Prisoner Transfer

by Miss_Inquisitive_Sci_fi

Summary

Captain Pike receives orders to participate in a prisoner transfer. The prisoner has vital intel on the red angel but regrettably turns out to be an old adversary: Harry Mudd. When Mudd is transferred to the Captain’s care a bizarre chain of events are set in motion that may cost Chris more than just his life. Pike was soon once again wishing he had never met Harry Mudd. Pike Whump.
Chapter 1

Captain Pike stared out of the shuttle’s view screen, watching the mesmerising warp-speed effect fly by. An arm jostled his shoulder which sadly ripped Chris away from his mindless daydreams. He sighed inwardly and glanced at the offending arm; seeing it belonged to the prison security team leader. Pike’s eyes slid over the man briefly and lingered for a little while on the large phaser rifle the security chief had at the ready, he couldn’t help but feel a little anxious with the amount of fire power in the small shuttle especially seeing as he was unarmed himself.

The abrupt pull back into reality reminded Pike why he had been dragged all the way out here and that he was surrounded by unfamiliar officers. New orders had arrived direct from Starfleet Command instructing Pike and Discovery to collect a prisoner from a starfleet holding centre, because said prisoner had vital information about the red angel and the catastrophic future Spock had seen. Chris had his own doubts that such a person existed and how anyone could know more than they did, but the prisoner had clearly convinced Starfleet Command so the orders had flown down.

Because of this mysterious prisoner Chris was traipsing half way across the galaxy, alone. It was just one of the many reasons why Pike felt anxious and couldn’t settle. Apparently it had been one of the conditions of the deal the prisoner had negotiated, he had been asked for by name.

Discovery had been allowed to take him as far as a starbase then was ordered to remain there under Commander Saru’s capable command. Meanwhile the Captain disembarked and would have to travel the rest of the way in a prison shuttle. The prison was apparently of the highest security and didn’t want anyone knowing their location, even a federation starship. It made Pike suspicious about the identity of the prisoner and how dangerous they were. His concern only grew when he boarded the shuttle and clocked four armed security guards who hadn’t stopped eyeing him suspiciously since.

So the reason he was uncomfortable and rather unhappy was because he had been dragged away from Discovery alone, unarmed and been surrounded by unfamiliar prison officers who were leading him on a wild goose chase to keep the security facility’s location secret. He was completely in the dark and at the mercy of the prison guards and their protocol; he didn’t like it one bit but what could he do besides disobey a direct order?

The only way this field trip would prove to be in any way worth it would be if the intel was correct and could aid in their search for the red angel, Pike wasn’t a pessimist by nature but he really didn’t hold out much hope for this prisoner transfer. All he could do was wait patiently whilst they travelled the rest of the distance to the top secret location. No-one had said a word since he boarded except for checking his identity, and that he had complied with their protocols by leaving behind all weapons and communications devices.

Chris had lost track of how long they had been travelling for some time ago, and he had been purposefully kept away from the information screens so he had absolutely no idea where in the galaxy they were. Thankfully it wasn’t too long before he felt them drop out of warp, and Chris heard them dock with something when the ship clanged against metal. They had arrived.

Pike unbuckled his safety belt and got to his feet following the security officer’s movements. He waited for the doors to open and resisted the urge to use up some of his excess nervous energy, he really wanted to pace now but a cramped shuttle was hardly the place for that. He felt a chill wash over him and shivered as his neck hairs stood up on end, something was wrong and his instincts were screaming that danger was close. When the doors finally opened Pike’s chest felt unusually heavy all of a sudden.
Stood between a contingent of well armed guards was Harry Mudd, with his hands restrained in front of him and arms held securely between the well built prison officers. The prisoner’s dreary expression transformed when his eyes found Pike; his face lit up like a supernova and he beamed just as brightly. Chris’ reaction was exactly the opposite. He was stuck between so many emotions and he couldn’t decide on one completely; shock, horror, fear, anger, betrayal? Pike knew he would be having words with Starfleet Command about this, and if he had the chance to tell them right now they would not be nice ones; Mudd was the last person he was expecting and wanting to see.

“Captain you came.” Mudd greeted him warmly, clearly ecstatic that Pike and Starfleet had granted his specific request.

Pike’s chest tightened as he realised that Harry Mudd must have been the one to ask for him by name. With their history the request couldn’t mean anything good, at least not for Chris. The Captain realised most of the officers were staring at him, and Mudd was clearly waiting for a response.

Pike made his mouth respond eventually, trying but failing to keep the anger out of his voice. “I didn’t have much choice.”

Mudd smirked happily. “Well no matter the reason, I’m glad you’re here.”

Chris almost flinched when he saw a very familiar murderous expression flash across Mudd’s face, one he had sincerely not wanted to see ever again. Pike had to remind himself that even though this man was restrained and covered by weapons he was exceedingly smart, capable and dangerous. That twinned with the fact that Mudd seemed genuinely elated to see Captain Pike specifically, made Chris suspect that Mudd was after revenge or something similarly dreary. If he had known that Mudd was the prisoner then he would have argued against taking anything he said as truth, and he would have definitely petitioned to refuse Mudd anything he asked for.

The Captain stood aside and watched Mudd warily as the armed guards transferred him to the shuttle team who dragged him inside the ship; securing him to a seat in an alcove with leg chains. They left Mudd alone and activated a force field around him, effectively cutting him off from the main occupants of the shuttle. With that done the guards then positioned themselves in strategic points around the ship and Pike marvelled at how different they were now Mudd was aboard. He could feel the nervous energy in the air and was glad it wasn’t just he who took the threat Mudd posed seriously.

Pike took a seat opposite the alcove and buckled up, not willing to turn his back on Mudd for one second longer than absolutely necessary. The pilot didn’t waste any time so they shot off into warp as soon as the back doors closed. Pike noticed the security team all had their weapons in a ready position and he couldn’t help but feel his anxiety creeping up. There was a lot of firepower in the small space. The only people who weren’t armed were him and the prisoner which hardly seemed fair. Still there was nothing he could do about it; the federation prison had strict rules for a reason.

Chris stared dead ahead and tried to ignore Mudd who was attempting to catch his eye, staring at him unnervingly with a growing grin spreading across his face. Mudd looked rather like a kid who had been given free reign in a sweet shop, the look really didn’t do anything to help quell the Captain’s distress. The bastard actually chuckled and Pike realised the prisoner was enjoying watching him squirm.

“Relax Captain, we’ve got a long journey ahead of us.” Mudd laughed sinisterly.

Pike schooled his expression and let Mudd’s words wash over him, not willing to give the prisoner any further reaction or entertainment. This wasn’t some cushy field trip and Mudd didn’t deserve to be having a good time, if it were down to Pike he would have left him behind bars for good and
thrown away the damn key. When Chris couldn’t watch Mudd’s amusement any longer he turned his attention away from the prisoner and stared out of the main viewport at the passing stars. Mudd was playing mind games but Pike was so done with having his head messed with.

He watched the warp effect outside and let his thoughts drift away from the bat-shit crazy situation and back to happier thoughts, of Enterprise, Discovery, his crew. Chris began counting down the minutes in his mind, the further he counted the closer he was to getting home. Soon he would be back aboard Discovery where he would truly feel safe, and where he wouldn’t have to be trapped with Harry Mudd ever again.

***

Chris had finally managed to not think about where he was or who he was sitting across from for 5 whole minutes, when the universe decided to intervene and provide some excitement. The shuttle juddered and shook violently as it dropped unceremoniously out of warp; ear splitting alarms rang out and the whole flight console lit up like a christmas tree.

Pike’s senses were on alert immediately and he watched the pilot frantically silence the alarms and punch several buttons in frustration. Chris knew shuttles well and figured he was a damn good pilot so he knew something was seriously wrong without even looking at the flight console. The engine sound was troubling and thrummed inharmoniously, and the violent way they had been booted out of warp indicated severe power problems.

Still this wasn’t his ship and the pilot should know what to do here with all the protocols they’d spouted at him over the long journey. So instead Pike focussed on the most dangerous element present, and stared at Mudd suspiciously thankful that the force field was still stable. Mudd met his gaze and shrugged innocently, lounging back in his chair like he didn’t have a care in the world.

Chris scrutinised the prisoner carefully but couldn’t detect any attempts to move or prior knowledge of the shuttle’s power problems. After a few minutes of drifting and flickering lights passed by the Captain’s patience ran out, enough was enough.

“Is there a problem?” He voiced the question knowing full well that there was indeed a problem, whether the pilot would reveal anything however was unknown.

Surprisingly the pilot turned to him and answered albeit a little frantically. “I can’t figure out what’s wrong and we’ve lost power all over the shuttle.”

Pike clocked the sudden frigid atmosphere and saw the security team exchange worried glances with each other. Chris brushed off the initial panic from the pilot’s problem, drowning the fear and seamlessly moved into Captain mode. “What systems are affected?”

The pilot bashed the control panel to try and get any screens to respond. Chris could see from his seat that the whole system had gone haywire and the shuttle lights kept crashing in and out. “Engines, the warp core, communications, life support, weapons and countermeasures.”

Great, so the broken systems were everything they needed and almost every critical system. Life support was the one that stuck in Chris’ head though, without air they would suffocate in no time. The Captain glared distrustfully at the prisoner. “Do you know anything about this?”

Mudd just smiled back innocently like butter wouldn’t melt. “I know as much as you Captain.”

Pike rolled his eyes and decided to give up on that line of questioning knowing talking to Mudd would only piss Pike off more. Deciding the emergency trumped prison protocol Chris unbuckled his
seatbelt and moved towards the cockpit. Predictably the pilot glanced over his shoulder at the sound distrustingly, eyes flicking from the prisoner to the guards and finally to Pike.

Chris held up his hands in a non-threatening manner and smiled uneasily. “Look this is an emergency, I can help.”

Pike could see the pilot’s mind whirring away, battling between following protocol and accepting some much needed help. Chris saw the moment the emergency won and the pilot relaxed back into his seat. “Alright. What do you suggest?”

The Captain wasted no further time and slid into the co-pilot’s seat, tapping away at the consoles quickly until they started to respond to his commands. Luckily the prison shuttle used the same sort of software as other federation shuttles so Pike became familiar with it in moments; it also meant it didn’t take long before he spotted the main problems. He cursed when he followed the trails and realised how much was wrong and how many systems were on the verge of collapsing.

Something was causing power surges across the entire shuttle’s electronics making almost every system unstable in one way or another, in extreme cases a system would be so badly affected that no matter how many times he tried to get any response from it he couldn’t. Pike’s fingers flew over the console as he began to prioritise vital systems they needed, attempting to cut them off from the unstable power problems.

“I’m going to isolate life support and impulse power on it’s own circuit.” He explained as he carried out the intricate work, struggling to keep ahead of the surges and find a place the problems hadn’t breached yet. One look at the warp engines was enough to tell him they were a lost cause, he doubted that a fully fledged engineering team could fix it before life support ran out. Strangely communications was another system that had completely blacked out so he couldn’t even ping off a distress call, which made their options rather limited.

The pilot picked up the Captain’s plan quickly enough and helped him isolate the vital systems and divert the crazy energy spikes. With the two of them battling the computer for control the power eventually became more stable, and mercifully life support responded and kicked back in.

Pike jumped when he heard guns powering up behind him and spun round in his seat, panic flaring and his instincts screaming vociferously. He saw that it was the guards’ weapons who were powered up and aggressively held, Pike followed their aim and soon saw what had caused the alarm. The force field surrounding Mudd had fizzled out of existence, so the only thing keeping the prisoner in place now were the restraints and chain that held him to the floor. Mudd didn’t even look like he noticed the disappearance of the force field; he looked bored out of his mind and had made no attempt to move an inch.

Chris was loathe to turn his back on Mudd but it was clear the security team had him covered for now, and he and the pilot had a job to do to get them all out of this alive before their life support failed completely. “What now?” The pilot sounded like he was struggling to keep it together.

The Captain brought up a map for the local area and breathed a sigh of relief when he spotted a commercial spaceport. He glanced at the power situation and prayed the fixes he’d made would hold long enough to limp in on impulse power. Staying here drifting in space was completely out of the question with fluctuating life support and no communication capabilities.

“We go here, and call for help from there.” Pike showed the pilot his plan. The pilot squinted at the coordinates and nodded fervently, seemingly happy to not be the one making the big decisions.

Pike entered the coordinates and fought fiercely against the ship’s power problems to engage the
engines long enough to last until the space port. He was not relishing the task of keeping the life support stable whilst keeping the ship from becoming dead in the water, being stranded out in space was no joke. The situation was made that much worse by the fact that he had his back turned to a dangerous prisoner who’s force field had gone down, and Pike couldn’t shake the feeling that Mudd knew more about all of this than he was letting on.

***

Held together by nothing more than a prayer the prison shuttle hobbled into the spaceport finally. When the blasted thing finally landed without any further catastrophes Captain Pike sagged back in the co-pilot’s chair with relief, his arms were tense and aching after fighting with the ship for so long. He glared at the difficult console tiredly and wanted to punch it’s lights out when the voice informed him that life support had finally failed. He hadn’t had so many things go wrong in a shuttle ever before.

Pike got out of his seat and turned to the guards who were still pointing their weapons at Mudd. “We need to all get off this shuttle. Life support has failed completely.”

The team watched the prisoner skeptically but did as commanded when alarms started blaring. They unchained Mudd from the floor and held him securely between them, making sure his restraints were still tight and functioning first. The pilot swiftly opened the back doors and Pike followed the security team and Mudd out into the port.

Pike breathed in the fresh air and revelled in the amazingly non-stale smell that was rich with oxygen. It was crazy how everyone took oxygen for granted, Chris definitely wouldn’t again after that turbulent journey.

On his way out the pilot handed him a phaser pistol from the weapons locker. The Captain took the offered weapon and looked at the pilot questioningly.

“There’s not exactly a protocol for this kind of situation, but it would be best if we were all armed to keep an eye on the prisoner.” The pilot explained. Chris warmed as he realised this meant he had earned the man’s trust.

He smiled gratefully and attached the holster and phaser to his belt. Having the weapons at his side helped to quell some of his nervous energy, and it made him feel a lot better knowing they were all being cautious around Mudd.

The group moved away from their smoking shuttle coughing when the noxious gas drove it’s way into their lungs. Pike looked round the shuttle bay and spotted a spaceport security team heading their way, the leader of the group moving with purpose and haste. Pike reckoned they must have recognised the kind of shuttle it was; a prison shuttle crash landing in a commercial port was not normal or something any security chief would want to deal with.

Pike glanced back at the shuttle as robots race past their group to contain the damage, erecting a force field round the smoking vehicle before it caused anymore damage to the air. Chris could see the prison team were not happy with outsiders combing over their shuttle but it wasn’t like they had much of a choice, the damn thing was on fire.

The space port team formed a loose ring around Pike and his team, all officers tensely holding their guns in near ready positions. “What are you doing here? This is a civilian space port.” The leader of the security team asked aggressively.

Chris resisted the urge to hold his head in his hands, why were security personal always so
outwardly threatening and predictable. He flashed the chief his go-to disarming smile. “I’m Captain Pike and this is a security team from a starfleet prison station, we’ve had serious problems with our shuttle which forced us to land at the nearest safe location.”

The security leader looked them all up and down with a piercing gaze. “Which just happened to be here.” He grumbled dejectedly.

Chris’ diplomatic smile didn’t falter, he refused to allow the the man’s negativity to make this situation unsalvageable. He had faced more difficult diplomatic problems in his career than an unwelcoming security officer. “We lost life support and communications. I’m sorry we’re bringing this to your door but we had no other choice.”

After the apology the security team relaxed a little and the chief even had the audacity to look a little ashamed of his harshness, it wasn’t like the prison shuttle had any choice if they wanted to live. “What do you need from us?” The chief eventually asked although it sounded like he was doing it out of duty rather than genuine concern.

Pike honestly didn’t care what the chief’s reasons were as long as he helped them and they could send a message to Discovery. He clearly didn’t want them here any longer than necessary and they really didn’t want to be here. “I need to use your communication system to send a message to my ship, they can come and collect us and be out of your hair.”

The security chief latched onto the easy option to get the prison delegation out from under his jurisdiction, but instead of looking happy with the solution he stared at Mudd and frowned.”What about him?”

Ah the difficult one, Mudd was a dangerous prisoner who really needed to be confined and not having a field trip aboard a civilian space port. Pike glanced over his shoulder at the prisoner who was looking round the space curiously, stance relaxed and non resisting.

“Have you got a secure holding area we can keep him until my ship gets here?” Pike decided finally.

The security chief looked like he wanted to wash his hands of this whole mess but he eventually nodded and turned on his heel. “Yes follow me.”

Pike blinked at the change of pace but followed the security chief all the same; hopefully they could get Mudd secured and get Discovery here in no time. The convoy walked through the spaceport and Pike was wary of the amount of looks they were getting as they went past. Everyone was curious, whispering and pointing at the security team escorting their prisoner.

Pike kept glancing over his shoulder at Mudd expecting him to bolt any second or make a move, but he simply walked along relaxed and beamed at him. The spaceport was bustling with people and Pike was as aware as the security team that this was far from an ideal situation to be in.

“Is there not a quieter route to the holding cells?” Pike asked nervously glancing at the increasing crowd around them.

The security guard answered sympathetically. “Usually yes, but we’ve been having power problems of our own today.”

*Power problems, huh.*

Pike didn’t believe in coincidences and everything about this situation was putting him on edge. He realised he was becoming hyper alert and began to hear every sound and notice every minute movement. He clocked all the entrances and exits to the rooms and wished he had seen a blueprint of
this place before they set off. His eyes landed on the growing crowds and he felt even more anxious when he spotted a large group of school children playing, whilst teachers and adults tried to usher them away from the patrol. On their right was a canteen of some kind which was also heaving with people; innocent people.

The universe heard his concerns and brought his deepest fears to life, she really could be a cruel mistress. The Captain came to a sudden stop when the world fell into darkness and surprised yelps and screams echoed throughout the spaceport. He heard a scuffle behind him and his thoughts quickly flew to the prisoner.

No, not here. This can’t be happening.

Pike gripped his phaser in response to the sounds of distress and spun on the spot, blinking in surprise when the lights abruptly returned and blinded him for a few seconds. When his vision returned his heart sank when he saw what had caused the scuffle.

Mudd held a powerful grenade in his hands with the pin pulled out. One of the security team was sprawled out on the floor desperately clawing for breath, whilst the other man who had hold of Mudd’s arm was just regaining his footing.

A stunned silence fell over the room for several moments as everyone took stock of the change in situation, then there was chaos. It was like a storm had suddenly crashed through the walls of the station, drowning everyone under waves of fear and panic. Harry Mudd stood in the eye of the storm and laughed.
Chapter 2

At the sight of the grenade Pike blocked out the deafening chaos and felt his training kick, reacting with his well-honed instincts and reflexes. He focussed on the life-threatening device and it’s wielder, bringing up his weapon to point at Mudd alongside the rest of the security team. The Captain distantly heard people screaming hysterically, and watched as everyone tried to scramble as far away from the armed incident as they could. Panic was beginning to spread like wild fire.

“Drop the grenade!” One of the spaceport’s anxious security officers screamed.

Pike closed his eyes completely exasperated. That was not the command you wanted to give someone who held an unpinned grenade in their hands, clearly he was surrounded by inexperienced officers who were allowing the hysteria to get to them.

“I don’t think you want me to do that.” Mudd grinned wolfishly.

Chris interrupted before anyone lost their heads completely and did something irrevocably stupid, like shooting Mudd. “He’s pulled the pin for god’s sake, nobody fire.”

Pike observed several of the security team’s mouths drop open in shock, their eyes widening as they finally saw what he did. A few of the more inexperienced officers actually stumbled backwards a few steps, reacting to the threat in fear. Mudd’s grin soured as he noticed the surrounding crowd were all beginning to scurry away as far as they could get.

“Nobody move!” Mudd screamed angrily holding the grenade up high for the whole room to see.

It was like a spell had just been cast over the hall, one minute people were yelling hysterically and bustling for the exits, and the next everyone stood as still as statues and lost control of their voices. It was so quiet that Pike could actually hear his heart thumping away madly. Now there were hundreds of pairs of eyes staring fearfully at the powerful grenade, imagining what damage it could do if released.

This hellish situation was precisely why the Captain had been so wary when they had led Mudd through the public space. Now there were far too many civilians at risk, and the only thing standing between all of them and a fiery death was Mudd’s hold on the grenade. Pike wasn’t certain of the blast radius of such a device but he and the security team would almost certainly perish, not to mention the civilians. Any civilian casualty was frankly an unacceptable outcome in Pike’s book, and he knew Mudd knew that too.

The school children sheltered round their teachers and began to sniffle and cry, causing Mudd to scowl at them with an annoyed expression. Pike’s mind raced as he glanced from the children to Mudd; he needed to get all these people as far away from the incident as possible.

“Mudd, let the children leave. Please.” The Captain pleaded keeping his phaser pointed at the ground but ready to engage if the situation changed.

Mudd shrugged half-heartedly with no remorse. “Why should I?”

Pike just barely resisted the urge to snap. “They’re innocent and they’ve got nothing to do with this.”

Mudd rolled his eyes tiredly and looked like he wanted to yawn out of boredom. Suddenly he stiffened though and his gaze landed on Pike’s gun; Mudd grinned as an idea sprang to mind. “Alright Captain, the children can leave if you give me your weapon.”
Pike glanced from his weapon to the children and decided to make good on his promise to get people to safety, his only priority now was saving as many lives as possible. Anyway his weapon was essentially useless in this situation, if he shot Mudd then they would all been blown to hell. “Okay.” He eventually agreed. “You let them leave first though.”

Mudd narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “You wouldn’t be trying to trick me now would you Captain?”

He really wasn’t, he wanted people safe. “No. I don’t risk people’s lives Mudd.”

Mudd considered him for a few moments then turned to the children. “Alright get out of here, scram.”

The kids didn’t need telling twice. They scampered out of the room to safety, sprinting away from the mad man with the grenade. Pike watched them go anxiously and felt a small stab of relief when the last kid got well out of range, that was until Mudd motioned that his patience was running thin. Mudd had kept his word so now it was time for him to do the same.

Pike lowered the phaser to the floor and kicked it towards Mudd. The prisoner planted a boot firmly on the weapon but didn’t move to pick it up. He glanced around the circle of guards contemplating his next move and watched carefully for any signs of dissent. Eventually he jiggled his restraints and growled. “I want these off.”

The leader of the prison security team stepped forward hastily and brought his weapon up to aim at Mudd’s head. “No way.”

Chris saw the warning signs before anyone else and cursed inwardly as he watched Mudd lose his temper completely, blowing up rather like the grenade he held in his hand. Pike’s heart sank when Mudd went to release the grenade. “Okay then, I guess we all go boom!”

The Captain stepped forward urgently trying to regain Mudd’s attention. “Wait, stop!” With any luck he could stop the guard’s hastiness from killing all of them.

Mudd stopped just shy of letting go completely and threw all the guards surrounding him enraged glares, if looks could kill then they would all be dead. “It’s time you all took me a little more seriously.” He screamed and raged, pacing round the confined area pointing animatedly at everyone. “If you don’t start doing what I say when I say it then I’ll kill all of us including these precious civilians.”

Pike knew he needed to retake control of the situation before the security guards got everyone killed, perhaps they didn’t think Mudd was capable of what he was threatening but Chris knew differently. He sent the team leader a hard stare. “Don’t provoke him, he’s holding the cards here.”

Mudd’s furious expression morphed into something lighter, a small smile tugging at his lips. “That I am. I’ll talk to you Captain, you seem to understand the situation well.” Mudd was practically rolling the grenade in his hands as if playing with it.

The security team leader’s eyes flashed angrily and for a second Pike thought he was going to lose control completely and simply shoot Mudd, thankfully his self-preservation stopped him from rebelling against the orders and he signalled for the others to lower their phasers. Anyone could see they had been beaten.

Mudd watched the scene unfold happily then wiggled his restraints again. “Whose got the key then?”

“I do.” The pilot piped up nervously and held the key out in his hand.
Mudd glanced from the key to Pike then back again. “Give it to Captain Pike, I want him to unlock them.”

Chris almost regretted making himself center of attention, but he was the only one willing to negotiate with Mudd so this was the price he paid because of it. He gritted his teeth and took the key from the pilot, starting forwards slowly whilst watching the grenade carefully. When he got close to Mudd the prisoner cocked his head in warning then held his manacled hands out. “Careful now Captain, I wouldn’t want to lose my grip on this accidentally.”

The Captain glared at Mudd not appreciating how lightly he was treating this situation, the man had continuously demonstrated to be exceedingly cavalier with people’s lives. Pike moved the key into the lock slowly, careful not to jostle the grenade or make any sudden moves. He held his breath when the lock clicked resoundingly, and observed Mudd carefully as he removed the restraints from the prisoner’s wrists.

Mudd stepped back and shook the circulation back into his wrists happily, laughing triumphantly after his miraculous escape. “Excellent!” He shouted exuberantly; he then gave Pike a chilling command. “Now you put them on.”

Wait that hadn’t been part of the deal.

“What?” Chris exclaimed automatically.

“You heard me Captain.” Mudd stepped into the Captain’s space threateningly, a nasty sneer pulling at his lips. “Pass me the key first though.” He added almost as an afterthought.

Chris scanned the frightened faces of all the people who would be blown to smithereens if he refused to comply; it was enough to ensure his unquestioning cooperation. He really didn’t appreciate Mudd gambling with people’s lives to get what he wanted, it was cowardly and spoke volumes about his character.

Pike sighed heavily as he handed over the key to the man man’s waiting hand. Now Mudd had his hands free from restraints he only held the grenade together with one hand, which only served to increase the already excruciating tension and fear in the room.

“Now cuff yourself.” Mudd ordered impatiently, eyes darting round for any signs of reinforcements.

The Captain snapped the cuffs round his wrists and felt helpless when the restraints clicked shut, locking his hands in place for good. He showed Mudd that they were locked who seemed content with the arrangement. What Pike wanted to know was just exactly what crazy plan Mudd had next.

Mudd dropped to the ground and picked up Pike’s phaser, predictably setting it to kill and pointing it at his hostage’s chest. The Captain had a pretty good idea what the former prisoner had planned now, well for him at least.

“Turn around.” Mudd ordered restlessly. He was watching the security team like a hawk, cautiously watching for any sign of movement.

The Captain reluctantly turned his back to the dangerous threat and stiffened when he felt the phaser rest against the nape of his neck. Strangely the only thing he could think of was which death would be worse? Being shot in the head at close range or being blown to bits in a fireball.

“Captain Pike and I are going to leave the room now and you will all be locked in. Anyone tries to follow and I kill the Captain.” Mudd pushed the gun harder against his captive’s head to emphasise the threat. Pike honestly couldn’t believe this was the second time he had been this man’s hostage; all
these power issues that led them to this sorry predicament couldn’t have been a coincidence. How could Mudd have pulled something like this off though?

Pike was pulled from his muses when Mudd prodded him with the phaser to indicate which direction to move. He flinched when Mudd’s hand which held the grenade landed on his chest, and remained there pulling him tightly against his chest. It was an uncomfortable position and Chris couldn’t help but glance warily at the grenade pressed against his body; he couldn’t get out of Mudd’s grip even if he wanted to.

Mudd pushed them out of the room leaving behind the security teams and more tragically all of the guns. Pike’s mind raced for a solution of some kind but kept coming up blank, the grenade was a wild card which was making this so difficult and unpredictable. If it were just his life on the line then things would have been different but he couldn’t be sure of that; sure enough on their little stroll they walked past hundreds of people who had become trapped across the spaceport. Any one of them could be caught in the blast radius so for now Pike played the part of a model hostage and complied with Mudd’s erratic movements.

Why did everyone always underestimate Harry Mudd?

***

Mudd steered Pike through an endless maze of corridors, all the while pressing the grenade tightly into his captive’s chest and he kept the phaser pressed tightly against Pike’s neck. As they walked Chris grew even more suspicious of Mudd. Somehow the prisoner knew the layout of this place like the back of his hand, which was something Pike didn’t even know. The only possible explanation he knew all this was if he planned to be here in this moment, escaping. How on earth could he managed such a feat though?

The Captain couldn’t help but take a peak down at the grenade every now and again; unsurprisingly the amount of explosives pressing against his chest was making him edgy. No matter how many times he tried to shake himself out of it and stay objective; he couldn’t help but ask himself pressing questions over and over.

What if Mudd stumbled? What if his hand got tired? What if Pike became expendable?

Honestly Pike didn’t understand why he wasn’t already expendable. He also didn’t understand why he specifically was being brought along for this crazy ride, and his biggest desire in this moment was to get as far away from Harry Mudd as possible. Being the man’s hostage was becoming a little tiresome.

The unlikely pair took countless back routes past sections which would have been handy earlier, Pike mused that somehow Mudd was responsible for the change in access for the areas. It didn’t take them long to end up back in the shuttle bay unmolested.

The Captain glanced round the empty shuttle bay and watched for any indication of Mudd choosing a shuttle, he wondered just exactly how Mudd was planning on stealing one and what his immediate plan was. Mudd continued to press them both onwards and Pike’s jaw slammed open when he spotted a very familiar vehicle.

Impossibly the prison shuttle sat in front of both of them looking completely normal, there wasn’t even any sign of the fire that had broke out earlier. Pike stared in disbelief as he noted the lack of force field, the lack of black smoke rising from the back and the fact that the engine was already turned on and sounded absolutely fine. He did a double take a few times and questioned if this was indeed the same shuttle, but the etchings on the side matched and there was no sign of any other shuttle like it in the bay.
When they reached the base of the ship Chris glanced over his shoulder at Mudd’s face. He had a million questions but he could only manage one syllable. “How?”

Mudd let go of the Captain’s chest careful to keep the grenade held together as he did so. Pike was then spun round so the pair were facing and predictably the phaser came to rest against his chest.

Mudd studied the Captain and looked mildly amused. "Oh come now Captain, did you think I was making up this whole escape plan on the move?"

Pike felt like a prize idiot. He had thought something was wrong earlier, there were too many coincidences and he had ignored his gut. "You caused the shuttle malfunction." Was there no end to Mudd’s reach?

The prisoner beamed proudly. "I'm quite proud of my work yes but that's not the only system I took control of." He indicated their surroundings and Pike closed his eyes in resignation.

"The power problems."

"Precisely." Mudd confirmed then glanced around to make sure no-one was still following them. "Although I doubt the locks I've put in place will hold for much longer so we best get moving."

He suddenly grabbed the Captain’s shoulder and impatiently pushed him up the ramp digging the phaser into his captive’s lower ribs. Pike struggled to keep up with all the revelations and change in pace; he still didn’t understand exactly why he was still being pushed along.

"Why are you taking me exactly? And where are you planning on going for that matter?" Both were valid questions for someone in his position but clearly Mudd didn't think so, as he just scowled and pushed his captive forward more forcibly.

"We can talk later Captain, but right now just know that if you don't do as I say when I say it I'll shoot you." He threatened menacingly the gun coming up against Pike’s neck to demonstrate.

Pike kept his mouth shut with effort knowing from previous encounters with Mudd that talking back was a sure way ticket to earn violent treatment. Mudd was also stubborn and if he didn’t want to talk yet then nothing Pike did or said would make him do so.

The Captain was a little sick of being dragged around like a rag doll, so he had to bite back a complaint when Mudd grabbed his shoulder again and pushed him up against a data screen. "Close the doors, access code 3827."

Following the cavalier threat Chris thought his best bet to remain whole was to comply without hesitation. He keyed in the code and operated the door controls, watching mournfully as he and Mudd were both sealed off from the outside world.

Pike noticed the tension in the room drop as soon as the door hissed shut; he stumbled when Mudd started pushing him towards the front of the shuttle. They came to the area that Mudd had previously been restrained in and Pike’s heart sank when he was pushed inside the holding area.

He glared at Mudd as the man indicated he sit down in the prisoner’s seat. "Attach the chain to your leg." Mudd ordered and keyed in a code to a panel near the entrance.

Predictably the force field sprang to life in front of him, sealing him in the alcove effectively. Pike eyed the shimmering effect with dismay; Mudd glared at him warningly making Chris realise he had been keeping him waiting for too long. The Captain quickly snatched the chain up from the floor and closed the open restraint round his left leg, earning a satisfied nod from Mudd when it clicked into
With his captive under control finally Mudd pulled the grenade pin from his pocket and made the device safe, placing it out of reach in a locker. Pike felt a great weight lift off his chest and crossed off the possibility of death by grenade. So Mudd only had, well... hundreds of ways to kill him left. Great.

“Don’t go anywhere now will you Captain.” Mudd warned playfully and chuckled heartily at his own joke.

The former prisoner then sprang off towards the flight controls and kicked the thrusters into gear. With Mudd distracted Pike puled against the restraints on his wrists and his legs but foreseeably it was in vain, they were far too tight to work with. He reached out to test the force field with his hands and winced when the containment field issued a nasty shock.

Knowing he was well and truly trapped he turned his attention to Mudd, but the problem was he could barely see the cockpit from his position. From what little he could see he figured Mudd was plugging coordinates into the dashboard; his suspicions were confirmed when he felt the familiar feeling of the shuttle entering warp drive.

That was yet another thing that was now miraculously working. The Captain honestly didn’t know how Mudd had managed to pull off this elaborate escape plan complete with magical illusions. Especially as he had been behind bars for months. If Mudd had managed to plan all this so successfully then what else did he have set up for the immediate future; more pressingly what did Mudd have in store for him?

***

Pike wallowed in self pity for the majority of the journey all the while keeping a wary eye on Mudd. Sadly he couldn’t see the screens to know their destination but he had been counting in his head since they’d taken off, and he knew they’d been travelling at warp speed for about 10 minutes.

Chris tensed automatically when Mudd pushed his feet off the deck and stalked towards the force field. The former prisoner pulled up a seat opposite the holding area and smiled happily. “You wanted to talk?”

The Captain blinked a few times in confusion, he had forgotten about Mudd saying they would talk later. It’s not like he had thought the prisoner would honour his word anyway. Pike had so many questions he wanted to ask and the list had only grown during his confinement, he decided to start with the most pressing question first.

“Why am I here and still alive?”

Mudd rolled his eyes dramatically. “What is it with you Starfleet officers thinking I murder everyone I see?”

Pike threw him a knowing look. "You seemed quite happy to murder everyone in that spaceport.”

Mudd sighed. "Alright point taken." He noticed Pike staring and finally answered the original question. "Insurance Captain.”

“Insurance?”

Mudd nodded. "Yes, by now a distress call will have reached Discovery. I need you as insurance until I get to my ship.”
Pike let his confusion paint his face, surely Mudd couldn't think he would be enough to stop a manhunt. "Threatening me won't stop Discovery from recapturing you."

Mudd cocked his head like he knew something Pike didn't. "I wouldn't be so sure about that Captain."

Pike rolled his eyes and fought the urge to bang his head against the wall in frustration. It was clear he wouldn’t be getting any more answers from Mudd about his escape plan which only Mudd could see working. Instead Chris changed to a different line of questioning determined to make sure this whole sorry debacle wouldn’t be for nothing.

"Was the intel you had about the red angel real?" Even as he asked the question Pike felt his hopes vanish.

Further confirmation that the trip had been a total waste of time came when Mudd’s face screwed up in confusion; like he didn’t know what the red angel was. Eventually Mudd mimed an oh and began laughing. “Oh that…”

Mudd stifled his laughter when he noticed the Captain’s face fall miserably. “Sorry Captain, I’m afraid I lied.”

Pike frowned heavily. "The federation said you told them information about the red angel, how did you get that information if you don't know anything?"

"Information is my game Captain. That and computer systems. It's easy to get what you want when you know your opponents weakness, the one thing they would do anything to get their hands on. It didn't take much digging to find out what the federation wants most." He leaned forward with a gleam in his eye. "And that's the red angel."

The phrase know thy enemy sprang to mind; Mudd was expertly showcasing how knowing one’s enemy could be used to manipulate events. Annoyingly he had been on the money with the red angel, the federation was desperate for any new intel so of course when Mudd had come forward they jumped at it. “So you made it all up?”

"I'm afraid so yes. The information I told Starfleet was a mixture from what I lifted from their current intelligence,” he gestured with his hands into the air, “and make believe."

Just when the Captain thought this day couldn’t get any worse it got worse. This entire trip had been a massive waste of time and had always been a ruse. The cherry on the shitty cake was Mudd’s smug face, he looked so damn happy that he had tricked the great federation.

The reaction reminded Pike how much Mudd hated Starfleet. “Why do you hate Starfleet so much?”

Mudd scowled darkly. "What's not to hate? Your 'peaceful' organisation meddles in everyone's affairs and wage wars that put the rest of us in danger." Mudd stopped himself mid-rant and took a deep breath, just talking about Starfleet enraged him to a whole new level. "I'm sick of getting caught up in problems you guys cause."

Even though Pike disagreed with almost everything Mudd had just stated he did at least understand it, people had suffered because of the war and Starfleet didn’t always hold up to what it was meant to be. Mudd along with many others had got caught in the middle of the war and nobody had apologised to the man for the treatment.

"For what it's worth we never wanted people to get caught in the middle. On behalf of Starfleet I apologise for your suffering during the war, I know we played a big part in that.”
Mudd looked dumbfounded and stared at his captive suspiciously. “Huh, the mighty Starfleet apologising.” After he studied his captive for a few moments he looked at the Captain in a new light. "You really mean it don't you?"

Pike nodded sincerely. "Of course I do."

Mudd smirked realising something. "You're not sorry for betraying me on your ship though are you?"

"I didn't exactly betray or lie to you. You got yourself into that mess, so no I'm not sorry.” Pike turned serious. “You got what was coming to you that time.”

Mudd found Pike’s shift in mood hilarious. "So you'd stun me now if you had the chance?"

“In a heartbeat.” Pike promised. It was time for Mudd to see how serious he could be.

Mudd appraised his captive behind the force field and seemed to catalogue something new, perhaps it was the conviction of Pike’s promise or the danger he now emanated. "I'm glad it was you who came, I'm beginning to like you Captain Pike.”

Pike scoffed then raised his cuffed hands. "You have a funny way of showing it.”

Mudd grinned dangerously and whispered morbidly. "You should see the people I don't like."

Then with that he was gone leaving Chris to react to the threat, hating the way it sent shivers down his spine. He had been threatened countless times over the years and knew when someone was simply showing off, Mudd was not. The man was incredibly smart, devious and immoral. No matter how much they bantered Pike would never forget that Harry Mudd was a dangerous criminal capable of anything.
A steady blue light cast an eerie shadow throughout the corridor, and automatic lighting kicked in to match Pike and Mudd’s steps forward. Eventually they reached a doorway and Mudd held his hand print against a data pad; a few seconds later the handprint flashed green and an unlocking sound echoed throughout the corridor.

“Open the door.” Mudd prodded his captive.

Pike grabbed the wheel with his cuffed hands and turned it until the door swung open, he hadn’t operated an old fashioned door like this in some time. After his captor’s prompting Chris stepped over the hatch and took in his new surroundings marveling at how dusty and stale the air tasted in here. Mudd had landed the prison shuttle and docked with whatever abandoned place this was, and it looked like nobody had stepped foot here for years.

Mudd’s powerful grip landed on Pike’s shoulder and he pushed the Captain towards the centre of the room, keeping the phaser pressed against his back. Chris allowed himself to be steered and he glanced round the space; clocking the other entrances and exits automatically. Except for the entrance they had just walked through there was just one other door on the opposite side.

He scanned the room sparingly and noticed lots of junk, computer terminals and rusting furniture. In fact the space reminded him rather of the crashed ship he and Michael had been trapped on with Mudd, at least this one had no signs of blood or monstrous creatures. The lights and terminal screens flickered to life when they reached the centre of the room and Pike noticed the ventilation kick in, which sent piles of dust flying into the air like dozens of mini tornados.

“What is this place?” He asked Mudd who had let go of his arm and was busy clearing piles of junk off a metal chair.

Mudd surveyed the area with a fond expression. “An old bolthole.”

The Captain canvassed the room with anew insight, who knew what secrets Mudd had stashed away here?

“Come and sit down in the chair.” Mudd ordered, rapping his knuckles on the back of the chair.

Pike considered the chair then Mudd and sighed in defeat when the phaser pointed at his chest. He dragged his feet across the ground and plopped down on the very uncomfortable freezing cold chair. He noted the ghastly thing was bolted into the ground because it didn’t move an inch when he sat down heavily.

Mudd reached into his pocket then threw a small item towards Pike. “Catch.”

Chris almost missed the item but just about managed to get his fumbling fingers to latch on. He opened his fist and saw it was the restraint key for the cuffs on his wrists, he looked at Mudd for any indication of what he should be doing with such a gift.

“Uncuff one of your wrists then throw me back the key.” Mudd instructed.

Pike glared at the former prisoner but did as instructed leaving his right wrist free, throwing the key back to his captor who caught and pocketed it again. “Now what?” Pike couldn’t help but let a little of his agitation bleed into his voice.
Mudd smirked but chose to ignore the attitude. “Now I want you to cuff your hands behind your back, round the back of the chair.”

The Captain’s heart sank heavily. Having his hands trapped behind him was seriously going to limit his movement, not to mention tire his muscles out. “I’m not sure my wrists are flexible enough to do it by myself.” Pike tried with his most successful charming smile; an ideal situation would be to get Mudd closer so he had an opportunity to take him out.

Mudd barked a laugh seeing straight through the ruse. “Oh you’ll manage Captain.” He pointed his phaser at Pike’s head to emphasise the threat.

Well, it had been worth a try.

Accepting defeat Pike twisted his wrists behind the chair and awkwardly latched the other cuff onto his wrist. He winced at the unwieldy angle his wrists had been forced into, and ended up using the chair as leverage to secure the restraint in place completely. Mudd waited for the click and scrutinised his captive suspiciously, walking round the back of the chair to see the evidence for himself.

Mudd was as wary as his reputation stated and was careful to stay well back incase Pike had tricked him by closing the cuff around thin air. The Captain had actually been half tempted to try such a feat but now he was damn grateful he hadn’t; something had warned him not to and it had clearly been the right decision.

Pike stiffened when he felt a body close behind him, and then rough hands closed around his wrists tugging at the restraints to make sure they were fully secure. Mudd scrutinised the arrangement for a few moments before nodding happily; he then walked off in search of something. Chris tracked the former prisoner’s movements and watched the man power up several terminals and systems, blowing more dust away from the unused work stations.

The Captain decided he wanted to squeeze Mudd for more information about where the hell he had been dragged too. “So you own this place?”

Mudd glanced up suddenly remembering he had company, it amazed Pike how quickly the man could dissolve into his work and get lost within it. Strangely it reminded him of Spock, he soon shook that awful comparison away and vowed to never compare Mudd to one of his officers again. Mudd’s answer broke through his musings. “Yes, although I haven’t been here in quite some time.”

He could say that again, the amount of dust swirling in the air right now was ridiculous. Pike watched Mudd attach a device to one of the terminals and start to configure it, strangely it looked oddly familiar. Pike twigged what it was the moment he thought back to his last incident with Mudd. “Is that a transporter jammer?”

Mudd beamed happily and seemed a little impressed that Pike had recognised it. "Yes although it’s not the only thing it can jam. I never leave home without one." He quipped happily.

Pike had to admit Mudd was good at thinking X moves ahead, and he was probably a damn good chess player for the same reason. He had countermeasures for almost everything and always had a plan in place to stop federation technology and protocols, which was just another example of the amount of research Mudd put into knowing the enemy. He was nothing if not meticulous.

With the device switched on Mudd started searching through drawers and cabinets for something. Eventually he emerged triumphantly with several coils of rope. The Captain’s stomach clenched anxiously as he watched Mudd approach him with the restraining material; he knew it was meant for him.
"Uhh you don't have to do that, I'm not going anywhere." Pike muttered eyeing the rope warily.

Mudd ignored his concerns entirely and started winding the rope around his captive’s chest. "Well this will ensure you won’t go anywhere."

Pike grunted when Mudd tugged on the rope sharply, pulling the restraining material tightly across his chest after each loop round. The rough material was soon pinning Chris to the back of the seat uncomfortably. “Sorry Captain but I’m not naturally a trusting person.” Mudd didn’t sound that sorry, actually he had a small smile on his face as he continued to truss Pike up like a chicken.

Chris tried to bunch up and tense his muscles so when he relaxed the rope would be a little looser, but it was no good. Mudd was tying the damn thing too well and pulling far too tightly to counteract any methods Pike deployed. The former prisoner finally finished after the fifth go round and tied an impressive knot well out of Pike’s reach.

The Captain appraised the bindings scornfully. “I can see that.”

Mudd withdrew two more lengths of rope from his pocket and wiggled his eyebrows humorously. “I’m afraid I’m not done yet.”

He kneeled down beside his captive and grabbed Pike’s leg in a firm grip, harshly pressing it against one of the chair legs. “Hold still now.”

Pike rolled his eyes and resisted the urge to struggle knowing it would be futile in his current state. Mudd was currently in an amenable mood, which he had to admit sounded like an odd thing to say about somebody who was tying him up, but his captor hadn’t been physically violent with him yet so Pike was keen to keep it that way.

He ignored Mudd tying his legs to the chair and returned to the pressing matter at hand. “What exactly is your plan Mudd? You know the federation will track you here.”

Mudd finally finished tying off the knots on both legs and got to his feet standing in front of his well restrained captive. "Oh I'm sure they will. But don't you worry about that." He slapped Pike’s shoulder roughly and raced away to the terminals. "This place isn't the best equipped of my hideouts but it'll certainly do in a pinch, I have everything I need here to enact my plan.”

Pike glared from where the hand had hit his shoulder to Mudd and the terminals. What was it with this guy with half truths, it was infuriating and getting really really old. Honestly Mudd’s vagueness made the Captain think that just maybe Mudd did make everything up as he went along, and perhaps he wasn’t the evil mastermind he would have people believe.

“What exactly is your plan Mudd? You know the federation will track you here.”

Mudd glanced up from something that had caught his attention on the screen. "I have another ship.”

"That was it? That was all Mudd had?"

"A new ship can be tracked just as easily as the prison shuttle.” Pike dead-panned.

Mudd squinted at the screen then smiled brightly. "Yes, but Discovery will be a little busy.”

Pike tracked the prisoner’s movements as he jumped up from the seat and began rummaging through closets and lockers, sending everything in his wake flying through the air. The Captain’s mind raced as he clocked Mudd’s expression and glanced to the screen the man had been studying. Had Mudd
“My ship-“

Mudd popped his head up and interrupted. "Yes, yes they've just dropped out of warp. Starfleet are so predictable.” Mudd then rolled his eyes dramatically and disappeared back into a storage locker, throwing everything out from wiring to mechanical tools.

Pike couldn’t help but tingle with anticipation that a potential rescue was so close, that he wasn’t suffering with Mudd by himself anymore. Salvation was that close that he could almost taste it. The only thing souring the feeling was Mudd’s reaction, why did he not seem worried?

He bit the bullet and asked the burning question. "So why exactly will Discovery allow you to leave on your ship?"

Mudd ignored him until he found what he was looking for, returning from the locker with a triumphant grin on his face. When Pike clocked what Mudd had in his hands he wished he had never asked. The former prisoner held a device cradled in his arms that looked rather suspiciously like explosives.

“Because of this.” Mudd laughed cheerfully, walking over to Pike with the device.

Chris watched the prisoner and the device warily, frowning when Mudd held his handprint to a biometric scanner on the side. Pike felt his heart drop into the pit of his stomach when the thing in Mudd’s hands lit up like a christmas tree and started beeping harshly.

“Is that a bomb?” Pike asked fearfully not exactly relishing the idea of being so close to another explosive after the grande incident.

Mudd’s eyes gleamed happily and he nodded fervently. "This isn't just any bomb. This is one of my finest creations and before you ask yes its capable of turning this entire place to space dust.”

Pike swallowed nervously as Mudd placed the bomb on the floor right in Pike's eye-line, throwing him a wicked smirk as he did so. Chris was sure he was an open book to Mudd right now, no matter how many times he tried to school his expression the prisoner would always know which buttons to press and how to get under his skin.

They both snapped to the terminal when it beeped and Pike realised he wasn’t the only one who was a little jumpy. Mudd grinned widely when he approached the screen and he saw the cause of the intrusion. “Ah, right on cue.”

Mudd tapped a few keys in quick succession and after slamming the side of a terminal a viewport flickered into life in front of Mudd, Pike was a little shocked that this place even had a viewport and was even more surprised to see who was on the other end of the line, Commander Saru on the bridge of Discovery.

Chris had never felt so elated to see a ship before, or his XO. Well not for some time anyway. The sudden appearance of a bomb into the equation had thrown him for six, seeing that Discovery was here helped abate his nerves. The crew were here and they had his back.

“Ah, Discovery nice of you to join us.” Mudd greeted the Commander. He was happily lounging in a chair with his legs nonchalantly up on the counter.

Predictably Saru did not look amused. “Where is Captain Pike?”
Mudd rolled his eyes dramatically. "You're like a stuck record, don't you want to know what I want first?"

Saru remained cold and stony. "No."

Mudd narrowed his gaze then tapped a few things on the keyboard. "Fine, fine." The viewport increased and zoomed out to cover Pike as well as Mudd. "There's your Captain see?"

Captain Pike locked his jaw annoyed at Mudd’s joking attitude yet again, however he managed to hold his tongue. He locked eyes with Saru and watched his first officer scan for any injuries. Except for his discomfort about being tied to a chair and concern about being a few feet from a bomb Chris could happily say he was fine.

"Captain are you alright?"

Pike looked over at Mudd warily, from past experience he knew to be cautious about what he said around the former prisoner. Mudd waved him on indicating he could talk feely.

Chris managed to force a strained smile. "I'm fine Commander, just a little stuck at the moment." He'd always been told it was strange how he clung to humour in times of stress, number one had teased him relentlessly about it over the years but it was a habit that had stuck.

Mudd hopped up off the chair and strode over to take center stage. "Good now that's out the way let's get down to business." He waited until he had Saru’s full attention again. "I'm sure you've figured out by now you can't beam down here or beam anyone up, courtesy of my signal jammers."

Saru nodded grimly. "We have."

Mudd proudly stared at his tech, happy it was doing the trick. "Good so I'm going to get into my ship and leave, and you're going to let me."

Saru looked suspicious and a little bit amused. "And why would we do that?"

"I'm glad you asked." Mudd walked over to the bomb putting it in shot. "You'll let me leave because of this."

The Captain closed his eyes and dropped his head with resignation; Mudd was putting Saru in a really difficult situation. No tactical way out and all options covered. Mudd knew their playbook like the back of his hand and he knew where to strike to manipulate people, and it certainly made for a dangerous opponent.

Saru’s eyes narrowed when he saw the device and Chris noticed the Kelpian’s eyes zoom in on the object. "A bomb?"

Mudd nodded then held up a detonator. "Yes, one powerful enough to destroy this entire place along with everyone in it." He glanced between his captive and the bomb, face coming alive as he shared his devious master plan. "I'm going to be setting it on a 15 minute timer which should allow you enough time to get a shuttle over here and rescue your Captain."

"A shuttle?" Saru interrupted.

Mudd sighed dramatically, snapping back. "Yes, as we've already discussed transporters are out of the picture, well on the way here at least." He walked over to the signal jammer. "This is the jammer by the way which you can turn off when you get here."
He threw up a drawing of some calculations and Pike clocked it was a diagram of Discovery’s position and wherever Mudd had dragged him too. So Mudd had put some thought into this at least and hopefully wasn’t going to get him killed by leaving Discovery too little time to enact a rescue.

"I estimate it should take you between 10 and 12 minutes to make it here and turn off the jamming device but I'm adding a few minutes on just in case."

"How kind of you." Pike quipped miserably, forgetting in that instant to hold his tongue.

Mudd narrowed his eyes at his captive dangerously. "I could make it shorter."

Pike met the prisoner’s glare and threat, seeing quickly he had pushed a little too far. He swallowed his pride. "No thank you. 15 minutes is good."

Mudd studied him silently then nodded and switched his attention to the detonator. "Of course I will also be able to trigger the bomb remotely. If anyone tries to stop me, if anyone tries to follow me, if I see anything I don’t like then: Boom!" He made an explosion effect with his hands.

There was silence on both ends of the line for some time as everyone took in the instructions. Pike couldn’t currently see a way out of this that had him walking away and Mudd going back to prison. Perhaps Saru would though, although just by looking at the Commander’s unhappy expression Pike wasn’t getting his hope’s up for achieving both outcomes.

"How do we know you won’t detonate the bomb as soon as your shuttle is clear?" Saru eventually asked.

That was a damn good question and one Pike wanted answering too. He studied Mudd’s reactions carefully knowing how good a liar the man was, it came as easy to him as breathing.

Mudd grinned wolfishly. "I suppose you’ll just have to trust me."

Saru scoffed. Pike rolled his eyes. He may as well have just asked Saru to believe he was a God.

Mudd noticed the looks of disbelief and dropped the comedy act. "It may surprise you to learn that the Captain and I have been getting to know one another, and I quite like him." He walked round Chris and placed a firm hand on his shoulder.

Pike looked affronted at the contact and quipped. "So much so that you tied me to a chair."

Mudd shrugged half-heartedly. "We are who we are." He addressed the screen again. "My point is I don't have any desire to kill Captain Pike, I simply need him as leverage."

Chris frowned deeply. How delusional was Mudd thinking they were somehow friends after all this? Pike wasn't entirely convinced that Mudd wouldn’t blow him to hell as soon as he was able and neither was Saru.

Mudd watched the pair carefully seeing the distrust overriding their ability to acquiesce to his demands. He ran a weary hand over his tired face and addressed his captive. "Have I harmed you in any way?"

If Pike was honest with himself he had to admit that Mudd had been surprisingly restrained throughout his ordeal. He wasn’t the most comfortable person in the universe right now and he had had his life threatened, but it was true that Mudd hadn't laid a hand on him violently.

“No.” He eventually replied, adding the truth Mudd probably wouldn’t want to hear carefully.
“However you have threatened to kill me. Numerous times.”

Mudd wagged a finger in his face. "Yes exactly threatened. I haven't needed to hurt you as you've complied with my orders." He turned to Saru. "So if you comply with my orders then you get your Captain back in one piece."

Saru scrutinised the man then Pike and came to a decision. Pike didn't know what he would have done in such a position. Mudd was a slippery one, who really knew what he would do? He was extremely unpredictable.

"You haven't really given me much of a choice Mr Mudd." Saru stated sadly.

Mudd smiled seeing Saru was about to give in. "Don't blame yourself, I'm very good at what I do."

Saru glared at the man. "You will be allowed to leave unchallenged, but know this; if you do not keep your side of the bargain then we will not hold back."

Pike shivered at the tone, the icy emotion somehow transmitting over the view-screen. Saru was rather scary when he wanted to be, Pike had never seen that look on his XO’s face before. Mudd went rigid when he recognised the threat, eyes narrowing sharply. Thankfully he let the comment go and after glancing between Chris and Saru barked out a laugh, at least someone was finding all this amusing because Pike really wasn’t.

Mudd walked towards the bomb, knelt down and entered in a code. "I don't want to see any shuttles leaving before I've undocked, is that clear?"

Saru nodded in acknowledgement. “Understood.”

Mudd nodded content then pressed a button on the bomb. A ticking sound rang out and the whole thing whirled into life. "You've got 15 minutes starting now."

Mudd pressed a button on his watch and the view screen and Saru disappeared. Pike felt desperately alone as the bridge was snatched away from him, and he felt his stomach churn nastily when the bomb chirped to life; saw the time attached to the front steadily counting down and jesus he might only have 14 minutes and 35 seconds to live.

What on earth did one do that with that time tied to a chair?

He was brought out of his musings as Mudd raced towards his workbench, grabbed his belongings and headed to the back door. Pike found his tongue just before Mudd reached the exit. "You can't run forever Mudd, the federation will find you."

Mudd spun on the spot and took the Captain’s promise as a challenge. "I think I can. Regardless though I'm going to give it a damn good shot." He pressed the final commands into the panel and the door swished open. "Anyway Captain it was nice seeing you again, if you're ever in the area drop me a line. It's always nice to catch up with old friends." Mudd beamed and waited at the now open door.

Pike regarded the former prisoner stonily. This lunatic was leaving him tied to a chair next to a bomb and he had the audacity to call him a friend? "I'm not your friend Mudd."

Mudd’s jovial mood dropped a level and the temperature seemed to plummet with it. "Trust me Chris, you don't want me as an enemy."

Pike ignored the way Mudd used his first name as if they really were best buddies. He wanted to
snap something back in return but his brain stopped him just in time, something about the way Mudd was looking at him now was setting off all sorts of warnings. He was giving off a deadly vibe and Chris did not want to give the man a reason to set the bomb off early.

The look soon vanished as Mudd realised Pike wasn't going to speak out. He smiled and waved before heading out the door. “Toodlepip.”

The door slammed shut heavily behind him leaving the Captain tied to a chair alone with his thoughts, and one very nasty looking explosive device ticking away nearby. Pike watched the numbers tumble away getting lost to the winds of time. His day was just getting better and better.
Chapter 4

When the timer hit 13 minutes Pike doubled his struggling efforts, trying to find any give in the ropes or shift the bolts nailing the chair to the floor. No matter how hard he pulled or wiggled neither his legs, chest or the chair gave any sign of becoming free. Frustratingly the ropes remained where they were and there was no way he was getting out of the handcuffs without the key, which was currently absconding with Mudd.

In short he was irrevocably stuck.

The clock soon rolled over to 11 minutes and Chris blinked a few times at the clock, wondering where on earth the last two minutes had gone. He watched the seconds tick by and couldn’t help reminiscing his career, and all the people he would miss. His thoughts flew to his crew on the Enterprise and he wished he could speak to them all just one last time; he wished he had gotten the chance to find Spock. God knew the kid needed them. Chris felt a cold shiver run through his body as he thought of his XO, Number one would be so pissed when she heard about this. He had promised her he would be careful and he’d ended up like this. She was going to kick his ass when she learned of this disaster, well presuming he still had an ass left to kick.

At 9 minutes Chris thought about all the stupid, ridiculous situations he had ever been in throughout his life; the endless sick bay trips after awry away missions. He was sure he had been in some tight scrapes but for the life of him he was struggling to think of a situation quite as ridiculous as this. It was different being able to watch how long you had left to live, to watch the seconds disappear for good. Having the timer here dragged the moments out and it made him think about every mistake and regret he ever had in his life, thinking what he would do if he just had a little more time.

Predictably the next memories that plagued him were of Vena; the short time they had together but more importantly what could have been. That wound was still so fresh after it had been unkindly ripped open by the Telosians. Sometimes if he closed his eyes he could still see her face; could still feel the warm brush of her lips against his; could still hear her breathing.

Chris yelled out angrily when the seconds tumbled by and the clock hit 7. He was actually starting to think that maybe this could be it, more than half the time had already been and gone so maybe his luck had finally run out. Really he didn’t want anyone risking their life for him but he doubted Discovery would do nothing, not from what he knew of that crew. They had risked it all for one another time and time again against impossible odds, it reminded him of Enterprise.

It was strange facing one’s mortality so slowly. He kept flipping between wanting to see one of his crew bounding through the door and wishing they wouldn’t come incase something went wrong.

When there were only 6 minutes left Chris thought about his Mum back on earth and he couldn’t help but feel tremendously guilty; this news would hit her hard and it was the last thing she deserved. Another person he would give anything to talk too just one last time, if only to say goodbye.

He shook away the dark deflating thoughts hardly recognising them as his own, it was not like him to give up. Chris fought against the restraints with everything he had left, determination rekindling from the will to live. He would not give in to this fate whilst he was still breathing.

Pike was honestly surprised that he was still in one piece when the countdown reached the 5 minute mark. He had half expected Mudd to blow him to kingdom come the moment he got clear but miraculously he was still breathing. Of course still being alive didn’t help his restrained situation. So far all his struggles had been for naught and he hadn’t felt anything budge more than an inch, if only
the chair weren’t bolted to the ground he might have stood a chance getting away from the bomb.

For the umpteenth time the Captain cried out in frustration and bucked against the restraints, not caring that his wrists were probably red and raw and there were likely bruises across his chest left by the tight rope.

Suddenly he heard a clang coming from the far door and his head snapped up to the sound, feeling a tiny spark of hope. Just when Pike felt his hopes slip away, thinking he had imagined the sound, the door slid open and a very familiar face sprinted into the room.

“Burnham!” Pike beamed ecstatically hardly believing his own eyes. He then remembered that she had just walked into a room with a bomb in it; all for his sake. “You shouldn’t be here.”

Michael side stepped the bomb and reached his side in less than a second, she withdrew a knife and started cutting away the ropes at his chest efficiently. She smirked at him. “Well I don’t see anyone else helping you.”

Pike stared at her sternly which was rather difficult given the ridiculous predicament. “Michael there’s a bomb in here, Mudd could set it off any second.”

Michael finished slicing through the ropes holding his chest to the back of the chair and quickly moved to his legs, glancing at the timer and feeling relieved it read 4 minutes 30 seconds left. “If Mudd wanted to blow this place to smithereens he would have done so already.” Michael dead-panned all logic.

Pike sighed but dropped the point realising he wasn’t going to win this argument. He looked at Michael sincerely. “Thanks for coming.”

She smiled at him strangely, as if to say why wouldn’t I? “We don’t leave people behind Sir.”

Pike rolled his eyes good-naturedly, now she was parroting his own words back at him. He really didn’t have a leg to stand on giving her a hard time for walking in here; he would have done the same in her position.

Chris glanced at the timer and saw it was nearing 4 minutes, and Burnham was just cutting through the last ropes on his legs. He realised Mudd’s times might have been a bit off or Burnham had broken several speed records. “You made good time.” He indicated the timer.

Burnham smiled, her eyes twinkling. “I ran.”

He stifled a laugh and felt jovial despite the perilous surroundings. A few seconds later and his legs were finally free so Michael helped him to his feet; it was damn good to be off the chair. She glanced at his restraints briefly and waved him back round. “We’ll deal with those later.”

Pike hummed in agreement and watched Burnham turn off the signal jammer and flip open her communicator. “Discovery ready to beam up.”

The Captain watched the familiar golden glow surround him and looked down at the bomb, still 3 minutes 30. All his earlier regrets and thoughts seemed stupid now. He didn’t really know what he had been so worried about, of course Discovery would get to him in time; it hadn’t even been close.

Pike felt his skin tingle but frowned as he saw the red digits suddenly flicker and speed up. He was about to shout a warning to Michael when the damn thing hit 0 and exploded with a tremendous force of heat and light.
Chris felt the searing flames lick at his clothes and skin; felt the force of the explosion crash into his chest and lift his feet off the ground. His mind raced and adrenaline swarmed his system as one minute he was surrounded by fire and the next he was looking up at Discovery’s ceiling falling backwards; his heart flying into his mouth as he realised he was plunging uncontrollably.

He groaned when he eventually hit the ground forcefully. His shoulders jolted harshly and his wrists were crushed painfully under his weight. The Captain saw stars for a few seconds and took a moment to process what the hell had just happened, he could still remember the heat from the flames and had been sure he was going to be blown apart but then suddenly he was aboard Discovery in relatively one piece.

“That Bastard.” He muttered vehemently into the air.

Pike heard Michael begin to stir beside him so he opened his eyes to check she was alright; explosions were unpredictable and who knew how much they had got caught in before they were beamed out. One second longer and they could have both been incinerated. The Captain found Michael sprawled out on the transporter pad in the same position as he was, flat on her back and dazed but with no obvious injuries.

“Bridge we’ve got them.” A distant voice floated through the air towards them. Chris realised his hearing was a little off and there was a faint ringing echoing in his head, just one of the nasty side effects of having a bomb go off in your face.

Chris was almost glad that he and Burnham were grounded when the whole ship shook around them which felt just like an aftershock. The lights and power on the transporter pad flickered for a few seconds and Pike heard metal straining and groaning across the hull. The danger to the ship snapped him back into reality with a jolt and he switched into Captain mode seamlessly. He was very aware of the amount of lives he was responsible for on the ship, so he tried to get up. Of course he had forgotten that his hands were restrained and cursed when his limbs refused to cooperate properly.

Michael was just as quick to shake off the effects of their near miss and react to the danger. She jumped to her feet and helped Pike get to his, the emergency overriding any embarrassing comments about not being able to get up. Surprisingly Pike actually felt a little unsteady on his feet at first, his head swam uncomfortably and he had to bite back the unwelcome nauseating feeling accompanying it.

Maybe I did hit my head hard…

Pushing the matter aside for now Pike followed Michael over to the transporter station, which just happened to be the closest terminal which they could use to contact the bridge. The ensign operating the transporter had already rushed out of the room, reacting to the red alert and racing to his assigned station. They both reached the terminal when the ship trembled again, this time it was much smaller but still forceful enough to almost knock Pike off his feet.

The Captain went to open a line to the bridge and grunted in frustration as he was painfully reminded that his hands were still trapped. Michael glanced at him sympathetically and opened the line for him.

Chris nodded gratefully to her, this having no hands business was getting rather old. “Pike to bridge, status report.”

Michael jumped behind the console and started typing in commands to the computer, bringing up logs and ship damage reports. Chris glanced at all the information and quickly evaluated the ship’s current status as well as the live reports of problems. Whatever had happened hadn’t broken the ship in two and problems were already be worked on, at first glance it wasn’t as bad as he had feared.
“Captain.” Saru’s surprise shone through loud and clear. “The explosive device detonated prematurely and destroyed the starbase, unfortunately Discovery was caught unprepared and we were unable to raise shields in time.”

Pike scowled darkly. He couldn’t believe how close he and Burnham had been to death, so much for not cutting it close. “Any damage or casualties?” Pike managed knowing he probably sounded snappy but he was having a really bad day.

“No casualties reported Captain, but we have several unconfirmed reports of sensor malfunctions and critical tracking systems are unresponsive.”

Pike sighed heavily. That could not have been a coincidence. “When did they go down?” Michael asked curiously.

“Just after the explosion detonated, it seems like an electro magnetic wave emitted from the station.” Saru explained.

Pike and Michael glanced at each other wearily, Mudd must be responsible for the attack on their systems. How the hell did he keep seeing so many moves ahead?

“For now all of the sensors are inoperable or giving false readings so at least for now Harry Mudd is in the wind.” Saru gingerly revealed.

Pike wasn’t exactly surprised but the news still hit hard. Mudd had gotten away again. Chris had to admit the man’s escape plan thus far was flawless. “Alright thank you Commander, restart the search whenever you can. I’ll be on the bridge soon, Pike out.”

Michael cut off the connection before Pike had the chance to get too annoyed with his restrained hands again. However that didn’t stop the sudden urge to bang his head against the wall in frustration, but that wouldn’t be very Captainly.

Instead he studied Michael who was doing a good job of looking more miserable and weary than he did. Chris wanted today to have never happened, he wanted Mudd to be back behind bars where he belonged and most of all he wanted these damn restraints off.

Michael noticed his fists clenching against the restraints and walked up to him. "May I have a look?"

Pike smiled warmly and turned his back to her. "Please do, they are really starting to get on my nerves."

Michael scoffed knowing full well they had gotten on his nerves long ago and now he was just barely holding his temper back. Pike’s happiness that his restraint problem was being seen to lasted for all of one second. His skin tingled when her fingers brushed against his wrists lightly; she clearly caught his reaction and smirked. "I didn't peg you for the ticklish kind Captain."

Chris' mouth went dry and he was fearful for a second that she would take advantage of the new information. "Don't you dare Commander." He growled without any real heat.

Michael's fingers danced round his wrists playfully and she laughed warmly. He felt her scrutinise the lock and try and manipulate each cuff. "I wouldn't do that to you Captain, don’t worry.”

Chris realised his shoulders and wrists were clenched and maybe he had been a little too worried. He quickly released the tension making it easier for her to see what she was doing. Thankfully it didn't take long for Michael to come to a conclusion. She tapped him on the shoulder and guided him round letting him know she was done looking.
He stared at her expectantly hoping there was a damn good reason his cuffs were still on. "Do you want the good news or the bad news?" Michael teased.

Pike groaned miserably and rather over dramatically; today the universe wasn’t against kicking a man when he was down. "Michael please."

She sobered when she heard the tiredness in his plea. "Okay, okay. So the bad news is the lock is specific to the prison and procedure dictates we contact them for a key which they would have to be transported here under guard, etc etc."

The last of his good mood tumbled over the abyss as she explained the situation, at this rate he could be restrained for some time. He then remembered there was supposed to be good news. "And the good news?" He prompted miserably.

She looked a little mischievous like she was about to impart a secret. "Well with the tools I have in engineering I could just cut them off."

Pike blinked, he hadn't been expecting the good news to actually be that good. This was a damn good solution and one he could get behind. Quite frankly it was the best news he'd heard all day. He beamed. "Well what are we waiting for then? Cut away."

Michael cocked her head surprised. Chris had to admit it was an odd expression and he didn’t understand why she was looking at him like he’d grown a second head. "What?"

Michael shook her head smiling mysteriously and started to put the engineering coordinates into the transporter pad. Pike was glad she had thought ahead and he wasn't about to trample through the corridors like a common prisoner. That was an image that would be hard to shake off.

Eventually she answered his initial query, finding the whole thing far too amusing. "Its nothing. I just never expected you of all people to go around destroying federation property."

Chris smirked and stepped up onto the transporter pad. "Technically I won't be doing the destroying."

Michael glared at him her fingers poised over the controls.

"I won't tell if you don’t." Pike spluttered quickly, desperate to get out of the restraints and not lose his only ally.

Michael grinned and finally joined him on the transported pad. "Deal." She agreed and within a few moments they swapped the transporter room for a thankfully empty engineering lab.

The Captain watched Michael go off in search of tools she needed for the jail break so he took the opportunity to sit down on one of the stools; his tired worn out muscles relaxed a little well except for his shoulders. He had wanted to stretch them for hours.

Burnham soon returned with the cutting tools she needed and eyed him warily. "Are you sure about this? We could just wait for the-"

“I trust you.” Pike interrupted, making her see the conviction in his eyes and how much he really did trust her.

She nodded slowly and indicated for him to turn round. He lifted his wrists up and away from his body as much as possible to make the job as easy as it could be for Michael. She touched his shoulder just before she began. “Let me know if the metal gets too hot.”
He nodded knowing he would put up with a little discomfort to get his hands free. Michael took a deep breath and started up the power tool, gripping his arms firmly and slicing into the metal. Pike felt sparks hit his skin and closed his eyes to distract himself from the discomfort.

“Do you think Mudd set off the explosives on purpose?” Michael suddenly asked.

Chris opened his eyes and was grateful Michael saw fit to distract him from the discomfort, his tensed shoulders had probably tipped her off. “I think he set up the damn thing to go off when someone beamed out, we had plenty of time before it sped up.”

Michael hummed and turned up the power on the tool which made a nasty metal screeching sound. “I suppose the real question is was he trying to kill you?”

Pike thought about it for a second but it didn’t seem right, if Mudd wanted to kill him he had any number of chances. Why wait until they were leaving? “It doesn’t feel like his style, I think he just wanted to destroy any evidence he may have left there.”

Michael perked up. “He’d been there before?”

Pike nodded over his shoulder, feeling the metal warming a little. “He said it was an old bolthole so my guess is he was just covering his tracks, but to be honest Michael I am done with trying to guess what Harry Mudd will and will not do.”

Michael laughed. “I stopped trying to figure him out a while ago, I suppose we’ll probably never know either way. And attacking our sensors is just another parting gift from Harry Mudd.”

Pike scoffed, you really couldn’t make this stuff up. Mudd had gotten past every system he needed to just enough to hinder his opponents. “I don’t want anything from Harry Mudd ever again, unless it’s his surrender.”

“That’s unlikely.” Michael argued amused.

Suddenly the metal became molten and then Pike heard a snap; blissfully the restraint came free. He brought his wrists to the front and waved his hands about a bit to cool them off. His shoulders gasped in relief and he felt amazing to be able to use his arms again. “Yes…” He breathed giddily.

Michael picked up a different tool. “That was the easy part, now we’ve got to get the wrists released.”

Pike didn’t let the news dampen his mood; his hands were still encased but they were no longer trapped together so that was all that really mattered. He held his hands out for Burnham to take hold of and she rested his right wrist on the worktop; she picked up a laser cutting tool with concentration written all over her face.

Chris used the silence to take a closer look at Michael now he could face her whilst she worked. His studied her body discretely and as far as he could tell she didn’t look harmed by the blast, well a little singed perhaps. “Did you get injured in the blast? It was a pretty close one.”

She glanced up in surprise but quickly turned her attention back to his wrist. “I’m fine, although I have to admit my face still feels a little warm.” A slight quirk of her lips told him she was joking.

It turned out her humour was infectious. “I was worried I lost my eyebrows for a second.” He grinned.

She smiled and shook her head. “Please, we both know it was your hair you were worried about.”
The Captain suddenly made a grab for his hair with his free hand, faking shock and despair. He actually earned a chuckle for his efforts. “I like my hair.” He defended quietly, secretly happy that he could feel all of it mostly where he left it. Thankfully on the surface at least they had both got lucky escaping the worst of the explosion.

Burnham pouted at the manacles and dropped the power tool, going in search of another. Pike took a look at her current progress and saw where she was running into problems. She would need something with a little more beef that wouldn’t slice through his skin. She soon returned with a more powerful tool and powered up the laser aiming it at the same point on his wrist.

“So dare I ask?” Michael arched an eyebrow.

Pike frowned in confusion. “Ask what?”

“The red angel.” She clarified. “Was any of what Mudd sent true?”

Pike barked out a bitter laugh. “That’s what makes this situation just plain cruel, the trip was a complete waste of time because Mudd made it all up.”

Michael looked puzzled. “Then how did he convince the admirals he had intel?”

Pike grimaced. “He hacked into our files, it turns out we’re pretty transparent and he hit the nail on the head with the red angel. Starfleet Command would do just about anything right now to get fresh intel and Mudd took advantage of that.”

Michael hummed thoughtfully and concentrated on his wrist, noticing the restraint had almost snapped free. Out of nowhere the metal broke apart, shattering into multiple pieces which fell to the work surface with a loud clang. Pike grinned at Michael and flexed his fingers, getting giddy and drunk on his new found freedom of movement.

Just one to go and he would be as good as new. Well, except for the chafing on his wrists. He caught how red and raw his wrist looked when the restraint fell away musing it must have happened when he was struggling for his life, sadly Michael clocked it too. Her mood darkened instantly like the moment a storm cackled to life, or when thunder sparked to life.

“Did he hurt you?” She was staring at his wrist seriously.

He tried to draw her attention away from it. “Besides the tying me to a chair and blowing up a bomb in my face?” He asked half joking.

“Yes.” She breathed seriously, looking him in the eye.

He sobered when her voice cracked. “No, he didn’t hurt me.”

She scrutinised him disbelievingly. “Are you sure?” She was probably thinking back to how rough Mudd had been in their previous encounter.

“Michael, I promise you he didn’t hurt me.” Technically his red wrists were the result of Mudd but the prisoner hadn’t raised a hand to him physically, which was what Michael was worried about.

Thankfully she took him at his word but remained pissed off. “We’re still going to catch him though.”

“Damn right we are.” Pike agreed.
With that out the way Michael returned her attention to the laser and the last restraint. Now she had the hang of it and the right tool it took no longer than a few seconds. Pike watched the laser break apart the last of the metal and Michael let out a cry of triumph as the restraint snapped in two. Pike shrugged out of the remains and flexed his fingers experimentally. Both hands were now completely free and it felt wonderful.

“Michael I could kiss you!” He shouted elated.

Michael looked almost embarrassed to receive the praise. “I didn’t do much Captain.”

Pike’s expression softened. “You saved my life Michael, I’m very grateful and I’m also aware it’s not the first time. I owe you a few by now.”

Michael smirked. “3, not like I’m counting.”

Pike walked towards the exit, shaking his head a little, he could have sworn it was only 2. He soon realised there weren’t footsteps following so he stopped and looked back to Burnham. “Are you coming?”

“Where?” She asked suspiciously, dropping the power tools and bent metal on the table.

“The bridge.”

Michael glared at him sternly. “Doctor Pollard told me to tell you to drag your ass to sick bay when you got back.”

Chris raised an eyebrow at Michael’s paraphrasing, but he imagined Doctor Pollard had used those exact words. Pike ran his hands over his face and groaned, exasperated by the latest problem he had to dodge. “But I’m fine Michael.”

She crossed her arms sternly, reminding Chris strangely of his XO aboard Enterprise. “You were just involved in an explosion.”

Oh two could play at that game. “So were you Michael.” Her confident stance faltered so he pressed home his advantage. “Are you telling me you’re going to submit yourself to Medical right now?” He knew how much she hated the place, almost as much as he did. Especially after such a long confinement.

He could tell he had won when she glared at him. “What am I supposed to tell Doctor Pollard when she comes looking for you?”

Pike grinned cheekily. “Tell her you haven’t seen me.”

Michael huffed in frustration. “I’m not lying to my CMO, Captain.”

Pike didn’t miss the way she emphasised the word, like she was telling him he should know better. “I’m afraid I can’t help you Michael, gotta dash.” He almost made it to the door before her rushed question stopped him.

“Why do you need to go to the bridge now? You are the Captain but you’ve just been abducted and blown up, you need to rest and sick-bay would be a good place to do that.”

Ah, now she was being serious so he would have to answer properly; he wouldn’t put it past her to call Doctor Pollard on him. He dropped the joking attitude and looked at her, letting his defences fall away and letting her see how tired he really was.
“I need to see that the crew is okay, that the ship is okay with my own eyes.” He opened up further without really thinking it through. “And I want to walk around a bit, being trapped brings back unpleasant memories. Sick bay might drive me crazy right now.”

Michael looked sympathetic and after some time nodded in understanding; she would let him go unmolested.

Chris hated depressed atmospheres so he tried to lighten the tone. “Besides I’ve also got lots of very strongly worded communiques to send to certain prison officials, naive admirals and any other idiot who okayed Mudd’s transfer.”

It worked. A small smile worked its way onto Michael’s face against her volition. “I wouldn’t want to be them.” Her smile dropped. “You know when you don’t show up in sick bay Doctor Pollard will come and drag you there herself.”

Pike threw Michael one of his most charming smiles and palmed the door control. “She’ll have to find me first.”

He disappeared out of sight and Michael couldn’t help but bark a laugh. He really was incorrigible, and she wished she could be a fly on the wall when Doctor Pollard eventually caught up with the wayward Captain. Captain Pike had wanted to ruffle a few feathers and Michael could safely say he had done that continually, unexpectedly they’d also managed to have some fun along the way too.

Finis

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!