted to quarters except for duty. Help to restore the ship's efficiency, but otherwise remain in your quarters.”

Nyota took a breath to protest – Spock needed her on New Vulcan! But it never came, because Li called from the comms station. "Sir, New Vulcan is hailing. It's… It's the Lady T'Pau."

The two Enterprise officers would have sworn any oath that Barnett paled a little bit beneath his dark skin before he took a deep breath and ordered, "On screen, Lieutenant!"

A moment later the large view window was again a screen that showed the aged face of New Vulcan's uncrowned matriarch, sitting in a dimmed room with a covered window and the Vulcan IDIC symbol in the background. “Admiral Barnett!” she greeted coolly.

"Ma'am," Richard bowed slightly. "I hope Admiral Norton's assault on your person left you
“I’m quite well and already back in my office," T’Pau answered and came straight to the topic without any preamble. "I have learned that you have regained command over the Excalibur which means that her treacherous captain is in custody. Are you updated concerning Vice President Whitman’s mission?"

Barnett didn’t bother to ask how she knew about the top secret mission on Earth and shook his head. “No, Ma’am. We agreed that we would keep silence until…”

“Have you had a chance to contact one of your fellow admirals who is involved in the mission?"

Richard took a deep breath. "We agreed on a particular frequency that can be used, but only in case of emergency."

"Hail them. If you want to eliminate the danger of Section 31 once and for all, you have to get the instigators – namely those men and women within the Federation Council, who support Luengo in secret. Selek and I have an idea how to get them, but it has to be done in concert with Luengo’s exposure."

If Richard was irritated by T’Pau’s stern interruption, he didn’t show it. “May I ask what you have in mind, Ma’am?” He was cautious whenever it came to the matriarch, because even if she was a Vulcan who followed Surak’s ways to the very last word of his teachings, she could be dangerous. How razor sharp her mind and her will had been proven more than 120 years ago, as Vulcan experienced its own share of internal conspiracy that had been revealed by a very young T’Pau and another captain of another Enterprise – the first ship with this name in the newly founded Starfleet.

The matriarch lifted a dark eyebrow at Barnett’s question. “I want to cite one of your Terran proverbs: Cast out the devil with Beelzebub. Or perhaps another proverb is more fitting: The rats will leave the sinking ship first. Selek got a the report from Captain Kirk about everything Luengo and his fellows did, including copies of the records the scientists of Gamma 12 made as they abused Mr. Singh’s crew for their experiments."

Barnett gasped. “Dr. Green experimented with…”

Again the Vulcan Elder didn’t let him finish. “Selek also was able to copy the records of the pathogen Professor Dashwood and the others designed from the Rigelian flu together with some
elements of Mr. Singh's DNA, mainly his enhanced immune system. The pathogen…"

"One moment, Ma'am!" Richard said, lifting a hand. "I was informed that the Klingons are developing…"

“Luengo twisted the facts. It's not the Klingons searching for such a biological weapon, but Section 31 – to eliminate every living Klingon. This is the real reason why Mr. Singh was sent to the LSH labs in Nevada and had to serve as a lab rat. The pathogen is immune to any known antidote and neutralization is more than difficult because of the augmented DNA that repairs itself.”

On the bridge several gasps and murmurs were heard; everyone was as shocked as Barnett was, as he whispered, "And Selek has evidence of this… This insanity?"

T'Pau nodded. "Yes – and more. I suggest that we send everything to every single member of the Federation Council. Those who are part of the conspiracy or have knowledge of Luengo's true intentions, will reveal themselves by their reaction and so trusted security personnel have to be present to get them in time. But this step has to be done in unison with the arresting of Luengo and his fellows so that they cannot warn each other in advance."

Barnett pursed his lips for a moment, before he murmured, “Let me guess. This is Selek’s idea.”

Again the old Vulcaness simply lifted a brow and that was answer enough.

"When you say you have incriminating information from Kirk, then obviously it is Starfleet. I want to check it first, before…"

“I invite you down to my office to have a closer look at the records Selek sent me minutes before our seat of government was assaulted by Admiral Norton.”

“A clever move, I have to give him that,” Barnett murmured. “Where is Selek now?”

The aged face didn't show anything. "He's still in the hospital donating blood for Sarek's surgery, but he will arrive soon." T'Pau cocked her head. "My assistant will give you the coordinates for transport. I expect your arrival within the next five minutes.” The screen went dark and showed a moment later the ball of New Vulcan again.
'Vulcans are polite – my ass! If there is anyone who can make the leading admiral of Starfleet feel like a four-year-old being rebuked by a teacher; it's T'Pau,' Barnett thought, shaking his head. "Commander Taylor, you have the con 'til I'm back. Please don't hesitate to contact me should something come up."

Quickly, he left the bridge before Uhura was able to refer to the topic of her being restricted aboard the Enterprise.

Wesley, Scott, and four Redshirts materialized in the Enterprise’s Auxiliary and looked straight at four beaming faces – well, one was motionless as an oyster, yet the pitch black eyes of the little Royalan seemed to laugh. Bob glanced at the scarred and obviously exhausted Sulu and then at the two other young men who looked more boy than adult. ‘And those four brought a whole troop of Elite Security to their knees! Incredible!’

"At ease, Gentlemen," he said as they quickly remembered protocol and came to attention.

That seemed to fire the starting pistol because Scotty quickly closed the distance to his crew mates. "Sulu, you're the best!" he grinned, clapping the helmsman on the back before he pulled Pavel and Kevin into a rough embrace. "Lads, I owe ye a bottle of the finest whiskey. Mark my words!" Then he rushed to Keenser and gathered him into his arms, earning him a protesting gasp that he ignored. Lifting the tiny Royalan almost over his head like a toddler, he laughed, "And who initiated the mission, got the boy out of medbay, and tricked McCoy's biobeds? Of course my little climber!"

"Down!" Keenser grumbled asking himself what had gotten into his human friend.

"I thought you loved heights," Montgomery teased, before he set the Royalan down, whose eyes seemed to ask 'Have you finally lost your mind completely?'

"Keenser saved Kevin and me when we were caught in Auxiliary hidden from Security. I zink he was about to shoot us; then Keenser dropped down on him literally and beat ze daylights out of him," Pavel said, looking fondly at the little alien.

"Ha, never underestimate the little people!" Scotty chuckled.
"I don't think you're referring to the fairy realm now, Commander," Riley smirked. As an Irishman, he and the Scots shared a lot of myths and legends.

Wesley had watched the short encounter with amusement; then his communicator sent a signal he quickly answered. "Wesley here."

"Lieutenant N'Hale here, Commodore. Our men have secured the decks which were infiltrated from Norton's men. They are all still unconscious even though the air is clean now. The gas has been removed from the climate system. I checked crews' quarters. The Enterprise’s crew is also still out."

"Right, Lieutenant, take the Elite Security to some rooms you can lock them in. Two of your men should go to the brig to set the imprisoned crewmember free – but only the Enterprise’s crewmembers. All civilians should remain in custody – should they still be there. If not, search for them and lock them up again. They are accused of some very grave crimes."

"Aye sir, I'll report when the work is done. N'Hale out!"

Bob closed the communicator and looked at the four Enterprise officers. "All right, Gentlemen, I want an exact report of everything – every detail you can remember. I also want to check the log book, so please someone sent me a copy on my PADD. And afterward, Mr. Sulu, you take your leave to medbay. You, son, belong in the next available bed – and that's an order!"

"Commodore," Pavel dared to address the staff officer directly. "May we learn what happened to Khan? Joaquin felt his pain and despair, and he and Selek beamed over to ze Excalibur, but we haven't heard anyzing from zem. Is Khan okay?"

"Yes, that's the question. And what about the captain, Mr. Spock, and the others?" Hikaru added, concerned.

Bob sighed. ‘Indeed, thick as thieves!’ And then he began to explain the events aboard the Excalibur, hoping that his lovesick protégée and the Augment were going to be all right.

ST***ST

Time is an odd thing. For some it seems to run, for others, it seems to creep. The same went for Barnett while he consulted the records and reports T'Pau showed him, and the same also went for the
present people in the two surgery rooms in the New Vulcan hospital.

While Spock would always point out that time never alters its speed, he found it difficult to track the minutes as he lay beside his father on another biobed and watched the surgery, donating his blood. Selek had already given a lot – almost a liter and Sorel had practically ordered the Elder to lie down and to rest but had been ignored. Spock had to admit that he felt some amusement as he witnessed his older self, refusing to give himself a pause and discussing with the physician the logical and illogical reasons for resting when something else very important had to be done. The first officer remembered all too well similar moments with McCoy, only that the CMO’s arguments were loaded with one-sided emotional outbursts, while Sorel kept calm and controlled. Spock was able to detect some irritation in the healer, as Selek left on unsteady feet.

That had been two hours ago, and Spock couldn't deny that his control struggled with his nagging worries for his father – who was still being operated on – and for Jim. He could sense his T’hy’la’s fear like an everlasting echo deep in his soul, and he wanted to reach out and soothe Kirk. Emotions! It was difficult to deal with them sometimes, yet there was no Vulcan who was truly without them.

A female healer bent over him and checked his vitals. "Are you experiencing nausea or chill, Spock?" she asked through her medical mask, and he shook his head carefully.

"No, I am all right," he answered, which was – if he would admit it – only half the truth. He did feel a little bit cold and even sleepy – both symptoms of the blood loss.

She removed the needle from his arm and treated the small wound quickly. Sorel looked over his shoulder; his gloved hands were green with Sarek’s and Spock’s donated blood. “The surgery was successful,” he informed the young half-Vulcan. “Your father will be weak for quite a time, and he needs a lot of rest, but his health will be fully restored after some rehabilitation.”

“My clan owes thee,” Spock answered traditionally. To thank verbally for someone fulfilling his duty would have been an illogical act in the Vulcan culture.

He allowed himself a deep breath as he lifted his head and stole a glance at the pale face of his father, and only as both healers turned away, did he closed his eyes in relief. His father was out of danger and would heal. Only now he realized how tense he had been during the last hours.

Down the hallway, in another surgery area, the tension was even stronger. Joaquin had donated all the blood he could and rested on a biobed beside the operation table, where McCoy, Corrigan, and T'LEY still tried to save Khan's life. Jim sat beside Nien's head and held one of his beloved's hands, hoping that the touch and his proximity were enough to give his bondmate strength even in his
sedated state. Adrenalin still coursed through Kirk’s system, while he listened to the surgeons’ exchanges of statements, suggestions, and demands.

Nien's torso was covered by a portable pressure chamber through which the surgical procedure was done, necessary because of his punctured lung. His liver had already been mended with a plasma regenerator, but there was still internal bleeding. Bones had aspirated the abdominal cavity twice before he had been able to close veins which had ripped under the brutal assault of the kicks and blows the Augment had received. As McCoy put it, "Any other human being would be dead by now."

From time to time, Jim looked at Joaquin, who had turned onto his right side and watched every movement of the doctors with eagle eyes, yet he was alarmingly pale and utterly exhausted, which was no wonder. After all, the Augment boy still suffered the side effects of the long cryosleep. A thermal blanket offered him some warmth, but Kirk saw him shivering and knew that the cold Joaquin felt had many reasons – blood-loss, exhaustion, fear, shock… The kid was ready for a good, long vacation; that much was sure.

But Jim's primary concern lay with Khan. Seeing him lying there on the steel operating table, white as a sheet with sunken cheeks, shadows beneath his eyes covered by the long lashes, and blooming bruises, he looked more dead than alive. And Kirk had a hard time repressing the dread that lurked deep in his soul. He somehow knew that Nien maybe would sense it, if he allowed his fear to come to the surface, and this wouldn't help the superhuman at all.

"Dammit!" McCoy growled as he looked at the screen of the life support system. "He'd lost so much blood I'm surprised that his heart works at all."

Joaquin, feeling dizzy and freezing like a little puppy, lifted his head. “If you need more, then…”

Daniel Corrigan, who had made his interplanetary examination only a few months ago and was now specializing on Vulcan biology, glanced first at him and then at his colleague. “No way! We can’t take more from Mr. Weiss, or…”

"Bones," Jim said quietly, clinging to the far too cold hand of his soulmate like a lifeline. “Maybe you can use my blood plasma to give his body at least a little bit more fluid?"

“Jim, you know that Khan’s blood differs from hu…”
"I've got his cells in my blood, as you of all people know," Kirk interrupted him, desperate enough to speak about his changed biology in the presence of strangers. "And I he doped me during our flight from Turkana with a drug made from his blood. This certainly is..." He stopped as he caught McCoy's exasperated glare, while Corrigan glanced baffled at him. Even T'Ley showed a hint of surprise.

"Jim!" Leonard groaned. "You know what you just spilled?"

Kirk's face became stern while he looked at the two other surgeons. Grabbing the bull by the horns, he said, "What I'm telling you now, is top secret, and I trust that it will not leave the room. I got radiation poisoning during an incident in my ship's Engineering compartment more than a year ago. Khan's blood healed me, but it left traces – changed my cells and my DNA just a bit. I heal quicker, and I'm more vital. The imprint he left, so to speak, was refreshed because of a similar treatment he gave me after he freed me from Klingon captivity; that was made from his blood, too. This circumstance is now an advantage because you can use my blood plasma for him." He drew a deep breath, feeling new fear clenching his belly. The thought of losing Nien was agony! "Please, at least try it! I wouldn't be able to handle his death!" Oh yes, love was selfish!

Daniel bit his lips, and his gaze roamed over the captain's face. "You're… augmented, too?"

Usually, Jim would have rolled his eyes, but he was far too tense for it now. "Let just say that I'm a little bit healthier and stronger than before; that's all. No super powers or that kind of stuff. My blood is maybe Nien's only chance!"

Bones grimaced. No super powers, all right! If he remembered correctly that minute in which Kirk sped through the hostile lines of Elite Security aboard the Excalibur, he couldn't find another description other than 'super powers'. And the CMO was very glad that Spock had covered it by pretending it had been him who hurled those men out of the way by mimicking Kirk's action only a second after Jim's attacks.

Corrigan took a deep breath and nodded at the captain's words, acutely aware of the secret's weight, but also of the medical confidentiality he was bound to. T'Ley just bowed her head in acceptance and turned away to prepare the blood drawing supplies to extract the plasma from the blood sample. "I will first check if your blood plasma will be compatible with Mr. Singh," she simply said, and returned with the equipment. Kirk offered her his left arm; his right hand still clutched Khan's fingers; his gaze hung on the pale features of his beloved. 'Hold on, honey; I'll help you. No matter how much they have to take to keep you alive, but the Grim Reaper will not get you today – or anytime soon!'

The next minutes seemed to stretch into endlessness. The seconds as T'Ley tested the blood plasma until she finally exclaimed that it wouldn't harm Khan but would help him, felt like hours. Jim sighed
in relief at the Vulcaness' words and beaming at a grumbling McCoy; he watched as T'Ley took blood from him.

‘Nien stopped his deadly assault back in San Francisco when he smelled his blood in me. Will he be able to smell mine in his veins, too? Are we brothers then too?’ Jim asked himself.

The next quarter hour was spent removing the splintered rib from Khan's lung and mending all his broken bones – Bones doing some of his miracles as he healed the broken body as best he could. Another critical moment came and went when the med scanner beeped an alarm because of swelling in the brain – a result of the brutal beating, yet Khan had suffered more than a concussion. McCoy knew that the enhanced nature of the former dictator would perhaps prevent worse, but a traumatic brain injury always bore significant risk, and Leonard hadn't the slightest idea how the brain of an Augment would react to that kind of damage – if the brain cells would restore themselves or not.

The alert and Leonard's frantic reaction, followed by him and Corrigan working with some devices at Khan's head, raised new alarm in Kirk and Weiss.

“Bones?” Jim demanded, and McCoy sighed, "The concussion is worse than I thought. He has the symptoms of a TBI." He gave Kirk a look full of understanding and sympathy, while he murmured, “I'll do my best, Jim!”

Kirk closed his eyes and sent a prayer to any higher being that might listen, while Leonard continued his work with his colleagues. Then his eyes found Joaquin, who lay on his side. His knees were drawn up and he watched with big, fearful eyes as the surgeons worked on his brother. Usually, Jim would have gone to him to gather him into a brotherly embrace, but he couldn't. Somehow he knew that his hold on Nien's hand was the only anchor to the living that the Augment had left.

The surgery lasted almost three hours, despite the modern medical technology, and the CMO felt bone tired as he finally called the surgery complete. Thanking Corrigan and T'Ley for their work, McCoy lifted Khan from the operation table on a portable biobed with Daniel's help to take him to the recovery room next door. Bandages were wrapped around the Augment's arm, leg, chest, and abdomen; dark bruises marked the alabaster body, and Nien remained connected to the life support system.

McCoy stretched his back and glanced at Kirk and Weiss; one was still lying on the biobed – Joaquin – and one sat on the chair looking as though he was about to fall off – Kirk. Bones caught the demanding stares of the two other males, while Corrigan washed his hands behind them.

"And?” Jim prompted as Bones kept silent.
McCoy looked at his friend and saw the intense worry that had burrowed wrinkles around Jim's usually bright, now glassy blue eyes. "I don't know, Jim," he said truthfully. "We did all that we could for him. Only time will tell if it was enough."

Kirk gulped down his rising fear. "But... But you stopped the internal bleeding, and... And he got enough blood, didn't he?"

"The damage was so much; even a Vulcan would have trouble healing. I know that Khan can deal with a lot, but truly, Finnegan and his men did their best to beat him into the ground." His gaze found the Augment leader, who lay like the dead beneath the sheet T'Ley had spread over him. "Just have faith, Jim. Maybe he can sense it." He nodded towards Corrigan. "Let us take him to the recovery room."

Kirk rose unsteadily to his feet, and Bones, who instantly wanted to protest, closed his mouth with a click when he caught the fierce gaze of his friend and captain. Well, he knew a protest was doomed to fail. Nothing would stop Jim from remaining at Khan's side, not even his weak condition.

Grumbling something under his breath, he nodded at Jim, and together they left the operating room. Joaquin followed them with weak knees, supported by Corrigan.

The next room was cool by Vulcan standards, but for humans it was comfortable. The portable biobed was placed beside a life support system, and quickly McCoy linked Khan to it before he got a chair and placed it beside the bed, helping Jim to sit down. Ordering Joaquin to lay down on a spare bed, the CMO began to remove his gloves and washed his hands.

Jim still gripped Nien's hand. His back was giving him hell; he was exhausted and stiff, but it didn't matter. Nothing but the soft beeping of the monitor that told him that Nien's heart still beat and the gentle hiss of the air supplying the oxygen to his lungs and the movement of the bandaged chest.

"It will be about an hour before he wakes up," McCoy said groggily, "maybe a bit sooner. Hard to tell with him being all super – and the sedative Dashwood developed. I'm not entirely sure."

"I'll stay with him," Jim murmured.

Bones rolled his eyes. "Of course you will," he sighed. "But you should get rid of the sterile clothes – or the cap and the mask, at least." He stepped to Jim to give him a hand, but at that moment the
biobed gave an alert, and McCoy whirled around to his patient.

"Sweet Lord!" he gasped as he saw that the Augment's eyelids flutter. "He can't wake up already! That's not pos…"

Khan's eyes opened and stared blankly ahead. In two steps, McCoy was at his side; Corrigan followed within seconds.

The pale, bloodshot eyes of the former dictator moved quickly around. They took in the lab-like room, the monitors above him, and finally found the two figures who bent over him, wearing sterile clothes.

Bones saw horror rising in the superhuman's eyes, and shocked he realized that Khan, still sedated, misunderstood the situation he was in. His surroundings reminded him of the time he was the scientists' captive.

"Khan, you're safe!" he called, but his words didn't reach the Augment, who began to panic. Bones ripped the mask and cap from his head and bent over the enhanced man, hoping that Khan would recognize his face, but his attempt resulted in the superhuman's wild thrashing.

“Nien!” Jim still clung to his bondmate’s hand, bent over him, and tried to calm him down, but the blue-green eyes saw Jim – and didn't recognize him. They only mirrored terror. Then the Augment's body arched; he ripped his hand away from Kirk's soothing hold and grabbed his mask. The signals of monitor above the biobed went wild showing the Augments pulse racing dangerously.

"Quick, the sedative!" McCoy shouted, knowing that the Augment's mind was too far gone for him to reason.

Then, all of sudden, Khan's body went limp and his eyes closed; above him, the monitor let out one long shrill sound. The bio-signals had flatlined.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
I know, this is certainly the meanest cliff-hanger of all… And many of you will think, ‘hey, Khan is an Augment, of course he can overcome such a physical and psychical stress. But, please remember, everyone has his limits – and Khan had been pushed over his own limits far too often…

Regarding the ‘cliffy’ I will not speak of the next chapter and what you can expect. Only that there will be some serious twists…

I hope you enjoyed the new chapter nevertheless – and that you all have a nice Advent time.

Love

Yours Starflight (who will seek cover now – smile)
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so much for all your reactions. I know that the last cliff hanger was one of the meanest I ever wrote, and I can understand that you all are sitting on the edge.

So, to release you into calm holidays, you get a little Christmas-gift from me now: The next chapter.

Because I don’t want to give any spoilers, I will not give a little pre-view this time.

Have fun with the new update

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 77 – The power of love

The moment the monitor in the recovery room sent its long signal that told of death's finality; a shout of sheer pain escaped Jim, accompanied by Joaquin's outcry. Panicking, the Augment boy left the spare bed and staggered towards his brother, while Jim bent in despair over his bondmate and called his name frantically.

“God dammit, it’s the shock! Defibrillator, quick!” McCoy shouted over his shoulder towards T'Ley, who had already slipped out of her scrubs. In a few seconds, she brought a portable defibrillator, while Corrigan made short work of the bandages around the Augment's chest.

"Jim, step aside!" McCoy ordered, and he saw his friend's eyes wet and brimming with despair. "Gel!" he snapped towards T'Ley, who already had the needed tube in her hand. A moment later she had prepared the two pads and Bones pressed them on the superhuman's chest. "200 joules, 3-2-1, now!"

Khan's body arched up as the energy bolted through him to stimulate the heart and restart its function. Bones' gaze hung at the monitor above and for five seconds there was a heartbeat before it stopped. "Once more, 300 joules, 3-2-1, now!"
Again the charge reached the heart instantly – and this time the rhythmic signal showed that the heart began to work.

"Heart rate increasing. Twenty-three, thirty-seven. BPM is forty-eight now." T'Ley gave McCoy the readouts. "If his heart rate continues, I believe he will stabilize soon."

"Adrenalin, four units!" Bones ordered, and Corrigan hurried away to get the demanded serum.

"Is he safe?" Joaquin asked hoarsely which Jim's mind was screaming as well, yet Kirk didn't find the strength to voice it.

"I can answer that in a few minutes, son," Leonard murmured, still watching the monitor. He didn't need to look at Jim to know how terrified his friend was. His heart went out to Kirk, yet he couldn’t comfort him like he wanted. Khan needed his full attention. "Dammit, his brain activity is confusing," he said quietly. "It is as if he wants to shut down, but is augmented nature won't allow it." He glanced down at the pale face. "Don't you dare to give up now, Noonien! Don't you dare to leave Jim and your little brother behind, or I'll kick your ass into the next week!"

Jim didn’t listen to Bones’ rambling. His own heart beat painfully slowly; ice seemed to flow through his veins, while a lump was in his throat – bitter with fear. This couldn’t happen! Not now, not after they made it so far! Kirk’s whole being was fixed on his bondmate; his soul was crying out to him in rising panic, ‘Don’t give up! Come back to me! Don’t leave me! Please, Nien, come back to me!’

“Jim!”

That voice was, besides Nien’s, the only one that could get Jim Kirk's attention at any time. Looking over his shoulder, his gaze found the tall figure, clad in hospital clothes. His normally shiny, black hair was tousled, and he supported himself on the door frame.

"Spock!" It was a shout of relief but also for help. Somehow he knew that with Spock's presence, hope had a better chance of winning. It was illogical, this much Jim's mind was aware of, but the deep faith he had in his Vulcan soul-brother woke the almost childish belief that everything would turn out to be all right because of his arrival.

Spock had rested in a separate room beside the PAR, where his father lay when he had sensed something – a rising sensation deep in him. Shutting out all impressions and noises around him, the
Vulcan had listened inside himself, only to be bombarded with bone-deep dread and rising desperation. Jim!

Something was the matter with his T'hy'la. He felt Kirk’s fear, heard him crying out to someone – Khan, no doubt. Something went terribly wrong, and Spock didn’t need to be a genius to figure out what it was. The Augment was on the brink of death.

In a blink of an eye, Spock had pulled out the needle that supplied his body with fluid after he had donated almost a liter for his father. Ignoring the alert his biobed instantly initiated, he flung the blanket aside and rose. Nausea washed over him, and for a second he had to support himself on the bed's edge; then his Vulcan control kicked in. Straightening up and pressing two fingers on the tiny wound the needle left, he walked on unsteady feet towards the door when a nurse stepped in.

“Commander,” she addressed him without preamble. “You have to stay in bed for…”

"No time!” Spock pressed out, ignoring his wobbling knees. Forcing his body to function, he slipped past the nurse and headed down the hallway, taking deep breaths to calm his churning stomach. Jim needed him; that was all that mattered at the moment.

"Commander, after a blood loss of almost one liter, your system must be granted some rest. Commander!” The nurse wasn't used to someone who didn't listen or react to her reasonable orders, and she rushed after him. Barring his way, she lifted her chin. "Commander, I have to insist that you return!"

Spock felt another wave of panic coming from Jim and gritted his teeth without even realizing it. "Nurse, you will not stop me from aiding my T'hy'la!"

For a second, bewilderment flickered in her eyes. “Your T'hy'la?” she asked with as much surprise as a Vulcan could admit. Spock used this little distraction to step around her and to continue his way. Again, dizziness gripped him, and he had to keep himself on his feet by using the wall, as he tumbled forwards. His stubbornness was the only thing that made him going on.

He passed the door to the surgery area where he knew Jim would be and headed towards the operating room, as the nurse appeared again. Spock felt a very unvulcan wave of anger waking in him. "Nurse, I apologize for my bad behavior," he said, and the Vulcaness lifted a brow.

“What bad behavior, Commander?”
Spock steeled himself. "This one!" With those words, he simply lifted her at her waist and put her down again behind him. Not wasting another valuable second he entered the double doors to the surgery. Instantly, he heard McCoy's voice ordering someone to adjust the defibrillator, followed by a female voice that reported the return of the heartbeat.

Taking another deep breath, Spock closed the distance to the room he identified as another recovery room like the one his father rested in, and he braced himself against the doorframe. He saw Jim bending over Khan, while McCoy laid the defibrillator pads aside and reacted in his typical manner to let off steam: he groused at the Augment, daring him not to give up and leave them.

Calling out his captain and friend's name, he met Kirk's terrified gaze a second later. Jim looked half relieved, but his body – his soul, cried out. Straightening his shoulders, Spock pushed himself away from the doorway and walked on unsteady feet to the little group, ignoring McCoy's startled, "Spock! Sweet Lord, you should be in bed! And what's with your arm? Don't tell me you ripped the needle out!"

The Vulcan's glance found the Augment – bandages cut open, the pale skin reddened where the electrodes of the defibrillator had reanimated the superhuman's heart, sealed wounds bleeding anew in the area. "What happened?" he asked. "Did the surgery…"

"It went fine, Spock, until Khan woke a bit early – just two minutes ago, stared around at us, panicked, and then just shut down," Bones snapped frustrated, while he quickly took a disinfecting spray and a patch to treat the first officer's arm.

The Vulcan lifted a brow and looked around him. Yes, this was a recovery room, not a lab, yet the similarities were clearly seen. "He thought he was back with Section 31 clutches," he murmured, not caring what McCoy was doing to his arm.

"Jesus!" Jim whispered. "But, I held his hand the whole time and…” He shook his head in despair. "He didn't recognize me."

Spock glanced at Jim. The captain still wore the sterile clothes, the medical mask, and cap, so it wasn't a surprise that the traumatized Augment mistook him for one of his tormentors. "His mind was already shut down when we saved him on the Excalibur," the first officer mused quietly. "He has withdrawn into himself – as a kind of defense mechanism. And now…"

"Now he wants to die rather than to find himself in those bastard's hands again!" McCoy groaned,
finishing treating the Vulcan. "Superb! Jim, maybe it'll help if you try to kiss our sleeping beauty awake or… Spock, what are you doing?"

Sarek’s son didn’t answer, but sat down on the biobed’s edge, rubbed his palms against each other, reached out with his right hand, and placed his fingertips on Khan's psi-points. "My mind to your mind, my thoughts to your thoughts – we are one," he murmured, realizing that this was maybe the only way to bring the Augment back and to save Jim the agony of losing his bondmate.

First, he met resolve, then fear that he tried to soothe. And then the barrier gave away, and the Vulcan plunged…

… Right into Khan’s mind.

Darkness surrounded him; icy wind tore at his clothes and hair, bit into his skin and made him tremble. He stayed where he was and looked around himself. Bit by bit he could make out a corridor; the walls were covered with colorless flags and the floor with an odd synthetic dark material. It smelled of disinfecting agents – and blood.

Carefully, Spock began to walk down the hallway, passed security doors and rooms separated from the corridor by large windows. He saw medical equipment, cots, operating tables, and labs. After passing another corridor, he saw rooms with beds – side by side with lockers on one wall. Faceless people sat or lay there, most of them only children.

The first officer lifted both brows, realizing that this had to be a dark mirror of the labs where Noonien Singh had been bred and lived in as a child. Despite his Vulcan control, Spock felt a small shiver running down his spine. This was NO place to raise a child!

Suddenly, he thought he heard harsh breathing, and as he stopped at the next edge, he saw a small figure jumping up and dashing away, black hair shimmered in the pale light of the old fashioned strip lights, the movements gawky, yet somehow familiar. Spock knew that this was Khan as a boy.

Quickly, he followed the child, calling softly, "Noonien, you do not have to fear me. I will not harm you!"

It didn't help; the boy ran even faster, and Spock had difficulties following him at all. Suddenly the corridor ended in front of a door that didn’t open, and the Vulcan realized that the Augment had slammed another door in his mind behind him to keep the painful world out. Aware of the danger of
losing Khan completely, Spock carefully tried to open the door, and after some tugging it was possible.

As he crossed the threshold, he stopped for a moment in surprise. He was on a high plateau bathed in sunlight. It was warm even for his senses. The air was filled with the scent of plants and rain that seeped into the earth. Animal sounds were heard from afar – the chirping of birds, the shout of a primate, the buzzing of insects. Behind him, a large jungle raised its trees into the skies; in front of him, he recognized mountains, covered with more jungle. A waterfall rushed down into the abyss to the east, and the sun had painted a rainbow over the water. The high plateau ended only a few meters away from him, and there he saw the tiny figure of a boy, who sat on a rock, had pulled his knees to his chest, had wrapped his arms around them and rocked gently back and forth.

Spock took another deep breath; this time was the smell far more pleasant. Then he started to close the distance to the boy with slow steps so as not scare the frightened child. As he walked nearer, the boy lifted his head quickly and looked at him with big blue-green eyes. The sun shone on the small face with the high cheekbones and shimmered in the tousled, almost black hair. Yes, there was no doubt. This was Khan Noonien Singh – only eight or nine years old.

Being aware that his presence was another pressure for the Augment, he stopped dead in his tracks and cocked his head, trying to appear as non-threatening as possible. "Noonien?" he asked quietly, using the superhuman's given name purposefully. Experiences with his human comrades had shown that this calmed them in periods of extreme stress.

The child didn't answer, but continued to look at him. Then he moistened his lips and answered something Spock was unable to understand.

"I am sorry, but I do not speak your language," he murmured. "Do you speak English?"

The boy nodded slowly. "Yes, I do – other ones too," he replied carefully; his stance told Spock that he was ready to flee if it became necessary. "You are not one of them," he pointed out, and the first officer didn’t need to ask to whom the child was referring. Of course, the boy meant the scientists who had bred him.

"No, I am not," the Vulcan replied. "My name is Spock."

Again those pale eyes looked at him – waiting, wagering, curious. "I think… I know your name, but I don't know how." He cocked his head. "Your ears… Is that a mask or are they pointed?"
Of course. Of all things, this was the first thing a human of the twentieth century would ask. Spock felt a hint of amusement but turned serious again in a second. "They are real," he answered.

“I don’t believe in higher beings or magical creatures. Therefore you have to be an alien.”

Again the first officer nodded, impressed by the calm logic the child displayed. "That is correct. I am a Vulcan."

Noonien pursed his lips. “That sounds… familiar, too. Why is that so?”

Spock took another step towards the boy, who shrank back. Lifting both hands in a calming gesture, the Vulcan said gently. "I am not here to harm you, Noonien."

“And how do you know my name?” the boy demanded, then gulped. “You were THERE! I saw you. And you called my name then, too, but you’re not one of them.”

"When you say 'there' you mean the shadow labs," the first officer stated, and the child nodded carefully. "I wasn’t there, Noonien. I saw it through your eyes in your mind,” Spock added – a comment that confused the child.

"How can you look through my eyes?” he asked, bewildered.

Spock crouched down; knowing that he looked less threateningly like this. “Where are we, Noonien?”

“South of New Delhi, near Bhopal,” came the calm reply.

“Have you been here before?”

"Yes,” the boy nodded, "after we escaped the labs and we began to explore the country I came here for the first time. I came later back after I ensured my position.” His words were those of an adult, yet his voice remained that of a child. He glanced to the mountains and jungles on the other side of the valley cut. “It’s calm here, not as noisy and busy as in New Delhi. It’s a place where I can find the peace that I cannot get in my palace.”
Spock lifted a brow. "You speak of your palace in New Delhi – the seat of your government." As the boy made an affirming gesture, the Vulcan asked quietly. "Isn't it strange that a child your age rules a whole country?"

The Augment boy glanced at him, frowning. "I'm..." He stopped himself and looked down on himself. "I'm a child again," he murmured; thunderstruck.

“No, you are not,” Spock replied. “You are a strong man in his early thirties, loved by his family – and his bondmate.”

With wide eyes, the boy stared at him before he fiercely shook his head. "No, I'm... I'm..." he stammered and gulped, realizing how antithetic this all was.

"Noonien," the Vulcan began again, his voice soothing and soft. "This is not real; it's a dream – a memory you love, so you fled to this place to escape the outside world."

A dark glare hit him. “I'm no coward!”

"No, you are not – you never were and never will be," the first officer agreed. "You are one of the most fierce warriors I have ever met, loyal to the death to those who hold your heart, yet you withdrew into yourself and are about to LEAVE those who love you most."

Enraged the boy jumped to his feet. "I would never let my own down, Vulcan, never!"

The first officer had to fight the sudden urge to smile as he heard the way the Augment almost spat the name of Spock's race – the first hint that Khan was becoming himself again; after all, how often had he called Spock by his race before they came to terms with each other? "No, you so not let your family down easily – or the man, who is waiting in the real world for you. He is in agony at the moment, because he thinks you are about to go forever."

The child drew some harsh breaths. "What are you talking about!" he demanded; his boyish voice held a bit of the superior arrogance Spock knew so well from the adult Khan.

"Noonien, this is an illusion you created yourself, nothing more. Right now you are on the planet
that the survivors of my race have colonized. You are in a hospital because you were severely wounded during a battle."

“That’s not possible! I’m on Earth!” He made a gesture towards the mountains.

“You and your people fled Earth in 1996 aboard a sleeper-ship you named ‘Botany Bay’,” Sarek’s son stated. “You created cryotubes which ensured the survival of your people, allowing them to sleep safely for 250 years. We are now in the year 2260 and…”

“That’s the story you came up with!” the boy interrupted him in angry denial, yet Spock realized that the child had begun to mature as younger memories stirred in him.

“No, it’s the truth. Your ship was found, and you were woken up. You had a rough start, but now you found your place in this new world; you’ve made new friends,” the Vulcan continued, knowing that he had to go on until the boy became a man again. "And you are bonded with my captain and friend Jim Kirk."

The Augment, now in his early twenties, looked at him with something close to fear in his eyes; his chest heaved. "This… cannot be,” he whispered. "I’m here, in India, near…"

"Khan," Spock called him by his title to wake some more memories, "as I told you, you fled from the real world because you thought you were in the clutches of an organization that inflicted great pain and sorrow upon you. But you are safe. You are on New Vulcan in the Vulcan Academy Hospital. The surgery was successful – you only have to return with me – to Jim."

During those words, the superhuman had matured back into the fully grown man, yet there was an almost childish innocence about him that confused Spock.

"Jim?" Khan quietly. "This name… It's so… so familiar."

"You call him ‘Pyāra’," the Vulcan added helpfully.

“Pyāra – that means ‘love’ – or ‘beloved’,” the Augment mused. He lowered his head as if he were listening to something only he could hear. "Blue eyes…” he whispered, ”golden skin kissed by the sun…"
"Sunrise," Spock commented and met Khan's gaze again. "This was the cover name you gave yourself after you and Jim spent a night together in San Francisco. You used it to send us warnings – and to have an official name during your time with The Shadow – a gang of people you joined to fight against the Klingons in the war that has come to a ceasefire now – thanks to you and Jim." The Vulcan stopped as he realized that the surroundings began to change. The sunlight turned into twilight; the voices of the jungle faded away. The mountains became walls; the air cooled. He saw, Khan wrap his arms around himself, and added quietly, "You rescued Jim on Turkana and brought him to Aldebaran, an Earth-like planet where you two stayed several days. You became lovers there – later you bonded."

“Bonded,” Khan repeated slowly. "We… We marked each other," he whispered, fingerimg his throat were Kirk gave him the first mark – pale in comparison to the one Jim branded inside of him while they bonded, yet it was still there. "I can sense him, and I'm used to feeling his warmth, but…" He looked around himself. "It's so cold here!"

“I agree, this is not the place you should be,” Spock nodded and rose to his feet. “Shall we return?”

Alarmed the Augment stiffened. “To where?”

"To Jim," the Vulcan answered, knowing that it was the best when he referred only to Kirk. He turned around and walked back the way he came several minutes ago. Between the trees which had turned into stones melting into a wall, he saw the door again and looked over his shoulder. Khan still stood where he was; uncertainty is written all over his face. "Are you coming, Mr. Singh?"

The Augment shuddered. "Don't go through this door! It leads to a dangerous place."

The first officer nodded. "Yes, to your memories of your childhood – of the labs you spent your first years in. But this is the past, Noonien. On the other side is acceptance, friendship, freedom, peace – and your bondmate."

The superhuman moistened his lips. "Can we just walk directly to this place you speak of?"

Spock sighed inwardly. Despite his deep baritone, Khan sounded almost like a child again, and the Vulcan realized how fragile the Augment's soul had become; how deeply wounded it truly was. "You have to confront your fears before you can get rid of them," he answered with a hint of sympathy. "Believe me. I have been through the same." Fighting down his instincts, he offered the enhanced man a hand – for the compassion that moved his far too human heart, and for Jim. “Take hold of
my hand and do not let go. I will lead you through the darkness."

Never in a million years did the Vulcan think he would see this man hesitating, almost afraid to deal with a supposed danger; this here was not the man Khan showed everyone on the outside. But his mind – his soul... And it was vulnerable as any other soul, maybe even more given the Augments’ higher brain activities and their potent emotions. Sometimes intelligence could be a curse.

The superhuman in front of him bit his lips, and then – inch by inch – he lifted his hand while he closed slowly, carefully, the distance to Spock. Reluctantly, he finally placed his hand in the Vulcan’s, and a barely audible sighed escaped him as Spock’s fingers closed firmly, yet reassuringly around his.

Side by side, they faced the door. "You have to open it," Spock told him. "This is, after all, your mind."


“Give it time,” Sarek’s son said quietly. “You’re in deep shock and even your brilliant mind has to come to terms with everything you went through.”

For the first time, a hint of a smile ghosted around the Augment’s lips, a memory of the arrogant smirk he so often displayed. "'Brilliant mind’, huh? I like that!” He took a deep breath and reached out for the handle; his hand began to shake badly, yet determination woke in him. With a shout of defiance, he tore the door open and almost shrank back as darkness and an icy wind seemed to grip for him.

"I am with you, Mr. Singh!” Spock’s voice turned forcefully. "I am here, and I will not leave your side. But you have to pass through these hallways, or you will never find a way back."

Khan glared at him; a part of his old self showed through the grim face he wore. "I hate it!” he growled, and Spock nodded.

"Understandable. And if your fury helps you to overcome your fear, then hold to it – and to my hand. Whatever happens, do not let go! I will not allow any harm come to you!"
"Brave words, Vulcan. You have no clue what lies ahead!"

"I saw images as I searched for you, Mr. Singh," Spock objected. "But as I said, this is the past. If you allow the past to control you, you never will have a future."

"An alien with poetic understanding! What a world," Khan scoffed, straightened up and crossed the threshold – Spock at his side. The door closed with an eerie bang behind them; its echo sounded from the walls.

The first meters were easy; the corridor was dimly illuminated. Then they reached a place where several hallways crossed, and again Spock saw walls made of glass, faceless people bending over stretchers, devices linked to small bodies. "Turn away," the first officer advised quietly. "This is not real! This happened a long time ago – in another century in another world. This is the past!"

"You are repeating yourself," Khan grumbled, but his trembling voice betrayed his rising fear – buried for decades but still alive.

Together they made their way down the corridor; Spock remembered the way he came, but the surroundings were different. Through a window, he thought he saw a large Indian style building, burning down in wild flames that raged into the night. People were running; he heard screams and shots. Khan stopped at his side and gasped. Out of instinct, Spock wrapped his free arm around the Augment and led him away, reminding him that this was also events from a long time ago.

They faced another door, and Spock lifted both brows. He hadn't come through this one and… Before he could think of explanation, Khan had already torn it open, and so the Vulcan followed him – only to be the one who stopped dead in his tracks this time.

The rooms were modern – today's style, yet they were laboratories, too. Faceless people in dark coveralls crossed their way without seeing them, wearing the Starfleet symbol encircled with a script Spock was unable to read. Someone came out of a room and Spock instantly recognized the man in his middle fifties: Admiral Alexander Marcus. The former Chief in Command's bright eyes were narrowed as he sneered, "You got enough time to think about my offer. Accept it, and I'll forget your little rebellion. Refuse to cooperate and face the consequences!"

Spock felt loathing tugging at his mind – a human emotion he quickly suppressed, yet his human side couldn't deny the disgust Marcus woke in him. "He is not real!" he said to Khan. "He died more than a year ago."
The enhanced man didn't answer but continued his way – passing the admiral's ghost without sparing him a further glance. They rounded the corner – and this was the moment Spock understood fully what had made Khan snap. They were in a cargo hold and in front of them the cryotubes were lined up. Marcus was there again, together with four other men, and his hand lay on one of the tubes. "Last chance! Agree, or he dies!"

Another man stepped towards Spock and Khan – Conelly, grinning widely and making a grab for the Augment. "Another round, pretty?"

Dashwood appeared, too. “Four days in sub-zero and he's still going. Maybe we should add another day – to see how far his augmented body can keep him alive."

"No food until he starts working on the Vengeance! And if he becomes ill, I don't care! The schedule for the war stands! And we have to be finished!" Marcus railed.

And there were more phantoms of Marcus, more Conelleys, more Dashwoods, more faceless people – they all closed in, while in the background, four of the cryotubes were destroyed. Spock thought he could hear the sleeping Augments crying out in agony while dying.

Khan had moved to the wall, surrounded by the images of his enemies, yet he somehow was still clinging to Spock's hand – almost like a lifeline. In the broadest sense, it was a lifeline.

Spock watched the cornered Augment, saw the terror and the exhaustion weighing him down – and realized that Khan did not have enough strength to deal with this alone.

Placing himself beside the superhuman, the Vulcan pulled him closer, steadying his swaying frame. Darkness and cold increased, and Spock shivered, but still, he didn't let go of the Augment though a part of himself withdrew from the scene.

He knew that what he intended was risky – would be even for Vulcan healers. Spock may be sensible, and his telepathic skills were considerable, but he was no trained healer. His plan was dangerous. But this was maybe the only chance to save them all – Khan, Jim and himself, too, because he realized how deep he was involved in the Augment’s memories and that he couldn’t leave without consequences.

Concentrating on the warmth that was in the outer world and trying to listen to its noises, he attempted to regain some consciousness, but also stay connected with Khan. At the same time, he
searched for the golden light that was his T’hy’la, and for a moment he opened his eyes and…

… And saw Jim bending over him still wearing sterile clothes but sans the mask and the cap. Kirk was pale; his eyes were large and dark with fear and hope, and then Spock felt his friend's hand on his shoulder. Kirk's lips moved, but the Vulcan couldn't make out what Jim was saying.

It was an effort beyond imagination to rasp out audible words, "Jim, you must join us."

McCoy, who watched the monitor and his friends, gaped at Spock, who sat on the biobed's edge, ashen, shaking and about to drop to the floor. "Join you? Have you lost your Vulcan mind?" he snarled. "I don’t know what mumbo-jumbo you’re doing here, but… Jim! Don’t!"

But Bones’ shout was utterly ignored, as Kirk pulled the chair directly in front of the triangle Spock, Khan, and the bed built. He reached out and placed his T’hy’la’s free hand on his temple, guiding the Vulcan, who was still in a mind meld with Nien. Spock's fingertips moved over Jim's soft skin, found the psi-points, and then Kirk felt his mind being pulled away…

Khan pressed himself against the wall that seemed to be made of ice. His whole body was frozen, while he watched Marcus switched off the four cryotubes, Conelly forcing him on the steel table, binding him with handcuffs too strong to rip them apart – and the unbelievable pain. He heard Marcus ordering the destruction of every cryotube; heard the explosion in the Vengeance's belly; saw Dashwood bending over him in the labs – and then Elite Security kicking, beating, and brutalizing him without mercy…

“You’re nothing, Singh, only a bred creature!” The words came from one of the Indian guards in New Delhi, his face a sneering mask.

“You’re no human, only an animal!” another voice shouted.

"You were bred to serve the humans – Earth! Now do what you were created for!" Marcus smirked darkly at him and…

And behind him, a single golden figure stepped into the scene, pushed through the crowd, and finally stopped in front of Khan. Blue eyes bright like the skies shone at him with utter tenderness. Lips, soft and promising, smiled lovingly; blond hair shimmered golden like the sun.
“Nien, it’s me,” a warm tenor said soothingly, comforting, compassionate. “Come back to me, honey. This all here— The man made a gesture that encompassed the surroundings. “is not real anymore. You’re safe – loved!” He closed the distance to him and cupped his face in both hands. “I love you, Nien! I love you more than anything or anyone else in the world. You’re safe with me, I swear.” He bent forwards, and those gentle lips touched Khan’s in such a sweet way, the Augment felt a sob rising in his throat, filled with longing. "Come home with me, baby," the man in front of him whispered. Warm, strong, yet fragile arms closed around him, and his mouth was captured again.

Sweetness – freshness – masculine cinnamon mixed with honey…

It was familiar…

So familiar, Khan was ready to weep if these lips and warmth would ever be denied him again…

The voices around him, the scenes, the icy wind, the darkness – everything vanished and made room for the warm, golden light that began to cocoon him. A body of a mere human, yet so strong in its own way, supported him. Gentle breath washed over his face. Soft lips and a clever tongue challenged and comforted him.

Another place – a flat or apartment… Outside a thunderstorm that mirrored his emotions – a hand offering him a glass of liquor. Blue eyes looked with wariness and sympathy at him – the same blue eyes which were filled with love while the bright flickering of a fireplace danced in them. A lean, muscular, golden body glistened in the light of the flames. Soft music played in the background, love that was directed only to him…

Pyāra!

This time a sob did escape the Augment, while the dark veils around his mind changed into a mist that fled.

"Jim," he whispered, feeling his soul reaching out to the only being he would never be able to live without.

"I'm here, Nien, I'm here," the younger man replied – and then the last vestiges of confusion left Khan.
He looked around – the scenes had frozen, yet he shivered. Then he felt another presence and turned
his head. His gaze wandered over the greenish, pale features of the alien man he once thought as an
enemy – the man he thought had killed his family. Now he was a protector and ally – and more!

"Mr. Spock," he said quietly, finally fully recognizing him.

"Mr. Singh, I'm glad that you found your way back to us." It wasn't an empty phrase, but the truth. The Vulcan was, indeed, pleased that the Augment was overcoming his trauma and became more and more his real self. Spock had learned to respect Khan – not only his brilliance and logic but also the person. And even more, Spock would do everything to spare Jim the agony of a ripped mental bond that would result in Khan's death. Therefore, the first officer felt relief as the superhuman let go of his hand and allowed Jim to pull him into an embrace – even returning it. For a long moment both men stood in the middle of the frozen nightmare the Augment leader had been captured in – then Khan lifted his head.

“Take me home, Jim,” he whispered.

Kirk smiled at him; tears glistened in his eyes, but they were tears of joy. "I will, baby. Come with me – with us. We're together in this."

Taking Nien's hand, Jim turned around toward the way he came, and Spock, knowing that it was up to him to lead his T'hy'la and Khan back and to end the mind-meld, took the superhuman's other hand again, strengthening the mental bond.

Together they went down the hallway, passed by rooms and persons from Khan's past, yet none of those phantoms moved or talked anymore, and the scenes vanished. Finally, they stepped through another door and found themselves in only warmth and light.

Khan visibly and audibly sighed in relief and closed his eyes, before he looked at Jim, who smiled at him, "You made it!"

"Yes, thanks to you." the Augment whispered.

Spock turned towards the two humans and said quietly, "It's time. I'll separate us now." He seemed to fade away, and Khan called, "Spock?" For the last second the Vulcan was clear to see, and so the former dictator added, "Thank you for coming for me."
The first officer lifted a brow. “You are welcome, bondmate of my T’hy’la!” Then he vanished and…

… And Khan blinked into the clear light of a room. He felt a throbbing pain in his chest and even if his enhanced senses told him that the temperature was quite warm, he was freezing. Disoriented, he blinked, then he recognized the soft beeping of medical systems and turned his head.

And a face appeared over him – a face he loved.

“Jim,” he whispered; his voice was hoarse.

Kirk suppressed a sob of utter relief as he glanced into those beloved blue-green eyes. Nien was awake! He had left the sinister spiral of haunting memories which had almost taken him away. Khan would be okay – now, after he had overcome the shock and had followed him, Jim, back to the real world.

“Nien!” he croaked, closed the distance to him and kissed the dry lips. It didn't matter that everyone watched him. All that mattered was that Nien had given up first and had been at the brink of death, only to return to him at the very last moment. "God, never do that again!" he whispered into the Augment's mouth, while his hand combed tenderly through the dirty, dark hair of his beloved.

"You three can't do that again! It's more than creepy to watch you three lost in a trance and mumbling like a bunch of monks!" Bones groused but didn't get further, as he heard Joaquin's suppressed sob. The Augment-boy still stood at the other side of the bed, glanced at his brother in heart-wrenching relief and then, all of sudden, almost fell on the bed's edge. Jim lifted his head and made room for Weiss, who bent over Khan. "Noo! What happened?" he choked out, placing a hand on his older brother's shoulder.

The Augment leader turned his head carefully. "Joaquin," he rasped. "Don't worry; I'll be all right."

The boy swallowed another sob, while he stroked the older man's cheek. "I thought I'd lost you." He glanced at Spock. "What you did – it was the same thing the high minister did after our arrival, right?"

The Vulcan nodded slowly; his eyes were half closed.
T'Ley exchanged a glance with the nurse who had followed and tried to stop Spock; both Vulcan women were confused about what just happened. McCoy, who knew that he had to patch up Khan again soon, glared at his two friends and the exhausted Augment-boy. "You three should…"

Jim began to sway and supported himself at the biobed’s edge – the blood loss and the psychological stress of the last days and especially during the mind-meld took their toll. Spock, suffering similar effects, reached out for Kirk to steady him, yet every movement was arduous. As Jim stumbled, he was able to hold him, yet it was Corrigan who spared the captain of the Enterprise the humiliation of a fall by shoving the chair directly under his butt.

“Look at you two!” McCoy pointed at Kirk and Spock. “You can barely hold yourself upright and, so – for God’s sake! – lay down!” He turned towards Corrigan. “Get two stretchers and…” He stopped again, as Jim, still holding Khan’s hand, rested his free arm on Spock’s right arm to support himself. The Vulcan didn’t comment on this behavior; rather he used the offered opportunity to steady himself on Kirk.

Bones pressed his fists into his hips, glaring at the four males – three hanging around together to keep each other upright, while the fourth lay there, shielded by the others. “A veritable knot of bodies,” he swore under his breath. "Jim! Spock!" he called. "You really should lie down and get some rest! What you’ve been through is not exactly chicken feed!"

T'Ley lifted a brow. “Why should one of them use food that is meant for Terran fowl?”

Daniel grinned for a moment, while Bones rolled his eyes. Vulcans! Then the CMO glanced at his patients again, who hadn't moved, yet it was more than clear that Kirk and Spock were only able to sit because they supported each other. They were on the brink of falling asleep.

At that moment another person stepped into the PAR – Healer Sorel. He glanced at the biobed and its many occupants, lifted a brow and looked at McCoy. "May I ask what is going on here? Spock should rest and…"

McCoy combed his hand through his hair that was already tousled from the surgical cap. "They all should rest, and I think Spock is going to need your help after he mind melded with Mr. Singh to bring him back from the brink of death." He pointed frustrated at the four men. "But you try to separate them!"

Sorel lifted the second brow. "That appears to be a difficult task, Doctor."
"See, that's the point!" He nodded his head in the direction of the biobed, before he once again called, "Jim, Spock, try to get to your feet and hit the next bed possible! The same goes for you, Joaquin." Again there was no reaction, and Bones threw his hands up. "I give up! There is no cure for them!" He shook his head and looked Sorel. "To spare us all trouble and a lot of arguing and running – does this hospital have a room with four beds?"

More than two hundred kilometers above New Shi’Kahr, Admiral Barnett sat in the center seat of the Excalibur’s bridge, sipping iced tea. He had returned from New Vulcan only half an hour ago and had informed Wesley and the other senior officers of the meeting with T’Pau and later with Selek, who had come to the one-level, elongated house, built from the sand-colored stones of the mountains that served as a kind of abbey until New Gol was completed. It was not much that the Elders had been able to take with them when Vulcan was destroyed and, at least, T’Pau had managed to save the shrine that held Surak’s *katra* – the only *katra* in the Halls of Eternity that could be recovered before the whole planet had imploded.

Most of the documents and artifacts within the house T’Pau and the others used as keepers for Vulcan traditions and ceremonies came from other colonies, but at least it was a start for something greater. Barnett was very aware of the honor T’Pau had paid him by inviting him to this place as he had stepped into her office, and his hope that the relationship between Earth and New Vulcan wasn't damaged after Norton's assault, had grown again.

But this topic was not his biggest concern at the moment. There was the whole mess with Luengo and Section 31 that busied his mind.

Richard had only needed a quarter hour to look through the all of the documentation Old Spock had assembled from the records and reports Kirk sent him, and from the copied data he got as he had infiltrated the data bank of Starfleet Headquarters. The Chief in Command didn't want to think too much of the latter. Yes, Selek was from the future, and even his younger counterpart was a genius when it came to computer technology, just like Kirk, as Barnett had to admit after the stunt Cadet Kirk pulled two years ago. But the fact that it had been so easy for the old Vulcan to get access to one of the most secure data banks of the Federation was alarming.

Barnett had simply asked Selek how he had been able to bypass all the security protocols, but the only answer had been a quick half-smile – scandalizing for a Vulcan, yet Spock Prime seemed to have made peace with his dual heritage and was comfortable with his human side. T’Pau hadn’t even reacted to slip – and Spock was – technically – her grandson. So Barnett didn't dare say anything and let the topic drop.

The documents the admiral had inspected held so much shocking and almost terrifying facts, he still
felt nausea three hours later. He never thought that Section 31 would go this far; that a man they all knew and trusted until several weeks ago, was able to plan a genocide. It was insane. The plan to kill every Klingon with a pathogen was… Barnett had no words for it. Luengo's betrayal concerning the events in Borderland and his attempted murder of Khan's crew, Kirk, and the others, paled in comparison to his ultimate goal. And that said a lot!

Richard was also aware why T'Pau – and Selek – were so hell-bent on supporting him in his attempt to not only reveal the conspiracy but also to catch the traitors. Vulcan had its share of conspiracies in the past, as Vulcan High Command used the existence of the Syrrannite movement, a cult concerning Surak, to cover its intentions. Command did not even shrink back from bombing the Vulcan embassy on Earth, using the young Vulcanaess T'Pau's DNA to make it look as if she had been behind the cowardly assault, giving the Federation and Earth a reason to intervene with the cult and to support the Vulcan High Command. That was until Captain Archer, the first captain of the first Enterprise within Starfleet, met T'Pau and together they revealed the truth.

Barnett had read the history books and the Starfleet protocols regarding this incident during his time as a cadet, and later, after he and Sarek worked together, he increased his knowledge of this troublesome time. After all, Sarek was the son of this remarkable Vulcan woman who prevented Vulcan from becoming corrupt. Even all that brilliance and logic was not immune to the hunger for power, as this case showed – a case that had a lot of parallels with what Section 31 has done over the last weeks.

It was no wonder that T'Pau supported him and the others in stopping Luengo and his fellows before Section 31 – and therefore Starfleet and the Federation – made themselves guilty of war crimes beyond imagination. It was a significant advance to have the Vulcan matriarch as an ally, yet Barnett was still wary when it came to her. He would never admit it – he had even trouble admitting it to himself, but the female Elder scared him! End of story. How Spock could be her grandson was almost beyond Richard, because the young half-Vulcan was a very sensible and gentle being – well, as long as no one was mixed up with those who were close to him, then Spock could turn in someone very uncomfortable to deal with. Vulcans may deny their emotions, but Barnett recognized the difference between duty and deep friendship and love of different kinds. Spock's loyalty towards Kirk and the other staff officers of the Enterprise based on more than duty and that marked the science officer from his grandmother.

Again Barnett had to admire T'Pau's razor-sharp mind – and that of 'Old Spock', too. The plan they came up with to convict those Council members, who supported Section 31 or even belonged to it, was simple but effective if they didn't make any mistake in its implementation. They had to startle the traitors so that their reactions would give them away. And to reach that goal they had to send the most relevant documents, Selek collected, and copy them to every member of the Federation Council and staff officer. Those, who had a reason to fear the truth, would reveal themselves.

Barnett had contacted Whitman via a secret frequency that Selek himself scrambled to discuss the details, sending the signal piggy-backed, using other transmissions as the transmitter. They all knew that such a counterblow needed a lot of preparation, yet time was what they had least of. Barnett
called it 'pure luck' that Commander Stones of Starfleet Security didn't belong to Section 31. He was the most important person to give the plan a chance of success. Stones – and the fact that most Council members were on Earth at the moment so that Security could start an observation within a few hours. The declared death of Barnett and the delegation, as well as the situation concerning the ceasefire, had forced the Council to hold several meetings, and therefore the members were on permanent standby in different towns and hotels. If everything went as smooth as Barnett (and Selek) hoped, then Luongo's strategy would backfire on him.

And now all they could do was wait for Whitman's or Stones' message that the 'package' could be delivered – meant that the preparation was finished. T'Pau had offered to make the transmission from her office. It was safer to communicate from New Vulcan rather than a Starfleet ship. SBI had its fingers everywhere, especially when it came to Starfleet's technology, so it was only logical to use the opportunity of exchanging messages with Whitman and the others from T'Pau's desk.

Barnett sipped his tea again and threw Li an asking glance, who shook his head. Still nothing from T'Pau and therefore nothing new from Earth. Richard took a deep breath and tried to remain calm outside, even if the inner tension was taking its toll on him. His gaze wandered to the large main screen and the view of New Vulcan.

This silence was getting on his nerves. And what was about the two surgeries? Was Sarek all right? What about Khan? Why, for God's sake, didn't he get any update? Shouldn't have someone contacted him by now – McCoy or one of the Vulcan healers?

Dammit, this waiting was the worst of all!

ST***ST

Of course, the hospital didn't have a room with four beds. Vulcans valued their privacy to the extent that it was unheard of for humans and other races, and that went especially for the cases when a Vulcan became ill or injured. Khan had to stay in intensive care, so McCoy managed to organize a spare bed for Jim that was placed beside the Augment's biobed; another one was placed on the opposite wall and offered Joaquin a place to stay the coming night. Bones didn't try to talk the boy into leaving and returning to the Enterprise. He knew that it would be fruitless. Augments were bred to be stronger at everything – and that went for their emotions and stubbornness, too. McCoy could understand Weiss. The boy was not only a stranger to this planet, but to the whole world – the universe – around him. If Leonard had been in Joaquin's shoes, he would be scared half to death.

Spock had been led away by Sorel, and Bones knew that the first officer would meditate as soon as he was able to. You don't have to be an expert in telepaths to understand that the mind-meld had shaken Spock to the core – after all, they all knew the hell Khan went through as a small child and after. And Spock could deny it all he wanted, but it was a fact that the half-Vulcan hid a very gentle
and compassionate heart under the stony mask of Vulcan control. That Sarek's son needed time to come to terms with everything he saw and felt during the mind meld with Khan, who had been out of control, was... well... logical!

Jim worried for Spock as he watched his friend being led away, but he believed Bones' words that Sorel would take good care of the younger Vulcan – that Spock would get the treatment he needed.

After reaching the intensive care station and after the equipment and beds were set up, Kirk didn't want to lie down first, even if he only was able to walk with McCoy's help. Therefore, the CMO decided it was about time to use some drastic methods. The moment Kirk sat down on Khan's bed, he felt a sharp sting in his neck, and even while he was turning around and cursing at his friend, the sedative took its effect, and the captain fell instantly into a deep slumber. A male Vulcan nurse, who had set up the life support systems and bio-monitor for Khan, helped McCoy put Kirk to bed. Joaquin, who had no desire to be tricked like this, lay down on the other spare bed, watching everything around him with tired eyes. Everything that happened within the last hours began to overwhelm him, and only his pride prevented him from shedding tears.

McCoy sensed his mood – Leonard was not only a good doctor but also, deep beneath his harsh behavior, a very sensitive man. He took some time to sit with Joaquin and to talk with him after the Vulcans had left. Half an hour later, Joaquin's eyes began to drop, and after checking one last time at Khan and Jim, McCoy finally left the room and went to the next healer's ready room to contact first Wesley or Barnett, and then Selek to give them the required update. He had learned from Sorel that Sarek was out of danger, and not knowing if the healer had informed at least Selek, he also would tell his superiors and the high minister about the success of both surgeries.

The healer's assistant was quite helpful with contacting the three ships in New Vulcan's orbit, and a minute later Bones heard the familiar melodious voice answering the hail, "New Vulcan Hospital, USS Enterprise here."

The CMO nodded politely at the young Vulcanness and took over the call. "Uhura, it's me, McCoy," he said, frowning slightly. "Pray tell me, what you're doing up there?"

"I'm here on duty, Doctor – and afterward I will return to my quarters. Only my quarters," she added with a whisper and Leonard's eyes widened. Uhura was restricted to quarters – dammit! And he had a very pretty good idea why Jim had ordered her to come with them as he had told Bones in the transporter room. He wanted her and Spock to stay together during their time in exile. And McCoy also assumed that the first officer would use the chance to do what Vulcans maybe did when they brought an intended to their family's attention. Bones didn't know if Sarek was informed of his son's involvement with the Enterprise's comms officer, but the CMO had a certain feeling that Spock had planned to make his relationship with Uhura official – perhaps making the last step in binding them permanently. Bones may not be too familiar with every written order of Starfleet protocol or Federation law, but as a physician, he was informed about certain rules concerning couples when
telepathy was involved. Federation law protected those bonds by not allowing justice to separate them – and McCoy, knowing Spock always had some tricks up his sleeves, presumed that the Vulcan would use this regulation to keep himself and Uhura together whatever court material might bring for them all.

Bones frowned. He would have to do something about Nyota's restriction aboard the Enterprise – out of reach and with no chance to return to exile. He may quarrel with Spock at every given opportunity, but he hated it when two people who belonged together, were separated against their will. But just right now he had to keep up the professional behavior.

“Who has the conn now?” he asked, shoving the problem to the back of his mind to deal with it later.

“Commodore Wesley, Doctor. He’s already aware of your call and…”

Her voice was replaced with that of the staff officer. “Doctor McCoy, Wesley here. One moment, please, we open a link to the Excalibur and Admiral Barnett.”

Bones rolled his eyes. So much for his intention to speak with Wesley in private. A few seconds of silence followed, then he heard Barnett's deep voice. "Doctor McCoy? What news do you have? Are Sarek and Khan out of danger?’

Bones gave his two superiors a summary of what happened, and clearly, he could hear the admiral’s relief at the mention of Sarek’s stabilized condition, and Wesley’s worry as he learned that Khan had been clinically dead and had been reanimated. But it was a fact that the August leader wasn't out of danger quite yet. Barnett required that Kirk hail him as soon as he had recovered from the mind-meld Bones had to tell him about. And after McCoy had gotten a short report about how the Enterprise’s crew was dealing with the side effects of the sleeping gas, the transmission was ended. He had wanted to speak with M’Benga, too, but before he could, the channel had been closed.

Bones stared out of the window into the late afternoon sun. Dammit! It seemed that Jim, Spock and he were out of the fray – at least for now. And neither Wesley nor Barnett had answered his question as to what was going on in the HQ with Luengo and the others. Both staff officers seemed to be only half into the talk which told Leonard enough. Obviously, the big counterrevolution in Starfleet was lying ahead or was in full progress.

Sighing, he rubbed his face, knowing that the next call lay ahead – certainly a nicer talk than with Barnett. McCoy couldn't help himself, but somehow it was easy to speak with Old Spock – easier than with their clipped first office. And, as Bones pondered, maybe Selek's clever mind and high position was exactly what was needed to help Spock and Uhura.
Straightening, Bones hailed the seat of government and, oh wonder, had no problem with being patched through to Selek. Apparently, his call was expected. Only half a minute later the screen on the desk sprang alive automatically, and the CMO looked in the aged face of the Vulcan Elder.

“High Minister,” he greeted politely.

“Oh, Leonard!” Old Spock answered in this oddly familiar brotherly and warm tone he used with every one of the Enterprise’s senior officers. “Sorel informed me that Sarek is out of danger, but how did Khan’s surgery go?”

The human doctor grimaced. “The surgery went well – at first. And then, afterward, there were… complications. Spock helped when physical treatment was not enough.”

“What happened?” The Elder wanted to know, feeling unvulcan concern rising in him.

“I patched Khan up as far as was possible. He suffered not only broken bones, torn arteries, a tear in his liver, a punctured lung and bruises enough to cover most of his body, but also a TBI, yet I was able to operate him successfully. And then I got a flatline.”

Selek stiffened, while his gaze wandered to T’Pau on the other side of the desk; he was sitting in a visitor chair. He was still in her office to assist her as soon as they got Whitman's information that the transmission of the documents to every single member of the Federation Council had occurred. McCoy had been piped through from the seat of government to the matriarch’s desk – not aware of it, as far as the Elder could tell.

Spock Prime watched his Clan Mother lifting a brow in confusion at McCoy’s words, not familiar with this term, but Selek was. He tensed as he learned of Khan having a cardiac arrest and a part of him instinctively reached out to the faint echo of Jim’s soul he was somehow able to sense. “Leonard, could you bring back Mr. Singh?” he asked, worrying more for Kirk than for the Augment. If the former dictator didn’t survive the surgery, then the Elder had a pretty good idea of what his younger counterpart would need to recover from now: to stabilize Jim Kirk's mind and to shield him against the shock that a ripped bond always left.

Bones sighed deeply. "Yes and no. You – I mean, our Spock – mind melded with him together with Jim.”
"Spock and Jim mind melded together with Khan? A triangle mind meld?" Selek's brows almost vanished under his ash-grey bangs not having expected this. Even T'Pau, still out of the camera’s range, bent forwards, fascinated and a little bit concerned.

"Such a successful triangle mind-meld needs long and detailed training before a schooled healer can execute it," the Elder said slowly. "Spock has no training for such a thing."

McCoy shrugged. "It isn't the first time Spock helped someone like this. It only concerns Jim, yet they have become very close friends as you certainly know, so I think the effort Spock had to undergo during these mind-melds weren’t that bad. He didn't hesitate to help Khan in the same way when he showed up in the PAR where I tried to reanimate Khan.” He shook his head. “Without Spock’s intervention Khan would be dead now, no doubt about it.”

Selek took a deep breath. His younger counterpart did exactly what he would have done if he would have been in place – well, he did things like this in his own time with his own Jim. “How is Spock doing now?”

“Healer Sorel examined and led him away after we were able to separate him from Jim. Our troublemaker and Khan are as sleep as I'm sure Spock will be as well. He's exhaust because of the amount of blood he donated for his father and because of the mind-meld with Khan. The latter was no walk in the park – rather a walk through hell. I didn't understand everything Spock or Jim muttered during the procedure, but it was enough to give me still the chills. The man has faced torment and sorrow almost his whole life and has finally reached his limits. He woke up in the PAR and freaked out when he saw us. We still wore our scrubs and…”

"And he thought he was back in the hands of Section 31 and went into shock," Selek nodded in understanding. "Leonard, as you assumed correctly, Mr. Singh is deeply traumatized. I became aware of it during the mind-meld I initiated with him after the Enterprise’s arrival this midday. He suppressed the trauma and Jim’s… friendship helped him to heal some of the mental wounds he received, yet he is far from being cured. He's very vulnerable at the moment."

McCoy made a face. “I know. ‘Never thought I would say this, but aside from medical help, the man needs a big group hug badly and…” Bones stopped himself as he remembered that it was taboo among Vulcans to speak about intimacy. "Well, given time he certainly will overcome the trauma, yet I don't see him fully recovering for least a month or more – despite his enhanced nature. The injuries he got would have killed any other human. What Finnegan and his men did was…”

"Was attempted murder," Spock Prime cut in. “They are in custody, together with Professor Dashwood and Doctor Conelly, as Admiral Barnett informed me. Green and his staff are arrested too, for illegal experimentation on sentient beings."
McCoy nodded grimly. “Very good! These bastards violated not only a dozen laws and ethical codes, but they also were ready to leave the Augments to certain death.”

“Very good!” the high minister agreed before he got back to the topic that busied his mind most – among other things. “Leonard, how is Jim doing? After the close-call Khan went through, I assume he isn’t in the best condition.”

"Jim is dead to the world at the moment,” Bones snorted. “I gave him a mild sedative, and I don’t know how long he will be in dreamland – after all, he not only has to recover from the mind-meld but also from donating blood for Khan."

For a second, Prime Spock's eyes widened. "He gave blood to Khan? But… Khan is an Augment. His blood…"

“Spock, we both know how Jim was saved last year after he was radioactively contaminated and that this treatment left some traces. Jim's blood plasma was compatible with Khan's body, and so we defaulted to it after Joaquin had given his blood for his brother.”

On the other side of the desk, T’Pau lifted a brow at words concerning Kirk's blood but remained silent. She would ask Selek later for details.

“Please inform me when Jim comes around,” the Elder asked.

Bones affirmed the request with a short. “I will.” He hesitated; Selek reminded the CMO that he had something more on his mind.

“What is it, Leonard?” he asked, and Bones chuckled dryly.

“You know me well, don't you?” He took a deep breath. "This… is a private thing, but…” He gulped. "Hell, how can I put this?"

For a moment something close to amusement lit in the Elder’s eyes. "Just say it like you say everything that troubles you – or, like Jim would say, 'spill it.'"
Again Bones grinned for a moment before he began slowly. "Do you… Uh, are you informed about … Spock’s and Uhura’s… uh… close relationship?"

T’Pau’s both brows were lifted, and this time her Vulcan façade slipped. "My grandson is involved with someone?" she asked sharply, breaking her silence.

At the other end of the line, Bones' eyes widened in comprehension as he heard the female voice in the background, rough with age. And after T’Pau's forceful entrance and behavior only a few hours ago during Norton's assault, McCoy remembered her voice very well. Looking with big eyes at Selek's weathered face, there was only one thought left on his mind: Oooops!

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, my dear readers, as promised this chapter was more calm – and maybe calmed your nerves. It also contained a big step in Spock and Khan coming to terms with each other. I hope you liked it.

In the next chapter everything is ready to spring the trap concerning Luengo and Section 31. T’Pau will learn a lot more of Spock and Uhura (the old lady will be really shocked) and there will be some changes going on in the hospital.

I wish you all know a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,

Thank you so much for all your comments and kudos within the last year and that you still stay with the story, even if it lasts so long now.

For you all: Happy Holidays.

Love

Yours 
Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

I hope you all had a good start into the New Year and that business doesn’t give you a too hard time. Sorry for the delay, but especially at the beginning of another year there is really a lot to do. Please don’t fear that I will drop the story; of course it will be written to its end!!! I know that the larger breaks of approx. two or three weeks make you all a little bit nervous, but I depend on my beta-readers, and the two ladies are very, very busy in the moment, so please show patience with us.

Thank you so very much for all your reviews (and kudos); I love you guys.

No more words now, but off you go to the ST-universe.

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 78 – Fall of Judas

McCoy stared at Selek with large eyes. Selek, in turn, lifted a brow and tried to get his thoughts back under control. T'Pau was with Old Spock? And she had heard his, Bones', request to help Uhura and Spock? This is how she learns that her grandson had an affair – a lover?

Mega shit!

Spock was going to kill him, no doubt about it (well, maybe, given the Vulcans' peaceful ways, he would survive the first officer's anger).

But how did the old saying go? You're too late if you close the barn door after the horse has escaped. And now he, McCoy, had to fetch a lasso to catch said horse – well, figuratively. He knew that he had to fix his mistake. Somehow!
He cleared his throat and felt his ears beginning to burn, as Spock Prime turned the screen a little bit and the stern face of the Vulcan matriarch appeared. "Ma'am!" Bones croaked. The hint of surprise on her aged face told him everything. Dammit! The old woman obviously didn't know about Spock and Uhura's relationship and McCoy feared that he just revealed something to her that would mean trouble for the Enterprise’s lovebirds – well the other lovebirds. The most famous pair rested side by side, sedated, just down the hallway.

T'Pau looked firmly at the younger human male on the screen. She saw first his ears and then his face turn red, and she interpreted that reaction herself – after all she had dealt with humans for more than 120 years. She had caught him red-handed, as the Terrans say. "Did I understand your words correctly, Doctor? My grandson is in a relationship with a Terran woman?" As McCoy only nodded, she looked at Selek. "Did you know about this, too?"

Old Spock cocked his head and replied calmly, almost casually, "If you are asking if I am aware that my younger counterpart and Miss Uhura are romantically involved, then the answer is yes." He ignored his grandmother's stiffening and the soundless gasp that escaped her lips. Selek did not know if it was a good thing that his clan mother had learned of young Spock's involvement with the Enterprise’s comms officer like this, but now the cat was out of the bag. There was no logic in pondering the 'ifs'. His glance returned to Bones. "You did not mention this delicate topic for naught, Leonard. Is there a problem between the two?"

The CMO caught himself finally and took another deep breath. The damage – or non-damage – was done, so he grabbed the bull by the horns and plunged ahead. "No, everything is perfectly fine with them, as far as I know. I mentioned it for another reason. They need your help."

That woke Selek's' attention. "Why had Spock not mentioned that?"

"Sorry, Selek, but Spock doesn't know, and I stumbled across it by accident when I hailed the Enterprise several minutes ago to give our friends and the commodore an update concerning the surgeries. Uhura answered my hail and let me know that she's restricted to quarters when she's not on duty."

The Elder nodded slowly. “Nyota was here with you and the others, and now…”

McCoy combed a hand through his thick hair. "That's the problem I wanted to talk to you about. Jim gave Uhura orders to accompany him and the others. That way he could protect her from any charges of desertion Command might accuse her of. And after she found asylum on New Vulcan everything seemed to be all right. But by leaving New Vulcan to fight at our side against Section 31 and free Khan, she also left that protection and Barnett punished her for it, restricting her aboard the Enterprise for being involved in hiding our Augment hero.”
"So the woman is arrested," T'Pau said, her voice neutral.

Bones nodded. "Yeah, she is. And that robs her and Spock of the only chance they have to prevent Command of separating them unfairly with a court martial."

Selek lifted a brow in understanding. "Spock wanted to introduce her officially to the House of Surak and declare her as his intended?"

Leonard rubbed his neck. "I might be mistaken, but I think that's exactly what Spock wanted to do. That way he can protect her. The two – I think that's the way they are headed... And if Spock did that – introduced her as you put it, no judgment can separate them, given the fact that one of them is a telepath and they have special protections concerning their intended."

"Logical!" Selek commented, while T'Pau straightened her tiny frame.

"Uhura is a fellow female officer." It was more a statement than a question, but McCoy felt the need to answer it anyway.

"Nyota Uhura is our principal communications officer – a highly intelligent young woman who speaks more than twelve languages and several dialects. She also has a vast knowledge of many cultures. She and Spock met at the Starfleet Academy and…"

"So my grandson has had a relationship with this woman for a period of years?" T'Pau interrupted him, and Leonard smiled sheepishly.

"Yes, they have, but I don't know for how long exactly."

The Vulcan matriarch nodded slowly; her face betrayed nothing of her thoughts. Selek took the opportunity to speak up again.

"You want me to demand her return to New Vulcan." he deadpanned, and Bones sighed,
"Yes, that was what I wanted to ask you. The two belong together. Every one of the staff would state this. But with Uhura restricted and under arrest and Spock on New Vulcan, there is the chance that they will be separated not only until court martial takes place, but maybe even a long time. And, blame my romantic southern heart, but I don't want to see the two unhappy and denied the chance to grow old together. So, yes, I wanted to ask for your support. An admiral of Starfleet assaulted you and the Lady T'Pau, violated Vulcan's independence, and above all forced entrance in your seat of government. In my opinion, Command owes you big – and letting Uhura return to New Vulcan would be a start to the reparations Command should make for the whole mess."

To anyone one else, Selek's face revealed nothing, but McCoy recognized the amusement in the dark eyes and the quick twitch of the lips. Old Spock was laughing in his Vulcan way, which gave Bones hope.

"As always you come up with quite simple, but practical solutions, Leonard. I'm glad that this hasn't changed in this timeline." He bent forwards, and his hand reached for the button to cut the link. "I will see what I can do for them."

McCoy smiled at him. "Thanks, Spo… Selek." He looked at T'Pau, whose eyes and face reminded him of a hawk – a hawk on the hunt. Uh-uh, not good! Still, he managed to keep his expression neutral, bowing slightly in front of the screen. "Ma'am!" he greeted and the old Vulcaness only nodded at him.

"Doctor, thank you for your information." Then the connection was broken – and in the hospital, Bones quickly wiped his forehead clean of the sweat he became aware of only now.

Right, Selek would try to help his younger self and Uhura, but T'Pau… Dammit, why had no one in the seat of government told him that he was through to the old woman? Had he known that Selek was in T'Pau's office, he never would have mentioned it.

Groaning, he rose and rubbed his neck. "Dammit to hell and back," he whispered. "I don't want to think about what Spock is going to say about this."

He rose and left the office – only to stumble into a few colorful figures. Two powerful, hoof-like hands steadied him when he almost lost his balance; then he looked straight into the pig-like face of a Tellarit. A very familiar face now!

"Galven?" he asked perplexedly, and the Tellarit oinked an approval. "Aye, it's me," he squealed.
Behind him, McCoy recognized the fierce Caitian with the fire-red hair who had given him trouble in med bay and tried to charm Wesley: Caviw. At her side were a Rigelian and another young man, obviously a human. Bones groaned. Yes, like many other people, he owed The Shadow his life – and he owed them Jim's life and Khan's too – but right now he had no patience left for them.

“Uh… nice to see you, guys, but please excuse me. I have to…”

"What about Khan?" Caviw asked; her tail whipped for and backward – the clear signal of her stress.

"Yes, and what's the matter with Jim? The lady at the entrance told me that he is in intensive care, but when we saw him aboard the Excalibur he was brimming with energy. So…"

Bones interrupted Galven by lifting a hand. "Khan's surgery went well, and Jim is staying with him for now. Sarek is well, too, so please don't worry."

"Can we talk with Kirk?" Ritek wanted to know, and the CMO shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but I gave him with a sedative so that our whirlwind would sleep for a while. The same goes for Spock and…"

"There was this other young man – boy," the Rigelian interrupted him. “I heard how you referred to him as being Khan's younger brother. He's an Augment, too, right?” he asked, and Leonard grimaced. It seemed Joaquin's identity was out in the open by now.

"Yeah, he is an Augment – a drained and exhausted young Augment, who has to deal with the fact that he slept twice as long as Sleeping Beauty, came face to face with aliens, is on a different planet and had seen his beloved brother beaten into a bloody pulp. So he is sedated, too."

Galven nodded slowly and checked his chronometer. It was late afternoon and the chance that one of the boys would wake before nighttime was not high. Therefore was only one logical thing to do, if they didn't want to leave the planet to stay close to their friends. "Do you know if they have hotels here in the colony?" he asked, and McCoy shrugged.

"Given the fact that several hundred non-Vulcans are working here to set up the colony, and that New Vulcan is cultivating contacts with many Federation members, the answer has to be yes.” He hesitated and groaned inwardly. Dammit, now he sounded like Spock.
Caviw began to snicker. “The Vulcans are rubbing off you, Doctor,” she teased, and Leonard sighed deeply.

“Yeah, I’m aware of it!”

After the talk with McCoy, Selek leaned back in the visitor chair, knowing what the next minutes would hold for him. His gaze found T’Pau's, who observed him with deep black eyes.

“You knew about your younger counterpart being involved with this Terran woman. Why did you not say anything? Our clan…”

“It was up to Young Spock to decide when to bring his relationship with Nyota Uhura to the clan’s attention,” he quietly said, interrupting her.

A thin brow was lifted, then the old Vulcaness pursed her lips. "Were you involved with this woman in your timeline, too?"

Selek took a deep breath and something close to regret shimmered in his gaze. "No, I never dared make the first step." His glance wandered into the nothingness. "I met Nyota first time at the Academy. I was, just like Young Spock, her tutor there and I… I felt some attraction towards her, but I made up my mind to speak with her only regarding professional matters. My younger counterpart was… more daring in this case. Why we differed at this point of time years before Nero attacked, I do not know." He looked back at T'Pau, who listened closely. "Nyota’s and my way separated after her graduation. She was sent to the USS Farragut; I became junior science officer aboard the Enterprise. Only twelve years later we met again – after Jim took command of the Enterprise and I became his first officer. With Pike gone, many of his senior staff left, too, and were replaced with the crew I served with for more than thirty years. Uhura was among them, and we became friends – just like I befriended the others. We were – like the humans say – one big family.”

The Vulcan matriarch nodded slowly, recognizing the missed chance her grandson from the other timeline was obviously regretting. "Did your Uhura show any interest in you?"

This time it was the Elder who lifted a brow. "Nyota was always too professional to let personal feelings disturb anything, yet – thinking back – I do understand that often her concern regarding my
person was based on her affection for me. But she showed it through friendship. We often made music together – she sung and I played the *Ka’athyra.*” (Author’s note: Vulcan lyre) He took a breath. “Later I taught her to play the *Ka’athyra.* She was surprisingly gifted for a human.”

"But you were never romantically involved with her." T'Pau stated, and Old Spock nodded.

"That is correct. After we had met again, we both were more mature and wrapped up in our jobs. I have to admit that, looking back, I could imagine regarding her as more than a friend, yet our lives in the other timeline followed slightly different paths than here – and I dare say that I admire my younger counterpart to have made the move that I never allowed myself.”

T'Pau fell silent. Still, she watched him. She could comprehend that Selek showed understanding for his younger self and would try to protect him and the young human female, but this didn't mean that she was delighted that her grandson had chosen a Terran woman as his bond partner.

On the other hand, she had foreseen something like this when Spock declined his study at the Vulcan Academy and went to Earth to join Starfleet. Then she had learned from Selek that he had been *T’hy’la* to his captain and that his younger counterpart had found the same steady anchor and close friend in the James Kirk of this timeline.

Kirk – another captain of another *Enterprise,* yet it seemed to be a kind of fate that the commanding officers of the ships with that name were there whenever Vulcan needed real help. Captain Archer had once supported her effort to bring the Vulcans back to the way of Surak they were about to leave. Kirk, just a cadet, was there as Vulcan was destroyed, yet his intervention was something generations of surviving Vulcans would remember.

Kirk had bought the rescue ships time to save as many Vulcans as possible by accepting a mission in Vulcan's skies that had been almost suicidal – also giving Spock the chance to evacuate the Vulcan High Council and therefore Vulcan's roots of culture. T'Pau accepted that Kirk and Spock's rough start turned into a profound friendship as she had accepted for many years now that Spock was unique. Well, like the Terrans said, Spock's obvious soft spot for humans ‘ran in the family’. After all, he was his father's son. T'Pau remembered very well her long talks with Sarek after he declared Amanda Grayson, a human teacher from Earth who volunteered at the Vulcan Embassy, would be his wife.

Like father, like son so a human proverb goes – one she could understand. And concerning Spock, there was more to calculate. His mixed heritage was evident in his genes and *katra* and his understanding of the humans therefore, greater. Selek had spoken of it many times and she had to admit that he opened her eyes to some fascinating interpretations and ways. To watch and to keep Vulcan tradition was her priority, but she had also learned that to cling to them at any cost was illogical. In earlier times, before the Federation, Vulcan had only a few contacts with other species,
which changed drastically with the foundation of the UFP. For a long time, she had blamed it for what Vulcan Command tried more than 120 years ago; then she had begun to realize that many Vulcans had started to leave Surak's ways even centuries ago. The influence of other species was only one part of that progress that had been stopped at the very last moment. Now, afterward, T'Pau had to admit that the different opinions and point of views of other species could be instructive. It was IDIC coming to life – and it was illustrated in the marriage between her son and Amanda, and in the friendships Vulcans developed with other species, personified by Spock and Kirk.

Another marriage between a Vulcan and a human was something that would bring unease among the Vulcan people. They were an endangered species now, and their survival depended on the next generations – as more children were born so grew the chance that the race of Vulcans would continue to exist. Yes, Spock was a half-Vulcan and therefore his offspring – if he were able to reproduce due to his hybrid state – would not be pure-blood Vulcans, but every child counted now. Logic dictated it. On the other hand, despite any logic and calculation, T'Pau was also a mother – a grandmother! And she knew better than to cling to the legend that Vulcans were unable to feel and that logic was the answer to everything. She had seen how much her son Sarek had bloomed after he married Amanda; how at peace he had been with himself and everyone. ‘Happiness' didn't belong to Vulcan language officially and was only found in old poems and legends, yet T'Pau could not deny that it did exist. Sarek had been the living example of it.

The same would go for Spock. T'Pau was very aware of her grandson's difficult childhood – of the shameful behavior of his schoolmates because of his mixed heritage. Even Vulcans adults had treated the child and later the adolescent with arrogance and coldness – something the matriarch had witnessed with distaste. Prejudice was illogical, and the others’ manners were incompatible with the principle of IDIC, yet even Vulcans had their weak spots. Spock's decision to join Starfleet had not surprised her, yet the way he confronted his father with his wish had been… impossible – for a Vulcan. Well, he was half human after all, and so something like this could be expected.

What T'Pau hadn't expected was the way her grandson matured. She had known from the beginning that he was extremely intelligent and sensible, but this was not all. His PSI-abilities were astonishingly strong – maybe stronger than those of many other full-blooded Vulcans. How he had helped the Augment Khan only an hour ago proved his great telepathic skill. But there was, again, more. Spock had become an everyman – an excellent scientist, highly regarded by his superiors and friends, loyal beyond the usual extent, brilliant. He was also a warrior in the best sense of the word. The most formidable and admired characteristics of Vulcans and Terrans were united in her grandson! And for that she admired him.

And also, he maintained a rebellious spirit. She wasn't exactly someone who obeyed rules to the letter, even if she was a fierce hard-liner of Vulcan tradition based on Surak's ways. There had been times in her earlier days where she had shaken the Federation and Vulcan, and some of her doings had taught everyone a lesson – including her. So you could say that Spock's sometimes rebellious streak was ‘in the family’ not only in Amanda's humanity.

It was no wonder that she, deep down, felt attached to her grandson. Maybe it was also a good thing
that she knew what kind of man he would grow into. She was blessed with the miracle to meet him as an Elder, near her age. His life within Starfleet – his life with his friends – had done him well, and it was evident how much he missed them even now. Especially Kirk – and, as it seemed, the missed chance with the woman Nyota Uhura. Vulcans didn't speak about sentiments, yet they were able to have them. Sarek had been happy with Amanda, this much T'Pau could tell. Should she prevent her grandson from having the same happiness – he, who had lost already his mother and his whole planet?

Logic dictated that the survival of the Vulcan people was priority – her heart told her that Spock deserved more. And, as she had to admit, his mixed heritage and therefore the human blood within his children would always make him and them lesser in many Vulcans' eyes. So, why misspend his life to attempt to be someone he would never be and deny him something even Vulcans needed – love?

And there was another important matter she couldn't ignore. Spock's intended bonding partner, T'Pring had perished with Vulcan, and because his Vulcan genes were dominant, he would face Pon Farr sooner or later. And then he had to take a bond mate or die. If he thought the Terran woman could withstand his blood fever as Amanda had, then T'Pau would trust his judgment. Even more, she wouldn't stand in his way.

Selek had watched his grandmother the long minutes she simply sat there staring at nothing, but he saw the many thoughts mirroring in her eyes, while she weighed the options. He hoped that she would not give his younger counterpart trouble. In his timeline, T'Pau had been unrelenting and hard, insisting on tradition, even if it cost a young Starfleet captain's life because he was the best friend of a Vulcan in Pon Farr. Selek had never forgiven her for that incident, and if his Jim really would have died all those decades ago in the red sands of Vulcan, he – Old Spock – would have broken with his home forever.

But now Selek had some hope. Vulcan's destruction had changed T'Pau, and he dared say for the better. She showed more acceptance, more willingness to listen to others, and toleration for the decisions and needs of those who didn't conform to her point of view. Maybe now she would...

"I came to a decision!"

T'Pau’s voice tore Prime Spock out of his thoughts, and questioningly he lifted a brow.

"When Starfleet is back in the rightful hands of the chosen Chief of Command and the members of Section 31 have been arrested, I will contact Admiral Barnett. I want to talk with the woman who would be my grandson's wife!"
Admiral José Luengo shut off his terminal and looked at the darkened screen. Six hours! Six hours ago he received the last scrambled transmission from Norton, telling him that they were nearing New Vulcan and that the sensors caught the emissions of the Enterprise. And since then – nothing! Absolutely silence.

What was taking Styles and Norton so long? Was it that difficult to get a few deserted officers, one Augment, and a couple of tubes? Right, the Vulcans certainly didn't agree to deliver Kirk and his friends to Norton. Selek would complain about that, but New Vulcan had only a few ships and Luengo knew from earlier visits on the original planet and later in the colony that Vulcans didn't have much of a security staff. There was simply no need for something like a police force among their people, which meant that they couldn't put up much resistance if Norton took Kirk and the others by force.

True, Luengo expected a call from the Vulcan High Council with an official objection any moment, but…

But what he not expected was his secretary informing him that a Commodore Durandet from their station in Paris wanted to speak to him about an urgent matter. Curious, what did the highest ranking officer in the capitol of the United Federation of Planets want from him? He ordered his secretary to put the man through, hoping that this wasn't about some planned attack against the president was celebrating his birthday today.

The screen sprang alive and showed an older man with gray hair and a round face, wearing the gray uniform of the ground personnel. "Admiral Luengo, thank you for accepting my call."

"Commodore Durandet, how are things in Paris?"

"Calm, given the fact that we’re technically still at war, but we don’t need Klingons to have trouble. Sometimes puzzles accomplish the same thing."

That caught Luengo's interest. "What do you mean, Commodore?"

The man nodded, "Lieutenant Leraure of Federation customs caught a space vessel this morning arriving from Rigel and stated it was manned with dealers. When customs went to inspect the delivery, they not only found the crew gone except for one man; they also recognized that the
spacecraft is a Starfleet vessel."

"One of our vessels?" Luengo frowned. "Given the fact that you think this important enough to inform me in person, I assume that this ship isn't an old, decommissioned one that was sold off."

"Correct, sir. It wears the traces of heavy use, and the registration number was removed, yet it belongs to the newer generation. It's a long range shuttle – the kind standard aboard the heavy cruisers – like the Constitution class, for example. My men are trying to find out which space dock it came from by checking the numbers of the drive's construction parts, but they'll need time to… Admiral? Is something wrong?"

José had gone rigid. A long range shuttle from a Constitution cruiser! Maybe this was the reason Norton hadn't sent any new information? Had Kirk tricked them again, by sending his ship to New Vulcan and escaping with Khan in that shuttle that now was parked at the Paris spaceport? But why should he return to Earth? The chance of getting caught was multiple times greater than if he had gone to New Vulcan. And what about the other Augments? Khan would never leave them – except if he thought their chance on New Vulcan was better and his chance of protecting them was better here on Earth. Or had this shuttle nothing to do with Kirk?

'Never!' a voice in his mind spoke. ‘Every odd thing which happened over the last weeks was connected to that damn farm boy and his new super friend. But what is Kirk doing here? What…‘

Luengo shot from his seat as though he were bitten by a spider.

Paris…

The President…

This cursed boy, and his Augment pet chose the direct way to solve their problems and ran to the president, informing him about Section 31 and…

"Commodore, have your people tracked down the crew of the shuttle?"

"No, sir, even the custom members haven't seen them, except one – and he's silent as a grave. My Security department scanned his retina and the databank is collating it with other entries, but given the large amount of data it will take some time."
Luengo felt his mouth going dry and a twisting in his gut. "Keep me updated, Commodore – and put your security staff to be on standby, ready to rush to the president's house. I've got to check something first. Luengo out!"

He interrupted the transmission and took a deep breath. “Dammit! DAMMIT!” He punched the button of the intercom on his desk. “Lieutenant, get me a line to the president and…”

He didn’t get any further, as the door to his office opened and a well-known voice said, “I’m here, Mr. Luengo. And the shuttle, that obviously unsettles you so much, belongs to the Lexington – and its crew is with me!”

José went white as he turned around to President Robertson, whose face was grim. Beside him were two men in admiral green and white’s – one of Asian – the other one of African heritage. Luengo was certain that the floor beneath his feet had turned into thin air and he was in free fall – at least he felt like it.

“Morrow – Nogura,” he whispered.

"In the flesh – no thanks to you!” Harry said icily.

Commander Stones, Chief of Security, stepped forwards. “Admiral José Luengo, in the name of Starfleet Command you are under arrest! Charges are…”

Luengo, whose mind worked furiously, could only snort. “I am Starfleet Command, Commander, so…”

"The Head of Starfleet is still me, Mr. Luengo! And it was me who ordered your arrest.” Robertson made a fleeing gesture towards the secretary's desk. "That was an interesting talk we just heard. At least Starfleet Security in Paris still works – that is if they aren't infiltrated by Section 31 like HQ.”

“Section 31?” José tried carefully, but was stopped by Morrow, who snapped,

"Skip the theatrics, Luengo. You and your fellows have been unmasked – your dirty game was revealed. It was you and Norton's idea to use the war as a chance to bring back Section 31. And
knowing that neither Barnett nor Morrow, Nogura, and the others would agree to such measures, you sentenced them – us – to death in order to take over Command! And Styles and the Klingon renegades were the hangmen you recruited. A shrewd move, I have to give you that, but lies have short legs, and you can't run away from the truth that will come out sooner or later. Thankfully it wasn't too late – and thanks also to some brilliant minds which looked through the tales you and the others wove."

"Kirk," Luengo said quietly, realizing that he and the others had been busted. "He and Khan, am I right?"

"An extraordinary team," Robertson affirmed with a short nod. During the last hours, he and the others had to wait for the trap to be set up, Morrow and Nogura had informed him about the Augment – that the wanted 'space-terrorist' Khan and the mystical war hero 'Sunrise' were one and the same person. The same man who developed the SDD, saved Kirk, Tammeron, and Aldebaran, and had been through inhumane cruelty in Section 31’s hands – including the murder of four of his crew members, and faced the genocide of his people that Kirk was able to prevent. Robertson had been shocked, to say the least. He had been outraged, yet he knew that there was no way he could spare Kirk, his staff, and the Augment a trial – a fair trial that he would attend, too, to make certain that everything would be… well… fair!

But just right now there was another problem soon to be solved, and the president felt some very human satisfaction as he hurled into Luengo’s face, “Kirk, Khan, Sarek's son, Kirk's staff and Wesley found out the truth of your well-played out conspiracy. They acted the way true and honorable people – Starfleet members are expected to."

José stared at him. "Wesley… Of course! I knew that he was in cahoots with Kirk and that this transmission about the accident in his Engineering was a fake – just like the probes Kirk sent to chase Styles through the half Alpha quadrant."

Nogura looked smug at that. "My teaching!" he said, not without pride, and as he saw Morrow's baffled gaze, he added, "Haven't your read my essay about misdirecting an enemy to buy time to prevent being caught in a battle you can't win?"

"Yes, I did – but I am not sure Kirk didn’t come up with this idea alone. The boy has his sleeves so full of tricks I'm sometimes surprised he can still move his arms."

Robertson didn’t listen to the two admirals. His attention was focused on Luengo. "Yes, Kirk used distraction tactics to escape you and your fellows. He…"
"He has allied with Khan, a wanted space terrorist. I got holophotos of them together on Aldebaran, but instead of delivering the Augment to the authorities, Kirk hid him on his ship!" Luengo interrupted him; waiting for the shock of this revelation setting in. But it never came, rather he looked into the almost bored faces of Robertson, Morrow, and Nogura. So they knew? "Are these facts irrelevant to you?" he asked enraged. "And that's not all Kirk did! He destroyed Gamma 12 to get hold of Khan's crew, and now they are…"

“Gamma 12 was destroyed on your order, Mr. Luengo,” the president stated with cold loathing. "I got the reports of the last meeting of the Council, in which your order to eliminate four of our high-security facilities came out by accident because Wesley’s first officer confirmed that the members of the squadron completed the mission. You called it a preventive measure to stop the Klingons from taking the secrets which were stored in the station, but I rather think it was nothing more than a trap for Kirk. You knew that Khan was aboard the Enterprise from your spy. But instead of officially accusing and arresting the senior officer staff of the Enterprise you wanted to lure them together with Khan into a trap to have a reason to destroy her, eliminating the danger Kirk and his crew had become for you. And the bait was seventy-two people, unaware of anything – asleep, not knowing that you ordered their death to get hold of their leader and his allies!"

Luengo knew that everything was lost – that he was likely going to be convicted and that there was no escape. Straightening up, he still clung to his defense. "These creatures are not people. Barnett's predecessor stripped them off human rights and…"

"And as such, created a new race, because there is no doubt that they are sentient beings in every meaning of the word," Morrow said coolly. "And that gave Kirk the right to protect them against the genocide you ordered, Luengo, and to take them to New Vulcan, where they now have asylum."

José balled his fists. "I don't understand why you all seem to be all right with the fact that Khan is roaming free through the galaxy and even has asylum on New Vulcan. The crimes he…"

"According to Wesley, Khan has agreed to face trial – a real trial this time, not the farce he faced the last time. Because he was denied any lawyer and had no chance to make a statement and was never really asked, his sentence is invalid. And there are many occurrences which have to be heard by trial – from both sides! Khan has been enslaved, tortured, blackmailed and held captive. He will press charges against Section 31 and those who murdered four of his crew. And he will press charges against you, Norton and the scientists, who ran illegal experiments on him," Morrow stated coldly.

“He wants to press charges?” Luengo shook his head. “This criminal…”

“Had been pushed over his breaking point first by Marcus and then by your scientists, yet he was strong enough to change his ways and to become a hero!” Robertson interrupted him again. "You wanted to know who ‘Sunrise’ is? It's the same man you call a ‘creature’.” He almost relished the
shock on Luengo's face, and couldn't help but to add with a smile, "Oh, and he is the SDD developer as well."

"WHAT?"

Nogura smirked grimly. "Yes, those delegation members, which were rescued by Wesley, can thank Khan for developing this device, because otherwise Wesley and his ally wouldn't have been able to save us at all."

"Wesley's ally?" Luengo hoped that he was still lying in bed and would wake up any moment. "I thought Kirk was…"

"Oh, Kirk was already on his way to New Vulcan when Wesley found us – but not alone. Contrary to yours and Section 31's firm belief that the Klingons are soulless monsters which have to be exterminated by developing a deadly plague based on the Rigelan fever, enhanced with Khan's DNA concerning the immune system, the Klingons are…"

Morrow interrupted himself as Luengo’s eyes widened in horror; his face became white as a table cloth.

"Yes, we even know about that, Luengo!" he spat. "All you and Section 31's crimes have been revealed – thanks to Selek of New Vulcan!"

"But…” José could only stammer, not believing that, indeed, every well planned secret operation was out now.

"There is no denying," Harry continued; his eyes blazed. "You were about to murder a whole race – an entire empire! Only to establish your power! The Klingons have more honor beneath their fingernails than you have in your entire body! You know who Wesley's ally was? Who came willingly to our rescue, risking his life by doing so? It was Lord Kor, fleet commander and warlord of the Klingon Empire!"

Nogura bared his teeth with a sinister smile as he watched José's eyes look as though they would pop out of his head. "Isn’t it interesting that a high ranking admiral of Starfleet falls prey to greed and hunger for might, and a *Klingon* helped an enemy so that the truth will come out?"
"Hah!" Luengo was regaining some composure and cocked his head, not ready to give in. "You have only a few accusations and speculations, which are nothing more than twisted truths or outright lies by that cursed farm boy and his friends! Every so-called bit of evidence you have based on Kirk's and Khan's lies is so they can cover their deeds to get you on their side to prevent him being executed. You…"

"You're wrong, Luengo – about the documents and our assumption concerning Kirk and Khan. Both are more than willing to face court martial and bring out the truth. None of them, neither Kirk nor his officers and not even Khan want to stay in exile on New Vulcan forever. They want to deal with everything officially – and that speaks volumes!" Morrow growled.

"We've all needed evidence to arrest you and you can all yourself lucky if you're not executed for multiple murders and high treason," Nogura said sternly. "We have the records from the Excalibur's bridge, we have your orders concerning the Augments, Kirk, and the Enterprise, and we have the Orion pirate who made a deal with your men concerning the attack against the Excalibur. And he's ready to testify against you, Norton, Styles, and the contact men you sent."

"Your precious main accusers won't be able to testify at all," Luengo taunted; feeling grim satisfaction rising in him. "Norton is on New Vulcan to get the rogue officers, and I'm certain they are in his care by now. Without them…"

"Wrong again!" Morrow said. "The Lexington has been at New Vulcan for a few hours now. Styles and his two allies are under arrest, just like Norton – after he forced entrance into New Vulcan's seat of government, threatened Selek, took T'Pau hostage and forced Khan to deliver himself to the scientists, which backfired as another Judas turned out to be a savior. Your gorilla Finnegan forgot himself and tried to kill Khan out of revenge – and if Mr. Singh doesn't survive the injuries, I will personally see to it that Finnegan gets a life sentence!"

Luengo stared at them. "It seems you already have sentenced me and there is nothing I can say to make you see it from another point of view, but…"

"Where murder, attempted genocide – twice! – and high treason is involved, there is no place for 'another point of view'. You are the new leader of Section 31 who abused its power to an abhorrent extent, barely recognizable anymore for what it was original founded," Morrow said icily.

Luengo lifted both brows. "And you think you can eliminate the organization that was established by the first officers of StarFleet watch out for dangers to the Federation? Did it not occur to you that the watchers of law and order – of StarFleet – is needed and therefore supported very well by those who take their responsibility towards the Federation very seriously?"
“Of course you couldn’t push your intrigue as far as you were able without support from influential and powerful people, who hold the political reigns of the Federation in their hands.” Robertson interrupted him harshly. "Well, I have more news for you: They will reveal themselves within these very minutes – as we speak, Mister Luengo – and we are ready to get them all!"

For a long moment both men only looked enraged at each other, then – all of sudden – Luengo’s terminal gave the signal of an incoming message. José stared at it but didn't move a finger.

“Don’t you want to answer the call?” Robertson asked, and after the signal was repeated and the president nodded at him sternly, Luengo sat down and opened the channel.

"Luengo here," he said shortly and frowned as he saw the face of Nahal Nushua, a Federation Council member on the screen.

"Luengo, I just received a transmission from New Vulcan. Kirk has managed to send proof of action concerning the delegation to Selek. And you must have a leak in Starfleet's firewall. The plan about the pathogen is out, too. I just called you to warn you – and I'm off planet now for… WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?" The man had interrupted himself before he was able to finish his sentence as he jumped from his desk chair – face flushing in anger.

"Starfleet Security, Mr. Nushua, in the name of the United Federation of Planets you're under arrest!"
A voice said from somewhere in the background, then the screen was switched off.

Paling even more, Luengo could only look at the empty screen, then another hail reached him he answered without any word. Another member of the Federation Council appeared on the screen, whispering fiercely, "José, your and Section 31's cover is blown. Somehow Selek of New Vulcan got reports and documents about your plans and sent it to every Council member and the president. If I were you, I would pack my things and go off world. I'm off for now. Maybe… Sir this is a private office, and you've no right… WHAT THE HELL?"

This transmission was closed, too – and Luengo rose from his chair, leaving his desk. His gaze found Stones. "Obviously every Council member has been watched so you could intercept at the right time – when Selek's transmission reached them… That must be your doing." The commander only nodded, José smiled – an actual smile this time. "You're a hell of a good Chief of Security – flawless work. Congratulations – even if it means that this will weaken the Federation enormously for decades."

“Wrong, Mr. Luengo,” Robertson addressed him. “You weakened the Federation by trying to murder Starfleet's most prominent staff officers and ambassadors during the war, trying to end a declared
ceasefire. If it weren’t for Lord Kor's prudence and his high regard for even hostile officers who are honorable, and Kirk's and Wesley's ability to look past an enemy's mask, the acts of war could have continued and hundreds – thousands – of people would have died on both sides. You weakened the Federation by infiltrating Starfleet with your spies, who fed you with information about respectable officer's decisions and doings you wanted to use for your purpose. You broke dozens of laws…"

"The laws are made for people, not the other way around. And during a war, there is no place for petty regulations that hinder warriors from protecting their home and fighting the enemy, no matter if they come from inside or outside!"

"So, that Norton assaulted New Vulcan, threatened its government and took the highest ranking Elder hostage is acceptable in your opinion, because Selek followed the law and offered asylum to those you wanted dead?" Nogura asked sharply. "Dead, because this someone and his friends revealed your crimes?"

“And what about Captain Heldron and his first officer?” Morrow threw in. “Are you responsible for the accident that placed Styles in command of the Excalibur? Or what about Khan? The man was delivered to the LSH-lab and was abused as a lab rat. That was your idea, too, wasn't it? Only the SBI, corrupted by you, could pull all these strings, including hiring Klingon renegades who attacked the Excalibur!”

“And what about the sudden custom demands for every trading ship that nears Earth?” Nogura continued. “Are you in need of more credits to build up your little empire, masked by a 'new' Starfleet? And what's with the increased security at every corner in the larger cities Earth wide? You're observing our civilian citizens so that you can act the moment some of them get the wrong – better to say the right idea – about all the sudden changes? I'm very familiar with Earth’s history, and this kind of scheming and action is still very well-known – from a time in first half of the twentieth century. Hitler and Stalin seemed to be good teachers even today!"

Luengo sighed. "You don't understand! None of you understands how important it is that Starfleet become a military unit and…”

“What I understand very clearly is that you broke your officer's oath, that you went against everything the Federation stands for, and that you abused your rank to make your twisted ideals real," Robertson said slowly. "For this, you didn't shrink back from any method, including conspiracy with terrorists, pirates, and slave traders. And because of you, many good women and men had to die aboard the Excalibur during the feigned Klingon attack, including those delegation members and some of our officer colleagues who manned the second shuttle that was destroyed by the Klingon renegades. You and your fellows will face court martial for this, and you will pay for every single crime you did in person or ordered!" He looked at Stones. "Commander, conduct Mr. Luengo away to custody. No visitors, no rank-privileged perquisites." He glanced back at Luengo. "You have the chance to call your lawyer or a lawyer will be provided." He nodded at Stones.
"Commander, if you please!"

Stones stepped forwards and placed heavy handcuffs around the former admiral’s wrists. Without another word, Luengo accepted the escort that instantly took him into the center and led him away.

Robertson sighed. "Finally! I thought I might feel sick at the end of this day because of too much birthday cake. I had no idea the interim Chief of Command would top it. I couldn't imagine it if I tried." He rounded the desk and looked at the screen. "Unbelievable! Eight more incoming messages – all from Federation Council members." He looked up at the two admirals. "This is going to be impossible to keep from the public!"

ST***ST

At the same time, Starfleet Security also stormed the offices of the SBI, arresting everyone who worked there. Files were opened to get the personal information of the SBI members which were off duty at the moment, and Redshirts were sent to their homes to take them into custody, too. Computer terminals, data disks, even printed documents – everything was secured. Officers who worked with the SBI faced custody, too, and there was also a big mess as Redshirts forced entrance into the offices and rec rooms of the Elite Security. Right, they had only followed orders, yet there were doubts about those. Obedience only stretched so far. Richardson had a quick talk with Barnett, and after he had learned of the battle aboard the Excalibur and how many of Elite Security acted in the New Vulcan seat of government, he realized that the most of them had to be fellows of Section 31.

In the meantime, the LSH lab in Nevada was stormed, too – its Security putting up no resistance as Admiral Morrow showed them the order of the president. Within an hour, the lab was empty save for the Redshirts and Morrow, who took over the science department, replacing Norton. Records, tests, and examination results and analyses from Khan and many things more were secured – and Harry, who was interested in science, though he'd chosen another department, was schooled enough to realize the shocking dimension the whole incident had taken. Reading just one record concerning the Augment's reactions to diseases introduced to his system was enough to make Morrow sick to the core. What had been done to the enhanced man was beyond imagination, and the admiral began to understand – really understand – why Jim Kirk risked his career and freedom to help Khan. Despite what the superhuman had done last year, Morrow knew that Starfleet and some of her widely civilian departments would have a lot of to make up for.

There were also tumults – particularly in the residences or other homes of those Council members whose calls to Luengo (or to Norton’s abandoned desk) gave their real face away. Data was rescued there too, revealing connections to other supporters of Section 31. It was evident that it would take weeks to follow every twisted path and round up everyone involved. Realistically, some would slip through the cracks if only for a time. But he wouldn't rest until as many as possible were brought to justice.
Four hours after Robertson had stepped into Luengo’s office there was one thing that could be proclaimed: Section 31 had been smashed, and its leading men and women were in custody. But the work had just begun.

“It’s done! Luengo and his fellows are arrested, Section 31 will be gone soon – and Mrs. Whitman is safe,” Wesley told Lady Ania Morganth, after the conference between himself, Barnett, and President Robertson a few minutes ago. Bob, pretty busy aboard the Enterprise, didn’t hesitate to contact the Betazoid ambassador, knowing how much she worried for her friend, Batari.

"So, Starfleet is back in the rightful hands?” Ania asked, and as the commodore on the screen nodded; she sighed in relief. "That is good news!” she smiled, then she bit her full lips. "Commodore,” she said softly, “during the turmoil aboard the Excalibur and on New Vulcan, I sensed despair, anguish, fear and pain from two or three persons. Their emotions seemed to drive out all others and… and then they seemed to come from a greater distance. And now I sense… nothing at all anymore. Can you tell me about them? Do you know who had to suffer so much? Do they still need help?"

Wesley stared at her with rather large eyes. Oh, he had a pretty good idea whose emotions she had sensed. Kirk's panic and frantic attempts to calm Khan had been heart-breaking as had been the Augment's horrible condition. McCoy's statement that he had sedated Kirk after Khan's surgery spoke volumes. He also knew that the two lovebirds weren't the only one who had been through horror within the last hours. Wesley had met the augmented younger man only briefly, but how much the mere boy loved his ‘older brother' had been plain to seen. Wesley was convinced that Ania had sensed the boy's turmoil, too.

Sweet Lord, how strong their emotions had to be that the Betazoid had felt them over the distance – not only from ship to ship (normal range for a Betazoid's empathy) but also from the ship to the planet's surface. Bob was not religious, yet he had a certain feeling that those three souls had cried out in anguish loud enough to be heard, and he didn't want to think about the pain required for such a cry.

Realizing that the lady's dark eyes still rested on him, he cleared his throat. "I might be mistaken," – he was not! – "but it's possible that you sensed Captain Kirk and Mr. Singh. The latter had been injured and…"  

“I want to meet them!”
Wesley grimaced, as he looked in the suddenly very stern face of the Betazoid-woman. "Ma'am," he began carefully, "Captain Kirk and Mr. Singh are in very good and capable hands, so you don't have to worry about them. And, by the way, both have asylum, so…"

“I already plan to visit High Minister Selek and so there is certainly the chance to meet the two gentlemen. Vice President Whitman is… concerned for Mr. Singh, regarding the fact that he belongs to her home's past. And Captain Kirk is a hero in the Federation, and his reputation is known on our planet. When I give my report to our government, our leaders certainly want to know more details about the human man who was able to stop the Klingons." She cocked her head. "After all, his activities within the last weeks led to the ceasefire.'

Taking a deep breath, Wesley stopped himself from making a grimace. Lady Morganth knew how to reach her goal, and so he spread his hands in a gesture of surrender (and frustration). "Ask High Minister Selek, if he’ll allow you to make contact with the two. Oh, and don't forget to inform Dr. McCoy first that you want to speak with his two troublemakers. I swear this man is the biggest and most terrifying mother-hen in the whole galaxy when it comes to his friends."

Ania began to smile; recognizing the humor. “Don’t worry, Commodore, I know how to… persuade someone.”

"I've no doubt," Bob sighed before he bowed his head and bit her farewell. The screen went dark, and he leaned back in the chair in the captain's ready room. He was about to rise as the doorbell informed him of a visitor, and curious who sought him – here, behind the bridge – he called an "Enter!"

To his surprise, the two ensigns with the incredible luck stepped in, and his gaze wandered from the Russian wonder-boy to the cadet, and back. "Yes, Gentlemen?” he asked, as both remained silent.


Bob lifted a gray brow. "The young Augment – Khan's little brother?"

Both ensigns nodded. “Yes, sir,” Kevin answered this time. “As far as we know he’s on New Vulcan in the hospital.”

“And wiz ze keptin and Khan out cold he’s alone zere,” Pavel cut in. “Right, Dr. McCoy is zere, too, but he certainly has ozer zings to do zen distract Joaquin from everzing zat happened.”
"You see, sir," Riley added, "Joaquin only woke up four days ago – in a completely strange world full of alien people. And now he’s on a foreign planet, surrounded by men and women who are not human, worrying his head off for his brother. I would be scared if I would be in his shoes."

"Scared, sir!" Chekov nodded quickly.

Bob frowned. "Yes, this certainly is a difficult time for the young man, but may I ask what you have to do with it?"

The ensigns looked at each other before Pavel said quietly. "You see, sir, we've… befriended Joaquin. He knows us, and we've stayed togezer between ze time of his awakening and our arrival at New Vulcan. Ze kep'in even declared it our duty to stay wiz Joaquin. I zink it would be good for him, if he would have some friends wiz him just now, so…"

"Do I understand you correctly, Ensign? Are you asking me to leave the ship and to beam down to New Vulcan to keep the Augment boy company? You are aware of the fact that Admiral Barnett more or less grounded everyone who is involved in the whole matter with Khan?" Wesley was baffled by request. Was Kirk's staff completely crazy?

“Sir, we’re off duty now until beta shift tomorrow,” Pavel held his ground. “We give you our word of honor zat we report in time back to ze ship…”

“To you in person, sir!” Kevin threw in helpfully.

“Da!” Chekov nodded firmly. “We report to you in person, but we should take care of Joaquin."

"Commodore, please understand that Joaquin has only come to know dark times since he woke up. Except for Ji… Captain Kirk and his crew, his only experiences with this century, are of violence against his beloved brother, blood, and brutality. That's no good reflection of our world – a world he and his siblings are going to live in. The least we can do is to be there for him now – showing him that people still care these days."

“And to show him what it means to have friends here,” Pavel added. “Please, sir, give your permission to…”
Wesley lifted both hands, and instantly both ensigns silenced. Bob looked at them – and began to chuckle. “Sweet Lord, Kirk has a bad influence on you boys! You even sound like him.” He shook his head and took a deep breath. "All right, gentlemen, I agree that Mr. Weiss certainly hasn't got a good picture of our today's world and that there are a few things which have to be set right. Having someone with him he knows, will help him stomach everything he's been through." He saw the excitement on the two boyish faces and pointed a finger at the ensigns the moment Chekov opened his mouth. "You can beam down tomorrow in the morning, and I expect your return to the Enterprise at 1500 ship's time! There is no need to stay the night on New Vulcan occupying the few hotel rooms New ShiKar can offer at the moment – or rob Dr. McCoy's already stressed nerves by bombarding him with questions.”

“Zank you, sir!” Pavel beamed at him.

“Thank you so much, sir!” Kevin grinned the same moment, and Wesley rolled his eyes.

"Don't make me regret this. If something goes wrong, Barnett will have my head for it. As grateful as he and the others are for being rescued because of Kirk's and Khan's clever minds, both are still in trouble as the rest of this ship's staff – including me, because I covered for Khan, too. So, if the two gentlemen play with the idea to accepting Vulcan hospitality for longer, then I'm in trouble!"

“We'll be back in time, Commodore! I swear by the welfare of Mozer Russia!” Pavel avouched. Kevin nodded, too. “I swear on Ireland's fairies!”

Promptly, he got a baffled look from both men when Pavel murmured something under his breath in Russian, and Wesley felt the urge to laugh. "Well, then I hope you actually still believe in fairies."

"It may sound strange for someone who chose a career in Starfleet, sir, but in a certain way, I still believe in them. Sometimes it's a good feeling to remember fairy tales and that they usually have a happy ending. It increases the courage when everything around you is falling apart,” Kevin smiled.

Bob nodded. "Wisely spoken, Ensign. We all need hope to cling to when the times are dark, and everyone has their own way of facing the dark." He rose. "Right, you two, off to your quarters. I'll inform the transporter chief that he'll beam you down to New Vulcan hospital in the morning." He cocked his head. "And if there is the tiniest chance that Jim Kirk is awake during the time you're there, please tell him to contact Barnett or me. There's a lot we need to ask him."

The two ensigns saluted and vanished the second Wesley said, "Dismissed!” Amused Bob watched them almost flee the ready-room – bright smiles on their faces. Had he been that young, too? Yes, a long time ago, and just for a moment, he wished he could go back in time to be that careless young
adult again without the weight of responsibility on his shoulders.

ST***ST

The evening came quickly in New ShiKar, and like all places near an equator, the time of dawn was short. New Vulcan's burning sun had barely touched the surface of the mountains when night already settled in.

As Spock opened his eyes after a long nap helped by the mild sedative Sorel had given him, nature was already bathed in darkness, and the voices of insects and night animals from near mountains came through the open windows. A cool wind was coming from the large lake, but it was not unpleasant – not even for Vulcans.

“It’s good to see you awake, my son.”

The deep, familiar voice was still a little bit hoarse, yet Spock felt a wave of relief and something humans called ‘happiness’, as he turned his head and looked straight at his father, who lay in the next bed to his left.

“Father!” he murmured. “I am glad that the surgery was a success and the healers were able to help you.”

"Yes, Healer Sorel is not called one of the best healers in the Federation for naught," Sarek agreed; his breath was still a little bit heavy. Given the fact that was in surgery only a few hours ago, to be awake now and even able to talk, told much about Vulcan strength.

For a moment both were silent, then Spock took a slow breath. “I was not aware of your illness and only learned from Admiral Barnett and Commodore Wesley about it after we got the Excalibur back.” It wasn’t meant as a reproval, and Sarek understood.

"I thought I had more time before a surgery would be necessary. Therefore, I didn’t see any reason to concern you. It seems I was wrong." He moistened his lips. "We have to thank Admiral Barnett for my arrival at New Vulcan in time. He insisted that the Lexington not return to Earth but to our colony, where he hoped to meet you in case Selek would not be able to provide enough blood." For just a moment there was a soft twitching the left edge of his mouth. "The admiral can be quite stubborn if he has set his mind on something."

“I know what you mean. My captain has the same characteristic!” Spock deadpanned with his very
own dry sense of humor that showed up from time to time.

Again the ambassador’s left edge of the mouth curled for a moment; then his dark eyes roamed over the pale face of his son before his features relaxed. Sarek looked for a moment almost vulnerable, as he whispered, “Sorel told me what you did – for me, but also for Captain Kirk and his bond mate. I am… proud of you, Spock! Your selflessness saved lives – again – and spared your friend a great loss.”

Spock shifted on his left side to face his father fully. "You have been awake longer than I suspected to know this,” he stated, and Sarek nodded slowly.

“Three and a half hour ago, I woke for the first time, and the second time thirty-two minutes ago. Sorel was here shortly before you woke up. Maybe his departure pulled you out of sleep.” He took a breath slowly, and Spock let his gaze linger on his father's ashen features.

"Is that truth?"

Promptly a gray brow was lifted. "Do you imply I would not tell you the truth, my son?” It wasn't a rebuke, rather a kind of uncommon teasing between two Vulcans. Amanda had rubbed off on her husband, and Spock had, after all, her genes.

"I imply that you want ‘not want to concern me’ again, Father,” he answered wryly, and for just a second, amusement shone in the ambassador's eyes.

"Then be assured that the surgery was a success and that Healer Sorel is confident that I can leave the hospital within a few days."

“And I’m certain that he also will order two or three weeks of rest for you,” Spock commented dryly, which elicited a quick frown from his father.

“We will see!” he murmured. Like his son, he regarded rest as a waste of time.

The same second Spock felt something tugging at his mind – a fearful pull from a familiar soul he was able to sense far more clearly these last days than ever before. Without hesitation, he sat up and pulled the thin blanket away.
Alarmed Sarek lifted his head. “What’s the matter, Spock?”

“Jim needs me,” was all his son answered, then the younger Vulcan was already on his way; knowing that something must have happened to Khan…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, at least one good thing: Luengo is arrested and Section 31 was destroyed. I loved to write this scene, because it gave me great satisfaction to bring the evil guys finally to fall (*snicker*). But even without Luengo and his goonies there is still trouble for our friends – and with Bones’ being a chatterbox even more.

In the following chapter Khan’s condition will be the reason for the next big alert, Spock learns from McCoy about his slipping with T’Pau, Joaquin gets support from his two new friends and Bob learns some more new things which won’t ‘amuse’ him.

I hope you liked the new chapter and, like always, I’m curious about your reactions.

Have a nice rest of the week and an even nicer weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Aftermath

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

And once again a big ‘thank you’ for all the comments and kudos you left. After almost 80 chapters of this story I’m still flabbergasted that you all are sticking true to the fanfiction for this lone time. Thank you so, so much.

As I already promised this chapter will be one of two parts that leads to the last big ‘shot’ of the story – in a longer term of approx. 8 or 10 more chapters, so don’t freak, please.

And because I don’t want to reveal too much, I release you know to the ST-universe.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 79 – Aftermath

He was deeply asleep – not only because Bones had stabbed him with one of those dreadful hypos and sedated him. No, he was simply exhaust.

Jim had woken up during the early evening, had looked at Nien who lay dead to the world beside him in the bio-bed, and had fought to doze off again. The quiet around him, the setting sun, and the fact that sounds from the town came through the open window made it clear to him that there was no
actual danger around. It should have lulled him back to sleep.

He had contacted Scott via a private channel, using the doctor's ready room. Montgomery had given him a quick report. Besides the fact that the whole crew was suffering from a king-sized headache, the ship was running within acceptable parameters. The talk had been short because Jim didn't want to wake his superior officer's suspicion or worry him.

The ship was currently under the command of Wesley, and Kirk didn't want to have to answer questions about the last hours before the *Lexington* arrived. Right, Bob was his mentor – a fatherly friend – yet the whole mess in the Vulcan seat of government had left some trouble. In addition to that, Jim wanted to avoid Barnett. He had the feeling that the Chief of Command wasn't amused by the escapades of the *Enterprise's* staff officers over the last weeks.

So Kirk cut the conversation with Scotty short and had returned to the room where Khan rested. Being utterly exhausted, sleep found Jim easily again – only to be risen by a strong hand on his shoulder that shook him. “Jim, wake up!”

The voice was familiar and…

"Jim! Please! Something isn't right with Noo, and I don't know how to alert the healers. I can't find any alert bell or red button!"

Joaquin!

The boy’s voice combined with ‘Noo’, ‘not right’ and ‘alert’ was enough to push his mind and body from zero to hundred in seconds. Nearly jumping out of bed and hurling the blanket away in the process, he was with beside Khan in one step. He looked down at the pale face, darkened and colorful with far too many bruises.

“I can barely feel him and look at the monitor!” Weiss said fearful, pointing at the display.

Four of five indicators were low – too low! And the heartbeat…

“SHIT!” Jim yelled as a wave of panic began to seize him. With a, "Stay here with him, I'll get Bones!” he raced out of the door. Frantically, he looked around and saw at the end of the hallway the open door of the doctor's ready room through which light fell into the corridor. The rest of the station
was dim during the night.

Not wasting any time, Jim ran down the hallway and stopped at the entrance, out of breath. On the couch laid the sleeping form of his friend. For a moment he felt regret waking him after all the stress of the last day, but he had no other choice. Closing the distance to the couch, he bent over his CMO, shaking him. "Bones, wake up! Something isn't right with Nien!"

Leonard had been deeply asleep, and he needed a moment to wake up. He looked groggily up to his friend.

“Wha’is’n?” he mumbled and groaned in protest, as Kirk shook him harder.

"Wake up, Bones! Nien's monitor going crazy and he…"

He didn't need to continue. Years-long training kicked in, and McCoy rose quickly enough to make Jim hastily step back to prevent a collision. Swearing beneath his breath, Bones hastened to the desk and checked the incoming data at the terminal that was connected to Khan's biobed.

"Dammit!" he growled, took the med kit that was placed beside the desk and left the office – Kirk on his heels. Several seconds later they entered the intensive care room and Bones strode with determined steps to his patient, shooing Joaquin out of the way with a few waves of his free hand. Eyeing the monitor for a moment, McCoy bent over Khan and addressed him – without any result. He took a med scanner from the kit, let it roam over the Augment's body, and checked Khan’s pulse finally the good old fashioned way by pressing two fingers to his wrist.

Jim stood beside Joaquin; both almost didn't dare breathe. The biosignals were very low – heart rate and blood pressure, and Jim had to agree with Joaquin concerning the bond. He could barely sense the familiar presence of Nien in him.

Soft steps drew nearer, and Jim didn't need to look to know that Spock had entered the room, too. As always when something terrible was about to happen, the Vulcan was there like a rock in the raging sea ready to support and help. Kirk couldn't suppress the urge to brush the back of his hand against Spock's arm in silent gratitude as his first officer stopped at his side.

"What happened?" Spock asked quietly, taking in the data on the monitor with some unease, while his friend’s gratefulness washed over him like a warm breeze mingled with the cold fear that held Jim in its brutal grip for so many hours now. Spock wanted to make the latter go away – wanted to shield
his *T’hy’la* from this darkness, but he knew he could not. Not at the moment. But his intention to teach Kirk (and hopefully Khan) some mental techniques to benefit their health became more resolved.

“I don’t know what happened,” Kirk whispered anxiously. “Jo woke me.”

McCoy straightened his shape and turned around. His eyes were soft – too soft. "He… He's in a coma," he said quietly. He heard Jim gasping and watched Joaquin pressing a hand against his mouth. Gently he continued, "This could be a natural reaction of the brain – to give the body a better chance to heal. It also could be…”

Spock interrupted him with a lowered voice. "Are you suggesting that his coma is a kind of healing trance?"

Leonard pursed his lips. "Like you Vulcans do when you're seriously injured?" He cocked his head. "It could be. After all, his brain activity resembles a Vulcan's – and he has some PSI-ability as we learned yesterday." His glance found Weiss. "Have you heard of something like this before, Joaquin? Have other brothers or sisters of yours shown similar reactions to grave injuries?"

The young Augment gulped, feeling all eyes on him. “I’m… I’m not sure,” he said pressed. “I remember when I was younger that Otto got injured during a mission, but I was only allowed to visit him after he was better. And during the Eugenic Wars…” He shuddered. "Noo always wanted to protect me and kept me away from the wounded people. He and the others got a bruise now and then, and one time he was shot in the shoulder, but I never saw one of us do this." He pointed to his older brother.

"Still the chance that he is in a kind of healing trance is a possibility," Bones mused quietly before he looked first at a miserable Jim, and then at Spock. “Do you think one of your healers could find out more about it?"

The Vulcan nodded slowly. “A trained healer should be able to detect the nature of Mr. Singh's condition. I suggest you speak with Healer Sorel; he already knows of Mr. Singh's and Mr. Weiss' heritage.”

“Right,” Bones nodded. “Any chance that he is still on duty?”

Spock lifted a brow. "My father told me four minutes and eighteen seconds ago that he spoke with
Healer Sorel only approximately eight minutes before I woke."

“So he could be still here despite the late hour. Excuse me!” McCoy was out of the room in a rush, running down the corridor. The Vulcan’s acute hearing listened as the CMO discussed something with a nurse. Listening carefully, he finally turned towards his friend and the Augment boy.

He had to admit that Kirk’s usual ability to control himself was quite admirable – for a human. But now it failed him completely, as it had several hours ago. Jim's eyes were wide and dark with fear; his complexion was ashen gray. He was terrified for his bondmate's life, and Spock felt the illogical but irresistible drive to comfort him. “Calm down, Jim,” he said gently, laying a warm hand on his friend’s shoulder knowing how much Kirk craved physical contact when he was upset. “As far as I am able to read the monitor, all essential biological functions of Khan's body are working as they should, albeit rather slowly. I assume that his body has, indeed, entered a healing trance,” Spock continued softly.

“And what if it's not? What if he is in a coma?” Jim asked, his voice hoarse. A slight tremor went through his body, and Spock instinctively squeezed the strong shoulder of his T’hy’la.

“Then he has to overcome it all alone, Jim,” Bones’ voice sounded from the entrance, as he entered the room again. “Medical science has come a long way. Still, there are several things nature can fix. A coma is one of those things.” He sighed and rubbed his forehead. "Sorel is still here. He is on stand-by until he is confident that Sarek has successfully recovered from surgery. He's on his way.”

“Thanks, Bones,” Kirk murmured; his eyes hung on the pale, motionless figure on the biobed.

Leonard grumbled something and looked at the two emotional men and the Vulcan beside them who hid his obvious discomfort only as half as good as he usually did. ‘We're all overdue for a nice, long, calm vacation!’ McCoy thought.

That same moment Sorel arrived. Giving the others a nod of acknowledgment, he stepped to Khan and took in the readouts of the monitor. "He's in a coma," he said quietly.

"Is it possible that he has entered a healing trance?” Spock voiced his assumption again and met the healer’s dark eyes. "Selek recognized Mr. Singh's telepathic abilities, and Mr. Singh's augmented nature affects not only his body but his mind as well. His brain activity resembles that of a Vulcan," the Enterprise’s first officer explained.
"The evidence points to this possibility," the healer answered slowly.

"Could you check?" Kirk addressed Sorel, who lifted both brows.

"Are asking me to meld?"

Jim nodded. “I know that this demands much of a Vulcan – even a Vulcan healer – but… Please!” Kirk, who always knew how to talk people into doing something they didn't want to, failed to find the right words. The older Vulcan understood him. If there was one thing a Vulcan was able to grasp and respect, it was the depth of a true mating bond. And, as incredible it sounded, these two Terrans had entered into this kind of special relationship that was otherwise only known among telepathic races.

“You are right, Captain. This may be the only way to discover Mr. Singh's actual mental condition," Sorel said quietly. He looked into the pleading blue eyes of the Terran captain, then in the bidding dark ones of the boy beside him, and finally at those of McCoy. Finally, he saw Spock, whose gaze betrayed a hint of a plea as well. Friendship – the principle wasn’t foreign for Vulcans, yet he never saw a friendship like this one. He took a deep breath. “Very well,” he almost sighed. “I will meld with him.”

Nervous, Joaquin watched how the old Vulcan fell silent, pressed his fingertips together for a long moment and at last bent over his brother, placing his fingers at Khan's temple just like the old Spock of the future had done that morning.

Tension grew in the room. Jim didn't even realize that his right hand clung to Spock's left wrist, but the first officer didn't make any movement to stop this touch. He could barely shield against Kirk’s whirling emotions, and so he endured it – knowing that his T'hy'la needed him. ‘I have to talk with Selek,’ he thought. ‘We must teach Jim and Khan to shield their emotions better – for their sake and mine.’

For several minutes, Sorel stood there bent over Khan and didn't make a sound. Then he blinked and straightened up carefully before turning slowly around. He was pale, and his dark eyes were glassy for a moment; then he took a breath and gathered his self-control.

"I cannot sense if he is truly in a coma or if his body is undergoing a healing trance. The fact is that he has withdrawn himself completely; his brain is maintaining all bodily functions, and they are stable though nearly dormant. He does not answer my attempts to reach him, but I can sense his mind, blockaded as it is. He is calm, this much I can tell." His gaze found McCoy. "I suggest that you continue to monitor his condition. If anything changes, especially his brain activities, call me
regardless of the time of day or night."

Bones nodded. "Thank you, Healer Sorel."

Jim gulped. "So… we know as much as before?" he whispered, and the old Vulcan looked at him with something close to sympathy.

"I am sorry that I cannot give you another answer, Captain. If this is a healing trance your bondmate initiated, then it is one of the deepest I have ever witnessed."

"What can we do now?" Kirk asked, already knowing the answer.

"Nothing," Bones replied quietly. "Nothing except for you to get some rest – and to be there for Khan. Some coma patients can sense and hear what is going on around them, especially from those who are close to them. And since you and Khan share a mate's bond – and Joaquin a family bond with his brother – the chance that Khan is aware of you two is high. And if he is in a healing trance, I think it a good thing if you stay close to him."

Sorel nodded solemnly. "I agree with Dr. McCoy. Given the unique link between you, Captain, and Mr. Singh, it would be wise to remain close by his side. Of course, you don't have to stay here non-stop for next days, but I advise you to be reachable and only a few minutes transport away in case Mr. Singh begins to wake or his condition changes." He bowed his head slightly in a polite gesture. "Despite the unpleasant news, I wish the gentlemen a good night." His gaze found Spock. "And you should return to your room to meditate."

"I will, Healer Sorel," the first officer acknowledged and watched as the healer left. A part of him had hoped that Sorel would find out more about Khan's condition and he felt a hint of disappointment; then his Vulcan control was back in place again.

Bones sighed as he closed the med kit and stepped to his two friends and the Augment boy. Placing a comforting hand on Kirk's shoulder, he said, "Lie down, Jim, and try to get some more sleep." His gaze wandered to Joaquin. "The same goes for you, son. You both are no help to our superman here if you drop from exhaustion."

"I'm not that tired, Bones," Kirk mumbled.
“Yes, you are,” Leonard answered firmly, yet gently. “Stop being so obstinate, kid! You are beyond exhausted. So follow your man's example and rest! Don't worry about him. Knowing Khan, he would come back from the death to be with you – and his little brother.” He winked at Joaquin who tried to smile back but failed miserably.

‘Something has to be done for the boy,’ McCoy thought. ‘I have to think of something that will pull him from this nightmare! Augmented or not, his soul is human – and he has been through hell, too. Interrupted by a 250-year nap, but the terrible mess back on Earth was just a short time ago for him.’

Jim took a deep breath – God, how much he loathed the sterile smell of the hospital! "All right," he whispered, "I'll lie down again." He nudged Weiss. "You too, Jo. Try to get some sleep. Bones'll watch your brother." His glance found Spock. "Thank you for coming – again. How is it that you always show up when I'm upset?"

“My mental shields appear to be weaker than they typically are. I sensed dread from you," the Vulcan admitted, aware of the three humans' curious glances as he uncharacteristically spoke of his weakened state.

“And of course you came running," Bones sighed. "Sweet Lord, someone should call the press, Vulcans fee…”

"Doctor," Spock interrupted him before he could finish his comment. "You know that it is my du…”

"Don't tell me ‘it's my duty as the first officer to, etcetera, etcetera'. We know that you two have the biggest soft spot for each other ever known in the fleet." He flicked a thumb at the two gaping officers and said to Joaquin. "You can't imagine what I've been through the last two years with these two around. Hell, I thought it couldn't get crazier than when I shared a room with the kid during our time at the Academy, but – boy! – I was wrong. These two are about to send me up the wall one day because they freak as soon as the other one even mutters an ‘ouch’ or sneezes.”

“Vulcans don’t sneeze, Doctor!”

"I'm not a sissy, Bones, and I don't whine because of a bruise!"

McCoy’s grousing and his friends’ protests did the miracle. Joaquin had to chuckle for a moment. Then he turned serious again and closed the distance to his ‘brother's’ bed, taking one of his hands
Leonard watched him and gave his two friends a short nod, but Jim had already understood what the CMO was up to. And one look at Spock confirmed that the Vulcan had recognized the doctor’s weak attempt to cheer the young Augment up, too.

Focusing on a fatigued Kirk again, Spock said quietly, “This time I have to agree with Dr. McCoy…”

"Don't! It scares the hell out of me," Bones grumbled, but he was ignored.

"Go to bed and sleep, Jim. I'm sure that Admiral Barnett will not be delayed anymore tomorrow and we must answer him. And humans are better… functioning when rested. So lie down, _T'hy'la_."

Whether it was the soft, pleading tone Spock used or his referring to Jim as his brother – Jim didn't know. He just obeyed, but not before he referred to his friend's earlier support. "I didn't thank you for your help back in the recovery room." Before Spock could answer something, he added heartily, "Thank you, Spock! You saved Nien – and me."

Spock cocked a little bit his head. “There is no need for you to thank me, Jim. You are my _T'hy'la_, and I was and will always be there for you.”

The statement, spoken with warmth, was like balm for Jim's troubled mind and soul, yet he knew that Spock’s help was demanding for the Vulcan. Kirk let his gaze wander in concern over the pale, even slightly yellow features and the glassy eyes of his friend. "How are you doing? This mind-meld… It shook you pretty bad, didn't it?"

Promptly the Vulcan clasped his hands behind his back and lifted a brow; his stoic mask was firmly back in place. "Healer Sorel saw to my needs, and I am rested now. I will meditate soon so that I am fully recovered in the morning."

‘In other words, I'm still exhausted and need to sort out my thoughts,’ Jim translated in his mind. Then he remembered the other reason his friend still troubled. "And how is your father doing?"

“He was already awake as I woke up and we talked. Then I sensed your fear and left the room…”
“To which you will return now, Spock!” McCoy stepped in. “And I don’t want to hear anything about Vulcans and their need for less sleep. You look terrible and even off-duty, you’re still my patient.” He pointed to the door. "There you go – and I'll come with you!"

This time the first officer did sigh. “Doctor, I assure you that it is not necessary to…”

“I have to speak with you in private,” McCoy admitted, looking suddenly rather nervous which, of course, didn't slip Jim's attention.

"What's the matter, Bones?” he asked worriedly, and the CMO rolled his eyes.

"If someone calls me mother hen again! You are even worse than me.” He gestured to the empty biobed. "Off you go, kid! What I have to talk about with Spock has nothing to do with you, your honey, or our boy here, so don’t be so nosy and lie down.”

Kirk grumbled something not even the enhanced hearing of Spock or Joaquin was able to understand, and he walked to his bed. Bones watched him for another moment; then he gave the Vulcan a signal to follow him. After exchanging a few words of good night wishes, the first officer left the room and went at the CMO’s side. He glanced at McCoy from beneath his long lashes, sensing the other man's discomfort coming in waves from him.

“What happened, Doctor?” he asked quietly, and Bones shook his head.

"Not here," he answered quietly. "You Vulcans have sharp ears, and I don’t want the whole hospital hearing our talk." He headed for the office he was using, stepped in, waved at Spock to enter, too, and closed the door. Rubbing his forehead, he tried to find the best words to start the confession he now had to make. The only thing that came to his mind was a blunt, "I think I dropped the ball."

Promptly, a Vulcan eyebrow was lifted. "I was not aware that you found time for recreation these last hours, Doctor, but I'm confident that no one will give you trouble because you got a little too loud in the gym."

Leonard stared at him for several seconds, before he stuttered, "You're pulling my leg, aren't you?" As Spock's eyes moved to his legs, McCoy lifted both hands. "Stop it, Spock! I know you know what I'm talking about, and I think this topic is too serious to joke about."
THAT got Spock's full attention. "What is it, Doctor?" he asked, feeling some tension growing in him. Tension without the tiniest clue what he should expect. Illogical! He was in need of a long meditation.

Bones bit his lips for a moment. "I know we both have our differences – we rarely agree on things, but... But Khan was right, you know. I do regard you as a friend – even if you rob me of my nerves sometimes."

Okay, now Spock was indeed worried! "What did you do?" he asked calmly, which seemed to unsettle the human even more.

Bones looked at the tall Vulcan, wearing only a black long robe and nothing else. He was in bare feet – a clear signal that he didn't waste any thought for himself as he left his bed to rush to his soul brother's side. Deep inside, the 'hobgoblin' was gentle as a summer breeze, and despite their many, many verbal quarrels, McCoy liked the Vulcan. And he liked Nyota Uhura. The two were so good for each other, and now...

"I swear I only wanted to help you and Uhura, Spock!" he almost whispered and he saw how the Vulcan's eyes widened ever so slightly betraying his inner alarm. "I called the Enterprise to tell our friends and Wesley about the success of the two surgeries, and Uhura answered my hail. She signified that she is restricted to her quarters when she's off duty."

"Nyota has asylum on New Vulcan," Spock interrupted him, which was highly unusual for the always polite Vulcan, betraying his rising unease.

"Yes, I know, but when she accompanied us to the Excalibur, she didn't have a chance to return to New Vulcan and Barnett restricted her." He moistened his lips. "Am I right that you intended to introduce her to your family and become engaged?"

Spock only nodded, and Bones groaned. "Superb! This is exactly what I assumed. You want to marry her sooner than planned so that Command can’t separate you, whatever the sentence of court martial will be." He gulped. "I contacted Selek to tell him of Sarek's and Khan's state. During the discussion I..., I asked for his help concerning you and Uhura."

The first officer cocked his head. “I fail to see what unsettles you so much. Your intervention was very considerate, Leonard. Selek knows about Nyota and me. I am certain he agreed to help.”
“Yeah!” Bones lowered his gaze, realizing in the back of his mind that the Vulcan had called him by his given name – as his older self did. “What I didn’t know was…” He took another deep breath. “…that Selek wasn't in his office but in T'Pau's.” There, the cat was out of the bag!

"Selek was with T'Pau?" Spock asked slowly, already assuming what had shaken the good doctor so much.

"Yes," McCoy nodded. "And she heard me refer to you and Uhura as a couple." He glanced back at the Vulcan, who had grown stiff. "I swear, I had no clue that Selek wasn't in his office – or that he wasn't alone. I learned of it when T'Pau more or less freaked out – well, for a Vulcan, you know. Selek remained calm, but your grandmother…” He combed his right hand through his already tousled hair. "She wasn't too happy about the whole thing and… Spock, I think I've given you and Nyota more trouble instead of help.” He looked like a kicked puppy at this moment; the brown eyes sad and full regret.

Spock was familiar with the concept of regret. Even a full-blooded Vulcan could face a situation in which he or she had to take the blame, and had to make up for it. And given McCoy's strong running feelings – and his deep compassion he usually hid so well – Spock understood the doctor's emotional turmoil.

This time it was the first officer, who took a deep breath. McCoy had put his foot in his mouth this time – or however this human phrase went, yet Spock realized that the CMO had only meant well. It wasn't his fault that Selek had been with T'Pau. Spock had to agree with McCoy. Knowing T'Pau, she would give him trouble, no doubt about it.

Realizing that McCoy still looked at him like a child hoping for less punishment than he deserved for his mischief, he audibly sighed.

"I know that you only wanted to help Nyota and me, Leonard, and I appreciate it," he said carefully and saw something like hope in the human's dark eyes. "Yet you could be right in your assessment that your intervention will backfire. T'Pau is not known for tolerance and understanding. I had hoped to speak first with Sarek about my intention to marry Nyota – to receive advice from him. Now I think this chance is forfeit.”

McCoy looked crestfallen. “I’m sorry, Spock,” he said quietly. “I’m so sorry.” He grimaced. “Do you think there is the tiniest chance that your older self will convince T’Pau that she should give you and Nyota the opportunity to explain yourself?”
“It depends,” the Vulcan answered slowly. “What exactly did she ask you about Nyota and me?”

Bones shrugged. "The usual, I guess. How long you two knew each other – which I couldn’t specify, yet she understood that you two have been together a while. I mentioned the academy.” He pursed his lips. “She also asked about Uhura, and I told her about Nyota's job, of her knowledge and... and that the whole crew thinks that you two belong together. I also told her and Selek that Uhura didn't hesitate to join you and us to fight against Section 31, risking her own arrest."

Spock lifted a brow. “You talked as Nyota’s friend with T’Pau?”

“Of course,” Leonard rumpled. “I was not speaking as the Enterprise’s CMO that moment, but simply as your and Uhura's friend, as I pointed out. I also mentioned my assumption regarding your intentions – that you maybe wanted to introduce Nyota to your family to give her and yourself the chance to stay together no matter what the trial will decide concerning us." He threw up both hands. "I have no clue how your grandmother took it – you Vulcans can be eerie when you're doing the staring thing as she did. I think she wasn't that happy learning that her grandson has his father's stubborn streak and wants to take a Terran woman as his wife." He shook his head. "I'll never forgive myself if I've destroyed what you and Uhura have," he whispered, looking away again.

Suddenly a far too warm and firm hand was laid on his shoulder. "Leonard, look at me, please!" The Vulcan's voice was unusually gentle. As Bones did as he was bidden; he glanced straight at Spock's calm, but also soft features.

"You tried to help – and perhaps your attempt was more successful than you think. Nyota has no blood relatives here on New Vulcan, who could have informed T'Pau of her relationship with me. But you – like Jim – are something close to family for Nyota – and as such you spoke with T'Pau. Therefore T'Pau was formally informed by one of Nyota's ‘family members' that a member of Surak's House wants to marry Nyota. Usually, the intended groom introduces the lady to a Clan Mother, but time demanded other actions. There is still the chance that T'Pau accepts this unusual, but reasonable proposal – because you only sought to ask her help."

McCoy frowned, then he rubbed his neck again. “In other words: I didn’t mess it up totally?”

"Oh, you certainly ‘messed’ T'Pau up enough that she would enough for you to distinguish it," Spock deadpanned, "but given time she may come to a decision that is acceptable for all of us. And, as you said, my older self is with her. I am sure that he will talk to her."

Bones’ look roamed over the Vulcan’s face. “I know that your people don’t say anything only to spend some comfort, yet my gut tells me that you attempt to calm me.”
"I do understand that humans easily blame themselves when something goes wrong – humans of exceptional character, at least. But be assured, my words are not only are chosen to offer you some comfort, but also to inform you about Vulcan tradition. You will stay for several weeks now, Leonard, and I do not want you to ‘drop another ball’.

McCoy chuckled – half relieved, half still rueful. "You could be a decent therapist, Spock – even in your Vulcan way. Thanks for that!"

"Your gratitude is reciprocated, Doctor. You tried to help and to protect Nyota and me – not from mortal danger, but for our planned future together. Thank you." He turned to leave.

“Well you still speak with your father before you face T'Pau?” Bones asked softly, and Spock looked back over his shoulder at him.

"This seems to be the best way," he affirmed. "Good night, Doctor." He left, and Bones took a deep breath.

A brandy! He'd trade a kingdom for a Saurian Brandy, but knowing the Vulcans, there were probably only a few bottles in some hotels, which only served to offworlders. And he, McCoy, couldn't leave the hospital at the moment. Not with Khan's life still at stake and a freaking captain, whose heart only beat for said Augment.

Sighing, Bones decided to have a last look at his two troublemakers before he would hit the pillow again – or, in this case, occupy the couch. Returning to the room that held Kirk, Khan, and Weiss, McCoy stopped dead in his tracks at the threshold. He wasn't certain how Jim managed it – maybe with Joaquin's super-strength – but somehow Kirk had moved his biobed so that there was no gap between it and Khan's. Jim lay on the mattress, eyes closed and holding one of Khan's hands. Joaquin sat on the other side in a visitor chair; his upper body rested on the bed beside his older brother, his head lay on his folded arms.

McCoy only shook his head. What should he do with those boys?

ST***ST

The morning came far too quick, even if the day and night cycle on New Vulcan was longer than Earth's. But so much happened the previous day that everyone, even the Vulcans needed time to rest (or meditate).
Jim woke very early but didn't rise, staying just where he was – beside Khan, holding his hand. Joaquin had moved to his bed during the night and was sleeping deeply; his stressed body (still healing from the long cryosleep and the psychological pressure of the last hours) needed time to adjust to everything, especially the higher gravity of New Vulcan.

Bones was also already on his feet after he received a call from M’Benga on a private frequency half an hour earlier. He was glad that his colleague and friend had no problem ignoring protocol to update him about the crew’s condition aboard. The painkillers had mostly worked, and everyone was declared fit for duty except those who were injured in the fight for control of the Excalibur and of course except for Sulu, who slept the sleep of the just. Leonard was not at ease. It should have been him who helped the crew. His place was in his medbay, but at the moment there was nothing he could do about it. And his very own personal troublemakers needed him – that went for the hobgoblin, as well as for Jim, Khan and even Joaquin for whom Bones worried.

In another room not far away, Spock ended his meditation just half an hour after Jim woke up. He left the meditation alcove and returned to the recovery room where his father rested. Sarek had entered a healing trance, and Spock knew that his father would remain that way for the next couples of hours. For a long moment, the younger Vulcan looked at the ambassador and slipped finally back into bed. It was, after all, still very early in the morning and feeling better after the meditation, Spock had time to ponder how to bring the topic of Nyota and himself to his father's attention and gain his support in this delicate matter.

Two hours later the peaceful night was over – in the New Vulcan Hospital and aboard the starships in the planet's orbit. While McCoy examined Khan again and wracked his brain over how to cheer up Joaquin, who was ashen pale and didn't want to eat breakfast (like Jim), Chekov and Riley were already hastening towards the transporter room. They had agreed to beam down as early as possible, and so they asked Kyle to beam them down 0758 ship's time. Kyle had received Wesley's permission for the two ensigns spend time on the planet, and so a minute later the two young men materialized on the campus of the Academy. Even now, early in the morning, the air was very warm, and both ensigns simply knew that at midday the heat would be almost intolerable for the most humans.

They entered the hospital and asked a Vulcan woman where the intensive care station was located, then headed in the given direction. Five minutes later, after riding the lift to the wrong level and twice taking the wrong corridor, they reached the waiting area of the surgery and intensive care unit. The area differed considerably from their equivalents on Earth. There were seats and tables, and even a replicator, but rooms were built along two walls, each one provided with thick, dark red curtains to offer privacy to the person occupying the space. Every space had a simple stone bench and an elegant iron holder where a bowl was placed. Chekov, always curious, stepped to one of the spaces and peeked down in the bowl. A soft scent emanated from it and he saw old-fashioned matches set on the edge of the bench. He realized that this little bowl was meant for a single flame.

He lifted both brows, as he remembered something Uhura once told him. "Zis has to be for
meditation,” he whispered to Kelvin, who had closed the distance to him. “I have smelled zis scent on Spock and Uhura a few times – when zey come to ze recreation deck after shift. Uhura once told me zat Vulcans use a single flame to concentrate before zey meditate.”

Riley nodded slowly and looked at the wall. "They're offering the family members or their friends a chance to come to terms with the condition of the sick or injured ones," he murmured, lowering his voice like Pavel out of respect for this place. "And everyone says Vulcans have no feelings."

"Bullshit," Chekov grumbled. "Even if our Mr. Spock is a special exception because of his human mozer, I know zat zey are sensitive. I saw his fazer on the bridge of ze Enterprise after Vulcan was destroyed and I watched him and Spock afterward. And all the ozer Vulcan survivors we had aboard… It was heartbreaking!” He took a deep breath. "Remember Selek yesterday, how he reacted as he zought our keptin in danger or as he learned zat Khan needed help? He was completely like our Spock when ze keptin is in trouble – his emotions were on his sleeve so to speak.”

Kevin pursed his lips and made an affirming gesture. "Come, let's look for Jim and the others," he murmured. "I think, Joaquin will be with them and…”

Pavel quickly waved him silent and pressed an index finger against his lips, before he pointed to an alcove at the end of the waiting area. The curtains were closed; the nook was in use, and Chekov didn't want to disturb the man or woman who had sought solitude to meditate. On silent feet, the two young men crossed the area and bypassed the alcove. The curtains weren't completely closed and the navigator, nosy as always, couldn't suppress the urge to throw a glance toward the occupant inside.

He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw the familiar shoulder-length brown hair and the simple civilian clothes that Enterprise’s replicator had produced only two days ago.

"Joaquin?” Pavel burst out in surprise, and the slender figure in the alcove raised startled his head. Big brown eyes looked at him with a glassy expression; then they cleared, and acknowledgment began to shine in them.

"Pavel?” While Weiss rose, Chekov already opened the curtains. Riley returned to his side instantly.

"Hey, mate, what are you doing here?” Kevin asked, smiling at Joaquin.

Pavel rolled his eyes. "He was obviously meditating," he deadpanned. "And I was stupid enough to interrupt him.” He grinned sheepishly at the young Augment. "Sorry for zat."
“No need to apologize, Pavel,” Weiss answered and stretched his slender frame. “I wasn’t far gone.” He sighed. “I never was good at meditation – especially not when I have so much on my mind.”

Chekov took in Joaquin’s pale face and the dark circles under his new friend’s eyes – eyes which held enough anxiety and sadness to stop his compassionate heart completely. "How’s your brozer doing?" he asked quietly – already assuming the answer.

"He was clinically dead yesterday after the surgery, then Spock got him back with this mind-sharing or whatever it's called. And last night he… He went into a coma." The words sounded calm, yet his eyes gave his inner turmoil away.

Pavel and Kevin gasped, then Chekov closed the small distance between them and pulled him into a brotherly embrace. Riley mirrored the gesture immediately.

For several seconds, Joaquin tensed, but after sensed their compassion and the well-meaning behind the gesture, he relaxed and returned the embrace, feeling as if he was together with his brothers again.

And at the door that led to the intensive care unit, a thunderstruck then smiling McCoy stood watching the little group hugging. He was glad that the youngest of his ‘problem children’ had found a place to relieve his stress and the moral support of his new friends.

Of course, Joaquin sensed his presence since he wasn't trying to meditate any longer. Looking over Pavel's shoulder, he saw the figure of the CMO in the door frame and instantly went on alert. "Noo?" he asked fearfully, which made the two other young men turn around.

Leonard lifted both hands in a calming manner. "No, no, son. No change. I just wanted to look for you, but I see that you already got yourself some company."

Chekov and Riley had both saluted – after all, McCoy was a staff officer. Bones smiled at them. “At ease, boys,” he said kindly. “I do hope that Wesley knows about your little trip?”

“Yes, Doctor,” Pavel nodded. “We got his permission to visit Joaquin when we’re off duty.”
"That's good to hear." McCoy came nearer and gave Weiss a critical look. "Okay, son, you're far too pale, too stressed, too exhausted." He glanced back at the two ensigns. "I am certain that there are a few restaurants around the hospital and the academy. Take Joaquin to one and see that he eats." He shook his head as the Augment boy opened his mouth to protest. "Healer Sorel already said he doesn't expect any changes in Khan's condition in the next few hours – and I still think that he is in a healing trance. So there is no need for you to stay here and to walk holes in the floor – or to worry your head off. There is nothing you can do at the moment. So go with your friends and have a look around. This is the first foreign planet you've visited, full of strange but fairly gentle people – if you don't irritate them too much, that is. Go. Get yourself some fresh air and try to find something for you to think about besides your brother. I'm sure Khan would want that. He didn't risk his neck for you and his other family members just so you could you linger inside a stupid hospital when there is a whole new world to explore."

Joaquin bit his lips. He knew that McCoy was right. There was no logic in spending the day at this place, yet he felt as if he were abandoning Noo if he left.

Pavel – realizing his new friend's dilemma – put a hand on his arm. "I know zat you don't want to leave your brozer, but he's in good hands here – and ze keptin is wiz him. We will only be away for a few hours and zen we'll come back. And I'm confident Dr. McCoy will call us if anyzing happens." He glanced at the CMO, who simply nodded.

"Yeah, no problem. Give me your frequency, Mr. Chekov, and I'll call if Khan decides to leave dreamland while you're away." He sighed. "It isn't as if I have anything else to do."

Pavel chuckled, looking straight through the grumpiness of the good doctor. It was his way of dealing with stress. Quickly, giving McCoy the frequency, he and Kevin pulled Joaquin with them before the young Augment could change his mind.

Bones watched them leave and took a deep breath. He wasn't as confident as he pretended to be, but he knew that the boy needed a time-out. Rubbing his stiff neck, he returned to his patient.

ST***ST

Admiral Barnett stepped into the Excalibur's transporter room to beam over to the Enterprise. His night had been short, too, because there had been long conversations with President Robertson and Vice President Whitman, who wanted to know in detail what happened on New Vulcan. Barnett wasn't surprised to learn that Robertson already knew about Sunrise's true identity and of him being the constructor of the SDD. Morrow and Nogura, who joined in had plenty of time to inform the first man of the Federation's near solving the riddle of ‘Sunrise'.
Robertson and Whitman were both shocked to learn what Norton and Section 31 had been ready to do to reach their goal. The assault of the Vulcan seat of government and taking T’Pau, of all people, hostage meant trouble, no doubt about it. And the fact that a man – wanted criminal or not – was nearly beaten to death by Starfleet's own Elite Security was something Robertson didn't want to think about in detail. Not to mention that Norton had threatened to kill Kirk, his officers, and the Vulcan High Minister. The president was furious, to say the least, especially after he learned that Dashwood and Conelly had been ready to put the Augment back into stasis or cryosleep which was truly just a death sentence of which they were fully aware. Robertson knew that the impending court martial would be nasty, yet he looked forward to it. And he had to admit to himself, secretly, he hoped that the outcome would be a good one for Kirk, his new Augment friend, and the officers of the Enterprise.

The talk went on for more than two hours, and afterward, Barnett didn't find any sleep easily. He read the reports he got from the four ‘boys', who gave Starfleet's Elite force a hard time, protecting their ship with the fierceness of a le-matya, once again. To think that two green ensigns, an injured young helmsman, and a little Royalan fought off a hostile boarding led by highly trained officers – it was almost laughable. The four had gained Barnett's heartfelt respect with the stunt they pulled.

After he finally lay down on the bed, his thoughts shifted to Kirk and the others down on New Vulcan. In his memories, the scenes in Selek's office replayed over and over again – Norton, who held T’Pau hostage, the short hand-to-hand battle, Kirk beating the crap out of Norton, and the Augment boy who tried to protect the Vulcan matriarch.

And then, afterward, Kirk’s reaction to Khan's forced surrender to his tormentors – the young captain had been half mad with worry for the Augment. This concern was far too intense for just a friend. Something was going on, and he couldn't put the finger on it yet, but he was determined to find out what it was. With these thoughts, he finally drifted into a restless sleep that was over far too soon.

Therefore he wasn’t in the best mood when he beamed over to the Enterprise to meet with Wesley and have a closer look at Starfleet's flagship. A quick inspection of Engineering made him think of the costs Starfleet would have to pay for the needed repairs. On the other hand, he couldn't deny that he was impressed with Scott's excellent work. It was almost a miracle that he had been able to keep the machines together until the damaged ship finally reached New Vulcan.

Barnett also spoke with Keenser and Sulu and stifled any comment as he learned that the other two heroes – Chekov and Riley – were on the planet to keep the Augment boy company. Of course, Scott defended this decision and even Keenser looked with big black eyes at the Chief in Command and grumbled, "Boy afraid, feels his brother's anguish. The boy needs warmth – needs friends! Keenser glad that others with him.” Compared to the amount the little alien talked normally, this was a speech to remember.

Richard rolled his eyes inwardly. Sweet Lord, the entire Enterprise’s officer staff seemed to
transform into a pack of fierce mother-hens when it came down to the two enhanced males – always protecting and watching out for them. There was no doubt; the two Augments belonged to them now; they had become a part of the family the command team had built around themselves.

After the inspection, Barnett and Wesley had a short briefing to determine how to proceed. There were many things to do before the *Lexington*, and the *Excalibur* would return to Earth. Richard put Wesley in charge of interviewing the scientists – those from the destroyed high-security station and Dashwood and Conelly. They, Nurreaux, Finnegan, Styles and his two allies would be questioned soon. But first, they would ask Norton a few questions. It was questionable if the Vulcans would deliver the treacherous admiral to Starfleet. After all, the man had attacked their government and the most respectable matriarch of the Vulcan High Council. It would be the Vulcans’ right to hold Norton, yet he was also a key figure in the conspiracy.

And then Barnett had to meet with Kirk, Spock and the others. Even if Richard had gained knowledge of what had happened aboard the *Enterprise* since Kirk recognized the true nature of the fake attack against the *Excalibur* in the Borderland, there were still many questions unanswered.

Leaving briefing room three, they met Scott on the way, who had come from an inspection of the impulse drives and was on his way to the bridge. Wesley and Barnett returned his polite nod and continued their talk. Bob moved to another topic that had to be discussed. “Richard, Lady Morganth wants to meet Selek – and Kirk and Khan. She sensed their great distress yesterday and intends to learn of their fate in person.” He threw Scott a short glance, hoping the engineer would get the hint and would warn Kirk that an empath was about to visit him and his sweetheart. If their love affair had been a secret so far, it wouldn't be much longer.

Barnett stared wide-eyed at him. "She wants to learn of… What IS it with those two that everyone wants to make certain that they're all right? And why, in the name of God, does Lady Morganth show any interest in them at all? Yes, all right, Kirk and Khan discovered Styles' foul game which saved the lady, Sarek, the others and me. I understand that she is concerned for the two troublemakers in a more personal way."

Behind him Scott bit his lips, having caught Wesley's pointed glare. Of course, he knew that Betazoids were empaths. Apparently, the lady in question had sensed Kirk's great turmoil and maybe Khan's pain, too, and worried about them. That was all right and even sweet given the fact that she didn't even know the two men, who had a big part in her rescue. Yet Scott realized immediately the danger that his friend and the Augment's true nature of relationship could be revealed, should the woman visit them.

What surprised Scott was Wesley’s meaningful look at him after he told Barnett the lady’s wish. And, as far as Montgomery was aware of, neither Wesley nor Barnett had the tiniest idea that Kirk and Khan had become lovers – bondmates even. Could the commodore's glance mean that he had learned of it? Did he want him, Scott, to warn Kirk? There was no chance of asking Wesley in a
direct way – not here and not now. In other words, it was once again up to Scott to give his friend and captain a warning of approaching trouble behind their superiors’ backs. Superb! Why was it always him who had to keep Kirk’s neck out of the noose?

His attention went back to the two staff-officers.

"She told me about how the Betazed Council would ask her questions about the Federation's newest hero and this mysterious ‘Sunrise’," Wesley replied to Barnett's complaining as they stepped into the next turbolift. "Betazed doesn't belong to the Federation yet, but the chance that they will join is high. We should cooperate – especially after Lady Morganth accompanied the delegation as a neutral member and was kidnapped and held captive during the mission because a group of our people used her and the others to re-start the war and make a bid for power. It's only logical that the Betazed Council would want to have details about the mess. And Kirk and Khan being those who initiated the rescue mission – well, the interest of the Betazoids concerning those men's fate is understandable."

The admiral groaned in the meantime. He knew that there was no way to deny the lady what she wanted. "Rrrright," he sighed. "I'll see what I can to do for her." Then he shook his head. "Damn clever move Khan made – becoming a war-hero and winning a whole lot of people for himself. And, what is unnerving, is the fact that he didn't do it on purpose, as you said – and I believe it, too. This man is the great, black knight with his heart in the right place – someone you fear and admire in one. I already see the media going in that direction should his identity and his role in the war ever become known to them!"

The lift reached the bridge, and the three men stepped into the control center. Scott walked to the engineer station, while Barnett's gaze wandered over the men and women present. Carol Marcus was also there, checking the weapons station and doing some repairs. Uhura was on duty, too, and even Barnett, who didn't know her that well, recognized the paleness beneath her chocolate brown skin and the dark circles under her eyes. The atmosphere on the bridge was tense; Kirk's and Spock's absence was like a hole in an otherwise tight net. Sulu was still in medbay, and with Chekov off duty too, the mood was even darker. The cheerful way of the young Russian was obviously missed by his comrades. Richard sighed.

Good God, he had known that the aftermath of the whole Section 31 thing was going to be highly unpleasant, but it has turned out to be one big mess!

"Any news from Kirk or Spock?" he asked Uhura, who shook her head. "No, Admiral. We haven't had any hails from the surface since yesterday evening when Dr. McCoy informed us about Ambassador Sarek's and Khan's condition." A lie – at least a little one. Of course, she knew of the private hails, but they were private, and therefore she had no problem being silent concerning them.
Barnett frowned slightly, and Wesley sighed, "Contact the hospital and try to get Dr. McCoy on the line, Lieutenant. It would be meaningless to beam down to the hospital only to learn that Kirk and Spock are still under McCoy’s observation.” He caught Richard’s surprised glance and added under his breath, only for the admiral to hear, "You don't want to have this overprotective CMO down your throat because you dare attempt to see one of his poor, sick sheep. I swear this man is creepier than a bunch of Klingons, Romulans, and Orions together when it comes to his patients."

This time the Chief in Command couldn't help himself. He had to chuckle. Oh yes, McCoy may be one of the best CMO's within the fleet; the man had gained himself quite the reputation over the last three years. But his temper when it came to his patients was notorious.

“Sirs?” Uhura got the both staff officers’ attention. "I reached the hospital and the ward healer of the intensive care unit. Dr. McCoy is not available at the moment. He is in a briefing with Vulcan healers." Worry and sadness shimmered in her eyes. "Khan went into a coma last night."

Scott cursed quietly, and even Barnett couldn't suppress a quiet, "Shit!" Then he glanced back at Uhura. "Did they give you any details?"

Nyota shook her head; her kind heart was full of worry for her captain and friend – and for the Augment, too. Somehow Khan had become one of them, a member of this fine little family aboard this mighty ship, and she was concerned for him.

“Then maybe we should interview Norton first,” Wesley suggested. “Kirk will be not availa…"

"Kirk isn't the one in a coma, Bob," Richard reminded him. "He must have some time for us. After all, he doesn't have much to do right now.” He sighed inwardly, as he caught Wesely’s uncomfortable shift. What in God's name was it with Kirk being beside himself because of Khan? Grimacing, he grumbled, "Yet I agree that we should first get the permission of Selek to see Norton, and then we'll have a closer look at our troublemakers.”

Wesley smiled at him, and the comment ‘good choice' was on the tip of his tongue, but he bit it down. He turned towards Uhura again. "Lieutenant, please contact New Vulcan and ask when Selek will be in his office.”

Nyota nodded, and while the two staff officers talked quietly with each other, she hailed the New Vulcan seat of government already assuming the outcome. Spock would be on duty if he were in Selek's shoes given the current situation – and she was right. A half minute later she called, "Sirs, High Minister Selek is already present and accepts your transmission."
Barnett and Wesley exchanged a quick look. Selek was there at this early hour? Well, this was Spock after all! A moment later the screen showed the aged, weathered face of the Vulcan high minister. After exchanging polite greetings, Richard got straight to the point. "High Minister, I want to visit Mr. Norton to interview him. Seeing that he is in your custody, I ask for your permission."

Selek cocked his head and lifted a brow – a gesture that was very familiar for Barnett, Uhura, and Scott. "Admiral Norton is in our high-security area, and despite some emotional outbursts of an unpleasant nature which certainly wasn't good for his blood pressure, he is well. If you want to visit him, I've nothing against it, yet I want to accompany you – as the high minister of the planet whose seat of government he assaulted – not to mention his manhandling the Lady T'Pau."

Barnett nodded. "Of course, High Minister. It's in both our interests to get answers to the many questions we have. I also want to ask you about what transpired in your office before I showed up."

Spock Prime frowned slightly. "Hasn't Captain Kirk told you about it?"

"Sorry, High Minister, but I haven't seen Kirk or talked to him since we beamed aboard the Excalibur to stop Styles and rescue a certain Augment from being beaten to death. And I don't know when Kirk will be available for an interview. He seems to have taken Khan's condition very much to heart."

Something shifted in the old Vulcan's face. Nothing Barnett could put the finger on, yet there was a slight twitch in his expression that made Richard wary. Apparently, Selek knew more than he let on, but being Vulcan – a Spock from another timeline who seemed to be devoted to Kirk as his younger self was – the admiral knew that it was fruitless to ask him about it.

"I haven't heard anything from Dr. McCoy since yesterday evening," Selek said. "Is there a problem with Mr. Singh?"

Barnett sighed. "He went into a coma last night. Obviously, even his augmented nature is having trouble healing from the serious injuries he sustained."

"I see," Selek said quietly; his far too human heart went out to the younger version of his T'hy'la knowing Jim had to be crestfallen by his soulmate's condition. "In this case, Admiral, I suggest that we meet at the hospital. All questions can be asked there, too, and Captain Kirk will not be required to leave Mr. Singh for an extended period in case his present is needed."
Richard pursed his lips. "All due respect, High Minister, but why for God's sake should Kirk's presence be needed concerning Khan. Mr. Singh is in very capable hands and…"

"Admiral, this is a private matter that I am unable to discuss with you. It's up to Captain Kirk to satisfy your curiosity about this topic." Selek had taken a slow breath before he continued. "We will meet in fifteen minutes in the intensive care unit of the hospital, Admiral. In the meantime, I will instruct our security to prepare for our visit of Admiral Norton which can take place after our talk with Captain Kirk."

“I agree,” Robert nodded, aware of the fact that he wasn't given any choice. "There is one thing more, sir. Lady Morganth, the Betazed ambassador, asks politely for a meeting with you. She also wants to go the hospital to pay Ambassador Sarek and Captain Kirk a visit.”

For a moment, Barnett was certain he caught Old Spock sighing. They all knew how prying Betazoids could be. "I'd be honored to welcome Lady Morganth to our planet, Admiral. Please inform her about it."

Richard nodded. "Thank you, High Minister. See you in fifteen."

The Elder bowed his head and cut off the connection. Richard groaned – for what he was sure was the thousandth time this morning. "Okay," he grumbled and closed the distance to Wesley. "I ask myself how Kirk managed to get not one but two Vulcans as personal bodyguards," he mumbled. "Oh, I forgot, they are the same person."

Bob smiled amusedly. "Don't forget to add his staff to the list of ‘bodyguards’, Richard. They all would and already have thrown themselves into the fray for him."

"Yeah," was all Barnett said – torn between frustration and amusement. Then he straightened up. "Well, I think you should start to interview Styles, Nurreaux and Finnegan. I'll beam down to…"


Both superior officers turned around. “Kirk?” Barnett asked, and Nyota shook her head.
“No, sir, it’s… T’Pau’s office.” Surprise was in her voice.

Wesley and Barnett exchanged a glance. T’Pau – this early in the morning? This could only mean one thing: Trouble. Nevertheless, Richard ordered, "On screen, Lieutenant!"

A moment later, the stern face of the old matriarch appeared on the screen – and though the Vulcan's expression was motionless, Barnett knew that this wasn't a friendly call…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Ooooh crap, what does T’Pau want? Of course it has to do with Uhura – and Barnett has no clue of our second couple of lovebirds. And concerning Jim and Khan – well, in the next chapter Richard will get it. And not in a gentle way, rather he gets confronted with the true relationship of our two boys with a big ‘bang’.

Yet also there is still the question, if T’Pau agrees with Spock’s choice of marrying Nyota, and if not, what our dear Vulcan will do to get the ‘maiden’s’ hand in marriage.

Furthermore Joaquin will meet the Shadow-Gang – better to say, he will become aware of them, after all he already met them aboard the Excalibur, but was too distracted by his brother’s condition to realize how strange these guys are.

I hope, you liked the last chapter, even if it was without so much trouble. But sometimes even the more silent things are serious. And – what a wonder – Bones has a bad conscious because of Spock. Right, our dear CMO is a ‘softie’ at heart, who tries to mask it desperately with his hard charm, but to admit it in front of Spock is a new one. I hope, you loved to read this scene like I loved to write it.

As always – I’m curios of your reactions.

Have a nice rest of the week and a better weekend,
Love

Yours Starflight
Love is worth everything

Chapter Notes

My dear readers!

I’m really sorry that the publishing of the next chapter is so much overdue, but my dear beta-reader Rhiannon as very hard, personal time in the moment (family matter) and ran out of time for our hobby. Cerridwen has agreed to edit the next few chapters and I can already promise that the pauses between the chapters will be shorter now.

Thank you so very much for all the comments (and kudos); will answer them in a few hours.

For now I wish you fun with the next chapter.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 80 – Love is worth everything

Barnett watched the image of T’Pau on the screen. “Ma’am,” he greeted her politely; lifting his right hand into the Vulcan greeting Ta’al.

T’Pau simply returned the greeting, before she came straight to the point. “Admiral, I require your assistance in a private matter.”

Richard controlled his features to hide his bafflement. He hadn’t the tiniest clue what T’Pau meant with ‘private matter’, but he had a certain feeling that it wouldn’t be a comfortable one. When Vulcans indeed referred to something ‘private’ then it was of enormous importance, otherwise they wouldn’t speak of it – especially not to an outworlder.

And, after everything that happened yesterday, Barnett was well aware of the fact he better not deny his support to whatever the matriarch demanded from him. “How can I be at your service, Ma’am?” he asked.

Again the old Vulcaness didn’t waste any time with polite phrases. “It has been brought to my
attention that Lieutenant Uhura, the Enterprise's first communication officer, has been restricted to her quarters when off duty. I require her return to New Vulcan.”

Barnett threw a glance over his shoulder at a very aghast looking Uhura. “I beg your pardon, Ma’am?” He asked astonished. He didn’t know if he was still asleep and having a very – very! – weird dream, or if this was indeed reality. Why should T’Pau be interested in Uhura? His eyes hung at the Vulcan matriarch, who looked sternly from the screen at him; her dark eyes as hard as granite.

T’Pau lifted an elegant slanted brow; asking herself for the hundredth time why humans had the very illogical urge to pretend to have not heard something correctly when they didn’t agree with it. “I was informed that Lieutenant Uhura is hold aboard the Enterprise despite her status of being an accepted asylum seeker on New Vulcan,” she repeated. “I require her to return to us, for that she needs your permission to prevent personal consequences.”

Frowning, Barnett cocked his head. “Ma’am, contrary to all Starfleet regulations I allowed that Kirk and his comrades can stay out of custody, but…”

“Admiral.” T’Pau’s voice became sharp as steel. “Only yesterday Starfleet assaulted our seat of government, threatened Selek, my grandson and his friends – and one of your admirals took me hostage. I know that Norton is a traitor and ran amok as he felt himself cornered, yet there will be consequences because of these actions. You owe us – and I don’t think that under these circumstances you will deny me my request of speaking in person with my grandson’s intended.”

Silence!

Absolute silence!

You could have heard the famous needle hitting the floor.

Barnett didn’t even realize that his jaw hung open, while Carol looked with big eyes at Nyota, and then began to grin as she realized that her friend was about to marry Spock.

Scotty blinked in shock. The two wanted to marry? Really? Well, it was about damn time, but why hadn’t they said anything – at least Uhura? He glanced at her and realized that the pretty young Bantu woman was utterly taken by surprise, too. Well, Vulcan proposal obviously differed from Earth tradition, if Spock’s Granny was informed of the First Officer’s wish before the bride.
And with this, another thought struck him. ‘Spock’s grandmother… Holy Mary, T’Pau is Spock’s grandmother! She’s one of the most important Vulcan Elders – of Surak’s House, as far as I know. And therefore Spock is… By Nessie’s giant flippers! Spock is kind of royalty. Just have a look. The silent waters are always the deepest ones!’

His gaze wandered back to Uhura and he had to stifle a chuckle.

Nyota was utterly speechless. Spock hadn’t mentioned his intentions – not once. They’d grown pretty close – a cohesiveness that went beyond of sharing a bed, and Uhura had hoped that Spock would make the last step, but this here seemed to come out of no-where. And, above all, how did T’Pau already know about it? Spock was still in the hospital after he donated blood for his father. Of this she was certain. He wouldn’t leave Sarek’s side so soon after he got his father back from death, so to speak. And he also would never leave Jim in the situation the captain found himself being placed – with Khan’s life still at stake which had to trouble her friend and captain beyond imagination. She simply knew that Spock hadn’t any chance to speak with T’Pau in private. So how did the matriarch know of his and her – Uhura’s – relationship?

After seconds of thunderstruck hesitation, Nyota remembered Vulcan traditions. Quickly she stepped into the range of the cameras and lifted her right hand for the Vulcan greeting Ta’al. A fluid of Vulcan words left her lips as she greeted the Vulcaness in the High Vulcan Standard; showing her deepest respect like this. T’Pau’s face revealed nothing if she was surprised or pleased to hear the young woman speaking her language that well, yet her dark eyes softened, as she returned the greeting.

Barnett had caught himself by now and turned towards the communication officer. “You and Commander Spock are… a couple?”

Nyota felt some resolve waking in her. What was so unbelievable in her and Spock being an item? Lifting her chin a little bit she turned her head and looked the Chief in Command straight into the eyes and said, “Yes. Is there a problem, sir?”

Richard was very aware of T’Pau listening to every word and that the old hag wouldn’t be pleased if he said something against her grandson and his future wife. “No, Lieutenant, not really – after all you both are members of the bridge staff and therefore no advances could be demanded or given. I’m only… confused that I haven’t heard anything of this planned marriage concerning two staff officers of our flagship.”

‘Guess who is surprised here, too!’ Uhura thought dryly; aloud she spoke, “Vulcans are very private people, as you certainly know, and until we have received the assent of Commander Spock’s clan nothing will be officially mentioned.” She cocked her head. “Sir.”
Barnett knew better than to rebuke her – after all she did nothing else than submitting to the tradition of the culture she was about to join. And, like any other culture’s traditions within the Federation, the Vulcan one was accepted and protected by the UFP Constitution.

Knowing that here diplomacy was more demanded than strictly following Starfleet protocol, he saw no other option than to bow to T’Pau’s request. “Very well, Lieutenant. But I can count on your return when it comes to the court material?”

“Of course, Admiral. I won’t dishonor the House of Surak or my oath as a Starfleet officer.”

Barnett believed her without hesitation. “All right, then please pack the things you’re going to need on New Vulcan and report to the transporter room. I’ll instruct the chief there to beam you down.” His glance returned to the screen and for a second he thought he recognized some kind of satisfaction on the matriarch’s face, but it vanished so quickly he assumed he was mistaken. “Ma’am, please give us the coordinates Lieutenant Uhura can beam to.”

“My assistant will inform you. I expect Lieutenant Uhura’s arrival.” She watched the young Terran woman bowing towards her, saluting to her superior officer and vanishing from the camera range. Then T’Pau’s attention was driven to the next topic, as she slightly bent forward. “Am I correct that you plan to beam to the hospital soon?”

Again Barnett had to control his reactions. “Yes,” he answered. “To pay your son a visit – and to speak with your grandson and Captain Kirk.”

T’Pau’s expressionless features became even sterner. “Please keep in mind that James Kirk and his officers are under Vulcan protection, Admiral. The same goes for the two Augments and their still sleeping comrades.”

Barnett took another deep breath. “Are you certain that you or your government want to take the responsibility for them, Ma’am? I know that Mr. Singh was violated and run amok – something the other Augments have no fault in, yet they are not comparable with ‘usual’ humans.”

Again a black eye-brow was lifted. “I appreciate your concern, Admiral, but I think that we are far more qualified to handle them than Starfleet. What I learned from Selek about Mr. Singh and what I also learned from the short contact with the Augment-boy who shielded me during the combat in Selek’s office, the Augments are highly intelligent, have mental abilities, are much stronger than mere humans and have deep running emotions. They remind me of our people before Surak came to
show us a better way to handle our aggressive streaks. We’ll be able to help the Augments how to cope with this new world they will find themselves in, and I’m also sure that we can teach them some self-control concerning their mental and emotional strengths.”

Richard pursed his lips and nodded slowly. “It’s a high responsibility and even risk you are willing to take, Ma’am.”

For a second the left corner of the old Vulcaness’ mouth curled. “Not more than we took when we made the first contact with your people, Admiral – and look what a benefit it was. Not only for you, but also for us.” She cocked her head. “What are your intentions concerning the violation of Mr. Singh? I know that he committed crimes, too, yet what has been done to him can’t remain unpunished.”

‘God dammit’, Richard thought. ‘This woman is more forward with the topics than anyone I ever met before. Vulcans! It costs a lot and needs even more time to win them, but once you’ve gained their protectiveness they defend and fight for you like a wild sehlat for its puppies! And not only Kirk, but also somehow Khan has won at least the House of Surak.’

He cleared his throat. “Those, who are responsible for his injuries – and the other crimes which were inflicted on him – will be brought to court material.”

T’Pau nodded. “A small but first step to eliminate the criminal subjects within Starfleet. It’s good to hear this and makes it easier for me to decide what should be done concerning Admiral Norton.” She bent slightly forwards in her chair. “He is still in our custody. We’ll deliver him to you and Starfleet justice when you return to Earth. If you want to interview him first, please inform Selek in advance.”

This time Barnett was grateful. New Vulcan had every right in the world to take justice in its own hands, yet T’Pau was ready to let Starfleet handle Norton. There weren’t many other planet governments within the Federation which would have reacted like this. “Thank you, Ma’am. He assaulted your seat of government, the employees there and even you in person. To leave him to Starfleet Command is regarded well.”

Again the matriarch didn’t show what was on her mind, as she answered, “The Federation has Her laws and Her justice which are involved whenever necessary. It responds to everyone’s rights and duties independent of heritage and title. I will be there when Justice will be called. Only then is the right time to bring everything into the open.” She straightened her shape. “Good day, Admiral.”

The screen went dark and showed a moment later the ball of New Vulcan again.
Barnett sighed. He had a good imagination of what T’Pau meant with her last words: She would be present when the court material happened – as a witness and, as Richard would bet his last shirt, also as support for her grandson, Kirk and the others. The House of Surak was the most influenced clan of Vulcan and as a close friend of Spock, Kirk was more or less under the personal protection of Sarek’s family. Of course something like this shouldn’t matter when it came to court material, yet Richard knew that this connection had to be considered.

But for now there were more important things to do – like speaking with Kirk, and delivering Uhura to her maybe future grandmother-in-law.

ST***ST***ST

The same time Barnett had his short briefing with Wesley before he went to bridge to talk with ‘Selek’, Chekov, Riley and Weiss left the hospital. The day was still young and the murderous heat was yet to come. The soft wind from the lake made it almost pleasurable to walk down the campus.

Joaquin had to admit that his curiosity was growing despite his worry for his ‘brother’. Again he could smell the foreign air, the strange scents of the plants which grew along the campus, and he took in the architecture around him. The sky was a light red orange and as Pavel saw his gaze, he explained, “Vulcan – ze original Vulcan I mean – had ze same colored sky in ze morning. During ze day it became more a grey-sandy color – exactly like here.”

Weiss nodded slowly. “It’s… difficult to deal with so many new things at one time. My senses take in so many different, foreign sensations, it’s dizzying.” He grimaced. “Right, I was outside yesterday, too, but as I have to admit, I was utterly caught in meeting the Vulcans, to see my other family members being brought to safety and then this damn shit in Selek’s office.” He shook his head. “It’s…”

He stopped dead in his tracks as he saw a group of people coming their way. A very strange group of people, as he realized. In the front marched two beings which reminded him of pigs on two legs, with curly messy hair, something that could be a beard and a mouth that was definitely a snout. Beside them walked a slender woman with fiery red hair who had a… tail! She reminded him of a cat becoming human. On the other side was a man, whose face held several stripes which obviously weren’t any tattoos, but were part of his skin. Behind them walked a male in his middle twenties who looked, to Joaquin’s relief, simply human. Something stirred in his memories. He already had seen these people – yesterday, as Jim and the others raced to the transporter room to bring Noo down to the hospital. He hadn’t paid much attention then, but now…

“Just have a look,” Chekov grinned. “If zis isn’t Ze Shadow…” He caught Joaquin’s confused gaze
and added, “The gang your brozer hung out wiz.”

“These are Noo’s allies during the last weeks?” Weiss almost squeaked; staring at the people who could have come straight from a fantasy novel.

Kevin began to laugh. “They are not the only strange guys in the universe.”

“I believe you!” Joaquin croaked as just that moment two other, very foreign looking men bypassed them; reminding Weiss at amphibians just coming out of the water. How they could be comfortable in this dry climate was beyond him.

The Shadow was reaching them now and Caviw watched the young warrior between the two other Terran males with worry. They all had learned from Ritek what kind of violence Khan had been forced to endure during his first encounter with Section 31 – with Conelly. They had been outraged – furious! Conelly could call himself lucky that he was aboard the Excalibur in custody; otherwise there had been the chance that he wouldn’t have lived to see another day. Tellarits and Caitians were very possessive and protective of their family members and friends, and something like rape could end in a very painful death for the rapist. Neither Galven, nor Caviw would have had a problem with killing Conelly with their bare hands – even if that would have meant jail for them.

But with Conelly out of reach for them, their whole attention was driven to the victim – to their friend and comrade in arms, Khan. And therefore their concern lay also with his younger brother. None of them knew if the boy had learned of this one detail of the many torments the older Augment had been through, and none of them would mention it for now, yet their urge to comfort and take care of their friend’s younger brother drove them. At least the boy wasn’t alone. Neither Caviw nor the others had ever met the two young Starfleet officers, who accompanied the barely grown enhanced man, but given their gazes and the protective way they hunched close to the boy told The Shadow that they meant well for the young Augment.

Galven greeted them first. “Morning, Gentlemen.” he oinked, before he looked straight at Joaquin. “I learned that you’re Khan’s younger brother.”

It was a statement, not a question, yet Joaquin felt himself compelled to answer, “Yes, I am.”

The Tellarit nodded. “How is he doing?”

Weiss gulped and looked at the others. He found himself surrounded by the aliens and for a long
moment anxiety woke in him. Then he felt Pavel and Kevin stepping closer to him and to his surprise it indeed calmed him. Was he really watching them as friends already that he trusted them like this? Obviously the answer to this was 'yes'. “He’s… in a coma – or healing trance. The healers are not sure,” he said quietly to the stout alien.

The cat-like woman bent forwards and laid a slender hand with very sharp nails on his shoulder. “Calm down, young warrior,” she said softly, while pointy teeth were to see. “I know this all must be very unsettling for you, but you are among friends.” Her tail came around and was laid on his other shoulder in a soothing manner. Perplex he stared at it – and Caviw began to giggle. “Your brother used to pull at it to tease me,” she explained.

Weiss frowned. “Noo… pulled your tail?” he asked perplex; imagine Khan of all people pulling a cat-human at its… ungh… her tail. It was… unbelievable. Almost. His brother did have a sense of mischief after all.

“I think he’s the only one who is allowed to so and come out of it healthy,” the other young human looking man chuckled. “Hi, I’m Jeff.” he introduced himself and offered his hand. The others followed his example and within a minute Joaquin had touched more alien hands than he liked. It was so… strange, unnerving almost, yet he sensed that these beings didn’t mean him any harm.

“So, any chance that we can visit your brother or Jim?” the man who had introduced himself as ‘Jeff’ asked.

Joaquin shrugged. “Dr. McCoy sent me away to ‘clear my head out’, as he put it. He and some Vulcan healers were fuzzing around Noo as I tried to meditate, and Jim was sitting on his bed, jumpy like a caged tiger.”

Galven oinked something in his own language, before he grumbled. “No wonder. The two are so smitten with each other; it must be hell for the boy to watch his mate in such a condition.”

Weiss’ eyes widened. “You know about them?”

Promptly the whole gang burst out laughing, before Calvin giggled, “They are so cute together!”

Joaquin almost choked. Noo and ‘cute’? He could imagine his brother’s reaction to that statement.
Galven rolled his eyes in a very human way, before he turned towards the two ensigns. “How are the things aboard the *Enterprise*? I hope, Kirk’s superiors don’t give you guys too much trouble for your solo actions within the last weeks?”

Chekov sighed. “Zey are not too happy zat ze keptin hid Khan on his ship. Better to say, Admiral Barnett isn’t zat delighted about it.”

“I thought so,” Caviw nodded. “Mrs. Whitman talked with us about Khan during our journey to New Vulcan, and we learned a few things about him, we didn’t know about earlier – like him losing it last year and running amok. Yet we have only come to know him as a loyal ally, who cares dearly about those who hold his heart. And in my culture family comes above everything else, so fighting for them is usual.”

“On my planet the people think the same,” the other pig-like man added, who had introduced himself as Galten.

“The lad may have overdid it a little bit,” his brother oinked, “yet we Tellarits can justify the best how it is to lose your temper when your own clan is at stake. I only hope the admiral learns to see it likewise.”

“Admiral Barnett is grateful for Mr. Singh’s help,” Pavel said carefully. “And he also sort of admires ze keptin for doing ze right zings despite any protocol or orders from zese traitors. But he has to weigh ze protocol and what ze heart tells, and so it’s not easy for him. But he already allowed ze keptin, Mr. Spock and ze ozers to remain out of custody. Mr. Scott, for example, can be on duty but under observation.”

Galven grinned at him. “This Mr. Scott is a fine engineer. How is he doing?”

“He’s very busy with the repairs,” Riley answered. “Jim let the engines run to their maximum for several days despite their condition, and now they are more or less done for – at least the warp drive.”

“Hm, I could give them a hand up there,” Galven pointed a hoof-like hand towards the skies. “It isn’t as if I have nothing else to do in the moment.”

“Zank you, sir, but I zink you need Admiral Barnett’s or at least Commodore Wesley’s okay for zat – wiz you being a civilian, and so on,” Chekov smiled sheepishly.
“No problem, Buddy, I’ll call him. It isn’t as if we hadn’t had a few talks with each other before,” Galven smirked. “I also talked with Diego last night – better to say, I sent him a message about everything that happened here. He’s a friend of your brother, too, and…”

“The man who let Noo and Jim stay in his cabin at the lake on this planet the Klingons tried to assault later?” Weiss asked; glad that he knew at least a few things of this strange new world.

“Yes, exactly,” the man with the stripes on his face nodded, while he chuckled, “I think, the outcome for him was the best of us all. He got the task to fix a few of Starfleet’s ships after the battle, and provide them with spare parts. His ship yard profits big by it.”

Galven glared at Ritek. “This was my speech, you know.”

“Aw, don’t fret, piggy. There is still enough news you can tell the boys.”

“Piggy?” the Tellarit outraged. “Did you just call me ‘piggy’?”

The other man sighed. “How often I have told you to look in the mirror – really look, I mean. You do resemble a Terran p…”

“What?” Pushing his fists there were other people had a waist, Galven straightened his shape so that he reached to the Rigelian’s chest. “And you, chipmunk, have…”

“Guys, not here.” Jeff cut in. “Heavens, you are on the almost ‘holy’ grounds of the New Vulcan Academy and the hospital. And when I see the gazes the Vulcans are throwing in our direction, I get the feeling that our stay will be overdue soon, if you two continue like this. So shut up, for once! And, by the way, what shall our young lion here think of you, if you behave like old-fashioned sumo wrestlers?”

Galven cocked his head. “What is a sumo-wrestler? Are you trying to offend me, Jeff?”

Caviw groaned, and shook her head, before she addressed the two ensigns and the Augment-boy. “Never mind them. This is a never-ending story.” She pointed nonchalant at the Rigelian and the Tellarit with the tip of her tail. Then her glance fell at the hospital. “Well, as long as those healers are
flittering around our White Tiger, we’ve no chance to have a look at him. Just as well we can have a nice, decent breakfast until the way is free for us.”

“’White tiger’?” Joaquin echoed; already assuming to whom the cat-lady was referring.

He was right, because she simply grinned, “It’s a cover-name we came up with for your brother. I saw a photo of a white tiger of your planet and with its blue eyes and white and black, it really resembles Khan – including the grace and danger both possess.”

Weiss stared at her, while Jeff sighed, “We so are not going down this road again, Sweetie. The man is taken, as you know.” He shook his head. “But in one thing you’re right: breakfast.” He pointed at a building on the other side of the street. “They’ve intergalactic food over there. Come on, boys, I’ll buy you a meal.” Without waiting for a reply he began to head in the right direction, and the others followed him; among them Galven and Ritek, who couldn’t stop grumbling some more things beneath their breaths.

ST***ST***ST

Lost in thought Uhura entered the transporter room; carrying only a small bag. After all, she already had taken her most needed clothes and utensils with her as she accompanied Spock, Kirk and the others yesterday to New Vulcan, yet she was glad to have the chance to save some personal items – not only her own, but also some of Spock’s he valued. Yes, they would eventually return to the Enterprise – maybe to fly back to Earth to face court material, yet Nyota didn’t take the risk that Command would store their stuff somewhere. Some of Spock’s belongings were very personal; especially those that he got from his mother, and even if he called it ‘illogical’ Uhura simply knew that these things were very important for him.

“Hey, lass.” Scotty’s voice torn her out of her thoughts and startled she looked up. She smiled as she recognized Montgomery, who stood at the controls. Kyle was nowhere to be seen.

“Scotty,” she nodded. “Are you beaming me down?”

“Aye,” he said and waved her urgently over to him. Curious she closed the distance to him and cocked her head. “What is it, Gomery?” she asked.

“Have ye heard that a Betazoid is goin’ ter visit the capt’n and Khan?”
Nyota made an affirming gesture. “Yes, she’s the ambassador Wesley and the others rescued…”

“She’s an empath – an’ Barnett dunna know about our lovebirds.” He saw the realization on her face and added, “I think Wesley has at least an idea about the two – gave me quite the pointin’ look as he told Barnett about the lady’s wish. I’ll try ter contact Jim via the private frequency we agreed on, but maybe you’ve also the chance to warn him? If Barnett learns that he and Khan are…”

The same moment the door opened and revealed the admiral in question – and Scotty, always the quick thinker, instantly switched the topic smoothly. “Afterwards the transmitter should be okay again. I’ll have a look at it, lass.”

“Thanks, Scotty,” Uhura answered; pretending to discuss some business with Scotty and that she hadn’t recognized Barnett’s arrival. “I don’t know if I’m only over-sensible, but I really think there were some noises in the background which don’t belong there.”

“Always on duty, Lieutenant.” Richard said not unkindly – and Nyota did a very realistic show of being startled. Jumping an inch into the air she whirled around, gasping an “Admiral!”

Richard chuckled quietly. “That jumpy, Lieutenant? I can understand it. I don’t want to be in your shoes in the moment – facing T’Pau all alone, who certainly is going to probe you a lot before she gives her permission for you and her grandson to marry.”

“By the way, Nyota,” Scott smirked. “Congratulations!”

Uhura sighed; relieved that Barnett bought her little show. “I think that’s too early, Scotty. First I’ll have to pass the test of his Clan-Mother.” This time her groan was real. “Sweet Lord, why has it to be T’Pau?”

Again Barnett had to grin, while he fastened the strip of his tricorder around his shoulders he would take with him to record Kirk’s and Spock’s statements. “You have my sincere sympathy, Lieutenant. I dealt with the old dragon a lot of times and…” He cleared his throat. “My apologies for that slip of politeness. After all, you will belong to her House soon, if everything runs smoothly.” He cocked his head. “Yet I think this whole proposal came as a sort surprise for you.”

Uhura promptly grimaced. “Yeah, I haven’t the tiniest clue how she learned about Spock and me. Spock certainly had no chance to speak with her in private since his arrival on New Vulcan, and T’Pau may be a wise woman and her mental abilities are one of the most powerful ones among her
people, but she is no seeress.”

Barnett nodded slowly and watched the young, brilliant woman with almost fatherly affection – despite the fact that she was in big trouble just like her friends. “Am I right that Spock hasn’t proposed to you until now?”

An almost sheepish smile was the answer, followed by an, “You are right, sir. I hoped for him to ask me, but…” She made a fleeting gesture; sighing again.

The admiral laid one strong hand on her small shoulder. “Just be yourself and don’t back down in front of her. I’ve come to learn that it gains her respect if someone speaks his or her mind. And knowing you, you’re going to pass this ‘test’ with flying colors – just like you did at the Academy and here aboard the Enterprise.”

Nyota gave him a warm glance. “Thank you, sir. I know that all of us including me are in deep water for covering for Khan, and I’m grateful that you gave us the chance to explain everything without putting us behind bars.”

“Even if Jim Kirk sometimes behaves like a good, old-fashioned cowboy we aren’t in the wild west anymore, Lieutenant. Bars are history,” he chuckled. “And I do know whom I can give my trust and whom not. Kirk, you and the others definitely have earned it, even with the stunt you all pulled. And if I would put everyone in custody that covered for Khan, I would have to lock up the whole crew – and then there is no-one who would take care of our flag-ship. And, by the way, Kirk has some very mighty protectors I really don’t want to piss off even more. And despite that fact, I owe him, Khan, Spock, you and you too, Mr. Scott, my life. If it hadn’t have been for you all, Commodore Wesley would have never come to our rescue, Luengo’s plan would have been successful and the Federation would be back at war now at latest. And Starfleet would have the blood of seventy two innocent people on her hands, too – not to speak of the many lives the continuation of the war would demand. So, to arrest heroes doesn’t go well with me, the public and certainly not with the media. And, above all, the president and Mrs. Whitman declared that you all have to remain free – but under observation, even if it is only a formally thing. This all doesn’t really give me any choice.” He pointed to the transporter pads with another smirk. “And now – off you go. Don’t let T’Pau wait.”

Uhura gave him one of her wide, brilliant smiles and stepped onto the transporter platform. Taking a deep breath she addressed Scotty, “Just check the transmitter in my console and please run some tests with it. I let you know how everything went.”

Montgomery grinned at her. Of course he understood the real meaning of her words – that he had to use her communication station to send Jim a short warning and that she would try to do the same. “Aye, Nyota, don’t fear. I’ll take care of it.”
She nodded. “Energize!”

A moment later she vanished in the golden light of the transporter beam. Barnett rubbed his neck and stepped himself on a transporter pad. “All right, Mr. Scott, beam me down to the hospital. I’m certain you know the coordinates well by now.”

A large grin spread over the engineer’s face. “Aye, sir, ya could say that.” He activated the transporter and watched how the Chief in Command vanished, too.

The sound of the transporter beam had barely faded away, as Scott was already running out into the corridor, heading towards the bridge. He had to warn Jim that a full blown empath was about to come his way. He only hoped that he were able to send the secret transmission before Barnett would reach Kirk.

ST***ST

Uhura had materialized in the front of the flat large house, built in the typical rational style of Vulcan architecture. She had seen pictures of Gol and of the ancient buildings near the former Vulcan Academy, where the Elders had their working domicile – among them T’Pau. What a difference to this actual Seat of the Elder, yet it held the remains of Vulcan’s culture.

Only a few artifacts had been saved in the minutes before Vulcan was destroyed, and the new building was not even the beginning of a copy of the original one – something that made Nyota very sad. But she knew that this was only the beginning. She could already see the preparations to add ornaments to the house – art of pre-Surak time. Of course it had been more important to make shelter for the survivals than to re-build an abbey, but even the logical Vulcans needed something familiar after the grave losses they mourned in their own way, and Uhura was glad that there had been time enough to establish something cultural.

Taking a deep breath of the still fresh air, Nyota walked the small path that led to the main entrance. She hadn’t reached the door yet, as a Vulcan male stepped out, wearing the traditional clothes of a religious instructor. Lifting her right hand into the Ta’al-gesture, Uhura greeted him with utterly respect and just for a moment she thought to recognize a hint of surprise in his dark eyes, before he returned her greeting and walked her into the building.

Nyota had to admit that she got more and more nervous the closer she drew towards T’Pau’s office. She had to take over the comms station as a cadet during the Nero-crisis, had watched the home-
planet of her beloved being destroyed, had feared for his friends and for Earth, had faced a very aggressive Klingon patrol on Qo’noS, had thought to die as Admiral Marcus ordered the *Vengeance* to fire at the *Enterprise*, had thought to lose Spock in that damn volcano on Niburu, had watched her captain and friend dying and revived… The list could go on for many more occasions she had lived through and had been afraid. But to meet Vulcan’s matriarch now, who was above all Spock’s Clan-Mother and to know that the next minutes decided about Spock’s and her future, was the top of everything. Yet she would have to stay calm and had to pretend as if her whole happiness wasn’t at stake – a task that was a challenge even for someone as brave as Nyota Uhura.

The Vulcan in front of her stopped at a door, gave a signal and gestured to her to step in. Schooling her expression into calmness and straightening her slender frame, Uhura nodded politely at him and entered the room. It was an office for two or three people, but there was no-one to see. But the door to the next room was open and simply knowing that it led to T’Pau’s office, the comms officer walked towards the entrance.

She was right. T’Pau sat at a large desk in the middle of the room; wearing traditional robes and head-cover. The sun rays fell through the window and bathed the old Vulcaness in gold-red light; on the shelves at the walls were stored ancient papyri, boards, documents and books. But they weren’t many – only several dozens. The rest were data-chips and re-prints – donations from Vulcan’s colonies. Other data-chips came from befriended planets who had copies of ancient Vulcan documents to study, but returned them immediately so that a part of the destroyed records could be restored. Right, they weren’t comparable with the originals, but at least the written words of many centuries ago weren’t utterly lost.

Uhura realized that she had stared as T’Pau’s old voice said, “Come in, child. Do not fear.”

Nyota was tempted to lift a brow, but controlled herself. Lifting again the *Ta’al*, she said in Vulcan High Standard, “I come to serve, Ma’am. And it is not fear that made me stop at the threshold, but the respect I hold for you and the remains of Vulcan’s culture.”

The Vulcaness looked her straight in the eyes, and then she leant back – a good sign in Uhura’s opinion. “You are partly familiar with our manners, tradition and culture. I think my grandson had a hand in it.”

Nyota shook her head and stepped nearer, but didn’t sit down on the visitor chair. It wasn’t offered to her until now, and she wouldn’t occupy it before T’Pau invited her to. “I am a linguistic, Ma’am, and you only can learn a foreign language for real when you know more about the people who created it.”

“A wise mindset for someone so young,” T’Pau answered slowly; regarding the young Terran female in front of her. For Earthen standard she was pretty – even for Vulcans’ taste she was
aesthetically pleasing. Harmonious facial features, bright intelligent eyes, a slender feminine figure and obviously a strong and determined mind. And she seemed to be able to hold her composure. There weren’t many Terrans who would stand like this in front of Vulcan’s matriarch in such a calm manner, and T’Pau had encountered men and women of far higher ranking and heritage. It impressed her; this she could admit.

“And since we begin to speak if wisdom – do you think it wise to bond with a Vulcan?”

Uhura took a slow, deep breath. ‘Here we go!’ she thought, before she carefully answered, “Wisdom goes barely hand in hand with personal wishes of emotional nature, yet often new wisdom will be born from fulfilled wishes.”

T’Pau nodded. “True. To follow the heart, as you humans put it, can initiate new ways and new ways are important for the growing of a people. Stagnation is a step backwards, as the saying goes. Yet sometimes new ways can be a hindrance when it prevents the progress of people – in this case of an endangered species.”

This time Uhura lifted a brow. “You refer to Spock and the children he is supposed to have to make the Vulcan race rebuild – children from him and a Vulcaness.”

“Correct,” T’Pau affirmed; watching her with hawk-eyes.

“Are you sure that this is something the other Vulcans want?” Nyota asked carefully; returning the matriarch’s glance calmly.

This time she got a reaction from T’Pau, as she said, “Explain.”

Uhura took a deep breath. “As far as I understand Vulcan culture and point of view, every individual’s life and nature is valued – the principle of IDIC. Yet Spock was never on the receiving end of this dogma, but faced intolerance and even rejection from other full-blood Vulcans because of his Terran mother. His children, born by a Vulcaness or a Terran woman, will never be regarded differently, no matter his wife’s heritage. They will always be the ‘children of the half-breed’ – not full-bloods your people want and need. Therefore there is no logical reason to deny him at least the bond-mate he wishes for, rather than be forced into a bond with someone he doesn’t know and who doesn’t want him. ‘The duty to his people’, as you certainly going to refer to, would be for naught.”

Was she mistaken, or was there really a spark of amusement in the dark eyes of the matriarch?
“Did you talk with Selek?” T’Pau asked, and Uhura frowned for a second.

“Yesterday, at our arrival, yes. May I ask what he has to do with this?”

The Vulcaness lifted a hand and made an almost human fleeing gesture with it. “I was only curious, because he used almost the same arguments like you, why I should allow Spock the step of bonding with you.” She straightened her shape again. “Don’t misunderstand me, child. You are an intelligent and pleasing young woman, but Spock has not only duty to his people, but also to his clan. He is the heir of the House of Surak – and as such he carries responsibilities beyond those towards this new planet.”

“The line was already broken by Sarek as he married Lady Amanda,” Uhura argued politely. “Her genes and blood are rooted in Spock which caused the whole problem – a problem you certainly have become aware of shortly after Spock’s birth. But, as far as I’ve heard, Sarek has a brother who lives in an outer colony and will return within the next months. He has two children who can continue the line – therefore the House of Surak is not at stake.”

“And yet Spock is the heir – as Sarek’s son who is my firstborn.”

Nyota cocked her head. “And yet you allowed Sarek to bond with Lady Amanda – knowing fully well that the line of Surak would change because of their child’s mixed heritage and maybe would come to an end should Spock be sterile – latter is thankfully not the case, as medical science confirmed.”

T’Pau took a deep breath – the Vulcan equivalent of a sigh. “Of course I’ve foreseen these possible outcomes, but Sarek can be very… strong minded if he wants something.”

“A quality his son shares,” Uhura commented dryly, and for the length of the blink of an eye both women understood each other; then the matriarch pointed at one of the visitor chairs. “Have a seat,” she invited the Enterprise’s comms officer, and Nyota felt herself calming down. This offer was another good sign. So far she had managed to gain some respect from the stern Vulcaness.

T’Pau folded her weathered hands in front of her on the desk surface and watched the young woman in front of her for another minute. It pleased her that the female officer didn’t get nervous because of it. There had been strong men who almost squirmed under her firm gaze, but this ‘child’ held her ground with determination and grace.
“So, you think that even the most survivalists of our people will still look with disdain at Spock because of his mixed heritage? Despite the fact that he saved the Elders and the remains of our culture?” T’Pau continued the topic. “That would be illogical.”

Nyota nodded. “I agree, Ma’am, yet what he did for his people won’t be enough to change their behavior towards him for good. You must have recognized the other Vulcans’ rejection of your grandson when he was still nothing more than a little boy. Even the role he had in saving as much from Vulcan as possible won’t alter his former classmate’s opinion. His generation – and the older ones – will always see the ‘half-breed’ in him. You spoke of his duty towards his clan – that you want him to come into your inheritance. The other Vulcans will never accept this – especially in the given circumstances. If all, this would confuse your people even more.”

Again Uhura thought to see a hint of disport as T’Pau’s left mouth edge curled for a moment. “This all is not only because of him, child, but it’s also a matter of his bonded wife. She will be the new Clan-Mother after I pass. Tell me, could you fill my place?”

Nyota stared at her; her bright mind reeled before she came up with the only answer possible. “I’m no Vulcan and even learning everything possible of your culture would not be enough to fulfill the duties you are bonded to – especially concerning the telepathic parts.”

T’Pau nodded slowly. “I see you understand my point.”

At this Uhura lifted a brow. “I do, Ma’am, yet I ask myself: Would Amanda has become the new Clan-Mother if you would have passed before her? If so, Spock’s mother would have faced the same problems you confronting me with now. The Lady Amanda was Terran, just like I am – therefore a part of a Clan-Mother’s duty couldn’t have been fulfilled by her. If she or I would have been named Clan-Mother, it would have ended in one and the same dilemma. So please excuse my plain statement that this topic isn’t an argument against Spock’s and my marriage.”

T’Pau looked at her for a long time, before she quietly murmured, “You are indeed brilliant. Selek was right.” She activated an intercom. “T’Lal, bring two cooled H’nt-teas into my office.” She didn’t wait for a reply, but cut the link and looked back at a surprised Uhura. “I think this talk will last longer than thought, young one.”

Jim didn’t know exactly how much time had passed since he watched Joaquin leaving the room after
he insisted that the boy get some fresh air. Not that Weiss would really listen to him. Kirk simply knew that the young Augment would stick around somewhere, but after all Joaquin had been through – emotionally – within the last days it was important to get some distance to the current big mess. Jim was relieved as ‘Jo’ obeyed finally and left. Then, for a while, it had been only Jim and Khan, before the young captain was forced to use the restroom. After his return he simply sat down again at his bondmate’s bed and watched the slow and almost not recognizable rising and falling of Nien’s chest.

Despair…

That was what lurked deep in Kirk’s mind, mixed with fear and dark visions. What if Khan wouldn’t wake up again? What if this was indeed a coma and not a sort of healing trance? What if these injuries would be too much even for his mate’s augmented body?

He couldn’t lose Nien – he simply couldn’t! It would be too much to bear.

What had Khan said after Spock and the Enterprise had rescued them from the space-station above Aldebaran? That he, Nien, would keep on going if he would lose Jim, but it would be a mere existence – a function of body chemicals and duty. A human robot at best.

Only now Kirk began to realize fully what Khan had tried to tell him – now, as the situation was the other way around and Jim was about to lose the love of his life; the very being that gave his life the sun and made his soul soar.

Without his own doing he reached out for the Augment’s hand and wrapped the usually so strong, now weak, motionless fingers into his own, while his other hand found its way into Nien’s shock of dark hair. Even when Khan stood still and was concentrating he vibrated with energy – now there was nothing to see or to feel. It was as if only the body was still alive, but his soul had gone.

No!

Jim wouldn’t accept this!

He would not allow Nien to go!

Not without a fight – a fight without a real enemy he, Kirk, could combat with. He only could try to
hold the dark phantoms at bay which haunted his beloved.

‘I'm here, Nien! I'm here! I'm not going anywhere! I'll stay with you! Please, keep going! Hold on! There is so much I want to show you. I want to explore the stars with you – the real ones and those which dance around us when we’re making love! I want to be at your side – sharing my life with you! Always and forever!’

He pressed a kiss to the far too cool hand, while his thump stroke over the pale, smooth skin of the back Khan’s hand. He felt how his eyes began to sting and gulped down the lump that was forming in his throat. Nien needed his strength now, not his sorrow and pain.

Yet this was easier said than done. Jim had always hated it to be helpless – if it was in a situation concerning him being in danger, or, even worse, concerning his friends and his ship. It was not in his character to stand idly by and to nothing more than to watch and to hope. Now he had no other choice. There was absolutely nothing he could do to help the man who held his heart and soul except for be there for him – to be at his side and hopefully make him feel his presence.

Jim knew that Khan had been his whole life more or less alone. Yes, there were his friends – his family. Yet being the utter leader Nien was he didn’t burden his brothers and sisters with his own personal fears. It was exactly what Jim did, too, and Kirk was very aware how much he and his soulmate were alike. Worries, pain, anxieties… He tried to block it from his friends who had their own problems to handle. And Jim was absolutely certain that Nien had done the same with his brothers and sisters. It was the fate of leaders – to be alone, even with loyal friends around them.

But not now. Jim would make certain that Nien never ever again would think to be alone in dark times. He would share them with him, exactly as the good ones. But Khan would have to overcome the injuries for that; would have to win another battle again. Kirk knew how much tired the Augment was of fighting – of being threatened and of fearing for those he loved. But this was over. He, Jim, had only to make him see this.

Clinging to Nien’s hand and combing the fingers of his free hand through the damp mass of midnight dark hair, his gaze hung on the pale, bruised face with the aristocratic high cheekbones and the soft lips; willing his beloved to hear him in his mind.

‘Come back to me, honey. The danger is over – you, Jo and the rest of your family are safe. No-one will harm you here. You are among friends. You are with me and I will not allow anyone to harm you again. Just open your eyes – give me another sunrise to enjoy. Just one more miracle, Nien! Please – I beg you! Don’t give up. Come back to me!’
But the Augment’s eyes remained closed; his chest never hitched a sudden breath that would show his awakening; the monitor beeped in its endless monotonous way.

All of sudden Jim sensed a calm presence – that of Spock. He didn’t even know how he got this perception; he simply felt his T’hy’la being near. Like yesterday after Nien’s surgery and like last night, his Vulcan brother must have recognized his inner turmoil and had come – steady like the ocean’s tide.

Lifting his head, Kirk looked towards the entrance and the view-window beside it.

And what he saw made his blood freeze. There, at the other side of the glass, were the shapes of several people, but only one was clear to see. Jim gasped as looked straight into the face of no-one else than an obviously absolutely shocked Admiral Barnett!

ST***ST

Spock lay on the biobed that was placed next to his father’s and was thinking. Well, ‘brooding’ fitted it better. Usually any kind of problem was a challenge for him and, if he was human, he would have admitted to enjoy solving problems. And usually almost every problem could be dealt with by using logic. But this time logic wasn’t the answer to the current problem, because said problem was an emotional one. And to admit the latter was not right for a Vulcan, therefore the whole problem was split in two sides: One, the fact that it had to do with feelings and two, the resulting fact that logic couldn’t be used.

In other words: The challenge Spock was facing turned in circles, and as highly intelligent and brilliant as the first officer was, here he didn’t know how to even begin to search for a solution.

The problem itself was a wide-ranged one: his affection for Nyota, his wish to bond with her and the certainly expected trouble T’Pau would give them. And not only T’Pau. Spock anticipated his father was going to decline a bonding between his son and the Enterprise’s comms officer. No, Sarek was no Vulcan who pedestalled old traditions, seeing that he himself married a Terran woman. But Vulcans belonged to an endangered species now, and the survival of their people was the most important thing in the moment. Of course the Elders would expect – demand – that Spock would marry a Vulcaness to help in rebuilding the population. It was only logical, and Sarek would be right by requiring this logical step from his son. Yet something humans called ‘hope’ was brimming in Spock that his father maybe would support his decision – egoistical as it was.

Their relationship had improved within the last two years. In their grief for wife and mother, the reason for the icy silence between them had vanished completely, and both tried to catch up the time
they lost of being simply father and son. Sarek had become… softer somehow. Yes, it was also possible that Spock as a fully adult now saw his father in another light. He could understand his father’s point of view better than years ago. Maybe both facts had a role in their better understanding for each other. But Spock wasn’t certain if this was enough to convince his father to support him in this special matter. There was no time for their people to be egoistic, not when the survival of their whole race was at stake. Yet…

The door opened and a gruffly looking McCoy peeked inside. “Morning,” he whispered after a short glance at the ambassador. “Are you all right, Spock?”

The first officer lifted a brow. McCoy could be grumpy like rarely any other human he had met in his life, but he had come to know that this was the doctor’s very own way to deal with stress – especially when said stress was provoked by one of Leonard’s friends being ill. And the CMO regarded him, Spock, as a friend, even if he seldom showed it. Of this the Vulcan had no doubt.

“I’m quite functional, Doctor. Thank you,” he answered quietly.

Bones nodded with a grimace. ‘Translation: I’m doing a little bit better,’ he thought. Sighing he stepped into the room. “I got a call from Selek only a minute ago. Barnett is on his way to the hospital to interview Jim and you. Selek will come, too.” His voice was still hushed.

This time Spock lifted both brows, while he rose. “I’ll be with you in a minute, Doctor. Is Jim informed of the admiral’s arrival?”

Leonard shook his head. “He was in the restrooms as I checked on Khan and him,” he murmured.

The first officer slipped in a robe and in a pair of light shoes. With a wave of his hand he gestured for McCoy to leave the room; he followed the CMO on his heels. “How is Mr. Singh doing?” he asked as they walked down the corridor.

“No change in his condition,” Bones sighed. “I had a briefing with Healer Sorel and two other Vulcan healers as well as with Daniel Corrigan. They analyzed the read-outs of Khan’s brain activities and they all are unsure what to make of it. We simply haven’t enough data of an Augment to conclude if he is in a coma or in a kind of healing-trance. We have to wait until…” His communicator beeped and rolling his eyes, he put it out of his trouser pocket and opened it.

“McCoy here,” he answered the hail and was met with the whispering voice of no-one else than
“Doctor, I tried ter reach Jim but he doesn’t answer the hail.”

“Yeah, he’s there where even a king goes to afoot,” the CMO grumbled – a comment that made Spock looking at him in an almost astonishing way.

“Ye’ve ter warn him, Len. The Betazoid ambassador will visit him and Khan – and bein’ a Betazoid she’s…”

“An empath.” Spock said; a hue of concern edged in his voice.

McCoy stared with wide eyes at him; getting the implication. “Dammit! When she tells Barnett of our two lovebirds, then we’re done for!” He began to run. “Thanks, Scotty!” he said and closed the communicator.

“I’ll try to speak with my counterpart. He has to inform the lady about the secret affair and how important it is to stay silent about it,” Spock mused, while he remained at Bones’ side.

“Yes, do this!” Leonard wheezed and rounded the next corner. “Maybe…” He stopped dead in his tracks and would have lost his feet if it hadn’t been for Spock, who quickly steadied him with a steel-like grip around his upper arm. His gaze followed McCoy’s shocked glance and then he went stiff himself.

There, only a few meters ahead of them, was Jim’s and Khan’s room – and outside at the view window stood a very uncomfortable looking ‘Selek’ and a flabbergasted Admiral Barnett, who turned towards CMO and first officer as he heard their approach. His right index finger pointed nonchalantly at the window, while he gasped, “Pray tell me at WHAT exactly I’m looking at here?”

Spock was the first who found back his composure and straightening his shape he stepped away from McCoy, who rubbed absently his arm. Closing the distance to the Chief in Command, he greeted him respectfully with a, “Good morning, Admiral. Elder Selek.” he bowed towards his older counterpart. Only then he turned his attention to the scene behind the window – and felt the very illogical and far too human urge to curse.

There, beside the still motionless and unconscious Khan, sat a pale and very tired looking Jim Kirk,
who held the Augment’s hand in a tender way before he kissed it – a gesture far too intimate to be a simple one of friendly concern. And as if this wouldn’t be enough to give Barnett the utterly right idea of the true nature of the two males’ relationship, Jim’s other hand was stroking through Khan’s sweat-wet, tousled hair, while his face betrayed not only his worry, but also the deep feelings he had for the former dictator.

McCoy had closed the distance to them; anticipating the worst.

Well, it was more than worse.

There was no way on Earth that Barnett would mistake the scene for something else than it was.

Leonard gulped.

Shit!

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Oooops, this certainly isn’t the best way for Barnett to learn about our two lovebirds. And Jim will have to explain a lot within the next chapter. And not only to him, but also to Wesley, who confronts him with the whole secret love-affair our dear commodore learned from Kor.

I hope you liked the new chapter and the little discussion between Uhura and T’Pau.

As always I’m curious of your reactions.

Have a nice rest of Sunday and a good start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
No more secrets

Chapter Notes

Dear readers,

Thank you so very much for the comments. I’m glad that the long delay of the next update didn’t push you away. And, as promised, the new chapter comes quicker now.

I know how much you all simmer with excitement for the scene in which Barnett FINALLY learns about Jim and Khan – and therefore I don’t want to let you wait any longer.

Have fun with the new chapter

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 81 – No more secrets

Barnett’s astonished question had barely been voiced, as Selek tried to save what could still be saved. Quietly he said, “Mr. Singh’s condition is very grave – and Captain Kirk and he have become friends. It’s no wonder that the Captain is concerned about…”

Barnett whirled around; forgetting for a moment that he was speaking with the Vulcan High Minister. “‘Concerned’? ‘Friends’?” He shook his head as if he wanted to clear it. “All due respect, High Minister, but don’t give me this lame excuse. I sat at my wife’s bed like this as she was about to give birth to our first daughter and heavy complications arose. And I guess that my expression wasn’t that different from Kirk’s now, not to mention the kiss he just pressed to Khan’s hand.” His dark eyes found the two younger officers, who wore almost sheepishly expressions – even Spock in his very own Vulcan way. Richard’s face became stern. “What. Is. Going. On. Here?” he demanded and fixed Spock with a glance that had sent students and cadets fleeing on a regular basis.

Well, it didn’t have the same effect on Sarek’s son, yet Spock saw no other choice than to stick to the truth. Barnett had witnessed the tender affection Jim held for Khan. There was no chance in denying it any longer. “Captain Kirk and Mr. Singh have grown close together,” he said carefully.

“‘Close’?” Richard didn’t believe his own ears. For a moment he thought the Vulcan had pulled his
leg, but dismissed that thought immediately. Even if he knew perfectly well that Spock did have a fine, dry sense of humor, this was certainly not the right time to use it. “You’ve a nice way of understatements, Mr. Spock. Please enlighten me: How close are they?”

Spock clasped his hands on his back. “It is not my place to speak about the Captain’s private life, Admiral.”

Richard took a deep breath to answer, but Selek was quicker.

“They are lovers.” The Elder’s calm words earned him two piercing, almost accusing glares from Spock and McCoy, and a deep frown from Barnett. “And before you ask, Admiral, Mr. Singh’s feelings for Jim Kirk are deep and true – just like it is the other way around.”

Barnett had the certain feeling that he had lost the ground beneath his feet. Kirk, Starfleet’s ‘lady’s man’ number one, had indeed a liaison with a male? Well, that would have been a big surprise even without the twist that said ‘male’ was a wanted criminal and that Kirk had even hidden on his ship.

“Their feelings for each other have nothing to do with the captain’s decision to help Khan to get a fair, second chance, Admiral,” Spock said, and Richard asked himself not for the first time if the Vulcan was able to read minds even without touching someone.

“No, of course not,” he growled; sarcasm plain to hear in his voice and obvious enough for Spock and Selek, because the younger one of the two Vulcans added, “They got close during their stay on Aldebaran – after the captain already worked together with Khan concerning the Battle of Tammeron and after Mr. Singh saved him from the Klingons.”

“Yeah, and I really want to know why Kirk trusted him from the beginning.” Barnett sounded anything but amused.

“Because Mr. Singh made the first step of trust as he revealed himself by warning the captain about the Klingon’s planned attack at Tammero…”

The Chief in Command rolled his eyes. “This sounds naïve – and Kirk is anything but.”

“Jim has a fine sense for sensible matters,” McCoy cut in. “And…” He stopped as he saw a movement within the room. Kirk had sensed Spock’s presence and lifted his head. He took in the
four men on the other side of the view window – and then his blue eyes widened in shock as they fell on Barnett. Like he had been stung by an adder he shot up from the bed’s edge and let go of the Augment’s hand; his face flushing alarmingly.

Richard grimaced and gave him one of his infamous glares – something that made Jim hurry towards the door and step out into the corridor.

“Admiral, sir,” he greeted a little bit breathless. “I… uh… I checked Khan’s fever and…”

“Not that we haven’t med-scanners today which are perfectly capable of checking for fever among further things – without using the sensibility of human lips. And even if Mr. Singh is maybe in need for a barber – to comb through his hair with your fingers will not replace a coiffeur’s work.” Barnett scoffed and if he hadn’t been so irritated, he would have been amused as his most promising but also most troublesome captain turned an even deeper shade of scarlet. He shook his head. “Really, Kirk, I never took you for one being in the man-to-man-department, but that’s up to you. What isn’t exactly compatible with being captain of Starfleet’s flag-ship and your private life is the fact that you obviously are bedding a wanted criminal – and hid him from the authorities.”

Jim gulped; realizing that the big fat cat was utterly out of the bag. He glanced quickly at the others. Spock’s eyes betrayed a hint of sympathy but also determination. His T’hy’la would support him, like always. McCoy looked rather contrite – and anything but happy. And Selek? His eyes held a mixture of warning to stay calm, but also reassurance. Jim knew that Old Spock would back him up too. And given the fact who he was now – the High Minister of Vulcan – and the role Starfleet played on this planet only yesterday, Jim was certain that the older counterpart of his Vulcan brother would light a fire under Barnett’s butt, if the admiral would give Jim a too hard time.

Taking a deep breath, Kirk looked his superior officer straight in the eyes, and said, “I didn’t hide Khan from the authorities, sir; I granted him asylum like every starship captain should if the given circumstances demand it – and go hand in hand with the book. Mr. Singh never faced a legal trial, never got the chance to press charges against his tormentors and the murder of four of his crew members, and never got a correct sentence, yet punishment was executed. He was abused as a lab-rat and had faced inhuman cruelty and unthinkable agony as the scientists forced his augmented body to produce anti-bodies against maladies. And even after he escaped, there were still official Starfleet personnel after him who simply wanted him back for their sick experiments or to kill him. His crew endured a like-wise fate at Gamma 12 and were about to be killed in an act of genocide. Tell me, Admiral, if Mr. Singh did not have any right to pledge asylum for his crew and himself, who then?”

Richard groaned. “I already heard all those arguments, Kirk, and they are hard facts I can’t and never will deny. Mr. Singh has been wronged beyond imagination and his people’s lives were at stake. I agree with you on this. But what I really wonder is, if you helped him because you fell for him or because it was the right thing to do.”
Kirk’s face hardened; anger streamed through his veins and made his eyes blaze like an upcoming thunderstorm in the late summers of Iowa. “You should know me better, sir. Yes, I admit that I care for my crew and my friends a lot and that I… interpret a rule here or there in my own way to keep them safe …”

“An understatement,” Barnett commented wryly, but Jim continued without hesitation.

“But I wouldn’t have agreed on helping Khan in the first place, if I hadn’t been convinced of his real background story and of his intentions of seeking true justice. According to the regulations and as the captain of a Starfleet starship I considered his request of political asylum and complied. Mr. Singh made it clear from the very beginning that he would go to a trial – a real one. All we had to do was to wait for the best chance to speak with you in person, because, as I also have to admit, there are not many members of the brass left I trust – not with such a delicate topic. But, regrettable, this damn war prevented the chance to speak with you in person and then Luengo took your place after you were declared dead. My officers, Commodore Wesley and Mr. Singh did everything in their power to rescue you and your surviving companions after we found out the mean trick that had been pulled on you, your companions, Starfleet, the Federation – us all, to point it out plainly. We tried and succeeded to prevent the cease-fire from being ended – by hairbreadths. And Mr. Singh paid the highest price possible for it.”

He pointed nonchalantly through the door at the motionless Augment. “There he lies – in a coma, almost beaten and kicked to death by fellows of the same organization that already took his crew hostage, killed four of them, put him into slavery, abused him and tormented him. Several minutes alone with them, and see what they did to him The healers and Dr. McCoy are not even certain, if he makes it at all despite his augmented nature. And you have doubts that I let my personal feelings for him get in the way as I made my decision to ‘hide him from the authorities’? I can’t imagine that your question was a serious one.”

Barnett watched the young man in front of him. He had seen and heard many things during his career – first in the Academy and later as Chief in Command. There had always been men and women who broke rules because of personal relationships and feelings. It was only human to do so, despite any good intentions and all given vows of duty. And Richard was convinced that this was also the case with Kirk now, yet the captain had given some very serious reasons why he had helped Khan at all. Reasons, which had been enough even for a staff officer like Wesley to spread his protective wings over the two allies – allies which were also lovers. Barnett was almost certain that Bob knew about the two, and he would have a word or two with him about ‘holding back information’, but just right now the admiral had to make sure that the captain of Starfleet’s flag-ship hadn’t broken dozens of rules and orders because of his bolting libido.

“Every point you made is correct and I’m glad that there are still officers in Starfleet who follow the codex of honor and for whom ‘morality’ isn’t an alien concept. But all your given arguments would have been stronger if you wouldn’t have taken Khan to your bed – or the other way around,” he
grumbled as Jim promptly opened his mouth to protest.

Kirk glared at him. “I didn’t know that love is a crime now that it even can influence given facts.”

Barnett cocked his head. “Love, Jim?” he asked – and the young captain was reminded at Old Spock’s reaction as he told him about his true feelings for Khan. Funny that both men used the same words, but made it sound so different.

“Yes, love,” he nodded; straightening his shape as if he wanted to dare Barnett to assume something different.

“And… does Mr. Singh return this affection?”

“He does,” Spock Prime spoke up for the first time. His calm gaze caught Richard’s troubled one, while he continued. “Everything Captain Kirk said is true, Admiral. Mr. Singh’s intentions towards him and concerning finding justice are true and even honorable.”

“And you know this how?” Barnett asked, which earned him a lifted brow.

For a Vulcan Selek almost looked exasperated. “Admiral, I don’t have to remind you about certain telepathically abilities Vulcans – and especially we Elders – have. Mr. Singh allowed me to share his mind. There are no doubts left anymore.”

“Usually it isn’t allowed for a Vulcan to share information about impressions he got during a mind-meld,” his younger counterpart cut in. “Not without the other one’s permission, but seeing that Mr. Singh is unconscious and the circumstances demand a quick decision, I dare to tell you that the cruelty and pain he experienced in Section 31’s hands were intense and large enough to break even a very strong mind. That he is still sane and is able to develop… tender feelings, is something humans certainly would call a ‘miracle’.”

Richard stared at Spock. “You saw it during your mind-meld with him last night, as you ‘pulled him back from the brink of death’, correct?” As he recognized the fleeting expression of surprise on the younger Vulcan’s face, he nodded at McCoy. “His words, not mine.”

Promptly Bones found himself in the focus of two half-Vulcans and one baffled starship captain. “Hey, I had to give our superiors a report about yours and Khan’s condition, Jim – after all Khan’s
injuries were inflicted by Starfleet personnel. The admiral and Commodore Wesley asked questions, I had to answer. And the two gentlemen were also worried for Sarek and Spock. Therefore I had to give them proper information. That’s all.”

“As it seems, Doctor, an old Terran phrase fits very well with you,” the first officer said indignantly. At McCoy’s asking glance, he explained, “To talk stress away.” He gave him a pointed glare, and Leonard grimaced.

“I already told you that I’m sorry for the mess I made for you last night.”

“Yes, Doctor, and I accept you apology. Yet even you should know that Vulcans speak very – very! – rarely about mind-melds.”

Jim looked between his two friends back and forth. “What did you mess up, Bones?”

The CMO groaned as he saw Kirk falling back into his typical protector-mood he had been about to leave. “Sweet Lord, never mess with your Vulcan brother, isn’t it?” He rubbed his neck. “As I informed Selek about Khan and the successful surgery of Sarek, I didn’t know that he was in T’Pau’s office and I somehow slipped that… well… that there is a second pair of lovebirds aboard our ship.”

Kirk gasped; his eyes wide as saucers. “Bones, you chatterbox!”

“Oh, so I can give you my thanks that I had a very stern and peeved T’Pau on the line this morning, who demanded that I had to release Lieutenant Uhura from being restricted and to send her back to New Vulcan immediately.” Barnett grumbled.

“You restricted Uhura?” Jim asked; new anger shimmered in his eyes. “She already got asylum on New Vulcan before she risked her neck to bring down the traitors aboard the Excalibur.”

“Lieutenant Uhura is back on New Vulcan, Admiral? Could you please tell me, where she is?” Spock asked at the same time; his stance tense.

“T’Pau got our language-wonder free?” Bones beamed and looked at the Elder. “I think you had a little part in it, Selek, didn’t you?” He pointed at Spock. “Our pointy-eared Romeo here worried his head off what his granny will say to the fact that he wants to marry a Terran woman, but I think you
already had a talk with the lady concerning our couple here.” He snickered. “Sneaky hobgobl…” He stopped himself; giving Selek an apologizing glance that was returned with look of barely hidden amusement.

Jim’s eyes were about to pop out of his head; his anger forgotten at the moment. “You’ve proposed to Uhura?” he addressed Spock, and before his friend could answer, he clapped him on the back. “Congratulations, Spock. Why didn’t you say anything? Hell, I would like to throw you and Nyota a party – if this is agreeable with Vulcan culture.”

“Jim, I assure you that I haven’t proposed to Nyota until now,” Spock corrected him. “I hadn’t the chance for it, yet it is indeed my intention to marry her.”

Kirk began to laugh; for a moment the tiresome worry fell into the background. “As I said: Congratulations, my friend.”

McCoy began to chuckle. “Well, I already promised you and Khan a little party, Jim. Maybe we can link this together with Spock’s and Uhura’s engagement.”

Barnett realized that his jaw had dropped during the little exchanges of the three friends, and quickly closed his mouth with an audible ‘click’. “Sweet Lord,” he wheezed, “Starfleet’s proud flag-ship has become a love-boat.” He met two grinning faces and one that showed nothing more than mild frustration. “You three are costing me years of my life with your crazy escapades, do you know that?” he growled.

Jim smiled at him. “Sir, what would be life without challenges?”

“In your case it would mean peace for me.” Richard retorted wryly and then he had to give into Kirk’s boyish grin, and smiled the tiniest bit. Pointing a finger at Jim he warned, “But don’t think that you’re already off the hook, Kirk. The same goes for the two other gentlemen. I think, we’ve got a lot to talk about.”

Kirk sobered up. “I know, sir.” He glanced back into the room and at Khan. “But… I can’t let him alone in the moment. I promised him to stay with him until he… he’s himself again.” He looked back and directly at Selek. “Please, don’t get me wrong, but Nien has experienced only pain and abuse within scientific and medical hold. He freaked out yesterday after surgery as he came around and found himself facing people in sterile clothes. That was the reason for his panic attack and him clinical dead for a minute or so, until Spock showed up and was able to get him back by initiating the mind-meld Bones mentioned. I’m simply afraid that he will react the same way when he wakes up, sees the sterile room and no-one is there he knows and trusts.”
Spock Prime lifted a brow; knowing of course of the other fact Jim didn’t want to name now: The mating-bond. Khan, even untrained in mental abilities, reacted on pure instinct when it came to his mate’s presence. With Jim’s absence there was the tiny but real chance that the Augment would withdraw even deeper into his mind as he was just right now.

But officially this shouldn’t be mentioned. The telepathically link between Jim and Khan should be kept a secret until it would be wise to reveal it. Therefore Selek answered gently, “I’m not offended, Jim. I realized how deep Mr. Singh is traumatized while I melded with him yesterday. Your reason for your wish to stay with him is logical. Yet I do think that the talk with Admiral Barnett is important – for all of you four. Mr. Weiss certainly will stay with his brother until you are back.”

“By the way,” Richard cut in, “where is the superboy – or our two greenhorns who buffalooed over hundred Elite Securities?”

Kirk frowned. “Whom do you mean?”

“Our whiz-kid Chekov and that young Irish sprite, Riley,” the admiral deadpanned. “According to Wesley they beamed down that morning to keep the Augment-boy company – something he and your whole remaining senior staff greatly approved.”

Jim grinned. “Well, they became friends.”

“I saw Chekov and Riley together with Joaquin in the waiting lounge at a meditation alcove,” Bones informed the others. “I sent them out to get some fresh air and maybe something decent between their teeth.”

Kirk nodded. “Well done.” He took out his communicator and looked at Barnett. “I know that I’m released from duty in the moment, but may I call the Enterprise so that they contact Chekov, asking him to take Riley and Joaquin back to the hospital?”

Richard glared at him. “As if you wouldn’t have already talked with your officers aboard since yesterday.” he scoffed. “Lieutenant Uhura may state that there were no hails from the planet since Dr. McCoy’s quick information about you, Khan and Sarek, but I know you too well, Kirk. There is no way in hell that you haven’t talked at least with Mr. Scott in the meantime.” He grimaced, as Jim shrugged with a sheepish smile and opened his communicator that was an admission in its own way.
Spock used the chance to address Barnett in an own private matter. “Admiral, can you tell me to where Lieutenant Uhura was beamed?”

The Chief in Command sighed inwardly. “Don’t worry, she is with your grandmother,” he said, and cocked his head, as Spock instantly went rigid.

“She is…?” The first officer stopped himself as he realized that he was about to copy a typical human behavior by repeating something he didn’t want to be true.

“She!” Bones grumbled, while in the background Jim talked with Scotty, before he was patched through to Chekov.

Selek lifted a calming hand. “Don’t fear, Spock. Leonard was right as he assumed that I already talked with T’Pau. I stated several very serious and logical arguments which she can’t thrust aside in her consideration of your request to bond with Nyota. And if your Uhura is only the tiniest bit like the Uhura I know from my time, she’ll do fine in the moment.”

Bones began to chuckle. “Just have a look, the universe never cease to surprise me. You are a matchmaker, Selek.”

Promptly an ice-grow brow was lifted. “I simply performed damage control, Leonard.”

McCoy shook his head. “Aw, don’t give me that excuse. You – and your younger counterpart – are big, big softies at heart. But don’t fear, I’ll tell no-one.”

“Sorry, Doctor, but this is something I can’t believe.” Spock commented dryly; still tense by the thought of Nyota being with T’Pau.

“What? That you’re soft hearted hobgoblin or that I won’t tell anybody about it?”

“Guys, it’s too early for that.” Jim closed the communicator and glared at Bones and Spock. Shaking his head he glanced at an obvious amused Barnett and then at Selek, whose dark eyes shimmered
“Are they always like that?” Richard wanted to know, and Kirk rolled his eyes.

“You have no idea, sir. They’re like fire and water – and yet they can’t be without each other. I have a big assumption that they love their bantering.”

“Captain, you have no reason to offend me,” Spock declared, and Jim was certain to see his Vulcan brother pouting for a tiny moment.

“And there I thought you’re my friend, Jim,” Bones complained, but deep in his eyes shone something close to laughter.

“I admit that you really have a difficult job, Kirk,” Barnett teased and then he nodded at the closed communicator. “Any luck?”

“Yeah, the boys are at a restaurant a few hundred meters away from here and having breakfast with The Shadow-gang. Pavel promised to hurry up. They’ll be here in less than a quarter of an hour.”

Barnett took a deep breath. “All right. It isn’t as if I have nothing else to do,” he mumbled. Then he pointed at Khan. “May I have a closer look at him, Doctor?” he addressed McCoy. “I got your short report, yet I want to see with my own eyes what these bastards did to him.”

“From my point of view there is nothing that would speak against it. Jim?” he asked his friend and captain, who bit his lips.

Jim knew how much Nien hated to be seen weak and vulnerable. But, on the other hand, it would serve them both good if Barnett realized how brutally Khan had been handled by Starfleet’s Elite and Section 31. He didn’t know if Barnett would be the judge at the expected court material, but the chances were high. The whole matter of Luengo’s and Norton’s betrayal, Section 31 and the part the Enterprise and Khan had in revealing everything, the trial would be a high explosive military and political subject; something the public would follow with hawk-eyes. That the Chief in Command would preside was logical. All right, Barnett was involved and personally affected which could prevent of him becoming the judge, yet he would at least be a witness and would belong on the jury. And to have him on Khan’s side would be half the battle, so to say.
“I agree,” Kirk said quietly. “Please follow me.”

He entered the intensive care room with Barnett and stepped to Nien’s bed. Selek was on their heels and Jim heard a sharp intake of breath from the admiral. Turning around he watched how Barnett’s eyes widened, while he took in the bruises, bandages and read-outs of the med-scanner above the biobed.

“Sweet Lord,” Richard whispered; getting at last the idea which kind of brutal violence had been needed to wound the enhanced man like this. “Those … animals!.”

“He suffered likewise before, during his forced stay with Section 31 and Admiral Marcus – both in body and soul,” Spock said softly, who had followed them, too. McCoy was at this side; his expression hiding his outrage only barely.

Barnett looked shocked at Sarek’s son and then he shook his head. “I believed Wesley as he told me about the true background history of Khan concerning Section 31, but to see it now…” He pressed his lips into a thin line. “I can understand that you wanted to protect him, Kirk, even if it almost sounds laughable that an Augment of all people needs protection.”

“I am certain that this was ‘only’ a pay-back from Finnegan because Nien shielded me at Gamma 12 against his attacks,” Jim murmured; his eyes blazed. “Finnegan opened fire at us without even demanding surrender or making himself recognizable in advance. He attacked from ambush. If it hadn’t been for Khan who pushed Spock out of harm’s way, I would be without my first officer now. Later Finnegan lay in wait for me after his fellows attacked me and our Redshirts came to my support. We fought and I realized that he had every intention of killing me. Then Spock and Khan came into the scene, and Nien joined the fight – protecting me. Finnegan realized that he stood no chance against Nien and aimed at him a phaser set to kill and… Well, Spock had been able to call the Enterprise and Scotty beamed us out in the very last second. Finnegan was taken to the brig, because twice he tried to murder my senior officers and me. That he wasn’t successful in at least killing me and Spock was because of Khan’s intervention.”

“By the way, Mr. Singh made no attempt to kill Commander Finnegan, but to defeat him without using full his strength – after Finnegan shot at him first,” Spock added; knowing that this behavior would grant Khan another bonus. Fascinating, how much he – Spock – had begun to support the Augment and his intentions.

Barnett nodded slowly. “Wesley will interview Finnegan today – also Styles, his two allies and Luengo’s spy.” He glanced at Kirk. “Any chance that I get more surprises concerning your relationship with Khan?”
Jim shook his head; not ready to reveal the bond between himself and Nien. “No, sir, we are together – seriously together. There is nothing more to tell.”

Richard nodded, before he sighed, “I should be glad that wild boy-you finally found someone who not only caught your heart for true, but also has begun to tame you. But had it to be a wanted man half of Starfleet is after?”

Bones chuckled. “I asked him the very same question, sir, but there is only one answer possible: Love can’t be controlled – it happens.”

“Yes, I know – but I ask myself what the judge will say to this statement – or T’Pau should Lieutenant Uhura use these words, too.”

Kirk groaned as he saw Spock stiffening again. “Admiral, did you have to make Spock any tenser because of the fact that his intended spouse is facing his hag of grandmother just right now and he can’t do anything to support her in the moment?”

“Captain, I assure you I’m not tense,” Spock protested and Bones rolled his eyes. “Sure thing. And there is the saying Vulcans can’t lie.”

“Doctor, there…”

“Jim?” Joaquin’s quiet voice interrupted the next round of banter and the four men in the room turned around. Weiss’ big eyes drifted quickly to his ‘brother’, before he looked at Kirk and then at the dark-skinned man in the green and white uniform he recognized as the admiral who had come to their aid yesterday.

Behind him stood Chekov and Riley; both having a doggy-box in their hands. Obviously they hadn’t finished their breakfast in peace, but had headed back to the hospital immediately; taking the rest of their food with them. And according to the voices in the corridor, The Shadow had arrived, too.

“Jo,” Kirk smiled at him. “Thanks for coming so quickly.” His glance found Chekov and Riley. “The same goes for you, Gentlemen.”
“At ease, boys, I’m out of the chair at the moment, and, by the way, you two are here in private.” He stepped to them and laid a hand on both their shoulders. “As I heard, you two re-seized our ship,” he nodded towards the ceiling. “You, Keenser and Sulu. Thank you so much, guys. I don’t have any details now, but if I put the pieces together the picture is clear. You kicked those pirates in uniform into the next week and also supported Selek enough so that he could manipulate the Excalibur and we were able to beam up to save Khan and to arrest Styles. Well done, Gentlemen. I’ll leave a commendation in your files – if I get the chance for it,” he added; looking swiftly at Barnett.

“They already got the entry in their files, Jim, just like you, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and the other senior officers.” As he caught the surprised gaze of the young captain, Richard added, “That you all ‘interpreted’ protocol to your liking doesn’t prevent that you saved the day again so to speak. You all surpassed yourself to protect civilians during the war, saved the cease-fire and revealed a new conspiracy within Starfleet what led to the rescue of the surviving delegation members; myself included. Of course that deserves the highest commendations possible.”

“This I’m calling ‘the spirit’,,” an oinking voice commented. “Knew you had it in you, Admiral.” Galven winked simply at Barnett; not giving a damn about the Terran man’s position and rank within the Federation.

Richard almost groaned, but somehow he had come to like the stout Tellarit, who never had a problem to call a spade a spade. “Not a spirit, but rather a crazy phantom seems to have encountered our troublemakers here.” He glanced at an innocent looking Spock, a grumpy CMO and a scary pale, yet at least a little bit smiling Jim Kirk. Then his gaze found the rest of The Shadow-gang, who had gathered around Khan in an almost protective way.

Silence returned to the room, while the members of the militia looked outraged and shocked at their augmented friend. Ashen grey, sweaty from fever, body and face covered in bruises he was barely recognizable as the proud, fierce warrior they all knew.

Caviw laid one hand on his arm; making a half meowing, half purring voice in the back of her throat; her tail twitched in worry and anger. “This is wrong,” she hissed, before her blazing eyes glared at Barnett. “Shouldn’t your men be trained to avoid such violence? They were Starfleet’s Elite, for the holy tree’s sake. To lash out like this on someone vulnerable, is the lowest way of acting possible.”

Barnett felt his cheeks heating up – in embarrassment, but also in irritation. The latter was aimed at Finnegan and the men who were responsible for the Augment’s state. And he had no problem in voicing it. “Those, who did this to Mr. Singh, will pay, Miss Caviw. Be sure of it.” he all but growled. “I don’t tolerate any violence inside of Starfleet and certainly not between Starfleet and civilians.”
The Caitian woman nodded slowly, but it was obvious that she wasn’t satisfied.

The two Tellarits had greeted Selek in the meantime; showing respect despite Vulcan and Tellarit history, but times had changed for the better. And as Spock Prime thanked Galven for taking Jim Kirk to safety and to look out for him, the Tellarit grumbled something awkwardly – displaying an uncharacteristically shyness.

Then Galven looked the young captain up and down, closed the distance to him and laid one hoof-like hand on his shoulder. “Don’t lose hope, lad,” he said almost gently; knowing exactly why the Federation’s newest hero was so crestfallen. “Khan is a fighter – and he loves you deeply. He’ll come back to you and the boy,” he nodded towards Joaquin.

“Galven!” Caviw hissed; throwing a pointed glare at her friend, whose little eyes widened as he realized what he revealed. Turning his attention quickly to Barnett he found the human rolling his eyes and grimacing.

“No need to watch your words,” he murmured. “I already know of the two lovebirds here.” His glance found Spock. “Pardon, two pairs of lovebirds.” He watched how the younger Vulcan’s ears turned green, and – oh wonder – it was McCoy who came to Spock’s aid.

“Don’t get me wrong, Admiral, but ever heard of Vulcans valuing their privacy?”

Richard sighed; getting a new proof how close the three officers were for real. Then his glance turned towards Kirk, who was talking quietly with Joaquin. He watched the augmented boy with rising curiosity, which didn’t go unnoticed by Weiss. Looking from Jim away he returned the admiral’s gaze unblinking. Jim realized who had caught Joaquin’s attention and turned towards his highest ranking superior. “Admiral, may I introduce you to Joaquin Weiss? He’s Nien’s younger brother.” He laid a hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Jo, this is Admiral Richard Barnett, Chief in Command of Starfleet.”

Moistening his lips, Joaquin headed towards the admiral and offered him his hand. “Sir, it’s a pleasure to meet you without a big fight going on.”

Barnett didn’t hesitate to take the almost grown boy’s fingers into his own. “Welcome in the 23rd century, Mr. Weiss. I’m sorry that you were introduced to our time like this, but I hope that the worst is over and that you’ll find peace here.”
Weiss nodded slowly. “Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate your concern. Jim told me about you – that you are an honorable man who doesn’t prejudge. I heard that my brother… caused some big trouble last year, even if this took place after he had been wronged in brutal ways. That you are willing to give him – and us – a chance is very generous of you.”

Taking a deep breath, Barnett said quietly, “Your brother has earned a second chance. And concerning you and your ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ – well, they did nothing wrong here. The Vulcans offered to help them coming to terms with this century and the Federation. I think this would be a good start for them and I hope I can convince the Federation Council to see it likewise.”

Joaquin nodded, before his gaze drifted first to his brother and then to Kirk. “I know that the admiral has to speak with you, Jim. Just go, I wait here. Should something change, I inform you.”

Kirk gave him a little smile. “Thanks, Jo. We’ll be… uh, where the next briefing room?” he addressed Selek, who pointed to the left. “Only four doors down the corridor.”

Barnett rubbed his neck. “All right, Gentlemen, just let us get the talk over with.” He glanced up at the high minister. “Do you really want to join that briefing?”

It made the alert bells in him ringing, as Selek answered dryly, “Admiral, I haven’t had the pleasure to listen to Jim Kirk talking himself off the gallows for many decades. Believe me; I have time for this discussion!”

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Wesley all but stormed down the corridor towards the next turbo-lift. No, he wasn’t in a hurry; it was rather a way to get off some steam. Outside his face betrayed nothing despite a set jaw and some tension around his eyes, but inside he was boiling with rage.

He had interviewed Styles – who didn’t say anything useful. And he also spoke with the two other former bridge officers who had been part of the conspiracy. They all three insisted on their rights to give no statements without any lawyers. Bob could live with that. The proofs Command had concerning the three officer’s high treachery were clear enough. No lawyer in the universe would be able to get them off the hook.

This wasn’t what had awoken the commodore’s fury. It had been the talks with Green, Dashwood and Conelly – latter was still recovering from the beating he got from Kirk. And his wrath also
rooted in the talk he’d had with Finnegan.

He had known that neither the scientists nor the commander regarded Khan as a human, but to deny him any rights of being called a ‘sentient being’ had woken Bob’s searing fury. And what shocked him the most was the coldness of which the three scientists spoke of the ‘subject’, while Finnegan only referred to him as ‘the creature’, and how sorry he was that he hadn’t been able to ‘finish him off for good’. Between the Irish man’s words lay also the deep loathing and hate he held for Jim Kirk, calling the Enterprise’s captain a ‘man-slut’ and ‘gay bastard’ – something Wesley didn’t tolerate for a second and added ‘heavy offences against a superior officer’ to Finnegan’s list of crimes. And the short interview with Nurreaux was as frustrating and infuriating like the other talks. Luengo’s spy didn’t held personal grudge against Kirk or Spock, but the cold-blooded way of shrugging his shoulders as Bob mentioned that Nurreaux had almost killed the Vulcan, showed once again that future officers should be selected more carefully. Starfleet didn’t need any functional machines in human bodies without any care for their colleagues. What this could lead to showed in the present situation.

What also unsettled Wesley was the fact that Finnegan and Nurreaux were both aware of Kirk and Khan being a couple – and sure as hell both certainly had blurted that out to Norton. The treacherous admiral’s way of blackmailing Khan into surrender by threatening Jim’s life made it clear that Norton knew of the two love-birds. If this was the case, Bob’s protégée’s weakness concerning the handsome Augment would be out in the open the moment Barnett would interview Norton, who would love to rub Kirk’s ‘failure’ into Richard’s face. Bob sat between two chairs. He didn’t know if it was better to beam down and to speak with Jim in person to make him understand that it was for the best if Barnett learned from him of the love-affair, or if he – Wesley – should keep silent; hoping for the best outcome.

His glance found his chronometer he wore at his left wrist, hidden beneath the uniform sleeve. Three hours. Barnett was on New Vulcan for approx. three hours. Certainly he was done with interviewing Kirk and maybe Spock, and was about to investigate further with talking to Norton. Hopefully the Chief in Command hadn’t had any chance to do the latter until now. Then it wouldn’t be too late to inform Richard of the true relationship of Kirk and Khan. It would be far better if Barnett learned that detail from him rather than from Norton. And as this thought grazed Bob he realized that he had already made up his mind.

Reaching the bridge – and collecting his composure to hide the wrath that still boiled in him – he ordered the current comms officer to call the hospital and to get Kirk or McCoy into the line, but it didn’t come to that.

“Sir,” the young man addressed him. “The Lexington is calling us. Lady Morganth wants to speak with you.”

Bob groaned. “I have no time for her in the moment and…”
“She says it’s about her visit to New Vulcan,” the comms officer interrupted him carefully.

Wesley closed his eyes. Yes, the lady’s visit to New Vulcan – and her checking on the two beings whose great distress and suffering she had sensed.

Just a moment! He had to meet her before she met with Kirk, Spock and certainly Barnett. He had to tell her to keep the love between the two heroes for herself – at least until he had had the opportunity to speak with Barnett in private about it.

‘Dammit, Jim, I knew that one day one of your love affairs would catch up with me and give me the grays – lucky me.’ he groaned inwardly.

“Right, Lieutenant, please ask the lady to meet with me at the New Vulcan’s hospital main entrance. And send Lieutenant Ericson of the Lexington the coordinates. Lieutenant Li of the Excalibur can give them to you. They will be the same that High Minister Selek received yesterday from Healer Sorel as he beamed back to the surface, together with Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy and Mr. Singh including later’s brother. And give the coordinates to Mr. Kyle, too. I’m going to transporter room one.” He activated the intercom. “Commander Scott, please come to the bridge. You’ve the conn while I’m gone.”

Nodding at the officers he left the bridge; assuming that the next hour would be fateful at least for Kirk, his friends and Khan. He couldn’t know that the cat was already out of the bag – a very large cat…

Five minutes later New Vulcan’s merciless heat enveloped him as he materialized on the campus. It was early midday and the sun brimmed in the rusty colored sky. But, at least, there was a soft breeze from the gigantic lake a few kilometers away that made the air bearable. Bob had been on Vulcan a few times and he instantly realized the similarities between the original world and New Vulcan, but also the differences. And, as he had to admit, one difference was very pleasant for him and certainly for all other humans: said soft wind with the fresh aroma in it.

“Commodore Wesley.”

He turned around and was greeted with a very nice view: That of Lady Ania Morganth, dressed in a white and sandy long dress and with her golden hair open except for some locks which were pinned away from her sweet face. Her dark eyes twinkled in the sun and Bob could have sworn that two Vulcan males looked a little bit longer than polite into her direction. Well, why not.
Bob closed slowly the distance to the lady and greeted her politely. While walking towards the entrance he quickly informed her about the two secret lovers and why it was necessary to keep the true nature of their relationship a secret for now.

Ania looked with big eyes at him and smiled, “No problem, Commodore. We Betazoids have a knack for secret love-birds.” To use a human term like this just sounded funny coming from her.

Two minutes later they reached the intensive care station – and Wesley stopped as he saw the many figures who crowded the entrance of a patient-room. Instantly he recognized The Shadow-gang, and among them Chekov, Riley and the young Augment Jim had referred to as Khan’s brother.

“This is exactly what I needed,” he groaned, and Morganth began to chuckle.

“They are all worried, but they all try to show a brave face. How sweet.”

She ignored the commodore’s indignant gaze which was directed at her, and walked ahead. She could feel a special mind among the others – the unsettling concern, mixed with shining love and stubborn hope she had already sensed yesterday. Even before she reached the room she could hear the gentle tenor she had heard in live streams and other media reports concerning Starfleet’s newest hero. She smiled at Galven and Caviw, then at Ritek and Jeff, nodded towards the other three young Terrans and stopped at the door.

She gasped.

There, on the biobed, lay a beaten, very pale human man with dark hair. The bruises couldn’t fool the aristocratic high cheekbones, full lips and even features, while beneath the blankets the shape of a lean, slender body was recognizable. Even in his wretched condition the enhanced man was highly attractive, and Ania didn’t need to think twice why the young captain had fallen for his former nemesis.

Then her gaze wandered to the other men in the room. She recognized a human male in his early thirties, who looked rather concerned at the readouts of the monitor above the biobed. On the other side of the bed stood the young, gold-haired man she had seen in the media. He was pale, dark shadows circled his eyes and his thick hair was in disarray, yet these boyish handsome features, the strong, lean body, the broad shoulders and those incredible blue eyes were not to be mistaken. She couldn’t help but gave the young man a warm, gentle, shining smile, as he lifted his head at her entrance and looked at her confused.
“Captain Kirk?” she asked quietly, and the officer straightened his shape.

“Yes, Ma’am? How can I be at your service?” he asked politely with a smooth tenor.

She closed the distance to him. “Ania Morganth – one of the lucky people your intervention saved from a cruel fate in the Borderland.” She offered him her hand he instantly took and implied a kiss on it.

“Milady, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” he replied quietly; realizing that he faced the Betazoid ambassador. He gestured politely to Bones. “May I introduce you to Dr. Leonard McCoy, my CMO?”

While Ania greeted Bones, Jim continued, “I’m sorry that I can’t introduce you also to my first officer, Mr. Spock. He went with Admiral Barnett to Ambassador Sarek, his father.” He saw her nodding and only then he recognized Bob, who stood at the entrance and looked shocked at Khan. On silent feet Kirk closed the distance to him and stopped beside him.

“Good God, he looks even worse than yesterday,” Wesley murmured and Jim swallowed.

“Yeah,” was all he said; his voice turned rough again.

Bob’s gaze wandered over the injured figure on the biobed. “How are his chances?” he asked quietly.

“Bones isn’t sure,” Jim whispered; feeling a sharp pang in his chest. He realized that the Betazed ambassador looked his way, but he hadn’t the strength to return her glance that certainly was full of compassion. He knew about these people’s empathy. “They don’t even know if he is in coma or if this is a special kind of healing trance. The readouts are still the same since last night.”

Wesley put a hand on Kirk’s shoulder. “Don’t give up hope, son. I know how much he loves you and that he certainly fights his own battle for you, his brother and his family – to be with you and them.”

Jim nodded first and was about to thank Bob for the gentle words, as his older friend’s statement hit
home. Kirk’s eyes became wide as saucers. “You know…?” he began and the commodore grimaced.

“Yeah.” He nodded towards the corridor. “Do you have a minute?”

Kirk hesitated – his glance wandered to Nien.

Bob rolled his eyes. “For God’s sake, Jim, Khan will go nowhere at the moment and he is safe here with your friend, his brother and a whole militia as bodyguards, so tear yourself away from his side for a few minutes more.”

Promptly the young captain sighed. “I don’t fear that someone will harm him – but something.” He gulped. “Nien snapped as he came around after the surgery and…”

“He’ll be fine, Jim,” Joaquin said quietly. “I’ll stay with him. If he should wake up I make certain that it’s me he first lays eyes upon.”

Kirk nodded reluctantly; scratching his head inwardly at how Bob had come to learn of him and Nien. Well, there was this call in the middle of the night and Wesley spoke first with him and then with Khan. Nien even had assumed that the good commodore would put two and two together and would realize what was going on between his protégée and the former dictator, but that Bob was so calm about it made Jim almost nervous. Almost.

Nodding towards Bones, which meant ‘keep an eye on Nien’, he left the room and followed his superior towards a quieter place down the corridor.

“So,” he began carefully, “you know that Nien and I…”

“Are sharing a bed?” Wesley interrupted. “Being madly in love with each other?” He watched the younger man blushed, and growled, “Yes, I know! And I would have preferred to learn it from you instead from Kor – of all people.”

Kirk’s eyes became wide as saucers. “Kor?” he asked thunderstruck. “How did he know…? We weren’t even together in this sense as Nien saved me from this hell-hole Kor called is headquarters.”
Bob snorted. “Please, Jim, this tale you can tell your grandfather, not me.” He took Jim’s left elbow and gestured towards the lift. “Let’s go outside the campus. I don’t think anyone should hear this within the near future – or ever.” He didn’t wait for the young captain but walked briskly towards the lift.

“Lady Morganth is an empath and…” Jim began, but was shut up by Wesley firmly.

“She knows about you two and I asked her to stay silent about it. Especially in front of Barnett.” His brown eyes narrowed. “And he should learn of your liaison from you and not…”

“He knows,” Kirk murmured, walking towards his mentor and superior officer. As he caught Wesley’s surprised gaze, he added sheepishly, “He caught me as I was holding Nien’s hand and… and checked his fever in a rather unusual way.”

“Meaning?” Bob asked.

“Well… I kissed his hand and…” He stopped, as Bob moaned in frustration and closed his eyes for a moment before he glared at Kirk.

“You really have knack for rearing things up, don’t you?” As he saw the younger man only smiling rather embarrassed, he demanded, “How did Barnett take it?”

“He… wasn’t that delighted, but when Selek told him about his mind-meld with Nien and Nien’s real feelings for me and his true intention concerning facing a real trial, Barnett was convinced that I helped Khan NOT because we were rolling between the sheets. Spock also added fluid to the flames, when he explained what Nien has been through – stuff Spock experienced during his own mind-meld with Nien. Barnett… well, he believed them. He hadn’t any other choice, after all they are Vulcans and Vulcans don’t lie.”

“Yeah, except when they stretch the facts and the truth to an extent until it makes another sense – just like your first officer did the two or three times he bent the rules to come to your aid. And I’m certain that Selek did the same with his Jim Kirk – and still does today when it comes to you.” Bob said, planting both fists at his hips and stared at the other captain. “You can call yourself very – very! – fortunate that you have not one, but two Vulcan friends who stand up for you without a second thought. Hell, if they talk about mind-melding with Khan, they really broke a sort of taboo – all for you.” He rubbed his face; making a decision. “Come on, there is something I need to ask you – but not here.”

Giving in, Jim followed him. Two minutes later they stepped outside in the now brimming heat of
New Vulcan’s midday, and walked in the shadows of some trees along the campus.

Kirk was the first to speak again; curiosity getting the better of him. “So, you learned from Kor that Nien and I…?”

“Kor’s ship made records of you and Khan after this little trick with the parachute – while you were surrounded by Kor’s warriors,” Bob grumbled. “He showed them to me when I was aboard his ship. The way you two embraced has absolutely nothing to do with a hug among friends – not even in the face of death.”

Kirk bit his lips; avoiding Bob’s piercing eyes. Wesley shook his head at his protégée’s silence. “You told me that you and Khan met on Turkana for the first time and that you became friends afterwards. And here is where I get this certain feeling that you used a little white lie; because there is no way that you two weren’t already in some sort of relationship as those records were made. Khan pulled you closer into this embrace and you came willingly – even clung to him. You…”

“I just escaped hell, Bob. I was sentenced to death by torture and was already tormented for hours when Khan showed up and broke me out of that damn hole. We fled and then the escape failed. I was facing the next brutal attack that would lead to my death – and Nien was about to face the same fate. Of course I was scared shitless and…”

“Bullshit!” Wesley barked; lowering his voice as he received some lifted eyebrows from by-passing Vulcans. He saw the shock written on Kirk’s face and added, “I don’t doubt that you were afraid – deadly afraid. Hell, I would have gotten weak knees myself. Who wouldn’t? But the way you two reacted, held each other – the way Khan looked as if someone was going to kill one of his family, spoke volumes.”

“I told you that Nien regards me as a kind of family member, because…” He stopped, but it was too late.

“Because?” Bob prompted.

“Because I’ve got some of his blood in my veins,” Kirk mumbled. Taking a deep breath he revealed in a few short sentences what really happened during those minutes the Enterprise tumbled towards Earth and that he died behind the glass door of the warp core – and that Khan’s blood brought him back. Speechless Wesley listened and looked his protégée up and down afterwards.
“You… you were dead? Really dead?”

Kirk nodded. “Yeah – I even was brought in a black sack to medbay, where Bones more or less had a silent breakdown – that’s until the dead Tribble he gave a shot of Khan’s blood to wake up again. Then Spock caught Nien, brought him back aboard, Bones took a blood sample and… well, the rest is history.”

Bob stared at him – pale and perplexed. “You know what this would mean if this ever becomes public?” he finally whispered.

“Yeah, they would be after Nien and his family like the devil after a lost soul,” Jim growled.

“Not only this, but you would be regarded… different,” Wesley mumbled.

“Yep – they would call me a ‘freak’, because Nien’s blood left some nice side effects in me. More agile, stronger…”

“Crazier,” Bob deadpanned, while he shook his head for the second time. “And this blood doping shot Khan gave you during your escape from Turkana strengthened the side effects, didn’t it?”

Kirk chuckled. “Bones doesn’t know if he should thank or curse Khan for it.”

For a moment both men fell silent, and only the soft murmurs of the wind and the gentle noises of the town were heard, then Bob murmured, “So, because of some of his blood in your veins Khan regards you as family. Makes sense. What doesn’t make sense is the fact, why you and Khan already acted like lovers from the moment you two met in person for the first time after over a year.”

Jim moaned inwardly. Wesley wouldn’t let it rest, as it seemed.

“Well, he smelled his blood in me and…”

“And that gave him the idea, ‘Hey, he has my blood in him, I love him for it and therefore I will embrace him for the last time in front of approaching Klingons. And his coming death pains me as if someone is about to tear my limbs from my body. Because, Jim, that’s just what his expression
looked like.” Wesley cocked his head; his face became hard. “This wasn’t the first time you two met after the whole shit last year. This is the real reason why you already trusted him before ‘Turkana’ happened. This is the reason why you believed him the moment he contacted you to warn you about Tammeron. This is the real reason why he came to save your neck, risking his own life. You two were already close when you were taken captive and he raced to the rescue.” He took another deep breath of the hot, dry air. “When did you two became lovers? Last year, before the…?”

“No!” Jim snapped. “Last year I was ready to strangle him – I was ready to kill him like Marcus ordered. Spock talked me out of it, thank the Lord. I don’t dare to think what would have happened if I had shot these torpedoes at Qo’noS, and…”

“So when did you two get close at all? After his escape from the labs in August?” He saw the younger man blushing and snapped, “Jim, for God’s sake, spit it out! I can’t help you if I don’t know the whole truth.”

Kirk bowed his head; looking like an uncertain schoolboy for a moment.

Wesley pressed his lips in a line for a moment, before he said quietly, “I thought, we’re friends – that you trust me.”

Jim lifted his head again; blue eyes wide. “I do trust you, Bob, but… you won’t understand…”

“Try me.”

The Enterprise’s captain sighed tormented. “You’re going to hate me.”

“Nonsense. I’m sure that Spock and McCoy already know this little dark secret you’re so eager to protect, and they don’t hate you, but are still protecting you. So, out with it.”

Rubbing his neck, Jim finally whispered, “We met back in San Francisco – several hours after his escape from the labs in Nevada. It was the same day of the memorial speech I delivered. He… he came to my apartment to kill me – still thinking his family had been murdered by Spock, and me being okay with it.” He moistened his lips. “It didn’t get so far – everything changed after a short fight. Turned out that he was attracted to me from the beginning and I… I had no chance in stopping his… his seduction he forced upon me after he smelled his blood in me. Afterwards we talked. He learned of his family still being alive, I learned of his fate during the earlier months.”
Wesley stared aghast at him. “He came to your apartment and… You let him go?”

Kirk shrugged. “The night was… intense. I fell finally asleep – absolutely exhausted. When I woke up he was gone.”

Bob snorted angrily. “And of course it slipped your mind to inform Command of your nightly visitor.”

Jim spread his arms. “What should I do, Bob? He was already gone, and as I sorted out my thoughts Bones came running, thinking Khan had murdered me after Spock contacted him, giving him the news of Khan’s escape. Before I could even make up my mind Security was there, too, and I recognize a man-hunt when I see one. They wanted to kill Nien, after all he had been put through by some double-faced staff officers who still roamed free through Command; breaking all moral codes and kicking every kind of honor into the next century with the way they treated him. Yes, he killed, but I realized that his rampage the previous year was an amok-run because they broke him first.”

He rubbed his neck; cursing the heat of the early midday. “You should have seen him after I told him of his family’s survival. He sobbed, Bob. It was if someone pushed a needle into a rubber dinghy and all air escapes. He simply broke down in relief and new anguish. All his mourning had been for naught. No one told him that his crew was still alive. I couldn’t attack him in this moment of weakness. And I couldn’t give him away to Command after all the stuff I learned – not only from him, but also later during the encounter in Barnett’s office. As I heard how Dashwood and Connelly referred to him as a ‘subject’, stripping him of all human rights because of his heritage some crazy ancestors of the same kind of insane scientists were responsible for at the first place, I made up my mind. I couldn’t give him away. I simply couldn’t!” He took a deep breath. “And my decision had nothing to do with the fact that he seduced me earlier and gave me the night of my life. I’m a sexual being, I know this, but I do think with my brain, and not with my dick. I kept his visit a secret because I couldn’t live with the knowledge that he would be killed because of me – not after he spared me and told me about everything he had been put through by the very same people I thought to be honorable men and women.”

Wesley had listened carefully to everything the younger man told him, and one thing was clear: Jim was telling the truth; the harsh, unpleasant truth. He had lied for Khan and had covered up for him even back on Earth – because of compassion. Because of this damn urge to do the right thing, even if it went against protocol and broke rules, even laws.

Rubbing his jaw, the commodore murmured. “If Khan would have gone rogue again, his victims had been on your hands, too. You know this, Jim.”

Kirk nodded. “Yeah, but I knew he wouldn’t snap again. He was calm as he told me that he would search for his people. He knew – or hoped – that they were safe where they were. He asked me
about their whereabouts and I answered that I didn’t have a clue, but thought them to be off planet. He agreed, because it was a logical step for Command to take them away from Earth. He said he would find them – and if it would last a life time. That didn’t sound as he would go Rambo again. I think he learned his lessons.” He bit his lips again, before he added, “He left me a note; telling me that he gave me another sunrise to enjoy.”

“That’s why you knew it was him as he referred to himself as ‘Sunrise’,” Bob acknowledged, and moaned back in his throat. “Who knows about this all?”

“Only Spock and Bones. They came to the same conclusion than you did, but not because of some records the Klingons made, but because of other intimate details which were exchanged during our talk and during a call from Bones to Turkana – to me, to be precise.”

Wesley nodded very slowly. “Does Barnett suspect something? Does he assume that you and Khan have to know each other in a ‘familiar’ way for longer than after Turkana?” As Kirk shook his head, Bob sighed. “Right. Take care that it remains this way, otherwise you’re in deeper shit than you already are. That you granted Khan asylum on your ship after you learned of his true background on Aldebaran, like you told me and certainly Barnett, too, is the story you and Khan have to stick to. Otherwise, son, prosecution will use your ‘slip’ in San Francisco against you. That you hid Khan aboard the Enterprise because of the given reason is one thing. To stay silent about your encounter with him in your own apartment before war and everything started, would mean your downfall, so stay the hell silent about it.”

Jim gaped at him and closed his mouth with a click as Wesley grimaced. “You… you’re okay with it?” he asked flabbergasted.

“Of course I’m not ‘okay’ with this shit, Jim. Goddammit, you withhold important information from Command and covered for an escaped criminal – you lied for him! I’m already afraid that the prosecution is going to accuse you of complicity concerning the whole mess last year because of you hiding Khan within the last weeks. If they learn that you both already fucked before the Turkana incident they’ll steer the trial into a direction neither you nor all the other people involved want to face.”


“Did you clean your apartment before you left?” Wesley asked and Jim nodded.

“Yeah. I also terminated my lease contract, because of the upcoming five-year mission. I also ordered a storage company to stock my few furniture in a hold. I received the affirmation of the order’s
execution a day after we departed Earth. And you know that a flat is utterly disinfected before it’s rent out again. There are no tracks left which could give a hint of Nien’s presence in my rooms.”

“Very well, at least we’re on the safe side concerning this mess you made,” Bob grumbled. He looked at his sheepishly smiling protégée and pulled a face. “Really, Jim, you do know how to complicate things. Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

The last sentence had been spoken in a quiet voice, and Jim felt a bad conscious nagging at the edge of his soul. “Well, I knew it would screw up the whole thing by staying silent about Nien’s ‘visit’, yet I was more afraid for him and of the outcomes if the truth were to be revealed, than for me. And I worried for my friends. Not that they would drop me like a hot potato. I know that they would listen and understand, just like you do, yet… I made a decision that was utterly my own and I didn’t want to pull anyone in the mess because of it.” He shrugged. “Turns out that my friends know me better than I assumed.”

Bob grumbled something beneath his breath, before he murmured, “Someone has to look after you, son. Your far too big heart and this crazy drive to set things right will be your death one day – already was, as I learned several minutes ago. I’m only glad that I heard about it now, after you’ve been brought back and stand healthy in front of me. I really don’t want to mourn your loss – already thought I’d lost you as Kor told me that he couldn’t do anything to help you.”

Jim frowned. “What did you mean?”

Wesley sighed. “Right, you are not the only one with big secrets here, and given the fact that this is the hour of truth, I think I have to admit something, too.” He pursed shortly his lips, before he went on, “I contacted Kor when I learned of your capture, and more or less begged him to spare you. Later I learned he was about to give in in his own way, by granting you a quick, painless death. But as he came to the ‘questioning-chamber’ Khan had been already quicker and broke you out.”

Kirk blinked. “One moment- You contacted him during open war? You, a staff officer contacting in private a hostile other staff officer?”

Wesley rolled his eyes. “You are not the only one who interprets the rules… differently, if there is a necessity for it.” He snorted again. “Luckily everything turned out quite all right. And it should remain like this, so don’t say or do anything that gives Barnett even the tiniest clue that you and Khan have been lovers or far longer than he thought.”

Jim felt like a huge burden was taken from his shoulders. It was a relief to tell about this last of all secrets to someone besides Spock and Bones, knowing he could trust Wesley like he trusted Pike.
“Thank you, Bob,” he murmured; his eyes shone with gratitude.

“Yeah, whatever. You’re taking years of my life away, Kirk, and…” His eyes looked behind Jim and widened. “Uh-uh, now I’m dying of curiosity, how that talk went.”

Confused the young captain turned around and he took a sharp breath. Not far away, at the street, a hyper-car had stopped, wearing an official Vulcan sign on its front doors. A male Vulcan, obviously the driver, had already opened the door of the back-seats and just in this moment T’Pau raised from it; Uhura stood on the other side of the open door and waited for the matriarch.

“Sweet Lord, here we go,” Jim gulped; hoping that everything had turned out well for his T’hy’la and his female friend…

TBC…
Your Starflight
Faith wins

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

And once again thank you for all the comments and reactions. Even if the ‘action-part’ is more or less over now, I can promise some more twists, thrills and so on.

One of it comes in the new chapter – a father-son-talk between Sarek and Spock. Then you learn about the outcome of the talk between T’Pau and Uhura, before the old matriarch comes face to face with Joaquin, whom she owes big.

Therefore I don’t want to keep you away from the next chapter any longer.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 82 – Faith wins

Spock had accompanied Admiral Barnett and High Minister Selek to Sarek after ‘the talk’ was done. He understood that the Chief in Command had developed some friendly feelings towards his father and that Barnett still worried about the older Vulcan. Of course Selek went with them. Even if he was older than Sarek now, the ambassador was still – somehow – his father, too, and the younger Vulcan could understand that his older self was concerned about him.

In the timeline ‘Spock Prime’ came from, Sarek was already dead – this much had the Enterprise’s first officer learned from the Elder – and therefore Selek used every given chance to be with Sarek. And there was no need to tell his younger self about the dispute he also had with his father in his own timeline. Spock simply knew that they both shared the same kind of childhood and the same results of their good-bye from home as they both chose Starfleet above the Vulcan Academy. The younger of the two half-Vulcans couldn’t deny that he was glad that he and Sarek were on speaking terms again, yet something Jim called a ‘gut-feeling’ told Spock that the family history of his older counterpart had been different. Last but not least because of Amanda’s early death. Spock simply knew deep down in his soul that Selek and the Sarek of his time-line had clung to their stubborn pride longer than their others selves now. So it was in its own way logical that Selek wanted to be in Sarek’s company as often as possible.
The ambassador was still pale, but he looked better as they arrived and he even made polite small-talk with Barnett. Yet his composure wasn’t fully restored, as it was plain to see for the two other Vulcans, as Sarek finally asked about the meeting. This could be the only reason why his face even showed relief as Richard told him that the statements of his son, Kirk and McCoy had been recorded, and that they remained free until court martial would happen. And, this much Barnett could admit, it didn’t look that bad for Kirk and his officers. It really was a big advantage to be heroes and, by the way, had saved the survivors of a delegation and staff officers from Starfleet Command, restored a cease fire during a war, revealed a conspiracy and protected the capitol of a planet. Well, and that Kirk’s decision to cover for Khan led to everything good the Augment did within the last weeks (which peaked in saving a planet’s whole population and in protecting Starfleet ships by sharing his developed SDD), wasn’t that bad also.

Rather the opposite.

Jim had done everything possible to let everything look in a slightly different light.

Spock was still baffled (if he would admit to feel something like this) how easy Kirk had twisted here and there some small facts, answered questions with own questions which led to an answer that was positive for him and the others, and ‘titillated’ Barnett at his honor, like the Terrans said. His older self (who had mostly sat there and had watched everyone with satisfaction and amusement) had been right. Jim Kirk could talk himself from the gallows, no doubt about it. How did Dr. McCoy put it before they parted? ‘Jim could even sell a freezer to an Eskimo.’ Kirk was highly intelligent and had a way with words that almost made Spock dizzy. Of course he was… well… relieved that his T’hy’la was able to render the whole ‘Khan’ incident with a special touch that had to impress Barnett, but it also showed the younger Vulcan how difficult humans could be, when they said one thing and meant something completely different.

Now he stood at his father’s bed and bid Admiral Barnett and his older self good-bye the moment Jim Kirk followed Bob Wesley to the campus. The door closed behind the two older men, and Spock took a deep breath, got himself a visitor’s chair and sat down beside Sarek. There was another topic that demanded his full attention – something he had to talk with Sarek about here and now. No-one could know how long T’Pau would speak with Uhura, and he wanted his father to be prepared when the outcome of said talk would take its influence on them all.

Having pursued a line of arguments, Spock was about to open the conversation, as Sarek already murmured, “What troubles you, my son? Speak openly.” Two pairs of dark eyes met each other – one calm and almost gentle, the other one first surprised, then it masked the rising feelings.

“I am not troubled, Father, yet there is an important matter I need to discuss with you.”

For the hint of a heart beat something close to amusement curled Sarek’s left mouth edge, while he
answered, “Spock, don’t try to be more Vulcan than Vulcans themselves. It’s okay to be tensed about important things which have to be settled.” He recognized confusion in his son’s gaze and sighed inwardly, ‘Is this my fault? Did I tried to trim him too hard as a child to embrace the Vulcan way that he is even ashamed of himself when he does feel something? We do feel, we only don’t allow our emotions to rule us. Maybe I was too stern with him – he, who also bears his mother’s human and emotional side in him what makes him so unique.’

Spock saw the questioning look of his father and took another deep breath. To avoid a necessity was illogical. “Father, as you said the first time aboard the Enterprise you met someone in my quarters – a cadet in her fourth year who took over the comms on Captain Pike’s order.”

Sarek nodded slowly. “Yes, a young talented woman you spoke highly of. An ascetical pleasing looking Terran woman, as it didn’t slip my attention. As far as I understand it’s the same young lady you often mention within our correspondences and sub-space communications.” He lifted a brow as he saw his son’s soft astonishment. “You haven’t noticed how often you bring her up, have you?” His glance became gentle. “Is there something… special you want to tell me about her – and you?”

Against all attempts to control his body functions, Spock felt how his ear tips and cheeks warmed up and he knew that he was blushing like a little boy. And, out of no-where, all words he had prepared to say, fled his usually so bright and clear mind. For a moment he was twelve all over again, admitting to his father that he had given his schoolmates, who not only perpetually mocked him but also had dared to insult his mother, bloody noses.

Sarek interpreted his son’s reaction in his own very correct ways. “I think, your mother and your human friend would say ‘congratulations’.” His amusement increased as Spock’s face flushed fully now, and allowing parentally instincts taken over, he reached out and laid a hand on his son’s arm. He knew exactly what this all was about. “Spock, to find a mate is most important for us – not only because of our Time that yet has to come for you, but also our katras need a counterpart. Especially now, after the Great Loss, we need to find new ‘anchors which stabilize’ us, like your mother once put our… need to bond with someone. You lost your betrothed and therefore it was absolutely necessary for you to find someone new who can and wants to be your bonding-partner. And as I take it, this young woman is your intended.”

Spock was for another moment lost for words. He had hoped that his father would display some tolerance for his choice – especially after he himself married a non-Vulcan. But this kind of understanding was… close to a shock. “You agree with my decision?” he asked quietly and promptly earned another risen eye brow for it.

“Why shouldn’t I? Because the young lady is Terran? I married your mother and as I admitted to you, I did it because I loved her – still do. Am I correct that you harbor equal deep and warm feelings for Lieutenant Uhura?” Oh yes, he remembered her name – after all there was no correspondence with Spock without his son mentioning the other young officer.
“I do – as much as a Vulcan is able to,” Spock whispered, and Sarek nodded.

“Very good. We Vulcans do feel, my son. And even if we have learned to control our emotions there are situations in which they bloom too strong to ignore them – even outside of our Time. It became clear to me after I met your mother and she ‘slipped beneath my Vulcan shields’, like her father said. And I think the same goes for you and Lieutenant Uhura.”

It wasn’t a question, yet Spock felt obligated to reply, “Yes, it is.”

Sarek’s features softened. “I am… glad for you, my son. To find the right partner, someone who shares more with you than simple respect, is something not all Vulcans manage – even before our race was so cruelly and drastically reduced.” He sighed quietly and it was obvious that the next words demanded something from him. “I think… T’Pring wouldn’t have been the partner you wish for. Your mother warned me as we made the arrangements between you and T’Pring as you were children, but I didn’t listen – following traditions. Now I have to admit that your mother… had been right.”

“How so?” Spock wanted to know; unable to suppress the immense relief he felt at his father’s acceptance, but also at Sarek’s fatherly words.

The Ambassador hesitated, before he answered Spock’s question, “I met T’Pring several months before… The Day. She’d become quite a fine lady with a pleasing appearance, yet she seemed to be… very distant – sullen in company even.” He lifted a brow. “‘A block of ice’ as your mother said afterwards.” He nodded slowly to himself, before he looked his son straight in the eyes. “I know you, Spock. This bond would have been a burden to you. You’ve your mother’s soft heart – a gift many of us didn’t recognize as such. This includes me – at least in the beginning. As you decided to join Starfleet I worried that this gentle side of you could become a danger for you – out there, deep in space that harbors not only phenomena and new cultures, but also hostility. Only after the Great Loss, as I became aware of my mistake concerning you and got more involved in your life again, I realized that your soft spirit is a great advantage – one, not only you but also your shipmates and friends benefit from. Especially your captain. He is a highly intelligent, yet very emotional and impulsive young man – something that certainly wasn’t easy to deal with in the beginning. Nonetheless you two became close friends – despite your rough start.”

Again a gentle hue of green tinted Spock’s cheeks. “Jim and I spoke about those minutes you witnessed on the bridge of the Enterprise, as I told you afterwards. There stands nothing between us anymore.”

“Yes, Selek told me that it was his idea how to ‘set some things right’. I had to agree with his logic. It
was sound and plain. Yet… you’re my son, and when someone hurts you, my logic… fails me sometimes.”

This admission sent warmth through the younger Vulcan, but the chosen words woke also something like amusement in Spock. This time it was him, whose left edge of the mouth curled a little bit. “Your neutral regard of Jim Kirk wavered during these moments and you wanted to act on it.” He thought he could hear McCoy ‘translating’ his statement in a Southern drawl of ‘You thought this insolent kid needed a good spanking’… Well, it was good that the CMO wasn’t here in the moment. Spock could imagine his father’s reaction to that ‘translation’.

Sarek snorted quietly – something he had begun to mirror from Amanda three decades ago. “I was about to nerve-pinch him, and not in a gentle way,” he admitted. “During our Time we not only experience passion and need, but under certain circumstances also rage. Believe me, for several seconds I came close to the latter, even if my next Time is years away.”

Spock stared at his father – his non-existing expression vanished and made room for an almost baffled face.

Sarek lifted both brows. “Don’t look so shocked at me, Spock. I just suffered the severed bond from your mother, had lost our planet, had to stomach the fact that not more than ten thousand of us had survived, and then there was this cocky half grown boy, who had nothing else better to do than to insult you and my dead wife. Even Vulcans have their limits – and yours was reached a breath before mine.” He squeezed his son’s arm. “And if it hadn’t been for Kirk’s success in saving Earth and his sincere apology towards you including a sound explanation for his behavior that you told me of, I would have made certain that this insufferable individual were kicked out of Starfleet.” He relaxed. “And then you two became the command-team of the Enterprise, are known as ‘heroes’ Federation-wide and above all it turned out that you two are soul-brothers.” He allowed himself the tiniest of a sigh. “The universe never ceases to surprise me.”

“I know what you mean,” Spock murmured; asking himself why it had lasted almost three decades until he and Sarek could have a real father-son-talk. It… was good and calming to speak openly with his father like that – an experience he last had when he was five.

“After I returned to bridge that day to offer my service despite the fact that I was emotionally compromised, I… was astonished how well Jim and I worked together,” he said quietly. “During our mission aboard the Nerada, he and I saved each other, and somehow… we both knew what the other one was doing without checking first – like we had known each other for years and not days. Then I manned the abandoned small ship in the Nerada’s hangar and was greeted with ‘Ambassador Spock’. That and the technical enhancements aboard allowed only one logical deduction: It came from the future – with my older self aboard whom I later met.” He looked away; knowing that the next revelation would hurt Sarek, but he saw no reason to hide his decision anymore.
“I was ready to die in those minutes – hurling the ship with the Red Matter and myself against the Nerada to stop Nero from destroying Earth just like he took our home planet from us,” he continued; seeing from the edge of his view how his father tensed. “There seemed to be no other way to save at least Mother’s home planet – the only home I had left. I was… full of rage and pain – something I experienced last year again, after Jim… Well, you know what happened during our first encounter with Mr. Singh.” He took a deep breath. “That day in Sekel’s ship I was ready to embrace death – a way out of the pain and also a chance to stop this insane madman and to avenge Mother. But Jim wouldn’t allow it – not then, not a year later as he broke the Prime Directive to rescue me out of an erupting volcano, or as he entered the warp core chamber unprotected to save the crew, myself included.”

Sarek frowned the tiniest bit. “You sought death?” he asked quietly.

Spock took another deep breath. “I have to admit that after the shock of so many Vulcan bonds ripped apart – something even I sensed – to die didn’t seem too bad. Today I think Jim recognized this and kept me on my toes, like the Terrans say, to give me a reason to fight and therefore to live. Then he became my friend and his safety became my priority – another reason to go on and to bear the pain that begins to become less by now. And this is Jim’s doing. He knows me so well I sometimes find myself questioning how this can even be possible. He looks through me and is there for me when times are dark. He’s an anchor, as you or mother put it, and I don’t think I would have made it so far, would have healed the way I am now, if Jim hadn’t entered my life.” He still held his gaze lowered – after all he was speaking about deep emotions here. He was almost certain to see rebuke in his father’s eyes, but this was not the case.

Again Sarek showed real understanding. “As I said, Vulcans do feel – and I don’t want to know the real number of those we lost after The Day, because they couldn’t handle it and simply died in soundless pain.” He met his son’s surprised glance, and continued, “Don’t be ashamed of your pain or to think of death, Spock, but don’t give into its luring. Life is still worth living. Not only because we’ve a duty to those who have survived and need our help, but also because whatever happens, life remains sacred. And you have more reasons to turn away from darkness and walk back into life. One of them is Kirk, as you already said. You’ve a T’hy’la. There are not many Vulcans who can say that. I don’t remember hearing about T’hy’las within the last centuries at all, but you’ve found yours. Kirk helped you going through the storm of the Great Loss, but I think he also needs you – not only as his first officer, but also as his friend. And I think it’s the same the other way around.”

Spock made an affirming gesture. “I’ve talked with Sekel several times since our first meeting, and he always pointed out how important the friendship between Jim and me will be – how much it would define us.” He felt the illogical urge to moisten his lips and he suppressed it in the last second. “I began really to understand it the moment Jim took his supposed last breath – and his first after his revival. As he died in the warp core chamber, I… Something in me snapped!” Something close to shame edged in his voice and he felt his ear tips burning, as he looked at his father at this admission. “I… cried and I screamed… I hunted Khan through San Francisco – not to arrest him, but to kill him. I thought him to be responsible for Jim’s death – and therefore almost prevented Jim’s only chance of survival: Khan’s blood.” Now he did moisten his lips. “I was emotional compromised that day on the
bridge you witnessed, but this was nothing compared to these minutes I was after Khan. I… failed the Vulcan way utterly, Father. I wept in pain and went out to get revenge by killing someone. That is… far from anything Surak taught us.”

Spock was certain that he would see a signal of disappointment, maybe even disgust in his father’s eyes, but there was none of it. The ambassador’s gaze even softened more, while his voice took a deeper and warmer tone. “No, Spock, you didn’t fail Surak and the Vulcan Way. You simply became one of our ancient warriors for a few minutes – someone who had already suffered a lot and now had to deal with another deep loss. You snapped as another bond was ripped apart – a growing bond of friendship this time and not a parental one, but nonetheless an already strong link. The pain was too much finally. As I said: Even we have our limits, despite Surak’s teachings.”

Spock stared at him. He couldn’t remember when they had spoken with each other like this. Maybe the Great Loss and the life-threatening situation a few days ago had broken through Sarek’s resolve and had made clear for him that any talk with his son could be the last one – with Spock being in Starfleet in these difficult times, and Sarek being still a diplomat who had to leave the colony over and over again.

For a moment – like many times before – Spock wished with all his heart that his mother would still be alive. He knew how much she had hoped for him and Sarek to become close again – how much she had suffered under the icy silence that had spread between father and son for years. Now father and son had renewed their relationship, but too late for Amanda to enjoy it, and for that Spock felt sad and a little bit guilty. Maybe, if he had acted less proud and more rational that fateful day in front of the Elders, Amanda would have had her whole family intact.

Spock sighed inwardly. Of course it was highly illogical to think about an ‘if’ when nothing could be changed anymore, yet his human side couldn’t be silenced easily.

And the topic they were discussing wasn’t finished until now.

The younger Vulcan swallowed a not-existing lump in his throat. “Father, the loss of my self-control almost made it impossible to retrieve Jim. My wrath would have been his ultimate demise, if it hadn’t been for Nyota, who beamed down and stopped me. All chances to get Jim back would have been forfeit because I lost control.”

Sarek realized how much this matter troubled his son, and he reached out again and took Spock’s hand in his own. The parental link brimmed with new found energy between them and transmitted warmth and understanding from the older to the younger Vulcan. “This is the real reason why you are at odds with yourself,” the ambassador assumed correctly. “You blame yourself for something that didn’t happen. You were stopped! You didn’t kill Mr. Singh. Kirk was brought back. That is all that matters, Spock, everything else is nothing you have to be ashamed of. I saw Vulcans losing
control because of less and I would never judge them because of it. It needs a lot to make a Vulcan snap, but it has and will happen again. Kaiidth – what is, is.” He pursed shortly his lips.

“Kaiidth,” Spock murmured. “If I would have given into this old statement, Jim wouldn’t be here now.”

Sarek lifted a brow. “It’s an expression of accepting something that can’t be changed anymore – not an excuse not to try every option left to change a situation, Spock. And, as your mother always pointed out, hope dies last.” He watched his son nodding, and came to his own conclusion. “I assume that you and Kirk built the T’hy’la-bond after his ‘revival’ – as a kind of… healing?”

Again Spock made an affirming gesture. “Yes. The monitor above Jim’s biobed gave an alert and Dr. McCoy wasn’t there. I initiated a mind-meld and kept Jim’s soul with me until Dr. McCoy arrived and stabilized the captain’s condition. Only later I realized that we still were linked on a special level.”

“The ripped bond was completed again. Two souls which reached out for each other – parted and never parted…” The older Vulcan took a deep breath; something close to wonder, but also acceptance shone in his dark eyes. “Like I said: true T’hy’las are rare.”

“Yes,” Spock agreed quietly. “He’s the brother of my soul, and his welfare is important to me like that of Nyota.”

“The one is your T’hy’la, the young lady is your will-be-bondmate.”

Spock took another deep breath. “I know that in earlier times – before Surak – T’hy’las could also have separate bondmates. Yet I never thought it could work like this – or that I would face such a situation one day.”

“You mean, T’hy’las have to be lovers, too? That’s not necessary. Of course to be close to someone like this can lead to a sexual relationship, too, but it doesn’t have to be. Miss Uhura fills this part for you and I understand that she is the one who will be your bond-mate, while Kirk is your friend and brother.” Sarek cocked his head. “When do you plan to introduce her to our clan?” he changed the topic a little bit; knowing that this was the real reason why his son had begun this talk at all.

This time Spock really sighed. “She already is introduced – sort of.” As he caught the hue of confusion in his father’s eyes, he explained, “Dr. McCoy mentioned Nyota’s and my relationship
towards Selek and asked for his help, because Admiral Barnett had grounded her despite the fact that Nyota already got asylum on New Vulcan. What the good doctor didn’t know was the fact that Selek was with T’Pau, and like this grandmother learned of Lieutenant Uhura and me.”

For a moment Sarek’s eyes widened; already assuming the worst. “How did T’Pau react?”

“I don’t have any precise data, Father, but Dr. McCoy said that she was ‘shocked for a Vulcan’. I also learned from Admiral Barnett that T’Pau demanded Nyota’s return to New Vulcan and that she was beamed to New Gol several minutes before the admiral came to the hospital to interview the captain, Doctor McCoy and me.”

Sarek lifted his head. “Miss Uhura is with T’Pau? This… could mean complications. Did Selek mention something how T’Pau…”

“He said that he talked with her and gave some serious arguments in mine and Nyota’s benefit. Yet I’m not certain how grandmother will decide concerning my wish to marry Nyota. It is very well-known how much T’Pau values the Vulcan way and that she distrusts outworlders – at least most of them.”

To his surprise, his father carefully sat up. “I think I’ve got to speak with her. I already know all her arguments which will be against this bond.”

“Because of you and Mother?” Spock asked, and Sarek’s right edge of his mouth almost curled.

“You have no idea of the discussions I had with my mother. I was ready to leave the clan, if T’Pau would insist of me giving up on Amanda. Only then…”

Steps drew nearer and Sarek allowed himself a soft frown as he sensed his mother’s present. “She’s here,” he murmured.

Spock remained stoical while he rose from the chair. For a moment Jim’s voice seemed to echo through his mind, ‘Speaking of the devil…’.

Then the door opened and T’Pau stood in the entrance. Her dark eyes immediately found the sitting person on the biobed, and her hard features seemed to soften for a moment. “Sarek, I’m glad to see you awake and in re-growing health, my son.” she said calmly. “This gives me the chance to speak
with you and your son about a serious matter concerning our clan.” Her gaze wandered to the younger Vulcan. “Spock, as I was informed of one of your friends, you want to bond with a young lady from Earth. Your friend spoke on her family’s behalf, like it is traditional if a bride’s family isn’t present. You chose your friends well.” She turned around. “Please, child, join us.”

Spock needed every inch of self-control to prevent his jaw from hitting the floor, as Uhura stepped beside T’Pau and the matriarch laid a hand on her shoulder. In the background the young Vulcan recognized a broad beaming Jim Kirk, who lifted a thumb in triumph and beamed at him like crazy…

“Sarek, may I introduce you to Miss Nyota Uhura – your son’s intended.” T’Pau’s voice was strong and didn’t allow any protest.

The ambassador watched the young Terran woman he only had met once for a few minutes. He took in her gentle eyes, the soft and beautiful features, the long thick black hair and her tiny frame. Then he saw the high intelligence in her glance, the calm expression of her face and the proud stance of her slender body – fragile, yet not vulnerable. An aura of warmth and understanding, but also of strength surrounded her, as she lifted her right hand; her fingers parted in the Ta’al-greeting. The traditional sentence “I come to serve.” was spoken in almost perfect Vulcan High Standard – just like Amanda did all those years back, as she was introduced to T’Pau.

‘Well chosen, my son,’ he thought. ‘Your mother would be proud of you.’

“Your service is welcomed,” he replied quietly. He saw how her glance wandered to Spock and only his long experiences with Amanda made it possible for him to recognize the deep warmth and love that shone for a moment in her dark eyes as she looked at his son. ‘Composed, yet emotional – she’ll be a perfect match for Spock.’

The younger Vulcan felt something bubbling up deep in him – recognizing it as a very positive emotion as he realized that T’Pau obviously wasn’t against his wanted marriage with Nyota. And with this he remembered his expected manners. Quickly he offered his grandmother the vacant visitor-chair, before he went to Uhura’s side and clasped his hands behind his backs. He heard a soft noise from the corridor and throwing a quick glance over his shoulder, his eyes met the blue ones of Jim Kirk.

His friend still grinned at him, lifted this time both thumbs, waved at him, bowed towards a slightly amused Sarek and went away – knowing that the coming talk was a very private one he didn’t want to bother with his presence…
Jim walked with quick steps down the corridor; feeling relieved for once. While he and Wesley had accompanied T’Pau politely into the hospital, Kirk had exchanged a short but very concerned glance with Uhura, and as she had given him a fleeing brilliant smile, he had known that everything had turned out to be okay for her and Spock. Happy for his T’hy’la and for Nyota he could push his worries for Nien aside for some minutes, but now – as he neared the intense care station again – he felt the heaviness of his concern returning.

He stepped around a corner and heard Wesley’s and Barnett’s voice talking.

“You knew it, Bob! You knew of these two being a couple, and you didn’t tell me! Hell, even Norton had nothing better to do than to rub this liaison under my nose, as I interviewed him a few minutes ago!” The Chief in Command didn’t sound too happy.

Jim stopped. It wasn’t his way to eavesdropped, but he had to know where Barnett really stood.

“Sweet Lord, Richard!” Wesley sighed. “As I said, they love each other. Love happens! If there is one thing in the whole universe you can’t change, then it’s this fact! And, by the way, don’t you think it’s far more important that the conspiracy was stopped, the traitors are arrested, you and the others survived and above all that the cease fire still exists, instead of grousing about a pair of love-birds, who are, by the way, responsible for all the good I just listed?”

“You don’t even deny that you knew about them!” Richard sounded more frustrated than angry by now.

“I had a suspicion – and it was confirmed as I asked Jim straight ahead while you visited Norton in custody. Yes, they are lovers – and? As I said, I don’t think that this is any kind of drama.”

“You are aware that trial will see this differently – that the lawyers will try to use this to their advantage? Kirk and Khan are going to need a hell of a good lawyer to get out of this mess in one piece – and I don’t even speak about Kirk remaining captain of the Enterprise.”

“I know someone, who will be perfect for Jim’s and Mr. Singh’s case.” – That was Selek’s voice and Jim felt a wave of affection for the old Vulcan. Like always Spock was there for him – even in his aged form from another universe.

“Good Lord, High Minister! Is there the tiniest chance that you will stay only once out of this?”
Barnett sounded exasperated by now.

“No, the chance is zero-point-zero, to be precise, Admiral,” Old Spock deadpanned wryly, and Kirk had to suppress a chuckle. He wasn’t very good at it, as it turned out a moment later.

“How are my younger counterpart doing, Jim? Does T’Pau approve with his choice of bondmate?” Selek called, and Jim rolled his eyes.

“Sorry,” he said nonchalant as he finally turned around the corner; letting his shoulder drop while his stance became unsteady. “I didn’t want to eavesdrop, but I got a little bit dizzy and had to rest for a moment. The blood-loss, you know…” He finished lamely and suppressed the urge to duck his head, as his two superior officers gave him a stern look – not buying his show for a minute. Only Spock Prime remained calm; his glance showed gentle amusement.

“You didn’t seem that dizzy as you followed T’Pau and Uhura,” Wesley grumbled.

“Maybe the briefing with me and your constantly firing of ‘clear and logical’ arguments finally got to you,” Barnett almost scoffed, even if the left edge of his mouth curled.

“Bones told me to take care not to overstress myself – I didn’t listen to him,” Jim shrugged sheepishly.

“Like always.” Old Spock commented dryly. The Vulcan Elder enjoyed himself far too much for Kirk’s taste, but he could understand him. He knew that he gave a very lame excuse for eavesdropping to the admiral and the commodore.

“Well, then you should return to your room and lay down, son. I really don’t want this mother-hen of CMO fussing around you, because you slumped,” Barnett said, and added for good measurement, “This is an order, Kirk!”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Aye, sir!” Hesitating for a moment, he drove his attention to Selek. “To answer your question: Uhura let me know that her talk with T’Pau ended positive. The old lady isn’t against Spock’s and Nyota’s bonding.”

Satisfied the Elder nodded. “It pleases me to hear this,” he replied, but something in his stance and his voice told Jim that Spock Prime already knew about it. ’Bones is right, Spock IS a matchmaker!’
Kirk thought with an inward grin.

“Please pass my congratulations to Commander Spock and Lieutenant Uhura,” Barnett addressed Jim. “I would tell them in person, but the Lexington and the Excalibur will depart for Earth within the next two hours, and I’m needed aboard.” He glanced at Selek. “Would you please tell Lady Morganth that she should contact the Lexington within the next 90 minutes? Otherwise she’ll have a longer vacation here on New Vulcan.”

Spock Prime nodded slowly. “I’ll tell the ambassador of the departure schedule after we’ve exchanged some topics about mutual interests, Admiral. Lady Morganth is the first Betazoid who has visited New Vulcan, and I think her people are able to… help us with some upcoming urgent matters.”

“Urgent matters?” Kirk asked; concern laced in his voice.

Those old, knowing and gentle eyes turned his way. “It’s something Vulcans do not speak of – especially not towards non-Vulcans, yet I’m ready to explain it to you in private. Later.”

Jim nodded in acceptance – and he felt honored. If there was something Vulcans didn’t talk about with outworlders (well, there was a lot Vulcans didn’t talk about, by the way) and Selek was ready to break this taboo, then he – Kirk – felt a little bit special.

To change the topic he turned towards Barnett. “What about Norton?” he asked; his voice a low growl.

“High Minister Selek and the Lady T’Pau allowed us to take him with us, but they will also press charges against him for the attack on their seat of government. The Lady T’Pau will also join in action because of the assault of her person.”

Jim’s expression became grim. “If she wants witnesses, my officers and I would love to give our statements – as I’m certain Joaquin will to.”

Barnett made a face. “Just see that you, your officers and your sweetheart get a very good lawyer who can pull you all out of the fire, before you start worrying for T’Pau. I personally think you did well and my heart tells me that you had no other choice to act like you did, but the law will see it differently. And even my influence will not be strong enough to give you and your friends a free ticket.” He turned to leave, but looked one time back over his shoulder; his face was soft now. “Jim?
Thank you for everything you and your comrades did for me and our fellow captives – not to mention all the other good things you and Khan were responsible for. If there is something I can do for you, contact me.”

A true smile spread over the young captain’s face. “Thank you, Admiral. Maybe there is one little thing you can do.” As he caught the questioning look of his superior officer, he said, “Please allow me to return to the Enterprise as soon as Nien is out of danger. I know that Commodore Wesley is now in charge of the ship, but she is still my ship – and my crew needs me.”

For a long moment Barnett looked him straight into the eyes, and then he sighed. “You know the book, son. When you’re relieved of duty because of an upcoming trial, even I can’t allow you to pick up duty again until that trial happens. This permission can only be given by the Head of Starfleet – meaning the president.” As he saw the disappointment in those blue eyes, he grimaced. “When we’ve returned to Earth President Robertson will certainly have many questions only I can answer for him. I’ll ask him if he could make an exception for you and your staff – seeing that there really is no danger of you all running off. I’ll let you know about his decision.”

Promptly Kirk beamed at him. “Thank you, sir! When, do you think, will you be able to speak with him?”

Richard chuckled. “Jim, as far as I understand you won’t leave Khan’s side until Mr. Superman is back in the land of living and himself again. Therefore the matter of you returning to the Enterprise doesn’t become acute within the next days, so don’t push me.” His expression was gentle; almost teasing. Then Barnett sighed, “All right, son, take care of yourself. You too, Bob.” He looked at Spock Prime. “Selek.” he bowed his head towards the Elder and walked away; his steps echoed through the corridor and faded away.

“Rrrright,” Wesley murmured; glancing at Jim. “As Barnett said; off you go and find some rest. You really look like someone ate and spat you out again.”

“Thanks a lot,” Jim answered sarcastically; rolling his eyes.

“Jim, Commodore Wesley is right,” Selek cut in gently. “Come with me, young one. I’ll accompany you to your room.” He laid a hand on the captain’s shoulder and steered him softly forward. Kirk chuckled again.

“You don’t trust me to really return to my room – despite the fact that Nien is there and needs my presence?”
“No, Jim, I know that you will go to your room – but I simply know you too well. You will not lay down without some… persuasion. And I will make certain that you don’t find any excuses for staying out of bed.”

Jim groaned. “You are really as bad as my Spock – maybe even worse!”

“Young Spock doesn’t have the experiences with your stubbornness like I have, T’hy’la. I do know how to persuade you!”

Wesley watched them go away – the young proud and mule-headed captain and the older counterpart of his first officer and soul brother. Both were arguing with each other in an almost teasing way – both aware that neither of them would give in easily, yet both seemed to relish in the little discussion. Bob sighed; hoping against hope that the next weeks would turn out well for his protégée and his friends…

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Two hours later the Lexington and the Excalibur left orbit and headed towards Earth. Those, who would face their own court material and had been aboard Enterprise, were on the Excalibur in custody: the members of the conspiracy including Nureaux, the criminal scientists and those men of Elite Security, who hadn’t listen to Barnett’s direct order and continued their fight against the admiral and his allies the day before – among them of course Finnegan and his four fellows who had tried to kill Khan. Aboard the Lexington were the rest of the delegation – all diplomats were happy that their odyssey would be over soon. Further talks with Whitman had confirmed that the HQ had been cleared. Yes, several men and women who were accused of having a part in Section 31 or / and in the conspiracy were still being sought, yet the main group of the ‘ulcer’ – how McCoy named them – had been arrested.

The Enterprise stayed in orbit around New Vulcan, and – as Scotty put it – the Grey Lady was in need for a serious ‘cure’ for the next two or three weeks. Galven offered Wesley his help aboard and the commodore accepted gladly. The Shadow-gang had also remained on New Vulcan; not ready to leave their augmented friend, his ‘little brother’ and Kirk.

Chekov and Riley beamed back aboard around 1330 ship’s time, reported dutiful to Wesley and prepared for their shift. Yet they had left Joaquin a communicator they had switched to a private frequency on which he could reach them any time. The Augment-boy hadn’t said much, but the gratitude that shown in his dark eyes spoke volumes. And the two ensigns were glad and a little bit proud that their offered friendship was this welcomed.
As the afternoon began in New Shi’Kahr something close to daily routine had returned and the waves were calmed.

Almost.

T’Pau had spoken with her son, her grandson and Uhura for quite a time. Only as Sorel appeared and insinuated that the ambassador needed rest, the visitors left the room. The two younger people insisted on accompanying the matriarch to the exit and therefore they passed by the intensive care area, where the elder all of suddenly stopped. Without saying a word to her grandson and his intended, she entered the corridor and after orienting herself she headed straight for the room in which Khan and Kirk rested. The younger Terran male she had come to know as Dr. McCoy left the healer’s ready room in this moment, and stopped dead in his tracks as he saw the old Vulcaness coming his way.

Bones knew that he maybe would never be able to give a proper Ta’al, and therefore he bowed in the old-fashioned gentlemanly way as the matriarch closed the distance to him. “Lady T’Pau, it’s an honor,” he said.

Spock’s Clan-Mother looked at him, recognized his genuine respect and stopped in front of him. “Dr. McCoy, I want to inform you as the Speaker of Miss Uhura’s family that your intercession has been accepted. Spock’s wish to bond with your friend was met with my approval.”

Bones felt like a whole mountain dropped from his heart in relief. And the short glitter of amusement in the matriarch’s eyes spoke volumes. Grinning like mad he turned towards a calm Spock and a beaming Uhura, waited until T’Pau continued her way and closed then quickly the distance to his two friends.

“Nyota, congratulations!” he smirked, pulling the young woman to him and placing a quick kiss on her cheek. Laughing quietly Uhura returned the gesture of affection, before Leonard turned towards the first officer.

“Spock, m’boy, congratulations!”

A lifted brow and a short frown were the reactions to that addressing, before the Vulcan answered politely, “Thank you, Leonard.”
McCoy grinned at him and suppressed the urge to slap him on the shoulder; knowing that this was a privilege only Jim was allowed to do – being soul brothers, and so on. Instead of forcing an unwanted contact on the Vulcan, the CMO smiled, “Finally one happy ending! I could get used to it.”

Spock clasped his hands on his back and nodded. “I have to agree, Doctor. And to use a Terran proverb: you were quite lucky under the given circumstances. Obviously your chosen words and your reactions during your talk with T’Pau were interpreted by her as your right as a friend to speak on Nyota’s behalf in place of her family.” He lowered his voice that became soft. “Thank you, Leonard.”

McCoy couldn’t help himself – he blushed. Out of joy that his mistake had turned to a good account, but also because it was very rare that the clipped Vulcan showed and even voiced gratitude.

“Well… you two are welcome,” he mumbled, then he saw Nyota’s eyes widening in alert and turned around. “Uh-uh,” he whispered, as he watched T’Pau and standing at the threshold to Kirk’s and Khan’s room.

The matriarch had reached the room in which Khan lay, and looked inside. Her glance found a sleeping James Kirk, laying on another biobed beside a male Terran with dark hair, who was tightly monitored by med scanners. She saw the bruises on his face and a hue of irritation grazed her – an instinctively reaction to any display of violence. She heard her grandson, his intended and the human doctor stepping beside her and asked in a hushed voice, “How is Mr. Singh’s condition?”

“His injuries are serious and he fell into a coma – or healing trance. Healer Sorel and I are not sure,” Bones said.

T’Pau nodded slowly. “And Kirk?”

“Exhaustion – physically and psychically. The last weeks weren’t a walk in the park, Ma’am, with him taken captive by Klingons and being tortured, then his stunt on Aldebaran – better to say above the planet – and afterwards everything he went through until the conspiracy was revealed and we all reached New Vulcan. And now he suffers because of the mental bond he shares with Mr. Singh. He needs rest – even if he wouldn’t agree with me on it.”

The matriarch lifted a brow. “To overestimate the own strength is the prerogative of the youth, Doctor. That even counts for young Vulcans.” She gave her grandson a pointing look, before she turned away. “Keep me updated of Mr. Singh’s condition, Doctor. And when Kirk feels strong enough again, I want to speak with him.” She lifted her gaze one last time to her grandson. “Am I
right that you want him and Doctor McCoy being present at the bonding ceremony of you and Miss Uhura?”

“Jim is my T’hy’la and Leonard is my friend, too,” Spock affirmed.

“Very well, then I have a topic more I have to discuss with Captain Kirk. When he is ready to leave his bondmate’s side, tell him to contact me. I will instruct my secretary to link him through as soon as he calls me. Spock, you’ve the frequency of New Gol. Please pass it to Kirk.”

“As you wish,” the first officer nodded, then T’Pau walked away – quick, with smooth movements, proudly straightened shoulders and yet with the burden of someone who had to carry too much responsibilities on their shoulders.

The old Vulcaness left the intense care station and walked through the visitor area where the meditation alcoves were. She thought she sensed inner turmoil from someone and her gaze found one occupant of the alcoves. She watched a human boy rising from his position from the bench – the youngling at the threshold to adulthood, who had protected her.

Joaquin gulped as he saw the old Vulcaness stepping into the visitor area and shot off the bench. He had tried to meditate again, but it had been for naught. His thoughts turned in circles around everything that happened within the last days, and therefore he heard the matriarch’s silent entrance. Their eyes met and gulping Joaquin straightening his clothes while he closed the distance to the female alien. He bowed – not knowing when this odd lifting of a hand and spreading its fingers was allowed and when not. “Ma’am,” he greeted respectfully.

T’Pau lifted a brow. “You are Joaquin Weiss as I learned from Selek.”

Weiss knew that it was a statement, not a question, yet he felt obligate to answer, “Yes, Ma’am.” He cleared his throat. “Uhm, I apologize for… for my rough handling of the situation yesterday in High Minister Selek’s office. I learned from him and Mr. Spock that it is more or less a taboo among your people to touch them, but… I saw no other way to prevent you from further harm, as help arrived and this crazy guy was losing it.”

The old Vulcaness had not expected to get an apology from the Terran youth that spoke of a greater sensibility than the most humans showed in that matter. And it sparked her curiosity about his true intentions of his yesterday’s action. “Why did you do it?” she asked. “As far as I understood, you didn’t know who I was then, yet you risked your own health to protect me. Why?”
Promptly Weiss blushed. He couldn’t tell her about Shani, couldn’t he? Or would the old lady understand it the way he meant it? There was only one way to find out – and, by the way, he had a certain feeling that she would sense it if he would come up with some lame excuses. Therefore he would tell her the plain truth.

“Well… uhm… I don’t want to sound offensive, but… it was a simple reaction. You… you remind me very much at a woman I knew in my childhood. She was the first normal human who treated my siblings and me like… like people and not like things – or animals. She became something like a mother for us.” He scratched his head – a gesture of embarrassment. “Of course there are many differences between you and her, Ma’am, but your face and your statue resemble that of Shani very much. I… I simply acted on an impulse.”

For a long moment T’Pau let those words sink in. This wasn’t the first time she was confronted with human emotions and their own very special way of dealing with difficult situations. Usually she couldn’t understand humans’ reasoning for their acting on feelings, but this special case was different. She had to admit that she hadn’t expected this kind of explanation, yet she could grasp the boy’s motivation for his action. “You are right, I may not resemble this woman except for my looks, yet I do understand your loyalty and… affection for her and that you passed it on my person. You don’t have to be embarrassed – as far as I realize this is even a sort of compliment.”

Promptly the young man grinned at her and bowed his head. “Thanks, Ma’am. I feared that you would be offended.”

T’Pau cocked her head. It was and would be always difficult for her to grasp the concept of human gratitude, but she had come to accept it. And, what surprised her now for the second time this day was the fact that she was confronted with a human who respected Vulcan ways and traditions without hesitation, yet remained simply himself. That was a new experience for her. She hadn’t expected something like this. Neither from this boy, nor from her grandson’s intended. Maybe the Terrans had learned a thing or two within the last century. Of course she knew that the officer staff of the Enterprise and the enhanced youngling in front of her weren’t usual examples for the human species, yet she couldn’t deny that she was impressed with them. One more time she could comprehend why her grandson had taken a human as his T’hy’la and had chosen a Terran woman for his bondmate.

She met the big eyes of the Augment-boy and nodded slowly. “We Vulcans don’t overvalue our ego to take offence. And given your case, Mr. Weiss, Terrans would say that it is a compliment to be compared to someone who was this important. I do understand this sentiment. And given the fact of your and your siblings’ heritage, this woman, you spoke of, must have been very tolerant and… sensitive to give you younglings a home.”

Joaquin sighed. “Yeah, she really was special,” he affirmed. “She didn’t understand the difference between normal humans and us. She simply saw us as children who needed help – that counted even
for the older Augments, like Noo, Otto and the others.” He lowered his head; sadness tingled in his voice. “We missed her after her sudden death.”

T’Pau didn’t ask how this woman had died; she had a really good imagination how this female had met her ending – last but not least she had studied some documents about Terran history of the Eugenic Wars. It had been necessary after she learned from ‘Selek’ of Kirk’s pledge of asylum for Khan and the other Augments.

“It’s the fate of young people to face the death of the elder sooner or later – and it pains.” She saw surprise in his gaze, and added, “A pain even we Vulcans do experience. To follow a path of logic and to control emotions doesn’t mean to be immune against the latter. The way you choose how to deal with it decides if the pain rules you or if you will find peace again.”

Joaquin made an affirming gesture. “I know what you mean, Ma’am. Noo told me likewise after Shani’s death, yet even he mourned. She was, like I said, the first human who treated us fairly and with affection.”

T’Pau cocked her head. “You and your siblings faced a lot of cruelty, as far as I learned. How much do you know about your brother’s fate in this century before he and James Kirk became friends?”

The short flash of anger told the matriarch already enough, as Weiss growled, “Noo and Jim told me everything. And I got a very nasty example how these treacherous bastards within Starfleet think about my people, as they had nothing better to do to beat Noo into a bloody pulp. If it wouldn’t have been for Jim, McCoy and Spock – or this funny engineer – who showed friendship towards my brother, I would think that we’re still in the nightmare we tried to escape two and a half centuries ago.” He shook his head. “I fear that certain kind of people will never change.”

“I agree with you,” T’Pau said quietly; surprised at herself that she had risen such interest in the young superhuman and his ‘siblings’. “There will always be those who are incapable of accepting new ways and who cling to their old believes, as proven wrong they ever may be. But there are also those who have opened their eyes and whose minds are stronger and ready to learn. Admiral Barnett risked his life as he came to your and your brother’s rescue, knowing perfectly well who you are. Captain Kirk suffered the loss of his mentor because of your brother, as Spock told me, yet James was ready to listen to your brother’s words and forgave him. You are strangers to us – ‘aliens’, is how you humans would say the other way around – yet we are ready to protect you and your siblings, and to help them settle in this new time they will face. You see, young one, there are always two sides among people. To not fall prey to bitterness and hate because of the so-called dark side is the best way to show them, how wrong they were in the first place.”

For a long moment Joaquin only watched her, and then he smiled, “You should have had the chance to speak with Ghandi. He was a great thinker and strong defender of peaceful ways. I think you two
could have philosophized for hours.”

Again a dark slanted eye brow was lifted. “I learned about him after my contacts with Terra grew. He was a wise man. Several of his teachings are almost identically with Surak’s ways.”

“With ‘growing contact’ you mean Spock’s mom, don’t you?” Youthful curiosity shimmered in the augmented boy’s eyes, and T’Pau recognized it as such. For a second she was almost startled that this offworlder, who was awake in this century only for a few days, knew already so much about her grandson and their clan, but on the other hand it made sense. Spock had obviously tried to help the boy to come to terms with this strange world Weiss had found himself in after waking up. There was no doubt that the young man must have been overwhelmed with anxiety after finding himself two and a half centuries in the future, facing not-Earthen species. When Spock spoke about his own people it certainly had helped the boy.

Still seeing the curiosity in Joaquin’s eyes, T’Pau decided to follow Spock’s example and to speak of the House of Surak – and of one particular person within the clan. “Amanda was a very tolerant and bright woman, who left her own world to join ours. Not many humans are ready to do this, because our way of life differs greatly from their own. The most Terrans call us ‘cold-hearted’ – a phrase I had at first difficulties to understand, because our body’s core-temperatures are higher than that of humans. Amanda explained it to me among other many things which were confusing for me. I have to admit that my understanding for her people increased because of her, and the other way around. She was… an enrichment for our clan and her death was a great loss that also brought my son awful unsettlement.” The Vulcaness pursed shortly her lips. “I think she would have tried to help you and your siblings to gain a foothold, as you Terrans say.”

Weiss nodded slowly; beginning really to understand what open wounds the destruction of these people’s home world must have caused. “You speak of the lady’s loss and what it did to your son and your clan. I think… this is even crueler than the loss of your home.”

T’Pau nodded slowly. “To lose a house – the ground you’ve been born on – can be very difficult for many species, yet the loss only contains stones and familiar surroundings. It fades in comparison to the death of so many people. There is not one family that wasn’t and still isn’t faced with the consequences of dead bonding partners.

Joaquin frowned. “I hear in your words that the latter is a big problem for your people. Because of the mental bond married couple share?”

“Yes,” the matriarch nodded; not surprised that the Augment-boy made the correct conclusion. “Selek told me that your brother and Kirk are sharing a likewise bond – one that led James to Mr. Singh as he was attacked aboard the Excalibur – one that gave your brother strength during surgery. I am… curious how you people developed this kind of mental ability.”
A short smile rushed over Joaquin’s youthful face. As it seemed, there was one thing Vulcans couldn’t resist: When something stirred their interest they developed a great hunger for learning and knowledge. Well, that was fine with him. And, by the way, the old Vulcaness had told him a lot about her family and her people, it was only fair to return the favor.

“Dr. McCoy thinks it’s because of our stronger brain activity that we develop some mental skills usual humans lack,” he said. “Otto and Katie were the first of us to be married and they told Noo about this bond at some time. Noo explained to me a few days ago, after I woke up, that he sort of claimed Jim – and the other way around. I think this was the beginning of the bond, but I have no clue how strong it is – or how deep our telepathic skills are.”

T’Pau watched him again. “I recognize your exhaustion in body and soul – the latter because of your brother’s condition. To settle the mind by meditation is a good way to calm your soul, yet I think your attempt of meditation was unsuccessful?”

Weiss looked back at the alcove he had sat in a few minutes ago. “Yeah, I was never good in relaxing enough to enter the state of mediation. And now it’s almost impossible with everything that is going on and being on this strange planet, whose noises and smells are so foreign for me. Sorry.”

“There is no need to apologize, Mr. Weiss,” the matriarch replied. “Your mental skills are uneducated and therefore uncontrolled.” She made a decision. “I advance a proposal. A mind-meld. I can calm your mind and your *katra* – your soul – so that you can bear up the next days without suffering like you're doing in the moment.”

Joaquin bit his lips, before he said, “And in return you learn of our mental abilities and of our past.”

“Selek already got the latter information from your brother. His word is good enough for me – your people will find here a safe haven from the horrors they escaped as your ship was launched. But they will be among telepaths and it will be better for both sides to know how to handle each other.” Her voice became softer. “And, by the way, you are still very young – and the young ones have to be taught how to use their skills to their best abilities. Selek told me that you felt your brother’s pain, exactly like Kirk. While such bonds have their advantages they can be a hindrance under certain circumstances – yes, they even can be a danger for both sides. You should learn to shield yourself to keep a clear mind. This is something Selek will teach Kirk and your brother when the latter has regained some strength. And I think Selek also will be your teacher, but until then it can become necessary that you are able to control yourself.”

Rubbing his neck, Joaquin murmured, “Let me guess: My emotions are screamingly loud for you and your people.”
Again a Vulcan brow was lifted; remembering what Selek told her about Lady Morganth and her requirement to visit the hospital. “Kirk’s and Khan’s bond was strong enough to bring a Betazoid to her knees and to alert her enough to have a personal look at them despite the distance between her and the two men. So, yes, the emotions of your people are very strong.”

Weiss didn’t know why, but he felt himself blushing. “You’re speaking of the beautiful lady who visited us around midday?”

“Yes, Selek told me of her visit. She was in great worry for your brother’s and Kirk’s wellbeing with them being responsible for her rescue from the Orion pirates. Even for a Betazoid it’s very difficult to sense emotions of others over the distance between a ship in orbit and someone on a planet’s surface, yet the anguish of those two was deep enough to call to her. And if I lower my own shields only for a moment I can sense your fear like I would if I were touching you. While I know that emotions are very important for humans, I also came to learn that they can do damage to them. Let me help you, young one, like you helped me during the scenario in Selek’s office.”

It was the matriarch’s way to show gratitude, this much Joaquin was aware of, yet he felt something knotting in his stomach. But he tried not to show it. Rather he straightened his shape, while he asked quietly, “How much will you see?”

“I will not probe your mind. To invade personal parts without allowance is a crime among our people – something I will not do. Show me what you are comfortable with or keep your thoughts for yourself. I simply will try to calm your unsettled mind and will test how strong your mental abilities are.” For a second the left corner of her mouth seemed to curl. “It will not hurt.”

“I’m not afraid of a headache,” Weiss murmured, while he remembered the short talk between Selek, Spock and Khan the day before – how shocked the old Vulcan was as he learned that his younger self had forced a mind-meld on Noo during their fight the year previously. It showed him how serious these people were concerning their incredible mental abilities. And one look in those dark eyes of the old Vulcanaess was enough to convince him to give her his trust – something he didn’t do only because she still resembled Shani so much.

“Okay,” he said slowly. “Where shall we do it? Here?”

T’Pau made an inviting gesture towards the alcove. “We will be not disturbed there.”

Politely Joaquin let her sat down first, before he closed the curtains and took his place beside her. He
felt another pang of nervousness, but fought it off. “What do I have to do?” he wanted to know.

“Just close your eyes and relax. Don’t fight me, it will become uncomfortable otherwise. I will sense how far you will allow me to go and will respect your decisions, so don’t be afraid. I am not here to harm you.”

Her voice was warmer now, softer – alluring. For a moment Joaquin compared it with the behavior of a Greek siren, ready to lull the mindless sailor in, and then he remembered that these people were anything but a dangerous creature from Terran legends, and forced himself to relax. He felt warm finger tips pressed gently against his left temple and cheek, then a careful pressure seemed to be in his head. For several seconds he stiffened, and then he heard the Vulcaness’ voice in his head.

‘Don’t fight me, young one. There is no reason for it.’

Gathering all his courage, Joaquin slackened his frame and tried to ease his rising mind. Noo had done it, so he could do it too! And, by the way, this was Spock’s grandmother, no real siren.

‘Nice comparison,’ the voice in his mind deadpanned, ‘but usually Vulcans do not swim.’

Out of no-where Joaquin felt the impulse to laugh at that shown dry humor, then warmth and peace began to engulf him – and he drifted away…

And in the entrance stood the tall, slender frame of Spock, who had just witnessed something he had never thought possible: T’Pau, the un-crowned matriarch of Vulcan, the defender of Surak’s ways and keeper of traditions, had shown sympathy for a young boy who didn’t even belong to their race. She offered her help in a way the most members of the clan had never gotten – him included.

No, it wasn’t jealousy Spock felt, rather the opposite – something like warmth and gentle joy. T’Pau was known as a stern, sharp woman who barely accepted compromises. Now she showed even understanding for the need of an outworlder. How would McCoy put it? She’s not such a dead loss as he had thought…

TBC…
Chapter End Notes

Yeah, T’Pau really surprised a lot of people, but how is the saying? With age comes wisdom, grief can open the eyes (it’s an old Indian saying, by the way). And that Sarek starts to understand his son was about damn time!

In the next chapter, there will be a very sweet and romantically scene between Spock and Uhura. Then something changes within in Khan’s condition, and Selek stays true to one of the promises he made to himself: To teach Jim some mental controls.

I hope you liked the new chapter, and – like always – I’m curious about your reactions.

Have a nice start into the next week.

Love

Yours Starflight
Of emotions and telepathy

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

And once again I have to thank you for all the lovely comments and kudos. I know that all of you hope for Khan to wake up, but after all the serious injuries he got, his augmented nature has to fight its own battle.

One point of it is the empathically and telepathically connection between him and Jim – and the two Spocks have enough of watching Jim and Khan suffering because both feel the distress of the other one. Therefore both Vulcans decide to do something.

Well, and then there is still an open issue between our second lovebird-couple – namely ‘young’ Spock and Uhura; after all Nyota was never officially asked for her hand in marriage.

I promise you a sweet and romantically, but also a chapter full of warm friendship – and a little silver lining concerning Nien.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 83 – Of emotions and telepathy

As Spock returned to the intensive care room, Jim was still asleep and even without touching him; the Vulcan knew that his friend suffered nightmares. Not bad enough to warrant waking him up to prevent harm, but his slumber was restless. Brushing a hand over his captain’s temple, Spock tried to send warmth and calmness to his T’hy’la’s troubled mind, and only as Kirk lay still again did Spock turned his attention to the other man in the room.

The read-outs of the med-scanner above Khan’s bed didn’t show any changes, as he had already assumed. Spock knew that there was nothing he could do now, and so he decided to give Nyota and himself a break.

Bidding the approaching McCoy fare-well for now and asking him to give Jim his regards as soon as he woke up, Spock and Uhura left the hospital – both not wanting to disturb T’Pau, who would
return to her own seat later.

Spock led Uhura to the flat his father usually occupied, where they would stay for the next days until Sarek would be released from hospital. Until then, so Spock dared to admit the ‘human emotion of hope’, the president would have allowed him and the others to return aboard. Otherwise he and Nyota would go to a hotel. The flat was simply too small for three people – what a difference to the residence Sarek had called his home once.

Joaquin returned to the intensive care room one hour later – pale, confused but far more stable than he had been within the last two days. Spock hadn’t told McCoy of what he had witnessed between T’Pau and the Augment-boy and so Bones almost got a heart attack as Weiss mentioned the mind-meld with the matriarch. It had been an ‘exciting but also strange experiment’, he said; feeling far more at ease now. Bones’ comments about ‘Vulcan voodoo-magic’ and ‘she just had to peak into your head, hadn’t she?’ woke amusement in Joaquin. He knew the CMO well enough by now to realize that this was McCoy’s way to deal with stress and to hide his obvious concern.

He easily fell asleep afterwards and only woke up the moment Jim rose from his own bed in the early evening – rested but still not feeling well. Bones didn’t let him and Joaquin alone until they had eaten a decent dinner in the cantina with him. Kirk’s talk with Scotty afterwards affirmed that everything aboard was in order – well, at least concerning the daily routine. Montgomery didn’t hesitate to whine about his machines and Jim, who was well taught in technics too, had a good imagination what Engineering was looking just right now. It itched him to return to the ship to have a closer look at everything, but he knew he couldn’t leave the planet without giving Nien stress. And, by the way, he was still released from duty and in official exile. For now Scott’s reports had to be enough, but just like Spock, Jim hoped that President Robertson would give him and the others the permission to step on the Enterprise again. Kirk wouldn’t waste any time afterwards to return to the ship – well, of course only after Khan was out of danger and himself again.

Jim contacted Spock via the Enterprise, got his private frequency on New Vulcan afterwards and bid him and Uhura good night – thanking once again for the help especially Spock had given him and Nien.

While the Lexington and the Excalibur headed back towards Earth, night fell on New Shi’Kahr, and this time there were no horrible changes in Khan’s condition. The next morning began far more peacefully, yet the immobile body on the biobed was eating Jim’s nerves away. Even Chekov’s and Riley’s return to the hospital and their jolly behavior didn’t cheer him up. The same went for The Shadow-gang which also paid a visit. Like this Kirk learned that Galven had offered Wesley his service to support Scotty – an offer that had been accepted half an hour ago. Jim was grateful, yet it rankled it that the Tellarit was allowed aboard and he, captain of said ship, had to wait for the president’s permission to step aboard his Grey Lady.

Around midday, after the two ensigns beamed up again and The Shadow-gang had vanished, Bones
had had enough of Jim’s mood and more or less kicked him out of the intensive care station –
together with Joaquin. Shooing them away and giving the medical order not to return until evening,
the two thought first of hanging out on the campus, but the scorching heat chased them back indoors
within a few minutes. Learning that the hospital had a gym, both let out their frustration by doing
some sports.

At one point Spock showed up; having learned of their whereabouts as he checked on Khan and met
Bones. Even if he had come to visit his father, he decided to seek him out later as he was informed
by McCoy of the mental state his friend and the young Augment were in. Quickly he borrowed some
sport outfits and began to teach Joaquin Ashumi – training with Jim, too. Sweating, with some
bruises but feeling better after letting off some steam, Kirk and Weiss returned to their room, only to
learn that there were still no changes. After showering, Jim went off to pay Sarek a visit – barging
into a discussion concerning the upcoming wedding. With Kirk being Spock’s T’hy’la and also
Spock and Uhura’s commanding officer, Sarek included the young captain in the matter, and Jim
was surprised as he suddenly realized that he had talked with them for almost two hours in an almost
comfortable atmosphere.

Sarek used the given chance to thank Jim for his help during the Borderland-crisis, and promised him
support at the upcoming court martial. Sarek had great influence within the Federation and even, if
he wanted, within Starfleet. To have him as an ally was a big advantage.

Spock accompanied Kirk finally back to his room, and as he saw how the soft color that had returned
to his friends complexion was rapidly changing back into ashen white, he decided that something
had to be done. He would not watch his soulbrother suffering like this any longer. This had to stop –
now!

He was barely back in his father’s flat as he contacted Selek; discussing with him a few possibilities
to cheer Jim up. They both knew that Kirk’s mental state wouldn’t get any better until Khan’s
condition improved – and the latter worried both. The injuries Khan had suffered were healing, yet
the former dictator made no move to come out of the depths his soul had gone to. Spock had a theory
about it – that the distress Jim felt by his mate’s condition echoed in Khan’s soul that withdrew even
more because of it. Had the feeling of Kirk being in trouble always alerted the former dictator since
the two became lovers, it seemed to have the opposite reaction now, as only Khan’s subconscious
worked and its instincts were on full survival mood.

Selek listened to his younger self’s muses and agreed. Jim had to learn to shield the bond with Khan
at least a little bit, otherwise it would bring both more harm than anything else. And the high minister
was ready to give Kirk a few lessons next day – something Spock was grateful for. He knew that his
older self had a certain way to deal with Jim’s stubbornness he – the younger Spock – still had to
develop yet.

Satisfied with the talk Spock cut the transmission and rose to join Nyota in the small living-area. She
looked up at him from her PADD, and smiled at him; having listened to the conversation with one ear the whole time.

“It will be good for Jim to be distracted by learning something new – something that maybe will even help Khan in his current state,” she said quietly.

Spock nodded, while he took the seat beside her on the settee. The sun was nearing the horizon and the great window gave a full view over the large lake. “Yes, I think so, too. I already tried to talk Jim into letting me shield him, but he refused. Maybe my older self will be more successful.”

Nyota lowered her PADD. “Isn’t it weird?” she asked, which earned her a lifted brow and look of light confusion.

“To what do you refer, ashayam?” Spock asked.

Uhura felt warmth spreading through her whole being as she heard the Vulcan familiar form for ‘beloved’ that Spock had never used before with her, yet she concentrated on the conversation.

“You practically talked with yourself – as if you would look into a mirror and some magician presented you with a picture of yourself only several decades older.”

This time the Vulcan was able to grasp the complexity of emotions and human way of thinking he just was confronted with. “I do know that Selek is in truth me, but he is also not. His life differed from mine a lot.”

“Yet there are many things within both your fates which are identically. You both were first officers aboard the Enterprise. You both developed a deep friendship with Jim Kirk. You both verbally quarreled with Leonard. You both…”

“As my older counterpart said, the universe seems to try to correct done damages to the time-line. He…”

“He made certain that at least this part will be the same – and it was totally egoistical,” Nyota grinned at him, which obviously confused her lover completely.
“I beg your pardon?” Spock asked; both brows lifted this time.

“As far as I understand his friendship with his Jim Kirk, it was the most important thing in his life. It made him strong – still does. He wanted this for you, too – and therefore in a twisted turn for himself. It must be calming for him to see you and our Jim Kirk going along so well with each other. It certainly gives him some peace – and so he made certain that you two got a second chance after you were at each other’s throats first.” She saw Spock wincing the tiniest bit and laid a hand on his arm. “Sorry, love, I didn’t want to wake unpleasant memories. Kirk had earned your wrath almost two and a half year ago. I think it was a kind of lesson for both of you – and in the end everything turned out well. Last but not least because of Selek.”

“His… support in several personal matters was and still is welcomed,” the Enterprise’s first officer admitted reluctantly. “He had earned a wisdom I wish to have one day.”

“Well, he is 156 years old and had more or less a whole lifetime to gather knowledge and experiences.” Uhura cocked her head. “Could it be that you don’t see yourself in him but rather a kind of distant relative?”

This last question was an interesting one – at least for Spock. Pursing his lips in a gesture his mother had often done, he leaned back against the back rest and thought about it. “It may sound strange,” he answered finally, “but it really is that case. Selek… is a little bit like my father, yet he shows streaks Sarek never had. Of course, after all he has mother’s… genes in him. Yet I have to agree with your assumption. I rather regard him as a kind of distant uncle than as an older vision of myself.”

Nyota chuckled. “Well, that explains why you don’t find it weird to be in contact with him. I think I would freak out to meet my older self – maybe with white hair and added weight on the hips.” She winked at him, and again Spock was able to understand the humor Uhura displayed.

“I am certain that you would be still of pleasing appearance – and that your mind would be still the inspiring warm breeze I have come to be attached to.”

The young woman smiled; recognizing the love declaration in those words. “I hope so,” she teased. “After all you’re stuck with me now – even if you never asked me THE question of questions regarding an upcoming wedding.”

Spock blinked uncomprehending, and so she added with a sigh, “Don’t you think you should have asked me first for my hand in marriage before your father began planning the ceremony?”
A soft huff escaped the Vulcan – the only audible sign of frustration. “I planned to ask you – yet Dr. McCoy was quicker in informing T’Pau about my intentions.” He shook his head. “I know he meant well, yet he initiated unsettlement with his thoughtless words.”

Nyota snorted, amused. “You mean, he woke chaos – nothing untypical for him.” She bent forwards and looked expectantly at Spock. “Well?” she asked as he only looked at her in silence.

“‘Well’ what?” Spock questioned; at loss what she wanted from him.

“You still have to ask the special question,” Uhura reminded him gently.

Again a slanted brow began to wander upwards. “Our marriage is set,” he said. “To ask for something that is already decided is illogical.”

Uhura suppressed a groan. ‘Patience, Nyota, he is after all a Vulcan and even if he lives among us humans for quite a time and had a human as mother, you can’t expect that he knows all our customs.’ Taking a deep breath she said gently, “Spock, to be asked for the hand in marriage by the groom is one of the most important things for a woman. It’s not only a matter of polite behavior, but also a very intense experience – if the right man asks this particular question.”

Spock cocked his head; accepting Nyota’s wish. Yet it confronted him with a little problem, because what were the right words? How to do this properly? He asked himself what his father had done and said to Amanda all those years back. He didn’t know. He had never asked – and now it was too late. He hadn’t even thought about that tradition among humans, even if he had seen it in TV-shows, movies and even witnessed two times at the academy this kind of custom. Well, at least that gave him an idea how to proceed now. Should he rise and bend on one knee in front of Nyota, like he had seen in one of these silly movies? It was the only gesture he was certain of that it belonged to this ritual.

Rising gracefully he hesitated a moment, before he offered Nyota his hand, who took it. Calmness, warmth, joy and this excited wild emotion he knew was love, spread from their connected fingers to his mind – and all of sudden it wasn’t that difficult at all to go on with this special human tradition. It would make Uhura happy and that was all that counted.

As she stood in front of him, he glanced softly at her – and bent on one knee. He heard her gentle gasp while her eyes widened in disbelief. Obviously she hadn’t thought that he would stick to this particular human tradition while already following one of her people’s customs, and a little part in him enjoyed her reaction that also gave him some satisfaction. He liked to surprise her.
“Nyota Uhura, since we first met at the Starfleet Academy you woke my interest – with your brilliant mind, your beauty and your warm, kind soul. It gave me pleasure to be your teacher, yet it was me who learned more from you than I could ever teach you. You gave me your acceptance, your friendship, your trust, your loyalty – and finally your love. I find satisfying pleasure in your presence, and your heart and mind are often my anchor. My father once told me that it was logical for him to marry my mother. Later he admitted that it was logical because he loved her. It is untypical for Vulcans to admit feelings, even such sincere ones, yet I’m also half human, and therefore I want to tell you: I love you. Do you want to become my bondmate – my wife?”

With rising unease he watched tears suddenly brimming in Uhura’s eyes, but her gaze was one of sheer happiness.

Nyota couldn’t believe it. Not only that Spock had asked her in the perfect mixture of his people’s and her own people’s way of words, no, he even went down on one knee – a gesture he certainly had seen on TV or had witnessed elsewhere. The warmth of his fingers which still enveloped hers, the soft gaze of his dark eyes and the way he asked for her hand in marriage made her heart beat like the hooves of a wild galloping horse.

Her usually melodious voice choked in her throat, as she fiercely nodded and whispered, “Yes! Yes, yes and thousand times again yes!”

He rose with the elegance of a feline. “I think to repeat one word a thousand times is a waste of breath and…” He didn’t get further, as Nyota wrapped her arms around his neck and her full, gentle lips found his. For a moment he was caught by surprise, and then he returned the embrace and her kiss. His always present mind realized that his pulse rose by 69.3 percent and his body core temperature by…

His clear thoughts left him, as not only his human, but also the part of his Vulcan ancient ancestors began to rise. Fire licked along his nerves and under his skin. For a second a warning voice reminded him that he was here in the flat of his father, who certainly wouldn’t appreciate it to have his son and his future daughter-in-law giving into the thing humans called ‘passion’, then Spock decided to ignore the voice. His mother would approve with his flaring longing to be together with the woman who held his heart.

Lifting Nyota on his arms he strode with uneasy steps towards the settee – allowing his mother’s genes to take over…
The next morning brought a change – one that was hoped for, but seemed to be out of grasp since the final battle aboard the Excalibur.

Kirk woke up and still felt groggy. He had to force himself to go to the bathroom, where he spent a short time to give into human urges and to clean himself. Looking in the mirror above the basin he scowled as he observed his own face. No, it wasn’t the two-days-beard he would have to shave off this day or the fact that his hair was in need for a proper washing. It was rather the haunted look in his eyes, the shadows beneath them and the fact that his cheek bones were plain to see. He had lost weight – and quite a lot. How had Wesley put it the day before yesterday? He looked like he had been eaten and spat out again? Well, Bob was right. He really looked… sick. But was this a miracle? The love of his life, the other half of his heart and soul, lay only a few meters away on a biobed and was dead to the world. Hell, even such a good Vulcan healer like Sorel couldn’t tell him if Nien was simple in a kind of healing trance or in coma, and this uncertainty was driving Jim mad.

After brushing his teeth and rinsing out his mouth, he searched for the single-use shaver he had seen yesterday in the cabinet, when he felt a weird sensation rising in him. Only a second later the med-scanner in the room next door gave an alert. Like he had been stung by a spider, Jim let fall everything he just held in his hands and raced out of the small bathroom. His fearful gaze found the slender body on the bed beside his own – and saw Khan’s head rolling from one side to the other.

Not hesitating one second, Kirk dashed to him; calling his name. He heard quick steps coming nearer – Bones, without any doubt – but Jim didn’t take his glance away from the Augment, while he bent over him and gently gripped his shoulders.

“Nien! Nien, wake up! It’s me – Jim! You’re safe, honey! You’re here, with me! Wake up, Nien, wake up!”

McCoy stopped beside the bed, checking the monitor. “His brain activities are changing – they are increasing,” he mumbled.

The same moment Joaquin burst into the room. He had been again in the visitor area to attempt a meditation as he had felt the soft change within the family-link he shared with his older brother. Hope and worry warred in him, while he looked with wide eyes at ‘Noo’ and the two other males.

There!

For a moment Khan opened his eyes – the blue-green depths were glassy and reddish. He took a
deep breath and something close to fright began to shine in his gaze.

‘The smell of disinfection agents!’ Jim thought. ‘They remind him of...’

“Nien!” He bent straight above Khan’s face; cutting of any other sight than that of his own. “Nien, baby, I’m here! You’re safe!” He cupped his beloved’s left cheek with one hand; his thumb stroke in gentle circles on the feverish skin, before he pressed a quick kiss to his dry lips. “Everything is all right now, honey! There is no danger anymore! You are with me. Stay with me, Nien, please!”

Bones pursed his lips. “If he were a casual human I’d inject him with some stimulants, but given his augmented nature I don’t dare such a thing.”

Jim’s attention was only directed on Khan. Their eyes met...

And there...

For a few seconds recognition shimmered in Nien’s eyes and the left corner of his mouth curled. His lips formed the captain’s given name – then his conscious faded away again.

“Nien…” Jim whispered; feeling so damn helpless. Then a warm hand on his shoulder startled him. He looked up and straight at a beaming McCoy.

“He’s asleep now, Jim, no less, no more. No coma or some voodoo-mind-tricks. He is simply asleep. I think he is out of the woods now.”

Silence.

For a long moment there was only silence in the room after those longed for words, and then Joaquin let out a loud whooping sound, while Kirk closed his eyes. A sob escaped him – one of utter relief, and he didn’t even realize that Bones supported him and more or less carried him to the bed beside Khan’s.

“Easy, kid!” Leonard said gently; still smiling. He couldn’t help himself and ruffled his friend’s thick hair in a brotherly way. “The worst is over, as far as I can tell. He’ll heal now. Just give him some
time and… uff!” Kirk had wrapped both arms around his middle and was hugging him strongly enough to cut off his breath. Behind him Joaquin was laughing now – loud and boyish laughter that rang through the corridor. A by-passing Vulcan nurse lifted both brows at this behavior. Humans!

The wave of relief was strong enough to make Jim dizzy. He felt his eyes beginning to burn and even as he tried to suppress the tears, the emotional stress was too strong and needed a valve. Bones bit his lip and felt a lump in his throat, as his friend’s body in his arm began to tremble with uncontrolled sobs. McCoy showed everyone a snappy and grouching mask, but deep inside he was as soft as pudding. And he was anything but immune to such an outburst of emotions – especially when it happened to a friend – his best friend! Jim had been through so much, Leonard’s heart went out to him like rarely before.

Bending down he simply buried his face in Jim’s tousled hair, and held the younger man close to him; making cooing sounds and whispering nothingness of comfort and understanding – just like an older brother.

Behind him Joaquin had stopped his war-dance like hopping; his eyes hung on his brother’s mate and the doctor, who did his best to give his friend some security. Feeling himself ready to burst with too many emotions, he let himself fall on the spare bed and closed his eyes. Like this he all of sudden heard quiet steps coming nearer and stopping at the entrance. Looking up he saw the aged face of Selek, who first glanced alarmed at the two officers, then his gaze found the read-outs of the med-scanner and he relaxed visible.

Joaquin, grinning like crazy, rose and bowed slightly. “Good morning, High Minister,” he greeted politely, what made McCoy looking over his shoulder.

“Morning, Selek,” he said quietly, while the Elder stepped nearer.

Jim lifted his head from Bones’ middle and Selek sighed inwardly as he saw the familiar, yet far too young face wet with tears and with puffy eyes, which shone with happiness. “I take it that Mr. Singh’s condition has improved,” Spock Prime concluded, which was answered with two nods.

“He woke up for a few seconds – and recognized me!” Kirk all but sniffled; his blue eyes brimmed with joy, relief and more tears.

The old Vulcan felt the urge to reach out and to offer the younger self of his $T'hy'la$ some reassurance. Without his own doing his weathered fingers cupped one of Jim’s strong shoulders and squeezed it. “I am glad to hear this news,” he said softly. He had watched his own Jim mourning two times for a lost love – and both times it had hurt him, too, even if he hadn’t been ready to admit it. To
see now that this time-line had at least some twists for the better filled him with peace.

“He’s asleep now,” Joaquin added; still beaming.

Old Spock’s attention was driven again to the former dictator, who lay absolutely motionless on the biobed, yet his eyes moved beneath his closed lids.

“He reacted badly at first after he took a deep breath, then Jim was all over him and he relaxed again,” McCoy murmured. “He still associates his surroundings with nasty memories from his past.”

Selek pursed his lips. “Then still his instincts rule him – something I knew would happen. His augmented nature may heal the body quicker than usual, yet his soul is deeply hurt. Young Spock and I talked about it yesterday evening.” He looked back at Jim. “I have an idea how to keep his bad memories at bay and to improve his mental healing. He reacts strong to everything that has to do with medical care – even the scents are unsettling him. Therefore it would be the best if he would be released from the hospital and…” His voice grew stronger while he raised a hand to stop McCoy’s instantly beginning protest. “And to be brought to a place that doesn’t remind his subconscious permanently of the labs of his youth or of his captivity in Marcus’ and later Dashwood’s hands. Of course he has to be supplied with a biobed and med-scanners, and if you, Leonard, will still take care of him, I do believe he will heal as quickly as he is doing now. Yet his mind will be more at ease if his surroundings don’t constantly wake the worst memories in him as soon as sleep releases him for a moment.”

Jim had wiped his happy tears away, and was now looking at the Elder with big eyes. “What place do you have in mind?” There was no doubt that Old Spock had already thought the whole thing through. Otherwise he wouldn’t have made the suggestion at all.

The warm, brown eyes glanced at him. “New Gol,” Selek said calmly, and his mouth curled the tiniest bit as two hanging jaws were the result.

“You… you are kidding, right?” Kirk finally managed to gasp.

“Jim, you of all people should know that I don’t do ‘kidding’,” Spock Prime rebuked gently.

“Bullshit! You – better say your younger self – pulls my leg often enough,” Bones said, and Selek gave him his not showing half-smile.
“Because it is always... fascinating how easily you can be driven up the next wall, Leonard.” he deadpanned, what earned him a scowl from the CMO and a short laugh from Jim.

“Rrrright, no kidding then,” Kirk said; his blue eyes shone even more. “So... you already talked to T’Pau about your idea?”

“I did this morning,” Selek affirmed. “And I didn’t have to persuade her for too long. As it seemed, our young lion here impressed her.” His glance was directed on Joaquin, who gaped at him.

“W-w-w-what?”

“T’Pau mind-melded with you yesterday and your way of thinking and the structure of your mind impressed her,” Selek repeated, before he turned his attention back to Jim. “Young Spock and also T’Pau brought to my attention that you, Mr. Singh and Mr. Weiss should be trained in working with the bond that links you to each other. I already knew from my own meld with Mr. Singh that he and his family have some telepathic abilities and Spock told me how much Mr. Singh distress had distracted you during the fight on the Excalibur, Jim. This could turn out to be very dangerous in serious situations – for you, Mr. Singh and the ship. I offer you, Mr. Weiss and after his healing also Mr. Singh to teach you some possibilities on how to shield yourselves. It will not be a hindrance to your mating-bond or to Mr. Weiss’ family bond with his brother; it rather will serve you to the best purpose in the face of dangerous and harmful situations.”

Jim frowned. “When I shield from Nien, he will think that he is alone again and...”

“You misunderstood me,” Selek interrupted him gently. “You both still will be able to sense each other and the most times there will be no need for you or Mr. Singh to raise your inner shields at all. But if you’re in serious situations again – and knowing you, you will – you both will be able to act without being hindered by each other’s discomfort. The latter is maybe a further reason for Mr. Singh’s and your distress that you are both suffering from at the moment.”

Kirk blinked in confusion. “What do you mean?”

Spock Prime allowed himself a little sigh. “You fear for him – which is understandable. But your fear produces unpleasant echoes in Mr. Singh’s mind. And by the other way around you feel his pain which increases your worry. To use a Terran phrase: The cat bits her own tail. If you could shield your fright for Mr. Singh’s welfare it would end this circle.”
“Just a sec!” McCoy flared up. “Did you just say that’s Jim’s fault that Khan remains more or less lost in dreamland?”

“You didn’t listen closely enough, Leonard – a streak I remember very well,” Selek answered calmly. “I just said that…”

“Selek is right, Bones,” Kirk interrupted any upcoming discussion and lifted a hand. For a moment he felt like he was preventing one of the many verbal quarrels between his own Spock and McCoy. “I was compromised as I sensed Nien’s agony and dread. It drove me forwards…”

“… Quite recklessly, when I remember those minutes correctly,” Bones nodded shortly. “You fought a way through the others like a berserker and hurled people away as if they were dolls. If it hadn’t have been for Spock, who covered your sudden super-strength, you would have had to answer many questions by now.”

“See, that’s the point,” Jim agreed. “I didn’t think but acted – driven by the bond between Nien and me. And the bond still works like this – even in this very moment. Selek is right concerning these mental echoes. I’m tired despite a long sleep, I’m restless, have lost any appetite and…”

“And look like the living dead,” McCoy grumbled. “Because you sense on a certain level Khan’s suffering?”

“I knew that he woke up even before the biobed gave an alert, so, yes, I do think that his condition influences me constantly,” Kirk agreed. “This all really comes in handy, yet just think if Nien feels my worry and restlessness in return. Yes, he recognized me, but only after I touched him and talked to him. Selek just said it: Nien’s soul is gravely injured. The last assault on his person was one time too often. I saw it through the mind-meld with him and Spock. I saw these shadow-labs and witnessed what the former guards of those labs in New Delhi, Marcus and the others said and did to him. This all left deep scars in his soul and they are now entwining with what his senses tell his subconscious about his surroundings here – for example the typical smell of a hospital and through it his brain only remembers the labs. It gives his subconscious the wrong idea of his actual whereabouts. And my fear for him doesn’t help this at all.”

“You think he misinterprets your fear for worry because he had fallen in an enemy’s hands again?” McCoy cocked his head. “This would mean that he is still able to make some logical conclusions even in unconsciousness or in sleep – something I would call ‘impossible’, but given his superhuman nature it maybe is possible after all.” He glanced at the intense listening Joaquin. “Have you heard of such a thing before?”
Weiss shrugged. “I remember that I once was hurt during a monsoon and lost conscious. Yet I somehow sensed the moment Noo arrived and picked me up. I knew that I was home even before I fully woke up.”

Leonard nodded at this affirmation. “Well, I think that answers my question.” He looked back at Jim. “Your honey simply knows that he is a medical or scientific place – and given his whole experiences with those facilities he fears what will be when he wakes up. And, maybe, Selek and Spock are indeed right and your worry adds oil to these flames.”

Spock Prime lifted a brow at the words ‘maybe indeed right’, but he skipped any comment. Knowing Leonard he would pick a little quarrel only for good measure, and they had no time for something like this – even if the Elder would enjoy a discussion with the feisty CMO. The last time he had argued with ‘his’ McCoy was an awful long time ago.

So instead of reacting at the verbal punch, he simply said, “After we at least agree on my assumption, I suggest that we discuss how to proceed from here on. Mr. Singh should be moved to New Gol as soon as possible, but only if his condition allows it.” His attention returned to Jim. “You’ll find the calmness and the peace you need to concentrate and to learn. And, by the way, you also can summon on your mental and physically strengths.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “I’ve rested and…”

Kirk’s protest was cut off, as Old Spock said gently, “You, my friend, are in serious need for a vacation. Not one of the shore-leaves you prefer, but a real vacation. And Khan will need you at his side during his own healing, and you need to be close to him to find peace for yourself. New Gol offers you a refuge where you can heal, too.” He lowered his voice. “You are going to need all strengths possible when you return to Earth to face court martial – you, Leonard, Khan, even my younger self. T’Pau offered her support in many ways. She has not forgotten that it was your courage that gave Spock the time to save the Elders, her and at least some documents and irreplaceable artifacts of our culture, before our home world was destroyed. And what you did now to rescue Sarek – her eldest son. You even risked your life and career not for the first time to do what is right.” He cocked his head. “Spock told me you even broke the Prime Directive to rescue him.”

Jim shrugged. “I couldn’t let him die in that damn fire hole he was caught in. I think that we’re being stuck together like this is simply fate – in this timeline, just like you and your Jim were in yours.”

McCoy gave him a glare. “Jim!” he warned, before he looked carefully at Joaquin. Promptly Kirk stiffened as he realized what just had slipped him.
The young superhuman cleared his throat and closed the little distance to them. “Uh, just for the record – I know that he is Spock II, only a little bit older,” he said; flicking a lazy thumb at the Elder. Three pairs of eyes looked rather big at him, and he smirked sheepishly. “Well, this Judas of an Admiral called you ‘Mr. Spock’ as he attacked you in your office, High Minister, and you really have to be blind not to realize that you and Jim’s first officer are one and the same person. Okay, you’re more aged, but the gestures and stances are quite the same, as are the choice of your words and the way you act towards Jim.”

Kirk gulped; knowing that there was no reason for denial. “Jo, do you understand how important it is that this is kept a secret? Selek comes from the future more than 100 years ahead. The…”

“Time-paradoxes! I understand, Jim. And I think bastards like Norton would love to gain the knowledge the High Minister must possess. So my lips are sealed, don’t freak!” He had clasped his hands on his back and was bobbing on his toes forwards and backwards; a smug smile on his face.

“He’s just a smartass like you are, Jim!” Bones commented wryly and returned his attention to Selek. “So, you think it would be the best for Khan if we put him somewhere nice, peaceful and decent and he comes out of his Sleeping Beauty slumber?” He glanced with a lopsided grin at Kirk. “In case that isn’t enough, you still can kiss him awake – you with being Prince Charming and all.”

Jim shot him a glare. “Will you ever develop some sensibility, Doctor?”

“Yeah, the day you stop being a stubborn hothead, Captain!”

“Believe me, Leonard, this day will never come,” Selek threw in his own comment; looking very innocently at the two younger selves of his old friends. Then he turned serious again. “To return to the topic, I do think the sooner he is removed from the hospital the better it will be for Mr. Singh. How is his exact condition, Leonard?” He threw Joaquin a short glance. “With your permission as Mr. Singh’s brother, Mr. Weiss.”

Joaquin made a fleeing gesture with his right hand. “You’ve my brother’s best interest at heart, so, yeah; I have nothing against it that Dr. McCoy tells you about Noo’s condition.”

McCoy took a deep breath. “The rip in his lever is closing and his lung is healing, too. These two injuries are the most serious ones besides the TBI. I don’t think it will be safe to move him within the next two or three days. The broken bones in his body are still mending, but given the actual progress the process won’t be finished within the next ten days or so. The same goes for the torn sinews. The bruises are also beginning to fade, yet those which lie deep in his body will need some more time than the superficial ones.” He grimaced. “His augmented body is awesome and today’s medicine has
a lot of tricks, yet there are no such things as miracles. Every good healing needs time; that goes even for our superman here.”

Selek made a slow agreeing gesture. “Then we’ve enough time to prepare a room for Mr. Singh that he can share with Jim.” His glance found Joaquin. “Would you mind sharing a room with the good Doctor? The original seat of Gol was made of many large buildings, but until now we were only able to raise one building in which the priests are living. We don’t have so much room to spare.”

Weiss nodded without any hesitation. “That’s no problem, sir. I… I appreciate the chance to stay near my brother despite the own problems your people have.” He glanced at Leonard. “I will behave.”

McCoy grinned. “I hope so, son. I’ve already all hands full enough with this overgrown boy here!” He gestured towards Jim, who rolled his eyes.

“Love you too, Bones!”

“All right, then it’s settled,” Selek said. “I…” He didn’t get any further, as cheerful voices sounded down the corridor. “I think your friends showed up again, Mr. Weiss. Don’t let them wait.” He nodded towards the door.

Weiss hesitated, gave Jim an asking glance, who mumbled, “Go! I’ll stay with Nien!” That was enough and Joaquin quickly left the room; meeting Chekov and Riley half the way. Kirk scratched his head and looked at Selek. “So, any advice on how to behave in New Gol? I don’t want to give anybody trouble.”

An ice-grey brow was lifted. “I am certain that Spock will teach you everything you need to know. And otherwise: Just trust your instincts. They never failed you.”

Jim beamed at him and elbowed a groaning McCoy. “See, told you so!”

“Ego much?”

“Nope, only healthy self-conscious!”
Selek felt new amusement rising in him. Some things would never change, despite the altered time-line. Then his glance found the read-outs of the med-scanner again. Khan was still not out of danger, this much he could tell, yet the chances for survival had increased. Soon it would be about time to take care that the Augment not only healed, but would also remain free. He, Jim and the others. Spock Prime nodded to himself. Yes, he would have to make some calls soon – but first he would begin with the most needed matter…

Selek wasted no time to begin his instructions concerning Jim’s and Khan’s link. He knew from his own Jim and from the experience with his T’hy’la’s younger counterpart on Delta Vega during their mind-meld that James Kirk’s psi-powers were practically non-existing. Yet it didn’t surprise him that he found during the meld he initiated with Kirk in one of the meditation alcoves in the late morning that the mental skills had increased. Young Jim’s brain activities were higher than he remembered; his sensitivity strengthened by them even more.

Curious the Elder slipped deeper into Kirk’s mind until he saw the two bonds the young captain shared with the two people which were most precious to him. The bond between him and Young Spock shimmered in warm golden and rational blue in Jim’s colorful mindscape – the bond between him and Khan was even stronger and shone in passionate gold and red like a large big firestorm, yet there was also the cool color of rationality that kept both men sane.

The mind of this timeline’s Jim differed from the one Old Spock knew from his own friend, yet the ground and the many emotions which flowed in harmony were almost the same. Selek felt the deep love the young captain held for his friends, his crew, his ship – and, of course, for Khan. He also sensed the compassion and the strong need for equity that drove Kirk, tangled with fierce protectiveness and faith. There was also earnestness and sincerity, combined with high intelligence, hunger for knowledge and deep tolerance. This Kirk’s mindscape was certainly a little bit more chaotic as Selek was used to finding in his own T’hy’la’s katra, yet on the other hand it was similar enough to give him a feeling of home-coming.

Once again he painfully realized how much he missed his own Jim – what dark, cold hole gaped deep in his soul where once his T’hy’la’s presence had been.

For Jim it was a new experience to meld with Spock Prime. Yes, they did it on Delta Vega, but during those minutes, he a) just had to calm down after being chased by a giant lobster-like monster that wanted him for lunch, b) had to come to terms that he had been, indeed, marooned on a block of ice in the middle of nowhere, and c) that the older vision of the Vulcan who just had kicked him out was there and didn’t hold any grudges against him but rather seemed to love him. To say the least: Jim Kirk had been in a highly confused state. And the many pictures, voices, events and emotions he received from the old Vulcan during the short mind-meld hadn’t lessened his bad shape.
Later, after his own Spock had melded with him sporadically, Jim had felt more at ease – the younger Vulcan’s mind was a like a lukewarm ocean in which he could soar without any efforts. Yes, he even had relaxed and had thought to be near a beach in the sunny warm Caribbean Sea instead of sharing his mind with his first officer.

Selek’s mind still differed from what Kirk experienced with his own Spock, but he didn’t get an overload of images like he received the first time. He could sense the strength within the Elder, the power of an old soul that had grown with the decades, but he also felt the warm affection and the burning protectiveness Spock Prime held for him. It made him lower his instinctive wariness – something the Elder called Jim’s ‘inner shields’ which he had to learn to control.

Kirk had ever been a quick student. Curiosity coupled with a high IQ is certainly an advantage when you step into a completely new territory – because nothing else could describe the whole ‘Vulcan voodoo-jumbo’, like McCoy called it as Jim and Selek left the room for the first lesson.

The young captain listened to Selek’s instructions he ‘heard’ within his mind and tried his best to get some control over the link he shared with Khan, but after half an hour it was obvious that he would have to learn a lot more.

Ever so carefully Selek helped Jim to raise his inner shields and to keep them in place. He sensed the young man’s sudden wariness and calmed his worry by telling him that Khan was still able to feel him, yet Kirk’s stronger emotions wouldn’t spill so powerful into the link anymore. Especially the fear that still ruled Jim – the fear for Khan’s health and life. The Elder really hoped that this little trick would help both men.

But this was not all the Vulcan High Minister learned during the mind-meld.

He knew now why Young Spock could sense his friend’s stronger emotions better than before. The link between Kirk and Khan, together with Jim’s increased brain activities, had initiated some psi-powers in the young captain where only a spark had been before. The Elder had a pretty good idea how this happened: Khan’s blood. It was only logical that Kirk’s cells had been influenced by it. McCoy already affirmed this a mere hour ago as he referred to the ‘super-power’ Kirk developed during the battle aboard the *Excalibur*. Khan’s blood had left changes in Jim – not only in his muscles and immune system, but also in his brain. This, together with the mating bond, had strengthened the tiny mental skills Jim had, which echoed also in the link he shared with his Spock. Not even knowing that he possessed mental shields, Jim had no reins on his strong emotions. Selek could only guess how much his younger self had been forced to keep his own mental shields in place – and despite this Kirk’s feeling pierced them.
The proof for the latter came several minutes later, as Selek stated that this was enough for the first lesson and he left the alcove. He wasn’t really surprised to find his younger self sitting in the visitor area and waiting for them; his posture stiff.

Spock rose as he saw the two figures emerging from the meditation alcove and his eyes roamed with barely hidden concern over Kirk’s pale features. Nodding his head in respect at the Elder, he first addressed his captain and friend, “Are you all right, Jim?”

Kirk grinned, yet he couldn’t hide that he was groggy. “Yeah, I’m okay. He poked around a little bit with his mental fingers and showed me my ‘inner shields’. Still have to learn to rise or to lower them, but at least I sensed them.”

Selek lifted a brow. “You did well, young one. For someone who never learned any mental techniques this first lesson was very successful.”

Jim whistled. “Wow, a compliment from you!” His gaze found that of his own Spock. “I could get used to it,” he said, winking at him.

“I rather stated a fact,” the high minister corrected him, but he couldn’t fool Kirk.

“I had you for half an hour in my mind, Selek. You aren’t the only one who had a proper look inside the head!”

“Half an hour?” A small crease appeared between Spock’s slanted brows, while he glared at Selek. “Was this necessary?”

“It was, otherwise I wouldn’t have done it,” Spock Prime replied softly. “His mindscape differs here and there from the one I knew from my Jim – and I had to learn how it comes that you can ‘hear’ him even if you don’t touch each other. The results of my research are fascinating, and I think we should inform Leonard about them, too. I’m certain that he can add the one or other missing piece of the puzzle.”

The Enterprise’s first officer still fixed him with a hard stare and only shifted his gaze away as he felt Jim’s hand on his arm.

“Hey, don’t fret,” Kirk said gently. “I’m fine.”
“I don’t ‘fret’, Captain, as you certainly know,” the younger Vulcan replied indignantly.

Kirk rolled his eyes. “Sure, just give me a minute to find the Vulcan equivalent of ‘fretting’. Oh, I forgot, that’s exactly what you just did!” He watched how Spock took a deep breath and shot him one of his famous glances, what made Jim chuckling. Then the captain turned serious again. “I’m really okay, Spock.” He squeezed his friend’s arm before he let go of it. “Selek didn’t go any further than where our link and that between Nien and me begin. Then he began to practice with me.”

The tiny frown on Spock’s forehead deepened oh so slightly. “You have to be deep in someone’s *katra* to see a mating- and friendship link, Jim.”

“You don’t have to search for it for long,” Selek explained softly. “Both links shine brighter than our new homeworld’s sun.” His warm eyes lay once again on Kirk. “You were and will always be a man of strong emotions, yet you already have a tight grip on them when needed. The only thing you have to learn is to get some control over what you reproduce into the two links you share with Young Spock and Mr. Singh. Everything else will turn out all right afterwards.”

Jim beamed first at him, then at his own *T’hy’la*. “Told you so. It isn’t that bad!”

Spock ignored him for once; still not liking that his older self had such a deep mind-meld with Jim. “Did you find the reason why the captain’s and my link suddenly has increased like it did?”

Selek nodded. “Yes – and I have some more assumptions I want to discuss with Leonard. And, of course, with you two.”

“Bones will be delighted,” Kirk sighed. “You know how much he distrusts the ‘Vulcan mind-voodoo’.”

“Given the fact that he is the *Enterprise’s* CMO and that a Vulcan belongs to the ship’s crew, he has no other choice than to deal with this topic,” the Elder deadpanned.

“Rrrright,” Jim snickered. “But it will be you who tells him that!”

A quarter hour later the atmosphere in the little room that served McCoy as a ready-room was tense.
Bones had crossed his arms in front of his chest and glared at the two Vulcans and Jim; his left foot tapped on the floor under the desk.

“So, let me get this straight. You-” he pointed at Kirk, “have developed some mental skills because Khan’s blood drives your crazy brain to an even stronger thinking-chaos-mix than it already did and that certainly will give me more grey hairs than I already have because of you.” Then he pointed at Spock. “And Jim’s increased brain-working influences the link you and he-” he flipped a thumb at Kirk, “have, because your two minds are fitting together like a pair of old shoes.” He nodded towards the corridor. “And Khan is in the middle of it, because the sensitivity of his super brain works like a transmitter?” He glanced at Selek. “Did I get the last part right?”

“Not really,” the Elder replied. “The links Jim shares with Mr. Singh and Young Spock are separated. Spock can’t feel what Khan feels and the other way around.”

“So, Jim is the lucky guy with a direct connection to Spock and a second one to Khan, but both still have to use a communicator to speak with each other if they aren’t in the same room. Great!” he groaned. “This is a free ticket for the kid to be even more reckless!” He lifted both hands as Kirk began to protest. “Save your breath Jim, we both know that you hurl yourself head first into the most dangerous situations without thinking of yourself for only a minute. And knowing now that your first officer and your superman will come running the moment they sense only the tiniest unsettlement from you, will certainly give you some very bad ideas.” He pointed nonchalantly with his index finger at his friend. “And you can be certain that I will not stand aside and watch you take even more risks than you already did until now. I really don’t want to have a fretting Vulcan and a looming Augment in my medbay every time you come back from a foreign planet and I have to patch you up!”

“Told you that you’re fretting,” Jim grinned at Spock. “Even Bones says so.”

The first officer wasn’t able to suppress a sigh this time, while he looked upwards for a second. Selek, who sat at his side, gave him an amused glance. “It’s really difficult to remember Surak’s Teachings when dealing with those two, don’t you agree?” he asked.

“To deny it would be a lie,” Spock answered wryly.

Kirk laughed quietly, while Bones stayed serious. “All right, so we know now why Spock all of sudden is a receiving terminal for Jim’s emotions, and how it was even possible for Jim and Khan to build a mental mating bond at all. The question is: will it harm them sooner or later?”

Selek shook his head. “I don’t think so, Leonard. Vulcans share links with their parents, with their
siblings, with their partners and sometimes, like in this case, even with close friends. It’s in our nature.”

“Fine and dandy,” Bones grumbled. “But what about Jim and Khan? They’re humans. This mind-jimbo-jumbo isn’t common for us – at least for those of us who weren’t born as supermen. And Jim’s increased brain activities are only resulting from Khan’s blood. Will these activities cease again or will they remain? And how will the bond react if Jim comes down from his super-high-flight?”

Spock cocked his head. “Interesting questions, Doctor.”

“Questions I need answers for,” Leonard stated more sober now.

“Because this is a first case, I can only speculate,” Selek said.

McCoy whistled. “You – speculating? That’s a new one!”

The high minister ignored him, while he continued, “There was only one mating-bond between a non-telepath and a touch-telepath, and that was between my parents.” He leaned back in the chair. “The Sarek in my timeline once told me that my mother’s mental skills grew with time during their marriage and that she was a permanent presence in the back of his mind. Great distances sometimes lessened the presence, but never enough to harm the bond they shared. My mother had zero mental abilities, Jim has some – even my Jim possessed some which increased over the years we shared the T’hy’la-link. Therefore I think that, despite whatever will occur concerning Jim’s enhanced cells, the bond between him and Mr. Singh will certainly remain, yet I don’t know how strong it will be when Khan’s blood might cease to influence Jim’s body functions. And referring to the latter: only time can tell how long he will have them.”

McCoy grimaced. “Well, now I know as much as before,” he grumbled. “At least I can be sure that those two don’t have a fit because of a fading bond if it remains. If I’ve learned one thing during dealing with our lovebirds here, then it’s the fact that both are only functional when they sense each other being all right.”

Kirk shot him a glare. “Because I was worried aboard the Excalibur doesn’t mean…”

“Jim, you weren’t only ‘worried’, you were about to be pushed over the edge,” McCoy corrected him gently. “You panicked – and I have to agree with Selek. This could turn out to be a real big problem if one of you two gets injured during a crisis and the other one has to stay true to his duties
to solve said crisis. I’m happy for you that this bond between you and Khan exists. It stabilizes you – sort of. And it stabilizes our superman and certainly prevents him from becoming homicidal again. I’m relieved that this link will not cease to be because of your cells losing their super-abilities sooner or later, yet I also understand that it can and already has influenced you greatly. Not only you, but also Spock.”

“I’m not influenced, Doctor.” the first officer stated and earned two raised brows from the CMO for it.

“No? So tell me, how did you know that Jim was being beaten into a pulp by Finnegan at Gamma 12? Or why you come running as soon as Jim gets knitters in his boxers because of Khan’s condition or because he doesn’t feel well? You’re calling this not an influence?”

“I share a T’hy’la-link with the captain as you know, Doctor. Therefore…”

“Spock, you and Jim have been soulbrothers for more than a year now. Just tell me, did you feel Jim’s anxiety as you decided to leave the battlefield and to speed to Aldebaran, or was it more a calculated chance that the Klingons would attack the burning space station and you came to the deduction that he could be in danger?”

The younger Vulcan cocked his head. “I had no proof for the captain being in danger because of the Klingons. I…” He hesitated. “It was… a gut-feeling.” It was obvious how much it cost him to admit this.

Bones nodded not unkindly. “See, you followed an instinct – and not a clear knowledge. Knowledge you couldn’t possess at that time because the link between you and Jim wasn’t as strong like it is now. The last days were proof enough. Every time Jim was greatly unsettled you arrived on the scene – even admitting that you sensed his distress. This is a big change – and it worries me. How will it be for you in person – and for Jim – if the super-drug Khan gave Jim loses its effect and our kid’s brain isn’t running 1000 miles per hour? Then the link between you, Spock, and Jim certainly will lessen. Or what will happen if the super-blood’s effect doesn’t wear off and you three are staying connected like you are now forever?”

“I can live with that,” Jim said quietly.

Spock nodded at him shortly; showing his agreement at this. Then he lifted a brow and looked at McCoy. “You gave this matter a lot of thought within the last hour, Doctor.”
“Of course. You three are not only my friends, but also my patients. And I’m the CMO of the Enterprise and responsible that the commanding officers are fit for duty. This all here, Jim with his increased body and hyper-active brain, and this special bond between him, you and Khan is completely a new one within history. And I really want to be prepared for all possible or impossible opportunities which can happen to you three. Selek’s explanation after his mind-meld with Jim only confirms what I already assumed.” He glanced at the Vulcan High Minister. “And I really can sleep more in peace if I know that these three will be able to handle the bonds better.”

Selek nodded in understanding. “It’s my intention to help all three in this matter, Leonard – and therefore you, too. I do remember your need for a decent beauty-sleep here and there,” he added with a hint of teasing in his voice.

It didn’t go by unnoticed by McCoy, who first made a face, then grinned at the old Vulcan. “Well, even a high-tech, well-cared warp-drive needs a break here and there to stay functional. Just ask Scotty about it. And I’m not a robot, but a simple country doctor.”

“The latter is well-known, Doctor,” Spock threw in; his face once again very innocent.

“At least you skipped calling me a shaman,” Bones growled.

“Every intelligent being is able to increase knowledge – therefor you are not a ‘lost cause’,” the first officer answered very politely, what let McCoy sputter something no-one was able to understand.

Jim snickered and shook his head in amusement, while Selek watched the interaction with fondness and melancholy. Several things really wouldn’t change – but what had to change was the current situation concerning Kirk, Khan and the latter’s family. And Selek would start to make the fitting arrangements now!

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, never underestimate Spock when it comes to Jim – and that goes for both visions of our favorite Vulcan. Of course Selek will move Earth and hell and to help the
younger counterpart of his T’hy’la, yet it will be a hard and stony way the team around Kirk and Khan are going to face.

Well, Selek also promised Jim and the others a peaceful stay in New Gol – and they will move to the seat of the Vulcan priests within the next chapter. Then there will be the official statement of the president and Barnett on TV concerning the whole mess media got wind of, and the broadcast will not be to Jim’s liking. And then – well, Khan already woke up for a moment; it’s about time that he will start to end his ‘beauty-sleep’.

I hope you liked the new chapter, and – like always – I’m curious about your opinion.

The next chapter will be posted next week before I’m off for a vacation.

Love you all,

Yours Starflight
A broadcast with consequences

Chapter 84 – A broadcast with consequences

The next two days flew by. While the repairs aboard the *Enterprise* proceeded, The Shadow-gang showed up here and there, and Kirk got two more training lessons from Selek while Spock and Uhura began to make further plans for their wedding. A message was sent to Nyota’s family and her parents, her two sisters and her cousin at least would attend the ceremony, the date of which still had to be settled. Spock and Nyota wanted to wait until Sarek was strong enough to join the ceremony without too much problems.

Jim stayed with Nien at the hospital, but at least he was able to talk Joaquin into making trips to town together with Chekov and Riley or with Caviw and Jeff. Spock accompanied them once; he was curious of the progress New Shi’Kahr had made. In the afternoon of the first day, he and Jim hacked with their PADD’s into the *Enterprise’s* databank and learned of the ship’s true status. Spock knew that this behavior was childish at best, yet he couldn’t say ‘no’ to Kirk as Jim mischievously suggested trying their computer skills in a ‘different way’, and looked with this wide-eyed pleading look at him – something the young Vulcan found impossible to resist. He told himself that this ‘prank’ distracted his friend and made him happy for a short time – something Jim needed.

Well, of course Wesley wasn’t happy to learn from the second science officer that someone had gotten access to the ship’s computer – someone who was down on New Vulcan. Irritated he called
Kirk, knowing that this had his protégée’s handwriting on it, and his gruff “If you want to know something, Jim, then just ask and don’t hack into the data-bank of your own ship!” stopped the two friends – one grinning like mad, the other one obviously amused and not the tiniest bit ashamed. Rather the opposite. The little trick showed Spock that the databank wasn’t as safe as it should be. He would increase the databank’s firewalls as soon as he was back aboard, and Jim agreed on his suggestions.

At the same time Selek made several arrangements – some of them in secret, some of them officially. The latter was especially the case as a room in New Gol was prepared in a medical way; containing now a bio-bed with med-scanner and monitor, life support systems (just for a possible emergency), a second bed and other furniture including a small desk with a computer terminal. A door led to an attached bathroom that even offered the luxury of a real water shower. Because of the lake close by, the town of New Shi’Kahr didn’t need to be economical of water use – something completely new for the surviving Vulcans. Yet this was only a small comfort given the circumstances which led to their new settlement on this still strange planet.

The secret arrangements Selek was responsible for concerned the outcome of the conspiracy and, of course, the upcoming court martial. Jim, Khan and the others needed a ‘hell of a lawyer’, as Barnett had put it, and Spock Prime would make certain that the younger vision of his T’hy’la and his friends would get exactly such a man. He knew who he was going to contact soon, and did not need much time to trace the man down. As it seemed the lawyer was busy with an important current case and so Selek would wait one or two days more before he would speak with the man.

That same late afternoon Khan became conscious again – if only for a minute, but it was enough to make Jim and Joaquin hilarious with joy. After arguing with McCoy for almost a quarter hour, Bones gave finally in and allowed – with hesitance – that the former dictator would be moved to New Gol the next day. Kirk informed Galven and the other Shadow-members of Khan being brought to the Vulcan abbey, before he contacted Spock.

Learning from Jim of the news, Spock came to visit him in the evening and explained to his two friends and the Augment-boy several rules which should be regarded while staying at New Gol. As it seemed everything was allowed except for disturbing meditations – something the two officers and even Weiss were well aware of. And to be loud and noisy wouldn’t fit into that place as well as it would confront Vulcans with a strong display of human emotions. The three humans understood it, and as Jim compared it to a living in an abbey, his first officer agreed on the parallels. Well, they could live with that.

Afterwards Kirk contacted Wesley to inform him about the upcoming change of location. Bob only stared with big eyes at him; realizing the honor that was being given to his protégée, McCoy and the two Augments to be granted a stay at New Gol. During their talk Jim learned about what had been happening on Earth – or better to say around the whole Federation. It didn’t catch him by surprise that the big cat was out of the bag and was the first topic of conversation for all people and in all the news – news he had skipped watching or had any interested in all until now.
Of course a large security operation like what had happened in the Headquarters, in the Chamber of Council, in private residences and even in hotels couldn’t go unnoticed. The media got wind of it within a few hours and for the next four days as the first mass arrests happened reporters began to swarm out like bees. Starfleet’s press center, the spokesmen of the Council and the president weren’t granted any rest as it became clear that something like a coup attempt must have happened within Starfleet’s own ranks and among a few council members.

When the *Excalibur* and the *Lexington* arrived two days after their launch from New Vulcan’s orbit, the news channels were full of reports, interviews and wild guesswork. Barnett and Sonik, who was acting captain of the *Lexington* during their flight back to Earth, knew that they would barely be able to set a foot outside of Headquarters without being surrounded by reporters. Fortunately there were other methods to reach designations and Norton, Finnegan and their allies as well as the scientists were beamed to the high security prison where they were put into custody. Barnett, a not fully healed but feeling better Komack, Lady Morganth and the bridge staff of the *Excalibur* met with President Robertson and Mrs. Whitman at the Headquarters – and Sonik was the only one who didn’t get hug or a slap on the shoulder; respecting his repulse of being touched. Robertson didn’t mind embracing Barnett for a moment in relief to see his Chief in Command alive again, and the two ladies didn’t care about showing the depth of their friendship by more hugging and smiling.

During the hour in which Spock taught Jim, Bones and Joaquin several rules which had to be respected in New Gol, President Robertson sat together with Barnett, Sonik and the bridge staff officers of the *Excalibur*, and had a subspace hook-up with Wesley. Komack had been brought to Starfleet’s Medical Center where he was in good hands, while Lady Morganth enjoyed the hospitality of Robertson’s private residence. She would find more peace there than in a hotel, where reporters otherwise would hunt her down for interviews.

Robertson and Barnett agreed on giving an official statement the next day, and after the talk with Wesley was done, the two men and some advisers sat for a longer time together to discuss which details should be kept a secret and which facts could be revealed to the public without scaring the people too much – or damage Starfleet’s reputation even more. The chaos of last year wasn’t forgotten, and if the people learned that the same organization that had been responsible for the mess more than a year ago had now attempted to take power by a coup, even ready to sacrifice the most important admirals and diplomats for it, an uproar would go through the Federation. And, technically, they were still at war with the Klingons. A ceasefire didn’t mean a long stable peace – not at this point in time.

They agreed on sticking to the truth as closely as possible, but without revealing too much – especially concerning the fact that the *Lexington’s* rescue mission only had been possible because of a certain Augment’s technical development. Barnett thought it to be safer if it didn’t become public that the war-hero ‘Sunrise’ was in truth an Augment from the twentieth century and had snapped a year ago which resulted in a blown-up archive, the attack on the Headquarters and in the end, the crash of the *Vengeance* into the San Francisco Bay. Starfleet would certainly lose another big part of her reputation if it came out that Section 31 had enslaved the Augment and was the reason for his running amok. Barnett wanted to keep the ball low, especially when it came to Kirk’s court martial.
To send a hero to trial wouldn’t go well with the public – after all the young captain had saved Earth, the citizens of Aldebaran’s capitol and the ceasefire, and was responsible for the revelation of the conspiracy, including initiating the rescue mission for the declared dead delegation.

In conjunction with this topic of discussion Barnett informed Robertson of Kirk’s requirement to be allowed back aboard the Enterprise – he and his officers. There was no risk that they would try to run off with the ship. James Kirk, Spock, Leonard McCoy and Nyota Uhura were honorable people, who wouldn’t do something like that, yet the book was very clear about this. There couldn’t be made an exception – not even for heroes like the gang around Kirk. It was already against protocol that Scott stayed on duty, yet given the ship’s status and the engineer’s knowledge it was a necessity.

Robertson deeply regretted that he had to decline Kirk’s request, but his hands were tied in this case. Yet he allowed that Kirk would be updated and could remain in contact with his crew. The same went for the other officers. But at least one exception could be made – Leonard McCoy.

He was the leading physician and given the fact that medbay was overcrowded and that one of the senior staff – Lieutenant Sulu – would be soon in need for another surgery, McCoy could return to the Enterprise; working under observation. Like always, doctors held a special status.

Hearing about Sulu, the president also asked about Khan and as Barnett told him of the bad condition the Augment was still in, Robertson decided that the court martial shouldn’t happen within the next two or three months. The man had to regain his health first – this was the least Starfleet could do for him after all he had been put through because of Section 31 (again). Yet the president wanted to get Kirk’s trial done, after all Starfleet needed her flagship as soon as possible. Only as Barnett pointed out Kirk’s case was mixed up with Khan’s, two different court martials would make absolutely no sense. Robertson realized that this whole matter couldn’t be delayed more than one or two months. But, of course, first the Augment had to heal.

And, after all, in the meantime the judges would have their hands full for the next weeks with all the arrests. No, court martial for the heads of the conspiracy wouldn’t happen within the next couple of months – if not even years until all evidence was sifted – but decisions concerning custody had to be done and this would need a lot of time. And there were a lot of main witnesses which had to be interviewed – for example the Orion pirate who had been hired by Luengo, or the scientists which had run illegal tests on Khan and his people. There was so much to do the president and the staff officers didn’t know where to begin first.

Neither Robertson, nor Barnett could know that their well-meant decision concerning Kirk’s and Khan’s delayed court martial would be turned upside down sooner. Just right now they had a lot of problems to deal with, therefore they didn’t waste a thought that someone famous like Jim Kirk would be needed soon concerning the war again – but until then a few weeks would elapse.
The talk between president and admiral went on very late, and Barnett remained in the Headquarters for the rest of the night – sleeping like the dead. He knew that the most trouble would start with the official statement the following day.

The next morning certainly would bring new turmoil for the Federation population, yet on New Vulcan early morning in New Shi’Kahr was calm. Well, not exactly for Jim and Joaquin, who watched with worry as Khan was prepared for the switch of location. After he was secured on a stretcher with life support systems, he was removed from the hospital and brought to New Gol with an ambulance service. Spock and Nyota were present, too, and drove Kirk and Joaquin to the seat of the priests; using Sarek’s hover-car the ambassador had lent his son, McCoy rode in the ambulance with Khan; keeping an eye on his patient. With Jim in close proximity only a few meters away there was no risk that the superhuman would react to the short separation at all.

The journey didn’t last long – only half an hour – but Jim was glad as they finally arrived. Despite his concern for Nien he was curious about New Gol, and looked fascinated at the large flat building that would be his home for the next days; maybe even weeks. To his relief and delight Selek awaited them and showed them their rooms. At Jim’s question if the Elder really could spare time like this for them, he only got a half-smile back combined with the words, “If you don’t find any time for your friends, then you did something wrong.”

Selek led them through the building in the southern direction, where the quarters of the priests were. Passing many doors, he finally entered a side-wing to the west. Broad daylight flooded the corridor from the large windows to their left, while they passed by another door, before the Elder opened the last remaining entrance.

He revealed a larger room, furnished with a casual bed, a biobed, a desk, a small table with two arm-chairs, a wardrobe and a dresser. The walls were painted in the warm color of the sand outside, the two windows were framed with curtains in a warm red and soft yellow and the furniture was made from wood – certainly an import from one of the many Federation colonies and Earth itself who supported the Vulcan survivors with everything they needed. The room was functional, yet it contained a comfortable atmosphere. And, what was certainly most important for the Augment, it smelled of fresh air, dry sand and a pleasant scent Jim instantly recognized as the same he knew from Spock’s and Uhura’s quarters; smoke candles Vulcans liked to use during meditation.

“It’s not comparable with a higher standard hotel, but I think you will do well here,” Selek said quietly to Jim, who beamed at him.

“It’s perfect, Selek! Thank you so very much!”

McCoy quickly checked the medical equipment. Of course everything was correct – Vulcans never ceased to impress him with their accuracy and foresight. “All right, please bring Mr. Singh in,” he
said to one of the Vulcan nurses and made room for them.

With Argus-eyes Jim and Joaquin watched the nurses during the next minutes, in which the Augment was placed on the biobed and connected to the life support system, while the med-monitor gave its first readouts. McCoy studied them carefully and nodded satisfied.

“No harm done because of the transport.” He glanced at the two nurses. “Thank you for your support, Gentlemen.”

As members of medical staff the two Vulcans were familiar with customs foreign to Vulcan culture, and therefore they didn’t point out that thanks were illogical when all they had done were doing their jobs. Rather they bowed their heads, replied with a “You are welcome,” and left after paying Selek respect.

Spock and Uhura entered the room too, now, and Jim exhaled in relief as calmness settled in. Then his attention was driven back to Nien and Bones.

“How is he?”

McCoy sighed. “The healing status is quite the same as before we left the hospital, and the brain waves show that he is still simply deep asleep.” He glanced back at Kirk and Selek. “Let’s hope that this new location will really help our dark knight in shining armor get better soon.”

“You doubt about it, Leonard?” Old Spock asked calmly and Bones shrugged.

“I still haven’t figured out how this super-brain of his works. Maybe he indeed realizes that he isn’t near any labs now, maybe not. But, like my uncle loved to say, ‘Let’s clutch at a straw and hope that it will change into a big piece of wood’.”

Kirk frowned. “I’m not sure if I’ve ever heard that last part of your proverb.”

McCoy rolled his eyes. “Well, what do you want to do with a straw when you’re flooding in deep water? A big piece of wood will float on the surface and can carry you.”
It was Selek, who commented wryly, “Contrary to your point of view, Leonard, I would know what
to do with this straw while being in water.” At the CMO’s asking glance, he deadpanned, “Using it
to breathe after sinking under the surface.”

Bones groaned. “I knew it! Never try to use a metaphor on a Vulcan. Either he talks until he’s blue
in the face, or his not understanding of the simple use of proverbs drives you up the next wall.”

“I have to correct you, Leonard: Vulcans can’t turn blue in the face – only brown-green,” Spock
Prime retorted – and Jim wasn’t the only one who recognized the hidden fun the Elder obviously
had. Joaquin and Uhura did their best to suppress a giggle, while he – Kirk – snorted with choked
laughter.

Leonard grimaced and flicked a thumb at Selek, while he addressed the younger Spock. “He’s as
bad as you!”

“Thank you, Doctor,” Spock replied politely.

This time Jim couldn’t control himself anymore and began to laugh, which almost made him miss
Bones’ sour answer,

“Typical! Only you would take an insult as a compliment!”

“It always depends on what you’re willing to make of said words, Doctor. And, by the way, if you
want to be understood more clearly you should choose more precise formulation.”

Joaquin snickered soundlessly, while he looked at Uhura. “They are really like this all the time,
aren’t they?”

Nyota nodded, chuckling and grinning widely. “Yes. I’ve come to take it as a signal that they are
both okay.”

“Be careful, young lady or I’ll put a red sign in your med-chart,” the CMO growled.

“Well, then it’s really bad luck for you that I’m engaged to one of the best hackers within the fleet.
The ‘red sign’ wouldn’t be there for long,” Uhura beamed at him.

“Spock breaking regulation?” McCoy gasped. “Never!”

“He just did – the day before yesterday, with me,” Kirk smirked. “We hacked into the Enterprise’s databank and…”

Bones lifted both hands. “I don’t want to hear about it, Jim! We’re already in deep shit enough without you two becoming boys again doing mischief.”

That sobered Jim up a little bit. Rubbing his neck, he shrugged sheepishly, “Well – at least we found out like this that our databank needs a better firewall.”

“Let me guess – this is the excuse you presented Wesley for the prank you two pulled.”

Innocent faces were the answer – and Selek hummed what was clearly a not too successful attempt to suppress the Vulcan equivalent of laughter. It brought the attention of the others back to him, which he instantly used to come to the next topic.

“Speaking of the deep water you are in, I made some researches concerning a lawyer.”

Jim bit his lips shortly. “Well, I thought I would use the time during Nien’s healing to search for a good lawyer, but if you know one then I would be happy.”

“I know one. He is one of the best within the Federation. I’ll contact him soon and…” His communicator buzzed and quickly he answered the call. He listened, nodded, obviously thanked someone and ended the talk by closing the little device.

Jim gave Spock a short glance and saw that his friend had stiffened, as had Nyota. After all she spoke the modern and the ancient Vulcan language fluently.

“Leonard, your room is next to this one on the other side of the bathroom,” Selek addressed the CMO. “Yours is equipped with a TV just like this one here, but I don’t think it to be wise to use it until Mr. Singh is in a better condition. I suggest that we use yours to watch Starfleet’s and the
President’s official statement that will be live broadcasted in one hour and thirty three minutes. My secretary just informed me about it.”

The four officers looked at each other. “An official statement from Starfleet concerning this whole mess? This is going to be interesting,” Kirk mused.

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One and a half hours later Jim, Bones and Joaquin had settled in with the help of Uhura and Spock, while Selek went to T’Pau to inform her about the upcoming official statement and to discuss some matters with her. As Bones switched on the TV, he stepped backwards and sat down on his bed beside Spock. Joaquin took the other bed that was placed on the other side of the wall and Jim simply joined him. There were also two chairs and a table in the niche near the window, but they all had agreed that the lady – Nyota – should make use of them. The other chair was kept unoccupied for Selek, who certainly would return to watch the live broadcast together with them.

Jim let his gaze wander through the room. It was more or less similar to the room he and Nien had been presented with, only that its window showed to the north and that the bathroom was to the left. It was functional, but also comfortable and ‘aesthetically pleasant’, as Spock put it, to which Bones was forced to comment “Can’t you just use the word ‘nice’ for once?”

Of course the first officer hadn’t replied to that at all.

Now they sat there and waited for the broadcast to begin. As the scene changed from a reporter in front of Starfleet Headquarters to a larger room within the building, Jim sighed as he instantly recognized the official conference hall that was always used if Starfleet was forced to give official interviews.

The hall looked ready to burst because of the many people which crowded the room. It seemed every Federation member had sent reporters, and the four Starfleet officers were certain that the many humans among them came from outer Earth colonies. The flags of the UFP hung down on two walls while on the long table on the stage the emblem of Starfleet shone and the windows were covered – banning the clear sun of the morning.

At the same moment Selek entered the room, caught Jim’s short grin, nodded at everyone and took the free chair beside Uhura, who gave him a gentle smile. The old Vulcan sighed inwardly. Yes, not to act on his attraction towards the beautiful and highly intelligent comms officer in his own timeline had really been a mistake!
“Here it comes!” Bones grumbled, as on the screen the door behind the podium opened, and two ordinances appeared.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, please rise from your seat and pay respect to the President of the United Federation of Planets!” one called and instantly everyone rose and exceptional silence spread through the hall.

Robertson entered the room; Barnett, Nogura and Morrow behind him. The appearance of the three admirals resulted in surprised shouts and urgently called questions.

Jim exchanged a glance with Selek. “Did no one know that they were rescued?” he asked quietly, and the Elder lifted one shoulder in a kind of shrugging.

“As far as I learned their survival was kept a secret to give securities more scope to catch the conspirators by surprise,”

Jim snorted while Bones mumbled something under his breath even the two Vulcans and Joaquin couldn’t catch.

On the TV two commodores and Sonik followed the admirals. Kirk glanced at Spock. He knew that his first officer and the other man were the only Vulcans within Starfleet. Not for the first time he wondered to himself what his friend thought of it.

The commentator’s voice speaking of what was to come drove Kirk’s attention back to the screen where Robertson had reached the dais. Barnett remained at his right; Nogura took the side to the president’s left, while Morrow, Sonik and the two commodores took the remaining seats.

Robertson remained on his feet, looked quickly at the tiny screen in front of him, cleared his throat and began to speak – simply drowning out the verbal tumult by raising his voice.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, please cease speaking. I know that you all have many questions and I promise you I’ll answer them as detailed as possible, but certainly some of your confusion will be resolved if you give me a few minutes to explain everything that has happened.”
He had to wait almost half a minute until the last reporters fell silent, then he nodded politely. “Thank you.” He took a deep breath.

“No, this wasn’t the case. We all, including me, were convinced that the Federation had lost her most important diplomats and Starfleet five of her leading admirals. How did it come to this misinformation? Well, what I now have to reveal to you will certainly cause you all – not only the present ladies and gentlemen, but also all the people on Earth and outside on our befriended planets and in our colonies – horror and anger.

For a few days now, rumors have spread through the media and are the prevailing topic on every world and colony of the Federation. Rumors of a conspiracy, of treachery and of an involvement in said conspiracy of high ranking Starfleet officers and even Council members. The many arrests which have happened seemed to give proof to these rumors and gossips. And to my deepest regret I have to tell you today that those rumors are thoroughly true.”

The uneasy whispers began to become louder. Robertson looked into the cameras.

“The Council and Starfleet were infiltrated by men and women, who took the view that the values of the Federation are outdated, and that ethics and morals are for the weak. They wanted a Starfleet that was utterly militarized and a security system that watches all citizens on every planet and colony – a Federation in which surveillance of all people has priority to prevent resistance that sooner or later would happen. For that a kind of coup was necessary – which needed a precise plan. The premise to implement this plan was given the moment the leading officer of the SBI – Admiral José Luengo – was won for that sick idea and he used all the resources his department was able to provide him with.”

The voices within the audience got loud again, and Robertson had to wait for a further minute until he could go on.

Within the next quarter hour he explained what happened and he revealed more than Kirk and the others had thought he would. The president told of the ways Luengo misused the SBI to execute his plan step by step to become first interim Chief in Command in the hope to take over that appointment.
Robertson didn’t spare the audience in the hall or through the screens all over the Federation the brutal details of how Luengo and his fellows manipulated other officers, Council-members and even himself, the president. Robertson also told of the sheer coincidence that led to the revelation of the conspiracy, as the Klingon Warlord Kor – who was accused of being the attacker of the *Excalibur* in Borderland – was at the same time parsecs away to support the Federation’s flagship against Klingon renegades.

That was the moment Robertson mentioned Kirk and his staff officers, naming them ‘those, whose brilliant minds and staunchly, intrepid souls stood true to the Federation’s and Starfleet’s true values’. He spoke of Kirk’s and Wesley’s unswerving efforts to save the surviving members of the delegation, and to stop the conspiracy. Robertson also told of the ordeal the admirals and diplomats went through, how Kor – again – supported a Starfleet officer to help justice to gain a victory over treachery, and how the *Enterprise* and the *Lexington* played ‘cat and mouse’ game in the end to lure the treacherous Styles, Norton and the others into the set trap.

After he finished with his report, most reporters were unable to stay silent anymore; bombarding the president and the admirals with questions, and the two ordinances had a lot to do to bring some order back into the erupted chaos.

Jim looked still straight at the TV; not listening to the short discussion that broke loose between Spock and McCoy concerning the president’s speech. Something wasn’t quite right here, and Kirk didn’t need more than a few seconds to figure it out.

“Why hasn’t he mentioned Section 31 at all?” Bones just asked. “I’ll tell you why, Spock: He wants to wipe it under the carpet, even if the same bunch of idiots were responsible for whole trouble last year. And now Section 31…”

“Doctor, as I tried to tell you only 8.3 seconds ago, the existence of Section 31 was and still is top secret. There is no way the president can reveal this sub-department of the SBI to the public.”

“Nonsense!” McCoy groused. “It was the beginning of everything. The members of this sick club are…”

“He hasn’t mentioned Nien,” Jim cut in – with a quiet voice that instantly ended the discussion. To hear Kirk speaking in this manner was highly unusual.

“I beg your pardon?” Bones asked, confused.
His friend’s ever so blue eyes were directed at him. “Sunrise,” he said. “The president hasn’t mentioned Nien’s involvement at all – neither has he referred to his pseudonym as ‘Sunrise’, nor did he tell about Nien’s existence at all. Nien has become quite the war hero – with him not only saving Tammeron but also the capitol of Aldebaran and the people in the space station. He developed the SDD. He was the one who rescued me – otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to reveal the conspiracy at all, because I would have been dead. Nien rescued Diego – hell, he saved Starfleet personnel and travelers by going after Koloth. The whole war, the cease fire and the revelation of the conspiracy are strongly intertwined with him and his nature. Now would have been the best chance to tell public of Nien’s existence. The people would have accepted him, and…”

“Jim, he also didn’t tell that you, Uhura, Spock, I and the other staff officers are about to be sent to court martial – because we hid Khan, who attacked London and San Francisco last year,” McCoy cut into Kirk’s rising tirade.

“It doesn’t sound so good that war heroes have to face trial,” Uhura added. “Therefore the president obviously decided to not speak about the whole matter, otherwise he would have to tell the public why we’re going to face trial – what would lead to Khan and the reason why keeping him on the ship was breaking the law.”

“Now would have been the best time to tell public the truth about everything – about the shit last year and now! But again they want to keep it all a secret – just like I already said!” Kirk growled. “And we saw how well that went last year. And what about the other Augments? Heavens, they’re going to live here within the Federation! Their existence can’t be kept a secret! Not like this! And, dammit, they have the fucking right to live free and without any silly old-fashioned prejudice against them – because sooner or later their true nature will come out!”

“Jim,” Selek said calmly, “they are speaking about you.” He nodded towards the TV, which silenced Kirk, while Spock cocked his head and Uhura sighed soundlessly.

“Yes, it had been Captain Kirk and his staff who found the first irregularities in the records of the Excalibur’s bridge during the pretended attack,” Robertson obviously answered a reporter’s question at this moment. “As it became clear that either Captain Styles had been tricked by the Klingons who pretended to be Kor, or that he made a willing false statement, Commodore Wesley – Styles’ and Kirk’s superior officer – sent Kirk the records to compare the camera shots of the attacking Klingons with the records the Enterprise made from Lord Kor’s ship. It was the beginning of the revelations, so to speak.”

A woman rose from her seat, after she had lifted her hand and Robertson pointed at her. “Yes, Ma’am?”

“Halley Miller from CNN Earth. Mr. President, we heard about Captain Kirk’s strong involvement
in the whole matter and how he and his crew looked through the net of lies. He’s therefore one of the key persons which caused the conspiracy’s downfall. Why is he still on New Vulcan and not here? Shouldn’t he be an on Earth to testify against Luengo, Norton and Styles?”

Robertson glanced at Barnett, who answered the question. “The Enterprise was heavily damaged after her fight with the Klingon renegades, and her engines have to be rebuilt after their strong overstressing during Kirk’s flight from near the Borderland to New Vulcan. The Excalibur tried to intercept the Enterprise to hinder Kirk from reaching New Vulcan where he and his staff officers were granted asylum – a precaution should the attempt to stop Luengo have failed.”

“Yes, this much we all understood,” Halley Miller replied, “But Norton’s ineffable attack against New Vulcan’s seat of government to get hold of Captain Kirk was five days ago. Why did the captain not accompanied you, Admiral?”

Only those who knew him very well saw the rising frustration in Richard’s eyes. “Because the whole fight didn’t leave him and his officers unharmed. As I launched from New Vulcan’s orbit he was still in hospital. The Enterprise’s medbay was overcrowded after the whole knock-out-gas matter President Robertson told you about, and therefore Kirk was treated on New Vulcan. Next question, please!”


Kirk rolled his eyes at the CMO and was rewarded with a low chuckle, and then Jim’s attention returned to the TV as he heard the name ‘Sunrise’ for the first time during the whole broadcast.

“… Therefore I and great deal of my colleagues think that the mysterious man who goes by the name ‘Sunrise’ had to be involved in all this, too,” the male reporter, who was a Rigelian, said. “Rumors don’t want to quit that he saved Captain Kirk from Klingon captivity and we already learned that this man warned Starfleet about the planned attack against Tammeron, and – above all – there are plenty of witnesses who spoke about a slender, dark-haired man who fought with Kirk side by side at the space station above Aldebaran. We all know that the Enterprise came just in time to hinder the space station from dropping on the colonists’ heads and that she also saved Captain Kirk in the last moment. But the mysterious fighter vanished – just like this.” He snapped his fingers – a human gesture he mirrored from some co-workers. “So, we all ask: Is the mysterious war-hero dead, because he gave his life by saving the day aboard the space station once again, or was he rescued by the Enterprise, too?”

Jim held his breath, while a fierce fire began to shine in his eyes. “Don’t you dare to declare him dead!” he hissed; addressing the admirals and the president on the TV-screen. “Don’t you dare – or I’ll give a live-interview, too, and convict you all of lying through your damn teeth!”
As if Barnett had heard him – or he simply knew Jim Kirk well enough not to provoke an outburst from him – he sighed. “Sunrise was rescued together with Captain Kirk.” Instantly new questions bombarded him and he raised his hand – and his voice – to stop all the asking. “He is also on New Vulcan and in medical care because of some severe injuries he suffered during the big show-down, to use some dramatic words. And please – please! – skip questions about his true identity. While we learned about it by now, he asked for privacy – a request we accepted and granted.”

“Bullshit!” Jim snarled; his face flushed with anger. “You don’t want to tell the truth because that would lead to far more uncomfortable questions – like those of ‘why was his identity kept a secret’ which would lead to explanations which will provoke the next question ‘why did he run amok’. It really would become inconvenient for Starfleet to reveal that the ‘under-department’ of the SBI tortured, blackmailed and enslaved the man who is today a war hero!”

Spock bent forwards and laid a hand on his T’hy’la’s arm. “Hush, Jim. Your rising emotions will disturb Khan until you’re able to shield yourself better. Just let us listen to the rest of the interviews.” He returned Jim’s furious glance with one of his soft ones, and Kirk visible forced himself under control.

“I repeat,” Robertson just said, “High Minister Selek and Lady T’Pau require that their guests will not be disturbed at the moment. No reporters are allowed near Captain Kirk and his staff to give them time to heal and to repair their ship, so please don’t even try to set a foot on New Vulcan. Given the highly explosive political subject Norton’s incursion and assault on the Lady T’Pau left, it would be unwise. It cannot be in anyone’s interest to defy the Vulcans’ decision that was made in agreement with Captain Kirk.”

“Pray and cross your fingers that the members of the writing guild listen to him, otherwise New Vulcan will experience a glut of nosy reporters!” McCoy grumbled. “These guys are the last we need at the moment.”

On the TV the interviews continued; several of them still referred to Kirk and his friends, some even to ‘Sunrise’, but none of the admirals or the president really answered them.

Ten minutes later the show was over, and Robertson thanked everyone for being present, then he, the admirals and Sonik – who had given some information, too – left the podium.

Jim rose from the bed and switched off the TV. For a long moment there was only silence in the room, before he growled. “It’s just like last year – they keep the public in the dark about the most important details! They’re too cowardly to admit even now, after Section 31 more or less kicked their asses, to call a spade a spade! They’re still afraid the public would grill them if it comes out what
these bastards did to Nien and to what it led to in the end – and that they were blind and ignorant enough not to recognize something as large as the building of the *Vengeance* just under their noses.”

“At least they admitted that even Council members are involved in the mess – that’s a beginning,” Bones tried to calm him, and received a heated glare.

“Of course – after all there are hundreds of holo-photos and records which show how these guys were arrested and taken away. And after Norton was crazy enough to attack New Vulcan’s government and Luengo pulled the strings, Command had to stick close to the truth. But, of course, they still keep the real start of this shit – what began with Section 31 within the last years – a secret.” His glance found Joaquin, who looked at loss and a little bit unsettled. “I will not allow them to wipe your brother’s torment at their hands under the carpet. Right, neither Barnett nor the other admirals had any part in Nien’s walk through hell, yet they disregard Starfleet’s values and also their oaths as officers, which are based on said values, if they try to keep something like this from the public!”

“And what do you want to do about, Jim?” Bones wanted to know; his voice quiet. “If you are going to be willfully obstructive they can give you hell. They have the upper hand, after all.”

Kirk shook his head. “Truth has the upper hand, Bones, and nothing else. Everything comes to the light in the end. There is no other way, or the lies will go on which will lead to more secrets, to more distrust, to more violence. It *has* to end – and I don’t care about the consequences regarding me!”

The same moment his communicator came alive, and the young captain wasn’t surprised to hear Wesley’s voice. After a short greeting Bob asked, “Did you watch the live broadcast they just showed on TV?”

“Yeah, my friends and I did!” Jim’s tone of voice betrayed his anger.

Bob sighed; clearly aware of Kirk’s mood. “Jim, I don’t know what you expected. They told the people of the conspiracy, of the attempt murder of our delegation and of your role in this whole mess.”

“Yes, they did. But what about Khan?”

For a moment Bob didn’t answer, before he obviously realized the reason for his protégée’s irritation, because he said “No one knows of his true identity and nature, Jim, so…”
“And this is the way it should remain? The public has no right to learn that the war hero, the media already made their figurehead, is in truth a superhuman from the 20th century, who was abused and enslaved by the same club that now tried to take over Starfleet and the Federation’s government in the end? The people shall not learn the truth? Or doesn’t Robertson know about Nien’s true role in all this?”

Wesley groaned. “Jim, President Robertson is well informed about Khan’s whole role in the mess and that millions of people owe our superman their lives. Barnett told me an hour ago about his talk with Robertson last evening and night, and that he spoke well of our superman. His support during the war and his selfless actions will not be forgotten during his trial – rather it will be welcomed. But Barnett fears that the public will go crazy if they learn that an Augment from the 20th century had a part in the mess last year and is now even deeper involved in the new conspiracy. And referring to Section 31: It has to be kept a secret so as to not unsettle the people even more.”

“In other words they want to deal with Nien more or less in private, keeping the public in the dark about his martyrdom and heroics to prevent that Command is shown in an even worse light than last year,” Jim said bitterly. He took a deep breath. “I will not tolerate this!”

Another sigh was heard. “Jim, I know that you have Khan’s – and your friends’ – best interest at heart. And you are right when you say that the public has a right to learn about the truth, but some details are better not mentioned. The people are uncertain enough at the moment with the war on an uneasy cease-fire and Starfleet in an uproar. Barnett’s – and the president’s – decision to keep the one or other low ball is a wise one. And you should accept their decision.”

“Why? Because it’s easier for them to deal with everything like this?” Jim snapped.

The others could practically hear Wesley rolling his eyes, as he answered, “Please remember that not only Khan, but also you, your officers and I are in deep water, too. And don’t antagonize Barnett or the president. Both are on your side, son, and want to help you coming out of this shit with your captaincy still intact.”

“And for what price?” Kirk snarled. “I’m not bribable, Bob! Not even with my command!”

“I know – just like Barnett knows it. He asked Robertson to make an exception for you and the others to step aboard to help with the repairs, but the president’s hands are tied in this matter. You remain free, but released from duty you aren’t allowed to be back aboard the Enterprise.”

Kirk growled quietly. “I knew it!”
“Jim that you and the others are remaining out of custody as soon as you leave New Vulcan is a premature show of trust that Robertson puts in you. He could have ordered us all under arrest, me included, yet he bent the law to an extent that is remarkable. And, by the way, I was allowed to update you on regular basis and you and the others got the permission to speak with the crew openly through the comms. The latter is a relief for me. I swear, if I watch the sour faces of the crew members any longer I’ll go crazy. I have the feeling that I’m surrounded by bottles of vinegar, and not by people.”

Kirk felt a hue of satisfaction. That was his crew – loyal to the toes! Yet his crew was still up there and he was down here – unable to support them. “So, Spock, Bones, Uhura and I are out of the game for now,” he said; his voice couldn’t hide the bitterness.

“Uhm, I forgot to mention that McCoy is allowed back to his medbay to support his staff – especially when it comes to Mr. Sulu;” Wesley replied. “The good man is in proper need of a beauty surgery, and because he is a senior officer and McCoy his personal physician, your friend may return aboard as soon as he wants.”

Leonard felt the gazes of the others upon him and stepped up to Jim; bending over the communicator. “Commodore, McCoy here. Can you give me a report about Mr. Sulu’s condition?”

“He’s up in the gym and can be barely kept in medbay, yet he tries to avoid contact with the crew because of his current appearance. I spoke with him yesterday evening and despite that he shows a brave façade to everyone I know that the poor boy is very unhappy about the whole situation.”

Bones sighed. “I’ll beam up as soon as Mr. Singh is really stable and talk to Sulu. Maybe you can assure him that he’ll be as pretty as he was when I’m done with him.”

“Sure – I’ve nothing else to do at the moment,” Bob grumbled sarcastically, yet it was out of question that he wouldn’t indeed try to comfort the helmsman. After all, Wesley was – like Jim – a captain to the heart.

Kirk nodded at Bones, before he began to speak again. “Bob? Please tell Barnett when you talk with him that I appreciate his efforts and that I’m glad that at least my CMO is allowed to aid my crew. But I will not take this as a payment to stay silent about the truth Command obviously still tries to hide!”

“Jim…”
“I will consult with my lawyer about this topic…”

“You lawyer?”

“… and will consider what he will advise in this matter.” He looked at Selek, who lifted a brow. “Thanks for the information, Bob. Kirk out!” He closed his communicator before Wesley could say something more. He knew that he was too angry to stay rational at the moment, and he didn’t want to say something he would regret later. He had learned his lessons, yet he wouldn’t hesitate to teach the brass some lessons, too.

Spock cleared his throat – a signal that he disagreed with something and had to voice it. “Captain, you do know that protocol demands that the higher ranking officer ends a communication, right?”

Jim smirked grimly. “I’m still released from duty, Spock, so to hell with protocol!” His attention drew back to Selek. “Now, the lawyer you spoke of… How quickly can he arrive on New Vulcan?”

The old Vulcan lifted one brow – just like his younger self did the same moment. “I already know of his current location, but I wanted to contact him after the official statement of Starfleet and President Robertson. It will give me some advantages when I wake his curiosity about the hidden facts behind the live broadcast.”

Bones snorted, Uhura chuckled, Joaquin shook his head and Jim smiled mischievously at him – relaxing visibly. “You do know that you have an evil streak deep in you, don’t you?”

“On the contrary, Jim, I call it ‘acting with advanced logic’,” the Elder deadpanned. “As far as I know of this lawyer, he will be not able to resist taking over such a complicated case like yours and Mr. Singh’s.”

“Rrrright,” Kirk nodded. “But please tell him that I only can give him a deposit. Nien has to be on his feet again to pillage his bank account Starfleet Command filled so nicely.”

“Khan wants to use the money Command gave him for the SDD to pay the lawyer that will lead the case against Starfleet?” Uhura snorted in amusement. “You know that you and Khan are impossible, Jim, don’t you?”
He grinned at her. “Tit for tat, Nyota! They want to wipe the dirt that was thrown in Nien’s face under the carpet once again? They’re going to be shocked by the big vacuum cleaner I’ll use to clean the mess they try to keep hidden. And the best part is: They even took care that said vacuum cleaner can be bought!” He bent down to the little table and took a fruit from the plate that had been placed there before they arrived at New Gol. Biting in it, he gave his comms officer an impish grin. “Jusht wait until we drop she ball on shem,” he munched; his face betrayed his mischievousness but also stern determination. “Shis will be a moment shey never forget!”

ST***ST

One hour later Selek stepped into his office. The tracks of the violence Norton’s assault left were repaired or removed, and something like daily routine had returned to the seat of government. But not for the old Vulcan. He knew that his role in the whole drama wouldn’t be over until Jim, his friends and Khan (of all people) were free men (and women) again. The Federation – the universe – needed Jim Kirk and his officers. Spock Prime knew what the future held, and that Earth and many other planets wouldn’t survive the next twenty years (and more) without this particular team around the man who was the captain of the Enterprise. If it would come to the worst he would have to reveal some information to the brass to keep Jim in the center seat of the Enterprise, but first he would exhaust all possibilities to help Kirk without breaking his own self-given oath.

Contacting his secretary he waited for the required comms link and sat down in his chair; his mind replayed the last hours. He knew that Jim was playing with fire if he would go against Starfleet Command, yet he remembered that his own younger Jim Kirk had been a hothead too, whom he, Old Spock, had trouble understanding in the beginning of the five-year-mission. Only during the first months did he realized that his new commanding officer’s strong display of emotions came from the devotion and passion to do the right thing, to help right to succeed and to support and protect those who were weak. Jim Kirk was a man of high morality and deep compassion. He held sympathy for everyone, even bothered to win his stiff first officer who was struggling with the two sides of his heritage. Spock knew that he wouldn’t have found that kind of inner peace he developed later if it hadn’t been for Jim Kirk, his acceptance and his deep friendship with him.

The Jim Kirk of this time-line was younger then Spock Prime’s own Jim when he met him for the first time. In his world Jim had gone through the whole teaching at Starfleet Academy and had gathered experiences first as an ensign, then as a lieutenant aboard several ships before he took command of the Enterprise. In this new time he had been thrown into cold water at the age of 25 – forced to take a responsibility he hadn’t been ready for. Now he was 27 and in the Elder’s eyes he still was too young to have such burden on his shoulders, yet Kirk managed somehow to remain captain of the Enterprise and even had his first share of heroic deeds. Jim Kirk always did what was in his nature – fighting instead of quitting.

Selek was aware of the fact how much the young man had struggled at first after he was given the command of Starfleet’s flagship. He had fought so hard to gain the crew’s respect and had won them over – just like he won the senior officers. And now he was about to throw everything out of the next airlock, like McCoy certainly would have put it, only to help right to succeed again. Jim Kirk
didn’t think of himself, but put others welfare above his own, like always.

But this time he could pay a price for it that was too high – and Old Spock would not allow that this happened. He would do anything possible to keep the younger version of his T’hy’la there, where he belonged and where his fate lay, and not only Jim’s fate, but that of the universe and the Federation, too.

“High Minister, I have reached the person you want to speak to. I will put him through,” his secretary’s voice sounded from the comm station on his desk.

“Thank you,” he answered politely; still grateful that she took the risk several days again and brought T’Pau the dangerous disks of Jim’s collected proofs against Luengo and the others. The screen of his terminal sprang alive. Selek hid his reaction very well as he looked at a man, he met in his own time-line, too – and who was now, of course, also younger than he remembered.

“Thank you for accepting my hailing,” he began the talk, and the man on the screen looked with blue eyes at him.

“High Minister Selek, it’s an honor to speak with you. How can I be at your service, sir?”

ST***ST

The feelings within the Federation ran high after the live broadcast. Media went head over heels with statements of so-called experts, new speculations, and interviews with dubious witnesses and live reports of many colonies’ and planets’ reactions. As it became late afternoon in San Francisco – and early afternoon in New Shi’Kahr – the whole Federation seemed to be in turmoil. The comm stations at Starfleet’s press center didn’t quiet down, hundreds of reporters gathered in front of Headquarters, demonstrations against Starfleet, against war in general and against anything possible spread across planets. It was chaos; Security was only barely able to keep control.

None of this was really acknowledged by Kirk and his friends on New Vulcan. While Jim, Bones and Joaquin settled in, thanked T’Pau for her hospitality and got a short tour through New Gol, Spock and Uhura visited once again Sarek and talked with him about the broadcast he also watched and their own private matters. As Spock learned that his father would be released from hospital in three days, he and Nyota decided to stay at his flat even after his return – tight space be dammed. They didn’t want Sarek to be alone in his flat even after his return – tight space be damned. They both knew how stubborn and secretly proud Sarek was – streaks he shared with his son, as Nyota teased her betrothed.
Joaquin had to admit that he missed Pavel and Kevin, but the three friends had decided the day before to wait a little bit before they would ask Selek if the two ensigns were allowed to visit New Gol, too. Bones used the time to give Joaquin a few lessons in history – true history, not the chaotic summary he got until now. And Jim, who had calmed down after Selek informed him that the lawyer would arrive within five days, gave into his body’s demand for some rest and took a nap in his bed beside Khan’s biobed. The air within the abbey was warm, but not hot, clear and smelled of peace – somehow. It didn’t last long until Jim fell deeply asleep; snoring softly what elicited an amused raised brow from a young Vulcan priest as he stopped by to bring some fruits.

Like this the early afternoon shaded into the later day – a day that held another surprise for the young captain…

ST***ST

It was warm – and bright. These were the first real impressions his mind could acknowledge. Next his nose caught a pleasant but strange scent – a smell of dry sand, warm stony walls and something he knew but couldn’t place. And then he heard it – the soft beeping and buzzing of electronic devices, yet he also felt a foreign object stuck in his left hand while fluid entered his body. Simultaneously he smelled something that made his belly clench in anxiety: the reek of sterilization products and medical equipment.

Then the pain came – in his arm and leg, in his upper body, in his side, in his head… There seemed to be no spot that didn’t hurt. Yes, he realized that he was sedated – a little bit – but it wasn’t enough to stop the whole pain.

Sedated…

This realization woke new horrible memories – without pictures and voices. They were nothing more than bad emotions which lurked deep in his mind but they rose from the shadows like phantoms. Yes, he sensed that this time soft material was beneath his back – maybe a hospital bed – but his body was being fed with some unknown chemicals.

Like before when he was in the hands of Section 31…

Like the times he was held somewhere else without any chance of moving or talking, asleep and not asleep, full of pain he soundlessly begged to subside…
And at this very moment when he was about to give up, his instincts reacted. He had to survive! Like before his instincts wouldn’t allow anything else.

Before his mind could clear up enough to gather one logical thought, Khan forced his eyes open and sat up – ready to rip out the needle in his hand to fight his way to freedom.

A searing pain in his side and in his left arm and leg made him gasp, while dizziness made his head spin. The bright light around him blinded him for a few seconds and even his enhanced eyes couldn’t prevent the rising tears, then something dipped beside him on the mattress and a familiar scent mingled with the not unpleasant but unfamiliar one.

“Nien!”

Warm, gentle hands cradled his head; a rush of relief, warmth and love washed over him.

So much love…

He thought he would drown in it, yet he felt no urge to fight it. Rather the opposite. The love enveloped him, bathed his scared soul in security and caring, made him forget the pain more and more – and finally his eye sight adjusted to the brightness.

The first he saw was gold and blue, and then his view cleared.

Sky blue eyes in an ashen face looked with awe and unlimited joy at him; daylight brightened golden, tousled hair; the grey features began to flush with new life. A moment later gentle lips brushed over his; the familiar taste and scent woke deep trust in him.

Jim!

While his usually so quick mind was still struggling with coming to terms with his surroundings, his heart went out to the younger man beside him, who pulled him into a careful, yet tightening embrace and whispered words of relief and love.
Kirk bit his lips to hinder the tears of joy in his eyes. Nien was awake! Despite the fear and confusion the Augment radiated, he was really awake!

Even in his deep sleep Jim’s soul had picked up the rising awareness of its mate, which tore the young captain out of his well-earned slumber. Feeling Nien’s rising anxiety he forced himself to wake up, only to see his beloved sitting up – eyes wide and teary, the face betraying the fright and pain that seemed to engulf him. Without wasting a moment he more or less jumped out of bed and was a second later at Khan’s side; taking the beloved, pale face gently between his hands.

Those so deeply missed blue-green eyes sought his, looked at him with questions, puzzlement and still lingering horror, then recognition began to shimmer in them – and Kirk couldn’t hold himself back any longer. Bending forwards he gave his bondmate the most tender and gentlest kiss possible; knowing that Nien needed reassurance and safety more than anything else at the moment. Those far too cool and dry lips became soft under the fondling, and acting on pure instinct, Jim closed his arms around the slender frame; cradling the Augment against him just like Khan did all those weeks back as he rescued him from the Klingons.

And then the tension left the enhanced man’s body.

Simply relaxing against the strong, yet so fragile body, Khan allowed himself to close his eyes again and to lay his forehead against his beloved’s shoulder; taking in the familiar scent that soothed him even more. Wherever they were, whatever happened to him to be in such bad condition, it didn’t matter at the moment. He was safe, as was Jim. Nothing else counted for now.

“Nien,” Jim whispered; barely believing that the other half of his soul was awake and obviously doing better. “Honey, please lay down again. I’ll help you.” As Khan made no move to do as he was asked, Kirk delicately pushed him back; using both arms to lay down the older man with utter care – cradling the Augment’s head with one hand to ease it gently down on the pillow. He met the newly rising questions in his bondmate’s eyes, and answered them with a soft, “You’re seriously injured, Sweetheart, and you really shouldn’t move very much. Your liver was torn, you’ve got several bone fractures and other inner injuries. Oh, and you suffer of a TBI, so – please! – don’t stress yourself.”

Khan needed a little bit until his mind caught up with the information, then a low groan left his lips. As it seemed he got it nasty this time – whatever ‘this time’ happened – but he knew deep in his soul and heart that he didn’t need to be wary. He was in good hands and was well-cared for. Jim was here and…

The same moment the door burst open, and while Jim almost jerked right out of his skin, Khan simply tried to lift his head to take a peek at the entrance; his instincts had already acknowledged the arriving person.
“Noo!” shouted a joyful young voice, and then Jim had barely time to move aside as a happy Joaquin more or less threw himself at the older Augment.

“Careful! Your brother is still healing!” Kirk chided, but his eyes laughed.

“Just have a look, Sleeping Beauty honors us with his shining awakened presence!” a voice drawled from the entrance. Bones strolled into the room; med-scanner in hand. “I really don’t need any med-monitor when the boy is near. He recognized the changing condition of his brother before my instruments gave alert.” His glance found Jim, who beamed at him like a boy who finally got the most wanted candy or toy. “And I don’t have to ask if you woke up because of our superman leaving dreamland before even he knew that he was waking up, didn’t you?”

Kirk only chuckled, and Leonard – shaking his head in fond amusement – stepped to the bed.

Khan glanced up as he heard the other almost familiar voice and instantly recognized the grumpy face of McCoy; yet the brown eyes of the good doctor betrayed his relief.

“About damn time you woke up,” the CMO said softly, while he shooed Weiss away and passed the med-scanner along the older Augment’s body. “These two infants here really drove me up the wall!” He nodded towards Jim and Joaquin, who both grinned at him. “One day more and I would have asked Spock or Selek to show me how to meditate!” He watched the readouts and grimaced. “Alright, my friend. You’re healing, but are far away from being healthy. I don’t want to bother you with details – after all you’re only awake for a minute or so, and I don’t want to give you the greys. BUT: No quick or uncontrolled movements, no leaving of the bed, sitting up only with help and slowly, and…”

“Bones, I already gave Nien a quick report of the injuries he received,” Kirk cut in, while he sat down at the bed side again and took Khan’s hand.

“You did?” McCoy frowned at him. “Ever heard the phrase ‘don’t shock a patient with the truth after he just came back from the dead’?”

“No,” Jim shook his head. “And I’m pretty certain that this isn’t a common phrase but something you just came up with.”

“No, not me but my Doctor-father told me that! And that man was always all right – well, almost,”
he finished with a grimace. Then his attention was driven back to his patient. Khan looked pale and ashen, his eyes betrayed his tiredness, yet Bones saw the returning clearness and intelligence in the Augment’s glance.

“Are you thirsty or hungry? Are you in much pain or is it tolerable? To tell the truth, I pumped you so full with sedatives I really don’t want to heighten the dose if it isn’t absolutely necessary.”

Khan moistened his dry lips and croaked something no one was able to understand. At loss Leonard glanced at Jim, who bent over his bondmate. “Nien, are you thirsty?”

A short nod.

“Are you hungry?”

A very slow shaking of the head.

“Your pain – do you need more against it?”

Again a negative answer.

“Right,” Bones grumbled and filled a glass with the fresh water that was in a bottle, placed on the table. “We start everything slowly – including taking food.” He returned to the bed and watched how both Jim and Joaquin helped Khan to move his upper body a little bit into a more sitting position. Gently Leonard pushed the glass against the enhanced man’s lips; realizing that the two other males kept close like a pack. He sighed. “And, as it seems, this time I’m outdone in the whole ‘mother-hen-department’.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Bones is outdone with being THE mother-hen of the Enterprise. All right, Spock outdoes him often enough when something happens to Jim, yet our dear captain is as
bad as his two friends (laugh).

I think that the president doesn’t inform public about everything was something to be expected, yet he really missed a chance to make Khan and his heritage known to the people in a good way. But don’t fear, Jim has the last word in it (he, Selek, the lawyer, and so on).

In the next chapter Khan will wake up completely and will have a longer talk with Jim. Then Wesley tries to calm Kirk down, what will be impossible – and T’Pau demands Jim’s presence in her office to have a certain talk with him.

Sorry, but the next chapter won’t be published within the next two weeks, because I’m now off for a vacation, and the new chapter isn’t quite finished.

I wish you all Happy Easter,

Love

Your Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers.

I hope you all had a nice time during Eastern. Sorry for the delay, but after the return from my vacation I was very busy, and only found time to end the next story during the last weekend. But therefore it will hold a lot of what you’re waiting for. Promised!

So, I don’t want to let you wait any longer. Off you go to our Star Trek universe – and thank you for all the comments and kudos you left.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 85 – Waking up

Khan had fallen asleep again barely after he had drunk half a glass of water, yet it was a peaceful slumber. Jim hailed Spock and told him about the good news; learning as he did so of Sarek’s planned release from the hospital in three days. Kirk was glad that Spock’s father was doing so much better.

Bones contacted M’Benga to get an update of the current situation in medbay. Both he and Kirk were happy to hear that Sulu – indeed – was doing very much better and was regaining his strength in the gym.

The rest of the late afternoon went by uneventfully and New Gol’s guests went early to bed – both Jim and Joaquin at peace for once, even if the young captain still boiled because of the broadcast and the president’s wasted chance to make the public aware of the new war-hero’s true nature.

In the middle of the night Jim’s slumber was interrupted by Khan’s sudden movements and whimpers. The young captain was wide awake within a second and out of the bed the next moment – closing the distance to the biobed with two large strides. In the pale light of New Vulcan’s satellite Jim watched his beloved, whose face grimaced while words in Hindi left his dry lips. Yet you didn’t need to be a genius to figure out the current matter. Nien was having a nightmare – nothing
unexpected.

Sitting down on the bed’s edge, Jim took Khan’s hand into his and stroked with his free hand through the older man’s sticky hair; making soothing sounds. It seemed to help – at least a little bit, but as the Augment finally lay quietly between the sheets, he didn’t let go of Kirk’s fingers. He rather clung to them like a life-line, and Jim realized that his close proximity was the only reason for the former dictator to have calmed down.

The urge to be as close to Nien as possible, mixed with his protectiveness and his desire to comfort his still hurting mate made Jim shift, and quietly he slipped beneath the covers beside the Augment. Promptly Khan moved closer to him and rolled on his right side – snuggling against the other man with a satisfied sigh.

Jim smiled into the semi-darkness, carefully lifted Nien’s head, placed his left arm beneath it and pulled the far too thin body closer to his own. He felt the fever that still burned in the Augment, as Khan’s head came to rest on his shoulder. His hot breath brushed over Jim’s exposed upper body, while the enhanced man wrapped his still healing left arm around the other man’s waist – something that had to give Nien pain, yet his instinctive longing for nearness and protection were stronger.

Ever so tentatively Jim wrapped both arms around Khan. He felt as if he had come home – now, as he finally could hold his beloved once again like this. Their closeness chased the dark phantoms of the last days away, and utter peace began to wash over the young captain. Even the damn broadcast was forgotten for now.

Suddenly Kirk heard a low noise at the door and after lifting his head his eyes found the slender frame of Joaquin lingering on the threshold.

“Is he all right?” the Augment boy whispered. It was obvious that he had felt his brother’s distress.

“Nightmare,” Jim answered equally quietly.

Joaquin stepped nearer and looked with big, compassionate eyes at his brother’s still form. “Sometimes he had them even back in New Delhi. He never told me about them, yet I know they were strong. He… never admitted it, but I know he was grateful when I cuddled with him.”

Jim smiled; realizing what Joaquin was more or less asking for. The young man was still stressed from everything that happened, and was therefore in need for a ‘cuddling’. Carefully moving his arm
on which shoulder Khan’s head rested, Kirk moved the blanket a little bit. “Come here,” he murmured. “I don’t think your brother would mind having you close, too. Rather the opposite.”

Weiss hesitated a moment, then he simply slipped under the covers at Khan’s other side and moved closer; spooning against his brother.

A soft sigh escaped Nien and even if he was already relaxed, Jim thought he felt him relaxing even more. A smile tugged at the young captain’s mouth. Super-strength and genius-brain be dammed, his beloved was also simply a human who needed here and there to be shown affection.

Snuggling against Nien’s forefront and feeling Joaquin’s arm touching his own as the boy wrapped himself around his brother’s back, Jim took a deep breath. Pressing a sweet gentle kiss on Nien’s forehead, Jim sighed in contentment and closed his eyes; feeling whole for the first time in days. It didn’t last long until he fell asleep again.

In this night Khan suffered no more nightmares.

ST***ST

“Awaw – how cute!”

The slightly sarcastically voice woke Jim up. For a moment he blinked into the golden-red rays of the sun which fell through the uncovered window and quickly he closed them again. Then he felt Nien’s weight pressing him down into the mattress and a smile spread over his face. At the same moment Kirk felt another hand gripping around and brushing against his arm – a slender hand with surprising strength. It came to rest on his wrist and relaxed again – something that was accompanied by a satisfied sigh.

“You three remind me of a bunch of ferrets. They love to cuddle in sleep like this, too.” the intruder’s voice mocked.

Groaning Jim opened his eyes again and looked straight into the half amused, half exasperated face of McCoy.

“Morning, Bones,” he mumbled.
“Morning, kid – or shall I say, kids?” The CMO grinned at him and a sleepy Joaquin, who looked up at him with big eyes. “Hell, why didn’t you tell me that you wanted to do a pajama-party?” Leonard teased them further. “I would have joined it, really! I only ask myself what the Vulcans would say if they catch you like this.”

“They are far too polite to barge into someone’s sleeping room – contrary to someone who just tore me out of sleep!” Jim grumbled.

“It’s already late morning, Jim – even by counting Vulcan time. Aboard the Enterprise they are about to have lunch, so rise and shine, oh glorious Captain! Wesley beamed down a few minutes ago and wants to speak with you,” McCoy rallied him even more. He threw a short glance at the biobed’s monitor that informed him about the three males’ current condition, and left the room while whistling a melody very off key; obviously in a very good mood.

Joaquin, who had oriented himself, moved away from his brother’s form and sat up. He had to grin as he realized that Noo more or less lay fully upon Jim, who rubbed his face with his free hand. “Usually Bones is the grumpy one early in the morning,” Kirk complained, and Weiss began to chuckle.

“Well, maybe that changed because it’s already late morning.”

They exchanged a glance. “Yeah. He must have had a cup of coffee by now,” Jim sighed. “There is no way in hell that he is in such a sunny mood without a decent coffee.” His free hand found its way into Khan’s messy hair and stroked gently through it. “I hate to move now, but I really shouldn’t let Wesley wait.”

“I’ll help you to get out without waking Noo,” Joaquin said gently and supported Jim in moving Khan enough to give the captain room to slip out of bed. Groaning, Jim stretched; mumbling something about “This mess can’t be my back!” Yawning he walked towards the bathroom; simply knowing that this day would be unusual.

He couldn’t know how right he was.

ST*###ST

The Augment woke up shortly after Jim had left dreamland and the biobed. He was disoriented and didn’t say more than a few words to Jim and Joaquin. Bones, who came running as the monitor in
his room gave an alert, checked Khan thoroughly again and was satisfied with the readouts. The enhanced man was healing nicely, yet it didn’t slip the CMO’s attention that the former dictator was still very weak and made no move to fight against it. This fact made Bones nervous, but he wouldn’t say anything about it for now. Maybe Khan simply needed time to rebuild his strength for once. Soon afterwards the Augment slumbered again.

At the same time Bob sat in the shadows of one of the many refuges outside in the gardens and waited for Jim, who arrived a quarter of an hour later – hair still a little bit tousled, expression a little bit sleepy and with a growling stomach and the shadow of a growing beard. It was more than obvious that he had been asleep as the commodore asked for him, and Wesley regretted that he had woken his protégée up. That Kirk was in serious need for some time-out was clear, yet they had to speak about the whole situation. There was no delay possible.

Kirk greeted Wesley politely. It didn’t slip Bob’s attention that his protégée was still irritated – obviously about yesterday’s broadcast – and after asking how Khan was doing, Bob suggested that he and Jim should take a short walk. It was very late morning and the sun was burning hot, yet it didn’t stop the two officers from taking a stroll. Kirk led the commodore further into the gardens and chose a small path that headed towards the near mountains. And only after they had brought a little distance between themselves and the building did Bob began to speak.

“What you are about to do?”

Jim frowned. “I beg your pardon?”

Wesley asked himself if Kirk was playing dumb or really didn’t understand the question’s reason. Sighing he clarified, “What will you do concerning Khan – and Section 31? Robertson’s yesterday lack of mentioning them isn’t for naught. You can get into even deeper hell if you don’t play along.”

Jim pressed his lips into a thin line briefly, before he answered, “As I told you yesterday: I’ll speak with my lawyer and will consider yours and his advice.”

Bob grimaced. “Jim, I can understand that you want the best for Khan, but you won’t do him or his people a favor if you decide to take your own road in that matter. Barnett told me that he spoke with the president about Mr. Singh and the other superhumans very intensely, and Robertson shares our opinion that the Augments should be given a chance to build their own life in this world, yet the public’s interest has to be considered. And I do understand that he doesn’t want to fall with the door into the house by telling the public that some supermen and –women are about to spread through the Federation. The Eugenic Wars were more than 260 years ago, but they have not been forgotten.”
Jim snorted. “If this is the case then he started in the wrong way. Khan’s positive role within this war would be a good chance to change the public’s opinions concerning his people. ‘Sunrise’ has become quite a hero and, as Lieutenant Uhura told me during the last week several times, the channels are filled with rumors and stories about him. This could be used to an advantage.” As he watched Wesley rolling his eyes, he added, “Maybe you should think about my idea instead of prejudging it from the beginning.”

Bob watched him shortly. Khan was a part of the Enterprise’s crew by now; a member of the ‘family’, like Kirk loved to call his friends. And woe betide anyone, who went against one of the ‘Enterprise-family’ – he, she or they would be confronted with the full force of enraged mother-hens no one wanted to face then. Bob could sing a song or two about it. He himself had been on the receiving end of it a few times. When he remembered the moment more than three weeks ago as McCoy made a big fuss as he, Wesley, wanted to speak with the still healing Kirk, or how Spock ruffled his feathers every time someone dared to come near Kirk with unkind intentions, the commodore really didn’t want to imagine what would be the outcome, if Barnett – and Robertson – wouldn’t do the best for the Enterprise’s senior officers and Khan.

Bob sighed inwardly and shortly pursed his lips. “I do understand what you mean, Jim. I really do! But we’re walking a tightrope here, and I fear that it will swing too much in the storm that would be raised by Command.”

Kirk remained unimpressed. “The admirals owe their lives to Khan’s SDD – just like Miss Whitman and the surviving diplomats do. Nien didn’t hesitate one moment to give the construction plans for his development to you so that you could travel into Borderland to start the rescue mission. And he had a part in revealing the conspiracy, which in the end saved Starfleet and the Federation we know. All this, combined with his further role within the last months and his torment at the hands of Section 31, would certainly influence public’s point of view in a positive way. To use one of Dr. McCoy’s idioms: If you have a good card then play it before someone else plays the first hand.”

Wesley wiped his forehead. The heat was strong, and here, farther away from the lake, the winds weren’t cool anymore, but warm. “In other words: We should make the first move before Command does.” He cocked his head. “To say in plainly, Jim: I get a stomachache when I think of everything that could go wrong.”

“No risk, no success, Bob,” Kirk deadpanned.

“Yeah, right – that’s your life-motto, isn’t it?”

Jim smirked shortly, before he stopped, which made the commodore halt too. “Bob, this is far away enough from New Gol.”
Surprised Wesley looked at him. “I don’t think that any wild life would come so near to a settlement, and…”

“It’s not because I fear some new kind of Lematya. I simply don’t want to put more distance between Nien and me.”

Bob frowned. “Why?”

Jim took a deep breath. “I have to remain close to Nien until his mental condition allows him to think rationally again. Augments have a very fine sense when it comes to the proximity of their family members, and because we have become close as two beings are able to, my presence soothes Nien.”

Wesley’s brown eyes wandered over the skyline of New Shi’Kahr and the glistening lake in the background. “And there is it again: This mysterious ‘staying near’ you always come up with since Khan was injured.” He glanced back at his protégée. “Why do I think that you’re withholding something from me concerning you two?”

“Bob, if I don’t know exactly which information you require, I can’t answer you,” Kirk avoided the question.

Wesley rolled his eyes. “Sweet Lord, it is as if I’m talking to Spock or Sonik when they don’t want to answer a question.”

“Well, Spock rubs off on me,” Jim shrugged with a trademark grin, and Bob shook his head.

“I surrender!” he groaned. He followed Kirk back the path they had just come, and grumbled. “And, by the way, Jim, next time we two talk via communicator, please don’t shut the line. It’s still a superior officer who ends a talk!”

Jim smiled sheepishly. “Spock already pointed out this part of protocol to me yesterday.”

“As if you didn’t know this part of protocol,” Bob rebuked, but was met with another disarming smile.
“Sorry?” Jim offered, and Wesley rubbed his forehead again in frustration. Sometimes imagining of retiring from Starfleet and to use some connections to get a nice, calm desk job wasn’t that bad!

ST***ST

After Wesley beamed up again, Khan awoke in the early midday – and this time his eyes weren’t that glassy anymore. Still tired but with new clarity in his gaze he looked up only to find Jim sitting at the table and working with his PADD. The younger man’s face betrayed his concentration, the small frown on his forehead spoke of problems and the way he chewed at his lips told the Augment that Kirk’s mind was fiercely at work to solve the obvious problems.

For a long moment Nien simply watched his soul-mate, enveloped in the warm light that fell through the window and made his blond hair shine like gold. It was quiet around them – the silence of a peaceful place – and for a few seconds the Augment felt utterly at peace. The pain wasn’t that bad anymore, his mouth didn’t feel that dry like before and the headache was less than the last time he woke up, yet there was something that unsettled him. He couldn’t remember what happened.

The last thing he knew was that he had been involved in some fight – a battle even – the rest was a blur. And whenever he tried to remember more, something blocked his brain. This was highly unusual for him and he felt slightly irritated about it. He was enhanced, he was superior, he was better! Then why did his mind play that mean trick on him and deny him access to his memories which would explain why he was this injured at all?

Suddenly Kirk turned his head and their eyes met. Pure joy spread over the captain’s face, while he sat the PADD down and rose.

“Hey,” he greeted softly; closing the distance to the bed and sitting down on its edge. His left hand reached out and smoothed some sticky locks away from Nien’s forehead. “How are you’re doing?”

Khan moistened his lips and rasped, “Better – I think.”

Jim, happy to hear an understandable answer from his bondmate, bent down and pressed a gentle kiss to Nien’s dry lips. “I’m glad,” he whispered. His gaze roamed full of love and tenderness over the slender and far too pale features. “Do you want something?”

“Yes – my memories back,” the Augment murmured. As he saw how those blue eyes widened in
shock, he carefully raised his right hand and touched the other man’s shoulder. The effort he needed to do so, was unbelievable. “Don’t worry, I do know who you are,” he croaked. “But I haven’t the tiniest clue where I am and why I’m in this bad condition.”

Kirk sighed in relief – for a moment he had feared Nien had lost his memory completely and therefore didn’t recognize him. But this fright was for nothing. Sitting up a little bit more and taking Khan’s hand in his own, he answered, “We’re at New Gol – the seat of the Vulcan priests. We were invited to stay here and heal.”

Khan frowned; his usually so quick and bright mind needed a moment to work out what Jim had said. Well, if this was a seat of priests, it was an abbey. So it was no wonder that it was so quiet and peaceful here. He looked around himself. He saw the hooked-up infusion that was linked with his body, recognized that the beeping belonged to the monitor of the biobed he obviously lay on and that his left arm was wrapped in bandages – just like a great part of the rest of his body.

“What happened?” he rasped, while he once again tried to remember. But everything was still shut away in a dark fog he simply couldn’t – or didn’t want – to pierce just right now.

Jim bit his lips. He didn’t know how much Khan could already take and what would be too much for him. Okay, Nien wasn’t comparable with casual humans and could stand a lot more other people wouldn’t bear at the moment, yet Bones had made it very clear that Khan needed rest – augmented nature be dammed.

“Well,” Kirk tried to beat around the bush, “there was this fight and you… Uh...” He stopped, and saw how his beloved made a face.

“If you try to spare me, please notify that I get far more unsettled by not knowing what happened than by learning the truth.” Khan’s voice was still hoarse and there was no smoothness in his usually full baritone, yet there was this stubborn streak Jim knew all too well.

Kirk grimaced. “Nien, Bones practically ordered rest for you and…” He caught the defying glance deep in the still tired eyes, and gave in. He and Khan were so similar! If he – Jim – was in Nien’s place he wouldn’t give it a rest too, until he knew what happened. “What is the last thing you remember?” he asked softly.

The former dictator pursed his lips; thinking straight made the headache worse. “Hallways on a starship and… we crawled through a supply shaft. And… there was a room with many stations, but not the bridge…” He blinked in confusion.
Jim nodded slowly. “‘We’, you said. Who was with you?”

Again Khan had to concentrate and for a second he thought could see another known face – that of a young woman with shoulder long blond hair and blue eyes. “Marcus…,” he mumbled. “Carol Marcus. She was with me and… we were in this room. We locked the doors and… and I was busy with at a station, but…” He shook his head, before another memory crept through the fog. “There were men, too. They… they attacked…” He fell silent and looked questioningly at Jim; trusting him to fill the gaps that lingered in his memories.

“What do you remember us arriving at Vulcan, taking your people to safety and being at Selek’s office as Norton and his cronies arrived?”

Khan’s forehead furrowed and he needed a moment before he slowly nodded. “Yes, there are fragments of images and voices in my memories, which point out something like this. But I can’t remember it clearly.” He took a deep breath. “This is highly irritable!” he whispered.

Jim gently squeezed his hand. “Give it time, baby. You’re suffering a TBI. It’s normal that your brain shuts down in the aftermath – even for a genius like you.” he added teasingly; winking at the Augment, who was… pouting. Jim sighed. Sweet Lord, sometimes this biological enhanced superman was simply cute!

“Well, let me tell you what happened. Maybe you’ll begin to remember then,” Kirk said softly; receiving a huff from his bondmate. Shaking his head inwardly he began to speak, “Let’s start when Norton and the others stormed Selek’s office,” he began quietly. He knew that it was indeed better to tell Nien what he wanted to know than to keep him in the dark.

“After Norton, Styles and Elite Security cornered us, Dashwood and Conelly arrived, too. Norton blackmailed you in surrendering to them by threatening my life.” He gulped; the memory of those minutes still pained him – this damn helplessness he had been forced to endure and to watch the love of his life sacrificing himself… It still gave Kirk the chills. “You gave in and were beamed aboard the Excalibur together with Styles, the scientists and Carol, who pretended to be on Norton’s side.” Jim took a breath. “Only after she was beamed up she let her mask slip. She didn’t betray us but lied to Norton to remain free to support us. She somehow helped you to escape and you made it to the Excalibur’s auxiliary – the room you remember.” He bit shortly at his lips. “In the meantime Bob and the Lexington had arrived and…”

“Hold it,” Khan murmured; furrowing his forehead as another fragment of his memories returned. “As far as I remember the Lexington was supposed to speed to Earth to stop Luengo.”
Jim nodded at the underlying question that was in Nien’s voice. “Yes, you remember correctly, Sweetheart. But Bob and Barnett changed the plan, because Spock’s father became very sick and needed surgery. And because of his rare blood type he had to return to New Vulcan as soon as possible. Mrs. Whitman, the vice president, flew to Earth with the other admirals, managed to catch Robertson in private, told him about everything that happened and now Luengo and his fellows rot in custody.” For a moment Kirk grinned broadly.

The Augment blinked slowly. “So… the conspiracy was stopped? And Mr. Spock’s father belongs indeed to the survivors?” he asked; confused that he remembered these details almost without any effort, but still had problems to catch what had initiated his current condition. And then this blasted headache! It was more than irritating.

Jim smirked widely. “Yeah, Sarek lives. And concerning the conspiracy: Section 31 was destroyed; Luengo and his cronies are in custody like several Council members, too and…” He hesitated as Khan’s eye lids began to drop. He waited a moment and was about to rise, as the Augment looked up at him again.

“Please continue,” he said quietly, but Kirk frowned.

“You’re sure? You look tired.”

“I am tired,” the former dictator admitted, which told a lot about his condition. “Yet I want to know what happened.”

Sighing, Jim gave in again. Taking a more comfortable position on the bed’s edge, he continued, “Barnett beamed down to New Vulcan just in time, and together we overpowered Norton and his men. Then we beamed aboard the Excalibur to free you, but Styles was clever enough to set Security up against us, telling them that Barnett was an imposter and that I and the others had to be arrested. It came to a battle, during which I first learned from Carol where you and her were and then… I felt your pain.”

Khan looked at him confused. “You felt… my pain?”

Kirk nodded. “Yeah, I did – just like you feel when I’m upset or when something is the matter with Jo.” He shrugged. “Selek thinks it has to do with us being bonded – but more of it later.” His thumb moved in soothing circles over the back of the Augment’s hand.
“As Security was about to break down auxiliary’s door, you forced Carol to flee through a support shaft and remained behind to cover her back,” he continued to fill the gaps in Khan’s memories. “Finnegan and a few of his men finally stormed auxiliary and… Well, you were weakened by a strong sedative one of the scientists gave you before Carol could act against it. Because of it Finnegans and his bastards overpowered you and… they found it a nice pay back for escaping them at first by beating you senseless. Then they took you to medbay to… to put you into stasis in your cryotube.” He watched how Khan’s now glassy eyes widened and added hastily. “But it never came to the last step. We…”

“Jim came in the very last second, gave Conelly the beating of his life and got you out of this ice-coffin before anything worse could happen to you – well, almost, given the state you’re still in,” another voice cut in. Bones stood at the entrance and smiled gently at the two lovers; his usually grumpy face betraying his soft side. He stepped nearer; his eyes directed at the Augment. “Your mind was more or less gone, and you only reacted on your instincts. My butt hurt for hours after you made it very clear that only Jim – or Joaquin – were allowed to touch you.” He rubbed his backside; shrugging as Khan looked puzzled at him.

“I don’t understand,” he said quietly, and Bones chuckled,

“I wanted to check you thoroughly, and give you something against the pain and stop the bleeding – and as a hearty thank-you you struck out like a wounded tiger and I found myself a few meters away polishing the floor with my butt.” He shook his head, while he stopped beside Kirk. “The only one who was able to reach you was Jim.”

The former dictator closed his eyes; fighting against the increasing headache. “I apologize, Doctor,” he said nonetheless; knowing when an apology was necessary.

“Don’t – you weren’t in your right mind, which was utterly understandable,” McCoy said softly. “These bastards really got you pretty bad. Any casual human wouldn’t have survived it. I’m only glad that Jim gave Finnegans his own pay-back.” He met the ocean-colored eyes again, and added, “He broke the bastard’s jaw after he gave him the punch of his life. And Spock nerve-pinched Finnegans in the hardest way possible afterwards – certainly his own way of revenge, even if he will deny it for the rest of his life if you confront him with his actions.”

“Spock… sort of avenged me?” Khan asked baffled; forgetting his tiredness for a moment longer.

This time McCoy laughed quietly. “Yeah, he was obviously pissed off by the whole situation – with Jim at the edge of losing it, you in mortal danger and Starfleet’s Elite playing Rambo.” He snorted in amusement. “The Vulcan nerve-pinch can be delivered ‘softly’ and even then it’s quite unpleasant,
so I’ve heard. But it also can be bestowed in a very hard and therefore really painful way – and when
I remember the scream Finnegan howled just before he dropped back on the floor and an almost grim
looking Spock just leaving him, I simply know that our Vulcan gave him his own piece of mind.” He
smirked. “As it turns out the Vulcans’ peaceful way doesn’t count for Spock anymore when it comes
to his friends. Then he transforms back into one of his ancestral warriors.”

“Yes, this I remember very well,” Nien grumbled, but his voice lacked any of the old grudge he had
held against the Vulcan. Somehow within the last weeks it had vanished. And the thought that Spock
of all people more or less avenging him, confused but also pleased Khan. Maybe they could become
friends one day.

“Spock simply checkmated Finnegan before this bastard could do more crimes,” Jim mumbled;
feeling the illogical urge to defend his soul-brother’s unusual behavior.

Bones shook his head. “You were ahead and didn’t see it, Jim. I just threw a glance over my
shoulder as I heard Finnegan cry out. Spock just looked like a demon in this moment, with fire in his
eyes and this not-real, yet existing thunderous expression on his face. I almost wish that I had had a
holo-camera with me to record him in those seconds. I could rub it under his nose until he’s old and
grey.” He sat down on the chair Jim occupied before and comfortably stretched out his legs. The
monitor above Khan showed that the Augment’s condition was stable, and therefore there was no
need to check him again with a med-scanner.

“This is so like you!” Kirk groaned; already knowing that his two friends would bicker about this
matter in the future.

Khan had listened closely. He was well aware of the seriousness of the whole topic concerning the
battle aboard the Excalibur – a battle he still had to remember properly – but he also realized that his
bondmate and the CMO were trying to lighten the mood, and even if it was unnecessary, Nien
couldn’t deny some gratefulness for their attempt. It showed once again how much he was cared for.

“So, you fought your way to medbay to reach me in time,” he took up the thread again; suppressing
a yawn.

McCoy made an affirming gesture. “Jim got to you in time by fighting his way free with his bare
hands. I swear the amount of people he simply punched or threw out of his way to get to you is
uncountable. I’m still baffled that no-one noticed that he somehow got super-strength.”

“Yeah, as far as I learned by now we’ve Spock to thank for it. He somehow covered for me – but
don’t ask me how,” Kirk sighed. “I reached medbay just in time to stop Conelly and Dashwood from
activating the cryotube, pummeled Conelly…"

“You beat him into the ground, kid, and I really don’t mind it one bit!” Bones threw in; crossing his arms in front of his chest.

“… And during that fight your cryotube crashed to the floor, opened and you crawled out,” Jim finished without reacting to Leonard’s comment. “Spock and Ritek, who was with us, secured us while Bones treated you, first Bob and then Joaquin and Selek appeared, and…”

For a moment Khan’s growing tiredness was forgotten, as he slowly lifted his head. “You took Joaquin with you aboard the Excalibur?” he asked; almost shocked.

Jim’s eyes widened. “What? Of course not! I sent him with Selek aboard the Enterprise and…”

“The Enterprise was in the hands of Section 31,” Nien interrupted; anger began to shine in his eyes.

“No, not anymore at that time,” Kirk assured him and started to grin. In the next minute he told Khan about the trick Chekov, Riley, Keenser and Sulu played on the Elite Securities and Section 31. “So they all woke up hours later with the mother of all headaches, the Enterprise was free and could corner the Excalibur together with the Lexington, and now…”

“And now the two kids walk around with an ego as large as the Mount Everest, and half of the brass laughing their heads off because two boys, a little Royalan and an injured young helmsman brought down more than a hundred Elite Securities,” McCoy snickered. “This will go down in history, mark my words!”

Khan looked from one man to the other one; still struggling to comprehend everything he had just heard. “And… where is Joaquin now?”

“Outside in the gardens, talking with a young Vulcan priest last time I checked on him,” Leonard informed him. “The two seem to get along very well, yet I think the boy misses our two troublemakers, Pavel and Kevin. They kept him company during the last few days, but now, since we are at New Gol, we still have to check if it’s okay when they come here to visit him.”

Jim smiled reassuringly; knowing that Khan wanted the best for his little brother. “I’ll talk to T’Pau about it. She wanted to speak with me anyway, yet I waited until you were better.”
Again Nien seemed to need some time to stick all this information in his mind, before he mumbled, “Obviously I was out for a long time. How long?”

“Five days,” Kirk answered softly. “You were dead to the world for five days.” Something in his tone told Khan that Jim’s words had a further meaning, but he was too tired to ask about it. And, by the way, the main injuries that he yet had to count were paining him more minute by minute.

Bones realized the Augment’s condition and rose. “Okay, that was enough for the first time,” he said. “Khan needs rest and you,” he looked at Jim, “can maybe ask T’Pau’s secretary for a meeting with her. I’m really surprised that she hasn’t demanded your arrival in her office until now.” He cocked his head. “She seems to have a soft spot for you.”

Jim snorted. “You exaggerate. T’Pau simply accepts that Nien needs me close by – with him being my bondmate, and so on.” He grimaced. “I don’t look too forward to the talk.”

“Yeah, I know she can be scary, but – as I said – she is softer when it comes to her family. And you with being Spock’s Tyhna…”

“T’hy’la!” Jim corrected with a roll of his eyes.

“Whatever. With you being his soulbrother you more or less belong to the family. So don’t turn chicken and go speak with her.”

Kirk made a face, but nodded. Then his attention returned to Khan, who had listened to the short bickering with something close to amusement in his eyes, and then he took a deep sigh – clearly trying to fight off sleep. Jim bent down and kissed his forehead. “Try to sleep, honey. I’ll back in a few – promise.”

Khan hummed under his breath – then he slipped back into slumber; delaying any thoughts of what happened to a later time. Jim carefully let go of the pale, usually so strong hand and rose. His gaze lingered lovingly on the older man, who just looked so innocent and vulnerable in his sleep, before he turned away. He and Bones exchanged a glance.

“He’s going to be fine, Jim,” Leonard said gently. “Don’t be afraid any longer. He is doing well so far.”
“Yes, but what about when his memories return?” he asked quietly. “His real memories, not only the facts I gave him? The brutality he has been forced to endure, the cruelness he faced… This won’t leave him untouched.”

“It certainly will take a toll on him,” McCoy nodded. “Beneath his arrogant façade our superman is a very sensible man. But you will be there for him. You and Joaquin – and I think this is all he’s going to need then.”

Jim wasn’t convinced – and it would turn out that his concerns weren’t for naught.

But the trauma Khan suffered wouldn’t be the only problem the friends were going to face. And fate wouldn’t give them much time to recover.

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Just like the last time Kor had been at this place, the Great Hall was crowded with veteran warriors and the council members of the Klingon Empire. Guards closed the high double doors behind him, as Kor stepped into the chamber of the High Council; his gaze fixed on the grey, yet still impressive figure of Chancellor M’Rek who sat straight vis-à-vis on the other side of the large round table on the elevated throne that had already held the emperors of centuries now bygone.

Kor knew exactly why he had been called to the High Council: His report concerning everything that happened within the last week in the Borderland and in its neighborhood. It must have been like a bomb dropping on everyone’s head – including M’Rek’s. Of course the chancellor had known some parts of the events before; after all the Federation president Robertson had contacted him after Kor had been accused of attacking the diplomats’ starship, but the true background of everything had certainly been a shock for everyone. And Kor already knew that at least the half of the High Council members sniffed a chance to conquer the Federation once and for all – with Starfleet weakened like it was.

The moment his entrance was acknowledged by the High Council members, he was already bombarded with questions and demands of statements – the most appealing to the wish to conquer just like Kor had already anticipated. The chancellor’s eyes and Kor’s met and for a moment they held each other’s gaze, before Kor pressed a fist to his chest in the traditional greeting and bowed his head. Still the verbal tumult continued and it was only M’Rek’s sudden outburst of “SILENCE ALL!” that made the others shut up.
Kor’s gaze wandered over the present Klingons – politicians, counselors, veteran warriors, generals and highly honored commanders. Among them he recognized Kang, an old friend of his, who simply nodded a casual greeting. Formality wasn’t usual between them after knowing each other since childhood. To his regret, but not unexpected, Koloth wasn’t among the warriors. His failure on Aldebaran must have brought him more trouble than thought.

M’Rek looked at the last descendant of the past emperors and raised his voice again. “Kor, son of Ryhan, welcome in the Great Hall and within the circle of the Empire’s most trusted men.”

Kor’s face betrayed nothing, yet a satisfied thought rose in him. ‘Last time he demanded an explanation of something I didn’t do and I had to prove myself, and now I’m welcomed back. This man is more complicated than a room full of Vulcans!’

“Your reports were read by the High Council and the generals – and they left more questions than gave answers,” M’Rek continued. “You were given the order to elucidate the incident within the Borderland concerning the attack on the Federation ship *Excalibur* and why the Federation president Robertson accused us – you! – to be responsible for the death of the delegation.” He lifted a PADD that lay before him on the table. “But what I got as your report is… a joke – or the most daring thing I’ve heard of for a long time. And knowing you I think it’s the latter – hopefully. The Empire doesn’t need to suffer the loss of one of its finest and bravest fleet commanders.”

It was praise and a threat in one. Kor knew that he stood with one foot in his grave, like the Terrans said. He had known it from the beginning as he agreed to Wesley’s daring plan – and he hadn’t regretted it. Not then, not now.

“I’m certain that my answers will prove me to be still the fleet commander you need – despite my temporary alliance with a Terran.”

M’Rek cocked his head. “Yes, this is a good point to start.” He bent forwards, while placing the PADD back on the table. “You allied yourself with a Starfleet commodore, crept into an Orion slave market that wasn’t ruled by the Orion Syndicate and freed the members of the delegation which already were declared dead! Then you took some Romulan officers captive and in the end re-sized a captured Klingon vessel that was equipped with this strange new devise that makes it impossible for any sensor to read, but said device was de-mounted before you got the ship back. And you and the commodore parted ways just like… good friends. And several days before this whole strange incident you flew into Federation space to offer support to the *Enterprise* which battled against rebellious Klingons. I ask myself, Kor, son of Ryhan, what’s on your mind!”

Grumbles and growls were heard from the other present warriors, veterans and council members. Kor remained calm. “I simply saw to it that the Empire’s given word of ceasefire during the upcoming peace talks wasn’t broken, which would have brought shame upon everyone within this
chamber. No one will make the Empire look like its given word is unworthy. No renegade Klingons, no pirates, no slave traders! And certainly no Romulans! The way I had to choose to protect the Empire’s honor may seem to be… unusual, yet stony ways shouldn’t stop a warrior to stay true to his given task.”

“With the ‘stony way’ you mean your alliance with this Starfleet commodore – Wesley. The same officer who was involved in the incident on Organia which led to the current situation!” M'Rek took a deep breath. “Your path crosses with this Terran often, doesn’t it?”

“Maybe Kahless tests me,” Kor shrugged. “Or fate shows that there are opponents who are honorable enough to go along with if circumstances demand it. I have come to know Wesley as a trustworthy warrior, who shows the same honor and fighting spirit like we possess. He came to me, asking for help to elucidate the same incident I was trying to clarify. It was only logical to combine our efforts and to support each other to save the surviving delegation members.”

“You speak like a Vulcan!” a High Council member mocked.

Kor’s gaze became piercing. “The Vulcans were once a race of fierce warriors – and this fire of their ancestors still lives in some of them. I heard that Ambassador Sarek was injured and in weakened condition because of the way the slavers held him and the others captive, yet he took part in the fight as Wesley and the others tried to free him. He broke a Romulan’s neck with one single snap of his fingers. And the Enterprise was captained by his son Spock during the Battle of Aldebaran. According to the official reports of those who survived the battle, the Enterprise led the Starfleet formation for the most time, took down many of our vessels and sped afterwards to Aldebaran to save her captain in the last moment. Sarek’s son may obey the rules of cold logic, but he also is a fighter – just like his father. I’m not offended to be compared with them!”

His short speech earned him many disbelieving looks, whispers and the one or other toothy grin. Yes, the Romulans were well-known to be fierce fighters and being related to the Vulcans it made the Vulcans look weak and boneless – on first sight. Yet the saying ‘never make a Vulcan lose control’ didn’t exist for nothing. Vulcans could be deadly warriors if given no other choice – or if they had to protect their family or those they called ‘friends’.

The last gave Kerekh, a veteran general, the transition to the next topic. “You are speaking of the Enterprise. Tell us, why you decided to come to her aid as Koval and Noy attacked her. Yes, we were on ceasefire, but Koval and Noy rebelled. They could have finished the Enterprise off and it wouldn’t have been our fault – after all, the two commanders worked without the High Council agreement. The criminal Kirk would be finally dead and…”

“I am surprised which measurements you are willing to embrace only to get your personal goal, General. Yes, your grandson died in the incident on Qo’noS, but he died in battle and was therefore
welcomed in the Black Fleet. I don’t think he would be proud of his grandfather to learn that said grandfather approves of a revenge that would cost the Empire’s honor!"

Kerekh jumped from his seat and bared his teeth! “How dare you to speak like this!”

“Truth has to remain truth! Lies are for the weak and the cowards!” Kor returned with a growl.

“Kirk came to our home planet, killed our guards cowardly and…”

“As much as it irks me to say that, but Kirk is anything but a coward!” Again murmurs were heard. “By our standards he is still more a boy than a man, yet he chose to endure the given sentence of death by torture instead of taking the lighter way out to give away a few secrets and to die painlessly. He withstood torment for hours without breaking – something I don’t think many men would be able to. At Aldebaran, he risked his life to help the people aboard the space station. True, his intervention prevented Koloth from being successful, yet Kirk didn’t think twice as it was up to him to stop his enemies. And later during the battle with Koval and Noy he fought honorably and even offered the defeated crew mercy – what of course wasn’t accepted, yet he showed generosity. He may be a pest in the ass, so to say, but he is no coward!”

“He is a sentenced criminal – he, his first officer you speak so highly of, and…” The younger Klingon who was member of the High Council for only several months now was interrupted by Kor again.

“I know – and I didn’t hesitate to execute the given sentence when Kirk was in my hands, despite the dishonorable reason we got hold of him. Yet I repeat myself: he remained brave and strong and faced his fate with his head held high. There was no wavering, no display of fear as he was brought to the chamber where he was about to face an agonizing death. He and his first officer are warriors, no doubt about it!”

M’Rek bent forward again. “There is one thing missing in your report – one thing that is connected to the time you held Kirk captive and later to the other actions Kirk did. Koloth spoke in his report about the Dark Warrior, who obviously is the same who freed Kirk earlier – and who attacked our patrols on Qo’noS. Koloth affirmed that this man was with Kirk – and that he had the strength of a Vulcan yet he his human appearance. I also know the records from the fight on Qo’noS. This figure is a slayer through and through. You already voiced your assumption once that this man could be an Augment – which would mean that the Federation has lied about the stopped Augment program and has broken her word by stating that there weren’t any Augment embryos left after the incident with another Enterprise a century ago. I am certain that you have crossed paths with this man – or, at least, know more about him. Tell me and all the others here plain and simple what you know about this man. Is he an Augment or not?”
Kor stilled and took a deep breath. He had known that it would come to this question – of course. The Augment had freed Kirk, had fought side by side with him since then and had worked in the background during the war. The latter wasn’t confirmed by Wesley, yet it made sense. And if there was one reason to stop the ceasefire and the peace talks, then it was this engineered man, whose existence was a threat the Klingon Empire would not accept.

And Kor knew that the only way for the Empire to survive were these damn peace talks!

No, his decision to vote for peace hadn’t anything to do with his deep respect he held for Robert Wesley, or with the growing respect he began to feel towards the Kirk-boy, who turned out to be a warrior of honor and showed more bravery than quite a few people within this room. No, Kor wasn’t that sentimental – after all he was a warrior at heart. His opinion to end this war had been formed as he realized that other parties drew a lot of advantages while the Federation and the Klingons weakening each other with battles.

The Romulans were already daring enough to send military members through Klingon space and to interact with Orion pirates. The Orions themselves became bolder and insolent from day to day, and it was only a question of time until the Tholians would smell the rat and would take the given chance to conquer parts of the Federation for themselves – and certainly wouldn’t stop at the formal Neutral Zone. And there were also still the Gorns, who wouldn’t let slip the given opportunity to get a piece of the pie, too. Alpha- and Beta quadrants would be in uproar for decades – and Kor knew all too well that the Empire’s resources wouldn’t last forever. Rather the opposite. The battles with Starfleet had them brought already to their limits – war against the Romulans and other realms would be too much and would lead to the Klingons downfall.

Kor was not a typical Klingon. He rather used his mind before he drew his dagger, yet his reputation was also that of a fierce warrior. But he knew that he would have to do a lot of persuading to make the High Council see reason. At least M’Rek was circumspect. His decision to give the Federation the chance to do some research on the incident in the Borderland instead of reacting to the offending accusation of attacking a diplomat vessel, proved M’Rek’s providence. And maybe M’Rek would regard the Dark Warrior like Kor did when he learned the whole truth about him.

His voice sounded strong through the Great Hall as he answered the chancellor’s question, “Yes, the Qli-jagh is an Augment.” Shouts erupted from everywhere, demanding return to war because of this new threat.

“So, the Federation lied about the stop of…” M’Rek began; something close to disappointment but also fury was in his eyes.
“No, they didn’t lie about the whole incident a century ago,” Kor answered; rising his voice to be heard. “This man is a relic from the Earthers’ first attempt to increase their race. The Dark Warrior comes from a time almost three hundred Earth years ago.” Open mouths and widening eyes were the result of his statement, before several Klingons cried “Lies!” and “Cheat!”

M’Rek’s fist landed on the table in front of him and silence spread once again through the chamber. “Continue, Kor!” he demanded.

“The Augment who goes by the name Khan was one of the engineered humans three centuries ago – an experiment that led to a global war. Some Augment leader overdid it and the casual humans fought them. At these times the Terrans weren’t that advanced in space travel. The newest development was a kind of sleeper ship. The Augment escaped with such a ship and slept on it until two years ago, when the leader of the traitors which undermined Starfleet found him and awakened him. He forced him into service by threatening the Augment’s family, who were also aboard. Khan escaped again and fled to Qo’noS, thinking to be safe there from Starfleet and plotting a plan to free his family, too. Later Kirk was sent to Qo’noS to capture an escaped criminal who seemed to have some terror attacks against us in mind. Knowing that we wouldn’t believe him, Kirk flew with his first officer and a language specialist to Qo’nos, where he was attacked by our patrols. The criminal died in the battle and the Augment, who hid nearby, came to Kirk’s aid. He didn’t know that Kirk was a member of Starfleet with him being out of uniform, otherwise the Augment certainly wouldn’t have moved a finger after all he went through. He only saw young humans threatened by our warriors – and blood is stronger than water. After the battle was won and the Augment learned whom he helped, he fled again – and returned somehow to Federation space later, where he went underground. He re-appeared as the war started, helping Kirk again whom he had come to trust.”

“And who told you that story?” another general asked. “Kirk?”

“He and later Wesley. They told me independently of each other and even mentioned the same details as I asked first Kirk and later Wesley. I believe them.” He straightened his shape. “But that isn’t all. Wesley let me know that this shadow department that undermined Starfleet was led by the former highest ranking admiral of the Federation, who ordered Kirk to kill the escaped criminal on Qo’noS by bombarding him with over seventy torpedoes.” – Again an uproar went through the Great Hall. – “I don’t have to tell you what this would have meant for our home world. And Kirk knew it too. He disobeyed the order and tried to capture the criminal in person. The traitors tried to use Kirk to start a war which would have strengthened their position – and when we started the war several weeks ago we gave these cowards exactly what they wanted: A reason to militarize Starfleet and gain power. The new leader of this shadow department pulled the strings which led to the attack on the Excalibur as we agreed on peace talks – he wanted to end the ceasefire to consolidate his position. We all, the true warriors on both sides, were nothing more than pawns for him and his fellows! And this has to stop! None of us should tolerate to be used as a puppet in this foul game. And to end this insanity we have only one way to go: making peace with the Federation and to take the wind off the last traitors’ sails which maybe are still roaming free.”

None of the present Klingons were still sitting except for M’Rek. He watched the members of the
High Council, the active generals and the veterans, who discussed wildly with each other. He knew that it was useless trying to stop them at the moment and so he gave them time to live out their rage. Looking at Kor he waved him over, and respectfully the fleet commander closed the distance to the chancellor.

M’Rek observed him for a long moment, before he bent forwards and said with a lowered voice, “You seem to have made up your mind concerning the peace talks.”

Kor nodded; seeing no reason to deny his opinion. “My Lord, cowardice and dishonor are an offence for every true warrior. That goes for the honorable men and women in our fleet as it goes for those Starfleet members who are true warriors, despite their sometimes foolish ways to fight with words instead with weapons. They and we were misused to help some power hungry cowards to gain their goals. If we continue the war, those, who used us all as pawns, would succeed – even if the most of them are arrested, like our Intelligence found out by simply listening to the Federation’s media, which are full of the news. But this is not all.”

He paused and M’Rek gave him a signal to continue.

Kor took another deep breath. “The longer we battle with the Federation, the more others are ready to use our weakened position to make their own moves. The Romulans already traveled through our space to reach the Borderland without being caught. It shows the condition our outposts are in. I give the Romulans enough credit that they only wait for a chance to seize our territory. The Orion Syndicate is not a trustworthy ally. We can’t count on them if we should be forced to fight on two fronts. And I’m sure that the Tholians also only wait for an opportunity to gain territory – of the Federation and us.”

The older Klingon nodded slowly. “Is this the reason why you allied yourself with Wesley and freed the surviving members of the delegation?”

“Yes and no,” Kor answered. “First I only thought of defending the Empire’s honor. The rest of the delegation were at stake because of a Klingon who was dismissed in dishonor from our fleet. Then another thought occurred to me. The surviving admirals – and the two Vulcans – were about to be handed over to the Romulans, which could result in a great disadvantage for us if the pointy ears learn more about Starfleet as soon as the captive admirals would fold – something that would have happened. The Romulans are good in torture like we are. And that they have some tests running with Vulcan DNA is something our Intelligence knows, too. You didn’t need to be a genius to guess what they had in mind for Sarek and his assistant – and Sarek is maybe the best candidate to make peace work. To save the admirals and the diplomats was the only way of preventing worse from happening.”

M’Rek bared his teeth in a short grin. “You should consider a career as a diplomat whenever you
feel the pull to leave the fleet.”

Promptly Kor groaned. “Please not! Wesley suggested the same and I already told him that rather the Black Fleet should take me away than becoming one of them.” He pointed nonchalantly at the still discussing Council members and veterans.

The chancellor began to laugh and clapped the younger Klingon’s shoulder. “It would be a shame to lose such a fine warrior within our fleet.” He turned serious again. “Concerning the peace talks: Many things have to be taken into consideration. This shadow department may be smashed and I do know that men like Barnett or this Wesley are honorable warriors, yet our generals are right when they say that Starfleet and the Federation are very busy with themselves which gives us a chance to make a one and all deciding strike.”

“And for what purpose? We declared war because we were offended and threatened. But the offence and threat weren’t what we thought. We shouldn’t give into the Starfleet traitors’ intention which would turn us into their puppets once again. And, as much as it pains me to admit it, the Federation is stronger than assumed. There is an old Terran saying: If you can’t defeat an opponent make him your ally. And a Starfleet under command of men like Barnett or Wesley are an honorable ally. The Romulans will think twice before they take action against us again – or making demands because of their spies we captured. We have to pick up the shards the war left before we are strong again – and I really don’t want to fight off our pointy eared neighbors just right now.”

M’Rek sighed. “It’s a fine line between wisdom and showing weakness – or between pride and sanity.” He shortly pursed his lips. “What about the Augment? He killed seven of our warriors as he freed Kirk. And what about Kirk? We could demand both men’s delivery in exchange for the peace talks.”

“That would be unworthy for us,” Kor said calmly. “And, by the way, the Augment killed those who threatened and tortured Kirk. He avenged his mate. He did nothing different from what anyone of us would have done in his position. This is something I can accept.” As he caught the chancellor’s baffled glance, he smirked. “Yes, my Lord, I said ‘mate’ on full purpose. The two are nuH-loDnl – brothers in arm.” His grin widened. “In every way!”

M’Rek frowned, blinked, realized to what Kor was referring – and began to laugh again. “Terrans! If you think you have understood them finally, they come around the next corner with another surprise!” He shook his head. “So, you think we should simply wait until we have another chance to seize them?”

“If we make peace with the Federation we’ll have no right to capture them. But, as I already said, why not make them allies? Kirk has the potential to become an admiral someday, which could be an advantage for us, given his codex of honor and quirk to help anyone.”
Cocking his head, M’Rek grumbled quietly under his breath, before he said, “You think highly of this boy, don’t you?”

“He gained my respect during his captivity – and, even if I don’t like to admit it, but his disobedience last year saved thousands of Klingons – if not our whole home planet. A climatic catastrophe would have been the smallest outcome if Kirk had fired all those torpedoes on Qo’noS. They maybe would have destroyed our planet. He risked his life then to do the right thing by turning against his highest ranking officer. Later he took the same risk as he protected the civilians on Aldebaran. So, yes, I have come to respect him. And I’m certain you would agree if you would meet him in person once.”

M’Rek nodded slowly. “That gives me an idea.” He looked at the still discussing other Klingons. “But first we have to convince them!”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, a few people woke up within this chapter. Khan, Wesley as he began to understand Jim’s arguments, and some Klingons – on top of them M’Rek. Kor really can be convincing, but if his reasonable arguments will be enough to make the High Council see is something to be bide.

In the next chapter there will be a cute scene in the beginning, then there is the talk between Jim and T’Pau (with some surprises for our captain), and then Bones will get the shock of his life (snicker).

I hope you liked the new chapter and – like always – I’m curious what you think about it.

Until next week

Love

Yours Starflight
An unusual task

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so much for your lovely comments. I knew that you were eager to see Khan awake, and I can already promise that you’ll ‘see’ more of it. Yet he suffers greatly and even his augmented nature can’t keep up with everything. Therefore he has a longer road to go – but he has Jim and the others.

In the new chapter there is the big talk between Jim and T’Pau – and the old lady has a special task for our captain (and for Bones – poor guy, *giggle*). Then Khan wakes up again and he faces Spock for the first time after the big mind-meld our Augment has now memories of (until now).

Well, and for all who are very sensible: Be careful. There comes a new cliffhanger.

Have fun with the new chapter – and for all moms: Have a nice rest of Mother’s Day.

Love

Your Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 86 – An usual task

Warily Jim headed to T’Pau’s office. He really hoped the uncrowned matriarch was in a good mood – even if she would have stated that she as a Vulcan had no moods at all. The old lady could be scary as hell, this much he knew, and he really didn’t want to be at the receiving end of her sometimes icy behavior.

Reminding himself that she was also Spock’s grandmother and that her grandson certainly got the one or other streak from her, which would make her more familiar, he entered her anteroom. The secretary replied to his polite greeting and announced his arrival to T’Pau, before he was led into the highest ranking priestess’ office.

Kirk lifted his right hand into an acceptable Ta’al and formulated the traditional words in Standard, “I come to serve, Ma’am.”
T’Pau sat behind her desk and returned the greeting with the traditional reply, “Your service is welcomed.” She waited until her secretary had left and closed the door, before she pointed at one of the visitor chairs. “Please, James, have a seat.”

For a moment Jim was utterly surprised that she addressed him with his given name, and then he tried to control his features and sat down with a polite, “Thank you, Ma’am.”

T’Pau’s gaze told nothing if his slip of control had been recognized or was simply ignored. She came straight to the point. “I heard that Mr. Singh is doing better.” It was a statement, not a question, yet Jim felt obligated to answer,

“He was awake yesterday evening and this midday he spoke with Dr. McCoy and me. Yet… he is disoriented and doesn’t seem to remember what happened at all,” Jim told her quietly.

T’Pau lifted a bow. “As far as I was informed Mr. Singh suffers a TBI. Temporary amnesia is quite common in those cases – even for Vulcans. Patience, James – even if this is much to ask of a human as emotional as you are.” It wasn’t meant as an offence, and Jim took none in her statement. It rather showed that the old Vulcaness seemed to understand him a little bit, and this realization pushed some of his inner stiffness away.

His attention was still drawn utterly to the matriarch, as she continued, “I want to speak with you about Spock’s upcoming bonding-ceremony, but also about your stay here and how to proceed from here on. Selek informed me that he already contacted a lawyer who will conduct your case. I did some research concerning this man and agree with Selek’s choice. It was well done. Yet you’re going to need all the help you can get.”

Kirk grimaced. “I know, Ma’am. My officers and I are in deep water because we covered for Khan. Hell, I practically lied to my superiors and more or less hijacked the Enterprise for a private purpose as I first recovered Khan’s crew and then sped to New Vulcan afterwards. I practically stole my own ship. All right, Luengo was the leader of a conspiracy that threatened the whole Federation and he had to be stopped, yet I broke more rules than the first officer of the Bounty.”

For the tiniest moment the young captain thought he saw something close to amusement in the matriarch’s dark eyes, as she replied, “I’m familiar with this classical Terran novel. It’s a good comparison, after all the Bounty’s first officer did what was necessary to keep the crew safe – even against his captain. Just like you did as you went against Luengo and the others.” She cocked her head. “As Spock told me you don’t always play by the rules, yet you do what has to be done despite any personal consequences. Some of your admirals may call it insubordination, other people call it heroism. The truth lies, like always, somewhere between both sides.” She leant back in her chair.
“When you work out a strategy with your lawyer on how to act during the upcoming trial, please remember that you have my support. I am considering pressing personal charges against Admiral Norton for taking me hostage and against the Elite Security for doing nothing against it. Our government will also press charges against Starfleet Command for the illegal storming of our seat of government, for threatening the high minister and rightful accepted asylum seekers, and for injuring our guards.”

Jim frowned. “Starfleet Command wasn’t responsible for…”

“At the time the crimes happened, Admiral Luengo was the rightful interim Chief of Command and therefore the highest ranking officer of Starfleet Command. Two of his direct underlings – Admiral Norton and Captain Styles – followed his orders and went against established law; something they shouldn’t have done despite their mission. Every man or woman in his or her clear mind should know where the red line is, yet Norton and Styles overstepped it greatly. And with Norton still being a legitimate admiral at this time, Starfleet Command was indeed responsible for what happened in Selek’s office and later aboard the Excalibur – and aboard your ship. This has to be punished.” She folded her hands on the desk top. “And, by the way, by doing this Command will be brought to make up for everything that was done to us – something I plan to use to your advantage.”

Jim knew what T’Pau meant without voicing it. Command would do everything to straighten out the crimes the treacherous officers had done against New Vulcan. They would think twice before going completely against T’Pau’s and Selek’s wishes. Yet he was baffled that the old Vulcaness was obviously so hell-bent to get him out of the hangman’s loop he had put himself into.

“Why do you want to help me?” he asked quietly. “Because my realization what was going on saved Sarek in the end?”

A pitch black eyebrow was lifted. “Of course I’m grateful that my eldest son’s life was spared. Yet this isn’t the whole reason why you have not only my and Selek’s support, but that also of our whole people. You, James, saved the most important matters of our culture.”

“Me?” Kirk didn’t believe his ears. “Ma’am, I couldn’t save Vulcan. I failed you all and…”

“You did more than you are obviously aware of,” T’Pau interrupted him; her voice softened. “Because of your intervention there was enough time to save at least some of our most important and sacred artifacts and documents. Without them our surviving people would have lost the roots of our culture and therefore the hold they need now while trying to rebuild our race.”

Jim gulped as he realized what T’Pau was implying – but in his eyes what he had done hadn’t been
enough. “As much as I’m glad for you that you could save religious objects and documents, but this wasn’t my merit. I could have done so much more, yet I didn’t.” He looked miserable – and T’Pau lifted a brow again; realizing what went through the young human’s head.

“Tell me, James, did you know that our enemy came from the future and had therefore enhanced technologies we still have to develop?”

Kirk looked up. “No,” he said; shaking his head in surprise. “I only learned later from Selek where Nero came from.”

“So there was no chance for you to stop the drill before it was too late, yet you still tried, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but…”

T’Pau didn’t let him finish his self-accusations. “Did you waste valuable time fighting the Romulan guards off, who expected you on the drill?”

“No, of course not! I…”

“Did you stop the drill in the end?”

“Yes, but it was too late and…”

Again T’Pau interrupted him. “None of us, James – not even Vulcan engineers! – would have been able to stop the attack before the point of no return was reached. You were a young cadet in his final year at the Academy, facing a whole life – yet you were ready to die that day. To die for a planet that was not yours and that was, despite that it was a member of the Federation, alien to you. You risked your life to buy the surviving ships time to evacuate as many people as possible – even jumping after a colleague to save him, knowing full well that the chance for success was practically zero and that your action would lead to certain death, yet you risked your life again to help your colleague. Only the skills of another young man prevented the worst from happening to you and the other man, as he beamed you two up in the very last second.”

Jim stared at her; astonished. “How do you know…?”
He didn’t end his question, as he saw the short flash of humor appearing in the matriarch’s dark eyes. It vanished so quickly he thought for a moment to be mistaken, but T’Pau’s next words affirmed his guess. The old Vulcaness was amused.

“Selek has many talents – and to hack into Starfleet’s databank to learn more about you and the other younger visions of his former crew mates, was an easy task for him. He told me of what you did – what you risked. ‘A typical Jim-Kirk-stunt’, he called it, and given what you did within the last weeks I have to agree with him. To use a human phrase: You like to dance between the rain-drops. Even if this is the most illogical saying I ever heard, I do understand what it means. And it fits you well.”

Jim rubbed his neck; embarrassed. He knew that T’Pau had just given him a compliment, yet he still didn’t think he deserved it.

The matriarch seemed to read his thoughts, as she turned very serious again. “I repeat, James, you made it possible that a few thousand Vulcans and the most important artifacts of our culture could be saved. From this we have a tiny but real chance of re-building our species and our culture. There has never been a greater support from offworlders concerning our people.”

Kirk blushed a deep shade of red, while he lowered his head. “Yet so much was lost. I even can’t really grasp what all the loss means for you. The severed bonds, the millions of deaths, losses in every clan…”

“Yes, our people are facing the darkest time of their existence. Even in pre-Surak times we didn’t suffer like now. But that we even have the chance to survive is because of you – and your colleague.”

Kirk looked around himself and his gaze fell on the shelves with the documents. “This is what you mean, isn’t it?” he asked quietly; pointing at the ancient scripts. “Are they from Surak’s time?”

“Some of them are from Surak’s time, some of them were written before his birth, others shortly after his death.” She lifted a brow again. “What do you know about Surak?”

Jim took a deep breath. “He reformed the Vulcan way of life. Your ancestors were fierce warriors and your people were about to kill each other. He cultivated them by using logic and peace as a way out from the destruction that was about to sweep across your planet. He taught them how to tame and to control their emotions – sometimes even to suppress them. I’m not aware if he also was the one
who taught you how to meditate to find this level of steadiness and peace every day despite everything that happens, but it was he who began this way of calmness that led to your today’s peaceful ways.”

T’Pau took a deeper breath. “You know more about him than many other humans I met,” she stated.

Jim shrugged. “Spock told me about him – and I was curious and did some research. I think if you want to learn about something about foreign cultures you have to start with their religion and their traditions. And with my first officer being a Vulcan it was only… logical to learn about Surak to understand Spock better.” His look wandered back to the shelves. “At least a few things from Surak’s time could be saved,” he said quietly; a sad tone in his voice.

“Yes, but they are not all that was brought to safety before Vulcan was lost to us forever. The most important relic – the root of our today’s culture – was saved, too,” the old Vulcaness told him.

Jim frowned. What could be small enough to be taken with a handful of Vulcan priests while being beamed away, and was of such great importance as this?

Again T’Pau proved that she was very skilled in reading people. “You are curious what this could be.” She leant back again in her seat. “It was the relic that holds Surak’s *katra*.”

Promptly the young captain’s jaw dropped, while he gasped. “Surak’s… *KATRA*?” His eyes widened even more. “Spock told me that the *katra* is… is comparable with what we humans call ‘soul’. Are you telling me that Surak’s *soul* still… uhm… exists and could be taken with you as you were evacuated from Vulcan?”

The matriarch remained placid. “Yes, his *katra* seemed to be lost for centuries, and then it was saved almost a hundred years ago. Another Starfleet captain had a hand in it. I think you are going to find this amusing. It was Captain Archer, captain of another *Enterprise*.”

Jim’s eyes were about to pop out of his head by now. “Archer… saved Surak’s soul?” He had a certain assumption when this happened: During the crisis in which Vulcan Command tried to start a war against the Andorians and T’Pau had been still young; trying to save her people by reminding them of Surak’s teachings – a path they were about to leave. Archer had left out several details in his report concerning his stay on Vulcan; stating that he had to stay silent because of the Vulcan culture. And thinking closer about this all, Jim was convinced that these ‘details’ referred to Surak’s soul. “I… I learned from Selek that Vulcans can transfer their souls to family members before they die and that they… continue to exist somehow. But… they can be… transported?”
“Sort of,” T’Pau nodded – and for a moment her gaze became absent. “As the grounds began to shake and Spock appeared in the Great Hall in Mount Seleya, calling that we had to leave immediately, I knew that something bad would happen. I couldn’t assume that we were about to lose our home planet, yet I realized that everything that was holy to us was about to be harmed. So I took with me the relic that holds Surak’s katra, while some other priests gathered as much as they could, before they followed Spock out to the mountain’s side.” For a moment she seemed to age several decades and she looked almost fragile despite the mighty robes. “It turned out that even I understated the situation. The only things which were left for us were those documents over there and Surak’s katra. All the other katras, billions of them, died with our planet.”

Jim felt his throat tightening as he realized the enormity the surviving Vulcans mourned. The immortal essences of their ancestors and family members didn’t exist anymore – lost forever like their destroyed home-planet. “I’m sorry,” he croaked; feeling his eyes moistening.

T’Pau didn’t need to ask what he was sorry for. It wasn’t an apology, but an expression of compassion that was plainly written on his even features and in his dampening eyes.

“‘To look back will never change the present; only the look forwards will’, an old saying of Surak goes,” she said quietly. “Kaiidth – what is, is. To accept this is the first step of continuing the path that leads to the future and therefore to life.” She leant back in her chair.

“Surak was indeed wise,” Kirk murmured; his composure back in place. “It’s no wonder that Spock devotes him…” He stopped, before he corrected hastily. “I mean, Spock honors him.”

T’Pau looked straight at him. “I do know that my grandson has effort in controlling his human emotions, so you don’t have to cover for him in choosing synonyms for his point of views and… feelings. In my opinion he has embraced the Vulcan way just like any other full-blooded Vulcan, yet he regards himself as imperfect in being a Vulcan.”

“Guess whose fault that is!” Jim grumbled; knowing from his first mind-meld with Selek how much Spock had suffered as a child from the bullying of his schoolmates and his everlasting attempts to meet his father’s never voiced yet still existing demands to be ‘fully Vulcan’. Given the fact that Nero’s influence on their personal life only began two and a half years prior, it was logical that Jim’s Spock and Selek experienced the same childhood. Therefore the Enterprise’s first officer had endured the same affronts, insults and bad behavior of the other Vulcans like Selek did – something their father (and grandmother) could have prevented, or, at least, would have been able to offer him the comfort the little boy simply needed from time to time. But they didn’t, which resulted in Spock’s wrong conclusion that he disappointed them by being not ‘fully Vulcan’. And this was something that made Jim furious. He had to force himself to stop thinking about it; otherwise he maybe would say something he would regret later.
A moment later he realized that the matriarch’s fine hearing must have heard his uttered words of a few seconds ago, because for a second her lips were pressed into a thin line.

Knowing that he shouldn’t irritate the matriarch given his friends and his own position at the moment, he took a deep breath. “Sorry, Ma’am,” he apologized, yet his next words made it clear that he wouldn’t change his opinion because of the current situation; his loyalty to Spock shining bright in them, “I know that it isn’t my place to criticize the stony way Spock was forced to walk as a child, yet I can’t help myself. I have sometimes this silly human urge to shield him, even against things which happened in the past.”

T’Pau lifted both brows this time. “To stand up for his T’hy’la is something every Vulcan respects – and you are protective of Spock. This much I have understood by now – even if he is the stronger one of you two.”

“In body and mind, certainly,” Jim agreed. “But when it comes to his personality many people misunderstand him and hurt him without realizing it. I will never tolerate this! Spock is my friend – my brother in soul – and anyone who tries to attack him verbally or in person, or hurts him in any other way, will have to face and answer to me!”

The fire that suddenly flashed in his blue eyes, told T’Pau more than words ever could. Vulcans, despite their chosen way, weren’t immune to strong emotions – like love in any kind of way. And this young human man in front of her, who had managed to be the Federation’s youngest hero in history, loved her grandson fiercely. Not in the way he loved the former Augment-leader, yet his feelings for Spock were equally strong. He would stop at nothing to protect his chosen brother.

Slowly she nodded at his strong statement. “Spock can call himself fortunate that he was blessed with a T’hy’la like you. And I begin to realize why Selek still mourns the loss of his own Jim Kirk. You are indeed two parts of one katra.” She folded her hands on the surface of her desk again. “And since our talk has reached this topic, I want to speak with you about something that concerns your friendship with Spock.” She took slowly a deeper breath. “As Spock’s T’hy’la you’ll join the bonding-ceremony between him and Miss Uhura. I learned during Sarek’s and Amanda’s wedding that you on Earth knows a similar position during a bonding-ceremony. It’s called ‘the groom’s best man’.”

Jim made an affirming gesture. “Yeah, the best friend of the groom testifies the correctness of the wedding, assists the groom in the days before the ceremony and… well, he is the one who gives the groom the wedding band. I don’t know if latter is a custom between Vulcans, but…”

“It isn’t, yet Sarek gave Amanda a ring. And I think Spock will stick to this part of Earthern tradition,
too. He’ll need your help in selecting it – and to make the other arrangements. Usually the groom’s family is responsible for the latter, but given the fact that Sarek still has to take it easy after his surgery and that our clan has been drastically reduced after the Great Loss, Spock would have to make the arrangements alone if he wouldn’t have a T’hy’la – you.”

Kirk’s eyes widened as he realized to what the old Vulcaness was up to. “I shall… organize Spock’s and Uhura’s wedding?” He gulped; feeling cornered. Not because he didn’t want to help, but… “I have absolutely no clue, how this ceremony runs – or what is expected of me.”

“I’ll instruct you – and support you whenever support is needed. I contacted my younger son, Silek, on Hydrilla. He and his wife will travel to New Vulcan within the next week. But given you and your officers’ position with the upcoming court material, Spock and Nyota should marry as soon as possible so that no-one can separate them. It would delay the ceremony if Silek would have to organize the bonding-ceremony by himself after his arrival.”

“So it’s up to me to throw Spock the wedding party,” Jim sighed – before he suddenly began to grin. “Bones is going to faint, when he hears this,” he snickered, but sobered up as he remembered where he was and with whom. He cleared his throat and looked sheepishly at her.

T’Pau ignored his little slip. “As I said I’m going to support you – in both cases: your upcoming trial and Spock’s bonding ceremony.” She took a small disk from her desk and offered it to Kirk. “I compiled information about traditional Vulcan bonding-ceremonies for you. They are translated in Federation Standard. You also have to learn a few Vulcan sentences, because you will have to answer some traditional questions which will be asked by the priest who will perform the ceremony. I’m certain that Spock or Silek will help you to practice the pronunciation. One of my assistants will also provide you and Dr. McCoy with traditional robes.”

Jim cocked his head, while he took the disk from the matriarch’s aged hand. “Dr. McCoy shall attend the ceremony, too?”

“Yes. I have come to understand that Dr. McCoy is also a close friend of Spock, and the speaker of Nyota’s clan. As such he will attend the ceremony within the family circle.”

Kirk needed all his control to suppress a smirk. ‘Bones is going to LOVE this!’ he thought gleefully; imaging his friend wearing long Vulcan robes and standing in the middle of the day in the hot sun, trying to compose a neutral face.

“He will be honored, Ma’am,” he said, before he bowed his head – remembering his good manners. “As I’m honored to arrange Spock’s wedding.”
“You should be,” she affirmed nonchalantly. “You are the first offworlder who is accorded to this honor – and to the House of Surak.” She watched how the young human paled, and added, “But given your many talents I’m certain you’ll manage.”

Jim almost pulled a face. ‘Just have a look. The old hag has some humor – even if it is at my cost!’ Aloud he answered, “I will not disappoint Spock – or dishonor his clan, Ma’am. I’ll do my very best.”

“I know, James,” she replied almost casual. “As Spock’s T’hy’la you are accepted within our family by very ancient, yet still existing laws. This is another reason why I will aid you during yours and Spock’s court material.” For the tiniest moment the left edge of her mouth curled, as she saw the shock on Kirk’s face; knowing the reason for it. “Yes, James, you are under the protection of the House of Surak from now on.”

Jim was at loss for the right words. And given everything that happened within the last weeks, he was just astonished enough now that even his quick mind didn’t come up with any kind of answer. “Uhm…” Was all he could muster.

“The correct answer is, ‘I’ll honor my T’hy’la’s House until death parts us and our katras remain as one in eternity’. ”

Even if Jim simply knew that with this comment T’Pau was pulling his leg in her very own Vulcan way of dry humor that her people sometimes displayed in humans’ company, Kirk also realized that she was serious. With dry mouth he repeated the sentence; grasping only now that he now belonged – more or less – to Sarek’s family; Spock’s brother so to speak. For a moment the humorous part of him flared up and he would have loved to ask T’Pau if he could address her as ‘granny’ from now on, but he suppressed the urge; knowing that it would be utterly unwelcomed. Therefore he bowed deeply and waited for what the matriarch would say next.

“I’m sure that Spock will answer all your questions you certainly have.” She leant back again. “Do you have any further questions only I can provide you with answers?”

“No, Ma’am, I’m…” Jim stopped as a thought occurred to him. “Ma’am, there is indeed something I wanted to ask you. It concerns Joaquin Weiss. See, he has made friends with two of my junior officers and they kept him company until he came here to New Gol. I wanted to ask for your permission that those two can visit him when they’re off duty. Their company… does him good and gives him a feeling of safety.”
The matriarch hesitated a moment, then she nodded shortly. “If the two young men will not disturb our daily routine here, they may visit Mr. Weiss. Distraction and security are necessary for him given his whole situation.”

Jim bowed slightly. “Thank you very much, Ma’am. I will instruct them to stay quiet.” He didn’t expect an answer, and didn’t get one. Rather the old Vulcan woman straightened her shape.

“If this is all I release you to return to your bond-mate’s side.” It was a kind of dismissing him, but Jim did hear the softer tone in her voice.

“Thank you, Ma’am,” he answered and rose.

“Farewell for now, James,” she used a traditional Terran greeting, what showed Kirk her respect.

He managed to form another Ta’al. “Live long and prosper, Ma’am,” he said; bowing afterwards for the uncounted time, which was answered with a short nod. Quickly he left the office, flashed the secretary a smile – what was answered with a lift of an eyebrow – and returned to his room.

ST***ST

“You are going to do WHAT?” Leonard McCoy was famous for his outbursts which sometimes rocked the medbay – or the briefings with the other officers. That he had controlled himself until now after everything that happened within the last weeks, was something Jim was ready to praise him for. But just right now the good doctor forgot any kind of composure. Eyes wide, jaw hanging open, expression thunderstruck he stared at his best friend and commanding officer; simply not believing his ears.

Jim leant against the table in Bones’ and Joaquin’s room and sipped at the glass of water he had helped himself to after he returned from T’Pau’s office and after he checked on the still sleeping Nien.

“I’m going to arrange Spock’s and Uhura’s wedding-ceremony,” he repeated; his grin wide. “T’Pau in person gave me that task – and who am I that I disappoint Spock’s granny? Now, after I practically belong to his family?”

McCoy’s eyes bulged even more. “You do WHAT?”
Kirk chuckled and placed the empty water glass on the table top. “As Spock’s *T’hy’la* I’m welcomed in his family and I’m now under the protection of the House of Surak. T’Pau’s words, not mine,” he added, as he watched his friend gasping for air. And for good measure he mentioned the next fact that would freak out his CMO – no doubt about it. “Oh, by the way, as the speaker of Uhura’s family and Spock’s friend, you also have to attend the ceremony – kind of second best man, or something like that.” His grin was about to split his face, as he watched Leonard paling. Smirking he continued, “You’ll be provided with the correct Vulcan robes for the ceremony, just like me.”

It really could be called fortunate that the next chair was close behind Bones, as he let himself fall on its seat. “I will WHAT?” he more or less squeaked.

Kirk couldn’t help himself anymore: he began to laugh – hard enough to shed some tears. “Sweet Lord, Bones,” he gasped; shaking with laughter. “God, that face!” Nonchalantly he pointed at his friend. “You should see yourself!”

Promptly the CMO frowned darkly. “If this is one of your sick jokes, Jim, I swear I will…”

“No joke, promise!” the young captain snickered; lifting both hands in mocking surrender. “We both will attend Spock’s bonding-ceremony, I’ll be his ‘best man’, so to speak, and you will stick around because you are the ‘speaker of the bride’s family’. And, of course giving the fact that this is a Vulcan ceremony, you and I are going to wear Vulcan clothes.” He cocked his head; still fighting off some more chuckles. “Heavens, Bones, close your mouth! There are no bugs to catch.”

McCoy did hear Kirk’s words, yet he didn’t grasp them, as he continued to stare with hanging jaw at his friend.

“Is there a particular reason that the Doctor opened his mouth without giving one of his long strains of illogical comments?” The deep voice from the entrance made both men look over to the door, and while Jim still grinned, McCoy seemed to be torn out of his shock at Spock’s arrival. Nonchalantly he stuck his right index finger in Spock’s direction instantly and growled,

“That was *your* idea, just admit it! That was *your* idea of pay-back for all the little discussions you lost during the last two and a half years. And to prevent me from any escape, you stuck behind your grandmother and let her give me the task so that I can’t decline without risking an interplanetary scandal. And the whole while you stay back and rub your hands in delight!”

At these accusations both slanted brows almost vanished beneath Spock’s black hair, while the
young half-Vulcan looked with as much surprise as it was possible for him at the CMO. “May I ask to what you refer to, Doctor?” he asked; his voice betraying his confusion, before he cocked his head. “And if you mean with ‘little discussions’ my permanent attempts to neutralize your illogical ways of acting and arguing, then please note that I succeeded in render you speechless in 72.6 percent of all cases. So, to use your words, I ‘won’ more of our ‘discussions’ than you.”

“You… you counted our discussions?” Bones asked flabbergasted.

For the tiniest moment there seemed to be something close to satisfaction in the Vulcan’s far too human eyes. “After I came to know your personality better, I assumed that you would state a wrong result of our arguments at the first given possibility. And to prevent false rumors from spreading, I – indeed – counted our talks concerning different opinions.”

McCoy opened his mouth and closed it again; looking like a fish out of water. And promptly the Vulcan topped his little teasing attack with pretended worry, “Doctor, aren’t you feeling well? If the heat finally has taken its toll on you, I will call Healer Sorel to attend to you.”

“Ha, what for? There only will be another Vulcan who drives me nuts!” Leonard groused; finding his voice again.

“To get in touch with rationality and logic should prevent a mind from being ‘driven nuts’. Maybe this offers an enticement for you to control your emotions for once and to try some rational thoughts ruling you.” Spock looked very innocent.

“Rational thoughts’?” Bones complained. “The last time I had ‘rational thoughts’ I tried to give you and Uhura help by asking Selek for support, and just look to where it brought me! I have to wear a nightgown in front of all, while I’m roasting in the sun!”

This time Spock was indeed confused. “A nightgown, Doctor? Who demands something like this from you?” He was clearly at loss by now.

“Who’, you ask? Your dear granny!” McCoy growled; shooting the first officer another glare.

It was obvious that the CMO’s statements were as clear as mud for Spock. “T’Pau asked you to wear a nightgown?” He looked at Jim; hoping his friend and captain could explain what was truly happening, because McCoy made less and less sense. Then the Vulcan almost frowned, as he saw how Kirk had wrapped his arms around himself and had lowered his head. “Jim, maybe you can
clarify for me what’s going on h…?” Spock stopped himself as Jim lifted his head and he saw the tears which rolled over his T'hy'la’s cheeks – tears of silent laughter. Jim tried to control himself, but he just couldn’t stop the guffaw anymore that broke out of him.

“You two,” Kirk finally gasped; wiping some tears away. “I swear, one day I really will…” He never ended his humorous threat, because new laughter shook his whole body.

Promptly Spock straightened his frame and clasped his hands on his back. “Captain, if you simply would tell me what makes Doctor McCoy even grouchier than usual and what amuses you beyond all measure, I would be able to give the correct answers and reactions you two obviously expect from me.”

Jim pushed himself away from the table and crossed the room to his indignant Vulcan friend; hiccupping from all the laughter that made his belly ache by now. “Spock,” he began, but failed miserably at becoming serious. Again he had to chuckle and bit his lips in another desperate try to sober up.

“I think you are having something humans call a ‘laughing-fit’, Captain,” Spock deadpanned; cocking his head in barely hidden curiosity.

“Yeah, whatever!” Kirk snickered and looked with still wet eyes at his first officer, but there was also a warmth in his gaze that washed gently over the stiff Vulcan. Again he cleared his throat. “Spock, I talked with T’Pau a short while ago and she told me some very interesting facts of being someone’s T’hy’la – especially concerning wedding-ceremonies and their preparations.” To speak about the serious topic finally calmed the young captain enough to put his whirling emotions back under control. “I don’t know what she told you already, but…”

“T’Pau and I haven’t spoken together since her meeting with Uhura, my father and I in the hospital,” Spock interrupted him; curiosity mirrored in his eyes. “She talked with you about my upcoming bonding-ceremony?”

Jim nodded. “Yes. She said with your father still on medical leave and your uncle only arriving next week, I – as your T’hy’la – should make the preparations for your wedding. Something I will love to do, even if I haven’t the tiniest clue what is expected from me.”

Spock’s face seemed to be expressionless like always, yet Jim had learned to read his friend like no-one else. And therefore it didn’t slip his attention how Spock’s features softened the tiniest bit, while something in his eyes lit up. “It would be a great honor for me to call you my nenikaya t’ Van-Kal T’telan, Jim.” At Kirk’s confused face, he translated, “You would call it a wedding planner.”
“Be careful while choosing the flower arrangements, Jim. You know that you are allergic to the half of them,” Bones commented wryly from his seat he still hadn’t left. Then his gaze wandered to Spock. “That is, if Vulcans use flowers at ceremonies at all.”

“Doctor, even you should realize that it would be a great waste to use flowers during any ceremonies on a desert planet, whose flora is reduced to a minimum. Of course we don’t use flowers,” Spock rebuked him, before all of sudden his eyes widened. “But Nyota certainly expects some. Doesn’t a bride have a bridal bouquet?”

“Yes – and after the wedding ceremony the bride throws the bouquet away and the unlucky lady, who catches is, will be the next who falls into the trap of marriage,” McCoy grumbled.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Bones, some marriages are ending in ‘happily ever after’, you know. And given Spock and Uhura I have no doubt that they’ll have a happy, long life together.”


Kirk turned his attention back to Spock. “Uhura also expects a ring from you. T’Pau thought that I could be of help by giving you some advises.”

Spock nodded. “Logical – after all you certainly have greater knowledge about Earthen traditions concerning wedding ceremonies than I possess.”

“What? You admit that there is something you don’t know?” Bones couldn’t skip to taunt. “Hallelujah, I mark this day red in my calendar!”

Jim turned around; grinning broadly. “I’ll mark this day in my calendar, too, because this is the day you begin to learn some Vulcan sentences.”

“What?” Bones gasped again.

Kirk looked to the ceiling. “Gosh, has the heat really caught up with you, why else are you mainly reduced to squeaking this one word?”
“Maybe it has to do with the fact that you two are giving me the shocks of my life and are about to drive me crazy,” McCoy muttered.

“Doctor, you can’t be ‘driven crazy’,” Spock said wryly. “It’s impossible to cause something that has already happened.”

Again Bones’ jaw was about to drop to the floor, while Spock looked – in Jim’s eyes – almost smug. Then the Vulcan turned his attention back to Kirk. “If you’ll attend the ceremony as my accepted T’hy’la, you have to learn some Vulcan sentences, too.”

Jim, who had been on the brink of getting another laughing-fit at the last to and fro between his two friends, stopped dead in his tracks. Well, Spock was right and… And didn’t this sneaky Vulcan look almost gleeful that he, Jim Kirk, sat in the same boat like Bones? Yes, in his very own, expressionless yet existing way Spock really seemed to enjoy the position T’Pau had brought his two friends to.

‘Vulcans and free of emotions and glee – my ass!’ Kirk thought. But he also had to admit that the whole situation had, indeed, a streak of fun.

He sighed. “Yeah, T’Pau told me that I have to answer some traditional questions in the traditional way during your bonding ceremony. But I’m not that lost as you seem to think, my dutiful first officer,” he pointed out with a triumphant grin, while he took the disk out of his trouser pocket. “T’Pau gave me this. She said that it contains all the information I’m going to need, including the traditional sentences.” He watched how Spock cocked his head and opened his mouth certainly to state that he didn’t think Jim was ‘lost’, and added quickly, “I’m sure I’ll manage those few words.” Then he frowned as he remembered the times he had listened to the Vulcan languages and groaned, “All right, maybe I’m going to need some help. But, hey, Uhura will certainly give Bones and me a hand. Or Selek would.”

Spock looked a little bit offended. “Jim, as if I would let you struggle with something when I could help it. Of course I will practice with you and Dr. McCoy. And given the whole preparation: I would be grateful to have your support with it, yet I will not let you do the whole work alone. And I’m certain that my father will give you a hand, too – as much as he is able to in the moment.”

Jim smiled at him; knowing that this was a serious topic now, even if some laughter still bubbled in him. “Thank you, Spock. I don’t want to mix up the certainly most important day in your life. And the same goes for Bones, right?” He looked over his shoulder at Leonard, who dangled on his chair, supported his upper body with his left elbow on the table and looked for the whole world ready to surrender to anything that could happen to him.
“Of course I’ll support our hobgoblin,” he grumbled. “And… I’m honored to be invited to your wedding, Spock,” he added; failing in his attempt to hide the joy that somehow lurked beneath all the grousing.

“That’s the spirit!” Kirk beamed at him, and then he became stiff as deep in him something began to stir. He needed no more than a second to recognize it. “Nien is waking up!” he called; rushing out of the room.

Spock and McCoy exchanged a glance, before the Vulcan turned around and followed Jim; Bones – chuckling under his breath something about ‘fools in love’ – on his trail.

Jim sat down on Khan’s bedside, smiling down at the older man as the Augment slowly blinked and woke up. His eyes looked groggily around before they came to rest on Kirk, and instantly Nien relaxed.

“Hey,” Kirk greeted gently; taking one of Khan’s hands into his. “How are you doing?”

“Don’t know,” came the mumbled reply, before the Augment seemed to clear his mind. “I felt… something from you. You were… upset?”

Jim shook his head. “No, rather the opposite. Those two slobs over there gave me a laughing fit,” he smirked; flicking a thumb backwards at his two friends. “And all of this because Bones doesn’t want to wear Vulcan robes.”

“Hm, if this would be all I could adjust to it, but certainly this whole ceremony will take place in the middle of the day and I really don’t look forward to being roasted in this blaring heat of a sun!” McCoy grumbled.

“Doctor, contrary to your belief Vulcans do not seek out ‘the blaring heat of a sun’ on principle – and we are, as I often stated, a race of logic. Of course the ceremony will be in the early evening for the comfort of anyone.”

Khan, realizing that something important must have happened, squeezed Jim’s hand to get his attention. “What is this all about?” he asked quietly.
He received a confused glance, and then Jim rolled his eyes at himself and sighed, “I forgot, I haven’t told you until now. Something very good is about to happen.” An almost face-cracking broad smile spread over his face. “Spock and Uhura are getting married.”

The Augment’s eyes widened for a moment, before he deadpanned, “About time.”

Jim burst out laughing, while Bones groaned, grimaced and murmured something about ‘the whole world is in love.’

Spock couldn’t suppress a sigh. Humans! Then the Vulcan’s gaze wandered to Khan and their eyes met. It was the first time they had met after the Augment had woken and seeing the enhanced man in his still weak condition – the tracks of the battle and the received injuries still standing out – raised something deep within the young Vulcan. Something humans would call compassion.

“Mr. Singh,” he greeted. “I am pleased to see you awake finally and, as Jim would say it, ‘out of the woods’.”

Nien’s gaze hung on the slender tall form of the alien man who had once been one of his most loathed enemies and who had turned into a comrade in arms – and more. They had grown to respect each other, had trusted each other with the other one’s life and…

And there was something else. Deep down, in the edge of his still shut-off memories, Nien thought he could grasp some pictures from his earlier times as a boy and young man – mingled with the Vulcan’s presence. For a second he saw the green of jungles, the blue of waterfalls and the abyss of mountains – and Spock crouching down beside him. It made no sense – absolutely no sense at all. Yet he knew that something important had taken place while he was out cold. Something that was connected with the Vulcan. But as long as he couldn’t truly remember he thought it better to stay silent about these weird pictures.

So he tried to nod while he answered, “Mr. Spock, as far as I heard you took part in my rescue. Thank you for it – and for having Jim’s back.”

The Vulcan lifted in his typical way one brow. “You are welcome, Mr. Singh. And concerning Jim: He is my captain and my friend. Of course I watched out for him.”

Nien felt a smile tugging at his mouth. “Nonetheless: Thank you.” Then he remembered what he just learned and added, “My congratulations to your engagement with Lieutenant Uhura. You two make
Spock knew that it was absolutely illogical, but he felt the tips of his ears becoming warm. Gathering his full Vulcan body control he willed the blood out of his ears (and face), while he watched the Augment. Khan was Jim’s bondmate – his other half – and Spock made up his mind; not only because of politeness, but also because Khan’s interventions within the last weeks had saved Jim and also the Enterprise – and therefore Nyota and him, Spock, too. Clasping his hands behind his back, he said calmly,

“Nyota and I would be pleased if you would attend the ceremony too, Mr. Singh – if your health allows it,” he added quickly as McCoy drew a deep breath to protest.

“That has to be seen. The lad is far from leaving his bed any time soon,” Leonard pointed out.

Jim grimaced and winked at Nien, “Welcome to the club!”

Khan frowned; inwardly pleased at the invitation. “What club?” he wanted to know; confused.

“The club of those Bones fusses over worse than any real mother-hen ever could!” Kirk replied wryly; snickering as instantly the expected protest sounded,

“I do not mother-hen! I’m a doctor and as such I’m responsible for my patients.”

“Really, Doctor? Maybe you should start to spare your patients’ nerves then. That would demonstrate real responsibility,” Spock made a potshot and as Jim looked over his shoulder, he had to chuckle again. Spock stood there with a very innocent expression while McCoy glared at him.

“It remains to be seen whose nerves are more tried – mine or the patients. Especially when I have to treat patients like you and Jim! I swear, the first grey hairs I got are because of you two.” He heard Nien snorting in amusement and pointed a nonchalant finger at him. “The same goes for you, mister! I really thought I would lose you, your augmented nature be dammed. It was a close call I don’t want to experience again any time soon, so please stay out of trouble for once.”

Khan lifted both brows and looked at the CMO, while he saw – and felt – Jim cringing. “Was it… that bad?” he asked quietly; once again cursing the fact that his memories were blocked.
“Yeah,” Bones murmured quietly. “You went flat line for several minutes after the surgery – better to say after you woke up too early, spied Jim in full medical outfit, got a panic attack and then your body gave in. If it hadn’t been for Spock, who did his Vulcan-voodoo-magic on you, we would have lost you. Guess the kid’s condition in those minutes.” He nodded towards Jim.

The former dictator didn’t even realize that his mouth hung open. Staring first at McCoy and then at Kirk, he finally glanced at Spock, who still stood unfazed at the foot of the bio-bed; returning his gaze calmly. “I… was clinically dead?” Khan whispered; grasping what that meant – not only for him, but also for Jim. He had been dead – gone! Still he was here now, alive. And this only because of the Vulcan?

His face must have betrayed not only his shock but also his unvoiced questions, because the first officer nodded slowly. “Yes, your life indicators were completely down. I… sensed Jim’s distress and hurried to the PAR, only to learn that your body and obviously also your mind had shut off. As Dr. McCoy put it; it seemed that you didn’t want to survive – after being confronted with men in medical outfits and your mind obviously mistaking them for your former tormentors. I… melded with you, convinced you that there was no danger anymore and you agreed to follow me out of the world you had fled to. Jim joined our meld at one point and together we made it back.”

Spock’s voice sounded as composed like his whole stance was, yet Khan realized what the Vulcan had done for him. What Spock had risked saving him.

“You… came for me,” he murmured; astonished.

Promptly a Vulcan brow was lifted again. Khan couldn’t remember that these were the exact words he had said to Spock shortly before the mind-meld was ended, but Spock recognized them instantly. Taking a deep breath, he said softly, “Your body was seriously harmed and you thought yourself back in the hands of Section 31. You gave up – but I couldn’t allow this. You are needed, Mr. Singh – not only by your family, but also by your bondmate, who happens to be my friend. And… perhaps not officially but nonetheless you belong to the crew now – to those who are ‘family’, as Jim likes to say it. None of us would let you down.” He shifted slightly, like he wanted to mask some unease, before he added with a tight voice, “And I… apologize for the mind-meld I tried to force on you last year. Even in a fight to the death it is unethical to use this skill as an attack. There is no excuse for leaving the Vulcan way like I did at that moment, even in my emotionally compromised state.”

For a long moment silence hung in the room. Jim looked with big eyes at his Vulcan brother, Bones hid a smile and Khan – well, his gaze was fixed on Spock. He knew what it had cost the man to offer this apology, and for a second he felt something close to satisfaction, then this feeling faded away with rising understanding. “You wanted to avenge your captain – someone who is in a special way a kind of brother for you. You were in anguish – just like I was as I thought my crew, my
family, to be dead. Therefore I… understand what you did.”

“Yet it is no excuse for my failure,” Spock murmured; his body stiff.

Khan closed his eyes; a headache was coming. “No, but it’s an explanation.” He forced his eyes open again. “You are forgiven,” he murmured. “I can’t let you face one of your most important days in life with guilt weighing down your shoulders, can I?” Before the Vulcan could answer, Nien added, “And, by the way, I understood your actions a long time ago – certainly earlier than you did. To understand means to accept – and I accept that you simply reacted like I did in a comparable situation. Now you have to learn to accept it, too.” He smiled a little bit. “And if it hadn’t been for your people’s skills concerning this mind-melting-thing, I would be dead now. Therefore we are even – if you agree.”

Spock took a slow breath and bowed his head shortly. “I agree, Mr. Singh. Thank you.”

The Augment snorted quietly. “Well, than I thank you, too – after all it was you who brought me back from the dead.”

“Spock didn’t do it alone,” Bones grumbled. “As far as I understand you were confronted with some very nasty shit from your past as you hovered between death and life, and Spock saw no other way to get Jim to convince you to join the world of the living again. Your three minds were connected.” He shook his head. “It was almost like in a good old séance, only without candles and pentagrams.”

Even if these words woke some funny imaginations in Khan’s mind, he didn’t miss the point McCoy was making: Not only Spock, but also Jim had risked a lot to bring him back?

Looking at Kirk, he whispered, “Didn’t I tell you to keep the ball of danger low, Pyāra?”

Jim smiled; cupping Nien’s hand with both of his hands now. “And I already told you that I can’t give you this promise. Not, when your life – or that of my friends – is at stake.” He bent down and kissed the Augment’s still feverishly hot knuckles. “I couldn’t lose you, Nien. Not ever, damn the risk! And, besides, this wasn’t the first time Spock and I melded. You simply were with us in the boat, that’s all, so don’t freak, okay?”

“‘That’s all’!” Bones scoffed. “Hell, the stunt you two pulled” – he pointed at Kirk and Spock – “shocked even T’Pau. Sort of!” he added as he received another raised eyebrow from the first officer.
Khan frowned. “How many people know about our mind-melding?”

“A few,” Bones admitted. “Two Vulcan healers, Selek, T’Pau…” He shrugged. “Obviously it’s uncommon for three people to meld and therefore Spock’s stunt drew some attention.” His voice turned soft. “But our dear hobgoblin is right. This was the only way to save you.”

The former dictator nodded slowly; his eyes sought that of Spock again. “What did you see?” he asked; clearly uncomfortable with the idea of the Vulcan witnessing his nightmares.

“Dark corridors of some labs, faceless people – adults and children – and you had fled beyond these rooms to somewhere within the Indian landscape. You… were a boy, too, then but as you learned what you were about to miss if you wouldn’t follow me back, you accompanied me. There were… glimpses of what you went through during your time with Section 31 and this was the point you didn’t want to continue. I saw no other chance than to have Jim join us – after all you trust him utterly and I was still someone who you were wary of. Jim’s presence chased away the phantoms of the past and you followed us back to reality, where I ended our meld. Afterwards you were shortly awake, but soon went into coma – or a comatose condition.”

“Or a sort of healing trance,” Bones cut in. “Not even Healer Sorel was sure what happened to you – if you were in coma or simply very deeply asleep.” He shifted a little bit; his curiosity got the better of him. “Is healing-trance something common among your people?”

Khan pursed his lips shortly. “We… our bodies lower their functions when we’re seriously injured. At least that happened to Otto once and to Paolo, too. I think my body reacted in the same way.”

Leonard nodded. “The lesson is clear: Augments have a kind of healing-trance.” He bounced on the balls of his feet. “I was right!” he beamed.

Jim groaned. “Yes, oh mighty genius, you were right!”

McCoy grinned at him. “And don’t forget it. Maybe you and Spock will listen to me from now on when I prescribe medicine or bedrest.” His gaze found Khan. “And the latter goes for you now too, Mr. Singh. Do some eye care and I’ll bring you some food in the evening – testing what your stomach says about it.”

“Eye care”, doctor?” Spock was, once again, at loss.
“Off to dreamland, meeting Morpheus’ realm, kipping – *sleeping*, Spock!” Bones explained exasperated. “Dammit, you can’t tell me that you’re liaised with a human woman and befriended with Jim, but haven’t heard those idioms before.”

“The illogicality of human idioms never does cease to surprise me, Doctor,” the Vulcan replied indignantly. “It is really worth a closer study. Maybe I should suggest it to the New Vulcan Academy.”

“Hmpf!” was all, Leonard said to it, and Spock – obviously in high spirits, even if he would deny it till his death – said kindly. “And again, Doctor, I won one of our ‘arguments’. As you see, I didn’t exaggerate when I told you that I render you speechless 72.6 percent of our discussions. But I have to correct that number, because now the correct percent is 73.8.”

Bones’ jaw dropped down, while Jim began to laugh again – bending over Nien and pressing his face at the Augment’s neck. “I swear, one day they’ll drive me insane,” he snickered.

A far too warm hand weakly cupped his head. “Don’t fear, I’ll be with you and will hinder them in driving you even crazier than you already are,” Khan whispered; chuckling as he heard the protesting sound Jim made.

Feeling enveloped and safe in his bondmate’s presence, the Augment sighed and closed his eyes – his mind still too tired to think closer of everything he had just learned…

ST***ST***ST

Healer Sorel stepped into his office and sat down at his desk. Opening Sarek’s case sheet he added the last examination results, which showed that the ambassador was doing very much better. The surgical wound was healing well. There wouldn’t be even a scar left when Sorel was done with it. Sarek’s heart beat strong and even, his body had caught up with the blood loss and the other injuries he received during his captivity weren’t any problem at all.

Satisfied Sorel prepared the ambassador’s release papers for the next day, added a to-do-list and a prescription for the medicine Sarek would have to take for the next weeks. He was almost done with it, when suddenly a little device in his robe’s pocket began to beep.

His body stiffened as the alert startled him for a moment, then he quickly gave his terminal a code
and the picture of the screen changed – showing now the large cave hall beneath the hospital that held the 72 cryo-tubes with the sleeping Augments. Quickly he analyzed the data the scanners of the monitoring collected non-stop, and he took a sharp breath as he saw the results. One of the tubes had a malfunction – and whatever had triggered it meant danger for the man or the woman within the tube. And maybe for the other sleeping Augments, too, shouldn’t this malfunction be limited to this one tube.

Gripping a communicator he opened the frequency that would connect him with the human healer McCoy, while he hurried out of the office. Yes, Sorel was one of the most experienced healers of Vulcan, yet the Terran already had collected experiences with the enhanced individuals of his species – experiences which would be needed.

“McCoy here,” came the reply while Sorel already stormed towards Daniel Corrigan’s office.

“Sorel here. One of the cryotubes has a malfunction,” the Vulcan informed the Enterprise’s CMO. “If we don’t find the cause and can make the old technology work again, we will have to wake up the man or the woman who is in the tube. Please come to the hospital as quickly as possible. I will inform Dr. Corrigan to wait for you at the entrance.”

A loud “Shit!” followed by a hastily, “I’m on my way!” was all Sorel got from physician, and then the connection was shut off.

He reached Corrigan’s office and entered without any knock; startling the young human. “Daniel, we’ve an emergency I’ll need your support for.”

The young human rose from his chair. “How can I be at your service?” he asked his mentor.

Sorel took a deep breath. “The Augment you met in surgery a few days ago wasn’t the only one who stepped on New Vulcan. Down in our cellars there are 72 cryo-tubes, which hold his crew. One of the tubes is about to fail – and I think we have to wake the man or the woman who is inside to prevent his or her death. You’ve had some experiences with this special Terran race, therefore your support is needed.”


Sorel lifted a greying brow. “Yes, the tubes are of old Earthen technology that put humans into a kind of stasis. They were brought from the Enterprise to New Vulcan to ensure their inhabitants’
safety, but I received an alert that one of the tubes has a malfunction. I’ve informed Dr. McCoy who is on his way to the hospital. Please meet with him at the entrance. I will instruct you where to go to find the tubes.”

Daniel stared wide-eyed at him – realizing that he had only scratched the tip of the iceberg as he assisted the Starfleet doctor during the strange Augment’s surgery. Yet he was first and foremost a doctor – and there was someone in need for medical assistance. Questions could wait.

“I’m with you,” he said; already taking his med-kit with him. “Do you know what kind of malfunction threatens this old kind of stasis?”

Sorel shook his head, while both men headed towards the next elevator. “No, I don’t. But I will contact Elder Sanak. He’s already familiar with this old Terran technology.” They stepped into the next lift cabin “Hopefully our help will not come too late.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I know, that’s really a mean cliffhanger. And the outcome will be not like the one as Joaquin’s cryotube failed…

In the next chapter there will be action, many sensible moments and more cliffhangers.

I hope you liked the new chapter and, like always, I’m damn curious what you think of it.

Have a nice start into the next week

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Like so often at the beginning of a new chapter I want to say ‘thank-you’ for all your comments concerning the last installment. I know that you all are really curious what will happen next – and what’s about the failing cryotube and its habitant.

Therefore I do not want to keep you waiting any longer and hope that you’ll have fun with the new chapter.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

87. Chapter – Decisions

It wasn’t really a surprise that Dr. McCoy wasn’t alone as he and Daniel arrived in the large cave that held the cryotubes. A very nervous Jim Kirk and a tense Spock accompanied them.

“Long life and peace!” Kirk greeted quickly; offering like Spock a ta’al before the young captain instantly continued, “How is the man’s or woman’s condition?”

Elder Sanak, who had arrived only a few minutes earlier, looked up from the cryotube that gave them trouble now and answered the greeting shortly with his own ta’al, before he replied, “The man is alive, but the malfunction… confuses me. I can’t detect the reason for it.”

Spock had already hurried to him and kneeled beside the cryotube; examining the mechanism.

McCoy had closed the distance to Sorel in the meantime, who came straight to the point, “The first read-outs of the med-scanners say that the man’s life indicators are changing.”

“In what way?” Bones asked; heading toward the cryotube in question.
“Pulse and blood circulation are increasing – only slowly, but continuous,” Sorel informed him; falling into step with McCoy; Daniel and Jim on their heels. Spock had risen to his feet and walked from tube to tube.

“What about the others?” Kirk asked him.

Spock lifted a brow. “They are still functional, but as long as we don’t know what triggered the malfunction there is the risk that the error can befall them, too.”

Jim looked down at the man on the other side of the frozen observation-window. He seemed to be of the same age as Khan, but he was clearly of northern heritage – Europe maybe. Brunette hair, straight features and a strong neck was all Kirk could see, but it was enough to wake an assumption in him. “This could be Otto,” he murmured, “one of Nien’s closest friends.”

“I don’t care who this guy is. He’s in danger that is all that counts for now,” Leonard grumbled; checking the life signals with his own med-scanner.

Jim nodded slowly before he stepped to Sanak’s side and observed the read-outs of the old-fashioned small display as well. Some signal lights were blinking and the usual soft humming sound of the cryotube was different. “What’s causing the malfunction?” he wanted to know.

The old Vulcan took a deep breath. “As far as I understand this old technology, the cryo-condition is reduced now. Which means that…”

“That the man inside is going to wake up.”

“Yes, but only if the cryogenic is ended in the correct way. Otherwise…” Sanak didn’t need to finish the sentence; the outcome was obvious for everyone.

“Can you control the mechanism?” Jim asked.

“I can try it,” Sanak said reluctantly.
Kirk shortly pressed his lips into a thin line, before he looked at his Vulcan friend. “Spock?”

The first officer cocked his head. “My knowledge concerning the cryotube’s technology is limited. Mr. Scott has worked together with Mr. Singh after Mr. Weiss’ cryotube failed. If there is someone who could analyze the problem in a short time, it’s Mr. Scott.”

Kirk nodded grimly and pulled out his communicator. “Kirk to Enterprise. Come in, Enterprise, it’s an emergency!”

A moment later the voice of one of Uhura’s substitutes answered, “Enterprise here, Captain.”

If the whole situation wasn’t so serious Kirk would have grinned that he was still addressed with ‘captain’, even if he was released from duty. But given the present circumstances his thoughts were only fixed on the current problem. “Lieutenant André, please put me through to Mr. Scott. It’s an emergency!”

“One moment, Captain.”

A few seconds later Jim heard the familiar Scottish drawl coming from the communicator’s little speaker.

“Cap’n? Scott here.”

“Scotty, one of the cryotubes has a malfunction – different from what happened to Joaquin’s tube, yet it’s a danger for the habitant. Take your equipment and go to the transporter room. I’ll speak with Wesley to get his permission for you to beam down to the hospital.”

A short curse in Gaelic was heard, followed by an “Aye, Cap’n! I’m on my way.” Then the connection was shut off.

“I’ll go upstairs to lead Scotty down here. I don’t know if he remembers the way,” Jim called; already running towards the exit, while he hailed the Enterprise anew; this time demanding to speak to Wesley.
Bones watched him go, before he returned his attention towards the male Augment in the cryotube. “Dammit!” he grumbled, checking the life signals for the second time. “And once again: Dammit! Pulse at 9 per minute and rising; breath rate increasing, too.” He exchanged a glance with Sorel and Daniel. “If you ask me we should bring the tube upstairs to the stasis-department. Then we force this coffin open and put the lad into one of the stasis-chambers before anything bad happens to him.”

Spock lifted a brow. “Do you think that to be wise, Doctor?”

“It saved Joaquin – and the situation is similar. At least it would reduce the risk for the patient as long as we don’t know what’s making this cursed coffin quitting its work.”

“If the malfunction would be stopped now…” Spock began to ponder, but Leonard quickly shook his head.

“Too late for it. The man’s awakening is too far gone to put him back into cryosleep. Stasis is the only answer now.”

Sanak rose from the kneeling position before the tube’s mechanism. “As far as I can tell, there is an error in the cooling system – and the fresh air supply isn’t starting its work like it should to ensure the inhabitant’s survival after the end of the cryogenic.” His dark eyes found McCoy’s. “I agree with you, Doctor. The inhabitant of the tube has to be removed to prevent him from serious harm caused by an abrupt ending of the cryosleep and lack of oxygen.”

Sorel made an affirming gesture. “I agree, too.”

“All right. Lend me a hand, gentlemen!” Bones ordered; instinctively taking command. Spock was at his side with three large steps, while Daniel and Sorel went to the end of the tube. Together they lifted it and began to carry it towards the exit. Sanak stayed back. “I will check the other cryotubes and follow you afterwards.”

“Okay,” McCoy called over his shoulder. “Maybe you and Scotty can find out what makes this cursed thing start quitting – before the same coughing infests the other tubes, too.”

Confused the Elder lifted both brows. “‘Coughing’? ‘Infests the other tubes’?” he asked, almost perplexed.

“Doctor McCoy means that there is a chance that the same malfunction could be happen to the other tubes, too, if there is a general cause for it,” Spock translated, and Sanak nodded.
“I understand,” he said; exchanging a glance with Sorel. Humans!

The two human males were panting as they finally reached the cellar of the hospital; Spock and Sorel didn’t show any signs of tiredness despite the fact that the cryotube was heavy. Quick steps approached and even before Kirk and Scott rounded the corner, Spock knew that his T’hy’la was coming.

“Captain, stay where you are. We are bringing the cryotube upstairs!” he called. There was no reason that Kirk and Scott had to run more than necessary.

“What… what are you doing?” Jim gasped, out of breath as he fell into a slower step; Scott beside him.

“We… we bring hi… him upstairs to put… out him into stasis,” Bones wheezed; his face red with effort. “No… no other chance to… to make him survive.”

Kirk’s worry deepened even more. “How is he? Is he in danger? What’s about the others? What…”

“Captain, Elder Sanak monitors the other tubes,” Spock interrupted him. “Mr. Scott and I will check this tube here after we’ve removed its inhabitant. Maybe the cause of the malfunction can be found that would help to gain knowledge if the other cryotubes are about to fail, too,” he continued calmly while bypassing Kirk and Scott.

“Damn Vul… Vulcan strength! I… I can’t even breath prop… properly and he… he is relaxed like du… during a walk in the park!” Bones groused; shooting Spock a glare.

“If you would spare your breath and stop talking so much, you won’t have a problem, Doctor,” Sarek’s son deadpanned, which made Corrigan chuckle – even if the young physician was wheezing just like his older colleague was doing.

Several minutes later they reached the department where the stasis chambers were placed – after bringing a lot of attention to themselves as they first carried the cryotube through the lower level of the hospital and then used a lift to ride it to the third level. Bones was sure that he hadn’t seen so many raised Vulcan eyebrows in such a short range of time ever before.
“Captain, take my place! I’ll inform our colleagues of the arrival of the new patient,” Daniel Corrigan addressed Jim the moment the lift door opened, and hurried away before Kirk could say something. Not wasting precious time Jim helped to carry the tube and a few moments later they arrived in one of the rooms that held a stasis chamber. Two Vulcan healers looked from a quickly explaining Corrigan to the newcomers with as much astonishment as Vulcans were able to; obviously taken completely by surprise.

“Healer Sorel,” one of them began. “What is the meaning of…?”

“I’ll explain it later. This patient has to be removed from the tube and brought into stasis immediately. The correct adjustment of the stasis procedure will be made by Dr. McCoy,” Sorel interrupted his colleague. “I take full responsibility for this case,” he added.

Bones wiped the sweat from his face; grumbling something about ‘heavy stones’ and ‘damn heat’, before he stepped to the stasis chamber, where he got a short instruction from Daniel. The annotation was switched from Vulcan language into Standard, and because the array on the panel was almost identical with the stasis chamber aboard the Enterprise McCoy didn’t need more than a minute to learn everything he needed to know. Quickly he programmed the stasis-chamber and within a few seconds the blue light shimmered through the observation windows, while the chamber sprang to life.

Leonard turned around and saw that Scott and Spock were already engrossed with the cryotube’s function. “All right, time to move our male sleeping beauty to another bed,” he said. “Can you open the tube without problems, or do we need some hammers and Vulcan arms for it?”

Scott shot him a short glance. “Doctor, are you offending me? The mechanism I don’t look through still has to be developed.” He punched several buttons and a noise as if air was escaping abruptly was heard. Several clicks sounded and the lid moved a little bit. A warn-peeping and several blinking lights followed, but neither McCoy, nor the others were distracted by them.

“Quick now!” Bones called, and while Scott opened the cover, one of the younger Vulcan healers bent down, pushed his arms under the naked human form and lifted the Augment on his arms. No expression showed on the Vulcan’s face that the icy fog inside of the cryotube was unpleasant for him. With long steps he closed the distance to the stasis-chamber his colleague had opened by now and lowered the large Augment inside. Seconds later the stasis undertook the former cryo-function and ensured the enhanced man’s life functions.

McCoy’s eyes hung on the display Sorel had switched from Vulcan to Federation Standard. “Pulse at 14 per minute, blood pressure 34 to 12, hypoventilation but constant.” He grinned. “If his body behaves like Joaquin’s, I dare to say our friend here isn’t in any danger and will stay in dreamland until we wake him up by reducing the stasis.”
Jim sighed in relief and rubbed his face. He didn’t want to imagine how Khan would have reacted if there was another loss of his beloved crew to mourn. “You recorded the data of all Augments in sickbay after Joaquin’s case,” he said; remembering that the enhanced man’s identity was still more of a guess than knowledge. “Can you compare them with the DNA of our friend here, so that we can learn who he is?” he asked Leonard.

Bones nodded. “I took the data with me when we left the Enterprise. All medical charts are recorded in here.” He lifted his med-tricorder and pointed it now at the man whose shape shimmered in the blue light of stasis. A minute later the tricorder peeped and McCoy rolled his eyes. “You should have placed a bet, Jim. You could have earned some Credits this way. Our sleeping beauty here is – according to the information Khan gave me – indeed Otto Hoffmann.”

Kirk smiled shortly. “He’s one of Nien’s closest friends – one he knew from childhood. He told me once that Otto was brought to the labs of New Delhi a year prior to the Augment children’s escape from said labs. Like Nien he took the smaller Augments under his protective wings. He, Nien and a few others were the only ones who were like a family to the younger ones.”

Leonard grimaced. “Children raised in a lab – with no social bonds to parents or parent-like adults. It’s a miracle that they are able to develop true relationships at all.” He looked over his shoulder at the cryotube, as he heard the soft murmuring behind him.

Scott and Spock were already busy with analyzing the mechanism of the cryotube; checking the electronic and mechanical components – searching for the error that had led to the malfunction. Yet they would need time to find any results.

Sorel met the asking glances of his two colleagues and explained in Federation Standard, “The patient belongs to a group of fugitives which were granted political asylum on New Vulcan by High Minister Selek and the Lady T’Pau. They were held hostage by the members of the conspiracy that shook Starfleet and were abused as test subjects. I ask you to stay silent about their presence – and the fact that the patient is an Augment.”

For Vulcans the two healers reacted rather shocked, but before they could say something, Sorel continued. “This is the reason why Dr. McCoy and Dr. Corrigan will monitor this man and undertake his case. They have already collected experiences with this subspecies of Terrans and will be able to help him should his body react differently from what is usual.” His glance found Kirk. “Has your… friend knowledge of what happened here?” he asked.

Jim sighed again. “As your call reached my CMO, Nien was already deep asleep again, but I think Joaquin will be rather suspicious because Bones, Spock and I more or less peeled off from New Gol.
I would appreciate it if one of your staff could beam me back to New Gol so that I can speak with him, before the boy gets bees in his butt and does something that would mean trouble.”

Sorel lifted a brow. “We don’t have bees on New Vulcan, Captain, but an equivalent that…”

“Healer Sorel, this is a human description for someone who gets very nervous,” Spock translated.

Something close to a sigh escaped the older Vulcan. “Illogical,” was all he murmured under his breath. Then he turned to one of the two other healers. “Please escort Captain Kirk to our transporter room and beam him back to New Gol.”

A short nod followed by a “Please come with me, Captain,” was the outcome.

Jim looked at Spock and Scott. “Please keep me updated with what you find – or not find, okay?”

“Of course, Captain.”

“Aye, Cap’n.”

Kirk’s gaze found Bones. “That goes for you, too. If something should change…”

“I’ll call you,” McCoy affirmed. “Just make sure that the boy doesn’t freak out – or Khan. He has to stay in bed, no matter what, even if you have to bind him.”

Jim grinned shortly. “I know a far better method to keep him in bed.”

Spock lifted a brow, Scotty chuckled and McCoy groaned, while Sorel and the other healer politely ignored the obvious meaning of said ‘method’. With a “Thank you for your help, sir!” towards Sorel, Kirk left the room – but not without throwing a last glance at the stasis-chamber. ‘Hold on. Nien will need you!’
A few minutes later Jim found Joaquin sitting at Nien’s biobed. To say that the Augment-boy was nervous was an understatement. He was unsettled – restless even – and he almost jumped out of his skin, as Kirk entered the room. Pressing a quick finger to his lips, Jim gestured towards Joaquin to accompany him and led the boy outside into the gardens. In the later afternoon it was still hot, but Weiss’ augmented nature had already adjusted to the strange climate that ruled New Vulcan. Jim, on the other hand, felt the heat like an impact and took some deep breaths before he began to tell Nien’s ‘little brother’ what happened.

Of course the young Augment was shocked and deeply worried – not only for Otto, but also for his other brothers and sisters. What if the malfunction of Otto’s cryotube wasn’t a single case but would befall the others, too? What if his whole family except for Khan was in danger of falling prey to the old technology that once promised them survival?

Jim did his best to calm down Joaquin. Scotty knew so much about the cryogenic process by now – last but not least because of Khan, as the two men had worked together in sickbay aboard the Enterprise. If there was a general error that showed its effect now, then Scotty – or Spock or Sanak – would find it.

Afterwards Kirk contacted Wesley to keep him updated and also to tell him that Chekov and Riley were allowed to visit Joaquin. And then he and Weiss could do nothing else than wait.

Jim had to admit that he was nervous as well, yet he tried to remember the few mental techniques Selek had taught him before. Under no circumstances did he want to wake up Nien because of some emotions flaring through their link – at least as long as he, Jim, didn’t know any results.

The sun was already lowering to the horizon as his communicator peeped.

“Kirk here!” he answered the hail.

“Spock here, Captain. Mr. Scott, Elder Sanak and I have checked Mr. Hoffmann’s tube. It seems as if something influenced the tube’s own energy supply which triggered the integrated emergency protocol which would wake up the tube’s inhabitant to prevent him from dying by a wrong cryogenic process or lack of oxygen supply.”

“In other words: The battery was about to run out of power and therefore the wakening procedure was started, but had some problems because the air-supply didn’t work?” Jim made sure that he had understood his first officer.
“Correct. The latter was the second error. The first one is the fact that the battery ran out of energy at all. Mr. Scott told me that the battery re-charged itself by using not heat but the coldness of the cryogenosis – another development of Mr. Singh. But something interrupted the process now.”

Kirk bit his lip and exchanged a glance with Joaquin. “Do you have any idea what interrupted the re-charging?”

Another voice sounded, “Scott here, Cap’n. We have ter pick the tube ter pieces ter get maybe an answer for that question. If ya ask me I think the battery’s useful life was simply over – maybe evoked by fatigue of one or the other components. The cryotubes weren’t constructed ter work for centuries but for decades, as Khan told me once. And even if he got the best materials for the tubes Earth could serve with at his time, they aren’t comparable with today’s productions. Another reason for the failure can certainly also be found in two other facts: One – several cryotubes were certainly placed nearer to the hull of the _Botany Bay_, what could have influenced their work. I don’t think the ship’s internal energy lasted the whole time and it got really cold inside – especially near the hull.”

“Nien told me that Marcus found the _Botany Bay_ drifting, what means that her drive and certainly other functions had quit by that time,” Jim interrupted his engineer’s report.

“Aye, that makes sense,” Montgomery affirmed. “And another reason can certainly be found in the handlin’ of the tubes within the last months. They were opened several times by Section 31 and later by those scientists on Gamma 12. The tubes had a lot of work ter do ter compensate the temperature fluctuation in the inside. And, by all means, Jim, the tubes weren’t exactly handled carefully. If ye take a closer look you can see bucklin’s and dents in them – not big, but still existin’. This all certainly led to the current situation.”

“In other words: Otto’s cryotube wasn’t an exception, but maybe the beginning,” Jim murmured.

Yet Scott heard him.

“Aye. The question is not ‘if’ another tube will quit workin’, but ‘when’. It could last minutes, days, weeks or even months, but I don’t think that they will function for a longer time now.”

Weiss had listened to the talk quietly. Now he rose to speak, “Then we have to wake them up!”

Jim nodded slowly. “Yes, it seems so. But with your brother still in dreamland we have a big
problem: Only he knows how to end the cryogenic correctly so that there will be no danger for your brothers and sisters. Even with the Enterprise’s and the Vulcan hospital’s combined number of stasis-chambers we can’t wake your friends up at the same time.”

“And there is another problem, Captain,” Spock cut in. “We know how… sensible Mr. Weiss reacted after he came out of stasis. And like Mr. Singh told us Mr. Weiss is a peaceful example of his people. If we wake the Augments up and they find themselves on a strange planet without their trusted leader, we could face some serious problems.”

“They are highly intelligent, Spock, and I do think that some logical explanation and a calm treatment of their worries will keep them calm,” Jim pondered.

“I could also speak with them,” Joaquin piped in. “They know me and trust me. I may be the youngest of them all, but they knew how close Noo and I are. If I tell them what happened, where they are and that they are not in danger, they will believe me.”

“Be that as it may,” Scott took part in the talk again. “I can’t guarantee that the other cryotubes will continue to do their work dutifully for the next weeks. One catastrophe could be prevented, the next time we may run out of luck.”

Kirk pinched the bridge of his nose. “I know, Scotty.” He pursed his lips as many thoughts ran through his mind, before he asked, “Is there a chance we can charge all the batteries up with an external energy supply?”

“I don’t trust the old batteries anymore, Jim. Or the components. Joaquin’s tube quit because it was opened one time. Mr. Hoffmann’s tube went down certainly because it was opened several times. To be opened and closed doesn’t do the tubes well. And I don’t know how much damage hides in their functions by now.”

Jim made up his mind. There was only one possible way to go now. “Okay, Scotty. I’ll speak with Selek and T’Pau and tell them that we have to wake their guests up earlier than thought.”

“But we don’t know how to start the wakenin’ process and…”

“But Otto knows,” Kirk interrupted his engineer, before he looked at Joaquin. “Right?”
Weiss nodded. “Yes, Noo taught Otto, Rodrigues and Paul everything about the cryotubes in case that he… wouldn’t make it.”

Kirk smiled at him. “Security first – typical of your brother.” He lifted the lowered communicator again to his lips. “We wake up Otto and he has to help to wake up the others. Are the tubes still monitored?”

“Yes, Captain,” Spock spoke again. “Elder Sanak has installed another alert program that will inform him instantly as soon as one of the tubes runs an error.”

“Please tell him I’m grateful for his thoughtfulness and his efforts, Spock. I think we have to accept the fact that we’re going to wake up Nien’s family earlier than planned. Please ask Healer Sorel if several larger rooms could be prepared for them, where they can rest and come to terms with the new situation they will find themselves in. I’ll contact Selek and keep you updated. Is Bones on his way back to New Gol?”

“Negative, Captain. Dr. McCoy wants to stay here for some more hours and will return in the later evening – if Mr. Singh doesn’t need his medical support.”

“Nien still sleeps and I think he’s doing fine – well, as fine as you can be after what he’s been through,” Kirk answered. “Are you returning to your place?”

“If you don’t need me for the rest of the evening, Jim, I would like to return to Nyota. My father will be released tomorrow and…”

Jim smiled. “Don’t apologize for wanting to prepare everything for your father’s arrival – or for spending the last free evening with your girl, Spock. You already did enough for the others and me.”

The Vulcan sounded confused. “Captain, I didn’t ‘apologize’, I simply wanted to explain…”

“Sp-o-ock, you understood me. Have a nice evening with Nyota and give her my greetings,” Kirk chuckled, before he turned serious again and raised his voice. “Scotty?”

“Aye, Cap’n?”
“I know that you’re needed aboard our ship, but please remain on standby in case that you’re needed down here again.”

A soft laughter was heard, followed by “Okey-dokey, Jim. I’ve already kept that in mind. I gave Elder Sanak my private frequency. If one of the cryotubes coughs he’ll call me.”

“Thanks, Scotty! I know I could count on you,” Jim beamed, before he added, “And Scotty? No word to Wesley about the need to wake up the others soon. He’s still bound to answer to Command, and I don’t want to get them nervous. Just tell him about the one tube that failed and that its inhabitant is safe in stasis for now. I’ll inform him about the changes later – when I know more.”

“Understood, sir. It’s not my place to speculate about ‘ifs’ and ‘whens’.” It was clear that Montgomery was pulling Jim’s leg a little bit, but was also deadly serious what the little secret involved. “Good luck with Selek and T’Pau, and give the boy my greetings. Scott out.”

Jim closed the communicator and looked at Joaquin, who shifted from one foot to another. “And now?”

Kirk took a deep breath. “Now we have to contact Selek.”

ST* ***ST

The clear dark eyes within the old face looked with thoughtfulness at the young captain. “You do know the risk if the Augments wake up without finding their leader in their midst?”

Jim leant back on the bench he and Selek occupied in one of the separated parts of the gardens. Kirk thought it wiser to speak with him alone and had asked Joaquin to watch over his brother for the time he, Jim, was busy with the High Minister.

Rubbing his sweat-wet neck – it was still damn hot this evening – Kirk sighed. “Yes, I know, Spock,” he said quietly; using the old Vulcan’s true name on full purpose. “Your younger self already drew my attention to it, and I have to admit that I do get some bellyache at the thought of what could go wrong, but…we’ve no other choice. There is no guarantee that Otto’s cryotube will be the only one that quits working. Hell, Joaquin’s was the first, properly speaking. And his failed because of the same reason as Otto’s: it was opened and closed while the cryogenic process was working. Only three other Augments were spared being abused as lab-rats, that means that only three tubes may work flawlessly for a longer time. Concerning the others it’s only a question of time until
the next emergency call from the hospital will reach us. And besides the fact that we haven’t enough stasis chambers in which we could place the Augments to keep them alive, there is still the risk that we’ll come too late. I really don’t want to tell Nien that one of his brothers or sisters died under my watch.”

Selek nodded slowly. “They would have to be woken up sooner or later, Jim, but the plan was that Khan would be a part of the procedure and would keep his family calm.”

“Yes, but Nien is out of question at the moment,” Jim grimaced. “But they trust Joaquin – and certainly Otto, too. If Otto learns and believes that he is among friends – people who won’t harm him and the others – he can take Khan’s place for the time Nien heals.”

One ice-grey brow was lifted. “Don’t get me wrong, Jim, I know that the risk for the Augments has increased because of the new situation, but what do you think will be Mr. Hoffmann’s and the others’ reaction when they learn that their beloved leader was beaten almost to death and is too injured to visit them? They will demand answers – answers which could lead to misunderstandings. And given their stronger emotions, this all could end in a catastrophe.”

Jim understood Selek’s concerns, but he had made up his mind and would not change it. “It would end in a bigger catastrophe if more tubes get malfunctions and we run out of stasis-chambers to keep the tube-less Augments alive. Nien and all the others will ask themselves why we simply didn’t wake them up – with Otto assisting us. They will think we distrust them – Nien will think we still distrust him. That I still distrust him – and this after I pledged my trust and love for him. Can you imagine what this would do to him?”

The Elder looked in those soft pleading eyes, which still held the wrong color – at least for him. Yet they were the same which had looked at him so often like this all those decades ago. Logic mixed with humanity – it had been his undoing during all the times he spent with his own Jim; it was his undoing now.

“Like always your logic is… strange, but sound,” he admitted, and felt warmth rising in him as he caught the bright, boyish delightful grin of his old friend’s younger counterpart. Even the recall of the strictest ways of Surak’s teachings couldn’t prevent the warm feelings from spreading through Selek now.

“So, you agree?” Jim asked.

Selek allowed himself a sigh. “Do I have another choice?”
Kirk only smirked at him, and the old Vulcan shook his head in amusement. The things he was and would always be ready to do for this man…

“I will speak with T’Pau,” he said, “and convince her of the necessity to wake up the Augments so soon. I hope that you and Joaquin will be able to keep Mr. Hoffmann calm. With Mr. Singh still healing and Mr. Hoffmann in charge we face another situation that originally planned.”

Jim cocked his head as he realized that Selek was still concerned. “You knew him from your time, don’t you? Otto, I mean.”

This time it was Selek who took a deep breath. “It was a whole different situation – and he and the others were fed with wrong information. What happened then and now isn’t comparable in the slightest bit. I only ask you to be careful when you deal with Khan’s family without him. I don’t want to see you get hurt – emotionally or physically.”

Kirk began to chuckle; his eyes shone with almost son-like affection for the Elder. “Bones is right. You’re a big softie when it comes to me.”

A short glare was shot in his direction. “You have no idea!” Selek deadpanned. “I never admitted it, but my Jim was able to wrap me around his little finger in the end. And given your personality and charms, and my younger counterpart’s youth I fear the worst for him.”

That was it. Jim had to laugh – a clear, rich sound Selek hadn’t heard in a very long time. Repressing the mixture of sadness and joy, he watched the young captain at his side; vowing to himself that he would look out for him ‘til the end of his life.

ST***ST***ST

He was on the flight – climbed through a shaft; a young woman was with him…

A room full of stations…

Blinking lights…
The floor and the stations seemed to whirl around him…

A woman’s voice, “Jim, we’re in Auxiliary, but they’re trying to break through, and we don’t stand a chance if they’re successful…”

Lights ate their way through a door, sparks flew…

And then they were there – men in uniforms. He found himself lying on the floor, his arms and legs didn’t obey him like they should, and then the men were above him.

He was kicked and hit everywhere; booted feet met his abdomen, his back, his legs, his shoulders. Gloved fists smashed down on his head and face he was barely able to cover with his slow arms. Pain from almost every part of his body shot through him, blinded him, and slowed down his already foggy mind. Hateful shouts called him ‘bastard’, ‘creature’ and ‘monster’, while his own screams of agony echoed in his ears. He looked up and saw a tall, bulky man standing above him, the slightly familiar features glowing in glee, before the sole of a boot aimed for his face. He managed to turn his head away in the last moment but the boot hit his temple and everything was dark for a moment…

Then a long corridor…

Lights that gleamed above him, while he was roughly pulled among two men down a hallway…

A small room…

The faces of his former tormentors mixed with those he knew from earlier times – one of them bore the bitter taste of one of his ugliest humiliations he had ever experienced…

And there it was – the long object that had become his greatest horror…

They dragged him towards it – towards his certain death. He tried to fight…
A man who attempted to stop them but didn’t succeed…

He was in the object – in the tube…

He waited for the iciness to put him under, to send him to everlasting sleep – to death…

The cover closed…

No!

He had to survive!

His family… Joaquin… JIM!

His soul screamed for its mate, begged his tormentors to stop, to let him live, to give him a chance to stay with those he loved…

“Nien, wake up! It’s all right, Honey, you are safe.”

That voice…

That voice that meant security, warmth… love!

Gentle lips touched his, soft fingers stroked his face, a strong feeling of affection flooded his mind and soul…

The world around him melted away and gasping for air he tore his eyes open.

Jim’s beloved face hovered inches above his own; worry and love lay in his gaze.
“Hush, Sweetheart, you’ve nothing to fear. You are safe now – here, with me.”

Only slowly did the dreams release their hold on Khan’s mind. He looked around him and saw in the light of a little lamp sand-painted walls, listened to the soft peeping of some monitors and smelled dry air and a faint scent of something he knew, but couldn’t place at the moment.

And there was Jim – his soulmate; bending over him and shielding him against everything that could harm him. Just like the moment he had come to the rescue…

For a long moment Khan closed his eyes; imagination flickering through his mind: Of the minutes he lay on a cold floor with Jim curled around him while someone injected him with something before a device was placed on his face and he could breathe easier again… Then new pain while again lights flashed above him on a moving ceiling, then fresh but hot air that changed into cooler one, heavy with the smell of medicaments… and then – nothing.

He moistened his lips as he realized that these pictures and the nightmare he had just suffered weren’t phantoms of his subconscious, but true memories. The raging hate he had been bestowed with, the brutal blows and kicks, the hateful insults, the cold ignorance of his agony, the unaffected indifference with which he was forced to face certain death… This all hadn’t been a bad dream, but reality.

His memories were back – but he wished that they would have stayed hidden. For the first time in his life he would have preferred to be ignorant instead of learning the truth.

“I remember,” he whispered; feeling a soft burning behind his closed lids as the wounds in his soul began to bleed again. “I remember now.”

Jim felt his throat tightening. “Oh Honey,” he murmured as he realized what the returning memories did to his beloved. He could feel it – deep in his own very being.

“Is everything all right here?”

Bones stood in the entrance. He had skipped to put on a top over his sleeping pants as his monitor gave an alert to Khan’s flipping life signals. A dozy Joaquin stood beside him and looked with tired, big eyes at his brother.
McCoy had returned very late from the hospital and had given Jim a short report of everything, before he went straight to bed. Before his return he had had a small dinner with Corrigan, who would take the night-watch, before Bones would come back to his patient in the early morning.

“Nien got his memories back,” Jim told him quietly and looked over his shoulder; knowing that Khan didn’t want Joaquin and McCoy to see the tears which prickled beneath his closed lids in the long dark lashes. “I’ll handle it. Go back to bed, you two.”

Joaquin wanted to protest, but before he could utter a word, Leonard pressed a finger against his lips, took the Augment-boy’s arm and pulled him along with him. “Night, you two. If you need me, you know where to find me,” he said softly, before he closed the door. He knew that it would be far better for Khan to speak with Jim now than getting a sedative.

Kirk’s attention returned to the Augment. He saw the tight expression Khan wore – obviously the enhanced man was trying to suppress the rising emotions which raged through their bond. He felt dismay, fright, horror and bitterness battering against his mind like a giant wave of sorrow. For a moment he drifted back in time to those minutes in his apartment after he had told Khan about the survival of the other Augments. Nien had been likewise affected – only with one big difference. Then his breakdown had been because of immense relief mixed with old sorrow, now his feelings were raging because of new terror he had faced only a few days before.

Not wasting any time, Jim rose, lifted Khan’s blanket and slipped under it – taking the stiff, yet slightly trembling man in his arms; careful not to hurt him because of the still healing injuries. For several minutes Nien remained stiff and didn’t react at all – his usually so brilliant mind was turning in circles. The voices and pictures of what had happened played within his mind over and over again, like a tape on a loop, while his intellect tried to chase them away and in the end attempted to ignore them. With little success…

“They didn’t stop,” were the first hoarse words Khan whispered suddenly. “…I was on the floor – couldn’t fight back, couldn’t even move, everything hurt so much, I begged them to stop, but they… they didn’t.” He gulped. “They simply didn’t.”

Jim felt a lump rising in his throat, as his mind confronted his heart with the harsh reality of something he had already known deep down. Finnegan and the others would have beaten Nien truly to death, if it wouldn’t have been for the orders Finnegan had been forced to obey.

And in this moment Kirk realized that Khan had been through something he once had chosen for Jim. All those weeks back the Augment had come to his apartment to give him exactly this kind of death – only it hadn’t come to that. Khan’s instincts had forced him to alter his plans. His feelings for him – Jim Kirk – had already been too deep, without even acknowledging them before it was too late for any change. And if Kirk thought closer on to those moments, something else came to his
attention. Khan could have beaten him to death within a dozen seconds, yet he didn’t. Something had held him back after the fury of their combat was stopped by the door-bell and Kirk’s angry neighbor. Something had made Khan pause afterwards; had made him simply hold Jim at bay while voicing threats instead of acting on them. And the young captain was convinced that this all wasn’t only because of his own blood Khan had smelled in Jim’s body.

No!

Something deep in the Augment had tried to stop him from carrying out his revenge in this way. Something had forced Khan to handle Jim gently during and after the seduction; making him care for him even when they were – technically – still mortal enemies.

And it had nothing to do with the fact that Khan had and would never violate someone in the way he had endured as boy and later at Connelly’s hands.

What had driven Khan even in those minutes in Jim’s apartment was humanity; despite his deep mourning of his people he thought to be lost forever and the fact that he thought Kirk to be guilty.

Humanity had been the reason for him to fight the pirates at the outpost to keep Federation citizens safe.

Humanity had been the reason he risked revealing himself to Starfleet when he warned of the planned attack of Tammeron.

Humanity had been the reason to get Diego out of the burning part of the orbital station above Aldebaran – and Khan’s whole action aboard the doomed station.

Despite anything the people of the past and some of the present believed, Khan Noonien Singh had far more humanity in him than many casual humans were able to feel or to act on.

And the search for humanity in others had been the reason why Khan had entrusted him, Kirk, with how to get in touch with him again. Those sub-space talks before the disaster on Turkana… they had been nothing more than a silent plea from the Augment for someone to accept him – and for Jim to show that the human race could do better than in the gory past of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.
Kirk and Khan had begun to really understand each other even before they turned true lovers. And before their stay on Aldebaran it had once again had been humanity that had steered Khan’s decision to come to Kirk’s aid.

Jim would never forget that Nien had put him over his own and his people’s sake as he came to his rescue on Turkana.

Turkana…

Jim had been delivered to the same cruel brutality with no hope of escape – until Khan showed up and broken him out of the hell-hole. The horror that followed the young captain in dark dreams afterwards were so like what Nien had to endure now – and Jim remembered all too well how the Augment held him on his bunk in his arms to comfort him; accepting him despite of his shown weakness and tears.

Sweet Lord, how similar was the situation now, only the other way around.

“I know what you faced,” Jim murmured; brushing his lips over his beloved’s suddenly icy forehead. “I know how it is – the hate of people you’ve never met in person, yet they treat you like you were dirt – as if you had earned every pain they inflict on you. You… can’t grasp their wrath, don’t know why they hate you so much and how to stop them… to make them see what they do to you and how wrong they are. You can only try to avoid the blows – and hope that they will stop. But they don’t.” Pure empathy echoed from Kirk’s soul to that of the mentally suffering Augment.

Khan’s brilliant mind understood instantly the explanation for the strong understanding he felt from his soulmate. Jim was maybe the only one in his social environment who was able to comprehend what had been done to him – not only in body, but also in soul. Jim had been through the same – on Turkana. He had faced the same brutality, the same cruelness…

Jim wasn’t surprised that Nien didn’t answer, but he knew that his beloved was listening. He moved his head and pressed another sweet warm kiss to the Augment’s surprisingly cold forehead despite his still lasting fever. “I only wished I could have stopped them like you did for me on Turkana. I… was too late to hinder them carrying out their stirred up hatred, forgetting in their raging fit that they were attacking a sensitive living man who was already weakened by a sedative. I was too late to spare you… this horror.” He felt tears rising in his eyes and quickly swallowed down the lump in his throat. Nien needed his strength now, not his pity – or self-accusations. Yet he couldn’t stop himself from whispering, “I’m sorry, Nien. I’m so sorry that I let you down like this and…”

“Don’t!” Khan croaked. “Don’t apologize.”
Jim felt his heart sinking – thinking for a moment that he had truly failed Nien and that the Augment was disappointed in him. But he didn’t need to fear. Khan’s next words proved the deep link they had with each other anew.

“You have nothing to apologize for. You came after me, you fought your way through corridors full of enemies, and you didn’t hesitate to battle your own people – misguided as they were. You… you saved me, Jim. You came in time to… to stop Dashwood and Conelly from… putting me back into cryosleep – a sleep I would have never woken up from again. You stopped them.” He took a deep breath; Jim’s familiar scent calmed his raging nerves at least a little bit. “You saved me,” he whispered again; relaxing the tiniest bit. He felt the younger man’s arms tighten around him, and a feeling of security washed over him for a moment.

It was over.

He was no longer threatened.

His family, Jim and his friends, and he himself were safe now – here, on New Vulcan.

What happened, happened. There was no changing the past. He had faced hate before, had been treated like an animal often enough in his life to develop some inner walls against it. He always overcame the ghosts of those events; he would manage to do it again – eventually. He would go on like always… even if he didn’t know how in the moment. His intellect realized that he maybe had been brutalized one time too often now – that he wouldn’t be able to shake off the memories of those agonizing minutes like he did before, but he refused to admit it. He was tired, that was all.

“I would move the Earth and heavens to save you,” Jim murmured; kissing his brow again. “I will always come for you, Nien, will always be there as long as I live. If you are uncertain of everything, but not of this. I would cross hell to get you out of it.”

It was a vow – one Kirk had already made with other words, yet it gave the shaken man in his arms new reassurance.

“I know,” Khan murmured; exhaustion rising in him like a night after the sun had vanished behind the horizon. “I know…”

Jim felt how Nien relaxed utterly and he didn’t need to look at the small pale face to realize that
Khan had fallen asleep. Stroking gently through the now really sticky, dirty hair, Kirk held his beloved close; hoping that his presence was enough to keep more nightmares from Khan’s slumber away…

Kirk overslept – after a very restless night. Over and over again he had woken up and had listened to the breathing rhythm beside him or had listened into himself; fumbling with mental fingers for the bond between him and Nien to learn if the Augment was maybe plagued by more nightmares, but despite some uncomfortable stirrings the enhanced man slept fitfully through the night.

In the end Jim joined his deep slumber and only woke up, as a far too warm, strong long hand gently shook his shoulder. Blinking groggily in the bright daylight that streamed through the uncovered window, he needed a moment to sort out where he was. On his shoulder lay a tousled dark shock of hair and a long, fever-warm arm was wrapped around him.

‘Nien!’ he realized, but before he could gather further thoughts, he was shaken again – this time a little bit more firmly.

Turning his head his gaze found the weathered, angular face of Selek hovering over him – one eyebrow raised and with something close to amusement in his dark eyes. “I apologize for waking you up, Jim,” he whispered, “but I have news.”

Starfleet-training kicked in as the young captain went wide awake from one second to the other. Careful not to disturb his soulmate’s sleep, he untangled himself from the Augment and sat up. “And?” he murmured, while he slipped from beneath the blanket – Selek making room for him.

“T’Pau agrees,” was all the High Minister answered. “I already informed Leonard. He, Healer Sorel and Dr. Corrigan are going to wake up our special friend.”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Well, the whole scenario with the failing cryotube didn’t turn out as nasty as you maybe thought. On the other hand to wake up the Augments without Khan will be a big challenge – and to keep Nien more or less in the dark to spare him more stress, will be even more troublesome. And then there is still the question if you can keep Khan in the dark at all… And he really needs rest after his memories returned.

Given all these new facts, I don’t want to reveal what will happen within the next chapter. I only can promise you another roller-coaster of emotions, some more problems and trouble, among some sweet scenes.

I hope you liked the new chapter and, like always, I’m curious about your thoughts.

Have a nice start into the next week,

Love

Your Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi my dear readers,

Sorry for the new delay, but like always I was too busy to finish the chapter sooner. Therefore you'll get something for the heart – an emotional rollercoaster, so to say.

So, no long words now.

Enjoy the next chapter – and thank you so much for the feedback.

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 88 – Pain and joy

“And you really think to keep Noo in the dark will be better for him?” Joaquin looked skeptically at his brother’s bondmate, who emptied his cup of tea; a bowl with almost untouched cereal stood on the table beside him. They were in McCoy’s and Weiss’ room because they didn’t want to disturb Khan’s still lasting sleep – and they didn’t want him to listen to their conversation.

“What do you think will be his first and only reaction if he learns of the almost-disaster yesterday – and that we are going to wake up Otto?” Kirk simply asked and watched the Augment-boy, who grimaced and finally even rolled his eyes.

“He would try to get up and go to the hospital, not caring about his own injuries,” Joaquin admitted; knowing his brother far too well.

Jim nodded. “See my point?”

“Yes,” Weiss sighed, before he bit his lips for a few seconds. “But you know that he could get furious when he learns later that we kept something like this from him?”

The young captain took a deep breath. “Even if I loathe the mere thought of arguing with your brother, I’d rather risk his anger than his relapse. His broken bones are still mending and the TBI is
still dangerous for him. I have no problem of getting an earful from him, but watching him hurting himself because of his stubbornness would be a problem for me.” He looked at Joaquin who suddenly grinned at him. “What?”

“That’s the pot calling the kettle black,” the Augment-boy smirked. “As far as I’ve learned by now you and Noo are equals when it comes to stubbornness.”

“Hey!” Jim feigned to be hurt. “I’m simply strong-minded.”

“The understatement of the year,” Weiss chuckled.

“I’ve to agree wiz Joaquin,” sounded a quiet voice from the door. “You are very strong-minded, Keptin.”

Kirk and Weiss turned around and faced the wide smiling Chekov and Riley.

“Are you calling your captain a mule-head, Mr. Chekov?” Jim asked sternly, yet the laughter in his eyes and the broad smirk betrayed his amusement.

“Njet, sir, zat I would never do,” Pavel said innocently.

“Yes, but you think it – just admit it, Mister.”

“Thoughts are free,” piped up Kevin, then he and his companion stepped into the room – greeting Joaquin by slapping him on the shoulder and beaming at him.

“How are things up there?” Jim wanted to know, pointing a finger to the ceiling.

“Not ze same wizout you, Mr. Spock, Doctor McCoy and Lieutenant Uhura,” Chekov sighed. “Ze repairs are proceeding, but… ze mood isn’t good. Ze whole crew worries for you four – and for Khan.”

Joaquin felt warmth rising in him as he got another proof that his brother had truly found a place in
this new time where he belonged and that there were people who regarded him as one of them.

“Well, at least Khan is out of the woods given his injuries, but the rest…” McCoy spoke up as he entered the room; coming from the next room where he had checked on Khan. He had heard the last sentence and despite his usual sarcastic manners he also felt soft joy that the whole crew was concerned about Jim, Spock, Nyota, Khan and himself. He caught Kirk’s asking glance and said, “Khan’s readouts are okay. He’s healing well, yet some of his brain parts are in uproar. I think it’s a result of the returned memories.”

Jim nodded slowly. “He… he was stiff and almost beside himself last night. He didn’t take his up-welling memories well, as you can guess. I fear that they resulted in a kind of shock.”

Bones made an affirming gesture. “I agree. Selek already told us that Khan is deeply traumatized, and Spock confirmed this after his mind-meld with him in the hospital. The man has been through so much that most other people would have broken by now – and I fear that he is only a hairs-width away from it, too. I’d advice sparing him anything that could upset him further. He needs calmness and peace to come to terms with what happened to him – again, as I have to point out. As far as I understood Spock, Khan has been through very serious shit from young age until now, and even an Augment has a breaking-point. So none of you should say anything that gives him new reason to be on alert.”

“Understood,” Jim acknowledged – giving Joaquin a pointed glance, who nodded. Pavel and Kevin affirmed McCoy’s instruction with an “Aye, sir!” before they drove their attention to Joaquin.

“You’ve been here for quite a while now. Care to show us around?” Kevin asked him.

“Boys, you can do whatever you want except for disturbing the daily routine here or the Vulcan priests,” Kirk said; slipping easily back into his captain-role. “Don’t talk loud, no childish games and please no displays of temper. It’s a great honor that T’Pau permitted us to stay here and to allow you two to visit your friend.” His firm glance wandered from Chekov to Riley and back. “I really would be greatly disappointed if I’m confronted with any kinds of complaints. Understood?”

Promptly the two ensigns saluted. “Aye, aye, sir.” The snappy salute lost its seriousness as Weiss lazily tipped two fingers at his temple, drawling an “Aye, Captain.”

Pavel and Kevin had some effort to keep down the bubbling laughter, while Jim closed his eyes, praying for patience. Sweet Lord, had he been so cocky once, too? Yes, he had been as he clearly remembered. Grimacing at the three young men he quickly ruffled Joaquin’s hair like he would do with a younger brother; chuckling, “You’re impossible.” Then he turned to leave – and Weiss
became very serious again.

“Dr. McCoy? Please keep me updated, okay?”

Bones nodded with sympathy. “I will.” He slipped the strap of his tricorder over his right shoulder and took his med-scanner. “I’ll inform Jim about the process and he passes the messages to you, okay?”

Joaquin made an affirming gesture and left the room; ignoring the curious glances of his two friends. As soon as the three young men had vanished, Kirk took a deep breath and addressed his CMO, “What do you think? How long will the process last?”

Bones shrugged. “That isn’t easy to say. Joaquin needed some time because his body was weakened by the malfunction of his tube. Mr. Hoffmann was luckier. We could put him into stasis before his body had to struggle too much. If everything runs smooth, I think he’ll be awake by tomorrow.”

Jim pursed his lips and stepped to the window, before he murmured, “I think Jo should be there when Otto awakes. I can imagine that Otto will have some kind of shock when he learns that he is on a strange planet with ‘aliens’ around him. Jo’s presence will give him some assurance that he and the others are not in danger.”

“Good idea,” Leonard agreed. “What about Khan?”

Kirk looked back over his shoulder. “What do you mean?”

“I said that Khan shouldn’t be upset about anything, but given the new situation with the cryotubes and Otto, I don’t think we have any other chance than to do some damage control.” At Jim’s confused face, he added, “For in case that you have forgotten, your sweetheart is mentally linked to the closest of his crew members – his brothers and sisters. Don’t you think that he will simply feel that one of his brothers is awake? How, do you think, will he react?”

Kirk stared at him; realizing for the first time that it was more or less impossible to keep Nien in the dark concerning the change of not one, but of all his family-members’ condition. He moistened his lips. “You said that he shouldn’t get upset and…”

“Jim! He will know – as you are certainly aware of. Hell, he sensed the tiniest changes in Joaquin
from afar. Right, the boy is his charge, but given the information you shared with me concerning Otto, these Paolo, Rodriguez and Katie, they are very close to Khan, too. I do think that he will be able to sense Mr. Hoffmann’s awakened presence despite the distance between here and the hospital. And then he will realize that we didn’t tell him about it. Do you think that will be wise?”

Jim sighed and pinched his nose. “This is something I’m still working on.”

Bones rolled his eyes. “I don’t think that there is anything you could ‘work’ with. After all I witnessed from you and Spock, mental links can’t be fooled. Heavens, the hobgoblin comes running every time you’re in big distress and I remember several situations in which you got all nervous because your ‘belly told you that something isn’t right with Spock’ – and it turned out be right. Mental links just work like that – and I’m certain that Khan will feel Otto being awake the moment this European giant opens his eyes.”

Biting his lips, Kirk pondered over the given possibilities. “Well, you said yourself that Nien shouldn’t be upset at the moment. And if he learns that one of his closest friends was in danger and is stuck in a stasis-chamber right now, he’ll be more than a little bit itchy. And just think of his reaction if he learns of the chance that all cryotubes are about to fail within the next weeks. He would be out of bed within a blink of an eye, despite his own condition.”

McCoy crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Yet there will be no way to keep Khan in the dark. He’ll learn of it sooner or later – and just think of his reaction then. He has come to trust you utterly. Don’t you think that he will feel betrayed that you didn’t tell him about his family, even if you did it only to protect him?”

Jim shortly pressed his lips in a thin line. “You sound like Joaquin.”

“Then maybe you should think about our arguments. They certainly are not that wrong.” He sighed. “It’s your decision, but I think the aftermath of you keeping something like this from Khan will be far more upsetting for him than telling him the unpleasant truth from the beginning.”

“In other words, whatever I do, it will be wrong – the one or other way,” Jim whispered.

Bones stepped beside him and clapped him on the shoulder. “You just have to decide what of the two possibilities will be the better one – and given your way of words I think to tell him the plain truth will the only solution without damaging what you two have gained so far.” He smiled encouragingly at Kirk, before he walked to the door. “I’ll keep you updated.” He looked back one time. “Oh, shall I inform Spock about the decision to wake up the Augments, or are you going to do it?”
Jim grimaced. “I… would appreciate it if you would call Spock. I don’t want to be caught by Khan at the phone, speaking with Spock about the Augments before Nien learns of it. Could make him angry and…”

“And upsetting him more than necessary is not an option – from a doctor’s point of view,” Leonard winked at him. “I’ll tell your dear hobgoblin about it. Maybe we can meet at the hospital – after all Sarek will be released today.”

“Give Sarek my greetings,” Jim asked him and the CMO nodded.

“Of course. Until later.”

The door closed behind him and Kirk was alone – alone with many things to ponder about.

ST***ST

“Not so mighty and superior now, are you, freak?” Another blow was delivered to his belly, another kick was added to his back the moment he curled himself into a tight ball. More kicks hit him, on the upper leg, against the shoulder, his back, even his feet – fists followed quickly.

“Stop it!” he rasped; being more in pain than ever before, while sheer mortal fear erupted in him. Even slowed down by the sedatives his mind realized that he was absolutely helpless and could do nothing more than endure what was happening to him. “Stop!” he gasped again.

Harsh laughter and more blows were all that followed.

“It talks in single words like a toddler. You really think he’s all mighty and a genius?” a second voice taunted.

“You have no idea of what this beast is capable!” the first voice answered, before it continued, “This is for intervening with the farm-boy!” A further brutal kick broke his arm. “And this is for hitting me!” New pain shot through his body.
A cruel hand buried in his hair and tore his head up; agony pierced his whole being as a fist collided with his jaw. “Yes, regrettably!” The first voice was so close; breath grazed his skin. “Otherwise I would send this Frankenstein-monster to where it belongs – to hell!” Another blow – and then everything melted into a blur...

Khan woke up with a gasp; the hateful words still echoed in his mind, while he thought for a moment he could still feel the violence that had been bestowed on him. Only as his mind grasped his surroundings – the private atmosphere of the room, the sunshine, the sandy colored walls, the peace around him – he became fully awake.

He was on New Vulcan, in this Vulcan abbey – safe and well cared for.

The phantoms of what happened to him only days ago melted away – at least a little bit, yet he could still feel them lurking in the depths of his subconscious.

Lifting his head Nien realized that he was alone. He heard the soft peeping of the medical monitor, some quiet voices down the hallway talking in an alien language – presumably Vulcan – and the opening and closing of a door, otherwise it was silent.

Where was anyone? Khan was certain that his nightmare had made the med-monitor give an alert and until now the good doctor had come running every time that happened. Not to speak of Jim who was at his side as soon as he – Khan – only was about to wake up. And Joaquin? There was no trace of his little brother, too.

Odd!

Really odd!

Not that he complained. After all he was not only an adult, but also an Augment – the former leader of millions of people! He really didn’t need anyone to hold his hand during sleep because he got some bad dreams, but somehow he had become used to finding Jim beside him as soon as he left dreamland.

Laying back his gaze trailed to the ceiling; its warm color of sand was calming. The enhanced man
was still shaken from the dream – from the memories which had risen during his sleep. He remembered every detail by now: the pain, the brutal blows and kicks which were delivered to him without any restraint, the cruel words, the utter hate he faced without even knowing the men except for one – Jim’s old school rival Finnegan.

It hadn’t been the first time Khan had been exposed to such treatments, yet every time it happened it didn’t only hurt his body but also his soul. He still couldn’t comprehend why people who didn’t know him in person met him with such loathing. His rational mind of course concluded the reason for the people’s reaction: fear. Fear of him as an unnatural being; fear of him because he was born from a test tube; fear of him because of his strengths and his intelligence – and fear because he wasn’t human. Not in the traditional way of sense. It was intangible that the people of today accepted aliens, trusted them and made friends with them – even married them – but had problems with accepting a synthetically enhanced human from their own planet.

It would never change, this much he had come to realize by now. Jim, McCoy and the others – even Spock – had befriended him (in the Vulcan’s case it was a big victory to have gained not his friendship but his respect), yet he knew deep down in his very being that he and his family would never be fully accepted from the original human race. As much as men had proceeded in evolution tolerating a synthetic being among them was something no man or woman would ever be able to get along with.

And it pained. He knew that it was an illusion to hope for acceptance among the human race, yet some childish hope had never given up on this dream. And look where it had gotten him: Beaten into a bloody pulp who only survived because today’s medicine was something close to miracle-work and because of a half-Vulcan who chose to save him because he was his best friend’s bondmate.

Khan sighed and bit his lips. His clever mind knew what he was doing – that he was about to spiral down to darkness once again, yet he couldn’t stop it. Something had broken in him as he was kicked and punched over and over again, despite the fact that he lay already on the floor, unable to defend himself. The panic that had risen in him as the cover of his cryotube closed, knowing that the icy sleep he was about to face would lead to certain death, had done the rest.

Khan Noonien Singh was tired of fighting – tired of trying to find a place in the world. Yes, he had found one, beside Jim, but did he really belong into this century – in this world at all? He didn’t think so. Yes, he was being unfair towards Jim’s ‘family’, who had taken him inside their circle, but these officers were outstanding in any sense of the word, so they couldn’t count as ‘usual’. The casual humans would never, ever, approve of him or his crew. He would remain an outcast, despite what he had done during the war within the last weeks – and, what almost shocked him, he didn’t care.

He was about to care of nothing at all anymore, except for Jim.
Jim, who was sitting on the edge of his bed and looked with worried eyes at him, and…

One moment? Jim was here? And he, Khan, hadn’t even recognized him coming in?

Alas, he was far more off the edge than thought.

“You okay?” Kirk’s voice was soft and warm; betrayed his concern.

Was he okay? No, certainly not, but he didn’t want to worry the younger man even more than he already was.

“Yes,” he mumbled.

The young captain frowned. “Liar,” he said quietly with a teasing tone adding to his gentle voice. “You can put on your poker-face all you want, but I look through you, honey. You’re anything but ‘okay’.” He reached out and cupped one of Nien’s cheeks in his hand; his thumb stroke soft circles on the impossibly high cheekbone. “You forgot that I can sense it when you are troubled. I could feel it even when I was outside in the gardens, speaking with one of the priests who is a kind of gardener. It made me rush back to the house, you know.” He bent over the Augment and pressed a kiss to the still warm forehead. “What was it that upset you so, sweetheart? Another nightmare?”

For a moment Khan was really tempted to tell Kirk of his dreams, but he decided against it. He didn’t want to add more concern to his bondmate’s shoulders. So he simply nodded and took a deep breath; the familiar scent of his beloved calmed him like it always did.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Jim asked; sensing that Nien withheld something from him, but didn’t push for an answer, as Khan only shook his head. Sighing, Kirk let his fingers comb through the sticky strains of the Augment’s dark hair. “Alight, baby, but if you want to talk about it, I’m here, okay?”

Making an affirming gesture, Khan drove his attention away from the younger man towards the table. Kirk instantly knew what his bondmate needed and rose. “I’ll bring you a glass of water. Are you hungry?”

“No, not really,” Nien murmured while he watched Jim pouring him a glass of water from the carafe that stood on the table. For a second it struck him that a race with advanced technology like the
Vulcans still stocked their water in carafes, and then he realized that this wasn’t the usual case but a kind of luxury. The water would turn stagnant within a few hours and would have been poured away, yet it was served like this to offer some individuality to the abbey’s guests.

Jim returned with the glass. “No wonder, after all you’re hanging on IVs for days now.” He helped Khan to sit up and offered him the glass the former dictator took; careful not to move his broken arm. His hand shook slightly as he lifted the glass; hating it to feel so weak. Kirk’s first impulse was to help him, but he knew what he would feel if he would be the one on the biobed. He would loath it to be too weak to even hold a damn glass! Therefore he simply remained on alert to react if needed, otherwise he watched the older man slowly sipping the water.

His glance roamed over the slender, pale figure. Nien was obviously shaken and far from being healed – inside and outside. The mere thought of Khan leaving bed now was absurd, but Kirk assumed that his bondmate would try exactly that as soon as he learned about Otto Hoffmann. Yet Bones’ and Joaquin’s arguments of keeping Khan in the dark concerning one of his brothers wouldn’t do anyone good – neither him nor Jim. On the other hand, Nien had just come out of a very disturbing nightmare, this much was for certain. To be confronted with another personal problem could harm him more.

Khan had emptied his glass and handed it Kirk; catching the young captain looking intensely at him while being lost in thought. Something wasn’t right; Nien felt it in his bones.

“What happened?” he asked quietly; startling Jim.

“What do you mean?” Kirk asked; face far too innocent, while he put the glass on the nightstand.

The Augment rolled his eyes. “Give me a little bit of credit here. I may be injured, but my mind is still working. Your thoughts are a kind of rollercoaster. Don’t think I couldn’t feel it. So, out with it.”

Kirk stared at him. Dammit! He had raised his inner shields as he had stepped into the room, but obviously he hadn’t been able to keep them in place. He really needed some more sessions with Selek, no questions.

“You’re doing better, aren’t you?” he tried to distract the Augment. “Two days ago you could barely talk, yesterday you had a little conversation with me and now you’re sitting there talking.” He beamed at him. “I’m so happy that you’re out of the woods.”
Those green-blue eyes watched him; some of the old Khan was blinking through the tired expression of the older man’s face. “You’re avoiding my question,” he simply stated. “Something is troubling you – and I can’t shake off the assumption that it has to do with me.”

“Why would you think something like this?” Kirk asked; faking surprise.

Khan narrowed his eyes. “It’s not your style to duck out of something, you’d rather face it.” His glance found the door. “Where is Joaquin?”

“Out in the gardens with Chekov and Riley. T’Pau allowed them to visit Jo, and they beamed down a few hours ago to keep him company until their shift starts.”

Nien nodded slowly. “And where is McCoy? I’m sure my nightmare made this thing over there” – he flipped a thumb at the med-monitor – “beep like a bevy of sparrows in uproar, yet he didn’t come running. Odd, don’t you think so?”

Kirk flashed him a charming smile – a smile of hiding something else. “Bones isn’t here at the moment. Sarek will be released from hospital today and…”

“And McCoy is his personal doctor all of sudden so that he has to oversee the ambassador’s release?” Khan interrupted him, lifting both brows in a mixture of mockery and beginning irritation. “Jim, what are you not telling me?”

This time Kirk bit his lips; his mind and heart battled with each other. And the moment his instincts joined the struggle, he listened to what his belly was telling him. It always turned out to be the best if he listened to his belly, and not to his mind – well, almost all the time.

“There was an incident yesterday Bones is taking care of,” he began hesitantly.

The Augment only sat there; looking expectantly at the captain; urging him silently to go on.

Jim sighed. There was no going back now. “Sonak, a Vulcan Elder and distantly related to Spock’s clan, is a technician to the heart and monitors your crew since arrival. He called Bones yesterday and…” He quickly bent down, took Khan’s bony shoulders in his hand and tried to hold the enhanced man back; knowing exactly why the Augment wanted to leave bed. “Nien, listen! No one was hurt or is in danger! They are all okay, promise.” he said quickly; seeing and feeling his
bondmate’s rising fear. Those sea-colored eyes seemed to pierce him, as Khan rasped, “What happened? Tell me!” It was a demand, not a question. And Kirk could so understand it. He would have reacted the same way if the lives of Spock, Bones, Nyota, Scotty, Hikaru or Pavel would have been on stake.

He sat down on the bed’s edge; still holding Khan’s shoulders – one to restrain him, two to calm him. “One of the cryotubes began with the wakening-process. Sonak installed a monitoring system that alerted him as one of the cryotube’s systems changed if its sound and its display gave signals. He instantly alerted Bones, and Spock, he and I beamed to the hospital. Corrigan, one of Healer Sorel’s protégées who was also involved in your surgery, waited for us and took us underground to the cave where your crew is hidden. Sorel was there, too. I also called Scotty to beam down to have a closer look at the tube – after all he worked with you in our medbay as you two checked all the tubes through. It became clear that something had triggered the wakening process, and so we took the cryotube upstairs. Your brother was put into stasis – he isn’t in any danger.”

Kirk felt how tense Khan was, while he sensed over their shared bond how anxious and upset the older man was. “Who is it?” Nien asked hoarsely; his heart beat painfully hard behind his rips. “I helped Dr. McCoy to catalogue every cryotube’s inhabitant and…”

“It’s Otto Hoffmann,” Jim interrupted him gently and heard how Nien took a sharp breath. Losing the grip on Khan’s shoulders, he took the slender, now trembling hands into his. “Bones and Corrigan monitored his life signs for many hours and he was absolutely stable as Bones finally returned from hospital yesterday late evening. His pulse and breath has increased, but he is still deep asleep.” He bent forwards and rested his forehead against Nien’s; recognized the soft quiver that went through the Augment’s body. “He is safe, honey, believe me. Corrigan, Bones and Sorel watch over him. That’s the reason why Bones isn’t here. He left to take over the watching-shift.”

Khan bit his lips and tried to stop the tremble of his hands, but without results. After all he was through; he now had to learn that one of his closest brother’s life had been at stake while he lay and slept. Slept, for Shiva’s sake! That was unacceptable. “Was he ever in danger?” he wanted to know; his voice still hoarse from the strong emotions which filled his chest with anguish.

“I am not sure,” Jim said truthfully. “Sonak and Spock mentioned that the wakening process had begun but the air support system didn’t kick in. Therefore they, Bones and Corrigan carried the whole cryotube to the next stasis chamber upstairs and put Otto into it. I think we can thank Sonak and his installed monitoring system that nothing bad really happened.”

Khan closed his eyes; feeling guilt and shame spreading through his heart and soul. He had been about to lose Otto – and he hadn’t had even the tiniest clue about it. He should have been there to save him. He should have been able to sense his German brother’s distress so that he could act on it. Instead of being alarmed and rushing to Otto, he had lain on this damn bed to nurse some bruises – well, a lot of bruises and inner injuries, as his mind told him sternly, yet…
“I want to see him,” he whispered and felt how Jim’s left hand cupped his cheek again.

“Honey, this is exact the reaction I anticipated – and the reason why I hesitated to tell you at all.” Instantly he found himself in the focus of now angry eyes, and continued softly, “You cannot leave your bed at the moment, Nien, no matter what. You would tear up the inner wounds again if you walk too much, and would feed your TBI with new nourishment that would strap you to bed even longer. Besides, your left leg is broken. Even with the today’s usual bone-menders you need at least two weeks to use your leg at all again.” He winked at him. “Well, given your augmented nature you maybe can strain it a few days sooner, but you’re far from being able to leave this room now or tomorrow or the day after.”

Khan frowned deeply; not happy with Kirk even considering keeping him in the dark of something that important. “Otto is one of my dearest brothers. He would do the same if I…”

“He will do the same as soon as he learns that you are bounded to sick-bed,” Kirk spoke up; again he didn’t let Nien finish the sentence. He already anticipated Khan’s reaction to this special choice of words, and indeed it woke the Nien’s attention immediately.

“He will?” Khan pressed.

Jim smiled. “They are going to wake him up,” he let the cat out of the bag. His smile broadened as he saw how Nien’s eyes became wide as saucers. “And not only him. I talked with Selek yesterday evening and he had a discussion with T’Pau, who agreed with my intention to wake up your sisters and brothers within the next days.”

Nien gasped. “You are going to…?” He gulped as hope was washing over him with the might of a tidal wave. “You’ll wake them up? So soon?”

Kirk nodded. “Neither Scotty, nor Sonak or Spock could detect what triggered Otto’s cryotube to start the wakening process. They assume that it has something to do with it being opened several times while being in full operation – at least that’s Scotty’s opinion. And the system-battery of Otto’s tube was about to be discharged and the emergency system you installed for such a case kicked in – only it didn’t bring the air-supply online. Scotty thinks the batteries have simply outrun their serviceable life and will fail one by one. And this goes maybe for all tubes.”

He saw Nien paling even more and stroked once again through the Augment’s dirty hair. “Don’t fret, honey. We’ll wake up Otto who will help us to start the regular wakening process of the other
cryotubes, before another one of them makes us running like mad to the hospital again. Bones thinks that Otto will be fully awake by tomorrow. During this time Sonak watches over the other cryotubes with hawk-eyes. Should one of them get a hick-up again we’ll beam its inhabitant to the Enterprise’s medbay to put him or her into one of our stasis-chambers, or we bring her or him upstairs to one of the hospital’s stasis-chambers. Sorel is preparing three large halls to contain your brothers and sisters, setting them up with biobeds, monitors, and so on.” He pulled the now shaking man into his arms. He knew exactly what invoked the Augment’s physical reaction. “You’ll see, baby, in a few days you and your family are reunited – finally!”

For a long moment Khan simply sat there, hugged by a – like always – optimistic Jim Kirk. Then the news he heard reached his mind. His chest became wide with too many emotions – hope, joy, disbelief, relief…

They would be woken up – all of them!

He would see them again in a few days, safe, sound and well!

He would listen to Katie’s gentle humor, to Otto’s dry comments, to Paolo’s ramblings about technics, to Rodriguez’ certainly rising curiosity of the alien planet’s geography… Joan, Harley, Omar, Sanchez, John… The names were flooding his heart and soul. They would be reunited with him in a few days…

His always brilliant mind failed him as for several seconds as he wasn’t able to grasp the whole truth – that the time of being separated from his beloved ones was rapidly nearing the end. Wild feelings, too much to handle, flared up in him. He didn’t even realize that tears burnt behind his closed lids or the dry sob that escaped his tight throat.

Jim was hyper-aware of the turmoil that rocked his bondmate’s soul – turmoil of utter delight and almost painful relief. The bad condition Nien was still in, did its own to let the superhuman almost break down – not in sorrow, but in joy and something like redemption. Kirk tightened his hold around the older man’s slender form and laid his head against Khan’s, as the Augment buried his face at Jim’s neck. It really was good to have listened to his instincts and to have told Nien the truth. Jo and Bones had been right. To keep Khan in the dark would have done him no good – both of them.

He felt how Nien’s arms went slowly around his waist, and while Khan held the left arm as still as possible, his right one returned Jim’s embrace almost fiercely. His feelings bombarded the captain’s mind; his shields too weak to resist the emotional wildfire that had overtaken the usually so composed Augment. Yes, Spock and Selek were right. Not only he, but also Nien would have to learn to work with their bond to keep each other and themselves sane.
Something wetted his neck and Jim realized that it was Nien’s tears – tears of heart-melting happiness. Whispering sweet nothingness in his beloved’s ear, he let his hands roam over Khan’s back, into his hair and down again. He really was glad that he had spoken openly with his bondmate. He had the assumption that Khan’s youngest nightmare was connected with his returning memories – cruel memories of most brutal violence. To receive finally such a blissful message, to know that his torment hadn’t been for naught and that he was about to reach the end of the long dark tunnel he was forced to walk, must be like balm for the enhanced man.

Jim heard the door opening behind him and looked back over his shoulder. Joaquin stood there, Chekov and Riley flanking him. Smiling at the Augment-boy and making a short gesture with his head to leave him and Nien, was enough to let Weiss nodding towards him and to retreat; knowing that his brother had learned of the good news.

Kirk pursed his lips; asking himself if all Augments were mental connected like those two, or if it was an example. Well, he would get the answer as soon as Otto would be woken up.

Khan needed some time to calm down and as he finally loosened his embrace around Jim, he looked almost sheepishly at the young captain. “Sorry,” he mumbled; realizing that he must look like a big mess.

“What for?” Jim replied gently. “For being overjoyed to see your family in a few days again?” He tenderly kissed Nien’s dry lips; tasting salt on them. “Your reaction is pretty understandable. Hell, it would have been strange if you wouldn’t have reacted like you did. I know how much you love them and that you missed them terrible. You had to fear for their lives so often, fighting for them. It’s only normal – human! – that you are a little bit overwhelmed now.”

Nien sighed and lowered his gaze; a headache was forming again. “I don’t want to fight anymore,” he whispered. “Yet I know that we will have no other choice. Your and my future are still uncertain – that of my family, too. And…”

Jim brushed his lips over Khan’s temple. “Don’t worry, love. Selek contacted this mysterious lawyer he is almost smitten with. I do believe that this guy will bring us out of the deep water we’re swimming in.”

The Augment looked up; mocking disbelief on his face. “Selek – smitten with someone else than you?!”
Kirk laughed quietly. “Well, he is all ‘he’s the best’ and ‘he’s the only one who can get you out of it’. For a Vulcan that is quite an enthusiastic hymn of praise. Even T’Pau was happy with his decision.”

“T’Pau – happy?” Khan had to chuckle finally. “I haven’t met her until now, but from all I heard of you and what I read about her, I don’t think she will ever do ‘happy’.”

Jim groaned. “All right, she agreed with Selek’s choice – I mean, she really agreed with it. That says a lot.” He smirked. “So don’t get your boxers in knickers and relax. No soup will be eaten as hot as it was cooked.”

“You’re bad with adages like Dr. McCoy.”

“Well, he rubs off on me,” Kirk admitted; smirking like mad. Then he turned serious again. “Jo will accompany Bones and me to the hospital tomorrow to be there when Otto awakes. So... you will be alone for a few hours. Do you think you can manage it?”

Khan glared at him before he grimaced. “I’m not a toddler, James,” he grumbled.

“No, but you are quickly bored – just like me. Hell, I really loath the times I’ve laid on a biobed and had nothing else to do than staring at the ceiling. The minutes were creeping then. And I think it’s the same for you.”

This time the Augment sighed. “As I said, I will manage. Maybe you can give me a PADD to have some distractions, maybe with some literature loaded down on it.” He looked around him. “Do you think there is the tiniest chance to leave this room for a while – maybe resting on some cot outside?”

Jim chuckled. “Just have a look. Really awake for only a few hours and already he has ants in the pants.”

“I don’t wear any pants in the moment – only this damn hospital gown,” Khan muttered. Carefully he lifted his right hand and combed his fingers through his hair. At least he tried to, but his fingers were stuck within the strains, sticky with dried blood and sweat.

Kirk bit his lips. “I know Bones will give me the lecture of my life, but... I think I can organize some help to get you cleaned up. Maybe even we can wash your hair. You’ll feel better afterwards.”
The hope that shone on Nien’s face was utterly different than the hope he had flooded with a few minutes ago. He looked almost… like a boy shortly before being led to the birthday table. “You think this could be done?” he asked; childish joy on his face. It made him look so much younger and almost vulnerable.

Jim snickered and stole a kiss from him. “Just give me a little bit time and I’ll come up with something – before Bones returns. What has been done can’t be change, so he can complain all he wants.” Mischief glittered in his eyes.

Khan couldn’t help himself; he had to chuckle. His beloved reminded him of a little rogue. “You love to mix up everything and everyone, don’t you?”

Kirk shrugged. “Hey, what is life without a little bit fun?” He rose. “I think I’ve already an idea. I’ll be back in a few.” He left – and Nien lay back on the mattress.

He would see his family in a few days again!

He still couldn’t believe it and for a moment new tears threatened to rise, then he closed his eyes and sighed in happiness. Even the new headache didn’t lower his rising moods.

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“How is Mr. Hoffmann doing?” Spock had clasped his hands on his back and looked expectantly at McCoy, who threw a further glance at the read-outs, before he answered,

“Pulse at 38, breath rhythm is increasing.”

The first officer nodded slowly and gazed at the stasis-chamber. The blue shimmer bathed his face in an almost eerie light and made his face even more angular than usual. “So, T’Pau agreed to the captain’s plan to wake all Augments up,” he said slowly.

Bones sighed. “It was the only logical choice if we don’t want to risk the lives of Khan’s family. Jim was right, yet… I’m a little bit at the edge imagining that all these supermen and superwomen will be awake in a few days and Khan not being here to keep them in check. No offense against Joaquin,
but he is a mere boy at the threshold to adulthood. I don’t know if his word will be enough to calm
the others.”

Spock stepped nearer. “Do you fear trouble, Doctor?”

“Trouble is Jim’s middle-name, and given the fact that he is strongly involved in this all, I do have
some second thoughts. Yet, like I already said, we had no other choice. Hoffmann and the others are
still people. Enhanced, yes, but they are human beings. I don’t want to risk their health because we
have to make the last step now, of which we all knew it would happen sooner or later.” He rubbed
his neck. “How is your father doing?”

“Healer Sorel is handing him the release-documents and instructs him about the medicaments and
how to behave within the next days.” Despite the fact that Spock’s face was expressionless like most
times, something close to frustration mirrored in his dark eyes. “I have doubts that Sarek will follow
the latter in detail.”

“Like father so son,” McCoy teased and received a rising brow for it. “If Sarek is only a little bit like
you while being sick or injured, I sympathize with Sorel. To keep you in check is almost
impossible.”

Indignant the half-Vulcan cocked his head. “Doctor, as long as your instructions make sense, I’ll follow them.”

“Yeah, except if the ship is in danger, Jim needs you or you’re bored to death. Then I need additional
eyes in the back of my head to keep you in medbay.” He chuckled. “And I have the certain feeling
that Sarek isn’t the tiniest bit different.”

Spock preferred to skip any reply. Instead of reacting to the CMO’s banter, he turned his attention
back to the Augment in the stasis-chamber. “How long will it last until he is fully awake?”

“Approximately in twenty hours,” came Sorel’s voice from the entrance. The healer entered the room
and continued, “Basing on the standard life-signals of a Terran human, Mr. Hoffmann is stable and
the process of awakening is flawless. Usually the process of wakening someone up from stasis
doesn’t last longer than a few hours, in this case I advised Doctor McCoy to take it slower. Mr.
Hoffmann’s body has to come to terms of getting its full functions back.”

“Logical,” was all Spock said to this.
“Your father is ready to leave,” the healer informed the younger Vulcan. “He expects you in his room.”

The first officer lowered his head in affirmation. “Understood. I’m on my way.” He looked back at McCoy. “Please keep me updated, Doctor. I want to be here when Mr. Hoffmann awakes.”

“Of course,” Leonard nodded.

“Was Mr. Singh informed of the changing of the made plans?” Spock asked further.

The human surgeon sighed deeply. “Ask Jim. He wanted to keep Khan in the dark, because our sleeping beauty has started to get his memories back and reacted badly to them. Jim wants to spare him. Personally I think this will be a mistake and I told him so, but it’s up to him if he tells his sweetheart about the news, or not.”

Spock pursed his lips. “If Sarek’s condition allows it I’ll visit the captain in the afternoon. Good day, Doctor.” He left the room to return to his father’s side; knowing that Uhura had prepared everything at their momentarily shared flat. He was down the hallway as his communicator beeped.

“Spock here.”

“Kirk here,” he heard his friend’s voice. “Spock, I need your help.”

“How can I assist you, Captain?”

At the other end of the line Jim sighed exasperated. “Spock, we are both released from duty. There is really no need to call me ‘captain’.”

“I know that we are released from duty, Jim. It’s the reason why we both are on New Vulcan, together with Dr. McCoy and Nyota.”

Kirk, who stood on the terrace, had to chuckle. He knew that this was Spock’s very own way of
teasing him. “Well, shore-leave is always a good thing – even a forced one can be it,” he smiled, before he turned serious again. “Spock, Nien got his memories back and they do him no good. He’s… depressed. The only thing that cheered him up was me telling him of Otto Hoffmann and that we’re going to wake his crew.”

“So you decided to follow Doctor McCoy’s and Mr. Weiss’ advise,” the Vulcan answered, and Jim frowned.

“How did you know?”

“I’m at the hospital to pick up Sarek, and visited Doctor McCoy to get an update. He told me about Mr. Singh’s condition. So, with what exactly do you need my help?”

Jim smirked. Typical Spock – always coming straight to the point. “Nien is absolutely tired of being sticky, dirty and clad in hospital gown. Concerning the latter I didn’t dare to ask the priests here to help us out with clothes. Therefore I wanted to ask you if you could buy some light Vulcan trousers and tunics, maybe a robe, too. I would do it myself, but a) I don’t know New ShiKhar and where to find the shops, and b) I don’t want to leave Nien in the moment. Despite that he is almost hilarious with the prospect to see his brothers and sisters in a few days again, his returned memories have shaken him badly. He needs me.”

“I understand,” sounded Spock’s voice. “I wanted to visit you anyway in the afternoon. I’ll bring some clothes for Mr. Singh – light ones he can wear on the biobed and after the time he is bound to bed.”

Jim sighed in relief. “Thank you, Spock. I’ll transfer the Credits to your account. I don’t know about the prices here, so… I’ll transfer an amount and pay you the difference after I learned of the exact price.”

For a moment Spock was silent, before he replied almost offended, “Jim, I do have some money spared. I really can spend some Credits without you paying in advance.”

Kirk snickered. “Sorry,” he said; clearly not sorry.

“What do you plan concerning Mr. Singh’s non-existing hygienically status?” his friend wanted to know and the young captain groaned. “We – Jo and I – will wash him.”
“Does Dr. McCoy knows about your intention?”

“No – and it shall remain this way. I know that he has only Nien’s best interests at heart, but Nien’s soul needs a proper healing as bad as his body. And this is my responsibility. We’ll clean him up, help him getting some other clothes on and you will see he’ll bloom up like a flower after a long night.”

The same instant Jim felt his face flushing. Heavens, he was sweet-talking like a lovesick schoolboy.

“Be careful that said flower will not get dehydrated by your plan,” Spock deadpanned – and Jim had to laugh. Vulcans did have humor, no doubt about it.

“No problem.” He hesitated a moment. “So, thank you, Spock. And please give Sarek my regards.”

“This I will do. Until later, Captain.” The link was closed and Kirk rolled his eyes. “It’s ‘Jim’,” he grumbled, and changed the frequency. “Kirk to Enterprise.”

“Enterprise here, Captain,” came the answer instantly.

Jim smiled this time by being addressed with his rank. He knew that he technically wasn’t his Grey Lady’s captain at the moment, yet the crew still regarded him as such. “Lieutenant, please put me through to medbay, Dr. M’Benga.”

“One moment, sir!”

Only seconds later Kirk heard the rich voice of the second CMO. “M’Benga here, Captain. How can I be at your service?”

“Geoffrey, I need a favor from you.” In the next minute he explained what he needed and as the talk ended, everything was settled. Grinning broadly Kirk looked over to Joaquin, Pavel and Kevin, who sat in the shadows of a large tree and were talking with each other. “Well, boys, I’m going to need your help, too,” he whispered and left the terrace; heading to the young Augment and the two ensigns.
McCoy returned in the early evening – tired but relieved. The wakening process was going perfectly and Otto Hoffmann’s body reacted exactly as it should. Bones was glad for it and looked forward to the next day. He had to admit that he was curious to meet another Augment. Joaquin had been a nice surprise. The boy was sweet and affable, contraire to his older brother at first. Leonard wondered how Otto would be – if he would be like Khan or like Joaquin, or completely different.

Suppressing a yawn, he headed to the guest-wing of the abbey and heard Jim, Joaquin and Khan talking as he entered the hallway. Kirk and Weiss were chattering, sometimes joined by the deep rumple of the Augment leader’s baritone. Well, that was a beginning.

But as McCoy stepped into Kirk’s and Khan’s room, he stopped dead in his tracks. The former dictator sat on the biobed, clad in a light Vulcan robe. His hair was clean and a lock fell over his high forehead. He still wore the dark bruises of the brutal violence he had to endure, but he also looked more… content.

“What the hell…” Bones began, meeting Jim’s and Joaquin’s broad smiles and the almost challenging glance of Khan. “How did you…” He stopped again; glaring at Kirk. “That was you!”

Jim grinned at him. “Nien felt dirty and sticky, and so…”

“Have you lost your mind?” Leonard snarled. “Mr. Singh suffers a TBI and has several broken bones, including inner injuries! No strong movements, no stress, no…”

“Calm down, Bones, we took care of everything,” Kirk interrupted him; rolling his eyes. “Nien needed to get the smell and dirt removed. What is the old saying? A healthy mind in a healthy body?”

“Don’t give me a quotation of Freud!” Leonard growled. “Physiology is up to me, kid!” He closed the distance to the biobed’s monitor and checked it, before he glanced down at Khan. “Right, your bones are still mending and your brain activities are not unusual – for you, at least. Yet I ask myself: Do I really want to know how these two stupid boys have managed to wash your hair and put you into clothes without doing any damages to your barely healing injuries?”

Nien simply smirked at him, and it was Jim, who answered, “I had medical help, Bones. The whole medical equipment for such cases – freshly beamed down from the Enterprise and with M’Benga
taking care of everything.”

McCoy whirled around. “You called Geoffrey to…?”

“You were at the hospital to watch Otto, so I asked M’Benga for support. He beamed down with the
cleaning equipment from our medbay, and while Jo and I held Nien, M’Benga washed his hair.
Spock stopped by later and brought fresh clothes and he and I were able to help Nien to put on the
robe. Light trousers and tunics are over there and hopefully Nien can wear them in a few days.” He
pointed to the wardrobe.

Khan knew that the whole thing had held some risk, yet he was incredibly grateful that he was at
least cleaned up with washed hair and shaved jaw. And he really appreciated it to wear something
else than the damn hospital gown. He always had loathed them – in his time and now in this new
century. It made him feel weak – something he would never be able to accept.

“I have to thank Jim and his clever mind that I feel like a human being again,” he said softly. “I know
that you worry about me, Doctor, and I’m grateful for your professional and also friendly concern,
yet I’m more myself again after your colleague, Jim, Joaquin and the two ensigns were done with
me.”

“Yeah, and risked your health!” McCoy snapped.

“Heavens, Bones! M’Benga was here – he is your substitute. Give the man some credit to do his job
right,” Jim sighed.

“And he agreed to your intentions – even given Mr. Singh’s injuries?” McCoy was angry, this much
was clear.

“I do think that M’Benga is able to decide something like this,” Jim answered, while he rose, stepped
beside Leonard and laid a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “We were very careful and Nien did
everything M’Benga asked of him. If M’Benga wouldn’t have agreed to the measurement, we would
have listened to him, but he said it was okay.”

“I’m really glad to be clean again, Doctor,” Khan joined the talk. “At least the stench of these
bastard’s fists, my own dried blood and a lot of sweat don’t bother me anymore.” His right hand
stroke over the soft material of the Vulcan robe. “And to be out of the hospital gown is good as
well.”
Yes, the whole washing-procedure had been a little torture for him, but he had endured the pain gladly to get really clean. It also had been embarrassing that Spock had been forced to lift him on his arms while Jim and Jo stripped him of the hospital gown and clad him in the robe, but even these moments worth the result. He felt like new born – well, almost.

Bones grimaced. “Yes, I do understand you, yet you took a big risk – despite your augmented nature. A TBI is nothing you should take easily, you know.” He pinched his nose. “Right, what’s done is done – and at least it turned out well.” He pointed a stern finger first at Khan and then at Jim. “But no more risky experiments, Gentlemen, or I’m forced to stay here!”

“Are you blackmailing us?” Jim asked and McCoy only snorted.

“I call it ‘discussion with strong arguments’ – the only thing that will go through your thick head, kid.”

“The most important thing is now to wake up my family properly – and Otto in advance,” Khan cut in, and McCoy looked with big eyes first at him, before he smiled at Kirk.

“You decided to listen to me for once? Hurrah, I mark this day red in my calendar.”

Jim only snorted, while Khan commented wryly. “You’ve to mark a lot of days red in your calendar by now.”

“And whose fault is that?” Leonard grumbled. He shook his head, before he sighed. “And now I want to take a nice, decent shower, have a good dinner and then I’ll leave for bed. Tomorrow will be a big day, and I want to be well rested when I welcome Mr. Hoffmann to the 23rd century.” He glanced at Jim and Joaquin. “And you two should hit the bed soon, too – after all you’ll be also at the hospital tomorrow.” He went to the door. “Until later.”

Jim took a deep breath and smiled at the two Augments. “Well, that went better than thought,” he beamed.

Khan only rolled his eyes, while Joaquin began to chuckle. “He really can be scary sometimes – but he is a good man.” He leant back in his chair; looking at his older brother. “Do you really think you can survive tomorrow while we all are being away?”
“Yes, I will,” the former dictator almost groaned. “Stop handling me like a little child, you two!”

“Well, Chekov and Riley could keep your company,” Jo suggested. “They already offered as they learned that I’m away tomorrow and…”

“Let the boys enjoy their spare time for once,” Khan interrupted him. “I will be all right!”

“You are sure?”

This time Nien only groaned and closed his eyes; faking offence. Joaquin promptly snickered and Jim grinned as he saw how his beloved’s mouth curled for a moment. But Kirk couldn’t be fooled. He saw the tension in Nien’s body and behind the cheerful mask Khan wore for their sake. He knew that deep in his soul the Augment leader was filled with worry for the next day. And if he was truthful to himself, Jim Kirk was nervous, too…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yes, it’s understandable that all are nervous, even if they are nervous out of different reasons. The next day will be THE answer if the other Augments are able to fit in the new century and this new world, and how they are going to react to everything. Well, at the moment it’s only one Augment – namely Otto Hoffmann – but is from Khan’s generation like the most other enhanced men and women, and so Otto can be seen as an example.

In the next chapter you’re going to meet him, but not only him. Of course Khan gets bored while being alone, but Jim – who knows him best – has an idea how to distract him.

I hope you liked the new chapter.

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Meeting Otto Hoffmann

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you for the many comments. Even as I told you several chapters ago that the last big show-down was done for now, you certainly assumed that there would come more interesting scenes. Well, besides the fact that Jim, his friends and Nien are – indeed – going to face trial, there are first other matters they have to take in their hands.

And new persons will arrive.

First of all another Augment, Otto Hoffmann. Being an Augment from the ‘first’ generation he resembles more Khan than Joaquin, yet he differs from Nien.

And Khan? Well, a highly intelligent man with such a bright mind gets easily bored when there is absolutely nothing to do except for looking at the ceiling – or the wall, the door, the window and back again (somehow I imagine Sherlock in this moment – snicker). But, of course, Jim always thinks of his beloved and takes care that Khan will not die of sheer boredom, while parallel he worries for Otto. Our Augment-hero gets visitors – while Kirk, Spock and Bones will meet Otto.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 89 – Meeting Otto Hoffmann

The night seemed to be longer than usual – at least for the guests within New Gol. Neither McCoy, or Joaquin or Jim found much sleep, and even Khan woke up several times; lying in the dark and staring at the ceiling. Nightmares and the mixture of anticipation and anxiety didn’t let him find any good rest. During the night Jim crawled into his bed; knowing that his sheer presence would calm his bondmate. Yet none of them slumbered well, and the next morning Nien’s mood seemed to sink from minute to minute.

He wanted to be there when Otto awoke; wanted to be the one who instructed McCoy and the others how to start the wakening process of the cryotubes and to watch over it. Instead of doing what was his sacred duty and keeping his word to his family that he had given them before launching the Botany Bay – to wake them up when they were all safe – he lay here in this damn bed and had to leave everything to others.
It was… infuriating!

He had hoped – dreamed – of starting the wakening process and to watch his brothers and sisters waking up, and now he was bound to sick-bed and could do nothing else than waiting.

And waiting – and waiting.

Jim had promised him to keep him updated, and if there was someone Khan trusted his family with then it was James Kirk, but to be unable to attend his people was beyond frustrating.

Useless!

He was utterly useless, and this after all he had done his whole life to keep his family safe.

As the minutes crept away and the morning turned into early midday, Khan was almost ready to climb the ceiling. Yes, Jim had left him some interesting literature on his PADD, but despite his high intellect and superior mind, Khan Noonien Singh found himself unable to concentrate for only a minute.

One of the Vulcan priests looked in two times after him and served him something to drink, but even these short distractions weren’t enough to keep his thoughts away from what was happening at the hospital for more than a few moments.

As he heard different steps coming down the hallway, Khan gritted his teeth and fisted the sheets in his hands – almost tearing the material. He knew that the priests meant well and he was grateful for their hospitality, but he was about to lose his polite manners, if they…

“Mr. Singh? You have visitors,” an older Vulcan told him as he reached his door. He stepped aside and five people stepped in.

Khan stared astonished at them, before his almost painful attention melted away and made room for joyful surprise. “You?” was all he managed to say, and then he was surrounded by five broad smiling faces.
“Surprise!” Galven oinked.

“Jim called us and said that you had to be alone here for today. We thought it was about time to pay you a visit,” Ritek smiled at him.

“How are you doing?” Caviw asked; her tail slipped gently around the Augment’s shoulder and stroke over his neck; tickling him.

“Better, thank you,” he replied; still astonished.

Jeff grimaced. “Don’t get me wrong, my friend, but you look like shit.” He cocked his head. “These bastards got you pretty bad.”

“I’m healing – and thanks to my enhanced nature I’ll soon be fit again,” Nien played down the issue.

“Your little brother told us that you’ve gotten a TBI and several broken bones. You shouldn’t take these injuries too lightly,” Caviw murmured.

Khan lifted both brows. “You met Joaquin?”

The five members of The Shadow began to snicker. “Yes, him and these two young ensigns. He was utterly perplexed at first,” Ritek smirked. “The poor boy certainly got a kind of shock – after all he isn’t used to alien people.”

“His face as I told him that you pulled my tail literary, was priceless,” the Caitian woman giggled. “He really is sweet.”

The second Tellarit, Khan was certain he hadn’t met before, chuckled, too, which woke Galven’s attention. “Ah, may I introduce you to my brother, Galten?” he said; putting a hoof-like hand on the other Tellarit’s shoulder.

Nien felt his mouth curling into a real smile. “So you found him,” the Augment stated; glad for his
comrade. His ocean-colored eyes hung at the far too thin frame. Galven’s brother looked like he had been through hell.

“Yes, during our mission with Wesley to the slavery market, where the survivors of the delegation were held prisoner,” Galven nodded; his little eyes shone with delight. “That was an adventure! I only wished you could have joined us, lad.”

“I was busy otherwise,” Khan smiled.

“You mean besides cuddling with the captain?” Ritek teased.

Promptly the Augment rolled his eyes, “Yes, even if you don’t believe it. I was made petty officer for some time and took the place of the first helmsman. At least I could do something useful,” he grumbled.

Jeff nodded in sympathy at him. “It’s boring to lie here all day, isn’t it?”

“You have no idea,” the former dictator murmured.

“We thought so. And when Jim called me and told us that it would be okay now to visit you at New Gol, we came here as soon as possible,” Ritek beamed at him. “That is, after Galven returned from the Enterprise where he helps out in Engineering.”

“You assist Mr. Scott?” Khan asked, a little bit perplexed.

The Tellarit shrugged. “You all made quite a mess of the ship’s engines and with you being away, Scotty and Keenser are really in need for some help. But when Kirk told us that you’re here all alone for today, I took a day off, beamed down and here we are.”

“But if I think of the reaction of the Vulcan at the entrance, I guess Jim forgot to inform your hosts of our visit. The good man looked slightly taken aback, and this tells a lot given the fact that the doorman is a Vulcan,” Galven chuckled.

Nien only groaned. Typical Jim! Avoiding trouble by creating precedents.
“So, Kirk has to assist Spock with the preparation of his wedding?” Caviw piped in. “That’s really nice. I haven’t heard before that Vulcans allow outworlders to be a part of their ceremonies.”

“Jim and Spock are close friends,” Khan replied; realizing that Kirk hadn’t mentioned the real reason for his absence in New Gol. “And with the most members of Mr. Spock’s family being dead, Jim is the logical choice to support him.”

“So, you and Spock made peace with each other?” Jeff wanted to know, and the Augment shrugged.

“As far as I understand I owe Mr. Spock my life. He helped me with a mind-meld after my life-signals went flat-line after the surgery. And with him being Jim’s ‘Vulcan brother’ so to say, it’s better for all of us if we two get along. And, by the way, he isn’t that bad when you come to know him better.”

“Aha, listen to this,” Ritek laughed.

Khan smiled at him, before his manners kicked in again. “Sorry for my failure, my friends. Please have a seat. I apologize that I can’t offer you anything else than water, but…”

“Don’t worry, I took care of everything,” the Caitian woman smirked, stepped to the table, stripped off her backpack and emptied it. One by one two bottles of wine, glasses, sandwiches, sweets and a lot more was placed on the table.

“We thought that you maybe would want to have something else than water, tea and vegetables,” Jeff joked.

“Or being feed with this stuff,” Ritek said; pointing at the IVs.

“And if the good doctor complains about the wine – just tell him that not only your body, but also your soul needs some healing. Wine is joy – or something like this,” Galven oinked.

Khan shook his head in fond amusement. They were really his friends. “I’ll take a glass of the wine – and a sandwich, please,” he said. “And then you have to tell me how you were able to retrieve the delegation.”
Pulling the two chairs nearer, the two Tellarits took their seats, while Jeff and Caviw sat down on Jim’s bed – all of them just plunging into the story, while Ritek filled the glasses he took with him from the hotel room he and the others lodged in at the moment. And Khan didn’t even realize how he began to relax.

ST***ST

„Pulse 64, blood pressure 124:75, body temperature 36.9 °C, brain activity within the standard parameter – well in Khan’s and Joaquin’s parameter.“ McCoy smiled at the others. “I think we can take Mr. Hoffmann to the prepared hall and wait until he wakes. All life signals are stable.”

Joaquin Weiss sighed in relief while he felt Jim Kirk’s hand squeezing his shoulder. Beside him Spock remained silent, but the young captain could read the soft satisfaction in the Vulcan’s eyes. McCoy and Corrigan pushed an antigrav-stretcher beside the stasis-chamber which was switched off by Sorel in this moment. The door hissed as it was opened and coldness crept into the room, while Sorel bent down and lifted the large body of the Terran Augment from the chamber; placing him carefully on the stretcher.

Two minutes later Otto Hoffmann lay in a comfortable biobed within one of the three halls Sorel had ordered prepared. Transportable dividers were placed between the beds to offer the patients some privacy, but could be removed easily if wished. At one wall three large windows usually gave a free view to the town and the lake, now they were covered with curtains. Enhanced intelligence or not, the Augments would face some culture shock after they woke, and Sorel – and McCoy – thought it better to let them learn about their true whereabouts step by step. To know to be on a strange planet and actually seeing it were two different pair of shoes, and the two surgeons agreed that it would be the best to break the news gently to the men and women.

“All right,” McCoy murmured. “Now there is nothing else to do than wait.” He glanced at Jim. “Didn’t you promise to support Spock with his wedding? Maybe you two could head to downtown and...”

“We haven’t even talked about anything until now,” Kirk interrupted; looking questioningly at his Vulcan friend, who lifted a brow.

“We have no data when we can expect Mr. Hoffmann to wake up. And because we all want to be here then, I suggest that we stay close by.” His gaze found Jim’s. “If you agree, we can retreat to one of the refreshing rooms and you can give me some information about the human way of marrying. I know that there are details within the ceremony Nyota certainly expects me to consider. For example the tradition of a wedding-band.”
The young captain smiled at him. “No problem. Bones, would you be comfortable to be here alone with Otto?”

McCoy rolled his eyes. “I’m a grown boy, you know. And Joaquin will be here, too. So, off with you two.” He made some shooing gestures with both hands. Jim chuckled and walked to the door; Spock on his heels. “Call me when Otto wakes up,” he said over the shoulder. “I’ll inform Nien about Otto lying in a bed now and that his vitals are okay.”

Leonard nodded. “Good idea. I’m sure he’s bored to death by now – and itchy, too, because he’s worried for Mr. Hoffmann.”

Kirk stopped at the entrance and turned around. “I don’t think that he is bored. I called Galven and asked him to spend some time with Nien. He agreed to go to New Gol together with the others.”

Bones smirked. “Good idea.”

“Did you inform T’Pau about the guests in advance?” Spock asked him – and Kirk’s face told him instantly everything.

Jim stared wide-eyed at him and smiled sheepishly, “Uh… no?”

Sarek’s son sighed. “You are aware of the rather tight relationship between Vulcans and Tellarits, aren’t you?”

An almost boyish mixture of innocence and mischief shimmered in the captain’s sky-blue eyes. “Well, you and Galven get along very good – and he and the others are visiting Nien, not T’Pau. So… I don’t think that it will be a big issue.”

The Vulcan slowly shook his head; almost exasperated. “To use one of your Terran sayings: Your words in the Lord’s ear.”

“Well, it was an emergency – sort of,” Jim defended himself. “Nien is traumatized and to be all alone with his worries wouldn’t do him any good. So the visit of some friends is important for his health. I’m sure T’Pau regards it likewise.”
A Vulcan brow was lifted. “You should ask her at the next given opportunity,” Spock commented dryly. “And prepare a proper apologizing. Who steps into New Gol and who not is only up to T’Pau and the other high priests.”

Jim rubbed his neck. “I did something rash, didn’t I?” And as Spock only nodded, he sighed, “Right. I’ll talk to her when I’m back at New Gol.” He waved at Bones and Joaquin. “See ya!” He pulled out his communicator and hailed Galven.

“Hi, Galven, it’s Jim,” he said after the Tellarit answered the call. “Are you still with Nien?”

“Yes, we are,” replied the leader of The Shadow.

“That’s great. Can I talk to him?”

“One moment, laddie.”

A second later Khan’s still hoarse baritone sounded from the little device. “Jim? Is everything all right?”

“Better than right,” Kirk smiled. “Spock and I are off for some coffee now, just waiting for a friend to join us. He has overslept, you know, but he is okay and we’ll wait for him now.”

Jim thought he could feel Nien’s relief even from the distance. “That’s good to hear. Just enjoy your little break, Jim,” the Augment played along; answering the hidden message that lay in Kirk’s words. “I’m fine here – with Galven and the others keeping me company.” In the background the soft clinking noises of glasses were heard, and Jim and Spock exchanged a quick look.

“Did you have lunch with the others?” Kirk wanted to know and heard for the first time something close to a laugh in his bondmate’s voice.

“Caviw feared that I was starving here and brought sandwiches, cookies, a cake and even something to drink. Even if the IVs feed me, I prefer real food.”
“Enjoy it,” Jim chuckled. “I call you if something new happens, all right?”

“Thank you – and have a nice time with Mr. Spock.”

“I will. Bye!” Jim closed the communicator, while they stepped into a cafeteria. “I should have left him a communicator,” he murmured. “How shall I reach him if we all are not at New Gol?”

“Just ask Commodore Wesley to beam one down from the Enterprise. You’ll be with me away from New Gol for a few times from now on, and I’m certain the commodore doesn’t get wary because of your request.”

Jim smiled at him. “Why do you think I want to avoid Wesley getting wary?”

“Because you haven’t informed him until now about the changed status of a further Augment – or that we are about to wake them all up. And I think you don’t intend to let him know about it any time soon.”

Kirk frowned while they sat down at a table. “Do I recognize there some disagreement from your part, Mr. Spock?”

The Vulcan suppressed another sigh. “Wesley is our ally, Jim, not our opponent. He has to answer to the Federation Council just like we are going to do. Command could even send him to trial for keeping Khan’s presence aboard the Enterprise a secret. We have to pull at one string, therefore Wesley should be ‘taken in our boat’, as the saying goes. His statements could turn the scales.”

Jim had to chuckle as he heard Spock using so many idioms. “Can it be that Bones is rubbing off on you?” he teased.

“I have watched you understanding the good doctor instantly when he uses idioms, even if you don’t approve of this particular habit. I simply chose to speak like he would do to make you see my point.”

“You mean you want to emphasize the importance of your opinion by using human phrases.” Jim shook his head in fond amusement. “You are always good for surprises, Spock.”
“On the contrary, Jim, it’s you who never ceases to surprise me.”

A barman came and Spock ordered tea for himself and coffee for Kirk. When they were alone again, the Vulcan continued, “Command will be not very pleased to learn that all Augments were woken up – without informing Admiral Barnett and the Council in advance. Yet the circumstances demand quick acting from our side, yet you would spare yourself more trouble if you would at least inform your direct superior of the changed status. And, as I said, Commodore Wesley is our ally – and your friend. He trusted your judgment enough to keep Khan’s involvement of the last weeks a secret. I think it’s your turn to pay his trust back by showing yours in him.”

Jim pursed his lips, while he returned the intense glance of his friend. Spock was right – like always. Wesley sat in the same boat like he, Spock and all the others. They had to act and to appear on the scene as one big team – or Command would tear their arguments apart.

“You’re right,” the young captain mumbled. “I’ll inform Wesley this evening, after Otto has maybe woken up for the first time. Then I can report to Bob of Otto’s hopefully nice behavior. It would calm Wesley’s nerves.”

Spock nodded slowly in agreement. The same moment their tea and coffee was served, and then their talk headed towards another important matter: The upcoming wedding.

ST***ST

The air smelled – strange. It was warm, but not unpleasant, yet it simply smelled strange. His mind, slowly beginning to work again, identified disinfection agents, among other things which told him: hospital. He lay on something soft and a blanket was spread over him. Beeping noises were nearby and he sensed an injection needle being stuck into his left hand – maybe IVs. It was quiet – well, almost. His enhanced hearing picked up some steps outside, hushed voices which spoke in a foreign language and one time he thought an opening and closing of a door, but he wasn’t certain.

As the sleep gave him more and more freedom, he tried to explore his surroundings without giving himself away; keeping his eyes closed and his features relaxed.

One thing was for certain: This was not the Botany Bay. It was not only the strange smell in the air, but also the fact that outside of his room people were walking by – something impossible aboard a spaceship, after all there didn’t exist any antigrav-devices. Not in their time. Khan was an excellent engineer, but even he hadn’t been able to create synthetic gravitation.
The lesson was clear: He wasn’t on the *Botany Bay*, but somewhere in a hospital. Had the rocket engine failed and they had fallen down back on Earth? How did he survive then? Had they fallen in the hands of their enemies at the end? Where were the others then?

He tried to concentrate on his bond with Katie. He could sense her – not far away and obviously deep asleep. Maybe she was still in her cryotube. But who had woken up him then? It had been the plan that first Khan’s cryotube would start the wakening process after ten years and he would decide if it was safe to return to Earth or not. Only then he would have raised the others, but Otto Hoffmann was sure that his leader and friend wasn’t somewhere nearby. He would have felt him otherwise.

So, what was going on?

There was only one way to find out: Taking a proper look.

Realizing that he was alone in the room, he carefully opened his eyes – only to close them as they promptly began to sting. The light in the room was dimmed, yet it was enough to make tears well up. His enhanced sight was only used to the darkness of sleep; his pupils far too large for any brightness.

The next time he simply raised his lashes a little bit and gave his eyes time to get adjusted to the light. He saw a polished floor, a sand-colored wall a few meters away from him and a door. Carefully lifting his head and peeking upwards he saw a monitor above his head showing things he didn’t understand. Beside him were a nightstand and a holder with a bag holding some fluid that was fed to his veins.

So, definitely a hospital – or some likewise medical facility. But in which country was he? Who treated him – friend or enemy? What…

Steps drew closer and quickly he lay back again and closed his eyes; willing his features to relax again. A moment later the door was opened – it hissed open, therefore it had to be some automatic door. The steps came nearer and stopped beside his bed.

Otto listened closely. The newcomer’s breath was steady and even. A soft scent of some cologne grazed the Augment’s senses – again unknown, but not unpleasant. Then he became aware of the stranger bending over him – and his self-defense instincts kicked in.

McCoy had been outside to talk with Corrigan, who would take over the late shift. Joaquin had excused himself for a few moments to go to the restrooms, yet Bones didn’t think there would be a
problem if he left the room with the enhanced boy gone. It really would be a stroke of bad luck that in these three or four minutes Otto would wake up.

Well, the bad luck did strike, as Leonard learned all of sudden.

Only seconds ago he had watched the monitor before he bent down to pull the blanket higher over the Augment – remembering very well how much Joaquin was cold for the first days after waking up. And in the next moment a large hand closed mercilessly around his left wrist and pulled him down, while the second hand gripped his throat.

Brown eyes glared up at him. “Where am I?” a hoarse voice whispered; unused to uttering a sound for almost two hundred and seventy years. “Who are you?’’

The shock Bones felt the moment he was gripped began to leave him; his training as a doctor and a Starfleet officer helped him to stay calm.

“You are obviously in bed – and I’m the nice doctor who simply wanted to check on you,” he deadpanned.

The Augment didn’t seem to be amused, because he growled, “This is no answer to my questions.”

“Well, on principal I don’t answer guys who try to wring my neck,” McCoy replied wryly. “Maybe we can make a deal. You let go off my throat and I tell you where you are.”

The large man still flashed his eyes at him. “You’re either stupid or very brave.”

Leonard grimaced. “I’ve been called both.” He tugged at the hand that was still closed around his throat. “Well?” he demanded.

Reluctantly the Augment let go off his throat, yet his fingers around the CMO’s wrist tightened even more – a silent warning.

At the same moment Bones heard the light steps of Weiss coming nearer, and clearing his throat he called, “Joaquin? Would you please tell your big brother here that I belong to the good guys?”
“What are you…” Otto began, but didn’t get any further as a familiar, slender, half-grown figure stormed into the room and yelled a joyfully “OTTO!” A laugh sounded, before the newcomer called, “Let go off Dr. McCoy, Otto. He’s a friend!” A second later Hoffmann indeed had to let go of the casual human because he had his arms full with a very enthusiastic Joaquin Weiss.

Bones retreated two steps and rubbed his wrist; eyeing it. Dammit, that would leave bruises. Then his attention was driven back to the giant enhanced man on the biobed and the happy Augment-boy, who hugged the larger male like he wanted to break his bones.

“You are awake! Finally! I’m so happy to see you! How are you? Are you okay?” Joaquin more or less squealed – and Hoffmann had no other choice than to return the hug, before he glanced warily over the boy’s shoulder at the human, who simply smiled at him. Realizing that the strange man was no danger, he clapped Joaquin on the back and whispered,

“I’m okay but where are the others? Where is Khan?”

Joaquin began to chuckle. “You don’t have to whisper. Dr. McCoy and the others are perfectly aware who and what we are.” He felt Otto tensing up, drove back a few inches and beamed at him. His eyes roamed over the familiar features, the tousled brunette hair that had grown an inch or two, and over the bulky stature of his older brother. “Everything is okay, Otto, don’t fret. The others are still asleep and Noo…” He sobered a little bit. “Well, he got injured and… is confined to bed – and certainly is pouting because he can’t be here at the moment.”

Hoffmann tensed. His leader and beloved friend was injured – bad enough to be bound to bed? And the boy said ‘everything was fine’? He looked around – and saw beside him and on the other side of the room – no, hall! – many beds placed, which were empty. “Where are we?” he asked and tried to sit up. And, to his astonishment, he only could move slowly.

McCoy cleared his throat; knowing from Khan that with him bound to sick-bed, Otto Hoffmann was in charge for the other Augments – together with the oldest of the superhuman, Paolo, if he would be awake.

Stepping nearer again, he said calmly, “Mr. Hoffmann, as Joaquin already told you the others are still asleep, but they are safe and well watched. Khan, regrettably, was indeed injured during a fight, but he is out of the woods. Yet I ordered bed-rest for him to avoid any chance of a relapse. And as for your question; where you are, I’ll think you better remain in a lying position. You’re going to need it.”
Otto watched the man in front of him. He was in his early thirties, had clear eyes, an open face and wasn’t the tiniest bit threatening. There was no falseness in his voice – and no fear. The man had to know whom he was facing – after all he knew Khan. Yet he wasn’t on alert. Yes, he was wary – no miracle after his, Otto’s, rough handling of him. But the man was free of anxiety.

Odd!

Really odd!

“I can bear some news, Doctor…?”


“Starfleet is a para-military organization that explores deep space. The Enterprise is her flagship.”

Otto frowned again. “Exploring of deep space?” he repeated; baffled. Then he looked at Joaquin. “How long have we slept?” He tried to sit up more and his arms shook as he attempted to steady himself backwards.

“That’s exactly the reason why I suggested that you lie down again,” Bones threw in; pointing at the stressed limbs. Closing the distance to the bed again he gently pressed Hoffmann back on the mattress. It was clear that he was only able to do so because the Augment was too perplexed to be touched this casually. “Your muscles must learn to do their work again, so give them some time,” McCoy continued. “And the higher gravity doesn’t help it at all, so just stay relaxed and let your body adjust to the new situation. Augmented or not, muscles are still muscles, and they have their own agenda.”

Otto’s eyes went wide for a moment. He couldn’t remember that there ever had been a simple human who didn’t mind touching him or one of his other brothers and sisters. Well, that wasn’t true. He remembered that there had been Augments which bound themselves to casual humans – Kabir for example.

Kabir…
The flight from India to Australia, Kabir’s sacrifice as he stayed back to grant him, Katie, Khan and the others a chance to escape…

Them all boarding the *Botany Bay*…

Khan putting him to sleep, promising him to wake him up first…

Otto shook his head. Handling the unsettling memories – his last memories before he went to cryosleep – could wait. Just right now he had to make sure that he and the others weren’t in danger. The human doctor beside him seemed to be friendly, but Hoffmann had his own share of bitter disappointments. He wouldn’t trust anyone easily.

Watching the surgeon he frowned again as the man’s words reached his mind. ‘Stronger gravity’, ‘exploring deep space’, ‘starship’…

Dammit, the human race couldn’t have developed something like this within ten years. Impossible! So…

“How long have we slept?” he asked again, and Joaquin smiled sheepishly at him.

“You’re sure you can stomach the news?” As Hoffmann only shot him a glare, Weiss sighed, “We’ve slept for almost 270 years.” – Otto’s features got out of control and he gasped. – “We’re in the year 2260, November to be more precise,” Joaquin finished.

Paling, Hoffmann could only stare at the youngest of his brothers and sisters. “You’re kidding,” he croaked.

“Nope?” Joaquin shook his head. “No kidding here.”

“He is right, Mr. Hoffmann,” Bones cut in again; throwing a wary glance at the monitor. Some of the Augment’s vitals went crazy which told McCoy everything: Shock – at least a little one. And seeing that this man was more like Khan, Leonard decided to give his patient enough information to calm him down, but not to reveal too much to spare him more stress. “It’s indeed November 2260. So you were a more than two times longer asleep than Sleeping Beauty,” he joked, before he turned serious
again. “The world has changed since you left Earth – a lot. You’ll have to catch up on a lot of history.”

Otto only nodded; still stomaching the fact that he and the others had been asleep for more than two and a half centuries. Of course his enhanced mind could wrap around this fact, yet some part of him still couldn’t believe it.

A tremor shook him and he realized that he felt very cold despite the warm temperature in the room. Promptly the surgeon pulled the blanket higher. “You’re going to feel chills for a few days,” he explained. “With Joaquin it was the same, and Khan told me the same went for him after he woke up.”

Otto nodded. Noonien had hinted that these reactions could be expected as a by-effect of the cryosleep. Apropos…

“Where is Khan?” he asked. “If this is a kind of hospital and he was injured, he must be here. Can I see him?”

“Noo is not here anymore,” Joaquin piped in. “You know him and hospitals. He reacted badly to this place, even when he was still out cold. Jim decided that it would do Noo better to be away from here and brought him to the Vulcan abbey outside of the town. And it was the right thing to do. Noo is healing nicely.”

Otto blinked baffled. “Vulcan abbey? Are we on Sicilia or what? And who is Jim?”

McCoy chuckled. “No, we are not on Sicilia, Mr. Hoffmann. We are not even on Earth.” He waited – and the reaction came quickly.

“Not on Earth?” This time the Augment’s voice was an octave higher.

“No,” Bones shook his head. “We are on New Vulcan, a colony of a befriended species of peaceful humanoids – well, vulcanoids fits it better. They look a lot like us, but there are a few differences. The first contact was made on the 5th April in 2063, after an engineer developed the warp-drive – a drive that makes vessels fly with multiple light-speeds. Their attention was driven to us as the engineer tested his development. It changed everything. Earth, Vulcan and some other inhabited planets founded a Federation – the United Federation of Planets, short UFP. Today we’re living in peaceful context with a lot of species.”
Otto could only look at him; mouth hanging open. “Aliens…” he whispered. “You’re really telling me that men have befriended aliens – and that I’m on an alien planet at the moment?”

“Yeah, on New Vulcan – the new main colony of the Vulcans. They are a race that follows the path of logic, are very peaceful and our oldest friends, so to say.” He watched Hoffmann closing his eyes for a moment. “I know that’s a lot to put up with,” he said sympathetically. “Jo here had the same problems in the beginning.”

Weiss grinned at him as Bones used the short-form of his name just like Jim did. Then he glanced at his older brother. “As I met my first alien I almost screamed like a girl. Poor Dr. N’Halro, he really is nice – and I almost freaked out.” He met Otto’s eyes again. “You’ll see most aliens are really nice guys. Well, some of them do look like they just came alive from some science-fiction or fantasy-novels, but they are okay. When I think of the Tellarits…” He had to snicker as he remembered his first contact with the gang Noo had hung out with. “I think it was a good idea of Jim to call Galven to keep Noo some company,” he said; his words directed at McCoy.

Otto lifted his head. There was again this English or American name. “Who is this Jim?” he wanted to know. Obviously this mysterious man was an important figure given the fact that he took care of Khan and relocated him from the hospital to some abbey.

“Ah,” McCoy nodded, “that reminds me that I should have contacted him minutes ago.” He pulled his communicator from his trouser pocket and opened it. “McCoy to Kirk.”

“Kirk here,” came the reply only seconds later; a pleasant smooth tenor as Otto recognized.

“Jim, our patient is awake. Do you want to welcome him to this new world?”

“Spock and I are on our way. Have you told Otto about... well, his whereabouts?”

“Yes, I have. Therefore you can bring Spock in. Mr. Hoffmann knows that there are aliens. At least our hobgoblin doesn’t look scary.”

“I take that as a compliment, Doctor,” sounded a second voice – a cool baritone – through the futuristic mobile.
“I was stating a fact, Spock,” McCoy answered.

“As did I, Doctor,” was the dry reply.

“Boys, play nice. We’re there in a minute, Bones. Kirk out.”

Joaquin was chuckling again as he watched the surgeon, before he whispered to his giant brother. “Dr. McCoy and Mr. Spock love to banter. Don’t put too much in their bickering. It’s a kind of hobby for them.”

“And I know someone who is about to get a red mark on his medical chart,” Leonard grumbled.

“No problem, Jim is a good hacker. He would remove it,” Weiss beamed at him.

“Don’t be too sure, son,” McCoy smirked. “I have some ‘hypo’-arguments Jim certainly wants to avoid.”

Hoffmann had listened silently to the short exchange of humor. And it made one thing clear. “You are already longer awake,” he assumed; glancing at Joaquin.

“For ten days,” Weiss affirmed.

“And Khan?”

“Uh… longer. There were some problems which first had to be solved before…” Joaquin’s well-meant explanation without revealing details which would upset Otto were interrupted by Kirk’s and Spock’s arrival.

The door opened and Otto’s attention was instantly driven to the newcomers. The first who stepped into the room was a young man in the middle or the end of his twenties. He had gold-blond hair, striking blue eyes, a very attractive face and a slender, yet muscular body. Even as young as he was he radiated authority – a natural streak of character, as it seemed.
Behind him was another man; only a little bit taller. His hair was black, his eyes were brown and he had angular features. He wore dark trousers and a kind of strange tunic. His movements were graceful, like that of a panther, and…

And Otto went rigid as his eyes returned to the man’s face. The newcomer had shortly nodded at McCoy, which had him turn his head the slightest bit. And this was the moment Hoffmann saw it: The man had pointy ears. And only now the Augment also realized that the man’s eye-brows were slanted upwards. In the same second his nose caught the unknown scent, while his ears picked up the other rhythm of the stranger’s heartbeat.

Alien!

This man was an alien!

Instinctively he was instantly on alert.

The blond man stopped in front of him and eyed him for a moment, before he extended his hand.
“James Kirk, captain of the USS Enterprise. Welcome in the 23rd century, Mr. Hoffmann.”

Reluctantly Otto shook the man’s hand. The young male wore no uniform, but strange yet nice civil clothes, yet he was someone who was used to leading people. There was no doubt about it.

“Thank you,” he said hesitantly. “Otto Hoffmann is my name, but I think you already know.”

The alien man had stepped beside the captain, lifted his right hand and split his fingers between the middle and the ring finger. “Long life and peace, Mr. Hoffmann,” he greeted.

Otto, unsure how to react, answered hoarsely. “The same for you.”

The man nodded slowly, let his arm sink and clasped his hands behind his back. “Thank you.”

“My first officer Commander Spock from the planet Vulcan,” Kirk introduced the strange man. “The Vulcans are our hosts at the moment.”
Again Hoffmann could only make an affirming gesture. “Thank you for your people’s hospitality,” he said; hoping not to offend the man. He had absolutely no clue of polite habits of these people, so he simply went with his guts.

“You are welcome, Mr. Hoffmann,” Spock replied. “Circumstances made it important to ask the captain for my people’s support which was granted. You and your comrades are safe here.”

The Augment frowned. “And yet my leader and friend Khan was injured. Bad enough to bind him to bed. So, what happened?”

“It’s a long story,” Jim answered. “And I’m certain that Nien wants to be there when we explain everything to you.”

“Nien’?” Otto echoed, perplexed.

Joaquin smirked at him. “You know the Americans, Otto. They love to shorten names, despite what they make of them by doing so.”

“So, you’re from the United States?” Otto asked the blond male, who smiled at him. And for the first time the Augment became aware of the high intelligence that shone in those deep blue orbs.

“It’s called simply North America now. It belongs to the United States of Earth.” He chuckled as he saw the other man’s confusion. “Don’t worry, I’ll provide you with some reports and literature to catch up on history.”

“Thank you, Captain,” Hoffman said slowly. “Yet my priority lies with my friends – and my leader. How is he? How does it come that he was injured?”

Jim smiled in utter understanding. Those questions would have been the most important ones to himself, too, if he were in Otto’s place. “Nien was injured in a battle I’ll tell you later of. He… got some broken bones, inner injuries and suffers a TBI…”

“What?” Hoffmann hissed, trying to sit up again.
“Please calm down, Otto,” Joaquin said softly; grasping one of his brother’s hands. “Noo is really doing better and he’s on the road of recovery.”

“I’m sorry that you are confronted with something like this, minutes after you woke up, and I do understand your concern for Khan. We all were worried about him, but he is already whining at being stuck in sick-bed and that tells a lot,” Jim said gently.


“I’m no stranger to your brother, Mr. Hoffmann. Nien and I are… close friends,” Kirk replied kindly.

Promptly McCoy began to cough. “Yeah, very close,” he deadpanned; rolling his eyes.

Curious Otto looked at him and then at the alien – the Vulcan – and to his astonishment the man’s ear tips became green. Fascinating!

Then his attention returned to the youthful captain. “You befriended Khan?” he asked; surprised. “Khan isn’t known to trust others easily – especially non-Augments. You must be very special to wake his interest.”

Jim didn’t know if he should be embarrassed or amused. In the end he was both. “Nien and I have a lot in common – and we had our shares of different situations that bind us together.”

Slowly Otto nodded, sensing that Kirk spoke the truth. “When can I see Khan?” he almost demanded. If his friend and leader was this heavily injured he had to make certain that he really was well cared for, no matter how much these strangers tried to reassure him.

“As soon as you can walk for several minutes without falling over your own feet,” McCoy said. As he received an almost offended glare from the Augment, he added good-natured, “New Vulcan has a higher gravity than Earth; therefore you’ll have some problems at first getting adjusted to it. And, don’t get me wrong, but even an Augment’s muscles have to rebuild after resting so long. You’re going to need a few days – especially after you weren’t woken up like it was planned.”

Otto blinked shortly. “I was not?”
“No, your cryotube began the wakening-process without being initiated. The air supply didn’t kick in and therefore we had to put you in stasis – a medical deep sleep not unlike the cryonic but different enough to change your body functions,” the CMO explained. “It was the same with Joaquin here. He needed two days to get up without landing on his butt.”

Weiss looked with big eyes at him. “You know?”

“That you left bed and ended up on the floor? Of course. I’m used to this kind of behavior of another thick-headed mule.” He glanced at Jim, who only grimaced and shrugged it off.

Hoffmann had watched them. The officers were more than colleagues. They were friends, no doubt about it. Then he thought of what McCoy had said – that his, Otto’s – cryotube had started the wakening process without it being initiated. In other words: His cryotube had a malfunction. Alerted he raised his head. “If I understood you correctly, Doctor, you were forced to wake me up because my cryotube didn’t work anymore.”

It was the captain, who answered him, “Yours and the other cryotubes are monitored and well watched over. We planned to wake you all after Khan was back on his feet, because he knows best how to initiate the process. But your tube is the second that failed now and…”

“The second?” Otto pressed; even more alarmed now.

“Mine was the first,” Joaquin informed him. “Noo and Jim got me out it in the last second. I was also put into stasis, but needed longer until I came around – contrary to you, as it seems.”

Hoffmann’s face became soft for a moment. “You come from another generation of Augments, Joaquin. You and Suzette were… created for other purposes than Khan, I and the others.” Then his glance wandered back to Kirk.

“Did you discover the reason for the malfunction?”

“Mr. Scott, my chief engineer, Mr. Spock and Elder Senak, a Vulcan technician, think that the batteries of the cryotubes are quitting. They were not constructed to work for such a long period of time. To say it plainly: You and the others are very fortunate that the batteries didn’t quit decades ago.”
Otto turned grey beneath his paleness, and then he caught himself. They did survive; there was no reason to think of what could have happened. “So… my friends are still in danger,” he deduced, and Kirk sighed.

“I talked with Selek, the Vulcan High Minister, and Khan about it. Nien thinks it’s the best if you assist us to initiate the waking processes of the other tubes, before another one begins to quit.”

“And to be able to do so, you first have to regain your strength,” McCoy said; making his point. “So, no premature attempts to leave bed before your muscles are ready to work. I’ll make some trainings with you while you are still in bed and some others afterwards. It helped Joaquin a lot and I’m certain it will do the same for you. I hope that you’ll be able to have some walks within the next two days. In the meantime we watch the other cryotubes with hawk eyes. If it should come to another emergency we’ve enough stasis chambers to put your brother or sister in it. Yet the latter isn’t the optimal solution. To wake them up the way it was planned will be the best; therefore it’s important that you’re up as soon as possible.”

Otto nodded slowly; agreeing with the CMO’s reasoning and sound logic. “You’ll have my full support, Doctor, in bringing me back on my feet and during waking my friends up.” he said quietly. He pursed shortly his lips. “So, I also can visit Khan in two or three days?” he asked again, and Kirk smirked at him.

“Yes, at latest. But you can speak with him. One moment.” He pulled out the same-looking device like the one the surgeon had used before, and opened it. “Kirk to Galven.”

This time Otto had to wait longer until he heard an answering voice – an oinking one? “Galven here. How’s going, lad?”

“Everything is fine, Galven. Are you and the others are still at New Gol?”

“Yes, filling Khan in on what happened in the Borderland, and he told us about everything that happened since we last heard from you. Boy, no wonder that your ship looks like shit at the moment.”

“Don’t remind me,” Jim sighed. “Could you link me to Nien, please?”

“Of course, buddy. Here we go.”
A second later Hoffmann heard the familiar baritone of his leader and friend – worry edged deep in his tone. “Jim? Is everything all right over there?”

Kirk smiled… tenderly? Yes, there was clearly affection on the captain’s face. Interesting!

“Yes, everything went perfectly fine, Nien. I’ll link you to someone.” He offered Otto the communicator and nodded encouraging, as the Augment hesitated. “Just take it. You don’t have to put it to your ear like the old mobiles of earlier times. Just use it like I did.”

Hoffmann took the little device; nervousness all of sudden settled in his stomach. “Noonien?” he asked quietly into the communicator; hoping that this wasn’t some kind of trick.

“Otto?” Khan’s voice was not more than a whisper – a whisper of awe. “Otto, is that you?”

“Yes, it’s me,” Hoffman said quietly: his voice still rough.

Silence. Then Khan choked, “How… how are you?”

Otto gulped as he realized that his friend was at the verge of tears – something that happened rarely. “I… I’m fine, I think. A little cold and… confused.”

“This is normal,” Khan murmured; then he took a shaky breath. “I… I’m just glad that you’re okay – that you are awake.”

Hoffmann couldn’t remember his leader sounding like this since they left childhood. Khan was deeply shaken, this much he could tell.

Jim could sense his bondmate’s turmoil like it was his own. Nien was overwhelmed with joy, wonder and relief, and Kirk wished he would be at New Gol to take his beloved into his arms. “Hey, honey, don’t fret. He is fine and will visit you in two or three days,” he said into the communicator; bending over Otto in the process.
Another deep intake of breath was heard, followed by a gentle, “Thank you, Jim! Thank you so much.”

Kirk felt his cheeks warming. “I didn’t do anything. That was all Bones’, Corrigan’s and Sorel’s doing. I’m just the messenger.” His eyes found Otto’s who gaped at him. ‘Honey’? Jim felt a chuckle rising but suppressed it. “I think Mr. Hoffmann is just a little bit overwhelmed with everything – new time, new places, and new people – among them aliens. He’s wary.”

Khan’s voice became steadier by now, as he addressed his brother. “Otto?”

“Yes?”

“You can trust Jim Kirk utterly. That we are still alive is only because of him. He saved me and you all; protected us fiercely. There is no need to distrust him. The same goes for Dr. McCoy and the other officers.”

Otto moistened his lips and looked at Spock, who simply lifted a brow. “And the alien?”

There! For a second Jim heard Khan laughing quietly, which soothed him. “I take it that Mr. Spock is also there?” Nien asked.

“I’m here, Mr. Singh,” the first officer raised his voice.

Again there was amusement in the Augment leader’s voice. “Otto, you also can trust Mr. Spock. Just don’t mix up with Jim and everything is perfectly fine. Otherwise you could learn why these people are called ‘Vulcans’ – outside stony, inside fiery. And by the way, I need Jim whole and healthy.”

“Yeah, cuddling can be unpleasant when bruises are ruining the moment,” Bones grumbled sarcastically – and earned a sharp glare from Kirk. “What?” he asked innocently. “It’s enough that Khan is denied the pleasure when you two are playing teddy-bear to each other. If you suffer likewise I would have to deal with two pouting boys, and that’s more I can endure.”

Otto just stared at the surgeon and then at the young captain. Cuddling? Teddy-bear? Pleasure? And… had this casual human just called Khan Noonien Singh a ‘boy’?
The next moment Khan’s voice sounded again – exasperated but also amused. “Doctor, originally I wanted to fill Otto in of my… changed status.”

“Be my guest,” Bones called.

Hoffmann began to realize that Khan seemed to be very comfortable with these men and that something important was going on here. He threw a quick glance at Joaquin, who beamed brightly at him. What the hell…

“Otto?” Singh’s voice sounded again. “Just follow Jim’s lead and everything will be fine.”

“You… you really trust him, don’t you?” Otto asked; still trying to put the evidences together.

“Of course I do – after all Jim is my bondmate.”

The giant Augment only stared at the communicator. “B-b-b-bondmate?” he stuttered; staring with wide eyes at the smiling young captain beside him.

“Yes, Jim and I are bonded,” Khan affirmed. “He’s my soulmate – just like you and Katie.”

“Noo finally found one to share his life with!” Joaquin grinned at Otto. “Isn’t this great?”

Otto gulped. Maybe it was a good idea to simply go to sleep again and to wake up anew. Eventually everything turned out to be nothing more than a crazy dream…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, sometimes every one of us wishes to simply go back to sleep and to wake up again in the hope that everything has changed then and turned out to be nothing else
than a weird dream. This is exactly the point Otto just reached – understandable. Poor guy. Not only that he slept for more than 270 years and woke up on a strange planet, no, he learns ‘by the way’ that his friend and leader is practically married. And above all he also meets an ‘alien’. This is a little bit too much even for an enhanced man. At least he could talk with Khan and got assured that everything is ‘fine’. If Otto knew of the guys who keep Khan company in the moment… I think he would freak out (at least a little bit – LOL).

In the next chapter you get Nien’s POV from his talk with Otto, latter learns more about the century, Wesley gets the news about another Augment being awake and you also read something again from the president and Barnett, because the two men and justice have a lot to do in HQ on Earth.

I hope you liked my ‘vision’ of Otto – and I promise you’ll read more of him. And soon of the others, too.

Have a nice rest of the week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Many confusions

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

At first I want to thank you again for the feedback you left. I’m amazed that the story has still so many fans, and this after it already runs for 90 chapters!!! Thank you so much.

As promised you’ll get Khan’s POV of his talk with Otto, but also the reaction of The Shadow-gang. Further you’ll witness how Otto will react to everything he learned. And then Barnett and Robertson will have an interesting talk, while Jim talks with Wesley (just imagine the good commodore’s shock – snicker).

Have fun with the new chapter

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 90 – Many confusions

As Galven’s communicator beeped for the third time since The Shadow-gang had arrived at New Gol, Khan instinctively knew that Jim finally had the news he was desperately waiting for. The moment Jim said he would link him to someone and explained to said ‘someone’ how to use a communicator, the Augment’s hope had changed into certainty: his brother was awake and already fit enough to talk. But even this certitude paled compared to the overwhelming joy that washed over Khan as he finally heard Otto’s voice – a voice, even rough as it was in the moment, he had painfully missed, just like those of his other brothers and sisters.

He hadn’t been able to control his rising emotions. Relief and happiness brought tears to his eyes – which was almost embarrassing because of the gang’s presence in his room. He had always held his feelings in check when someone else was present. To stay collected was a necessity he had learned when he had been still nothing more than a young boy. But this time his control failed him miserably. After all those months – years – of fearing for his family’s life, of thinking to have lost them not one but two times, he was beside himself to finally speak to another member of his crew.

Maybe – maybe! – the TBI and what he had been put through during the last battle also had part in his reaction, yet he couldn’t care less. Another one of his siblings was awake and out of danger. Nothing else mattered. And, by the way, he was among friends – friends who had seen him at his
worst and had learned what he was, yet they remained loyal and called him still ‘one of them’. To show some tears was a luxury he permitted himself to display for once.

And, at the same time, he felt a wave of deep love and understanding coming from Jim. It was obviously that his soulmate felt over their shared bond the depth of his emotions and reacted to them. Warmth, joy and also relief washed over the link and wrapped his mind and soul into a protective blanket. Alas, how had he ever lived without this closeness to someone who shared not only his bed, but also his soul? He had only been half alive without his mate – something Otto had explained to him as he informed him of his engagement with Katie. Well, only now, since Jim and he had become more than lovers, Khan could finally understand the deep peace and anchor Otto had found in his wife.

Otto…

He had sounded tired, confused, wary, yet it was unmistakably him. Khan knew Hoffmann inside out, and therefore there was no doubt that the other Augment was on alert – finding himself on an alien planet with unknown people and learning that his leader was injured. The only thing that would keep him in check was to ensure him that none of them were in danger – that they were among people who were their allies; their friends. So he told him to trust Jim Kirk. His bondmate would find the right words to tell Otto what he needed to know without revealing the dark facts, which would unsettle Hoffmann.

Otto was a protector, maybe even more fiercely than Khan. His giant figure had given him this role after he came from the German lab near Munich to the labs of New Delhi, a year prior to the Augments’ revolution and their escape. Hoffmann felt responsible for all of his siblings, just like Khan did, and even if Noonien Singh was quicker in hand-to-hand combat, Otto was someone the Indian Augment didn’t want to face as an opponent. This and his deep running affection for his siblings had made Otto an excellent guard. His personality mixed with his technical know-how, he had been the logical choice to wake up first. His enormous strength could have helped Khan if some of the cryotubes would have given them trouble and had to be forced open.

Now he and Otto were separated, nothing had gone like planned, yet Khan was grateful that at least some things turned out well. Jim was with Otto – and Kirk had a special way to calm down most people he crossed paths with. Then there was McCoy. As grumpily and as sarcastically as the good doctor could be, deep down he was soft like butter and he had a high empathy with everyone. And he was brilliant. Nien was certain that McCoy had already gained Otto’s respect. And Spock… Well, maybe it was a good thing, too, that of all aliens this Vulcan was the first extraterrestrial Otto met. He was calm, peaceful, highly intelligent, sometimes infuriating logical and loyal to death. And, what you wouldn’t guess on the first and second sight, he was also a warrior and this in the best sense of the word. If Nien imagined Otto’s reaction had he seen Galven or Ritek before he met Spock… The mere thought was fun.
Apropos Galven and Ritek…

They and the others looked with big eyes at him; an invisible question-mark printed on their faces. Well, of course they had listened to his talk with Otto. And that they were able to put two and two together showed in Ritek’s next words,

“This Otto just awakened and you practically ordered him to trust Jim and his officers?” The Rigelian cocked his head. “They woke up another of your crew.” It was a statement, not a question, yet Khan felt obliged to nod.

“Yes, his cryotube began the wakening process without the air supply kicking in. Healer Sorel alerted us about this change, and Dr. McCoy and he put my brother into stasis yesterday. Today he woke.” He lowered his head; joy flushed his still pale face. “I’m happy that he is okay.”

Caviw’s tail wrapped around his right arm; squeezing it in soothing manner. “I’m glad to hear this,” she said.

“So, another one of your family has joined the world of living,” Jeff said. “I’m curious how he will react to everything.”

“That makes us two,” Nien deadpanned; grinning for a moment as he saw the slightly shocked faces of the others, then they began to chuckle.

“So, why was his cryotube waking him up?” Galven asked; his technical understanding rose anew. “What triggered the process?”

“Mr. Scott and Mr. Spock assume that the batteries have outrun their functional life,” the Augment explained, and it was Ritek who instantly came to the correct conclusion.

“That goes for all tubes then – in other words, they’ll wake up your crew soon to avoid further problems.”

Khan nodded. “Yes, they will. Seeing that I’m stuck to this damn sick-bed it will be up to Otto to assist Jim and the others. And soon as he has adjust to his surroundings and his muscles allow it, he and the others will initiate the wakening process of all cryotubes.” He looked from one to the next, saw the thoughtful expressions and was about to comment it, as Caviw said gently,
“Then you’ll be re-united with your family in a few days.” She gave him a toothy grin. “I’m so happy for you.”

“Yeah and just think how happy Starfleet Command will be,” Ritek joked. “They certainly hoped to have some more time before they had to face the fact that the Federation can add another species to her member-list, and now they have to deal with it so soon.” He snickered. “Serves them right.”

“You seem to have no problems with my siblings being woken up,” Khan mused, and it was Galven, who shrugged.

“Hey, after we learned who you are we knew that this day would come. And if your brothers and sisters are like you…”

“Or the boy!” Ritek threw in.

“… then I really have no problem with welcoming them in our century.”

“I only ask myself, why Jim didn’t mention the true reason for his absence from New Gol today,” Jeff grumbled. “Doesn’t he trust us?”

“I rather think he imagined us becoming nervous with concern for the lad’s family,” Ritek pondered; clasping carefully Khan’s left shoulder. “And because Jim wanted us to distract our genius here from worrying his head off by us being our cheerful selves, he kept us in the dark.”

“And, by the way, Jim really is counseling Mr. Spock concerning the upcoming marriage,” Nien added. “He’ll be away within the next days for several hours.”

“Just call us, and we’ll keep you company,” Caviw smiled at him.

“Yeah, and continue to feed you,” Jeff winked at him. “You’re far too thin.”

“How, do you think, will your crew react when they face this new world?” Ritek came back to the
main topic, and Khan took a deep breath.

“Well, this is something I really want to witness,” he murmured. “Especially when they face you guys for the first time.”

Confused the gang looked at each other, and then they realized which effect their appearance must have on those men and women, who had never seen non-human sentient beings.

“Hm, concerning Galven they certainly will think Porky Pig has come alive,” Ritek began, which instantly raised the Tellarit’s irritation.

“And concerning you they’ll think that you have fallen into some paint buckets,” he oinked. “Or they’ll think…” He stopped as he heard Khan groaning,

“Gentlemen, you’re in an abbey here, please no childish fights!”

As Galven and Ritek only glared at each other, but at least kept silent, the Augment laid back and closed his eyes; amusement plainly written on his face. Sometimes he was almost convinced he was in the middle of a kindergarten.

ST***ST

Jim closed his communicator and looked down at the large Augment, who simply stared back.

“Bondmate,” Otto stated; shaking his head. “I… can’t believe it. Khan never considered… Hell, in our time he had his share of romantic adventures. Attractive young men, beautiful women… Yet it was never more than simply that: adventures. And now, after being here for a short time, he…” He took a deep breath. “Don’t get me wrong, Captain. I don’t want to offend you, but what do you have the others didn’t have?”

Jim shrugged; he didn’t feel offended in the tiniest bit. Heavens, he had asked himself the same question a dozen times and more. “As I said: We’ve a lot in common.”

“Two sides of one coin, may I add,” Bones threw in, smiling.
“Yeah, something like this,” Jim affirmed. “First we… didn’t get along very well. To tell the truth, we fought – and not only with words. Then things changed and turned the tables. First it was simply passion – then it became more. Much more.”

Otto watched him closely; trying to ignore the tiredness that was rising in him. Taking another deep breath this time his nose caught a scent he had smelled before as the captain stepped into the room, but only now he identified it.

“Blood…” He whispered; shock written all over his face. “You have Noonien’s blood in you!”

“You Augments are pure scent-trackers, aren’t you?” McCoy sighed, but was ignored.

“Yes, I have,” Kirk nodded. “Khan’s blood saved me – and it opened the door to the change of our relationship.”

Very slowly Hoffmann made an affirming gesture. “Kinsman. Noonien regards you as a kind of kinsman. This given with your personality, intelligence and appearance won him over.” He snorted. “Khan always had a thing for not playing by the rules – and he had a soft spot for casual humans. No wonder that he is attracted to you.”

“Well, Jim has that first ‘weakness’, too,” McCoy deadpanned. As he caught Otto’s asking glance, he defined, “Not playing by the rules, I mean. Jim has a very special way of interpreting the rule book.”

“I have to agree,” Spock said; giving Jim a certain glance that proved that he was pulling the captain’s leg.

“Don’t, Spock! I told you several times by now that it’s eerie when you agree with me,” the CMO grumbled.

“It’s not my fault that you’re scared that easily, Doctor.”

“Scared easily – me? After sharing a room with Jim at the academy and galloping with him and you through unknown space?” Leonard scoffed. “I’ve earned a bravery medal hundred times over.”
“Even if the captain’s academy-days have reached quite a reputation among other students and his extraordinary way to beat my test has become a legend by now, I have to defend him. There certainly was nothing he did that would scare a follow student.”

“I got my first grey hairs because of him – and you!” Bones pointed an accusing finger at him.

“If the human aging-process has already proceeded like this, Doctor, I would suggest that you let Dr. M’Benga check you thoroughly. Or you should try some meditation techniques, because I think your nervous system simply overreacts because of your lack of controlling your emotions.”

Joaquin, who had kept quiet since Otto and Khan had talked, began to snicker. “See?” he addressed his brother. “That’s what I meant.”

Hoffmann looked slightly baffled up to Kirk, who groaned in this moment, “Can you imagine what I have to endure to speed through space with those two in tow?”

For a few seconds the Augment felt pure amusement rising in him; the bickering reminding him of some of his brothers. “Sorry but I don’t have any regret for you,” he commented wryly, before he lay back again and slowly rubbed his face with one hand.

“You’re all right?” Jim asked and Otto’s brown eyes were directed at him.

“Yes – as far as someone can be who learns that he has slept for almost 270 years and woke up on an alien planet, where said someone is greeted by bantering officers which serve on a spaceship that flies quick enough to reach other star systems within months.” A hint of sarcasm was heard, but it was good-natured. This much was clear.

Jim laughed softly. “Yes, it’s quite a shock.” He cocked his head. “But I have to correct you. We don’t need months to fly from Earth to New Vulcan. Only two days and a few hours.”

Hoffmann stared at him, before he slowly shook his head. “Alas, I think I have a lot to learn.” He bit his lips shortly, as his mind returned to his wounded brother and leader. “Khan sounded… not well.”

“He’s injured,” Bones said softly, turning serious again.
“Yes, but I know my friend. Rarely did I hear him...like this.”

“He has been through a lot,” Jim admitted quietly. “And now he is only happy that you and the others are safe.”

Hoffmann quirked both brows. “Did I get that right? We’ve been in danger great enough to bring Khan of all people close to tears after the danger was over?”

Kirk nodded slowly. “Yes, regrettably. Nien fought hard to keep you and the others safe – even thought that you all were lost. Therefore it’s understandable that he is so glad that you and your siblings’ lives are no longer at stake – and to hear your voice after all this time.”

Otto pursed his lips, as his mind made further conclusions from the captain’s last words. “How long was Khan awake?”

“More than two years,” Kirk answered truthfully. As the Augment gasped in disbelief, Jim added, “Circumstances prevented him from waking you and the others up like it was planned. Then... several things got out of hand, so that only now could your long sleep be ended.”

Lifting his head again, Hoffmann stated plainly, “And if it hadn’t have been for my cryotube’s malfunction I would still be asleep, wouldn’t I?”

Jim nodded. “Yes. It was planned that Nien would assist us in waking you all up when he’s healed. Therefore your cryosleep was ended only a few days sooner than intended.”

“How comforting,” Otto grumbled. “He said he would wake me up first. Well, there certainly are several things that went wrong that he had to change plans.”

“You’ll learn of it soon,” Jim promised. “But just right now you need rest.”

“You’re taking my words right from my mouth,” Bones said sternly. “That was enough for Mr. Hoffmann for now.” He raised his voice as Otto wanted to protest. “I know, enhanced mind, augmented nature and super-brain. Khan already gave me a full list of arguments why he didn’t need any rest when he was my patient in med-bay over three weeks ago, nursing frost-bites and stretched
muscles. And yet I proved my concern correct when he fell asleep barely as he hit the cushions – and snuggled to his sweetheart here.” He nudged Jim, who simply rolled his eyes. “So, please be a good patient and do what the nice doctor says,” McCoy ended his little speech.

For a moment Otto only looked at him, and then he began to laugh. “I was right. You are foolish and brave, but also a good man. Khan told me to trust you, and I begin to see why.” He snorted. “You three are the first casual humans who treat us like we belong to your people.” He glanced at Spock. “Well, two casual humans.”

“I’m not offended, Mr. Hoffman. Indeed you are fifty percent right, because I’m only a half-Vulcan. My mother was human and came from Earth.”

A low whistle escaped the Augment. “Just have a look. Men really learned a thing or two by now when they even marry aliens.”

“Love knows no limits,” Jim smiled.

“Obviously – seeing that Khan chose you as his bondmate,”

“Well, what can I say? I have my charms,” Jim joked – and Hoffmann laughed anew.

“Yes, I can see this.” He shivered slightly, which made McCoy step to the next bed to get a further blanket. He spread it over Otto, who gave him a tiny smile. “Thank you, Doctor.”

“You’re welcome,” McCoy nodded.

One more time Otto looked at Kirk. “Has Khan decided in which order the rest of us will be woken up?”

Jim instantly knew the real question behind those words. “I can imagine that you are eager to see your wife again.” He smiled as he received another astonished glance from the Augment. “Nien told me about you and Katie. You two were a kind of example for us as we realized how very close we had become – in soul and heart, I mean. Nien explained to me the connection you share with your wife – and it’s the same for Khan and me. So, yeah, I do know about Katie.” His voice became even warmer. “And I don’t think that something speaks against it to wake her up as one of the firsts.”
Otto pursed his lips before he began to relax. This young man and Khan were indeed close if Noonien shared such delicate details with the captain. At least it gave him the assurance that everything he had witnessed in the last minutes wasn’t one big masquerade to lull him into a false sense of security, but the plain truth. “Thank you, Captain,” he said quietly.

“You’re welcome. And please call me Jim.”

Hoffmann lifted both brows, before he nodded. “Well, you’re Khan’s mate and have his blood in you. Therefore you belong to the family – sort of. Please call me Otto.”

“With pleasure,” Kirk replied.

“Right, I’m glad that this is settled,” Bones cut in businesslike. “And now I ask you two to get lost,” he said to Kirk and Spock; flicking a thumb at the door. “And you,” he addressed Otto, “should relax and try to get some more sleep. The sooner you’re back on your feet, the sooner you can see Khan and your wife again. So, off to dreamland.”

Otto couldn’t help himself: He had to chuckle. The easiness with which the doctor treated him was a welcome exception of the usual behavior of men towards him and his people.

“May I stay here with Otto a little bit longer?” Joaquin asked and McCoy nodded. “Of course – but give your brother the chance to sleep. Just remember how tired you were after you woke up from cryosleep.”

Weiss saluted informally. “Aye, sir!”

Jim laughed softly and shook his head in exasperated fondness. “He’s like me in my first year,” he said.

Spock shook his head. “From what I have heard concerning you, captain, you were worse.”

Kirk gaped at him, speechless for once. And Otto – who looked at them – could have sworn he saw some teasing satisfaction in the deep brown eyes of the alien man, while in the background the doctor chuckled.
Harhan Robertson, President of the United Federation of Planets, looked up from the PADD Admiral Barnett had given him, held his gaze for a few seconds, took a deep breath and blurted out,

“What a mess!”

Richard snorted. “If I may say it plain and simple, Mr. President that is the understatement of the century.” He pointed at the PADD. “I haven’t gotten the results of all the questionings, but I don’t think they will change a lot. If we hadn’t the proof of the whole conspiracy and of what Mr. Singh has been put through – he and his crew – I would say that there is no way on Earth Kirk and his officers would get their heads out of the noose they have placed their necks in. If we only listen to the statements of Norton, Styles and his allies or those of Green, Dashwood, Conelly and their colleagues, I would be forced to think that Kirk and his team have gone utterly rogue. Insubordination, desertion, rampage of a high security facility, unlawful detention of the scientists and their security men, unauthorized changes of flight, ignorance of direct orders, hiding a wanted criminal… The list is shocking long.”

Robertson nodded. “And yet Kirk and his team did all of this only to save Starfleet from an inner putsch and to protect the Federation’s fundamental laws in the middle of a war. His actions prevented a genocide from taking place; his intervention revealed said conspiracy and saved our delegation. And, by the way, he gained the Klingons’ respect enough that Lord Kor, of all warlords, came to his aid and supported another Starfleet officer – Wesley – to get our most important admirals and ambassadors out of captivity. And then he also stopped another admiral gone rogue from damaging our relationship with the Vulcans. Pray tell me how shall I condemn this man? He already saved Earth, stood loyal to the original Starfleet without giving a damn about his own career and even his life, and – above all – had a big deal in stabilizing the ceasefire, not to speak of the thousands of people he saved at Aldebaran.” He shook his head. “Sweet Lord, this boy is about to drive me nuts.”

Richard snorted. “I know what you mean, sir.” He took a deep breath. “All Jim Kirk did was for Starfleet and the Federation. I do know that he interprets the rules a little bit… casually here and there, but if there is one thing I can say about him, then it’s the fact that he is a man of high morality and loyalty,” he stated softly, but firmly.

“Yes,” Robertson nodded. “Yes, I know.” He rose and stepped to the window; his gaze hung at the Eiffel tower which was illuminated by the orange light of the sunset. “And the court martial I’m forced to convene wouldn’t be more than a hearing in Kirk’s and his officers’ case, if it wouldn’t be for the fact that Kirk hid a wanted criminal aboard his ship.”
Barnett pressed his lips shortly in a firm line. “Well, Khan was never truly convicted. His trial was unlawful because he didn’t get any counsel nor had the chance to give any statement. He wasn’t even questioned. I checked the protocols of that trial. The so-called witnesses which were heard never entered the courtroom but were on duty elsewhere. The only correct statements were from Commander Spock and Captain Kirk’s entries in their log-books. Khan’s walk through hell during his forced servitude with Marcus was never mentioned.” He bent forwards and looked straight at the president, who had turned around again. “Khan still has to be convicted, this time within the frames of law – and I think the outcome of this trial will greatly differ from the last one. Not only because he has become quite the hero within the last weeks, saved a whole planet and the population of a colony’s metropolis, but also because he had been wronged first. Amok-run is a good reason to attenuate a judgment, not to mention the fact that he was tortured, abused for illegal science experiments and blackmailed with the lives of his crew.” He leant back again. “We have to be damn careful that this whole mess doesn’t become an affair of state, and the heavens may prevent that this all ever gets made public.”

Robertson crossed his arms in front of his chest. “You mean the court should be held secretly?”

“At least concerning Khan. There is no way on Earth or in hell that we can deal with the wirepuller of the conspiracy behind closed doors. The public has a right to learn the truth. And, by the way, our ‘dear’ neighbors, the Klingons, want to see heads rolling for the wrongful accusation that was made against them and their pride as Norton and Luengo blamed them for the attack against the Excalibur. And there are still the Vulcans. High Minister Selek has already informed me that he and his government will press charges against Starfleet Command because of Norton’s storming of their government’s seat. And I bet my last shirt that T’Pau will press personal charges against Norton because he took her hostage. We have to deal openly with these details in our own interest. The media are already stinging the public’s opinion. If we keep silent about the next steps they will eat us alive. But concerning Khan we should hold the ball as low as possible.”

The president sighed and sat down again. “You already advised me about it before we faced the media during the live media conference four days ago, yet there are two big problems we should find solutions for – and this before we decide how to proceed from now on. First: Kirk’s case is tightly woven with Khan’s. There will be no way to separate the case and I’m prone to hold the assizes for them together. And two: Khan is not the only Augment. The second superhuman is already awake – and there are still seventy-one further enhanced women and men waiting to be woken up from their frosty sleep. And the Vulcans will wake them up, as you told me. What to do with them? Shall we keep their existence a secret, banning them to a fitting planet to build their own colony or shall we try to integrate them into society? If we do the latter then we have to tell about Khan at the least.”

Barnett stared at him – and groaned. Only thinking of all this gave him a headache.

“And that’s not all,” he finally said; knowing that he had to inform the president about another delicate detail in advance, before he learned of it during the trial. “Kirk and Khan could get into more trouble during the trial because of their relationship. Someone could and certainly will get the idea that none of them is neutral anymore.”
Robertson cocked his head. “How so?”


Robertson lifted both brows. “They’ve become friends, as far as I know and detected. I saw the pictures the speed-trap on Aldebaran made from them – Kirk driving the hover-bike and Khan on the backseat, clinging to him. And then the way both acted in union during the whole crisis. They understand each other and…”

“Sorry, sir, for interrupting you, but… it’s not only friendship that has transpired between them.” He cleared his throat. “The two are a couple.”

For several seconds the president only looked at him; trying to comprehend what he just heard. Then his control slipped. “WHAT?”

Barnett shrugged. “They’re lovers – maybe even more. Kirk freaked out as Khan was forced aboard the Excalibur and was about to be stuck into his cryotube again. That was more than the worry for a friend, that was the panic of someone who is about to lose a loved one. And… I caught them – better to say I caught Kirk as he held Khan’s hand in hospital and kissed him.” He grimaced. “Spock and Dr. McCoy – even Selekt – confirmed it in their very own special way. Kirk and Khan are romantically involved and they have been so for quite a while now.”

Robertson had leant back on his chair; his face baffled. “Since when?”

“Since Aldebaran – after Khan rescued Kirk from the Klingons. First it was obviously nothing more than letting off some steam. It’s nothing new that fury can turn into passion in the straight opposite way, but in this case it grew into more. It’s more than an erotic adventure. They both are pretty close by now.”

Pinching his nose, Robertson sighed heavily. “Then Kirk is emotionally compromised and a neutral statement in Khan’s case…”

“Sir, I already talked to him about it – and believe me, he didn’t help Khan from the first because he and the Augment shared a bed. The change of their relationship came after Kirk learned of Khan’s true fate. He let go of the old grudge because he knew what drove Khan to snap like this. Both men want to get even with everything and certainly hope for a ‘peaceful life together’. At least that’s the
Shaking his head, Harhan grumbled, “That’s exactly what we need – a sappy love-story between the criminal turned into hero and our other hero, who is, by the way, the captain of our flag-ship. The media are going to LOVE it – if they ever get wind of it. And I don’t want to imagine the public’s reaction – especially that of the romantics among them.” He grimaced. “Who knows about the two?”

“Besides Kirk’s team, the half of the Enterprise-crew, Selek, T’Pau, a handful of healers on New Vulcan, The Shadow-gang and Wesley?” Barnett asked and had to chuckle as he caught Robertson’s shocked face.

“They all know…?” He groaned. “Well, then we’ve got to deal with this situation. I only ask myself how we can convince the jury that the two are speaking the truth when they make their statements. Both are emotionally compromised.”

“Yes, they are. In Khan’s case even twice, because of what he has been through in the last two years. But I think I have an idea, Mr. President,” Barnett smiled. “It’s uncommon, as I have to admit, but given the unusual case we have to take any chance we get.”

“You’ll do WHAT?”

Jim Kirk asked himself why Bob Wesley needed a communication station at all. The commodore was loud enough to certainly be heard throughout the whole ship without using the intercom.

“We’ll wake up Nien’s family,” the young captain repeated calmly. “It’s the only way to prevent a catastrophe.”

“B-b-b-but… But it was planned to wake them up later,” Bob all but stuttered.

“And now they’ll wake up a few weeks earlier. What’s the problem?” Kirk asked innocently. “We all knew that this day would come, so why risk their health – their lives – by waiting until another cryotube gives up the ghost? That would be unforgiveable – and highly illogical.”

At the other end of the line Wesley groaned. “Let me guess, you already spoke with Selek and got
“his blessing.”

“Well, yes – and even T’Pau agreed to it,” Jim added quickly; exchanging a glance with Spock. He stood with his first officer outside of the hospital, in the middle of the sun and Kirk was already sweating, even if they had only left the temperature-controlled building two minutes ago.

A noise of frustration was heard, before Wesley asked, “Is this man – Otto – already awake?”

“Yes, he woke up half an hour ago. He’s a little bit confused and wary, mind you, but after he talked with Khan he calmed down. He’s sleeping again now and Bones is watching over him.”

“He talked with Khan? I thought our superhero is still confined to bed?” Bob sounded surprised now.

“Yes, but you know there are these interesting devices for more than 350 years now that allows people to talk with each other from afar,” Kirk joked.

“Jim!” Wesley rebuked, which made the captain laugh, before he said, “Since we’re speaking about communication – I need a new communicator, Bob.”

“Why? Is your broken?”

Jim frowned. “Well, now that you mention it – yes, mine is no more. Selek smashed it to prevent Norton from tracking me down and I got Scotty’s afterwards. But nevertheless I need a further one.”

“And for whom?”

“For Nien. I’ll be away from New Gol here and there, and I don’t want to bother the Vulcan priests with patching me through to Nien every time I have to speak with him.”

“Of course, no problem,” Wesley replied sarcastically. “There is no reason why a civilian shouldn’t be provided with Starfleet property.”
“Bo-ob, Nien belongs to the crew and he was even petty officer for some time…”

“Don’t remind me. I get a belly-ache thinking of the moment Command learns of it.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “They are used that I interpreted the book differently if circumstances demand it, so don’t panic.”

“Why should I panic? It’s only my head that is at stake here – oh, and yours and more or less that of the whole crew, so why should I get nervous? There is absolutely no reason to be unsettled – even less because in two or three days more than seventy Augments will roam New Vulcan.” This time stress edged in the commodore’s voice.

“If they behave like Otto everything will be fine,” Jim assured him. “He’s a nice guy. A little bit on the edge first, which I can understand utterly, but he is peaceful and took the news well that he has slept for more than 270 years and is on an alien planet.”

“He certainly thinks he’s still dreaming,” Bob deadpanned, before he silenced for a few seconds. “How long until they all are back in the world of living?”

“Two or three days. Otto has to support us to start the wakening processes correctly, and Bones thinks he’ll be able to walk the day after tomorrow at the latest. To hope for Nien’s assistance is out of the question. He’s still confined to sick-bed – even if he’s pouting like a six-year old by now.”

“Oh, doesn’t this sound familiar?” Wesley scoffed, and then he took another deep breath and let it out in a giant sigh. “Well, there is nothing I could or want to do concerning your boyfriend’s crew. The Vulcans took over the responsibility and I’m not foolish enough to interfere with them.”

“A wise decision,” Spock murmured, but quietly enough not to be caught by the communicator’s microphone.

But Jim heard and only grinned at him, before he returned his attention back to the talk. “What about my request to get an additional…”

“I’ll beam you down a communicator to your recent coordinates,” Wesley interrupted him. “I’ll give Kyle the instruction, so wait a few minutes.”
“Please hurry up, Bob,” Kirk said. “It’s hot enough out here to melt bones.”

“Well, try to think about something cold then – an ice-cream maybe,” Bob replied wryly. “I have to ponder a lot more than a few hot sun-beams. For example how to inform Command about the fact that New Vulcan will have seventy more special inhabitants within the next few days.”

“Knowing you, you’ll come up with something,” Jim flattered, and Wesley only snorted again.

“Too much honor here, m’boy. Be careful with your new friends. I don’t think they will be too delighted when they learn what happened to their leader and four of their comrades, so… just be careful, son, all right?”

Jim smiled. “We’re careful, Bob, don’t fret.”

“Fretting is for McCoy – and Spock when you get yourself injured again.”

“Commodore, I do not fret!” the Vulcan said indignantly.

“Tell that your grandmother, Spock. Wesley out.”

Jim closed the communicator and Spock looked at him, at a loss again. “This is the second time someone said to me I should tell something utterly unimportant T’Pau. Why?”

Kirk began to snicker. “Well, it’s a figure of speech that someone doesn’t believe what you say. Not that you’re lying, no. It means that someone doesn’t believe that you believe your own words.”

Now the Vulcan was obviously confused. “Why should I say something I don’t believe, and then, above all, to make someone believe that I don’t believe what I say? That’s highly illogical.”

Jim began to laugh and clasped a hand on Spock’s shoulder. “Just keeping up with these kinds of sentences, and you can talk someone dizzy.” He stepped towards one of the trees to wait in its shadow for the communicator to be beamed down.
His first officer followed him. “It’s impossible to make someone dizzy with a speech.”

“Oh no, it isn’t,” Jim shook his head. “Just listen to the politicians for half an hour, and you’re dizzy with tiredness because it’s so boring.”

Spock lifted a brow. “I can’t help myself but to recognize that you’re trying to tease me, Captain – or that you’re trying to confuse me.”

Kirk laughed again; mischief shimmered in his eyes. “Maybe both. It’s so cute when you try to analyze one of our human idioms.”

Cute!

That screamed for revenge – even if it was against Surak’s principles.

Spock clasped his hands on his back and cocked his head. “On the other hand, Captain, the human idioms give me another reason to be grateful towards my ancestors that they were wise enough to follow Surak’s path of logic. At least we’re speaking in understandable sentences.”

Jim smirked at him; taking the bait. “But you love challenges. Don’t deny it!”

“As a scientist you need a personal streak of natural curiosity, otherwise you wouldn’t…” Spock was interrupted as the bell-like sound of an incoming transporter beam was heard and a communicator materialized only a few meters away from them.

Kirk retrieved it and turned towards Spock. “So, what about you and I having a trip downtown to look for some wedding-bands?” he changed the topic.

The Vulcans’s eyes became very soft. “Don’t you want to return to New Gol to…”

Jim shook his head. “No, Spock. I promised you to support you with your wedding. Nien has company and feels reassured that Otto is out of the woods. He can go on without me for two or three
hours more.” He closed the distance to the Vulcan and said gently, “Your great day is important for me too, Spock – after all you are my closest friend. My T’hy’la. My being bonded to Nien doesn’t prevent me from spending time with you – ever!”

Sarek’s son pondered the words. “I’m not jealous, if this is what you read in my suggestion.”

Promptly Kirk chuckled. “I know. You rather worry that I’m forced to do something I don’t want or don’t have nerves for at the moment, but be certain: I’m looking forward to prepare your wedding together with you. And, as far as I understand it, also Nyota is going to need a hand or two. Her family will arrive in a few days and until then everything has to be ready.”

Suddenly something close to glee shimmered in Spock’s eyes for a few seconds. “With Leonard being accepted as the speaker of Nyota’s family it’s up to him to support her.”

Jim gaped at him – and began to snicker. “There you caught Bones on the wrong foot, my friend. Because he and weddings are a big problem after his divorce. And, by the way, he’s taking care of Otto and the others. So it’s up to me to help Uhura out.” He shortly pursed his lips. “Maybe I can ask Bob if he’ll allow Carol to beam down a few times to assist Nyota. After all, there are certain things only women can do.”

“I’m sure Commodore Wesley will be very pleased to be asked to make another exception from the regulations,” Spock commented – and Jim had to laugh again.

“You’re full of jokes today, Spock.” With those words he began to head towards the end of the campus.

Spock had lifted both brows and almost looked scandalized at him. “Captain, there is really no need to offend me!”

The answer was another brilliant laugh from his friend, and then he followed him into the day’s heat.

ST***ST

Otto blinked into the dimmed light. For a moment he was utterly disoriented, and then his memories kicked in again. He and the others had slept for almost 270 years, were now on an alien planet and Khan was injured.
That wasn’t exactly the outcome Khan had planned for them all. At least they seemed to be among people who weren’t hostile towards them – even friendly in the three young officers’ case. Well, he wasn’t certain what to think of the alien man on whose species’ planet they were. The doctor had said these Vulcans were peaceful, but Otto had learned in painful ways that ‘peaceful’ was a word people interpreted differently. He could only hope that the Vulcans and he understood the same meaning of the word, otherwise he and his siblings would have a serious problem at hand – after all these people here had a technology remote from what he was used to and could best them any time.

“Otto? You awake?”

Joaquin!

Of course. The boy had said he would stay here for a little bit longer – and he was affectionate through and through.

Lifting his head, Hoffmann looked into the direction the voice had come from. He spied Joaquin on one of the other beds; something that looked like a little screen was in his hands.

“Yes, I am,” Otto murmured.

With smooth movements the young Augment rose and stepped to the older one’s bed; the little screen was still in his left hand.

“You’re okay?” he asked quietly, and Otto nodded.

“Yes. I’m still… cold but Khan said that is normal.”

“Yeah, I experienced the same,” Weiss admitted. “I was freezing for two or three days. It was only when I came to this planet that the coldness left me. It’s pretty hot here – approx. 36 to 42 degrees Celsius every day.”

Otto pondered these words. “It’s a desert planet?”
“Yes. One with a big lake where the town is built now. The skies are sandy-orange like the
mountains, but the plants are green like on Earth.” He sat down on the bed’s edge. “You’ll see,
despite the temperature and the desert it’s beautiful outside.”

Hoffmann nodded slowly before his gaze wandered to the device in Joaquin’s hand once again.
“What’s that?”

The boy showed him. “It’s called a PADD. It’s like a transportable mini-computer, only with much
more memory capacity. Jim gave me one after I woke up. I took it with me from the Enterprise and
now to the hospital, so that I have some entertainment while you’re sleeping.”

Otto watched him closely. “You seem to be content,” he said slowly; his mind worked better and
better by now.

“Yeah, I am. I already made friends – good friends. They are ensigns aboard Jim’s ship and one of
them, Pavel Chekov, is indeed a genius. If I didn’t know it better I would say he’s one of us. He’s
only eighteen, but is already the Enterprise’s first navigator, graduated the Academy two years ago
with honours and his hobby is enhanced transporter techniques. Jim thinks he’ll be an expert in no
time.”

Hoffmann had listened intensely and grimaced. “You were always easy to impress, little brother,
so…”

“I know, I know,” Joaquin interrupted him; rolling his eyes. “You always say that. But you’ll see.
When you come to know everything – really know, I mean – you’ll be impressed, too.”

Otto sighed; knowing exactly that the youngest of them all was quickly excited. “So, you already
made new friends. Isn’t it odd that they seem to accept us this easily?”

Joaquin shook his head. “The humans of today are used to having strange people around them.
There are hundreds of different species and they accept them. And, by the way, Jim’s team already
knew Noo when I woke up – and he did a lot of unbelievable things within the last weeks. They are
on his side, defending him even – despite what he did before.”

Aha! Now they were getting to somewhere. Otto tensed.
“What did Noonien do?”

Biting his lips for a moment, Weiss said, “Noo wants to tell you himself. He… mixed up several things very badly. But it wasn’t his fault – otherwise he wouldn’t have Jim’s and the others’ full support. Hell, even this commodore – Wesley – stood up for Noo and took him under his protection.”

Now Hoffmann was really on alert. “Khan needing protection? Since when?” He tried to sit up. “What’s going on here, Joaquin? Out with it!”

The boy shook his head. “No. Both, Noo and Jim, told me to not upset you and to let them explain everything.” He smiled softly. “Don’t ask me to break my given word.”

Otto groaned and rubbed his face. “You know that this sounds even worse?”

Joaquin shrugged. “Well… So much happened, I do think it’s for the best that those two tell the tale. I think, even I only know the half of it.”

Hoffmann grimaced. “Noonien and his secrets!” He shook his head. “At least he wasn’t alone the whole time. How long have he and Jim been a couple?”

“For several weeks,” Joaquin smiled. “But they’ve known each other longer.”

Shortly pursing his lips, the older Augment grumbled, “This Kirk seemed to be a sincere man of high morality. And if Noonien trusts him enough to make him his mate, I’m ready to put some trust in him, too. The doctor seems to be okay also, but this other man – Stog…”

“Spock. His name is Spock. And he is the son of Vulcan’s ambassador – the very same the commodore saved from being kidnapped by allies of those damn conspirators and was brought to New Vulcan at the last minute, because he needed a surgery.”

Otto stared at him; his lips curled in amusement. “Should these crazy hints of something big that obviously happened tell me anything, or are you going to be so nice as to explain it in a way I’m able to understand at least a little bit of it?”
The boy blushed and snickered. “Sorry, more I can’t tell – only that the last weeks sound like one big adventure novel.”

“No miracle when Noonien is involved,” Hoffmann deadpanned wryly; smiling for real now. “So, you’re feeling well here and…”

He stopped as he suddenly he heard steps coming nearer. The door opened and McCoy entered; a Vulcan in his middle age followed him. “Ah, awake again.”

Otto lifted both brows. “How did you know, Doctor?”

The surgeon smiled and pointed at the monitor above Hoffmann’s bed. “A little birdie told me.”

“They have a way to scan your vitals, brain activities, nerve stimulus and so on, while you’re lying on this kind of bed. It’s called a bio-bed and alerts the medicals if the patient needs something,” Joaquin explained quickly.

Bones grinned. The boy learned really quickly. Then he turned serious again. “Mr. Hoffmann, may I introduce Healer Sorel to you? He is the one who is monitoring your brothers and sisters, and alerted me when your cryotube got into trouble.”

Otto looked at the other man and this time he saw instantly the foreign appearance. Firm, angular facial features, slanted brows, pointed ears and a hue of yellow-green on the skin. He wore a half-long tunic and fitted trousers in sandy colors with an emblem on the left side of the chest that showed a circle in which a triangle pointed. The man was middle-aged, as far as the Augment could guess, and seemed to rest in himself. Never before had Hoffmann met someone who seemed to be that calm or as much at peace like this man.

A man who had saved him.

“I learned from Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy that I owe you my life, Healer,” he addressed the man; hoping not to trespass on some etiquette. “Thank you for your help.”

Sorel only nodded slowly; familiar with the human urge to thank even for things which were done in the line of duty. “You are welcome, Mr. Hoffmann,” he answered politely.
“Mr. Hoffmann, Joaquin and I will return to New Gol within the next half hour, and Sorel will keep an eye on the progress you make,” Bones began. “If you have any problems, he’ll be there for you. The late-shift will be taken by Dr. Daniel Corrigan – a colleague who assisted me during Khan’s surgery and monitored your vitals during your stay in the stasis-chamber last night. He’s informed about your enhanced nature and already got some experience with it while Khan was still here. Tomorrow in the morning I’ll be back and we see if you can get up already. Please don’t try to leave your bed alone. You would only hurt yourself and your dear brother would have my head for it.” He winked at the last sentence, and Otto sighed.

“I promise, Doctor. Just enjoy your evening – and give Khan my greetings.”

McCoy snorted. “I’m far from done for today – and, by the way, it’s only afternoon. I have to prepare another surgery aboard our ship – concerning our helmsman.”

Weiss looked quickly at him. “You’re going to operate on Mr. Sulu?”

“Yeah,” Bones nodded. “He’s healed enough and neither he nor we want to let him walk around with such a face longer than necessary, the poor man.”

Joaquin only nodded, before he asked, “Doctor, may I stay here over night? Otto is utterly strange to this world and knows no one here except for me. I think it would be better for him, if…”

“I don’t need a babysitter, Joaquin,” Hoffmann cut in; exasperation and amusement shone in his eyes.

“I know that you’re the big guy, but do you really think you’ll be comfortable wholly alone on a foreign planet almost 270 years in the future and with no one around you know? Hell, even Noo was unsettled the first night, as he admitted.”

The German Augment rolled his eyes, but kept silent. The boy had a point here; there was no denying about it – as much as it tickled his ego.

McCoy shrugged. “There is nothing that would speak against it.” He glanced at Sorel. “If you agree?”
“Mr. Weiss’ suggestion is quite logical given the current situation,” the healer answered. “There is no reason why he shouldn’t remain here.”

Bones nodded slowly. “Okay. I’ll replicate some sleep clothes for you and…”

“We have spare tunics in a clothing storage,” Sorel interrupted him. “I’m certain that I’ll find something fitting for the youngling. You can eat at the cantina, Mr. Weiss. I’ll send Daniel over to accompany you to dinner in four hours.” He glanced back at Otto. “I think it will be save to serve you breakfast tomorrow. Your stomach should be adjusted to functioning by then. Just right now your body will be fed by the IV.”

Hoffmann sighed. “Don’t trouble yourself on my account, Healer. Khan already told us before we boarded our ship that our bodies will need a day or two to be fully functional again. And I think he’s right.”

“Of course he is,” Bones rolled his eyes. “Your brother seems to be skilled in many departments. When I think of the doping-agent he produced from his blood that gave Jim enough strength to storm through a jungle despite the torture he underwent …” He shook his head, before he straightened his shoulders. “Right, I’ll tell Jim that you are staying here, Jo. I’m back early in the morning. You have Jim’s private frequency?”

Weiss shook his head. “Nope – I don’t even have a communicator.”

McCoy sighed. “I’ll send you one down after I returned to the Enterprise, programmed on Jim’s and also Spock’s private frequency. If something happens, just call.”

Weiss smiled at him. “Thank you!”

“You’re welcome,” Leonard nodded.

“Where is Jim?” Jo wanted to know; wondering that the captain hadn’t returned by now.

“Jim is in town with Spock – shopping for wedding-bands and further stuff. And afterwards he’ll stop by at Sarek’s to discuss the details of the upcoming ceremony.” He cocked his head. “That gives me an idea. Uhura certainly needs a hand. Maybe Carol can support her. I’ll ask Wesley about it.” Again he recognized the asking glance of Otto and explained, “Spock and Nyota Uhura, our
Hoffman cocked his head. Uhura – that meant freedom, as far as he remembered the Swahili-language he learned some from his Zulu-brother Mandla. And Nyota was a female name of the same language. So, a woman of African heritage was about to marry an extraterrestrial man? Interesting! “Give him my congratulations, Doctor,” he said politely.

“Oh, you’re going to see Spock again to tell him, no doubt about it. If there is one thing Vulcans can’t resist then it is satisfying their curiosity.”

“Is this the result of your experiences with Commander Spock, Doctor?” Sorel asked and received an amused laughter from the CMO. “This is the result of my experiences with all Vulcans, Healer – you included.” He nodded at Otto. “Just sleep a little bit more. Tomorrow we’ll try to get you on your feet.”

“I’ll try,” Hoffmann answered; dazed by everything he learned – and not learned until now.

With wary eyes he watched the surgeon leaving the room, before his attention was driven back to the Vulcan, who lifted a brow. “And now?” he asked.

“Given your already proceeded condition I think it’s safe to make some tests on how far your arm-muscles can be stressed.”

Eager to be fit as soon as possible, the Augment only nodded – hoping to get a chance to ask the healer some more questions about his race.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, there are many lines within this part of the story, which proceed parallel. Spock’s and Uhura’s upcoming wedding, the waking-up of another Augment, on Earth the president (and Barnett) learn more and more about the whole mess and are going to face
several unpleasant public occurrences... This all are storylines which are heading into the same direction to become one.

In the next chapter Jim will meet Sarek again – and Spock’s father has some interesting ideas concerning the current problems. Bones will learn that obviously ALL Augments are stubborn and Bones will be aboard the Enterprise again and meets Carol.

I hope you liked the new chapter. I know that the story doesn’t proceed quickly in the moment, but many details will be very important what will come soon.

Please leave some feedback again – I love them all.

Have a nice start into the next week and for those, who’re going on vacation soon, have a good time.

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

And once again thank you for the feedback. I know that you all are eager to read more about Otto, but in this new chapter the focus is on Jim and him being now a ‘part’ of Spock’s clan. Our dear captain will be tired out in the evening, because neither an upcoming Vulcan wedding nor discussing important topics with Sarek will be easy for him. In the meantime Bones will see Carol again, and Wesley is about to need a vacation soon (snicker).

Have fun with the new chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 91 – Vulcan oddities

“Jim! This is a nice surprise.” Uhura smiled at her captain as she opened the door to the flat she and Spock, and since the day before, Sarek lived in.

Kirk looked shortly over the young woman’s appearance. She wore light wide pants and a half-long tunic that hugged her slender figure nicely, while flat sandals showed her painted toe nails. Her clothes were Vulcan – and in their own way they seemed to be very comfortable.

Smiling at his communication officer, Jim returned her warm greeting. “Thanks, Nyota. That’s a nice welcome.” He stepped in after Spock nodded at him. Barely controlling his curiosity, Kirk looked around.

The entry merged into a surprisingly comfortable living area with large windows from where Kirk could see the lake. A dining area was to his right next to the open door where Jim recognized the kitchen. To his left a sofa, two arm-chairs and a coffee table was placed, while another door – now closed – led to an attached room. The flat was functional yet it didn’t miss some personal decorations. On a shelf Jim saw two framed holo-photos, a lyre-like instrument was placed on a side-board and Kirk also saw a 3D-chess-set. Yet this flat reminded him of a suite in a hotel – pleasurable but impersonal.
Of course.

This was where Sarek lived. Every personal item the ambassador possessed had been destroyed with Vulcan. The few things which showed that this was a private flat were new – or had escaped destruction because they hadn’t been on Vulcan when The Day happened.

Yet someone – and Kirk had a very good idea who this ‘someone’ was – had added some homey things. There were two carpets in the living room and dining area – one of Terran, one obviously of Vulcan heritage. Candle holders were on the tables and two of the walls had different color emphasis which harmonized utterly with the basic color. The air was warm, but not hot – the perfect compromise for the human and Vulcan inhabitants.

Jim realized that he had stood here for some time, staring, because Uhura smirked almost mockingly at him, while Spock faced him was a raced eyebrow. Feeling blood rushing into his face, Kirk mumbled an, “Uhm, it’s… nice here. Comfortable and…” He sighed. “To tell you the truth, I didn’t know what to expect, but I really like it here.”

For a second amusement shimmered in his Vulcan friend’s eyes. “Thank you, Jim.”

Uhura’s glance found the bags Spock carried and cocked her head. “You two were shopping?” she asked perplexed.

“Yes, several purchases were necessary,” Spock replied. “I also brought something for dinner. Would you please be so kind to put the nourishment in the fridge?” He offered her two bags she took from him.

“Of course,” she nodded, before she headed for the kitchen. “Will you stay for dinner, Jim?” she called over her shoulder.

“Sorry, I would love to but I have to return to New Gol – telling Nien about Otto in detail.”

“How is he – and how is he doing?” Nyota’s voice sounded from the kitchen. “I mean this Otto?”

“Huh, he is… more like Nien than like Jo. He worries about Khan and the others, is wary because of
his current location and seems to be very protective of his friends. But all in all he seems to be a nice guy.” He caught Spock’s asking glance and shrugged. “Well, give him some time to come to terms with everything. It’s quite a culture shock for him.”

Spock only nodded, while Uhura called, “Sounds like Khan. No wonder. Both have to be about the same age, what means that they were… born for the same purpose. Is he aggressive?”

“No,” Jim shook his head. “He’s wary, distrusting and on alert, but he’s not aggressive. It became better after he talked with Nien.”

Something was opened and closed in the kitchen. “Just imagine how you would feel waking up over 250 years in the future, surrounded by strange people.”

“Thanks. I had already enough to wake up and to find out that I’ve missed two weeks. That really wasn’t a nice experience.” He saw how Spock slightly winced and laid a hand on his arm; squeezing it while giving him a calm smile which meant ‘don’t fear, I’m here’. “So, is your father at home?” he asked; tactfully changing the topic.

“Sarek is resting in the next room,” Uhura said; returning from the kitchen.

“I’ll go to him,” Spock murmured and gestured towards the living area. “Please have a seat, Jim. We’ll discuss the further preparations for the wedding when I’m back.” He vanished through the left door and before it closed, Kirk heard the slightly familiar voice of the Vulcan ambassador.

“How is he?” Jim whispered, after Uhura had closed the distance to him.

“He’s still weak, but he’s doing better,” she answered. “I’m sure that he will be back on his feet within a few days. I only ask myself how to make him take it slow afterwards.”

“Just handle him like you handle Spock in these cases and…”

“That’s the matter, Jim. If Spock is injured he listens to you, not to me.” She sighed and threw her hands up. “Boys – half grown, fully grown or aged. It’s always the same with them!” she grumbled and led Kirk to the sofa, where he sat down. His glance found the two framed holo-photos on the shelf. One showed a very young Sarek and a Terran woman with dark hair and very familiar big, brown eyes, who held a tiny elf-like boy in her arms. Jim felt a wave of fondness as he realized that
the toddler was his now often so stiff first officer.

The second photo showed the Terran woman alone – middle aged, with a peaceful expression, shimmering brown hair and large expressive eyes. Spock’s eyes, as Jim recognized again.

“Spock’s mother was beautiful,” he murmured and Uhura nodded.

“Yes, she was. And she was deeply loved.” She caught Kirk’s asking glance and explained in a hushed voice, “Spock told me that his father admitted his exquisite love for Amanda after… The Day.”

The warmth in Jim’s heart turned into sadness and a lump was rising in his throat. Quickly he suppressed the emotions of deep compassion and licked his lips.

Nyota, recognizing her captain’s mood but also his attempt to control it, cocked her head. “Do you want something to drink?”

“Water please,” Kirk nodded; grateful for the distraction. “The heat outside really got to me.”

She examined him. His shirt was partly soaked, his face was red and he looked exhausted. “Why did Spock pull you along for a shopping trip in this heat? He should know better!”

“Bones gave me a hypo with trioxide before we were off to town,” Kirk defended his friend and himself. “And, by the way, we had to start the preparations for your’s and Spock’s wedding. It’ll take place in eight days – there is not much time left.”

Uhura had gone to the replicator and offered now Kirk a glass of luke-warm water. He grimaced as he sipped at it. “Cold water would make you sweat more and would stress your blood system and your heart,” Nyota explained. “Believe me. This climate here doesn’t differ so much from several areas in Africa.”

“I believe you,” Jim sighed and drank more; feeling some of his tiredness being chased away. “So, how you are doing?” he asked, while he placed the empty glass on the table.
Uhura had sat down on one of the arm-chairs; her legs were gracefully crossed. “Very well. Sarek can be almost charming and the neighbors here are very polite. At first, they were curious, but after they learned who I am, they showed acceptance and respect.”

“So… they have finally come to accept Spock?” he asked hopefully, and the young Bantu woman shrugged.

“There isn’t a single Vulcan who doesn’t know that it was Spock’s deployment and effort that saved the Vulcan High Council, the priests and the most important artifacts of the Vulcan culture.” She flipped her ponytail back. “And they all know also about you – that you bought Spock time to get the council and the priests to safety. And many Vulcans owe you their lives, because without that almost suicidal mission many less Vulcans would have been evacuated.” She smiled. “The outcast and the outworlder saving the rest of a doomed culture. Believe me, Captain, they would celebrate you two if their traditions would allow it.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Please, Nyota, not you too! T’Pau already complimented and thanked me for something that was simply my duty.” He took a deep breath. “To admit the truth, I was simply hell-bent to stop this bastard – and to hinder him from another bloodbath. He killed my father, and now he was about to kill the people of a planet Earth owes so much. I was… furious and… hoped for a chance of revenge. Yet I couldn’t prevent the holocaust from taking place.”

“There was no time left to stop Nero,” Uhura said gently. “But you and Spock stopped him from destroying Earth, too. Two young men against a whole bunch of ruthless Romulans going pirate… It’s no wonder that you two became heroes – even here on New Vulcan.”

“If Vulcans would call someone a ‘hero’, you mean” Jim smiled, and Nyota chuckled.

“Well, they are very sparing with such terms.”

The young captain looked warmly at her. “And yet you’re going to marry one of them.”

“Spock is… different – and very special,” the communication officer stated with a hue of tenderness in her melodious voice.

“This I would subscribe to any time!” Kirk nodded. Then he shortly pursed his lips. “How are your preparations going? Do you need help?”
“T’Pau sent one of her assistants to support me, but…” She sighed. “I’m glad that I learned all the
details for the ceremony, yet I’m looking forward to when my family arrives. My younger sister,
Uaekundu, will be a more personal help for me and I also think my brother Malcom Marien can also
support you and Spock. I sent them the most important details of a Vulcan wedding ceremony so that
they are prepared when they’re here.” She sighed. “Father said he and the others will be here in five
days.”

“Three days left then until the big issue – not much, if you ask me.” Jim cocked his head. “You and
Carol have become good friends. Shall I ask Bob for permission to let her come down to New
Vulcan to assist you?”

Uhura beamed at him. “That would be nice.” She sobered a little bit. “And I have to make it up to
her. I almost scratched her eyes out as she came to the bridge aboard the Excalibur after the battle. I
still thought her to be a betrayer and was about to give her a piece of my mind. Only Scotty stopped
me…” She chuckled sheepishly – and Kirk grinned.

“Yeah, never mix up with you or those you regard as friends or family. Those who did should seek
cover immediately.”

Nyota rolled her eyes. “You’re not helping here, Jim!”

Kirk laughed quietly, but stopped as he heard the door opening again and two different steps nearing.
Quickly he rose as did Uhura, and turned around.

Spock led Sarek out of the attached bed-room; steadying his father with one hand on his upper arm.
The ambassador wore a loose robe over a casual tunic and loose trousers – obviously sleeping
clothes. His hair was combed, yet not in order as it used to be, and there were still dark bags beneath
his eyes. Yet he looked better – far better.

“Ambassador Sarek,” Jim greeted and lifted his right hand in a passable ta’al. “I’m glad that you’re
doing better.”

Sarek watched the captain in front of him – his son’s best friend and T’hy’la. And just like in the
hospital it didn’t cease to surprise him how much the young human had matured since The Day and
the incident on the bridge he had witnessed.

“Captain Kirk, welcome to my home,” he answered.
Jim, realizing that Spock steered his father to the sofa, hastily made room for him, while Uhura addressed the ambassador, “Do you want some tea, Sarek?” She pronounced his name differently than he, Kirk, did it. Hell, he had to learn some Vulcan soon, this much was clear.

“This would be acceptable, thank you,” Sarek answered and slowly sat down. Spock took the place beside him, while Jim took the second arm-chair.

“Spock told me that the Augment has woken up – Otto Hoffmann,” Sarek came straight to the point.

Jim nodded. “Yes. Spock, Dr. McCoy and I talked to him. He is confused and wary, but remained surprisingly calm in the face of the utterly foreign situation he found himself in.”

Sarek lifted a brow. “He’s enhanced, Captain. As far as I understood my son, Mr. Singh adjusted to this world in a short time, as did this younger Augment, Mr. Weiss. I do not doubt that the other Augments will come to terms with this century, too. I am rather… apprehensive that they will overreact when they learn of what their leader was put through.”

Kirk sighed. Sarek had a point here – a point that gave Jim a bellyache whenever he thought of it.

“To admit the truth, Ambassador, this is something I fear a little bit, too,” he said quietly. “Otto was very protective of Khan after he learned that Nien was injured. Strong family-bonds seem to be usual among the Augments. On the other hand, I can understand them – if Otto and Nien are typical examples for these ties. From an early age they had only each other, and no-one else. The scientists and guards within the labs didn’t treat them like an adult should handle a kid, not to speak of the lack of parentally affection and the security of a family’s bosom. I think it tied them more strongly together then if they would have been raised separately with some host-parents. To be protective of each other was the only thing that kept them going on and in the end ensured their survival. To learn now that the man, who was always there for them and risked his life on many occasions, was tortured, blackmailed and abused in this new age will certainly stir up some fury. Fury I have to soothe – with Nien’s help, at least concerning Otto. When we win Otto over and gain his trust, then it will be easier to deal with the other Augments.”

“Logical. Mr. Hoffmann is one of their own and they will believe him easier than you, Captain,” Sarek nodded. “It will need time before they will accept everything that happened – to their leader, and to them. I learned from Spock that most of them were also unwillingly part of illegal experiments – something that will terrify them, but also will hurt their pride. I offer you my support in negotiating with them.”
For a second Jim was astonished. “Sir, all due respect, but you’re still healing from a heart attack and a difficult surgery,” he began to protest. “You certainly…”

“I’m well enough to talk to people, Captain, after all that is what I’m just doing right here and now.” – Kirk could be mistaken, but he thought he saw a short glimpse of amusement in the older Vulcan’s eyes. – “And Healer Sorel insists that I check in with him every three days, so it’s no effort for me to meet at first Mr. Hoffmann – and afterwards his comrades.”

Jim cocked his head. “You already made up your mind,” he stated. “You only made the offer because of politeness.”

Sarek again lifted a brow, which Jim translated to ‘guilty as charged’. Then the older Vulcan took a deep breath. His voice was firm but also gentle – reasonable in a way Kirk knew all too well from Spock.

“As understanding and compassionate as you are, Captain, you are no diplomat – not in the common sense of the word. And, by the way, the ladies and gentlemen are going to have many questions, especially concerning their present exile here on New Vulcan. Questions I can answer the best, while at the same time I would be the connection between them and the Vulcan High Council. I would appreciate yours and my son’s assistance, because you two have more experiences with Augments, yet you two will not remain here for eternity, to use a Terran phrase, and to whom shall they come if they have questions or need support, when you and your team are back on Earth for the trial? They need a man of confidence. My current situation of health doesn’t allow me to make long travels within the next weeks, which more or less banishes me to the colony. By supporting Mr. Singh’s crew, I can do something useful until maybe a resumption of the peace-talks calls me away again.”

Jim looked at him for several seconds, then he grinned. ‘In other words, you’re bored to death already and hope for something to do. Like Spock you simply can’t sit back and do nothing. Sweet Lord, Vulcans are easy to read if you know their own language beneath the spoken words and beyond the showed expressionless faces.’

Aloud he said, “You gave a lot of thought to the whole problem, sir, and I’m glad that you offer your support. It’s true, Spock, Dr. McCoy, my team, I – and Khan – will be called to Earth within the next weeks to face court martial. Alone this circumstance will unsettle Otto and the others – and they are utterly foreign to this time and to their location. They, indeed, need someone they can trust. I already thought to ask Selek to take care of them, but I know that Selek is more than busy with his job and the growing colony. If you’re willing to help, Ambassador, I can travel to Earth with the knowledge that Khan’s crew – his family – are in good hands.”

Sarek made an affirming gesture. “Then I think it would be the best if you introduce me to Mr. Hoffmann the day after tomorrow. I’m back at the hospital then for the check-up and Mr. Hoffmann
should be adjusted enough then to talk about how to proceed from now on.” He took a deep breath. “Maybe he should be informed of everything then.”

Jim sighed. “I could barely ask for his patience after he woke up and learned of Nien’s injuries. He wants to meet Khan as soon as possible, and then Nien and I have a lot of explaining to do – including the whole shit that happened to him and the others.” He felt heat rising to his cheeks as he realized his harsh wording. “Sorry,” he mumbled, but both Vulcans decided to let his slip pass.

“How long does Dr. McCoy think Mr. Hoffmann will need to be properly up?” Uhura asked, and Kirk shrugged,

“He anticipated Otto being on his feet in one or two days. Jo needed longer, but – as I have learned from Otto – this could be because Jo belongs to the ‘second generation’ of the Augments, which were… born for a different purpose than Nien and the others. Otto is more like Khan – means that he’ll be up soon. Hell, he was thinking straight and clear within minutes, while Jo needed a whole day to get a proper thought done.”

“So, Mr. Weiss is in mind and body weaker than the others?” Sarek asked; curiously.

Jim shook his head. “He’s quick in thinking like Khan, but – as Nien told me once – he and the others of the younger generations were ‘created’ to be less aggressive. And aggressiveness isn’t always a bad streak. Used in a good way it can encourage intentions or can expedite healing processes. Jo came around rather quick compared to ‘casual’ humans, but slower than Otto – and certainly slower than Khan, too.”

Sarek pondered this a moment. “It will be fascinating to interact with the Augments,” he said – and Jim chuckled. As he caught the ambassador’s asking glance, he clarified,

“You and Spock are so similar when something has woken your interest. I think, Ambassador, deep in you a scientist is slumbering.”

“Scientists are people who explore the unknown or try new paths others haven’t done or haven’t succeeded in walking. To be a diplomat doesn’t differ so much from it, Captain, no matter if there are negotiations within the Federation or with foreign or even hostile cultures. There are riddles to solve, problems to eliminate and new ways to find. Only the purpose differs.”

Jim smiled at him; his blue eyes sparkled. “Well, your last words cover a lot of my job description.
So, I’m after all a diplomat, too.”

Sarek stared at him; his eyes widened for a second in surprise.

Uhura repressed a soft laugh, while Spock deadpanned, “You just experienced one of Jim’s peerless ability to talk someone into admitting or agreeing to something said someone had denied or disagreed to only moments before.” He glanced at Kirk; something close to fondness and pride flickered for a short second in his gaze. “Like this he even smoothed out some of his marginal actions within the last weeks due his talk with Admiral Barnett.”

Kirk knew that he was blushing again, while mirth mirrored on his face.

It was rare that a Vulcan showed reactions at all, but there was no mistake now: Sarek was impressed. “I have to correct my earlier statement, Captain. You may not a diplomat in the common sense, but that doesn’t hinder you in using our strategies.”

Jim chuckled again. “To talk myself out of a mess saved me a lot of punishment when I was younger.”

“You had problems with the law before the last weeks?” Sarek wanted to know. His face gave nothing away of his thoughts.

“Not really,” Kirk sighed. “Not when I was a boy, mind you.” He leant back. “If you would ask my mother she would say that I wasn’t… an easy kid. And it didn’t get better as I grew into a teenager. At the beginning of my twenties I lived at the razor’s edge and I certainly would have spiraled down, if it hadn’t have been for Christopher Pike, who met me by accident, recognized me because he was a friend of my dad, and dared me to do better. He suggested I should join Starfleet – something that occurred to me several times, yet I never ventured another failure of my non-existing career as a man living into the day with no duties and no purpose.” He shrugged. “Next day I drove by the shipyard in Riverside, saw the half-finished Enterprise – and fell in love. I wanted to captain such an incredible vessel one day. I think some genes of my dad – besides my appearance – woke up in me. I smuggled myself on Starfleet grounds, faced Pike, told him that I wouldn’t need four but three years to graduate the academy, stepped into the shuttle, met Bones there and well… And that was the beginning of it all.”

The dark orbs of the Vulcan ambassador watched him thoughtfully. “Changing from a rebel into a Starfleet captain within a few years. Fascinating. Maybe a certain rebellious streak has to be present in someone to make such a person – and to do the right things, no matter the written rules or the consequences.” He looked at Spock and then back at Kirk. “This is something you both have in
Jim grimaced. “If you refer to the incident on the bridge more than two years ago, I…”

“My son already told me everything, Captain, and I understand your motivations and actions. And you two have developed a close friendship – you are even T’hy’la. A sacred bond that is very rare, especially today. And Spock chose his friend well, seeing that you stop at nothing to keep your subordinates and friends safe, and even risk your career and freedom to do what has to be done. As far as my mother told me, she already promised you our clan’s support and welcomed you in the family. I want to repeat this given word. Not only my son, but also you and your team, as well as Mr. Singh, can rely on me when it comes to the trial.” He straightened his shape. “And to repeat T’Pau’s statement: As Spock’s T’hy’la you have the support and protection of the House of Surak.”

Jim bowed his head. “Thank you, Ambassador. I’m honored.”

Of course, it didn’t slip Sarek’s attention that the young captain used the traditional words, even if they were spoken in Federation Standard. ‘He learns quickly,’ he thought, content. “Seeing that you’re welcomed in our clan, formalities aren’t necessary anymore. Please call me Sarek.”

Kirk couldn’t help but smiled openly at him; his eyes sparkled. “Thank you again. Please call me Jim.” He looked at Uhura. “Could you teach me how to pronounce the name of your future father-in-law correctly? Because I certainly don’t do it right.”

Nyota smirked at him. “On this occasion, I will also teach you to pronounce Spock’s full name.”

“I would appreciate it if you would also teach Jim the sentences he will have to speak at our wedding-ceremony, Nyota,” Spock cut in. “I will assist you, but you know better methods to teach a human something he isn’t ‘in’ for.”

“Hey,” Jim protested. “I like foreign languages. It’s only they don’t like me.”

Uhura closed her eyes; knowing already what would come. And she was correct.

“A language can’t ‘like’ you, Captain. A language is a language – developed not to irritate you, but to give people the possibility to exchange…”
“Spo-ock!” Jim groaned; throwing his head back. “You know what I mean!”

Nyota laughed quietly, as she watched her betrothed and her captain. And she could have sworn that new amusement shimmered deep in Sarek’s eyes, before the older Vulcan – always the diplomat – drove the talk’s topic to something else that was also very important: The upcoming wedding. And soon Jim learned what was expected from him and how he could assist Spock until the big day arrived.

ST***ST

“Len!”

Dr. McCoy interrupted his talk with Geoffrey M’Benga and Sulu. The latter sat on a biobed and had just passed a last examination for the upcoming surgery. The left side of his face was still red and a web of scars deformed it, his throat and his left shoulder, but Bones had already assured him that he would be like new after the operation.

Hearing the short-form of his name, McCoy looked over his shoulder and saw Carol Marcus standing there; a joyful smile on her lips.

“Carol!” he greeted; grinning at her. “Just give me a minute, then I’m done here.”

She nodded and stepped back after winking at Sulu, who had grimaced at her. “No false shame, tiger. Len will get your face okay again,” she winked, and Hikaru sighed with a short nod.

“I hope so!” he mumbled.

“You can trust me,” Bones grumbled, before he discussed the last steps of the surgery with M’Benga. Clapping Sulu on the unhurt shoulder, he said finally, “So, no alcohol this evening, no fat food and try to sleep early. Tomorrow is the big day.”

Hikaru snorted. “One: I rarely drink alcohol…”
M’Benga coughed.

“Well, except for shore-leave or during some parties,” the helmsman clarified, before he continued. “Two: I don’t like fat food, and third…”

“Ah, Dr. Marcus and Dr. McCoy! Exactly the two people I wanted to speak to.”

Bob Wesley crossed the threshold and headed towards the little group. Bones saluted with a polite, “Commodore!”

Wesley stopped him with a wave of his hand. “At ease, Doctor.” He looked at Sulu. “So, the big day for you is tomorrow?”

Hikaru made an affirming gesture. “Yes, sir – and I have to admit I’ll be more than happy when I look normal again.”

“I can understand you,” Bob smiled, before he addressed McCoy. “I want to have your opinion on Mr. Hoffmann, Doctor, so please come to my quarters when you’re done here. Deck 5, cabin 1H52.”

Bones nodded. “Yes, sir.”

Then Wesley looked at Carol. “How is the situation in the weapons bay, Doctor?”

“The torpedo shafts are as good as repaired, one phaser-bank is burnt out and needs repair in a shipyard, and aft phasers are functional. The same went for seven torpedo shafts, one has to be fixed in a shipyard, too. I sent you my report three hours ago, sir.”

Wesley sighed. “Yeah, I saw your message but didn’t find any time to read through it.” He cocked his head. “I ask for another reason, Doctor. Captain Kirk called me only a few minutes ago. He asked if you could assist Lieutenant Uhura with her personal wedding-preparations. T’Pau already sent her assistance to support Uhura, but Jim thinks that our language-wonder needs a friend at her side, too. I agree with him. This marriage will be a big thing within the Federation, after all Spock is the heir of the House of Surak. And to support his future wife will maybe calm some irritation of our ‘not-irritable’ Vulcan friends after Norton’s assault. So, if I have your word that you’ll return to the ship when needed, you can beam down tomorrow in the morning to help the lieutenant with… well,
with what women do before a wedding.”

Carol smiled at him. “It would be my pleasure, sir, and of course I’ll return when needed.”

“I had no doubt about it, yet I’m bound to ask you this question,” he murmured. Then he glanced back at Sulu, then at McCoy and finally at Carol again, before he groaned. “What a mess! And I have no clue how we’ll get out of all this unharmed and still having our jobs!”

Bones, who wasn’t the big optimist, managed a small smile this time. “My grandmother loved to say: Just wait and everything will work out all right.”

“Then I hope that the old lady was correct, Doctor, because I have no idea how to haul our asses out of the swamp we’re in.” He went for the door. “Meet me in my quarters when you’re ready, Dr. McCoy!” he repeated and vanished.

Sulu looked up from his sitting position at McCoy. “I think the good man is a little bit nervous by now.”

“No wonder. This time we’re really in deep water,” Bones sighed.

Carol closed the distance to the two surgeons and the helmsman; giving Bones a short, warm glance before she asked. “Okay, who is this Mr. Hoffmann our dear Wesley wants to meet so much?”

Bones took a deep breath. “Rrright, Jim didn’t forbid me to speak about him.” He glanced at his three friends and said quietly, “Otto Hoffmann is one of Khan’s fellow Augments. We had to wake him up and…”

“What?” This came from Sulu and Carol in unison; while M’Benga only pursed his lips. Geoffrey already knew about it after all he had been called by Jim to help him to clean-up Khan, because McCoy was the New Vulcan Hospital caring for one of the Augments.

“And what kind of guy is he?” M’Benga asked.

McCoy only sighed again, and began to tell the others of the overprotective enhanced man, who had
found himself in an utterly strange world after almost 270 years of sleeping. Of course, it woke even more curiosity and Bones promised them to keep them updated. Afterwards he left medbay and headed towards Wesley’s guest-quarters; Carol accompanied him.

“I’m glad that you’re back aboard,” she said quietly; giving him a soft glance.

Bones felt heat rising into his cheeks – but not only because the beautiful young woman was flirting with him. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled and received a confused look for it.

“What for?” Carol asked.

McCoy gulped. “I… I thought you betrayed us all – and called you a ‘Judas’ inwardly.” He lowered his head. “I should have known that you wouldn’t do something like this – that you would stay loyal to Jim and us all, even if you haven’t forgiven Khan for killing your father.”

The weapons officer took a deep breath. “I think I tricked you all – Norton and Styles, but also you, Jim, Khan and the others. Even Spock, and this tells a lot.”

Bones had to chuckle while they headed towards the turbo-lift. “Yeah, that was quite a show you delivered.” He stopped in his tracks and turned towards her. His face was unusually gentle, as he said. “I apologize, Carol. I should have trusted you more.” He slightly shook his head. “You can’t imagine how relieved I was when you called Jim during the battle, told him about yours and Khan’s whereabouts and then when Khan informed us of you being still an ally who even saved him.” He moistened his lips, before he uttered, “It… hurt as I thought you’d betrayed us. Not only because of the betrayal, but mainly because… it seemed to be you who did the backstabbing.”

Carol smiled softly at him, lifted her right hand and cupped his cheek. “Apology accepted,” she said quietly. “I’m surprised myself. I didn’t know that I’m such a good actress.”

Bones chuckled. “If you ever get tired of taking care of weapons, you should consider a career at a theatre.”

Promptly Marcus had to laugh. “Oh no! This is really the last thing I can imagine for the future.”

The CMO cocked his head. “And what did you imagine for your future?” he wanted to know; asking himself in the same moment what had gotten into him to be so bold.
Another smile spread over Carol’s face. “Oh, maybe to do something big – to develop something that will change the whole galaxy,” she teased, then she became serious again. “But just right now I can imagine having dinner with you after your report to Wesley.”

Another sigh escaped McCoy, while they continued their way and stepped into the turbo-lift. “Regrettably I’ve to return to New Gol. I still have patients down on the planet but…” Bones began to beam. “I have an idea. How does it sound if I invite you tomorrow evening in one of the best restaurants New Shi’Khar has to offer?”

“Only you and me?” Carol asked hopefully, and as Bones nodded, she laughed quietly.

“I would love it, Len.” She rose on her tip toes and pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. “Just call me on my private frequency and tell me the location. I’m certain they have taxis on New Vulcan and I’ll find you.”

“Sounds great,” Bones smirked at her. At the same moment, the lift cabin came to a halt and the doors opened; the computer voice informed him that he had reached deck 5. “Well, I have to take my leave,” he said, before he took her right hand, lifted it to his face and pressed an old-fashioned kiss on it. “See you later, my lady,” he said, bowing dramatically and stepped into the hallway.

And he heard Carol’s jolly laughter even as the lift doors closed.

ST***ST

It was already evening, as Jim Kirk finally returned to New Gol. He had used an official transporter that wasn’t too far away from Sarek’s flat and had beamed over; happy that the murderous heat had changed into bearable warmth by now.

Gripping the three shopping bags tighter he headed for the entrance, where a tall Vulcan priest opened the door.

“Good evening,” Jim greeted him politely.

“Captain Kirk,” the Vulcan replied. “The Lady T’Pau expects you. Please follow me.”
Kirk felt a little stone dropping into his stomach for a moment. Hell, the old hag really seemed to have taken some offence by him sending The Shadow over to give Nien some company without informing her first. Then Jim straightened his shoulders. T’Pau was a hard-liner of logic and his decision to take care so that Nien in his mental state wasn’t alone, was only… logical.

Half a minute later he found himself in the anteroom of T’Pau’s office he already knew; only this time the matriarch’s assistant wasn’t present. The priest knocked, entered as the old Vulcanness’ voice called something and announced Kirk’s arrival, before he gestured towards the captain to go inside.

Taking a deep breath Kirk stepped in – and stopped dead in his tracks as he saw that T’Pau wasn’t alone.

“Selek!” he called, while a big smile appeared on his face.

The Vulcans high minister looked gently at him and nodded shortly, “Jim, it’s a pleasure to see you.”

“Thanks,” Kirk replied, before he dropped the bags to the floor and lifted his right hand in a ta’al. “Lady T’Pau, long life and peace,” he greeted. Then he folded his hands in front of him; waiting.

The matriarch looked him up and down. “You know why I called you?” she asked – and Jim felt a very unwelcomed blush widening on his cheeks.

“Yes, Ma’am. I apologize for not informing you of Mr. Singh’s visitors before their arrival. There was so much on my mind this morning, and it… simply slipped me to ask for your permission.”

For a long moment T’Pau said nothing, before she replied, “This isn’t the reason I asked Stran to bring you to me as soon as you arrived, but… your apology is welcomed – and accepted. I know you have your mate’s best interests at heart and worried for him if he would be alone for too long in his current condition. Yet I would appreciate it if you, indeed, let me know when visitors are expected at the guest wing.”

Jim nodded quickly; relieved that the expected tirade didn’t come. Well, T’Pau was Vulcans – and Vulcans never said more than needed. “Of course, Ma’am,” he answered; politely bowing his head.
T’Pau only nodded, before she came straight to the point. “I want you to tell Selek and me about the newly woken up Augment – Otto Hoffman, as I learned. And I also was informed by Sarek that you and Spock used the afternoon for the first preparation of Spock’s upcoming wedding. I can imagine that you have questions now.” She gestured towards the second chair that was still empty. “Have a seat, James.”

Jim would have loved to take a shower first and to have something to eat, but there was no chance for it now. So, he did as he was asked for; exchanging a short glance with Selek. And like always he felt utter safety and peace in the old Vulcan’s presence.

“There you are!” Leonard McCoy called, as half an hour later a very tired looking Jim Kirk headed towards him down the hallway that led to the guest-wing; the three bags in his right hand. “I was ready to file a missing person’s report by now!” Bones continued.

Kirk sighed. “I was already here half an hour ago, but one of T’Pau’s priests intercepted me and I had a little talk with her and Selek until now.

“So, Khan was right when he mentioned that you were near,” the CMO nodded. “This link you two have really comes in handy.” He began to grin. “Your honey bombards me with questions for more than an hour now and, by the way, he is very eager to see your lovely face again,” he teased.

Jim sighed; wiping new sweat from his face. “I also thought to be back sometime during the afternoon, but fate had other plans for me. I was with Spock shopping and afterwards we had a longer talk with Sarek.” He shook his head. “You don’t believe how complicated this whole ceremony will be.” He fell into step with Bones. “Nyota tried to teach me a few sentences I have to utter at the wedding. It was horrible. I tied my own tongue into a knot. I swear, Spock and Sarek were laughing their heads off – inwardly and in their very own Vulcan way, of course.”

McCoy chuckled. “Well, that’s the result when you not only befriend someone of a completely different culture, but if you become something like a part of his family.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “It’s not that bad. Sarek even allowed me to address him informally – and Spock was happy. Well, as happy as a Vulcan can be.”

“I’m over and over again surprised what you read in our hobgoblin’s not-existing expressions,”
Bones sighed.

“He does express a lot of hidden emotions – you only have to know how to read them,” Kirk protested. “Oh, by the way, he bought something for you.”

McCoy stopped dead in his tracks and looked with big eyes at him. “He did what?”

“He bought something for you – and for me.” He lifted the bags. “Our formal robes for the ceremony, including light boots. I hope I got your shoe size right. Spock meant they will fit, but I’m not certain.”

Bones gasped. “You’re kidding!”

“Do I look as if I would be kidding?” Jim asked seriously, opened one of the bags and let his friend peek into it.

All McCoy could see was a silver-white silken material. Suspicious he touched it – and whistled lowly between his teeth. “That’s indeed silk – or a Vulcan equivalent of it. Spock must have dug deep into his pocket to buy it.”

Jim nodded. “You have no idea. He bought a wedding-band for Uhura – titan and gold, woven in a beautiful web. He meant the silver color would stand for cool logic and the gold for warmth and emotions. I swear, he never ceases to surprise me. I knew that he can be very thoughtful but this kind of sensibility really astonished me.”

Bones smirked shortly. “Our hobgoblin is a romantic. Just have a look!” He cocked his head. “Gold and titan, eh? He really doesn’t spare expenses.”

“It’s the same with my robe,” Jim nodded. “I tried to stop him and to pay for mine, but there was no chance to talk him out of it. I only received one of these sharp glances he always musters as a silent warning, accompanied by a rebuking lifting of his right eyebrow and then he bought the clothes.” He smiled. “You should have seen his robe. I think Uhura will lick her lips when he wears it.”

Bones chuckled; his gaze was gentle. “Our pointy eared walking computer! Outside like stone, inside soft like pudding.” He shook his head in fond exasperation, while he continued his way down the hallway; Jim at his side. “I don’t know if I should damn or cuddle him sometimes,” the CMO
murmured.

A bark of laughter escaped Kirk. “Shall I tell him how you think of him, or…”

“Dare it and I’ll hypo you into the next week!” McCoy threatened.

“I already told you, Doctor, that such an endeavor would only bring you great disadvantages!” Khan’s dark baritone sounded from afar, as they headed towards their rooms.

“Dammit! Another guy with super-hearing. In Spock’s case, I can understand it – after all those long, pointy ears have to be for something useful. But Khan’s are round and…” Bones’ tirade ended, as Jim only laughed more and jogged the last meters to his room, calling joyfully, “Hi, honey, I’m home!”

McCoy rolled his eyes, mumbled something of ‘idiots in love’ and followed Kirk. And again, he had to groan, as he watched his friend letting the bags fall and bending over the Augment; hugging him before he kissed him. “Guys, you’re not alone!” he grumbled, but was ignored.

Khan couldn’t help himself. The moment Jim stepped into the room and beamed at him, he felt at ease for the first time in hours. And as Kirk embraced and kissed him, peace and something like happiness spread through him. Alas, so much for being an enhanced, superior being! And the oddest thing was: he didn’t care one bit – like many times before when this special young man was with him.

Without hesitation, he raised his good arm and slipped it around Jim’s waist; hugging him back. The familiar scent, mingled with the smell of something foreign, washed over him and his tension melted away.

“Sorry that I’m so late,” Jim began while he sat down on the bed’s edge. “But my stay at Sarek’s was longer than planned, and then T’Pau and Selek had several questions for me.” He took the Augment’s hand in his. “How are you?”

“Fine – now,” Khan said; admitting how much he had missed Jim. “Dr. McCoy already told me everything about Otto, but…” He seemed to seek for the right words.

“You want to know what I think of him – what my first impressions are,” Jim nodded; understanding
Nien’s need to know how his brother was doing and what Kirk thought of him. “Well, he was at first confused and on alert, but as Jo…” He stopped and looked around. “Where is Jo, by the way?” he addressed Bones, who sat down on one of the chairs.

“He wanted to remain in the hospital to stay with Otto. We thought it would be a good idea, after all Mr. Hoffmann is utterly foreign to this world and knows no-one except for the boy.”

“I’m glad that Joaquin decided to stay at Otto’s side,” Khan agreed. “Dr. McCoy and Healer Sorel were very considerate in allowing him to remain there.” He lowered his head. “I only wish I could be there to calm him. I know Otto. He can be very… demanding when it comes to the safety of us and certainly worries now, even if he hides it.”

“Well, I know another Augment who acts exactly the same way,” Jim joked; squeezing Nien’s hand. Blue and ocean-colored eyes met in mutual understanding and soft teasing. Then Kirk turned serious again. “He calmed down after he talked with you. Yes, he was still unsettled but he was willing to listen.” Kirk snickered. “And he was shocked that we two are bonded. He told me that you had lovers, yes, but never intended to bond yourself to one. To learn that I, a casual human, is your bondmate baffled him.”

Khan frowned. “I hope he didn’t say something offensive. Otto is more direct in speaking – less diplomatic so to say.”

Jim laughed. “No, he only asked me why I’m special to you at all.”

Nien groaned. “Typical! He gets an ear full from me when we meet.”

Kirk shook his head; still grinning. “There is no need for you to rebuke him. After we talked a bit, he spoke more easily with us and even apologized. He is curious, this much I can tell. And he worries for the others when he learned why he was already woken up. He has many questions, especially concerning the time you’ve been around here, but I told him that you want to do the whole explanation and so he stopped asking.” He smiled encouragingly as Khan grimaced slightly. “We can explain everything together to him, if you want,” Kirk offered. “I think he’ll have a lot of questions I can answer, too – and maybe can avoid making him hate the fleet.”

“Not all of Starfleet is responsible for what happened to us,” Nien said calmly. “Only a few people which filled, regretfully, important and powerful positions.” He sighed. “I’ll make Otto see and understand, Jim, don’t fear.”
“I don’t fear his anger but his disappointment. To board a ship and to risk everything by escaping to an unknown fate demands a lot of courage and certainly desperation, too – only to wake up and to learn what happened to you and your friends while you were asleep.” He shook his head. “I could understand when he’ll get furious, yet I hope that he remains calm. It’ll be the better for everyone.”

“Hm, and I hope Jo will be headstrong enough to ignore Mr. Hoffmann’s insisting of getting answers,” McCoy grumbled.

Khan only smiled lazily. “Joaquin may be a very young man and plays nice, but he can be stubborn as a mule. Believe me. I was often enough on the receiving end when he was still nothing more than a little boy. And this streak hasn’t changed much.”

“No wonder that he and Jim go along so well,” Bones scoffed.

Kirk rolled his eyes. “You’re really a mockingbird today. You should rather tell me how Sulu is, when you’ll do the surgery on him and how things aboard are.”

McCoy crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I already was wondering when you would ask.” He sighed as Jim only shot him a glare.

“Sulu has recovered nicely,” Leonard continued, “and I plan to operate on him tomorrow at 11:00 ship’s time, after Geoffrey has prepared him and I’m done with the first training session with Mr. Hoffmann. I don’t think the surgery will last longer than an hour. Wesley made me report to him in his guest quarters and asked a lot of questions concerning Mr. Hoffmann. He’s… wary, Jim. Maybe you should introduce Mr. Hoffmann to him as soon as possible to give the poor man a rest. He’s a lot on his mind with the Enterprise still being in chaos and with the upcoming questioning Command will put him through sooner or later. The mood aboard isn’t good. The crew is unsettled because of yours, Spock’s, Uhura’s and my fate – and a lot are also nervous because of Mr. Singh.” He looked at Khan, who lifted both brows. “They are worried for you, too. As it seems, they have fully accepted you in their midst and call you one of them.”

Was he mistaken, or was there a faint blush on the Augment’s face? Yes, obviously. Khan lowered his head but not quick enough to hide the surprise and joy that began to shine in his eyes.

‘He is grateful to have finally found a place he belongs to. How is it to be an outcast your whole life because of your heritage?’ McCoy mused. ‘Humans aren’t made to be alone. Yes, he had his siblings, but to prove every day anew that you aren’t a monster but a feeling, sensible being must be incredibly hard. And then everything that happened to him since he woke up in our time… Jim is right. It’s a miracle that this man is still able to love and to cling to hope at all.’
Aloud Bones went on with his report, “If you want to talk with Jo, no problem. I asked Scotty to beam a communicator to the boy and he received it. Khan and I already made a test-call when I came back.”

Jim nodded. “Well done, Bones.” Then he chuckled. “I can imagine what Wesley said when you asked this favor of him. He already got his knickers in a knot when I asked for a communicator for Nien and… Bones?” Jim saw his CMO’s face and knew instantly that something wasn’t right. “You did ask Bob in advance, didn’t you?”

“Uhm… it somehow slipped my mind,” he admitted – and Jim groaned.

“Superb!” He shook his head, before he snickered. “We both should check our memories then, because I forgot to inform T’Pau about The Shadow-gang’s visit.”

“Khan already told me,” McCoy chuckled. “And I don’t really believe that you indeed forgot it.”

Jim gasped. “Dr. McCoy, do you ascribe your captain to have contravened our hosts’ rules and to present T’Pau with a fait accompli to avoid an eventually refusal of my request?”

Bones shortly pursed his lips. “Just give me a sec.” He cocked his head, frowned and called with a grin, “Yes, this is exactly what I think you did.”

“I would never do something like this,” Jim replied with faked hurt.

“Of course not,” Leonard nodded with exaggerated seriousness. “We all know that you always play by the rules, obey every word written in the book and have the bedside manners of a high noble, not to speak of that you never try any trick in the universe to get what you want.”

Kirk couldn’t help himself: he stuck his tongue out at Bones, who simply smirked even more.

Khan laughed quietly; feeling another knot of tension leaving his belly. Otto was awake and well, Jim seemed to have gotten along with him and in a few days the rest of his family would join him in this world.
Yes, life seemed to take a little liking to him for once – if there wouldn’t be that damn trial that hung over his, Jim’s and the other one’s head like the sword of Damocles…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Poor Jim. It’s really a big difference to be ‘only’ befriended with a (half-)Vulcan or to belong (more or less) to the House of Surak. Right, Sarek certainly can be of big help concerning the Augments and later with the trial, but in return Jim has to learn what it means to be ‘adopted’ by a Vulcan clan. At least he isn’t the only one who has to howl with the wolves; Bones will get his own share.

In the next chapter Otto learns what happened to his leader and his friends. It will be an emotional rollercoaster, this much I can already promise. But that’s not all, because in the aftermath Jim is forced to make some amends. And Bones’ date with Carol? Well, the good doctor will get first almost a heart-attack.

I hope you liked the new chapter and I’m, like always, curios about your reactions.

Have a nice rest of Sunday and a good start into the next week.

Love

Yours Starflight
Learning of the 23rd century

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Like always I want to thank you for the nice feedback. After all these many chapters I’m surprised that you all are still keeping up with the story. Not everything is told – yet. And I can promise some very interesting twists and turns until the end of the story is reached.

But first Jim and Otto are going to have a talk – a talk that isn’t very pleasant, as you can imagine. Yet there are some humorous scenes (after all, Otto is utterly new to this world and its technics) and there is also something you’re all waiting for.

Have fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 92 – Learning of the 23rd century

The next morning McCoy returned to the hospital. Jim stayed with Nien – the latter talked with Joaquin and then with Otto via communicator. The former dictator was glad to hear that the night went uneventfully for his other brother, even if Hoffmann still was cold ‘like a puppy’, as he put it, but his voice was stronger now. Yet Khan hadn’t had to ask how Otto felt. He could sense his brother’s nervousness stronger now, and he hoped to be able to talk in person to him soon.

As McCoy arrived at his patient’s room, he found Otto and Joaquin still having breakfast. Hoffmann didn’t complain about the vegetarian food, yet Bones could easily read in the older Augment’s expression that he wasn’t too fond of it. Well, that made two now, because the first thing Leonard would do after Sulu’s surgery was to eat a big steak at the Enterprise’s officer’s mess.

McCoy suggested that the boy should to return to New Gol soon. Jim would visit Otto during midday and – this much the CMO knew – it was becoming more and more difficult to keep Khan in sick-bed. Yes, Nien knew that his broken leg wouldn’t carry him at the moment and that he had to lie still to heal his TBI, yet he was barely able to be patient. And Jo’s present would distract him.
But first Otto had to make the first attempts at walking – and he managed them. Barely.

“Well, that looks promising,” McCoy smiled at his unusual patient, who sat down on the bed with a groan.

“I should be able to walk properly by now, instead of a few meters!” Otto Hoffmann was the living example of frustration. “This here is… unacceptable.”

“Give it some time,” the CMO answered kindly. “Your muscles haven’t been used for more than two and a half centuries and you’re confronted with higher gravity. This kind of reaction is normal – even for an Augment.”

“I landed on my ass the first time I tried to walk,” Joaquin said. Sitting on one of the other beds and sipping at a glass of tea he grinned at his brother.

Hearing Joaquin admitting to having kissed the floor with his bottom, he grimaced. To tell the truth, he hadn’t been far away from suffering the same ungraceful incident only a minute ago and that irked him. He glanced at his legs, which trembled slightly. He – like his siblings – had been bred to be stronger; better. And just have a look at what a too long of a sleep did to him and certainly to the others, too: he was barely able to walk a few steps without getting the strong urge to sit down somewhere. “Khan said that some tension and maybe failing function in the muscles could be expected within the first hours. I am awake now for almost 24 hours but I’m still hobbling like a toddler,” he grumbled.

Leonard laughed quietly. “Impatience seems to be a characteristic streak of alpha males. Khan gets grumpier and grumpier from day to day, because he still has to stay in bed, and with Jim it’s exactly the same when he has to remain in sickbay. I swear, both use almost one and the same intonation when they grouch like boys and demand to be released.”

Otto glanced up at him. “So, Khan was injured before? I remember that you mentioned something about cold bites and stretched muscles yesterday.”

A sigh escaped McCoy. “It happened during one of those crazy adventures he and Jim had together. Your leader gave me quite a hard time as we had him and Jim back aboard from a tearing up space station…”

“I told you about Noo and Jim saving a planet’s capital by taking action aboard a space station,”
Joaquin piped up, but went silent as Leonard gave him a stern glance.

“… and Khan was wrapped so tightly around Kirk that I had to stick them both together into the infrared-chamber – naked,” Bones continued. “And then he made Spock and me come running because his biobed stopped sending signals and I feared for the worst, only to see him sleepwalking to Jim’s bed and crawling in with the captain.” He shook his head. “Is this tight mental bond between two lovers usual among Augments?”

Otto, who had to stomach the news that Khan’s instincts to keep Kirk safe had been so strong that he had functioned on auto-pilot so to speak, pursed his lips shortly. Only then he replied carefully, “Katie and I were the first who bonded this way. And one of our friends had fallen in love with a casual human woman, who died during the attack of the butchers, who slaughtered everyone who had been loyal to us. He was barely able to think afterwards and… sacrificed himself to give us a head-start to reach the Botany Bay. And, as you just told me, Khan reacts instinctively on Kirk’s behalf. So, yes, I do believe that these kinds of strong bonds are part of what we are.”

Bones nodded slowly. “It would make sense,” he said, while checking Hoffmann’s vitals again. “Khan found you and the others because he felt your presence. And he came running as Joaquin faced his first alien and got a shock. These kinds of mental connections are not unknown today. The Vulcans, for example, have these bonds with their parents, their closest friends and their mates. Spock simply feels when Jim is in danger, and Jim – psi-null like he is – still gets a ‘bad feeling’ when our hobgoblin is in trouble. The same is between Jim and Khan – only stronger. Selek, the Vulcan High Minister, is teaching Jim how to shield himself against the influence of the bond so that he can keep a clear head when Khan gets in trouble again. And he offered to do the same for Khan.”

Otto cocked his head. “This planet’s high minister is teaching Kirk? Is this a special privilege or is he the only one who can teach this mental technique?”

Bones transferred the read-outs of the biobed to Otto’s medical card. “Selek is an old friend, so to speak, and he has taken Jim and us all under his protective wing,” he explained. The same moment his communicator beeped and giving the Augment a short apologizing gaze, he accepted the hail.

“McCoy here!”

“M’Benga here. Morning, Leonard. I wanted to inform you that Lieutenant Sulu is prepared for the surgery.”

“Morning to you too, Geoffrey. So, the big issue can be started?”
“Yes,” came the reply. “Sulu is already getting impatient.”

“The boy is always in hurry. And there someone would think that he, as an Asian, would know what patience is.” He shook his head. “I’m on my way in a few minutes. Tell Kyle to be ready to beam me aboard.”

“Okay. See you!”

The connection was closed – and Otto looked with unhidden curiosity at him. “This was a man aboard Kirk’s ship, right?”

“Yeah, this was Geoffrey M’Benga, our second CMO.” He took a deep breath. “All right, Mr. Hoffmann, just lie down again and get some more rest. Healer Sorel will do further training with you in the early afternoon and Jim will stop by for lunch. I’ve a surgery to do.” He lifted his communicator, but stopped. “Uhm, what you’ll see now will certainly give you a little shock. We not only travel by hover-cars or shuttles today, but have developed a special kind of transporter. It’s called beaming.”

“You’ll be dismembered into your atoms and will be reassembled again at the location that was programmed by the transporter’s computer,” Joaquin explained helpfully – only to receive a horrified glance from his older brother.

“WHAT?” He stared with wide eyes at McCoy. “He is kidding, right?” he wanted to know and the CMO sighed heavily.

“No, he explained the procedure with simple words.” As he saw the Augment paling, he added, “I hate transporters, but you safe a lot of the time by traveling like this. And, by the way, they really come in handy if you’re in deep water and are facing trouble or certain death, and all of sudden the transporter beam catches you and takes you to safety. Jim and Khan were rescued like this from the space station. And I’ve lost count how often Jim, Spock, Scotty or even I have only lived for another day because we were beamed away in the very last second.” He gave Otto an encouraging smile. “It doesn’t hurt and if you would believe Chekov…”

“The ensign I befriended,” Weiss threw in.

“…then a transporter is the best thing of the world. The boy loves transporters and is really skillful
“Dismembered into atoms and reassembled again’,” Otto only murmured. “I’m still dreaming.”

“No, you aren’t,” Leonard said with another laugh. “I’ll call Jo when I’m back aboard, so that you can hear that I’m indeed still alive.” He opened his communicator. “McCoy to Enterprise.”

“Enterprise, Svenson here,” came the reply of the current communication officer on duty.

“Miss Svenson, patch me through to the transporter room, please.”

“One moment, Doctor.” A few seconds later a male voice sounded,

“Kyle here. Ready to be beamed up, Doctor?”

“Yeah, do what you have to do,” Bones grumbled, before he mouthed towards Otto ‘I hate transporters’.

Hoffmann was about to reply something, as a high ringing sound was heard – like hundreds of tiny bells. Then a golden light began to play around the doctor’s body – finally enveloping him completely like millions of blinking stars. Then the man simply vanished with the light. From one second to the other the surgeon was gone.

With an open mouth Otto could only stare at the spot on which McCoy had stood only seconds ago. The same moment Joaquin’s communicator beeped and as the boy opened it, the CMO’s voice sounded, “Just for the record: I’m still alive.”

Jo looked at his older brother – and burst into laughter. “You should see Otto’s face, Doc!” he managed to say; shaking with mirth.

Weiss’ obvious glee tore the older Augment out of his state of shock, and glaring at the jolly youth, he growled, “You’ve been awake longer in this time, so give me some credit for being surprised here and there!”
“Peace, boys,” McCoy said through the communicator. “Just don’t be at one another’s throats until Jim comes. Bye!” The link was disconnected and Joaquin closed the little device. He tried to sober up, but to no avail. Still snickering he watched Otto; knowing that this was only the beginning of all his older brother would have to learn.

An hour and two of further attempts at walking later, Otto sat on his bed; grinning broadly. The last attempt to get his muscles back to work had been successful. Right, with Joaquin’s help, still the older Augment was satisfied that he could walk through the whole room and back again three times without wobbling knees. He had made some stretching exercises – careful not to overdo it – and his body was finally adjusting to the higher gravity.

He was just about to do another walk, as the door opened and Jim Kirk entered; a young Vulcanness accompanied him. Otto couldn’t help to note how attractive the alien woman was with her thick hair pinned up in a complicate looking knot, with her exquisite even features, her slender body and her graceful movements.

After greeting the two Augments Jim asked Joaquin to return to New Gol to keep Nien company. During the morning, after Jim had helped him to get shaved again, Khan had become even more impatient and Kirk feared his bondmate would throw all caution to the wind and would try to leave his bed. Well, Jim knew a trick or two to ‘persuade’ his beloved to remain between the sheets, but given Khan’s still bad condition there was no thinking of employing said tricks at the moment.

So, distraction was the key to keep the Augment-leader in bed, and knowing that Khan was dying to learn more about Otto’s first hours in this new world, Jim sent Joaquin over to keep his brother updated. The young Vulcanness would lead Weiss to the hospital’s transporter where he would be beamed over to New Gol – to Otto’s utter horror.

“You say that you will… dismember him into his atoms, too?” he almost shouted as soon as Kirk had barely addressed Weiss.

Jo rolled his eyes. “Keep calm, big bro. I’ve been beamed several times before. It’s nothing dramatic.”

“Nothing dramatic?!?!” Otto’s voice was an octave too high. If the CMO risked everything by using this crazy way of transport then it was his decision, but to risk Joaquin like this was in his opinion…
The Vulcanness rose to speak. “The transport by beaming is a normal method for more than hundred Earth-years now and the number of accidents is proportionally small. The hospital transporter is checked every hundred days and the last check-up was four days ago. You and your siblings were brought to New Vulcan like this – and you are all well. There is no need to be afraid of it.”

“No need…” Otto stopped and took a deep breath. He had to calm down. He was almost 270 years in the future and that technology had improved was logical. Hence, this odd ‘beaming’ was certainly only one new development of many he still had to learn about. Clearing his throat, he continued, “I’m usually not easy to scare but to think that the boy here will be…”

“When I told you I’ve been beamed before,” Weiss interrupted him. “Noo did it dozens of times…”

“He even used a new kind of transwarp beaming device and transported himself from Earth to Qo’noS, right through the Alpha quadrant,” Jim cut in. “And he was more than well after his arrival. Hell, he brought down a whole Klingon patrol single-handedly. That says everything.”

Otto didn’t know what ‘Klingon’ was or what ‘Alpha-quadrant’ meant, but he didn’t care at the moment. His worry for the youngest of his siblings was stronger than his natural curiosity. “Khan knows what he doing – most times. But with him banned to sick-bed I’m responsible for the boy and…”

“I’m a grown-up, Otto, so stop mother-henning me,” Joaquin protested instantly.

After several back and forths Otto realized that he would have to learn to accept this crazy way of travelling, even if the mere thought made his stomach roll. And Kirk’s further well-meant words and explanations weren’t calming Hoffmann the tiniest bit, yet he had to give in finally.

With a cheerful, “See ya, big bro!” Joaquin left and followed the alien woman, whose expressionless face couldn’t hide the fact that she was more than astonished about the older Augment’s vehement denial of a transporter’s safety.

Three minutes later Joaquin called the captain and affirmed that he had reached New Gol ‘in one piece again’, as he put it. Only then did the older Augment lose some of his tension.

Jim smiled as he closed his communicator. “I know, there is so much that is new for you that you simply have to be overwhelmed,” he said sympathetically.
Hoffmann snorted. “You have no idea. All these new things are making my head spin.”

“I can ask the healers for a painkiller for you,” Kirk offered, but Otto shook his head.

“That’s not necessary. I’m just… nervous, that’s all.” He glanced back at his legs. “At least I’m making progress with walking. I want to see Khan and to assist you with my siblings’ awakening as soon as possible.”

Kirk pulled a visitor chair nearer and nodded. “I understand you, believe me. If I were in your place I would be impatient, too.” He leant back casually. “Healer Sorel still monitors the other cryotubes. Until now they’re running fine.”

Otto sighed and leant against the headboard. “Almost 270 years… It’s no miracle that their functions and batteries have begun to quit working.” He shook his head. “I don’t want to imagine what would have happened if the Botany Bay hadn’t been found in time. She must have lost course, otherwise she would have returned to Earth 15 years later and would have woken up Khan first.”

“She was in deep space,” Jim affirmed. “Yet I’m not informed about her condition. It wasn’t me who found her.”

Nodding, Hoffmann pulled his knees closer and laid his arms on top of them. He seemed to be relaxed for once, yet his thoughts were running a hundred per mile as his next words proved, “It will be an effort to wake up the rest of us. To monitor 82 people at once will be a challenge – even today, I think.”

Jim stiffened. 82… With Nien, Jo and Otto awake there would have remained 82 from the 85 which started their journey into the unknown all those centuries back. But the truth was that only 70 still waited to join the world of the living again. Kirk dreaded the moment Otto would learn of it – not because he feared the Augment’s fury. No, his heart simply bled because of the mourning that would follow.

Something in his face must have given him away, because Otto tensed again. “There are 82 left, right?” he asked slowly; alert rising in his eyes.

Jim avoided his gaze for a moment; knowing that it was up to Khan to explain everything. On the other hand, he knew that Nien more or less dreaded the hour he would have to tell his siblings – and
first Otto – of everything that happened to them and that some things were even his fault. Maybe Jim could help his beloved by taking this nasty occurrence from him. Maybe Nien would be relieved to not have to explain everything by himself.

Otto interpreted Kirk’s short silence in his own way. “What is it?” he asked. “What do you not want to tell me?”

Jim sighed. It seemed he had no other choice. He looked back at Otto. “Not… all made it,” he said quietly.

Hoffmann stared at him for a moment in rising fright, before he whispered, “How many?”

There was no doubt what he meant. “Twelve,” Kirk answered. “Twelve didn’t survive.”

“Twelve!” Otto gulped and bit his lips. For a second pain mirrored in his eyes, before he forced himself into control. “Regarding the length of time the cryotubes were forced to work, more of them could have failed until now.” He took a deep breath; bracing himself for the brutal truth. “Who are…?” He stopped as he saw how Kirk avoided his gaze again. The young captain’s whole body was tensed and there was something in his expression that made all alert bells ring in the Augment’s head. His enhanced mind already put two and two together and so he asked before he was even aware of opening his mouth, “They did fail, didn’t they?”

Jim had a sinking feeling in his stomach; knowing how much depended on the next minutes in which he had to tell the man on the biobed everything. “Eight failed. Your siblings were already dead when the Botany Bay was found,” he said softly.

“Eight!” Otto stated. “That leaves out four. What about them?”

Kirk hesitated. How to begin? How to tell someone that four of his brothers and sisters had been killed? This was a task dreaded by all police officers, security members or other investigation services in the whole galaxy. Hell, Jim was convinced that even a Klingon or Romulan police officer loathed these moments the most. But there was no way to avoid it now. Of course, he could have used some excuse and could leave anything to Nien to explain this mess to his brother, but Jim had never been a coward. And if it meant sparing a friend – his bondmate – nasty vexations, then he would walk this path; as uncomfortable it might be.

Rising his gaze, Jim decided to tell Otto the plain truth. “No, the cryotubes of these four men and
women didn’t fail,” he said; steeling himself for what would come now. “They were murdered.” He watched Hoffmann’s eyes widening in shock. “They were murdered in cold blood while they were deep asleep – dead to the world. Murdered by a man who held all our respect, was entrusted with one of the highest ranks within the Federation – within Starfleet – and deceived us all by having a double life which he used to gain power and might. It was he who murdered them.”

Otto felt one of his veins throbbing at his temple. “Who is this man?” A low growl echoed in his voice; a dangerous fire began to burn in his gaze.

“This man was Admiral Alexander Marcus, the Chief in Command of Starfleet.” – Otto gasped. – “It was he who found the Botany Bay,” Jim continued, “concealed his discovery, recognized what he found, woke Khan and forced him into service.”

“Forced by… killing four of us?” the Augment concluded correctly; his face reddened in fury.

Jim nodded slowly. “Yes – after other attempts didn’t lead to success.” He saw how Hoffmann balled his fists and fixed him with a stern gaze. “Don’t think of revenge, Otto. It’s too late for that. Marcus is already dead – killed by Nien’s hands. Literally.”

The Augment’s breath was heavy with effort to keep up his control. “And for that he is in this ‘trouble’ that Joaquin spoke of,” he spat.

It was a statement, not a question, yet Jim felt obligated to answer, “Yes – and no. As I said, Nien didn’t falter immediately. He put up resistance that Marcus tried to break. In some points, he was successful – and unleashed Nien’s rage and later his utter pain of mourning. Khan ran amok and left a blown-up skyscraper and a dozen dead staff officers in his path, who didn’t know anything of him or the other Augments – or about Marcus’ true plans.” Jim saw the inferno that had begun to burn in Otto’s gaze and carefully went on,

“None of us knew that Marcus had his own agenda. On the outside, he was the stern but flawless acting Head of Starfleet – the second in command right after the president. He wasn’t really well-liked by everyone, but he was respected and his reputation spoke for itself. No one, not even his own daughter, knew that he aimed for more power than he already possessed – that he wanted to militarize Starfleet. To reach this goal he implemented a secret department within Starfleet that was a kind of intelligence organization but without following the written law of the Federation. It was called Section 31. It ran through part of the Federation Council, Starfleet departments and corrupted several secret services. He built his own kind of state within Starfleet…”

“Aren’t there any checks of the psychological profiles before a man or a woman is entrusted with
such a position?” Otto interrupted; his tone was sharp enough to cut through stone.

“Yes, but you see, the whole Federation was in turmoil after the Nero Incident three years prior. It changed everything – not only wars and opinions, but also people.”

“Nero incident?” Hoffmann’s voice demanded answers – answers Jim was very willing to give.

Taking another deep breath Kirk continued, “Three years ago Starfleet Headquarters received an emergency call from Vulcan. The planet was under attack by an unknown mighty vessel. Half of the fleet headed to Vulcan to help – among them the Enterprise under the command of my mentor Christopher Pike. Because of a wrong start we arrived later at Vulcan than the other ships – only to find them destroyed. The strange giant vessel seemed to be inviolable, even if it was only a mining ship as we learned later. It drilled a hole into Vulcan’s core and… there was nothing left we could do to prevent the catastrophe.”

Otto stared at him; still trying to keep his rage in check but the young captain’s words distracted him for a moment. There had been nothing left to prevent…

“This planet here is named New Vulcan. Does it mean that…” The Augment hesitated – and got a sinking feeling in his stomach as the other man nodded with dread on his face.

“Vulcan was destroyed – utterly. Within a few minutes,” Jim confirmed his assumption.

Pure shock ran through Hoffmann’s soul, while ice crept through his veins; pushing his fury away for a moment. “Within a few minutes?” he repeated. “How many… survived?”

Kirk swallowed. “Not more than ten thousand – from an original six billion,” he said quietly.

Face white like death, Otto opened his mouth and closed it several times, before he only whispered, “Lieber Gott!”

Jim didn’t need a translation for the uttered German words to understand them. “The Vulcans are today an endangered species. This city – New ShiKahr – is where the most of all still living Vulcans are now. Befriended species try to help, of course, but it’s nothing more than like a drop of water on a hot stone. The loss of their home planet isn’t the worst that happened to them. Vulcans are touch telepaths and they have tight mental bonds between family and friends. There isn’t a single clan who
hasn’t lost most of its members – and the survivors suffer from mental shocks of the ripped bonds. I’ve heard that several of them even quit living, because they didn’t have any anchors more that could give them stability.”

Otto closed his eyes shortly. “We… know how it is to lose others we’ve… links to,” he murmured. “I can imagine how these people here feel.”

Kirk nodded, before he bent forwards. “Yes, your people and the Vulcans have some similarities. That’s one of the reasons why the Vulcans offered asylum for you and the others – because you and they share a similar history. You and your siblings are the last of the Augments, the people here in New ShiKahr are the last of their race.”

Hoffmann rubbed his face, as the full truth hit him with the force of an impact. All those lives… six billion people dead – within minutes! It was unimaginable – sickening.

“Why did this ship destroy Vulcan?” he asked hoarsely. “It… makes no sense. It was a miner like you said and…”

“It was an act of revenge,” Kirk explained. “A revenge for something that happened in the future.” Of course, he received a very confused gaze from the Augment, and so he continued, “What I’m telling you now is of a delicate nature, Otto, and I’m breaking some internal orders by doing so, but I don’t want to give you anything but the truth. You have a right to know, because it involves you and the others, too.” He bent forwards and braced his forearms on his legs.

“On the 4th January 2233 this mining-vessel, the *Narada*, came through a black hole from the future into our time. The vessel was manned with a crew of Romulan survivors who had just watched how their whole star system vanished because their sun went supernova. The latter was a process that started only years prior and… one of the Federation’s ambassadors, a Vulcan, offered help. The Vulcans had developed something that maybe could stop the process. But said Vulcan came too late, the sun exploded before he could reach Romulus. There were only a few survivors – among them the captain of the *Narada*. He called himself Nero and…”

“Romulus? Nero?” Otto was obviously at a loss now. “How do some aliens know about ancient times of Earth?”

“We named them Romulans, because their ranks are called ‘centurion’, ‘senator’, ‘consul’, etc. This much we intercepted during a war against them after they attacked us first last century. Their star system has two habitable planets we called Romulus and Remus, because both populations, even sharing the same heritage, aren’t on really friendly terms. As far as we know today, the Romulans are
keeping the Remulans subjected,” Jim explained. “But back to the story. Nero watched his home being destroyed by the flames of the supernova – and vowed revenge on the Vulcan ambassador, whom he accused of letting him and his race down. But before he could intercept the ambassador the Nerada was pulled into the black hole that was created by the supernova – the ambassador’s ship followed shortly because it also couldn’t resist the black hole’s gravity.” Kirk pressed his lips shortly into a thin line; deep in his memories he heard Old Spock explaining everything due to their mind-meld on Delta Vega.

Sighing he went on, “As the Nerada arrived in our time, more than 150 years in the past, she met a Starfleet-ship – the Kelvin. Nero, not knowing that he had been hurled into the past demanded information about the Vulcan ambassador from the Kelvin’s captain – an ambassador who wasn’t even born then. Of course, no one could answer Nero’s questions and in his fury, he attacked the Kelvin – without provocation according to what the taken records show. His first shots overcame the Kelvin’s deflector shields, hit the bridge and almost all staff officers were killed. The miner was built in the 24th century and was technically superior compared to our standard. Most of the Kelvin’s crew was able to flee in escape shuttles, but it was clear that the Nerada wouldn’t let them go in peace. So, one lieutenant stood back and steered the Kelvin into the attacking vessel – crippling and forcing it to flee. The lieutenant had only at three minutes at the con, but he saved hundreds of people.” – ‘And left his wife and new-born son,’ Kirk thought bitterly.

“And this ship from the future… It headed to Vulcan to destroy the planet in revenge?” Otto asked; feeling dizzy with all the information he got.

“No directly. It vanished for 25 years – waiting for the Vulcan ambassador to arrive. Black holes are no constant things. They change their gravity and therefore the forced time-travel caught both ships differently. Finally, 25 years later, the ambassador arrived. For him only a few minutes had gone by, for Nero two and a half decades. Nero captured him, told him what he planned to do, banished him on a nearby planet close to Vulcan to make him watch everything – and started his attack. That was the moment Starfleet was alerted, but we came too late. Nero had used one of the drills of his mining-ship to drill a hole into Vulcan’s core and set-up a kind of bomb. The planet imploded – within minutes. Less than ten thousand could be evacuated in time. Then Nero headed towards Earth to continue his path of destruction; wanting revenge on the Federation’s main planet, too. With half of the fleet destroyed and the other half on the other side of the Alpha-quadrant he had full rein. Almost. We – Spock and I – were able to stop him. We intercepted him, beamed onto his ship and while I freed our captain, Spock got the ambassador’s ship that was still in the Nerada’s hangar and used it as a weapon. The explosion created a black hole in which the dying Nerada was pulled into and torn into pieces. Earth was saved – but Vulcan is lost for all time.” His voice had become very quiet in the end.

Otto watched him closely; his enhanced mind was working quickly to store all the given information and to make his own conclusions. “You saved Earth – you and your first officer.”

Jim snorted. “I was still a cadet in my last year, Spock was a professor in the Starfleet Academy whose character-test I just beaten by cheating, and the officer team that serves today with me was
also only a bunch of cadets – assigned to the Enterprise in haste after the emergency call from Vulcan reached us. And then Nero demanded that our captain surrender in person. Pike obeyed to save the ship – and ordered Spock and me to take care of the Enterprise. The oldest of us was Spock, the others are of my age and younger, yet we beat the bastard. But I have to admit that we were simply lucky, nothing more.”

Hoffmann nodded in understanding, but as shaky as this story was, it didn’t give him any answers how it came that four of his siblings had been killed and Khan had run amok. “May I ask what this all has to do with us – and with Khan being forced by this Marcus into service?” he demanded.

Kirk grimaced. Now began the more complicated part. “This is the moment where I really began to disobey a general order concerning the whole Nerada-incident by telling you background knowledge. The whole catastrophe doesn’t only contain the destruction of Vulcan. Nero changed the time-line! We’re living in an alternative time now and that made Marcus go crazy – or berserk. It’s up to you how you want to call it.”

“An alternative time-line?” Otto wasn’t sure if he was still dreaming, if the captain had a vivid fantasy or if this was all really the truth. “How can you know something like this? You must have to remember the ‘original’ time to realize any difference to what happens here and now, but this is impossible because anything that went on since Nero happens for the first time.”

Jim smiled without any amusement. Enhanced mind, indeed!

“I learned about it from the Vulcan ambassador we rescued from Delta Vega after the Nerada was destroyed. He told us and Starfleet Command about the original time. In his time Starfleet wasn’t enhanced like it is now. The visual- and sensor-records about the Nerada, which could be saved from the Kelvin by the escaped crew, gave Starfleet engineers a good idea about the future’s technology. Based on this all our engineers developed technical devices within the 25 years between Nero’s first appearance and his ultimate attack – developments which weren’t built in the original time-line not until decades later. But Nero’s arrival from the future because of crossing a black hole did more than destroying a planet and giving some clever heads new ideas. It made Admiral Marcus realize that there are dangers in deep space which could threaten us before we even see them coming.”

He sighed again and shook his head.

“I think the whole Nerada-mess frightened the shit out of him – after all Starfleet cut quite a dash in this matter, and it could happen again. He began to explore deep space on his own, while he decided to militarize Starfleet. The latter is unprovided for, because Starfleet was founded to be a para-military group of explorers. So, he formed the plan to provoke a war with our aggressive neighbors, the Klingons. Then the Federation Council would have to agree to his request to militarize Starfleet
and parallel to this he would consolidate his own position. To reach this goal he founded Section 31, built a secret base near Jupiter and began to construct a new proto-type of a giant warship. And that was the time he found the *Botany Bay* on one of his patrol flights."

Otto frowned. “He… knew who Khan is?”

“There are still some records left from the Eugenic Wars,” Jim nodded. “The *Botany Bay* had become nothing more than a legend during the decades, but when Marcus found her he didn’t need much time to learn who he was dealing with. He woke Khan, told him about the upcoming threat from the Klingons and Nien – being the protector he is – agreed to help to shield Earth from harm. Only later, as he realized that Marcus followed his own plans and that there wasn’t any real danger from the Klingons, Khan denied any support to avoid a war.” Jim moistened his lips. “And then his hell began…”

Within the next minutes he told Otto everything that happened to his leader and friend – and what triggered the amok-run. He skipped the detail of Khan being raped, but every other cruel thing which had been done to him were laid open to the other Augment. Pale, trembling with rage, fury in his eyes, but staying silent Hoffmann listened; his heart went out to his brother who had suffered so much. Eyeing Kirk, he growled suddenly, “For someone who wasn’t part of this inhuman game you know a lot about it.”

Jim grimaced. “Nien told me – and concerning his flight from Earth to the Klingon Empire… Well, it was me Marcus sent after him. I had the order to kill him – using the new torpedoes which held you and your siblings, without me knowing about it.” He saw Otto’s eyes widening in horror. “I was furious because ‘Agent Harrison’ killed my mentor – the only man who was ever a kind of father for me: Christopher Pike.”

“Your former captain?” Hoffmann asked hoarsely; realizing how close he and the others had been to death as the young man in front of him was sent on a man-hunt to get Khan.

“Yes – and, as I said, Pike was also my mentor. The only man who saw more in me than a young rebel and dared me to do better. He was always there for me – and he died in my arms after Nien’s rampage.”

“And yet Noonien and you became lovers – bonded even,” Otto said; astonished.

“Well, what can I say?” Jim replied; shrugging his shoulders. “There was a sort of attraction from him for me from the beginning, as he told me later and he… persuaded me step by step. And after I learned the true background of everything I couldn’t fault him any longer. He was driven to do what
he did and I forgave him in the end.” He moistened his lips; realizing something he hadn’t acknowledged until now. He really had forgiven Nien that Pike had died because of the Augment’s amok-run. As he and Khan had spoken about everything on Aldebaran, Jim hadn’t been sure if he could ever really condone his lover for this particular outcome of his rampage. But now, hearing himself uttering these words, Kirk understood that he had made peace with this last thing that had staid between him and Nien.

He sighed and continued his telling, “But at that time back everything was still very different from today. I was torn between rage and pain and wanted nothing more than to make the man who took my father-figure from me pay. But Spock stopped my wrath by calling on my sense of justice. Luckily. I don’t want to imagine what would have happened otherwise. And I don’t only speak about my relationship with Nien now. If I would have followed my orders, the outcome would have ended in another catastrophe.” He snorted in anger. “At this time, I didn’t know that Marcus tried to use me to start the war he yearned for so much by sending me deep into Klingon space to kill ‘Harrison’. If I would have obeyed my orders, I also would have attacked the Klingon homeworld, where Nien hid. Instead of doing as told, I took Khan captive – better to say he first saved my, Spock’s and Uhura’s asses by eliminating a Klingon patrol that found us and surrendered afterwards as he learned that we had you and the others aboard. And then I learned the truth concerning Marcus…”

Kirk began to tell the second part of the story – and finally the third part. He didn’t spare himself or Otto anything. He told of his own death in the warp core chamber and how Khan’s blood revived him, while Nien had been sent to a fake trial he only learned of very much later. He spoke of Khan’s escape and how they learned to trust each other later, after the war finally started despite the fact that Marcus was stopped. He told about him being captured by the Klingons, of Khan saving him, of their time on Aldebaran where they became lovers and then their return to war as the space station above Aldebaran was attacked. And then came the most difficult chapter of the whole story – the one as they realized that Marcus was dead but not his idea and that he still had loyal fellows who didn’t shy away from sending their own delegation to death and ordering the murder of the Augments. Jim also spoke of Khan becoming a part of the crew, which accepted him in their midst after they learned what really happened to him – and how said crew risked career and freedom by supporting Kirk and his team, despite the fact that they broke a dozen laws and more.

As Jim finally came to an end, Otto was breathing hard and his face showed the shock and wrath that raged in him.

“They abused us as lab-rats, then they ordered you to more or less to kill us, tried to get you because you saved us – again! – and finally attacked this planet’s seat of government to get hold of you and all of us. And in the end some blokes almost beat Noonien to death – injured him badly enough so that he is bound to sick-bed for days now.” His shaking hands were balled into tight fists so that his knuckles shimmered white. It was obvious that he was a breath away from losing control.

Jim remained calm while he nodded, before he answered, “And they did more. By eliciting this war thousands of people were killed – on both sides. Hell, Luengo was ready to kill the highest-ranking
admirals and diplomats of the Federation to get the chair in the Chief in Command’s office; weakening the Federation like this in a way that more or less would have crippled her. His blood-dog Norton was ready to kill even the Vulcan High Minister and tried to kidnap the Vulcan High Priestess – the matriarch so to speak. Hundreds of good Starfleet personnel died because of these bastards, planets were annexed, families separated by force, people were taken into slavery. The whole Alpha- and Beta-quadrants will suffer for decades – only because of an obsession of this sick madman and his fellows.” He rose from his chair; unable to sit anymore. His bottled up energy had to be let out somehow, as he began to pace.

“And concerning you and the others? We knew that you were held captive somewhere in a high security facility and we all knew that Khan was abused for illegal experiments while the scientists had their dirty hands on him, but that they abused you and almost all the others in the same way was new to us. I thought Bones would have a raging fit when he realized the truth. Hell, even Spock was furious in his own Vulcan way.” Again, he shook his head. “I wished I could have decked Greenwood for this crime, but he will get his pay back for it. Be sure of it!”

Otto stared at him with still fiery eyes. “And you really think there will be true justice for them – for us? For Khan – and you and your officers?”

Jim nodded. “Starfleet and the Federation Council will have a lot to do to clean up the mess Luengo, Norton and the others left. The public was informed and the people want to see heads roll – the right heads because what happened last year with Marcus already left an uproar. The Klingons are demanding answers, too – and given the fact that we want to keep the cease-fire Starfleet is forced to intervene correctly. The Klingons may be brutal but they are not stupid – and they have good Intelligence. If the top brass tries to sweep something under the carpet, the Klingons will learn of it quicker than our media.”

“And Khan?” Otto demanded. “What about him?”

Kirk interrupted his pacing; now his eyes seemed to burn. “Nien ran amok. All he wanted was safety and freedom for his people – and then he lost it because he was driven over his breaking point as he was forced to watch four of his siblings being killed and finally was made to believe you all died. And he had reached his limits even before all this as Marcus tried to break him by using torture. Nien will press charges against Command because of murder, unlawful detention, slavery, blackmailing, torture and for running illegal experiments on him – several of these accusations were even done two times. Further he will press charges against the fake trial and for being imprisoned afterwards. Believe me, before a court martial could send him to a penal colony, they will have to make up so much for him their heads will spin. And there is still the public. I’ll make certain that the people learn of his true fate which will bring them on his side – and this will be half of the battle.”

Otto watched him closely. “You’re determined to get him out of trouble,” he stated slowly.
“Damn right!” Kirk growled. “He will get real justice and those who tormented him – and you all – will pay a high price! And I don’t do this because I love Nien. This is about right and wrong, and for this I’ll fight to my very last breath.”

Cocking his head, surprised by this casual human’s fierce morality, the Augment murmured, “You’re a patriot of your own through and through.” He took a deep breath. “You want to fight for Noonien, but what about you? You and your officers? As far as I understood you’re in deep water, too.”

Kirk grimaced. “Well, insubordination, disobedience of orders, wrong reports to HQ, stealing of the Enterprise more or less, hiding a wanted man, lying to superior officers… The list is longer than the budget list of the Federation Council. I certainly will not get away with all this, despite the fact I did it to reveal a big conspiracy within our own lines, therefore saved the ceasefire and the chance of peace, and prevented a genocide from taking place. If I’ll command a garbage transporter afterwards I can call myself lucky – but I don’t regret it.” He rubbed his neck. “I only wish I could keep my officers out of the whole mess, but they made up their minds and supported Nien and me of their own free will. They all stated it in front of Barnett. My friends are going to share my fate – and this is the only thing I wished for to be different.”

Otto shortly pursed his lips. “You saved Earth. You saved the population of a big town on this strange planet. Because of your intervention the admirals and the diplomats could be saved. Hell, if there is a small chance of making peace with these Klingons it’s also because of you. You, James Kirk, are a hero. You and your officers. I cannot imagine that they’ll give you a big penalty.” He made a face. “Yet you’re going to need a very good lawyer.”

Jim smiled for a moment. “Selek already called one. The man is on his way to New Vulcan. I don’t know who this guy is, but Selek says he’s the best. Even T’Pau said something likewise. And when two Vulcans praise someone for his abilities like this, it’s good enough for me.”

Nodding, Otto accepted this explanation, before he asked, “These pathogens they infected us with to gain antidotes – will they leave any side-effects on my brothers, sisters and me?”

Jim thought about it for a second. “To tell the truth, you’ve got me stumped here. Bones examined all of you after he and Khan found out about this shit, and both said afterwards you were all well, but if you want to have details, please ask Bones. He opened patient’s cards for all of you and wrote down all the results. He can show you and explain everything to you, if you want.”

“I want!” Hoffmann answered; there was still a sharp edge to his voice.
After everything he just learned he felt sick – sick in heart and soul. They all had hoped to escape the hell Earth had become – not only for them but also for most other people. They had risked everything when they boarded the **Botany Bay** and set off into the universe; dreaming of a better future somewhere else or at a later time. The latter had been the result, but for what price? A price Khan had paid for them. To imagine his strong leader and friend treated like an animal, tortured enough to drive him over the edge, made Otto nauseous. He would have damned them all – all of this so called ‘Starfleet’ – if it weren’t for this young man in front of him. He and his friends, who had sided with Khan and had given him their protection and friendship. And there was this commodore, who risked his own career when he learned of Khan’s true fate and had shielded him too. There was also this new Chief in Command, Barnett, who already interviewed Kirk, Spock and the others – and seemed to be a man of morality and decency. And there was more. Humans who married aliens, aliens who had close friendships with humans. Bigotry didn’t seem to be a big problem anymore.

Time HAD changed. There was no doubt about it. Only it was maybe too late for Noonien. Despite Kirk’s optimism concerning Khan’s case, Hoffmann was sure that a hard stony way lay ahead for his old friend. And he also was convinced that there were a lot of people like this Marcus and Luengo out in the world – men who stopped at nothing to gain more power. Men, who still saw monsters in the Augments. On the other hand, humans seemed to have learned to accept differences of foreign races. Therefore, there was maybe still a chance for him and his siblings to find a place in this world. If only the whole mess around Khan wouldn’t be… Otto would give his right arm to spare his friend what lay ahead – or what he had been through.

Again, he imagined the hell Noonien had endured, and his desire to see and to hold his brother became overwhelming. He had to see Khan with his own eyes – had to speak with him, had to embrace him. He was about to suffocate if he couldn’t meet his brother now!

Resolute he threw the thin blanket away and swung his legs over the bed’s edge. Jim’s eyes widened as he saw it.

“What are you doing?” the young captain asked; alarmed.

“I have to see Noonien – no matter what!” Otto growled and rose. For a moment, he swayed on his feet and dizziness overcame him, then he felt a fragile yet strong arm around his waist.

“Easy with the horses,” Jim said softly. “You won’t make it to the transporter room if you overdo it.”

Otto frowned. “You won’t stop me?”
Kirk only snorted. “If I were in your place – learning after a long sleep that Spock or Bones had been through such a hell – I would stop at nothing to go to them. And if I would have to crawl on hands and knees, I would somehow manage to reach them. How shall I demand from you to not do something I would do at any cost?”

Hoffmann looked deep into these intense blue eyes – and saw the kindred soul in the young casual human with Noonien’s blood in his veins. This man was a warrior of the best sort, and Otto felt real respect rising in him. This man was, indeed, worthy of Khan’s obvious affection.

“Let’s go,” he murmured, but Jim shook his head.

“Not so quick. You’re in hospital clothes, are on a strange planet and have never breathed its air. Just give me a few minutes to prepare you.” He carefully loosened his grip around the Augment’s waist and stepped to one of the windows which were still covered. Removing the roller blind, he glanced out and saw a part of New ShiKahr and even a little bit of the lake. “Ready to have a first look on your first alien planet?” he asked over his shoulder and watched Otto walking slowly towards him; ready to catch the taller man should his legs give out.

They didn’t. Driven by determination – and a good portion of stubbornness – Hoffmann closed the distance to him and stopped at his side. Jim couldn’t help himself but smiled as he saw the baffled expression on the Augment’s face.

Otto didn’t know what he should expect, but this was certainly something he wouldn’t have imagined. He saw an orange-sand colored sky with a few soft-yellow clouds over a city that held some skyscrapers, but also a lot of flat buildings – all constructed in the same simple but also somehow exotic style. It was harmonious, yet strange. Alien! He saw car-like vessels driving on streets not far away and people walking the pavements and the campus below the window. He recognized further Vulcans and a few humans, but also… creatures which looked human but obviously weren’t. Gulping he glanced away and to the shimmering surface of a lake at the edge of the city. Mountains enclosed the town – wearing the same sand-color but also showed the green of woods. It wasn’t too strange to get afraid, but it still was foreign enough to make Otto fully realize that this wasn’t Earth.

“It’s… strange, but also beautiful, yet…” He didn’t know what to say – something that didn’t occur often.

Kirk understood him. “Give yourself a chance to get accustomed to everything. This here must be unsettling for you, but I’m sure you’ll get used with everything soon.” He gently clapped Otto’s shoulder. “I’ll back in a minute – getting some clothes for you. And then we’ll beam to New Gol and be back before Bones returns and will have our heads for sneaking away.”
Hoffmann only nodded mutely and didn’t react as Jim left the room. Only after the door closed behind the young captain did he become aware of what Kirk had said. On alert he whirled around.

“‘Beaming?’” he echoed shocked, but there was, of course, no one to answer him. “I will not let be shredded into atoms and be set up like a puzzle again!” he called, before he leant against the window sill. “I will not!” he repeated; crossing his arms in front of his chest.

Spahrn, Vulcan priest-adept in his second year of study, had just left the abbey and closed the entrance behind him, when his fine ears caught something that truly startled him. There was not only the ringing of an incoming transporter beam, but foremost a male scream that grew louder and louder. Two humans materialized only a few meters away from him. One was the starship captain who was under T’Pau’s protection. The second one was a tall, strong-built human male with brunette hair and brown eyes – eyes which were widened in terror, before their gaze changed into surprise and the screaming stopped.

Jim looked to his left at Otto, who still had his mouth open and was breathing heavily. “You all right?” he asked.

Hoffmann tried to catch his breath and looked quickly down at himself. Well, he was complete, so to speak.

“You’re in one piece – just as I told you,” Kirk chuckled and began to snicker as he was rewarded with a deadly look.

Jim was still baffled with himself how he had successfully blackmailed the Augment into giving in. He had simply told Otto that there were two possibilities: one to be beamed to New Gol or, two, to stay at the hospital for a day more until he would be strong enough to make the trip to New Gol with a ride on a hover-car. Hoffmann had acted as coy like a maiden on her wedding-night before he had finally stepped on the transporter platform; cursing like a sailor and glaring daggers at Kirk. But his urge to see Khan had been stronger than his fear and so he had agreed. Jim still grinned inwardly as he remembered the Vulcan at the transporter control, who had watched Otto with the perfect mixture of fascination and lack of understanding.

The same look the young Vulcan in front of him was giving them both, only that this poor guy had even raised both brows and seemed to be at loss for words.
Giving the Vulcan a sunny smile, he bypassed him. “Sorry about that, but it was his first time,” he said; flicking a thump at Otto, who tried to get his composure back.

It hadn’t been unpleasant, but also not pleasant – this odd ‘beaming’. Otto felt a little bit dizzy, but this could be a result of the higher gravity, his still re-gaining of muscle-function and this damn heat. Sweet Lord, was this temperature normal for this planet? Yes, he still felt cold – better to say, had felt cold until now – but this here was definitely too much. The Sahara was comfortable compared to this temperature!

Seeing Kirk bypassing a Vulcan in long robes, he forced his still lingering anxiety into his subconscious, ordered his legs to move and followed the young captain. He glanced shortly at the alien man, tried to be as casual as possible and greeted him with a polite “Hello.”

“Hel-lo,” the Vulcan replied; stumbling over the word as if he was uttering it for the first time. Maybe this was even the case. Otto nodded at him and entered after Kirk into the large, flat building.

Spahrn reminded himself that he was a student of Surak’s Way and schooled his features, decided to think of everything later, straightened his shape and continued his path as if nothing happened.

Inside of New Gol the temperature was comfortable and Otto sighed in relief as the heat stayed outside. For a moment he pushed the thoughts of his purpose aside and looked curiously around himself; took in the simple but elegant ambience of the vestibule that also showed the obviously favorite sandy colors. A foreign smell was in the air and the silence was peaceful – inviting even. Parallel he could feel Khan’s presence – stronger than in the hours he had spent at the hospital. His friend and leader was here; he could sense him and to know that Noonien was nearby calmed his nerves.

“Can you tell me something of the Vulcans’ religion? I don’t want to rub them the wrong way by my lack of knowledge about their culture,” he whispered.

“There is no religion in the common sense,” Jim answered quietly. “It’s rather a study of the way of the Vulcan founder of their philosophy – Surak – walked first.”

Otto was about to ask more, as his fine hearing picked up quiet but quick steps which drew nearer. A moment later Kirk must have heard it too, because the young man turned around and looked for a second surprised before he controlled his expression, lifted his right hand, spread his fingers between the middle- and the ring-finger and bowed his head. “Ma’am, long life and peace.”
Hoffmann turned around, too, and saw an old Vulcanness with still black hair and…

“Shani?” he blurted out, perplex. Then he rebuked himself. The Indic woman who had taken the youngest of his siblings under her gentle, caring wings was dead for more than 270 years now. But the old female in front of him resembled her in an almost eerie way. “Sorry, Ma’am,” he mumbled. “You remind me very much of someone I knew in earlier times.”

T’Pau looked from Jim Kirk to the man at his side. Tall, strong muscles, clear gaze, an aura of arrogance that tried to hide the uncertainty the human displayed… She knew exactly whom she faced. Yet she waited until Kirk introduced them.

“Ma’am, this is Otto Hoffmann, another of Khan’s brothers.” Then he made a polite gesture towards the Vulcanness. “Otto, this is the Lady T’Pau, High Priestess and matriarch of New Vulcan and Clan Mother of the House of Surak.”

“Mr. Hoffmann,” T’Pau addressed the Augment, “welcome to New Vulcan.”

Otto bowed politely and offered his right hand – only to find his wrist caught in a surprisingly strong grip, given the fact that Kirk wasn’t an Augment (even with Khan’s blood in him). “No!” Jim said forcefully and shook his head. “Sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, Otto, but to shake a Vulcan’s hand is a very big no-go. Vulcans are touch-telepaths and you would force your emotions and thoughts on the Lady T’Pau if you touch her like this.”

Hoffmann felt heat rising to his cheeks. Despite his superior strengths and mind, he didn’t want to offend his hosts – hosts which had given him, Khan and the others refuge. “I… apologize, Ma’am,” he stuttered; replying to the stern gaze of the old Vulcanness without lowering his own gaze.

T’Pau lifted one delicate brow. “No offence is taken, Mr. Hoffmann. You are new to this world and had no chance to learn about our traditions in the short time you’ve been awaken.” She looked back at Kirk. “I heard a loud screaming outside. Do you know the source of it?”

The Augment blushed even more. “That… was me,” he admitted. For the blink of an eye the Vulcanness’ face betrayed surprise, then the impression vanished as quickly as it came.

“Otto didn’t trust the transporters and… it was the first time that he was beamed,” Jim said; mirth danced in his gaze.
“You find this very amusing, do you?” Otto grumbled and felt – despite everything he learned within the last hour – a smile tugging at his mouth, as Kirk simply nodded with a broad grin.

“You’re worse than Bones when it comes to beaming, and that tells a lot,” Jim replied; then he remembered that T’Pau was still present and turned his attention back to her. “Ma’am, I told Otto of everything that happened last year and now. Of course it unsettled him a lot and he’s here to see Khan.”

The Vulcan matriarch lifted a brow while she addressed Otto, “Your brother has been through a lot, Mr. Hoffmann. Your presence will give him comfort. Feel free to visit him whenever you want.”

Otto bowed again. “Thank you very much, Ma’am – for your hospitality and the refuge you offered my friend and my other siblings.”

Jim thought, T’Pau would answer with a typical ‘thanks are unnecessary’ or ‘illogical’, but again the old woman surprised him, as she replied, “You are welcome, Mr. Hoffmann. James certainly told you also about the fate that has befallen my people. We know what the loss of mental bonds means and how it is to be the last remaining few of a once big nation. You and your people are safe here.” Her glance again found Jim’s. “Please tell Mr. Singh that I will visit him tomorrow. I refrained from seeing him because I wanted to give him time to heal and to come to terms with everything that has happened to him. But now, I think, the time is right. I’ll come to him tomorrow in the morning.”

Jim nodded. “He’ll be honored, Ma’am. Shall I leave then or I am allowed to stay?”

There was again a short movement in the usual expressionless features of the Vulcanness – amusement maybe. “You can stay, James. It is logical that Mr. Singh will be wary first and your presence calms him. And, by the way, knowing you, you would find an excuse to stay even if I wouldn’t agree to it.”

Kirk flushed and grinned sheepishly, but skipped from answering.

Nodding at him, T’Pau turned around and walked gracefully away.

“Yeah. She can be scary as hell, but deep down she’s a nice guy. She only masks it perfectly.”

“It’s called ‘control’, James!” T’Pau’s voice sounded through the hallway, before a door was closed – and Kirk became bright red.

Oooops!

“Obviously these Vulcans have good ears,” Otto teased him – and then a true laughter was about to bubble up in him, as Kirk slapped both hands in front of his face and moaned,

“I just called Spock’s granny a ‘nice guy’. Spock is so going to kill me.”

Otto had to chuckle quietly, as he followed a still flushed Kirk down the hallway. “So, the old lady is your first officer’s grandmother?” he asked.

Jim sighed. “Yeah. I learned it only a week ago that my friend and first officer belongs to the highest clan among his people and that he is something we would call a prince.” He snorted. “I was absolutely baffled – and there I thought I knew almost everything about him.”

“They are tightlipped these Vulcans, aren’t they?” Hoffmann mused and Kirk rolled his eyes.

“You’ve no idea.”

They entered the guest wing – and then both heard from afar Joaquin’s urgent voice,

“Dammit, Noo, you can’t leave the bed. Your leg wouldn’t carry you and… Hell, lay down again!”

Jim and Otto exchanged a worried glance; knowing exactly what was going on. With a “Follow me as quickly as you can,” Kirk began to race down the corridor.

“I HEARD him, Joaquin! Something is wrong. Let go of me this instant!” Khan’s voice almost thundereed, even if it was still hoarse.
Jim skidded to a halt as he reached his and Nien’s room. The scene in front of him was exactly what he expected: Khan had swung his legs over the bed’s edge and was about to rise, while Joaquin had gripped his shoulders and tried to hinder him.

“Hey, what’s going on here?” Jim panted and entered the room; knowing that he had to calm the situation.

Khan’s ocean colored eyes shone with the inner fire the young captain had missed so much. “Otto! I heard him screaming outside. Where is he?” the former dictator demanded.

“Down the hallway. He’s still a little bit slower than I am,” Jim answered with a soothing smile, while closing the distance to his beloved. “Everything is all right, honey. Otto was simply… overreacting because he was beamed for the first time.” He tried to push Nien back onto the mattress but he might have as well have tried to move a large rock.

The same moment Otto stepped into the room; his legs felt heavy after he had tried to run without success.

Time seemed to stand still, as the two Augments looked at each other.

Khan’s eyes widened as he took in the familiar face, the broad shoulders, the strong neck and the rising warmth in those brown eyes. From day one as they had met for the first time all those years ago he had trusted Otto – his instincts told him that the German Augment was a brother in heart and soul. And to see him again was like balm for his tormented spirit.

Another one of his siblings was awake – finally!

Nien didn’t even realize that his good hand reached out to the other man; his heart hungry for the touch of another family-member.

Otto could only stare at his brother. He was thin – and scaringly pale. Dark shadows lay beneath the familiar blue-green eyes, his left arm was fixed and beneath the collar of the strange tunic he wore, Hoffmann could see dark bruises. One eye was still slightly swollen and there were also healing bruises on his face. The man he had accepted as his leader looked fragile; more vulnerable than he had ever seen him before – and Otto began to grasp utterly the hell Khan had been through. And it pained! It pained more than any stab through his heart could have hurt him.
With a mixture of a snarl and a whimper he was in front of Khan in three long steps. Kirk quickly made room for him and pulled Joaquin with him. And then Otto bent down and closed his long arms around his brother’s lean frame. He buried his face in the tousled hair and breathed deeply in; smelling Noonien’s familiar scent mixed with that of medication. His heart went out to the other man and for a second he felt a sharp sting in his eyes, but for Khan he willed his rising tears away.

Nien fought the lump in his throat as he was wrapped into the strong arms of his brother again – after all those weeks and months of fear of losing him and the others. He heard Otto’s heartbeat and how his breath heaved, while he could sense his brother’s inner turmoil. Lifting his right arm, he slung it around Otto’s waist, while he pressed his face for a long moment in the other man’s shoulder.

Re-united!

Finally, he was re-united with another one of his brothers!

He didn’t care what picture he and Otto gave – or that his eyes felt suddenly very hot. He was simply overjoyed to have another of his sibling with him again.

After what felt like a little eternity but really only lasted a minute, Otto lifted his head, loosened one arm and cupped Khan’s face. His wet gaze wandered over the pale features, while he felt feverish heat radiating from the smaller man. Beside the fact that his leader was indeed sick and injured, he was still very much the same he remembered – well, except for…

“You cut your hair,” he said quietly, and Khan chuckled for a second.

“Obviously.”

Otto ran his fingers through the short strains. “It suits you,” he murmured, before he became serious again. “Alas, what have they done to you,” he whispered, before he bent forwards and placed a gentle kiss on Nien’s forehead.

“It’s a long story,” Khan answered quietly; relishing in the brotherly display of affection.

“I already know this ‘story’,” Otto replied; a low growl in his voice, before he sat down beside him;
one arm still wrapped around his leader.

Nien frowned. “You know?” His gaze found Jim, who stood with Joaquin at the table and nodded in affirmation.

“As we talked this midday the topic came to the number of cryotubes and… I had to tell Otto the truth,” Jim said. “I hope you aren’t angry, but I thought it would be better this way.”

Nien cocked his head; knowing exactly why Jim had done it – to spare him the pain that explaining everything to Otto would have caused him. A wave of warmth and love rose in him and as he caught Jim’s smile it was obvious that his bondmate had felt it.

“I figure that you two have still a lot to tell each other,” Kirk smiled gently, before he nudged Joaquin. “Come on, Jo, give them some time for themselves.” He went to the door. “We’re in the garden.”

Weiss followed him, but Otto held them back. “Isn’t it too warm outside?” he asked cautiously.

Jim smirked over his shoulder. “There are some places beneath the trees which shield us from the heat. Just take your time, you two. See you later.” He gestured Joaquin to leave first, waved at the two other Augments and closed the door behind him. He could imagine that Otto had still a lot of questions – and that Nien just needed time with his brother alone…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, they are re-united. I know that you all waited for this to happen; Nien meets another one of his siblings. Finally. And this is only the beginning.

I thought that it would be typical for Jim to grab the bull by the horns instead of avoiding trouble – means, he wanted to spare Nien to re-tell what happened to him and the dead Augments by explaining everything to Otto. I chose to go more into the details of what led to the whole disaster instead of let Jim speaking of everything that happened
afterwards and is well known by now. I also wanted to lighten the mood a little bit by letting Otto reacting badly to transporters or by Jim forgetting about the ‘fine Vulcan hearing’.

I hope you enjoyed the new chapter and I’m, like always, curious about your reactions.

In the next chapter it begins: Otto, Bones and the others start to wake up the Augments. And you’re going to meet the lawyer Selek hired for Jim’s, Khan’s and the others’ case.

Have a nice start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Laughter is the best medicine

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

I’m so sorry for the delay, but a computer-error didn’t show me that the next chapter I sent to my beta-reader was stuck in the sending-process. I only learned of it days later, had to reset my e-mail program and then I was able to send the chapter finally to Kat, who did (again) a super job on my writing.

The chapter will be an emotional one and I’m sorry to tell you that the lawyer will not show up in it, but in the next one. It is better this way because with his appearance a complete new part (the last one) begins.

Thank you so very much for the feedback you left; I’m always happy when I get comments and kudos.

Have a nice rest of Sunday,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 93 – Laughter is the best medicine

“Hi, Carol!” Nyota Uhura beamed at her friend and made an inviting gesture. “Please come in.” Closing the door she added, “I’m so happy that Kirk could talk Wesley in letting you beam down.”

Marcus smiled at her. “You know that Jim has a way with words. After my shift was done I changed quickly and came as soon as I could.” Curiously she looked around herself and took a look at the flat. Then her gaze fell on the tall lean figure that just came from an attached room, and stood to attention. “Commander,” she greeted.

Spock lifted a brow. “At ease, Dr. Marcus. We’re off duty and technically I’m not your superior officer at the moment.” He bowed his head slightly in a polite gesture. “Welcome to my father’s home.”

“Thank you, sir,” Carol nodded. “I hope I do not disturb you or the ambassador.”
“My father is resting after lunch. And besides he and I were informed of your arrival, so your presence isn’t disturbing at all, Doctor.”

Nyota linked an arm with her friend. “Come, have a seat and something to drink. And then we’ll go out for some very overdue shopping issues.” She saw Spock lifting a brow, gave him a mischievous grin and led the other woman to the living room suite. The first officer sighed soundlessly. When women talked of ‘going shopping’ they don’t mean to purchase necessaries, but buying things which mostly weren’t really needed. And, if he remembered well, his mother had the same weakness.

“Please have a seat, Doctor, I’ll bring you something to drink,” he said; copying the human custom of a male host.

Nyota gave him a surprised gaze, then smiled tenderly at him; realizing his effort to fit into two worlds again despite the fact that he was at his own home planet (well, sort of). Sitting down with Carol she watched Spock walking to the kitchen. Turning serious, Uhura bent forwards on her seat and looked at her friend. “Carol, I have to apologize for my behavior aboard the *Excalibur*. I really thought that you betrayed us, even if I should have known better.”

Carol cocked her head; a soft smirk played on her lips. “I tricked you all. Leonard already suggested I should consider a career at the theatre, but I don’t think that this is something for me. It was difficult as hell to listen to all the crap Norton, Styles and those bastards of scientists said, and to keep calm. There were moments I wanted to scratch their eyes out.”

Uhura sighed. “Well, I was about to do the latter to you.”

Marcus snickered as she watched her friends flushed face. “It shows how good my acting was.”

“It brought you on the verge of getting hell from me,” Nyota mumbled, and Carol laughed quietly,

“Thank the Lord for Scotty. I really don’t want to have you in my face – literally.”

Spock returned and placed two glasses with a light red juice on the table. “My sincere apology, too, Dr. Marcus. I also was convinced that you have switched sides and condemned you without further proof.” He lifted a brow. “And I also want to compliment you. Your ‘act’, like you called it, was flawless.”
Carol felt heat rising into her cheeks. A real compliment from the stiff Vulcan was comparable with a commendation. “Thank you, sir,” she said.

“There is no reason to thank me, Doctor. I just stated a fact. But I’m certain Captain Kirk regards your engagement with even greater gratitude – after all it saved Mr. Singh in the end.”

Khan…

Carol still felt distaste whenever the Augment was involved, yet she had overcome her wrath concerning him. And as she remembered how Finnegan and the others had brutalized him, she felt a soft stirring in her heart. “How is he?” she asked, after she had sipped at her drink – a juice with a mixture of sweet and bitter taste. It was very refreshing.

Uhura gave Spock an expecting look; after all he had seen Khan only yesterday.

“He’s still in the healing process despite his enhanced nature. His broken bones are mending and Dr. McCoy doesn’t think that he will be able to leave sick-bed for only a short walk within the next days. Yet his mental state has improved, as have the most of the bruises and the inner injuries he suffered.”

Carol shortly pursed her lips. “His mental state?” she asked; feeling against her will some alarm bells ringing.

“Khan was almost beaten to death and faced certain demise after Finnegan forced him back into the cryotube. And after all he had been through until now the last encounter sent him over the edge by almost breaking him utterly,” Nyota explained; giving her fiancée a quick look.

“I was forced to mind-meld with Mr. Singh to make him see that the dangers were over and that life is still worth living,” the Vulcan told reluctantly. “And the last days weren’t exactly bright for him, to use a human term. Only after he was cleaned and changed into something else than a hospital gown did his mood changed for the better. And now, with one of his other siblings awake and the prospect to see the rest of them soon, his fighting spirit has awakened anew.”

Marcus was surprised with herself to hear her own words, “I’m glad.” She took a deep breath. “Not that I will ever forgive him killing my father, but I do understand the pressure he was put under. And to see how someone is beaten into a bloody pulp while said someone is helpless, made my stomach churn. He earned his second chance - and, by the way, I don’t want to see Jim mourn the love of his
life.”

Spock said nothing to this, but there was for a second an approving shimmer in his eyes.

Carol changed the subject. “Mr. Spock, I need your advice,” she said. “When I need a taxi-driver, are there any fixed taxi-points in the town or do I have to call a service to pick me up?”

Again, the Vulcan’s face didn’t betray any surprise or curiosity, yet Nyota did see some inquisitiveness in her beloved’s eyes. If there was something no Vulcan could resist, then it was to gain knowledge – even of unimportant things.

“I’ll give you the service-number. Nyota can help you with giving your current location and your destination.”

“I don’t know the destination until later. Leonard invited me for dinner, but he still has to tell me which restaurant,” Carol smiled.

Spock’s left brow almost flew to his hairline, while Uhura began to chuckle.

“So, our good doctor finally made up his mind and invited you to dinner?”

Marcus beamed at her. “Yes, he did. He was still operating on Sulu as I left the Enterprise, but I hope that he will find some calm minutes afterwards so that we can enjoy our evening together.”

Uhura nodded; glad for her friend that the beginning flirting between Carol and McCoy seemed to have reached the next level. She exchanged a quick look with Spock, who sighed this time audibly.

“Knowing Dr. McCoy, he will give himself no pause until everything is to his liking. And seeing that besides Mr. Sulu, two further current patients are at two different locations, the doctor will not rest until he has made certain that both are in satisfying condition.”
With open hanging mouth and large eyes McCoy stared at the empty bed with the ruffled sheets. There was no trace of its former occupant to be seen; the same went for a certain starship captain with the propensity to attract trouble.

“What the hell…?” Bones began; shocked. It was already afternoon and he had just beamed down from the *Enterprise* to look after Otto and to give Jim an update of Sulu’s surgery that had lasted longer than originally thought. But who could have known that the helmsman would react badly to one of the sequences the cellular fuser used for the deeper skin-layers? They had to interrupt the surgery and to stabilize Sulu before they could continue their work. Hikaru had woken up half an hour ago and was now asleep again – looking like himself again.

“Dr. McCoy?”

Startled the CMO whirled around with a yelp, only to see Healer Sorel standing behind him; his calm face showed a hint of rebuke at the Terran’s reaction. Didn’t the human hear him coming?

No, Leonard hadn’t heard anything as his words confirmed, “Sweet Lord, man, do you want to give me a heart attack? You Vulcans and your sneaking up on people!”

“May I interpret your words that you were unaware of my presence until I addressed you?” Sorel asked; lifting a brow.

“Yeah, exactly,” Bones nodded and tried to calm his racing heart. “Do you have an idea where our patient could be?”

The second brow was lifted. “I have no idea, but I do have knowledge about his whereabouts, Doctor. Mr. Hoffmann beamed with Captain Kirk to New Gol, and…”

“He did WHAT?” Bones groused. “Has the kid gone crazy? Hoffmann is in no condition to walk more than a few steps, not to speak of making a trip to New Gol!” He bypassed Sorel and began to storm down the hallway, before he stopped and looked back. “Uh, do you know a good restaurant at the lake-side where I could take a lady to?”

If Sorel was surprised of the drastic change of topic he didn’t show it. “The ‘Starshine’ is known as an excellent restaurant with a good cuisine that offers meals from different worlds – including Earthen food.”
Bones nodded. “Any chance to book a table there for this evening?”

The healer cocked his head. “If you wish I can call them and book a table for you. Just give the name of the restaurant to a taxi-driver and he will take you to the right address. The restaurant is very well-known on New Vulcan.”

McCoy smiled at him. “That would be very nice, Sorel. Thank you.”

The older Vulcan bowed his head. “You are welcome. I will send you a message if I’m successful or not.”

The CMO lifted a thumb. “Great! I’ve to go. See ya.” With those words he hurried away; his mood changing back to a stormy one.

‘*Beaming with Otto to New Gol. Jim must be insane. Just wait, my friend, this will get you an ear full, just mark my words.*’

ST***ST

Otto sat quietly on the edge of Khan’s sick-bed; his large hands folded in his lap, shoulders tense, his face pale with some hectically red spots on his cheeks. Even if Kirk had told him almost everything in advance, there still had been many questions the Augment assumed the young captain couldn’t answer for him or Otto simply didn’t want to ask him because he knew Kirk wouldn’t understand their true meaning.

Khan had been awake for over two years now, but for him – Otto Hoffmann – only 30 hours had gone by since he last talked with his friend and leader, just before he was put to cryosleep, facing an uncertain future. And the memories of the final attack against Khan’s summer palace, the slaughter of the whole staff they were forced to watch and the personal losses they suffered by seeing friends die, were still very fresh in the German Augment’s mind. He was still mourning those who didn’t make it aboard the *Botany Bay* and new sorrow had been added now because of the loss of twelve who fell asleep in cryo by his side but were gone now forever. That and Khan’s year of torment were weighing heavily on Hoffmann.

Without his own doing he gripped one of Khan’s hands and held it in his own fingers; love was radiating in gentle waves between the two kinsmen – the two ‘brothers’. 
“I am sorry,” Otto whispered. “I’m sorry for everything you have had to put up with and for everything you were forced to go through alone. We – I – should have been at your side. Your safety was always my first duty, and then…”

Nien squeezed carefully his hand. “No, Otto, it’s I who has to apologize. It wasn’t in my power to save those eight of our sisters and brothers whose cryotubes function fell prey to the long passage of time, but the lives of the four others were in my hands. I should have known Marcus well enough then to realize that this man wasn’t bluffing – at the latest as he switched off the first cryotube I should have understood that he would stay true to his given threat. Yet I tried to reason with him – ignored his warnings.” He shook his head. “Those deaths are on my shoulders.”

Otto bent forwards and lifted his free hand to his friend’s jaw, as Khan lowered his head in sorrow and shame. “Look at me, Noonien,” he said softly. And only after those sea-colored, sorrow-full eyes met his own brown ones, he continued, “Once and for all: It wasn’t your fault! You did everything – everything! – within your power to keep us safe. And not only us, but also Earth and the unthinkable number of people within this odd Federation. We were breed to protect, to take care of peace and to fight those who are a threat. Your decision to rebel against Marcus to prevent a war was the absolute correct thing. I wouldn’t have done anything different. This man was too deluded in his greed for more power and his bottled up fright of the ‘dangers out there’ to think straight. We’ve witnessed similar things in our time over and over again. Men have matured, no doubt, but those who build imaginary enemies to gain more might over the weaker ones have always existed and will continue to exist. To not give into their false ways and made-up point of views is the key of stopping them. You did what you had to do, after all peace and therefore Earth in the end were at stake. Earth is at stake now as long as this ceasefire Jim told me of doesn’t change into a peace contract.” He took a deep breath. “I’m only outraged and feel pain because of everything you had to endure.” He snorted. “And knowing you, you only told me the half of the torment that was inflicted on you.”

Khan shrugged; feeling at least some weight lifting off his shoulders at the forgiveness of his friend. “There is no need to go into details, Otto. You know how much we can bear and what it costs to bring us close to break down.” He grimaced. “I did break down before I ran amok. And if it weren’t for Jim and his rebellious streak to cling to this almost childish sense of morality and justice, you, Joaquin, I and all the others were dead by now. It was Jim who pulled me away from the darkness that had engulfed me and showed me the light again. He gave me new hope, despite the personal loss he suffered because of me.” He shook his head; fondness was written on his face. “This boy-man is too good for his own wellbeing.”

Otto watched him; a small smile began to tug at the left corner of his mouth. “You really love him.”

“Yes,” the Augment leader nodded without hesitation. “I love you and the others deeply, yet this love is different.” He chuckled. “I never thought that I would feel something like this – that something like this even exists.”
This time it was Hoffmann who chuckled. “Well, ask Katie after she wakes up. It’s the same with her and me.” He sighed soundlessly. “At least one good thing came out of all this: You’ve found a true mate. Well, and maybe we’ll have a safe future here.”

Khan smiled for a moment. “You and the others will be safe here, don’t doubt it. It takes a long time until you gain the trust and even the friendship of a Vulcan, but with Selek being attached to Jim like he is, and with the Vulcan matriarch on our side, no-one will dare to go against you and the others.” He gently freed his hand from his brother’s fingers and rubbed his temple with both hands. “If only they could make the headache go away. Hell, even today’s medicine isn’t flawless.”

“Especially when there are people who don’t listen to the good family-doctor!” A voice sounded from the entrance. McCoy felt, despite his irritation, amusement rising in him as both Augments jumped in surprise. “Don’t tell me you didn’t hear me coming;” he teased them, before he turned serious again. His stern gaze found Otto. “You, Mister, belong in bed! Pronto!” He pointed at Kirk’s abandoned bed, while he continued his tirade. “This was more than careless. Maybe you’re able to walk a few more steps by now, but your body is exposed to the air of a strange planet for the first time. It has trace elements that the air on Earth doesn’t have. Do you have any idea how your body could react to those strange contents you pick up with every breath? Superblood or not, your body has still come to terms with being functional again. And then the higher gravity, not to speak of the air.”

Khan cleared his throat, but Bones was quicker than him. “And you,” McCoy addressed the former dictator, “should lie back and rest. A TBI isn’t something to joke over – superman or not.” He placed his med-kit on the table and gave both Augments another heated glare, as both didn’t react to his words. “That was a medical order, Gentlemen, not a request. So, chop-chop.” He waved both hands before he turned his attention to the med-kit. “And where is the churl who took you on this trip, Mr. Hoffmann?”

“If you refer to Jim, he is outside in the gardens with Joaquin; giving Khan and me some privacy,” Otto grumbled.

“I know that you and your brother have a lot to talk about, but this is no excuse to risk your health,” Bones replied, turning around and stepping to Otto; hypo in hand. “This is a tri-ox dose that helps you to breathe this thin air easier. I take it that Jim didn’t think about it before he left the hospital with you?”

Otto lifted both brows. “He’s a captain, not a doctor,” he stated calmly. Then he saw McCoy’s face and lifted both brows. “What?”

“That’s my sentence!” Leonard protested.
Promptly Khan began to laugh; feeling some more weight being lifted from his shoulders. That same moment steps came nearer, and the CMO whirled around – pointing an accusing finger at his friend who entered the room; Joaquín on his heels.

“You! Are you out of your corn fed mind to take Mr. Hoffmann to a trip?” Leonard groused. “The man is awake for no more than 27 hours after sleeping in ice for almost tenfold that time, and what are you doing? Dragging him with you on a tour to New Gol.”

“I dragged him to the transporter room, the rest did the beaming, not me,” Jim answered cockily – and ducked his head as McCoy almost exploded.

“Do you think that’s funny? Dammit, Jim, I know that you aren’t a doctor, but I’m certain that this brilliant mind of yours is thoroughly able to get some logical ideas of what a weakened person can do and cannot do! You…”

“You always say that the soul is as important as the body is. And after the damn shit I had to tell Otto he needed to see Nien. Think of their mental family-bonds. His body maybe still has to adjust to being up again and dealing with Vulcan gravity and air, but I think it will be easier for Otto to concentrate on his healing now after he and Nien have been reunited.”

Kirk’s voice was calm and reasonable; he sounded almost like a Vulcan.

McCoy, recognizing it, grimaced. “Spock is rubbing off on you,” he grumbled.

“Perhaps, but in certain situations a cool head is better than a hot one.”

Leonard stared at him. “Aaaaall right,” he said slowly. “Who are you and what have you done to Jim Kirk?”

Joaquin began to chuckle, while Khan laughed quietly. Some more tension left the Augment leader’s body, as he listened to the familiar bickering. Otto, on the other hand, looked still utterly perplexed at the CMO. He couldn’t remember whenever he had been lectured like this. And then the way of speaking to Kirk… Shouldn’t McCoy be showing a least a little bit of respect towards his captain?
“Is this kind of tone usual between two officers?” he asked perplexed.

“Nope, only between these overgrown kids,” Khan deadpanned and laughed again as he caught a glare from his bondmate.

“I’m no kid,” Jim protested.

“Really? Even McCoy calls you ‘kid’ often enough,” Nien teased; relieved that the difficult part of talking to Otto was over. For now. Of course his brother had been furious and shocked beyond imagination at of all the things which happened to him. Even without the family-bond they shared, Nien would have had to be blind and deaf not see and hear how upset his brother was; how much he suffered inwardly with him.

It really had been fortunate that McCoy had chosen to enter the room at this point; letting out a tirade while scanning the baffled German Augment with his med-scanner. Khan, who was used to the grousing of the CMO’s mother-hen-behavior, had watched the whole thing with rising amusement. And to see Jim now being on the receiving end of the good doctor’s rebukes and to listen to how his beloved tried to talk himself out of the situation was almost fun.

Smiling innocently he replied to his bondmate’s glare, “Don’t pout, Jim. This boyish behavior of you does have its charms.”

“Thank you so much,” Kirk replied sarcastically. “That so helps my reputation.”

“What? That of a reckless churl?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Just look who is talking. Do I have to remind you of the stunts you pulled within the last weeks?”

“No – but I was forced to do the most of them to keep a certain ‘kid’ safe.”

“Boys!” McCoy interrupted them, while fishing another hypo out of his med-kit. “Stay quiet, after all we’re in an abbey here.” He checked the content of the hypo – and realized not only that utter silence had befallen the whole room, but that he was being stared at with wide eyes and raised eye-brows. “What?” he asked.
“I don’t believe it!” Jim gasped; flicking a thumb at Leonard. “He yells loud enough to be heard in New ShiKahr, and certainly has made T’Pau fall off her desk chair, but we have to stay quiet because of our current location.” He cocked his head. “I have to agree with Spock…”

“Don’t you always?” Bones threw in mockingly.

“… The heat really got to you.”

“No, I simply ask myself why everyone always gives the nice family doctor – that would be me – such a hard time.” He stepped to Otto and pressed the hypo at the Augment’s throat, who still looked astonished at him. “Don’t fear, this is a mixture to relax your muscles which are strained by being exposed to the higher gravity after your long sleep.” The hypo emptied itself with a low hiss.

“‘Family-doctor’ is a fitting description, but ‘nice’…” Jim stopped as Leonard shot him a death-glare.

“Just guess why I have to rebuke and to grouse every time I have to treat you, the hobgoblin, or – as of late – our superman here.” He glanced at Khan, who simply lifted both brows. Then he looked at Otto. “And I haven’t lost hope that at least you are reasonable enough to listen to what the good doctor advises you.”

“I want to spare you a heart attack, Doctor, so envision yourself as listened to,” Hoffmann said wryly. Then he turned serious again. “Doctor, Jim brought to my attention that most of my siblings, included me, have been…. abused as lab-rats.” Instantly he had McCoy’s sincere attention. “Can you explain to me what exactly has been done to us – and if my sibling and I will suffer after- or side-effects?”

Bones sighed, pulled a chair nearer and sat down. “This will take a while,” he said quietly. “First I have to give you a short overview concerning the maladies these damn Frankenstein wanted to fight with the antibodies they won from your and your siblings’ immune system.”

Kirk interrupted gently. “Bones, before you begin, only one question concerning another matter. How is Sulu?”

“There were some complications during the surgery because he reacted badly to some frequencies of the dermal fuser, but he woke up half an hour before I left the Enterprise and I think he’ll be back on his feet within the next two days. He already looks a lot better than before and by then the scars will
be vanished completely.”

Kirk smiled. “That’s good to hear. Thanks, Bones.”

“I’m just doing my job, kid, that’s all.” He turned back and looked again at Otto. “All right, Mr. Hoffmann, I’ll explain to you what happened, but please first lay down. You’ve overstressed your body enough already and we don’t want a relapse. You can use Jim’s b…” He stopped and his jaw was on its way down to the floor again, as Hoffmann simply gestured to Khan to make some room for him and stretched himself out beside his friend, who… who had this smug look of satisfaction on his face McCoy had come to know.

Shaking his head, the CMO sighed, “All right, this may do it, too.” He leaned back on the chair. “Okay, I’ll explain what has been done to you and the others. And if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to interrupt and ask me.”

Jim gestured to Joaquin to sit down on his bed, and then Otto began his first lesson in extraterrestrial maladies. Here and there Hoffmann interrupted McCoy’s explanations and asked questions, and it was obvious that the Augment did have a basic knowledge about medicine. And the more Otto realized what had been done to him and the others, the more his face darkened. That these bastards had tried to use the Augments’ enhanced immune system to develop antidotes against the most terrible maladies was something Otto could live with. When he heard how many victims alone this curious Rigelan Fever demanded every year he felt tempted to offer his help by donating blood. But to learn that he and the others were infected with all these maladies and that the scientists simply waited until their ‘lab-rats’ bodies could produce antibodies or not, risking the clueless sleeping people’s life like this, made Hoffmann’s blood boil. But the last straw was the fact that these monsters had tried to produce a new kind of malady that was immune to any known medicine to wipe out a whole race – a race this madman Marcus had provoked to war to establish his own power and to reach his own private goals. The thoughts made Otto sick and he could only assume how Khan felt about it – the man whose only goal was to bring peace and justice to the world.

Without his own doing his hand found that of his friend again, while he still asked McCoy questions that the CMO answered with utter patience and almost brutal truth. Half an hour later Otto had run out of questions, for which Bones was grateful. Sure, the man had a good basic medical knowledge and his enhanced mind made him a quick learner, yet it was something completely different to discuss medical details with a colleague or with a layman. One thing was for certain: McCoy would never, under any circumstances, become a professor!

Hoffmann stared into the distance without actually seeing anything. His mind drove in circles. His thoughts were like a mantra, ‘They injected us with mostly mortal maladies to win antibodies against it. We may still have the illnesses in us. They didn’t give a damn about us being feeling, living people.’
Then he felt Khan’s hand tightening around his, and as he turned his head he met the calming gaze of his friend and leader. No words reached his mind, because this kind of enhanced telepathy wasn’t possible even for Augments, but Otto sensed a warm attempt to soothe him. Khan’s eyes told him, ‘It’s done and it’s over. We are safe now. Don’t fret.’

The German Augment lowered his head. “When will you be certain that none of us will suffer from the maladies they put us through?” he asked.

McCoy sighed. “With Mr. Singh’s permission I took skin-samples from everyone and checked them thoroughly. All of you have enough antibodies in your blood to make you immune whenever you’ll be confronted with those pathogens again. I don’t think that anyone of you will suffer some side-effects, but I will be really certain several hours after your other brothers and sisters are awake.”

Otto nodded slowly and lifted his head again. His brown eyes found those of the CMO. “Thank you for everything you did for us – and for your honesty.”

“I am a doctor, Mr. Hoffmann. I made an oath to help people, not to harm them intentionally.”

“These bastards who did this to us are doctors, too – and I think they believed the Hippocratic Oath wouldn’t count for us, after all the status of being human was taken from us.” Bitterness swept within his voice.

“As cruel as it sounds, but the latter was fortunate for you,” Jim spoke up and met Otto’s asking glance. “It gave me the possibility to declare you as your own species that is endangered and was about to get killed in an ordered genocide of the current – nor former – Head of Starfleet. Being confronted with this situation I could legally hide you in my ship and the Vulcans could officially give you asylum. Even the Federation Council can’t do anything against this.”

Otto watched him for a few moments, then he chuckled humorless. “You really have a brilliant mind – seeing chances where they shouldn’t be and using them to your or others advantage.” He shook his head. “I think we really can call us lucky to have met you.”

“Oh no, please not! His ego is already big enough,” Bones groaned.

Jim stuck his tongue out at him, before he addressed Hoffmann again, “Every honest man would have done what I did. Bob… I mean Commodore Wesley is only another example of those who
would and *have* helped."

“By the way, the commodore wants to meet you, Mr. Hoffmann,” Bones cut in.

Kirk made a short affirming gesture. “And not only he. Sarek, Spock’s father, offered his diplomatic skills to be an intermediary between your people and the Vulcan High Council. I already talked with Nien yesterday evening about it and…”

“I haven’t told Otto about this detail until now,” Khan cut in and looked at his brother. “I’ll be away when the trial takes place – and maybe my absence will last longer. As much as I have learned Ambassador Sarek is a very trustworthy and honorable man, whose reputation is almost a legend by now. I haven’t met him in person until now, but if Jim trusts him, I do also. Sarek wants to meet you tomorrow after his check-up with the healers. I advise you to listen to him and try to come to terms with him. You and the others need someone who looks true to your needs when I’m not available. And with him being married to a human woman for thirty years or so, he understands men better than the most Vulcans.”

Otto sighed; knowing that Khan was right. They needed someone to whom they could turn when problems occurred, but this didn’t mean that he had to like it. Far from it. The mere prospect of *why* Noonien wouldn’t be available made the German Augment sick, yet his brother had made it very clear during their earlier talk that he would clear the air by facing trial of his own free will. And if Khan had made up his mind, there were only a few things that could make him re-think it. And in this case, Otto was sure, Noonien wouldn’t ponder another way than the one he had decided to walk.

“I’ll speak with him,” he agreed. “But I certainly need some instructions of Vulcan customs. I don’t want to rub him the wrong way like I almost did with this old lady that resembles Shani so much.”

As Jim caught Nien’s asking glance, he snickered, “Otto met T’Pau – who wants to speak with you tomorrow, by the way. And… well… Being raised as a gentleman, Otto wanted to greet her in the perfect Earthen gentlemanly way.”

Khan’s eyes widened, before he stared at his brother, who shrugged, “How should I have known that to touch them is a taboo?”

“Well, I pushed her out of harm’s way down on the floor and covered her with myself the first time we met,” Joaquin piped up; grinning broadly. “And she even thanked me.”
“Of course, after all she sensed your real worry and good intentions through all the touches,” Bones sighed. Then he glanced at Otto. “All right, I’ll take you back to the hospital in an hour, when I’m done with changing and getting clean. I’ll explain some general customs of Vulcans and check you through before I’m out for dinner.”

“You’re going out tonight?” Jim asked; surprised.

McCoy rose and only smiled at him, “Yes.” He walked towards the door. “And don’t wait for me, it can be late until I return.”

For a second Kirk’s eyes were wide as saucers. “You… have a DATE?” he almost squeaked.

Bones rolled his eyes. “Is that such a surprise for you? I do have my own charms, you know.”

“Yes, of course,” Jim hurried to agree, “but… I thought you were done with the ladies?”

“What?” Leonard cocked his head. “Whoever gave you this idea? I’m done with marrying, but that doesn’t mean that I’ll spend the rest of my life as an Eunuch.” As he saw the astonished expression on Jim’s now flushed face, he had to chuckle. “Don’t fret, I won’t put my foot in it. We’ll behave. And now excuse me, I’ve to dress up for the lady.” Jim’s call stopped him again,

“Hey, with who have you hooked up?”

“Aren’t we nosy today!” came the sarcastic reply.

“We never have secrets from each other. You even learned about Nien and me first.”

“Yes, after putting two and two together and confronting you with it so that you couldn’t use any excuse anymore.”

“Oh, come on, that was something completely different. Now, tell your captain who has caught his CMO’s heart.”
Leonard sighed loudly. “Dammit, Jim, don’t stress my nerves. I have a date, end of story. Now bother your honey and let me get ready and some beauty sleep before I bring our runaway back to the hospital.”

“Aw, come on, Bones,” Jim whined. “I’m so happy for you, really I am. I mean, Spock has Uhura, I have Nien, only poor you are all alone. I’m glad that you found someone. So, just tell me…”

“I tell you off, Captain. And now, let a man get a decent shower.”

Kirk threw up his hands. “Heavens, and there you complain over and over again, how I’m complicated.”

“You’re not complicated, you’re a full-blown natural catastrophe. Just like our dear hobgoblin. And now, for the last time, let me get…”

“This comment is illogical, Doctor,” a certain deep voice sounded from the entrance. “A member of a species, no matter how matured in culture or not, can never be a natural catastrophe. Neither the captain nor I are able to produce flashes, storms, earthquakes…”

“You two have elicited earthquakes within the HQ more than once, Spock,” McCoy said over his shoulder, before he glanced at the newcomer. “I don’t know about you during your Academy days, but Jim already started with giving the brass grey hairs only a few days after his first classes.”

“Hey! I wasn’t that bad,” Jim protested, before he smiled at his first officer, who stood on the doorstep, clad in a short brown Vulcan robe and fitting trousers with light shoes. “Hi, Spock. Everything all right?”

“Yes, Captain, I’m fine,” Spock nodded; bowing his head slightly before he looked at the two Augments. “Mr. Singh, Mr. Hoffmann, I trust you are feeling better?”

“Despite my head, and this damn leg and arm which still quit working, I’m a little bit better,” Khan said. “Thank you, Mr. Spock. How is your father doing?”

“He is healing well,” the Vulcan nodded, before he drove his attention to Otto. “I heard from Healer Sorel that you and Captain Kirk beamed over to New Gol. Obviously you’ve come to terms with your new surroundings.”
“He broke free of the hospital, with Jim’s help,” Leonard growled. “Don’t think that I allowed this foolishness, Spock.”

“On contraire, Doctor, you really should know by now that Jim loathes medical care and strongly sympathizes with everyone who is forced to endure a stay in medbay or hospital. That he would use the first given opportunity to reunite Mr. Singh and Mr. Hoffmann was only logical for him. Therefore it was ‘foolish’ enough for you to not foresee the current outcome.”

McCoy gaped at him, while Jim began to laugh. Khan shook his head in amused exasperation and closed his eyes. “Can you imagine how much my nerves have been stressed since I met these three?” he asked Otto, who chuckled for a second.

“Yes, I have a good idea about it.”

The same moment Bones’ communicator buzzed. “McCoy here,” the CMO answered the call.

“Sorel here, Doctor. I want to inform you that my attempt to book you a table at the ‘Starlight’ has been successful. Please inform your companion that you are expected at 1900 hours Standard Time. The table was booked in your name.”

Bones was very aware of the curious glances which were directed at him, while he replied, “Understood. Thank you very much for your assistance, Healer Sorel. I really appreciate it.”

“You are welcome, Doctor. I wish you and the lady a pleasant evening. Sorel out.”

Humming with satisfaction Bones closed the communicator, put it back into his pocket – and lifted both brows. “What?” he looked around. “Yes, Sorel helped me to find a nice restaurant. So what?”

“Doctor, may I be of some assistance?” Spock addressed him. “Dr. Marcus is still with Nyota. Shall I contact her and give her the chosen location for the dinner?”

Bones felt for the third time within a few minutes that his jaw hanging open, before he snapped it close, threw his head back on his neck and groaned, “Spo-ock!”
“You’re going out with Carol?” Jim asked perplexed, before he began to grin.

“I’ve Carol’s private frequency, so don’t bother with calling her,” Bones said to the Vulcan; ignoring his captain and friend for once. Now that the cat was out of the bag he could speak openly with Spock concerning the identity of his date.

“So, she finally answered your attempts of getting to know her better?” Kirk continued to question his CMO further.

“It wouldn’t bother me, Doctor,” Spock replied to Leonard. “Nyota and Dr. Marcus are still out for ‘shopping’, as they called it. The ride from downtown to the ‘Starlight’ is shorter than from my father’s flat. It would spare Dr. Marcus a longer ride on a taxi.”

“Since when have you two hooked up with each other?” Kirk cut in, but – again – McCoy ignored him.

“Well, this would be indeed good for her. On the other hand I don’t think that our girls want to go shopping ‘til the evening. Not in this heat. I’m certain that they want to return to your father’s flat to refresh themselves.”

“I assumed that you had a thing for her, Bones, but that you really invited her to dinner is a big step for you,” Kirk tried to interrupt again; mirth danced in his sky-blue eyes.

“Nyota and Dr. Marcus only left a quarter hour ago and ‘need some time out for the girls’, as they put it. I’m certain that they will find refreshment in one of the cafés in downtown and Dr. Marcus wants to take a ride from there to the restaurant,” Spock said to McCoy; refusing the temptation to look at Kirk. He knew exactly what his friend was playing at: ‘Driving the good doctor up the next wall’ – maybe as a little pay-back for McCoy grousing prior. And, to his surprise, the Vulcan felt a hint of amusement because of his T’hy’la’s silly behavior.

“Did she tell you that how long they want to do their shopping?” McCoy began the same time as Jim quipped in again,

“I never thought that you had it in you – a new relationship. You always want to play it safe and…”
That did it. Leonard’s patience was hurled over the limits.

“God dammit, Jim, can you stop talking for one god forsaken minute?”

Promptly Joaquin burst out laughing, quickly followed by Jim and Khan, while Spock lifted both brows – the equivalent of Vulcan guffawing.

“Rather Earth’s moon will be orbiting backwards,” Nien chuckled.

“Really, Doctor,” Kirk snickered, “as your captain I have to make certain that…”

“Don’t pull your rank, Jim,” Bones snapped. “We both know that I’m not in the same boat like you and Spock concerning ‘superior and subordinates’. I’m simply the CMO and the service I offer on duty is equal to everybody on the ship. So…”

“How unfortunate for the crew. And there I thought only I get sick from the medicaments I am given by you,” Spock said wryly. Some of his few human streaks were unable to resist the temptation to tease the doctor.

For the fourth time McCoy could only stare with open mouth, while now even Otto joined in the general amusement by chuckling quietly.

“You know what?” Leonard groused. “Have your fun all with yourself, Gentlemen. I, for my part, am going to my room now, to take a shower and get ready for the lady, before I take Mr. Hoffmann back to hospital.” He stomped out of the room. “And stop making surprised eyes at me, Jim. If you would have used your usual sensibility you would have realized that Carol and I got closer within the last weeks.” He vanished, while Kirk snickered,

“I don’t know why he makes such a big issue of it. He has a date – bravo. On the other hand, when I remember his complaining in the shuttle to the Academy and how his divorced wife took everything from him except for a skeleton that was in his praxis, I never thought he would try to win another lady over ever again.”

“‘Skeleton’?” Otto echoed. “Is this the reason you call him ‘Bones’?” As Kirk only nodded with a broad smirk, the German Augment began to laugh. “Heiliger Bimbam, you Americans really have a way to pick nick names!”
Spock remained at New Gol for some time more, and only left after not only McCoy and Hoffmann, but also Weiss had left. Joaquin had asked to stay with Otto again, keeping him company – well, that was the official version. In truth he knew with McCoy gone from New Gol for several hours ‘til late night, Jim and Noo had some time for themselves, and the way the two had looked at each other, Joaquin had a pretty good idea how the two wanted to spend the given chance of everyone else out of the house – well except for the Vulcan priests, but they lived in another wing of the building, so they didn’t count in this case.

Khan had nothing against his little brother accompanying Otto. Now, after everything was out in the open, Jo didn’t need to fear more uncomfortable questions of the German he couldn’t answer. And it also calmed Nien to know that Otto wasn’t alone in this strange world.

Bones left them with the strict order to get rest – especially Khan who sported a new headache and looked tired enough to fall asleep any second. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” he had said before he called the hospital and was beamed away with the two Augments; Otto again grousing about this way of transportation.

Spock bid his farewell, too, and went to the other wing to pay his grandmother an overdue visit. Despite their talks in the hospital several days ago he still owed his clan-mother a polite visit, and he also wanted to speak with her about several details concerning the upcoming bond-ceremony. To his surprise – he hid it very well – he was instantly let into T’Pau’s office, where the matriarch greeted him with unusual warmth as soon as the secretary had left. And somehow Spock knew that he had found, at last, family in the old lady’s presence, too.

In the meantime Jim and Khan did – for once – what McCoy had told them; but, of course, differently from what the CMO originally meant.

Kicking off his shoes, Jim joined Nien on the bed; offering his arm and shoulder as a pillow which was gladly accepted. And while Khan told him about his talk with Otto, both men drifted off to dreamland, only to be woken up later by a Vulcan priest, who brought dinner. Of course the priest didn’t show any reaction to the view of the two Terrans cuddled against each other on the bio-bed, yet Jim had learned to read Vulcans a little bit, and he could have bet his last shirt that the priest was amused.

After emptying their plates with salad and the bowls with something that reminded them of pasta and was surprisingly savory, Jim helped Nien to get ready for the night. Bones had asked if they needed support – M’Benga would have come down for it within minutes – but Kirk had learned a thing or
two of nursing someone and additionally he knew that Nien was far more comfortable with him
taking care of him than with anybody else.

With utter care he undressed Nien; realizing that several of the bruises did look better than two days
ago, yet Khan’s lean body still wore the brutal traces of Finnegan’s revenge. Some bruises were still
deep red, others had turned blue, the more healed ones wore the colors of the rainbow. Most cuts had
closed by now and only red stripes showed where the usually thick skin had been hit with enough
force to split open. But four lacerations were still matted, despite McCoy’s use of a derma-regenerator.

Khan had followed Jim’s gaze and sighed, “This all will heal, don’t worry so much.” He still
sounded tired, and if he would be truthful with himself, he would have admitted that he was
exhausted. The talk with Otto, despite Jim telling the other Augment the whole truth in advance, had
been an emotional rollercoaster. There was no chance for him to speak of everything without strong
feelings, and this combined with the after-effects of the TBI had worn Nien down.

“I know,” Kirk answered quietly, “yet I still think this all could have been prevented if I had been
quicker – or had been more on alert so that Norton couldn’t take me as a pawn and use me against
you.”

“Jim,” Nien chided, “whether Norton would have been able to grab you or not, isn’t relevant. He
always could have pointed his phaser at you from meters away. And he knew that keeping you safe
was and always will be my pressure point, and he used this knowledge. It wasn’t your fault.” He
groaned as he lifted his butt from the mattress to give Jim the chance to pull the comfortable wide
trouser from his hips. “This isn’t as worse as it shows,” he added as he received another concerned
look from his bondmate.

“Right, and I’m the emperor of China,” Kirk grumbled.

Jim took his time to wash the older man, who – of course – groused about being ‘damn useless’
again, but after Jim cleaned his legs, one look at the Augment’s eyes spoke of another language. And
the proof of Khan’s further thoughts was plain to see by the bulge in the boxer-shorts he only wore at
the moment.

Giving his bondmate a mischievous grin, Jim teased, “My, here is someone eager to regain full
strength.”

Khan frowned. “Of course! I’m tired of lying in this damn bed and counting the nails in the ceiling.”
“There are no nails, honey, only plaster.” He looked up from his washing again; his eyes full of mirth. “I’m worrying here again. People see white mice, but nails?”

Nien rolled his eyes; suppressing the urge to stick out his tongue. He stood over such a childish behavior, even if he was tempted. “You know, what I mean,” he said – and Jim began to snicker.

“You’re so cute when you’re pouting.”

“I’m not ‘cute’ and I don’t do ‘pouting’. The latter is for you,” the Augment leader protested; pouting even more.

Kirk’s chuckles turned into laughter. Crawling up, careful not to hurt Nien, he stole a kiss from his beloved. But the moment he wanted to move backwards, Khan’s good arm snaked around his waist and pulled him close again.

“Not so quick,” he whispered in Jim’s mouth. “It’s mean to give a very sick man a taste of heaven only to retreat instantly.”

“’A very sick man’, uh? Baby, then I really have to stop what we’re doing.”

“Don’t you dare!” the former dictator growled, bent his head forwards and captured his bondmate’s lips again with his own.

This time the soft warmth Jim had felt flared into something quite hotter. Sparks danced beneath his skin, despite his attempt of willing them away. It has been more than a week when they had been together, and even if this didn’t sound too long, after all they had been through their yearning to feel the other one – to get lost in the familiar warmth and love – grew within seconds.

Their mouths and tongues fell easily in the familiar erotica battle; eager fingers stroke through hair and skidded over skin; breaths mingled with each other. The desire to be with each other, to feel the other one alive and safe for once, was about to drive every sane thought away.

Only as Khan was about to wrap his broken arm around Jim and a piercing pain shot through his body, both stopped – panting, flushed, still aroused but also a little bit frustrated. Especially Nien.
Cursing in Indic, Punjab and several other Asian languages, Khan leaned back into the pillow; glaring darkly to the side to avoid Jim’s glance. “Even for this I’m incapable,” he growled; damning his weak body to hell and back.

Kirk braced himself with one hand and lifted the other one to Nien’s face; taking his chin between thumb and index finger. “Hey, look at me,” he crooned softly; a request that was only followed after the young captain used some gentle power. “You. Are. Not. Incapable! You are injured and are on your way to healing. There is a very big difference. Got me?” Jim’s voice was forceful, yet gentle. Their eyes met in silent challenge – and this time it was indeed Khan who gave in first. Lowering his gaze he mumbled,

“If you say so,”

Promptly he got a kiss on the nose for it. “Stop sulking,” Jim smiled. “I have every intention to cherish and kiss every part of your body as soon as you are more cured. And believe me, darling, you’re going to need a lot of stamina then.” He winked at him.

Nien rolled his eyes. “I’m an Augment. I thought you know by now that I don’t tire out so quickly.”

“Yeah, but the latter goes for me, too – even with only a little of your blood in my veins. I promise you, when I’m done with worshipping you, you’ll be ready to sleep for hours.”

It was another challenge – a sweet one. One, Khan couldn’t resist. Not when it came to this boy-man who had caught his heart and soul.

“I’ll hold you to this promise, Pyāra, be sure of it.” He lifted his good hand and combed his fingers through the thick golden hair of his bondmate. “And we will see, who will be exhausted first.”

“Yes, we’ll see,” Jim grinned, kissed his beloved one last time and rose from the bed. “All right, let’s get you ready for bed and…” He caught Khan’s heated gaze and threw his hands up. “I mean that you should be getting ready to sleep, not what you obviously interpret into my words.”

“And what do I interpret into them?” the Augment purred.

Jim threw his head back into his neck. “You are impossible!”
“And you love it.”

Realizing that this teasing was exactly the other way around like it usually went, Kirk began to laugh. “Well, now he even throws my own words back at me.”

“How does your medicine taste?” Nien asked with another purr in his voice, and the young captain groaned,

“I so wasn’t that seducing back on Aldebaran.”

“No?” Khan smirked at him. “I will only say two words: Fallen soap.”

Jim rubbed his face, peeked between his fingers down at his bondmate, saw that the bulge in his boxers hadn’t vanished – and was about to tease Nien of being ‘superior means to control himself’, but silent steps made both males tense up.

The Vulcan priest stepped into the room to clear the dishes. His glance found Kirk, then Khan who lay there in all his nude glory except for the boxers – and lifted a brow.

With haste the former dictator fingered for the blankets and threw them over himself; glaring at the Vulcan who… who had the nerve to lift both brows in a way Khan knew to be the Vulcan expression of amusement.

“If you need cold water, Captain, just ask for it,” the priest said in something close to dry humor. And as Khan only glowered at him, the Vulcan took the tray with the dishes and vanished with grace.

Jim began to snicker. “I’m only glad that Vulcans are not ones for gossip.”

“Are you sure? Given how nosy they are, I would say that they do have thing for gossip,” Khan grumbled. “Well, of course only for ‘logical gossip’.”
Kirk laughed again and helped his bondmate to get ready for the night.

And as McCoy arrived long after midnight – earning a rebuking lifted eyebrow from the doorman for it – he found his friend and the Augment in one and the same bed; arms and legs tangled with each other and cuddled together like two little boys.

Smiling in fond exasperation at the two, Bones pulled the blankets higher above them before he went to his own room; glowing in the aftermath of a very pleasant evening first in the restaurant and later at the lake’s shore he and Carol had spent a romantically late walk on…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, trust Jim and his friends to break the tense and sad atmosphere Khan and Otto experienced during their talk. As it seems, laughter is indeed the best medicine – especially when deep warm emotions are involved. And that Jim’s curiosity got the better of him while pestering Bones with his questions was, indeed, a part of the whole intention to cheer up his beloved bondmate. I also thought it important that Uhura apologized to Carol – and that Spock ‘felt’ the urge to do the same.

In the next chapter you really go to meet the lawyer Selek hired for Jim and the others; Khan meets T’Pau for the first time; the moment in which the Augments will be woken up comes and you also hear something again from the Klingons.

I hope you liked the new chapter, and sorry once again for the delay. I’ll try to get the next chapter ready before I’m off for my summer-vacation.

Have a nice start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
First steps

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Thank you so much for the comments again, and I’m glad that I was able to write the chapter until I’m off for my vacation.

As promised T’Pau and Khan will meet for the first time and you’re going to meet the lawyer. Fans of the original TV-show will know him; who hasn’t heard of him until now can have a look on the Star Trek-sides; then you have a good imagination what he looks like, even if he was older in the original show.

I can promise you some sweet scenes, fun but also serious stuff.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 94 – First steps

The morning came far too quickly. Not only for Jim and Nien, but also especially for Leonard McCoy. Of course he could go on for two or three shifts in row if an emergency demanded it, but usually he was in bed one or two hours before midnight. Midnight of Earthern count, not of Vulcan. In other words, Bones had gone to bed at 0440 am Standard Time and therefore he was groggy as a puppy when the set timer of his communicator woke him in the early morning.

Somehow he managed to get cleaned and dressed, commed M’Benga to ask how Sulu was doing and dragged his tired feet afterwards to the next room, where a very cheerful Jim Kirk greeted him with far too much enthusiasm.

“Bones, there you are! How was your evening? Everything went all right? Did Carol like it?” he asked; beaming at his moody friend.

“God, kid, these are too many questions for a poor man who hasn’t gotten his morning coffee until
Jim chuckled. “Well, I don’t think that they serve any coffee here.”

“A good tea does miracles sometimes,” Khan added; eyeing the tired-out CMO with amusement.

“Nothing is better than a strong coffee in the morning,” Bones grumbled and looked at the bowl Jim was eating from. “Porridge? I’m glad that you for once listened to me, but I need something different this morning. I’m beaming up and have a good, warm Southern breakfast.”

Kirk grinned at him. “My, my, I think I’ll have to speak with Carol to take better care of you.”


“So, how was your evening?” Jim wanted to know again, and the CMO sighed deeply while a true smile appeared on his face.

“Beautiful,” he whispered. “The dinner was fantastic; the wine was far too good and then the walk on the lake’s shore…” He sighed again; lost in his memories. Then, suddenly, he recognized the broad grin Jim was giving him, and even Khan chuckled quietly. “Oh, shut up, you two. Let a guy relish in his memories until the cold, hard reality catches up with him again.”

Kirk rolled his eyes. “Drama-queen!” He leaned back on his chair, while Khan emptied his own bowl; supported by several pillows Jim had stuffed behind his back to make it more comfortable for him. “Otto called a few minutes ago,” the young captain continued. “He was already up and has some training sessions with Sorel now. He thinks that he is fit enough to support us by waking up the rest of Nien’s family.”

Bones took a deep breath. “What is it with this rising at inhuman early hours? Is there no-one who values a decent long sleep anymore?” He stepped to Jim, took his friend’s cup of tea and emptied it; ignoring Kirk’s protest. “I’ll beam up, look after Sulu, have breakfast and then I’m down in the hospital to speak with Sorel and Daniel. If they give the green light for Otto for being up for a few hours, we can start to wake up the others tomorrow at the latest. I think it would be wise, if Scotty could assist us, too.”

“I’ll speak with Wesley about it. If he can decide that Engineering can go without Scotty for a few
hours, our Whiskey-lover will assist you.”

Khan, who had tensed up the moment the topic of his sibling’s awakening came on the table, looked at McCoy. “You’re going to wake them up?” he whispered, and for several seconds Bones was sure he saw some moisture in the Augment’s eyes. His compassionate side was instantly on full alert. Heavens, how often had that man hoped for this moment, only to realize that he had been lied to again. But not with him – Leonard McCoy. Or with this lovesick kid, who glanced with utter tenderness at the older man.

“Yes, we’ll wake them up within the next 24 hours. I’ll check Otto and if I think him strong enough, we’ll begin this afternoon. Everything is prepared for the big moment.” He pursed his lips. “I only ask myself if we should beam the cryotubes into the prepared rooms or if they should be moved manually.”

“Given the unsafe way from the cave up to the hospital, I think beaming would be better,” Jim stated; earning an affirming nod from Khan.

“Yeah, I thought that you would say that,” Bones sighed again, before he gripped his communicator. “Okay, I’ll beam up – and you should call Selek; tell him what we’re about to do. I think he should know about it.”

Jim nodded. “I already planned to call him after Nien’s and my talk with T’Pau. I’ll do it around midday. He certainly is very busy and I don’t want to harass him early in the morning.”

“If all people were as considerate as this, I would still be asleep,” McCoy grumbled, before he cocked his head. “So, the old lady wants to speak with our superman here?” He smirked at Khan. “Just stay calm and don’t interpret too much in her stern behavior. She is simply more Vulcan than the others.”

“Aw, come on, Bones. She isn’t that bad,” Jim said.

“What happened to ‘scary’ and ‘eerie’?” Leonard teased him. “But, of course, you would change your opinion. After all she’s the granny of your dear Vulcan brother.”

“This has nothing to do with Spock,” Kirk protested, but only received a short laugh as an answer, before McCoy opened his communicator and asked to be beamed aboard. As the soft ringing sound and the first light engulfed him, he heard Jim calling, “My greetings to Carol and don’t use too much
of her time during breakfast, or she be too late for her shift.”

Bones was about to give Kirk a fitting answer, but the transporter already beamed him away.

Jim snickered as his friend dematerialized and vanished; having seen the protest on Bones’ face before the beam took him away.

Khan looked amused at him. “You can’t stop yourself, can’t you? You have to pull his leg.”

“Bones loves me nevertheless,” Jim smirked.

“Obviously,” Nien deadpanned. “It’s the only answer to the question of why he still puts up with you.”

“Hey!” Kirk pouted; knowing that his bondmate wasn’t serious. Then light steps drew nearer, and Jim felt the hair on his neck rising. He knew exactly who was coming down the hallway, and quickly he took the tray with the rest of Khan’s breakfast away and placed it on the table beside his own bowl and cup.

His assumption concerning the newcomer was correct: It was T’Pau who stopped shortly at the threshold and let the gaze of her fathomless eyes linger on the two Terran males for a few seconds.

Jim lifted his right hand into the ta’al. “Good morning, Ma’am,” he greeted her, while bowing his head.

“Good morning, James,” she answered, while Khan tried to copy Jim’s gesture; glad that his right arm had been spared during Finnegan’s brutal assault.

“Long life and peace, Milady,” he said.

“The same to you, Mr. Singh,” T’Pau answered, while she stepped into the room. Instantly Jim offered her a chair she accepted, before he took the other chair; waiting for her permission to sit down that came in the form of a short nod.
“I see your healing process has progressed,” the old Vulcanness addressed Khan after her dark eyes roamed over his figure and face for a short time.

“Yes, I am feeling better, Ma’am. Please accept my gratitude for your hospitality in New Gol – and for giving my people, Jim and his officers and me asylum.”

Vulcans always pointed out that thanks were unnecessary, yet Jim was convinced that T’Pau took Khan’s words well. She simply bowed her head. “You are welcome, Mr. Singh. Your people and mine share a very similar fate. Only someone who burnt his hand really knows about the pain and will try to prevent others from getting harmed in the same way.” She watched him for a moment longer. “Your healing abilities are even better than those of my people, yet you are still far from being cured. Those men didn’t show any restraint as they attacked you.”

Nien nodded slowly. “No, Ma’am. I was already more or less paralyzed by the narcotic I was injected with and therefore defenseless.” It pained him to admit the latter, but it was the truth.

T’Pau lifted a brow. “And such a crime from Starfleet’s ‘Elite’. I will press charges against Starfleet for what Admiral Norton and his underlings did here on New Vulcan, but I will add a petition to the Federation Council that the psychological standard tests that the recruits of the Security Elite have to undergo, must be revised. Starfleet is liable to the Council. Such a behavior is unworthy of the Federation. I’ll make certain that such a situation will not rise again. Regrettably this comes too late for you.”

The Augment took a deep breath. “I’m not the only one who fell prey to Section 31, Luengo and his goonies. And I don’t only mean my people and the way they were abused in Starfleet labs. I also talk about the good men and women which lost their lives because of Marcus’ and later Luengo’s insanity. I’m certain that we wouldn’t be at war if Marcus and later Luengo had behaved differently.”

This time it was the matriarch who nodded. “You are certainly right, but it changes nothing to ponder about what ‘would have happened’. Kaidith – what is, is. We can’t change the past, only chose the future path.” She leaned back on the chair. “And I’m here to speak with you about your people’s future.”

Khan sighed. “I do hope that they will be able to live free within the Federation one day, but given Eathern history, I don’t know if this wish ever will come true.”

“Men went a long way from their warlike thinking to today’s more peaceful one, yet Humans are
creatures of emotions and often they have difficulties to forgive or to offer someone a chance. Yet times have changed. Humans are even tolerable enough to befriend other species – or to marry them. My former daughter-in-law was the best example for it, and I’m certain she would find better words for you to calm your worries, but she fell with Vulcan. Another soul to mourn.”

For the first time Jim realized that T’Pau must have really liked Amanda Grayson. Again he was sad that he had never had the chance to meet her.

The old Vulcanness collected herself and looked straight at Khan. “If the public is on your side, they will accept your family. Therefore we have to show them that your people are no danger for the Federation, but a valuable addition.”

Nien lifted both brows. “How so?”

“It will last weeks until your people have gathered all the knowledge they need to live in the Federation – weeks we will integrate them among our people. As far as I have come to understand, Augments are not only enhanced in body, but also in mind – meaning your way of thinking quickly, straight and logical is not unlike how we Vulcans do. Therefore your people will certainly have no problems to adjust to our colony – something that will not go unnoticed by the Federation Council. This in addition to the fact that they will be accepted as their own sentient species will give them the chance in the end to move freely within the Federation.”

Khan had listened closely and pursed his lips finally. “You want to teach first and to introduce them afterwards to the Federation.”

T’Pau made a slow affirming gesture. “Yes, but given the fact that many humans still have bad memories of those Augments who abused their enhanced nature, men should be made aware of your people’s presence carefully.”

“Like making the people first see that buffalos aren’t the big danger they always thought they were before environmentalists used the old conservation program back in the 20th century and reintroduced the buffalo in the Great Plains again,” Jim piped up.

He was rewarded with a confused gaze – T’Pau – and an amused one – Khan.

“I do hope you don’t compare my people with a flog of buffalos,” Nien said.
Kirk rolled his eyes. “I don’t mean it literally, but as an example, honey. You have to show the people that the so-called ‘danger’ isn’t one before you can make further steps.”

“James is right,” T’Pau cut in. “Before something new can be established you have to convince people to accept it. The question is: Will your people agree to being a part of our colony for some time?”

Nien pursed his lips, before answered slowly, “To tell the truth: We have no other place to go at the moment, so they will agree. When they learn that they are safe here – accepted – they will cooperate. We already assumed that we would have to win a new place to live when we left Earth, and even if the most of us thought that meant to re-gain our right to live on Earth one or two decades after launching the Botany Bay, they will adjust to the new situation.” He took a deep breath. “And this solution comes with a further big benefit. To move freely without any danger of being arrested or killed is more than we had the last weeks on Earth before we took off from the planet. It was months before that that we could roam the streets without the risk of getting attacked or eliciting new uproars among those who didn’t understand but feared us. To find peace here will convince my crew more than anything else.”

T’Pau made an affirming gesture. “Then it is decided. Your people will live among us until the Federation – Earth! – is ready to accept them. Concerning your personal case you can rely on my support. Even if we Vulcans are able to control the rest of our emotions, the principle of ‘running amok’ isn’t unknown to us. There are… circumstances even one of us can lose all control and isn’t sane anymore. Not condemning, but helping to heal is the right way – a path James was able to make you walk. That this path does not end in dark times again is something we will work on.”

Khan hadn’t anticipated such a kind of support. Yes, Jim – and Spock – had mentioned that to let the other Augments stay on New Vulcan until the way was clear for them was the best solution, but that his people could live among the surviving Vulcans for a longer period of time, was something Nien hadn’t thought possible. Right, the outer environment wasn’t the best one given the higher gravity and the heat, but the Augments had been built to be stronger and better. They could adjust easier to everything than casual humans. And if Jim and the others lived here for days now without any serious problems, the Augments could do it, too. Hell, Spock’s mother had lived on the original Vulcan for almost three decades without any health risks – even if she had to take this ominous tri-ox McCoy had given Otto yesterday, too (and Khan was certain that the same stuff was among the medicine that was pumped into his body by the IV’s). There was no reason his people couldn’t adapt to this place.

“Thank you, Ma’am,” he said softly. “Your help gives us the first real chance to find a new place to live on – and to live for. We are not ungrateful, rather the opposite. I’m certain that my people will be more than willing to assist you with building this colony. And even if their knowledge isn’t up-to-date, I’m sure they are going to learn quickly and can be of help afterwards.”
\[\text{T’Pau lifted a brow. “We don’t expect anything in return for our hospitality, Mr. Singh. The asylum was granted because it was the right thing to do – and to help other sentient beings is one of our most important laws. Life is sacred, Mr. Singh – something we are more aware of than ever before.” She cocked her head. “Yet, given the current situation, every assistance is appreciated. If some of your people do want to support us, it will be welcome. But, as I said, it’s not demanded as repayment.”} \]

She leaned back in the chair.

“Given the fact that your people will believe you the most and have to rely on your own experiences within the 23\textsuperscript{rd} century, the regaining of your health is of most priority. If you in need something, do not hesitate to speak of it.”

Khan hesitated. He was more than grateful for the old Vulcanness’ support, especially concerning his family. There was nothing he could ask more for, yet there was a tiny, personal problem she could, indeed, help him with.

“Ma’am, there is indeed something I want to ask of you.” As he saw her lifting one brow in a silent question, he continued, “It’s about the healing progress I make.”

A short tilting of her head was the only hint that the old matriarch was surprised. “Is there something amiss with Healer Sorel’s or Dr. McCoy’s medical care you want to improve?”

The Augment quickly shook his head. “No, Ma’am. Healer Sorel and Dr. McCoy are excellent physicians and I couldn’t be in better hands.” He took a deep breath. “But, you see, I’ve been stuck to this bed for days now and… I fear that I get cabin-fever.”

For a second confusion clouded the matriarch’s aged face. “I guarantee you, Mr. Singh, that these rooms are clean and that this particular room is disinfected every day to prevent from pathogens slowing down your healing process. There is no reason you have to fear germs within these walls that could provoke a new fever in you.”

Khan stared at her; not knowing if this was another example of Vulcan humor, or if the old lady really hadn’t heard that idiom before.

Jim, who had stayed quiet until now and had simply listened, felt amusement rising in him and he
needed all his composure to suppress a snicker. That he didn’t do a good job on it was proved T’Pau’s reaction as she turned her head towards him and lifted a demanding brow. “Yes, James?” she asked.

Kirk felt himself blushing – hell, the old lady had a way to make even a starship captain flush – and cleared his throat. “Ma’am, what Mr. Singh refers is the following: He has been bound to bed and to this room for several days and feels himself really cooped in by now. And given the fact that his broken leg will not be able to carry him within the next days, I think he wants to ask you for a desk-chair or something else that is placed outside on the terrace he can use to obey Dr. McCoy’s medical orders by lying down, but also to be out of this room for a few hours.”

“I do not know if the temperature will be healthy for Mr. Singh,” T’Pau thought aloud. “As far as I learned when dealing with Terrans you prefer lower temperatures.”

“Yes, but there are shadows on the terrace – and Mr. Singh comes from a land where the temperature doesn’t differ that much. India is rather hot and his body will remember it.” He gave her his best tested brilliant smile, combined with a puppy look. “My grandfather always said that fresh air is the best. I think Mr. Singh’s health will improve if he can leave this room for a few hours and can get some fresh air. It’s healthy for his mental state.”

T’Pau considered the words, before she asked, “Would it better for you too, if you were in his place?”

She couldn’t fool Jim; she was curious about this special Terran streak.

“Yes, most humans would prefer to lie outside with warm, nice weather to get fresh air than to be stuck in a room. I read in one of McCoy’s medical magazines that our subconscious feels left out when we’re bound to bed, while around us life continues. To leave the sick-room from time to time makes us part of the world again – and strengthens our hope of a quick healing. It encourages us and improves the healing process like this.”

The old Vulcanness watched him closely, then she nodded in understanding. “Social embeddedness seems to be important for humans like it is for us. I’ll take care that a lounger will be brought to the attached terrace and that Mr. Singh will be carried to it.”

Khan felt his cheeks heating up. Carried – like an infant! On the other hand there was no other option if he wanted to get out of this damn bed and room. And superior or not, his desire to be away from these four walls was almost irresistible. “Thank you,” he murmured; his voice a croak.
Jim looked at him – fond but also amused. Of course Kirk knew what was going on with his bondmate. The wish to get away from the sickbed for a few hours was something he could understand far too well, as well as the humiliation of being carried like a child. Well, where light was, there was shadow – nothing came without a price.

“Cheer up, sweetheart, you can rest outside, all tucked in and comfortable, while the others have to work.”

“I was never a man to be lazing around and let others do my work. To be reduced to watching is… difficult enough.”

Jim bent forwards and took his hand; squeezing it. “In a few days you’ll back on your feet and then you can outshine us all with your new found energy.”

“Can’t wait for it,” Khan mumbled; but he calmed down as he felt the gentle love flowing over the shared bond with the younger man.

“I suggest that Mr. Singh will rest outside until the early midday,” T’Pau interrupted them; ignoring the two men holding hands – something that was close to making-out in the Vulcan way. “Or until the temperature gets unpleasant for him.” She looked at Khan who was about to protest. “You can always return to the gardens in the late afternoon when the heat ceases a little. I do understand that you come from one of Earth’s warmer regions, but don’t underestimate our climate here. You are not adjusted to it, and given your state of health you shouldn’t take any risk. I don’t want to explain to McCoy why one of his patients got worse while under our care.”

She rose and instantly Jim followed her example. Familiar with this custom of Earthen gentleman behavior, she tilted her head slowly. “James, Mr. Singh,” she bid her fare-well.

“Ma’am,” Jim bowed, while Khan lowered his head; saying the same thing at the same time.

Just giving the two Terran males a short look of something close to amusement, the old Vulcanness left the room. And as she reached the door to the next hallway she heard the Augment sighing in relief, “Thanks to all higher beings which maybe do exist. I’m about to leave this room!”
“It was a very pleasurable evening!” Carol Marcus sat vis-à-vis of McCoy in the officer’s mess and lowered her cup of coffee. She had been surprised as she heard the CMO paging her via intercom aboard the Enterprise, and was happy as he told her that he was aboard and asked her to join him for breakfast in ten minutes. Half an hour until the shift started – that was enough time to have a decent breakfast and to speak with Leonard again.

Leonard simply smiled at her. “Yes, it was,” he nodded; eyes shining. He had beamed aboard a quarter hour prior, had looked after Sulu – who was awake and happy with the surgery’s results – and had afterwards hailed for Carol. For a moment he feared that seeing each other again after the last evening could be awkward, but far from it. The second she stepped into the officer’s mess, warmth had risen in Bones, and given the tender, beautiful smile she offered him before she kissed his cheek, made it clear that she felt the same.

Marcus laughed quietly. “I don’t know what was the better one: The delicious dinner, the breathtaking sight of the lake or the walk on its shores.”

“I think the best was your company,” Leonard said; making her blush a little bit.

“Prince Charming,” she chuckled.

“Belle,” he grinned.

Carol had to laugh again. “Well, at least you’re ‘Prince Charming’ from the beginning and aren’t a beast that has to transformed back into his human form.”

“I wouldn’t mean the kiss that did the transforming,” McCoy said wryly; seeing to his delight how her cheeks flushed even more.

For a few seconds they simply ate their breakfast, before Carol chuckled, “Did you seen the two Vulcans at the shore?”

Bones looked up at her. “Uh… no?”

The young woman began to laugh. “They sat in the sand side by side and watched the stars, while
being far too close, invading each other’s private space. They didn’t even see us walking by until we were on the same level as them.” She grinned. “I never thought Vulcans to be romantic.”

“Well, look at our tight-lipped first officer and how he melts when Uhura only looks at him. I think there you get your answer,” Leonard joked, and both snickered, while they sipped at their coffee.

“I would like to repeat our evening,” Carol said finally quietly; flushing again.

Bones wasn’t aware that he grinned like an idiot. “Yeah, that would be great,” he nodded; beaming even more. “That means, if Wesley lets you off the ship.”

“I don’t think that he would have something against it. We’re stuck here for now and… there are rumors that the commodore is pondering to give some shore leaves. The crew has been through much and to have some fresh air – even hot as it is on New Vulcan – would do them good.”

McCoy shortly pursed his lips. “Hm, that gives me an idea. Geoffrey is in charge of the medbay at the moment with me being released from duty officially, but if he – as the current CMO – suggests shore leaves for the crew out of medical reasons, Wesley will certainly allow it. After all, the good commodore is turning the same idea around in his head, as you said.”

Carol had to chuckle again. “You’re almost like Jim. You always find a way to get what you want – even if you have to manipulate a commodore.”

Bones smiled. “Well, Jim did rub off me – somehow. That comes with spending a lot of time with him. His rather unorthodox methods and his firm belief that no-win-scenarios are successful can do this to a man.”

“Yes – and they bring him often into deep water. Just like now.” She sighed. “What do you think? Will this mysterious lawyer, Nyota told me about, be able to get you and the others off the hook?”

McCoy shrugged. “Selek seems to think so – and I have to admit that calms me.”

The young woman cocked her head. “Jim said that Selek is an old friend of his, which strikes me odd enough given the fact how young he is and how old the Vulcan High Minister is. And now even you trust this guy enough to put your fate into his hands. Are you really sure that the outcome will be as good as you all hope for?”
“What is sure in the universe, darling?” Bones sighed. “One little component can change whole star systems. I really have no answers for you in this case. There are only two possibilities left by now: One, we trust Selek and let the lawyer he chose handle everything, or two, we hire our own lawyer and see what he is able to do. And given the fact that Selek seems to know this guy and is utterly convinced that he is the best, I choose Selek’s path.” He lifted his cup of coffee again. “And, by the way, the guy has this sometimes unnerving tendency to always be right.”

“Just like someone we both know,” Carol teased. “Mr. Spock is the perfect ‘I-know-it-all’ and ‘Of-course-I-am-right’.”

Bones knew that he had to be careful now. “I think that comes with being a Vulcan. High intelligence, logic and all this do have some advantages.”

The weapons officer leant forwards in her chair and looked straight at him. “Yes, and despite the general belief they do have emotions – just like the Vulcan pair yesterday evening. I only ask myself, if a Vulcan calls his lady what you just called me.”

Confused McCoy frowned. “And what did I call you?”

A quiet laugh escaped Carol. “You just called me ‘darling’.”

This time it was Bones who flushed, and as her laugh grew louder – clear like a bell – he blushed furiously red, before he grinned sheepishly, “What shall I say? I always wear my heart on my sleeve.”

Still giggling, Carol reached over the table and took his hand; squeezing it. “And I have nothing against it.”

“What?” he asked; hearing to his horror that his voice was far too high. Clearing his throat, he specified, “What do you not mind? Me wearing my heart on my sleeve, or calling you ‘darling’?”

Her answer was music to his ears, “Both!”

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Khan knew that it was childish, but he couldn’t stop the deep sigh of relief and utter delight, as he lay back on the lounger one of the Vulcan priests had put him on only a minute ago. The Augment had waited until the priest had vanished, before he gave into his emotions; knowing that only Jim saw him grinning like a cat that got the cream.

The lounger was placed in the shadow of two trees at the side of the terrace that was vis-à-vis to the door of Jim’s and his room, and a side-table held a med-scanner as well as two glasses, a carafe with water and some fruits as refreshment. It was very warm, mind you, but the air wasn’t that different from some areas in India. And, above all, it was fresh air – not a conditioned one. He felt the wind stroking his face and combing his hair, while it gently rustled the leaves of the two trees. He smelled sand, soil and flowers – exotic yet not too strange for his nose. Then he heard murmurs from some Vulcans working around fifty meters away in the large garden, while beside him a deck-chair creaked as Jim sat down in it.

Free…

He felt free and far more alive than within the last days and maybe even weeks. Only when he was with Jim on Aldebaran in their little shared love-nest had he felt likewise. Maybe now he felt even more at ease; with his crew safe, Joaquin and Otto already awake and with the knowledge that his other siblings were going to join him in one or two days.

Relishing in his surroundings and in the enfolding peace, he closed his eyes, while he took several deep breathes. He could feel Jim’s fond amusement through their bond, then Kirk’s fingers entwined with his.

“Better?” Jim’s gentle tenor asked.

Opening his eyes again, Khan looked at him – his breath taken away from him for a moment, as he saw the sunlight that broke through the rustling leaves bathing his beloved in a gold-red shimmer; conjuring a golden hue on his skin and making his hair gleam.

“Very much better,” he said. “Thank you!”

“Don’t thank me, but T’Pau,” Jim smiled.

“You asked her.”
“Yes, but she gave her permission and detached one of her priests to be our private butler again.”

Khan chuckled. “I’m trying not to imagine him in black-white striped dress-coat with black trousers, waist-coat and bow-tie.”

Jim looked bewildered at him, then he remembered this kind of clothing in old-fashioned movies – and began to laugh. “Well, this would be a sight to behold.” He lowered his voice as two Vulcans glanced in his direction. “You’re looking better,” he said after a few seconds. “You’re not so pale anymore.”

“Fresh air does work some magic,” Nien nodded. “Just remember how quickly you healed on Aldebaran.”

“Yes – thanks to the superblood of yours and especially your tender care,” Jim sighed.

“‘Special care’, hm?” The Augment glanced teasingly at the younger man. “And there I thought you would repay me in the same way yesterday evening, but just then you had to decide to act reasonable for once.”

“Aw, I do remember how much I needed to persuade you before we two could forget everything that happened by driving each other mad with lust.”

Khan growled softly. “You choose these last words on total purpose, didn’t you?”

Jim’s glance found the swelling bulge in the Augment’s trousers; viewable even through the tunic. He snickered, “Ah, honey, waiting raises the anticipation.”

“Just wait until I drop a piece of soap in the shower and you come running.”

Again Jim only laughed softly, then both men fell silent – content and at peace. Being still exhausted and suffering from the TBI, Khan drifted off to sleep within minutes, while Jim read his PADD, before his own eyes closed. None of them knew how much time had passed, until they finally were woken up by a crash that came from inside the building. And not from anywhere, but obviously very near their room – or maybe it really came from their room.
Both males were instantly on alert and looked at each other; lifelong training in Khan’s case and Starfleet schooling in Kirk’s, they were from zero on hundred percent within seconds. Well, Khan couldn’t do anything else than sit up, while Jim had already risen; his attention fixed on the open terrace door. Again some noises were heard, and Kirk headed inside with a “Stay here!”. 

“Wisecracker – as if I could go anywhere at the moment,” Nien groused; cursing his condition again. He watched Jim vanishing in the house and despite any orders from McCoy and any rationality he tensed his muscles; ready to leave the lounger and to hobble after Jim should the tiniest hint be given that his beloved faced some danger.

With all senses on alert, Kirk crept towards his and Nien’s room, but heard that the noises came from two doors down the hallway – next to Joaquin’s and McCoy’s quarters. For a moment he pondered the chance of getting his phaser from his room in the case that he was going to face some robbers, then logic set in. There was no way to make a step into New Gol’s holy halls without passing the main-entrance or to come through the garden – and both were watched. No Vulcan would allow some scallywags to enter the building without rising alarm. And, by the way, there was as good as no criminality on New Vulcan and those who went against the law were outworlders – the latter also very rarely in New Gol except for T’Pau’s official guests or The Shadow-gang. And the latter would have called him if they wanted to visit.

Ergo, the chance that the somebody two doors down the hallway was a robber were very small. Yet Jim didn’t take any risk. Tiptoeing down the hallway he stopped beside the door that stood ajar and peeked inside the room. He couldn’t see much, but heard noises. So he pushed the door carefully open, stepped in – and promptly stumbled over something that was placed directly in the entrance path. With flying arms and cursing he tried to hold his balance and maybe he would have been successful, if it weren’t for a sudden movement in front of him that startled him mercilessly. The attempt to regain his forward balance and to jump back in one motion was something not even a Vulcan or an Augment would have been able to master. The result was humiliating and hurting in one.

James T. Kirk, savior of Earth, fighter for justice, hero of the Federation and fiercely loyal man towards his friends, fell over his own legs and landed anything but gracefully on his butt with a yelp.

For a moment the world seemed to have come to a halt – a moment in which he tried to understand what just happened. Then he heard a chuckle not far away from him and as he looked up – rather dumbfounded – he glanced directly into the face of a human man in at the end of his forties. Brunet hair starting to thin out at the temples and intense blue eyes sparkled with surprise and amusement in a tanned round face – a face that showed the first crinkles. He was rather short, but slender, and the high forehead spoke of a lot of intelligence.
“Well, young man, this I’m calling sportive histrionics,” the stranger said with a strong light tenor. “But I think the outcome of the stunt wasn’t planned like this.”

Jim knew when his leg was being pulled, and grimacing he sorted his limbs before he began to rise. His gaze found the reason for his ungraceful entrance: An open box. “What man in his right mind places a box directly in the entrance?” he grumbled while clapping non-existing dust from his clothes.

“Someone who thought to be alone while moving in,” The stranger chuckled and rounded two further boxes. “So, High Minister Selek’s description wasn’t exaggerated: You are a man of temperament.”

Jim frowned and took a second to look around. There were many more open boxes and books. No, not PADD’s or discs, real paper-books. A lot of them. And one peek into the box that had made him fall contained more books.

“What…” He began rather unintelligently and the other man began to laugh.

“Yes, I use real books, young man. Not these electronic knick-knacks. You should try them. Believe me, it makes the whole experience more vivid if you have real paper beneath your finger tips and smell the unmistakable scent of a used book. And, by the way, you can tamper with electronic files, but never a written word on a paper. And the latter is most important in my job.”

“And that would be? Librarian?” Jim cocked his head. “Are you here to help T’Pau with cataloging the remains of the Vulcan artifacts and documents which could be saved?”

The man snorted – half irritated, half humorous. “I’m here to help a young man and his friends to get their neck out of the hangman’s noose where they put it in.”

Realization dawned on Kirk. “You are our lawyer!” he blurted out and the man rolled his eyes in new amusement.

“Obviously. You know the rumor that a lawyer knows every written law is indeed nothing more than a rumor. To know where look up them is the trick.” He pointed at the books, before he offered his head. “Samuel T. Cogley,” he introduced himself.
Kirk’s jaw moved towards the floor. “Co... Cogley?” No, his voice wasn’t that high, was it? Yes it was, but shock could do something like this even to the strongest men. The man in front of him was one of the most famous lawyer in the whole Federation, and the success of is solved cases were legendary by now. “Sweet Lord, there is no way in hell or on Earth I can pay you!”

The lawyer laughed quietly, his hand was still offered which Jim finally took and shook. “Sorry, sir,“ the young captain added hastily. “James Kirk,” he returned the polite behavior. “But I think you already know.”

“Of course,” Cogley smiled. “Your face is well-known, Captain.”

“I’m no captain at the moment,” Jim corrected him; letting go of the older man’s hand.

“And we’ll make certain that this will change again. You, young man, do the Federation a far better service when sitting in the center chair of your ship, then sitting at some desk or in a penal colony.” He looked over Kirk’s shoulder. “The same goes for you, mister, but before we speak about a chair I would think it wiser if you would use first a bed. Don’t get me wrong, but you look like hell.”

Jim whirled around; his inner antenna knew instinctively who stood behind him.

“Nien!” he gasped. “Are you insane? You cannot walk!” he almost shouted. With two steps he was at his bondmate’s side and wrapped one arm around his waist; making sure to support him at the injured side without causing him more pain.

“I felt your... distress,” Khan murmured; eying warily the older man who now stood in the doorway.

“I’m okay, I only kissed the floor with my butt as I stumbled over a damn box of books,” Jim answered. “Please, Nien, lay down again. Come on, let’s get you back on the lounger – and we shouldn’t tell Bones anything about your little trip, or he’ll ban you to the hospital.”

“Only over my dead body,” Khan growled; still watching the stranger, who closed the distance to them.

“Khan Noonien Singh, I presume,” Cogley said; recognizing how the other dark-haired man tensed instantly. Of course, given the fact who this man was for real, Samuel could understand the wariness of his client. “I’m honored to meet the man who saved the population of a whole planet, prevented
the main-strike of a Klingon terror-act and helped to rescue our diplomats.” He offered his hand again. “Samuel T. Cogley – and before you ask, I’m here to get you through the trial they’ll make you face because of your rampage last year.”

The Augment still watched the other man carefully, before he accepted the offered hand. “I already heard from your conversation with Captain Kirk that you are our lawyer. Thank you for coming.”

Cogley smiled. “You already heard, yes? Well, your hearing must be indeed very good – but that’s no miracle given your nature.” He cocked his head and looked the enhanced man up and down; taking in the fading bruises, the fixed arm and the pale face. “My, my, I really don’t want to piss off Starfleet’s Elite if this is the outcome. And when I consider your strong nature, they must have been more than ruthless. Don’t worry, Mr. Singh, we’ll get them for what they did to you – a few days ago and before that as you were held captive by Section 31.”

Jim shortly pursed his lips. “Just how much did Selek already tell you?”

“Enough to wake my curiosity and to make me realize one thing: If I get you two and the others away from the trial with your reputations completely restored – free of any penalty – I can’t save myself from being bombarded with new cases I’ll have to take.” He grinned. “Your cases, gentlemen, are absolutely intricate, and even more so because they include machinations and deeds in Starfleet’s highest ranks and in the Federation Council. I LOVE such complicated cases, so don’t worry about payment.”

Kirk frowned. “I afraid I don’t understand, sir.”

Cogley smirked this time. “To get you two and the officers out of trouble is a payment itself. I only demand a base-fee and that is already paid by High Minister Selek.”

Jim gasped again. “Selek paid…” He shook his head. “He can’t do this!”

“Why not, Jim?” a warm baritone, rough with age, sounded from the door that led from the main hallway into the guest-wing.

Kirk looked up and found Old Spock’s eyes, while the Elder came nearer on silent feet. A dark long robe waved gracefully around his thin long frame.
“You already risked everything by giving us asylum,” Jim protested. “Hell, you risked your life even! I cannot allow that you spend your money on me, too. We both know that you… have to build up a new life from nothing and…”

“Just like most of us surviving Vulcans,” Spock Prime interrupted him softly, “And money exists to buy things you need, otherwise it wouldn’t exist at all. There is no better way to spend my money than giving it for you and your friends.”

Jim felt himself blushing at the display of such devotion. Sweet Lord, his own Spock was fiercely loyal and held brotherly affection for him, but this was an even higher level.

Khan cleared his throat and looked at Jim. “At some time you have to tell me how exactly you won him over.”

Kirk shrugged helplessly. “I have no damn clue.”

“You won me over the years, Jim, and if once you win a Vulcan’s friendship, it remains until the last breath.” He looked at the lawyer and lifted his right hand into the ta’al. “Long life and peace, Mr. Cogley. My secretary informed me of your arrival. I am grateful that you could make it this quickly. Welcome to New Vulcan.”

Samuel returned the Vulcan greeting gesture, while he bowed his head. “Long life and peace, High Minister Selek, and thank you for the nice welcome. I’m pleased to meet you in person finally. May I say that I enjoyed our talks via communication net?”

“Your compliment is unnecessary, yet appreciated, Mr. Cogley. Did you find everything to your satisfaction?” He gestured towards the guest room.

“Yes, I was about to settle in as Captain Kirk stumbled into the room – literally.” The last word was accompanied by a wink at Jim, who grimaced and flushed again.

“Don’t tell me you really fell over this box?” Khan said; surprised.

“Yes, I did,” Jim sighed; grumbling in his throat as he felt Nien’s silent laughter through the bond and saw amusement shining in Selek’s familiar eyes.
“He came running after I dropped a box with books but didn’t see the hindrance in the entrance,”
Cogley explained to Khan and Selek. “Regrettably it’s not usual today that someone so young shows such a polite behavior. I was taught by my parents to help others if they are clumsy enough to let something fall, yet it isn’t the norm anymore.”

Jim’s eyes widened. “I thought you were a burglar.”

“What?” Cogley looked baffled at him.

“And you came to the rescue of New Goli without a phaser,” Selek all but sighed, before he lifted a rebuking eye-brow. “Really Jim, your recklessness is even stronger than I remember.”

“Hey, I thought the worst and I’m a trained Starfleet officer who can overcome a burglar. Of course I would protect my hosts instantly, who are only priests and aren’t schooled to fight.”

Selek cocked his head. “Who told you that?”

“What?”

“That Vulcan priests are unable to fight?”

Jim blinked several times. “Well… They are adepts of Surak’s ways and…” He shrugged.

Something close to a smile ghosted around Old Spock’s lips. “Most priests are masters of Ashumi, the…”

“The infighting sport of defense,” Kirk nodded. “Spock has been teaching me for a few weeks now.”

“Very good,” Selek nodded; remembering his sessions with his own Jim Kirk all those decades ago, when he taught him this kind of melee.
“And the priests here are practicing Ashumi?” Jim asked, curiously.

“Yes – and other battle ways, mostly traditional ones, yet not less dangerous to eventual opponents.” Selek’s gaze found Khan and took in the deathly pale face and the sweat on his brow. “But first, you, Mr. Singh, belong into the next bed available. I do hope for your sake that Dr. McCoy will not learn of your little adventure here.”

“He’ll have my head, not Nien’s,” Jim grumbled before he looked tenderly at his beloved. “Come on, tiger, I’ll get you back to the lounger outside.”

Nien nodded; already feeling his whole body tiring, while his left leg hurt, even if he had put most of his weight on the right one. “Deal,” he mumbled and with Kirk’s help carefully turned around. He limped for two steps down the hallway towards the open terrace door; pressing his lips into a thin line. Yet something must have given him away – or Jim’s worried expression did. In any case he suddenly felt a pair of long, thin yet inhumanly strong arms going around him and a moment later he was lifted.

“Allow me, Mr. Singh, it’s easier and the risk of harming yourself again is far smaller,” Selek said while carrying him towards the terrace.

Khan was too shocked to react at all – at least for the first seconds, then he protested, “I can walk on my own!”

“Yes, I clearly saw that,” Old Spock deadpanned and tightened his grip as the Augment began to struggle. “Please, quit this nonsense. You’re worse than Jim.”

“Oh, I do imagine you carrying him through the Enterprise’s hallways to medbay,” Khan hissed; shooting the old Vulcan a fierce glare.

“Yes, many times – whenever Jim managed to get injured during landing parties or when we were in battle ship-to-ship,” Selek answered in a whisper; making certain that Cogley couldn’t hear him. “And I also offered this service to other friends and comrades, whenever it was necessary. So to carry you isn’t a ‘big deal’, like Leonard would put it.” They had reached the terrace and the lounger, where he laid the Augment gently down. “See, it’s better like this,” he added; watching the enhanced human with a mixture of amusement and exasperation. Khan and Jim really were a lot alike.

“Thanks,” the former dictator grumbled; clearly embarrassed. “I heard Jim yelp and felt his distress,
“So you did what I would have done being in your place: Throwing all caution out the next airlock and limping to the rescue, even if it would be you who would be in need in protection because of some injuries.” As he caught the baffled gaze, he added, “Leonard *did* rub off me with his phrases after serving at his side for almost thirty years.”

“Well, if it loosens your younger self up just like it did in your case, I do not mind,” Khan sighed; feeling indeed relieved to lie down again.

Jim and Cogley stepped to them. “You all right?” Kirk asked concerned and Khan smiled up at him.

“I’m fine,” he reassured his bondmate.

Selek straightened his frame. “I’ll organize two seats and some refreshments. I think, Gentlemen, we’ve a lot to talk about.” He stopped before he was two steps away and looked back at Jim. “Did Leonard tell you when Mr. Hoffmann will be strong enough to assist him while waking up the other Augments?”

“Bones wants to check on him and will inform me, when he thinks the time is right. Did he speak with you about it?”

“No, but given the fact that Mr. Hoffmann visited Mr. Singh already yesterday, as I learned from T’Pau, it’s only a question of hours until he is fit enough for the task,” Selek answered. Then his glance found Khan, who had tensed up again. “Don’t fear for your crew, Mr. Singh. They will be in good hands.”

Nien nodded. “Thank you, Selek. I do not doubt it.”

While Spock Prime vanished into the house to get two chairs and more to drink, Cogley looked back and forth between the two younger men; recognizing the deep feelings as they gazed at each other. There was only one explanation for what he saw.

“So, how long have you been a couple?”
Bones let his med-scanner sink and looked questioningly at Daniel. “What is your opinion, colleague?” he asked; being in a good mood like not in a long time.

Corrigan smiled, while his attention drove to Otto Hoffmann. “Our patient has regained more than 80 percent of his usual strengths, if Mr. Singh’s and Mr. Weiss’ vital data are a base of Augment biology. I do think he’ll be able to be up for a few hours by now.”

Otto remained tensed. “Meaning, we are beginning to wake my wife and the others up?” he asked; voice hoarse suddenly. On the other bed Joaquin bit his lips in anticipation.

Bones grinned at him. “Yes, I think the time has finally come!”

“M’Rek demands WHAT?” Richard Barnett was famous for his self-control and his ability to remain calm even in the most stressing situations. But in this case his slip of composure was understandable.

He stood in front of the president’s desk in the Federation Seat of Government in Paris. Here it was midday, in San Francisco – where Barnett usually lived– it was deep night and accordingly he was tired as he received Robertson’s call. By now he was wide awake and every remaining trace of tiredness had been chased away by the news he just got from the president.

Robertson leaned back in his chair and sighed deeply. “I know, Richard, that this is a surprise. I have calculated a lot of outcomes of the Klingons’ counseling they did over the last days, but this…” He nodded towards the computer screen on which the frozen face of M’Rek was still showing. “I received his message only an hour ago. The Klingons are still interested in a conference concerning upcoming peace talks, but they demand full elucidation concerning the incident with the Klingon renegades which were hired by the former Chief in Command of Starfleet, which disgraced one of their finest warlords – the last descendant of the Klingon emperor. They also demand answers as to who is really in charge of Starfleet now and if the Federation Council is still the true government of the star union. Well, I can live with that – after all the mess Luengo and Section 31 left involved the Klingons a big deal. But the other demand…”

He shook his head and looked at Barnett, who finally sat back on the visitor’s chair he had occupied before Robertson’s information drove him off the seat.
“Did I get that right, sir? M’Rek demands that our delegation will be escorted by the Enterprise under the command of Jim Kirk?”

The president took a very deep breath. “Yes, that’s exactly what the Klingon chancellor requires. He wants to meet Kirk – and the dark warrior, meaning Khan.”

Barnett felt sweat breaking free on his forehead. “For what purpose? Kirk is sentenced to death in the Klingon Empire and if they really know who Khan is, they’ll sentence him, too.”

Robertson shrugged. “The peace conference will take place in a neutral place, outside of the Klingon Empire. And there was no hint that M’Rek knows that Khan was the one who brought down the two Klingon squadrons on Qo’noS last year. But Khan did hinder Koloth from being successful on Aldebaran, did free Kirk from a Klingon prison, and did run interference with the planned Klingon attack against Tammeron. From the military point of view, I can understand that M’Rek is curious about the two men who stopped some very important Klingon attacks and messed with their strategies – forcing the Klingons to the table of the conference like this. What worries me is the fact that Kirk, his senior officers and Khan will not be available to go with M’Rek’s demands because of the upcoming trial.”

“And M’Rek insists on Kirk and the Enterprise,” Barnett groaned. “Superb! What now? We can’t let Kirk and the others off the hook like this, even if I would welcome it after all they did for the Federation and the delegation. Our lawyers have already formulated the charges which will be pressed against them.”

Robertson nodded. “We have to court martial them earlier than thought. I really regret these circumstances, but we have to hurry if we don’t want to lose any chance of peace-talks within the near future. And, don’t get me wrong, but I pray to the Lord that Kirk’s and Khan’s lawyer is a really good one, or I’ll have to explain to M’Rek why the Federation and Starfleet are insane enough to condemn their own heroes…”

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Every time Barnett and Robertson think it can’t get any worse, it comes worse (snicker). Now even the Klingons are regarding Kirk in a different light, and court material seems to be less and less a good idea, yet it has to take place – after all law is law. Yet (eventually) M’Rek’s demand can play Jim and the others in the hands. And especially Cogley can use this circumstance, even if he has already an own plan how to get our boys and their friends out of the deep water.

I loved the old original episode “Court Material” in which Cogley showed up for the first time. And I loved even more him spreading all his books over Jim’s quarters about the spacestation and lecturing him about computers and books (even if Jim of the first timeline loved real books, too). Yet Cogley is younger in the Kelvin timeline than original, and therefore I wrote him more ‘loose up’. And Jim – well, he does have a little tendency to fall with the door into the house (literarily). I hope, you liked my introduction of the lawyer who holds our boys’ fate in his hands.

I also liked to write the scene with T’Pau – after all the Augments really will have to live on New Vulcan first. And, by the way, it was the first time she and Khan met in person. And that Bones and Carol had a nice evening was something I didn’t want to stretch too much, yet they are another pair of lovebirds so to say.

I hope you liked the new chapter.

The next one will come after my vacation, but please don’t let my holiday stop you from leaving feedback (laugh).

Have a nice start into the next week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers!

Sorry for the new delay. After my vacation there was so much to do in my shop and at home, I barely found some time to write the new chapter. But finally I’m done, my dear beta-reader did a great job again, and I’m able to publish the next installment.

Thank you so very much for all the feedback, and I hope that your expectation of the new chapter will not be disappointing. Sarek meets Otto, Katie wakes up and learns about her location of being on an foreign planet in a special way, and you learn about the ‘big plan’ Cogley, Jim and Nien agree on to face trial soon.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 95 – Waking up and Meetings

“Scotty will beam down to the hold with the other cryotubes, and will make certain that the right ones will be beamed over,” McCoy said and closed his communicator. His gaze found a tense Otto, an expectant Joaquin and a curious Corrigan. Sorel had gone to another examination room after he was informed that Sarek had arrived for his ordered check-up, but had promised to return shortly.

“How long until we can start?” Hoffmann asked and Bones smiled at him.

“A quarter hour, or so. Scotty has to come down and Elder Senak has to arrive, too. He’s the one who built the force-field around the cryotubes to keep them safe from Norton’s and Section 31’s grasp, and he’s the one to switch it off without some computers lightening up in alert like a Christmas tree.” He sighed, as he watched as Otto gulped. Full of sympathy he laid a hand on the Augment’s arm. “Stay calm. Everything will be fine.”

“Hopefully. At least I’m…” He stopped as the door to the room opened and three Vulcans stepped
in. One was Sorel, the other one was Kirk’s first officer and friend, Spock, and the third one… was an older Vulcan with the first grey in his dark hair and who held a certain resemblance to Spock. He assumed who the stranger was, and his assumption wasn’t wrong.

Sorel stopped behind the two other Vulcans and it was Spock who rose to speak, “Father, this is Otto Hoffmann, a close friend of Mr. Singh and his right hand. Mr. Hoffmann, this is Sarek cha’Skon of the House of Surak, my father and the ambassador of Vulcan to Earth.”

Sarek lifted his right hand into the ta’al – a greeting Otto hadn’t mastered until now, so he bowed his head deeply; remembering that Khan wanted him to work together with this Vulcan, even if the ambassador and the former dictator hadn’t met in person until now. As it seemed, Spock’s word and Kirk’s belief were enough for Khan to listen to them. That his leader trusted non-Augments that deeply was a circumstance Otto still had come to terms with, even if he liked Kirk and his friends.

“Welcome to New Vulcan, Mr. Hoffmann.” The ambassador’s deep voice wasn’t as strong as Otto had expected, but given the fact that the man had a cardiac surgery only a few days ago, it wasn’t a wonder. Hell, even an Augment would need time to heal and to regain strength after such an operation.

“Thank you, Ambassador,” he answered. “And my sincere gratitude for offering my people asylum. I learned of your surgery, sir. I hope you’re feeling better.”

Sarek – familiar with general Terran customs – lifted a brow. “My condition is satisfying, Mr. Hoffmann, thank you for your concern.” Then he came straight to the point. “My attention was brought to your and your people’s situation, Mr. Hoffmann, and that you all will be our guests for an unknown time until all ambiguities have been removed. My government as well as some other people with influence will do anything in their power to make the Federation accept you as your own species in her folds, but until everything has been clarified, your people will live among us. I offer you my support as an intermediary and handler so that your people are supplied with everything they need and learn to come to terms with this century.”

Otto had watched the Vulcan diplomat closely. Right, he wasn’t that good in reading people like Khan was for example and given the fact that this man was an alien made the whole thing even more difficult, but he was capable of recognizing if someone was making a foul play, and this man – Sarek – was honest through and through.

He and Khan had talked about the upcoming visit of the Vulcan ambassador and he knew what Noonien expected from him. But that wasn’t the only reason why Otto was ready to agree to Sarek’s suggestion. To accept help from these peaceful people to gain a foothold in this strange, new world was only logical. And, by the way, it was good to have people around them who were superior in mind and body just like Augments.
Therefore he took a deep breath and replied, “I know that I can speak for my people without even asking them, and I can tell you that we all are grateful for your support. Yes, Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy tried to help me adjust to this world, but it’s clear that there is still a lot for me to learn and the same will go for the rest of us. Any help will be welcome.”

Sarek nodded slowly. “Then it’s settled. As soon as all of your crew-mates have been woken up and learned of their current situation, I suggest a meeting between all of them and myself. There is a lot to do – for example to make living arrangements. The hospital will offer you all quarter until your bodies have adjusted to our climate and gravity, afterwards your own place to live is surely preferable.”

Otto took a deep breath. “I learned from Captain Kirk of the cruel fate that has befallen your people, Ambassador, and that you all are still building your colony. So please no extra services for us, sir. We need a simple place to live, maybe all together in one house. We often shared one building when we were younger, so there will be no problems. If we can support your people by preparing this house, we’ll do it instantly. I also want to offer you our help in return for your hospitality. We’ve two architects among us and one specialist for structural engineering. Of course, our knowledge is antiquated compared to today’s standard, but if you supply us with documents with which we can learn, we certainly will be able to help this colony to grow.”

Sarek was the third Vulcan Hoffmann met, but he already knew that it was best to speak with these people straight and in clear terms, instead of beating around the bush. It was the way that most Augments preferred, too, and for Otto it was almost a relief to talk plainly about important matters instead of packing them up in nice catchwords.

“Your offer wasn’t expected,” Sarek replied, “but is appreciated. I am certain that you and your friends will catch up with history and today’s technology quickly which will the base for all further actions.” He looked at McCoy.

“Sorel told me that you are about to wake up the first friends of Mr. Hoffmann.”

Bones nodded. “Yes, sir. We want to start with Mr. Hoffmann’s wife.”

Understanding shimmered for a moment in Sarek’s eyes, while he glanced back at Otto. “Vulcans don’t ‘hope’, yet I’ve learned that a lot of strengths go hand in hand with faith. I hope everything will run smoothly and that your wife will be in a good condition. It’s… difficult to function well when a close one is ill, in danger or dead.”
Otto smiled ruefully. “I learned of your wife’s demise. I’m sorry for your loss, sir.”

Again, Sarek showed that he was familiar with Terran politeness. “Thank you, Mr. Hoffmann. As far as I know your people and mine share a similar fate. We both lost not only family-members, but also our whole home. In your case there is still the chance that you’ll find a place on Earth again; our planet is gone. Yet we don’t give up – just like Mr. Singh, you and the others.”

Cocking his head Hoffmann watched the man. The Vulcan’s face remained expressionless, yet Otto could see some emotions lurking deep in the dark orbs. And he remembered Kirk’s words as the captain explained that most Vulcans still suffered from mental trauma because of the torn mental bonds they shared with spouses, family members and friends. For a moment he tried to imagine how the Vulcans had been before the holocaust. He guessed that they had had an aura of arrogance and that most thought to be superior because of their high intellect and flawless logic. But nothing of this had survived – at least not in the ambassador or Sorel. The people here carried on but it was clear that the pain and shock would last for the next generations – and Otto felt compassion wakening in him. Sarek was right. They both – Vulcans and surviving Augments – shared a similar fate.

“As long as you live there is hope for more,” he said quietly. “You yourself said that hope gives strength. Maybe this is a path that will help you to cope with your loss one day.”

Sarek bowed his head; recognizing the man’s words as an attempt at comfort. Yes, comfort was illogical. What is, is. Kaiith. Yet Vulcans were not immune against it; they tried to give it to family members and friends in their own way.

Alas, Sarek remembered very well the moments when he had tried to comfort his little son whenever Spock had suffered because of his peers – or when he had defended his mother’s honor with fists. Sarek had never admitted it, but a part of him had been proud that his son stood up for his mother (and father) and had shown his classmates that illogical behavior (their offences) would lead to not satisfying outcomes (Spock beating ‘the daylight out of them’, as a human phrase went). Sarek had seen Stonn and the others afterwards. His son had given them a good beating – even if Sarek had to have some uncomfortable talks with the other boys’ fathers’ days later.

Remembering little Spock’s grateful eyes whenever his father had shown some sympathy, or the strength he himself had drawn from Amanda’s comforting touches whenever he had faced messy situations, he allowed himself to take the Augment’s words ‘to heart’. And, to his surprise, some of the burden seemed to be lifted for a few seconds. To know that you aren’t alone in dark times is always a balm for the soul.

“The loss will never be forgotten, but the pain will lessen. This is something I learned from my wife as she lost her sister because of an accident. And she, too, spoke of the light of faith. I learned that my wife’s wisdom was a strange concept for a Vulcan, but she was often right and so I allowed
myself to trust her judgment. Your words are almost similar. I don’t know if this way to cope with loss and mourning is typically human, or if it is a way that higher intellectual beings see more clearly than others, but in any case, this point of view always helped. Just like your words did. I thank you for your true sympathy in the name of my House and my people.”

Otto smiled – a little bit. And he thought he saw the Vulcan’s face losing some of its sternness.

“I don’t want to take more of your time now,” Sarek skillfully changed the topic. “I know that you have to be eager to be re-united with your wife — and I have to take some rest, as Healer Sorel made it very clear.” He gave the other older Vulcan a short glare that was simply returned with a short inclining of the head. Lifting his right hand in the ta’al, the ambassador added, “Long life and peace, Mr. Hoffmann. Sorel and my son will keep me updated about the proceedings here. I’ll return as soon as all of your people have been woken up and have come to terms with the fact that they slept for more than 250 Terran years and are on an ‘alien’ planet now.”

Otto could be mistaken, but he thought he saw some amusement gleaming in Sarek’s eyes at those last words. But it vanished so quickly, it could have been his imagination.

“This would be very kind of you, sir. Once again my gratitude for your willingness to help us.”

“I’m the ambassador to Earth, Mr. Hoffmann, and you come from Earth. Your biological nature is of no consequence for me, only the fact that you — as Terrans — are in need of support. In other words, this is my job and I’m honored that you accept my offer. Good day, Mr. Hoffmann.” He turned and headed for the door.

Spock hesitated and looked at McCoy. “Is my assistance required, Doctor?” he asked.

Bones smiled; realizing that Spock was torn between the duty to bring his father home and his curiosity to remain here when the next Augment would be woken up.

“I don’t think it would hurt if you learn about the original way to end the Augment’s cryosleep. A further pair of eyes could turn out to be helpful. If your father agrees…”

Sarek looked back. “There is no need for you to drive me home, Spock. Remain with Dr. McCoy and…”
“You are in no condition to drive by yourself,” Spock dared to interrupt his father.

“I am capable of driving, Spock,” Sarek answered sternly.

“Yes, you have a driver license and decades of practice. Of course you are capable of driving – but not in your current condition.” The younger Vulcan raised his voice as he continued before his father had the chance to reply. “You would not only endanger yourself but also other traffic participants, which would be illogical.”

Father and son only looked at each other now – and Bones began to snicker. “I remember that I had a similar discussion with my old man, using the same arguments,” he said to no-one particular. “He didn’t give in – stubborn like a mule. I’m curious if the Vulcan superior intellect will succeed where human pigheadedness failed.”

He had spoken quietly, yet he knew that the keen Vulcan hearing had caught his words. And they had the wanted result.

“Your logic is flawless, Spock, I’ll take a cab,” Sarek stated, before he looked at McCoy. “Your attempt of convincing me in your own way is recognized, Doctor, but was unnecessary. Of course my decisions are made by following logic.”

With utter innocence Leonard smiled at Spock’s father; not surprised that Sarek had looked through him. This special streak seemed to live in the family. Nonetheless McCoy said, “I don’t know what you mean, sir. Your talk with your son was indeed similar to mine with my dad six years ago.”

Sarek only lifted a brow. “If you say so.” He nodded shortly at the two humans. “Good day, gentlemen. Spock.”

“Father,” the younger Vulcan acknowledged and watched the ambassador leave the room. Turning to McCoy he lifted an elegant brow, before he softly said, “Thank you, Leonard.”

Bones grinned at him. “I’ve learned a trick or two to get through yours or Jim’s thick skulls when you two are unwilling to listen to reason. Why shouldn’t it work with your father?”

For a moment amusement glinted in Spock’s eyes. “I’ll be warier in the future when you add some ‘useful’ comparisons to discussions.”
McCoy began to chuckle. “A challenge? I’m on it.”

The two officers, who had become friends despite their many differences, glanced at each other; both still ready to keep each other on their toes.

Sorel had listened to the whole little exchange with interest; deep down amused how similar father and son were and how well the human CMO knew how to handle them. Now, after Sarek left the room, the healer’s attention was driven back to the current task of waking up another Augment. He turned his head towards Otto.

“What, Mr. Hoffmann, if you are ready I’ll contact Elder Senak so that we can start the procedure of waking up your wife.”

Otto couldn’t help himself; anticipation, fear and joy mingled with each other and made him gulp.

“Yes, this… would be fine by me,” he whispered.

Selek went down the hallway to T’Pau’s office – leaving the gardens. He was satisfied with the outcome of the first briefing between Jim Kirk, Khan and Samuel Cogley. The lawyer’s reputation seemed to keep its promise: The man was dramatic but brilliant.

Cogley was more or less already familiar with Kirk’s and Khan’s cases – those which were woven with each other and the separate case concerning Khan’s captivity in Marcus’ and Section 31’s hands and his amok run later. There was still a lot for the lawyer to learn about the details, yet he concluded a lot of them on his own without his two clients having to point them out. And he was no-one who tried to blind others with false hope. The chance of getting Kirk and his officers out of the hangman’s loop would be difficult, to get Khan out of it would need something humans called a ‘miracle’. Even if Old Spock’s strong sense of justice and his morality wished that the Augment wouldn’t end up in a penalty colony – at least not this version of Khan – logic dictated that the chance of freedom for Khan was practically zero.

Yet Cogley had already a plan – a plan that went almost the same path T’Pau had suggested and also went along with Jim’s own thoughts on how to proceed from here on to get Nien out of the mess, and, by the way, his officers and himself, too.
Khan’s only chance: The judge had to show mercy because of the Augment’s torment and his later good deeds. And to manipulate the Starfleet judge and the Federation Council into bending the law was something that could only be warranted by public interest. And said interest had to be increased because it referred to two men who had served the Federation a lot.

After the destruction of Vulcan and the threat Nero had presented for the whole Federation, after the mess with Section 31 and now after a war with a cease-fire at stake, the public was hungry for heroes – for men and women who would stop at nothing to defend and protect civilians and comrades alike. As illogical as all this was in a Vulcan’s opinion, the belief in a superhero who would turn everything to the best was not a phenomenon only restricted to Earth. Most races had the same weakness. Well, when Selek was truthful, even Vulcans weren’t immune against it; not really, seeing how a lot of surviving Vulcans regarded his younger counterpart with respect all of sudden.

Jim Kirk already held a hero’s place in most Federation people’s minds and hearts. After defeating Nero and saving Earth, after him debunking the machinations of Marcus and Section 31, and after all he endured and did during the war, James Kirk’s name was well-known on every planet and in every colony, together with that of his first officer. The second man who was on the top of topics at the moment was ‘Sunrise’ – the mystery man no-one knew in person and who always came to the rescue when even hope had died. He was to the public the great mystery, the man without a face, the dark knight in the shadows – someone who was perfect to build stories and weave poetry around him. Selek knew humans well enough to assume that the Augment had already given wings to many female and certainly also male romantic fantasy.

And this was exactly the spot to tackle the path that maybe would lead to Khan’s freedom.

The public shouldn’t only learn about his true fate that had led to his breaking point, but foremost they had to learn about everything good that he had done and about his character. His true character. The latter was something Cogley had put into play. And his reasoning was so plain and logical even the Elder had to compliment him about it. The people had to trust Khan and his crew that they wouldn’t use their superior strengths – both in mind and body – to harm them. To harm someone on purpose was deeply written in the character of someone – in his psyche and genes – and if they could convince the public of Khan being a man of a good and noble character they would give him and his family a better chance; and would rather demand his release from any arrest than demanding a penalty.

The public was the tip of the scales, so to say, but Cogley, Selek and the others had to be careful not to antagonize the Federation Council or the members of the court martial if they realized that there was the attempt to manipulate them. This whole thing was a ‘walk on the tightrope’ – an idiom Selek could understand – and it was up to him and some other men to make the whole thing work.

“First we need someone who will publish the whole truth,” Cogley had said, while sipping at his third glass of cold tea. “Someone of the media, yet we have to choose this one carefully. This one
should interview Captain Kirk and Mr. Singh – including visual recording.” His blue eyes had found the Augment – clear but also with silent compassion. “I know that these wounds you received should be no subject of strategy, but – as cruel as it sounds – it will play in our cards. When the public sees – actually sees! – what happened to you, you’ve won the first round.”

Khan had glared at him. “I don’t want their pity!”

“No, but you need their understanding.” Cogley had countered. “And when they realize that this pales in comparison to what you’ve been put through, they will realize why you really ran amok. Amok sounds better than revenge, even if both are linked to each other in your case. Amok runs are old as time. Sometimes they happen because people want to make others see them for once, others are lashing out because of unbearable pain and cruelty that had been bestowed on them. The latter was the matter in your case – and we have to make the people see this; see you! You, the former emperor, yes, but also the man who uses his superior nature to help, to protect and to shield others. The man who risked his own life not only to defend his own people, but also strange ones – members of alien races he never met. And, as far as I understand, in your first life during the twentieth century, you were always the defender, never the aggressor. That people were too stupid to see the difference wasn’t your fault. Hell, if I researched history correctly, it was you who stopped several of your fellow Augments from genocide and other war crimes. This is the side today’s public has to learn of. Combined with what you did within the last weeks and how you still became the victim of this bunch of Judases, you’ll win the people over.”

Cogley’s words had been accompanied by impressing and almost theatrical gestures – a behavior Selek remembered very well from the Cogley of his own time-line when Jim had been accused of carelessness aboard ship that ended with a crewman’s death. The whole thing had turned out to be a bad piece of theatre in the end, and Jim had walked free, yet the old Vulcan still shook his head inwardly because of the dramatic way the lawyer had led the trial. This version of the brilliant man wasn’t any different, but Selek had matured and by now the man’s behavior almost amused him.

After Jim also spoke with Khan about this way of handling the whole mess, the Augment had given in. Now the next steps had to be made and they had to be discussed with the other senior officers; after all they were in the same boat with Jim and therefore with Khan. But knowing that younger Spock was with Sarek at the hospital for the ambassador’s next checkup before Sarek would get into contact with the Augment Otto Hoffmann, and also being aware that McCoy was busy at the hospital, too, Selek suggested delaying the next talk to the other day.

This way he also made sure that Khan got some rest. Despite the Augment leader’s pride and denial of being tired, Selek had only needed one good look to realize that Khan was exhausted, yet Nien didn’t want to retreat into his and Jim’s room despite the heat of the early afternoon. He felt content where he was and obviously enjoyed the warm temperature that reminded him of his home country. He was still unsettled because he hadn’t received some word from Otto or McCoy, nevertheless he fell asleep only minutes after Selek had gone.
Cogley, with a lot of old-fashioned handwritten notes in his hands, excused himself and went back into his room to finish unpacking his things and to do some very needed research. It was obvious that he was eager to get to work. Jim, on the other hand, had nothing else to do than to sit beside Khan, watching him sleep, sweating in the heat and doing some brooding. So, he was indeed glad to spy one of the Vulcan priests still working in the garden, and therefore he went to him and asked him about the plants; learning that not all of them were native to the planet, but also were original Vulcan plants which had been in greenhouses in other colonies. He remained with the Vulcan, who was surprisingly talkative, until the heat got the better of him and he returned to the terrace, emptied a large glass of cold tea and sat down in the shade again – not realizing when he finally drifted off.

Selek went to T’Pau to update her, before he contacted the seat of government, asking his secretary if his presence was required. Satisfied that the colony could go on without him for some more hours, he decided to meet Otto Hoffmann finally.

And, Old Spock had to admit, he was curious. Very curious concerning Khan’s crew and how they would react in this time-line.

ST***ST

Otto held his breath, as in front of him the sparkling light and the bell-like sounds vanished, only to reveal the first cryotube. One look proved that it was in full working order; the monitoring lights were completely on and his keen ears caught the soft humming of the cryotube’s function. Yet he was unable to control his breath or to suppress a shiver as he stepped quickly beside the tube and looked into the view window.

“She is in it, believe me. Khan and I made a list of which cryotube holds whom and numbered the tubes,” McCoy, who stood beside him, said with sympathy.

Otto didn’t respond, but his gaze was glued to the view in front of him.

There, beneath the thin web of frozen crystals, he spied his beloved wife. Her hair, now shoulder-long, was still the deep midnight color he had fallen in love with at first sight, not to mention her angelic features and the full lips, which were usually cherry-red, now pale and blue from the cryosleep. ‘Snow White’ had Joaquin always called her when he wanted to tease her, and just right now she indeed looked like Snow White to Otto; waiting for the moment to return to life.

Without his own doing he reached out and laid a hand on the view window. “Soon, my angel,” he whispered. “Soon we’ll be reunited.”
McCoy closed the distance to him; medical tricorder in hand. “Everything is fine with her,” he affirmed Otto’s silent asking glance. Spock, Joaquin and Sorel stood at the other side of the cryotube that had been beamed into one of the rooms which held the stasis chambers. If something should go wrong with the original wakening process, Katie Hoffmann could be put into stasis immediately.

“If you are ready, Mr. Hoffmann, you can start the wakening process,” Sorel said.

Otto took a deep breath. That was the moment he had hoped for since he climbed into his own cryotube – for him four days ago, in truth two and a half centuries ago.

He realized that Spock stepped to his other side, obviously to learn of the correct way to start the wakening process, but for once he ignored the Vulcan. Remembering the sequence, he had to use, Otto pressed several buttons and instantly the soft humming of the tub changed. The icy web beneath the glass began to melt as the temperature in the cryotube began to rise.

“Heart rate increases steadily,” Bones murmured; never taking his eyes from the med-scanner. “18, 24, 30, 36…” He cocked his head. “Breathe increasing, too, brain function rising.” He glanced at a very tense Otto. “This looks very good,” he smiled, before his attention was driven back to the med-scanner. Still the read-outs were nothing to get nervous. Rather the opposite. The data he received became more and more usual for a healthy human woman.

A low hiss was heard as the cover’s sealing was unlocked; the tube could now be opened any time without risking the inhabitant’s health.

“Pulse at 63,” McCoy informed Otto, who stood there, tense like a bow ready to send an arrow flying. At the same moment the young woman in the cryotube began to move – and with lightning speed Hoffmann bent forwards and pressed the button that opened the cover.

The woman’s eyes flew open – large, blue orbs looked first disoriented and then panicking to the ceiling. Gasping for air she tried to sit up, but her muscles – unused and frozen for so long – didn’t obey her. The next second Otto had her in his arms and lifted her out of the tube; calling her name softly and pressing her gently to him. Katie was trembling like a leaf in the wind – the coldness of the cryosleep was still deep in her cells.

Sorel was at the two Augments’ side with a few steps, and while Bones took new readings with his med-scanner, the Vulcan Healer did something that almost shocked McCoy after he became aware of Sorel’s doing. The Vulcan laid a hand on Katie’s temple, closed his eyes and remained like this
for several seconds, while the young woman became more and more relaxed. Leonard stared at his
colleague with surprise written all over his face. It was obvious that the Vulcan healer sent some
calmness to the young woman by lowering his own mental shields and touching her near the meld-
points of her face. Knowing how much Vulcans valued their privacy and avoided physical – and
therefore mental – contact with any stranger, Bones felt a rush of gratitude that Sorel endured this
certainly uncomfortable process only to help his patient.

As Sorel stepped back and opened his eyes, he caught the Starfleet CMO’s baffled gaze and lifted a
brow. “Is something wrong, Doctor?”

“No, but… sorry, sir, but don’t Vulcans usually avoid such kind of contact?”

“Usually yes, but I’m a healer and a healing process often includes the healing of the mind, too.
Therefore, we are trained to support patients this way.”

Bones gulped and looked at Spock. “No wonder that you aren’t that fond of my work as a doctor. I
lack of a certain detail a Vulcan healer could give you,” he murmured. “Maybe I should ask Uhura
or Jim the next time to hold your hand. Maybe this would help you better.”

“To ‘hold a hand’, Doctor, is similar to ‘making out’, as you would put it,” Spock explained wryly,
as he took a thermo-blanket and wrapped it around the young Augment woman as far as Otto’s grip
on her allowed it. “I don’t think that this would be the best solution – especially when you want to
involve our captain. I may be his T’hy’la, but I think Nyota wouldn’t appreciate it if Jim would ‘hold
my hand’.”

Bones rolled his eyes, while he took another scan of Katie. “I really don’t want to think of what you
just said, Spock – especially when it concerns you and Jim in that way. And, by the way, Khan
wouldn’t be too amused, either.”

Daniel Corrigan, who was also present, suppressed a chuckle, then his concentration drove back to
the two enhanced humans. Everyone could hear Katie’s teeth chattering, while she tried to move
closer to the warm source her husband was for her. With great effort she lifted one hand and clung to
him; face buried at his throat.

“Bio-signals still a little weak, but perfectly fine given her situation,” McCoy breathed in relief,
before he looked at Otto. The large German Augment’s eyes held some moisture he rapidly tried to
blink away – to no avail. One spilled over, and Bones realized that this was the very moment the
world had become mostly all right for Hoffmann again. For the man only a few days had passed
since he and the others had to flee, fearing for their lives; not knowing if they would survive the new
technology Khan had developed, yet using it as their only way out. Now they were on a strange planet among peaceful people who offered them shelter and he held his beloved wife in his arms. Leonard, always more empathic then anyone gave him credit for because of his grouchy moods, could fully understand what had to go through Otto’s mind and heart.

“Come on,” he said gently. “We’ll take her to the room where you woke up first and give her the chance to get warm under some covers. Maybe it would be for the best, if you shared your body-heat with her. Proximity is very important for your people, after all.”

A smile – a bright one – curled Otto’s mouth, before he followed McCoy out of the room; Joaquin in tow. Corrigan, Sorel and Spock remained behind to switch off the cryotube and to let it beam back into the cave. It would be the best if New Vulcan would store the no longer needed tubes until the Federation Council decided what to do with them. Even if the technology was antique, there was still a lot to learn about it – after all, these were the only cryotubes of this special construction which ever existed.

Otto moved with long steps down the hallway and finally entered one of the two large rooms which had been prepared to offer his brothers and sisters a place to regain their strengths and to come to terms with the present. Not hesitating a moment, he placed Katie on his own bed; knowing that his scent that still lingered in the pillows and covers, would comfort her. Only hesitantly did she let go of his shirt, while her eyes opened again – still fearful but clearer by now.

Sitting down on the bed’s edge, he combed his fingers through her thick dark hair and massaged her temples. He heard the monitor of the bio-bed coming alive; reading his wife’s condition and displaying it for the doctor to see, but he did not care. All that mattered was the feeling of being whole again – now, as the bond between them sprang alive again and he thought that his soul could breathe again. He met Katie’s big blue eyes and saw her lips move without a sound coming from them.

“Easy there,” he said softly. “Give yourself a little bit time to wake up. That was a hell of long beauty sleep you got.”

She snorted and coughed a moment later, as tongue and throat – dry from the cryonic – uttered the first sounds.

Bones – holding Joaquin back with one stern gesture – quickly filled a glass with water and offered it to Otto; assuring him, “She woke up the proper way. Even if her organs still have to come to terms with everything, I think a few sips of water aren’t a problem. Just take care that she drinks slowly and not too much in the beginning. We don’t want to ruin the sheets.”
Otto smiled at him; feeling more and more at ease. Carefully he lifted his wife’s upper body and wrapped the blanket more firmly around her, before he took the offered glass and set it against her trembling lips. For a few seconds she sipped slowly at the water; sighing in glee as the fluid soothed her aching throat, then she became more and more aware of her surroundings. The air smelled foreign and somehow everything felt very heavy. Her glance found the man whose voice she had heard and who was an utter stranger to her. Stiffening she looked at him – edging nearer to her husband.

“Don’t worry, my dear,” Hoffmann murmured tenderly. “You are among friends. This is Doctor Leonard McCoy – a new friend of Khan and one of our saviors.” He turned his face towards Bones. “Doctor, may I introduce my wife to you?”

Bones, always the Southern gentleman, bowed and offered her one of his most charming smiles. “Welcome to our world, Ma’am. I’m glad to see you finally awake, and hope you’ll find the peace here you sought for so long.”

Slowly putting a hand on the fingers of her husband which held the glass, she tried to push it away – signaling like this that she had enough water for now. Still feeling like she was sitting naked in the middle of a snowstorm – well, she was nude beneath the covers – she snuggled closer to Otto and regarded the other man warily. He was a casual human, no Augment. This much she could tell immediately, yet the man smiled at her with warmth in his brown eyes.

“Thank you,” she rasped; her own voice sounded strange in her ears.

“You husband is right, Mrs. Hoffmann. Your body, enhanced or not, needs some time to adjust to the new situation. Just give yourself a little time to recover.”

So, the man knew of what nature she and the others were, yet there was no fear or aggressiveness in his behavior or eyes. And his words about her finding the peace she hoped for made it clear that he knew of hers and the other’s past, but he remained friendly.

Curious! Odd even!

Her glance wandered around and tried to catch as much as possible, but except for the stranger – McCoy as she had learned – a row of beds with monitors on the wall and a pleasantly dimmed light she couldn’t see much. Yet one thing was very clear: This was not the Botany Bay!
“Where are we?” she croaked and looked up at the beloved face of her husband. “Where are the others?”

“Most of them are still asleep, but will be woken up within the next hours and days,” Otto explained. “We slept longer than intended,” he added carefully. “Many years have passed since we launched from Earth.”

“How many?” Katie asked; catching McCoy’s perplexed gaze. What baffled him?

“She is definitely fully awake quicker than you,” Bones said to Hoffmann. “Or than Joaquin and Khan.”

“Noonien….” Katie whispered; realizing her leader’s and brother’s absence. “I… can feel him, but he is not near.” She looked questioningly at Otto, who sighed,

“He is occupied elsewhere, and…”

“Occupied – while the most of us are still asleep and about to be woken up?” Disbelief lay on her pretty face.

Hoffmann didn’t know what to say at first. He didn’t want to confront Katie with everything that happened so shortly after her waking up, yet some information couldn’t stay hidden.

“Noonien was injured – but he is doing better by now,” he added quickly, as his wife gasped; worry in her eyes.

“If he would be that better, he would be here,” she replied. “Nothing would keep him away from us in this situation.” She knew exactly how stubborn her brother could be when he wanted to – especially when his family members were at stake.

“He is doing indeed better by now, yet I ordered him stay in bed,” McCoy cut in. He caught Katie’s astonished gaze and assuming what surprised her, he continued with a smirk, “Yes, he indeed obeyed my order, because it was the only reasonable thing to do. He broke his left leg and his left arm. The bones are mending pretty well, yet you can’t hobble around on one leg and crutches are useless when you have only on hand to hold them.”
Katie stared at him; becoming more and more awake with every passing minute. “How did he get injured?”

“He was involved in a fight,” Otto said calmly; driving his wife’s attention back to himself.

At the same moment McCoy heard the door opening and as he turned his head, his gaze found Selek. Alas, Katie didn’t know about being on a foreign planet until now and she knew even less of hers and the other’s host. Trying to warn Selek, he gave him a warning glance, before he looked pointedly down at Katie and back.

Spock Prime understood instantly, stopping where he was and nodded slowly at Leonard; signaling that he got the surgeon’s hint. He saw Joaquin bowing towards him and lowered his own head in a silent greeting, before his attention was called back to the scene in front of him. Curious he watched the two Augments on the bed. He recognized them without hesitation, yet where in his time-line the woman had looked with icy determination at him and the man – Otto Hoffmann – had threatened Sulu, the two enhanced humans were calm and showed even gentleness towards each other.

“Noonien was in a fight?” Katie asked startled. “He loathes fights.”

“You know how he is,” Hoffmann replied; sighing again. “If he thinks the reasons are worth it, he has no problems with joining a combat. Regrettably he wasn’t able to avoid injuries, and stays now in a facility where he can heal properly.” He stroked one of her cheeks gently. “Therefore, he assigned me to wake up you and the others, while Joaquin…”

“Joaquin is here?” she asked; trying to stretch to get a better look at her surroundings.

“I’m here!” a youthful voice said cheerfully. Weiss, who couldn’t stop himself anymore, rushed to the biobed, stopping at the other side, knelt down on the mattress and wrapped his arms around Katie as far as he was possible with Otto still holding his wife.

“Hey, Snow White,” he whispered; giving her a brotherly kiss full of affection on the still icy cheek.

“Hey, Bandar,” she whispered back – and Otto rolled his eyes as he heard his wife calling Joaquin ‘little monkey’ in Hindi again. Yes, little Joaquin had clung to Khan like a monkey after they had rescued him from the labs – and many days afterwards. And just like a young monkey Joaquin rarely sat still, was always bundled up with too much energy and had funny ways to reach a goal. So, as
the boy had been still very young, the nick-name had fitted, but now…? Well, it was their decision how to call each other. And as he saw, how Weiss began to laugh before he pressed another kiss to Katie’s cheek, he realized that the young man was stuck with the nick-name maybe for forever.

Selek lifted a brow. That was a side of Khan’s crew he never thought to see, and not for the first time he asked himself what went wrong all those decades ago in his universe, as Khan Noonien Singh and his crew became Jim Kirk’s most deadly enemies with no sense of mercy, but filled with insane hate.

“How are you feeling?” Joaquin asked; regarding his ‘big sis’ with love.

“Cold,” was the only reply, before Katie shivered even more. Good God, she couldn’t remember ever being that cold.

“Yeah, I know what you mean. Noo said that this is normal. I froze like a puppy first, but here you’ll get warm quickly. Just step outside for a few minutes and you wish you could get back into the next fridge,” Weiss joked, before he looked guiltily at Selek. “Sorry, sir, but… the heat really differs from India. At least from India near New Delhi.”

The Elder realized that now would be the best time to reveal himself and therefore his race to the Augment woman, and answered calmly, “No apology is needed, Mr. Weiss. It’s well known that humans have problems with our climate – here and back on our real home world. Last but not least because of the higher gravity and the dry desert air of the planet.”

Katie frowned. ‘Humans’? ‘Home world’? ‘Higher gravity’? ‘Dry desert air of the planet’? Of what was the other man speaking? And who was here in the room besides McCoy?

Otto felt his wife tensing and before he could react she lifted her head, stretched herself and looked over his shoulder – straight at Selek.

The woman’s blue eyes went wide as saucers as she took in the slender, tall man, clad in bottom long robes; with icy grey hair, a pale yellow like complexion on the ascetically face that had… slanted brows and… Were that pointed ears?!

She looked again, took in the calm yet straight stance, the long robe and the slender long-fingered hands, which were folded in front of him. Eyes, dark as the night, held more wisdom than a man could possible gain in one life time. He seemed to rest in himself; perfectly in harmony with his
It couldn’t be true, yet she uttered the first thing that sprang to her mind.

“An elf?” she gasped; tensing up as far as her still cramped muscles allowed it.

McCoy sighed, while he was under the impression that even Selek asked himself how often he would hear the comparison between his people and some Terran mystical creatures within the next days.

“No, Mrs. Hoffmann, I am not a being of Terran legends or fantasy novels. I am a Vulcan,” the Prime Minister answered patiently.

Otto sat up to give his wife a little bit more room and turned around. His gaze wandered over the old, unknown Vulcan, who stood a few meters away from him – relaxed and proud in one. And his features… Well, Otto thought he had already seen them – or at least this Vulcan resembled someone he met not long ago.

The stranger lifted a brow, as if he knew what Otto was thinking. Lifting his right hand and spreading his fingers into a ta’al, he said, “Long life and peace, Mr. Hoffmann. I’m Selek, Prime Minister of New Vulcan.”

Hoffmann gaped at him. Selek – the counterpart of Kirk’s Vulcan friend from another time-line. Dammit, now he knew whom the old Vulcan reminded him of. He was Spock, only very much older. There was really no doubt about it.

“Sir,” he greeted, “thank you for the hospitality your people offered us.” He watched how Selek simply nodded, before he turned his attention back to his wife. He saw the bafflement on her face, captured her slender hands in his large ones and squeezed them gently. He felt her disbelief, even shock through the bond and said softly, “Katie, that’s what I was about to tell you. We slept long. Very long. For more than 250 years.” He felt her alarm rising, while she stared at Selek; her quick mind already realizing that she faced a true alien. Soothingly Otto tightened his hold around her fingers even more. “We are on New Vulcan, a befriended planet of Earth for almost two hundred years now.”

With effort Katie tore her glance away from the alien man and looked at her husband. “Are you trying to tell me that we are, indeed, on a foreign planet just right now?” she rasped; her voice
heightened despite the poor condition of her throat.

It was McCoy, who answered her, “Mrs. Hoffmann, Earth made first contact in the middle of the 21st century – rather it was the other way around. The Vulcans’ attention was driven to us as we developed a faster than light speed drive. Our people became friends, so please don’t worry. I know this all has to be frightening for you, but no harm will befall you and the others here. You are safe now.”

Katie gulped and felt, how Joaquin stroke soothingly over her bare back, before he pulled the covers higher around her. “The doctor speaks the truth,” he murmured. “You, Otto, Noo, me, the others… We are finally safe and among friends.”

The woman’s blue eyes wandered to him. Joaquin was utterly relaxed and joyful – well, the latter was an almost usual mood for him. Of all Augments he was the most ‘jolly one’, like Paolo once put it.

Selek came nearer and his quiet steps caught Katie’s attention instantly. Over her husband’s shoulder she watched him closing the distance to the bed with graceful movements as if he would soar. She caught his strange scent, but it wasn’t unpleasant, and she also realized that his heart beat was far quicker than that of humans. Interesting!

“I understand that you have many questions, Mrs. Hoffmann, but I think it would be wiser for now for you to lie down and let your body get adjusted to the new situation. Rest is the best for you now. Dr. McCoy and I will answer your questions afterwards.”

Leonard spoke up again, “Do you want your husband to remain here, or shall we proceed with the procedure of waking up more of your people?”

Otto looked up at him. Sure, the CMO had suggested that he should lie down together with Katie to give her some reassurance; on the other hand, time was an important urgency with no-one knowing really when the next cryotube’s battery would run out of power.

The same moment Bones’ communicator beeped. “McCoy here,” he answered the call.

“Scott here, Doctor. Everythin’ all right after we beamed the lass in her icy bed ter the stasis chamber?”
Contrite for simply having forgotten to inform Scotty, who was still down in the cave, about the success, Bones answered, “Sorry, Scotty, it slipped my mind to call you back. Yeah, Mrs. Hoffmann is fine, awake and re-united with her husband.”

“Glad ter hear it.” The engineer’s smile was clear to hear in his voice. “So, do we continue or shall I return ter the Enterprise? The poor lady is still in bad shape and needs me.”

McCoy threw an asking glance at Otto, who took a deep breath. But before he could reply something, Katie croaked, “Go! The others need you. Joaquin can keep me company and certainly can answer my questions.” She looked at McCoy. “I’ll stay in bed and try to get warm,” she promised.

Leonard looked surprised at her. “I’m baffled. You’re the first who actually listens to me without complaining.” He pointed at Otto. “He may be not so bad, too, but Khan and Jim…” He shook his head. “I really ask myself sometimes how these two have survived so long.”

“Ah, the cap’n and Khan ’re not that bad, doc,” came the voice with the Scottish accent through the futuristic mobile-phone that held Katie’s interest for a moment.

“No, they’re worse – together with Spock,” Bones groused, before he turned serious again. “Okay, let’s beam over the next tube.” He glanced at Otto. “Whom?”

Hoffmann took a deep breath. “I think the best would be if you wake up Pablo and Rodriguez. They are familiar with cryonic, too, and can assist you, Healer Sorel and Doctor Corrigan.”

McCoy raised his voice and spoke into the communicator. “Did you hear that, Scotty?”

“Aye! I’ll compare the list and instruct Chekov ter beam the two gentlemen over. Remain on standby, Doctor.”

“I’ll do it,” Bones nodded, before he headed to the door. “You’re coming?” he asked Otto over his shoulder, before he addressed Selek. “Do you want to join us?”

Old Spock inclined his head. “With pleasure, Leonard.” He glanced back at Katie, who couldn’t
help herself but looked again with big eyes at him. “Mr. Weiss and Doctor McCoy are correct, Mrs. Hoffmann. You and the others are safe here. I do understand that this whole situation must be unnerving for you, but I assure you that no harm will come to you here. When you feel better, we’ll answer your questions. Maybe it will be even better when we explain not only to you, but also to a few of your other brothers what happened.”

“It saves time,” Joaquin half joked, half stated.

Selek lifted a brow. “A logical conclusion, Mr. Weiss. Maybe in the meantime you can tell your sister about the world she woke up in. I am sure that a little bit more knowledge will calm her.”

“Okay,” Joaquin grinned, sat down beside Katie, pulled the covers higher over her and took her in his arms.

“Usually it’s me who comforts you,” she murmured, while her gaze still rested on the alien man – that ‘Vulcan’. Selek’s mighty, yet peaceful presence mesmerized her.

“Yeah, and now it’s the other way around for a change,” Joaquin grinned.

She tore her eyes away from the tall figure that left the room together with the others, and who reminded her so much of a character in one of her favorite books. “An alien,” she whispered, while she looked at Joaquin. “It is true? We slept that long and are now on a foreign planet?”

Weiss nodded with a large smirk. “Yeah – and this new world is really cool. I already made friends and… And just wait until you meet Noo. I think, you’ll face a big surprise.”

Rolling her eyes, Katie punched him softly on the upper arm, before she snuggled back into the blankets. “Just tell me about this new world and those Vulcans. They seemed to be… nice.”

Chuckling Joaquin began to speak; telling her about the Federation, other planets and their inhabitants and of a certain ‘spaceship’ that was in orbit…

ST***ST
“I am sure that everything is fine, Nien. Otherwise Bones would have called us.” Jim didn’t know how many times he had uttered those words and he was really convinced of them, but regrettably Khan was not so trusting in Jim’s confidence for once.

“Why don’t they call – at least Joaquin? I know that Otto will have only eyes and ears for Katie, but the boy could give me some information at least!” The Augment leader still lay on the lounger outside in the gardens. The heat hadn’t lessened, not even in the early evening, but the wind that came from the lake was fresher now.

“Maybe they all have their hands full – and you know Jo. When he is distracted he forgets time.”

Khan only growled. “I can feel them. Not only Otto, but also some more of us. Why…”

“There you go,” Kirk smiled. “Then the first woke up and they are okay, otherwise you would sense it.” He reached for Nien’s hand and clasped it in a gentle grip. “Stay calm, honey. I’m sure that they are all right. Bones would have called otherwise and…”

Steps drew nearer; grit scrunched under shoes. Looking in the direction, Jim began to beam as he recognized Spock and McCoy coming nearer. Khan must have identified the two by the sound of their steps, because he sat up quickly and asked before he even turned around, “How are they, Doctor?”

Bones glared at him. “What are you doing out of bed? How did you…”

“Doctor, my patience isn’t the best at the moment!” Khan interrupted him; his eyes seemed to burn as he glared at the CMO. “How are my people!?"

Spock took the matter into his own hands; knowing that it would be far better to give the Augment first the information he desired before McCoy could start his lecture. “Mrs. Hoffmann and four of your other brothers were successfully woken up,” he said barely as he and Bones had reached the two love-birds. “They are going by the names Pablo, Paolo, Rodriguez and Chang, and their minds are clear and fully functional. Obviously, the original waking-up-process is far more appropriate than the method that had been used on you or in Mr. Weiss’ case.” He lifted a brow. “They are all a little bit disoriented and feeling cold, but they are fully awake, resting in prepared biobeds and trying to comprehend that they slept crucial longer than thought and are on a foreign planet.”

“And they were still bombarding Selek with questions when we left,” Bones added with a grin. “I
know how patient Vulcans can be, but I’m really impressed by Selek’s endurance.” He looked at Spock. “He’s even more patient than you.”

“Selek has the experiences of decades he spent with emotional loaded and irrational humans like you, Doctor. I think the Augments demand less of his patience than your counterpart ever did, because their minds are more logical.”

Bones gaped at him, before he growled. “Just give me a minute and you’ll get an answer to that!”

“I fear so,” the first officer deadpanned and clasped his hands on his back. Somehow, he was able to look exasperated and bored in one without any expression on his face.

Khan hadn’t any ears for the familiar banter between the two unlikely friends. He couldn’t repress the sigh of relief, while his eyes closed on their own accord. Feeling like a marionette whose strings had been cut off, he sank bank onto the lounger; fighting a sudden lump in his throat.

Four of his brothers and one of his sisters were awake now. Five more of his siblings were finally out of danger – safe and secure in the good hands of healers. The wakening procedure was successful; it didn’t risk their lives. Soon he would be re-united with his family.

F-i-n-a-l-l-y!

Jim’s hand squeezed his, while he sensed his bondmate’s joy and love. “Told you so,” he whispered. And as he met the slightly moistened eyes and caught the gaze full of relief, faith and happiness, he rose, closed the short distance to Nien’s loungers, bent down and caught his beloved’s lips with his own. Khan’s good hand raised and cupped Kirk’s neck in a lovingly grip; needing his bondmate close.

“Uh, boys, you’re not alone!” Bones protested. “What shall the poor Vulcans think who are working over there?” He pointed towards the priest Jim had talked with a few hours ago, and to another male Vulcan who was helping to remove the garden tools.

“They think what every Vulcan would think being confronted with such a situation,” Spock stated wryly. “Humans! It’s a miracle that they made it so far.”

Bones frowned. “If I remember correctly the history-lessons at school and later in xeno-culture at the
Academy, you Vulcans were far bloodier and more warmongering than we ever were.”

“Yes, but contrary to your people, Doctor, we learned from our mistakes and actually listened to the teachings of a wise man who brought peace and salvation to us.”

“What you are implying? That…” He didn’t continue, because of Jim’s very loud groan and Khan’s barely suppressed laughter. Looking at the couple, Bones met the almost frustrated glare of Jim and the through and through amused glance of the Augment.

“Like cat and dog,” Nien chuckled.

“Yeah, and I don’t know if it would help to empty a bucket with cold water over their heads to make them stop fighting.”

“We do not fight, Captain, we rather discuss some topics,” Spock pointed out.

“Dare to go through with your threat, Jim, and you’ll regret it during your next main examination.” McCoy began to grin, “That is, if you’re able to find a bucket with cold water in New Gol at all”

“Oh, no problem” Jim replied with an evil smirk. “I’m certain that Sukat over there will provide me with a hose pipe full of cold water if I ask him.” He gestured towards the two priests, of which one was watering the garden now.

McCoy’s eyes widened. “Don’t you dare!”

“Dare me,” Kirk grinned.

“It would be a waste of natural resources – and that on a desert planet!” the CMO warned.

“Wow, at least you begin to think logically,” Jim threw back; eyes sparkling with mirth.

“It’s Spock. He begins to rub off me,” Bones defended himself; flicking a thumb at the Vulcan.
“I am certain that this is not the case, Doctor. If you would listen to me only a little bit, interaction with you would be far more stress-free.”

“You admit to suffering stress?” McCoy turned fully to the first officer. “I’m worrying here, Spock. Shall I give you a checkup?”

“Doctor, it is common knowledge aboard that your methods are sometimes more than odd and old-fashioned. So please spare me another demonstration of your shaman hocus-pocus.”

“Shaman…” Again, Bones could only gape at him, before he growled, “You don’t complain about my methods when I have to patch you up. Then you’re good and obedient, but barely once you’re doing better…”

“Ah,” Spock interrupted him; both brows raised for once. “So, you admit that I’m a willing patient who endures your treatment without giving you ‘trouble’?” His lips curled for a second; smugness mirrored in his eyes. “I knew that you would someday admit the truth and that your own complaining was highly overstated.”

“I admit nothing, you damn hobgoblin. Don’t try to turn the words in my mouth, or…”

Jim’s laughter interrupted them. Sitting back in his chair and wrapping both arms around his belly, he had no chance to suppress the laughter and snickers which escaped him, while Khan had closed his eyes and shook his head.

“Someday they will grow up, Jim. Just be patient,” he said; amusement plain to hear in his voice.

“I hope so,” Kirk answered; feeling a lot of tension draining away, while merriment still bubbled in his belly.

Then he saw movement in the corner of his eyes and as he turned his head, he saw Cogley leaving the building and heading towards them. Smiling Jim rose and said, “Bones, Spock, meet our lawyer: Samuel Cogley.”

While Spock simply lifted a brow, McCoy’s jaw dropped again.
“The famous lawyer?” he gasped. “Sweet Lord, Jim, how were you able to hire him?”

“I didn’t. Selek did,” Kirk revealed.

McCoy looked at Spock. “You really would do everything for the kid here, wouldn’t you?”

The Vulcan sighed soundless. “Doctor, as I tried to explain you many times, Selek isn’t exactly me.”

“Bullshit! When it comes to Jim, I do not know which of you two is worse.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” the first officer deadpanned.

“Of course you do,” McCoy groaned, then they fell silent as the lawyer drew nearer. Both knew that the late afternoon would be filled with a lot of talking…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked Katie and the re-union between her and Otto. It also made a lot of fun to write her first meeting with Selek (guess to whom she compares him; snicker), and the meeting of Sarek with Otto.

Well, ‘Spock Prime’ of course remembers perfectly how Khan’s crew reacted all those decades ago in his time-line, and I think it’s a good way for him to re-think everything. The change of the time-line has no influence on the Augments, only on Khan, and that Old Spock watches them interact with each other in a way that makes him realize that they are ‘human’, too, is certainly something that will busy him a lot.

In the next chapter, Wesley will be involved into the ‘big plan’, more of the Augments are woken up, Nien will be re-united with his most beloved sisters and brothers, and between him and Selek will be an interesting talk.

Have a nice weekend – and, like always, I’m curious what you think of the new chapter.
Love

Yours Starflight
Re-united

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Thank you so much for the many comments you left. I know that you all are eager to read about the re-uniting between Khan and at least a few of his crew, and I can promise that this will happen within this chapter.

There will also be some more about the defense our friends will have to build for the upcoming trial, and Jim tries to get Wesley into the boat, so to say.

I'll hope you have fun.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 96 – Re-united

It was late in the evening when Spock finally returned to his father’s flat. He had contacted Sarek shortly after he and McCoy had been introduced to Samuel Cogley to inform his father and Uhura about his delay for dinner. It was clear that the talk between them all would need some time.

Now, as he opened the door, he saw Nyota and his father sitting at the dining table that was in order except for a set of dishes which waited to be used by Spock.

Uhura rose instantly, while Sarek turned around. It was obvious that they had been talking in a relaxed atmosphere seeing the casual posture of the ambassador and Uhura’s sparkling eyes. Spock was glad that his father and his future wife got along that well.

“Good evening, Nyota – Father,” he greeted. “I apologize for the delay, but it was necessary to discuss with our lawyer some ideas and first steps to build our general defense for the court martial.”

The communication officer was at his side with a few graceful steps and brushed her right index-
middle finger against Spock’s hand, while she also gave him a human kiss on the cheek. “No apology is needed,” she said softly. “After all our future is at stake.”

Sarek remained seated; his dark eyes watched the couple in front of him. Nyota Uhura may look different from Amanda – last but not least because of their different Earthen heritage – but still she and Spock reminded him of Amanda and himself. Something stung in his side where his heart beat and not for the first time he understood why humans spoke of ‘heartache’ even if it was common knowledge that the heart muscle hadn’t nerves which could ‘ache’. Sarek knew that he would have to take another wife sooner or later – after all Pon Farr was a life-threatening matter for Vulcans until they reached a very old age, and Sarek was far away from belonging on the scrap heap. But he also knew that Amanda would hold a special place in his *katra* (and heart) ‘til the day he died.

Realizing that his son had come over to the table, Nyota beside him, he inclined his head. “Spock,” he greeted. “I trust the talk went satisfying?”

“Yes,” Spock nodded, while he sat down. “Mr. Cogley already constructed a strategy with Captain Kirk and Mr. Singh during this midday and afternoon, and together with Doctor McCoy we canvassed everything once again. It should…”

“Noon?” Nyota interrupted him; eyes wide. And even Sarek lifted both brows.

“Are you speaking of Samuel Cogley, the lawyer who earned himself a certain reputation because of the many successful cases he won?”

Spock lifted a brow. “Affirmative.”

Nyota did her best to stop herself from gaping. “Sweet Lord, how did Kirk manage to hire this man?” She gulped. “How is he going to pay him? Yeah, he doesn’t earn a bad living as a Starfleet captain, but this…” She made a fleeting gesture with one delicate hand. “This must cost him three years salaries or so.”

Spock sighed quietly. “Selek hired Mr. Cogley – and paid him.”

Sarek stared at him intensely. “This sounds indeed like you,” he deadpanned.

“Father, Selek is not me,” the younger Vulcan said; exasperation shimmering for a moment in his
eyes.

“Yes and no – and when it comes to your friends, and especially to Kirk, you stop at nothing.” Sarek lifted a hand as his son wanted to protest. “And that’s absolutely all right. One of the most important parts of friendship is loyalty, and this is displayed not only by you – or Selek in this case – but also by your comrades and friends towards each other and to you.” He took a deep breath. “With Cogley as your lawyer the chances have risen. On what kind of strategy did you agree?”

“One you and Nyota will certainly label with ‘typical Kirk’: Grabbing the bull by the horns.”

“A procedure you hopefully do not intend to do literally. These animals can be quite dangerous,” Sarek murmured; showing his very own kind of humor.

“It’s a win or lose-scenario, but one that promises some successes,” Spock said, while he helped himself to some water from the carafe; not taking something from the salad that still waited for him. As Nyota shoved the bowl nearer to him, he gave her a warm glance. “Later, my dear. First I want to explain our plan.”

ST***ST

Several miles away, Jim and Nien lay together on Khan’s bed in New Gol. They had eaten a light dinner, before Cogley bid them good night and Bones also went to his own room. Joaquin would spend the night again at the hospital; certainly answering the questions of his brothers and sister, while trying to avoid the whole topic concerning Khan and his upcoming trial.

Jim had switched off the light and only the light of the moon still illuminated the room where the curtains at the windows weren’t fully closed. Being nude except for some boxers, he lay beside his bondmate; holding the older man in a tender embrace. Both longed for more intimacy than only a few shared caresses and kisses, but Nien wouldn’t be in any condition for their love games within the next few days, and Jim was for once too reasonable to risk any relapse of his beloved.

So they simply snuggled against each other, relished in being in each other’s arms and enjoyed their proximity. Yet neither of them could sleep. Khan was tired beyond measurement; his enhanced healing abilities demanded their toll, but he was too restless to give into his body’s needs.

First there was the knowledge that four more of his brothers and his dear sister Katie were awake in the hospital of New ShiKahr. He could feel their presence in the back of his conscious, and his soul and heart were too excited and relieved to give him any rest.
But that was not all. There were also the talks with Cogley and the others which spooked through his mind. Yes, he agreed with the planned strategy to make the public their ally, but this would also mean being exposed to the world. And it wasn’t the fact that he was Augment that made him inwardly cringe to tell the public the truth. He was what he was, end of story. No, what really would cost him a lot was to tell others – utter strangers – of what he had endured in the hands of Marcus, Luengo and Section 31.

Khan Noonien Singh was no-one who traded on sympathy. Always he had hidden pain behind a mask of strength and had only allowed himself to suffer when he was alone. Now he would have to reveal his personal hell to every man, woman and child in the Federation – and beyond her borders. Of course the Klingons would learn of everything, too. You didn’t even need a good functional intelligence to gain knowledge about someone as soon as the Media were involved. He couldn’t evaluate the position he, Jim and the others would maneuver themselves with such a method. And, by the way, he feared that Starfleet Command would blacklist Jim and his officers if they confronted Command like this. On the other hand, Khan had to agree with Cogley. To involve the public was the only way to hinder Command sweeping most of the things under the nearest rug, and – as Khan had to admit – Jim Kirk was the favorite of most people by now and the public would defend him with claws and teeth because of everything he had done within the last two years.

This was a dilemma that Khan loathed; especially because he hadn’t any real choice. Of course he wanted to avoid prison or a penal colony, but his priority lay with Jim – that this crazy madcap could keep his ship. And if this stupid strategy was the best way to gain that goal, then Khan would grit his teeth and play along.

As said: He didn’t have any real choice in this matter.

“You’re not happy with the plan Cogley and I came up with.”

Jim’s soft voice tore Nien out of his thoughts, and the Augment leader sighed. “Well, it is a plan after all. And if the people of today are thinking like the people of my days, then we maybe will be successful.”

Kirk snorted. “There speaks the politician. That was the utter ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in one little statement.” Jim’s hand carefully caressed the other man’s back. “You dislike the idea of telling others of what you’ve been through.”

Khan grimaced. “You know me too well.”
“No, it’s simple the fact that I don’t look forward to it, too. I mean, usually I deal with bad stuff on
my own and try to not pull my friends into it. If I fuck up something it’s up to me to make it all right
again, without complaining in public. But not this time. Now I have to play the people to get you, the
others and me out of deep water, and that is something I’m going to loath.” He sighed. “But on the
other hand, if it means making certain that those bastards get what they deserve, then to hell with my
pride.” He kissed Nien’s nose. “And a nice side effect will be that Command will be forced to clean
up the internal mess. Yes, Barnett will do everything in his power to clean the house, so to speak, but
I’m absolutely certain that he and the others also plan to keep some very shitty things to themselves.
And these things are attached to our cases, so we cannot allow them to hide anything.” He groaned.
“What a mess!”

“Just wait until your dear friend Bob Wesley learns of your plan. I think there will be only two ways
he’s going to react: One, he calls for the nearest doctors and puts you into a straitjacket…”

“You, Spock and Selek would protect me,” Jim chuckled.

“You’re worse,” Khan growled, before he bent forwards and brushed his lips over those of his
bondmate’s. “And for that I love you so damn much,” he whispered, before he caught Jim’s mouth
with his.

And then there was nothing to hear for a longer time beside the soft, tender noises of a pair lost in
loving kisses.

ST***ST***ST

“You want me to meet whom?” Wesley had lost track of how often he had asked himself within the
last few weeks if he maybe was still in bed and dreaming, instead of sitting at his desk and having a
talk with Jim Kirk via transmission.

On the screen his protégée grinned that infamous boyish grin at him, while he repeated, “I want you
to meet our lawyer, Samuel Cogley. He, Nien, Selek, Spock, Bones and I agreed on a strategy, but I
think you have to be informed, too.”
Bob blinked a few times. “Samuel Cogley, the star-lawyer?”

“The one and same,” Jim nodded. “And before you ask: Selek hired him.”

“Of course he did!” Wesley groaned. “Who else would get you out of trouble if not Spock – in every form and universe this Vulcan may exist.”

“He’s my friend,” Jim said simply.

“He’s absolutely devoted to you,” Wesley snorted. “I even don’t want to start listening to how often he’s walked the thin line between insubordination and hero-deeds within the last weeks to get your ass out of trouble.” He shook his head and took a deep breath. “All right, I’ll beam down in two hours and meet with you, Khan and Cogley. And afterwards I really want to visit the hospital to have a look at this Otto and the other Augments. Mr. Scott told me, five were woken up yesterday?”

On the screen Jim nodded. “Yes, and Bones is already back in the hospital to wake up the next ones. Scotty has beamed down, too and…”

“Mr. Scott already left the Enterprise?” The Commodore bent forwards. “Brimstone and gall, Kirk, do your officers always do as they please?”

Jim looked very innocent. “Bob, alpha-shift hasn’t started until now and… Don’t gape, of course I track the ship’s time, even when I’m down on New Vulcan and here it is so early in the morning that you can practically call it ‘still night’.” He cocked his head. “As I said, alpha-shift hasn’t started and I’m certain that Scotty checked out with the current officer in command, before he beamed down.” He smiled again. “And, by the way, you already gave your permission to let him support us in this matter. So he didn’t break regulations.”

Bob stared at him, before he growled. “I really ask myself why you need a lawyer. Your talent of twisting regulations should be enough to talk you off the gallows.”

“Thanks for the compliment, but even I have my limits. Cogley is our man, and I’m glad that he is here. Just come down and meet him in two hours. I’m sure you’re going to like him.”
Yes, Bob liked Cogley. The man was dramatic but a genius. This much the Commodore learned within a few minutes. What he didn’t like was the plan.

“Have you lost your mind?” he gasped; staring wide-eyed at Kirk after he had learned from Cogley of the ‘super strategy’ the advocate wanted to use. “They will skin and grill you alive!”

“That would add oil into the public’s flame of anger as soon as everyone learns of what really happened,” Jim smiled. “We simply have to be quicker than Command, then we’ve the advantage on our side.”

“Quicker!” Wesley shook his head; thinking back at the message he received from Barnett several minutes before he beamed down. “I think you’ll have to be very quick, Jim, because I guess the whole theatre will begin sooner than thought.”

Kirk stared at him, as Khan did, while Cogley frowned, “What do you mean, Commodore?”

Wesley pressed his lips into a thin line for a few seconds, before he answered, “Barnett hailed me shortly after our talk, Jim. He asked me about Mr. Singh’s condition and how soon he will be healthy enough to travel to Earth.” His gaze found the Augment. “And I think he didn’t ask only because he indeed cares what happened to you, but also for another reason. I can be wrong, but I think they want to start the court martial as soon as possible – preferably yesterday, so to speak.” He glanced back at the lawyer. “I have a good friend in HQ, Commodore N’Rahl from Andoria. He is in the legal department and belongs to the advisor staff. I contacted him before I beamed down and asked him if he has a clue when the court martial will take place. He promised to keep eyes and ears open and to call me back as soon as he gathers some information.” He leant back in his chair. “I have a bad feeling. One that tells me that there is something cooking and I don’t think we are going to like the taste of said ‘cooking’.”

Kirk crossed his arms in front of his chest. “What do you think could they be up to?”

Wesley shrugged. “I have an idea, but I don’t know if I’m correct. Maybe they want to antedate the whole thing, for whatever reason.”

“They want to deal with it before we can react, and be done with it,” Khan growled. “But not with us!”
“I agree,” Cogley nodded. “We have to act now and…”

“And what do you want to do?” Bob interrupted him. “As far as I understood your plan it depends on time! Time to win the public, time to build the strategy you want to use at the trial. And time is something you obviously will not have.”

Jim narrowed his eyes. “Nien is too injured to travel to Earth and to face trial. Bones, Healer Sorel, Dr. Corrigan – they all will confirm this.”

Wesley nodded. “Yes, they will confirm it – and it will save you a few days. Given Khan’s enhanced nature everyone knows that he will be fit far sooner than any other human.” He looked at Nien. “Right, you maybe can win some more days by simply staying ‘weak’ – something you certainly loath. But in the end, you are going to have too little time to prepare everything for the trial.” He sighed. “I think you’ll have to think of another strategy. One that doesn’t need weeks to get the whole thing going.”

“In other words: The sooner as we start the better,” Kirk said determined and bent forwards; fixing Bob with an intense glance. “Are you going to assist us?”

Wesley grimaced. “Even if I would be so tired of my career as to kill it by helping you by going against Command, I don’t know how I could help you two with this crazy plan. I’m almost in the same boat as you, Jim, because I covered for you and Khan. I…” His communicator beeped and with an “Excuse me!” he answered the hail. “Wesley here!”

“Enterprise here. Commodore, I got a call from the HQ, Commodore N’Rahl wants to speak with you. He said it’s urgent,” a female voice replied.

Jim felt adrenalin spiking his blood pressure and one look at Khan, Cogley and Wesley told him that the other three men were reacting the same way.

“Put him through, Lieutenant,” Bob ordered and waited until a silk-soft voice called,

“Bob? N’Rahl here.”

“Yeah, it’s me,” the Commodore replied. “I didn’t think to hear from you this soon.”
A gentle sigh was heard, followed by the words, “I don’t know if I have good or bad news for you, my friend. Barnett was here only ten minutes ago and ordered us to push the Kirk-boy’s and the Augment’s case forwards. I tried to elicit the reason for the sudden rush from him, but all I learned is that it’s somehow connected with the Klingons and their wish for another attempt at peace-talks.”

Wesley bit his lips and exchanged a glance with Kirk and Khan, who both looked tense at him.

“Is there any chance you can gather some information about it? If the Klingons have connected the peace-talks with any conditions concerning our two heroes it only can be a bad thing.”

“I’ll try to gather some more details, Bob, but I can’t promise you anything. Fact is that Barnett was almost nervous – and that makes me nervous. Usually there isn’t much that can make him react this way.”

Bob sighed. “Okay. Anything you get will help us, so please try to be a fly on the wall.”

Silence. Then, “You know that there is no way for me to change into an Earther insect – even if I have two antennas. So how should I…”

Wesley groaned. “N’Rahl, that is an idiom for gathering information without anyone learning what you’re doing.”

“So why don’t you say it?” came the surprised question, but before Bob could answer, the Andorian added, “You Terrans and your idioms! You never cease to surprise me.”

“Not that Andorians have colorful idioms, too,” Wesley mocked.

A quick laugh was heard, before N’Rahl continued, “I’ll try to ascertain more and call you when I’ve got something. Bye!”

The link was broken before Wesley could say something more, so the Commodore closed the communicator and pocketed it, before he looked at the three other men. “This I’m calling a very big messy shit!”
Jim nodded, while Cogley pondered, “There is only one possibility for the Klingons’ intervention, because that is the only reason why Admiral Barnett wants to rush everything. The Klingons demand Captain Kirk’s and Mr. Singh’s delivery and when they’re in the middle of a trial, Command has the best excuse to decline said demand. Maybe some of those who still think in secret like Section 31 will use the Klingons’ demand to do anything in their power to get rid of you and your friends, Captain. If the Klingons only agree for another attempt of a peace-talk conference when you and Mr. Singh are delivered to them, you can guess how Command and the Federation are forced to decide.”

“Barnett would not allow this,” Jim shook his head. “I’ve faith in his morality.”

“Enough to risk your friends, yours and my freedom and life?” Khan asked.

Kirk stared at him and groaned. Yes, he trusted Barnett, but what if Nien was right. To sacrifice two men – or three or four – was a little price for peace.

Wesley took a deep breath. “I have to agree with all three of you, Gentlemen. Barnett is trustworthy, yet factual constraint could force him to make a decision he loathes. The need of the many outweighs that of the few or of one. Plain and simple. And this new situation alters a lot.” He straightened his shoulders. “We have to hurry to prepare both you and your officers, Jim, and the more I think of your original strategy, the better I understand your plan. And I think I can be of some assistance.” He had the other’s full attention by now, bent forwards, braced his elbows on his thighs and said slowly, “You need someone of the media who publishes everything and pulls the public on your side. And I know someone who owes me – and especially you, Jim – a big deal.”

Kirk cocked his head. “Who do you mean?”

“Remember that the media brought the Klingons attention to your evacuation mission at Turkana? The result was that the Klingon Admiralty sent a whole fleet to Turkana which forced your ship to flee without you and you ending in up Klingon captivity. You only escaped thanks to Khan. The reporter, who started the whole mess by publishing a ‘good story’, goes by the name of Alec Armstrong. I contacted him after his live-report from Risa; wanted to know which asshole had provided him with information about secret missions of Starfleet. He didn’t answer that question – only that he had some sources and there is indeed no reporter in the world who would name his sources.”

“Logical,” Khan commented.
“Yet I don’t know why you bring this stupid idiot up,” Kirk growled.

Bob smirked shortly, “Just wait, son. I tried to make it clear that his report could endanger our flag ship, because if the Klingons got wind about your mission they would move earth and hell to get you – which happened in the end. I was about to send him to jail, but his boss begged me to let the charges drop. Armstrong was devastated when he learned his report made the Klingons fly to Turkana and what happened to you. I let him off the hook, but promised him a career in prison if he dares to spill out planned Starfleet missions in the middle of the war ever again. He was more than grateful that I let him go. In other words: The guy owes me – and he owes you for everything his damn report did to you. I’m sure that he will be more than willing to do us a favor. A favor that also means a big story for him that can make him famous.”

Samuel Cogley leant back on his chair. “You want him to be our media speaker, so to say?”

Bob nodded. “Armstrong is good at his job – overeager, but good. And he has a lot of connections. I did some research before I contacted him to give him the lecture of his life and to point out that to spill out secrets during a war has nothing to do with freedom of the press. He has an excellent career, is always up-to-date and seems to have a lot of contact people which supply him with information. And he belongs to one of the biggest media companies within the Federation. To have him as our mouthpiece will win half of the battle. It will be in his best interest to work with us together, because after the mess he caused he got in a lot of trouble with his bosses. If he now comes with the exclusive story about ‘Sunrise’ and James Kirk, he’ll be rehabilitated within his company and his name and face will be well-known Federation-wide – a bonus he certainly won’t want to miss.”

Jim cocked his head and pursed his lips. “And you really think he would be the best choice.”

“I agree with Commodore Wesley,” Cogley cut in. “Command will try to gag the press as soon as the story is published, but nothing is stronger than a bad conscious and the prospect of amends connected with a career leap. All those qualifications are accomplished by Armstrong – and he has connections which comes in handy. Command will not be able to stop him easily, and if his report is published, the whole thing is a sure-fire success. You maybe can try to silence the press, but never the public’s opinion. And given the fact that you two, Gentlemen, are war heroes, Command would be shooting itself in the foot if they complain too strongly about you.”

Taking a deep breath, Kirk nodded slowly; Bob, Samuel and Nien could see the wheels turning in his head. “I have to thank this idiot for the torture I went through, but if he’s able to help us with the upcoming trial then my torment wasn’t futile.” He glanced at Wesley. “Right, try to find him. The sooner he can get to New Vulcan the better. I’ll inform Selek about Armstrong’s arrival so that Vulcan Security will let him pass through.”

Wesley rose. “Right, I’ll beam back and get everything under way.” He looked at Khan. “I want to
visit your woken-up crew this afternoon. Are you okay with it?”

Nien hesitated. “Except for Otto no-one of them knows what happened to them and to me within the last two and a quarter years, Commodore. I’m certain they don’t even know more about Starfleet then that it is a para-military group that explores space in peace times. Maybe it would be better to give me and Jim the chance to explain everything to them before they meet you. My siblings haven’t the best experiences with military and maybe will have some problems first in regarding you as what you are: An ally.”

Bob rubbed his neck. “So I shall wait a day more?”

“I would appreciate it,” Khan affirmed.

“They have enough stuff they have to deal with first,” Jim supported his bondmate’s request. “Give them a little bit more time to come to terms with the fact that they are more than 250 years in the future on a foreign planet and have to face ‘aliens’. They will learn about the whole mess Nien is in soon enough – and then they’ll be grateful that you are on Nien’s side.” He bent forwards. “Did you inform Command that the Augments are being woken up now?”

Wesley grimaced. “Barnett didn’t ask me about them and so I ‘forgot’ to mention it this morning. I want to inform him combined with my report that Mr. Singh’s family contains friendly people who aren’t any threat for us.” He looked at Khan. “Don’t get me wrong, but some staff officers certainly will get nervous when they learn that your siblings are no longer frozen, and I want to prevent any unpleasant reactions.”

The former dictator lifted both brows. “A logical decision.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Does Spock rub off on you, what is with you and ‘logical’ this morning?”

An almost evil smirk played around Khan’s lips, as he replied, “Logic isn’t something you can be infected with, but a certain way of thinking. Maybe you should try it from time to time?”

Promptly Kirk stuck his tongue out, which made Cogley stare in utter surprise, Wesley groan and Khan chuckle. “Love you, too,” the Augment said – and this was the point that Bob decided to say good-bye.
As Selek entered the large room which held the already woken Augments, he instantly felt that the
air was tense enough to cut with a knife as an Earthen idiom went. Six more Augments had been
woken up and lay – or sat – on biobeds; obviously listening close to Otto Hoffmann. The Elder saw
worry and anger on their faces, and also concern in the eyes of those who had been brought out of
cryosleep the day prior. Only Joaquin and Otto seemed to be still calm.

The new woken Augments were currently distracted from their discussion with Hoffmann, as they
looked at the Vulcan High Minister – curious and wary in one.

Otto took it in his hands to introduce Selek and the six new woken Augments to each other, before
he said to Selek, “I had to tell them all about Khan’s injuries – that he was wounded in a battle a few
days ago. That led to more questions I cannot answer. It’s not my place to do so, but Khan’s.”

A pale man with white-blond hair sat up from his lying down position. “Otto informed us that Khan
stays in a kind of abbey not far away from here and is on the road of recovery. We want to see him.”

Selek sighed inwardly. He had seen this coming. “I can understand your worry for your leader and
brother,” he said softly. “But you are on a foreign planet, with foreign elements in the air and with a
higher gravity than you are used to. It would be advisable to allow your body to adjust before you
expose yourself to this new world.” He glanced at the other Augments who had joined the world of
the living the other day. “The same goes for you. You may be longer awake than your brothers, yet
your body has stayed so long in cryosleep that you should avoid exertions.”

“We appreciate your concern, sir,” Pablo replied, “but our enhanced nature has already kicked in.
We have no problems with the higher gravity anymore and I’m certain that the air of your planet will
not harm us. Dr. McCoy and Dr. Corrigan are both casual humans and they move freely here
without any obvious health effects. I’m certain that we are able to visit Khan without giving the
doctors more work to do.”

Katie, wearing loose fitting trousers, a blouse and light shoes, stepped towards Selek; his strong
warm presence still fascinated her. “Please try to understand us. For us only two days have gone by
since we fled from New Delhi to Australia, hoping to escape the madness that had spread through
the world and brought so much blood shed. We saw good friends – brothers and sisters – dying;
sacrificing themselves to give us the chance to escape. Kabir, one of Khan’s closest friends, stayed
behind to ensure our flight and we saw him fall. We not only lost our home, but also people who
were most dear to us. The pain is still fresh, there was no time to mourn for them until now. And then
we learn that the man who sacrificed everything to keep us safe was hurt within this new time we
woke up. In a battle, no less. We have to be close to him now. He needs us in a way you maybe are
not able to grasp.”
Spock Prime cocked his head. There was no trace of the icy behavior he had witnessed this woman displaying aboard his own *Enterprise* all those decades ago. This here had to be her true self, the sensitive being that lay beneath the merciless warrior he had come to face in his own time-line. All he saw was a soft pleading in her eyes, paired with strengths but also with sensibility. He had learned more about Augments in those few days than he ever thought to be possible.

“I do understand your need to be close to Mr. Singh, Mrs. Hoffmann – and of his need to have you all around him. I’m well aware of the latent mental abilities your species developed, certainly caused by your enhanced higher brain functions. I know about the family ties which have been secured between you all and that they have to be re-strengthened after all you have been through.”

Paolo frowned. “You know about it? How?”

Selek’s gaze found the other Augment male. “Mr. Singh and I mind-melded a few days ago and from this I learned about his ability to build mental bonds between himself and those he loves. He also affirmed this detail, and Captain Kirk and his officers learned about it as Mr. Singh was able to detect your presence despite some certain distance.” He clasped his hands behind his back. “Besides, Vulcans develop similar bonds with their family and their betroths. Therefore I’m quite able to understand your urges.”

“What is ‘mind-melding’?” Chang wanted to know. “This is certainly not literally meant.”

Raising again an ice-grey brow, Selek replied, “Yes, it is meant like it sounds. Vulcans are able to meld their own mind with that of others. It’s a very personal and intimate procedure, preferably only done with family members or close friends. Sometimes it is also a way to exchange information within seconds without needing hours to talk about certain topics. Mr. Singh agreed to a mind-meld with me when he arrived here. Be sure, I know about his pain and his desperate wish to be re-united with you all, but he also wants you to come to terms with your new surroundings first before you can leave the hospital.”

Joaquin, who sat on his bed, piped up, “Maybe they can just take a stroll over the campus and Dr. McCoy and Dr. Corrigan can accompany them. If they are all right with the heat and the air, we all can visit Noo.”

He ignored the glances of his older siblings – or Rodriguez’s frown. Really, since when did the boy speak for them?
“An acceptable suggestion, Mr. Weiss,” Selek said slowly. “Dr. McCoy wants to wake up five more of your friends, so I think it would be the best to let him first end today’s scheduled processes and afterwards he can watch your bodies’ reaction to New Vulcan’s atmosphere.”

Katie smiled at him. “Thank you, sir.” She pointed at the window whose cover had been removed the evening before. Seeing how clear thinking the Augments became within the shortest amount of time after waking up there had been no need to spare them any psychic stress in having a look on their current foreign home. “Is it really as hot as it seems to be?” Mrs. Hoffmann asked and Selek cocked his head again.

“I want to formulate it thusly: Imagine Earth’s Sahara in the middle of the day and you get an assumption of our climate.”

Katie sighed. “In other words, we’ll stop being cold within a minute after we step outside.”

“Correct,” Spock Prime nodded; amused. “Dr. McCoy always complains of being in an open frying pan whenever he leaves the temperature controlled rooms of the hospital.”

“Well, the comparison forces itself down my throat!” Bones entered the room, wiping his forehead. “And even temperature controlled it is still damn warm here.”

“I would have nothing against some more warmth,” Chang grumbled. “I’m still cold as though I’ve been in a fridge for hours.”

“You were in a biological freezer for over 250 years. This place can do that to a guy.” Bones deadpanned, before he looked back at Otto. “We’re ready to wake up five more of your siblings. Are you coming?”

Rodriguez cut in, “Doctor, we want to visit Khan as soon as possible. Maybe it can be done in the later afternoon?”

McCoy frowned. “You are all in no condition…”

“Leonard, they are,” Selek interrupted him softly. “At least the lady and the gentlemen you woke up yesterday. I can understand their urge to see their leader and brother. Their needs are similar to what we Vulcans have to endure at the moment.” He looked the younger vision of his old friend deep in
the eyes – eyes which had, like Young Jim, the wrong color, yet the man was still the same he had befriended and trusted more than the half of his own life.

Leonard held the intense gaze for a few seconds, then he realized to what Selek was referring to, sighed deeply and nodded. “All right.” He turned around and pointed at the Pablo and the others. “But don’t kvetch if you tire down quicker than you thought possible, because a walk through the Sahara would be easy compared to that damn heat outside.”

“It isn’t that bad,” Joaquin grinned; chuckling at the CMO’s grouchy mood. “You can adjust to the climate nicely given some time.”

Bones gaped at him, then he rolled his eyes. “Rrright, enhanced biology.” He shook his head. “Nevertheless, I’ll give you some tri-ox before you can make a sick-bed visit. Augmented or not, you’ll be happy to get the stuff. Be sure of it.”

ST***ST

Khan lay on the lounger in the garden of New Gol; resting. At least, he tried to rest, but after so many days of doing nothing else than staying in bed-like furniture, he was ready to crawl up the walls – even after he wasn’t stuck his room anymore. And he was absolutely certain that his back was about to break in two. Hell, even the backside of his legs and his butt hurt by now, and despite the fact that McCoy injected him with something to loosen up his muscles he felt stiff as a stick.

But that was only the tinier part that turned his mood sourer and sourer.

He was bottled up with a lot of frustration – frustration big as Mount Everest as Jim would have put it if he had voiced it at all; which he didn’t. Kirk knew when a tease was welcome and when not; well most the time, mind you.

There were so many points which put oil on the flames that the Augment was surprised that he hadn’t exploded by now.

There was the upcoming trial and, of course, the strategy he had been forced to agree to.

Two, he couldn’t be present when his siblings were woken up. That was currently the biggest part of his frustration. For over two years he had waited for those few days in which he could wake up his
family and be re-united with them – in freedom and without any danger. And now, when the time had come, he lay here on this damn lounger and had to let others do his job. He was useless at the moment, and this detail especially built his anger up for days now.

And Jim wasn’t here to lighten up his mood. His bondmate was with Cogley in the lawyer’s room to give more information concerning his personal case. Yes, of course that was more than important. Everything that could help Jim to stay out of prison and maybe lead to him keeping his ship, was for Nien more important than his own case. Yet Kirk’s absence bothered him, because Jim would keep his mind occupied and would make him stop brooding too much.

And since when did he need someone to get his own feelings and mood under control? Alas, just look how deep the mighty fall once they were caught in the net of love!

He felt a wave of warmth, understanding and love washing over his senses and realized that Jim must have detected his sour mood. The gentle attempt of his bondmate to calm him was met with a groan, followed by a deep sigh. It didn’t cease to amaze him how good this bond between them was for him.

Family-ties…

Family…

Hell, why didn’t anyone call him to keep him updated of how everything went in the hospital? Hadn’t he already rebuked Joaquin the last time as he – Khan – waited impatiently for some news about Otto? Hadn’t he told McCoy yesterday that he had also waited for news regarding Katie? And now they were doing the same: letting him wait.

He hated to wait – at least when there were other options.

Communication devices had been developed at the end of the 19th century, for God’s sake, and today they were even easier to handle than back in his own time. Why could no one just call him? Yes, he could make a call himself, but hell alone knew what was going on at the hospital and if his call wouldn’t interrupt some important measurements.

Alas, maybe this was the case why no-one called: Something bad happened and they tried to lessen a catastrophe. Maybe…
It gripped his subconscious and bloomed into knowledge: The presence of Joaquin – and others of his siblings.

They were near – here, somewhere!

Using his good arm, Khan tried to get into a sitting position and turned around as he heard soft footsteps drawing nearer. His eyes widened as he took in the figures, which just left the building through the terrace door. The first was Joaquin, pointing nonchalantly at him with a big grin before he glanced back over his shoulder with a, “There he is!”

The rays of the late afternoon sun bathed the beloved faces of Katie and Otto, Rodriguez, Paolo, Pablo and Chang in a deep orange light, while their familiar voices reached Nien’s ear. A relief and joy so intense he became dizzy for a second, engulfed the Augment leader, as his mind and heart called only one thing: They are here! They are safe! They are well!

He wasn’t even aware that his eyes moistened as Katie stormed forward, raced down the few steps of the terrace and headed toward him; hurling both arms with a squeak of glee around him as soon as she had reached him. Ignoring the short pang of pain in his rips and his left arm, he lifted his good one and hugged her back; drinking in her so deeply missed presence, her familiar scent, the beating of her heart and her quick breath.

She was alive and well! One of his most dearest sisters, who had been at his side since he turned four years old, was finally no longer endangered and with him again!

Katie hugged her brother and leader; trying to be gentle but also unable to stop herself from squeezing him. The last time she had seen him, he had nodded at her from his position at the controls while he initiated her cryosleep; not knowing if she would wake up ever again. The horror of the flight from New Delhi and the witnessing of Kabir’s death were fresh in her mind as the icy sleep overwhelmed her. And now she was awake, on a foreign planet with kind aliens, with her siblings partly already woken up and re-united with her dearest brother. And they all were safe! They had left war, pain and sorrow behind!

The Augment woman was drunk with relief.

“Just let the man live. He’s still needed,” Paolo’s deep baritone grumbled with amusement beside them and as Khan looked up over Katie’s shoulder, his eyes found the deep brown ones of his Italian brother. Behind him Pablo, Rodriguez and Chang grinned broadly at him, while Joaquin leaned
against the trunk of a tree and smirked the most impish smile Khan had ever seen on the boy’s face. Weiss mouthed a “Surprise!” at him and he rolled his eyes. To let him dangle for hours only to surprise him afterwards was so typical for the rascal, Khan was about to scold himself that he hadn’t thought about that possibility instead of worrying his head off.

“I’ll get you for this,” he growled, which made Katie lose her grip around him and Joaquin laugh out loud.

“I did nothing,” Katie said with her most innocent battering of her eyelashes.

Khan grimaced in amusement. “That would be the first time, dearie, but just right now I meant the boy over there.” He glanced at Weiss. “Didn’t I tell you to call me?”

“Yeah, but there was so much to do…” Joaquin shrugged.

“Yes, obviously,” Khan grumbled, then he gasped as he was embraced from behind; knowing instantly that it was Rodriguez.

“Hey there, tiger,” the Spaniard said softly into his right ear, and Nien found himself leaning back into the strong arms of his brother, while Pablo bent over Katie and ruffled his hair as if he were a five year old churl.

“You cut it,” Pablo mused and the former dictator rolled his eyes.

“Very observing, brother dear,” he chuckled, while he offered his good hand towards Chang, who took it, while Paolo pushed Rodriguez aside to press a kiss on his leader’s temple. Khan couldn’t help himself. His eyes closed in contented delight to have at least six of his brothers and one of his sisters with him.

Katie sat down on the lounger’s edge; her butt pressed against Nien’s left thigh, while she wiped her forehead. As she caught his questioning look, she sighed, “We have been warned, but the warmth and the higher gravity is really something you have come to terms with.”

Khan nodded. “Yes, it needs some time – even for us. But you’ll have all the time in the world to adjust to this century and to our current location.”
“It’s a desert planet, isn’t it?” Paolo asked, pulling a chair closer and sitting down.

“Yes, mostly. Here, around the lake, is the more pleasant area, but I’ve been told that on the other side of the mountains a large desert extends. It’s not unlike the planet that original bore the Vulcan race.”

“Well, at least it’s habitable and the people here are nice.”

Khan snorted. “Nice isn’t the word that comes first to my mind when speaking of Vulcans, because they really can get on your nerves with their damn logic, but they are peaceful. That is a lot more you can state about humans – even if they have changed within the last century or so.”

Pablo looked around. “At least they understand how to create a nice garden.”

“I agree,” Chang said. “The plants are utterly foreign, yet everything fits together and builds a nice picture.”

Nien smiled; knowing that those two would be interested in the plants immediately. He gazed at Katie. “And what do you think of your surroundings?”

A soft chuckle escaped her. “Well, I imagined Rivendell being different from this here – more green and with more water. But at least it is indeed a ‘Homely House’, offering shelter to those who are in need for it.”

Otto and Khan groaned, while the others began to snicker. All of them knew about Katie Hoffmann’s weak spot for classical fantasy literature.

“Hey,” Katie protested and nodded in the direction of the house, where the tall frame of Selek stepped onto the terrace this moment; a young man with blond hair at his side. “He does resemble Lord Elrond a little bit – with the gentle behavior, those long robes and those pointed ears,” she defended herself; anything but serious.

Khan looked over his shoulder, and saw Jim and then Selek who lifted a brow. The Augment leader sighed deeply. “Sister-dear, you should know that these ears not only look like those of an elf, they
are also likewise as keen.”

Katie’s eyes widened. “You think… he heard me?” she gasped.

The former dictator nodded slowly. “Definitely!”

The Augment woman blushed and rose hastily, as the young man and Selek approached the little group. “High Minister, I apologize. I didn’t mean to offend you,” she said quickly; embarrassment plainly written on her face.

Spock Prime sighed inwardly – this comparison again! But, like before, it amused him to a certain degree. “Mrs. Hoffmann, I’m familiar with the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, and also know of the fictional character of Lord Elrond. I take your comparison as a compliment, because Elrond was scientist and healer in one and I was in my younger years a scientist, too. And, by the way, it fits a little bit. As far as I remember Elrond was called ‘Half-Elf’, because he had human blood in his veins. The same goes for me, so your simile is not wrong.”

Katie’s cheeks remained red, while she smiled at him and bowed her head. “Thank you, sir.”

The young man, who was remarkably handsome, looked with striking blue eyes at the Vulcan and teased, “At least ‘elf’ sounds nicer than ‘hobgoblin’.”

Selek’s face remained expressionless, yet there laid a mixture of fond exasperation and melancholy in his eyes. “That depends on the point of view, Jim. Leonard loved to call me a ‘hobgoblin’ and seeing that these creatures could be helpful sprites as long as you treated them with respect, I was sometimes indeed like a ‘hobgoblin’ for him.” For a second mischief appeared in his eyes. “And if he treated me with disrespect he got his payment.”

Kirk began to laugh; remembering the quarrels between his own Spock and Bones far too well. “I know what you mean. Spock also gives Bones back as good as he gets.”

“I am pleased to hear this,” Selek nodded satisfied, while Khan and Joaquin snickered.

Then the Augment-leader turned serious. “Jim, it’s good that you came.”
“Selek informed me quickly of your siblings’ arrival and I didn’t want to miss the chance to say hello,” Kirk answered; looking curiously at the men and woman he hadn’t meet before. And even enhanced as they were they watched him with the same curiosity.

“Jim,” Khan continued, “please meet my sister Katie, and my brothers Chang, Rodriguez, Pablo and Paolo.”

“Welcome to this century milady – gentlemen,” Jim smiled and nodded towards them.

“My friends,” Khan added, “please meet our savior and protector James T. Kirk, captain of the starship Enterprise that is currently in the planet’s orbit.”

Rodriguez was the first who offered Kirk his hand. “We already heard about you. Nice to meet you, Captain.”

“Indeed,” Pablo said, while he shook Jim’s hand, too. “Your officers think highly of you.”

“I would be nothing without them,” Jim played down the issue.

Katie offered her hand too. “Nice to meet you, Captain,” she said kindly. “May I ask what the ‘T’ stands for?”

“Trouble!” Khan deadpanned before Jim was able to answer.

Joaquin began to snicker again, while Kirk groaned, “Really, Nien, I am not that bad!”

The former dictator gave him a very special sweet smile. “You, Kirk, draw trouble like light draws the moths.”

“Look who’s talking,” Jim teased back. “I don’t want to start counting when and where you’ve elicited trouble.”

“Yes, mostly because I had to save a certain troublemaker’s neck,” Khan smirked. “When your dear
Vulcan brother isn’t near it’s up to me to get you out of the deep water you land yourself in.”

“And you love it!” Jim joked.

“What, that you’re a magnet for trouble or that I have to rescue you?”

“Both,” Kirk grinned. “Just admit it!” He pointed a nonchalant finger at Khan, who rolled his eyes, before he carefully reached with his injured arm towards Kirk, who gently took his hand.

“You know that this is not all I love,” the Augment leader grumbled.

“That’s good to hear,” Jim answered softly; winking at his lover.

The other Augments – except for Joaquin and Otto, who already knew about the two – stared with big eyes at their leader and the young captain. Here was something going on, this much was for certain. But it was Katie who concluded the truth first.

She took at the loving gaze her brother gave the younger male, looked at the entwined hands and then at the tender expression of the captain. “You two are a couple!” she blurted out.

“What?” Rodriguez was certain his hearing had failed him.

Pablo gasped, while Paolo blinked in confusion at Katie. “You think so?”

Chang cocked his head, watched his brother and leader, pursed his lips shortly – and broke into a broad grin. “You finally decided to be done with the single-life?”

Nien smiled up at him. “Jim caught me good.”

“Rather he caught me first, literally,” Kirk explained. “And then we realized that we are far better off without trying to kill each other, I let him go, he saved me later, and then… well…” He shrugged. “Passion turned into more.”
“‘Into more’?” Rodriguez wheezed; staring again at Khan as if he was seeing a ghost.

Nien nodded seriously. “Yes, Jim and I are bondmates.”

“Bondmates?” Katie clapped her hands and whirled around to Otto. “That is the surprise you spoke of! Noonien finally found someone for himself and they are already bonded.” As her husband simply smiled at her, she began to laugh, bent down and pressed a kiss on Khan’s forehead. “Congratulations, brother-dear. It was about damn time!” Before he could reply something she straightened her slender frame and turned towards Kirk. Their gazes met. “Well, when you’re Noonien’s bondmate, formalities are no longer necessary.” She stepped towards him and gave him a quick peck on the left cheek. “Welcome to the family, James.”

Kirk, a little bit caught off-guard, grinned at her. “Thanks. Please call me Jim.”

She nodded. “Gladly. Just call me Katie.”

“With pleasure,” Jim replied, bowing his head.

Pablo and Paolo were the next who closed the distance to the young captain. “Alas, I never thought to see the day when someone would be able to catch Noonien in this way,” the Italian said; still baffled but smirking now. “You may be a casual human, but after all I’ve already heard about you, you have to be someone special. And you are Noonien’s bondmate. That’s good enough for me to agree with Katie. Welcome to the family.” He pulled the younger man into a rough embrace and Pablo followed the example.

Chang and a still gaping Rodriguez joined them. “Don’t let Noonien ride over you roughshod. He can be very commanding,” the Chinese joked; flicking a thumb at a thunderstruck Khan, who protested,

“I’m not ‘commanding’!”

“Oh, your brother has a point here,” Jim teased his beloved back. “It’s fortunate that I’m the one in command, so…”
Nien gasped for air. “Aboard your ship, but here…”

“Here it is Bones who commands you around,” Kirk snickered; clearly enjoying the bickering.

“My ass,” Khan growled. “And, by the way, he lectures you often enough, too.”

“He is my CMO; it’s his duty to drive my attention to certain things where the health of the crew is concerned.”

“Ha, most times he complains because you run with open eyes into the next danger. And now we’re back to the topic that it’s up to me to get your lovely butt out of the mess.”

Jim bent forward and he whispered to Chang. “But at least he loves my butt.”

The Chinese began to laugh, before he answered, “Don’t bother with Noonien’s grumbling. It’s his way to show that he cares.”

“I know, my friend. Believe me, I know!” the young captain chuckled.

Rodriguez had finally overcome his surprise and looked Kirk up and down. “I get the feeling that there is more to you than good looks, wits and a title.”

“Aw, thank you,” Jim smirked back; his blue eyes flashed with a silent challenge. “That shows the trust you have in your brother’s choices.”

Khan groaned, while the others laughed again.

“Don’t get yourself into a combat of wits with Jim,” Nien advised Rodriguez. “The chance that you’ll lose is really high.”

The other Augment pursed his lips shortly. “Maybe,” he said, before he offered his hand. “Noonien chose you, so… welcome to the family.”
“We chose each other,” Jim replied, while he shook Rodriguez’ hand and held his gaze firmly.

The man nodded. “Of course,” he grumbled.

Selek watched the scene carefully. Rodriguez was difficult; this much he realized. But at least the other Augments accepted Jim, and the old Vulcan was relieved. Maybe in this time-line Khan’s crew would really fit into this century…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, that was the more happy side of the re-union, but this will change when the others learn what happened to their beloved brother and leader…Especially Rodriguez is going to be difficult. He is the oldest of the Augments and even if he has accepted Khan as his leader, his protection instincts are very strong towards him.

I loved to bring up Katie’s comparison between Elrond and Spock Prime, and New Gol / New Vulcan and Rivendell. I imagined these scene weeks ago, and it was fun to write it. I hope you liked it.

I also planned since ‘Turkana’ to bring the reporter in person into the story concerning the court-material. For me the way of defense was clear from the beginning and that would need a man from the media to support our friends. Well, indeed he has to make up for what his reportage did…

In the next chapter the more dark part of the re-union will take place, but without too many details – after all we all knew about it. But there will be other twists which come up.

Parallel there will be fun later, because Wesley finds Alec Armstrong and he doesn’t come alone to New Vulcan. And the Augments are going to meet The Shadow-gang…

As always I’m curious what you think of the chapter.

I wish you now a nice rest of the weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
The question of all questions

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

I really wanted to post the new chapter at Halloween, but I found no time to re-read it and to publish it, because our plans for Halloween were altered, as at our friend’s house (where we wanted to have the party) a water-pipe burst was about of flushing the party away, and so we changed the plan and had the party at our house. Yeah, our friends came to help decorating and to do some cooking, yet it was a little chaos (laugh, it fits).

But now, at least, I found some time to re-read the chapter – thanks to Cerridwen again for her super job of beta-reading – and to put it online.

One little thing in advance: The meeting of Khan’s crew and The Shadow-gang will take place in the next chapter; in the actual one the questions of all questions will be asked. I can promise you a very romantically and sweet scene – after the big clash of feelings in the beginning, as the other Augments learn of Nien’s fate.

I wish you fun,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 97 – The question of all questions

The Augments, Jim and Selek spent half an hour more in a comfortable atmosphere – last but not least because Khan avoided certain questions concerning the two years he was already awake. And there were other topics to speak about – like the Federation, Starfleet and New Vulcan.

And because of the latter, they finally reached the point to which Khan couldn’t keep them anymore in the dark. After all, Nero’s arrival from the future and him destroying Vulcan had been the reason for Marcus to explore deep space more, where he found the Botany Bay. As the talk reached this point, Khan took a deep breath, exchanged a knowing look with Jim and said quietly to his siblings,

“You may think that it was luck under the given terrible circumstances that Marcus found our ship and realized who and what we are. But believe me, that we are all here and the last of us are about to
be woken up, is not his merit. Far from it. It turned out that he was our enemy – one of the worst I ever encountered. And we can thank Jim that you all and I are still alive.”

Katie, who had placed herself beside him on the lounger where he had first made room for her, cocked her head. She had sensed that something nasty was going on – and that Khan, Jim and his officers where in the middle of it. “What happened?” she asked. “Has it to do with the fight you were in and where you got hurt?”

Noonien grimaced. “This here,” – he lifted his left arm – “and the other injuries are minor compared to other things.” He felt and saw the other tensing up even more, and braced himself for what would come next. “I’ll tell you why it needed more than two years until you finally were woken up – and why I’m facing a trial within a few weeks.”

Rodriguez frowned. “A trial?”

Khan nodded. “Yes, trial,” he confirmed. “And before you protest or make up any decisions without hearing any of the closer details: it’s justified to bring me to court. At least, this time it will be a real one – with a damn good lawyer on our side.” He saw the shocked faces and moistened his lips. “What you will hear now will certainly enrage you, but please hear me out before you do something we all would regret later. I’ve got a second chance to set everything right, and I don’t want to lose it, so please stay calm while I explain everything.”

Pablo, Paolo, Chang and Rodriguez, who sat – like the others – on chairs which had been brought by several priests half an hour ago, crossed their arms in front of their chests like one man, while Katie suppressed a shiver. Her fine instincts sensed her brother’s inner turmoil, and if something stirred Khan’s emotions like this even after two years, what he was about to tell them had to be bad. Very bad!

With a calm, almost emotionless voice the former dictator told them of everything that happened to him and therefore later to Jim and Federation within the last 27 months. He didn’t want to hurt his siblings by telling them cruel details, yet he couldn’t spare them. He told of his amok-run in London and San Francisco – of him going more or less insane when he thought he had lost them all aboard the Vengeance. He spoke of the fight between Jim and him aboard, and how he wanted to take revenge on the younger man after he escaped Section 31 for the second time, only to give into his already long-living, foolish desire for the stubborn, proud, courageous and handsome captain after he smelled his own blood in the veins of the younger man.

And then how everything changed as he learned that his family was still alive and that Kirk had died protecting his ship, his crew and the Augments; only revived by McCoy trying the impossible by using Khan’s blood on him. This knowledge had heralded the start of something new – which changed everything. He told his siblings about his flight from Earth, from him joining the gang of
some crazy but genius warriors who fought against Orions – alien pirates who were worse than the pirates of Earth history. He spoke of the war and how he couldn’t help himself but try to protect those who needed help. He explained how he and Jim communicated in secret, how Kirk was caught by the Klingons and how he – Khan – threw all caution out of the next air-lock and came to the younger man’s rescue.

At this point he asked his siblings for forgiveness, because with him risking his life like this he had also risked theirs. Murmurs like, “You did what you had to do,” or “You followed your heart; that’s nothing new’” were the answers, while Chang grumbled, “Well, you knew how much the captain was needed to gain advantages against those Klingons – and you needed him to find us, so no offense taken here, Noonien.”

Khan frowned. “I have to admit that it wasn’t those thoughts which drove me to Turkana to get Jim out of the hell he was captured in. It was because the mere thought of losing him… scared me.” He lowered his head. “I only realized how deep he was under my skin when I learned of his upcoming fate and… reacted on my feelings.” He glanced up. “I knew that I was risking you all with my decision, but…” He swallowed. “I’m sorry, but I couldn’t let him down. I couldn’t let him die without…”

He felt untypically shy and bit his lips – something that told the others how much this dilemma still haunted him. Katie, who was pale as a tablecloth after everything she had already learned, laid a soft hand on his arm and said gently, “You couldn’t let Jim die without at least trying to save him, no matter the costs. Some of us were on the same receiving end of your love only weeks or a few months ago – at least it still feels like we only went into cryosleep yesterday.” She took a deep breath. “You don’t stop at anything if someone, who is dear to you, is in danger. And for this we love you.”

Nien felt relief and anguish in his chest, mixed with regret and an odd kind of helplessness. He had put Jim above his siblings in those moments. His sister and brothers were a little bit shocked about it, but they weren’t angry with him. This much he could see and feel.

“As, thanks,” he croaked and quickly cleared his throat, before he continued his tale. He told them about Aldebaran, of his time with Jim there and how they became real lovers. During this part Kirk threw cautious glances at Selek, who simply listened with a stoic expression, yet his eyes were warm as he looked at the younger version of his T’hy’la. His own Jim had never found the one true love to share his life with; those whom he would have chosen were killed or left him. Old Spock couldn’t help himself, but as he once again witnessed the deep feelings the Augment leader held for Kirk, the Elder was glad that at least one thing went better within this time-line.

As Khan told about the incident with Koloth, Jim began to join the tale, and both let the other Augments in on everything that happened afterwards. They spoke of Jim’s friends and how they rescued but also found out about them; of Bob Wesley, the Commodore who risked court martial too
by covering for Khan after he learned about the cruel fate the Augment had faced; of Selek who agreed on helping them – and they told about the last battle after said Commodore had rescued the admirals and the delegation; revealing the still on-going betrayal within some ranks of Starfleet.

The sun was setting as the two men came finally to the end. They had told them everything, even the current status of the defense they had agreed on.

For almost a minute the five Augments, who hadn’t known of Khan’s martyrdom until now, didn’t say a word. Numb with shock and fury they simply looked at their leader and brother, before Rodriguez whispered, “They tortured you, abused you – us all – as lab rats, killed eight of us, hunted you like an animal – and they dare to put you to trial? Even after they learned of what really happened to you?” Rage shimmered in his eyes, while his balled fists trembled.

Khan sighed. “I did kill a lot of people, Rod, even if it was within an amok-run. The outcome is the same: I killed! Good people who didn’t even know about me or what Marcus was up to in reality. Yes, Marcus and his fellows drove me thus far, yet that is no excuse for what I did. We are enhanced – superior. I should have able to control myself, but I didn’t. Two times I lost control – and it resulted in death and bloodshed.” He shook his head. “I failed our purpose – I failed you.”

“You didn’t fail us. You endured this hell to keep us safe,” Paolo said quietly; pale and shaken. “What happened is not your fault.”

“It was – partly at least,” Khan replied softly.

“Don’t blame yourself for what they did to you. They made you snap and had to pay the price for it. Hell, it’s them which should be arraigned, not the other way around!” Rodriguez snarled.

“And trial they will face,” Jim cut in; not able to keep silent anymore. “At least those who still live will have to answer to justice. Not one of them will be spared – and the charges are grave. In Nien’s case they include unlawful detention, slavery, torture, blackmail, running of illegal experiments, abuse, murder of eight of his crew, and a lot more. And that’s not all. Luengo, Norton, Styles and their fellows are accused of attempted genocide and high treason – something that can indeed end in a death penalty. There are only a few crimes left which are sentenced with death. High treason – and above all in the middle of a war – is such a crime.”

“And you think they will indeed show real justice to Noonien?” Rodriguez snapped. “The trial will be on Earth, led by humans. Do you really think they will judge him like they would judge on of their own?”
“You and the others are humans, too, Rodriguez, don’t forget it,” Jim said firmly.

“Wasn’t it you who made us into a completely new species?” the Augment growled. “Or did I misunderstand something of your tale?”

“You understood it only partly correctly. It was Marcus’ successor who stripped you all of being counted as humans – but you are sentient beings, which fulfills the frame of being an independent race. This way Selek could grant you asylum so that no one, not even the Council, can lay a hand on you. It also gives you all a chance to build a life of your own and to be accepted within the Federation as a sentient race that is endangered – which gives you a special protection status. You and your siblings are free to move and to live wherever you want as soon as your people are acknowledged as your own race. And until then you are under the protection of the Vulcans – and no-one in his right mind will try to make you leave by force.”

“Yeah, we just heard how smoothly that ran as this Norton-guy attacked the Vulcans’ government to get Khan, you and the others.” He glanced shortly at Selek, who simply lifted a brow but remained silent. The old Vulcan knew from experience that it was better to let Jim Kirk handle an overemotional dialog partner, instead of joining the discussion. Jim was the better candidate to put oil on the troubled water, as an Earthern idiom went.

“I said, ‘in his right mind’,” Jim replied. “Norton knew that he was about to lose everything and that made him crazy enough to break dozens of laws, for which he will pay. He, and those who hurt you. Yes, there may be some other people who think you all are dangerous or want to gain power and might by playing foul, and these people have and will always exist. But this will not stop others from being open-minded and defending the rules and laws. And they are good laws. They pledge tolerance, equality and freedom. Every man and woman despite their race and heritage have the same rights within the Federation, and still can follow their own ways, traditions and religions. The rituals of other planet’s original habitants are accepted, like marriages and partnerships. The planets remain sovereign with their own governments, free to live like they want, yet they are all under the protection of the Federation and benefit from free trade and exchange of culture and knowledge. Some of them have their own defense forces, others are under the protection of Starfleet – the real Starfleet, not that heap of insane guys which tried to change the fleet’s purpose into militarism. We not only speak of liberties, freedom and justice anymore, we live them! And I want you to become a part of this – to be an addition in the big family. And as far as I understood Nien, this is something you always wanted: To be a part of the world. Here you get the chance – but you have to realize and to take it!”

His voice was strong and powerful – the sort of voice that was convincing and spoke of the deep persuasion within Jim Kirk concerning the Federation and her system. Selek pursed his lips as he listened to the passionate speech of the young man; remembering far too well a situation in his own time-line when his Jim had spoken this way to a bunch of natives on Omega IV, which followed a path of honor and belief almost similar to the American Natives. Kirk had citied fiercely the preamble
of the Constitution of the United States of America. The belief of the right of voicing opinion freely, the right of tolerance, acceptance and equality for all people and not only for the ‘chiefs’, was deeply rooted in James Kirk. It was a spirit that came from his ancestors and drove the man’s decision over and over again. Just like he did with Khan in this time-line, just like he did now as he tried to convince the Augments to have trust in today’s justice. This firm belief had made Old Spock’s Jim Kirk go on and on, no matter what. And this same strength was in this younger version.

Khan had listened to his bondmate’s passionate speech with a mixture of interest and awe, even if Jim’s point of view and belief in the Federation’s goodness was nothing new for the former dictator. Jim Kirk was an idealist, someone who wasn’t easy to convince, but the moment you won him for an idea, a goal or a path, there was no going back for him. It made him something that was called a ‘good man’, someone you could trust utterly – and for that Khan loved the younger man even more.

“Jim is right,” he joined the discussion between Rodriguez and Kirk. “I’ve lived for two years in the Federation and it’s a good regime. It is based on true democracy and allows its members to live their own ways of life, offers protection and accepts even the strangest beings as long as they don’t try to threaten the Federation. It’s something politicians spoke so often of in the 20th century, but they never managed to come even close today’s standards. And justice is a great part of all this – a justice that considers the idiosyncrasies of the different races and is based on respect.”


Khan rolled his eyes. “You can’t make a whole world responsible for the deeds of a few people, Rod! It would be exactly what those butchers did back in our time when we were forced to flee. Yes, Section 31 and those scientists abused most of you and did unthinkable things to me, but they are criminals. And as such they are treated now. They not only harmed us, but were ready and partly did sacrifice their own colleagues and even whole populations of other planets and colonies. They provoked a war against a warlike opponent only to manifest their own power and might, and even wanted to eliminate the enemy completely by developing a pathogen that would be immune to almost everything – using our DNA for it. It would have cost billions of lives within the Klingon Empire, and just imagine what would have happened, if this cursed pathogen would have spread further – into the Federation and the other regimes like the Romulan Empire. Trillions of innocent people would have died. As cruel and bad as it was what those people did to us, it pales in comparison what they planned to do with the knowledge they tried to gain by using us as lab-rats.”

Rodriguez bit his lips. “I don’t deny this, Noonien. To hear what they planned and what it would have taken on in the dramatic scale in the end, makes me sick. But we aren’t speaking about those insane guys, but about you – what will happen to you?!?”

Khan almost smiled. Rodriguez was always the protector – the big guy who wanted to keep his siblings safe no matter what. Yet this topic was too severe to mix it with private fondness. So, he took a deep breath and answered, “As I told you: I have faith in the Federation’s real justice – and I
will accept whatever they decide.” His gaze wandered over his other siblings. “And no matter what will happen to me, you go on with your lives!” He raised his voice as some began to protest. “You heard me! We escaped Earth to find a new place to live in peace – or to return when the times had changed. Both have happened now. The Federation offers a place to live in acceptance, and the times have changed. More than 250 years can do this, and I don’t want you to waste your chance. I didn’t develop and constructed the cryotubes and the Botany Bay only that you hurl the first real given chance to live a worthy life out of the next airlock.”

“You are our brother – our leader,” Pablo said softly.

The former dictator nodded. “Yes, and as such I acted and overreacted, for that I will take responsibility. That has nothing to do with you. Of course, you can cross your fingers during my trial, if you think that helps…”

Some chuckles were heard.

“… but come fire or high water, you will do nothing to intervene! I fought for two years to get you out of the frying pan you were in without even knowing it. I endured all this only to get you to safety and to protect you. Don’t let my pain be in vain, because you dump the chance I finally gained for you.”

Jim didn’t need to be an empath to see the other Augments fighting inwardly with their deep love and loyalty towards Nien, and the stern logic of his demands. If he would be in his beloved’s place he would say the same to his friends – would order them to take the given chance, yet he knew that neither Spock, nor Bones, Scotty, Uhura or the others would let him down. And herein lay a certain danger, because if the Augments would rather sacrifice their own happiness for their leader, everything would be over for them. And for him and his officers, too, because if he – Jim Kirk – had taken Khan and the other Augments under his protective wing only to set a bunch of vengeful superhumans free, Command and the Council would have his head for it.

“Guys,” Kirk said softly, “I know how you feel.” Instantly he was the focus of everyone. “I know that your love for your brother demands that you defend him, but he is right. There is only one path left – for him, for me, for my officers: To face justice. The other path would be to flee and to hide for the rest of our lives. And if we would choose this way, your entrance into this century, into this world, would be far more difficult – full of stones and borders. Authorities would observe you, waiting for Nien or me to contact you. If we don’t face justice, there wouldn’t be any peace – neither for you, nor for us. I rather fight for my freedom than gain it by running away and hiding. And I think the same goes for Nien.”

“Absolutely,” Khan nodded; fire in his eyes. “I’ve been forced to run away three times in my life, and it turned out to taste bitterer and bitterer. The first was as we fled the labs in New Delhi, the
second time was as we were forced to escape from Earth and the third was as I had no other choice than to flee from Marcus’ secret station near Jupiter; thinking that you all were dead.” He looked sternly at his siblings. “You all know me. I’d rather fight than run away. I always fought for some or all of you. This time the battle will be for me and me alone, because if I go to trial I have the only real chance to someday be a free man again and to live at Jim’s side. Don’t ask me to throw this chance away.”

His siblings looked silently at him; understanding his motives. Then Katie touched his hand.

“Do you really think they will treat your fair?”

“Yes,” Khan nodded. “Jim and I will make certain that they have no other way than to play by the written rules.”

“How so?” Paolo asked quietly, who loathed the idea of watching his beloved brother on trial for something he wasn’t really to blame for.

“We got the best lawyer possible,” Jim raised his voice to speak. “He is someone every judge will have a tough time with. He’s already worked out a strategy to get Nien, my officers and me away from the gallows, so to speak. And we have mighty supporters, whose words weigh a lot.” He glanced from one to another. “Have some faith. Today’s justice isn’t comparable anymore with what you knew in your time.”

At the same moment Jim’s communicator beeped and with an “Excuse me,” he pulled the little device out of his trouser pocket and opened the frequency.

“Kirk here.”

“Wesley here. Jim, I only wanted to inform you that I reached Armstrong. He is on Aldebaran at the moment, working on a report about yours and ‘Sunrise’s’ fight against the Klingon aggressors. He was happy to learn that he can speak with you, because he still has a damn bad conscious. And when I told him that you wanted to give him an exclusive interview and that it would be him who reveals the real face of ‘Sunrise’ to the public, he was in flames. He said he would hire a charter craft and will come to New Vulcan as soon as possible.”

Jim grinned. “Excellent! Thank you, Bob.”
“No problem, son. I’ll inform Selek and…”

“Not necessary. Selek is sitting a few meters away from me and heard everything.” He looked askance at Spock Prime, who simply nodded, before he raised his voice,

“Commodore Wesley, please inform my staff of the charter craft’s ID-number and name as soon as you learn of it, so that Security lets Mr. Armstrong pass through.”

“Of course, Prime Minister,” Bob called back.

Kirk smirked again and winked at Khan, who smiled back. “All right, Bob,” Jim said into the communicator. “Thanks for the news. How is my ship?”

“Mr. Scott still ‘nurses’ it, as he puts it and your crew functions flawlessly, yet the mood is dark because they’re worrying for you and the others.”

“Tell them, Uhura, Spock, McCoy and I are well and that Nien is doing better. I’m sure that will lift the mood.”

“What do you think I already told them? But it doesn’t change much. Heck, my crew is loyal, but yours is crazy,” the Commodore sighed. “So, have a nice evening and greetings to Khan. Wesley out!”

Closing his communicator, he looked at Nien, who snorted, “One thing more, we have in common: Both our crews are crazy.” He glanced fondly at his siblings, who grimaced or shot him exasperated glares.

“So, any further questions?” Jim asked and it was Paolo, who cleared his throat; obviously trying to change the topic to give them all time to calm down.

“Well, we already used it to get to here, and it wasn’t unpleasant, but care to explain again how exactly this odd transporter-beam-device works?”

Joaquin began to laugh, while Otto grumbled, “Believe me, you don’t want to know.”
The Augments returned to the hospital half an hour later; still shaken, furious of what had happened to Khan, and rattled despite their enhanced nature. Nien was glad that Joaquin went with them to stay another night with them; knowing that the boy could tell good things about this new world which hopefully would calm them down some more.

Selek accompanied the enhanced humans, spoke quickly with McCoy to learn about the status of the other Augments which would have been woken up in the meantime, and finally returned to his office to get the daily updates of the colony. Bones arrived in New Gol in the evening – tired but also curious about how the visit went. Of course, he had sensed Rodriguez’s and the others’ inner turmoil, and so he wasn’t surprised as Jim and Khan told him of the more difficult part of the talk.

Cogley, too, joined them for a few minutes, before he retreated to his own room to do some more research. Kirk asked him what details were still unclear, but the lawyer only smiled and answered that preparation was everything in such a case.

The night went by uneventful, except for the fact that neither Nien nor Jim slept well. Too much was on their mind – in Khan’s case good things like the re-union with some more of his siblings, but he dreaded the prospect that he would have this discussion still more times until all of them were informed.

Jim, who felt his beloved’s unease, was simply there for him; pulled him into his arms and tried to project love, safety and comfort through their shared link; the faith that everything would turn out well in the end. Words weren’t necessary this time, and after two hours of simply lying there, Khan finally fell asleep. Kirk, always the one who took responsibility even into his well-earned sleep, followed him at last, too.

The next morning Bob called again; telling them that Armstrong was on his way since the prior evening and would reach New Vulcan within four days. It was impossible that Command would set the trial until then, especially after Wesley got the official inquiry of Khan’s condition and Healer Sorel and Dr. Corrigan gave a quick statement that their patient wasn’t even able to walk one step alone at the moment; the suffering from the TBI didn’t even need further explanations. Well, the latter was highly overstated, but Sorel ‘overlooked’ this detail in Corrigan’s report and sent it to the Enterprise, where Wesley was ‘very busy’ so that he could only pass the massage to the HQ hours later.

Spock and Uhura visited the two bondmates in the late morning and stayed for almost two hours. Nyota was excited, because her family would arrive two days later – earlier than thought, and Jim
was glad for her. He and Spock spoke about some further details concerning the official bonding-ceremony, and this way Kirk learned that Sarek’s brother Silek and his wife T’Ylle were on their way to New Vulcan, too, and would arrive in three days.

“Hmm, family-reunions seem to be trendy at the moment,” Khan chuckled, who listened to the talk while lying – again – on the lounger outside in the garden.

Nyota grinned at him. “If this continues, New ShiKahr is going to need another hotel.”

“How went your first reunion with your family members, Mr. Singh?” Spock wanted to know, and Khan took a very deep breath.

“First it was happy, then they learned what happened within the last two years, and I think it was Jim’s hell of speech about the Federation and today’s justice, and my command to stay calm that held them in control.” He grimaced. “We are very protective of each other…”

“Tell me something new,” Uhura sighed.

“… and especially Rodriguez thinks he is still the big guy who has to shield his little brother – me – from the big, bad world.”

“At least he came to terms with us both being bonded,” Jim said, and Uhura looked curiously at him.

“I really would have loved to see their reactions as they learned about you two.”

“Katie was all ‘yeah, finally’, the others congratulated and Rodriguez reacted like a father who had to face the fact that his ‘little boy’ was taken with another one, but then he accepted it,” Kirk explained.

Spock nodded slowly. “Something like this was to be expected. Mr. Singh displays open tolerance towards ‘casual’ humans, but I think some of his family-members hold some grudges against them. Understandable after all they have been put through.”

Surprised Khan looked at him. “And how do you know what my family and I have been put through
during the last weeks on Earth?"

The Vulcan’s dark eyes met the ocean-colored ones of the Augment. “Have you forgotten that I mind-melded with you, Mr. Singh? Directly after your surgery you were so far gone that Dr. McCoy got a flat-line from you and the resuscitation attempts more or less failed because you had given up. I found you lost deep in your own mental landscape after I had to cross a labyrinth of hallways of a lab in which you and your siblings obviously had grown up. After I convinced you to accompany me back to the land of living – to Jim – we had to walk back the same path, and there I saw what happened in the last hours before you fled India towards the Botany Bay. I saw the palace in flames, heard the screams and watched the butchery that took place there. So, I have, indeed, some knowledge what you and your siblings had to endure.”

Nien watched him closely and saw for just a second remorse and loathing in Spock’s gaze which were meant for the ‘liberators’, not for the Augments. And he remembered all too well the Vulcan’s presence in his mind, even if he had ignored this special experience until now. “It was dark times,” he murmured.

Sarek’s son nodded. “Yes, not unlike the times on ancient Vulcan before Surak brought peace and logic to us. Yet the insanity of raging hate, of losing everything your race calls ‘humanity’ never ceases to surprise me.”

“And yet you experienced something likewise during our first encounter,” Khan murmured.

Spock took a deep breath. “Yes,” he said calmly. “Ripped bonds can do something like this.”

The former dictator cocked his head. “As I already pointed out: You do understand why someone is pushed so far that he runs amok. It happened to you, too.” His words were not meant to poke in an old wound or to hurt otherwise. Spock knew that Khan simply stated facts.

“Yes, to both,” he affirmed. “And I plan to testify this at the court martial.”

Uhura and Jim stared wide-eyed at him, while Khan lifted both brows. “You would admit to the whole world that emotions got the better of you?” he asked, disbelieving.

“It would be illogical to keep facts a secret when there is the chance that my statement could support our defense. And, as far as I understood Jim and Mr. Cogley the day before yesterday, a part of the strategy is to take away the people’s apprehension concerning you and your people, Mr. Singh.”
When a Vulcan can ‘lose it’, then why not an Augment, too, even if we both belong to ‘superior species’ – no offence, Jim, Nyota.”

Kirk only shook his head with a grin; lifting both hands in mock surrender. Uhura simply rolled her eyes and murmured something like “At least not in bed,” under her breath, which made Spock’s ear tips tint green and Khan had to chuckle.

“I don’t think that was meant for our ears,” he said to Uhura, who blushed a little bit beneath her chocolate skin.

She cleared her throat. “Well, he can be a storm, don’t think otherwise. Silent waters are deep.”

Spock shot her a glare, she answered with a sweet smile. “I have to agree with Mr. Singh, Nyota. This is private and Vulcans…”

“Are tight-lipped.” Jim smirked; winking at his friend who suppressed the urge to throw a look towards the skies. Then Kirk turned serious again, “So, concerning our defense, maybe we should…”

He stopped himself as Spock and Khan turned their heads simultaneously and looked back towards the building. Samuel Cogley stepped out on the terrace, spied them, waved and neared with large steps. “Good day, all together,” he greeted, before offered his hand to Nyota. “We haven’t met until now. Samuel Cogley, at your service.”

“Nyota Uhura, chief communication officer of the Enterprise – on relief actually,” she added; smiling at him.

“A pleasure,” the lawyer answered; giving her a formal hand kiss.

Uhura felt amusement rising in her. Old-fashioned and dramatic – right!

Cogley drove his attention towards Spock. “So, this is the lovely lady you’re going to marry in a few days. Congratulations. I always knew that Vulcans appreciate beauty in their own ‘logical’ way.”
To his horror Spock felt anew his ear tips heating up, and as he saw from the edge of his eyes how Jim pressed his lips in a thin line to suppress laughter, eyes dancing with mirth, the heat spread even to his cheeks. Surak be with him, he was blushing like a boy before his Kash-whan!

Either Cogley decided to ignore the Vulcan’s reaction or he simply overlooked it – either way he continued with his topic. “The marriage is most fortunate. Whatever the judge will decide, he can’t separate you two. Vulcan bonding rituals include mental links and therefore they are liable to special protection due to Federation law. You two will stay together, no matter what.” He frowned and looked at Jim and Khan. “You two are bonded, too, right?”

Kirk nodded, while Khan cocked his head.

“But not officially.” It was a statement, not a question the lawyer voiced.

The enhanced man lifted both brows. “What is your point?”

“You two are bonded in the Augment-way, but regarding the fact that your race, Mr. Singh, isn’t officially approved even now, I doubt that justice will take consideration of your status should it come to the worst. An official marriage would prevent any attempt of separating you two – especially if New Vulcan will approve the mental abilities of your people, Mr. Singh.”

Silence.

With a few words Cogley had been able to let a bomb drop none of them had seen coming.

“You think we two should marry officially?” Jim asked; pointing at himself and Khan, who looked as baffled as Kirk.

Samuel nodded with a joyful smile. “Yes. There is no way that your relationship can stay hidden. Then it’s just as well you make it official – and it would bring you a lot of advantages.”

Jim still gaped at him, before he closed his mouth with an audible ‘click’. “But… if we don’t mention it no-one…”
“Oh, come on, son! You two are so smitten with each other that you have to be blind not to see what you two are to each other,” Cogley sighed.

“Even Admiral Barnett realized the true nature of your relationship, Jim. One look at you as you sat at Mr. Singh’s sick-bed was enough to tell him everything.” Spock agreed with the lawyer; looking at Kirk.

“See?” Samuel nodded. “That you two are lovers is clear as the skies at midday, and I’m sure that the prosecution will try to use this against you. Emotional compromise and all that nonsense. But if you two are married it will show everyone how damn serious your relationship is – that it is not a short affair that gave both of you advantages during the last weeks. And that Mr. Singh has latent mental abilities which binds you two to each other will result in the fact that they can’t separate you once you are officially married.”

“But it can also be interpreted otherwise,” Khan mused. “For example, that I influenced Jim by using mental powers – that he didn’t act on his own free will.”

“Did you?” Cogley asked bluntly and watched with interest how the eyes of the Augment began to flame like a wild fire.

“No! Of course not! I despise such humbug!” Khan growled. “And, by the way, I love Jim too much to do something like this to him.”

“Yes, but you didn’t love him from the beginning. As far as I understood you two hated each other, which turned into passion and then into more. And before this ‘more’ you had plenty of opportunities to use your abilities to manipulate the captain.” He lifted a hand as Khan was about to shout at him. “Don’t get me wrong, Mr. Singh. I do believe you, but the proxies of the prosecution will ask you exactly those questions. You have to be prepared – and have to stay calm.”

“They could try to use everything that happened between us personally against us,” Jim grumbled, and Cogley nodded.

“Exactly. And this is the reason why we have to be prepared. We must find a way to force them to meet us on our level and for that we have to create precedents – like, for example, the approval of the Augments’ latent mental abilities. That leads me to the next point. If this fact is officially acknowledged, it will support our defense concerning Mr. Singh’s amok-run.” He looked at Khan. “You told me that you have a thin link to your siblings – that you are able to detect their presence. That faded as you fled the secret space station near Jupiter, having heard prior how Marcus ordered his subordinates to kill your crew. This is why you were convinced that your brothers and sisters
were murdered. This pain combined with the shock of severed bonds drove you over the edge.” He glanced at Spock.

“Mr. Spock, I regret to stir up a not really healed wound, but please tell me: As Vulcan was destroyed, did you feel the loss of family members – besides that of your mother?”

Jim saw how his Vulcan friend tensed and his expression closed, yet Spock answered calmly,

“There is not one Vulcan, who hasn’t felt family ties being torn apart. Many of us died in the aftershock, others are still being treated because of it.”

Cogley nodded; his eyes were full of sympathy. “Thank you, Mr. Spock – and I’m sorry for bringing this topic up, but it had to be done.”

“There is no need to apologize, Mr. Cogley. I know to what you are up to. You want to compare Mr. Singh’s loss with what we faced the moment Vulcan was destroyed. He was in shock, which explained his amok-run, even if the latter came days later.”

Samuel smiled slightly. “Yes, that’s my intention. Everyone reacts differently after such a mental shock. Some hide, others rage. And some hide first and lash out later – and that was what Mr. Singh did.” He looked at Khan again. “Was Admiral Marcus aware of your family ties?”

“We never spoke about it, but he was highly intelligent. I think he assumed something like this,” Nien answered quietly. “And, by the way, his scientist tested and monitored me for weeks. Dr. McCoy recognized my higher brain activities immediately and deduced that my instinctive reaction towards Jim, despite us both being unconscious was the result of it. That there was already a bond between us. No offense against Dr. McCoy, he is an excellent surgeon, but he is no scientist. If he came to this conclusion, Marcus’ staff must have realized it, too.”

“So, we can say he tortured you in a double way by killing eight of your crew and watching you suffer not only because of the mourning but also because of ripped bonds,” Cogley nodded. “In Xeno-biology as school kids we learn that you have to treat species with telepathical abilities carefully. I think they also teach a little bit about Vulcan family ties and that a Vulcan goes in shock if he or she loses a bondmate?” He looked questioningly at Jim, who affirmed,

“Yes, this topic was introduced at school. And in the Academy, it was enlarged.”
Samuel smiled again. “So, Marcus knew what he did – which makes it even worse, but also explains Mr. Singh’s reaction. So, a part of our defense lies in the official approval of the Augments’ mental abilities.” He glanced at Spock. “Any chance that High Minister Selek or the Lady T’Pau can be involved in this procedure?”

The first officer lifted a brow. “Selek and I mind-melded with Mr. Singh and can affirm that at least he has some small telepathic abilities. Dr. McCoy and I also witnessed at several occasions that both Mr. Weiss and Mr. Singh sensed the other one’s feelings – especially in hazardous situations or when one of them was emotionally stirred up.”

“Perfect,” Cogley grinned; rubbing his hands. “This all shows that the main fault lay with Marcus, and not Mr. Singh.” He cocked his head. “And referring to you two, Gentlemen, you really should think about a true marriage. Though by your people’s standards you’re already married to Captain Kirk, aren’t you?” he asked Khan, who sighed,

“What we share is even more than a simple marriage. We are bonded to each other – a link only death can sever.”

Cogley nodded enthusiastically. “Superb! And congratulations, by the way. But your status has to be officially acknowledged by the authorities, only then it can be taken into consideration by the court martial.” He pursed his lips for a second, before he mused, “Hell, if the Vulcans can testify to the mental abilities of your people, Mr. Singh, and also the special connection between you and Captain Kirk, then they could also marry you two – under Vulcan law.” He glanced at Spock. “I think I have to speak with High Minister Selek about it. As far as I understand, you all are staying under his special protection. He would know who to involve implementing all this.”

Jim groaned. Old Spock had already done so much for him, he didn’t want to ask more of him. On the other hand, Cogley was right.

Uhura had listened closely to everything, before she now raised his voice. “All advantages aside, this is something you two shouldn’t do out of rational reasons. The question is: do you two want an official wedding at all?” She looked at Kirk. “Please do not misunderstand me, Jim, but you never struck me for the guy who does monogamy.”

The young captain rolled his eyes. “To tell the truth, I used to think of myself the same way, but everything changed after Nien and I got together. He’s all I need and I can think of.” He looked at his beloved – the man who had stolen his heart and was firmly anchored in his mind and soul. And then the words tumbled out of his mouth without his own doing.
“I cannot imagine a life without you anymore,” he said softly. “You’ve become everything for me, and… we are already bonded. A marriage would only officially confirm what we are already for each other.” He moistened his lips. “I… I never thought to be at this point at all someday. I never had a real family, and any relationship I had ended sooner or later. I thought I wasn’t born to be a husband one day, but you proved me wrong. You showed me that I can be bonded and still be free, and… I cannot bear the thought of losing you. And…” He chuckled nervously. “And it has a nice sound; husband. So, yeah, I would love to marry you – if this is what you want, too.”

Khan couldn’t help himself. Even his enhanced mind and nature couldn’t prevent that his heart had begun to beat faster. Technically he and Jim were already ‘married’, but to make it official with a ritual… Alas, this fluttering in his belly couldn’t be butterflies, but it damn felt like those pretty small insects had found in his stomach a new home!

“Have you just asked me for my hand in marriage?” he asked; his voice suddenly hoarse.

Jim shrugged, nodded, smiled, rubbed his neck, smiled again – and was lost for words.

Spock was about to turn around and to lead the others away to grant Jim and Khan some privacy, but Nyota prevented it the moment she threw her head back and groaned, “For God’s sake, boys, just do this special moment right! Hell, even Spock went down on a knee, so…” She made a fleeting gesture with her right hand and nodded invitingly to Kirk, who blinked uncomprehendingly.

“What?”

Uhura sighed. “For a genius you can be really dumb, Kirk. Hell, you began to ask him so bring it to a correct end. And because you are the only one of you two who is in the condition to be able to do this whole ‘kneeling-thing’, so go for it.”

Still Jim stared at her in confusion, then it hit him. Almost hastily he rose from his chair; cheeks flaming red. His own heart seemed to thunder in his ears, as he realized what he was about to do – that he was proposing to the one being he loved with everything he was. Gulping, he closed the distance to his beloved and bent one knee; gripping Nien’s good hand in the process.

“You wanted to know, if I just asked you to marry me, and the answer is ‘yes’.” He gulped again, as he watched his bondmate’s eyes beginning to shine with an inner light he hadn’t seen before. And… were those tears which welled up in the ocean-colored depths? Yes, obviously. And they were Jim’s undoing. The next words came over his lips without further thought. “I love you, Nien. I never thought that I could love someone the way I love you. You are the other half of my soul. You make me whole – and I would be the happiest man alive to call you ‘husband’. So… would you marry
Khan Noonien Singh had often heard those words – among the people in his palace, on the streets, one time even among his family as Otto asked Katie to marry him. In secret dreams he had longed to hear those words meant for him, too. That someone would want to share their life with him not to gain advantages or power because of his nature and status, but because out of love. True love! He knew that some lovers he had taken to his bed had hoped for him to utter these words, but he never had felt attached enough to someone to choose him or her as a partner for life.

But this had changed now – because of this beautiful, fierce young man in front of him with the eyes of the skies, the hair of the sun and a heart made of gold.

Jim Kirk was different than any other one Khan had ever met.

This proud young man had caught him with his ability to see behind façades and his drive to do what was right; no matter what. The moment he first had laid eyes on Jim – out of breath, holding a phaser rifle and having just check-mated Khan’s vessel at the HQ – he had felt an odd connection towards him. Their gazes had locked only for two or three seconds – seconds in which Khan had felt for the first time something new after the terrible pain his belief of his family being dead had brought him. There had been an odd challenge, paired with something that drew him to his opponent. As he saw him again on the Klingon homeworld he had realized that this young man was just like him: He never quitted – and he loved as deeply just as Khan loved: With everything he was. The blows Nien had received had hurt – of course – but somehow, he had sensed that he had earned them. He had seen the same pain in Kirk’s eyes that haunted him for days now.

It was the understanding of this special pain that brought them together in the end. It hadn’t been the fact that Khan’s blood flowed now in Kirk’s veins or the passionate minutes on Kirk’s bed as he had seduced the younger man against his will. No, it had been the moment Jim reached out to him as the anguish had become too much, and the silent offer of sharing a drink – something that held a special place in the Indic culture Kirk certainly hadn’t knowledge of.

It had been the first step, followed by their crazy love-making afterwards. Jim had accepted him in those hours as a lover; forbidden or not. Later he had lied for him to cover for him – and then, after Turkana, Khan had fallen prey to the incredible charm, warmth, humor and above all forgiveness the younger man showed.

They were so alike in many ways – and still there were differences between them that made them hold each other on the tips of their toes.

Jim was brilliant; a genius in his own way. He was clever, loyal to the death, stubborn like a mule and generous even towards his enemies. He could be a fierce warrior, but also an overgrown boy
who teased, joked and drove his superiors almost nuts. Like a storm Jim Kirk had ripped into Khan’s life, had tumbled it upside-down, had gotten hold of him and had pulled him with him – straight into this crazy world full of stars, strange beings, dangers and liberty. He had made Khan do things the Augment had never thought to be possible. Alas, he had even accepted Kirk being his captain aboard the Enterprise – and it had felt right. Still did! On the bridge Jim was his commanding officer – someone he would follow and protect without second thoughts. In private they were equals, never trying to order the other one around but willing to listen and to tolerate the other one’s opinion.

Jim Kirk had shown him a life worth living, risking his own freedom for it. Now they were bonded – their souls entwined ‘til the day of death, and nothing felt as right as this. So, to make the latter official – to show the whole world that they belonged to each other – was something Khan had not dared to hope for, but it was now offered. And it made his heart, mind and soul sing in joy – enhanced or not. How should he put this offer down? Never, of course.

Reaching out carefully with his broken arm, he cupped Jim’s still heated cheek with his hand; his thumb drew gentle circles on Kirk’s sun-kissed skin.

“You were the first who treated me as a human being in this world. You reached out to me to sooth my pain, covered for me and stayed with fierce loyalty to us. You showed me how misled I was, took my hand and led me back to the light – away from the icy darkness life had become for me. You gave me new hope and showed me the true meaning of love. Your tenderness wiped away the cruel scars I received from Marcus and the others; your love chased away the demons which possessed me. You changed me into something better and tamed the monster I was about to become. You woke something in me I thought I had lost: the ability to trust and to love someone besides my family.” He bent forwards and pressed his forehead against Jim’s; smiling as he saw a single tear running down his beloved’s cheek. “Yes, I want to marry you in the human way – or the Vulcan way, or whatever it takes to make the whole world see that we are one in two bodies and that no-one can ever tear us apart.”

To his horror Jim had felt his throat tightening at Nien’s first words, and then the lump in his throat almost hindered his ability to breathe. Nien’s gentle admission of love brought tears to his eyes and he knew that he couldn’t utter one sound in the moment except for a sob, so he tried to stay silent. He succeeded only partly and he knew that the others heard him, but he didn’t care. All that mattered were those lovingly blue-green eyes in front of him, the gentle rumble of Nien’s baritone and those words which changed everything again. Their lips found each other in one single, swift movement and the bond between them flared up. Their breaths mingled with each other, their proximity was the only thing that mattered, while Jim slipped his arms around the man he loved and held him close. The kiss wasn’t made of the fierce passion that engulfed them so often, but was a child of the deep feelings they had for each other.

Spock – feeling a little bit awkward to witness something so private and sincere – looked away at Nyota, and lifted a brow. She had pressed one delicate hand on her mouth and her eyes were wide and teary. As she felt his gaze, she glanced at him; her gaze full of emotions he partly couldn’t name. He knew that her sensibility that bordered at empathy was getting the better of her; her ‘heart’ going
out for her friend and captain, and certainly for the Augment too, who had gained their respect and comradeship within the last weeks.

Beside him Cogley rubbed his neck; half moved by what he saw and heard, half embarrassed to watch the two lovers in front of him. This moment was theirs alone and he had the certain urge to go away to give Kirk and Khan privacy, but he knew that he only would disturb them, so he stayed. He looked up to the tall young half-Vulcan beside him and tried not to stare as he saw deep in those dark eyes something akin to joy and fondness. Yes, the rumors that the son of the Vulcan ambassador and the youngest captain of Starfleet had become close friends were true – seeing the fact that Kirk’s happiness elicited an almost emotional response from Spock.

The latter leaned back in his chair and looked away from his *T’hy’la* and Khan, which still were locked in a tight yet tender embrace and whispering to each other quiet enough that not even his keen hearing was able to make out the words. And, besides, it would be highly impolite to eavesdrop. A second later his attention was really driven away, as Nyota – who sat beside him – leaned her head against his shoulder; closing her eyes. Hesitantly he wrapped his arm around her shoulder; displays like this in public were unusual in the Vulcan culture, yet they were for once alone in the garden and, as he told himself, Nyota was human like a part of him was. So, there was no reason to deny her and himself the pleasure of some innocent touches.

His gaze wandered back to Jim and Khan, and this time he felt the very un-Vulcan urge to smile that he suppressed only half successfully. Both men had buried their faces at each other’s throat and still held each other – a picture of utter closeness, content and love.

And for just now the world was all right…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I couldn’t resist to let them propose to each other – to herald an upcoming wedding of our two boys. Yeah, romanticism pure (laugh). I gave a lot of thoughts about this special matter, because an official marriage would protect both in a special way by law – and their love would be shown to the whole world.

That Rodriguez and the others would be outraged was something you certainly already expected and I hope I found the perfect way between their wrath and their rationality – including a good scene to show again Jim Kirk’s unique character and strong patriotism
we often saw in the original series. I hope you liked it.

The meeting of Khan’s crew with The Shadow – gang comes in the next chapter, including an unexpected re-union, and you also going to meet Uhura’s family (and Spock’s uncle).

Like always I hope you liked the new chapter enough to leave some feedback (smile).

Have a nice rest of the week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Thank you so very much for the many comments you left and the kudos. I’m happy that you liked the last chapter so much and that you were so smitten with the big proposal. Well, and after the proposal several calls and arrangements have to be made. Therefore our friends have a lot to do in the new chapter, including a certain talk with T’Pau. Oh, and Otto, Rodriguez and the others are going to meet The Shadow-gang (be ready for a lot to laugh).

So, no more prelude.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 98 – Of marriages and other plans

The prior evening McCoy had instantly known that the shit had hit the fan the moment the Augments had beamed back from visiting Khan. He didn’t need to be a genius to conclude what had dropped their mood. The evening had been tensed and he had had to answer a lot of questions they bombarded him with – especially regarding the health of their leader and what the scientists had tried to gain by abusing them all as lab rats. Bones had been glad when he finally was able to beam over to New Gol; knowing that the next day wouldn’t be any better.

Of course, he could understand them. He had been outraged about these things for weeks now, yet it was an almost eerie feeling to watch the anger building and ebbing away only to rebuild every time another enhanced man or woman was told what happened to them and Khan.

The next morning wasn’t any better, yet – at least – Rodriguez had calmed down. Finally. Last but not least because of Joaquin, who sat with the oldest of the Augments on a bed like two children during a pajama party. And they weren’t alone. In front of them sat a slightly tired Pavel Chekov, who had beamed down to visit his new friend – and found himself in the focus of two dozen enhanced men and women who watched him with obvious curiosity.
Being the sunny guy he always was, he tried to lighten up the mood. His warm behavior coupled with this boyish innocence and his genius brain, won one after another of the Augments. And as Bones looked in on them in the late morning, he saw Chekov and Rodriguez talking with each other as if they had known the other one for years now.

Inwardly the CMO shook his head. Pavel and his boyish charms really could do some magic. His gaze found Joaquin, who grinned at the young Russian; obviously happy that his friend had been able to brighten the atmosphere at least a little bit.

Smiling to himself Bones was about to leave again and to wait for the next four Augments to be beamed to the room where the stasis-chambers were placed – as was still for all cases they were woken up there – when his communicator beeped.

“I know by the ringing-sound that it’s you, Jim,” he grumbled into the little device as soon as he had answered the hail.

“Yes, it’s me,” Kirk’s joyful voice sounded from the tiny speakers. “Do you have a moment?”

Bones shrugged, even if his friend couldn’t see it. “Yeah, why not. Scotty is about to beam the next Augments over in ten minutes, the last four are slumbering in the second large room and your sweetheart’s siblings, who visited him yesterday, have come out of their foul mood – mostly.” He returned the challenging looks of said siblings without blinking, before he looked at the ensign. “Thanks to our sunny Pavel Chekov and the everlasting enthusiasm of Joaquin Weiss.”

Jim sighed. “We already assumed that Nien’s crew wouldn’t take the news easy. I’m glad that they calmed down by now.”

“Yeah, they did.” Leonard affirmed and stepped into the detection area of the door sensors, which instantly activated the doors to slip open.

Kirk cleared his throat. “I called to ask a favor of you. Are you free in five or six days – say, in the morning?”

McCoy frowned and halted on the threshold. “All of the Augments will be awake by then and… yes, if there are no complications I can spare some time. Why?”
“Well, I need you as my best man,” Kirk answered wryly.

Bones nodded. “Sure, no problem. Of course I can… You need me AS YOUR BEST MAN?”

Two Vulcan nurses and a healer, who had just walked down the hallway, stopped in the middle of their tracks and looked at him with the typical ‘there-is-no-need-to-scream-you-illogical-human’-look. But just right now McCoy couldn’t care less. He returned to the large room and the doors closed behind him; keeping the talk away from the official hallways.

“You… you are going to… You need me as… When has this hap… You are going to be mar…,” he stuttered; not realizing that all the Augments in the room and Chekov looked with surprise and partly big eyes at him.

At the other end of the line Jim Kirk began to laugh; sounding as happy as a boy under the Christmas tree.

“Yes, I’m going to be married. Officially! I proposed to Nien a few minutes ago and he accepted.”

It slipped McCoy’s attention that his jaw was hanging open and that he wore the most perplexed expression Rodriguez and the others had seen in a very long time.

Joaquin lifted a triumphal fist into the air and let out a loud whoop that was certainly heard even outside on the campus.

It seemed to be a kind of starting shot, because all of sudden most Augments began to whisper or to talk to each other. Those of them who had only learned hours ago of what happened in the last two years and that their leader was bonded to a casual human who was the captain of a spaceship, asked more questions; demanding to meet this ‘extraordinary man who had been able to win Khan Noonien Singh’. Katie clapped her hands and embraced two other enhanced women, who instantly began to talk of ‘about damn time all this was for Khan’. Rodriguez seemed to be torn between rolling his eyes and a grin, while Pablo, Paolo, a still very groggy Juan (a Spaniard who had been woken up the last evening) and a wide beaming Chang began to make plans for the wedding. Colin McPherson, an English Augment whose DNA was rooted in a Scottish man, sat carefully up in his bed; unable to hide the shock-like surprise that his beloved brother and leader was about to wed – and to a ‘normal’ human above all. Pavel Chekov, whose jaw, too, had almost hit the floor, began to smirk and screamed a “Congratulations, Keptin!” at McCoy’s direction, before he and Weiss embraced each other as if they were brothers.
“BONES!”

Kirk’s impatient voice tore McCoy finally out of the dazed state he had been lost in, and it was clear that his friend must have already called him a few times.

“Yeah?” he asked hoarsely.

“You’re still with us or shall I call Sorel to have a look at you?”

Leonard closed his mouth with a clear click, before he cleared his throat and croaked, “Did I hear you just right? You and Khan are going to get married?” He had to raise his voice because of the noises around him.

“Yes, I just did,” Kirk affirmed. “And from what I hear of the entire racket in the background, I think Nien’s siblings have heard the news, too.”

Bones looked around and for a moment the doctor and scientist awoke in him. There they were: Enhanced men and women, three times stronger than a casual human, more intelligent than Einstein, superior in so many different ways, warriors of their own – and they behaved like a class full of children who had been told that school was over for the rest of the week. McCoy couldn’t help himself: He had to smile.

“Yes, they heard you – and they are happy.” He began to chuckle. “You should see them. I don’t think one of them will miss the opportunity to see Khan getting married.”

Kirk sighed. “Well, I thought so – and this gives us a little problem. Where shall the ceremony take place? With 71 Augments, a few Vulcans…”

“Half of the crew,” McCoy threw in ‘helpfully’.

“Yes, and… WHAT?” This time it was Jim, who almost squeaked. Some Augments began to chuckle; recognizing the humor in the whole talk between the doctor and his superior.

McCoy grinned. “You don’t think that you can run off to get married without your crew taking
notice of it and wanting to join the fun?" He began to snicker. "And just imagine Barnett – or worse, Komack! – when they learn that you married and whom." He had to laugh now. "Sweet Lord, I would spend a whole month’s salary if I could see their faces."

At the other end of the line, Jim Kirk groaned. "Maybe we can marry in secret?" he asked no-one in particular, but his hope was destroyed by Chekov, who shouted in the CMO’s direction.

"Njet, Keptin! No chance! I’ll tell everyone zat you’re getting married."

"One word, Ensign, and I will call on discip…"

"You’re off duty, Keptin, so you can’t discipline me," Pavel almost singed and he wasn’t the only one who laughed, as Kirk growled something about ‘impertinent youth’.

Some of the Augments, who had been woken up only hours ago, listened curiously but also fascinated by the interaction; wondering about the casual tone between a superior officer and a junior officer. As it seemed, there was a lot for them to learn.

"Well, just wait until I’m back this evening," Bones smirked. "I want to have details. All of them!"

"There are still a few weeks until Christmas, Bones, so your wishing list has to wait," Jim snickered back.

"You know the doctor, Captain. His grumpiness can only be outdone by his nosiness," sounded Spock’s voice from somewhere nearby Kirk.

Bones gasped. "Don’t tell me you informed the hobgoblin earlier than me!" he all but pouted.

Jim chuckled again. "Actually, he and Nyota were here as I proposed to Nien – but I’ll tell you about it later."

"He stayed while you proposed to Khan? Where is this Vulcan priority of keeping private matters private he so loves to point out? Or doesn’t it count for our overgrown elf when you’re involved?" McCoy grumbled; imagining the Vulcan lifting a brow in irritation.
Kirk laughed again. “As I said, I’ll tell you later.”

“You’re damn right you will!” the CMO groused. “Be sure of it, kid.” Then he lowered his voice and turned around to at least get the feeling of speaking privately to Jim. He was all too aware that the enhanced men and women behind him would catch every word he may whisper.

“Congratulations, Jim. If you ask me, it’s the best step you two can make. Give Khan my greetings and congratulations, too.”

“With pleasure, Bones – and thanks! We’ll speak this evening. Kirk out.”

McCoy closed his communicator, pocketed it, turned around again, watched the Augments and rubbed his face. “I need a drink,” he mumbled. He met Chekov’s amused gaze and sighed deeply, “I really do!”

ST***ST

Having informed Bones as the first of the longer list he would have to contact, Jim called Scotty in the cellars of the hospital; learning that the next four Augments were beamed over and were successfully woken up. Understanding his captain’s reasoning concerning the delay to inform Bob and therefore Starfleet of his intentions to marry Khan, the chief engineer agreed to stay silent about it; promising to have a word with Chekov before they would beam up in the later afternoon.

Next, he contacted The Shadow-gang. With Galven still aboard the Enterprise, helping in Engineering, Kirk was glad that it was Caviw who answered his hail so that word of his upcoming marriage wouldn’t race through his ship quicker than light. Yes, he would inform Bob about the news, but later – when everything else was settled; like, for example, the Vulcans officially announcing the Augments as a separate species.

Of course, the Caitian was squealing and squeaking in joy as she learned of Jim and Khan getting wed within the next days, and promised to come by as soon as possible. She also accepted Kirk’s request to inform Galven only after his beaming down from the ship and quickly told her his reasons for it, which got him another outburst of excitement. As Jim finally cut the link, his ears were ringing. Who had thought that Caitians could make such shrill noises? He looked at Nien, who only sighed and rolled his eyes, while Spock looked like he was following a really fascinating experiment. Obviously, it was his best option of dealing with the overjoyed reactions of Caviw.
In the meantime, Joaquin called Nien; congratulating him and then the communicator he had went from one Augment to the next. This way, Khan not only spoke to his siblings he already met the day before, but also to those who had woken up just now. And it gave him another piece of peace, relief and joy. Some of them were still groggy, seven were still lost in natural sleep, others were already clear enough in mind to comprehend what was going on and bombarded him with questions.

Samuel Cogley had tactfully left the scene to grant his clients some privacy; inwardly smiling that his simple suggestion had such a good outcome. He almost pitied the Enterprise’s first officer, who sat on one of the chairs and looked a little bit lost by being confronted with so many emotions around him. He had been the first who congratulated Jim and Khan after the proposal; laying a hand on the captain’s shoulder and wished him happiness with a strange shimmer in his eyes which Samuel had acknowledged as ‘natural moisture’ – meaning tears.

He knew the young half-Vulcan would rather die than to admit it, but his loyalty towards his friends – and particularly Kirk – was based on the deep feelings of friendship and affection. And after all he had been through within the last three years, the trauma of losing his home planet still living in him, his control showed cracks here and there. And to congratulate Jim was one of those moments. Cogley remembered half amused, half moved, how Spock also congratulated Khan; offering his hand in the human way on full purpose to show his acceptance – something the Augment realized and accepted. Both men had shaken hands for a few seconds; making another step like this on their path of peace towards each other.

Uhura had given into her happiness for her captain and the Augment leader she had come to regard as a comrade. Simply pulling Jim into an embrace and giving him a kiss on the cheek she had wished him happiness, before Khan got the same treatment which made him first lift both brows in wonder, then he had returned her gesture with his good arm, thanking her. And that his gratitude wasn’t only referring to her congratulations, but also to her utterly accepting him into the circle of Kirk’s little Enterprise-family, was obvious.

Now, first officer and coms officer sat on their chairs and listened to the communicator talks around them – Spock a little bit uncomfortable to ‘disturb’ something so private with his presence, Uhura happy for her friends and smiling brightly.

With a last look at the four people in the garden, Cogley made a short walk through the gardens; knowing that the four needed some time for themselves now.

After Jim had made the calls, he spoke with Spock about the next steps – especially concerning Cogley’s suggestion that the Augments would be introduced to the Federation as an acknowledged separate species; officially recognized by the Vulcans.
Selek wasn’t available until the later afternoon, as his secretary told Jim when the captain tried to reach the older version of his Vulcan friend. Colony-matters had taken the Elder’s full attention, and somehow Kirk was even glad that fate prevented him from asking Old Spock for another favor. Selek had already so much done for him, Jim really would have felt bad to ask him for more. That left only one other high-ranking official who would be able to take the legal action, and whose word would never be doubted by any judge or member of the Federation Council: T’Pau.

And because time was important by now and Jim Kirk was not one who put something on the shelf, he found himself together with Spock walking towards the matriarch’s office only a few minutes later. Cogley was ready to join him as soon as Kirk would call him, but in the meantime the lawyer remained with Khan to ask him for more details; Nyota stayed with them – something the former dictator appreciated, because Uhura was not only highly intelligent, but her different point of view could be a helpful addition to the pow-wow the talk with Samuel always became.

Spock threw a short glance at his captain and friend. He knew that T’Pau more or less intimidated most people who met her – even Vulcans – and Jim Kirk wasn’t any exception, yet he walked with the straight posture and the determined expression of a man with a mission who would stop at nothing. Well, if you can say one thing about James Kirk, it was that he never stopped at anything once his mind was set.

Being T’Pau’s grandson was indeed an advantage, because only a minute after they arrived at the anteroom they were led into the high priestess’ office before her secretary closed the door behind them.

Spock lifted his right hand into a ta’al. “I come to serve,” he said the traditional greeting towards an Elder.

Jim, still practicing on optimizing the so easy looking but complicate executed hand-gesture, mirrored the ta’al and additionally bowed his head; repeating Spock’s words.

“You please me with your presence, Spock,” T’Pau answered in Standard. “The same goes for you, James.” She leant back in her chair. “How can I offer my support?”

Jim’s face betrayed some surprise, while Spock’s remained stoically calm. The old woman watched the young human male and for second the left corner of her mouth seemed to curl a millimeter. “Why else would you be here for a briefing with me without requiring it first?”

Kirk blushed. “Sorry, Ma’am, if I went against protocol by coming to you without any preannouncement, but… it’s really urgent.”
T’Pau’s gaze shifted to her grandson. “It isn’t against protocol. Otherwise Spock would have told you so. Yet it is… unusual.” She cocked her head and made a short gesture towards the visitor’s chairs. As soon as the two men had sat down, she asked, “With what can I help you?”

Jim glanced at Spock. To tell the truth, he hadn’t given any detailed thoughts on how to proceed from here, and he was relieved as his friend rose to speak.

“As James Kirk’s T’hy’la I politely want to bring to your attention that he has proposed to his already bonded mate and wants to marry him officially – by Vulcan law.”

Jim’s eyes widened. Well, that was straight to the point – typical for Vulcans. And somehow, he had the feeling that Spock had just let drop a bomb. He looked at T’Pau and for a second he wished he would have brought a camera with him, because the old lady looked as perplexed as a Vulcan could. After a moment her control was back in place, while she lifted a brow.

“You want marry officially Mr. Singh, James? Then, by human tradition, I think congratulations are in order, but allow me my question, why you want a marriage under Vulcan law?”

“Because of Mr. Singh’s small, yet undeniable psionic ability,” Spock took the liberty to speak for Jim again. “Both men share a mental bond, as my older counterpart and I detected as we mind-melded with Mr. Singh. Vulcan bonded couples come under the special protecting law to never be separated, neither by the taken job nor by trial. In Vulcan cases it is necessary out of… some natural matters. In Mr. Singh’s case a likewise necessity is given, because we have proof how much it affected him to be separated from those he shares a family link with. We have no proof of how a separation between him and his bonding-mate for a longer time will affect him, but I dare to guess that it would be worse than being away from his siblings.” He glanced at Jim. “And seeing that Captain Kirk is a non-telepath yet developed the bond with Mr. Singh gives me reason to assume that a too long separation from his bonding-partner will hurt him – even damage him.” He looked back at T’Pau. “So, if they marry under Vulcan law it will fulfill the requirement of being placed under The Vulcan Bill of Rights that is a part of the Common Laws of the Federation – in other words, no-one can separate them.”

T’Pau watched both men for a few moments. “Your logic is flawless, Spock – almost. Because there is one detail you haven’t thought of: Mr. Singh and his people are not an official recognized species and in here lies the problem. The Federation Council could declare the marriage as null and void under these circumstances.”

Jim could be wrong – had to be wrong, after all Spock was Vulcan – but he thought he saw for a fleeing second a smug expression on his friend’s face, before his first officer answered.
“Of course, it was thought about this detail before we came to you, T’Pau. With the given authority of a Starfleet captain, Jim already declared them as their own species, after Admiral Allistor, Admiral Barnett’s predecessor, stripped them of human status and declared them as non-sentient beings – a fundamental error in judgment that has to be rectified. And given the whole circumstances and the tiny but definite difference between the casual humans and the Augments – the Augments’ psionic ability, for example – to recognize them officially as their own species will be the best solution. It will put them into a better position when the time comes to be introduced into the Federation. It also will place them under full protection, because when they’re recognized as their own race you also have to consider their low number which will automatically give them the status of an endangered species. Mr. Singh’s crew would be utterly safe. And Mr. Singh’s fate would be moderated if he and Jim were protected by the Vulcan Marriage Law, no matter the outcome of the trial.”

T’Pau had listened closely and thought for almost a minute, before she looked straight at Kirk.

“You want me to acknowledge officially the Augments as their own species.”

Jim almost sighed. There was really almost nothing you could hide from a Vulcan – especially from this old lady.

“Vulcans can confirm the Augments’ mental abilities because they are touch telepaths. And a Vulcan’s word weighs a lot in the Federation – especially yours, Ma’am. So, yes, I want to ask you if you could make the legal steps to recognize the Augments as their own race.”

“They are coming from Earth – they are humans, James, despite their engineered nature. To acknowledge them as their own species will be difficult.”

Kirk cocked his head. “There were further human species on Earth, who didn't belong to the Homo Sapiens, but mixed with him over the thousands of years, Ma’am. The Aborigines of Australia, for example. They are humans, but their DNA differs minor from that of the modern humans – meaning the Homo Sapiens. The same goes for several other people which still live in the South Asian area. They are humans but their DNA has still some minor yet clear differences from our one. Their ancestors are called the Denisovan-humans. The Neanderthal-humans belonged at the beginning to this group, too, before their paths parted and the Neandertalers diverged before they died out. And that’s not all. There were other people who were related with the Homo Sapiens, yet had some differences within their defining DNA. They mixed with the Homo Sapiens during the evolution until only a few percent of their DNA differs from ours today. The Denisovan-humans and we are all called hominoids and we all came from the same prehistoric man - the Homo Erectus – only the evolution went different paths and the Homo Sapiens became prevalent in the end”
T’Pau had listened carefully. “An interesting detail I just learned about your planet and its original habitants, James. And I think I know to what you are up to. You want to get the Augments recognized as a further hominoid species.”

“It would the most correct one,” Jim nodded. “Okay, the differences between the Augments and us are based on modern engineering, yet those scientists 290 years and more ago created a separate race of humans – and as such they should be accepted. It would give them the same rights all the other hominoids have but also puts them under protection because of their low number.”

The Vulcanness pursed her lips. “This could be a solution. The main differences between the Augments and the ‘casual’ humans are their physical strength and their psionic abilities.”

“That’s not all. They are far more intelligent and adaptable to situations. And there are some further abilities which normal humans lack,” Kirk added. “For example, the Augments heal very much quicker, their immune system is more or less insuperable, their senses are stronger – not to mention the fact that their blood can cheat death.”

T’Pau lifted a brow. “I don’t think the latter should be made official knowledge – or neither Mr. Singh and his siblings, nor you will ever find any peace. Yet the other points could be added to the documentation why the Augments should count as their own group of hominoids.” She was lost in thought for a minute, and none of the two men dared to interrupt her pondering.

Finally, she murmured, “Selek had already mind-melded with Mr. Singh and confirmed the man’s low but existing telepathic skills. And I mind-melded with the boy – Mr. Weiss. I also felt the family tie between him and Mr. Singh – a kind of bond normal humans are unable to develop. That speaks for itself, yet we have no proof that all Augments have those skills. I would have to touch the mind of all of them to declare them officially as a telepathic species which puts them under further protection laws.”

Jim understood what she said between the lines. It would be difficult for her. As strong as she was, to touch the mind of so many humans would be pure stress for her.

“Maybe Sorel, Selek or Sarek could assist you,” he suggested. “They all are exalted representatives of New Vulcan – two of them are even Elders. Their word is as good as yours.”

“True,” T’Pau answered. “And it would solve several problems we already talked about together with Mr. Singh three days ago.” She came to a decision. “I’ll contact Sarek. He, Mr. Singh, you and I should talk to some of the Augments who hold a higher-ranking position in Mr. Singh’s crew. They have to agree to your idea.”
Jim suppressed his urge to grimace. To tell Rodriguez that someone was going to poke into his head would be so much fun! Yet there was no other way. Maybe he could first win Katie for his plan. It hadn’t slipped his attention that she was absolutely smitten with the Vulcans. Well, if you compared them to some Elven characters of Tolkien, whose books Kirk had read too, he could understand the enhanced woman. There were moments he could swear Spock – or T’Pau – could read his mind without touching him or had a foresight into the future.

“I’ll ask some of Nien’s siblings to come to New Gol to discuss the whole thing. Otto Hoffmann and Rodriguez seem to be Nien’s confidants, together with Chang, Paolo, Pablo and Mrs. Hoffmann. I have the feeling that’s half the battle when they agree.”

More or less familiar with those phrases, T’Pau knew what Kirk meant and simply nodded. Then she folded her hands on the desk-surface – a gesture Jim became familiar with by now.

“Regarding your upcoming wedding, James,” she switched to the other important topic, “you do know that you – how is this human phrase going? – will put Starfleet Command’s nose out of the joint by marrying Mr. Singh officially? You already have to face trial because you covered for him and he is accused of several serious crimes – even if he was driven to act like he did. You could get into even more trouble by choosing this way.”

Kirk shrugged. “Admiral Barnett is aware of Nien’s and my relationship. To make the whole thing official will tell him – and others – that our relationship isn’t an extended one-night-stand, but that we’re damn serious about it.”

Again, the old Vulcanness made an affirming gesture. “Logical,” she murmured. Then she lifted a brow. “You said you want to marry under Vulcan law. This would be possible if there wouldn’t be one fact that makes your intention almost impossible. Neither you nor Mr. Singh are Vulcans.”

Jim stiffened and his mind began to race. “Yes, we are not Vulcans, but… Nien has mental abilities and so…”

“There a many species who have some telepathic skills, yet there has never been the case that they bonded under Vulcan law,” T’Pau interrupted him. “Our laws were made from us for us.”

Her voice was not unkind but stern.

Kirk felt his stomach drop for a moment, but he wouldn’t give up. Never! “Spock’s mom…” he
“Amanda Grayson married one of us, but – as I said – none of you both is Vulcan.” Her gaze held his for several seconds, before she leaned back in her chair. “But Sarek and I welcomed you into our clan as Spock’s T’hy’la and we promised you the protection of our family. I do think that under these special circumstances our traditions’ demand is satisfied. Your request of being married to your already announced bond-mate under Vulcan law is herewith accepted.”

For a few seconds Jim could only stare at her. First, she said why Nien and he couldn’t marry by Vulcan law and moments later she found an excuse to circumvent the rules? Dammit, if this wasn’t a demonstration of a dry sense of humor! And of rebellion – just like Spock rebelled as he turned down his place at the Vulcan Academy or Sarek as he married Amanda. He couldn’t help himself: He had to grin.

“You just got me worried there,” he mumbled; his grin turning into a wide smile. “Thank you, Ma’am!”

An odd expression of satisfaction rushed through her eyes, before the matriarch became businesslike again. Yet there stayed a certain gleam deep in her gaze that made Jim wary. She wasn’t done with him; this much was clear. Her next words proved it.

“You’re going to need an adept or a priest who will affirm your mental bonding and declare you as husband and husband. Do you have someone in mind for it?”

Jim turned serious again and gulped. Well, he hadn’t thought about it, but… “Maybe you can recommend someone?”

He was absolutely certain that he heard the old matriarch sighing, yet he managed to give the impression that he hadn’t heard it at all.

“Neither Starfleet Command nor the Federation Council will acknowledge something that important without being convinced that everything went by law and order. We have to make them accept your marriage by giving them no reason to doubt its legality or the Vulcans’ acknowledgement of you two being mentally bonded. As you said, my word counts a lot, so I think it would be for the best when I lead the bonding-ceremony.” She stopped and again pondered something for a second, before she looked at Spock.
“You and James are T’hy’la. In this regard it isn’t unheard in history of a double-bonding ceremony. There are plenty of legends which speak of T’hy’las getting bonded to their intended side by side. The times of those warriors have long been over, and for many hundreds years there haven’t been acknowledged T’hy’las among our people, so your brotherhood not by blood but by mind can be called unique which leaves us with some latitude. And seeing that you are going to marry a human woman – just like your father – and that you’re T’hy’la with your human captain, the upcoming bonding-ceremony is already unusual. So, if you are willing, I will first bond you and Nyota and afterwards James and Mr. Singh.”

Jim didn’t even realize that his jaw hung open, while he looked with eyes as large as saucers first at T’Pau and then at Spock. Only as he caught his friend’s pointed glare did he close his mouth with a click. And with this his brain began to work again.

“Uh… Spock,” he began lamely; feeling his ears heating up. “This is your big day. Nien and I can marry later, so…”

“Jim, I know that you want to stay back to give Nyota and me a ‘special day’. But, as T’Pau already said, it is not unheard that T’hy’las marry their own mates at the same ceremony. In earlier times and even now it doesn’t lack for logic to marry at the same time at the same place. All those who have to attend the ceremony – the family members and the friends – are present, as well as the priests, the dignitaries and the witnesses. The Large Fire will be lightened up only once which will spare resources and – what is most important – both T’hy’las will make the same step in the same moment. None of them will stay behind – something that has a certain importance within our culture.” He placed a hand on Jim’s underarm; deep in his eyes lay warmth. “I would be honored if we both would be bonded to our intendeds side by side.”

Kirk gulped; feeling a little bit overwhelmed. “And Nyota?” he asked quietly. “Don’t you want to ask her first?”

“I’m certain that she goes along with T’Pau’s and my suggestion. Don’t forget that Nyota has a very rational mind.”

“Yeah, but when it comes to love we all lose rationality.”

Promptly Spock lifted both brows. “I do hope you don’t include me into that ‘we all’, Captain. I always keep my rationality.”

Kirk wriggled his brows. “Have you just admitted between the lines to feel love?” As Spock simply stared at him, Jim teased him further, “And concerning keeping your rationality, just ask Bob when
you left the battlefield to come to Nien’s and my aid during the Aldebaran-crisis – or when you
steered the Enterprise back into the Borderland to rescue me.”

“Both moves were acknowledged by Commodore Wesley, sir,” Spock answered almost stiffly.

Jim’s grin was wide enough to make his face hurt. “Yeah – after you made your moves. So, even
you said ‘bye-bye’ to rationality in those moments.”

This time the first office allowed himself a small sigh, while he looked to the ceiling in the more than
obvious silent prayer ‘Why me?’. Then both remembered where they were and turned their attention
quickly back to T’Pau, in whose eyes Jim thought to see another spark of amusement.

“If I wasn’t Vulcan I would worry now that you two are commanding Starfleet’s flagship,” she
deadpanned – and Jim had to laugh. He quickly tried to suppress it, but he was only half successful.
The old matriarch looked at her grandson; ignoring the young captain’s lack of control. “So, you
agree that James will be bonded to his own mate beside you?”

Spock made a short nodding gesture. “Yes, I do agree, T’Pau. As I said, I’ll be honored.” He still
heard Jim’s barely controlled chuckles and understood for the first time McCoy’s urge to kick Kirk’s
shin under the table on several occasions. If it wouldn’t be too human he would do the same just
right now.

Yet his grandmother surprised him again by simply giving Kirk a mild gaze that – o wonder – made
him restore his composure.

Clearing his throat, Jim bowed his head. “I thank you, Ma’am – also in the name of Khan.”

T’Pau straightened her small frame. “Then it’s settled. I’ll bond you two to your chosen mates in five
days.” She lifted a brow. “And now I have to make several arrangements concerning the new tasks
you two gentlemen just left me with. If you would excuse me, please?”

It was a polite booting out and both friends understood it as such. Quickly rising from their seats,
both gave her a ta’al and Jim also bowed. “Thank you for your help, Ma’am,” he said sincerely.

“The human return would be ‘you are welcome’,” T’Pau answered. “Before you go, James, I want
to give you some advice. Don’t inform Admiral Barnett too late about your intentions concerning
your wedding. Even I know that you have to inform Command contemporary about your decision of changing your personal status and I know Barnett as a man of honor. He is on your side, as much as I understood Selek. Don’t risk his patronage by showing him distrust.”

Jim frowned. “You yourself said that it would be the best if we publish everything Luengo, Marcus and Section 31 did. I don’t think that he is going to like it, so…”

“He will not ‘like’ it, but it gives him the chance to ‘make a clean sweep’ with everything, like you humans say. He’s in your and Mr. Singh’s debt which gives you an advantage. But you will gain more from it if you make him your true ally.”

Spock lifted a brow. Who had thought that his grandmother could be such a diplomat – or conspirator? The latter, of course, in a positive way.

Jim pursed his lips. “You think I should inform him about my intention of marrying Nien under Vulcan law and that the Augments are going to be recognized as their own species by your people?”

“The latter should be mentioned after it is done,” T’Pau stated. “It will cease any protest that maybe be risen from the Council. What is done, is done. Yet you shouldn’t keep him in the dark about your personal decision. If you want him to trust you to let you keep your command despite the fact that you covered, hid and protected a wanted man, you have to show him your trust in him and his person. I’ve learned that something like this makes all the difference in the end when it comes to humans.”

Kirk thought about it for a moment and had to admit that the old Vulcanness was right. They needed Barnett on their side and to inform him about the upcoming wedding was certainly a demonstration of trust. “I’ll speak with Nien. If he is okay with it, I call Barnett in person.”

“Very well,” T’Pau nodded. “You can use our communication unit for the call. Simply ask my secretary and she’ll connect you to the admiral. And now, Gentlemen, good day.”

They left the office and the anteroom, before Jim sighed deeply in relief. Looking at Spock he saw the Vulcan’s face softening. “That went well,” Kirk said and his first officer bowed in head in affirmation.

“I’m again surprised about your diplomatic skills, Jim.”
“Nah, it was you who gave the big prologue speech.” He smiled at him. “Thanks!”

“You are most welcome,” Spock answered, then he hesitated. “How shall we tell Nyota about the changes concerning our marriage?” he asked carefully; clearly not to certain of his beloved’s reaction to that news.

Jim realized some concern in the deep brown eyes, and smirked encouraging. Clapping the Vulcan on the shoulder he said, “No problem. As you said, she is rational.”

“We will have what?” Uhura stared wide-eyed at her fiancé, then at Kirk and finally at Khan, who had lifted both brows, and then back at Jim again. “Don’t tell me that was your idea!”

“It wasn’t, I swear,” Jim defended himself; lifting both hands in mock surrender. “Look, I already tried to tell T’Pau that this is yours and Spock’s big day and that Nien and I certainly won’t disturb it, but the old lady got all ‘logical’ on us how it would spare time and resources. And with Spock and me being T’hy’las and because of some old legends how warrior-brothers married their spouses in one and the same ceremony, she more or less insisted on it,” Kirk explained further. He knew this gaze from his comms officer. It was a silent accusing that he had done something wrong.

“Warrior-brothers?” Nyota asked dryly; glad that Cogley had drawn back into the house to work on his notes. This really was very personal, so she preferred to speak only with Spock, Kirk and Khan.

“Given Mr. Spock’s tendency to remember his ancestors’ more fierce behavior when it suits him, and seeing that Jim is indeed a fighter, I think the term ‘warrior-brother’ fits,” Nien commented wryly; chuckling as his words got him a short glare from Spock.


How did he think about a double-marriage? He wasn’t a fan of drawing general attention to his private life. And to marry Jim was certainly the most important step in his personal life ever – something he wanted to enjoy and to relish in. On the other hand, this whole wedding – with him being an Augment and Kirk being a casual human – was already uncommon enough. And to marry him under the law of an alien race on a foreign planet was even stranger. So, why not a double-marriage at the side of an important son of the spoken culture? If he understood the whole family-
structure of Spock’s clan then he came from royalty so to speak – the heir of Vulcans’ most important reformer. This was an advantage regarding the future, no doubt about it. And, by the way, he knew how much Spock meant to Kirk – that they were brothers in soul. And he, Khan, had also come to respect Nyota Uhura a lot. She was brilliant, a language-wonder and a genius on her own, not to speak of her really good looks and her fierce combat skills.

Yes, a marriage beside those two sounded better the more as he thought about it.

“I wouldn’t be averse to taking Jim as my husband at the side of you and Spock. As the Lady T’Pau obviously pointed out, it is only logical. After all it will save time and resources. The Vulcan colony is still under development and after the whole shock and trauma these people here went through, the priests and healers are certainly more than busy helping those who still suffer from the loss. So, we shouldn’t take more time from them as necessary. And, as I have to admit, I regard T’Pau’s offer as an honor. Spock is her grandson, so to lead his wedding ceremony is maybe common. But that she also offers to marry Jim and me – two non-Vulcans – is generous. I don’t want to offend her by rejecting her proposition. And, by the way, if she is the one who leads the ceremony there is no-one within Command or the Council who can repudiate our marriage.”

Spock lifted a brow and cocked his head. “Fascinating. You almost named the same arguments as T’Pau did. Your logic is nearly flawless.”

“That coming from you is a big compliment,” Khan deadpanned.

“I rather stated a fact,” Spock corrected him.

Kirk and Uhura exchanged a glance and sighed. As if it wouldn’t be enough that Spock and McCoy were bantering at any possible chance, now it was also Spock and Khan – well, the latter went on for some time now. And just like the everlasting teasing-battle between first officer and CMO, this one here was also done with respect and without hurting someone on purpose.

“I do hope, you two will learn to behave ’til our wedding-day and stop this silly mocking for once,” Uhura said; looking firmly back and forth between Spock and Khan. And why Nien suddenly felt like a youth rebuked by his mother, was beyond him, but just like Spock he simply bowed his head in affirmation.

Jim showed the more sensible part in the discussion by asking her, “Nyota, this is your marriage, too. How do you feel about it?”
Crossing her slender arms in front of her chest and pursing her lips for a moment, she watched him closely. He was uncomfortable with the concept—out of consideration for her and for Spock. The latter was okay with the suggested double-marriage, so…

“Will our team attend the ceremony?”

“I don’t think even a shipload full of Klingons could stop Scotty, Sulu and Chekov from coming. And I assume the same goes for Kevin, Keenser and some other of the officer staff—everyone Bob can do without for a few hours.”

“And McCoy will be your best man,” she mumbled, “As my sister will be my maid of honor.” She looked at Khan. “It would only be correct if one of your siblings would be your best man, too.”

“I thought we wed under Vulcan marriage law. Are there witnesses, too?” Nien asked curiously.

“The bonding ceremony is attended from the groom’s and the bride’s closest friends or siblings, which make certain that the wedding is rightful,” Spock cut in. “This tradition doesn’t differ so much from human marriage rituals. So, yes, of course one or two of your siblings can serve as wedding witnesses.”

Khan nodded slowly, before he looked back at Uhura; a hue of a gentle smile played around his lips. “May I interpret your comment and your questions that you are okay with a double-marriage?”

Nyota sighed deeply and threw her hands up. “Yes, of course! After all, it’s logical—and Jim and Spock are always joined at the hip, so why should this change all of sudden?” She lifted both brows. “But you wanted to be Spock’s best man, Jim. So how…”

“T’Pau will first marry you two and afterwards she’ll marry Nien and me.” He shrugged. “Vulcans are rational, as you know.”

“Interesting that you suddenly admit this,” Spock replied; giving him a pointed glance. “Only nine-point-three minutes ago you denied us to be rational under certain circumstances.”

“Spock, I teased you about throwing rationality out the next airlock if certain people’s welfare is at stake. That…”
“This I would subscribe to instantly,” Khan showed his dry humor once again. And while Uhura began to groan and Jim snickered, Spock only took a deep breath and wore his most bored expression to mask this odd mixture of irritation and amusement. Humans and their illogical but sometimes so quick minds! He should have listened to the warnings of his father!

“Rrrright,” Jim chuckled; fighting the sudden urge to embrace the two other males, because – really – just right now they were so damn cute. Clearing his throat, he turned sober again. “There is another topic Spock and I have to discuss with you, Nien. We spoke with T’Pau about your people and giving them the status of their own race.” He watched his beloved stiffening and took Khan’s good hand into his own. “Stay calm, honey. I think I have good news…”

ST***ST

The moment Khan called them, Otto and Rodriguez knew that something else than the upcoming marriage between their brother and Jim Kirk was going on. They simply felt it. Khan’s demand of them, Katie, Chang, Paolo and Pablo to come to New Gol in the afternoon would have even alarmed them, if they hadn’t sensed the calmness in their leader. Whatever the reason for this sudden request was, it wasn’t something bad. Joaquin would accompany them. First, he wanted to congratulate his older brother in person and then he had his own appeal to make.

So, as McCoy was done for the day – twelve more Augments rested now in the next room, all healthy yet groggy – he led Otto, the others and Colin McPherson, who demanded to accompany them to see his beloved brother and leader with his own eyes, to the transporter room of the hospital and beamed over with them. He heard Otto cursing as they re-materialized and he smiled in sympathy. At least one man who disliked transport-beaming just like he did.

For McPherson this wasn’t only his first visit of New Gol, but furthermore, it was the first time that he had a view at his surroundings outside of the hospital. Despite the heat and the higher gravity, he glanced around with large, curious eyes. The air was dry and smelled differently from what he knew from Earth. His look wandered over the nearby mountains – red and orange in color – over the sand-colored sky and the strange plants which bearded the desert landscape, and all of sudden it hit him with the strength of a truck: He was on a foreign planet – far away from Earth. Alas, he had never thought that he would live to see the day that something like this was possible. His glance found the elongated building that was the seat of the Vulcan’s priests as he had learned, took in the foreign yet pleasing architecture and smiled. Yes, he was certain that he would like to live in this world – despite everything that happened prior to his and the others’ waking up.

Greeting one of the Vulcan adepts at the entrance, McCoy led the others to the wing where he, Joaquin, Jim and Khan – and for two days now Samuel Cogley – lived and from there out into the gardens. Colin McPherson whistled in respect as he took into the large area with the strange trees, the
cactus-like plants, thin grass and interesting bushes. Several paths crossed the gardens and different terraces lay beneath large trees which offered a way-out shelter of the murderous sun.

He saw not far away two desk chairs, some folding chairs and a table, where he recognized a younger man with blond hair and… Khan!

“After you,” Bones invited him and the others, and followed them as Joaquin now took the lead and dashed forwards.

“Noo!” he called cheerfully and Khan barely had time to brace himself as he found his good arm full with an overjoyed Joaquin. “Congratulations, big-bro! I’m so happy for you.”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” the older Augment teased; ruffling the youth’s hair. Yet he couldn’t deny that his heart beat quickened by the mere thought of the upcoming wedding. And as Otto and the others stepped into his range of vision, he couldn’t suppress the wide smile that tugged at his lips.

Katie simply leant over Joaquin and pressed a kiss to Khan’s forehead. “I too, am very happy for you. I hoped that you two would make this final step, but that you will do it so soon is really awesome.”

McPherson stayed back, while the others congratulated Khan. Yes, he wanted to embrace his brother; convincing himself that Noonien was healing and insofar well as it was possible after all he had been through, yet he gave the others the advantage. Then those blue-green eyes which were so familiar found his brown ones and Khan gasped.

“Colin!” he whispered in awe to see all of sudden another of his siblings. Pushing Joaquin gently aside he sat up as far as it was possible and reached out to the other Augment with his good hand. A moment later, McPherson embraced him carefully so as not to hurt him. Yes, there had been times Noonien had been injured, too, but he had been told that the assault on his brother had been nine days ago and that Khan was still in such a bad shape spoke volumes of the damage that had been done to his body.

“How are you?” Colin asked quietly. “They told us what happened to you, but…”

“I’m very much better,” Khan interrupted him gently. And as McPherson backed away from him just enough to look him straight into the face, the Augment leader added with a smirk, “You should see
the other guy.”

“Guys – plural, if I understood Otto, Rodriguez and Dr. McCoy correctly.”

“Yeah, but the bastard who was responsible for it suffers now a broken jaw and nose, some serious bruises on his back and his lower half, broken rips and some things more that makes his life hell. And I’m certain that the Vulcan nerve pinch-grip still makes his nervous-system crazy. Spock, my first officer, was anything but gentle with him as he checkmated him.”

The man who spoke had a pleasant tenor and as McPherson turned around, he met impossibly blue eyes which looked curiously at him from the handsome face of the younger blond man.

“We haven’t met until now,” the male continued and offered him his hand. “James T. Kirk, usually captain of the Enterprise,” he introduced himself.

“Ah, our savior – and the man who captured Noonien’s heart.” The Augment took the other man’s hand. “Colin McPherson, Captain.”

“Please call me Jim. As I heard I’m now part of the family.”

McPherson’s eyes widened for a moment, then he nodded slowly. “Understandable. I can smell Noonien’s blood in you – and you’re already bonded to him, so you are indeed part of the family now.” He smiled. “Call me Colin.”

“With pleasure, Colin,” Kirk answered; bowing his head slightly.

Katie sat down beside Khan on the edge of the desk-chair. “So, you decided to make the big step,” she grinned at him. “I would have bet my last shirt that it would come to that.”

Nien sighed and looked at Jim, who was receiving congratulations from Otto and Rodriguez this moment. “Well, his proposal was… the most loving thing I’ve ever heard and there was no other choice than to accept.” Tenderness shone in his eyes and echoed in his voice, while he watched his bond-mate. “And, by the way, it only makes official what already happened in private.”
Katie chuckled. “Which wedding will take place first? Yours or Commander Spock’s?”

Khan smirked. “Oh, first Spock and Uhura are getting married and afterwards Jim and I – several minutes later, as it is.”

Mrs. Hoffmann stared at him. “A… double-marriage?”

“What?” McCoy gasped and whirled around to Jim. “You and Khan will marry together with Spock and Nyota?”

Kirk shrugged. “T’Pau more or less insisted on it. Nien and I marry under Vulcan law to fall under the protection of the Bill of Vulcan Rights that forbids anyone – judge or Command – to separate us. T’Pau in person will wed us. And because to spare time and resources, we two couples marry side by side.”

Bones only stared at him for a few seconds more, before he groaned. “Of course!Joined at the hips – even then. How should I assume otherwise?” He shook his head, but it was obvious that he had to suppress the grin that threatened to spread over his face to hold up his grumpy façade.

“A double-marriage?” Rodriguez blinked in surprise. “And you marry in consideration of these people’s traditions here?”

“Vulcans are touch-telepaths and have telepathic links with their mates – not unlike the bonds we have,” Khan explained. “If we wed under Vulcan law this bond is officially recognized as a psionic one, and Jim and I can’t be separated. It’s only logical.”

“Logic,” McPherson sighed. “It seems these giant elves here are only live for it.”

“It makes things easier for them. Their past was even more violent than that of Earth, and because Vulcans have very strong emotions – not unlike ours – they chose the path of logic. It ensured their survival – even if it means that they suppress their feelings until you think they have none.” Khan leaned back on the desk chair. “And the fact that we and the Vulcans have several important things in common is the reason, why I called you.”

“Sorry, Noonien, but these Vulcans may be peaceful and highly intelligent, yet their biology is very different from ours and…”
Rodriguez was interrupted by Khan, who smiled, “Believe me, dear brother, there are species which really differ from any hominoid. Compared with them, Vulcans are more human than…”

Katie gasped at this moment and her eyes were about to pop out of her head while her gaze hung at the door that led from the building into garden. The others followed the direction in which she was staring, and in the same moment Khan heard a familiar oinking voice,

“No problem, Master Vulcan, we already found the way. We’ve been here before, so don’t put yourself out on our account.”

“What in hell…” McPherson whispered, white as a sheet, while Otto gulped,

“Who was this odd comic-person back in our time the children loved so? Porky Pig?”

“Yeah,” Pablo nodded. “And they’re coming in double-package.” He cocked his head. “And… is this guy next to Porky Pig on the war-path or why does he have painted his face with stripes like that?”

Paolo whistled. “The girl is hot, to doubt here and… Does she have a TAIL?”

Khan closed his eyes; half exasperated, half amused, while Jim and Bones began to snicker. “This fits the topic perfectly,” Jim whispered; laughter bubbling deep in him. To watch Nien’s siblings’ reaction to the view of The Shadow-gang was more than funny.

“Hello all together,” Galven oinked cheerfully as soon as he had reached the group. Then he stepped to Khan and clapped him on the shoulder. “Hey, buddy, congratulations! We insisted on congratulating you and our sunny-boy here in person.”

Chang and Otto took a sharp breath as they heard how their leader was addressed – and that he didn’t seem to mind it.

Ritek shook Jim’s hand, while Caviw stepped to the other side of the desk-chair, bent down and pressed a kiss to Khan’s cheek. “I’m happy for you, white tiger,” she smiled.
“Thank you,” Nien answered, before he found his good hand captured by Jeff, who shook it like a pump handle.

“Congratulation, my friend. I hope you and Jim will have a happy life.”

“Tell this to the judge we’re going to face soon,” Khan grumbled; returning the gesture.

“It’ll be okay,” Galven smiled; his long nose twitched. “After all you got this super-lawyer. I don’t know how often he called Ritek or me within the last two days…”

“Or Jeff and me,” Caviw nodded.

“It really was a lot he wanted to know,” Gav nodded.

Khan frowned. “Why?”

“Because we had a part in the big issues you and Jim did within the last weeks,” Ritek smiled; offering his hand now too. “Congratulations, Khan. I’m happy for you and Jim.” He grinned over his shoulder at Kirk, who smirked back.

Khan finally realized that his siblings were still staring at the members of The Shadow with big eyes and partly open mouths. “Oh, may I introduce you to some of my siblings?” he addressed Galven and Ritek, before he turned his attention back to the other Augments. “Brothers, dear sister, please meet the command-team of The Shadow – the group that took me in and became true friends.”

Otto found his voice first. “You are the gang Noonien hung out with?”

Joaquin burst out laughing. “Haven’t I told you that they are funny guys?”

Caviw gave him a toothy grin. “Hi there, little lion. Everything all right?”
“Yes, of course,” Weiss smirked back.

“‘Little lion’?” Khan asked; lifting both brows. “Don’t spoil the boy too much.”

“He is the ‘little lion’,” she answered with a shrug. “The name ‘white tiger’ is taken by you,” she teased and ruffled with the tip of her tail through his hair, which elicited a further gasp from Katie and a throaty sound of utterly bafflement from Rodriguez and Pablo.

Shaking his head, Khan gripped Caviw’s tail with the speed of light and pulled gently at it, which brought him a playful growl followed by a hiss from her, while she showed her sharp teeth. “Easy there, pussy cat,” he chuckled; feeling more than comfortable in the presence of his former companions.

“Do you have a death wish to call me ‘pussy cat’?” she asked with a toothy smirk.

“Don’t forget: Tigers are stronger than little cats,” he retorted amused.

“Yes, but we are quicker!” With those words she jumped over the desk chair and Katie with one elegant looping in the air, landed gracefully on the balls of her feet, straightened her shape, turned around again and grinned at Khan; her tail whipping through the air. Then her eyes found the dark-haired woman who sat beside the enhanced man and gaped at her. The Caitian’s fine senses instantly recognized the predator and smiling she offered her hand. “Hi, I’m Caviw. And you are one of Khan’s sisters, right?”

“Yes, Katie Hoffmann,” the Augment-woman said hesitantly; still absolutely thunderstruck how easily these strange creatures behaved towards Khan. Then she remembered common behavior and accepted the offered hand. She felt how sharp those long nails were, but she suppressed any reaction towards it.

Jim and Bones watched the scene, took in the almost shocked faces of the Augments and had to laugh, before Kirk addressed Nien’s siblings, “As you see, there are a lot more sentient beings than humans and Vulcans. These here – he flipped a thumb at The Shadow – “are representatives of only a few species which belong to the Federation.”

Otto tore his gaze away from the odd people who surrounded Khan who obviously was glad to see them, and gulped again. “I have to agree, Jim. There is indeed a lot we have to learn.”
Chapter End Notes

Well, they indeed have to learn a lot – but the same goes also four our two couples concerning the upcoming ceremony (or when it comes to show Barnett some trust).

It was a lot of fun to write the scene of Khan’s crew meeting The Shadow-gang. Right, they had come to know some Vulcans, but if you latter compare with the Tellarits or the Rigelians… No wonder that Rodriguez and the others were about to faint (snicker). I also loved to write the scene with T’Pau and I hope I got the whole thing with the different human races from Earth right. I learned about it several years ago and did some researched in the web concerning hominoids which aren’t related to the Homo Sapiens – what also gave me the idea in which way Jim and the others can take action how the Augments can be recognized as an own species.

In the next chapter you’re going to meet Sarek’s brother Silek and Nyota’s family. Jim will call Bob and Barnett, the Augments learn of the friends plan to be acknowledged as an own race, and many things more.

I hope you liked the new chapter and – like always – I’m curios what you think of it.

Have a nice week

Love

Yours Starflight
Meetings

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Shortly before Christmas I finally got the next chapter done, Kat did once again a fantastic job on beta-reading it and at last I found some time to read it through once again, before I publish it now.

Thank you so much for the comments you left and I’m really happy that you’re still so smitten with the story.

One little thing in a private matter: I got a really big problem with my Microsoft Outlook program and lost a lot of contact addresses. So, Darry and Rhiannon, if you two read this chapter, please contact me at my known e-mail address so that I can write back. Just right now I haven’t any contact left which I could use to write to you.

For all the others: Enjoy the next chapter – there are waiting a few surprises for you.

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 99 – Meetings

“So, to get this straight: One of those elves lays his fingertips on my forehead, peeks into my mind, checks for some mental abilities and that’s that?” Rodriguez looked from his leader to Kirk and then to McCoy. “That’s crazy!”

“We’re talking about Vulcans here,” the CMO muttered. “‘Crazy’ is the secret name of these people.”

“Bones!” Kirk chided and shot him a glare. “I don’t think that your humor fits in the moment. Rodriguez and the others don’t know as much about Vulcans as we do, and are, of course, wary. Give them at least a chance to learn about them before your comments can be misunderstood.” It was a soft rebuke, but a rebuke nonetheless, and Leonard nodded with a grimace.
“Sorry.”

Jim sighed and looked back at Rodriguez; well aware of the other Augments’ gazes. They were all still coming to terms with the foreign appearances of Galven and the others, which had bid their farewell only ten minutes earlier; promising to help with the wedding-preparations if it was wanted and to attend the ceremony in five days.

“Nien and Jo already know what happens during a mind-meld…”

“A strange but not unpleasant experience,” Khan cut in, who had lay back on the desk chair and looked comfortable. “If the mind-meld goes very deep, like in my case, you may feel some nausea afterwards, but if the meld is only at the surface, you have no problems.” His gaze found Joaquin. “At least that’s what you told me.”

The boy made an affirming gesture. “Yeah. The old lady helped me with it as I was unsettled after all the mess with Norton and so on. It felt strange, but also calming. It’s nothing you have to fear.”

“Vulcans value privacy as much as the path of logic. Being a touch telepath brings something like this in its wake. Neither T’Pau nor one of the Elders would pry. They will only check the strength of your psionic for which only a superficial meld is needed. And you alone will decide how long it will last – or if you permit it at all,” Jim explained.

“Yet I would prefer if you grin and bear it,” Khan added. “If we’re recognized not only as our own race but also as a race with psionic, we – indeed – are protected by several special laws. Given our small number, our history with most humans and the partly still existing prejudice, it will put us in a far better position if those rules are applying for us.”

Otto sighed and leant back on his chair. “I do understand you, Noonien, but to imagine that someone looks into my mind is… troubling.”

Katie, having taken a chair for herself now too, cocked her head while she glanced at Joaquin. “You said, it is calming?”

Weiss nodded. “Yes, it is. How can I describe it? For a few moments you have the feeling as if you would never be alone again – just like the moment when I sense Noo, but stronger. It was warm and comforting. The Lady T’Pau is old and… you really can think she bears the wisdom of hundreds of years that whispers somewhere at the edge of your mind, like a touchless fondling. It makes you feel
as if you would be in the arms of a mother."

“I am surprised but also pleased that the mind-meld was a good experience for you, young one.”

The feminine, obviously old voice sounded from directly behind the group, and there wasn’t one of the humans – enhanced or not – who wasn’t startled.

Wide-eyed, Otto and Rodriguez sprang from their chairs, while they, Pablo and Katie gasped simultaneously, “Shanie?!”

Kirk and McCoy had quickly stood up, too, and bowed in respect, while Khan and Joaquin exchanged an amused glance about their siblings’ outburst – even if Nien asked himself how the old Vulcanness had been able to sneak up on them like this.

T’Pau looked from one to the other Augment; eyeing them. On the outside there was no difference between them and casual humans, even if they all were aesthetically pleasing to look on. Yet the High Priestess felt the unusual aura – a mixture of superior strength and arrogance, coupled with high intelligence that shone in their eyes and wariness. The latter was understandable. Even a Vulcan would be careful if he or she would wake up in another century on a foreign planet, surrounded by strange people.

And when one of these people held some resemblance to someone from the past, the wariness, of course, increased.

“I have already learned from Mr. Weiss that I resemble a foster mother from the days when you hovered on the threshold to adulthood,” she said calmly. “But, as you certainly realize, I am not the woman who showed you human warmth for the first time and took the youngest of you under her protection.”

Rodriguez recalled his position as the oldest of the surviving Augments and took a deep breath of the still hot air, even if the evening was near. “Ma’am,” he greeted; bowing his head. “I apologize for our lack of control, but… indeed you could be the twin of the lady who was something like a mother to the youngest of my siblings.”

“I know – and apologizes are unnecessary.” She looked at Khan. “Even your leader needed some time to calm his surprise, and he was forewarned.”
“Thank you for leaving out this detail,” Otto grumbled into Khan’s direction, who tried to suppress a smirk with little success.

“Just grant me some fun here,” he answered; winking at him.

Jim cleared his throat and stepped up to the old Vulcanness. “Ma’am, may I introduce some of Nien’s siblings to you.” He turned around. “Guys, please meet the Lady T’Pau, High Priestess of New Vulcan, Head of the Vulcan High Council and Clan Mother of the House of Surak.”

T’Pau gave him a pleased look. Kirk learned quickly, this much she realized once again.

One by one Jim introduced Katie and the others to her, and with everyone she exchanged a few words. Kirk knew that she tried to get an idea of the engineered humans she was about to declare as their own race, and he was relieved that the short talks went smoothly and well. It also baffled him how easy the Augments adjusted to the formal way T’Pau behaved and talked, and once again the young captain realized that there were indeed some defining differences between Nien’s people and the casual humans.

Afterwards she exchanged a few words with Khan concerning his well-being, and with McCoy; asking him about the process at the hospital and that she wanted to speak with him in private about the upcoming bonding-ceremony of Kirk and Khan – after all, Bones would slip into the same role Jim would take during Spock’s wedding.

Then she looked at Kirk and Khan. “I spoke with Selek about both your and Mr. Cogley’s idea concerning recognizing your people as their own species, Mr. Singh. Selek agrees with the plan, the same goes for Sarek. Given the fact that my youngest son, Silek and his wife T’Yle, will arrive tomorrow at the colony and that also my grandson’s intended’s family is expected, too, I think we should start with the analyses of your people’s psionic the day after tomorrow.” She glanced at McCoy. “When will all be awake?”

“If everything runs as well as it did until now, the last will be woken up by then. Some of them may be still groggy, but…”

“We will check them at last,” T’Pau interrupted him. “I also want you and Sorel to be present to monitor the vital signals and brain activities of Mr. Singh’s people. Humans tend to react with defense to a mind-meld which could lead to stress for the body – despite engineered biology. I don’t want to put anyone of them at risk.”
“So, there is a risk?” Otto asked.

“The mind-meld is a very… intimate and personal experience, even if it is only done superficially. People, who aren’t used to sharing their mind with someone else and above all have never learned to shield themselves, may regard the process as an intrusion in their privacy and personality, and react on it.”

Katie cocked her head. “So, we have to stay relaxed. Maybe you or one of the gentlemen you mentioned, can give us some advice before the meld begins. A meditation could help, couldn’t it?”

T’Pau lifted a brow and Jim was almost certain to see a flicker of being impressed in the old woman’s eyes.

“Meditation is the perfect preparation for a mind-meld. Your people practice mediation on a regular basis?” She gave Joaquin a short glance. “Because Mr. Weiss needed some assistance to reach the level of calmness that allows a meditation.”

“I was unsettled because of everything that happened – and because I feared for Noo,” the young Augment replied.

“You told me that you often have problems to gain the first step of meditation. I will ask one of our adepts to increase your technique and mental control to slip easier into meditation – if you want it, of course.”

Joaquin couldn’t help himself. He smiled at T’Pau. “That would be very nice, Ma’am. I know the advantages a meditation offers, yet… I never mastered it completely.”

“You are at New Gol. This place is not only an abbey, but also a place to find health by using your own psionic. Suna, one of our adepts, will help you,” the Vulcan matriarch decided.

“Then it’s settled?” Kirk asked, looking from one Augment to the next.

Rodriguez shrugged. “If this is the only way to be declared as our own race which gives us the advantages you and Noonien spoke of, so be it.” He glanced at Otto, who nodded,
“I have nothing against it. Maybe Ambassador Sarek can speak with the others and can answer their questions.”

“...”

“My son will visit your other siblings the day after tomorrow,” T’Pau affirmed. “Tomorrow he’ll be busy with family matters, which cannot be delayed.”

“...”

“Yeah – the double marriage,” Pablo grinned and looked with a teasing glint in his eyes at Khan and Kirk. “So, who will be the bride?”

ST***ST

The evening went by easily. After the Augments had beamed back to the hospital – except for Joaquin – McCoy bombarded his friend and captain with questions about details of the proposal. Jo, who remained with them, snickered here and there; happy for his older brother and the young captain he had come to regard as a friend, too.

After dinner, the young Augment decided that it was now the best moment to speak with Khan about something he had wanted to do for two days now.

“Noo?” he asked quietly, while Jim collected the dishes and placed them on the tray one of the Vulcans would fetch within the next minutes.

Khan looked up; questioningly. “Yes?”

“...”

“Uhm... Can Suzan be the next to be woken up?”

The former dictator frowned shortly. “Is there anything against it?”

Joaquin sighed. “...” He shrugged and gave his older brother his best tested puppy look – which almost always was successful. And this time wasn’t an exception.
“Doctor, please make certain that the young lady in question is the first who will be woken up
tomorrow.”

Bones grinned at Khan and Joaquin. “So, do I have to be prepared for another couple of lovebirds?”
he teased.

The older Augment sighed. “It seems so.” Then he turned serious again as he addressed Joaquin
again. “But Suzan’s presence will not distract you from your duties. She won’t be the only one who
will be unsettled after waking up and realizing that more than 250 years have passed by. Otto told me
that you did a good job of calming the others – you and Jim’s young wonder-kid. So please don’t
forget to be there for your other siblings when the young lady battens her lashes at you.”

“Suzan doesn’t ‘batten her lashes’ at me, Noo,” Weiss bristled. “We already left that behind us.”

Khan frowned. “How far has this liaison already gone?”

The boy blushed. “Not as far as you obviously think.”

“And what do I think?”

“Oh, please. I have already had enough with this mind-reading-thing from Spock when it comes to
Jim. I really don’t need more if that stuff.” McCoy groaned, which earned him an eye-roll from Kirk,
an exasperated glare from Khan and a chuckle from Joaquin. “Apropos ‘mind-reading’. When I’m
your best man, Jim, and you marry under Vulcan law, do I then have to dislocate my tongue and rip
my throat with the noises the Vulcans call a language, too, or can I speak in English?”

An evil smirk appeared on Kirk’s face. “Oh, I’m certain that we have to follow the ceremony in
detail to give the Federation Council no chance to enter caveat against its legitimacy.” He flopped
down on his chair beside Khan’s biobed. “So, you can already start with the practice. I’ll copy you a
memo Spock gave me for his ceremony.”

Bones stared at him – and groaned loud enough to let it sound like a growl of an angry bear. “Why
did I sign up for the five-years-mission again?”

“Because you love me?” Kirk snickered, and this time McCoy didn’t bother with an answer, but
only looked with frustration at him.
When the two lovebirds were finally alone, Jim asked Nien about his opinion of informing Barnett with a personal hail about their soon be changed status. He wasn’t really surprised as Khan thought of the same arguments as T’Pau did. As it seemed, Augments and Vulcans had the same sense of logic – and of strategy, because Khan pondered about making Barnett their true ally for exactly the same reason the Vulcanness had spoken of.

But first they had to tell Wesley – after all he was Jim’s direct superior and, what was equally important, his friend and mentor. It would be bad form to keep him in the dark while telling the brass that Starfleet’s flagship captain was about to get married.

Because Khan couldn’t get to one of the offices to use a larger communication unit with screen function, they decided to use Jim’s PADD, what wouldn’t be as flawless as using a real com-unit but at least they could visualize the talk.

It was already late evening aboard the Enterprise and so neither Jim nor Khan were surprised to find Wesley clad in a lose sweatshirt as he answered the hail in the guest quarters he lived in at the moment. Surprised he glanced at his protégée and the Augment.

“Jim, Mr. Singh! Up to some bed-time talking or to what do I owe the pleasure of the late call?” he teased as he realized that the former dictator sat in his biobed with Jim at his side.

Kirk smiled the best-tested charming, irresistible, innocent smile he could muster – and which instantly woke Bob’s suspicions, as his next words proved, “What have you done now, son?”

Jim sighed – obviously he couldn’t fool Wesley. “I want to invite you to our wedding,” he said bluntly, to which Khan commented with a groan and shot a glare in Kirk’s direction.

“Very sensible, Jim,” he scoffed. “Do you always go like a bull at a gate?”

The young captain rolled his eyes. “You just heard that Bob already assumed that something extraordinary happened.”
“Yes, given the time you’re calling him, I think everybody would guess that something big is going on.”

Jim frowned. “Hey, you first approved with it.”

“Just a moment!” Wesley interrupted the easy banter. “Did I hear you right? You two are getting married?”

Kirk beamed at him. “Yes! I proposed to Nien this midday and he agreed.”

“We’ll be married under Vulcan law – more or less side by side with Mr. Spock and Miss Uhura, so it would our pleasure if you could prolong your visit of Mr. Spock’s bonding ceremony and would remain until Jim and I are wed, too,” Khan added politely.

Wesley simply gaped at them and only closed his mouth a few seconds later, as Jim’s smile turned into a big smirk. Gulping and sorting his thoughts with little success, he blurted out, “Do you think that’s wise? I… I mean with the upcoming trial and so on.”

Kirk only continued to smile. “It’s the best idea of all, Bob. Nien and I already share a mental bond. The Vulcans will recognize it officially, the relationship will be acknowledged – and no judge of the Federation can separate us.” He leaned back against Nien’s unhurt shoulder. “I have absolutely no problem with telling the whole world that I love this crazy guy here.”

Khan only sighed, “Ditto.”

“Do you mean that you love yourself or do you mean that I’m crazy?”

“Both – but especially the latter,” the Augment smirked for a second, before he turned serious again and addressed Wesley, “Commodore, have you informed Command of my siblings being woken up?”

Confused for a moment because of the quick change of topic, Bob pondered the answer, before he said, “I was very busy with putting the ship back into one piece, so I haven’t found any time to send the report. Officially! In truth I first wanted to meet a few of your crew before Command will bombard me with questions.”
“Just tell them they can ask Sarek – or Sorel or T’Pau,” Jim chirped in cheerfully. “I’m sure that those three will answer Command questions absolutely satisfactorily.”

“Yes, with Vulcan charm,” Bob scoffed amused. Then he cocked his head. “Why the sudden hurry in informing Command, Jim? What are you up to now?”

Taking a deep breath, the young captain replied, “Cogley, T’Pau and I came up with an idea how to protect Nien’s crew in the future from eventual stalking issues from shysters and misguided security freaks.” He sobered up completely and switched easily into his captain behavior, as he informed Bob about the plan within the next minutes.

Wesley listened silently until Kirk ended, and nodded slowly. “This could be indeed a solution of how to introduce and to integrate the Augments within the Federation. Clever move, Jim,” he added with a smile. “And T’Pau is okay with checking Mr. Singh’s crew thoroughly like this?”

“Yes, she and Sarek will mind-meld with them – and maybe Selek, too, if he has time for it.” Jim bent forwards. “Bob, please keep silent about this. T’Pau – and Nien and I – think it better if we confront Command and the Federation Council with the facts so that they can’t interfere in any way. To place the Augments under the protection laws of endangered and psionic species is the only chance to keep them really safe.”

Wesley grimaced. “You know that the whole thought of keeping something like this from Command gives me belly ache?”

“Yes, I know – and I’ll stand you a good Saurian Brandy the next time we make it to a bar. To sooth your belly ache, of course.”

“Hmm, you can stand me one at your wedding, son,” Wesley grumbled, before he took a deep breath. “Congratulations, you two. I never thought I’d live to see the day you of all guys get married.” He looked at Khan. “Are you absolutely sure that you want to stick with this crazy churl for the rest of your life?”

Nien smiled shortly. “I’m already stuck, Commodore, and I don’t want to have it any other way.”

“Isn’t he sweet?” Jim chuckled – and Bob rolled his eyes.
“Please, boys, no love-scenes for my sensitive eyes and ears.”

“And this from a man who is married for a good many years,” Kirk sighed.

“Well, we don’t see each other often, maybe this is the reason why our marriage goes well,” Bob deadpanned.

“Hmm, so much for being an old-fashioned romantic gentleman,” Jim shook his head with mock sadness.

Wesley only laughed quietly, before he asked, “So, let me guess, you want to have your team with you when you say ‘yes’ to your honey.”


“I thought so,” Wesley groaned. “I see what I can do to give them some time off.”

“Thanks, you’re the best,” Jim beamed again at him.

“Yeah, and the mass of grey hairs which grew within the last four weeks are because of you, son, so don’t push your luck any further.” Then he smiled at the two younger men. “Have a nice night – and behave!” With pointing a warning finger at them he cut off the link and the screen of the PADD went dark.

“That went well,” Kirk said relieved.

“Yes, to tell Commodore Wesley wasn’t a real challenge, after all you’ve the poor man wrapped around your fingers. But to tell Barnett about our upcoming wedding, will be something utterly different,” Khan said seriously.

Jim only smiled at him. “No problem, I’ll tell him with tact and consideration.”
“Like you told Wesley so bluntly?” Khan teased, and Kirk rolled his eyes.

“Nah, far more sensible.” He laid the PADD on the nightstand and turned completely towards his beloved. “And I know a way to loosen me up and to give me strength for the talk tomorrow.” He bent forwards and brushed his lips over Nien’s.

“A very clever way, Pyāra,” the Augment murmured and captured the younger man’s mouth with his.

Admiral Barnett was a morning-person, so to say. Even as a young boy he loved the early hours when everything was still calm and peaceful. The sunrises were his favorites – especially when he stayed with his grandparents at their loggia in Tanga. With the loggia built outside of the town at the edge of a protected nature resort, he often had watched the elephants seeking out the river or the giraffes taking their first meal by plucking leaves from the trees.

Since he entered Starfleet there had been less and less opportunities to enjoy a decent sunrise – or a peaceful morning. It changed for the better after he wasn’t commanding a ship anymore and saw space only when he was in the orbital station of Earth, Starbase 1. His office in the HQ, on the other hand, provided him with a beautiful sight over San Francisco Bay, and often he arrived in his office before official duty began, checking a few mails or simply watching the town coming alive while sipping a hot coffee. These minutes were the calmest ones of the day, and whenever he had the chance for it, he relished in the quite scene.

This morning was the same. After endless days of interviewing Luengo, Norton, Styles, their allies and the scientists, after conferring with the Federation Council (the members which weren’t accused of having a part in the conspiracy) and speaking with the president at least four times per day, Barnett was only too happy to have a few hours for himself. Right, one look at his desk and the blinking number of incoming reports, mails and records told him that these few hours – until the next conference would start – were simply too few to catch up with actual work and that he should start working now than in a minute, yet he forgot duty for once.

He hadn’t found any time to come to terms – and to work out in his mind – what happened to him and his colleagues. Whenever he closed his eyes he saw still the shuttle crashing on the moon – over there in the Borderland. He still felt the cold of the cells he and the others had been held, and he still felt the dread as he, the other admirals, Sarek and his assistant were led away to be carried to the Romulan Empire. He knew that he should accept professional help to overcome the trauma he had suffered, but there was no time for it. He knew, when everything was over – the damn upcoming
court martial, the maybe continuing peace talks and hopefully the end of the cursed war – he would break down like a fallen tree and would need a few weeks to regain strength. But until then he would cling to stubbornness, sense of duty and the blood of his warrior-ancestors, who never gave up despite everything they had to face and to suffer.

Sighing he sipped again at his coffee and watched how the sun rose over the horizon – bathing the Golden Gate Bridge into a warm red light.

The tracks the crash of Vengeance had left were still like an open wound within the city’s landscape – they were even visible on Alcatraz, whose once high-security-prison turned into a museum had been razed to the ground as the mighty warship grazed the island. Officially it had been a tragic accident as the warp-drive of the new proto-type had malfunctioned which resulted in an explosion; crippling the already battered ship. It was a better explanation than admitting that a splitter-group of Starfleet Command had been able to build a ship in secret, was planning on hurling the Federation into a war to establish their own power and that an Augment from 250 years ago had had a part in the whole mess. Especially Khan had been kept a secret – and if everything would be like he wanted, this secret would remain one. Yet there was no chance for it. Not after what he learned from Bob Wesley’s last message.

It had been a tiny shock for him as the Commodore’s report about the Augments being woken up reached him the late evening prior. Somehow it had ‘slipped’ Wesley to inform Command earlier, because of the many repairs the Enterprise had to go through.

‘Bullshit!’ had been Barnett’s first thought. ‘You simply wanted to wait until it became clear how these guys tick.’ Then he had sobered up. Of course, Khan’s crew would be woken up at some point. The Vulcans – and Kirk – had been very clear about it. It only rankled Barnett that no-one had thought to inform Command before the superhumans were released from their beauty-sleep. On the other hand, it was up to the Vulcans to decide what to do concerning the Augments – after all Selek and T’Pau too had taken them under their protective wings. Yet he would bet his last shirt that the delayed informing had been not only Wesley’s but also Kirk’s doing. The young captain was more protective of Khan and the superhuman’s crew than a lioness of her chubs.

‘Love and what it could do to a man;’ he thought with some amusement.

Then his morning brooding was interrupted by an incoming call. Curious who would try to reach him this early in the day, he placed the coffee cup beside his terminal and answered the hail. It was the communication center of the HQ, because Barnett’s secretary had still an hour until duty would begin.

“Good morning, Admiral,” a young Rigelian in the grey uniform of ground staff greeted him. “I received a personal hail for you from New Vulcan. Captain Kirk requires to speak with you.”
Barnett’s eye brows shot upwards in surprise, then he schooled his features again and nodded, “Thank you, Lieutenant, please put him through.”

“Yes, sir.”

A moment later the Rigelan’s upper body was replaced with that of Jim Kirk; clad in civil attires, blond hair a little bit longer than regulation allowed, his skin tanned from New Vulcan’s sun.

“Jim, this is a surprise,” Barnett said, nodding pleasantly at his youngest and most troublesome captain – captain off duty, as he reminded himself firmly.

“Good morning, sir,” Kirk greeted him with a short bow of his head. “I just learned how early it still is on Earth. I hope I didn’t interrupt your morning routine.”

Richard chuckled. “You know that I was always the first in the office during my time as Head of the Academy, and this hasn’t changed. How are things on New Vulcan?”

“If it wouldn’t be for Spock’s upcoming bonding-ceremony I’m helping him with, I would be bored to death. The most fun is aboard my ship – even if I’m sort of glad that I’m not there to listen to Scotty’s endless rambling about how I dared to turn Engineering upside-down.”

A soft laugh escaped Barnett. “Yes, your chief engineer is a genius, but his temper is infamous.” He cocked his head. “Yet I’m surprised that you’re bored. After all, to welcome Khan’s people in this century is certainly a difficult job.”

Kirk’s face gave nothing away if he knew that Barnett had only learned the prior evening of this change of status concerning the Augments, or if he assumed that Command was informed for days now. He simply said, “They’ve come to good terms with the fact that they slept for more than 250 years and that they are on a foreign planet. What gives them trouble is the knowledge of what happened to their leader and friend – and that they were abused as lab-rats during their cryosleep. Thank the Lord for Khan’s calming influence on them and Dr. McCoy’s human heart. At least they don’t feel alone in this whole mess, but have learned that they have allies who support them.”

Barnett had tensed. “I already anticipated that this part would be the worst one – when they learn what happened within the last two years to them and Khan. But you said they stayed calm?”
“More or less – but they are willing to listen and to learn. And they are grateful for the Vulcans’ assistance. Ambassador Sarek’s diplomatic skills are coming in quite handy concerning all this.”

“Sarek is involved?” Richard asked curiously. “So, he is doing better?”

“Yes, but he is still released from any duty. The surgery wasn’t an easy one, yet he uses the chance to speak with the Augments whenever he comes to the hospital for the needed check-ups. He has offered to be a middle-man between the Augments and the Vulcan High Council, and Mr. Hoffmann – Nien’s second in command so to say – agreed to it. Bones and Spock are doing a good job, too, by introducing the Augments into this world, as well as Healer Sorel and even T’Pau. She stopped by yesterday evening and spoke in person with several Augments who came to New Gol to pay Khan a sickbed-visit.”

Barnett suppressed the urge to whistle. T’Pau herself ‘stopped by’? Well, that was indeed a huge step into casual human behavior for her. Then his attention was driven to the next important topic.

“Speaking of Khan – how is he?”

Kirk’s gaze became stern. “He’s doing a little bit better, but he still has to stay in bed and is healing slower than it is usual for his people. Healer Sorel thinks the reason lies in Khan’s utter mental exhaustion. And, by the way, his body has been put through so many nasty things that even his engineered nature demands its toll now. I only hope he’ll be able to sit in an antigrav-chair in four days.”

“Is there something special going on in four days?” Richard wanted to know; listening between the lines.

“Yes, it’s Spock’s and Uhura’s wedding day, and they invited him. And that’s not all.” He took a deep breath. “Sir, my call is also half official, because per regulation I want to inform you of a changing status of my person.”

Barnett frowned; a sinking feeling in his stomach. “You don’t want to leave the fleet, do you?” he asked warily.

The younger man looked thunderstruck at him. “Why do you think I would give up my ship and my crew? As long as I have the tiniest chance to keep them, I’ll fight with teeth and claws for them.” He shook his head. “No, sir, as I said the nature of my information is personal.” He drew in another deep breath. “Sir, I want to inform you that I’m going to marry in four days – and that my personal file has
to be changed because of it.”

Silence.

Barnett could only stare with big eyes at Kirk, who waited patiently for several seconds, cocked his head and fought without success against one of his boyish grins. “Admiral, are you well?”

“You… you are going to marry?” Richard was finally able to utter. “Sweet Lord, this all of sudden? Whom? And…” He stopped. “Don’t tell me that you ditched Khan. I’m sure that would lead…”

“Sir, how does it come that you assume I would ditch the best thing that ever happened to me?” Jim’s grin turned into a warm smile. “I proposed to Nien yesterday – and he accepted. We’ll be bonded by Vulcan law side-by-side with Spock and Uhura.”

The cat was out the bag – and you could hear a needle drop in Barnett’s office, before the older man blurted out, “You and Khan are marrying?”

Kirk nodded with a wide beam. “Yep, in four days. I would like to invite you, too, sir – if you can save some time to come to New Vulcan, that is.”

Barnett had the certain feeling that someone had let a water-bomb drop on his head. “But… Jim, Khan is a wanted man and you…”

“We both are going to face a trial as soon as Nien’s health allows it, yes. But that’s no reason not to marry him.”

Richard bent forwards and braced his elbows on the desk surface; rubbing his temple. “Son, you do understand that this could be used against you?”

“Why? Because someone could come up with the idea that I’m emotionally compromised? Well, that fits for everyone who is in a relationship – officially acknowledged or not. That goes even for married couples, so no big deal there. I rather think a wedding will turn out to be an advantage in this case. It will show that this isn’t some crazy, hormonal passion that will end sooner or later, but is a real thing. Nien and I love each other – real love, sir. To marry him is the logical thing to do.”
“Tell that to a Vulcan,” Barnett grimaced; rolling his eyes.

“Oh, even Sarek married out of the same reason, like Spock told me once, so I’m in the best company,” Jim smiled.

Richard leaned back again in his chair; worrying his lip between his teeth, before he murmured, “Are you absolutely sure that you and Khan want to stick together for the rest of your lives? You said you marry by Vulcan law – and that means for a life-time.”

“Yes, I’m absolutely sure – like Nien is.” Kirk had turned serious again, and the Chief in Command sighed.

“Well, if you are that sure I’ll integrate your changed personal status in your file.” He lifted a brow. “Does Wesley know?”

“I informed him a short time ago. He offered to send you the news with the next status report, but I declined. I wanted to tell you in person – after all you did for us.”

Again, a frown appeared on the admiral’s forehead. “What did I do for you?”

“You saved the lives of my officers and mine as you stormed the Vulcan seat of government. Your encouraged intervention gave my team and me the chance to rescue Nien in the last moment. And you didn’t throw us into jail but only released us temporary from duty. Yes, we have asylum on New Vulcan, yet we left the given refuge as we returned to the Excalibur. You could have arrested us, but you didn’t. And, by the way, I know that you are trying to get us out of the deep water we’re in. To inform you in person about my upcoming marriage is really the least I can do.”

“If you put it that way…,” Barnett grumbled, before he eyed the younger man. “I don’t want to press the issue, because I know that Khan is still healing and his injuries are serious, but . . . we’re running out of time, Jim.”

Now it was Kirk who frowned. “I don’t understand, sir?” Of course, Jim knew that something was up – after all Wesley had gotten some information from his ‘source’ – but what was really going on was still unknown, and he hoped to learn more about it.

Richard pondered his choices for a moment, before he said, “I want to be open and honest with you,
Jim, because call me insane but I have a soft spot for you, you crazy bastard. The Klingons want to
give the peace-talks a second try, but they imposed a condition.”

“A condition?” Kirk shook his head. “With what right?”

“When Luengo and Styles hired this Klingon renegade who used Lord Kor’s identity, it offended the
Klingon Council and the Klingon nobility because the wrong image was given that the Empire didn’t
stand to its given word. Of course, they understand that Luengo and his people are criminals, yet you
know how easy they are miffed.” He lowered his voice. “They demand that you will take the
delagation to the conference.”

“Me?” Kirk blinked; surprised about the real reason neither Cogley nor he had thought of. “For
heaven’s sake, why?”

“It was you – and Khan – who foiled most of their plans, and that gained you their respect.
Chancellor M’Rek wants to meet the men who were able to stop parts of the Klingon Fleet and
tricked the Klingon officers several times. He wants to meet the man who escaped Kor – or the man
who was able to break into a Klingon prison, killed seven Klingon warriors within a few seconds by
using their own weapons and stole their prisoner directly from under their noses. He also wants to
meet Wesley – the man who allied himself with a Klingon warlord to save their own people.” He
took a deep breath and shook his head. “From his point of view, I can understand him, yet his
demand gives us a chicken-and-egg situation.”

“Because we’re released from duty and are waiting for a trial to take place,” Jim nodded slowly,
before he asked quietly. “Do the Klingons know of Nien’s nature?”

“Wesley had no other choice than to confirm that Khan is an Augment. He also told Kor that Khan
comes from Earth’s past, yet he stuck to the same story you told Kor about a ‘criminal’ you wanted
to catch on Qo’noS and who died as the dark warrior, as the Klingons call Khan, came to your aid.”
Barnett grimaced. “We will stick to this story, yet we have to be careful, because Khan has to answer
to a real trial soon.”

“This all places you between a rock and a hard place,” Jim murmured and Richard threw his hands
up.

“The peace-talks have to begin – the sooner the better. And you can only escort the delegation to the
conference place, when you are still in the command seat of the Enterprise.”
With big eyes Kirk stared at him. “So… the trial will only be a farce?” he asked; not knowing if he should be pleased or angry.

Barnett sighed. “No, it will not be a farce. Command is not Section 31. And after all the stunts you pulled, Command and therefore the Federation Council are forced to court martial you and your officers. And Khan still has to be brought to a real trial. And don’t bring your hopes up that the outcome is already decided because of M’Rek’s demand. We can’t allow that the Klingons influence our right of justice.”

“Yet if this is a condition for the peace-talks, we always can escort the delegation to the conference place and the court martial happens afterwards,” Jim pondered. “We won’t run off with our ship, you know.”

“Yes, I’m aware of it, Jim, but the correct ways have to be considered, no matter what. Too much depends on it – not only yours, your officers’ and Khan’s fate, but also the fact that your trial will also be a part of the court martial against Luengo, Norton and the others. And the public have been demanding answers for days now.” He shook his head in frustration. “If everything would go to my liking, I would officially tell the truth, deal with the traitors and be done with it, but there are enough politicians who are already clamoring about the damaged image of Command and the Council – as if the truth would change this fact.”

Jim on New Vulcan pursed his lips. Barnett had entrusted him with a lot of information – things which certainly wasn’t meant for his ears. So, the Chief in Command was really on his side and tried to help, but – as it seems – partly his hands were tied. Politics were always a dirty thing, and the mere thought that several facts would be swept under the rug again to let some of the politicians sleep better, made Kirk’s stomach clench.

What had T’Pau advised? ‘Make Barnett your ally by showing trust’? Well, Barnett had made the first step – and Jim’s belly told him to make his own big step now, too.

“Sir, maybe I have a solution for your dilemma concerning telling the public the truth – a truth which has to be told, not only to clean up the mess within Command and in the Council once and for all, but also to help the Augments to settle down within the Federation.” He saw Barnett cocking his head in a silent question, and took a deep breath. “What I’m telling you now could decide the fate of my officers, Khan’s and mine, so… I ask you to keep this a secret. And maybe you can use it to your advantage concerning the cleansing-action you want to make.”

Richard frowned. “What you are up to, Jim? I know you a little bit – and you’re wearing your poker-face. That always gave me a bad feeling.”
Kirk chuckled quietly, before he said, “Sir, our lawyer advised us to go public and tell them what happened. It will force the Council to react on it – and those, who are still loyal to Luengo in secret, will betray themselves or will realize that their last chance of succeeding is over.” Jim had to suppress a smile as he caught his highest superior officer gaping at him.

“You want... You will…” Barnett closed his mouth for a moment, before he gasped, “They will grill you, son!”

“I don’t think so. The public has a big influence – and they have taken a liking of me and my officers, and they are already telling tales about ‘Sunrise’. We can use all of this to our advantage – and you can clean up the mess without any concern, because when everything is already published you don’t have to be careful not to irritate some politicians.” He lowered his gaze for a moment, before he added, “And, by the way, the Klingons are going to learn that we’re damn serious about the peace-talks, but that we also respect their points of views and try to bring to account those who offended them first-hand.”

Barnett stared at him for a longer time, before he growled, “Dammit, Kirk, you should change your job and should go into politics.”

Kirk quickly shook his head. “Never! My place is aboard my ship – on the seat on the bridge. This is all I need to be happy – well, at best with Nien beside me and with my friends around me.”

“Don’t become greedy, son. Your freedom hangs on a hair’s width, you know.” Barnett rubbed his temples. “Well, I already know that your plan will cause an outcry from a lot of people within Command and the Council, and they will give you trouble, but I know that won’t stop you. And I think you are right. It gives me the chance to use the big broom for the spring-cleaning that this cursed mess needs in order to be eliminated.” He fixed his gaze on Kirk’s face. “You do realize that it also bears the risk that the public will think that Mr. Singh’s people are dangerous?”

Jim only smiled. “They will learn about the Augments in a positive way. Don’t forget that Nien is ‘Sunrise’ – the secret super-hero who saved Tammeron, the capital of Aldebaran, messed the Klingons up and didn’t think twice of risking his own life while protecting people. History also tells that Khan Noonien Singh was the only Augment-leader, who wasn’t an aggressor but only protected his borders and helped the people within his realm a lot. If we put this all onto the plate, the public will give him and his people a chance – after all, men have changed a lot.”

Barnett pondered that for a moment. “This is a whole win-or-lose-situation, Jim. I hope you calculated the risk correctly.”
“I’m not Spock, he’s the one who could give you a detailed number, but even he agreed to this plan.”

“Of whom of the two versions are you referring to?” Richard almost joked. “Let me guess: About both.”

Kirk only grinned. “It’s really funny to have two of them, isn’t it? The younger is my best friend besides McCoy, and the older one is something like a father and grandfather in one for me – even if Selek really differs from Grandpa Tiberius.”

“Hmm, somehow you have the ability to catch the most different peoples’ attention and make them develop big parental instincts for you. Hell, even Wesley forgot some regulations to keep you and your honey under his protective wing.”

Jim wore the most innocent expression possible, before another thought struck him. “Concerning Bob – will he face trial, too?”

“At least he will have some very serious hearings when he returns to Earth. Not only that he interpreted the rule book here and there more than casually, he did break some rules – even if it was necessary to stop the conspiracy, to prevent a genocide and to rescue the delegation in the end; me among the latter.” He shook his head. “And there I thought the adventures of Admiral Archer were worth writing books about. You put him into the shade, no doubt about it.”

Shrugging one shoulder, the young captain answered, “That was never my intention, after all Archer is a hero himself. Someone, even T’Pau remembers with her very own kind of gratefulness. I rather think he and I are simply doing what have to be done to protect the Federation’s ideals, no matter whose uniform, rank or title stands in the way.”

“Hopefully you can make the admiral understand this. He had his own share of history concerning Augments, and he is one of those who are against wakening them up – something that doesn’t matter now anymore, as I learned yesterday evening. But be sure that he’ll give you and Khan’s people trouble.”

“I’m certain the admiral is able to differ between the incident all those decades ago and Nien’s people now. Racism isn’t something I would take him for.”

Barnett sighed for the uncounted time. “I hope you’re right. I talked the day before yesterday with
him, and let me tell you that his advanced age increases his stubbornness. Of course, he was outraged to learn that the Augments were used as lab-rats by Section 31, and he also agrees that Khan should face a fair trial, yet he was anything but happy as he learned that the Vulcans want to wake the other superhumans up. He thinks that they will give the Federation trouble – or will destabilize her.”

“Bullshit! You met Joaquin and…”

“He’s a nice boy as far as I can tell, yes. And he appears to be very peaceful. But neither Archer nor I have any clue how the rest of Khan’s crew…”

“They are people like you and me, Admiral. Yes, their feelings seem to run deeper than ours and they learn with a speed that would make you dizzy simply watching it, but otherwise they are absolutely normal. Katie loves musicals, for example, and ‘Lord of the Rings’. She compares Selek with the fictional character of Lord Elrond. Can you imagine Selek’s face as he learned about it and her reaction afterwards as she realized that he heard her? I needed all my control not to laugh my head off. Then there is Otto, Katie’s husband. He’s really okay. Then there are Chang, Rodríguez, Paolo and Pablo. Some of them are absolutely smitten with the plants or architectures on New Vulcan, while Thomas is curious concerning ‘all the aliens’.”

“Of course, they want to know more about the world they woke up in,” Richard nodded. “It has to be for them like being thrown into a science-fiction movie.”

“Yeah, something like that,” Kirk nodded, before he took a deep breath. “Sarek talked with them two days ago and Spock informed me that his father thought the discussion was very positive. Right, after they learned what happened to Khan and to them, they were furious, yet Nien could calm them down – and later Bones and Joaquin did the same. They are worried for Khan’s fate of course, and after all they experienced on Earth before they fled, they are very wary concerning today’s justice. The latter is a chance for us all to show them that justice is simply that: Justice – without preconception. And the Vulcans already offered them to integrate them within their community until they find their own place – or they can remain on New Vulcan. To realize that they are accepted for once helps them a lot.”

“And knowing you, you already made friends with a few of them.” Richard allowed himself a short smile, as he saw Jim frowning. “That was a compliment, son. You have a way of making people trust you – one of the reasons why I agreed to give you the Enterprise. We need such officers out there.”

“Then let us pray that the judge thinks like you and doesn’t give me a vacation at the next penal colony for a few years,” Jim grumbled, which made Barnett chuckle,
“I hope for the same.” Then he sobered. “Your plan to publish everything is crazy and risky – and I’m insane enough to agree with it. You only should think twice what you tell the press concerning your mission on Qo’noS and how Khan fits into the picture there. When the Klingons learn that there wasn’t a second criminal that brought you to the Klingon homeworld but that Khan was the one who was hunted, then they’ll realize that you lied – you, Wesley and all of us. And this will influence the peace-talks in a negative way.”

“Officially I’ll stick to the made-up story, sir. It’s up to Command and the judge if this detail shall remain altered or not. But everything else will be told to the public. We have to get them on our side, sir. It will be the best for you, Command, Nien and his people, my officers and me.”

Barnett made a slow affirming gesture. “All right. But be careful, Jim. There will be staff officers and Council members who will try to grill you for it. And officially I have absolutely no knowledge of your plan until it’s realized. I’m going to be annoyed and cross that you informed the public without any warning, before I present my colleagues the chance your strategy gave us: To clean-up the whole mess within the HQ and the Council.”

“So, it’s a kind of game,” Kirk murmured, and Barnett snorted,

“Yes, a game – a very dangerous game, Jim. One I wouldn’t dare to play if it wouldn’t be you who starts it. You are a man of honor who doesn’t shy away from playing dirty if it protects those you vowed loyalty to. Your goal is always to make things right, to undo unfairness and to protect the Federation’s and Starfleet’s ideals. So, go for it Jim – but remember: Officially I’ll be outraged first, so don’t take my words and statements seriously, okay?”

Promptly Kirk grinned. “So, in secret we’ll swing the broom for the big spring-cleaning together?”

“On this you can bet your last shirt,” Barnett nodded and reached for the switch-off knob beside his screen, but hesitated for a further moment. “Give Khan my congratulations. I see no chance to come to New Vulcan because of the mountains of work I have to do. But you two have my blessing when you say ‘yes’ to each other.” He shook his head in amusement. “I just don’t know if you should stick to the Earthern tradition of ‘kissing the bride’.”

“Because you don’t know who the bride is?” Kirk teased, and Richard laughed softly, before he answered,

“No, because you marry by Vulcan law and I already imagine dozens of risen Vulcan eye-brows and scandalized gazes, if you two kiss each other in front of them.”
Kirk snickered. “Well, Spock and Uhura do this two-finger-thing a lot in public, what is the Vulcan equivalent of kissing. So, no problem if Nien and I do the same in the human way.”

“Don’t unleash an intergalactic scandal, Jim;” Barnett rebuked not very seriously. “The Vulcan High Council is already peeved enough because of Norton’s drastic measures he used as he tried to get you and Khan in his hands.”

“I think, even Vulcans differ between a romantic gesture and an ambush,” Jim smirked, before he saluted. “Have a nice day, sir.”

“The same for you, Jim. And give the other couple my greetings, too.” With that he switched off the connection and leaned back in his chair. “Using the public to steer Command and the trial. You did the same thing like you did during the Kobayashi Maru: You change the parameter to turn a no-win-scenario into a win-situation,” he murmered; looking straight through the real background of Kirk’s strategy. Damn, this cursed, adorable farm-boy was brilliant enough to make the whole universe wary of him. “You really should get a commendation for original thinking, boy – and hell would have to freeze over, before I don’t get your ass out of the deep water you’re in. I need captains like you to gain Starfleet a good name again!”

ST***ST***ST

Six hours away from New Vulcan – measured by the time a long-range shuttle would need at Warp 2 to reach the planet – a smaller and a larger shuttle hung in space; only stabilized by their navigation drives. They were docked at each other which allowed three passengers to change over. This wasn’t a usual maneuver but in this case, it would spare the smaller shuttle a lot of time. Three of its passengers changed over to the larger shuttle that was a liner and anyway was scheduled to the three passengers’ destination. What cost time was bringing the luggage aboard, because the three people didn’t travel with one or two suit cases, but with larger boxes which held science equipment. Therefore, the time of arrival would be delayed, but none of the crew or the passengers aboard the larger shuttle complained about it.

Last but not least, most of the passengers were Vulcans, exactly like the three newcomers. Vulcans never complained, at worst they would voice a negative statement, but even this wasn’t the case at the moment. What is, is – Kaiidth! And even if there were a man or woman among them who would gain disadvantages because of the delay, he or she would never say something about it – not in the presence of ‘outworlders’.

In the lounge area, near one of the picture windows, sat a few humans – adults and two teens. They all were curious why the liner shuttle coming from Earth and heading to New Vulcan, dropped out
of warp a few minutes ago and the captain’s announcement via intercom that they would have a rendezvous with another shuttle to take over some passengers did nothing to satisfy their curiosity. Yet out of consideration for the Vulcan people aboard, they stayed calm and only talked with hushed voices, even if they were aware of the fact that the others could still hear them. Yet their thoughtfulness of the Vulcan culture had been rewarded with polite respect and two Vulcan gentlemen had a longer talk with the old and the younger man of the human group the evening prior.

Finally, as the shuttles separated again and the liner fell into warp, the door opened and revealed three more Vulcans – an old man, a male in his middle ages and a Vulcanness who was about to reach her middle age.

Most Vulcans looked up – and then the humans witnessed something very interesting. Some Vulcans looked at the middle-aged man up and down and turned briskly away, others greeted him with a respectful Ta’al or with a short nod.

Zahir Uhura, grandfather of a certain language genius within Starfleet, bent forwards to his son Alhamisi. “Curious. And there I thought Vulcans are above something like this.”

The younger man shrugged. “Nyota always says that they are people like you and me, they only hide it better.”

“Foreign cultures have foreign traditions. Maybe the gentleman over there did something wrong or overstepped boundaries,” the old woman beside Zahir said. Her snow-white hair and the wrinkles on her face betrayed her age, yet Imara Uhura held herself with grace and pride, while her dark eyes sparkled with an inner fire.

“They are endangered now. You should think that such a catastrophe would forge them together,” M’Umbha, Nyota’s mother, muttered.

Her youngest daughter and her son whispered to each other and looked a few times over to the newcomers.

“Don’t stare! That’s highly impolite!” their father rebuked them instantly, but his daughter Uaekundu whispered,

“He looks like Nyota’s honey.”
Alhamisi frowned. “What?”

His son Malcom nodded and showed his father his PADD. “Here are some holo-photos Nyota sent of Spock. Just have a closer look. The Vulcan gentleman over there resembles him a lot.”

Critically Alhamisi and Zahir watched the photos and risked a careful gaze over their shoulder at the younger of the two male Vulcans who had just arrived. “Hmm, maybe,” Alhamisi said and turned his attention back towards his children. “But it’s difficult to differ people of other species. Yes, the features of Spock and him are similar, yet…”

“He is coming over to our table,” Malcom interrupted his father with a quick whisper.

Turning around, Alhamisi watched the Vulcan in question arriving at their table and rose to greet him. “Sir,” he said, trying a Ta’al.

“Greetings, ladies and gentlemen,” the Vulcan replied with a warm baritone. “I heard you mentioning the name ‘Spock’ a few times. May I ask what business you have with my nephew?”

“Your nephew?” Alhamisi asked perplexed.

“You are Spock’s uncle? No wonder that you two resemble each other this much,” Uaekundu burst out which betrayed her young age. She blushed beneath her chocolate skin as she found herself in the focus of those dark eyes which looked at her with interest. “Sorry,” she added hastily.

“There is no need to apologize, young lady. I take your statement as a compliment. My nephew and I have many things in common, not only the outer resemblance.” He cocked his head. “Regarding some of the spoken words prior: I also have problems differing between humans of the same heritages, yet I do realize that you look a lot like my nephew’s betrothed. I figure that you belong to Nyota Uhrua’s family?”

“Yes, Nyota and Uaekundu are my daughters,” Alhamisi said. “I’m Alhamisi Uhura, Nyota’s father,” he introduced himself.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir. I’m Silek, Son of Skon.”
“You already know my daughter?” M’Umbha asked and the Vulcan shook his head.

“No, but my brother Sarek sent me a few photos. She is esthetically pleasant and my brother praised her high intelligence and sensibility, as well as her knowledge of many languages. This coming from him says a lot.”

Zahir smiled before he rose to speak, “I don’t know if this is against Vulcan traditions, but regarding the fact that two younglings of our families have brought us together, I – as the oldest – want to invite you to our table.”

Silek bowed his head. “There is no tradition that forbids something like this. I’m honored. I will tell my wife T’Yle and my father-in-law Stann of your invitation and bring them to your table. Please excuse me a moment.”

As he walked away, Uaekundu murmured, “Never let it be said that Vulcans are cold and sullen in company. This one is really nice – and almost casual.”

She had no idea how ‘casual’ Sarek’s younger brother had been for real in earlier days…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, my dear readers, I do hope you enjoyed the new chapter and the few twists in it. Sometimes things almost work out on their own, sometimes new stones are thrown into the path. What goes for our lover-boys and Barnett after his and Kirk’s revelation has to be seen. I also hope you liked the talks and the introduction of Nyota’s family and Silek.

In the next chapter, Spock will meet his uncle for the first time, Uhura will see her family again, Jim and Nien are going to have their own lot of work to do for the upcoming wedding – and there will be another reunion.

I don’t know if I manage to end the next chapter before New Year’s Eve, but I’m trying. Yet this chapter is definitely the last before Christmas.

So, I want to wish you all a Merry, Happy Christmas,

Thank you so much for your loyalty by staying true to this very long story,
May Santa brings you some nice gifts

And may the light of Jesus bring some peace into this crazy world.

Love

Yours Starflight
Family

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

Finally, after vacation, a nasty flu and a lot of catching up within my job, I was able to complete the next chapter. The 100th! Sweet Lord, I never thought the story would run this long, and I’m still astonished that so many readers are staying loyal to it.

Even if it is end of January, I don’t want to miss to wish you all a very late Happy New Year, and I hope you all had a good start into 2018.

In this chapter, family will occupy center stage. Nyota will be reunited with her family, Sarek meets his brother again (and Spock his uncle), Joaquin will have his beloved back and Jim will have a talk with his own family (guess, how this goes).

Thank you so much for the many reactions you left; I’ll try to answer the comments soon.

Have fun with the chapter,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

100 - Family

“Is this the young lady you’re so smitten with?” McCoy couldn’t help the smirk that formed on his lips while asking Joaquin the question. It was later morning again, and while a certain liner shuttle from Earth with three added passengers neared New Vulcan, Bones, Sorel and Corrigan woke up the next Augments. Scott was, like the three days prior, in the cellars; overseeing the last transports. Only eight Augments more, and Khan’s whole crew would be back in the world of livings.

Joaquin looked into the cryotube that just had been beamed from the cellars via the Enterprise into the room with the stasis chambers that served for the same purpose for days now. A smile, accompanied by a tender gaze and a deep sigh were answers enough for the CMO, who rolled his eyes.

“The whole world is crazy with love, as it seems in the moment,” he mumbled and nodded at Sorel. “Right, let us wake the little princess up.”

Joaquin beamed at him; his eager look gave away his youthful impatience. “Thanks, Doc,” he said, before he tensed up as Sorel deactivated the cryosleep and initiated the wakening sequence. The humming tone of the cryotube changed, two lights flickered to life and then the wakening process started – only to change into a shrill sound of alert.

“What the hell…” McCoy gasped and hectically checked the cryotube’s status.
“Heart rate at 12, not increasing,” Sorel said calmly. “The same goes for the blood pressure.” He quickly crossed the room. “We should move her to the stasis chamber.” With Vulcan speed he programmed the medical equipment, while McCoy and Weiss unlocked the cryotube.

“She… she jerks,” Joaquin called; fear edged his voice. Beneath the view window the Asian girl began to move on her own accord – eyes still closed, yet her body began to convulse.

Bones didn’t hesitate a second longer. Opening the cryotube he slipped his arm beneath the ice cold slender body of Suzette Ling and lifted her up. With two large steps he was at the stasis chamber Sorel had just opened, put the young Chinese inside and watched as the chamber closed and instantly began to work. The blue light engulfed the female Augment with the long black hair, and gave her an almost mystical appearance – like one of the sirens just coming from the depth of the seas. He felt Joaquin stepping beside him and wrapped a comforting arm around the young man’s shoulder; giving into his fatherly instincts.

“Vitals?” he asked no-one particular.

“Heart beat at 15, 17, increasing. Blood pressure rises, too. Lung function starts,” Daniel Corrigan read the display. “All vitals are correct.” He looked over his shoulder. “This I’m calling luck that we woke the young lady just in time.”

Sorel turned away from the stasis chamber and looked at the cryotube. “Or the wakening process triggered the mal function. I suggest that Commander Scott should check the tube out.”

Bones nodded. “No problem, I tell him – even if he won’t be too thrilled. After all a whole starship waits in the orbit to get repaired.”

“I’m certain that the other engineers of Starfleet’s flagship are able to replace Mr. Scott for a few hours more,” Sorel deadpanned with the typical Vulcan logic. “And if there are problems they always can contact him via communicator.” He walked to Daniel and watched the read-outs. “Blood circulation and heart beat are within the expected parameters. She’ll be ready to leave stasis within the next hour.”

A loud sigh of relief was to hear, and all three healers looked with sympathy at the young Augment, who sat down on the next chair and rubbed his temples; murmuring something none of them understood.

“I would offer you a Saurian Brandy, Jo, but it’s too early for it and you’re still too young,” Bones tried to cheer him up.

Dark eyes looked at him. “Alcohol has no effect on us, Doc, and, by the way, I doubt that you find some alcohol to consume within the hospital.”

“You are right,” Sorel nodded solemnly. “Vulcans don’t need poisoning substances to get themselves under control. I even learned that alcohol make humans lose their inhibitions and control – if they possess latter at all.”

McCoy grimaced, but said nothing. He knew that there was no way to have a discussion with Sorel like he often had with Spock. Where Sarek’s son seemed to have developed a kind of pleasure to have arguments with McCoy, Sorel remained calm and outdid everything with cool logic. Leonard sighed. Within the last two weeks he had come to recognize the small but defining differences between the full Vulcans and Spock – and he had to admit that he preferred the first officer’s dry but at least existing humor.
The same moment Bones’ communicator beeped and without wasting a glance at the caller’s ID, he opened it and said, “There was a small problem with Miss Ling’s cryotube, but she’s in stasis now and her body vitals are increasing perfectly. So no need to send the cavalry, Khan.”

For a moment there was silence on the other end of the line, before the Augment leader’s voice asked, “Have you become a foreseer now, Doctor?”

Bones grinned without humor. “No, but I know you by now – you and your crazy family ties.” He glanced at Weiss. “Jo got a little bit nervous, but he’s fine now.”

“What happened?” Khan asked, and McCoy launched into a detailed description; barely taking his attention away from the stasis chamber’s display during the talk. Then he gave the communicator over to Joaquin, who also spoke quickly with his brother, before the link was closed. Sighing, Leonard hailed Scotty. As it seemed, their precaution to wake up the Augments as soon as possible had been a wise decision.

ST***ST***ST

Uhura really wished for a cool breeze as she crossed the street to get to the entrance of New Shi’Kahr’s space center. The long dress she wore was thin and protected her against the sun, but it did nothing to cool her down. She was only glad that she had pinned up her rich long hair into Vulcan style, what let at least her neck free exposed to the one or other wind. It was almost midday, and the heat was nearly unbearable – even for Spock and Sarek, which walked beside her. Of course, both men didn’t show that they felt uncomfortable, yet Nyota knew her future husband too well. A soft green hue shimmered on Spock’s face and the same went for Sarek. The Vulcan ambassador allowed himself even a quiet sigh as they finally entered the building and the climate regulation banned the heat to the outside.

Spock looked at the large screen that told about times of arrival of today’s expected shuttles and other spacecrafts, but was unable to find one of the two shuttles they had come for. He lifted a brow. “The liner shuttle has a delay of 26 minutes,” he said, before he frowned. “But Silek’s shuttle is not mentioned.”

Sarek nodded slowly and walked towards the information station; his son and future daughter-in-law on his heels. “Greetings,” he said to the Vulcanness behind the counter. “We expect a private shuttle that comes from Hydrilla. It was announced for an arrival in approximate 1 hour, yet it isn’t mentioned at the information screen.”

The Vulcanness nodded and checked something at her terminal. “Shuttle A-1936 from Hydrilla to Terra Nova via New Vulcan,” she nodded. “The shuttle’s arrival has been deleted, Ambassador Sarek,” she told him; knowing the older man’s face from public reports.

“Deleted?” Sarek lifted a brow and felt Spock stepping beside him.

“Yes, we received a message 4.638 standard-hours ago that it changed its heading directly towards Terra Nova. Parallel we were informed that three passengers switched from it onto the expected liner shuttle E-2347 during a rendezvous midspace.” She glanced up again. “I can contact the liner and ask if the persons, you expect, are aboard, sir.”

“Three passengers, you said?” Spock asked, before he looked at his father. “Silek and T’Ylle are only two. Maybe someone accompanies them?”

“Possible, yet I wonder why Silek didn’t inform me about the changes of his travel,” Sarek murmured, before he addressed the Vulcanness again. “Your help is appreciated.”
“To serve is my duty,” she replied politely and watched the ambassador and his famous son walking towards the Terran woman with the dark skin, who was clad in Vulcan clothes in the lady-style of a high presented house. Curiosity was something no Vulcan was immune against, and so she observed the three persons for some minutes more; realizing that the Terran woman was attached to the ambassador’s son. Obviously, Spock followed the steps of his father and was about to take a human female as wife. Asking herself what was so appealing to be married to an emotional and irrational being, she drove her attention back to incoming information at her terminal; taking her mind away from the three visitors.

Realizing that they had some time to spend, Sarek invited his son and his future daughter-in-law to one of the restaurants within the spaceport. The thought of an iced tea was more than tempting.

ST***ST

“Do you really think this is wise?” It wasn’t the first time Jim Kirk asked this question. To specify it, he had voiced his concern in this way already three times prior – and the fourth time had the same result: None at all.

Well, almost, because this time he got at least an eye-rolling for an answer, and then – finally – a pressed “I have to try it at least.”

Jim sighed deeply and continued to steady Khan, who stood beside the desk-chair and tested his injured leg again and again. He was pale, and his set yawn and his pinched expression told volumes, but just like a certain young Starfleet captain the Augment was stubborn like a mule.

“The muscles have to bulk up. The bones are mended, as McCoy told me this morning after the quick check-up he gave me. And…”

“He also told you that the muscles and sinews are still stricken and that you have to be careful,” Kirk interrupted him.

Sea colored eyes met sky blue ones, before it was Khan who sighed now.

“Jim, our wedding is in four days. I will NOT attend it in a wheelchair. Therefore…”

“We’ve no wheelchairs anymore today, honey. They are anti-grav chairs and…”

“Stop this hair splitting, Pyāra. The principle is the same – and I will not be wheeled to my own wedding,” the Augment snapped; cranky because of the pain and the frustration that he was still so damn weak. “So, are you helping me or not?”

Jim glared at him. “What do you think I’m doing here?”

“Arguing,” Nien deadpanned – and then both men were startled as a familiar deep, aged voice in their back spoke with obvious amusement,

“To use a human phrase, Jim: How does the own medicine taste?”

Both men looked over their shoulders and straight at Selek, whose eyes twinkled with mirth while the right corner of his mouth curled – the Vulcan equivalent of a laughing fit.

“Oh god, why can’t you Vulcans cease to creep up on me?” Kirk groaned. “You should wear a bell so that other people are warned.”

Selek made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a muffled laugh, yet there was some melancholy
added to the amusement in his eyes. “I don’t know how often I’ve heard that sentence back in my time. Not only from the other you, but also from ‘my’ McCoy.” He cocked his head. “I’d lost count how often I’ve listened to discussions akin to what I just heard.” He looked from Kirk to Khan. “There wasn’t a single time my Jim spent in sickbay without arguing with Leonard about his condition and that he was ‘fine’ to walk on his own, to leave, to take back command – or whatever Jim thought to be most important at those moments. And if Leonard didn’t give in, he pouted just like you do now. So, how does the own medicine taste, Jim?”

Kirk was very tempted to stuck boyishly his tongue out, but thought better of it. Old Spock was, after all, the High Minister of New Vulcan, and even if he was also his closest friend in an older vision, there were certain things even Jim Kirk didn’t do. So he only glared at Selek, while Khan grimaced.

“Happy to amuse you,” the Augment grumbled, what elicited another humorous sound from Old Spock. Then the Elder turned serious, while he stepped nearer. “I can understand that you try to regain your mobile abilities to walk to your wedding, Mr. Singh, but don’t overdo it. The gravity of this planet is higher, and your injuries were gravely.”

Nien pursed his lips for a moment. “You’re indeed concerned for my welfare.”

“Of course. You have proven to be a real friend to the Enterprise’s crew, you are Jim’s mate and you are a formidable warrior with his honor still intact. I’m… glad to have the opportunity to see you like this.”

Khan cocked his head. He had the certain feeling that there was more to the old Vulcan’s statement that the eye met, yet he thought it better to keep this to himself. And for the first time he asked himself, if in the other timeline the Enterprise-Crew and he had met, too.

Selek watched him for a moment, before he turned his attention to the topic that brought him originally to New Gol. “I came to inform you that I’ll join the short psionic tests of your crew, Mr. Singh. I’m doing this not as the High Minister, but as a friend. I know how human minds work, and so it will be easier for them to meld with me.”

“Our minds work different,” Khan mused, “yet you are right. There are differences between Vulcan and human minds, even if latter are advanced.”

“I recognized it during our meld,” Spock Prime confirmed. “Especially concerning the discipline. We also should continue to work on yours and Jim’s mental shield-technics. Seeing that you both are going to marry in four days and that you are busy with the preparations, I suggest that the next lessons will take place after your both’s and Spock’s and Nyota’s bonding ceremonies.”

Khan pursed his lips and nodded slowly. He had a certain gut-feeling that to learn how to shield his mind would be handy during the upcoming court material.

“Good,” Selek nodded, then he lifted a brow as he saw how the Augment began to waver and quickly helped Jim to sat Khan back on the desk-chair.

“You all right?” Kirk asked in concern and the former dictator sighed.

“YESSSSS, Jim. And if you ask me this question one more time…”

“You’ll shut me up by kissing me,” Jim said cheerfully; winking at his soulmate.

“Allas, you’re cockier than a seven-year-old churl,” Nien grumbled; suppressing a relieved groan as he lay back. It irked him to no end, but he had to admit that he really should take it slowly.
“Oh, you should have seen me then,” Kirk grinned. “Sam and I liked to play some pranks – and Mom got fits on regular base.”

“I can imagine that very well,” the Augment deadpanned.

“Jim,” Selek cut in. “Speaking of your family: Will your brother or your mother attend your wedding?”

From one moment to the next, the laughter left Jim’s eyes and his expression turned gravely. “No,” he said quietly.

Frowning, Spock Prime lifted a brow. “I do understand that in this time-line you and your mother have some… serious problems. But you marry under Vulcan law, what means for a life-time. So this is an one-time event. Is the grudge this big that she doesn’t come to her own son’s wedding?” He met Jim’s defiant eyes and added gently, “I don’t want to pry, old friend, and I know that this is very personal, yet I ask because I don’t want to see you sad.”

Kirk bit his lips. Of course he had thought about his mother – or Sam and his family. Yet the mere thought of calling his mother and telling her that he was going to marry a man who was accused of several serious crimes, gave him belly ache. He simply knew what she would say – that something like this was typical for him, and that she had thought that being a Starfleet captain would have cured him of making rash decisions. She would point out that he was still the impulsive boy who didn’t think twice – that he would throw his life away because of some hormones he wasn’t able to control. She wouldn’t understand the deep love he felt for Nien. She had forgotten on purpose how it was to love like this. He had learned that the hard way.

“You haven’t informed them until now,” Khan’s words interrupted his dark thoughts.

Jim took a very deep breath and sighed. “No, I haven’t.”

Sitting up again, Nien watched his beloved attentively. “You think she will disapprove with your choice.”

“She disapproves with almost everything I do,” Kirk snorted. “Her only reaction as I was promoted captain, was a deep space call from some science vessel she served on, a ‘congratulation’ and the comment that at last I’m beginning to walk towards my father’s steps. Hell, when I was in hospital after… the warp-core incident last year, she stopped by only several days after I woke up, and I was two weeks in coma prior. Some sweets and some ‘I’m glad that your injuries are not that serious’ was all I got to hear. ‘Injuries’. I was DEAD, but this part she didn’t understand.” He shook his head. “And as she left two days later, she advised me to listen to the doctors and that I should think first before I act in the future, because one day I wouldn’t be ‘that lucky’ to be patched up again like now. If I would have pondered every pro and contra those minutes before the Enterprise hit the Earth’s atmosphere, my whole crew and yours would be dead now – without any chance of retrieve them. But that she didn’t comprehend, too.” He stared into distance. “Sometimes I think she and I are living in two different worlds – in a sort of parallel universe, because she never gets what really is going on with me or understands what I tell her.”

He felt a warm, thin hand on his shoulder and as he looked back, he saw that Selek had closed the distance to him. The old Vulcan’s eyes shone with comfort and warmth, but also with melancholy, as he said,

“I do understand your hesitation to contact your mother, Jim. After all, I saw some of what you’ve been through during your childhood while we melded on Delta Vega. But she’s your mother. And she is still an active Starfleet officer. We both know how quickly death can come out there in the
galaxy, and then it will be too late to give your relationship another try. You are a grown-up man now. Even she has to see and to recognize it, and maybe she sees your upcoming wedding as another sign that her ‘little, stubborn boy’ has matured. You are going to start an own kind of family. At least you should inform her about it.”

Kirk grimaced but remained silent.

Selek’s voice became even softer. “And concerning Sam: I don’t know what happened that you and your brother have drifted apart, but I know from my time-line that you loved him dearly. Yes, your contact was rare because of you being out there in the galaxy and he was on Deneva, yet you were still close.” He hesitated; uncertain how much he could reveal. “But even on a planet like Deneva, nasty incidents can happen and… people can demise. You shouldn’t keep your distance from Sam, Jim, or you’ll regret it one day. Believe me.”

Kirk had turned fully around to Old Spock and saw deep beneath the warmth, compassion and the echo of bad memories. And, of course, the young captain’s quick mind came to conclusion. “What happened in your timeline?” he asked quietly.

Selek took a very deep breath and sighed, while he lowered his head. “You know that I swore never to reveal too much to you and the others to give you the chance to walk your own way, but… contact Sam, Jim. And… when you two speak in private, you… you should tell him that he and his family should leave Deneva within the next three or four years.”

Kirk felt a sinking in his stomach. “Will something happen?”

Again the old Vulcan didn’t look at him, while he answered, “This is the only warning I can give.”

“And maybe you should indeed speak with your brother,” Khan joined the talk softly. “Call him, Jim. You know that Spock here can’t tell you more, but I understand his words as a warning that will spare you sorrow if you listen to him.” He took a deep breath. “Your family should learn about everything from you, not from the media, because when this reporter arrives, he’ll publish our ‘happily ever after’ within a blink of an eye. Whatever happened between you, your brother and your mother – they shouldn’t become aware of something important like this by listening to the radio or by watching TV.”

Biting his lips, Jim looked first back at Old Spock – whose eyes had an almost pleading intensity – and then back to Nien. And this little voice deep in him that always spoke up when his gut took over, told him to follow the given advise. Nien was right. He, Jim, hadn’t broken up completely with his family. Some loose ties were still existing and he didn’t want to damage those ties more; especially concerning Sam.

Sam…

Something would happen to him, if he – Jim – wouldn’t speak with him. Something that lay a few years ahead, but seemed to be gravely serious. And Kirk didn’t want to think of the risk Selek just took to give him this warning.

“You always led me on the right way,” he said gently; laying one arm on Spock Prime’s arm, before he glanced at Khan. “And your advices were always for my best – well, at least after the mess last year.” He sighed. “Okay, I call them.”

There was relief in the Elder’s eyes, before the Vulcan mask was back in place. And Jim knew that he had to convince his brother to leave Deneva. The older vision of his first officer hadn’t given away any details, but Selek’s reaction spoke volumes. Something very, very bad was going to
happen in a few years on this planet, and Jim didn’t want to think of what this could be – if it would not only be dangerous for Sam and his family, but also for other people, too. Wouldn’t it be Selek’s duty then to give a proper warning for all who were involved? On the other hand, Jim knew how dangerous it was to mess with a timeline. Old Spock just had broken a dozen rules and more to warn him concerning Sam. Jim couldn’t demand anything more from the Elder.

Sighing again, he sat down on the empty chair; looking all of sudden tired. Nien reached out and took one of his hands in his own and squeezed his fingers. “You’ll find the right words,” he murmured; anticipating why his beloved dreaded the call so much.

“Yeah, but to tell someone to leave everything he built up behind only because of some evidences isn’t much of conviction.” He grimaced. “And concerning Mom… I already know how she’s going to react.”

“And again: You’ll know what to say to both of them,” Khan smiled reassuringly.

“I have to agree with Mr. Singh. The day you don’t find the right words to convince someone is the day Earth’s moon starts to orbit backwards,” Selek deadpanned – and Jim began to laugh.

“Bones should have heard you using such a phrase.”

Something close to a smile curled Selek’s lips. “Leonard would be hilarious, of course. But sometimes it’s good to grant someone a little triumph.”

Khan snorted in amusement. “He’s a sly dog, your first officer – that goes for both visions of them.”

“Yeah. Can you imagine now what I have to endure?” Kirk grinned.

“My compassion is very limited in this case, Jim,” Nien chuckled.

“And once again I have to agree with Mr. Singh,” Old Spock commented wryly; content with the two younger men’s bickering. Then he turned serious again. “I not only came to inform you of my decision to have a part in declaring your people an own human race, Mr. Singh, I also came to prepare you two for your upcoming bonding ceremony.”

Jim looked with big eyes at him. “You what?”

The familiar brown eyes with too many crinkles around them smiled in their own way with love. “Usually that would be Young Spock’s duty, because he’s your T’hy’la, but seeing that my counterpart is busy with his own preparations, I take his place – if you agree.”

Promptly Kirk began to smile widely. “Yes, of course I’m okay with it.” He glanced at Khan. “Nien?”

“It would be an honor,” the former dictator replied; bowing shortly his head at the old Vulcan.

“All right,” Selek nodded and sat down beside Jim at the second chair. “Your bonding will not only be with words and vows, but also with some psionic events. Traditionally, the priest – in this case T’Pau herself – would help you to change the small link into a full bond. Seeing that you have already developed a full bond, she’ll simply confirm it. Yet she’ll will meld with both of you parallel, what is a very intimate process. And you should be prepared for it.”

Jim smirked. “And by the way you can teach us some more tricks how to shield, and how to handle our bond.”
Inclining his head, Selek said quietly, “Correct.”

Khan sighed. “Well, I knew that the next lesson would be about that.”

“You’re never too old and too wise to learn new things,” Old Spock added seriously, and Khan nodded while rolling his eyes.

“It’s a wise motto,” Jim agreed. “I just learned this morning that sometimes trust has to be shown before you get it.” As he caught Selek’s asking glance, he began to tell him about his talk with Barnett.

ST***ST

“There they are!” Nyota couldn’t help the excited smile that spread over her face as she saw her family leaving the security area of the arrival terminal. Wearing mostly modern business clothes but mixed with colorful scarfs in tribal style, they did drive some attention towards them, yet they moved casual and self-conscious as if it would be the most normal thing on the world that six Terrans of African heritage, carrying large luggage and chattering, walked through the New Vulcan spaceport.

Uhura stole a short glance at Spock, who had schooled his features into the expressionless Vulcan mask, yet she saw curiosity shimmering in his eyes, while he watched his intended’s family with interest. And one look at Sarek told her that the ambassador was slightly amused, yet curious, too.

Taking a deep breathe she headed towards them; taking care that she didn’t walked too quickly even if all she wanted was to run.

Her sister lacked this kind of control and barely she had seen her, stormed forwards with a joyful “Nyota!” A few moments later Uaekundu threw her arms around her sister in a bear hug; squealing in delight. Far too happy to meet her family again, Nyota refrained from rebuking her sister and returned the embrace with a suppressed laugh. Only seconds later her brother Malcom was there and wrapped both females in his long arms.

Words of “Look at you! All dressed in Vulcan’s finest!” or of “Love suits you, sis!” were exchanged, replied by Nyota with “Heavens, have you grown!” and “You have a different haircut, Malcom!” And this all in voices you really can’t call quiet.

Sarek and Spock stopped several meters away from the spectacle to give Nyota some room to welcome her family; both observed the display of big human emotions with interest but also with amusement. Not for the first time the ambassador asked himself how men had come that far with this lack of any control.

Uhura’s parents and grandparents joined the siblings and then the greeting became less noisy, but not less intense. Nyota embraced her parents as if there would be no morning, the same went for her granny while she greeted her grandfather with deep respect, before she also threw her arms around him. Her sister didn’t leave her side; speaking the whole time with unstoppable enthusiasm.

Finally, after many words, kisses and embraces (and after driving a lot of attention from by-passing Vulcans who all of them gave them the eye-brow), Nyota remembered that she hadn’t come alone. Taking her grandfather’s one hand and the other one of her father in her fingers, she led them towards the Vulcan ambassador and her spouse; the others followed her immediately.

“Sarek, Spock, may I introduce my family to you? My grandparents Zahir and Imara Uhura, my parents Alhamisi and M’Umbha, and my siblings Uaekundu and Malcom Uhura.” She looked at her family. “Please meet Ambassador Sarek of the House of Surak, and S’chn T’gai Spock cha’Sarek –
my intended."

Bots Vulcans lifted their right hands into the Ta’al, and Nyota felt some warmth mingled with pride as she watched her family returning the traditional gesture almost perfect. ‘They’ve practiced!’ she thought. ‘Sweet Lord, who had taught them?’

“Welcome to New Vulcan, honorable members of Nyota’s clan,” Sarek said. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” He let his hand sink. “My House is grateful to call Nyota a daughter, and spouse to my son.”

Alhamisi bowed. “We come to serve, Ambassador, and in the name of my family I voice our gratitude to invite us and to have Nyota welcome in the folds of your clan.” Then he looked at Spock; smiling. “So, this is the young man who stole my oldest granddaughter’s heart?” He cocked his head; his dark eyes shimmered warm before he glanced at Nyota. “You have quite the catch here, my dear. After all I heard about him and his captain, you’re going to marry a hero.”

Uhura blushed and Spock felt – to his horror – his ear tips turning hot.

It was Nyota’s mother M’Umbha, who stepped in before the situation could become embarrassing for her future son-in-law. “I know that it isn’t usual among your people to show affection in public, but I’m nothing more than a casual human mother, who meets the first time the man who will take her girl from her, so…” She stepped forwards, and with a “With your permission, son,” she took him in his arms and squeezed him gently.

Spock didn’t know how to react. For a moment he was thrown back in time, as his own mother still lived and she embraced him whenever they met after he left his father’s house to join Starfleet. Yes, Amanda had been more slender and taller, but even with his inner shields risen he could feel the motherly warmth the woman radiated with. Parallel he sensed her honesty and could smell the pleasant scent of her perfume. And simply acting on the human side of his instincts, he carefully wrapped his arms around her and forced himself to relax.

“Welcome to our family, Spock,” M’Umbha whispered. “Whatever the future holds for you and Nyota, always remember that you have now a place on Earth you can go to and can call ‘home’.” She squeezed him one last time, before she stepped back. She recognized the surprise and confusion deep in his eyes, and realized that Nyota hadn’t underestimated as she told her that Spock had been lonely the most time of his life. He wasn’t used to be a part of a group, to be welcomed in group – or into a family – and she also remembered that this young man had lost his mother only two years ago.

Nyota had told her that Spock’s mother had been the only one who had accepted him like he was, until the half-Vulcan met a certain young communication genius. And M’Umbha was glad that said half-Vulcan had made further friends in the meantime. It was an open secret by now that the youngest captain who ever commanded a Starfleet ship and the son of the Vulcan ambassador had become close friends, and she was curious to meet the rest of the famous gang of the ‘Starfleet-kids’ how she had come to call the young officers around James Kirk.

Spock cleared his throat; ignoring some scandalized gazes other Vulcans threw in their direction. “Thank you for your kind offer, Mrs. Uhura. It will be a pleasure for me to visit your home one day.”

The older woman began to laugh. “Honey, we’re as good as one family. Call me M’Umbha.”

“The same goes for me, Spock. I’m Alhamisi for you,” Nyota’s father said with a big smile, but he ceased of touching the future husband of his daughter.

“I’m Malcom,” Nyota’s brother said; nodding at Spock. “If my sister gets on your nerves too much, do not hesitate to call me. I do know a thing or two about it.”
Promptly his sister’s fist landed on his arm, while Spock replied, “Nyota is a very well-adjusted person and we share many interests, so I never tire to discuss topics with her.” He glanced shortly at his betrothed with warmth in his eyes, before he added, “Yet I thank you for the offer. Maybe you can give me the one or other advice concerning human behavior in general.”

“Believe me, nephew, you can become old, grey and wrinkled, yet you will not be able to solve completely the riddle called ‘human’,” a male voice from behind the little group said.

Despite still being weak from the surgery, Sarek demonstrated how quick Vulcans could move as he side-stepped Nyota’s family and looked with slightly widened eyes at the three persons which had stopped in the back of the Terrans.

“Silek!” he said; surprise edged for a moment in his voice, before his face became softer.

The Uhuras parted and made room for the three Vulcans to pass through, while Uaekundu murmured towards her brother, “See, I was right! Silek does resemble Spock a lot!”

And she was right. Nyota cocked her head and watched the older Vulcan coming nearer. His slender face with the high cheekbones, the lips and even the way to move was almost identically with Spock. Only his eyes were more almond-shaped and they bore the typical Vulcan straight look, while Spock’s eyes were more human. He also was slenderer and looked younger than Sarek, yet you couldn’t deny that the three Vulcan males were from one and the same family.

“Fascinating,” she whispered.

Ever so quietly Spock cleared his throat and gave her a pointed look that woke her amusement, then the Enterprise’ first officer watched the three newcomers with interest. He had never met his uncle, yet he knew that Silek had been a rebel within the clan – just like Spock as he vacated his place within the Vulcan Science Academy and joined Starfleet. Like him Silek had rebelled against his own father – Skon – and had chosen a different carrier then his family planned for him. He went to Earth to become a teacher and taught students there Vulcan linguistic. Skon, Sarek’s and Silek’s father, banned him from the clan – something that had a familiar bitter taste for Spock. But, surprisingly, Sarek didn’t obey his father concerning his brother and stayed in contact with him. As Sarek later became a member of the embassy, the two brothers met often – and Spock had heard one time that it had been Silek who introduced Amanda Grayson to Sarek, who was in need for a teacher who taught him better English and human traditions.

Later, after Skon’s death, T’Pau made use of her right as the clan’s matriarch and welcomed Silek back in the folds of the family, yet Silek didn’t return to Vulcan permanently, but attended a project on Hydrilla; marrying the daughter of a Vulcan follow scientist before he settled down there.

It was quite a paradox: The traditional Sarek married a human woman, and the rebel bonded with a Vulcan lady. Sometimes the paths of the universe were difficult to understand. And it didn’t slip Nyota’ attention that Sarek’s stance and behavior was stiffer than that of his brother – even if the ambassador gave into his obvious inner unrest for his younger sibling.

With a few steps he was in front of his sibling. “Welcome brother,” he said; lifting his hand into the Ta’al, Silek instantly replied, before both Vulcans wrapped their hands around each other’s wrists. “We were concerned as we learned your shuttle had canceled its arrival here,” Sarek continued.

“Told you, we should have called the ambassador to tell him about the changes,” Zahir said to his son.

“The commanders of the hired shuttle and the liner shuttle saw the logic in having a rendezvous in
space to spare some time the other passengers of the shuttle that came from Hydrilla,” Silek
answered. “And then we were occupied with the fine family your son’s intended belongs to.” He
nodded almost kindly at the Uhuras, before he turned toward his two companions. “Please meet my
wife, T’Ylle and my father-in-law, Starnn.”

Sarek’s, Spock’s and Nyota’a attention was driven to the Vulcanness, who watched them with polite
interest. She was a slender, tall woman in her middle age with dark hair that was cut on shoulder-
length. She instantly closed the distance to her husband as he lifted his right hand; index- and middle-
finger straightened, the other fingers folded into the palm. She returned the gesture with her own
right hand.

“Sarek, it’s an honor to meet you,” she said before her eyes found Spock. “Long life and peace,
Spock.”

The half-Vulcan lifted his hand into the Ta’al. “The same for you, T’Ylle.”

Then the old Vulcan stepped forwards. His hair was already snow white, his face full of crinkles and
his voice was high and hoarse from age, yet his eyes were full of life, as he greeted the others.

The same time two younger Vulcans headed into their direction; moving antigrav-baggage carts
beside them.

“Ah, our luggage,” Silek nodded and turned towards his brother. “Where can we store them until
we’ve found a flat to live in?”

To say that Vulcans were always in control was a lie, like Sarek clearly proved as both his brows
almost vanished beneath his grey-black peppered bangs, while his eyes widened. “I… beg your
pardon?”

Uhura didn’t believe her eyes, as she watched Silek’s lips curling into an almost-smile.

“Haven’t I told you?” Silek asked with clear faked innocence. “We’re moving to New Vulcan to
stay here.”

For two seconds Sarek’s mouth hung open – and Nyota could have sworn that she saw mischievous
humor in Silek’s gaze. It was clear that Silek had just pulled his brother’s leg in rarely display of
humor. She threw a glance at Spock, who obviously didn’t know what to think of the openness his
uncle showed.

The Enterprise’s comm officer hid a smile. Now she knew that the humorous streak Spock showed
here and there wasn’t only a genetic devisee from his mother, but ran also in his clan.

‘This is going to be an interesting time within the next days,’ she thought with amusement.

ST***ST

‘This is going to be such fun!’ This thought wasn’t born out of amusement, but was sheer sarcasm.
Jim Kirk sat at the same communication terminal he had occupied in the morning to talk with
Barnett, and waited for the connection to Deneva. The last he had heard about his mother was that
she was visiting Sam and Aurelan on Deneva, but that had been a three or four weeks ago and he
doubted that she was still on vacation given the damn war – despite the momentarily cease-fire.
Therefore he assumed her back in space. Maybe Sam could tell him on which ship she served in the
moment. He didn’t like the thought to contact Bob and to ask him for another favor to find out where
Winona Kirk was.
The screen sprang alive and Jim looked straight into the brown eyes of his older brother. Georg Samuel Kirk held a big resemblance to his sibling, yet he looked more matured – last but not least because of the moustache he wore. The blond-brown hair was combed side-parted and his skin was tanned from Deneva’s sun.

“Jim!” he called; bafflement and joy in his gaze. “That’s a surprise! Long time not heard from you.”

Kirk grimaced. “Well, we were at war, Sam, and several nasty things happened which prevented me from making social calls.”

Sam sighed. “Yeah, we heard about this conspiracy within Starfleet in the news and that you had a part in revealing it. Mom and I tried to contact you via Starfleet, but we were told that you were off duty in the moment and have asylum on New Vulcan. Guess how Mom took the latter.”

This time it was Jim who sighed. “I can imagine it,” he grumbled.

His brother turned serious. “Jim, I was told you were off duty and have taken refugium on New Vulcan – and seeing you in civil clothes instead of uniform and the fact that I received your call from New Gol tells me even more. Are you in trouble? Mom tried to get some more details, but the whole staff at the HQ is tightlipped. What happened?”

The younger Kirk groaned. “Section 31 happened – again. The Klingons happened. The…”

“Section 31? Never heard of it.”

“Yeah, of course not – after all it was a secret department within the SBI that thought it to be a good idea to start a war with the Klingons to gain more power and to militarize Starfleet. And for that they tried to use me last year and now they tried to eliminate all those who could reveal them – meaning my officers, me and Khan and his family.”

Sam cocked his head. “That are big accuses you’re making, but after all I heard in the news I think they told us only the top of the ice-mountain.”

“You have no idea,” Kirk growled. “But you’re going to learn everything about it, mark my words.” He took a deep breath.

His brother watched him. “There are rumors that you were captured by Klingons prior to your crazy stunt on Aldebaran. Are you okay?”

“Yeah – thanks to Nien. He freed me from this hellhole and healed me.”

Sam blanched. “You were… tortured?”

Jim made a face. “Sentenced to death by torture – and Nien only got me out hours later. I tell you, it was no walk through the park.”

The older of the two Kirk-brothers bent forwards. “But you’re okay now, are you?” Concern shimmered in his eyes.

“Yes,” Jim nodded. “I’m healed – something I can’t say about Nien. He got it hard during the last fight.”

Sam shortly pursed his lips. “Who is this Nien? There are rumors that you and this mysterious super-hero Sunrise worked hand in hand. Is this his name? Do you refer to him?”
Yes, not only Jim Kirk had a quick mind and was able to connect given details to a whole picture within minutes. Sam was the same.

“Yeah,” the young captain affirmed. “It was him – and still is him.” He braced himself. “Sam, I not only called to let you know that I’m okay, I also have big news. I’m going to marry in four days.”

Bang! The cat was out of the bag – and Georg Samuel Kirk stared with open mouth had his brother on the screen.

“You… what?”

Despite the fact that the two brothers had drifted apart after Sam ran off all those years ago and left his little brother with the hated stepfather behind, there was still some of the once shared brotherhood intact. Jim grinned at Sam.

“I’m marrying in four days and…”

He couldn’t end his sentence, because suddenly Sam was pushed aside by a slender hand, and the blond head of Winona Kirk appeared on the screen. Her deep blue eyes bore in those of her youngest son, while the long blond hair fell over her shoulder.

“Jim! Sweet Lord, finally! The brass didn’t answer any questions I had concerning you, and only stated that you off duty and on New Vulcan in asylum.” Her momentarily worried look raked over his face, before her gaze changed. “What have you done now that you have to take refuge on New Vulcan?”

This time Jim groaned loudly. That was exactly the reaction he had seen coming. “Oh, I did nothing – except for revealing a conspiracy, kicking some admirals’ asses which rot in custody now, and protecting a man and his family of falling prey to genocide named admirals ordered. And to keep me save High Minister Selek granted my officers and me asylum until everything will be cleared at trial.” He shrugged. “So, no big deal here.”

Winona stared at him. “No big deal?” she repeated. “You are to be… court materialled?”

“That’s the normal way when you disobey an admiral – who is, by the way, responsible for the attack against the Excalibur and those who didn’t survive it, tried to murder Nien and his people, and didn’t move one finger as I was taken captive by the Klingons. If it wouldn’t have been for Nien, I’d be dead again – this time without a ticket back to the world of livings.”

His mother rolled her eyes. “Don’t exaggerate the incident last year. Nuclear poisoning can lead to death, yes, but…”

“For the last time, Mom, I was dead for more than a half hour! And I only survived because Bones put me into cryosleep and feed me some of Nien’s blood!” Kirk shook his head. “You never got this part, didn’t you? I was dead – declared dead and zipped into a body-bag. End of story! And then I was retrieved. But believe me, to feel your own cells overheating and melting, because you are nuclear poisoned, cut off from any company and dying alone is something I wouldn’t wish at a snake!”

Winona stayed silent and it was obvious that she somehow still denied the knowledge to settle in. Jim had the sudden assumption that this was a kind of self-protection her mind came up instinctively.

Sam cleared his throat. “Mom, Jim is going to marry in four days,” he carefully changed the topic.

That brought life into Winona. “WHAT?” she shrieked and glanced back at her youngest son. “You
are going to marry?” She threw a short look up to the ceiling. “Lord I thank thee, he has grown up finally!” She waved her hand as Jim opened his mouth to give a fitting reply – after all he was a Starfleet captain, dammit! “Who is she? Is she there? I really want to meet the woman that was able to tame you. Is it this nice comm officer you have? Or the Marcus-girl? I heard that…”

“Mom!” Jim interrupted her sternly. “There is no ‘she’. It’s a ‘he’. I’m marrying officially my already acknowledged bondmate and he is male.”

That stopped Winona’s speech. With big eyes she looked at him. “Oh… well… I never took you for a bi, but…” She shrugged. “Hey, it’s all right. If he is a nice guy and you two are certain about the marriage, then… why not.” She smiled, but it was forced. “So, who is it? One of your two friends? I tell you, this doctor and your Vulcan officer hovered around your bed last year like two mother-hens.”

“Yeah, they are like mother-hens – and they say the same about me when the situation is the other way around,” Jim answered calmly. “But, no, it’s none of them. Bones is done with marriage, and Spock is going the wed my ‘nice comm officer’ in four days. It’s a double-marriage under Vulcan law: Spock and Uhura, and Nien and I.”

“Nien? As in ‘Nien’ whose blood cured you?”

“One and the same,” Kirk nodded. “And I don’t marry him because his blood saved me, but because we fell in love – real love!”

“Mom, Nien is this mysterious Sunrise,” Sam cut in. It was obvious that he was baffled about the revelation that his ‘baby-brother’ was about to marry a male, but he had no problems with it.

Winona was also open-spirted concerning same-gender-relationships and marriages, yet she knew that her youngest son loved to hunt skirts, and then a man captured his heart. Typical Jim. When there was one thing certain about him then it was that you couldn’t calculate him.

The woman bit shortly his lips. “Sunrise… Quite the hero you got yourself there.” She cocked her head and stemmed her fists on the hips. “You knew from the beginning who Sunrise is and you didn’t tell?” she all but demanded.

“If you’ve watched the conference with the media and President Robertson a few days ago, Mom, you would know that Sunrise doesn’t want to reveal his identity, and I respect that.” Jim crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Nien and I are already bondmates, and…”

“Bondmates? He’s psionic?” Winona concluded.

Kirk nodded again. “Yes, sort of. And our bond will be officially acknowledged by the Vulcans.” He took a deep breath. “If you, Sam, Aurelan and Peter want to attend my wedding, I… would be pleased.” Well, he would be pleased to meet Sam and his family again. And if this meant he would have to endure his mother’s presence, too – well, by all his means then she could come.

Sam sighed and looked sorrowful at his brother. “Heavens! Jim, I would love to, but… Aurelan is about to give birth to our second child within the next two or three days.”

“What? The time is already up?” Jim asked baffled; ignoring his mother rolling her eyes again. “I thought she has two or three months left.”

His brother chuckled. “Time flies by when you have a lot to do. The birth will take place in two or three days – the baby is already turning in the womb.”
“Well, then give her my best wishes – and call me when the little one is born. What will it be? A girl or a boy?”

“A girl – and Peter is head over heels already.”

Jim laughed. “Yeah, I guess.” He glanced back at his mother. “So, you are there to help Aurelan?”

Winona nodded. “Yes, I took my whole annual vacation to stay on Deneva to help Aurelan with Peter.”

“At least you are one time there when one of your sons need you,” Jim replied hard.

Again Sam raised to speak before his mother had a chance to answer the verbal blow “The pregnancy isn’t an easy one this time and Aurelan had a lot of problems within the last weeks. She barely could leave her bed.”

Jim liked his sister-in-law and so the news touched him. “I’m sorry to hear this, Sam. Is she okay?”

“She’s already in hospital. The doctors want to watch the last days of her pregnancy to act instantly should it be necessary.” He took a deep breath. “I’m sorry that I’ll miss your wedding, Jim, but…”

“Hey, no problem,” the young captain assured him and meant it. “My wedding is a little bit sudden and, to admit it, I already assumed that you didn’t have time. I simply wanted to inform you about it before you maybe learn it from the media.”

Sam grinned. “Don’t tell me you called the press.”

“Oh, something like this – but not because I think my marriage would be interesting for public. There is more to it.”

“Why do I have a bad feeling about it?” Winona asked; narrowing her eyes.

“Because you never placed any trust of faith into me,” Jim deadpanned. “No matter if it concerned some silly children pranks or serious stuff.”

“You can’t deny that you were anything but the nice boy,” Winona stated.

“Yeah, guess whose fault this is,” Jim said bitterly. “Sometimes children see no other way than driving not existing attention to themselves by disobeying the rules. Thank the Lord that I now have a kind of an own family – friends, who are there for me and accept me for what and who I am, and a mate who loves me dearly and didn’t hesitate to risk his own life to rescue me from Klingon prison where I faced death by torture.”

At the last part of the little tirade, Winona paled. “You were… tortured?”

“You are long enough in Starfleet. I’m certain you know what happened to her officers when they’re captured by Klingons – not to speak of those the Klingon Empire regards as a kind of personal enemy and sentence them to death.” Jim’s voice gave nothing away just like his face in the moment. Bones would have called it the ‘Vulcan mask’, but in this case it wasn’t a mask at all. Jim really didn’t care if his mother was shocked about his almost-fate or not.

Sam’s reaction was more valued to him. “Jim, how bad was it?” he asked quietly; eyes full of compassion but also anger – anger that was directed at those who had hurt his younger brother.

“Bad enough to give even Bones the chills. Klingon pain sticks should really be forbidden – or
Klingon knives.”

Winona gulped, while Sam swore under his breath. “Any damages left?” he asked quietly. As a biologist he had heard a thing or two about the Klingon pain sticks and how they worked.

“No – besides that this hellhole brought Nien and me together.” Jim unfolded his arms. “Well, guys, I hope everything will be okay with the little lady – and don’t forget to call me at New Gol when she is born. I tell T’Pau that you’re going to call so that you’re piped through to me.”

“You are… at New Gol?” Winona asked; thunderstruck.

“Yes, Nien, Bones, Jo and I are living here in the moment. T’Pau is really a very considering and caring host.”

“T’Pau,” Sam said; scratching his head. “Simply like that. She is… What? The Vulcan matriarch?”

“Sort of – and she’s Spock’s granny and because Spock and I are T’hy’la – soulbrothers – she welcomed me into her clan. So no big deal to ask her for the permission to receive some calls.” He grinned at the perplex faces on the screen. “Bye!” He reached for the button to cut the connection, but Sam called,

“Jim! Tell Dr. McCoy to take some photos! I so want to see you in robes.”

“Robes?” Winona asked astonished.

“He marries under Vulcan law beside Spock. So, yeah, Jimmy is going to wear robes.”

“Silke ones,” the young captain confirmed with a grin. “Spock chose them – and they really look nice. See ya!” With that he shut off the link and leant back. Well, despite his mother’s typical reaction the whole talk wasn’t that bad as he had assumed. And he had to admit that he wasn’t too sad that his mother wouldn’t attend the marriage, yet a small part of him was sorry that Sam wouldn’t be there. But the little lady was more important in the moment, so he could understand his brother’s absence.

Sighing he raised; happy that the call was over. Then he stopped in the movement. He hadn’t told his mother and Sam about Nien’s true identity. But knowing Winona she promptly would tell everyone who listened – or not listened – about the ‘Augment from the past’.

No, let them learn about like anybody else: From a detailed and clear report within the media, including everything that really happened.

Feeling more at ease Jim left the office; looking forwards to the next days…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

So, there were many reunions in this chapter, and this will not be the last reunions. In the next chapter, you’re going to meet Suzette, the psionic-test with the Augments will be done, Khan has an interesting talk with Selek concerning the other time-line and then
Jim and Spock will go shopping to get Nien an own wedding-robe (Vulcan style, of course). And this shopping tour will not be an easy one, because some of the bullies Spock had to endure during his school-time have survived.

I hope you liked the new chapter. In the Kelvin-timeline Winona Kirk is often portrayed as a woman who had changed drastically after her husband’s death, leaving her sons in the care of her second husband who was a bastard. And hearing his voice and how he talked to little Jim in the first movie seems to speak for such a background story, not to mention the book to the movie in which Jim’s unhappy childhood was told. Therefore I decided to write Winona like this. I also thought that it would be a logical reaction from her to simply deny that Jim had been, indeed, dead. Some people protect themselves from further mental pain by denying new losses. Okay, Jim was retrieved, yet I can imagine that it would have broken Winona completely if she would acknowledge that her son, who resembles his father so much, had died to save his ship just like Georg did. I hope you’ll like my writing of her.

Now I’m just curious what you think of the new chapter.

Have a nice rest of the week – and the next chapter will come quicker than the last one.

Love

Yours Starflight
Two roads diverged

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

At first a very BIG thank-you for all the comments you left. I’m really happy that you all are sticking true to the story, even if the next updates are often delayed. The more I’m glad that I can present you the next chapter sooner than usual. And I can already promise a big emotional rollercoaster.

Sorry, the scene in which Jim proofs that really no-one should mistreat his T’hy’la comes in the next chapter, but I think the last part of the actual chapter will compensate you.

Now have fun with the next installment,

Love

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 101 – Two roads diverged

At the same time the Uhura-family as well as Selik, T’ylle and Starn checked into the hotel Sarek had booked for them, at the hospital Joaquin sat at the edge of the bed and watched Suzette sleeping deeply and peacefully. She had been removed from the stasis-chamber only two hours ago and regarding the experiences they had had with the other Augments during the last three days, Suzette could sleep even a few hours more until she woke up. Nevertheless, he yearned for the moment she would open her eyes.

He looked up as McCoy stepped beside him, checked the monitor of the biobed and smiled down at him. “Our sleeping beauty still need some time, but her readouts are normal. So, what do you think of some lunch?”

Weiss shook his head. “Thanks, Doc, but I really cannot eat something until I’ve spoken with her.”

Bones rolled his eyes. “Sweet Lord, one worse than the next. So…” He stopped as the young Asian woman began to stir.

Hastily Joaquin bent over her and touched her still cool cheek. “Sue,” he whispered.

Her long lashes fluttered and with a deep intake of breath she opened her eyes. Almost instantly a shiver ran through her body which showed that her body – just like that of the other Augments – remembered very well the coldness it had endured for so long. With a groan she tried to roll into a ball to warm herself, but her muscles didn’t obey her immediately. Something close to panic woke in her eyes, but before the fear could really set in, Weiss simply gathered her in his arms.

“Sue, it’s okay. You’re safe. It’s me, Joaquin. Take it easy, love.” He pressed a kiss on her temple. “Just take it easy. We’ve slept very long. Give your body time to adjust.”
She coughed quietly and croaked something even the young man couldn’t understand, but at least she leant into him.

“Sh-sh, everything is all right, sweetie,” he murmured and looked up at McCoy, who had a soft smile on his face.

“Yes, she’s okay, m’boy. She’ll have the same tiny trouble you all have experienced, but tomorrow she’ll be able to move better.”

Suzette Ling listened to the words without really recognizing them. Her mind was working only slowly, but one thing was certain: She could sense familiar presences near and the one who held her was… Joaquin.

Feeling new tiredness rising within her she tried to comprehend what was going on, but she couldn’t understand anything except that she felt calmness and peace around her. Giving into her urges she fell asleep again.

“Give her time, son,” Leonard said gently. “You’ll see, in the evening or during the night she is going to be more awake. You weren’t any better as you raised from your beauty-sleep the first time aboard the Enterprise.”

Weiss sighed deeply. “I know – I watched the same reaction with most of the others of my siblings, still…” He pressed his lips in thin line, while he tenderly placed Suzette back on the pillow; covering her with the thermo-blanket before he stroked through her hair.

“Yeah, impatience is the prerogative of the youth,” McCoy grimaced with a mixture of amusement and sympathy. “So, come one, Romeo, have some lunch with me.”

Grumbling something, Weiss left Suzette’s bedside only reluctantly, but he followed the CMO out of the large room and accompanied him, Otto, a smiling Katie, Rodriguez, Paolo, Chang and Pablo to one of the restaurants on the campus. It was about time for his older siblings to get adjusted to the planet they would live on for some time.

ST***ST

The afternoon went by like time was flying. While Sarek had a longer talk with his brother, T’Ylle and her father settled in. Spock took the Uhuras together with Nyota on a sight-seeing-tour. He had to admit that he was impressed by the humans’ behavior that stayed controlled whenever they were in public, yet none of them lacked the warmth the young half-Vulcan had been captured with since he and Nyota had become closer. His future mother-in-law was kind-spirited, exactly like Malcom, while Nyota’s sister seemed to be curious about everything. The two older males had a wide common knowledge and Spock noticed himself that he liked to speak with Nyota’s grandfather. Yet he felt some relief as he took the Uhuras back to the hotel where they could freshen up before they would be picked up again to visit the same restaurant, McCoy and Carol Marcus had visited only a few evenings prior. Selik and his family would join them, and Spock felt some concern for his father, because the whole day had been very busy for Sarek.

And the next day wouldn’t be less stressful, when T’Pau, Selek and Sorel would test the Augments’ psionic to declare them their own telepathic race in the end.

While Spock was occupied with strict family-business, Jim remained in New Gol; learning new Vulcan sentences with the help of a young adept, and getting instructions concerning his and Nien’s upcoming wedding.
Khan also had to learn the traditional words and once again Kirk was impressed how quickly his beloved’s enhanced mind was able to adjust to the complicated language. While Jim still thought he got knots into his tongue by uttering the sentences, Nien’s pronunciation sounded almost smooth after the third or fourth attempt which earned him a Vulcan compliment.

As the evening came, Bones returned to New Gol like always, reported to Khan about his family’s condition and was glad to tell the Augment that all his siblings were now out of their cryotubes and put into ‘nice, warm, cozy’ biobeds. Joaquin remained at the hospital, which surprised none of the men. Hearing that Suzette Ling had been awake for a minute and was now back in dreamland had to glue the young man to her side.

Khan didn’t find any rest easily. Too much was at stake the next day, and even his logical mind – and Jim’ reassurance – told him that he and his family didn’t have to fear any other outcome than the official recognition as their own psionic human race by the Vulcans, a slight risk remained and so Nien was uncharacteristically nervous. It was up to Jim to calm him down with some cuddling – and some tales about the pranks he played as a boy – until the former dictator felt enough at peace to fall asleep finally.

At the same time Joaquin lay beside Suzette on her biobed, having wrapped himself around her and had dozed off. Of course, he had received some amused glances from his other siblings, two risen eye-brows from the Vulcan nurse and Healer Sorel, and a low chuckle from McCoy before the good doctor left to return to New Gol, but Weiss didn’t mind those reactions. He was only glad to be reunited with Suzette and to feel her even heartbeat and breathe.

Sometime during the later hours, he must have fallen asleep, because he woke up as someone carefully shook his shoulder and quietly called his name. Groggily he opened his eyes – and was gifted with the most beautiful sight he’d had within the last days. Suzette’s face, barely visible in the darkness, hovered a few inches above his own and her long hair tickled his cheeks and throat. Then his gaze cleared, and he saw that her almond-shaped eyes were wide and confused, with a hint of anxiety in them.

“Where are we?” she whispered. “Where are the others?”

Frowning, Joaquin lifted his head. Only the night-time illumination from the floor outside and the dimmed lights of the monitors banned some of the darkness within the room, yet the silhouettes from the biobeds and the sleeping Augments were visible.

“A part of us are here, the rest are in the next room,” he murmured as he lifted a hand and cupped her cheek. “Don’t be afraid, love, we are among friends and everything is okay.”

A quiet noise from the door woke both young people’s attention. In the light of the floor a tall, slender person stepped into the room, looked around and came nearer; the doors closed again. A hand-lamp illuminated the way the newcomer took and for a second Suzette was blinded as the lamp was directed at her.

“Miss Ling woke finally up,” the male voice said quietly, while the man stopped beside the bed. “How are you, Miss? Any problems or afflictions after the long cryosleep?”

Suzette tensed. The man spoke fluid English, yet it held a strange tune – one that would slip any casual human’s attention, but Suzette’s hearing was extraordinary (even for an Augment), yet she couldn’t place the accent.

“I’m… cold and stiff, but otherwise…” She stopped, while she carefully turned around on the mattress to look at the visitor. The same moment her nose caught a foreign scent, one she had never
smelled before, and the heart-beat of the stranger sounded… different. She looked up at the tall man and her eyes, adjusted to the semi-darkness, raked over the features… features which were slender and strangely lean, yet foreign. And then her gaze found the slanted eye-brows and the pointed ears, while her fine hearing realized that the male’s heart beat was at the side of his body, and not in the middle.

This only could mean one thing: The man was no human, but…

Bolting into a sitting position, Suzette Ling did something some other young women maybe would have done, too, being in her place: She opened her mouth and screamed.

ST***ST

Khan had slept for maybe two hours when he woke up because of a sudden inner turmoil. Something happened. Something that had to do with Joaquin and…

He remembered the first lessons Selek had given him concerning some mental techniques. Instead of jumping to conclusions which could be wrong, or taking action, he concentrated and listened into himself. Yes, it was Joaquin he felt – and the boy’s confusion changed into big amusement.

What the hell was happening at the hospital – in the middle of the night?

Untangling himself from Jim, who used him as a kind of personal teddy-bear, he carefully sat up and reached for his communicator that lay on the night-stand. Opening it he chose Joaquin’s frequency, yet he had to wait more than a minute until finally the boy answered him.

“What’s going on?” Nien demanded in a whisper.

Joaquin’s chuckling voice answered, “Suzette woke up and met her first Vulcan – unprepared. I swear, she screamed like the famous damsel in distress.”

“I’m NOT a damsel in distress – and wipe that gleeful grin from your face, Joe! I’m certain that you were as shocked like I am now!” the angry voice of the young woman was heard. “It’s not every day you’re meeting an alien.”

“Don’t fret, little one, Katie reacted the same way.” That was Otto, and Khan could hear the hidden laughter in his brother’s voice.

“I did WHAT?” Katie’s indignant voice sounded from afar.

“Whatish’n?” In the light of the communicator Nien saw Jim lifting his head, still more asleep than awake.

“Suzette met her first Vulcan – and panicked.”

Kirk looked at him as if he hadn’t understood one single word – his still sleep clouded mind didn’t work as it should. Then he shrugged, mumbled something of “She getsh ushed to shem” and returned to Morpheus’ realm.

Amused and with deep tenderness Khan watched his mate, while he listened to the bickering at the other end of the line, called finally a “Good night, Joaquin”, closed the communicator and lay back beside Jim. And only then he realized that sitting up hadn’t so much pained or had given him trouble like it did in the last days.

ST***ST
The next morning was the ‘big day’, like Jim called it, and he was torn between accompanying Bones to the hospital to be there when T’Pau, Selek and Sorel would test the Augment telepathical abilities, or to stay with Khan. In the end he watched Bones get into a large hover-car together with T’Pau – “Spock’s granny is giving me a ride, so for once my molecules will not be squirreled through a damn transporter”, had been McCoy’s statement before the departure – and returned to Nien’s and his room.

He received a short call from Spock who informed him that his father would attend the test at the hospital. Spock would drive him to the hospital within the next half hour. And then another topic became important: Khan’s formal robes.

As only a guest at Spock’s wedding, casual Terran clothes would have been enough, but as one of the bonding-partners within the ceremony, formal robes were in order. Given the fact that Khan was still in no condition to go shopping and considering the day’s pending decision concerning the Augments, Spock suggested that he and Jim would do the shopping the next day in the morning when the temperature was still comfortable for humans. Nien slated that he and Jim should wear the same robes, which also covered with some traditions from pre-Surak times when T’hy’las bonded officially, as Spock explained. He offered to contact the shop where he had bought the other robes to reserve the clothing.

Moving from the room out to the terrace, Khan managed to walk the whole way, even if it irked him that he had to make a pause one time. Yet it was obvious that he was strengthening from day to day, and Jim was convinced that this process would proceed once his people were protected by being declared their own race. Relief could work magic, as Kirk knew from his own experiences.

Then the waiting began – and after the first two hours it was unclear who of the two men was readier to climb the walls. When Nien concentrated he could feel the tension in a few of his siblings, and he knew how much it costed several of his brothers and sisters to trust those ‘aliens’ enough to let them touch their minds – their very thoughts. Only the knowledge that T’Pau’s appearance woke the memories of Shani within his family members and that this would calm them, gave Khan a little peace. Well, and he also was glad that Selek was with them. As fierce as Spock in any version and age could be, he was gentle when it came to the well-being of others. And Selek’s warm, yet powerful aura would certainly play a part in giving the Augments some assurance that they were safe.

Odd!

Since when had Spock become someone he compared with comfort?

‘Since he brought you back from the dreamland your mind had fled to – saving your life like this and sparing your mate a lot of sorrow. Oh, and you have come to know him better,’ his inner voice told him helpfully. Khan groaned inwardly. Yes, he not only learned to respect Spock, he also was about to take a liking to the Vulcan, who could be naïve and gentle as a little boy, and fierce like an ancient warrior, paired up with high intelligence and disarming logic. ‘Given time we’ll be buddies,’ he thought with a hint of sarcasm; imagining Spock’s eye brow vanishing under the black bangs if the first officer could hear those thoughts.

“Earth to Nien, someone in there?”

Jim’s amused tenor brought him out of his pondering. Askingly he looked at the younger man, who grinned, “I addressed you three times, but you were lost somewhere in dreamy-land.”

Kirk had talked to him and he hadn’t recognized it? Alas, so much for being an enhanced being. Making a face, he answered, “I was thinking of what is happening at the moment in the hospital.”
Jim, who sat on a desk-chair that was placed beside Khan’s, bent forwards and laid a hand on his beloved’s arm. “I know, honey,” he said gently. “I know that those hours must push you to your limits of patience. I’m tense, too. But have some faith. The Vulcans have…” He stopped, as his communicator beeped.

Both men almost jumped out of their skin and Jim almost dropped the little device in his haste to answer the call. “Kirk here!”

“Spock here, Captain. I’m at the hospital to pick up Sarek, who just told me that the tests were positive.”

For a moment Khan could only stare at the communicator in Jim’s tanned hand, then a deep sigh escaped him while he almost collapsed into himself like a puppet cut off at the strings.

They made it! Finally, after all those ups and downs, fears and hopes, despairs and fights, his people were acknowledged as what they were: their own race, rooted in human heritage, yet different. Different enough to get their own status – one that would protect them.

He closed his eyes in soul-shaking relief, while he listened Spock’s voice continuing.

“The older Augments have all psionic abilities comparable with those of Romulans or ancient Vulcans. Mr. Weiss is the only younger one, whose psionic is equally strong, yet Mr. Singh’s other younger siblings have undoubtedly some telepathic streaks which would increased when taught how to use them. Also, the medical and biological examinations have proved that the Augments have some fundamental differences within their body functions and in the genes compared to those of the casual Earthen Homo Sapiens. Therefore T’Pau, Selek and Sorel have recognized them as their own psionic race with Terran roots. And given their low number, the Vulcan High Council will also acknowledge them as an ‘endangered species’. The official statement will be made within a day.”

Jim couldn’t help himself: He let out a loud sigh of utter relief. “Thank the Lord! That was the message I waited for.”

“I know, Captain. For this reason, I called you and Mr. Singh – to stop your worry. Selek will come over to New Gol together with T’Pau and some of Mr. Singh’s siblings in a few minutes. I’m certain that they can answer all your questions.”

Kirk knew that he looked like an idiot, but he couldn’t stop the wide grin that was about to split his face. “Thanks, Spock! Thank you so much – you’re the best.”

“I know,” came the calm answer, which sounded far too smug.

Khan, finally able to find some his usual composure, felt laughter bubbling in his belly, while he smirked, “Vulcan modesty never ceases to surprise me.”

“We are not modest, Mr. Singh, we simply state a truth,” Spock replied through the communicator.

“And truth is the interpretation of facts,” Khan smirked, which made Jim laugh out loud.

“Oh, God help me! Two smartasses are too much for me.”

“Admit it, Pyāra, you love challenges,” Nien smiled; still half dizzy with relief and therefore in high spirits.

“I have to agree with Mr. Singh, Captain. Your streak of searching for challenges has gotten you several times… how do you humans put it? Into deep water?” Spock sounded far too innocent, and
Kirk imagined his friend lifting both eyebrows and having this little spot of mirth dancing deep in his eyes.

Jim shook his head; chuckling again. “Are you two allying up to tease me?” he asked; his gaze bright with fun and joy. “You’re going to be total friends one day.” That shut both up, and Kirk lifted one fist in victory. “Yeah, muzzled! Finally! Now I know how Bones feels every time he gets the last word.”

“Which is seldom the case,” Spock reminded him; his tone light. Then, suddenly, his voice changed. “Captain, my father just left the examination room. I’ve to drive him home. If it is all right with you, I’ll pick you up tomorrow in the morning.”

“How is it going with all the family gathering?” Jim asked, and he thought he could hear Spock sigh.

“Unknown. I still… come to know them – my uncle and his family, and Nyota’s clan.”

Jim grimaced. He himself was no fan of family-gatherings, to put it mildly. And knowing his first officer, Spock felt uncomfortable at the moment, too. “We’ll talk tomorrow, okay?”

“Affirmative,” the Vulcan answered, but it sounded more than a vow. Jim smiled in sympathy.

“Keep a stiff upper lip, Spock. I’m the big suggestion box for you tomorrow.”

“Why should I stiffen up my lip, Captain? And what is a ‘suggestion box’?”

Khan groaned, while Jim snickered. “The first means to hold on and the second is the famous shoulder to cry on. And before you complain that ‘to cry on your captain’s shoulder would be highly illogical and unfitting’, just keep in mind that I’ve an open ear if you want to talk about everything that stresses you at the moment,” he added hastily.

The next moment he heard Sarek’s voice calling something in Vulcan, which Spock answered with his own stream of words in the guttural language, before he switched back to Standard. “I have to go now, Captain. I wish you and Mr. Singh a nice rest of the day.”

“Yeah, ditto. And give my regards to your father and Nyota,” Jim smiled.

“My thanks for your consideration to let us immediately know about the test results, Mr. Spock,” the Augment said with raised voice in order to be heard at the other end of the line.

“You are welcome, Mr. Singh. Jim.” With that the connection was shut off, and Kirk put the little device back into his trouser pocket. Only then he and Nien looked at each other – and moving like one man, Nien spread his arms and Jim wrapped his around him immediately. Both could do nothing more than cling to each other for several seconds; relieved and happy above all measure.

“We did it,” Jim whispered; his face buried in Nien’s neck; breathing into his mate’s scent. “Your people are safe now and have a chance to build up their own lives.”

“Yes,” Khan murmured; his eyes tightly closed. “Because of you! Because of you and your friends. You not only gave me hope and strength to carry on, but made certain that my family survived and finally found peace.” He gulped, while he felt his throat tightening. “There are no words in any language which could express my gratitude,” he added; his voice choked. And this time he wasn’t ashamed of the tears which burnt in his eyes. They were tears of joy, of salvation, of happiness. He didn’t care at the moment what would happen to him. His brothers and sisters, the people he had grown up with or had taken under his protective wing, who had never let him down and had put all their faith in him as they accompanied him into the unknown of cryosleep and space, finally had a
real future.

His emotions flared high; his enhanced nature feeling everything stronger than any casual human was able to grasp, yet Jim sensed them. They brimmed along the shared bond, echoed deep in his mind and soul, spread like warm wind through his body, and giving into them he tightened his hold around his beloved – the man who had endured unthinkable cruelty, icy darkness, agonizing pain, hopelessness beyond imagination and terrible fear. Yet Khan Noonien Singh was still able to love – to love completely! – and to put faith in someone who didn’t belong to his family. Was there really still any question unanswered, why he – Jim Kirk – had fallen for the Augment that hard?

They held each other for a while; bathing in the shared joy, the bright love and peaceful warmth that enveloped them whole. And when a quarter of an hour later through the door to the terrace spilled a dozen Augments, Selek and Bones, the two lovers sat still on one and the same desk chair, hands locked.

“Aw, aren’t they cute?” McCoy teased, which earned him a lifted eyebrow from Selek and some chuckles from Otto, Paolo, Rodriguez and Chang, while Katie and Joaquin giggled.

Jim instantly rose to greet them properly, while Khan somehow managed to stand up on his own; ignoring the wobbling in his knees and the sting in his leg and back.

Otto was the first to reach them and slapped Jim with a grin on the shoulder, before he went for his brother and embraced him. “We did it,” he murmured, and the relief he felt was plain to hear in his voice.

Hoffmann was glad that the ‘test’ was over. It hadn’t been really unpleasant to feel a soft pressure within his head before he had been suddenly no longer alone in his mind. He had sensed a foreign presence, not unlike a thin connection he knew from the links with his family, yet it had been utterly different. Curiosity had out-won his resolve and with growing hunger for knowledge he had allowed Selek to deepen the meld. And then he had realized that there was indeed the mind of another person in his own – and he had shied away from it. Selek had sensed it immediately and sent warmth and peace towards him before he had backtracked and ended the meld. What had taken Otto by utter surprise was the feeling of loss afterwards; he had missed the strange contact.

And he learned from Paolo and Katie it had been the same for them. The latter especially had been deeply moved from the mind-meld. Katie had watched Selek with warmth and tender curiosity before, now she was openly adoring him. If Otto hadn’t been so sure of his wife’s love for him, the German Augment would have become jealous.

All this shot within seconds through his thoughts, while he embraced his brother and leader, whose relief he felt in the returned clinging.

Jim watched the scene, shook several hands and grinned like mad, as Katie whispered conspiratorially into his ear, “And I stand by my first comparison: Selek IS like Elrond – especially after I learned now that he also has this healing mind-thing.”

Chuckling Kirk looked at the older version of his T’hy’la, who obviously chose to ignore the murmured comment his sharp hearing had – of course – caught. Therefore, he didn’t mention it but chose to address another topic, “Where is T’Pau?”

“She parted from us in the hospital and decided to return immediately to New Gol. She… was in need for a longer meditation.” To admit something like this was certainly unusual, but Selek was Spock, and had therefore no problem with speaking with Jim about it.
“Yeah, I see,” Kirk sighed. “Of course, it must have cost her a lot to touch so many human minds – even if they are enhanced.” He cocked his head. “How are Sorel and Sarek doing? How are you doing?”

There was it again: This tiny half-smile Spock – in any version – had only reserved for him. “I’m well, Jim, don’t worry. And Sorel is a trained healer, while Sarek is used to the illogic but also fascinating dynamics of a human mind.” Something like sorrow shimmered for a moment in his eyes, and Jim realized that Spock Prime had lost his mother not one, but two times – even if he hadn’t met her in this timeline.

Reaching out, he laid a hand on Selek’s arm and squeezed it gently in mute understanding. Then he looked at Rodriguez who was a little bit pale around his nose. “You’re all right?” he asked and the other man sighed,

“Well, it really was strange to have someone sticking around in your head. I mean, T’Pau does resemble our Shani a lot, yet she isn’t her. The whole thing felt as if her fingers were dug into my skull.”

“I assure you once again, sir, that our fingers don’t break through the head-bone during a meld,” Selek told him with a hue of exasperation.

“I know – still it felt this way,” Rodriguez grumbled.

“So, what now?” Katie piped up, after she had given her best try to break a few of Khan’s ribs in the bear-hug she gave him.

“The Vulcan High Council will check T’Pau’s, Sarek’s, Sorel’s and my report and will acknowledge you as your own race with psionic abilities,” Old Spock answered, while he watched a few adepts bringing some chairs out on the terrace. Then his attention moved back to the Augment leader. “You have to think of an official name for your people – one that contains your Terran roots but also emphasizes the difference between you and the casual humans.”

Jim rubbed his sweaty neck – God, it was hot here! “What do you think of Homo Sapiens Augeretis?” he asked and found himself instantly in the center of everyone’s attention.

“Come again?” Khan replied; baffled.

Shrugging, Kirk repeated, “Homo Sapiens Augeretis. You all are rooted in Homo Sapiens, yet you’ve been engineered – enhanced, augmented in many ways. So, yeah, I think this would be a fitting name.” He looked from one to another.

“Fascinating,” Selek commented; clasping his hands behind his back. “Simple, but a very good idea in my opinion. This name would really cover everything you came from and are now,” he said to Khan, Otto and a wide-eyed Rodriguez.

Nien pursed his lips and exchanged a longer glance with his two brothers, before he looked at Paolo, Chang, Katie and finally Joaquin, who lifted his hand as if he would be at school.

“If you ask me, big-bro, I think Jim and Selek have a point here. This name would still link us to Earth and the casual humans, yet we are further developed – just like the Homo Sapiens came from the Homo Erectus.”

“As long as you don’t compare us with Neanderthals,” Bones grumbled good-natured.

“Na, you and Jim are better looking,” Weiss deadpanned.
“As if this would be the only difference,” McCoy groused, but he wasn’t serious. This much could be told.

Khan, Otto, Rodriguez, Paolo and Chang looked again at each other, before Nien answered slowly, “It is indeed an idea, but we should ask the others. A vote would be the best.”


“I think the others want to have a word in it, so, yeah, we all should discuss and find an agreement concerning the future name of our people,” Paolo said.

“All right,” Khan nodded. “Then you should discuss this during the day with the others after you’ve returned to the hospital. I await your decision in the evening and accept with whatever you come up.”

Rodriguez and Otto stared at him. Yes, Khan had always valued their opinion and had given his family free choices in several matters, but never before with such an important topic. As it seemed, his life within the Federation and especially aboard the Enterprise had changed him in many ways.

“Okay, this is reasonable,” Jim smiled; rubbing his hands. “So, anybody up to get something fresh to drink?”

Chang began to laugh. “Are you always so quick with jumping from one thing to the next?”

“You’ve no idea,” McCoy groaned; flicking a thumb at Kirk. “He drives us all crazy like this.”

“Crazier then you’re already are?” Jim asked with feign innocence, and almost instantly the bickering between the two officers began. Yet it was soon interrupted, because Joaquin pointed to something out in the gardens; his voice excited.

“What is that?” he asked, and everyone turned around.

Selek followed his outstretched index finger and lifted a brow. “A Ch’ana-a,” he said. “A native lizard species of this planet, not unlike an Earthen iguana. But this animal can change its colors utterly if necessary – and they take an intense blue and purple color when they try to woo an eventual partner.”

Khan watched the animal that was about one meter long, and really looked a little bit like a too tiny dragon. “Interesting,” he murmured; always hungry for new knowledge.

“Is it dangerous?” Jim asked; watching the lizard with fascination.

“No,” Selel shook his head. “No poisonous fangs or claws, no poisonous salvia, no sharp teeth. They are lazier than an iguana, and…”

“Lazier?” Katie laughed quietly. “Iguanas are lizard-like sloths in my eyes.”

“Yet they can move quickly if needed,” Selel replied. “Contrary to the Ch-ana-a. They always move very slowly, no matter what.”

“Understandable, considering this damn heat,” Bones groaned, while he rose and rubbed his sweat-wet neck. “Excuse me, please, I’ve a rendezvous with the shower.” He headed towards the building entrance. “A cool, wet, nice, long shower!”
Jim chuckled; understanding perfectly his friend’s need. Then his attention returned to the lizard that still held the others’ interest.

“Come, let us have a closer look,” Joaquin said to Katie; pulling her along.

“Of course,” Khan sighed; watching his youngest brother and his sister with fond exasperation. “Why I’m not surprised?”

“Because you know those two,” Otto smirked, before he looked back at the animal. “But I have to admit that I’m curious, too.”

“Well, then let us do some Ch-ana-a-watching,” Jim suggested, and he was not surprised that – except for Nien – the other Augments followed him.

Khan watched his siblings going with Kirk; chatting with him as if they had known him for years now. Sitting down on the desk-chair again, he pursed his lips; once again astonished at his mate’s ability to win over the most different kind of people.

Selek, who had occupied one of the chairs, observed the Augment nearby. He took in Khan’s fond look he gave his siblings and Jim, and how relaxed the former dictator was. ‘He had found indeed his place in this world,’ he thought. ‘At least in this timeline his way is a better one.’

Khan listened to the quiet voices of his brothers and sister, who asked Jim some more questions about other lifeforms he had met during his journeys, and Kirk showed again that he could be very patient, while he crouched in front of the lizard. How easy the young captain handled the Augments, and how relaxed they were around him. It was a little miracle after all they had been through on Earth, and Nien was – again – grateful that fate had led him to this particular man.

“He is amazing,” he murmured. “His selflessness and his empathy never cease to surprise me. I rarely met a man – or woman – who has such deep tolerance and is open-hearted like Jim Kirk.” He sighed. “I asked myself a few times by now, how everything would have played out if it would have been Jim, who found us, and not Marcus.”

From the edge of his eyes he saw Selek stiffening, while his dark eyes narrowed ever so slightly. It was only for a second or two, then the old Vulcan visibly forced himself to relax. And this reaction told more than thousand words. It was practically screaming ‘alarm’ – or it was the feedback to a very bad memory; one that maybe had been buried for a long time but was still nasty enough to elicit such a visible response from Old Spock.

And a grave idea woke in Khan’s mind.

“It happened in your timeline!” It was a statement, not a question, yet it demanded an answer – but Selek remained silent. Only his face had hardened.

Khan straightened his shoulders, while he bent forwards. “Mr. Spock,” he addressed the Vulcan High Minister on purpose by his true name. “Did this happen in your timeline? Did Jim find the Botany Bay?”

Selek avoided looking at him; his gaze drifted off to nothing, while the old tension surged through his body. A tension that had never really left his subconscious and returned every time he was forced to face this particular part of his past – of his and Jim’s.

He had learned during the last weeks to accept that this Khan Noonien Singh was different; that the Augment’s fate had taken a complete different path than his alter ego in Spock’s own timeline, and had changed him utterly. Spock Prime had even come to regard the superhuman as an honorable
man, who ran amok one time – yes – but otherwise was the victim, not the initiator. He had realized how much this Khan loved Jim Kirk and the other way around, and had admitted to himself that this Khan had earned a second chance after all the good he did.

But now Spock Prime was forced to encounter the old memories again – the memories of a Khan Noonien Singh who tried to kill them all not one but two times, and whose madness had shaken half of Starfleet, had cost Jim his beloved ship and his son, and had cost him, Spock, his life. If it hadn’t been for Jim Kirk’s crazy recovery mission that stripped him of rank, he – Spock – would have died again on this young planet called ‘Genesis’ that had restored first the life to his body and the was about to destroyed itself what would have taken him with it.

He took a deep breath to calm himself and looked finally back at the Augment, who still watched him intensely.

“Your silence means yes,” Khan said quietly. “Jim did find us in your timeline – but there were problems, too?”

Selek pressed his lips into a thin line. He had vowed to himself not to reveal any details from his own timeline. To mess with time was too dangerous as Nero’s influence had cruelly proven. Yet Selek had done so only yesterday as he gave Jim hints and warnings concerning the fate of his brother Sam. He had done so over a year ago, as Young Spock had contacted him, asking for details about Khan. He had done so as he talked to his younger version in the hangar after the Nero-Incident, speaking of the strong friendship with Kirk that would defined them both. And he had done so within the last weeks as he hacked into HQ and in Starfleet’s most secured databanks to help Jim; knowing that Starfleet Intelligence would sooner or later find tracks of his actions, revealing enhanced computer knowledge.

So, to speak of something that had already happened here differently than in the other timeline wouldn’t do so much harm. Maybe it would be even a warning for Khan what could become of him and the others if he would ever again fall for the dark demon called ‘revenge’.

Taking another deep breath, Selek looked the superhuman straight in the eyes. “Yes,” he said gravely. “In my timeline it was the Enterprise’s that found your ship.”

Nien frowned. Something was clearly off here. “But… that had to be a good thing, hadn’t it?”

For a short moment Old Spock had the urge to laugh – a grim, dark laugh without any amusement. “No, Mr. Singh, the outcome in this timeline is far better.” He saw shock spreading over the Augment’s face, accompanied by outrage. Selek bent forwards as he realized what Khan had to read in those words. His gaze was firm as he added, “Don’t misunderstand me, Mr. Singh. I do know that you went through hell within the last two years, and what Section 31 and those scientists did to you and your family is unforgiveable, yet what happened in this timeline is far better in the end for all who are concerned.”

The former dictator didn’t know what to make of this statement. “But… it was Jim who found us. Jim would never have treated us like Marcus did. He would never have tried to abuse my nature. He’d never would have tortured me or…”

“Yes, Jim would never do such things, yet everything went down the hill, like humans say. You did not learn to love Jim, but to loath him – hate him beyond imagination. In the end you were even insane with hatred for him.”

“What?” Khan didn’t trust his ears. He couldn’t imagine a world in which he hated Jim like Selek hinted. Alas, even his former fury for the young captain seemed to be a part of another life by now.
And in Old Spock’s timeline he, Khan, had hated Jim this much that he went mad? It was… unbelievable. “What... what happened?” he all but whispered.

Again, Selek hesitated for a moment, and pressed his lips shortly into a thin line, before he began to speak; relieving his katra from the pressure that had returned after he knew of Khan being awake in this timeline. “We found your ship drifting with no engines at work any longer. We beamed over, Mr. Scott activated the lights and therefore the wakening process of your cryotube. But something went wrong, and it was Jim who smashed the glass of your tube and pulled you out of it before you could die. You were beamed over to the Enterprise’s sickbay and survived. You were welcomed on the ship, Jim even gave you access to our databanks so that you could catch up on history. You also met one of our lieutenants who was a scientist of history, Marla McGivers. She was fascinated with you, and you with her. Then we found out who you were for real. History judged you positively – an Augment leader who kept peace within his borders, set up a better life for the people in the countries he ruled and never was the aggressor. Jim was wary of you, but also curious. Still after you learned that we knew of your true identity, you felt instantly threatened, talked Lieutenant McGivers in helping you, beamed over to the Botany Bay, woke up your people and took over the Enterprise. You threatened to kill Jim if we would not cooperate with you.” He watched Khan’s eyes widening in disbelief.

“But... why? Why should I try to kill him? I would never...”

“You didn’t hesitate for a second to put him in a depression chamber and made us watch how he suffered, blackmailing us with his torment and life,” Selek interrupted him harshly; the old anger he suppressed for so long flared up again and tore at his Vulcan control. “That Jim survived was only because Lieutenant McGivers freed him in the very last second. We took your people by surprise by using sleeping gas within the ship, yet you escaped to engineering, trying to blow up the ship. Jim followed you. You and he fought – he won.”

Khan had listened with appalled horror. In this other timeline he did what Marcus had done to him? He had used the Enterprise crew’s love for their captain to force them to yield? Yes, in this world he and Jim had fought, too, as they met for the first time and then later on the bridge of the Vengeance. He even had seen an enemy in the young man who had dared to challenge him, yet he had felt drawn to him the moment he had laid eyes on him. This obviously didn’t happen in the other timeline, but he had felt drawn to this woman. Well, he never preferred a gender. For him, intelligence, character and even appearance were more important. But what shocked him was the fact that he obviously had rampaged without a real threat. Yes, he also had felt alarmed as he learned from Marcus that the admiral knew who his ‘guest’ was for real, but Jim was a completely different matter. Kirk had high morals, he was honorable to an extent that could even be dangerous for him, and he always did what was right, no matter what. He wouldn’t have mistreated Khan and his family; abusing them for own purpose. So, how had it come that in the other timeline everything went so wrong?

Movements at the edge of his sight distracted him for a moment and he saw his siblings and Jim looking at his and Selek’s direction; confusion and alert on their faces. Of course, his mate would sense his turmoil, and the same went for a certain degree for Joaquin and the others. Waving them off and signaling them that everything was all right, he looked back at the old Vulcan. He wanted to know everything that happened in this strange other timeline without Jim Vulcan. He wanted to know everything that happened in this strange other timeline without Jim mother-henning him, or Rodriguez falling into overprotective mode.

He moistened his lips. “Jim and I fought – he won,” he repeated; almost not daring to voice the next logical question. “So, that means, he killed me?”

Selek looked astonished for a moment, then the Vulcan mask was firmly back in place, before he
answered, “No, of course not. Jim would never kill even an opponent if there is the tiniest option to spare him or her.” He sighed quietly. “He gave you and your people a second chance by dropping you all off on a M-class-planet that was habitable, but with no intelligent lifeforms. It had a harsh, but livable climate – and you accepted it with gratitude, because it gave you the chance to rule over your own planet. Jim provided you with everything you would need to build a settlement and with enough nourishment until you would be able to have a successful agricultural replacement.”

The Augment could only stare at him; utterly baffled. “That… is so typical for him and it was more than generous. To attack a Starfleet-officer is a crime within the Federation. Yet he didn’t bring me to justice but gave me and my people our own planet to live on?”

“Yes, but his decision wasn’t only selflessness generosity. He thought that you and your people were too dangerous to introduce you to the Federation. So, he used his right as a captain to exile you on a planet – providing you with everything you needed to survive.” He lowered his gaze for a second, before he added, “Lieutenant McGivers accompanied you. Despite the fact that you lost your ‘battle’ because of her, you were… already too attached to her to judge her – and she had fallen in love with you. So, she went with you.”

Khan watched him closely. A part of him didn’t want to ask for more details, but his always curious and working mind was hungry for more knowledge. “But this wasn’t the end,” he assumed, and Spock Prime sighed again.

“No, far from it.” He shook his head slightly in a far too human gesture. “Six months later the neighboring planet exploded which shifted the orbit of… ‘your’ planet, Ceti Alpha V. It was a giant environmental catastrophe that changed the planet into a large desert with ion storms and became hostile for life. Yet no-one knew that it had been the neighboring planet Ceti Alpha VI that exploded, because planet V took the orbit of VI. Therefore, we all thought you and your people had perished.”

He lowered his head again.

“When Jim learned about it, he was horrified. He thought that he had sent you and your people to death, and blamed himself for it. Yet no-one could have known that the star system was unstable. I checked everything with our sensors before I suggested that this planet was habitable.” The old eyes which held too much knowledge found again those of the aghast Augment. “I was at fault just like anyone else who was concerned with your… case.” Selek sighed. “18 years later we learned that you and the most of your people had survived – but not Lieutenant McGivers who you had taken as your wife. By accident you were found when an explorer ship mistook Ceti Alpha V for Ceti Alpha VI. You and your people escaped, hijacked the ship and then you declared war against Jim; trying your best to kill him.”

Khan could only shake his head. He knew that he had streak to overreact if someone had hurt his family or him, but this…

“Jim gave us a second chance. He…”

“Mr. Singh,” Selek interrupted him; his glance was sternly fixed at the enhanced man’s face. “You made him responsible for the death of your family-members which were killed during the planet catastrophe and afterwards. You blamed him for your wife’s death. You hijacked a Starfleet ship and attacked the Enterprise, which had become a training ship then. Your attack killed almost the half of the young cadets which were aboard, including Mr. Scott’s nephew. You tortured and killed the staff of a science station only to gain knowledge about a project you wanted to use against Jim. And you sacrificed first the rest of your whole crew – your family – and then yourself to destroy the Enterprise.”

At these words Nien leaped on his feet; swaying ever so slightly as his still weak left leg tried to cope
with the sudden movement. “NO!” he all but growled. “I would NEVER endanger or sacrifice my family for selfish reasons!”

“You did,” Spock Prime told him mercilessly. “Your hate was great enough to overrule your brilliant mind and to strip you off all affection and love you still maybe had stored for your crew. In the end they were only tools for you to still your hunger for revenge.”

Quick steps drew nearer, as Jim headed towards them; shouting over his shoulder. “Stay here, please. I’ll check what those two are arguing about.”

Selek lifted his hand in an almost priest-like manner. “Jim, stop please! This has nothing to do with you or Mr. Singh’s people.” Well, it wasn’t exactly a lie, yet it wasn’t the whole truth. Spock always had a way with words to speak between the lines and to put another expression to facts.

Jim slowed down but didn’t stop. “What’s up?” he asked – demanded, would name it better.

“Selek and I are discussing a… different way things could have happened,” Khan said carefully; giving his beloved a pointed look.

Kirk frowned – and understood. Stopping, he glared at Selek, then back at Nien, whose unsettling he felt like wild waves rippling over their shared link, yet the Augment was in control.

“We’ll talk later,” Khan said, and hesitantly – after giving both men another sharp glance – Jim turned away and walked back the way he came. He trusted Selek wholly, and the same went for Nien. If the latter said that they would talk later, he knew that he would learn of what this all was about at some point in time.

Khan watched Jim returning to the other Augments and gave them again a wave of his hand to stay away, then he returned his attention back to Old Spock. The short interruption had calmed him somewhat, yet his unease began again as he took up the thread. His belly clenched as he asked,

“You told me that I sacrificed my crew – my family – on full purpose only to gain the goal of revenge?”

“You did,” Selek replied expressionlessly.

Khan violently shook his head. “No, I would… I never could do something like this. They are my siblings, my family! I did everything for them. I…”

Spock Prime reached out and laid a hand on the Augment’s arm – gently increasing the pressure to signal the enhanced man to sit down again. Eventually Khan complied and he lowered himself back on the desk-chair, yet his gaze fixed Selek’s.

“No-one knows what hate can do,” the Vulcan Elder continued more softly; realizing the other male’s turmoil. “No-one can say in advance how much hatred can change a person. You already gave an example for it.”

The former dictator stiffened even more. “This was not…”

Khan’s protest went under as Selek stated with sudden ancient fire in his eyes, “I’ve seen what you did to Starfleet Headquarters. I saw what you did in London. I saw what you did to the Enterprise – and I know what you were up to as you escaped the labs of Section 31 several months ago. Revenge was always the answer for you to everything that went wrong. And if I wouldn’t have acknowledged your deep love for Jim in this world – or your selfless doings during the present war, saving millions of lives risking your own existence – I would put you down by myself; shooting you
on the spot simply to prevent any pain and suffering you could bring Jim like you did in my timeline.”

He saw Khan paling, while his eyes widened in acknowledgement. For someone so peaceful – for a pacifist – it said a lot when this someone was ready to take a life without being directly threatened. And somehow Nien didn’t doubt that his chances against this man were equal at best. Selek may be old, but his experiences outdid the speed and strength of his youth. The realization, how close he had been to not only be denied Selek’s support – and therefore for his people – but also being killed hit him like a starship at warp. He was only spared because he had chosen the path of love, not of hate.

“Have I lost it so deeply that you would even kill me without the same events having happened here, in your timeline?” he all but whispered.

Selek took another deep breath. “Your madness in my time not only costed more or less my life, primarily it costed Jim his son…”

“His son?” Nien gasped.

“In my timeline Jim and Dr. Marcus met, too, and their relationship built beyond a professional one that led to a son. Yet they separated, and Jim only met his son for the first time during the crisis I’m speaking of. But they only had a few days with each other before your madness resulted in the death of Jim’s son. And he lost more. His ship and his rank. I’m a Vulcan. For my people violence is never an option, never an answer. Yet there are exceptions. Be warned! Jim was, is and always will be my T’hy’la, no matter the year, the universe or the timeline. And I will protect him against everything and everyone that or who is a threat to him.”

Khan’s gaze roamed over the face in front of him. There it was it again what he had witnessed in Young Spock, too: The fierce passionate devotion and unbreakable urge to protect where Jim Kirk was involved. Even old, wrinkled and past his best, Spock son of Sarek would always be there for his captain and soul-brother. This was a constant he, Khan, would have to live with.

And something that had gnawed at the edge of his mind finally clicked into place.

“You love him.” It was a clear statement, free of any accusation or anger.

Old Spock looked away, before he straightened his shape and glanced back at Khan – proud, yet sans any possessive aggression. “Yes,” he replied simply and plainly. It had cost him years, almost a decade even, to admit this to himself, but he would never deny it again – not now, not ever.

This time it was Khan who needed a lot of air in his lungs to keep himself focused. He had known it – somehow. Spock’s drive to shield Jim, to keep him safe and close, had only one answer: The half-Vulcan loved his captain. But there wasn’t physical desire involved. The love ran deeper on a level Nien was only barely able to grasp. He had experienced the Vulcan race’s complex way of seeing – and feeling – things. That Spock, half human, half rooted in a species that held stronger emotions than any Terran could ever comprehend, was able to love with every fiber of his being, shouldn’t shock Khan. And on some level it didn’t, yet he got warier then he had in a long time.

And then Selek’s next words took the tension away – at least for a moment.

“I have and always will love him,” Spock Prime confessed. “Not in the way you do, but my devotion to him – my affection for him – isn’t smaller than yours, only different.” The melancholy that had played in his eyes for a second vanished and made new room for sternness. “So, make no mistakes, Mr. Singh, because if Jim suffers because of your streak to overreact, I’ll hunt you down in person – and even if it happens after my death there will be other people who will take my place.
This is the only warning I will ever give you, but take it to heart. If Jim gets hurt because of you, your life is forfeit!"

Khan believed him. And oddly he didn’t feel threatened. It almost calmed him to know that there was someone in the universe who would stop him, if he ever would lose his sanity like he obviously did in the other timeline.

And the latter was what shook him to the core. The mere thought that, in another time, he had sacrificed his people who were most dear to him only to feed his greed for vengeance, was beyond imagination. He had suffered so much to keep them safe – to keep them alive – and then he went berserk enough to send them to their deaths only to sate his own desire to hunt down a man who had given them all a second chance? Was this madness, this insane darkness, really in him?

Selek was right when he reminded him of what he had done in London and to Starfleet’s HQ. Yes, he had made certain that there had been no people in the streets and no civilian workers in the so-called ‘archive’ as he set the secret facility of Section 31 aflame. But there had been victims. And concerning the HQ he hadn’t considered that some commodores, captains and commanders weren’t informed about him and his people as he attacked Starfleet’s Headquarters in San Francisco. Worse, he had ordered the Vengeance to fly straight to the HQ when he thought his people dead – hazarding the consequences that the initiated crash of such a large space vessel at the edge of a metropolis would leave behind. Yes, he had tried to change the course of the doomed starship as he realized that it headed for Sausalito and therefore for the schools, universities and academies, but in the end, it had been his mad pain that had forced the first fateful order for the ship out of his mouth. And it had costed hundreds of lives.

So, was Selek right to warn him of the outcome if he didn’t learn to control himself? Was Selek’s concern legitimate where his – Khan’s – mind was concerned? He did lose composure easily when challenged. He had a streak to overreact when he thought those who were in his charge were threatened. His emotions flared up when those he loved were in danger. Was there really the chance that he would lose mind completely when he mourned too much?

For a moment he thought back to the minutes he had found Jim in the Klingon prison – torn, bloody, hoarse from screaming in pain, eyes dark with agony, body covered in bruises, sweat and more blood. He, Khan, had seen red. Literally. He still had no clear memories how he killed all those Klingon warriors within less than a minute. His so-called ‘enhanced mind’ had been switched off and only his augmented reflexes and deep instincts had driven him. Was this the tendency he had to fear? If something would happen to Jim, would he react again like this; endangering everyone around him because of his loss of control?

Well, he had already experienced how it was to see Jim in danger afterwards and trying to protect him – aboard the cursed secret facility his family had been imprisoned. He remembered how he had wanted to tear Finnegan apart for threatening Jim, yet he had been able to hold himself back. Somehow, he, Khan, had always been able to keep himself in check when Jim was involved.

Maybe this was his path – to learn to contain himself to be the better man Kirk deserved. And maybe he did need some help with controlling himself – to keep this fury and urge to lash out at bay. Not only for his own sake, but also for his mate and the people around him.

And the answer was in front of him: Spock – the man he first loathed, then hated, now respected, and even had come to like. And it didn’t matter which version of this remarkable man was concerned.

“You spoke of controlling the mind; of shielding,” he said slowly. “Perhaps I can learn from you Vulcans more than I thought.”
Selek recognized the statement for what it was: For a plea for help. “There are methods to rein in emotions by first accepting, then analyzing and finally restraining them. Those methods go hand in hand with mental discipline and learning more about yourself. If you accept me, I can teach you.”

Khan lowered his gaze, as for a moment his superior mind tried to rebel against such a suggestion. Then rationality kicked in. He was better, he was enhanced, he couldn’t accept his instincts to rule him when there were more logical solutions to solve a problem.

Lifting his head, he looked straight at the old Vulcan; his decision was made. “It would be an honor,” he said. And for a second, he thought to see Spock Prime’s mouth curl into the tiniest version of a smile…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Well, one day the truth of Khan’s fate – and therefore what happened to the others – in the first timeline had to be revealed. The thought of having Selek tell about it was in my mind for months now, and I hope I got the right atmosphere for something so tragic. This part of the chapter was more or less from Old Spock’s POV, in the next chapter Khan will have a lot to think about to make own conclusions. Yet last but not least he realizes the dark potential that still slumbers in him and even his enhanced intellect has to be schooled. And I think Selek will be the perfect teacher for him (smile).

And maybe the other Augments will need some training, too – now, after they’re declared an own species what will clear the way for them to set up an own life within the Federation.

In the next chapter comes the promised incident in New Shi’Kahr with Spock, Jim and one of Spock’s old school comrades, who proofs that there indeed existing louts among the Vulcan people. You also will meet Silek again. And while Jim and Spock are showing that it is really not a good idea to offend or even to threaten one of them, Khan will get visitors…

I hope you liked the new chapter, and – as always – I’m curios what you think about it.

Have a nice weekend

Love

Yours Starflight
Troublesome hours

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers,

Yes, the next update is already published and I try to shorten the distances between the edites.

Thank you so much for the feedback; you’re the best.

Because the new chapter holds a lot of rollercoasters and surprises, I don’t want to rob your time by writing a longer prologue.

Have fun

Love

Yours Starflight

Chapter 102 – Troublesome hours

To say that Khan relaxed easily after his talk with Selek would have been a big lie. Even if he kept an easy face and waved the worries of his siblings – and Jim – off, there was no doubt that the Augment leader was shaken to the core. Yet Otto and the others, as well as Kirk, knew better than to press the issue after it became clear that Khan was tight-lipped of whatever had transpired between him and the old Vulcan. Therefore the atmosphere was more or less tensed and it didn’t get better after Selek bid his good-bye to meet with the Vulcan High Council in the evening to get the Augments official acknowledgement as an own race to work. Only than Jim would inform Starfleet and Bob officially about the Augments’ new status.

Joaquin, Otto and the others returned to the hospital to discuss the suggest name of their race, while Bones beamed up to the Enterprise to check on Sulu. Well, Jim had the big assumption that his CMO had further reason to return aboard – a reason with two long legs, blond hair and a lot of female attitudes. Yet, this time, he refrained from teasing Leonard. His friend had done so much for Nien’s family within the last days that he really had deserved some time for himself.

They eat their dinner in silence – better to say, Jim tried to converse with Nien, but the older man’s answers were taciturn and after a while Kirk gave up. He knew Khan enough by now to give him some space when he was obviously that troubled. He helped Nien to get clean before he took his own shower. While the lukewarm water sprinkled down on him, Jim decided to get his beloved into talking. Khan and brooding was never a good connection, and he really wanted to know what his mate has shaken him that much.

Drying himself, brushing his teeth and going without any pajamas like the last nights, he finally left the bathroom. Nien sat on his bed just like Jim had left him – gaze fixed on nothing and deeply lost in thoughts.

Jim stopped at the foot of the bed, stemmed his fists on the hips and cocked his head. The moment
the Augment recognized his presence and his glance focused in him, Kirk took a deep breath. “Okay, spit it out!”

Khan lifted a brow in a very Spock-like way. “That would be highly improper. And, by the way, I’ve nothing in my mouth that could be ‘spat out’.”

That made the young captain frowning. “You’ve talked too long with Selek. You already sound like him, but that’s beside the point. You talked a lot with him – and it ended in you having a dark mood and far too much worry circling around your head.” As Nien only continued to look at him, Jim sighed and let his hands sink. Stepping around the bed, he sat on its edge beside his mate and cupped one of those sharp shaped cheeks with his right hand. “Honey, what is troubling you so? What is it that Selek spoke of what more or less sent you over the edge.”

Khan shot him a glare. “I’m not ‘sent over the edge’. That would look worse – a lot of worse, as it seems.” Bitterness swam in his voice what made every alert bell ring in the younger man. Inwardly he reached for the shared link and an echo of shock, horror, self-loathe and anger seemed to bring over the bond.

“Okay,” Jim began slowly. “If you don’t want to tell me, then I’m telling you of what you and Selek maybe spoke that changed you into a bottle of sour vinegar – figurative speaking. During our two first meetings, as we were aboard the Vengeance, my Spock contacted Old Spock and learned that we two had met you in the other timeline, too. Afterwards my Spock gave me only hints – such as that the meeting in the other timeline wasn’t a nice one and that you gave us a very hard time. And later, when I talked with Selek three weeks ago of you having escaped and being my friend now, our old Vulcan got quite the shock. Then him being adamant that he mind-melds with you, saying afterwards that your feelings for me were true, and I swear that Vulcan-Daddy was enormous relieved. The way he acted afterwards spoke volumes. This all let me make only one conclusion: The alternative meeting of you and I ended in a catastrophe, and Selek told you about it. And now you’re shocked what you have done then and are afraid that it can happen again in our time. Have I hit some marks?”

He smiled tenderly as he watched the Augment gaping at him for a moment, before Khan shut his mouth quickly – averting his gaze. “You’ve no idea to what I’m capable if the beast in me awakes,” he murmured. “As it seems I’m even able to sacrifice my family only to get my way.”

Jim pursed his lips; realizing the opening in the stubborn silence Nien had practiced the rest of the afternoon and the whole evening.

“Sweetheart, you do understand that – whatever happened in the other timeline – differs a lot from what is going on here? That not only the whole time has changed, but clearly you too?”

Khan snorted. “Are you that sure concerning the latter?”

Jim slipped onto the mattress and wrapped an arm around his beloved. “If I understood Selek correctly – and his words were very distinct – then you and I remained enemies in the first timeline. Mortal enemies! Now we’re more than lovers. We are soulmates and are going to marry in three days. Farther couldn’t any paths differ like ours do now.”

Nien lowered his head. “So you knew that we met in the other timeline, too.”

“Yeah,” Kirk answered softly. “And the little details I learned from Selek showed me that in our universe everything was different enough to not bother with what happened then in there. Yet he thought it to be necessary to tell you about it, for what reason ever. And so…”
“It was a warning,” Khan interrupted him. “A warning what could become of me if I do not learn to control me better or when I allow the monster in me to rise.”

At this the young captain stiffened. “You are no monster, Nien! Whatever Selek told you, you are no monster!”

Again, a snort escaped the Augment. “Obviously it is in me – or how would you explain the fact that I sacrificed my family only to get a chance of killing you?” He looked straight into those sky-blue eyes, which widened a little bit. “Does this shock you, Jim? Yes? Understandable. It shocked me, too. I developed such hatred for you that eighteen years after we first met I attacked your ship that was a training-ship by then, full with young cadets of which many died. I also murdered the crew of a space station and finally abused my beloved family as tools to get my hands on you. I went insane, stripped off any humanity. And when I remember that I – indeed! – ordered the Vengeance to fly to the HQ in this timeline, knowing the ship would crash, I don’t think that his other me and I differ so much.”

Jim narrowed his eyes. “You did everything in your power to steer the ship away from Sausalito, saving thousands of students like this. And that after all you went through only needed one more push to tumble over the edge, doesn’t transfer you into a monster, but shows that you’re simple and plain human. Whatever the reason was why you remained hating me in this other timeline…”

“You exiled us on a livable planet after I tried to steal your ship. A planetary catastrophe happened what killed some of my family and my wife – and that drove me to insanity,” Nien said flatly.

Jim watched him carefully. “That was the short vision, I assume. And you had a wife?”

“Yes, one of your officers – a historian,” Khan mumbled. “Alas alone knows why I fell for her and not for you.”

“Maybe I wasn’t that charming in the other timeline like I’m now,” Kirk suggested, wriggling his eye-brows – and promptly Khan groaned.

“Jim, please, this is nothing to joke about.”

“I know,” the younger man replied; turning serious. “Please, tell me what happened.”

Again, those sea-colored eyes found his. “Are you sure?” he asked quietly.

Kirk squeezed tenderly his shoulders. “In good and in bad times – even if the latter never happened here. But it troubles you, and you now the saying: A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.” He pulled his beloved closer to him. “You know you can tell me everything, honey.” He thought that he would feel a wave of anxiety making the bond between them trembling and realized the reason for it. “I will not judge you, Nien. Certainly not for something you haven’t done, but an alternate self.”

“It is still me, Jim. If I wouldn’t have chosen the path of love and had stuck to my hatred, I would be exactly what became of the other me.”

“But you did make another choice,” Kirk said firmly. “That is the point. You chose a different path and became another man because of it.”

“Really?” Khan sounded miserable. “I lost it as I found you in the Klingon prison. I haven’t even clear memories how I managed to kill all those Klingons within seconds. I’m… so full of anger when those I love are threatened or when trouble occurs. I…”

“Do you think I’m not furious when something is about to happen to you – or to Spock, Bones and
“Because of your love,” Nien murmured.

“Love has to be returned to bloom to its full extend. If you wouldn’t be able to love me back, all my love would have been meaningless. But look at us. Together we’ve become stronger, better – we embrace life now. I don’t know much about the Jim Kirk of the other timeline, but I think he never had such a fulfilling relationship like I have with you now. And whatever a clever guy he may have been, but I don’t want to switch places with him, because I can’t imagine an universe in which you’re not my mate – my soon-to-be-husband.”

He saw moisture shimmering in those blue-green depths, bent forwards and captured Nien’s lips with his own. It was a warm, tender, sweet kiss – made more of assurance and comfort than of passion. Wrapping his other arm also around the older man, he whispered, “Come on, baby, tell me. You feel better afterwards – and I can decide if I have to kick Selek’s butt tomorrow or if a stern talk to him will be enough.”

“I don’t think you mean this literary. Even old as he is, Selek is stronger than you,” Khan murmured.

A chuckle escaped Kirk. “And he will never use this against me.” He stroked gently over Nien’s cheek and waited.

For long seconds Nien only looked at him, then his shoulders slumbered like in defeat. “Very well,” he mumbled. Then he began to tell Jim what he had learned from Selek. He didn’t skip any detail, and even mentioned that the Jim Kirk of the other timeline had a son together with Carol Marcus – a son he lost in the aftermath of Khan Noonien Singh’s rampage.

As the Augment finally ended, Jim was quiet – and deeply lost in thoughts. There had been so many things gone wrong in the other timeline, Kirk was not sure what to make of it. As it seemed, he and Nien had torn each other apart – with Jim being the winner, but for which price? He had lost his ship and his son, had been stripped of his rank and… And he obviously had lost Spock. Whatever trick the Vulcan had pulled to cheat death, he – Jim Kirk – had been convinced that he had lost Spock. A thought that pained him deeply, and he only knew the half-Vulcan for three years and a few months now. How close would they be after twenty years?

‘Inseparable,’ as McCoy already called them now. Well, that was the other side of the coin when you fell in love or have a very close friendship: If something happened to the other, the sorrow was terrible. Well, there was no sun without shadows.

Then there was the fact that he had a son in the other timeline – with Carol Marcus. This was something Jim would have to think about, but the really important part of this ‘tale’ was what happened between him and Nien. Every decision, every word, every detail that led to more and more distrust that finally peaked in a disaster that was the seed for the catastrophe in the end.

“Why didn’t we reach this consent we did here?” he mumbled. “Why… went everything so wrong?”

Khan looked with unusual big eyes at him. “Is this what worries you the most?” He shook his head.
“Jim, despite the timeline, this was still me. I’m capable of such darkness that it can drive me insane and…”

“You had your share of madness, honey, and yet you became stronger of it,” Jim interrupted him softly; moving his cheek against Nien’s. Then a thought struck him. “Maybe there was something in the atmosphere of Ceti Alpha V after the planetary catastrophe that influenced you and the others,” he mused.

Khan frowned. “You think that…” He made a fleeing gesture with his right hand, Jim nodded slowly.

“I mean, Otto, Katie, Pablo, Rodriguez – they all love you dearly, but I do think that they would try to stop you if you ever would ‘lose’ it. Yet they obviously didn’t. They didn’t even interference as you – I mean, the other you – turned into a murderer and tormentor. Something you and your siblings would never do as long as you’re sane.” Jim fixed him with a firm gaze. “Maybe something in the changed atmosphere was the reason for the mess. Look, the other me gave your other you the chance of building an own life on a planet, and you agreed to it. Selek told you, your other you were even grateful for it. And then the big shit happened and you all went crazy. Selek also mentioned to you that there had been ion storms and that the air wasn’t breathable without oxygen masks. All of you – the others all of you – certainly got lots of poisoned air into your bodies and that maybe changed your bio-chemical vitals, enhanced nature or not. Perhaps in the end it robbed you all, step by step, of your sanity.”

“You can’t know this,” Khan murmured.

Jim shrugged. “I can ask Spock to run a simulation with the computers. I don’t know how much is in our databank about Ceti Alpha V and VI, but maybe the data is enough to build a likewise scenario of what happens within the atmosphere of no. V if it is shoved in the orbit of no. VI. And, by the way, as VI exploded it certainly send a lot of emissions towards its neighbor planet. Often only this is enough to change a planet to the worst. If it will calm you, I ask Spock to check this assumption.”

Khan carefully entangled himself from Jim and rubbed his forehead. “This all isn’t about the reason why I went mad in the other timeline, but the fact that I can be pushed so far. Selek warned me what could become of me if I don’t learn to control me. And he warned me not to harm you.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Selek is the worst mother-hen of all, so don’t fret.”

“I do not fret, Jim, I simply ponder what danger I could pose to you, the others and the Federation if I ever lose my mind,” the Augment all but brooded.

“I think, you be as dangerous as any other genius that becomes a bit batty,” Jim said calmly. “But it isn’t said that this will happen to you – after all, there are enough people here to set you straight if your temper flares too much.” He again wrapped an arm around Khan’s shoulder. “Don’t read to much in the behavior of the other you, Nien. This man doesn’t exist in this timeline – not this kind of man at least.”

“But it could come to that,” the former dictator whispered, before he took a deep breath. “Selek offered me to give me Vulcan training – to show me how to control myself better and how to deal with the strong emotions I have. All of us have!”

“You accepted his offer,” Jim assumed, and Khan made an affirming gesture.

“Yes. Selek once told me that we Augments remind him of the Vulcans before Surak came, and maybe he isn’t so wrong with this comparison. We are from different planets and my race only
existed for a few decades, but… there are parallels which can’t be denied. Surak taught the Vulcans how to overcome their aggressiveness and how to control their feelings. I do think that… it would be the best for us to get some likewise training, too.”

Jim couldn’t help himself; he smiled. That was typical Nien. Problem recognized, problem solved – well almost. After all…

Khan’s communicator beeped and he reached to the nightstand to get it. “Khan here,” he answered the hail.

“Otto here. Noonien, I wanted to let you know that the others agree with Jim’s suggestion about our official name. Homo Sapien Augeretis fits perfect in our opinion.”

Nien smiled. “Good to hear. I inform Selek so that the official acknowledgement can be released. Have a good night.”

“You too. Um… are you okay?” There was real concern in Otto’s voice, and the Augment leader rolled fondly his eyes.

“I’m okay, Otto. Really, I am. Give the others my greetings. Good night.” He closed the communicator, and saw how Jim took his own.

“I call Selek – and afterwards he gets a piece of my mind for worrying you so much.”

A long, pale strong hand was lain on his arm. “Jim, don’t,” Nien said softly. “I don’t know if it is my place to tell you, but… you should know that he, indeed, loves you.”


Khan grimaced. “Not in this way, silly, but as a brother or son. I said it to his face that he loves you and he confirmed it, but not like we love each other. And when I watch Young Spock I think he adores you in quite the same way.”

Jim blushed. “Well, maybe I can remind him of his affection for me every time he cites the damn Starfleet rules whenever I’m about to solve a problem without going by the book.”

This time Nien chuckled. “Don’t demand of him to change that drastically.”

Kirk grinned and hailed Selek; affirming the official name the Augments had chosen. Like this he learned that the Vulcan High Council had only waited for that information to finish the official acknowledgement, and that the Federation Council and Starfleet would be informed about the ‘new recognized race’ the next day.

Highly satisfied, Jim hailed Wesley to inform him in advance. After everything Bob did for him, Khan and the others, it would be really bad form to let him learn of something so important on the official way.

Only then he also hailed Bones to give him the good news. He had to wait a moment until his friend answered his call, and Leonard sounded… distracted, to put it mildly.

“So, it’s finally done,” Leonard grumbled as Jim had ended his little speech. “Congratulations!”

In the background soft music played, and Jim got a wicked gleam in his eyes, as he said, “I just wanted to let you know about it in person. Don’t let me keep you away from your duties. Oh, and give Carol my greetings.”
“What?”

Kirk began to laugh. “Don’t think I wouldn’t know what you’re doing in the moment, Bones. So, have fun – and make certain Carol doesn’t come too late to her shift tomorrow.”

“You are impossible, Jim!” sounded the female voice from afar.

“Gottcha,” Kirk snickered.

“Good night, Jim!” McCoy said firmly before the connections was closed. Still chuckling, Jim put is communicator on the nightstand, and met Khan’s thoughtful gaze.

“What do you think of it?” Nien asked, what took Jim by surprise.

“Of what do you speak?”

“That you and Carol Marcus had a son in the other timeline.”

Kirk pursed his lips, before he slowly said, “I don’t know. I mean, I like Carol and in the beginning I did flirt with her, but somehow there was something missing. And… Well, even if it isn’t fair to her, but after all her father put my friends and me through, I… lost the interest in her in a personal way, you understand? I don’t know how her and mine story went in the other timeline, but in our world here she is nothing more for me than a friend.” He cocked his head. “What do you think of the woman you took as your wife in the other timeline?”

Khan shrugged one shoulder. “She had to be very impressive to catch my interest in that way. Yet… I can’t imagine loving someone else than you.”

Jim smiled and took Nien’s good hand in his own fingers. “Then we are, again, on the same page here. In other words: Let the other timeline be whatever it was, we live our own life here.” He grinned. “And that means that a lot lays ahead for us.”

“Yes – our marriage among other things,” Khan nodded; smiling for the first time in hours.

“Yeah!” Again Kirk kissed him gently. “I’m so looking forward to those moments.”

For a second a wicked grin appeared on the Augment’s face. “But until then, Pyāra, you’ll have to work on your pronunciation of the Vulcan sentences you’ve to speak.”

Jim frowned in mock hurt. “Honey, don’t tell me that you can speak Vulcan better than I do – after all I train those damn words for days now, and you only for a few hours.”

The smirk on Khan’s face widened. “What can I say? I’m better at everything, as you know.”

Kirk’s reaction was so quick that even Nien’s enhanced reflexes were too slow. A moment later he had a pillow in the face he pushed away, only to find his arms full with a snickering captain, who straddled his lap – careful not to hurt him. “What do you think of a contest, honey?” He asked sweetly.

“What contest?” For once the Augment was at loss.

“Who kisses better,” Jim grinned with triumph, and Khan wriggled his brows.

“This is a challenge I accept!”

And then there was for minutes no other words spoken…
The next day was sunny and warm from the beginning like all the others prior. Even in the earlier morning, right after breakfast, the promise of heat crept through the streets of New Shi’Khar.

Kirk stood on the pavement in front of the hotel where the Uhuras resided in the moment. He had a hard time to suppress the grin that threatened to break through as he watched Nyota Uhura’s obvious exasperation with which she glared at her younger sister, who all but ogled at Jim. Beside her stood her brother, who seemed to be unsure if he should smirk or groan at his younger sister’s behavior, yet Kirk had caught him staring with admire at him several times. Usually that would have made the young captain flustered, because even after all he did during the last years he wasn’t someone who regarded himself as a hero. He did what had to be done to protect his crew, his ship, his friends, other people or the spirit of the Federation. He didn’t trick, fight or risked his neck to gain a good reputation, but to set things right, no matter what. So, facing such open admiration was something that awkward for him – if it wouldn’t have been for Nyota’s reaction towards her siblings.

Her parents and grandparents beamed at Kirk, too, but in a more casual way and Jim had almost instantly taken a liking to Nyota’s mother. She was everything his own mom wasn’t, and as she clapped him on the back with a good-natured “At least someone who can keep my daughter under control” he had to laugh.

“No, Ma’am. It’s the other way around. To spill a secret: It’s Nyota who is the real captain, because none of us boys up there dares to infuriate her.” He flicked a thumb skywards and winked at his communication officer, who stemmed her fists in the waist and glared at him. “See, that’s what I mean,” he added in a conspiratorial whisper towards her mother, who chuckled.

“And there I wanted to be nice to you, Captain, and wracked my brain how to help you with getting a better feeling for the Vulcan language you’re going to need in two days,” Uhura growled, yet there was a teasing gleam in her eyes that took the harshness of her voice away.

“Who says that I’m not better in speaking the needed sentences?” Kirk asked innocently.

Uhura rolled her eyes. “Your first attempts spoke volumes, Jim, and Spock also confirmed yesterday evening that you’ve still trouble with it.”

“Traitor,” he pouted towards his first officer, who stood beside Uhura and watched the whole meeting with the interest of a scientist who got his hands on a new species of insects. Not only that they were out in public, no, a lot of Vulcans had passed them by and their reactions to the joking humans ranged from indignant ignoring to barely hidden disbelief. Latter confused Spock, after all everyone knew that humans differed a lot from Vulcans, especially in the way of thinking and behaving. So, what were they staring at? All right, maybe the meeting shouldn’t have been in public, but the Uhuras had already been outside of the hotel as he and Jim reached it several minutes ago.

The meeting hadn’t been part of their scheduling, yet he hadn’t been able to deny Nyota’s family the chance to meet Jim Kirk before the wedding would take place.

So he had picked up Jim from New Gol, drove him to the hotel in New Shi’Kahr, and now he really hoped for the ending of this meeting. He was used to the emotional display of his comrades and the Uhuras were kind-spirited and warm-hearted, yet he sensed Jim’s embarrassment he indeed could understand, and wanted to end it.

But just right now Kirk and Nyota were engaged in one of their friendly quarrels and knowing from experiences this could last a while.
Uhura looked with barely hidden mirth at her commanding officer and friend, who all but huffed at Spock, and continued, “As I said, I thought a lot how to help you to get a better feeling for the Vulcan language in the next two days, before T’Pau and the other dignitaries getting the imagination you would speak Vulcan with a hot potato in your mouth.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “I’m not that bad.”

“No, you’re worse,” Nyota deadpanned, what made her sister gasp and her brother snickering.

“Do you really think this will be good for your career if you snap at your captain like this?” Malcom teased her, what earned him a smirk.

“Jim knows me – and that I only have his and the others’ best interest at heart.” She opened her handbag she had slung over her light summer dress she wore today and pulled something out. Smiling she offered him a tiny one-ear-head-set and the dwarf-vision of an universal translator. “Here, it is programmed with the four Vulcan dialects which are spoken in this colony. When you wear the one ear-plug you can hear what the Vulcans say in their language while you get the translation with a time delay of a few seconds. Like this you maybe get a better feeling for the accentuation and the speech melody.”

Jim grinned openly at her and took the two items from her. “Thanks, Nyota. That is really thoughtful of you.” Quickly he stuck the plug, switched on the translator and put it into his trouser pocket. Still smirking he addressed Spock, “Say something in Vulcan.”

The first officer sighed soundlessly, before a stream of words left his mouth the little device translated a moment later into, “If we remain here for longer we’re not done with shopping before the heat becomes intolerable for you.”

Because only Jim had heard the translation, the others – despite for Nyota – looked puzzled at Spock, who wore his most innocent and bored expression. Uhura laughed quietly. “You’re the first man who is eager to go shopping,” she teased her future husband. “No wonder that I love you so much.”

Spock stared with risen eye-brows at her, realized that his leg was pulled, and answered regally, “As the captain’s first officer it’s my duty to make certain that he doesn’t get hurt. So…”

“Bullshit, you boys simply want some time for yourself to do some men-talking,” Uhura snickered and gave Spock a gentle push. “Off you go, you two. I’ll show my family the new museum in the meantime.”

“Don’t you have better things to do two days for your marriage?” her sister asked with big eyes.

“Na, everything is prepared and planned with Vulcan sustainability, so the bride has some time for herself.” She waved at her two commanding officers. “Bye, gentlemen – and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Shooing her family away she walked down the pavement, while Spock allowed himself the tiniest vision of a frown. “What does she mean with ‘don’t do anything I wouldn’t do’?”

Jim snickered amused. “It means, we shall stay out of trouble.” He walked towards the borrowed hover-car. “Come on, let’s go shopping.”

Spock still pondered Nyota’s words and shook finally his head. “We’re on New Vulcan. There is no
‘trouble’. That would be illogical.”

He couldn’t assume how wrong he was.

“ST***ST***ST

“The… the Vulcans did WHAT?” Richard Barnett looked with almost boyish wide eyes at the screen that showed the face of President Robertson.

“You heard me clearly, Richard,” the Federation’s mightiest man said with a sigh. “I received a report from the Vulcan High Council that they have acknowledged officially the Augments as an own psionic race, Homo Sapiens Augeretis. And because of their low number they are also declared as an endangered species. Both attributes put them under special protection per Federation law. Therefore the people of our special friend ‘Sunrise’ are legally sheltered now, not only on New Vulcan, but in the whole Federation in general.” He bent forwards and cocked his head, as he saw the admiral gaping at him. “You didn’t know in advance,” he realized, and Richard hurried to click his mouth shut again, before he collected himself.

“No, sir, I hadn’t a clue that the Vulcans would make such a step,” he murmured; wracking his brain if Kirk had informed during the talk two days ago, as he told him about his planned marriage with Khan.

Barnett sighed. “I can’t help myself, but I have the certain feeling that a special young captain from Iowa is behind this all. He is protective of Khan – he loves him – and now the Augments are declared as an own species by the Vulcans, no less. I would bet my last shirt that Selek had a part in it, too – and we both know who he is for real. He would move hell and earth for Kirk. And if it wouldn’t be for Kirk’s courage, cleverness and intelligence he used again to push fate into the direction of his liking, I would curse the boy.”

“Mr. President, don’t forget that Captain Kirk…”

“Yes, yes.” Richardson waved a casual hand. “The boy saved Earth, several other planets, my vice-president, you and the others, showed the Klingons their limits… I can go on and on like this – and I don’t know if I should become wary of him or should put him on a pedestal.” He sighed in defeat. “Latter would be the only right thing to do, yet…” He shook his head. “At least like this he spared the Federation Council long discussions what should become of the Augments. With the Vulcans’ intervention they are free to move to every place they want – after all they are now an accepted species within the planet-union.”

Richard dared a smile. “Well, so this is the best outcome for anyone.”

“You think so?” asked the president. “I’m the last who does pre-justice, but the Augments did make a mess in Earth’s history and they are dangerous when losing control.”

“Khan and his people belonged to the peaceful Augments, sir. And after all I learned from Kirk, they are normal men and women who want nothing more than a place to live their lives.”

“Kirk sees everything connected with his beloved through rose-colored glasses,” Robertson grumbled. “Not that I can’t understand him. Love does those things to people. Besides, the pictures I saw from Khan show him as an attractive man. And what the Augments had been forced to endure is bare any humanity, so I can acknowledge that Kirk and his officers want to know them save. Yet I will contact Selek and will have a word or two with him. I need his assurance that the Augments hold no potential danger for the Federation.”
Barnett groaned inwardly. “Sir, due all respect, but to ask the Vulcans if they didn’t make an error in judgement will maybe offend them. And after everything Norton did, I think one drop more would make the barrel flow over.”

Robertson smiled shortly. “We are talking of Vulcans here, Richard. Offence would be an emotion.”

“One they have perfected in not-showing but acting on in the subtest way. I know of what I’m speaking. Even Young Spock can make someone like me squirm with this indignant gaze and lifting of an eyebrow if he thinks he’s offended.”

This made the president chuckle. “I know – but Selek has the wisdom of almost a whole Vulcan life contraire to his younger counterpart. And he understands us humans well. He will not take my concern the wrong way.” He bent forwards again. “Has Commodore Wesley already spoken with any Augments besides Khan?”

“I don’t think so. The Vulcan healers asked him to wait until the Augments have acclimated themselves to the foreign environment and the fact that they have slept for almost two and a half centuries.”

Robertson nodded. “Understandable, but they are awake for days now. Let Wesley check on them. I want his neutral report within one day. I need something to work with when hell breaks loose in the form of the Federation Council and some of our staff officers – especially Admiral Archer. It won’t be long until I’ve him in the line after the newest addition of the Federation-family comes officially known, mark my words.”

Richard groaned. “I speak with him first and try to keep him calm. Would you please let me know of the result of your talk with Selek?”

“Of course,” the president nodded. “I send you a short note you can work with, too. Until later.” The screen became dark, and Barnett sighed deeply. His gaze found the empty cup on his desk and he rubbed his head. He needed a new coffee – a strong one, preferable with a shot of whisky in it, but for something like this the day was still too young.

“Blast you, Jim! Why didn’t you tell me to what the Vulcans were up to? But, of course, you had to protect your friends – again. There is no going back now after they are officially recognized as an own species.” He shook his head. “I knew you meant trouble the day Pike accompanied you to the Academy and I saw you stepping through the door of my office.” Despite his frustration a smile began to curl his lips. “And boy, I can’t do anything else than admire your courage.”

ST***ST***ST

Jim smiled inwardly as he heard his first officer’s and friend’s rambling. Well, it wasn’t exactly a rambling the way humans understood it, but for Spock it was really unusual to speak more than four minutes now about the whole ‘family-reunion’ with something close to confusion mixed with exasperation. Yes, Nyota’s parents were nice people, her grandparents were wise in their own way and her siblings were… well, young humans. And regarding Spock’s own family… Well, Silek was a big riddle to Spock, who had never met a full Vulcan who had a thing for teasing others and who ‘wore his heart on the sleeve’. T’Ylle was a Vulcan lady through and through and her father was a scientist Spock was comfortable of to speak with, but all those strangers in the middle of the wedding preparation were unnerving – well, unnerving if he wouldn’t be a Vulcan.

And alone this choice of words told Jim everything while he walked beside his T’hy’la down the street towards the shop; having left the car on a parking lot two blocks away. Spock needed a time-out, as much as he would deny it, and Kirk was hell-bent to give his friend exactly that.
“What do you think of having lunch with me in one of the restaurants down at the lake?” he suggested, and Spock lifted an asking brow.

“What?”

Jim shrugged. “We’ll be done with the shopping in an hour, then we’ve some time left that you can show me the lake and then I invite you to lunch.” He lifted one hand as the Vulcan began to protest. “Just let me do this for you, Spock. Despite that your time is limited you first provided Nien with clothes, then you bought me my wedding-robe, now you’re going shopping with me for my marriage. Originally, I should assist you, not the other way around. So, to buy you lunch is the least I can do. And, by the way, we both have a break for once.” He beamed at Spock expectedly and excited – and this face with those hopeful warm eyes was something Sarek’s son was unable to say ‘no’ to.

“I think the correct answer would be ‘thank you’,” he said, and Kirk’s smile widened into a full-blown grin.

“You’re welcome. On Earth there is the tradition that the groom has a bachelor party. I know that this isn’t usual in your culture, so a little time-out with a nice meal and spending some private time with the best friend is a good alternative. And besides, you’ve a good explanation to Sarek and the others, why the shopping trip lasted longer.” He winked at Spock, who suppressed a sigh.

“I don’t need an excuse to spend time with my T’hy’la, Jim. Even my father understands that. And, by the way, he does some shopping with Silek this morning, too, so he wouldn’t miss my arrival at all.”

“Fabulous,” Jim smirked and rubbed his hands, before his attention was driven to the door of the shop they had walked to. “There we are. I hope we get Nien’s size right.”

“I ordered the robe the same size I bought the other clothes for Mr. Singh,” Spock stated simply and followed Kirk into the shop. Although the day was still young and the sun was two or three hours away from reaching the zenith, it was already very warm, and Jim took a deep breath as he stepped into the temperature-controlled salesroom.

Five minutes later they had already chosen the shoes and a few things more Khan was going to need for the wedding, while the reserved robe lay already packed at the counter. Jim’s own outfit had some additions, too, of which Spock had made him aware.

“And you think I really need the sash?” Kirk asked quietly, while behind them another customer entered the shop.

“It’s traditional, Jim,” Spock answered.

“So, the couple wear the same sashes. And the third sash? For what is it used?” Kirk wanted to know.

“It’s the symbol for the bond that will be strengthened and confirmed during the wedding ceremony. The partners take each other’s right hand and the sash will be wrapped around them, portraying outside what is happening within the minds.”

Jim smiled. “I didn’t know that Vulcans can be romantic.”

“This particular ceremony roots in the pre-Surak times, and is therefore… more symbolic than other, more modern ceremonies.”
“The old ceremonies are still holding rests of the emotions full Vulcans have learned to shed off,” an unknown male voice sounded in their back. “It’s no wonder that you prefer them, Spock, after all we both know that you’re anything but a full Vulcan.”

Jim felt Spock stiffening beside him, while anger flared up in the young captain at those words which he instantly recognized as an insult. Both officers turned around, and Kirk saw a tall Vulcan who was maybe in Spock’s age. He was almost bulk built, yet slender, and his almost expressionless face held an arrogant streak. His dark hair was short with a side parting and there was a gleam in his dark eyes that made Jim wary.

“Stonn,” Spock acknowledged the other Vulcan coolly; his face gave nothing away. But Jim knew his friend well enough. Spock was on alert, this much was for certain, which in turn made the inner alarm bells of Kirk ringing.

Stonn, as Jim had just learned, pointed at the sashes and asked flatly, “Don’t tell me that you found someone who is ready to bond with you – not after you sent your intended bondmate away.”

The last part of the sentence was uttered in Vulcan. It was unusual to speak about private matters in the presence of strangers – especially offwordlers – and therefore Stonn’s decision followed its own logic. He couldn’t know of the translator Jim still had switched on and given the fact that the hot wind outside had messed up Kirk’s hair enough to cover the little plug, Stonn had no chance to even assume that his offences were understood by the human.

But Spock knew it, and trying to prevent any trouble that could arise, he replied calmly, “T’Pring and I agreed that the arrangement our parents made as we were still children wouldn’t have benefited us, so we separated. But I don’t see why this should be of your concern,” he answered in his father’s language, following along with unwritten rules of his people.

“Wouldn’t you rather say that she was in your way as you decided to run off to Starfleet?” There was a low sneer in Stonn’s voice.

Kirk frowned. He didn’t know who this T’Pring was, but if he had understood the short exchange correctly then she had been something like an intended for Spock, and both had broken up. Yet this wasn’t the main thing that caught the captain’s attention. Even if Jim wouldn’t understand what both men were saying, the undertone the larger Vulcan used was clear to him – no matter the specie. Stonn was taunting Spock, and that increased Kirk’s anger. Instinctively he straightened his shape, ready to interference. Whoever treated his first officer – his friend! – disrespectful and even attacked him verbally, would have to deal with him.

“What do you think you know about it, Stonn? You haven’t been there.” Spock answered; still expressionless, still calm.

“She told me, Spock. T’Pring and I grew close after you left, but you are right. Your both decision to cut the link was made in agreement, and this is the only good outcome of it. Your unsorted, emotional loaded mind was a burden for her.”

That was a low blow – one of those Spock was used to when he was still a small boy. Being at the receiving end of his peer’s never-ending mockery and taunting was nothing new to him. Their cruel behavior had even elicited a raging-fit out of him that ended with Stonn being beaten into a bruised heap, while he – Spock – had been left alone afterwards for several weeks. Yet he hadn’t been proud of his victory, especially after his talk with Sarek. Then the bullying had started again until general school was over. And, as it seemed, Stonn was still up to the old ways.

In earlier times it stung, despite Spock’s Vulcan control, but not anymore. His bickering with McCoy
had taught him how to respond – even if this here wasn’t one of the unending discussions between
the CMO and himself. Leonard never threw verbal punches like this; he always showed respect,
even if he tried to provoke Spock to give into his emotions. And the half-Vulcan knew by now that
McCoy only tried to show him that to suppress one side of his being was wrong. So, you could say
that Leonard tried to help Spock.

But not Stonn. The other Vulcan’s intention was to hurt him – plain and simple. And Spock
wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of succeeding. Rather the opposite. The verbal quarrels with
McCoy had trained him to ‘shot’ back without violating the Vulcan way. As a child Spock always
had tried to ignore Stonn – despite the pain his schoolmate bestowed him with – but the small hurting
boy was no more. Spock was a full-grown man who had found his own place in the world, with
friends who cared deeply for him, and with a beautiful highly intelligent woman who was about to
become his wife.

There was nothing Stonn could say of making him think of himself as a lower being ever again.

“Your body has matured, Stonn, but your words are still those of the spoiled child I was forced to go
to school with,” Sarek’s son replied icily, while behind the counter the salesman had gone rigid. He
also could feel Jim’s tension without even touching his friend, and hoped that Kirk wouldn’t do
something stupid like intervening. Fixing his concentration on Stonn, he added, “You are not well
raised enough to value our culture to let logic leading your thoughts and to comprehend the wisdom
Surak taught us by seeing the benefit in differences.”

Jim wasn’t so compliant with the Vulcan culture in detail, but that Spock had given back just as he
had received, Kirk realized instantly. Inwardly he applauded his friend, who met the other Vulcan’s
arrogant and scathing behavior with cold logic.

Stonn stared at his former schoolmate; his nostrils flared for a moment. This half-breed dared to
doubt his Vulcan schooling and upbringing? He, who wasn’t even a full-blooded Vulcan but the
result of a biological experiment that should have been forbidden from the beginning? He raised his
chin by an inch. “As if you would always follow the way of logic, Spock. We both know that your
emotions are too strong for it.”

‘And how is this a disadvantage, you snob?’ Kirk thought; feeling the urge growing to tell the guy a
thing or two.

Again, Spock only raised a brow. “As you never stop to point out, Stonn, I’m only half-Vulcan. So,
of course, I have some emotions which I have learned to control. What is your excuse for letting your
obviously not trained feelings getting the better of you?”

This time Jim had a hard time not to grin. Spock was really good in dishing it out.

Stonn fixed Spock with a not-existing, yet clear sneer. “And there is the error in your words. Full
Vulcans don’t have any feelings which could get ‘the better of them’. But, of course, being infiltered
partly with your mother’s genes you can’t know how it is to have no emotions.” He came one step
nearer. “And maybe this is the reason why you failed to save her in the end. You were too afraid of
our collapsing world around you to take her to safety.”

Jim felt himself gaping at these effronteries. Spock and frozen of fear? Spock too shocked to react at
all, especially when someone he loved was at stake? That beat everything! This bastard in front of
him didn’t have the tiniest cue of Sarek’s son courage. And then Stonn’s next words took Jim’s
breath away,

“Or did you finally acknowledge her for what she was and decided that it was better when she is no

more? Then you would have done your clan a favor of removing this wh…"

“It would be very wise to cease your speaking just now, Stonn!” Spock’s tone was hard enough to cut through steel as he interrupted Stonn before the insulting word could leave the other Vulcan’s mouth. He struggled not to ball his hands into fists, to stay in control, even if his pulse began to thumb in his ears. “To speak low about the deaths is unworthy of everyone, let alone someone who is so proud of being a ‘full Vulcan with no emotions’. Because your whole behavior, your whole words, are nothing else than a display of loathe – and loathe is an emotion, don’t you agree?”

“I speak in that way so that you can understand me, half-breed. After all…”

“This is quite enough!” Kirk’s sharp voice rang out, as he couldn’t stand it one second longer. This bugger had not only offended the gone Lady Amanda, but also treated Spock like he was scum. And Jim, who was more protective of his Vulcan friend than any mother-hen of her fledging around the world, would have nothing more of it!

He stepped beside Spock, who looked with widening eyes at him. Of course they defended each other whenever necessary, but never before had they been in a situation that was this kind of personal and private. As he was a child – and later a teenager – no-one had stood up for him to shield him against his peers’ taunting and mocking, but here and now Jim did exactly this. It was a whole new experience and out of no-where warmth spread through the coldness that had begun to engulf Spock the moment Stonn had spoken up.

Kirk seemed to be taller than usual as he stood beside Spock, while he glanced at Stonn with the special glare he had only reserved for someone who threatened his friends and his crew. “I never thought that there are Vulcans who have the foul behavior of a Klingon, but the universe never ceases to surprise me. Obviously there are Vulcans without any manners!”

Stonn looked him up and down as if Kirk was a disgusting insect; giving nothing away if he was surprised that the Terran had understand every word. “Stay out of this, human,” he said arrogantly in Standard.

“In your dreams,” Jim replied with a low growl in his voice. “You’ve just affronted my first officer, his dead mother and…”

“First officer? You are Captain Kirk?” As Jim only fixed him with another deadly stare, Stonn continued with clear accuse in his voice. “So, you are the man who tried to save our homeworld and failed so miserably?” He turned towards the salesman, who looked as horrified as a Vulcan could be. “Since when do you tolerate failures in your shop, Sulter?”

The addressed Vulcan came out of his shock, stiffened and answered icily, “I advise you firmly to stop this intolerable way of speaking, Stonn. The House of Surak and a Starfleet captain will not be insulted in my shop!”

“The House of Surak fell from grace the moment the traitor Sarek took this human whore as his wife and above all created such a…” He gasped, as the hand he waved into Spock’s direction with the last words, was gripped with surprisingly strong, cool fingers. A wave of disgust and pure fury crashed against his inner shields, as the human’s emotions were transferred to him through the physical contact.

“One more word, mister, and I wipe the floor with your sorry ass,” Kirk hissed; his blue eyes flashed dangerously.

“Jim, he isn’t worth it,” Spock tried to calm his friend, despite the fact that gratefulness waved
“A Starfleet member who attacks a Vulcan citizen,” Stonn stated bluntly, freeing his wrist from Jim’s grip. “How interesting. This is nothing else than what your admiral did two weeks ago and…”

“I beg to differ. Admiral Norton assaulted your government – I defend the honor of the House of Surak,” Kirk snarled; feeling a strange desire to protect Spock’s clan. A clan, he somehow belonged to now.

Stonn watched him with something close to mockery for a second, before he answered, “You’ve no idea of what you’re talking, human, otherwise you would know that you have no right of ‘defending’ the honor of any House. So…”

“And again you speak of things you have no real knowledge of, Stonn,” Spock interrupted, and for a moment the other Vulcan was taken aback by the fiery sparkling in his opponent’s eyes. “James Kirk has been welcomed within the folds of my clan, and as my T’hy’la he has every right to intervene when members of our clan are harassed.”

“T’hy’la?” Stonn replied; disbelieving. Then he shook his head. “You’ve really no inhibition of trampling on Vulcan culture, Spock. Such a lower psi-null being can never be…”

“Stop speaking of my captain in this way,” Spock ordered with a voice that usually made even other officers running. “Your behavior dishonors our people!”

“You’re giving me no commands, half-breed,” Stonn all but spat. “Spare that for your Starfleet cum and…”

“Mr. Stonn, no more affronts against Captain Kirk and Commander Spock in my shop!” the salesman said sternly, leaving his place from behind the counter. “I do not tolerate any further insults!”

“This is private, Mr. Sulter, so remain where you are,” Stonn answered over his shoulder.

“Speaking like this in public is anything but private,” Kirk growled. “It is rather a stupid way of trying to revile a family whose generosity and respect you will never be able reach.”

“A family that consists of traitors, men who abandoned Surak’s way, a whore and a biological abnormality that…”

Kirk stepped half in front of Spock; knowing that his friend’s control was a hairbreadth away from snapping. There were only a few things which could make Spock seeing red – or green in his case – and insulting his mother was on the top of the list. Jim wouldn’t allow Stonn to provoke Spock into such a behavior that would, indeed, bring shame over Sarek’s son.

“You xenophobic bastard!” he snarled; feeling his own control breaking. “Spock is more worth than thousands of such scumbags like you. You’re so jam-packed with jealously that you even act against everything Surak tried to teach your people. Maybe you really…”

Stonn pushed him with his right arm aside. “Remove yourself from my eye-sight, human, or…” The rest of the sentence ended in a shout of surprise and maybe even pain, followed by a dull bang.

Jim had acted – out of pure instinct as he thought himself being assaulted, or out of his urge to keep Spock out of the escalating situation. Maybe it was a mixture of both. He gripped Stonn’s arm, side-stepped, ducked, kicked parallel with his right leg against the taller Vulcan’s shin and used the drive to hurl the other man through the air. Spock’s shout of bafflement and alarm went under in Stonn’s
outcry as the full-blood Vulcan landed on the floor. But Stonn’s reflexes were fast. Rolling aside he regained his feet within a width of a second and attacked.

Jim, who had pushed Spock aside and was purchasing Stonn, dropped instantly into fighting stance – slightly bent in his knees, fists lifted. Stonn threw two punches Kirk more or less was able to block, before the young captain received a blow to his temple that made him stumble. But before he could even start a counter-attack, a roar filled the air, followed by, “Leave him alone!”

The next moment Spock took hold Stonn’s upper arm and whirled him around; his fist connected with the other male’s yaw. Stonn’s head snapped back because of the strong impact, and Spock used the chance to reach for his opponent’s shoulder to use a nerve-pinch. Again, Stonn’s reflexes were superb because he turned away in the very last moment and faced him, throwing a hard punch. Spock ducked as Starfleet training kicked in and gripped the other Vulcan’s arms. Letting himself fall backwards he pulled Stonn with him and hurled him over, using the Ashumi-technic.

For the second time Stonn learned how hard a floor could be, but this time he hadn’t a chance to raise again, because Spock was on his back with the speed of a le-matya. Yet again the taller Vulcan was able to avoid to be nerve-pinched by squirming beneath his opponent and tried to throw him off, but Spock straddled him firmly; a snarl left the Enterprise’s first officer’s throat. The old anger had mingled with new rage as Stonn attacked Jim, feed by the fury of hearing his former schoolmate insulting his parents like he did. It was about to shatter Spock’s control utterly.

“Kroikah!”

The ancient command made both Vulcans stop like someone had pulled the plug. Jim, who tried to ignore the pain at his temple while he fought for balance, turned around as he heard the familiar male voice in his back – and froze.

Between entrance and counter stood no-one else than Sarek. And one look at the ambassador told Jim that they all were in deep, deep trouble…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Oh-oh, of course Sarek had to step into the same shop the big mess is happening. Yet, maybe, it’s a stroke of luck in a certain way before everything becomes out of control.

I loved to write Stonn into the story, because even if the bully of Spock in the first ST-Kelvin-movie wasn’t mentioned with name, I (and maybe some people more) automatically thought of Stonn. In the original serial he struck me as one of those schoolmates who ‘loved’ to taunt Spock because of his heritage. And in the next chapter you will learn why he reacted in my story the way he did.

It also was fun to write some reactions of the president and Barnett as they learn of the Augments being declared an own, even psionic specie. I also mentioned Jonathan Archer, and I can promise you that he will appear in the next chapter I hope to poste before Eastern.

What really had to be looked back on and reappraised was what happened to Jim and Khan in the first timeline and how Nien reacts to this knowledge. It was an emotional
and delicate topic – one that could give awkwardness or would forge our two love-birds even more together. I hope you liked the outcome.

As I already mentioned above, in the next chapter you’ll learn why Stonn behaves to completely out of the Vulcan way, you’ll meet a very old Archer (and T'Pol) and there will finally the re-union I spoke of two chapters prior.

Please let me know how you liked the new chapter – like always, I’m more than curios.

Have a nice rest of the week,

Love

Yours Starflight
Lessons from the past

Chapter Notes

Hi, my dear readers!

And once again I only can say ‘thank you’ for all the reactions I got for the last chapter. I knew that Stonn’s arrival and his behavior would take you on a rollercoaster – and I had to grin at your suggestions what will happen to him or how the others will react. And it made me more or less happy that no-one of you thought of the explanation for Stonn’s un-typical behavior I came up with (*smirk evilly*). Just wait until you read it. And concerning Jim – well, Sarek, Silek and the poor shop’s owner will get a very strong demonstration of our captain’s loyalty not only towards Spock, but also to his whole clan and towards Starfleet. In other words: Don’t mess with those who are close to James T. Kirk. Our dear captain can turn into a furious dragon who protects his treasure (even if latter isn’t made of gold and gems, mind you).

In the new chapter you will also meet two characters from another Star Trek-serial and I hope I caught them well. And there will be another re-union some of you already anticipated.

Have fun,

Love,

Yours Starflight

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 103 – Lessons from the past

„Homo Sapien Augeretis???? What… What has gotten into the Vulcans? Where is this brilliant, logical mind of theirs when it is really needed? Have they lost it – or is it only Selek and another few of the Elders who suddenly went insane?”

The voice that spoke with undeniable disbelief and anger had once been a smooth tenor, now it was rough and high with age. Yet the dark eyes encircled with a lot of deep wrinkles were still full of life and at the moment even fierce. The thin face that wore the spots of age was framed with a shock of white hair that had thinned out, and the bony fingers which held to the armrests of the hover-chair were trembling, but nevertheless there was no doubt that the old man was still sane and surprisingly healthy for the many years he had lived.

“High Minister Selek and the High Council certainly weighed all given information and facts before
they came to their decision. The Vulcan way doesn’t allow any other option, as you should be well aware,” came the gentle yet firm rebuke, spoken by a calm and soft female voice.

Richard Barnett sighed inwardly, while he looked back and forth between the two people in front of his desk, who were living legends by now: Jonathan Archer, former captain of the first Enterprise within Starfleet more than hundred years ago and later President of the Federation, and T’Pol, the first Vulcan who ever served aboard a Starfleet ship. Thanks to her job as counselor within Starfleet’s admiralty she hadn’t been on Vulcan the day Nero destroyed the planet, yet she hadn’t suffered any less. Even more than 16 light years away she had felt relatives die, and Barnett had heard that it had been Archer, with whom and some further admirals she conferred with because of the crisis, who caught her and stabled her mind by simply holding her close on his lap as she lost balance because of the mental shock. They both had shared several mind melds during their active duty days and both were close. Some people assumed that they were very close, but there were no proofs. Fact was that Jonathan had kept her sane as she realized of her homeworld’s destruction even before the official reports from the Enterprise NCC 1701 reached them, and Richard was still impressed how the old man had obviously reacted to shield and to comfort his friend.

Jonathan Archer was 148 years old – an age his ancestors of earlier centuries would have damned as ‘demon’s work’. Modern medicine gave him the chance to live a life in sane mind for so long. Yet it came with a price. His legs didn’t carry him anymore, his backbones had to be strengthened with some injections every month and his hands trembled almost without stop. But his spirit was still that of the determined explorer and protector he had been a century ago.

Contrary to him, age had been gentle with T’Pol who had stood at his side for so long and was still there. Even the first strands of silver in her short dark hair and the first crinkles around her large, brown eyes couldn’t change the fact that T’Pol was an unusually soft looking Vulcanness; with full, pouting lips and pleasant features. Yet Barnett knew the clear sharp mind that hid beneath the beautiful, somehow innocent appearance that reminded him of the images of fairies of the northers countries of Earth. It would be a big mistake to underestimate this woman, who displayed in her own way the same loyalty towards Archer that Spock did towards Kirk. And, exactly like Sarek’s son, she had no problem pointing out the illogic of an emotional statement; rebuking her old friend in this gentle way.

Archer looked from his hover-chair up to her. “You know that I don’t mean it literally,” he grumbled. “But… REALLY!” His thin hands flew up in a gesture of pure frustration. “I first thought it to be a bad joke when I received the memo from Robertson this morning but had to realize to my horror that it is anything but a joke. What devil drove your people to give AUGMENTS the status of their own psionic race; putting them under special protection laws like this?”

“The report gives you answers enough, Jonathan, you just can’t accept them. T’Pau herself tested the Augments and recognized their psionic abilities. And given the biological differences between them and the casual Terran human race they are indeed their own species. By the way, the Latin name is well chosen in my opinion.”
Archer groaned and grimaced. “Have you forgotten what happened when Soong raised Malik and the others? I still…”

“You begin with a false assumption, Jonathan. Malik and the others grew up alone after Soong was arrested when they were still children. The Augments we’re speaking of now are originals from the 20th century of your planet and belong to the more peaceful superhumans.”

“Yeah, this was clearly seen as this guy blew up the London Archive, attacked HQ and…”

Archer’s sarcastic reply was interrupted by Barnett. “Jon, with all due respect, but you and the other staff officers were informed in detail of what Mr. Singh had been forced to endure. He snapped - something I can understand. We all, including you, have our breaking points – and he was driven beyond it several times. And despite the way he was treated until a few weeks ago he used his strengths and intelligence to help us out during the damn war. Please don’t forget that the whole Tammeron population, most people of Aldebaran’s capital, our delegation and a lot of Starfleet members are owing him their lives. He freed Kirk from the Klingons and…”

“I know you are smitten with the Kirk-boy, Richard, and I have to admit that his cowboy-behavior does have some advantages. I wasn’t that different when I was young…”

“You can say that,” T’Pol muttered under her breath.

Archer shot her a short glance, before he continued, “… but it never occurred to me to hide a wanted criminal on my ship – or to turn a blind eye on the danger Augments possess, only because of a crazy friendship. I admire Kirk’s fighting spirit to never quit no matter what, but you have to agree that the whole command crew is a bunch of crazy individuals. Geniuses in their own ways, yes – even this mad Scotsman who used my dog to test his idea about a transwarp device…”

“It functioned in the end,” T’Pol cut in, but Archer waved her words away.

“… but if you regard it from a sane, neutral point of view these overgrown teenagers are overstepping boundaries and rules a little bit too often.”

Richard felt an almost fatherly urge to stand up for Kirk and his friends – after all, those ‘overgrown teenagers’ had already a long list of heroic deeds more experienced officers would never reach. He
cleared his throat. “Well, I do remember some tales in which you didn’t go by the book, too, Jonathan. You…”

“That was different!”

“A very often used statement from people who deny parallels they don’t like,” the Vulcanness commented; replying to Archer’s glare calmly with a raised brow.

“The times I went against rules can be counted on one hand,” Archer defended himself.

“I think age messes with your memories because you certainly went against rules more than five times,” T’Pol stated wryly.

“Be that as it may,” Archer grumbled. “When you’re out there in space you have to improvise sometimes. But when I read Kirk’s reports I get dizzy. I ask myself why he has a Vulcan as a first officer. Shouldn’t Spock prevent such insanity?”

“Spock cha’Sarek certainly accepts the captain’s own logic behind his decisions and trusts him, just like I did all those years back and still do concerning your style of command, even if I questioned it in my mind on a regular base,” T’Pol pointed out. “And if Captain Kirk speaks up on the behalf of Mr. Singh and the other Augments after he worked together with Mr. Singh for weeks, then he certainly has good reasons for it. I also want to drive your attention to the fact that no member of the Vulcan High Council would bend to his suggestion of recognizing the Augments as their own species if it wouldn’t be necessary.”

“Yeah – the necessity is to give them extra protection,” Jonathan groused. “Soong was convinced that Augments could be live among us if they are only raised as normal children but see what happened. Aggression is in their genes and…”

“Like it is in your whole species, Jon. Don’t forget that the Augments are enhanced *Terrans*. The gene material comes from your people. Yet, as far as I understand the report, the Augments which are on New Vulcan at the moment, have adjusted fine to the society and are acting peacefully – despite the fact that their leader has been tortured, abused and kept captive for many months. Given the usual reaction you could expect from them after being confronted with this knowledge, it speaks for them that they stay calm.”

Barnett leaned back in his chair; knowing that such similar discussions were being held in other
offices, after Richardson had informed the admiralty and the Federation Council of the Vulcans’ newest ‘development’.

“\n“I have to agree with T’Pol. I talked with Kirk a few times and I met one of the younger Augments on New Vulcan. Jim is convinced that they are going to take their given chance very seriously and will do their best to fit into the Federation. And if the young man I met is an example for his siblings, I’m drawn to agree with Kirk. We shouldn’t judge them because of what happened a century ago. This here is a complete different situation with different people.”

“It is not that I want to condemn them in general,” Archer sighed, “but what if something doesn’t go to their liking? What if their leader feels threatened again and goes berserk? You can’t stop them. Hell, you can barely \textit{kill} them and…”

“As I said, Mr. Singh’s crew differs from Malik and his fellows,” Barnett interrupted him. “They were introduced into this world by people who care for them. Khan trusts Kirk utterly and the other way around. This friendship shows them that they aren’t confronted with prejudice. Kirk already befriended a few of them, showed them the world they woke up into. T’Pau and Selek both assure that the Augments can be integrated into the Federation. We can’t just damn people because their abilities are differing from ours. After all the Federation consists of many different species, and we all swore to protect those differences because that is the essence of our union.”

“I know, Richard. I was the president for a few years, as you know, and I do remember very well the damn responsibilities that weighs down you with every new development that is made. I was an explorer for decades and loved every minute of it, and I certainly trusted new people several times too quickly and too often instead of playing it safe. Regarding my weakness when I was younger I can understand Kirk’s decision to protect the man who was a victim of Section 31 and to include the man’s people in said protection. But he hasn’t the experiences with Augments like I have, and…”

“I beg your pardon, Jonathan. I don’t want to step on your toes, but your ‘experiences’ with Augments was you chasing them through Klingon space and having some communications with them for a few days. On the contrary, Kirk has worked with Khan for a few weeks side by side, hand in hand. He has come to know Singh very well and he speaks kindly of Khan’s crew – ‘siblings’ is how Khan calls them. I talked with Selek before I called you, and Selek informed me that Sarek also shares the opinion that the Augments will fit within the Federation. By the way, Sarek is the middleman between the Augments and the Vulcan High Council.”

\textit{“Sarek agrees to this… insanity?” Archer demanded, shocked.}

“Sarek regards them as highly intelligent, reasonable people who want nothing more than to find a place where they can live in peace,” Barnett nodded. “Don’t forget what they’ve been through before they fled Earth. They had to face genocide, lost dear ones, were forced to see humans
butchering their people and even normal humans. The whole planet was caught in the most brutal blood-shed possible. Khan lost a brother during the escape, as Kirk told me. They all are traumatized, yet they adjust well to the new situation they find themselves in. The time they left Earth, ‘aliens’ were pure fiction. Other planets were pictures on a screen and numbers in observation labs. Khan’s sleeper-ship was the first of its type. None of them could know if they would wake up again at all, yet they took the risk, because it gave them a very tiny chance of survival. How desperate do you have to be to make such a step? They escaped – only to be faced with the same prejudice and loathing they tried to avoid all those centuries ago?” He shook his head. “No. This is not the way of the Federation. And if it comes to a hearing I would even tell exactly this piece of my mind to the Council.”

Archer sighed and leaned back in his hover-chair; pondering Barnett’s words. “Seeing it from the human side I have to be heartless not to agree with you. But… I’m still not convinced that this will all turn out in a good way.”

“The same concerns were discussed among our people after we had the first contact with you humans, yet a few Vulcans, who lived by the IDIC-principle, spoke up on your people’s behalf and suggested to give you a chance – to assist you while you were still struggling with the outcome of your third world-war,” T’Pol added of consideration. “And look where it got you. Do you really think Terrans would have made it so far if it wouldn’t have been for the trust we provided you with despite the doubts many of us had?”

Groaning again, Jonathan closed his eyes for a moment before he glanced upwards at her. “One thing will never change. You were and always will be my Jimmy Cricket.”

Rising both brows, T’Pol cocked her head. “I don’t know what my logical argumentation has to do with the fictional animal character of a fairy-tale concerning a puppet that turned to life.”

“Jimmy Cricket was Pinocchio’s conscious, as you are well aware,” Archer sighed.

“Yes, I’m familiar with this tale, yet I ask again why you compare us with those two fictional characters. You do have a conscious, as I’ve witnessed more times then I’m able to count, and you are certainly no wood-puppet turned to life. By the way, this story is highly unrealistic and therefore utterly illogical. I don’t understand why it is told to children.”

Jonathan looked at her and threw his hands up. “I give up!”

Barnett couldn’t help himself: He had to laugh. “I ask myself if Kirk has the same problems with Spock like you two have. Yet still I’m convinced that a human-Vulcan mixture command-team is the
best that could happen to Starfleet and the Federation.”

“That depends,” Archer murmured which earned him a stern glance from the Vulcanness, one he returned with one of his typical half-smirks. And as he saw the gleam that shimmered deep in her eyes he knew she understood his teasing. He asked himself, if Kirk was able to read in his Vulcan officer’s eyes like he, Archer, was able to do in T’Pol’s.

ST***ST***ST

Jim Kirk gulped, as his gaze roamed over the face of Ambassador Sarek who was the living example of a really NOT amused Vulcan. Spock’s father had one eye-brow raised, his face was expressionless, his eyes were cold – at least at the first look. But Jim had learned to read Spock, and his friend had inherited a few streaks from his father. Deep in those dark eyes Kirk recognized the anger the ambassador hid so well. And somehow Jim assumed that said anger wasn’t directed at Spock, Stonn or him, but at the whole situation.

A movement beside Sarek drove Kirk’s attention to the second male, who came to stand beside the ambassador. For a moment he thought it was Selek, but he realized his mistake a second later, because the Vulcan in front of him still had dark hair with the first silver at the temples, and his face – which resembled Spock a lot – didn’t show the deep crinkles Spock Prime sported. Jim assumed who this man had to be.

At hearing his father’s voice, Spock loosened his grip on Stonn. Catlike he rose and turned around; his uneven breath hitched for the tiniest moment as he saw his father and his uncle, before he brushed out his tunica, straightened his frame and clasped his hands on his back; Vulcan control firmly in place. “Father, Silek,” he greeted politely as if nothing had happened.

Stonn rose, too, yet not as elegantly as Spock. Giving the half-Vulcan a death-glare, he finally found his composure, straightened his clothes and looked at the newcomer. “Of course,” he grunted. “You always need a back-up, don’t you, Spock? First your captain, and now daddy comes to save the day.”

“In case it has slipped your incredible, formidable mind, you idiot: Spock had a good grip on you, and Sarek saved you in this case,” Jim growled – face flushed, narrowed eyes shooting daggers at the tall Vulcan, his body still strained to act if needed.

“Shut up, human! Your attack of a Vulcan citizen will be brought to…”
“Silence!” Sarek’s voice could freeze over hell.

Silek watched his nephew, the young human male at his side Sarek’s brother recognized as the Federation’s newest hero, and the other younger Vulcan whose attempt to stay in control was anything but perfect. “Interesting way of settling differences. Is this common now on New Vulcan?” he asked, and even if his face gave nothing away, Jim could hear the dry amusement in the man’s voice.

What had Spock said? That his uncle showed an almost scandalizing habit of teasing and ‘wearing his heart on his sleeve’? If Kirk had any doubts before who the second Vulcan in his middle age was, those doubts were dispersed, because even if Spock sometimes proved to have a wry sense of humor, this Vulcan here outdid him by a length. Jim knew that he faced Silek, Sarek’s younger brother, and as he met those sparkling dark eyes, he instantly took a liking to the man.

Sulter bowed in front of Sarek; greeting him with the ta’al. “Ambassador Sarek, it’s an honor to welcome you in my shop – even if the circumstances are less pleasant, because of the misbehavior of one of my customers.” He turned around and his gaze set sternly on Stonn. “Mr. Stonn, you not only insulted the House of Surak, Commander Spock and Captain Kirk without being provoked, you even attacked the captain. I bar you from my shop. Should you ever set foot into my house again, I’ll press charges against you.”

“As I said before, Sulter, this is private between Spock and me, so don’t inter…”

“I made myself clear, Mr. Stonn,” the shop’s owner interrupted him sternly. “When the situation is cleared by Ambassador Sarek you will leave my shop and never return. Otherwise there will be consequences.”

Sarek had listened wordlessly to the short exchange and there was no doubt what happened here. Stonn had insulted Spock, Kirk had stood up for his friend, the situation escalated and finally Spock had been forced to subdue Stonn to protect Kirk. One look at the young human proved his theory to be true, because Sarek could see the already blooming bruise on the captain’s temple that Kirk could only have received from Stonn. And, of course, Spock had acted to keep his captain and friend safe.

“Have the young gentlemen been infected with some unknown pathogen that they behave like a bunch of Klingon teenagers?”

Jim didn’t back down at Sarek’s cold voice but used the ambassador’s words to add fuel to the fire. Turning towards Stonn, he said, “See? I already told you that you have the impolite behavior of a Klingon.”
“And I advised you to stay out of it,” Stonn replied harshly.

“After insulting my first officer, his dead mother, his honorable father and even the whole House of Surak? No chance, buddy. Who ever dares to mess with Spock has to face me for it!”

With another almost-sneer Stonn turned towards Spock. “And you are calling yourself a Vulcan? A Vulcan who needs the ‘protection’ of a weak human?”

Spock simply lifted a brow. “Strength has many faces, Stonn, especially when it refers to the intellect and mind – but we both know that your strength lies more in the physical way. At least that was what I thought until a Standard minute and fifty-seven seconds ago. Captain Kirk and I spar a lot aboard the Enterprise, yet he hasn’t managed to hurl me through the air until now – contrary to his short fight with you. Obviously not only your intellect, but also your body is weaker than the first sight makes anybody believe."

Stonn made a threatening step towards Spock, which prompted Kirk to move quickly between them; shielding his T’hy’la again.

“Gentlemen!” Sarek warned while he walked closer; Silek at his side. The three young men stopped and looked at him – one pair of dark eyes angry, one calm and one blue pair of eyes expectantly.

Sarek’s glance remained on Stonn. The Vulcan ambassador knew of the strong dislike this particular Vulcan held for Spock and remembered the day he was called to school because Spock had ‘beat the crap out of Stonn’, like Amanda had pointed it out with some badly hidden pride. A part of Sarek could understand that his son had snapped at one point, after all he was partly human and all those years back he had been a child – just like Stonn. But now the latter was a grown man and that he obviously was still up to throwing insults strong enough to make a Starfleet captain act on it, was simply inacceptable.

“As far as I know I’m facing three adults – and to act childish like this isn’t tolerable.”

“Tell that this guy, who came into the shop and started throwing nasty insults on your whole family without Spock giving him the tiniest reason for it,” Jim said; returning Sarek’s stern look with his own ‘captain-glance’ as his crew called it. The same moment he heard his communicator beeping but ignored it for once. He knew that it was Nien who must have sensed his fury through their shared link, but just right now Kirk had no time to assure his bondmate that he was okay.
“Captain Kirk tried to reason with Mr. Stonn, but was attacked by him,” Sulter informed Sarek. “And as far as I know to attack a Starfleet officer is a crime.”

“I tried to move him aside, that was all. He should have stayed out of the differences between Spock and me,” Stonn growled; narrowing his eyes at Kirk, who lifted his chin in silent challenge. Behind him Spock tensed; ready to push Jim out of the line of fire and to protect him.

“Stop!” This time the ambassador used Standard, but it’s effect wasn’t any less than before as he called the ancient word. Attentively he watched his son’s old rival, saw the slightly flush on the cheekbones, the widened pupils – and a certain suspicion woke in him. Switching to Vulcan, he asked,

“Stonn, are you bonded?”

Spock frowned for the length of the blink of an eye in confusion, while Kirk’s face betrayed his bafflement at this question the still hidden device in his ear had translated instantly. What, the heck, had a bonding to do with the impossible behavior of this idiot?

“No,” Stonn answered. “Thanks to those two losers not only our homeworld but also my intended fell prey to the holocaust.” His expression betrayed the barely hidden mockery mingled with satisfaction that suddenly shimmered in his eyes. “I think you know her, Sarek. It was T’Pring – the woman you chose for your son but who couldn’t stand his chaotic mind.”

“If Spock’s mind is chaotic then I really want to know how yours can be described,” Jim growled. “’Catastrophic’ is the first word I can think of.”

Sarek looked surprised at him; asking himself how it came that Kirk suddenly understood Vulcan. Then his gaze found the tiny ear plug and he understood that the young captain was using a translator. In other words, Kirk had listened to everything Stonn had said to Spock, who certainly used their native tongue for the verbal quarrel. Knowing how protective Kirk was of his friends – and especially of Spock – Sarek didn’t need to ask why the situation had escalated as it did. And he didn’t want a repeat.

“James, please,” he said calmly; seeing Stonn’s nostrils flare. “This leads to nothing.”

“You said that T’Pring didn’t survive Vulcan’s destruction,” Spock spoke up. “If she was indeed
your intended, Stonn, then I ask myself why you are standing healthy in front of me, while she is
dead.” The first officer knew that it was a mistake to provoke Stonn, but his control showed several
serious cracks and his human side demanded fiercely to give as he had been forced to receive.

“A good question,” Kirk nodded, before he glared at Stonn. “Did you run quicker and reached a
shuttle, while you left her behind?”

Stonn breathed deeply in and out; fighting for control. “If you and your Starfleet-weaklings would
have been quicker – and more efficient – our homeworld would still exist.” He stared at Spock. “But
just like the biological mistake you are, you were not able to do anything.”

Silek took in a sharp breath; frowning. He felt tempted to give this Stonn piece of his own mind. Not
only that the insults concerning Starfleet were complete nonsense and unacceptable, the affronts
concerning his nephew were enough to tempt his Vulcan control to a measurement that would
demand meditation later.

Jim felt his anger turning back to rage. The same moment he heard Spock shifting and instinctively
he reached out behind him; pressing a flat hand against his friend’s belly to hold him back. Yet
despite his rationality that told him to prevent the resumption of an open fight between the two
Vulcan rivals, his temper was too strong to be kept in check. “At least Spock was able to save the
Vulcan High Council, the Elders and a lot of artifacts which are essential for your culture. And
concerning us ‘Starfleet-weaklings’ – more than 10,000 Starfleet members died that day to protect
your homeworld, half of them still cadets. Young people, with their whole life in front of them, who
sacrificed themselves by coming to your aid, and you are daring to call them ‘weaklings’? You, a
coward, who fled without his intended?”

“You know nothing of what happened that day!” Stonn spat.

“Stonn, be quiet before…”

Sarek’s sharp voice was interrupted by Kirk, who hissed, “‘I know nothing of what happened that
day?’ Then let me tell you a tale, you moron. I smuggled aboard the Enterprise to help Vulcan,
jumped from space through your atmosphere on the drill, fought off some Romulans, jumped after a
colleague who was about to fall to his death, was marooned on an ice-rock, let my atoms be hurled
through space by the first transwarp-beam that ever transported a human, not knowing if I would
make it in one piece, boarded the hostile vessel and fought side-by-side with Spock against those
Romulan madmen.”

Stonn opened his mouth to reply something, but Jim didn’t give him any chance. He seemed to grow
even taller, as he forcefully continued, “And while Spock still had to fight the mental shock of losing his planet, family members and above all the parental link with his mother, he still was able to evacuate hundreds of your people, commanded Starfleet’s flagship and destroyed Nero and his ship, ready to sacrifice himself in the battle. And what did you do? You ran to save your own life, and analyzing your character, you sure as hell didn’t look back and maybe even fought your way onto an evacuation shuttle – without giving a damn who was forced to stay behind in your place. I know guys like you. Once a bully, always a bully. And today the only thing you can do to sooth your bad conscious is to cling to the old childhood grudges you were never able to outgrow. And above all you lash out at everyone and everything because the legendary Vulcan control is possible for every Vulcan except you. So, who is here a ‘biological abnormality’? A half-Vulcan who follows the ways of Surak to the point of the book and shows more control than a Vulcan adept, or a full-blooded Vulcan who has nothing better to do than throwing insults and steaming like a bull seeing a red flag waving? A little hint from me to solve the riddle: Spock isn’t the one with the ‘abnormality’.”

To Jim’s astonishment and to the other Vulcans’ alert, Stonn was trembling now; his fists balled and opened over and over again, while he glared at Kirk, eyes wide. Spock laid a hand on Kirk’s shoulder and tensed his muscles. He knew that Stonn was the blink of an eye away from losing it and attacking Jim, and Spock was ready to shove his T’hy’la out of the way and to resume the fight to protect not only Kirk, but also his father and his uncle. A Vulcan out of control presented a great danger, even towards his own people.

It was Sarek who calmed the situation by stepping beside his son’s old rival. “Stonn, what Captain Kirk tried to make you see in his human way is that you are emotionally compromised. And I think we both know the reason for it.” His voice was low and almost gentle, while he ceased to switch back to Vulcan. With Kirk being the only non-Vulcan in the shop but wearing a translator, there was no need for it. “I advise you urgently to see a healer, because it is clear what triggers you to behave in such a dishonorable way that has nothing to do anymore with anything Surak taught us. I will tell Healer Sorel to expect you at the hospital. He knows addresses where you will find help.”

Stonn looked abruptly at him. “Don’t you dare to tell me what I’ve to…,” he began to protest, but the ambassador cut him off sternly.

“If you don’t check in with him, I’ll report you to the Elders. You not only attacked a Starfleet officer, but also a personal guest of High Minister Selek and Lady T’Pau. I don’t think you want to face the consequences which would follow. And given your personal situation an official rebuke from the High Council would deny you any social assistance you are going to need without delay.” His voice softened again. “Believe me, this is the best way for all of us. You are in need of… biological attention, and if you don’t submit to it, the outcome is well-known among our people.”

Kirk didn’t have the tiniest clue of what Sarek was speaking about, but it seemed to tell the others a lot if he interpreted Silek’s and the shops-owners stiffening and Spock’s sharp intake of breath correctly.
Sarek wasn’t done with Stonn. “And by the way, your current condition is the only explanation I will accept as an excuse for your shameful behavior within the last minutes.”

For a few moments they only looked at each other – a battle of wills, which Sarek won as Stonn shortly lowered his head. “As you wish.” He turned towards the entrance, but another voice stopped him.

“Don’t you have anything to say to my nephew and Captain Kirk?”

Jim was surprised how much Silek sounded like Spock – and even looked like his first officer: Hands folded at his back, head cocked slightly to the right side, one eye-brow risen. It was almost eerie.

Stonn glanced back at the two officers and took in their stance – Kirk still half in front of Spock, still glaring at him; Spock the living example of a controlled Vulcan, yet in his own way also human by having his hand laid calmingly on Kirk’s shoulder. Two different men, yet they seemed to be made from one and the same piece of wood, like a Terran saying went he once heard.

“Apologies are illogical, yet my behavior wasn’t correct. Live long and prosper.” He nodded shortly at them, before he left the shop without another word.

Jim let the breath he had held, escape, before he grumbled, “What an arrogant asshole.”

Spock cleared his throat and gave him a pointed look as Kirk glanced over his shoulder backwards. “What? I’m right, am I not?” Jim defended himself, and for a second Spock’s left corner of his mouth curled while amusement flashed in his eyes.

“I wouldn’t have voiced it that harshly, but in essence you are correct,” Silek spoke up, before he addressed his nephew. “Was this one of your former schoolmates?”

“Unfortunately,” Spock nodded, while he removed his hand from Kirk’s shoulder. Then he turned his attention shortly towards Jim. “Captain, if you would please let me go?”

Jim realized only now that he still had one hand pressed against Spock’s belly and snatched it quickly away. “Sorry,” he said; grinning a little bit sheepishly.
Spock suppressed a fond, yet exasperated sigh, and stepped beside him, before he glanced at his uncle. “Silek, may I introduce Captain James T. Kirk to you, captain of the Enterprise and my T’hy’la.”

Jim lifted his right hand into a ta’al just like Silek did, while Sarek’s brother answered, “There is absolutely no doubt that you two are T’hy’las. This was a fine speech of defense that you put up on my nephew’s and Starfleet’s behalf, young man. Even if Stonn wouldn’t have been… compromised I don’t think he would stand a chance in argument against you – despite your lack of logic.” The last part was spoken in an almost teasing manner, and Jim smirked at him.

“Sometimes logic mixed with illogic is most successful. I’ve been able to beat him in chess a few times this way.” He flicked a thumb at Spock; winking at him. Then he turned serious again. “And referring to Stonn’s offending choice of words and accusations; I already told your honorable mother that anyone who dares to treat Spock bad, will have to deal with me.”

Silek lifted a brow in surprise. “I can imagine her reaction to such a fierce statement.”

“I think she approved of it – in her own way. Spock is my closest friend and I’m always there for my friends, no matter what. And I certainly don’t stand by and do nothing when such a stupid bastard attacks Spock with such hurtful words.” His glance moved to Sarek. “But Stonn not only insulted your son, he also affronted you and your clan – and this is something I wasn’t able to tolerate any longer.”

“By fighting with Stonn?” the ambassador asked; astonishment echoed in his voice. “He is three or four times stronger than you.”

“It was rather the other way around,” Sulter explained. “Stonn pushed the captain aside as the captain tried to talk some sense into him, and Captain Kirk’s reflexes kicked in.” He glanced at the human; almost impressed. “But Ambassador Sarek is right. Vulcans are stronger than Terrans. You indeed took a great risk by accepting a physical fight with Stonn, yet you overpowered him. Your use of Ashumi was… different than a Vulcan would handle it, but it was most efficient.”

Jim shrugged. “I felt his arm colliding with my belly, saw his eyes while he glared at Spock and… well… The first thing you learn during the self-defense courses at the Starfleet Academy is to analyze a situation and try to prevent harm befalling yourself, your comrades and those who are under your protection. So, I thought it better to use the moment of surprise by bringing Stonn down before he could use his whole strength and maybe hurt Spock or me.”
Spock looked at Jim; knowing that this was a very interesting way of describing the ‘gut-feeling’ that had made his captain act, yet he kept silent about it.

Taking another deep breath, Kirk asked while pointing at the door, “So, you let him go and he only has to seek out a healer?”

Sarek only stared at him, just like Silek did. Confused Jim glanced at his first officer. “Spock?” he asked.

The half-Vulcan shifted his right foot and answered hesitantly, “My father recognized something that slipped my attention concerning Stonn. He faces… some biological difficulties at the moment which make him behave… atypical.”

“You mean, he loses control.”

“Sort of,” Spock replied uncomfortable.

Jim frowned. “The things he beat around your head were old topics, and for me this all sounded like something he tried to hurt you with all those years ago when you two were still children. Silek mentioned that Stonn was your schoolmate, and I know a thing or two about schoolyard bullies to recognize one when I see him. So, he more or less fell back into his days of childhood – very uncharacteristic for a Vulcan, don’t you agree?”

“This loss of control can have many faces,” Spock answered evasively.

Kirk cocked his head and looked at Sarek. “You spoke of ‘biological assistance’ Stonn needs without delay. Is he ill? Is there something Dr. McCoy can maybe assist him with?”

Silek lifted both brows. “You would try to help someone you just had a quarrel with?”

Jim shrugged. “If I understood you correctly, some kind of illness made Stonn behave in such an un-Vulcan way. And besides, he isn’t an enemy but a citizen of the Federation. So, if he is in need for medical attention, of course I would try to get him some help. Hell, I even would offer an injured Klingon help. I may be an illogical human, but no savage.”
Spock nodded slowly. He hadn’t expected anything else from Jim Kirk. But the words of the young captain surprised the three other Vulcans, as their lifted brows and widened eyes proved.

Then Silek cleared his throat and deadpanned, “You have indeed a good character, James Kirk. But I don’t think that your CMO whom you are obviously speaking of, would agree to the kind of assistance Stonn needs.” He ignored the stern and almost scandalized glances he received from his brother, his nephew and Sulter.

The young captain scratched his head. “So, this is no illness in the common sense.” Again, silence was the answer. Frustrated he demanded, “Could somebody please tell me in clear words what the hell is going on? I’m a little bit at a loss here by now and…”

Again, the communicator beeped and letting his head fall forward he groaned, “Yeah, yeah, I’m coming.” Taking the little device from his pocket he said, “Excuse me, gentlemen, but if I don’t answer this hail my future husband will send the cavalry in form of his siblings and half of my crew.” He flipped open the communicator, and said quickly, “Nien, I’m okay. No need to come to the rescue.”

“For Shiva’s sake, James, why didn’t you answer sooner?” Khan’s voice betrayed his worry, his impatience and his anger. “You were in a fight – and don’t deny it. I felt it the moment you got hit.”

Silek threw an asking glance at his brother. He had heard from him about the augmented Terran man who was going to marry Kirk, but this kind of bond was highly unusual between humans – enhanced or not.

“A little bruise, nothing serious, so don’t get your knickers in a twist,” Jim tried to calm his beloved, but used, of course, the wrong choice of words.

A growl was heard, followed by, “Can’t you stay out of trouble for once? Where is Spock? Dammit, shouldn’t he keep you safe?”

“I’m a grown man, Nien, so I don’t need a babysitter.”

“I want to cite an Earthern saying, Mr. Singh,” Spock spoke up. “You could herd cats easier than keeping the captain out of trouble.”
“Hey!” Jim protested with feigned hurt. “I’m not that bad!”

“Your streak of getting into trouble sets new standards for safety protocols,” Spock all but deadpanned.

Giving into a very childish urge, Kirk stuck his tongue out to him, before he turned his attention back to the communicator; ignoring the barely masked baffled looks of the three older Vulcans.

“I’m okay, Nien. Spock met an old goony, who had a fall back into his days as child, I disagreed with him, he flew through the air, Spock did the rest and then Sarek intervened and saved the day. So… we’re okay and I’m coming home later, honey. So please remain where you are, follow the good doctor’s order and don’t overwork your muscles; you are still healing.”

“Jim, you…”

The young captain cut off Khan’s irritated yet still concerned voice. “Love you, sweetheart. Until later. Kirk out.” He closed the communicator; knowing exactly that he would get an ear full from Nien as soon as he was back at New Gol.

“You do know that Mr. Singh isn’t satisfied with this kind of explanation and ending of the communication?” Spock topped Jim’s thoughts, who grimaced,

“Thanks for stating the obvious.”

“You are welcome, Jim.”

Kirk looked at him and rolled his eyes at the dry comment before he snorted in amusement. Typical Spock!

Silek watched him with clear fascination. “Your leadership style is interesting. I didn’t know that such a casual tone is usual now within Starfleet.”

“It is rather interesting that those two are commanding Starfleet’s flagship,” Sarek stated wryly; not knowing that he almost said the same as T’Pau did a few days ago.
Spock and Jim exchanged a knowing look, then the first officer stiffened. Concern shimmered for a moment in his eyes. Rising his hand, the young half-Vulcan reached for his captain’s temple but didn’t dare to touch him.

“You are indeed hurt,” he said quietly.

Jim brushed over the bruise and winced before he pulled his hand back to examine it. “At least no blood. I so don’t want to go to my own wedding with a big bruise.”

“Dr. McCoy certainly will give you the best treatment so that no bruise will be seen,” Spock stated, and Kirk’s eyes widened in alarm.

“Oh God, Bones is going to kill me that he has to patch me up again,” he sighed.

“Have it occurred to you that Dr. McCoy will make me responsible for what happened to you, just like Mr. Singh?” his first officer asked. His voice didn’t give anything away, yet it sounded a lot like complaining to Kirk.

“Well, Stonn is to blame, not you or me. I’ll explain it to them.” He sighed. “God, I already hear Bones grousing. ‘You can’t even go shopping without getting into trouble.’ I already hear him. Mark my words.”

Khan closed his communicator and laid back on the desk-chair; swearing under his breath. Selek, who had come to give him the official document that declared his people officially as their own species, had lifted a brow and looked at the little device in the Augment’s hand.

“Typical Jim,” he murmured; amusement in his eyes that began to replace the concern he had felt as Khan had shown all signs that something wasn’t right with Kirk. And as the young captain didn’t answer the hails Khan was sending, Old Spock had been ready to alert Security to search for his younger counterpart and Jim.

Odd – illogical! He should have waited until he had gathered more information before he reacted, yet
if he had come to know something about himself within the last years then it was the fact that his emotions weren’t any more controllable then in earlier times when he was younger. And now, after he met another vision of his T’hy’la, his Vulcan logic failed him often enough to give him seconds thoughts about his sanity. On the other hand, if there had been one being in the whole universe that could tear down his inner barriers and walls with a few words, one look or being in danger, then it was Jim Kirk. So, in its own special way it was ‘logical’ that he was ready to send the ‘cavalry’ when there was the tiniest hint that Jim was in distress.

“Well, Kirk certainly has a way to muzzle someone,” Otto chuckled, who sat on one of the chairs at the table. He, Pablo, Rodriguez, Katie and Chang had beamed over to New Gol a few minutes before Selek arrived, while McCoy was giving training sessions those Augments who had woken up recently – among them Suzan. And of course, Joaquin had stayed with her.

Khan shot his brother a glare; knowing full well that his Jim only had wanted to delay the rant Nien would give him.

“Sometimes it is the best to let someone calm down before you face him,” Samuel Cogley said, who occupied a chair besides Otto, and still studied the documents Selek had brought Khan.

“I am calm,” Khan said and rolled his eyes as his siblings, the lawyer and Selek gave him a certain look.

“Sorry, brother dear, but you are ‘calm’ as a stallion after an earthquake,” Katie commented wryly; ignoring Nien’s sharp glance.

“Spock met an ‘old goony who fell back into days of childhood’?” Pablo repeated Kirk’s ‘explanation’ and looked at Selek. “What does it mean?”

“It seems Commander Spock met an old school comrade and it came to a dispute. Even among Vulcans something like this is possible.”

Khan looked with wakening interest at him, knowing that the Elder concealed something. And the Augment leader assumed that it had something to do with Old Spock’s childhood which had to be identical with Young Spock’s – after all Nero’s intervention only became really serious after Spock and Kirk were already young adults.

The same moment Selek’s communicator beeped and answering the hail, the High Minister listened
patiently, before he answered something and closed the device again. Looking straight at Khan, he said, “I just was informed that the reporter has arrived. I gave the order to beam him directly to New Gol.”

Nien frowned. He didn’t like the thought of facing the man, whose thoughtlessness had led to Jim being captured by the Klingons, without Kirk. Of course, he and the others needed the man to follow the strategy they had agreed on, yet he knew himself well enough to assume that his dislike would be recognizable – even to this complete stranger.

“Shouldn’t we contact Jim and Spock to come over?” he asked; feeling himself a little bit like a small boy asking for his big brother’s assistance.

Unacceptable! Laughable even! Yet what was the old saying? If you acknowledge your mistakes, don’t ignore it but work with it. Well, it sounded a lot like the whole ‘control yourself’-speech Selek gave him yesterday.

“Maybe it would be better if I speak with the man first,” Cogley said. “We could…” He interrupted himself as they all heard the calm, cool voice of a male Vulcan sounding from the terrace directly outside the building, “You will find High Minister Selek, Mr. Singh and the other gentlemen over there.”

Selek turned around and saw a Terran male in the middle of his thirties. He had brunette hair, clear bright eyes and wore typical casual travel clothes, while he carried a large bag over his right shoulder.

And he wasn’t alone. Beside him stood another man of human heritage – a very large individual, Old Spock acknowledged. But before he could make further studies, the man’s gaze found Khan and without hesitation he began to jog forwards – yelling through the garden a cheerful, “Hey, amigo!

Otto, Pablo, Chang, Rodriguez and Katie didn’t even realize that they were gaping, as Khan sat up on the desk-chair and began to smile. The same moment the giant reached the little group, passed by Selek with an “Excuse me, sir!”, let his sea bag slid off his left shoulder and bent down over Nien – pulling the Augment into a bear-hug.

“Santa Maria, amigo, I can’t let you guys out of sight for more than a few days, can I?” he laughed. “Got mixed up, you two – like always. And where does this leave me? I’ve to worry for you boys!”
Khan chuckled and returned the embrace carefully.

Otto and Pablo exchanged a baffled look, while Katie closed her mouth with an audible ‘click’. What the heck…

The giant stepped back a little bit and examined Khan from head to toe before he groaned. “Just look at you – still all beaten up, even after almost two weeks. And this despite your enhanced nature. Dammit, those guys really got you bad. They can call themselves lucky that I wasn’t there when it happened. Would have punched them into the next week, mind you.”

Nien couldn’t help himself; he had to grin. “You and which army?”

“Galven and the others, of course,” the giant answered, before he simply reached out and ruffled the Augment’s hair as if he was a toddler. “Be careful the next time, amigo. I got grey hairs when I received Galven’s call and learned what happened.”

Behind them Rodriguez began to cough; his eyes wide as saucers. The giant looked at him and the others, cocked his head, took in their handsome appearance, began to grin and winked at Khan, “Your siblings?”

“A few of them,” Nien confirmed. His glance found the others and he had to laugh quietly as he saw their thunderstruck expressions with which they stared at the tall newcomer and their leader. No-one had ever treated Khan like this! The other Augments simply couldn’t believe their eyes – and Nien realized it with rising amusement.

“My friends, may I introduce one of mine and Jim’s supporters? Diego de la Vega-Martinez, one of the best engineers and tinkerers I’ve ever met.”

“Diego Carlos Franco Esteban Juan Soto de la Vega-Martinez, to be correct, but just call me Diego,” the Chilean grinned broadly. He flicked a thumb over his shoulder at the younger man who had closed the distance to them. “And this is Alec Armstrong – the guy who got Jim into trouble and has a lot to make up for.”

“I just told you how sorry I am,” Armstrong said; looking at the man on the desk chair with curiosity. He was indeed ‘beaten up’, even if the injuries were healing well. But given the fact that this man was an Augment the status of the wounds even after two weeks spoke volumes. Starfleet’s Elite had done a lot of damage – and to tell public the truth about it was only one detail that would lead to a
whole picture of this man’s fate. Commodore Wesley had told Alec everything he needed to know, and the reporter had a certain feeling that this was only the tip of the iceberg so to say.

“We all make mistakes – and you are in the lucky position to make yours right,” Cogley said and rose. Offering his hand, he introduced himself, “Samuel Cogley, Mr. Singh’s, Captain Kirk’s and his officers’ lawyer. Welcome to the club, young man.”

“Samuel Cogley?” Armstrong asked; almost shocked. “THE Samuel Cogley?”

“Yes, no need to turn into a pillar of salt. I’m of flesh and blood,” the lawyer joked, before he turned serious again. “May I introduce you to our host? High Minister Selek of New Vulcan.”

Armstrong quickly turned around to the old Vulcan, tried a ta’al – which failed – and bowed deeply. “Sir,” he greeted politely.

Diego looked with curious eyes at Old Spock and offered him the traditional Vulcan salute, before he grinned, “It’s an honor and pleasure to meet you, sir. The nice commodore up there- “he pointed towards the sky, “already told me that you are the one who is trying to get our boys here out of trouble. As it seems we two have this in common.”

Selek simply lifted a brow. So, this was the man with the shipyard who got the spare parts not all of them by official ways – the same man who lent Jim and Khan his cottage as refuge and a place to heal. The same man who fought side by side with them aboard the space station, saving a lot of people. ‘Jim Kirk, you always had and always will have this special talent to win the most extraordinary people for you,’ he thought, while returning the greeting with a calm, “Welcome to New Vulcan, Mr. de la Vega.”

Then his gaze wandered over Cogley and Armstrong. Two men who couldn’t be more different – and it came to Old Spock’s mind that these two males held the fate of Kirk, Khan and the others in their hands…

TBC…

Chapter End Notes
Yeah, Diego just appeared to be part of the big show that will start in the next chapter. I already imagined him mother-henning and treating Khan like a little brother in front of the other Augments, and how they would react to such a demonstration of casual friendship none of them ever experienced with ‘normal’ humans. I hope you liked it.

Jim’s speech concerning ‘The Day’ and that there were thousands of sacrifices besides the Vulcan loss was something that had to be written. I can imagine that this all not only traumatized the surviving Vulcans, but also those who were involved in the whole mess and tried to help. Stonn himself is traumatized, too, and then his upcoming pon farr… Well, of course Jim will not cease probing what the matter is with Stonn until he learns the truth. But I will not reveal who will tell him the truth in the end…

In the next chapter Alec Armstrong will start to make his report – and the big bomb will drop on the public when everyone learns of what really happened. Barnett is the only one outside of Jim’s ‘gang’ who knows to what Kirk is up to, and the shock for the others will be big (smile)…

I hope you liked the new chapter, and like always I’m curious what you think of it.

Have a nice weekend,

Love

Yours Starflight
Hi, my dear readers,

I’m so sorry that you didn’t hear from me within the last weeks and that I only found time now to write to you.

Please, don’t fear – I’ll NEVER abandon this story. I’m simply forced to take a short break out of several reasons:

First it’s because of my job. Another shop of a chiropodist closed in near area and I undertook a lot of her patients and customers, who are in need of my service. Additional to this circumstance, many ladies who want to have ‘beautiful’ feet during summer have come back to my shop (they appear during April and vanish at the beginning of October latest), and especially (now at the start of summer-holiday) everyone wants an appointment ‘yesterday’.

Additional to my shop / praxis, I also have a duty to a big rehabilitation center in our town, who attends mainly to stroke patients, and they opened further wards three weeks ago (with 72 more rooms). The larger quantity of patients within my own praxis and the Rehab.-Centre are ‘eating’ all of my time.

And – as a top – my Mom had a surgery on her right feet only four weeks ago and because of some complications she won’t be able to walk properly for three or four weeks more. My parents are both over 70 years old, have an own house and a large garden – and of course I’ve to support them.

This all put together I’ve almost no spare time left for myself – or my hobbies. Therefore I’ve to give my beloved writing some rest and hopefully will resume it during autumn.

Please believe me: I will NOT quit to write this story, but please understand that in the given circumstances I’ve no other choice than to put my hobbies into the background.

Maybe I’ve a little consolation for a few of you before I can re-start the actual writing.

I wrote a story of ‘Hogan’s Heroes’ a few years ago that was never published – but I’m publishing it
now during next week. Maybe a few of you remember this great comedy serial that tells the story of a farraginous gang of POWs during WW II, which act up with their German jailors and fought for the end of the war.

The main-character is / was Colonel Robert Hogan (brilliantly portrayed by the far too early gone Bob Craine), who had a bunch of other POWs who were not only his underlings, but also dear friends – a team that was unbeatable. His German counterpart, opponent and even strange kind of friend was the human but also very incompetent Oberst / Colonel Klink, who didn’t realize that the Allies had built a whole circle of espionage, refugium and sabotage-team right beneath his nose. Hogan’s real enemy was Major Hochstetter, officer of the Gestapo and SS, who gave the ‘Heroes’ as hard time and was several times very close to reveal them as Underground-agents.

One consistence of the serial was the endless bantering, discussing, pouting but also helping each other between the two opponent colonels. It gave me the idea of a story that also contains a lot of action, hurt, angst, friendship, brotherly love, but also slash (guess who falls for each other).

As I said, I wrote this story years ago and my dear beta-reader Kat was kind enough to offer me her service despite her own short spare time. Maybe you like to read this fanfiction as a ‘little consolation’ till I can continue with my beloved ST-story.

For those who give this old fanfiction a try: Thank you. For all the others – please keep in mind that I’ll return within the next two or three months, and I will let you know when I’m back.

I also hope that you’re not too angry and understand my current position.

On that note: Have a nice summer,

Love you all

Yours Starflight

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