How To Humanize A Vulcan

by StellarLibraryLady

Summary

Amanda Grayson and Winona Kirk ask old friend Christopher Pike to help their intelligent, but challenging sons at Starfleet Academy. The way is not easy for the young men or for the gifted doctor who befriends them.

How the Triumvirate met each other and began their careers. Not canon, but a blend of irreverence and angst, friendship and love, and the quest for glory and understanding.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Mother Knows Best

Chapter Summary

Amanda Grayson manipulates men in her life for the good of her son.

Chapter Notes

Part 1 of How To Humanize A Vulcan: The Academy Years.

She was getting tired of watching the endless parade. But knowing her husband as well as she did, Amanda Grayson knew that he wasn’t about to let this go anytime soon. And she owed it to him, and herself, to try to help him. Even if she had to ridicule him in order to do it.

“You do know, I suppose, that you could have simply told Spock that you would be concerned about him, instead of pacing a hole in this priceless antique rug, don’t you?”

Sarek, high ruler of Vulcan, paused in his determined circling of their private living quarters and shot a quizzical look at his wife when he heard the questioning inflections of her stern voice. His face was wiped clean of every emotion (except his worry which he would not recognize and his anger which he would share if anyone else in the room would tolerate it), and he stood with his hands behind his back. He looked as coiled and set to spring shut as any six-foot, obstinate mousetrap would in similar circumstances.

He tried to appear congenial and in perfect control of his world. It was often so charming how he tried to hide his true nature and feelings from her. It was really kind of sweet, in an awkward sort of way. The dear thing, he really did try to hide himself from her. “Whatever do you mean, my dear Amanda?” he asked innocently.

She drew her long regal robes around herself. She really loved looking the part of the ruler's wife. She fit the role so well. There were those detractors who whispered that she fit her role too well, but they dared not voice their opinions too loudly or too far. For she was still Sarek's wife and due the respect that was accorded to her. And if someone made the mistake of being too verbal, that person would surely lose prestige and position at court. And sometimes even more could be lost. For Sarek ruled absolutely. He had to be strong, if he was going to continue to rule. And his wife had to be strong, too.

And part of Amanda Grayson purpose was to not let Sarek get weak. She could not be clingy, but critical. And in that way, she helped her husband to stay strong. “Spock. Leaving home. Headed for Terran. To seek his future at Starfleet Academy. Remember now?” Her questioning timbre had been replaced by a decidedly mocking tone at the end of her inquiries. It was meant to wrangle her stiff acting husband who nonetheless loved her for it. He could never tame the rebel in her. Nor did he ever wish to, although it often brought him grief.

Indeed, her free spirit was what had attracted him to her initially. He would never clip her wings because he loved the challenge of winning her every time they made love. And she came to him
because she wanted to, not because she had to. They had a hunger for each other that was somewhat appeased by frequent sex, but never really sated. And never would be, if either of them had anything to do with their love life. They yearned for each other like newlyweds, even after all of these years.

Their relationship was ever new to them and forever young. They were complete unto themselves and sometimes they felt as if they needed nothing else in life except each other. On those occasions, they tended to forget that they even had a son, yet they loved him very much. He was proof positive that they loved each other and had cleaved to each other at least once. Those who knew them well, the ones who lived and worked in the royal palace and the hangers-on at court, understood that their love was invincible. They could never be riven asunder or take lovers on the side for the simple fact that they had fallen in love with each other long ago, hard, and they would never fall out of that ecstatic state.

But that did not mean that they were not flawed. They both had many flaws, but they had learned to love and to indeed relish those flaws. But that did not mean that the flaws were any easier to deal with.

Sarek sighed. But it wasn’t because of what she’d said in such a chiding manner. He knew well her sharp tongue that could bite deeply because it bit true. Amanda was as quick-minded and as intelligent as he was. The realization came to Sarek, as it had so many times, that Spock had inherited his mother’s stubbornness as well as some of her other less lovely traits. He could call it stubbornness in Spock, but not in Amanda. His son’s tendency to resist was nowhere as cute as in Amanda or as stimulating. While it was charming in the mother, it was just downright asinine and trying in the offspring.

“Really, Amanda, you shouldn’t have encouraged him,” Sarek whined. He felt safe in letting her know that he highly disapproved that she had sided with their son in his rebellion to his duty and heritage.

“And why not? Do you believe that he would work half as hard here at the Vulcan Science Academy as he will at Starfleet Academy? He has to find his own way, Sarek, or he will not be good for anything, least of all himself.”

“He has a duty to Vulcan and to me,” Sarek insisted, which was his chief argument. Surely Amanda should understand the duty that all men must face, be it to family, country, or way of life.

“And I believe that in time he will come to answer his responsibilities. But we have to let him have his freedom now. We have to let him live, or he will be bitter instead of wise when it comes his time to lead men. Sarek, my love, you have never suppressed me. Do not try it with our son. It will only bring you pain and his denial of all that you believe he should honor.”

"I want to prepare him for what he must face in life. He is so young and must learn so much."

"We must all learn the lessons which are required of us to learn; that is true. And he will, if we give him his opportunity to do so now. He has been too sheltered here on Vulcan. He must journey away from us to experience Life. Do not your own philosophers say that one cannot find his way home until he has left?"

"Yes, yes, of course, and they are wise philosophers. But that is abstract thinking and not practical in this matter."

"It applies very exactly to this matter. For it has the utter simplicity of its basic truth. Spock must leave us for awhile, or he will never be the man or the leader he was intended to be. A man must test himself among other men before he can ever know himself. That is as true for our son as for any
"But his duty, his obligations--" Sarek said weakly, knowing that he was losing the debate. Amanda knew logic as well as he did and could use it with cunning force. He would not be interested in her if she was a simpering, cloying trophy wife. But still, but still, sometimes it would be nice if she wasn't so damn logical and clear-headed.

Amanda touched Sarek's arm so he would understand her better. "Spock knows these things. In his heart he will eventually do what he must do for his people and for you. But he must learn to fly before he can be content to live in the cage of his obligations. His wings must not be clipped, but merely shaped for where his path should lead him. In that way, you will never lose him. Follow another path with him, a more stringent one, and you shall surely never see him again."

"I would not wish that," Sarek mumbled for he was still a father who loved his offspring in his own way.

"Nor would I. Believe me, Sarek, this departure of his for Starfleet is all for the best."

Sarek sighed deeply. "I suppose." He studied her with all of the admiration and frustration he felt for her displayed in his dark eyes.

"It will be alright," she reassured him.

"I suppose," he answered to that, also. "He is his mother's child," Sarek grumbled.

"And his father's," she reproved. "You know that a leader must be strong. Spock will learn that on his own, away from Vulcan and from us."

"I suppose," he grumbled again, but he was obvious that he was softening.

"Besides, our dear friend Christopher Pike will watch his progress and will guide him."

"It is a wonder that our young colt will be willing to be tethered to anyone."

"Sarek, Spock loves Christopher Pike. Spock may not understand that emotion, but the Terran part of him will recognize it. Besides, I have faith in our son. He will love those who will come into his life to help him. He may not recognize it as love at first, but he will eventually acknowledge it as such. Those others will respond to his integrity and his dedication, but they will also seek out the part of him that lies hidden. For they are meant to respond to that about him, too."

"What if he is as reclusive as he is here on Vulcan? What if he stays to himself?"

"Because Spock will be curious about Terran and the people he will meet. He gets that from you, my dear. All of you Vulcans are as curious as cats. That's one thing that makes you open to others, and one thing that makes you so utterly appealing. It is difficult to ignore someone who seems to need others to function."

Sarek smiled. "It is what keeps me drawn to you. I never know what you are going to do next."

She gave him a haughty look. "And I intend to keep you forever guessing, my pet. I know exactly what you will like and when."

Sarek gave his wife an evaluating look. "Sometimes I think that I married an oracle instead of a woman. An ancient Greek oracle who reincarnated into the most charming, most fascinating woman I ever met or ever hope to meet."
"Sometimes I feel Greek, dressed in chitons and living in a temple. This palace is more a Middle Eastern casbah than a home, but it is practical in this desert heat. And its wandering rooms and winding stairs suit me. I do not know about the oracle part, though--"

"I do."

She gave him a tolerant, yet loving smile. "It does not take a woman to be an oracle to know her child and what is best for him. Spock needs to be around men his own age whom he can respect and admire as much as he does his father. He will find those men on Terran."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because he has not found them here on Vulcan. They excluded him as a child because he was part Terran. They will exclude him as a man because he is your son. No, he needs to find his equals. He needs to know what that is like. It will not be easy for him or for them. Nothing worthwhile is ever gained easily. But eventually, they will enfold him unto themselves because they will be the same type of person that he is. He has many great friendships ahead of him. He simply needs to find those who are as special as he is, because they are seeking him, also."

Sarek risked a snide smile. "That which you seek is seeking you?"

"Of course," Amanda answered with a distinct chill to her voice. "Greatness seeks out greatness. Men are forever testing themselves. So it must be with our son, also."

"You seem very sure of all this greatness in Spock's future," he chided gently. He wanted to believe in the promises that she was offering to him.

"I believe in predestination for our son. He will not be ordinary. He will be great among men and much respected."

"Any mother feels that way. She believes in her son." Sarek, mighty ruler of Vulcan, stopped and gazed down at this woman who was so special to him. "And I believe in you, my darling wife," he whispered as he approached Amanda and settled beside her on her curved bench.

"It will be as I say. Spock will be great in his time. But he could not learn all that he needs to know from us or from Vulcan. He must find his teachers, and together they will learn from each other."

Sarek lifted one of her hands to his lips. "May he be as lucky in his quest as I have been."

Amanda Grayson smiled at her husband, and their eyes spoke of all that they needed to know of their mutual love. It was as eternal as their abiding faith in each other. That part of them would never die and would live forever in the heart of their son.

It had taken Amanda Grayson a long time to find beauty in the harsh, arid landscape of Vulcan. There was nothing forgiving in its brutal weather conditions, and it exacted a terrible price from anyone foolhardy enough not to respect its inflexible rules. It was a masculine world, Amanda decided. For there was nothing gentle or nurturing or even welcoming about its inflexible extremes. It could be blazing hot in the long, unblinking afternoons followed by bone-chilling cold in the nighttime hours. But only in those wildly fluctuating conditions did Amanda find anything that reminded her of Terran. And those similarities mimicked the cruelest deserts that she had ever experienced as a child. Hardly anything she could ever feel warm and fuzzy about.
But years had passed, and Amanda had come to appreciate the savage scenery of her adopted homeworld. It no longer was a menace to her but a sanctuary which protected her by keeping foreign threats from bothering her. It sheltered its own because she felt that it had come to accept her. She belonged to Sarek and therefore to it.

She knew that she was guilty of anthropomorphism. The desert outside had not really embraced her as one of its own. She should not be trying to assign human characteristics to an inanimate object. It couldn’t care less who she was or thought she was. It would strike her down dead as quickly as anything else that did not adhere to its rigid code. There were no compromises with the Vulcan desert. It was its rules, or death.

And yet she felt at home here. She had come to think of herself as becoming one with the desert. And by doing that, she had assumed the mannerisms of the desert. It had not conquered her; it had consumed her and given her a new birth. She had assumed its strength, and she could amass that strength so that she could use any means possible to help her child.

And she would. Even to enlisting the aid of an old friend from her past. Even to making him believe that there was still something between them.

Months later, Amanda sat in front of the viewing screen in her private quarters as she smiled at the handsome Starfleet officer before her. He was just as handsome as she remembered, back when they were all younger. True, there was some gray at his temples and some laugh lines at the corners of his eyes, but all of that looked good on him. He was still a lovely, lovely man and still very precious to her.

“I want to thank you again for taking Spock under your wing, Christopher. I believe that it was his admiration of you which first attracted him to the merits of attending Starfleet Academy and for his ambition of eventually becoming a member of that elite corps. I know that he will fare well under your tutelage.”

Pike visibly glowed in her open praise. “Well, he’s a worthy young man, Amanda. He is doing well with his schooling and is a quick study of all the curriculum. He practically inhales the subjects which he must learn for a general background. History, mathematics, all of the sciences, medicine, linguistics, philosophy, all fields of knowledge bend to his intellect. I could go on and on. He absorbs information as quickly and as easily as a computer.”

“Now you know that is the type of behavior that I am trying to steer him away from, don’t you, my dear?” she chided gently.

He gave her a sheepish grin which showed her once again the young man he had been years ago when they had both been part of a group of smart, intelligent, upward moving people aiming to get their share of the pie of Life. They had all had various levels of success with that quest, but they had all gotten the opportunity to try. And that was what she was so eager for Spock to have now: the opportunity to try. Success wasn’t as important as trying. Then, at the end of his life, Spock would not have to rue that he had never tested himself, for that is probably the biggest regret of all for people at the end of their lives.

“I know that you don’t want him to be a walking computer, Amanda, and I’m working on it. I try to encourage him to mix with people his own age and to try different entertainments. For extracurricular activities, he is quite taken with the Arts. Music, both singing and playing an instrument, seems to
come natural to him. He is even dabbling in opera."

"Opera!" The notion that Spock could relate to opera made sense after Amanda thought about it. For someone who tried to suppress his emotions as Spock did, the angst of the opera singers as they experienced the wide range of feelings in their music allowed him to experience emotion without compromising each other strict code.

"I am trying to introduce him to a wide range of activities, from scuba diving to mountain climbing. It's an asset that the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific Coast Range, and the high deserts of eastern California are all within easy driving range of San Francisco. Then we also have access to all of the cultural activities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Seattle. And New York City, Boston, and New Orleans are just a short flight away. We take in art exhibits, poetry readings, ethnic food tasting. Of course, it helps that he studied all of this on the computer when he was a child. But now he, and I, are getting to experience these activities first hand. It's like a month-long vacation when we go somewhere."

She could see the fire and the happiness that he was displaying as he described these things to her. The only regret she had was that Sarek had not thought to share similar activities with his son. But of course Vulcan did not have the wide variety of experiences that Pike was introducing Spock to. "I appreciate all the time you are using to work with him. It must be taking away a lot from your private time, though."

Pike grinned self-consciously. "No problem. I'm having a lot of fun, also, and it is not a hardship. I just want him to know about so many things. It's a pleasure to introduce him to all I can. I'm trying my best to be a good host and a good uncle."

“I know you are, darling,” she cooed. For as pushy as she could be, Amanda also knew the value of gentle praise. It could be as persuasive or more so than open belligerence. “And that is all that I can ask of you, dear Christopher, is that you try.”

Pike squared his shoulders with renewed determination. “Thank you for believing in me, Amanda.”

“We all need to know that the people we respect and love believe in us,” she purred.

“And Spock is glowing from that increased confidence that he is building in himself. He will be a fine officer and leader in time. He is learning to build that groundwork in himself now. No book or instructor could ever teach him that.”

“Good. Good,” Amanda murmured. This was just exactly the type of information that she was hoping to hear.

“I’m making him my Science Officer on an upcoming two-year mission that I am going to lead,” Pike announced proudly. “That is my big news that I wanted to share with you. I knew that you would be proud to hear it.”

She smiled broadly and it was a genuine smile for her heart was warmed by his words. "Oh, Christopher, I am thrilled to hear that! A mission on a starship! And he gets to study science! He is so fascinated with everything in the natural world! He will never be bored on that mission!"

Pike was blushing with the blatant praise. “I was hoping that you would like the news.”

“Like it? Oh, darling, I love it! It is everything that I hoped for him!” She couldn’t seem to get her fill of praising him.

“Well, sometimes, I think that he’ll spend part of his time studying humans.”
“Oh?” she asked, sobering slightly.

“He seems to be fascinated with us, also.”

“But of course he is, Christopher. You Earthlings are all so emotional. You will be like specimens in Petrie dishes to him. But what an opportunity for him in that regards, also.”

“Amanda. Darling.” It was his turn to chide her gently. “Must I remind you that you are an Earthling by birth?”

Amanda was taken aback. “I suppose that I have lived on Vulcan too long. I seem to have become quite one of them.”

“That’s not a bad thing, Amanda,” he said softly. “In fact, on you it is quite charming.”

“Christopher. Darling. You don’t know how much I’ve always loved you. You are so dear to me.”

“I know, Amanda. I love you dearly always, too.”

Yes, he knew that she loved him, he thought later as he stared at the silent screen after they had said goodbye. She just was not in love with him and never would be, not the way he was with her. And there was also the tiny fact that he was not Sarek of Vulcan. For after Amanda had met Sarek, she could see no other man in the universe.

Oh, well, Pike sighed. If he could not have the mother in his life the way he wanted, he could at least have her son near him. And in the process of helping him adjust to a whole new way of living, Christopher Pike could almost pretend that her son belonged to him, too.
Love Lost And Found

Chapter Summary

Another old friend calls Christopher Pike, and Jim Kirk meets two men who will be very important to him.

A few years later, Christopher Pike received a call from another woman out of his past. He grinned as he recognized the face on his screen. Sure, she was a little older, a little harder looking, but weren’t they all? The years had done that to all of them, he reminded himself.

“Winona! Winona Kirk! How are you?!” His grin widened. How many years had it been since he’d last seen her? Fifteen? Eighteen, at least. Probably even longer than that. Years had a way of slipping away effortlessly after awhile. Time seemed important as hell when we’re youths, he thought. Routine became a close and welcomed companion later on.

The blonde woman on the screen smiled softly back at him. “Actually, it isn’t Kirk anymore, Chris.”

“Oh?” He adjusted himself in his plush chair. Although the conn on the Enterprise fit him exactly, nothing could duplicate his chair back in his office at Starfleet Command.

“Yes. I’m back here in Iowa and married. I needed to get back to my roots after, after I lost George. And I needed help raising my boys. It isn’t an exciting life like serving with Starfleet, but it’s secure. It’s what I needed. Frank is what I needed.”

And her unspoken words echoed across to him as they had so many years ago. ‘I maybe could love you, Chris, but I have children who need a steady life. I have to think of them and of my own security, too. I need more than a space adventurer who shows up every year or so, or maybe never again. I lost my heart to one dreamer, I cannot risk it again. Even though I might like to do just that.’

“I’m glad that you are content with your life now, Winona,” Chris said, knowing she needed to hear that, even if it wasn’t the truth. He could see the disappointment that had been etched on her face through so many years of doing what she had to do instead of what she wanted to do. He felt the disappointment, too, of lost opportunities. Maybe if he’d been more insistent, they might have had something together. But it was too easy for him to climb onto a Starship and fly away into space. And now it was too late for anything except doing just that.

“And I’m glad that you are doing so well, Chris,” she said with a sudden false brightness to her voice. “I have been trying to reach you, but I was told that you were on an exciting mission somewhere out in space. How wonderful for you that you are still living the dream.”

“Well, yes, I was out on a mission. I don’t know how exciting it was, though.”

“Well, I expect that after awhile even space adventures might get a little tiring.”

“Oh, never that, Winona,” he said softly. “The thrill is still there. The thrust of the engines. The new worlds to see. The comradeship of your crew mates. The test of oneself to see if I’ve still got what it takes.”

“And apparently you still do,” she said with a new warmth and sincerity to her voice. “The captain’s
uniform looks good on you, Chris.”

He glanced down at his clothing and was happy that he was wearing his dress uniform. Yes, it still looked on him. Yes, he was still trim. Yes, he was still handsome and youthful, or at least hoped that he was. “Thank you. I’m sure that it would have looked good on George, too. Even though he was just the First Officer of the Kelvin when he died, he went out like the captain of his ship.”

“Thank you. For that,” she whispered.

Pike could see the tears sparkling in her eyes. Even though Winona might be married to some guy named Frank, she was still very much in love with George Kirk and probably always would be. Although Pike sensed that Frank was something of a jerk just by the way that Winona referred to him, Pike could not help but feel sorry for him. Maybe, though, this Frank just needed a trophy wife, someone who had served in Starfleet herself. Maybe her prestige was enough for Frank, and maybe Frank offered something of security for Winona and her sons. Her marriage, though, was certainly no love match. But, as the saying went, she had made her bed and she would lie in it. She had made her choices and she would honor them, even if it was leading her to a bitter old age.

And Pike would honor the choices he had made as a youth. He might have little to keep him company in his old age but memories, but they would be good memories. And he would cherish them.

“You said you had been trying to reach me, Winona. Is there a problem?”

“Oh, yes, there is. And I’m hoping that you can help. But I’ll understand if you cannot.” She frowned and he could see her worry and concern. “It’s Jim.”

Pike stiffened. Jim, the son born just as his father was dying heroically. Jim, the golden child, the one beloved so much by his mother.

“Winona. Tell me. Please.”

“He’s wild,” she said in frustration as she tried to sum up her problem in a couple of words.

“George Kirk’s son?” Pike teased gently. “Nah. Couldn’t be.”

She smiled and seemed to relax. “He is so like his father. Hotheaded. Impulsive. Driving himself and anything with a motor too fast.”

“Yet brilliant and charming as hell. You wanna slap him for his insolence and love him up because of that maddening smile, all in the same breath.”

She smiled sadly. “Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Larger than life and about to be eaten by it. Jim needs guidance, Chris. A man’s guidance.”

He knew it was petty of him, but he had to say it for his own benefit. “It’s a little late for me to become his father now. He’d have more than one question about the turn of events, I’m sure.”

“I don’t mean for you to quit Starfleet, come to Iowa, and became a small-town shop keeper. I mean for him to come to you.”

“To Starfleet?” This might be easier than he’d thought a moment ago. “Sure. Send him over. I’ll sponsor him and get him set up. I’m assuming he’s got the brains and body for the Fleet?”

“Oh, yes. He’s smart enough, just needs to apply himself.”
“Sounds good. There’s a new class starting soon. When can he be here?”

“He’s already in San Francisco.”

That came as a surprise. “He is?”

“He haunts Starfleet, but he doesn’t have the incentive to try. He’d say it was money holding him back, but he thinks he wouldn’t measure up to his father’s legacy.”

“Oh, hell. Pardon my language, but that would be awfully daunting for anyone to have to face.”

“I know. But I would really appreciate it if you could just talk to him. I can tell you the bar where he works as a bouncer. It’s close to Starfleet Headquarters.”

Pike grinned. “A bouncer at a bar, you say? That sounds like George’s kid.”

"He's so much like George, Chris, that you wouldn't believe it."

At that moment, Pike looked aside. “Yes?”

“Sorry to interrupt, sir. I have those reports you requested,” someone said in a low voice.

“Oh, you’re busy, Chris,” Winona said. “I’ll let you get back to your work.”

“Wait! I want you to meet someone.” Pike looked aside and made urging motions. “Come here.”

“Really, sir, I--”

“No, it’s alright,” Pike said as he pulled the younger man within viewing range. “Winona, this is Mr. Spock, Amanda Grayson’s son and my Science Officer. I thought that you might like to meet him.”

"Oh, goodness, yes! Amanda’s son." Winona was silent a moment as she studied the Vulcan. “Yes, I can see Amanda in your face.”

Spock forgot to be reserved. “You knew my mother?”

“We were acquaintances a long time ago,” Winona answered with a gentle smile. “Back in our salad days of joyful youth. Please remember me to her, will you? Winona Kirk?”

Spock nodded gravely. “I shall do that, madam.”

“Such a handsome, polite young man,” Winona cooed. “I know that your mother is proud of you.”

Spock’s hands automatically slipped behind his back and he clasped them together. “I certainly hope so, madam.”

“Spock and I have been exploring in space for a couple of years, Winona. There is talk that soon there may be a Starship that will be gone for a length of five years! Five years! Can you imagine that?”

“Five years sounds like such a long time, Chris. What a commitment to be away from one’s family for such a length of time, though.” Her voice echoed with the fear that most women had: the disruption of home and hearth.

“Yes, but think of the possibilities! To explore to the edge of the universe! To discover civilizations and worlds that we cannot even imagine now!”
“Oh, you sound so much like George! How he would have loved to be going on a five-year quest with you!”

“Yes,” Pike agreed nostalgically, yet wistfully. “But I believe that it’s for young bucks like Spock here to be going out on a mission of that length.”

“Do you believe that the attempt will be made anytime soon?”

“I don’t know. We’re in dry dock for awhile.” He gave Spock an inclusive smile. “I’m afraid it’s the classroom and training field for us for the time being, though, and seeing what talent is out there just waiting to be discovered. The men and women who will someday make that five-year mission are with us now. We just have to find them.”

“I wish you luck with your project, Chris, and you, too, Mr. Spock. Now if you can extend that luck to my project, we’ll all be happy,” she said diplomatically.

“We’ll certainly give it our best shot, won’t we, Spock?”

“I do not know to what project the lady has reference, but I will help you with whatever you attempt, Captain. I believe that you already know that.”

Pike beamed at him. “I most certainly do, Spock. I most certainly do.”

With a painful groan, Jim Kirk was just pulling himself up out of the refuse of the cluttered gutter when a frantic looking man wearing a Starfleet uniform came running up.

“Stay where you are! You might be severely injured!”

Seemed like a good plan, Kirk decided. With an audible grunt, he obeyed, hunkering down on the curb with the other rubble around his feet. He tasted the blood in his mouth, hoped no teeth were chipped, and waited as the young cadet reached him and dropped down to his knees in front of him.

Nice looking guy, Kirk thought. A little frantic looking, but that was to be expected from a Good Samaritan trying to help some poor soul who had been set upon and sorely used by some scoundrel or scoundrels. And here Kirk was, not looking his best since his recent rolling around in the gutter.

“Are you prone to falling?!” the handsome, but intense and harried looking guy demanded as he grabbed Kirk’s head and began to examine it.

“I’m more prone to fistfights,” Kirk answered. "Ouch! That hurt!"

“What? This place on your chin?"

"Yeah. Especially when you gave it the good jab that you did. You've established that it's connected to nerve endings, I suppose."

"Sorry. How many fingers do you see?"

"None. Your hands are doing other stuff. If I couldn't feel them, I wouldn't know where they were or what they were up to."

"Oh. Sorry." He held up a hand. "Now?"
“Two. Do I get a prize?” Kirk asked with a pleasant smile.

“Yeah, no concussion.” The stranger's assessing eyes darted over Kirk's face while his own face held a worried, flustered look. "What's your name?” the cadet demanded. Then in machine gun fire, he wanted to know: “What day is it? What city are you in? How many of me do you see?”

“James T. Kirk. Tuesday, July 2. San Francisco, United States, Planet Earth, Solar System, Universe, the Eye of God, as they say in 'Our Town.'" When that got no response, he continued, "One of you, so still no concussion. What's your name?"

“Leonard H. McCoy,” he answered as he probed Kirk's head further and searched for more open wounds. "What a helluva mess! You look like someone took a metal pan scratcher to you!"

"You oughta feel it from this side."

"I can only imagine," McCoy muttered, acting like he'd never seen such a mess.

"What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?" Kirk asked pleasantly to distract himself from the probing hands. "And don't you dare say 'vanilla.' That's everybody's favorite 'cause it goes with everything."

"Peach praline," McCoy answered absently. "And not just because I'm from Georgia."

"Georgia, eh? I'm from Iowa. That's where the tall corn grows, you know."

"I've heard. Iowans never get tired of crowing about it," McCoy muttered. "Now stop bothering me with useless shit like that. I'm trying to decide if you're gonna live or die."

Kirk grinned inside himself because it would hurt too much to try to smile on the outside. He liked this guy. About as rough as a cob, but seemed to be dedicated to his patient. "And what have you decided?"

"You're gonna live, but you're gonna hurt like hell for a couple of days."

Kirk grunted his agreement. "Figured as much. Nothing new there."

"Probably deserved what you got, too."

Kirk grinned despite his pain. "It was a damn good fight, though. Damn good."

"Shut up and let me work."

“Do all Starfleet cadets do double duty as doctors?” Kirk wanted to know.

“Just the ones who are already medical doctors before they joined the Fleet,” McCoy mumbled as he feverishly worked over Kirk. "You don't follow orders very well, do you? I'm talking about the shutting up thing, which you seem to have forgotten already."

“Not in my DNA code to obey. I ain’t never had a doctor see me curbside before,” Kirk mumbled as McCoy turned Kirk’s hands over in his.

“Kinda new experience for me, too,” McCoy agreed as his eyes darted here and there over Kirk’s body.

“Especially one who held my hands for so long.”

McCoy froze and stared at the guy who was grinning up at him in such a mocking, flirting, teasing,
KNOWING way. McCoy felt his heart give a lurch. The guy was gorgeous! Despite the dirt and blood, swollen shut eye and obviously throbbing jaw, Kirk was a hunk. But, damn it, Kirk knew it, too.

McCoy looked disgusted and slammed Kirk’s hands away from him.

“Hey! I might be seriously injured!”

“If you say in your head, I’ll agree.” Then McCoy remembered the oath he had taken. For the moment, the beaten up guy he’d practically pulled out of the gutter was his patient. “What were you doing, anyway? Who did you manage to piss off?”

Kirk pointed at the bar behind him. “I work here. As a bouncer. A couple of guys didn’t like that I threw them out earlier, so they were waiting for me when I came out. They got in a couple of sucker punches before I knew what was going on. And the rest, as they say, is history.” He touched his tender jaw. “If someone ever tells you that he’d won every fight he’d ever been in, watch out. He’ll lie about other things, too. What were you doing in the neighborhood?”

“I was coming here to check out the place, even though it's off limits. I like to drink. It's a hobby of mine I'm trying to perfect.”

Kirk gave him a lazy smile. “Well, you came to the right place. People drink here a lot. Here, help me up, and I'll prove it to you.”

“Are you sure?” McCoy asked as he grabbed Kirk’s arm and hauled him to his feet. “Don’t you wanna go somewhere like a hospital and get checked out better?” He didn’t like the way that Kirk was weaving slightly.

“You said that you’re a doctor, didn’t you?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Well, that’s good enough for me. Come on, I’ll let you buy me a drink. I’ve been beaten up before and I’ve always lived. I’ve never met you before and I wanna get better acquainted before you walk outta my life too fast.”

“Are you sure you aren’t just some bar bitch hustling me?” McCoy muttered as he followed Kirk.

“What? You think I get a kickback for every drink a customer buys me?” he asked as he looked back from the door at McCoy.

“Well, that is the definition of a bar bitch, isn’t it?”

“There you go,” Kirk agreed as he slapped McCoy’s arm. “I’ll be your bar bitch and you can be my doctor. It'll be a great relationship!” He wove slightly and McCoy steadied him as they walked inside.

“Will you watch it, damn it?! I don’t wanna have to pick you up again!”

“You’re beautiful when you’re angry. Have I ever told you that?” Kirk gave him a sloppy smile and an admiring look.

God, the guy was beautiful himself! McCoy thought, but he couldn't think about something like that now.
"No, you must’ve not gotten around to it in the whole fifteen minutes we’ve known each other,” McCoy grumbled as he steered Kirk toward a chair. "Here. Sit here. I’ll go get our drinks and some ice for that jaw. Try to stay out of trouble until I get back, okay?"

"You’re so good to me, Bonesy."

"What? What did you call me? Bonesy?"

Kirk shrugged, or as much as he could with his aches and pains. “Sure. You’re a doctor, ain’t you? Sawbones. Bones. That’s it! Bones! That’s what I’ll call you! Bones! Bones McCoy! My Bonesy!”

“Here’s he’s already acting like a damn drunk, and I’m getting more booze for him. I gotta be crazy,” McCoy muttered to himself as he turned away.

“What?!” Kirk demanded.

"Nothing, Jim Kirk!" McCoy flung over his shoulder as he stormed away. "Just, just hold that chair down and don't move so I can find you back! Okay?!

"Okay! Yes, sir!" Kirk threw a smart salute to McCoy's retreating back.

"Damn idiot!" McCoy muttered to himself. "Don’t know why I even bothered to help you! Just gonna be a whole lot of trouble, I can tell already!"

"Love you, too! How could I ever feel any other way about you?!" Kirk hollered after him.

Muttering to himself, the retreating McCoy waved him away in disgust and kept walking toward the bar.

Kirk laughed to himself, then turned around and found a pleasant looking, older man in a Starfleet uniform smiling softly down at him. Kirk was the gregarious sort. He smiled back.

"So you’re Jim Kirk," the older guy said. "Healing up from a fight, I see. Figures."

Kirk narrowed his eyes, but not in a bad way, more inquisitive like. “Do I know you?” he asked.

“Used to,” the man answered cryptically. “Mind if I sit down?”

Kirk held out his hand. “Ain’t my chair. Except I work here, so I guess it belongs to me a little bit.”

“Thanks.” The man swiftly seated himself. "You know, you wouldn't be bad looking if one of your eyes wasn't swelling shut and one side of your face didn't look like it had met up with a sledgehammer. That must've been one helluva fight you were in."

Kirk stopped running his tongue around the inside of his mouth and smirked with happiness. "It was a great fight! Too bad I was on the losing team, but all in all, not a bad fight at all. I made damn sure those two guys wouldn't forget me in awhile, though. Neither one's gonna be able to eat solid food for a couple days. Trouble is, neither will I. But, hell, that's the stakes when you gotta teach some guys a lesson. They left me with some knowledge, too. But, hey, you gotta respect someone who can go at it toe and nail. They know what they got and how they got it. There's something honest about that."

"That sounds like something that George Kirk would say. He used to know where all of the good fights were being fought. And he respected his opponents, too. At least the ones who had earned his respect."
Kirk gave him a piercing look. "You knew my father?"

"Yes, and your mother, too. In fact, I was talking to her just the other day," the man said with a pleasant smile.

"And the plot thickens," Kirk muttered as he flinched when he touched a scraped place on his face. The man gave him a sympathetic look. "Do you need a doctor?"

"Got one," Kirk nodded toward the counter where McCoy was being waited on. "Makes curb calls and everything. Helluva guy. Would go through fire with him any day."

"Yep, George's son would need his own doctor in tow alright."

Kirk frowned at the guy. Something about him was familiar, but it was a memory from a long, long time ago.

“I do know you. Don’t I.” It was a statement, not a question this time.

The man grinned. “I knew your folks very well. I’m Christopher Pike.”

A smile flowed over Kirk’s face despite his hurting mouth. “Of course. Mother speaks of you often. Said that you bounced me on your knee a time or two.”

"That I did. Don't want to try it now, though. You've grown up some."

The two men grinned at each other and shook hands.

“So you stayed in the Corps,” Kirk remarked, nodding at Pike’s uniform.

Pike got a pleased look on his face. “Yes, I did. And I’ve thoroughly enjoyed myself.”

“It must be a great feeling. Serving with such a group as Starfleet.”

“It is. The best. That’s what I want to talk to you about.”

At that moment McCoy returned with their drinks and a pail of ice on a small platter, and he saw that Kirk had company. Then he drew in his breath when he saw who it was. “Captain Pike?” His eyes enlarged. “Captain Pike?!” He slammed the platter on the table, snapped to attention, and saluted Pike.

Pike returned the salute. “Relax, Cadet. We don’t have to go by protocol now. Sit down. Sit down.”

“Begging the Captain’s pardon, sir, but it’s not every day that I find myself rubbing elbows with Starfleet brass in a bar. Sir.”

Pike grinned. “It’s not everyday that I’m in a bar, either.” He glanced around. “And it looks like a very good bar, too. Sorry it wasn’t here when I was a cadet.”

“It is a good bar,” Kirk spoke up. “It’s given me a home. A job downstairs and a room upstairs. It’s all I need.”

“Sure about that, Jim?”

“I don’t know what you mean, sir.”
Pike looked up at McCoy. “How about getting me whatever you guys are drinking. Bourbon, it looks like. Kentucky’s best, I’m assuming?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you are?”

“Ah, McCoy, sir, Leonard H. Sorry I forgot to say, ‘sir,’ sir.”

“I didn’t give you much opportunity, McCoy. Now, how about getting that drink for me, and I’ll pay for the next round for the both of you,” he said, handing McCoy some money. “And whatever bar food is sitting around. I’m sure you guys could go for a sandwich or two, couldn’t you?”

“Yes, sir!” McCoy said and hurried off.

“That’s generous of you, sir.”

Pike grinned at Kirk. “Young people are always broke and hungry, especially students. It’s the bane of the ones trying to prepare themselves for their life’s work.”

“You can say that again.”

“How long do you figure it’ll take you to save up enough money to get into Starfleet?”

Kirk shrugged and looked sour and regretful. “Too long, I suppose.”

“So this will be your life’s work?” he asked, looking around. “Being in this bar? Winning a few fights. Losing a few. Gaining a few more scars and aches and pains along the way?”

“Good enough.”

“No, it isn’t. Not for George Kirk’s son.”

“I’m never living up to that guy’s rep,” Kirk mumbled.

“Not in this place, no. But in Starfleet, yes.”

“Yeah!” Kirk smirked. “Big chance I’ve got of getting into there.”

“Yes, you do, with me sponsoring you.”

“You? Would you sponsor me? Because I’m George Kirk’s son?”

“Partly.”

“And partly—”

“Because you’re your own man. And I believe in you.”

“Boy, you are a dreamer,” Jim Kirk said, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Yes, I am,” Pike agreed. “I dream big, and I expect big, and I believe that you can make it.”

Kirk stared into Pike’s eyes and Pike stared steadily back.

“Here’s your drink, sir,” McCoy said as he set the bourbon down in front of Pike and dove into a chair. “What are we drinking to?” he asked, picking up his own drink.
“To new friends,” Pike said and raised his glass.

“New friends,” Kirk and McCoy echoed.

"To absent friends," Pike said softly and traded looks with Kirk.

"Well, as long as we're piling all sorts of toasts onto this one tiny drink: To new adventures," McCoy said, breaking the somber mood between Kirk and Pike and drawing their attention to him.

"To new adventures," Kirk and Pike both echoed.

Pike looked back at Kirk. “And to dreams, and the dreamers who dream them.”

“To dreamers,” McCoy echoed.

Kirk didn’t answer. He couldn’t for the big grin on his face. Damn, if he wasn’t starting to believe in the dream again himself, and he was going to give it one helluva shot.

Starfleet didn’t know what was headed its way.

But it’d know damn soon that something had struck its sacred citadel.

And that something was going to be James T. Kirk. Because he knew that he finally had a father's blessings. And that's all it took for him to finally believe in himself.
See Ya Around Campus

Chapter Summary

Jim Kirk collides with a stiff Vulcan instructor at Starfleet Academy.

Jim Kirk felt as disgusted as he looked. “Oh, hell, Bones, I got that ball-breaker Spock for thermodynamics!”

“Hell! Sorry, Jim. Guess your luck finally turned bad.”

"I can't figure out what happened. I signed up for someone else.”

McCoy shrugged. "The Registrar's Office must've screwed up."

“Well, it’s a lecture course. Maybe I can sit in back and avoid him.”

“For a whole semester?! You’ll cross paths on the first day, and then he’ll be watching for you. You’ll get labeled a trouble maker for sure. Just shut up as long as possible.”

“That will work only until he says something stupid.”

“It won’t be stupid. I understand that the guy’s some kind of mega-brain like you--”

“And you, Bones. Don’t forget that. You got a computer in your little finger. And that only indicates how smart that the rest of you is.”

“Thanks for the accolades, but that won’t help you any with that stiff Vulcan. It'll be HOW he says it. His sarcasm is so dry that students are begging for water at the end of his classes. He has no discernible sense of humor. And as for personality, forget it!”

“Jeez! Where did Star Fleet come up with him, anyway?”

“He’s some sort of whiz kid with an IQ off the charts. And get this: He’s some sort of princeling or something like that who will rule his own planet in due time.”

Jim Kirk frowned. “What the hell is he doing here then? Why isn’t he just sitting on his ass, waiting for his old man to die?”

McCoy shrugged. “Wants adventure, I guess. He’s been out on missions, but hasn’t found his place as yet. He keeps coming back to campus like a damn dumped dog that can always drag its worthless ass back to the kennel that turned him out.”

“He’ll be crabby as hell, then.” Kirk thought about it. “Poor bastard! Wants to fly and can’t. I can relate.”

“Come on, Jim! You can’t either relate to Spock! Your baseball glove has more personality than he has.” McCoy frowned. “I think that I just insulted your baseball glove. After all, it’s gotten around. It can be the life of the party. But from the way that I understand it, this Spock sucks the life out of any party unfortunate enough to have him for a guest.”
“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Thermodynamics 101,” the stiff acting guy in front of the chalkboard greeted in a monotone voice. He peered upwards at the rows and rows of seats rising gradually upwards and away from him in the lecture theater.

“My name is Mr. Spock and I am here to acquaint you with the importance of thermodynamics to science, to our lives, and to the exploration of space. Can anyone give me the Three Laws of Thermodynamics.” He consulted a list of names. “Miss Sullivan?”

A pretty brunette in the third row blushed. “I remember studying them in Physics, Mr. Spock, but off-hand I cannot state them as readily as I should be able to. I am so sorry, sir.”

In the second to last row from the top, Jim Kirk rolled his eyes and stifled a yawn. Miss Sullivan was a raging beauty, but must not have much brain matter between those pretty ears of hers. He wondered how she had ever got into Starfleet or taken this class. Maybe she was here to get a man and thought that she would score an alien. She seemed to be making moon-eyes at Spock. Wonder if he would fall for her clumsy act and flirting?

“Perhaps you are one who will profit from this class, Miss Sullivan.”

“Yes, sir,” she mumbled shyly as she blushed.

Give me a break, Kirk thought and groaned to himself.

“Perhaps Mr. Kirk would be kind enough to help you out, Miss Sullivan. Mr. Kirk?”

“Huh?” Kirk blinked and stared at Spock. Maybe his groan hadn’t been as silent as he thought it had been.

“Would you state the Three Laws of Thermodynamics for Miss Sullivan’s sake?” He glanced around the auditorium. “And for the enlightenment of the rest of the class?”

“Well, ah, energy cannot be created or destroyed. That's the First Law.”

“Very good, Mr. Kirk. Can you explain that?”

“Well, ah, in other words, we have to be very mindful of what energy we have to work with. We can’t go expecting to find energy where none existed a moment ago. I expect that would be a very important thing to remember in space travel.”

“A most critical thing to remember in space travel, Mr. Kirk. How about the Second Law?”

“Whenever energy is used in an operation of any sort, energy will be lost.”

“Meaning?” Spock prompted.

“Everything in the universe is slowing down. That’s why a perpetual motion machine will never be feasible. Because of drag, or friction, or whatever you want to call it. I’m sorry, Mr. Spock,” Kirk burst out. “But why must we go over principles that we should have learned in Sophomore Physics class?”

“That is an excellent question, Mr. Kirk, and I am happy that you asked it.”

Happy?! Spock was happy?! If that was Spock’s idea of happiness, Kirk decided, he was doing a remarkable job of restraining himself. He must be a hoot at a wake. Bet he won every time there was
a contest to see who could go the longest without moving a facial muscle.

But Kirk was losing track of what Spock was saying, and he just knew that the Vulcan must be treating the class to other golden theories and breath-catching examples of his inspired teaching techniques. Why, Kirk would probably be in such a daze of wonder when he left the classroom that he might be found later in some obscure corner of the campus, too befuddled to find his way back to his own dorm room.

“These are fundamental laws of science,” Spock was saying, “and are applicable to the other natural sciences. I am primarily a science officer, but am here to share my knowledge and experience so that you may profit from me.”

So share, Kirk thought. I’m all ears, but at least mine aren’t pointed the way that yours are.

Spock moved on with his introductory lecture to the course of study that he would guide them through, and the class moved ahead as Spock lectured and his students took notes. Kirk decided that Spock was finished with singling him out, so he could go back into his anonymity. It had just been a quirk that Spock had called on him.

At the end of the hour, the class was dismissed and Kirk stood up to shuffle out with the rest of them.

“Mr. Kirk, a word.”

Huh? Kirk jerked his head around. Yep, Spock was looking at him, so he galloped down the steps.

“Yes?” Kirk said.

The Vulcan seemed to be waiting for something.

“Sir?” Kirk finished.

“You seemed to be bored in my class,” Spock started.

“Hey, at least I was answering your questions! That’s better than Miss Sullivan was doing! But I forget. She had her hands full just trying to hold her head up with all that extra air she had inside it, didn’t she?!”

“Miss Sullivan was honest with why she is here. She wants to learn.”

“Hey, I wanna learn, too!” Kirk said, jerking his thumb toward his chest.

“And so you shall. You just have to be open to my teaching.”

“I don’t want to learn theories! I wanna be out there in space--” He threw his arm in a wide arc. “--proving them!”

“I most assuredly do, also, Mr. Kirk. But first we must ready ourselves for the task.”

“If you say that we’ve got to sing the song and dance the dance, I well might pop you a good one,” Kirk advised him with a tight-lipped, ironic smile.

“But we do, Mr. Kirk. Everything must pay the price for whatever it gets from the universe.”

“That surely is a basic law somewhere,” Kirk said, measuring Spock.

“The Second Law might well apply in this case.”
Kirk gave him a smirk. “The golden oldie about losing energy whenever we work.”

“That is correct. Nothing worthwhile is ever gained unless a fair amount of energy is brought forth by us.”

“In other words, we gotta sweat awhile for it all to be worthwhile.”

“That is correct, Mr. Kirk. I intend to make you sweat in this course, but sweat with your mind and not with your body.”

“You’re on, Mr. Spock,” Kirk said as he walked toward the door. Then he turned. “Oh, the Third Law of Thermodynamics that you managed to skip over in class? It states that no system can reach absolute zero. Because at absolute zero it would cease to move. It would have no more energy to move. It would just be a cold nothing standing there. So it is impossible.”

“That is correct, Mr. Kirk.”

“But I bet you’ve come close to absolute zero, haven’t you, Mr. Spock?” Kirk asked in a low voice. “I bet you don’t have any idea of what a warm, decent emotion is all about, do you? I bet you would fight something like that the way we Earthlings would fight the Plague.” And with that, Kirk whipped out the door.

Behind him, Spock stared at the closing door, then raised one eyebrow ever so slowly. He had never been insulted so soundly by anyone and yet not been so intrigued by anyone in a long while. Mr. James T. Kirk was going to be someone very interesting to know. Spock hoped that he was as interesting to know to Mr. James T. Kirk.

Jim Kirk loved knifing his cupped hands just so, then slicing into the water with nary a splash, then pushing the water behind him as if he was mad at it, then feeling the thrust it gave his body as he shot forward in the pool. He was swimming laps at the Academy gymnasium in an unusually aggressive manner, but he might as well have been plowing through rows of oncoming Klingons. Aliens went flying right and left in his imagination, and he grinned with glee as he saw the progress he was making through their seemingly unbreakable lines. Unbreakable, my ass! They just hadn’t come across James T. Kirk before!

One down for the Federation of Planets! And another one bites the dust! And another! Oh, look at them piling up on the sidelines! All those untidy piles of broken and defeated aliens with nary a spark of fight left in them! And all because James T. Kirk was wiping their ugly asses right outa this or any universe!

And then Kirk became aware of one lone alien before him, and all of the imagined aliens he’d slaughtered and the others he’d planned to dispatch disappeared with a magical Poof! The one real alien was standing at the edge of the pool where Kirk was headed. Spock had his hands clasped primly behind him and seemed to be watching with disgust something just beyond Kirk’s right shoulder. Kirk noted Spock’s severe gray worsted uniform with black braid around the collar that ended at the bottom of the jacket. That was the only decoration Spock had allowed except for the Starfleet insignia on his chest, his eyes squinting in disapproval, and that haughty nose flaring with heaven only knew what disgust. But Kirk figured the disgust centered around him, and that made him feel good all over.
Kirk grabbed the lip of the pool and grinned as water sheeted off his golden body. “Well, Mr. Spock! As I live and breathe! Thinking of going swimming, or just taking in the sights?”

They both glanced at the scantily clad young men in the rest of the pool. It was a scene to thrill the heart of any young maiden or any old lecher whose tastes ran to members of their own sex.

“Yes, sir,” Kirk seemingly drooled. “Does a body good to see all that talent being seduced by the water, doesn’t it?”

“Are you thinking of joining the swim team, Cadet Kirk?” Spock demanded, but did not permit Kirk to answer. “If so, I suggest that you do not attack the water in such a choppy manner. That action will make you tire easily. You will only be qualified for short spurts, such as a quarter horse performs in a race. You will not be trained for endurance.” Then came the killer: “You will not last very long in whatever you choose to do.”

Kirk studied him for a long moment. “Now just how in the hell can you presume to know what my objective has been out in the water today? For your information, I was mowing down Klingons right and left. I was making the Federation proud and safe by killing all of the damn green bastards I could get my hands on. Oh, wait a minute. I seem to have made a mistake about aliens, haven’t I?” he asked in a sneering voice. “Klingons aren’t the ones with green skin.” A heartbeat went by. Two. “Are they?”

Spock’s skin darkened up, but he didn’t so much as blink.

The guy’s either awfully cool-headed or awfully stupid, Kirk thought. Kirk was leaning toward cool-headed, knowing what he’d heard about Vulcans trying to keep their emotions under control. Kirk sure as hell didn’t want to get one of them stirred up too much, because another thing he’d heard about them was their strength. This bastard with him now probably knew pressure points and a whole lot of other things about the human body that Kirk might not want to get tested by an angry Vulcan.

Kirk decided to try a different approach. “Still say you’re down here to check out the scenery. How do you like all of us guys in our tighty whities?”

“Your skimpy garment is not white, Cadet, although it is as you phrased it ‘tighty.’”

Kirk gave him a knowing smirk. “It’s called French blue and I think that the color enhances my golden skin, don’t you?”

“I was not paying any attention to the enhancement of your physique, Cadet.”

“Oh?” Kirk asked in the same knowing look. “Well, let me give you the full benefit of a close-up view of a display of my physical charms.” And with that, he began rolling over and over in the water. One moment his front side was up, and then just that quickly, his well-rounded butt cheeks twinkled in the air. Then for a finale, he dove to touch his toes which thrust his butt up in the air and pointed at Spock.

Then the water churned as Kirk straightened, surfaced, and grabbed a lungful of air. He grabbed the side of the pool, spit water out of his mouth with a sputter, wiped water off his face, and slapped the surface of the water all in practically one motion. He’d slapped the water so that it splashed toward Spock’s black boots and just barely missed.

“Oops!” he said with a big grin as he frolicked in the water like a happy river otter. “Sorry there.”

“Yes, well,” Spock said with tight-lipped condescension, “Perhaps a brush-up with simple
"mathematics will improve your accuracy."

"Don’t hafta," Kirk disagreed as he treded water. “I tested out of simple mathematics.”

"As you apparently did out of my course on thermodynamics.” The barely contained look was still on Spock’s face as he gazed down in disdain at the impudent face sneering up at him.

“Oh, yeah, meant to tell you about that,” Kirk said as if suddenly remembering and regretting the oversight. “Gee, didn’t the student office notify you in a timely manner?”

“No, it did not. And really, Mr. Kirk, do you rely on others to tidy up your dirty work?”

Kirk blinked, halfway with real shock. Then he found back that famous endearing and maddening grin that showed off his beautiful smile yet seemed downright mocking. “Whoa! Did I just hit a nerve?! On a Vulcan?! Thought you had them removed at birth if one of the nasty little critters happened to get by your daddy’s super sperm.”

The tops of Spock’s ears and his cheeks flushed a darker green. Then Kirk remembered McCoy saying that Spock was a hybrid, that he had an Earthling mother. Kirk felt a flash of pity for the guy and a stab of shame for himself. He hadn’t meant to insult Spock. The guy couldn’t help his parentage. And it didn’t say a lot for Kirk’s tolerance of others, either.

“Look, I, ah, didn’t mean that the way it sounded. I didn’t intend to sound racist.”

Spock kept staring at him. He wasn’t making this any easier for Kirk.

“You can’t help who you are. I don’t dislike you because of that.” And then Kirk said what he said next because Spock was still doing that damn unblinking thing of staring at him like a damn comatose lizard of some sort. “I just plain don’t like you.”

Spock’s eyes dilated and seemed to broaden in his face, otherwise he remained impassive.

“I mean-- Oh, hell, I don’t know what I mean,” Kirk said miserably.

Spock drew himself up. “That certainly seems to be the case, Cadet Kirk. Perhaps you should take classes in diplomacy, psychology, and relationship negotiations. You seem in dire need of them.”

“They would help me to become a Starfleet captain, wouldn’t they?” Kirk thought it sounded reasonably humble.

But apparently not, because Spock shot back without thinking, “I doubt if anything would help you to become a Starfleet captain, Mr. Kirk.”

And just like that, Spock had found Kirk’s Achilles heel, just as Kirk had found his.

Kirk’s mouth dropped open and he knew that his eyes reflected the hurt he had felt by those condemning words. For they were the words of truth. Even strangers could see that Kirk would never be a Starfleet captain.

A furrow appeared between Spock’s eyes. “I did not mean that the way it sounded.”

Oh, but you did, Kirk thought. And no amount of backtracking will ever negate it.

“I was angry with you and I spoke before I thought,” Spock continued. “Vulcans never do anything hastily, but my Terran heritage taints me. It is a cross I must bear, and I apologize sincerely for insulting you.”
“Ain’t nothing wrong with being Terran. I’m one myself and it isn’t too bad,” Kirk mumbled, still treading water. “I know we’re flighty and illogical and erratic, but we’re a likable lot when you get to know us a little bit better.”

Spock’s lips almost curved into a small grin. “I do find you to be a fascinating species to study.”

“There you go! See? We’ve got our good points!”

At least Spock’s face relaxed and that was making a whole lot of progress, Kirk decided.

Kirk also decided to get the rest of it off his chest, too. “And I’m sorry for what I said about not liking you. I just haven’t given you a chance, that’s all.”

“Perhaps we have both been guilty of that.”

And that’s the way they left it because they were never going to see each other again, Kirk decided. At least nothing beyond brief glimpses across campus, and that in no way could be considered an intimate relationship. Kirk knew that he’d never have anything more to do with this guy.

Jim Kirk and Leonard McCoy sat sipping soft drinks in a student lounge on the Starfleet campus. It was part of a complex which included the lounge, a snack bar, the cafeteria, a bookstore, and a recreational area where students could pursue Starfleet approved activities such as non-gambling card games, television sets that showed only family oriented programs, and family night games such as Monopoly, Uno, and Clue. There was even a non-denominational chapel in a quiet corner for those who needed to take a minute to commune with whatever higher power they believed in.

Students of all sizes, descriptions, and ethnicities swirled around Kirk and McCoy, but the two friends had found a pocket of relative seclusion at a round table off to the side. It was nice just to sit here together and become anonymous to the rest of the world. Sometimes a guy just likes to become invisible for a moment and let the universe wash around him. And it’s always great if he has a buddy along who enjoys that same feeling of lost in space, too. It wouldn’t last long. In a moment the two would resume their lives. But just for now, let them enjoy this vegetative state.

Then Kirk jerked suddenly as if he’d been electrocuted, pitched forward and down much to McCoy’s alarm, twisted his head toward McCoy, screwed that pretty face up as if he was suffering mortal pain, and swore like an irate sailor. “Oh, holy hell, I can’t believe it! Surely you’d think I’d be safe here!”

McCoy was puzzled. “What?! What?!” he demanded as he looked around alarmed. Klingons in the cafeteria?! Romulans staging a raid?! Campus police on a crusade?! (Honest, officer, it’s just a coke! It’s not like we’re patronizing someplace on the banned list! Although I am surprised that you hadn’t found us at one of them instead of here.)

“I swear, everywhere I look, I see that guy! Doesn’t he ever sleep?! Doesn’t he have a real life?! Why me, Lord?! Why me?!”

“What?! Who?! Where?!” McCoy demanded, his head swiveling, his eyes flashing, becoming more and more agitated by the moment. Fight or flight?! Advance or retreat?! Prayers or curses?! A few clues here would help! But, no! Nothing!

If only he knew who the enemy was and where, maybe he could attack himself and have the element
of surprise. As it was, he was not going to tackle that sweet, little old lady tending the bookstore, and she looked like the softest target out there. Most of the students present looked tough, fit, and quite able to hold off any assault that McCoy might launch. Prudence told McCoy, therefore, that jumping just anybody handy might not be the wisest course of action.

“Careful! He’ll see you!” Kirk hissed in warning.

“Who?! Where?!"

At least Kirk had narrowed down the choice of adversaries to the males in residence. McCoy was kinda hoping that Kirk’s unknown enemy was female. Women were generally more ready to negotiate than engage in a fistfight. Besides, McCoy felt he could probably take most women in an out-and-out brawl.

“There! In the bookstore!” Kirk answered in a loud whisper. “Spock! He’s spying on me!”

“Where?! Where?! I’d like to meet that little bastard!” McCoy scanned the bookstore for a Vulcan lurking around with a shifty look on his face. “Honest, Jim, I don’t see anybody there except Miss Purdy. And she’s not looking too hostile today.”

Kirk cautiously raised his head. “I swear, Bones, I’m seeing that guy everywhere. I don’t know why I’ve gotten to be his newest interest, but it’s starting to creep me out.”

McCoy considered his friend. He didn’t seem like the paranoid type. Still, he was careful how he worded what he said next. “Maybe you’re imagining it.”

Kirk frowned at him.

“You are hitting the books awfully hard, trying to catch up.”

“Bones--”

“Look, you don’t have to blaze a trail through Starfleet Academy just because your dad did.”

It didn’t piss Kirk off the way McCoy feared it would. Instead, Kirk got a little sad looking. “Oh, yes, I do, Bones. He’s my incentive, my spur, my burr under the saddle.”

“I get it. He’s your inspiration.”

“Yeah,” Kirk answered softly. “That would be a better way of saying it, wouldn’t it?”

“Look, you wanna take the weekend off, go out on the Bay for some deep sea fishing or out to Yosemite and go hiking?”

Kirk smirked. “You’re a fisherman? Or a hiker?”


Kirk smiled back. “I know you would. And I love you for it.” He gathered his books together. “Recess is over, Teach. Back to the salt mines.”

“God, I hate it when you talk in metaphors,” McCoy muttered as he gathered his own books. "Makes me think you're gonna start writing books or something equally tweedy and quaint."

“Yeah, but we understand each other so well when I do. Earthlings use all sorts of figures of speech that confuse the hell outa aliens, especially Vulcans.”
“And we’re back on that guy,” McCoy muttered as they stood.

“What?! What’s wrong now?!”

“This Spock character. You’re obsessed with him.”

“Not me, Bones,” Kirk said softly. “I’d just like to know why he’s obsessed with me.”

McCoy brushed the corner of his mouth twice very quickly with his index finger, then performed the same two movements on the end of his eyebrow. All the way, he looked quite prissy and satisfied. "Maybe he likes guys."

"I more or less accused him of that. He did his popular imitation of Hell freezing over. I left before I got frostbite."

"Maybe you aren't his type."

Kirk took umbrage. "What?! Me?! I'm everybody's type!"

"Tell me about!" McCoy muttered.

Kirk gave him a languid smile. "What? Bonesy is jealous? Don't be that way, Bonesy. You know I'm yours."

"Yeah, and someday I just might take you up on that promise."


"Yeah, and anybody who believes that line is bound to wind up with a broken heart," McCoy muttered as he followed Kirk, but he hadn't muttered loud enough for Kirk to hear him.
Well, Now What Shall We Do?

Chapter Summary

Kirk and McCoy enjoy their student days and nighttime partying, but cannot seem to shake their Vulcan shadow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It started as it generally started with them with a prolonged session of horseplay. But they were weary from studying and needing to stretch muscles that were cramped from remaining in the same position for too long. The guys needed to pull new oxygen into their stale lungs and let off a little steam. Besides, they weren’t that removed from being teenagers. Well, at least Jim Kirk wasn’t. McCoy was a little bit further up the age ladder than Kirk, but it didn’t take much for him to drop everything for some good old-fashioned roughhousing.

And surely Leonard McCoy was about due for some fun. After deadheading through Ole Miss and medical school and collecting at least one broken marriage along the way, it was surely his turn to be a bad boy and enjoy himself for a change.

But he really hadn’t been in the mood that evening, even though Jim Kirk kept throwing balls of discarded paper at him. McCoy tried to ignore them, but they arched beautifully in the air and looked like they would miss McCoy by a good foot. Then at the last second they would swoop down as if a hidden timed device inside them had kicked in and brought them to a gentle stop between McCoy and his computer screen.

"Damn it, Jim, stop throwing your soggy germs over here on me."

"My germs aren't contagious."

McCoy snorted at that remark, but tried to focus on his studies.

"Besides, those aren't spitballs. They're just strips of paper. Would I do anything that gross? To throw a moist, soggy spitball at you? My old buddy? Hmm?"

"I wouldn't put anything past you," McCoy muttered.

"Besides, spitballs wouldn't get the same loft that strips of loosely crimped together paper would. Spitballs would just sink. Too dense, from all that spit." He wrinkled his nose. "It's science, you know."

"Well, I'm glad that you're getting some use out of your education at Starfleet," McCoy snorted. "Now let me get some good use outa mine!"

Kirk sat there and just breathed for a moment. Then even that lost its excitement and marvel. "Bored, Bonesy. Wanna go party."

"Maybe after finals are over," McCoy said automatically, like he'd said it so many times before this week. Which he had. Ad nauseum. A fact that Kirk could substantiate. Ad nauseum. McCoy was
A moment later another wad of paper sailed McCoy's way.

"Will you stop that asinine, juvenile behavior," McCoy muttered and unconsciously wiped at his eyes that were beginning to water from staring at a screen too long.

"Talk to me, Bonesy."

"Don't have the time."

"I'm bored."

"I'm not." He looked at Kirk and realized how bleary his eyes really were. "I'm not bored, and you shouldn't be, either. You better study."

"All work and no play makes Jimmy a dull boy."

"All play and no work makes Jimmy flunk out of Starfleet Academy flat on his lazy ass," McCoy muttered.

"Don't wanna be studying theory," Kirk whined, "I wanna be proving it." He knew he repeated himself too much, but it was a credo with him. He nodded upward, somewhere beyond the ceiling of their dorm room and somewhere far above the stratosphere over Starfleet. "Wanna be proving it before I'm old and gray and don't give a fart about it anymore."

"Don't worry. It's not going anywhere," McCoy muttered. "Now you, that's another matter. First you gotta get through the course of study, then the powers that be might consider letting you fly in one of their pretty starships."

"Somebody's gonna explore space in depth, Bones, and I wanna be one of the ones doing it."

"Gotta sing the song and dance the dance. Ain't no shortcuts. You gotta pay the piper, THEN, and only THEN, will they consider letting you fly in one of their pretty starships. And letting you command, well, that's gonna take a lot of paying the piper."

Kirk grinned as he studied McCoy. "What makes you think I gotta command a starship?"

"A crazier notion would be that I thought that you didn't want to command a starship. It's in your DNA, Kirk. You were born to do it."

Kirk grinned. "Yeah, I was."

"Besides, you're following in sacred footsteps," McCoy reminded him softly.

Kirk sobered. "That I am. George Kirk dying a few minutes after I was born gave me an awe-inspiring legacy, but put an impossible burden on me. He became a myth and I became a badly armed challenger. How do I chase a shadow?" he asked softly. "How can I ever win against something like that? How do I fight a legend?"

"By becoming a bigger legend, you dingus. And I have a feeling that you're gonna be one of the great ones, one of the ones that the next generation is gonna think is an impossible legend to catch. And the next generation and the one after that ad nauseum." He saw Kirk grinning self-consciously and blushing and knew it was Kirk's secret dream, the holiest of the holies. McCoy shifted himself around in his chair, relieving some sore muscles and finding a new sweet spot for his scrawny frame.
"Now get back to hitting the books, or you’ll become nothing but a Starfleet has-been who once was privileged to know the amazing Leonard McCoy."

Kirk gave him a lazy grin. “Yeah, he is kinda amazing at that. And he’s got great tastes in best friends.”

“Don’t go praising me. Ain’t gonna do you no good. I’m too busy. Besides, I’m immune to that boyish Kirk charm you got oozing outa all your pores like it was the nectar of the gods.”

Kirk studied his twisting hands and golden skin in awe. “And here I just thought it was just sweat, just like other people excrete. Didn’t know I had nectar oozing outa me.”

McCoy smirked without looking up at Kirk. “No way you’re just like everyone else.”

Kirk gave him a grin of appreciation as he studied him. “Aw, you’re just in love with me.”

“Yeah,” McCoy muttered, more to himself than to Kirk as he studied his computer screen. “But don’t let Jim Kirk know anything about it. It’d go to his head like cheap whiskey. Then I’d never get him to keep his hands to himself.” He paused, letting himself hear what he had been aimlessly muttering. “He’d be all over me like fleas on a coon dog. And everyone knows where that would lead us.”

“And where’s that, Bonesy?” Kirk asked softly.

“We’d be getting an itch that we shouldn’t be trying to scratch.” He looked at Kirk with burning eyes. “And then we’d try to scratch it.”

They stared at each other. Forgotten was McCoy’s tired eyes or his pressing studies. Forgotten was Kirk’s desire to go on a prolonged exploration of the universe. Right now, they had become aware of a new itch aggravating them and one that could be scratched with a lot less effort than a lot of other itches that plague the young, the doers, and the dreamers.

"Yeah, well, back to the books," McCoy finally muttered.

"Yeah," Kirk echoed softly.

They’d save it for another time. But it was definitely out there.

“Well, a real reason to be wearing our dress uniforms,” Kirk gushed as he and McCoy hurried toward the Reception Hall in the Administration Building. It was a balmy evening in San Francisco with no rain or fog or humidity. The weather couldn’t have been more perfect if they could’ve ordered it.

“We clean up pretty good, even if I have to say it myself,” McCoy answered, looking just as handsome in his uniform as Jim Kirk did.

“Wonder if there will be a lot of pretty girls there?” Kirk asked with his eyes dancing with excitement.

“Relax, Lover Boy, there will be plenty of pretty girls there. I expect any young girl from high school age through young, lovely professionals will be present to try to snag a real Starfleet cadet.”
“And that’s us, Bones. That’s us. We’ll get checked over more than livestock at the Grundy County Auction.”

“You would have to equate this formal occasion to a Country Western song, wouldn’t you?”

“It’s what I know, Bones. Country music has soul, and a song to fit every occasion.”

“I’m beginning to think that you’re right about that.”

McCoy had to grin at Kirk’s nervousness and excitement as they walked inside. Thank goodness he had grown up in Georgia where he had attended Cotillions and Teas and Balls as a way of life. They probably had little of that sort of thing in Iowa, just Kirk’s beloved Country music.

Kirk grabbed McCoy’s arm and pulled him along. “Come on, Bones, I see Christopher Pike.”

They made their way through the crowds until they neared Pike.

Pike looked up and grinned widely. “Jim! So good that you could make it!”

“Thank you for inviting us, Sir.” Kirk returned the grin as he shook Pike’s hand.

“Bones, always nice to see you, too,” Pike said as he shook McCoy’s hand.

“So nice to be here, Sir,” McCoy said smoothly. Great! Kirk even had the brass calling him ‘Bones.’ But at least the Brass knew who he was.

“Grab a drink, guys,” Pike invited. “The hard stuff is being allowed tonight. I'm sure that you young guys can manage without fruit punch.”

“Of course, sir,” Kirk said with a smile as he snagged some champagne as it went past.

McCoy grabbed a champagne cocktail, too. No lemonade tonight! Not that he wouldn’t drink it any time, anywhere! But this was champagne, for heaven’s sake!

“I’m glad for more than one reason that you guys are here.”

“Oh?” Kirk asked as he marveled at the sparkling drink he was sipping.

“Yes. You’ll get to meet some of the people who were with me on that two year mission recently. Great group! And a great ship! The Enterprise! Oh, here is someone from the engineering department now. He’s gonna be Chief Engineer if and when Hughes ever stops flying with me.” He snagged the arm of a passing genial looking man. “This is Montgomery Scott. Scotty, these are two Starfleet cadets, Jim Kirk and Dr. Leonard McCoy.”

“Aye, glad to be meeting you lads,” Scotty greeted with a twinkling eye and a firm, sincere handshake. “May you have a wonderful career with the Corps.”

“Thank you,” they both said as they responded to Scotty’s warmth.

“Oh,” Pike said. “And here’s my Science Officer. You gentlemen may know him. Mr. Spock, a moment please?”

Even as Kirk’s eyes enlarged and he sharply drew in his breath in the few seconds it took for the guy to turn around, common sense told Kirk that there could not be two officers at Starfleet named Spock. But, oh, how fervently Kirk hoped that miracles still happened and that this wasn’t the last guy on campus that he wanted to see again.
Well, no miracles tonight as Kirk saw the familiar green skin and dark crock bowl haircut. And the pointed ears, of course. How in the hell could he have forgotten the pointed ears so soon?!

“Mr. Kirk, good evening,” Spock said evenly.

“Mr. Spock,” Kirk mumbled.

“Oh, I see that you guys do know each other,” Pike noted.

“We’ve crossed paths,” Kirk mumbled.

Pike could feel the tension in the air, and he turned to McCoy who shrugged.

“Yep, small world,” Kirk mumbled which didn’t help the situation any. Then his voice got accusing as he aimed a pointed question at Spock. “Do you mind explaining just how come it is so small?”

“Mr. Kirk?” Spock looked a little insulted.

Spock was going to look worse than that when Kirk got through with him, Kirk decided. Special occasion or not, Kirk was going to make damn sure that Spock realized just how pissed off he was at him. “I think there’s more going on than even I suspected. I started to think that it was just an odd coincidence that I wound up in your class. Then I thought that you were taking a special interest in me when you showed up at the school pool. But instructors don’t hunt up beginning cadets like that. Then I started seeing you places that didn’t seem natural for you to be, and it didn't make any sense. It’d be different if I was something special, but I’m just an old plowboy from Iowa. Just what is going on anyway?”

“Actually, you are something special,” Pike answered sheepishly. "And what is going on is my fault."

“Yours?” Kirk wanted to know.

“Yes, Spock came into my office while I was talking to your mother, Jim. She asked me to give you a guiding hand while you’re in school here, and I knew that it would be too obvious if I did what she asked. But Spock here could do it without raising the same amount of suspicion that I would. So he’s been acting as my agent. I hope that will not bother you too much if he continues to do so, since we are doing it for your mother.”

It angered Kirk, but not as much as it could have. After all, Pike and Spock were only trying to help.

Kirk smiled. “How can I fault you for doing that? If you’ve eased my mother’s mind any, I thank you both for that.”

Pike slapped Kirk’s arm with relief. “Great! That makes me feel better!”

Even Spock looked relieved.

“Come on,” Pike invited. “There’s more people I want you to meet.”

Later on the way back to their room, McCoy said, “So that is the famous Mr. Spock. I liked him!”

“Well, I’m happy for you,” Kirk muttered.

"Are you sure you're aren't a tiny bit disappointed that he wasn't stalking you? You know, because he had the hots for you or something neat like that?"
"Come on, Bones! What are you insinuating here?!" Kirk snapped.

"As Shakespeare said, 'Methinks the lady doth protest too much,' or words of that nature. One's personal Vulcan in bed would be quite a coup. It might be worth a few bruises just to see if a Vulcan could really come unhinged and go all native." McCoy pulled up his head and grinned. "Yes, sir, that Spock might prove to be someone's special love muffin just waiting to be coaxed outa his shell."

"Sounds like a project for you, Bones," Kirk muttered.

McCoy held up his hands and rolled his eyes. "Not for me! No, siree! I've had my share of heartbreakers! That strong, silent type might freeze what I've got left of nerve endings."

"Or heat them up to a white-hot flame that sears your heart around his forever," Kirk said with a pleasant grin.

McCoy rolled his eyes in astonishment. "He's ready fired up your imagination, that's for damn sure!"

"I just know he can be damn persistent," Kirk muttered. "And all the while, he was really doing something nice. Who would've figured!"

"Are you gonna be all pissy about what they tried to do for your mother?"

"No, I’m gonna be all pissy about your bad intelligence network. You knew everything else about Spock, why didn’t you know that he had been Pike’s Science Officer?"

"No system is perfect," McCoy said defensively.

"Well, you’re right there. But you did know a lot about him. I’m grateful for what you did tell me,” he said diplomatically. “Someday I’ll have to show you just how grateful I am.”

Yeah, yeah, sure, you will, McCoy thought. “Whenever,” he said aloud, but he wasn’t holding his breath any.

Jim Kirk’s thanks arrived quicker than McCoy imagined and in a way that would’ve thrilled McCoy if he’d only known it was coming.

Finals Week was suddenly on them with all of its crazy study hours when regular mealtimes and sleeping hours are forgotten for cramming. Cadets needed breaks to blow off steam more than ever. And McCoy and Kirk saw that they took occasional time outs.

One particular wrestling match quickly got out of hand. Chairs were overturned and books were tossed around carelessly as the two brawny guys rolled around and around on the floor of their room in each others’ arms.

At last they stopped. Jim Kirk lay on his back on the floor and looked up into Leonard McCoy’s eyes. McCoy’s lower body was wedged tightly between Kirk’s legs which splayed away at painful angles from the two wrestlers. McCoy had locked his fingers into Kirk’s and was holding Kirk’s hands far above Kirk’s head.

Kirk was fairly well compromised and looked completely at McCoy’s mercy. But Kirk didn’t seem all that worried. In fact, he looked liked he was enjoying his defenseless position.
Kirk gave McCoy a devilish grin and winked broadly. “Well, now what do you wanna do with me, Bones?” he wanted to know. “Are you ready to take this action to its next logical step?”

McCoy became aware of their torsos slammed together. He became acutely aware of parts of his anatomy and of Kirk’s below him waking up and stretching to meet the new day. McCoy didn’t have to think too hard what that ‘stretching’ really was and what was causing it. He was a doctor. He had taken anatomy and had been a whiz at it. Still was. And if all else failed, he still had the “Hip Bone Connected” song to fall back on.

Why the hell not?!

McCoy unlaced his fingers from Kirk’s left hand and slammed his left hand laced with Kirk’s right hand fingers on top of Kirk’s open left hand.

“You can’t move either of your hands!” McCoy ordered.

Kirk looked puzzled.

“I can’t?”

“No!”

Kirk knew better. He could easily break McCoy’s grip. “Why?”

“Because I say so!”

Then Kirk sensed that a game was afoot. “Oh, well, if you say so.” He pretended that he couldn’t break the grip that McCoy had on his hands. “You’re right. That does makes a difference.”

“I thought that you’d see it my way.”

“I just had to have it explained.”

“Uh huh. I saw an opportunity to give you an anatomy lesson.”

“Oh, you did, did you?” Kirk asked with a grin. He didn’t know where this was all going, but he was loving it.

“Uh huh. Now lie still and listen very carefully ‘cause this is important stuff.”

“Uh huh.”

With his free hand, McCoy reached backwards and grabbed Kirk’s foot. “Foot bone.”

“Check. One of those at the bottom of that leg. Standard issued equipment.”

“Foot bone.” McCoy moved his hand several inches up. “Foot bone connected to the ankle bone.”

“Imagine that,” Kirk murmured with an idea of what was afoot.

McCoy dragged his hand up Kirk’s leg. “Ankle bone connected to the knee bone.”

McCoy had skipped a bunch of the stops around the foot, but Kirk and he knew that the interesting stuff was further up, the direction that McCoy was quickly headed.

“Knee bone connected to the thigh bone.” McCoy’s hand stopped halfway up Kirk’s thigh.

“What comes next, Bones?” Kirk dared softly. “What’s above the thigh bone?”
McCoy spread his fingers wide, crept up Kirk’s left leg, and never broke his unblinking stare into Kirk’s likewise unblinking eyes.

“Thigh bone connected to the hip bone,” McCoy answered softly as he caught Kirk’s hip bone between his thumb and index finger.

They both knew that if McCoy twitched that thumb any, he would be strumming some very private parts of Kirk’s anatomy. Kirk could even feel those private parts of his awakening to the presence of a hand that he would dearly love feeling on his alerted private parts.

McCoy read Kirk’s awareness and yearning in his glowing eyes. McCoy wanted to laugh at his power over Kirk, but he wanted more to reach out and touch that part of Kirk that was so close to his hand. He wanted to see Kirk’s eyes go all smoky when he responded to McCoy’s hands on him.

McCoy wanted to take it to the natural conclusion. They had been flirting around with this outcome for weeks. It would be so natural to undress Kirk and himself and take Kirk on the floor, or the bed, or while showering. Hell, there was no end of possibilities. They could entertain each other for days, for weeks, for months, until they were kicked out of Starfleet Academy for doing nothing else than what they wanting to do on the floor right now.

All that McCoy had to do was to lower his head and claim those luscious lips that were waiting for him. Those mocking eyes beneath him were daring him downward as was that mouth that he just knew would be soft and yielding to his. And those arms would come around him as his arms would go around that golden god just waiting to be claimed by him. All he had to do was to lower his head just a little bit lower, and then all of his dreams would come true. Jim Kirk would be his....

Someone cleared his throat. Someone else besides them.

Kirk tilted his head backwards and grinned in welcome. “Mr. Spock! Hey, there!”

McCoy leaned back on his knees, dragging his hand down Kirk’s leg as he did so. “Did anyone ever tell you that you have hellish timing, Spock?” he muttered.

“I did knock. I suppose that you were busy and did not hear me.”

“I suppose,” McCoy muttered as he hauled himself to his feet, dragged Kirk up with him, and tidied his clothing. He decided to let Kirk see to his own clothing. McCoy didn’t want to give Spock any more of a free show.

“Anatomy by Braille, Mr. Spock,” Kirk explained with a grin. “It’s one of those elective courses that is so popular on campus. You know, like Underwater Basket Weaving.”

“Well, yes. I have heard of those.”

“Did you have a purpose in showing up here, Spock?” McCoy demanded. “Or do you just like to disrupt anything good wherever you go? Is it your idea of spreading cheer, or are you just being your normal hard-ass self?”

Spock looked confused and almost hurt. “I am sorry, Cadet McCoy. I was simply checking on you and Cadet Kirk.”

“We’re just fine, as you can see. We were letting off a little steam because we’ve been studying so long. And I would appreciate it if you would kindly remember that I am still DOCTOR McCoy.”

“Of course. Doctor.”
Kirk knew that Spock shouldn’t be having his authority undermined like this. He slapped McCoy on the upper arm. “Come on, Bones. See the humor in all this. Mr. Spock saved us from something we shouldn’t be exploring during Final’s Week.”

McCoy smirked. “You’re right.” He glanced at Spock. “Sorry I yelled at you. That was uncalled for from me.”

“We will forget it, Doctor,” Spock said with a pleasant nod.

“We appreciate your dropping in,” Kirk said as he steered Spock for the door. “But we really need to be getting back to studying.”

“Of course.” He nodded at both of them. “Gentlemen.”

After the door closed on him, McCoy huffed out his breath. “Jeez!”

"I thought you liked the guy, Bones."

"That was before he started shadowing us everywhere. Anytime I look around, there he is. I'm getting so I check behind the shower curtain before I step inside."

“His heart’s in the right place, Bones. He seems to have adopted us. That’s kinda sweet in a way. There’s so many places in the city restricted to cadets that he’s just making certain that we don't get in trouble.”

“Well, he might have to cut the apron strings before I strangle him with them!”

Kirk laughed, but he hoped that he could help McCoy and Spock become better friends, too.

Chapter End Notes

“Sold (Grundy County Auction Incident)” is sung by John Michael Montgomery. County fairs are going on right now in small-town America, so this is my nod to them, another piece of Americana that may soon disappear.

I do not represent Mr. Montgomery nor do I own any part of any of his songs, including this one.
Can You Schottische To A Polka?

Chapter Summary

Kirk and McCoy have a protector whether they want him or not, but sometimes he does come in handy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Apples, peaches, pumpkin pie,
Who's not ready, holler ‘I!'
Let’s all play hide and seek.”

Leonard McCoy sat at a long table quietly nursing a bottle of beer with a group of middle-aged people. They were part of a vast audience ringing the sidelines of the vast community building, intently watching the whirring dancers performing the intricate steps to what McCoy figured was an old folk song from somewhere deep in Poland. It had taken something to get away from Jim Kirk and his ever hovering shadow Spock, but by cracky, McCoy had managed to do it! It wasn’t that McCoy was into folk dancing, he just wanted some activity that wouldn’t readily be embraced by the other two. If it eventually meant that he had to take up snow sledding downhill on a scoop shovel, then that would become the sport he would embrace. If it was good enough for his New England ancestors, then by golly, it would be good enough for him! Jim Kirk might tag along into the cold climes it would take for that activity, but McCoy figured that the frigid Vulcan would stay away simply when he heard about it. Spock might freeze up at the mere mention of the word ‘snow,’ so that was a plus right away.

“Bones! What the hell are you doing here?!” Kirk asked as he slid into the chair beside McCoy. "I had one helluva time trying to find you!"

McCoy took one look at the troublesome Kirk, heaved a big sigh, and tried to scoot away to the next chair, but Kirk followed him.

“Did you hear what I said?!” Kirk demanded as he tried to make himself heard above the squawking polka band and the stomping feet all around them.

"Heard what you said. Can't you tell when you're being ignored?" McCoy muttered back.

"Now, is that even nice?" Kirk was slightly miffed. Everyone wanted his company... didn't they?

"Sometimes I have to resort to being blunt," McCoy explained. "And even that doesn't always work," he mumbled.

"What?!" Kirk yelled.

"You're interrupting my concentration," McCoy answered instead as he indicated the dancers.

That was the first time that Kirk had taken more than a momentary glance at what was going on in
front of him. He'd been too busy looking for McCoy. But now he took a good look, and his eyes got big. "What the hell is that?!" he asked as he stared at the maniacal prancing of the mostly middle-aged dancers. Women were attired in peasant dresses with puffed sleeves and a dress style that did nothing to enhance their stout figures. The men were no better with their lederhosen and shorts, an outfit that's only purpose seemed to be to expose knobby knees and hairy legs. "And why in the hell are you watching it as if it was the most fascinating thing you've ever seen?! Those dancers fit my Upper Midwest heritage better than yours from the Deep South!"

"I'm trying out different cultures, Jimbo! It's time to branch out!" He propelled his arms in wide circles which caused Kirk to duck. "Time to spread my wings!"

"If you're not careful, you're gonna succeed in taking to the sky," Kirk muttered. "I've seen helicopters with less speed than you've got."

"It's the energy in the room. Can't you feel it?! Can you imagine the pluck it must take for some of them to even get out of their easy chairs?! And then they come down here to do this! Those talented folks are doing the polka, Jim."

"I figured as much," Kirk mumbled as he saved McCoy's beer from being swept onto the floor by McCoy's flying elbow. "I read the sign outside the hall."

"Fancy footwork they're doing, too. That takes real talent, you know? And probably a lot of wind."

"Yep. I know."

"The polka band is the Czech Melody Masters, but not the original members who were around at the start of the Twenty-First Century," McCoy informed him.

"I figured out that much, too."

"If we're lucky, they'll play another standard of theirs, but it's truly a sad song. Gets me right where I live. It's called, 'No Beer Today.'"

"I can see how that might alarm you."

"Tell me," McCoy asked as he cast blurry eyes on his friend. "Can you schottische to a polka?"

"Why ask me when you seem to be the expert here tonight. Besides, why do you ask?"

"Well, if you can't, someone better be telling that couple over there," he said pointing to the sidelines at a couple who were performing a much tamer dance than what was being displayed on the main dancefloor.

Kirk pressed McCoy's arm to the table and gave McCoy a reproving look. "It isn't nice to point!"

"Aunt Jean!" McCoy crowed with delight. "I didn't know you were going to be here tonight! I haven't seen you in ages! How's Uncle Phil? Same as ever? You sound just like you always did, critical as hell. Gee, I've missed that." He frowned. "You cut your hair." He gave Kirk a flirty smile. "But I kinda like it, though. Reminds me of a friend of mine. Jim Kirk. He's in Star Fleet Academy with me. You'd like him. He's a real buddy." He patted Kirk's arm. "A real buddy."

Kirk tried to give him a patient look. "Bones, I am not your Aunt Jean."

"Aw! Not my Aunt Jean?"
“No. Sorry to disappoint you. I am not your Aunt Jean.”

“I really loved my Aunt Jean, you know.”

“I didn’t, but I do now.” Kirk glanced around, hoping that they weren’t making too much of a scene. But he didn’t know how that was possible with the organized mayhem around them.

“But back to that couple doing a schottische to a polka,” McCoy insisted. "Why are they doing the schottische?"

Kirk shrugged. “Beats me. Maybe they can’t polka.”

McCoy nodded, impressed. “Makes sense. The polka is a difficult dance, compared to the schottische. I nearly flunked a Folk Dance class in undergraduate school because of the polka. Of course, if I had, so would’ve almost everyone else. Damn dance! You gotta do two kinds of steps at once. One set you do while you’re turning in a circle. You feel like a crazed corkscrew that’s gone berserk. You and your partner gotta look like a rustic set of demented Alpine dancers who've broken loose from the bottom of a cuckoo clock and aren’t sure which way to head with their newfound freedom. Whirling and twirling and stomping their feet and almost clogging. Hard on shoes, but damn good exercise, though. And a helluva distraction. Nobody knows what they’ll do next. Everyone will be keeping track of you, that’s for damn certain. Nobody wants to get in the path of that mowing machine at the speed they’re moving.”

Kirk frowned. “What the hell does any of that have to do with any of this!!”

McCoy studied Kirk with blurry eyes. “Makes sense to me. If you’re having problems with it, maybe you’re the one outa step, not me.” He turned back to the dancers and finished with a bored voice, “Great philosophical lesson to be learned there if you’re receptive. But I have a feeling that you’re gonna be bullheaded and stubborn tonight,” he mumbled with a martyr’s air about him.

Kirk sighed deeply. He might be bullheaded and stubborn, but McCoy was going to be difficult. He looked like his ass was firmly planted in that chair and had taken root. He wasn't about to move for love or money.

It couldn’t get much worse than this, Kirk decided. Then a motion out of the corner of Kirk’s eye caught his attention, and Kirk realized that the evening was about to get much worse and fast. He tried to slide down under the table, but that only exposed McCoy.

“Cadet Kirk. Dr. McCoy.” Spock said primly as he looked down at his charges. McCoy was sprawled all over the table, obviously inebriated and not paying any attention to him, while Kirk looked up with a slapdash smile. Spock didn’t know which was worse: the inattention or the absurd attention.

“Mr. Spock!” Kirk elbowed McCoy who snarled, but did nothing else to acknowledge Spock’s presence. “What a surprise! I did not realize that you frequented establishments such as this one! Are you a fan of 'oom pah pah' music?!”

Spock frowned. “While I realize that the music being played is loud in this hall, there is no need to shout unless you are experiencing a loss of hearing, Cadet. If you would be so afflicted, I would not be surprised, though,” Spock muttered. “I am certain that there are no undead left in that condition after an hour of listening to that music. It could truly raise the dead.”

“Why, Mr. Spock! You told a funny!” Kirk shouted, forgetting Spock’s admonition about yelling. “I didn’t know that you had it in ya!” He jumped to his feet and heartily slapped Spock on the shoulder.
Spock’s voice was barely contained. “Cadet Kirk. If you please.”

“Sure! Ya want me to slap you again?! Just tell me where, and I’ll be pleased to oblige you!”

Spock raised an eyebrow, but said nothing as he searched for properly stunning words of rebuke. Surely there were some that could wither Kirk in his tracks.

“Hey, look, Bones!” Kirk yelled as he turned. “Spock’s trying to figure out where he wants to be slapped next by me! What a guy! I told you that he was an alright person! Didn’t I?! Didn’t I?!”

McCoy winced. “Jim, please, have a heart. Must you bellow like an enraged bull? Isn’t it bad enough that the polka band is so loud, and now you try to outperform it?”

“Thank you, Dr. McCoy,” Spock remarked. “I find that this is the first time that I am in complete agreement with you. Which makes it a unique experience unto itself,” he muttered, almost as an aside.

“Well, hey!” Kirk yelled. “An evening of firsts! First time that Spock and McCoy agreed! The first time that we’re all ever at a polka party together!” He frowned. “Just why are we all at a polka party together, anyway?!”

“Ah, thank you for lowering your voice several hundred decibels, Cadet Kirk,” Spock snipped. “How come you’re exaggerating, Mr. Spock?!” Kirk demanded, returning to his loud voice. “I thought that a Vulcan couldn’t or wouldn’t do that?!”

Spock flinched at Kirk’s loudness, then looked puzzled. “Who is exaggerating? Surely not I.”

“You’re a pip, did you know that?!” Kirk wanted to know, leaning into Spock’s face. Veins were trying to stand out on his face and neck. “A real pip!”

McCoy grimaced, then snarled, “Damn it! Why are you two jokers here, anyway?! I came here to have a little fun, and then you two show up! Can’t a guy have a moment’s peace without you two butting in?! For all you know I may be studying folkways by attending this dance! A lot of countries have a national dance associated with it! This one sprung up in Eastern Europe and spread throughout the continent. Why, I might even work up a seminar of sorts to take on the road.”

“Very educational, Bones, but you can’t stay here. You’ll get in trouble. Isn't that right, Mr. Spock?”

“Both of you will get in trouble,” Spock corrected.

McCoy looked stunned. “At a dance?! Really?!“ He swept the room with his hand. “Take a look around, you two idiots! There’s nobody here less than fifty-five! What are they gonna do?! Raid a drugstore for arch supports?! Shoplift some milk of magnesia?! Mug someone for his dentures?! Stay up past eleven?!”

“He does have a point,” Kirk shrugged and said reasonably to Spock.

“And I have a point,” Spock retaliated. “This place is off limits to underclassmen.”

“Are you shitting me?!” McCoy demanded, stirred at last. “Are you really and truly shitting me?! A dance?! Attended by middle-aged married people?!”

Spock grimaced. “Please, Dr. McCoy. I am standing less than one foot from you--”

“Then act like it!” McCoy jumped to his feet, then promptly groaned and sat back down again.
“Are you experiencing problems, Doctor?” Spock actually seemed concerned about McCoy, Kirk noted.

“Nothing that another glass of beer wouldn’t cure,” McCoy muttered.

Spock drew himself up. “I believe that you are incorrect there. I believe that alcoholic simulation has begun having an adverse reaction to your system.”

“That’s one man’s opinion,” McCoy muttered. “Besides, who’s the doctor here?” He frowned with a new idea. “Say, maybe you can answer my question, Mr. Spock. You seem to know everything.”

Spock flinched, but chose not to let the two cadets notice that the remark had hurt him. “What is your question, Doctor?”

McCoy waved offhand toward a corner. “How come that couple is doing a schottische to an obvious polka?”

“Maybe they cannot polka,” Spock answered with a shrug that seem to say that it made sense to him.

“Hey, that’s what I said! They can’t polka!” Kirk yelled. “Sorry,” he said after he saw Spock flinch.

“Of course, there is the fact that the schottische is considered to be a slow polka,” Spock added.

“And he went and ruined it,” McCoy muttered. “And how, pray tell, do you know that?” he asked Spock with a look of exaggerated patience on his face.

Spock shrugged again because the answer seemed so obvious. “I googled it. I like trivia.”

“You would,” McCoy muttered.

“It is like a question I was once asked about a secret resistance group in Norway that thwarted the Nazis. The term was supposedly the same as a ski maneuver. I promptly answered ‘telemark’ which proved to be correct. Then someone else wanted to know how I ever knew that. Well, it so happened that I had seen a motion picture about the same subject. It starred Kirk Douglas.”

McCoy frowned. “You know of Kirk Douglas?”

Spock shrugged. “I had a lot of time to myself as a child, and I liked action pictures.”

“Did you watch the Star Trek and Star Wars movies?” Kirk wanted to know.

Spock shook his head. “I tried, but they were too unrealistic.”

“I can’t believe that we’ve got a movie buff on our hands,” McCoy muttered to Kirk.

“If you can be a music critic, then I can be a movie buff,” Spock retaliated.

Kirk grinned. "He's got you there, Bones."

McCoy eyed him critically and Kirk watched for a crack in the Vulcan’s facade. Nothing. Not even an eye twinkle. Damn he was good, they both decided. Their respect for Spock went up a notch.

“Now you gentlemen need to be leaving this establishment before you are seen,” Spock prompted.

“I think it’s too late,” Kirk muttered, looking over Spock’s shoulder.
A Starfleet Academy monitor approached the table where McCoy sat looking up at Kirk and Spock. “Do you cadets realize that you are in a restricted area?” the guy in the fancy red uniform wanted to know.

“It’s a dance we’re attending, Sergeant,” Kirk answered. “Family values and all that.”

“Alcohol beverages are being served, Cadet,” the monitor snapped back. “That is against family values.”

“These dancers aren’t exactly rebel-rousers,” Kirk pointed out.

“I don’t make the rules, Cadet. I just enforce them. If I don’t, then they’ll hire someone else who will,” the monitor snapped back.

“Excuse me, Sergeant,” Spock interrupted. “These men are with me.”

The monitor’s eyes narrowed. “Aren’t you an instructor at Starfleet?”

Spock drew himself up. “That is correct. And you need to be addressing me as ‘Sir.’”

“Yes, sir! But that still does not excuse these cadets from being in a restricted area.”

“Your duty is admirable, Sergeant. But you need to hear me out before you embarrass yourself.”

“I’m listening.”

Spock narrowed his eyes.

“Sir.”

“These cadets were telling me about research they are conducting about national Earthling dancing traditions. This evening’s subject covered a folk dance which arose originally in Eastern Europe and spread throughout much of the European Continent. I believe that they may even be working their research into a seminar.”

“You wouldn’t be covering for your men so they won’t get in trouble and thereby reflect badly on you, would you?” the monitor asked suspiciously.

“That is a fascinating deduction, Sergeant. How did you ever come up with it?”

The monitor was growing more disenchanted by the moment.

McCoy jumped to his feet, then caught himself as he wove slightly. Kirk and Spock both winced.

“We’ll prove it!” McCoy declared. “We’ll dance!”

“Perhaps the polka would prove to be too fast,” Spock suggested, to offer an excuse.

“Then we’ll do that damn schottische!” McCoy declared. “Come on, Jim! Let’s kick up our heels!”

Jim’s eyes widened, then he shook his head slightly. It was obvious that he didn’t know a schottisch from a slingshot.

“Doctor McCoy and I will do the dance,” Spock informed the monitor.

McCoy’s and Kirk’s eyes widened. The monitor looked skeptical.
“Come, Doctor. I will lead,” Spock said as he guided McCoy toward the other couple who were dancing in the corner.

“I suppose you googled how to dance the damn schottische, too,” McCoy muttered under his breath.

“I suggest that you trust me for a change, Doctor.”

“I gotta, don’t I? I don’t have much choice.”

Spock gave him a sharp look. “You always have a choice, Doctor. Right now, though, I would say that any other choice than dancing with me would be a very poor one.”

“Right now, Vulcan, I’d have to agree with you.”

“Wise choice.” Spock stopped, held up his right hand, and extended his left one toward McCoy.

“Place your right hand above your right shoulder and grasp my right hand behind your head. Then clasp my left hand in front of you. You will be assuming the position of the girl dancer.”

“The girl?!” McCoy fumed, glaring at him.

“Would you rather lead?”

McCoy rolled his eyes, but knew that Spock was the only one who could get them out of this mess.

McCoy stood beside Spock, extended his right hand so that Spock could grasp it over McCoy’s right shoulder, and joined left hands together in front of them.

"We're gonna fall on our faces!"

"No, we will not."

"Our asses then!"

“Come, Doctor, you watched the dancers enough so that you can fallow me. Alright, with the music.” He stepped forward and McCoy awkwardly followed. "And, left slide, left, and a right slide, right. Now, we walk: one, two, three, four. Left heel and toe, and out the lady goes. Right heel and toe and back the lady goes. Good. Good,” Spock praised as he caught McCoy’s hands again.

“It’s complicated!”

“Would you rather polka? It is faster, and we would have to circle, too.”

“The schottische is fine,” McCoy grumbled.

"Alright,” Spock coached as he reached for McCoy's hands to form the opening pose. "We will perform the ritual again--"

"The dance."

"As we wish. It looks like some sort of staid courting ritual to me."

"Mr. Spock, you can sure get a lot out of something that wasn't intended to be, can't you?"

"Be that as it may, we need to perform this ritual, whatever it is for."

"Agreed."
"Alright. And a left, slide, left, and a right, slide, right--" And they went prancing off together, not looking half as awkward as they were feeling.

When the dance ended, they rejoined Kirk and the Starfleet monitor.

“You two were lovely dancing together,” the monitor mocked.

McCoy looked annoyed, but Spock was unruffled.

“May I remind you that I outrank you, Sergeant?” Spock asked with an icy glare.

“On campus, maybe. But out here, I’m the biggest bull in the pen.”

“Then pray that I do not come across you on campus. Sergeant.”

The monitor looked uneasy. “Just make certain that your men are more careful about where they do their ‘research’ from now on.”

“You need not worry, Sergeant,” Spock reassured him. “I believe that they have been duly subdued by the evening’s activities. They have been impressed by the gravity of the situation and will do their research at Starfleet Library.”

“Good. I don’t want to see anyone misbehaving around campus, either,” the sergeant said and walked away.

“Don’t worry, Sergeant,” Kirk quipped, “You won’t see us.”

Spock whirled with flaring eyes. “Cadet Kirk! You should be at attention.”

“Oh, don’t be a ball-breaker,” Kirk mumbled.

“You have not even seen me begin to break your balls yet, Cadet. I cannot think of a more unpleasant task for an instructor to perform, but I will attempt it if it is required of me. And believe me, I can be very thorough if I am determined enough.”

Kirk frowned. Spock didn’t need to be doing anything extraordinary just for his benefit.

“Don’t worry about it, Jim,” McCoy breathed next to Kirk’s ear. “He probably doesn’t understand idioms. He wouldn’t actually try to break your balls.” He frowned. "I think."

“That’s a relief,” Kirk said with a deep sigh. He was kind of attached to his balls and was quite interested in their staying right where they were located and preferably unbroken.

“So was Spock being a jerk or not?” McCoy asked later.

“I think that depends on whether we’re going by our criteria or by his,” Kirk answered with a mellow smile.

“Well, of course, he’s gonna go by what makes him look good.”

“No, I think that he was giving us the benefit of a doubt.”

“I don’t get it!”
“Think about it, Bones. He had to have been leaning over backwards and giving us all sorts of leeway. That couldn’t be any sort of criteria that he had for himself. If he could, he’d sleep standing up, just so he didn’t baby himself.”

“You mean you think that he was spoiling us?! It sure as hell didn’t feel like I was getting spoiled!”

Kirk’s smile deepened. “You don’t understand how far he’s come, Bones. We have no idea just how strict his way of life has been. He’s harder on himself than he’d ever think about being with us.”

“That’s because he thinks that Earthlings are weak.”

“Maybe. And maybe we can change his attitude about that. We’ve got the time until we graduate, and then there’s the universe.”

"You think we're all gonna be together years from now?" McCoy's face said he wasn't quite believing it would ever happen.

Kirk gave McCoy his famous, flirty smile that hinted about a more serious side to him. "I think there's a good chance of it. In fact, I'm hoping we will be."

"Then I better be learning how to get along with him, huh?"

"I don't want you to be straining anything, Bones, but yeah."

McCoy walked away muttering, and Kirk gave him a fond look as he watched the guy who acted grumpier than he actually was pile down in a chair and turn on his computer.

Chapter End Notes

McCoy was wrong about the age of the song "Apples, Peaches, Pumpkin Pie." It was a novelty song written in America and was a hit in 1967 for Jay & The Techniques. It has since been adapted into a polka standard, but did not originate in Poland several centuries before. The Czech Melody Masters play it on "Mollie B’s Polka Party" on RFD: the farm and ranch channel.
Into The Wild Blue Yonder

Chapter Summary

Kirk and McCoy get the opportunity to go into space where they want to see some action. They meet some space pirate wannabes instead.

Chapter Notes

Part 2 of How To Humanize A Vulcan: The First Mission

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The door of the turbo lift slid open and Dr. Leonard McCoy stepped out onto the Bridge of the Starship Enterprise. Jim Kirk glanced up from the conn and smiled at his friend. Other crew members barely noticed McCoy’s arrival as he walked toward Kirk.

McCoy appeared to be tiptoeing rather than walking. Kirk understood why his old friend was doing that. None of it seemed possible yet for him, either.

“Well, here we are, Jim,” McCoy breathed softly so as not to bother the rest of the staff. Or perhaps it was not to break the illusion. Neither one was quite sure that their dreams were actually being realized.

“Yes, we are,” Kirk agreed with a grin, then continued in the same soft voice that McCoy had used. “Here we are just as we’ve always wanted to be: you in charge of Sickbay and me with this whole damn starship at my command. Damn sweet setup, if you ask me,” he noted, almost under his breath.

Then McCoy did a reality check for them. “Of course it would be a little sweeter if this was Alpha Shift and not the graveyard detail. And it would be sweeter yet if you had your captain’s insignia on your chest and I was C.M.O. of this tin can. Then it might seem like it’s really true.”

“It will come, Bones. It will come. I believe that deep inside my own bones.”

McCoy glanced around at the other crewmen efficiently going about their appointed tasks. Somehow, it all still seemed a little surreal, like Kirk and McCoy were watching a movie instead of real people. “Still doesn’t seem possible. I feel like a kid on the first day of school. Everything’s new. Anything’s possible.” He leaned close to Kirk’s ear. “We’ve got the universe by the ass, James T. Kirk, and nobody’s minding. Nobody’s yelling at us to put it down before we break it. We’re actually being trusted with big boys’ toys!”

Kirk smirked. “I know what you mean. We all gotta start somewhere, Bones. Not everybody gets to taste this much responsibility on their first real mission. Oh, we’ve gone out on training exercises. But this is the big time now.”
“Well, I gotta get back to Sickbay,” McCoy announced. “See you later and we’ll have something to eat. Breakfast or supper or whatever in the hell you eat in the morning after having worked all night.”

Kirk grinned. “We won’t always have these shifts. I’m gonna rotate in all the areas so I can get used to the feel of them all. A good captain has to know how all parts of his ship feels, not just the captain’s chair.”

“Still, it does seem to fit you pretty well, Jim.”

Kirk patted the arm of the conn. “Feels pretty good, too.”

As he watched McCoy head for the turbolift, Kirk remembered the day when he’d first met Leonard McCoy. The time between then and now didn’t seem as daunting as it had looked back when they’d first started their journeys.

Three years had seen Jim Kirk and Leonard McCoy both through Starfleet Academy. They couldn’t crow about it, though, because they knew that Spock and Christopher Pike and even George Kirk had performed just such a record in their own time. Kirk and McCoy were giants in a land of giants. If they’d picked lesser men to compare themselves with, they might be faring better now.

Kirk and McCoy also knew they were lucky to be even considered for this shakedown cruise, but it did pay to have friends such as Christopher Pike in high places. But it also helped that James T. Kirk and Leonard H. McCoy were both outstanding students who had zoomed through their courses, testing out of many of them without ever having stepped inside the classroom. They had earned their right to be aboard the Enterprise. They deserved their spots here. Nothing was being handed to them.

And now since they had finally gotten out into space, they wanted to prove themselves and have some high adventures. But they were stymied by doing just routine missions such as escort services.

It was just as Christopher Pike had told the disgruntled new officers that first day in space. "It isn't gonna be all high adventures, guys. I know that you're itching to prove yourselves, but this work is important, too."

"Why is that?" McCoy had wanted to know.

"There's bands of space pirates out there," Pike had explained. "Some of them are worse than others."

"What do you mean by that, sir?" Kirk had asked. "I thought that space pirates were space pirates."

Pike had grinned. "In most cases, yes. But there's one ship, the Fearless, captained by Joss Maggin and manned by a crew from Gerrend. Those guys just can't seem to make their minds up whose side they're on. They are just dishonest enough to be bad, but not bad enough to be ranked with, say, Klingons."

"Nobody's that bad," McCoy had mumbled.

"You're right, Dr. McCoy," Pike had agreed. "Anyway, we're out here to keep guys like Joss Maggin honest. He and that brute of a sidekick of his, Slade, need to be redirected. Every chance I get, I try to rehabilitate Maggin and his motley crew."

"I didn't know that you did humanitarian work."

"There's a lot to being a Starfleet captain, Jim," Pike had said with a smile. "You have to know when to be a peacemaker when you really want to tear into a bunch of guys and clean house."
Now Kirk and McCoy were itching for something to happen. But when it did, it was not what they had expected.

“We’re going to meet with Joss Maggin and his guys down on their home planet,” Pike explained. “It seems better to have a meeting somewhere neutral.” He grinned at the disappointment on the faces of McCoy’s and especially of Kirk’s. “What’s the matter, guys, did you think that we were going to be fighting Maggin’s bunch?”

“Well, yeah,” Kirk answered for them.

“Fisticuffs come when all else fails, Jim. First we negotiate.”

“And if that doesn’t work?”

“We negotiate some more. Don’t look so disappointed, Jim. Negotiation can be exciting. In fact, it can be just like a chess game.”

“If you say so, sir.”

“You watch and see.”

Gerrend was a Class M planet in that it was Earth-like in fauna, flora, and atmosphere, but was only recently being settled by pioneers from other parts of the universe. The place had a wide-open feel about it, and excitement seemed to be in the air as new settlers rushed to and fro. Kirk thought about Australia during the Mad Max era.

Goats and sheep and other livestock were being led around in the market square. Bleating and braying and cackling was everywhere as were the combination of the smells produced by all of those animals in a small area.

People seemed to look Scandinavian and Northern European with a preference for animal skins for clothing. Some wore blue jeans and work shirts and floppy Australian hats. Then there were those who favored a combination of the two styles. Those were the style, appearance, and national characteristics of Joss Maggin and the rest of his ragtag crew off the Fearless.

“I thought that this planet was supposed to be neutral,” Kirk muttered. “These guys look like they fit right in. This might even be their home planet.”

“I wouldn’t be stressing that point too much,” McCoy muttered beside him. “I figure that Pike gave a lot of concessions to get this motley bunch to meet him at all.”

"Guys, be on the alert," Pike cautioned, then nodded his head toward a bunch of men huddled against the wall of a nearby building. "There's Maggin and his crew now."

As if he had heard them, a tall, good looking man with a calm expression on his face glanced at them, noted their presence, and separated himself from the surly crowd of hulking men dressed in shaggy animal skins. Then he turned back to them and said something that his men apparently didn’t like for a general grumbling arose from the close formed ranks. He talked to them a moment longer until they reluctantly seemed to agree with what he was telling them. Then he walked forward and headed for the Enterprise group.
A much taller, bulkier guy with a bald head and an unhappy expression on his broad face fell into step beside the first guy. He looked like nothing that was happening today was in any way pleasant for him. At least the leader had a complaisant, agreeable aspect on his face, like he was halfway in the mood to listen to whatever their visitors had to say. His much larger bodyguard acted like he’d rather be tearing down a barn with his bare teeth than having to deal with Pike and his bunch of outlanders.

“The head honcho and his chief goon approacheth,” Kirk muttered. “And the goon doesn’t seem happy. Should that be our first clue?”

“Shh, Jim,” Pike cautioned. “But you’re right. That’s Joss Maggin, the leader, and his top aide Slade. Slade is rarely happy.”

“I’d believe that,” Kirk decided.

“Slade?” McCoy questioned. “First or last name?”

“I don’t know. Slade is all I’ve ever heard.”

“Probably all he can understand at one time,” Kirk muttered. “But the other guy knows what’s really going on. He’s sizing us up right now. Nothing much misses that quick eye of his, I imagine. Perhaps his buddy should be called ‘Shade’ because he’s tall enough and big enough to be that for his boss.”

Pike raised a silencing eyebrow at Kirk, but Pike's eyes were twinkling, too. He'd dealt with these two Gerrends before, and Kirk had made a fairly accurate evaluation of them. Kirk had a sharp eye, alright, just as he had said that Maggin did.

A motion from the remaining men drew Kirk's attention. "What's going on? Those two guys don't look too happy."

"They probably aren't. That's Dax Poral and his buddy Kai," Pike explained. "Poral is really a hothead. He's always trying to raise trouble."

"Kai," McCoy muttered. "Once again, only one name."

Maggin and Slade stopped a few feet away, and the two groups of men studied each other for strengths and weaknesses, just like men everywhere do. Women do the same thing about other women, but men are just more honest and open about it.

Then Pike stepped forward and extended his hand in greeting. Maggin reluctantly took it.

“Thank you for allowing us to visit your planet, Commander Maggin,” Pike started graciously.

Maggin nodded at him solemnly. “We are glad to welcome you again, Captain Pike.” He swept his hand to his side. “And you remember Slade.”

“Of course.” Pike traded nods with Slade.

Apparently that was as far as Slade went with diplomatic relations, Kirk decided. He probably preferred to do his negotiations with a weapon or rather simply with his fists. Anything more complicated than that was probably beyond Slade. At least a man knew where he stood with Slade, and Kirk didn’t know with Maggin.

Kirk could see bright, intelligent, probing, inquisitive eyes from Maggin. The local warlord was
constantly studying the men with Pike, and Kirk had to respect him for that. The guy probably had a lot of native intelligence if he was a leader. Time would only tell how he used that intelligence.

Pike turned to the men he had brought with him. “These are some of my crew. You may remember my Science Officer Mr. Spock.”

Spock traded nods with Maggin and Slade, but not handshakes. Spock didn’t touch just anybody. Kirk thought that was highly intelligent of Spock. Hard telling what diseases and manner of filth that these people of Gerrend had smeared on their bodies. Some of them looked like they lived with live members of the types of animals whose skins they wore.

Pike proceeded to introduce his First Officer and C.M.O. who likewise nodded. Maybe it was a social nicety of the Gerrends not to shake hands. Maybe Maggin was really being progressive when he shook hands with Pike. And maybe everyone else but Maggin and Pike were being rude.

“And these are men new to the Starfleet service. They have just graduated with honors and are anxious to meet the people of Gerrend,” Pike said as he indicated Kirk and McCoy and several others. “It is officers such as these who will deal with you and your people in the years to come,” Pike explained to Maggin and Slade. “I want you to meet each other so you will all become better acquainted.”

Oh, that explains it, Kirk thought. It seemed like an odd diplomatic ploy from Pike. Generally, the young stood off to the side and watched and learned as the older generation handled meetings with the indigenous people of an area or planet. But Kirk and the new ones were about the same ages as Maggin and Slade. How brilliant of Pike to throw the young together! They would talk the same generational language that Pike and his peers had forgotten. If Maggin and Slade’s fathers were here, then Pike and his middle-aged First Officer would be better matched to deal with the Gerrends.

And Maggin seemed to like the idea also of having contemporaries of his being at the meeting. At least that’s what Kirk surmised was Maggin’s interest as the pirate leader stepped forward and stuck out his hand to Kirk. Then Kirk got an entirely new thought about Maggin’s interest in him as the warm hand closed over his. Maggin clamped his other hand down on Kirk’s so that Kirk couldn’t have yanked away from him even if he’d wanted. Not that Kirk wanted his hand back from that glorious handshake. That was more than a willingness to be friends from Maggin, Kirk thought, as an electric energy flowed between him and Maggin. What Maggin had in mind went way beyond friendship.

“A young officer, James T. Kirk,” Pike was explaining to Maggin with a fatherly smile as if he was introducing young people who could be potential beaus and both families were hopeful for an eventual marriage.

What the hell, Kirk thought as Maggin moved on to meet McCoy and the other young officers. Kirk noticed, though, that Maggin did not clasp any of the others’ hands with both of his, nor did he smile down so fetchingly into the new set of eyes he was meeting.

Maybe Kirk was imagining all of it, that he and Maggin had made an immediate physical connection when they had gotten very close together for introductions. But Kirk did know that his hand continued to tingle long after Maggin had let go of it. What really sealed the attraction for Kirk was that other parts of him tingled long after Maggin had moved away, too. Hell, Kirk had to admit to himself as the meeting progressed, certain parts of him, certain hidden parts of him, continued to vibrate with interest and downright longing. Kirk hoped that Maggin had not picked up on Kirk’s interest. It might not bode well for the diplomatic mission of the Enterprise.

But then another part of Kirk hoped that Maggin realized how much Kirk was vibrating and how
much Kirk was hoping that Maggin was vibrating for him, too.

“What happened to you?” McCoy demanded later when he had an opportunity to lean close into Kirk. “You acted like a calf that got struck by lightning when Maggin shined up to you.”

“My god, Bones, are you jealous of a backwater heathen who is considered to be a space pirate?!” Kirk demanded, avoiding a straight answer to McCoy. “You must think that I’m not very picky!”

“I know you when you get the hots for someone,” McCoy muttered. “And you looked as goofy as a Freshman boy with his first crush on the head cheerleader!”

“Shh!” Kirk cautioned. “We’re going into dinner now.” He looked around. “This hall could seat a hundred people easily without crowding anybody up. Maybe they run the animals through and we’ll just gnaw off a bite. I wouldn’t want to trip in front of these folks. They might not be too picky about where their food came from or how cooked it was.”

“Most peasant people want their meat well done. No, I think they’ve got big families around here,” McCoy noted as he sat down at a banquet table. “Out in the streets, I saw several women with large flocks around them.”

“Probably not much to do on cold winter evenings around here except breed the next generation into existence.”

“They’ve got fertile valleys in the lowlands,” McCoy supplied. “Probably need all the hands they can get come planting and harvest times. Lots of daughters and sons make a cheap labor force.”

“Yeah, and I bet these people have learned at an early age the joys of reproducing their kind,” Kirk agreed. “They might be a simple people, but I expect that they probably learn those kinds of skills real young. After all, they’ve got all of those domestic animals around them breeding their little hearts out, inspiring the hell outa anybody who doesn’t have anything much else to watch. So who could blame the young folks for wanting to practice the skills they’ve learned from nature. And then, as they say, it’s all history.”

“You’ve got your mind in the gutter,” McCoy muttered. “Meeting that Maggin guy has tainted you.”

“What can I say? I'm easily inspired.”

Servants placed platters with huge slabs of meat in front of them. Bowls heaped with cooked vegetables sat steaming in the centers of the tables. Other platters held thick slices of some sort of crusty bread that not even a dedicated person on a hunger strike could pass up.

With a fork, McCoy lifted up one corner of the four-inch serving of meat bleeding onto his plate. “Must be rare. Reckon the blood’s set?”

“If we’re lucky. Told you that they might just run the animals by us,” Kirk muttered. “Our meat probably came off whatever animal provides the men with the clothing they wear.”

“Practical animals. They're so useful, coming or going.”

Kirk forked a couple of vegetables that were larger than his fists. “This must be what they call ‘rustic’ food.”

“Yeah, it was popular with farm people who led simple, crude lives back in the States.”

“Well, then, it should fit these people just fine,” Kirk concluded. “The whole planet looks kinda
At that moment a young lady wearing a bright smile and a white peasant blouse leaned in front of McCoy to give him a good view of her breasts trying to fall out of her straining clothing. “You want milk in your hot drink, ja?” she asked him brightly.

“Ma’am, that all depends on how you propose delivering it,” McCoy drawled in his best Southern accent and caused Kirk to choke on his own hot drink that reminded him of coffee.

The young lady looked puzzled, then burst out laughing and slapped McCoy across his arm as if it was all some big joke.

“Anna, will you come serve our other guests and leave the young officers alone?” Maggin suggested from across the table.

Kirk shot him a look and saw Maggin studying him closely.

“Wonder how Spock’s coping with that haunch of bloody meat he was served?” McCoy muttered. “If he tries to eat it, it’ll put him off his feed for a week.”

“He’ll probably major in those vegetables as big as his fists. Are they some kind of potato, I wonder?” Kirk asked. “And those yellow things are either big carrots or small rutabagas. They sure believe in getting their roughage around here.”

“That’s what I figured,” McCoy agreed. “These people must have wonderful digestion and elimination, what with all these root vegetables that they apparently eat. Earthlings could learn from them.”

“Well, if it’s an agricultural society, they probably don’t have many store bought foodstuffs.” Kirk grinned. “Listen to us, sounding like a couple of sage old farm boys.”

“Hell, Kirk, we ARE a couple of sage old farm boys, me from Georgia and you from Iowa!”

Kirk grinned back. “That we are, Bones, that we are.”

“You gentlemen do entertain yourselves, don’t you?” Maggin asked, suddenly beside Kirk.

“We never get bored that way,” Kirk answered with a suggestive grin.

“Are you enjoying your meal?” Maggin wanted to know as he leaned into Kirk. “Or are you a selective gourmet about what you eat?”

“Oh, I like a wide variety,” Kirk lisped back with hooded eyes.

“That’s what I figured,” Maggin breathed as he brushed against Kirk as he straightened and walked away.

“What the fuck?!” McCoy objected. “He’s after your ass! That was sexual doubletalk, if I’d ever heard it! ‘Are you a selective gourmet about what you eat?’ He must think that you’re a starving bottom! Or do things orally!”

“Relax, Bones. He’s just being a good host, checking with his guests.”

“Well, he didn’t check me out the way he did you! Did he leave the imprint of his chest on your arm?! I thought that he was trying to weld himself to you!”

rustic to me.”
“Has anyone ever told you that you’re beautiful when you’re angry?” Kirk asked with a languid smile.

“You’re trying to make me jealous!”

“I’m trying to eat some awfully bloody meat without it bawling at me for cutting into it,” Kirk complained as he tackled his food once more. “It’s so raw that it might get up off my plate and walk outa here.”

Spock leaned toward them across the table. “I recommend that you do not flirt with Commander Maggin, Mr. Kirk.”

"Thank you! That's what I tried to tell him!” McCoy snorted.

Kirk set down his fork. “The man came over here, I didn’t hunt him up! And he talked to me! Am I supposed to snub him or act like a shy, young thing who’s never been around a virile man before?!”

"So you have been checking him out!” McCoy's eyes were blazing.

"He's awfully damn hard to miss!” Kirk snapped back. "And he's awfully damn pretty!"

"I knew it! I knew it!” McCoy declared.

Spock's face got very serious. “I suggest that you remember that we are guests of the people of Gerrend and that you are in danger of causing an intergalactic incident.”

“By not spurning their leader’s advances?! Or by not eating their damn bloody meat?!” Kirk slammed down his fork and pushed back his chair.

“Stay in your place, Mr. Kirk,” Spock ordered lowly. “You will surely cause an embarrassing incident for Captain Pike if you leave.”

“Hell, I’m screwed whatever I do,” Kirk complained lowly.

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” McCoy muttered back.

“That Dax Poral didn’t like the way that Maggin was reacting to you,” McCoy told Kirk later. “He was glaring at you a lot. I think that he was pretty mad at you.”

“He’ll have to get in line,” Kirk muttered. “I’m not the one who caused this mess, Bones.”

“Oh, yes, you are,” McCoy argued. “All you had to do was look up at Maggin with those bedroom eyes.”

“I can’t help it if everyone on this planet is oversexed. I think they get too much inspiration from the animals that are forever fornicating.”

“You cannot know that the animals are constantly in heat,” Spock objected.

“Oh, yes, I can!” Kirk argued. “One, there’s so many of them! And, two, they’re so busy making more of them!”
“Mr. Kirk, you are being highly emotional.”

“Maybe I’ve got a good reason, Spock. Did you ever think of that? Everybody’s crazy on this planet! Just plain crazy! From the horny commander to the brooding bodyguard to the self-serve milkmaid! No wonder the men go out to be space pirates! They gotta get someplace sane!”

“That is not very logical,” Spock objected.

“Maybe not,” answered the sullen Kirk. “But it sure as hell is right.”

“Hey!” McCoy objected. “I'm supposed to be the emotional one around here! Don't expect me to be the voice of reason! Not on this crazy planet!”

Spock and Kirk both stared at McCoy.

“I think you're safe there, Bones.”

“Hey!” McCoy roared. “You could at least have to think about it! That isn't very flattering!”

“Hell, Bones, we gotta have a change. We’ll go out drinking and blow off some steam. Then maybe things will seem normal again.”

Then Spock spoke up. “I recommend, and I believe that Captain Pike could agree with me, that you gentlemen should not frequent the establishments which are known to be haunts of the space pirates.”

“Spock, are you trying to be a ball buster again?” Kirk complained.

“I am trying to keep yours from suffering that injury,” Spock reassured him.

“Spock, you’re all heart,” McCoy said sentimentally. “Has anybody ever told you that?”

“Dr. McCoy, I cannot accept something which I believe that you intended to be a compliment. For if I was all heart, I would be nothing else.”

“He’s so damn literal!” McCoy complained to Kirk.

But Kirk was grinning, his old humor restored. “You two are better than Laurel and Hardy, did you know that?!”

“I sincerely hope that is something good, Mr. Kirk.”

“Something very good, Mr. Spock. Something very good.”

Chapter End Notes

Any name of a person living or dead is purely coincidental.
Nerves Of Steel

Chapter Summary

Kirk and McCoy get in over their heads in a barroom brawl.

“I don’t know what the Brass thought was so wrong with this place, Bones. Just look around. Music. Women. Good food. Booze. Oh, did I mention the women?” Jim Kirk asked with a lazy grin.

The two new officers glanced around the bar. It was dark and noisy and some sort of exotic music was playing behind them somewhere. Some of the guys looked like they were wearing animal skins, and they wouldn’t have been out of place if they had helmets on their heads with horns growing up out of the sides.

Kirk leaned closer to McCoy so he wouldn’t be overheard. “Do you get the feeling that some big chested, hefty woman with metal plates for brasserie cups is gonna come striding out at any moment, backhand some guy across the face for smiling at her wrong, and start bellowing something Wagnerian? I tell you, Bones, this place has got atmosphere if nothing else. Why, Genghis Khan or Attila the Hun probably owns the joint. And just look at how they cook food. There’s gotta be the carcasses of three animals the size of American bison hanging over that roasting pit. Whoever thought up this place must’ve set that roasting pit up and built the saloon around it.”

McCoy took time away from his drink to frown at the carcasses. “I’m just glad that we didn’t run into those critters out in the woods. They look like they could take out a freight train. Probably nobody goes hunting drunk. If they did, they might be roasting over the pit instead of those burly critters.”

"Uh, oh, I think I see the reason why we were told not to fraternize with the locals, especially in this place." He nodded toward the door.

McCoy turned. "Yeah, that's some of the guys who were with Maggin alright. And they look pissed off about something."

"Probably us. Being here."

"Uh huh. Hmm. Dax Poral. Kai One-Name. And three others. Five of them all together," McCoy noted. "That's not an even number. We'll have to share one of them."

"I suggest the biggest guy, Kai. He looks like it'd take bookends to put him in his place." Kirk frowned. "I don't know, Bones. The closer they're getting, the bigger all of them are looking."

The big guy stopped in front of them and snarled, "You! Kirk! What are you doing here?!"

"Now, is that any way to greet a guy?" McCoy protested. "You'll hurt his feelings."

"That's not all I intend hurting, McCoy! I intend to make you cry like a baby!"

"I'd like to see just how you propose doing that, Poral."

"Bones," Kirk cautioned in a low voice. "I wouldn't challenge him."
"Me?!" McCoy turned with blazing eyes at Kirk. "He started it!"

"Yeah, I know, but--"

"Enough talk!" the towering Dax Poral bellowed as he sent their table flying with a sweep of his big hand.

"Hey! You spilled my drink!" McCoy bellowed.

"I don't think he cares about that, Bones."

"Well, I do!" And with that, McCoy jumped to his feet and sent a flying block into Doral's midsection.

Doral bellowed in pain as he fell backwards. The other four piled on top of McCoy.

"Oh, hell," Kirk muttered to no one in particular. "I like watching a good fight as much as the next guy, but those odds are a little one-sided." And with that, he jumped on top of the guys piled on top of McCoy and Poral. "Hey, Bones! I'm here!"

"About time! Needing a little help here!" McCoy landed a kidney punch to someone and was promptly rewarded with a rain of fists from two other guys. "Hey! That hurt!"

"It was supposed to, Enterprise eunuch!" Poral snarled. "That whole damn ship is manned by eunuchs!"

"Hey! You can't say that about the Enterprise! We've all got our balls!"

"And how would you know that?! Are you one of those fairies, like your Captain Pike is?!"

"Oh, I think you're in trouble with Kirk now," McCoy said as he sent a fist into someone's belly.

"Why? Is Kirk his favorite lay?"

That's when Kirk roared, tore into Poral, and the fistfight escalated by several notches.

"Leave something for someone else!" McCoy demanded as he ducked a punch.

But then a burly guy (How come they were all burly compared to Kirk and McCoy?) shoved Kirk backward until something stopped his body at the knees while the rest of him continued backward. Then downward. Fast. As he landed on the brickwork, he realized that he was lying on the brazier with his head hanging over the live coals beneath the roasting haunches of meat.

Kirk tried to yank himself aside but the burly guy, Kai, had Kirk by the throat and was shoving him steadily toward the glowing fire. He could feel the heat increasing at the back of his head. The guy above him was taking a great deal of pleasure in forcing the off-balance Kirk downward.

"Bones!" He knew it was useless to yell for help. McCoy would be busy and needing help himself with the other four guys attacking him.

The fire grew closer to Kirk's head. He began to smell hair burning. His hair. He would be scarred for life. That is, if his life extended beyond the next few minutes. This well might be it for him and for McCoy, too. He didn't see how they could come out of this battle unscathed.

"Enjoy the heat, Earthling!" the brute over him yelled. "I'm going to enjoy watching the flesh melt off your head! I might even eat your roasted eyeballs for a snack!"
None of those prospects sounded particularly charming to Kirk, but he knew he couldn't do a whole lot to help himself.

"Kai!" Poral yelled. "Damn it! Don't kill him! That'll piss Maggin off for sure!"

For one blazing moment Kirk thought that Poral was going to come over and pull Kai off him. That would really be nice and considerate of him if he'd do that.

But Poral must've gotten sidetracked because Kirk got no help. All he was aware of was Kai's snarl of victory as he slowly, ever slowly shoved Kirk back toward the increasing heat of the fire. Kirk knew that the fire was getting hotter. That meant he was getting closer to it. And that was bad news.

In the background Kirk heard an increase in the shouting and a rise in the scuffling, and then bodies began flying through the air. They must be, because Kirk could hear them landing and he even saw one sailing past him from the corner of his eye. McCoy must've gotten his second wind. Kirk made a note never to wrestle with him again. Bones must have super powers he'd never disclosed before.

"Watch it!" McCoy yelled. "He's got a knife! Damn it, you can't do that to him, you bastard!"

McCoy sounded really pissed now. Kirk would really like to know what was going on with McCoy, but he was kind of tied up with his own problems at the moment. And then he knew that if the fire didn't get him, the hand choking his throat would.

The burly guy over him saw Kirk's eyes glaze over from lack of air, and he laughed. "I bet Poral's right about you, isn't he?! You're wanting to get fucked by Maggin! If we were somewhere a little more private, I'd flip you over, rip those tight britches off you, and really make your eyes glaze over! I bet you've got a pretty hot ass and it gets a lot of use. You sure are pretty enough to be a good bottom. And I'm just the guy who's got what it takes to make you forget all the others who've ever had you!"

At any other time, Jim Kirk might be able to stir up a reasonable amount of interest in what the guy was proposing. It certainly had to beat getting his head roasted or his neck snapped in two. And from what he had seen of the guy, he was built like a brick outhouse. Might be an interesting interlude at that.

Then Kirk noticed the darkness at the edge of his vision that was getting bigger. "Bones!" he croaked.

"Jim! Oh, hell! Jim! He's getting killed!"

"Damn it, Kai! I told you not to-- Oof!" And Poral shut up as if someone had turned off a television.

Kirk tried to make a noise, but couldn't. All that would come out was a strangled whine. And Kai was enjoying every moment of Kirk's slow death throes.

Suddenly the guy holding Kirk down looked startled as he was jerked backwards and upwards. It was as if a giant fist had grabbed Kai and was flying away with him. Kirk coughed, trying to get the needed oxygen back into his lungs. He struggled to pull himself from the open fire before he lost his balance and fell backwards into the pit. But he was woozy, woozy.... And sinking, sinking....

Hands grabbed him, hands that were not trying to hurt him, hands that were pulling him up, hands that were trying to help him.

"Come on, we gotta move and give them room," a wild-eyed McCoy said as he pulled the gasping Kirk aside and tried to shield his disoriented friend. "Ain't nothing gonna stop what's gonna happen
now," he said with awe in his voice. "The Vulcan's too pissed off."

Spock?! Spock was here?! But how....

But there was no time for explanations now as McCoy pushed him away.

A moment later they stopped and Kirk had the strength to raise his head so he could see what was going on. He could feel McCoy's hands gripping his shoulders, but it was the fascinated horror on McCoy's face that held Kirk's interest. And no wonder. Kirk was stunned when he saw what was happening, too.

Poral and three of his men lay heaped moaning and writhing in an untidy pile on the floor. Spock held the fifth man, Kai, the man who had assaulted Kirk, by the scruff of his neck with one hand and was slapping him across his face with his open hand, back and forth, back and forth while Spock shouted at him. The look on Spock's face was full of pure hatred. Kirk and McCoy had never seen such rage.

"You!"

Whack!

"...do!"

Whack!

"...not!"

Whack!

"...hurt!"

Whack!

"...my!"

Whack!

"...ship!"

Whack!

"...or!"

Whack!

"...my!"

Whack!

"...crew!"

Kirk and McCoy glanced with horrified faces at each other, thinking that the beating was over. The burly man was already unconscious and dangling from Spock's hand.

But Spock's punishing hand swung once more.

Whack!
"...mates!"

Crewmates! He'd been saying "crewmates" and had just split it up into two syllables. And with that one word, Spock became one of them.

Kirk fought to keep his balance as McCoy suddenly released him and rushed toward Spock to grab his arm. "Spock! Stop! Stop it with Kai! Drop it! Now! He's had enough!"

Spock glared at McCoy because McCoy had reprimanded him like he was a misbehaving puppy. Then Spock looked tired and seemed to lose interest in the whole mess. In the next moment Spock might drop whatever he was doing, even if it was holding onto an unconscious and injured man, and walk away from the chaos without a backward glance.

McCoy realized what Spock was going to do and stopped that, too. "Don't! Don't literally drop him! He's hurt enough! He doesn't need to be crippled! Damnit, don't take everything I say so literally!"

Spock looked disgusted but did as McCoy said and hung onto his limp burden, but he didn't seem too thrilled about it.

McCoy glanced aside. "Poral is waking up. So are the rest of his men. Hope they've learned their lesson by now," he muttered. "No! No!" he ordered, putting his hands up to stop Spock who was suddenly glaring at the wounded men staggering to their feet. "They've had enough, too. We're not here to kill anybody. Remember? They're part of the good guys, too, just got sidetracked a little." To Poral who was stumbling toward them, McCoy said, "Take your guy and get outa here before I turn the Vulcan loose again. I have a feeling it wouldn't take too much for him not to listen to even me. He can get pretty determined."

Poral took one fearful look at the dedicated Spock, then grabbed his unconscious man from Spock's hands and retreated with the rest of his bruised and battered men.

Spock shot one look of disgust at McCoy, then moved away from him as Kirk rejoined McCoy. Kirk and McCoy both stared at Spock as if they were seeing him for the first time. And, indeed, this Spock they were seeing for the first time.

"What's wrong with that guy?!” McCoy demanded of Kirk. “Does he have nerves of steel?! Or a death wish?! Who goes wading into a brawl and fights the way he did?! Who takes on someone else's fight like that?!”

“I don't know, Bones,” Kirk muttered, just as stunned as McCoy was. It must've been quite a sight. Apparently McCoy had rarely seen anything so brave, or so stupid.

“Maybe he doesn't know himself,” McCoy muttered, still impressed.

“Oh, I think he probably knows just exactly what he’s doing.”

“Then why doesn’t he act like it?!”

Kirk understood McCoy’s anger. There had been a time when they wouldn’t have cared much one way or another what Spock would do to endanger himself. But that had been back before they knew him very well, back when he had just been an obscure member of the crew and a pain-in-the-ass officer.

"Why isn't he just a regular guy like us?!"

Kirk shrugged. Then he wouldn't be Spock, I suppose.”
McCoy mulled that over. "Yeah, you're right." Then he looked around. "Now where in the hell is he wondering off to?! Damn idiot needs to be on a short leash!"

Something about this whole thing didn't ring true for Kirk. "He's not exactly a flight risk, Bones. He's a grown man. He'll turn up eventually when he needs to."

"A fat lot you know about it!" McCoy snapped. "He's got to explain himself! And now!"

Kirk made a grab for McCoy's passing arm, but missed. His injuries were making him slow. Kirk muttered an expletive that would've made McCoy proud.

“Hey! Spock! Hold up!” McCoy yelled as he hurried after the Vulcan. "Where in the hell do you think you're going?!"

“Bones. Wait! Oh, hell,” Kirk tried to stop McCoy, but McCoy was having none of it. Kirk hobbled after them. McCoy and Spock couldn't start fighting now, and McCoy was just erratic enough to do something like that.

Spock turned, puzzled as well as curious as McCoy bore down on him. “Yes, Doctor?”

“What the hell was that supposed to represent?!" McCoy demanded with his eyes blazing.

“Pardon?” Spock asked calmly. "To what do you have reference?"

“That, that suicide attempt disguised as bravery that you just pulled!” McCoy bellowed in his face. "You don't step in front of a knife meant for someone else! That's, that's downright crazy and suicidal! That knife was meant for me! I won't have it, do you hear me?! Nobody commits suicide for me! Nobody!" McCoy was mad and scared and fighting tears, but he wanted that crazy Vulcan to understand what he was saying.

Spock placed his hands behind his back and gave McCoy a placid look. “I assure you, Doctor, that if I had wished to commit suicide, I would have completed my own annihilation even if you had been standing directly in front of me.”

“Over my dead body!”

“If it comes to that, then that is how it shall be. But I assure you that my code is not to take the life of another.”

“Just your own,” Jim Kirk mocked as he hobbled up with a stunned look on his face because he was seeing what McCoy had known all along. Now Kirk had a good view of the spreading patch of green blood on Spock's abdomen and was understanding a lot of McCoy's anger. It was actually fear that they were seeing a dead man walking among them, a dead man who was apparently not even aware of his own mortal wound.

Spock gave Kirk his full attention. Dark Vulcan eyes drilled into the crewman from Iowa, but Kirk did not flinch.

“You seem to have a code of conduct yourself, Mr. Kirk. Or at least you understand the concept.”

Kirk did not give an inch, either. “If you mean that I stand behind any pissing contest I get into, I do.”

“Perhaps that is the logical place to stand in that sort of contest,” Spock quipped dryly. "It would be ill-advised to be in front of one's opponents at a time like that."
Kirk’s eyes twinkled. For a skinny guy, Spock was damn scrappy.

“While you two are busy making calf-eyes at each other, I’ve got a man bleeding to death here!” McCoy muttered as he started digging at Spock’s side. "Didn't anyone ever tell you that you gotta seek medical attention when you get stabbed?! It's so much better than letting yourself just bleed out! Damn Vulcan! Doesn't have the sense God gave a turnip!” He made cussing sounds as he dug around at the wound site.

Impressed, Spock looked down at the wound in his left side. "Amazing. I did not realize that I had suffered an injury."

"Yeah, well, that's what adrenaline will do to you when you get hyped up while plowing a path through a wall of adversaries." McCoy glanced up at Spock's noncommittal face, then back down to his work. His own face showed a strange mixture of anger, awe, worry, and just plain being pissed off. "Whatever possessed you anyway into thinking that you were a one-man demolition team?!" he demanded as he roughly jerked on Spock in his rush to heal and yet not show anxiety. "You don't go picking up guys and beating the hell outa them! That makes your heart work harder, you ninny!"

"Ninny? Explain, please."


"That is hardly flattering," Spock objected.

"Wasn't meant to be." McCoy gave him an extra vicious jerk.

"Sorry," McCoy muttered.

Spock grunted with pain.

"If you don't go crowing about it," McCoy demanded. "You aren't outa the woods just yet."

"Well, don't go crowing about it," McCoy muttered. "You aren't outa the woods just yet."

"I am sorry that I am inconveniencing you, Dr. McCoy. Perhaps you should leave my medical aid to someone who is less emotionally involved." McCoy pinched his lips together when he saw that his patient was deteriorating. "Damn Vulcan!" he muttered. "That's what you get for being such a hotdogger! Now I'm gonna have to take you somewhere and get you stitched up before you bleed all over this beautiful carpet for these nice people!"

"Fascinating." Spock remarked pleasantly. "I was unaware that you were my personal physician. It is reassuring that you are with me in my hour of need."

"And just who in the hell do you suppose that is?!" McCoy demanded. "I am your doctor, and you better not be forgetting that fact any time soon!"

"Why would I be attempting to crow, especially in a wooded area? Those conjectures will need some further explanation from you, if you please." McCoy froze and stared up into Spock’s pleasant, inquiring face. Then Spock had the audacity to smile at him while he waited for an answer. At least a grin tried to break across his face, but he managed to fight it down.
McCoy and Kirk glanced at each other. Something was very wrong. Spock must be getting lightheaded from blood loss. Otherwise, he wouldn't be trying to grin.

Spock's baby grin turned into a puzzled frown. "Odd. I seem to be experiencing some vertigo and a general feeling of malaise. Sort of floaty," he ended in a dreamy voice a higher octave than he'd started. He looked up with amazement as if he was trying to count the stars in the sky even though it was only early afternoon and he was indoors. "Amazing. Just amazing. I feel as If I could float up into the sky and just become a will-o'-the-wisp or perhaps a piece of thistle down."

"Well, that happens after experiencing the blood loss that you are having," McCoy snarled. He grabbed Spock's shoulder. "Grab his other arm, Jim, before he goes down on us."

"I do not need your assistance," Spock protested as he returned from his floating journey in the sky. Then he got a startled look on his face. "Or perhaps I do need your assistance after all, gentlemen, although I generally make it a rule to require no one else's aid. But I believe that in this particular instance, I might have to deviate from the norm." His eyes bugged. "I do say, that is a peculiar sensation. Most peculiar indeed." With that, Spock opened his mouth as though he was going to yodel, then changed his mind. His eyes turned up into his head, and he started to slump.

McCoy caught him and tossed him over his shoulder like he was a sack of overcooked oatmeal. "Yeah, well, we'll discuss later whether you are or are not needing anyone else's help. Right now, I believe you do. Damn Vulcan!" he muttered to no one in particular. "He's starting to need a keeper! That would take a lot of pressure off everyone if someone was officially designated with that thankless job."

"Well, it looks like you volunteered for it, Bones," Kirk observed with a slapdash grin as he walked alongside McCoy and his burden. He tried to catch one of Spock's flopping hands, then thought better of it because it would look odd as hell if he was walking along holding Spock's hand.

"If you get any more cocky, Kirk, you're gonna wind up with this sorry sack of wet cement to carry! I don't care if your injuries are forcing you to walk sideways like a damn drunk crab, you'll be toting him!" McCoy warned as they exited the saloon with a lot of curious onlookers gawking at them.

Kirk held out his hands. "Hey, hey, not me! You're doing a great job!"

"Well, just remember that! Hey! Hail that hovercraft! We gotta get this guy back to the Enterprise!"

The first thing that Christopher Pike saw as the three guys materialized on the transporter pad of the Enterprise was Spock's butt. He never thought that Spock was that broad across the beam, but of course Pike had never seen that part of Spock so prominently displayed before, either.

His second thought was that he had not kept his vow to Amanda. Here was her son, injured, and Pike was primarily to blame. Granted, he had been nowhere near where the incident had taken place, but he still blamed himself.

His third thought was that Spock must have been grievously wounded. He worried about his young charge, because Pike truly liked Spock even though the younger man was stiff and difficult to get to know. Pike understood why Spock was that way. Pike also understood, although Amanda had not really come out and said it, that she wanted her son to loosen up. Well, he got loosened up tonight, that was for damn sure.
"Let us help you," Pike offered as he and a couple of red shirts stepped toward the pads.

"I've got him," McCoy muttered as he struggled to step down and around Pike. As he did so, he shook up Spock quite a bit.

Spock objected to the jostling around with a groan, and McCoy bit his lips together.

"Wha-- Wha's--" Spock mumbled.

"Shhh," McCoy said in a surprisingly gentle voice that did not reflect his worried face. "You'll be okay. We're back on the Enterprise."

"Let the guards take him--" Pike started.

"Outa my way, damn it!" Then McCoy saw who was talking. "Sir."

"Bones, you'll want to operate, won't you?" Kirk suggested softly.

"Hell, yes!"

"Then let the guards take Spock so you can get cleaned up. Otherwise, you can't operate."

"Over my dead body! Nobody else touches him! Nobody! Got it?!" Spock's moan of protest made him bite his lips together.

"That's what I figured you'd say, but you need to take a moment. Okay?"

"Okay," McCoy mumbled as he surrendered Spock to the red shirts.

"Hmm," Spock protested. "Doctor, what is going on?"

"Shut up, Spock! You're injured!" McCoy answered, then slumped with sudden fatigue as the adrenaline drained away in him.

Kirk saw the slump and knew McCoy needed support. He grabbed McCoy's shoulder and stared steadily into McCoy's eyes, sending his strength and calmness. "You'll be okay," Kirk reassured him with a nod.

It was what McCoy needed. He straightened and snapped into action. "Watch him! Gently!" he ordered the guards as he followed them out.

Pike glanced at Kirk. "You look like you need some medical attention yourself," he noted.

"Yeah, I expect I do. I've probably got first degree burns on the back of my head, and my eyeballs may need to be popped back into place. But outside of that, I'm in pretty good shape."

"I bet there's a story there."

"It was a good fight, Chris. The outcome would've been worse, though, if Spock wouldn't have shown up."

"Do you and McCoy need to be put on report?"

"Poral and his bunch can't tell us where we can go."

"Maybe not, but I can. It was for your own good. Now we've got an incident."
"We've got Poral respecting us more. At least he does Spock. Spock was a regular tiger. I've never seen him so pissed off."

"That's what happens when he sees people he likes getting hurt."

That gave Kirk a strange thrill. "He likes us?"

"You know he does."

"Yeah, I just wanted to hear it again. He and I didn't get off on the right foot when we first met."

"But that's changed now."

"Yeah," Kirk said softly. "It sure as hell has."

"He just doesn't know how to say it, though."

"That's true for a lot of us."

"Come on, you better get patched up. I think it's gonna be a long night for you."

"I know it is," Kirk said with a tired smile, but there was determination inside him, too. No way were Spock and McCoy facing this night alone.
Chapter Summary

Kirk sits with Spock after he has been operated on by McCoy, then referees one of their many disagreements.

Chapter Notes

A pissing contest can mean an argument in which "each participant is merely attempting to out-do the other one, not for the sake of the truth coming out, but simply to win." (www.urbandictionary.com)

'Pecker' is American slang for penis.

Spock began to moan as he regained consciousness. He grimaced and pulled protective arms around his belly. "Hmm," he moaned. "Hurts."

"Easy there," someone advised as Spock's hands were gently pulled away from his abdomen. "You've been injured and have had surgery to correct the problem. You don't wanna mess up your surgeon's handiwork. Not a good idea at all. He wouldn't take too kindly to it."

"Something must have hit me," Spock mumbled. "Do you know what it was?"

"Yeah, something big and sharp," Jim Kirk agreed with a grin. "Eight inches of surgical steel. Don't worry. Those guys aren't gonna be bothering any of us anymore. Dax Poral and Kai and the other three have been convinced to take up farming. It was either that, or leave Gerrend."

Spock opened his eyes, then narrowed them at Kirk as if the light was bothering him. "Where am I and why are you here?"

"You are in Sickbay and I am watching you so you will behave."

Spock frowned. "Why?"

Kirk nodded toward Spock's abdomen. "Hurts, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, moving around a lot will make it hurt more. That's why you gotta behave yourself."

"Quite logical."

"You're hooked up to get a steady flow of pain medication, but they'll get in here real fast with more if you can't tolerate the pain. Just let me know and I'll pass the word along."

"I can tolerate the pain," Spock declared.
"I figured you'd say that. You don't wanna be making a martyr outa yourself, either, though. I expect McCoy would frown on that sort of behavior. He's kinda feisty when it comes to the care and comfort of his patients."

"Do not worry. I will not suffer unnecessarily."

"Good. Good. Just so you understand. You just gotta take everything slow and easy. That's why you don't wanna get too rambunctious, either, so you don't mess yourself up and backtrack in your recovery. You gotta behave for me, or I'll lose my job."

"And we cannot have that apparently."

"Oh, no, we cannot have that," Kirk emphasized with a shake of his head and a serious look on his face.

"And just why is that?"

"Because if I'm not here, then McCoy will be. And it will be easier on you if I'm here instead of McCoy, believe me."

"And that is not a good thing right now, I am assuming?"

"You assume correctly."

Spock's frown deepened. "Why?"

"He's pretty pissed off at you right now."

"Why? I saved your lives."

"He knows that, but in the process of doing that, you risked your own life. He doesn't take kindly to his patients acting foolhardy."

"I do not understand--"

"That won't change much the longer you know him, either. But a friendly word of advice from someone who knows what he's talking about. Whatever he recommends when it comes to your health, you just say, 'Yes, Doctor, whatever you say, Doctor.' Then haul ass to do exactly what he said, and everything will be fine between you. Otherwise, it might all get rather ugly for you. 'Cause that guy just won't suffer fools when it comes to your wellbeing. He'll be your toughest advocate, but he expects you to do what he says with no backtalk."

"I do not understand how he can act so arrogantly with people."

That really made Kirk grin. "Funny. He says the same thing about you. Says you're looking down your haughty nose and favoring the world with your pearls of wisdom, whether the world wants them or not."

"Perhaps he would be wise if he paid closer attention to my 'pearls of wisdom,'" Spock noted with a disdainful sniff from that haughty nose of his. "He might well learn something valuable since he is in such dire need of humility and instruction. Especially humility."

Kirk laughed and shook his head in amazement. "You two just crack me up! I don't think I've ever seen two guys who could get in a pissing contest quicker than you two can!"

"You and your friend seem to be involved in a lot of that type of activity."
Kirk shot him a look to see if he was serious. Then he shrugged. "Oh, you know how it is at our ages. We're all so full of piss and vinegar. We have to get rid of all that extra juice somehow."

"Then perhaps it is a good thing that you have organized competitions to eliminate your excess kidney wastes. As for the over abundance of vinegar in your systems, perhaps you would profit from simply not having that liquid as part of your dietary regimen."

Kirk studied him some more. "You really aren't shitting me, are you? What you are saying is for real, isn't it?"

"Certainly it is 'for real,' as you so quaintly phrased it. If it had not been 'for real,' I would not have said it." His dark eyes snapped, and he set in his heels for the long haul. He was quite prepared and willing to take their discussion further and for however much longer it required for Kirk to embrace his viewpoint.

Kirk held up his hand for peace. "Let's leave the debate there, okay? That's more in McCoy's line anyway. Besides, I shouldn't be getting you stirred up."

"I am not 'stirred up.' I find this discussion to be quite stimulating. I find that I require mental exercise if I am to be confined to this austere room much longer. Right at the moment, you are the only thing present to distract me."

"Well, I don't want to get you too stimulated, either. Your doctor might not like it. Oh, speaking of him, you probably should pay the bill to get his tunic cleaned."

"I do not know why I should be doing something of that nature, but I will go by your recommendations. In fact, if it will help to expedite matters any, I will gladly purchase a whole new uniform for him since it appears that I am indebted to him for performing life-saving surgery on me."

"Well, you probably really weren't that close to Death's door, although it sure as hell looked like it there for awhile."

"Nevertheless, I will gladly honor my debt to him, even if it requires the purchasing of a whole new wardrobe of clothing for him."

Stubborn little cuss, Kirk thought to himself and understood McCoy's point of view. "Well, you don't want to go shining up to him, either. That'll make him suspicious as hell of your motives. Besides, it was just the top of the tunic that was damaged. You bled all over his shoulder and back and chest. Made a helluva green spot on both of you. Looked like you both got hit by a giant green olive."

"Just how did that happen? That I bled on his shoulder and back and chest?"

"Well, when you started to wimp out on us, he slung you over his shoulder to keep you from falling."

Spock's dark eyes snapped. "He slung me over his shoulder?! An officer?! How undignified!"

"Looked kinda undignified, too, with your ass shining up so prominently the way it was. I was just hoping that you weren't oozing out any gas that you couldn't control, being unconscious the way you were and all. For all that any of us knew, you could well be a secret sleep farter. That part of you was damn close to McCoy's face. But did that make any difference to McCoy? Hell, no! He just acted like it came with the territory. Made me think twice about being a doctor, though, I can tell you, or even about carrying someone that way."

"It seems that he should have chosen a different method of transportation."
"At the time, it seemed the quickest way to transport you. I was a little shaken by nearly getting my head toasted over the meat spit and by nearly getting my eyeballs squeezed outa my head, so I wasn't much help for him. By the way, thanks for pulling Kai off me. I really appreciate it."

Spock gave him a somber look. "You are most welcome, Jim. I feared that I would be too late to help you."

"You showed up just in time," Kirk assured him with a mellow smile. "McCoy couldn't have held out much longer, either."

"He was quite inundated when I arrived. It is understandable that he was quite upset by what was happening, and then finding that I had sustained an alarming injury bothered him immensely. But still, it appears that Dr. McCoy could have thought of something different than 'slinging me over his shoulder' like some dirty laundry."

"Maybe. But he was scared when he saw how injured you were. He just did the first thing that seemed natural to him. He gets kinda basic sometimes with his care of people, but he manages to get the job done."

"I am certainly glad that I had not lost control of my bowels during the fighting and soiled my trousers. It is hard telling what he might have done to me right there in public to have corrected such a situation as that. I am certain that most of the ladies present would have been embarrassed by my state of undress."

"Or impressed by what was being revealed for their scrutiny."

"There is always that option for them. We Vulcans are noted for our natural endowments," Spock shot back with a straight face. Kirk studied him a moment, then grinned. "Mr. Spock, that is probably the driest sense of humor I've ever seen displayed. You might make a worthy opponent of Leonard McCoy's growling bear attitude after all."

"I assure you, Mr. Kirk, that was not my goal."

"Still, you're gonna make my stay at Starfleet entertaining as hell. Between you and Bones McCoy, I'm never gonna be bored."

"Nor was that my goal, either."

"Well, isn't this all just a happy coincidence then?" Kirk asked pleasantly.

Spock looked around. "Just where is my doctor with the questionable bedside manner anyway? I would have thought that he would have had more interest in my case."

Kirk grinned. "Well, now, that's quite a story. Seems like after surgery, he wouldn't leave you in just anybody's care. I finally got him to get some rest by promising not to budge from your side. Knowing him, though, he was probably too wired to sleep and has been working his tail off in Sickbay while you and I have been loafing. He leaned close to Spock's ear. "Don't tell him, but I have taken a couple of bathroom breaks. But I did leave the door open if case you suddenly awoke and tried to escape."

"Luckily for me I did not do anything so rash as to awaken while you were using the bathroom facilities. I thereby saved myself from all sorts of experiences that you were apparently quite willing to share."
"Mr. Spock, you are an absolute hoot! I did not know you were such a comedian!"

"I assure you, Mr. Kirk, that providing you with comedic entertainment has not been my present goal."

"Yeah, but nevertheless, it sure is coming off to me that way." He wiped happy tears from the sides of his eyes. "Anyway, back to McCoy and his stubbornness about not leaving you in just anybody's care. I had a helluva time convincing him any different. It had to be him. Or if not him, then it'd be someone who was bending over his dead body 'cause that was the only way he was leaving your side. He was pretty adamant about it. You should've seen him."

"I am quite aware of how frequently he is willing to throw himself down prostrate at someone else's feet and expire. I have heard him state it twice myself in the last few hours and at close proximity, and now you inform me that he was quite vehement about it especially when I was incapacitated."

Kirk grinned. "Quite."

"Dr. McCoy seems to be worse than a latter day Ophelia concerning such matters, and he displays about as much drama and angst as that young lady did in her death throes in 'Hamlet.'"

Kirk gave Spock a grin of appreciation. "Why, Mr. Spock, you can be downright funny. McCoy will be amazed to learn that about you."

"I request that you do not mention my slip of the tongue, Mr. Kirk. He may make an unwise use of that information."

"Whatever you say. But I still think he'd like to know that you've got a sense of humor."

At that moment McCoy appeared in the doorway. He looked tired but determined and wasn't too happy when he saw that his patient was not resting. With his thumb he made a jerking motion over his shoulder. "Kirk. Out. Now."

"Well, I guess that's my cue to make an exit," Kirk said with a smile to Spock. He indicated McCoy with a twist of his head. "Good luck. I think you'll be needing it."

Spock looked around Kirk. "What if I wish for him to stay?" he asked McCoy.

"Protocol. I want to examine you."

"I am certain that I have nothing that Mr. Kirk has not seen before."

"It's for your own damned privacy!" McCoy roared. "I don't want you to be embarrassed! It's so you'll be comfortable!"

"I will be more comfortable if he is with me."

"Have it your own damn way then!"

"Thank you, Doctor."

"Only if he agrees, though. Kirk's kinda skittish when it comes to blood," McCoy stipulated. Kirk rolled his eyes at that remark. McCoy was just plain being an ass, and a hard-ass at that.

"Kirk?" McCoy questioned.
Spock and Kirk looked deeply into each other's eyes. Spock seemed to plead with him.

Finally Kirk grinned at Spock, then turned to McCoy. "Just what are you planning on doing to him anyway, Bones? Anything that might upset my delicate sensibilities? Gonna open his veins or put leeches all over him to suck the bad blood outa his system?"

"Why in the hell would I do that?!" McCoy roared. "This is the Twenty-Third Century, not the Thirteen! Medicine has come a long ways since then!"

Spock and Kirk's eyes warmed as they continued to look at each other, and they sealed a bond of friendship right there.

Spock glanced at McCoy. "Proceed with your drums and rattles, Doctor. I am prepared." He looked back at Kirk who gave him a soft look of approval.

McCoy lifted the sheet and began his examination, all the while grumbling under his breath.

Finally, Spock could take it no longer and looked at McCoy. "Doctor, what is the problem?"

"Well, luckily it isn't with you! You seem to be healing nicely!"

"That is the problem? That I am healing?" asked a puzzled Spock.

"No! How did you ever trust me to operate on you?! Kirk wasn't holding your hand then! Why do you need him with you now?! Apparently, you're just damn lucky I didn't sew your gizzard to your pecker! Then, whenever you farted, you'd get an erection that would be the pride of the corps! Everyone would be interested in dating you! Males! Females! Klingons! You couldn't handle all the sex you'd get thrown up against you! You'd be run ragged, but you'd die with a smile that no mortician could ever get off your damn green face! You'd be buried smirking!"

"Doctor, I beg to differ with your statement."

"I figured you would," McCoy growled. "The burning question is just WHERE you object."

"It is a well accepted opinion that was developed in the Twentieth Century that the concept of two sexes, male and female, is prevalent throughout the universe, is that not true?"

"Well, yeah, it's basic biology. And your point being?"

"Klingons likewise enjoy a division of sexes in their society. Otherwise, the race would have died out in one generation, and they would be just a distant memory in the annals of mankind. A footnote to species history, if you will, and nothing more."

"What the hell does any of that have to do with this discussion?!"

"You put forth the theory that if you had enhanced my natural mating equipment, I would be very popular to males, females, and Klingons. Even though I am no great lover of the Klingon race myself--"

"Who is?" McCoy muttered.

"I must protest on their behalf because you have excluded them from the universal rule of the male/female paradigm that is generally accepted by enlightened scientists."

McCoy blinked. "Of all the nitpicking, asinine nail-splitters-- What the hell does the biological condition and reproductive habits and assets of the Klingons have to do with the price of tea in
"Doctor, we were not talking about the price of tea in China or elsewhere. We were discussing the
concept of two sexes being prevalent throughout the universe."

"I know that! Lord, I know that!" McCoy nearly sobbed as he rolled his eyes.

"Spock," Kirk said softly. 'Not for all the tea in China' is an idiom that means that no amount of
anything would be enough to pay for something, because tea has traditionally been known to exist all
over China. The way that McCoy used it means that what you were saying was very finite and not
really pertinent to the discussion. Understand?"

"I believe I do. Thank you very much for explaining that information to me."

McCoy looked stunned. "You understood him?!!"

"Certainly," Spock answered. "His answer was quite succinct and easily assimilated. You would
profit by using a similar method of explanation of the curiosities of your language, Doctor. I had no
trouble at all with understanding what Mr. Kirk was trying to tell me."

"Maybe I should have sewn your gizzard to your pecker! And then you'd have more to worry about
than my poor powers to explain English! I could be making a fortune by performing those kinds of
operations! I'd have all kinds of men lined up, just waiting to be changed into super studs! I'd be
known as the 'Father of the Fart Elevated Erection!' Such a simple concept, too! It's a wonder that
nobody had ever figured it out before! Just ingest some food that causes gas in the lower digestive
track, and Pop! You've got an erection that Zeus would envy! And he fathered gods! Just think what
a mortal man could do if he was sporting around with a pecker like that! Why, I could make millions!
Billions!"

Kirk mulled all of that information over, then turned in amazement. "Do you do those kinds of
operations, Bones?"

"Why?! Interested?!"

"I may be. So might a lot of other guys. And we'd make a ton of money by selling dry beans to them
so they could do all that farting. We could corner the market on beans and create a monopoly for
ourselves. Think of the profit we'd make! On beans!"

"No, thanks!" McCoy threw a cotton swab at the trash can. "I didn't sign up to be no bean peddler!
Pecker changer, maybe! But no bean peddler!"

"Bones! I'm jerking your chain! So is Spock!"

"Knew that all along," McCoy muttered as he took several quick glances at Kirk's wide grin and
Spock's twinkling eyes. "You two are in cahoots, aren't you?"

"I do not know where that town is located, Doctor. But if I can have Mr. Kirk's assistance, I will be
most happy to reside there."

"Well, glad you two are finding so much happiness with each other." With downcast head, he
prepared to leave. "I'll just leave you two lovebirds alone so you can bill and coo to your hearts
content. With all of your plans to make with beans and being in cahoots together, you won't even
notice that I'm gone."

"Bones--"
"No use talking to me. I've got other patients, patients who need me."

"Bonesy--"

But McCoy was having none of Kirk's cajoling.

Spock studied him. "Dr. McCoy?"

"What?" McCoy mumbled without looking at him.

"I wish to thank you for saving my life."

"Oh, I didn't do that much. Just sutured you shut and making you rest until you have a chance to heal up. Nothing special."

"But it meant a lot to me. I appreciate that you took such good care of me and that you personally saw to it that I had the best care available."

McCoy looked up with a glimmer of interest on his face. "Really?"

Spock gave him a soft smile. "I said so, did I not?"

"Yeah, you did," McCoy said with a grin slowly spreading over his face. Then he sighed and all of the tiredness he was feeling settled over his face.

"I believe that you are the one in need of rest, Doctor."

McCoy rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, it does seem to be catching up with me. I still got some places hurting on me from that bar fight."

"Perhaps you should see to them. In fact I would rest easier if I know that you are not neglecting your own health."

"Good idea," McCoy said, rolling his shoulders. "Meanwhile, you can get cleaned up. Shower. Shave. Whatever it takes to make you feel human again. I'll have some food sent up. Vegetarian, right? That's what I thought. Get some good food in you, then you get some more rest. I'll check you tomorrow to see if you can be dismissed to bedrest in your quarters."

"And what do I do for boredom in the meanwhile?"

"Sorry. Not your social director."

"Ah," Kirk spoke up because he saw an escalation of open hostilities between them. "Is it alright if I bring a three-dimensional chess game here?" He saw Spock's eyes brighten and knew it would be alright with him. "It would exercise his mind, but keep him quietly in bed."

McCoy shrugged. "Fine with me. Maybe it'd keep you both occupied and outa my hair." He headed for the door.

"I'll be back in a little while," Kirk told Spock. "Do what he said." He scooted out of the room and ran after McCoy. "Bones!"

"Quiet!" McCoy ordered with a snarl as he turned. "This is Sickbay! Sick people are here! That's why they call it Sickbay!" He began to stalk away again. "Don't know how you could stand to pull yourself away from your new buddy," he grumbled.
"Bones, don't be that way," Kirk begged, grabbing his arm.

"You have something to say, Kirk, spit it out. Otherwise, I'm busy."

"Bones." Kirk kneaded McCoy's arms with his hands. "You don't have to be jealous."

"I am not--"

"Yes, you are."

"Okay, so I am. What of it? Want your promise ring back?"

"Bones, be nice. That guy needs friendship, too."

"I hope you two will be very happy together. It's a match made in Heaven." McCoy started to turn away.

"Bones. Please." Kirk tightened his grip on McCoy's arms and gave McCoy a pleading look. "Please?"

McCoy relented and with a huff, stopped.

"I can't lose you, Bones." Tears sparkled in Kirk's earnest eyes, and his lips quivered just a little. 
"Not my Bones." He cupped McCoy's cheek with one hand. "Never my Bones. I need you in my life. Nothing will ever replace you. Don't even want to try. Ever."

McCoy stared into the earnest eyes beseeching him. Then he melted. "Oh, hell, I know. Nothing will ever replace you, either, you dumb jackass. Just, just try to keep from getting yourself killed all the time, okay? I could take about anything, but that."

Kirk gave him a huge grin and slapped his arm. "There you go! Love you, too, Bones! Always will!"

"When I saw what Kai was doing to you and I couldn't get to you...." McCoy's voice trailed off.

"I know," Kirk said softly. "I felt the same way when I couldn't get to you."

McCoy bit his lips together, but didn't say anything. He couldn't.

"It'll be alright, Bones," Kirk said earnestly. "Just as long as we're together, we can do anything." He slapped McCoy's arm again, then started walking away.

McCoy looked up. "Where you going now?!"

"To get a three-dimensional chess set! I think I'm about to get my ass whooped, but I don't care! I think that guy's worth it!"

"Not half as much as you are," McCoy muttered as he watched Kirk hurrying away. "But then, what do I know?"
Chapter Summary

Amanda Grayson and Sarek wish to visit their son and thereby set up some interesting pairings.

“They’re gonna do what?” McCoy asked, reaching for clarification, hoping he hadn’t heard what he’d just been told, but knowing that the news was nonetheless true.

“Spock’s parents are wanting to beam aboard so they can visit their son,” Christopher Pike repeated slowly so that McCoy would understand him this time. He knew that McCoy was worn out, that he’d just put in a superhuman schedule, that he needed to go somewhere dark and quiet and just vegetate for a number of hours. But Pike needed some answers and he needed them fast. He had hurried to Sickbay to confer with McCoy to see if just such a visit was needed or even feasible. “They wondered if Spock was up to having visitors yet.”

McCoy closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose with his fingers. He didn't know if he was ready to explain their son’s condition and prognosis to a set of anxious parents. When he pulled his shaky hand away from his face and opened his eyes again, he blinked them to clear them, but they looked weaker than ever. “And I suppose his folks are just a stone’s throw away from us, even as we speak.”

Pike grinned slightly. “In a manner of speaking, yes.”

“How is that even possible? We’re nowhere close to Vulcan.” When things didn’t make sense, especially when he was tired and couldn’t think straight, McCoy couldn’t even begin to get a grasp on the reality of a puzzling situation. It was in times like this that he came closest to relating to Spock when he had a problem with something’s logic. No wonder the Vulcan acted short-fused when he thought he was surrounded by idiots. It was the only way he could act.

Pike shrugged. “Nevertheless, they are nearby awaiting word that they can beam aboard.”

“What do they have?” McCoy asked as he stretched his back, then walked toward his office with Pike following him. “Second sight? Although this has seemed like a never ending night to the rest of us, Spock got hurt just a few short hours ago. And how could his parents get here so fast? The Enterprise isn’t exactly in their neighborhood.”

“Helluva coincidence, Bones. They were headed home from a conference when they heard where we were and decided to divert their journey long enough to pay us a visit. I think what really convinced them was that they had heard of Spock’s injuries. It all just seemed too convenient for them to ignore, apparently. Took care of two obligations at once, I suppose.”

“Heaven forbid that they let Spock think that they were visiting because they were worried about him, or something wildly sentimental like that,” McCoy mumbled as he picked up a pot. “Coffee? I can get another cup for you.”

“No, thanks. You go ahead, though. I know that you’re tired. You’ve had quite an evening and next day, haven’t you? First that fistfight, then operating on Spock, then working nearly a full shift. You
really didn't have to take this shift, you know," Pike reproved gently.

"I know," McCoy said as he closed his eyes and rubbed the back of his neck. "I was too wired to calm down, if you know what I mean."

Pike grinned at him. "Yeah, I do. But now you probably are in need of some serious sack time. I suggest you take it, before I have to make it an order."

McCoy grinned sheepishly. "Yes, sir."

Pike slapped McCoy's upper arm. "Good man! Now do what you're told. It's well deserved."

"Yeah. Wouldn't hurt." Now that the excitement was over and the crisis calmed and his shift was about over, McCoy could acknowledge his weariness that appeared as dark circles at the edges of his peripheral vision. Fatigue washed over him in waves and he felt his muscles relaxing all over his body. Any moment he could truly melt in his tracks and assume the formless puddle that his weary body envisioned for him. He wanted to become one with the floor, but it sounded like he couldn’t yet.

It was as if Pike had read his mind. "Look, if it’d help, I could talk to his folks for you. We’re old friends. You just get some rest and see us tomorrow. How about that?"

McCoy gave Pike a happy, slapdash smile. "Best plan I’ve heard in awhile. My own aches and pains should be over by then."

"That’s right. You got worked over pretty good before Spock rescued you, didn’t you?"

"Well, I wasn’t exactly a complacent punching bag for Poral and his bunch, if that’s what you’re implying!" McCoy snapped. "I did get in some of my own licks! They’ll remember me, that’s for damn sure!"

"I know, I know," Pike cajoled him. "Is Spock doing okay right now?"

McCoy frowned. "Last I saw, he and Kirk were planning on playing three-dimensional chess and having a helluva good time. Wish that was all I had to do."

"As I understand it, that was the only way you’d relinquish your watch over Spock," Pike reminded him gently. "If Kirk took over."

"Kirk talks a lot," McCoy mumbled.

"Take care of yourself," Pike advised, but McCoy was already making plans for a long period of sleep.

Thirty-six hours later, McCoy was feeling like he just might live after all. An undisturbed rest bookended by a couple of lengthy, soothing showers and meals featuring foods rich in proteins had made him think he could clean up this end of the universe of Klingons, space pirates, or anything else lurking around with a piss-ant attitude and needed killing.

McCoy entered the small reception salon to find an intimate group waiting for him. Actually, they weren’t waiting for him, it just seemed that way. When he studied the scene closer, he could see it
was two separate groups and one guy sitting all by himself. In one corner Christopher Pike and Amanda Grayson huddled together as if they were continuing a discussion they had been having before a couple of guys named Sarek and Spock had interrupted them and gotten in their way. And off in another corner, Sarek was hovering over Jim Kirk in a possessive way as if Kirk had a gilded ass and Sarek was after it.

McCoy smirked to himself. Sarek probably was doing what anybody did who’d been charmed by the charismatic Kirk. Jim Kirk was an experience alright. McCoy could testify to that, for damn sure. He’d been half in love with the golden-god-among-us since the moment he’d first laid eyes on Kirk pulling himself up out of the gutter to sit on the edge of a dirty curb. But the way that Kirk had done it, he had looked like he was assuming a throne, not trying to regroup after a fistfight. Looked like Kirk was still packing in the fans, McCoy decided, if Sarek’s animated face was any indication. And McCoy was certain that Sarek’s reaction was typical of Kirk’s sexual appeal.

That left only one person in the room in a conversational wasteland: Spock. The Vulcan didn’t look in bad shape, McCoy thought as he approached him, so it was probably alright for him to be out of bed. But Spock seemed to be staring into middle space as if he was in a self-imposed trance. Probably a defensive stance to hide the fact that he was by himself. McCoy didn't blame Spock. He'd probably want to go into a trance, too, in the same situation.

“Released by whoever was on duty?” McCoy asked.

“Hmm?” Spock looked up, then visibly relaxed. He actually seemed happy to see McCoy. Well, knowing Spock, it was probably relief and not happiness. “Oh. Dr. McCoy. Good evening.”

“Good evening to you, too,” McCoy agreed as he sat down. “Dr. Browning thought you were healed enough to leave Sickbay?”

“Yes. As long as I do not do anything too strenuous, I may even attend a function such as this.”

“Well, even I would attest that this function is causing no strain on your person,” McCoy noted as he and Spock turned to study the other two groups that were lost in their own worlds.

“Quite,” Spock agreed.

“So, how about those Cubbies?” McCoy asked after a few moments of quiet solitude passing between them.

Spock turned back to McCoy with a puzzled look. “Pardon?”

“That’s one of those cliches that guys are supposed to use to start a conversation with other guys who aren’t known to them that well socially. The Chicago Cubs are a baseball team, and sports is something that is generally thought of as a safe topic for guys to discuss.” Then he added because Spock still had a blank look on his face, “Because most guys have a rudimentary knowledge of most popular sports.”

“Not I.”

“And I said ‘most’ guys. 'How about those Cubbies' is sometimes referred to as an icebreaker.”

“There is ice to be broken?”

“And that’s why I didn’t use that term in my original statement,” McCoy explained in a tired voice and wondered how he had ever gotten into this conversation. “I used ‘cliches’ and you seemed to understand that, although it really didn’t define it, either.”
"But I understood ‘cliches’ where I did not comprehend ‘icebreaker.’"

"I know you did.” How to get out of this mire? “I guess we really don’t have that much in common,” he finally had to admit.

“But we do have a lot in common. We have both attended Starfleet Academy and are now serving on the same starship, the Enterprise.”

“A lot of people can say that.”

“And we are James Kirk’s closest friends.”

McCoy smiled. “Now, THAT is something I can agree with. We do have that much in common that no one else has, don’t we?”

"Most assuredly, Doctor,” Spock agreed as he returned the pleasant smile.

It was the first time they had ever been that companionable with each other, and they both were finding it very gratifying. And surprising. In fact, it was most agreeable to be in each other's company.

Across the room Christopher Pike was smiling in appreciation at Amanda Grayson. “This seems like old times,” he remarked.

“Oh?” she asked with haughty interest. “How is that, Christopher?”

“We’re looking at each other like sweethearts, and Sarek is hovering close by, acting like he isn’t watching us. But all the while, he is taking in every move we make and every glance we exchange.”

“Really?” she asked coolly. “And here I thought that he was quite taken by young Mr. Kirk.”

“Oh, Sarek is that, too. Jim Kirk is quite a toothsome morsel.”

“And you would know this by firsthand knowledge?”

Pike had the grace to blush. “Oh, no, nothing as sordid as that. I look at Jim and see his father.”

"Oh, yes, George Kirk." Amanda studied Jim Kirk. “Yes, I can see the resemblance. George was quite a toothsome morsel, too, as I recall.” She looked back at Pike. “Is that how you remember George, also?”

Pike blushed again. “George is difficult to forget.”

"Why try? He is forever young, forever exploring new worlds, forever at the helm of his ship.”

“George would like that,” Pike decided, biting his lips together. He shoved his feelings back and gave her a brave smile. “That is how I would like to be remembered, too.”

“That is how everyone who has ever lived would like to be remembered, darling. As someone immortal, someone who goes on living beyond a normal lifespan and beyond all sense and logic.” She arched an eyebrow. “Someone Greek.”

Surprised, Pike grinned. “Greek?!”

“Classical Greek. As in the Greek gods, I meant,” she answered coolly. “Even though mankind stopped believing in them as gods and goddesses a long time ago, still they have the feel of
immortality about them, as if they still existed somewhere, on some plane of existence, just waiting to be important to mankind again as they once were."

He appraised her levelly. “Spock didn’t get all of his intellect from his father, did he?”

“Now what woman would admit to something so masculine?” she asked in a coy voice and with a straight, unblinking stare.

“Oh, you and Winona Kirk. You have both been the women I’ve loved in my life. And I let you both slip away from me,” he declared without stopping to censor his thoughts which had somehow become spoken words.

“Careful, darling, your heart is showing.”

“You see through me so easily,” he said while showing her the shy, boyish blush which she remembered so well and had loved so much from long ago. It hadn’t been that long ago in the scheme of things, not really.

“Winona Kirk and Amanda Grayson,” she said, mulling the names over on her tongue, liking the shapes of them in her mouth. "So different and yet so similar. We knew you loved us, darling, but we knew that we could never hold you. You had another mistress, and she was mightier than either one of us. For we were mere mortals, and she was in the shape of a starship.” She nodded at Jim Kirk. “I think that young man has the same lusts in him. I think that no mortal woman will ever be able to hold his heart. And if he is lucky, no woman who truly loves him will ever try to control him, either.” She looked back at him. “Just as the women in your life were brave enough to let you go.”

“Amanda….”

She gave him a bright, hard smile. “Don’t worry. I’m not admitting that I have been secretly in love with you for all of these years. Neither has Winona. True, either of us could have married you and had a good life with you. But we both knew that wasn’t what was best for you.” She looked at Sarek hanging over Jim Kirk. “I am in love with Sarek. He answers my needs, and I answer his. Both of us could have found a measure of happiness with other mates, too. We just would have found a different way to be happy.” She looked back at Pike. “All couples find some common ground that they can tolerate and can live with. Or they will try other mates. I’m trying to say that there is no perfect union, but a union is perfect if it gives contentment and familiarity for the ones in it. So it has been for Sarek and me, and what it was for George and Winona Kirk in the short time they had together.” She gave him a sincere smile. “And for Christopher Pike, the mighty space explorer, and his elusive mistress out in space.”

He smiled at her and she smiled back, then continued, “Christopher Pike, a man I am truly glad to say is a friend. And one who once was almost more,” she added in a husky voice. She saw his smile fade in concern for her. “We never forget our lost loves, my darling. But they have their proper places in our lives, as you do in mine,” she finished by looking up into his eyes. “I am glad that I have known you, for you are indeed a part of me now and always will be.”

His lips slowly formed the smile that was reflected in his eyes. “And you are a part of me, too. Forever.” His voice was as husky as hers had been, for they shared the same emotions and the same regrets. But they had each found a way to live their lives, and it had been good for them.

Perhaps they were both wistful because they were no longer young and life was swiftly passing them by. Perhaps they knew that there would not be many more such meetings between them, for life is a challenge for all and a guarantee for none. And human life is short in the time frame of the universe.
Holding her eyes with his, he took her hand and slowly raised it to his lips for a gentle kiss. They gazed at each other and were content for what they had. And for what might have been, they would keep in a quiet corner of their hearts.

Sarek nodded toward the place where his wife sat talking with Christopher Pike. “They are old lovers, you know.”

Kirk pretended that he wasn’t shocked, but it still came across. It always does when the younger generation cannot picture the older generation, especially the associates of their parents, “doing it.” Philosophically, the younger generation realizes that most members of the older generation "did it," or else the younger generation wouldn't be here now and in such vast numbers which were steadily increasing.

"Oh, I don't mean that they actually went to bed together," Sarek continued as he studied his wife and Pike visiting. Their body language spoke of the old familiarity and ease that was still between them, although Amanda held herself back slightly. But Sarek was well aware of Amanda's self-imposed reserve. He always treasured those rare moments when she let that constipating reserve down. Those moments were some of his fondest memories in bed with her because those were the times when she was almost feral.

“But aren't you jealous?” Kirk asked with the outrage of the young.

The young could be so puritanical, Sarek thought. Jim Kirk would only understand that truth when he would see it years from now in a generation or two younger than himself.

Sarek could also tell Jim Kirk insightful tidbits about his own parents when they had been young and stupid, but such information would just hurt the younger Kirk. Kirk had his own picture of his mother's shortcomings because she'd had time to disappoint him. He'd had time to realize that she was human. As for the father, George Kirk was forever cloaked in legend and was larger-than-life to his son. And as far as Sarek was concerned, that was how George Kirk would remain. At least Sarek could protect one son's opinion of his sire even if Sarek couldn't protect his own son.

But Jim Kirk had asked a question about his being jealous. At least he could protect himself a little bit with his answer. “Amanda stays with me,” Sarek bragged. “I make it worth her while.”

Kirk raised an eyebrow and gave Sarek an appreciative look. “I bet you just do.”

Sarek returned the appreciative look. “I am capable of making it worth the while of anyone,” he hinted.

You old lecher, Jim Kirk thought even though he smiled calmly at Sarek. How could this guy possibly be Spock’s father? What in the hell could they possibly have in common? Why, Sarek had been spending more time with Kirk than with Spock. Of course, Spock was still recuperating, but still…. His father could have made more of an effort.

“You’re thinking I’m an unnatural father,” Sarek noted.

Was he a mind reader?!

“The truth is that I’m a disappointed father.” And just by the monotone way he said it, Kirk knew it was the truth.

“We probably all disappoint our fathers,” Kirk offered.

“And yet you didn’t. I know. You didn’t have the opportunity. At least you never made your father
suffer that way. You need never feel guilty because of that.”

“But it is not the responsibility of the sons to live out the dreams of their fathers. The young must have their own dreams.”

Sarek smiled. “You are just as logical as my son, but you have compassion, too.”

“I studied ethics. And relationship problems.”

“You are destined to be a Solomon then,” Sarek deduced.

“Will I be able to perform up to expectations?” Kirk asked in awe.

Sarek got a glint in his eyes, and Kirk knew that the moment when Sarek could have given him some great insights or good advice might well be over. Sarek felt insecure to offer such momentous words, such fatherly words, so he slid back into a more familiar pose, the ineffective lecher whose bluff was mightier than his performance.

“Will you be able to perform up to expectations, young Mr. Kirk? Only time and testing can prove either. And I don’t mean just in the bedroom.”

Kirk blushed. Sarek had put a name to it, the thing that had dancing around between them all evening. Luckily, though, Sarek slid back into a fatherly mood and wanting to impart advice to someone who seemed more willing to hear it from him than his own son did. "Whatever you do, you must never be hesitant. For, alas, there will be neither the opportunity nor the time for second thoughts. For the universe is not the same as it was a moment ago, and it will not be the same in the next moment. So is the sad fate for any of us. All of our moments are moving too fast for any of us. And at the end of Time, we will find that we have made nothing from all of our efforts.”

For a moment, Kirk thought that Sarek had gone completely mad in the middle of his speech. And then he thought that he was the saddest of men for he was the most disappointed in his own son.

Sarek was continuing however, so Kirk listened. “But we will have had the experience of living, and we have been conscious of our actions during this experience of living. Perhaps that is the greatest gift of all: Just knowing that we have lived and tasted Life. Whether we won or lost or simply kept pace with the herd is unimportant compared to the experience of existing. Not everyone can be a winner. Somebody needs to lose so someone else can win. So victory cannot be what we aim for, but that we tried. That is the lesson that we need to take from the experience of living: That we tried. And in that, I am a success. And so will be my son.”

Here was a man trying to compensate himself for not being able to influence his son enough for that son to want to be like him.

“Your son will be a success in his own right,” Kirk replied. “Spock just needs to find his own way, as you have done. He needs to find what is right for him before he can judge himself. He learned that from you, Sarek. You taught him well and he listened. If not with his mind, then with his heart.”

“You are right,” Sarek said with awe in his eyes. “I have influenced my son after all.”

“Yes, you have,” Kirk reassured him. “You’ve done a good job. You have been a good father.”

Sarek gave Kirk a genuine smile. “And you are a good friend for Spock. And a good adviser to me. You will be known as a great Solomon, Mr. Kirk, for you already are one.”

Kirk preened. He couldn’t help it. He liked to feel that he was pronouncing wise platitudes. “You
Sarek gave him a smile full of the old flirting. Sarek couldn’t help doing that, either. “You are easy to flatter, because it is not flattery. It is the truth.”

Kirk gave him a soft smile which probably looked like flirting back to someone who had not heard their conversation.

“Just look at that,” McCoy mumbled. “Kirk flirts with anybody.” Then he realized what he was saying and to whom. Sarek wasn’t just anybody; he was Spock’s father. “Sorry. I didn’t mean that the way that it sounded.”

“Do not apologize, Doctor. I have seen that trait in my father. It makes me realize that my father is the same as anyone’s father. None of them are perfect. And perhaps that is for the best, also. For they all raise imperfect sons, just as they themselves were raised.”

“I think that we’re all getting bogged down in a philosophical hodge-podge.”

“And what else is there but our poor philosophies?”

McCoy grinned. “That’s probably something that Shakespeare said once. Or should have,” he decided after thinking about it for a moment. He took a good look at Spock. “And I believe that it’s time for you to call it a night.”

“Indeed, what else should I call it?” Spock wanted to know with a quizzical look. “It is after our evening meal and before most of the ship retires to bed for the evening.”

“Ha, ha, such a joker,” Kirk said as he stood and went over to help Spock stand. “Come on, Mr. Spock, I’ll escort you back to your room.”

“Indeed, shall we all go along?” Amanda demanded brightly as she jumped to her feet.

Suddenly, everyone was ready for the evening to be over, too, so they all paraded through the halls of the Enterprise like a group of merry revelers. But they had the feel of Geoffrey Chaucer’s pilgrims in "The Canterbury Tales" about them as if they fled something they could not see. For there was something a little sad and desperate in the forced gaiety of these modern day pilgrims, as if they knew it was all meant to be over forever in a very short time.

But just for a little while, they were all together, with their hopes and fears and yearnings.

And they would not think about the dreams lost to them forever.
To Absent Friends

Chapter Summary

A death in battle causes havoc for the crew of the Enterprise.

Christopher Pike would never ignore a call for help, especially when it was from someone he knew.

"It's Maggin and the crew of the Fearless, Jim," Pike informed him grimly. "The pirates have invaded Gerrend City looking for them. There's women and children in peril. Their homes and way of life could be destroyed. We have to help."

"I know we do," Kirk agreed and wondered why Pike needed validation from him. But Kirk willingly gave Pike what he needed, because even great men sometimes doubt their own decisions.

The fighting was long and bloody with much death on all sides: Gerrends, pirates, Enterprise crew. It soon scattered into hand-to-hand combat in individual streets and a lot of buildings throughout the city. The Enterprise crew soon found itself as scattered as the other combatants.

Kirk never found out the details that led up to what he discovered until long after it was all over with. He only knew that he could not find McCoy or Pike or Spock, and he felt terribly alone without any of them by his side. Then he forgot about himself and had to reassure himself that they were safe. That's what started his building to building search, fighting first one pirate and then another. Would he never find the ones he sought, the friends he could not live without? For if they were gone, he might not be very interested in this life any longer, either. And he sure as hell wouldn't be interested in Starfleet anymore.

Kirk found them there, Spock and Pike, huddled together on the floor. At first he thought that they had both been wounded because there was so much blood. And then Kirk realized that all of the blood was red. Spock was simply covered with it.

Kirk went down to his knees. "No," he objected as he stared at Pike. Anyone could tell that the injuries were mortal, but Kirk did not want to accept it. "No," he muttered again, shaking his head. This was not right. Not Christopher Pike, the only father he had ever known. "No. No."

Spock looked up at Kirk’s ashen face and glassy eyes. Perhaps he worried that Kirk was going down. Perhaps he wished to explain Pike’s dire circumstances so that Pike could not overhear. For whatever reason, Spock left Pike and went to Kirk’s side.

The jostling awoke Pike. He opened his tired eyes and managed a grin. There even seemed to be pride on it.

"They are," he managed to choke out.

Startled, Kirk and Spock stared at him.

"My boys," he mumbled in a voice so thin that his listeners had to strain to hear him. "Both my boys. Together. As they should be."

"He is hallucinating," Spock explained. "He has no sons."
“Yes, he does,” Kirk growled. “And don’t you disappoint him now.”

“Boys, boys,” Pike mumbled. “Fighting like brothers do. But helping each other when the time comes.”

“Chris…. Don’t. Save your strength.”

“Oh, my rebel child. Jim, I’m dying. I wish I could protect you both longer. But now you have to protect each other.”

Spock frowned as his hands on Pike were telling him of his fading strength. “Commander. Please.”

Pike turned his eyes on Spock. “And my other rebel child. I could have been your father.”

Spock felt tears prick his eyelids. “I know.”

Pike studied them both. “No man could be any prouder of his two sons. I loved you both, and I thank you for the love that you always gave back to me. You did your old man proud.” He closed his eyes and slumped to the side. And that was the end.

At first Kirk and Spock did not realize that Pike was gone. Then Kirk sobbed, gently gathered Pike to him, and rocked the remaining shell. Spock did nothing. He did not know what to do, so he allowed Kirk to embrace the dead man for as long as he wished.

Finally, Kirk lay the corpse aside. Tears streamed down his cheeks and turned his handsome face into a twisted mask of pain. He dropped his head and hung as if he was being held up by his shoulders.

Then he turned and surprised Spock by grabbing his shoulders. His head landed on Spock’s chest and began sliding down him as Kirk’s hands continued to grope Spock’s shoulders.

Still, Spock sat mesmerized. No one had ever come to him before in grief and seeking solace. His hands fluttered uselessly around Kirk’s arms. His natural instinct was to take Kirk in his arms and hold him close. But Spock had never hugged anyone before. He did not know the simple mechanics of the operation. He did not know if his hug would be welcomed, especially by Jim Kirk.

Leonard McCoy ran up and took in the scene.

“Hug him back!” he ordered as he sank to Pike’s side. “Let him know that he is not alone! For once in your heartless life, show a little compassion for someone else! You just might find someone inside yourself that you could like! Now, help him!” Then he busied himself with Pike.

Spock floundered for a moment longer. Then he seemed to follow a pattern inherited from his mother. The Earthling in him grabbed Jim Kirk to his chest. In the next moment Spock had buried his head over Jim Kirk’s head. It seemed natural to be running his hands over Kirk’s back and to whisper soothing words in Kirk’s ears. It would’ve been more perfect, though, if the words were not being wrenched out of him.

McCoy scooted toward the grieving pair. There was nothing more that he could do for Christopher Pike. But maybe he could aid the young men who had been the closest to Pike. He squatted on his knees and looked at the huddle that was Spock and Kirk. Kirk’s head was not even visible, buried as it was against Spock’s body. Spock had finally seemed to have gotten down this business of compassion. It was probably good medicine for both of them.

McCoy pulled himself to his feet and decided to let the other two have their moment undisturbed.
There would be time enough in the days ahead to find out for certain just what had happened. All that was really important, though, was that Christopher Pike was dead and that his loss was going to be felt very much by the two young men huddled together now in each others’ arms.

Hell, it'll be felt by the whole damn crew, McCoy realized. Pike was their captain, their heart. And it showed just how numb McCoy's own heart was because the realization was just now sinking in.

Joss Maggin and several of his men came rushing up. “You guys saved us!” he informed McCoy.

Maggin’s face was alive with the success of battle after having faced unbeatable odds alone. He and his crew thought it had been their death day, and then they got a new surge of energy when they’d been saved by the Enterprise. Adrenaline was pumping wildly through his circulatory system as it was all of his men. He felt invincible and happy and damn lucky.

Maggin looked around at the surprisingly quiet scene. “How’s everything here?!” he wanted to know.

McCoy frowned and shook his head slowly, then turned to the scene of carnage and death behind him on the floor.

Maggin looked mystified, but followed where McCoy was looking down. Maggin squinted his eyes as if he didn’t want to admit what his eyes were telling him: Pike dead and Kirk and Spock in desolate mourning. “Oh, hell,” Maggin breathed in pain and sorrow. “Not Pike. Anybody but Pike.”

“Anybody else dying would’ve killed Pike,” McCoy murmured. “At least he didn’t have to face losing one of his own, at least not again.”

“If I just would have listened sooner, this might not have happened.” It was plain that Maggin was crushed nearly as badly as Pike’s own men were.

“It happened as it was supposed to happen,” McCoy offered.

“Pike never gave up on me. Even after everything I did.” He cast haunted eyes on McCoy. “Even after Dax and Kai and that bunch jumped you and Kirk in the bar and nearly killed Spock.” He looked down at Pike’s crushed body. “Even then, he was still trying even though I wouldn’t listen….”

“He saw something good in you, something that was worth saving. He knows that you were fighting for your people, but just needed a little direction in how to find the best way to do that.”

“But how did he know that there was something in me worth fighting for--” Maggin’s eyes were large with shock and disbelief.

“I expect he saw himself in you, in his younger days. But someone helped him. He was just passing it along. A debt like that can never be repaid, but you can help someone else who is struggling, someone who doesn’t even know he’s struggling.”

Maggin slowly nodded his head.

“I-- I don’t know what to say, what to do--” Maggin finally managed to say.

“Help us bury our dead,” McCoy suggested softly. “We can’t do it ourselves.”

Maggin bit his lips together and continued to nod his head.
“Help me with these two,” McCoy said. “Spock still isn’t healed up from his stab wound. And Kirk.” He frowned as he studied the blonde officer quivering and half hidden in Spock’s arms. “Kirk is a basket case.”

Maggin and Slade stepped forward and bent down. Maggin gently gathered Pike’s broken body in his arms and struggled to rise with his burden. Slade lifted also which stabilized Maggin until they were both on their feet again.

Maggin nodded toward Kirk and Spock, and Slade stepped toward them. McCoy bent and pulled on Kirk. Kirk looked wild for a moment, then allowed McCoy to pull him up into his arms. Spock looked up, lost, his charge suddenly gone. Then Slade offered him a hand and Spock took it and allowed Slade to pull him to his feet. Spock slumped a little, his injuries remembered, and Slade pulled his steadying arm around him as McCoy had his arm around Kirk, holding him up.

Then the silent procession started with two of Maggin’s men in the lead operating doors and helping Maggin wherever they could. It was understood that his men could help, but Maggin would carry his burden alone. It was one of the last things Maggin could do for the man who had tried to help him so much and in the end had died saving him.

Then followed Maggin with Pike’s body lying slumped in Maggin’s arms while long limbs hung downward at awkward angles. Behind them, McCoy practically carried the weeping Kirk who was having trouble accepting the magnitude of his grief. Kirk just could not wrap himself around the fact that this man he had come to regard as a father-figure was suddenly out of his life.

Behind Kirk, Spock was faring little better as Slade dragged him along, being careful not to touch the location of Spock’s knife wound. Spock marveled how easily that Kirk was showing his grief. If only Spock could trust himself to release his own emotions that way, he felt that he could begin to travel down the road of healing. He had known Christopher Pike for years and had thought of him as a generous and well-meaning uncle. Pike had been a part of his life and of his parents’ lives, especially of his mother’s. Pike’s death would be devastating for all of them.

At the end of the grieving procession, the last of Maggin’s men picked up Pike’s hat, phaser, and other personal items. One last time, the men glanced around the room that was smeared with Christopher Pike’s lifeblood, then closed the door on the carnage and hurried to rejoin the shuffling procession of mourners.

The little group of men stood on the highest hill above Gerrend City. Shapes of buildings stood starkly against a bleak horizon in the background about a mile away. The few trees on this windswept prominence lifted gnarled and agonized leafless limbs into the unforgiving sky. If the Enterprise men would have thought about the setting at all, they might have wondered why these people had chosen such a harsh location for the final resting place for their dead.

But Kirk, Spock, and McCoy were not concerned with useless thoughts such as these. They were more occupied with questions about why this had to happen and how would they ever get along without their leader. Pike had been more than their captain; he had been fatherly to the whole crew and just Kirk and Spock.

Where would they find their leader now? Who could pick up the rein of command now that it had slipped from the hands of a man whom they all loved and respected so much? Who could possibly be the captain of the Enterprise now? Who could possibly follow Christopher Pike?
But those whirling doubts had to wait. First the sorrowing group had to pay homage and honor to the man who had led them so well for so long. He had believed in so many now mourning him when they hadn’t believed in themselves. He had encouraged them and gently badgered them then they had needed it and had shown them an infinite patience that they would marvel at more and more as Time would separate the mortal man from those who would miss him forever.

McCoy stood between Spock being held up by Slade on one side and Kirk who was flanked by Miggan.

“Odd,” Kirk remarked finally remarked as the chilly wind gently ruffled his golden hair. “Christopher Pike was like a father to so many of us, yet he never had a family of his own.” He frowned and found that what he was going to say next was so hard to accept. “He never even had his own home. A starship is the only place he truly belonged, and now that starship is going to have to fly away without him.”

“He has a home now, Kirk,” Miggan vowed beside him. “He will be with us here forever. And we will honor him as being a part of our own.” He glanced at Kirk. “Because now he truly is.”

Kirk returned the steady gaze as the two men who had once been enemies took each others’ measure and found nothing lacking in the other.

“Thank you. For that,” Kirk said softly. “He would be honored to rest with your people here. He would be happy to call Gerrend home. For worthy people live here, and there was no one worthier than Christopher Pike.”

Miggan nodded solemnly at Kirk, and they both knew that from that day forward, they would be friends and allies. It was the best monument that either could have envisioned for Christopher Pike. And one that Pike could have readily chosen for himself.

A few hours later, after wounds had been seen to and some sort of order was restored to the crew of the Enterprise, Kirk, Spock, and McCoy gathered together to make some basic decisions. They had to call Starfleet Command and report what had happened. But they couldn’t wait for replacements for lost crew. They had to make do until the proper authorities could expedite the situation. But for now, they had to do some things for themselves and do it before some unruly faction would try to take over the Enterprise.

“My mother knows about Pike,” Kirk said in an aside to Spock.

“So does mine,” Spock answered back and exchanged an intimate glance with Kirk.

There would be time for domestic issues later, so much had to be seen to now.

“We are in a helluva mess, gentlemen. The First Officer was also killed, as was the C.M.O.,” Kirk recounted as though he was reciting by rote some half-forgotten nursery rhyme from early school days. “Also the Chief Engineer.” He stopped, tipped his head back, closed his eyes, and rubbed the back of his neck. Then he rolled his shoulders. “I’m sorry, guys,” he said after he had opened his haunted eyes again. “This is a nightmare. The four chief officers of our ship have been killed. When does that even happen?!?” he lashed out. “Why did we lose them all?!”

“Jim….” McCoy soothed. “We’ll take it a little bit at a time.”
“God, that’s all we can do, Bones! But we cannot allow anarchy to take over!”

“We’ll keep the faith of the crew,” McCoy reassured him. “We’ll stand strong together. United.”

“Yes, yes,” Kirk reached out and patted McCoy’s chest. “Thank you for being here.”

“You know I will be.”

“Thank you for being real,” he whispered.

McCoy knew what Kirk meant. The surreal predicament of a starship without its upper echelon of officers was unheard of. They needed a new routine so life aboard the Enterprise would feel normal again. They needed officers so the crew could feel secure again.

“Scotty could come on as Chief Engineer,” Kirk decided. He looked up into Spock’s face as a new thought struck him. “And you as Science Officer could be the captain! Why didn’t we think of that before?!” Relief shone on Kirk’s face. He looked like they’d been saved.

“I wish you to consider the fact that I have not been Science Officer for very long,” Spock reminded him. “Just this cruise and the one which Captain Pike led immediately proceeding your admission to Starfleet.”

“Over three years ago,” Kirk murmured. “But that’s more experience than anyone else has had around here. I say that you are our captain until Starfleet can get someone else out here.” He gave Spock a level look. “And if I had any way about it, you’d stay our captain.”

“If that is your decision—”

“It is,” Kirk affirmed and McCoy echoed it.

“Then I have something I wish for you gentlemen to hear.” And with that, Spock produced a tape.

“What’s that?” Kirk wanted to know. McCoy’s eyes reflected his curiosity, too.

“A moment please.” Spock popped the tape into the monitor on the desk and stepped back.

They didn’t have long to wait.

Christopher Pike appeared on the screen. He gave his unseen audience a solemn look.

“Chris,” Kirk breathed and McCoy frowned beside him.

“I am Captain Christopher Pike of the Starship Enterprise,” Pike greeted his listeners. “If you are seeing this tape, it means that I am dead.” Pike relaxed and got a self-conscious grin on his face. “You don’t know how odd it feels to be saying that. I always thought that a speech like that was so dramatic in a movie.” The slight grin disappeared and the solemn look was back. “But now all I can feel for you, my survivors, is sorrow. You have been my children and I hate to leave you alone. But I know that you will be strong and will do whatever duties are thrust upon you.”

Pike straightened his shoulders, and his audience unconsciously straightened theirs, also.

“That being said,” Pike continued, “I also want to leave you with my wishes and recommendations about rotation of officers.” He paused for his audience to realize just what he was saying.

“My God, how this must have worked on him,” Kirk murmured.
“It would on any good commander,” McCoy murmured back.

Pike continued. “I know that this crew is a young, untried one, but I believe you have the talent among you not only to cope with your present emergency, but to thrive, also.”

Kirk felt the hairs on the back of his neck vibrate. It was almost uncanny how Pike’s prerecorded speech was applying so well to their current situation.

Pike stared straight into the camera. “It is my recommendation that the vacancy of my captaincy be filled with James T. Kirk.”

“What?!” Kirk bellowed.

McCoy’s mouth dropped open with shock, also.

Kirk’s eyes looked wild. “But, but, I can’t do that!”

“Yes, you can, too, do the job, Jim,” Pike replied as if he had heard Kirk’s exclamation. “You will do your father proud, and me, and yourself. It’s in your genes, boy. It’s in your heart. You’ve got the instincts for it. Don’t fight your destiny, son. It was meant to be. I believe in you and so does your crew. Now believe in yourself and make us all proud.”

Spock leaned forward and took the tape out of the machine. Kirk was still looking wild. “But, but I can’t!”

“If you truly believe that you cannot fulfill Captain Pike’s sincere request, I am certain that Starfleet would entertain your resignation if and when the relief ship arrives,” Spock informed Kirk solemnly.

“No, no, I just need a minute,” Kirk said, fighting for breath and realization. He began to nod his head. “I can. I can! If Captain Pike and my father sacrificed so much for me, I can damn sure assume my obligation to them!”

“I am glad to hear that, Captain Kirk,” Spock assured him dryly.

Kirk and McCoy grinned sheepishly at each other.

“It does have a nice ring to it, doesn’t it, Bones?!”

“Sure as hell does!”

“I have a request, Captain,” Spock interrupted.

“Oh, hey, that’s me!”

It took a moment, but Kirk and McCoy finally settled down.

“Yes, Mr. Spock?” Kirk managed to ask.

“I would like to resume my post as Science Officer, if that is at all possible.”

“Well, now, Mr. Spock, seeing as how I would’ve never known that Captain Pike recommended me for the captaincy position if you hadn’t produced that tape in your hand, I believe that you could request about anything out of me except-- maybe exclusive rights to the women’s barracks-- and I’d be obligated to hand it over. Which I would do so fast, it’d make even a Vulcan dizzy.”
“I wish simply to be your Science Officer, Sir. I have no use for exclusive rights to the women’s barracks. That would probably create all sorts of social problems if I was to accept.”

Kirk and McCoy traded quick glances, then Kirk grinned at Spock. “Not to mention one very tired Vulcan.”

“Of course, Sir.”

“Tell you what, Spock. I’ll let you be my Science Officer on one condition.”

Spock frowned slightly. Kirk was going to make stipulations? But Spock plowed gamely ahead. “And what is that condition, Sir?”

“Well, two actually, now that I think about it. First, stop calling me ‘sir’ all the time.”

“But, Captain—” Spock protested.

Kirk grinned. “It wasn’t that long ago I was being a smart-ass in your Thermodynamics class and I was trying to splash swimming pool water on your shiny black boots. It’s gonna take a little while for me to get used to the reversal in our roles.”

“Yes, Sir,” Spock answered stiffly while staring straight ahead.

“And I will only accept you as my Science Officer if you will also be my First Officer.”

Spock forgot to stand stiffly. In fact, he stared open-mouthed at Kirk.

“I take it that you’re flattered as hell and that your answer is ‘Yes?’” Kirk prompted.

Spock snapped back to attention. “Of course, Captain.”

But there was a tiny trace of a smile at the corners of his lips, and Kirk saw it.

“There you go,” Kirk congratulated him and slapped his shoulder.

Spock relaxed. “I feel that I must amend something, though.”

“Amend away,” Kirk offered with a lazy smile. “As long as you don’t resign.”

“Of course not, Captain. If you will permit me,” he said as he stuck the Pike tape back into the monitor.

Kirk and McCoy glanced at each other. Now what?

The image of Pike reappeared, right where Spock had pulled the tape out of the machine.

“I have a further recommendation for you, Jim. If the position of First Officer is also vacated at the time that the captaincy is, it is my wish that Mr. Spock be offered that job. He would be a worthy adviser and good friend for you.”

Spock took the tape out of the machine.

“You knew that last part was on there, didn’t you?” Kirk questioned. “But I would’ve never known if I hadn’t asked you first, would I?” It was more an accusation than a question.

“I did not wish to force you.”
“And I appreciate that. But don’t gamble on me always using common sense. You’d make a helluva poker player, Mr. Spock.”

“I am not a gambler, Captain, but I trust you.”

“Just pile it on me, will you? I think the only way I’m gonna be able to handle all the strain is if you’re my C.M.O., Bones,” Kirk said as he turned to McCoy.

It took a moment for it to soak in what Kirk had said, then McCoy’s eyes bugged out. “Huh?! You can’t make me the head of Sickbay! I’m untried!”

Kirk patted McCoy’s cheek. “Well, hang onto your scalpel, Doctor, because you’re about to get one helluva workout!”

“But, but!” he sputtered. “Spock! Talk some sense into him! I can’t do that job!”

Spock put his hands behind his back and eyed McCoy calmly. “As your immediate superior, I will see to it that you will perform your duties in a timely and efficient manner, Doctor, or you will have me to answer to for the quality of your work. And believe me, I will be much harder to please than the amiable captain.”

“Jim!” McCoy begged. “Save me from the Vulcan! He’s gonna be a nit-picking piss-ant! I just know it!”

Kirk smiled to himself. This was going to be a piece of cake.

And fun.
Chapter Summary

Joss Maggin joins forces with Jim Kirk to fight off the pirates, and Spock makes some questionable moves.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kirk and a lot of the Enterprise crew were in Gerrend City only to be suddenly awash with pirates. And they would have lost the day if it hadn’t been for the fact that Maggin and Slade and the rest of the crew of the Fearless hadn’t shown up when they did. Still, it was a bloody, tooth and nail battle through the buildings. Hand to hand combat scenes were everywhere, and it became a contest of individual men against each other, just like in the good old days of fighting several centuries ago.

McCoy was struggling hand-to-hand with a pirate. They were of equal strength and abilities. Neither would win without assistance from someone else. And suddenly McCoy got that assistance.

McCoy looked startled as the pirate was pulled out of his arms and thrown aside by Spock. The pirate yelled as he rolled away. Spock paid him no further attention.

McCoy watched the daring rescue, then grinned. “Thanks. I was needing a little help there. Come on, let’s go show the rest of these devils that they can’t interfere with Federation representatives.”

But Spock grabbed his arm and wouldn’t let him pass.

McCoy looked at him puzzled. “What?”

“Doctor, you must seek safety,” Spock insisted as the battle whirled around them.

“I can’t go into hiding now!” McCoy argued with wild eyes. “Every man is needed for fighting! And I gotta be here to help with the wounded!”

“Doctor, please--”

“Spock, I gotta do my duty. Otherwise, I’m a coward.”

“Otherwise, you will be alive.”

“Well, yeah, there is that, too,” McCoy said thoughtfully. Then he ducked as a pirate came charging him. "Spock, you're distracting me!” He grabbed the passing man and sent him skittering across the floor to crash into the distant wall. “And stay there, if you know what’s good for you,” he muttered to the man who was sitting on the floor and shaking his head as if trying to reorient himself.

“Will you not retreat to safety?” Spock asked desperately.
“No, I will not retreat to safety.” McCoy turned to deal with the alien he had sent crashing into the wall. The man was coming back for more, but McCoy gave him an uppercut which knocked him out and made him slump to the floor. “I’m not turning tail and running, either.” he mumbled to Spock. “Ain’t the way I’m hardwired.”

“Doctor--”

“Go away, Spock! ‘Protect’ someone else!”

The next moment McCoy yelled, “Hey!” as Spock scooped him up and slung him over his shoulder. Spock started toward the door with the struggling man.

“Let me down, you idiot!” McCoy bellowed as he saw the battle quickly disappearing in front of him.

But Spock did not heed him as he rushed out of the room away from the hand-to-hand combat.

“Spock! Damn it! Put me down before you hurt yourself! You’ll reopen your wound!”

“Stop struggling. I am only trying to help you.”

“Well, I don’t need that kind of help! Now, do as I say! Put me down!”

But Spock continued down the hallway.

“Damn it, Spock! I insist!”

“And I insist that you be still.” And with that he cracked McCoy a resounding slap across McCoy’s buttocks with his open hand.

McCoy was stunned. Spock had struck him. Worse than that, Spock had spanked him. Like he was an unruly child, an unruly child who needed correcting.

“Thank you,” Spock muttered. He quickly opened the door of a utility closet and deposited the stunned McCoy on his feet.

“Hey!”

“Stay here. You will be safe,” Spock instructed.

McCoy looked around. “This isn’t a sanctuary! It’s a death trap! I’m cornered in here!”

“You will be safe until I come back for you.” And with that, Spock shut the door on McCoy and locked it.

“And if you’re killed and nobody knows I’m here?” McCoy muttered as he looked around. “What a helluva surprise for some poor slob of a janitor when he comes for cleaning supplies, say in a couple of weeks. It’ll take more than the cleaning supplies stored in here to clean up what’s gonna meet that guy’s eyes. And nose.” He looked around some more. “Hell, Spock, you’ve put me in a helluva situation now.”

At least the lights worked with the door closed. If someone tried to come in, McCoy would cut the lights and have a few seconds when the other person’s eyes would be adjusting to the dark. It might make the difference between life and death for McCoy.
Then he checked out the assets of his cell. He discovered that if he cleared the bottom shelf of clutter and added several cushions that were in storage that he could make a snug little nest. At least he could lie down. Which he did.

And promptly felt stupid.

Here he was, used to living on a state-of-the-art starship, but now with the accommodations of a mop. But at least it was a safe place. That was the good news. Everything else was bad news.

The pirates could win. Bad for him in a trap.

Someone could take the closet key off Spock’s body, hunt him down, and dispatch him. Bad for him.

Spock could get killed out there….

Oh, hell, Spock could get killed!

Jim could get killed, Scotty, the others.

Spock…. Oh, hell, Spock!

Spock could get killed!

That pain in the ass might not make it. There were no guarantees for anybody, even Spock.

McCoy turned on his side, pulled himself in the fetal position, crossed his arms over his chest, and moaned.

No! Please!

All he knew and loved could die.

Jim!

Spock!

If that was the case, bring on the blood-thirsty pirates. Life wasn’t worth living if his friends were dead.

And if Spock wasn’t dead, McCoy was sure as hell going to kill him when he got the chance! Just let that Vulcan come back in here! He’d learn a thing or two about how mad Earhtlings can get!

Just come back, McCoy thought as sleep washed over him.

Just, please, please, come back for me.

And to me….

Please.

Spock reentered the scene of the major fighting. He found Jim Kirk and Joss Maggin fighting back-to-back and badly outnumbered. Now that McCoy was safe, Spock could concentrate on helping the
others. He plowed into the ring of pirates around Kirk and Maggin.

“Hey, Spock’s back!” Maggin yelled with joy. “Watch this, Kirk! Your guy’s like a whirling dervish!”

“What do you know about a whirling dervish?!” Kirk demanded as he dispatched a pirate who was aiming a sword at Maggin’s back.

“I have as much access to a computer as you do,” Maggin answered as he backhanded another pirate.

Kirk grinned. “So you’re learned, are you?”

Maggin gave Kirk his full attention. “A lot more learned than you can imagine, Kirk.”

Kirk stared at Maggin to see what he meant by that remark, and Maggin gave him a burning look that sizzled the air between them.

Spock was suddenly there, knocking two pirates aside who were bearing down on Maggin and Kirk. “If you gentlemen would take a suggestion, I believe that it would be more conducive to our mutual benefit if you would forego your conversations of mutual discovery for a more appropriate time.”

Maggin turned back to the fray. “Is your First Officer always such a prig, Kirk?” He asked with a grin as his sword sliced into pirates.

“Somebody has to be the voice of reason around here,” Kirk answered. He was enjoying this action and this discussion immensely.

Spock just shook his head in disgust. He had hurried back for this? Kirk and Maggin were acting like they were actually enjoying themselves, as if they were having fun.

“Hey, Kirk, is your First Officer also a philosopher?!” Maggin asked as he hacked away at pirates.

“I don’t know! Why do you ask?!” Slash! Another pirate fell.

“It’s either that, or he’s gone into a trance! He’s just standing there like he's been suddenly turned into a statue!”

Kirk lowered his weapon as he turned from the fighting around him. “Hey, Spock!”

Spock looked up. “Captain?”

“You wanna help us, or are you gonna wait and catch the next war?!”

“Damn it, Kirk!” Maggin yelled as he slashed at an opposing pirate aiming at Kirk’s back. “Don’t let your guard down! That guy had a clear shot at you!”

“Sorry, Captain.” Spock joined them in the bitter fighting.

Soon it became obvious that the outlaws were edging away.

“We’ve got them on the run!” Maggin yelled.

Kirk war-hooped and charged.

Soon the battle dwindled down, then stopped completely. The area was littered with the dead, the
dying, and the wounded with various degrees of injuries.

“It’s a doctor’s nightmare,” Kirk muttered when he saw the carnage. McCoy must be beside himself, not know where to turn first. He frowned. “Where is McCoy? All I should be seeing of medics are their asses and elbows. And I don’t see McCoy’s anywhere.”

Maggin frowned. “Oh, hell, Kirk, I hope nothing’s happened to him. He’s a scrappy little bastard, and he’s a whirling dervish, too.”

Kirk looked at Maggin and grinned. “You’ve got something for a whirling dervish, don’t you?”

“A lot of your guys are. Even you.”

Kirk accepted the compliment. “But that doesn’t explain where McCoy is. Spock, have you seen him?”

“Yes, I have, Captain. He was in danger, so I put him somewhere safe.”

Kirk shook his head. “You put him-- where?”

“Somewhere so that he could be safe. He was not being cautious during the battle.”

“Spock, you can’t do that. I’d like to put us all in a cone of safety, too, but that isn’t always feasible. We have to take chances occasionally, even McCoy.”

“But--”

“You have to let him do his job, Spock.”

“That is what he said,” Spock grumbled.

“Would you want him preventing you from doing your job?”

“Captain, that is not the same thing--”

“It’s exactly the same thing!” Kirk answered. “And probably for the same reason,” he mumbled and saw Maggin grinning at him. Maggin was realizing what Kirk had suspected for awhile about McCoy and Spock. The pity was that Spock and McCoy seemed absolutely clueless about what seemed apparent to anyone who thought for a couple of minutes about the relationship between those two. “Now, where is McCoy?”

“Locked in a closet,” Spock mumbled.

“A... closet--?” Kirk coached, not understanding completely.

“A closet, a utility closet,” Spock confessed in misery.

“Well, now that the fighting has stopped, do you suppose it is safe for McCoy to come back out among us again? It looks like his work is being done here by others, but I expect he would like to see for himself, don’t you suppose?”

Spock could hear the sarcasm dripping off Kirk’s words. Generally it was McCoy who was guilty of such mockery, not Kirk.

“Yes, sir.”
As Kirk watched the disgraced Spock hurrying away, he glanced at Maggin who was grinning widely.

“One word, Joss, and the truce is over between us. I don’t care if you did save my life several times today.”

Maggin held up his empty hands as he tried to wipe the laughter off his face.

“That’s better,” Kirk grumbled.

Maggin’s eyes were still twinkling. “You gotta admit, though, it is kinda sweet. Those two left-footed guys finding something together is really kinda special.”

Kirk glared, then saw the humor in it and grinned. “Yeah, it is, isn’t it?”

The clicking of the door awoke McCoy and he drew back. Anything could be coming inside, from a janitor to an opposing pirate to a Klingon. McCoy was kinda hoping that it was Spock, but he wasn’t holding his breath.

The door swung open and Spock stepped inside. Kirk and Maggin must have won and the battle was over, because Spock wasn’t acting excited or alarmed like they were in immediate danger. Trouble was, Spock wasn’t acting a whole lot of anything. That was worrisome in itself.

“Spock? What’s wrong? Did we win?” He frowned. "Jim?! Is Jim okay?!"

Spock nodded as he stood over McCoy.

McCoy breathed a sigh of relief, but something was still wrong. Spock would not look at him.

“What is it?” McCoy questioned.

The only answer that Spock gave was to sit on the edge of McCoy’s makeshift bunk. McCoy moved his legs over and made room for him.

“Spock? You’re scaring me. What’s wrong?”

“I wronged you,” Spock answered in hollow tones when he finally spoke.

“Uh huh,” was all that McCoy could answer to that admission. He figured that Spock would be obstinate, not contrite. McCoy figured there would be an argument to end all arguments between them. Not this, this, game of silence. Generally, Spock was full of all sorts of logic. But now he had no words to help himself or to explain himself.

“I struck you,” Spock finally added.

“Well, yeah, you did. But maybe I deserved it, did you ever think of that?”

“You did not strike me when you carried me.”

“Well, that would've been a helluva thing for me to have done now, wouldn’t it?!” McCoy demanded with his old fire. “You were bleeding to death and in a great amount of danger.”
“You were in as much danger today, as you believed I was in after the barroom fight.”

“The two instances were nowhere close to being the same!” McCoy insisted.

“They were to me,” Spock insisted back. “Besides that, the fact remains that I imprisoned you unjustly and that concept has been pointed out to me most acutely by Captain Kirk.”

“I bet it has.” McCoy could only imagine the pointed words that Kirk might have used. That exchange probably hurt the both of them.

“It will not happen again, Doctor, I will make certain of that.”

McCoy felt a stab of disappointment. Spock was not going to be protecting him anymore? Of course, it must’ve hurt Spock when Kirk was disappointed in him. But McCoy never figured that Spock would quit watching out for him. After all, it had been going on as long as he’d known Kirk and Spock. Spock would miss it, too, McCoy figured. Would this change in behavioral patterns even be a big step backwards for Spock’s development? McCoy couldn’t let any of it go to waste. Maybe he could still salvage some of it, though.

“Well, we don’t have to be going all crazy about this reforming thing, you know.” McCoy wanted Spock to know that some things would still be appreciated.

“There is no restitution which I can ever make which will correct the error I made--”

McCoy settled a hand on Spock’s arm. “Good heavens, man, have you never heard of forgiveness and mercy? Stop being so hard on yourself.”

“I can never forgive myself. I struck you, and I would rather strike myself. It would hurt less. You mean too much to me.”

McCoy sucked in his breath. What was Spock saying? The irony of it all was, though, that Spock probably had no idea either of what he saying or what it all meant.

"Ever since the fight in the barroom, I have been upset. But that was because you were upset with me, Doctor."

"Well, hell, yes, I was upset with you. You rescued me, but could've died from it. I didn't want you making that kind of sacrifice for me."

"When I saw all of those men attacking you, I felt such fear. But I felt the same fear from you, when you were carrying me. And after the operation, I was confused about my feelings for you. That was why I wanted Jim to stay with us. I did not want to be alone with you, not until I had an opportunity to sort out my feelings. But it has not gotten any better. In fact, I am more confused than ever, especially today when I could not allow you to be in danger." Spock looked aside.

"Oh, my poor friend. I am so sorry for what you have been going through. And all because of me," McCoy lisped. He put up his hand and cupped Spock’s cheek. Spock closed his eyes when he felt McCoy’s touch.

McCoy meant to turn Spock’s head back toward him, but Spock’s hand settled over McCoy’s before McCoy could move. Spock’s hand felt so warm and so natural over his. It brought a strange sort of peace to McCoy, a peace he had not realized until now that he had been needing.

Then Spock went and abruptly changed the paradigms of their relationship again. He caused McCoy to suck in his breath sharply as he turned his head and gently kissed the palm of McCoy’s hand.
Then Spock opened his dark eyes and gazed down at McCoy with a deeply troubled face.

"Oh, hell, Spock, what's going on with us?" McCoy breathed in wonder.

“I do not know, but I wish the pain would stop.”

The obvious hurt that Spock was feeling was painful to watch. It was bad enough when people who were used to dealing with suffering did not know how to cope with their burden, but Spock had had no training in how to handle the angst he was feeling. It was more than he could bear.

McCoy pulled himself up into a sitting position. “I’m sorry that you’re going through this.”

“But what can be done for it? The learned philosophies that I have studied and all of my logical arguments have not prepared me for this, this ache in my heart. What can I do to heal myself? My instincts tell me that I cannot combat it and win over it, yet that is all that my experience has trained me to do.”

McCoy gave him a sad look. “It’s something illogical. It cannot be understood using conventional methods. It’s more a leap of faith than anything that common sense would tell you is right.” He touched Spock’s chest with his free hand. “One thing that generally helps is to share your problem.”

“But with whom?” Spock begged to learn with beseeching eyes.

McCoy felt a heartbeat in his neck. He could barely breathe. Five minutes ago he had been unaware that he had wanted something like this, but now it had become the most important thing in his life.

McCoy gently rubbed his fingers over the uniform tunic beneath his hand. How many times had he touched the body beneath this tunic as a doctor, a crew-mate, or a friend, and not felt what he was suddenly feeling for it now?

His hesitant eyes flicked up to Spock’s imploring face. Then McCoy said softly, “Share with someone who has the same problem.” He saw more confusion from Spock. Then McCoy added quickly before Spock could speak, “Me.” He cleared his throat because the word had sounded so husky even to him. “Share with me. Because, ah,” he whispered as his eyes flicked over Spock’s face again. “Because I’m finding that I’ve got the same problem. About you.”

“But, what can we do about it?” It was clear that he wanted some immediate relief, and the prospects for that had just been improved by his good friend McCoy.

“Well, there’s one thing that helps in generally most of the cases.”

“What is that, Doctor?” Spock was ready for any solution.

McCoy slid his hand over Spock’s shoulder, cupped the back of his neck, and gently tugged Spock’s head down to him. “This,” McCoy said huskily and softly brushed his lips over Spock’s. Then he pulled back slightly.

Spock looked electrified. New life burst into his dark eyes and an expression of wonderment replaced his confusion and misery.

“That, that was wonderful!” Spock remarked in awe. He glanced down at McCoy. “Can we do that again?”

A happy grin spread over McCoy’s face. “Sure can,” he lisped in a soft Georgia drawl.
But this time, he didn’t just brush Spock’s lips with his. This time, McCoy bore down and tried to tell Spock just what he had awakened in McCoy and just what was waiting for him in McCoy’s arms.

Spock drew back, and the wonderment on his face of their first innocent kiss had been replaced with happiness and downright joy. McCoy laughed when he saw that look, then realized that he wasn’t laughing at Spock but with him. That same happiness and joy that McCoy saw on Spock’s face was surging through McCoy’s body. He hadn’t felt this light and carefree in years, and it had all resulted from one amazing kiss of discovery.

McCoy pressed his chest against Spock’s and tucked his head under Spock’s chin. He lay that way for several moments, just enjoying the fact that they were wrapped in each others’ arms. Who would’ve conceived of something like this being possible, let alone happening?

“I don’t know how this all came about,” McCoy murmured last. He pulled his head off Spock’s chest and looked up into his eyes. “But I’m glad that it did. And I’m thankful for all it could mean.”

“So am I, Doctor.” At least he didn’t look so haggard anymore, just tired.

McCoy ran his fingers gently down Spock’s arm just because he could. After a moment of doing that, he pulled on Spock’s arm. “Come, lie down with me. We’ll rest for awhile. You’re still healing. I'm afraid that you've reinjured yourself.”

"Just tired," Spock said sleepily. "I cannot think of anything I would rather do than lie beside you and rest."

"Then that's what we'll do," McCoy said as he stirred around making room.

"Will not Jim be needing us? Will he not wonder where we are?"

“We’re going to do something for once for ourselves,” McCoy answered in a husky voice. “Not even the Federation of Planets has jurisdiction over our whole lives. We owe something to ourselves, and we’re going to take it.”

Spock offered no further arguments but stretched out on his side so that he shielded McCoy from any possible harm. He drew his arm around McCoy’s body and nestled his head on McCoy’s chest. He drew a contented breath, sighed, and fell asleep with a smile on his face. He had not felt this calm and satisfied in a long time.

Neither had McCoy.

“Computer, where are Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy?”

“The alien life forms known as Spock and McCoy are in the supply closet twenty feet from your present location, Captain Kirk,” the computer answered in a chipper voice.

Kirk looked up at Joss Maggin who used his now familiar gesture of hands up in surrender while he still stood there with a maddening, mocking grin on his face.

“Hey, my computer. Sees them as aliens. You can’t fool a computer.”

“You wouldn’t have to enjoy it so much,” Kirk grumbled as they walked toward the indicated
supply closet.

“What I’m enjoying is the fact that they’re in there together,” Maggon chided. “Perhaps you better knock before you go barging in. Hard telling what sort of assignation you might interrupt.”

“They aren’t gonna be doing any sort of trysting in a hall closet where anyone could come across them.” Still, he paused to tap lightly on the closet door before slowly opening it.

McCoy had not moved from the position he had been in when Spock went to sleep. He looked around Spock’s head and indicated for Kirk to be quiet.

“Is everything alright?” Kirk wanted to know as he looked down at Spock sprawled across McCoy’s chest and McCoy holding him securely in his arms.

“He was exhausted,” McCoy answered in a stage whisper. “Sleep’s the best thing for him, but I’m afraid he’ll get cold. Is there anything on the shelves to throw over us?”

Kirk looked around. “Here’s an old solar blanket that looks like it’s seen better days.”

“That will work. Just throw it over us.”

Kirk did as he was told, then stood back. “Anything else?”

“We’ll be fine.” McCoy grinned down fondly at the Vulcan draped over his body. “We’ll be fine now.”

Jim Kirk walked glumly down the hallway. It was evident that his friends did not need him at the moment, and he didn’t quite know what to do with himself. He’d had more than a chance with either one of them, but had ignored them. Now he was alone. And it was his own damn fault.


“Don’t even start,” Kirk warned.

“You didn’t even hear what I was going to say,” Maggin protested.

“It was going to be some smart remark about them,” Kirk indicated with a nod of his head. “Or of my being a fifth wheel.”

“Now would I be that obvious?” Maggin wanted to know.

Kirk shot him a look of contempt, but didn’t answer.

“No, I was going to suggest that we go out for a drink.”

Kirk was impressed. That actually sounded nice and considerate of Maggin.

Then Maggin went and ruined it. “Seeing as how your friends are pretty busy with each other and all.”

Kirk snarled.
Maggin held up his hands. “Whoa! Thin-skinned, aren’t you?! Touch-y! Touch-y!”

“You would be, too,” Kirk grumbled.

“Yeah, I probably would be… if I found Slade wrapped up in McCoy’s arms.”

Kirk gave him an exasperated look.

“Okay, okay. I’ll be nice. How about that? We can even go to a place you know. It’s even got a spit that roasts meat in the middle of the floor so we can grab a bite to eat.”

Kirk knew that Maggin was just being a smart-ass now to get Kirk’s goat. He decided to play along.

“Just so Kai isn’t there. He’d tried to show me way too much of that meat roaster the last time I was there.”


Kirk gave him a sharp look.

Maggin returned the look, trying not to let Kirk know how important this was to him, but Kirk knowing it anyway. “In a back corner I know. No one would disturb us. If you're interested.”

Kirk gave him a shrug that gave his assent and hinted at a promise.

“There you go,” Maggin said in relief as he possessively threw his arm around Kirk’s shoulders, pulled him toward himself as Kirk snaked an arm around Maggin’s waist, and steered him toward the front door. “I know just the thing to take your mind off the lonesome blues.”

“I thought we were going drinking,” Kirk goaded with a lazy smile.


Always land on your feet, Kirk, he thought as he leaned into Maggin to feel his hard body and strong arm around him.

And it sure as hell looked like he had this time, too.

Chapter End Notes

The title has nothing to do with the Action video game Guts And Glory.
“So you’re about ready to be leaving us?” Joss Maggin asked with an inquisitive look on his face as he turned to Jim Kirk.

They’d been walking around Gerrend City with their lieutenants in tow for awhile now, looking at the cleanup efforts that were being made. People bustled here and there, removing debris and an occasional body not found until now. The city had a new energy behind it as if the ridding of the pirates had reminded the Gerrends that the rest of their lives started now and they’d better hop to it.

“The space pirates have moved on and we need to follow,” Kirk replied, but he knew that certainly wasn’t what he wanted to say and he suspected that wasn’t what Maggin wanted to hear him say, either.

Maggin squinted against the brightness of the sunlight. “Duty calls.” Was that just a little wistfulness that Kirk could hear in Maggin’s voice or was that just wishful thinking on Kirk’s part?

“Remember I will recommend you to Starfleet Academy if you ever decide to join us,” Kirk reminded Maggin with a certain amount of breathlessness. He saw the sudden widening of Maggin’s eyes as he noticed Kirk’s breathlessness. Kirk saw the sudden pain in Maggin’s eyes.

As if Maggin needed reminding, Kirk thought. He was well aware of the quandary Maggin was in. It was the same one that Kirk had put Maggin in when he had first proposed his idea of Maggin joining Starfleet so that someday they might be able to sail through space together in a starship. Kirk had been as breathless then as he was now.

At least he wasn’t as naked now as he had been then, Kirk thought with a smirk. Then he saw by the haunted look on Maggin’s face that he was remembering that occasion, too. That night after sex when Kirk had stood on his knees, legs spread far apart for balance on the rumpled bed, his eyes sparkling with tears, his face and outstretched hand pleading, and had told Maggin how it all could be if they were together forever. He had painted a picture of what he wanted for them, and he knew that Maggin had listened because it was something that Maggin wanted, also.

But now Maggin turned and with a frown watched the scurrying about of the Gerrend City people, his people, the people who needed him to stay with them and lead them. Kirk felt the two-way tugging inside Maggin as surely as if it was tugging within himself. Maggin was a good man, and Kirk would not love him so much if the decision had been an easy one for him.

“Harvest is about ready in the valleys,” Maggin said at last. “And we have all of this rebuilding to do. Next Spring, we can try different crops that we have heard about from your people.” He glanced back at Kirk. “And our educational system needs to be improved and expanded. Amanda Grayson has consented to come and advise us. We will be fortunate to receive her wisdom and guidance.” He glanced at Spock. “I can never thank you enough for your suggestion, Mr. Spock. I am certain that we will owe a great debt to your mother as well as to her son.”
“My mother is more than happy to advise you with her expertise, Commander,” Spock answered with a gracious nod. “She said that it would give her a new interest and incentive.”

“I hope that your father will not begrudge her time in helping us.”

Spock raised an eyebrow and his eyes twinkled. “The decision was not Sarek’s to make, and I quote her exact words. She is quite her own person, Commander, and I believe that my father secretly likes her that way.”

“Just so I do not cause problems between them.”

“Problems between them will never come from outside sources,” Spock reassured him. “Just from each other.” And with that, he gave McCoy a pointed look.

McCoy had the grace to blush, look flustered, and beam with pride, all at once.

Kirk bet there was quite a story there and figured he pretty well knew what it was. His friends had been inseparable lately.

Spock and McCoy at least were lucky. They got to go on together.

But Kirk and Maggin-- Well, responsibility and circumstance would probably always separate them. But maybe Kirk could help erase some of the pain from Maggin’s eyes. For Kirk loved Maggin in his own special way, and he knew that Maggin loved him. But Time and Place were not in their favor.

At least not for now.

Kirk remembered what he had lisped to Maggin during their last night together, just a few hours ago. They had lain in each others’ arms trying to memorize the feel of each other, but knowing that memory was a fickle bitch and would soon cause all they had known to fade.

“A lesser man would turn away from his home and from those who needed him,” Kirk had said softly as he had gazed into Maggin’s eyes. “But I love a god among men, and he will do what is right no matter how much it hurts. Just as I will do what is right.”

Maggin had nodded with the wisdom of the words, but Kirk had seen Maggin’s bright tears then just as he was seeing them now. At least they’d had a little while together, and it had been good.

Suddenly there was commotion and noise, lots of noise. Across the street a braying woman and bawling kids came boiling through the people trying to do cleanup work.

“Rupert Alvin! Rupert Alvin! Where are you, Rupert Alvin?!"

The Enterprise men looked around in true puzzlement. Who was this woman and why was she headed their way? And who for goodness’s sake was Rupert Alvin?!

“Oh, there you are!” She stopped in front of the men and looked at them expectantly. Her long, light gray dress reached the top of her sturdy shoes, but was short-sleeved as befitted the warm summer weather. Her upper arms were muscular and as full as her ample breasts and a belly large with her next child. She huffed as she swung a toddler in her arms so that he wasn’t riding so much on his future sibling.

A girl about four years old let go of her mother’s skirts and ran forward to grasp Slade around the calves of his legs. “Dad-dee!” she crowed in delight as she grinned up at him in childish pleasure.
Her tangled blonde hair and snotty nose needed tending, but her apple red cheeks and morning blue eyes were duplicates of her mother’s.

“Take Judith!” the woman ordered.

Slade reached down and gently pulled the little girl up into his arms. They grinned at each other in delight. It was obvious who Slade worshiped and doted on.

“The twins are somewhere out in the crowd!” the woman continued as she looked around. “Those boys will be the death of me! And who knows where Martin has gotten to?! They were all with me when I started across the street.”

“They are just boys, Wiota,” Slade offered. “They will be alright.”

Slade could talk! And follow orders! And apparently perform in the bedroom! Would wonders never cease!

“Come, we must go,” Wiota instructed. “Tammany and Burra are preparing the noon meal. Then we must check the gardens for vegetables to preserve against the coming winter.” She turned to leave, expecting without question that Slade would follow.


Poor Slade! The remaining men all thought.

But he would have a roof over his head tonight. And food to eat. And a woman and children to love him and keep him company when he was sad or lonely or no longer young.

Rupert Alvin Slade. Perhaps the luckiest of them all.

Spock approached Amanda Grayson hesitantly. Even though it had been awhile since Spock had last been on Vulcan, he knew the proper protocol that must be observed between members of the royal family while receiving guests or even each other.

“Spock,” Amanda said majestically, but her eyes glowed with warmth for her son. “How good it is to see you again.”

Spock stiffly inclined his head to give her the honor that was due to her. “Mother, I am pleased to see that you are in good health.”

Several paces behind Spock, McCoy leaned toward Kirk. “I don’t know how in the hell he can tell that. He hasn’t so much as taken a good look at her.”

“Shh, Bones,” Kirk admonished. “We’re in a royal audience.”

McCoy shook his head. “Whenever it’d been awhile since I’d seen my mother, I’d grab her up in my arms and twirl her around several times. She yipped like a banshee, but she never doubted my love for her and that I was glad to see her.”

“They must have different traditions here on Vulcan.”

“I would’ve thought that the love between a mother and son was something that was fairly universal.
No wonder the poor bastard didn’t know how to cuddle up to us.”

“Shh, Bones! They’ll hear us.”

“Well, somebody better let them know that they’re acting weird as hell!”

“Bones! Shush!”

Amanda looked up at the disturbance behind Spock. “I see that you have brought guests with you.”

Kirk beamed at her with his brightest, closed-mouth smile while McCoy tried to look pleasant. It came out rather disgruntled, though, as though he was fighting down an attack of dyspepsia.

"Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy have accompanied me here, Mother,” he explained, not glancing behind him. He knew that McCoy was being generally disruptive again and that Kirk was probably flirting with her as soon as he caught Amanda’s eye. “You remember meeting them on the Enterprise.”

“Of course. And that’s how you became acquainted? Being in Starfleet together?” she questioned with almost a twinkle in her eyes. "And you quickly became closer?"

“Far from it,” Spock admitted. “It took a while for a relationship to develop.”

"But then all good things do take time,” Amanda reminded him.

"I suppose you might say that they have become a necessary evil to me,” he admitted to her.

"Well, don't go straining anything just on our account," McCoy blustered.

"Now, Doctor, you know how much I rely on the both of you."

"Well,” McCoy grumbled, but he was nonetheless pleased by what Spock had said. "Seems like if you hadn't been along, we would've had a rougher time of it than we did. We couldn't have done it without you, Spock, and that's a fact."

“Well, it certainly sounds like you had quite an adventure, dear,” Amanda said warmly to Spock.

"Please, Mother,” Spock said in an almost embarrassed voice. “It was not an adventure. It was a mission. An away mission that could have had dire consequences if it had failed. It was quite risky for awhile, but we managed to succeed. But not without our losses, though.”

"Yes, I know. Dear Christopher." She firmly shook herself out of her reverie. "And your health is much improved?"

"Enough so that I could do my duty to the Corps, you will be pleased to learn." "Of course, dear. But the important thing is if you had fun, and I believe that you did.”

On either side of him, Kirk and McCoy grinned in agreement.

“Mother. Please.” Spock pinched his lips together as he fought for the right words and the correct tone in which to say them. “It was not meant to be fun.”

“Speak for yourself, Vulcan,” McCoy muttered. “I've been having a whole lot of fun that I never expected to be having with you,” he said pointedly to Spock.
“Dr. McCoy, please, I beg of you. Do not give my mother the wrong idea of what we have been doing together in your quarters. She might be quite shocked to learn of our mutual activities, do you not believe?”

Kirk covered a laugh with a coughing fit.

Then everything became very personal as McCoy gave Spock a wide-eyed stare and said, “There’s nothing I could say or do that would pique her curiosity as much as what you just told her about what’s been going on between you and me, Vulcan. I’m telling you something right now, though. I’m not denying a thing and you can’t since you can’t lie.”

Spock’s mouth dropped open. His face flushed a deep shade of dark green.

Kirk slapped Spock’s right shoulder and settled his right hand on Spock’s right forearm. “Don’t worry about it, Spock. He’s just yanking your chains.”

“And doing rather a good job of it, too, I might add,” Spock said primly as he pulled down on either side of his tunic even though the garment needed no straightening.

McCoy slung his right forearm over Spock’s left shoulder so that McCoy’s fingers dangled over Spock’s Starfleet insignia. He leaned into Spock rather heavily.

“Don’t worry about your son, ma’am,” McCoy said. “I know he’s still sounding like he’s been constipated for a week, but we’ll get that taken out of him if we have to die trying.”

“I know that you will, Doctor,” Amanda answered with a gracious smile. “I can tell that he is much less rigid than when he left his boyhood home. You and Captain Kirk are both to be commended. You have done wonderfully well with him.”

Spock jerked. He had been under the illusion that he had been making changes in himself. He opened his mouth to protest.

“I know he’s a work in progress,” McCoy said as he accepted her compliment. “But aren’t we all?”

Spock gave him a writhing glare. “I am amazed that you are willing to include yourself in my group of apparent misfits and inept social outcasts.”

“Well, at least you recognize what you are,” McCoy joked.

Spock sneered. “Dr. McCoy, my mother will fear that I have been cast among lunatics.”

McCoy gave him a pleasant smile. “Your mother will know better. She seems like a levelheaded person to me.”

Spock tried to turn aside with a grunt of displeasure.

“Your mother will think that Jim and I are the bravest beings in the universe, to befriend you.”

“I fear that you may be correct, Doctor. Ordinarily, she is a very discerning person, but you and Captain Kirk have managed to delude even as astute a person as she generally is.”

“Wrong, Mr. Spock,” McCoy said softly, letting his eyes flick over Spock’s disgruntled face. “She will think that Jim and I are the luckiest beings in the universe to have found such a friend as you. And she will be right. You’re so loyal and steadfast and brave and strong. I don’t know what we ever did without you before we met you. But we don’t ever want that omission to happen ever again.
We’re a Triumvirate now and that’s the way that he and I want it to stay.”

Spock’s mouth really dropped open at the bald-faced statement, and he was at a loss for words. McCoy’s ranting was something that Spock could handle, but praise left him speechless. Truth be known, Spock was choked up by the good feels washing over him.

“Gee, Jim, I’ve finally found a way to shut up the Vulcan. Isn’t the quiet peaceful?”

Kirk bent forward to study Spock’s stunned face. “I think that you removed his vocal cords, too, Bones. He seems to have lost the power of speech.”

“That will come as a blessing to my ears,” McCoy muttered. “Although I was becoming kinda used to his pis—” McCoy glanced at Amanda’s amused face. “To his peculiar ways of phraseology,” he finished lamely.

“Yes, indeed,” Amanda noted with a wise smile. She knew that Kirk and especially McCoy were being very careful with their speech and would not say anything that would be embarrassing to a lady. “I can tell that everyone has done a lot of adjusting for the common good.”

“You can sure as, ah, everything say that again, ma’am,” McCoy agreed.

“It has certainly been a joy for the three of you to visit,” Amanda said with a sincere smile.

“Well, don’t you be worrying any about your son,” Kirk assured her. “We’ll be taking good care of him on the Enterprise. He’s one of us now, and we take care of our own.”

“I know you will, Captain. And that pleases me very much.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Kirk replied with a soft smile.

“And I will be pleased to begin my work on Gerrend.”

“Glad to hear it!” Kirk said. "It will be worthy work and very pleasing for you to do. You will find that their commander is very easy to work with, also, once you get acquainted.”

“Yes,” Amanda answered. “I am looking forward to being with that young man.” And just by the way that Kirk grimaced, she knew how much he envied her. She would be very helpful and gracious to the people of Gerrend for Kirk’s sake, if for nothing else. Because she knew how important Kirk was to her son.

Amanda smiled to herself. The circle of love only improves with use. Just see how much it had expanded since she had sent her son out into the universe to find his life. And he had apparently found it with these two worthy men, and Amanda couldn't be happier.

"My husband will be sorry he missed you. He had been planning a visit to see his son Sybok when you called."

McCoy looked stunned. “You mean there’s other Spocks in the universe?”

Spock took a great deal of pleasure saying it. “Indeed.”

“Give us mercy,” McCoy muttered as if he was receiving horrendous news. “We’re gonna need it,” he said in awe.

“And the men of the family are quite fertile,” Spock reported with a great deal of satisfaction.
“It just keeps getting better,” McCoy muttered with unblinking eyes. Then he looked up as if remembering that he was not alone. “And by that, I mean more terrifying.” Then he seemed to collect himself. “I guess that Starfleet will just have to keep you busy so you will be unable to find any time to be proving your reputed claim to high fertility.”

“I will do my duty in regards to my people and my offspring, Doctor.”

“Yeah, and I think that you’ll probably take a lot of pleasure in doing that duty, too,” McCoy said with suspicion.

“You have said it yourself, Doctor. A man must serve where and when he can for the common good.”

“Yeah, but that duty isn’t in your immediate future,” McCoy decided briskly. “In the meanwhile, you are ours,” he said with a great amount of possession reflecting in his voice.

“I will be the judge of where I will be of most value—”

McCoy stroked Spock’s cheek with the back of his bent fingers. “Jim and I took a vote,” he said softly and very seriously. “And you’re with us.” His voice had grown quite husky.

“Doctor, how can you act like that when you’ve always made me feel like a fifth wheel—”

"Not always.... Have I?" he asked in the same husky voice.

Spock was lost in the wonder that was McCoy. "Well, I.... suppose not...."

McCoy’s left hand grabbed Spock’s left arm as McCoy leaned against Spock further. If Spock moved now, an unbalanced McCoy would fall flat without Spock’s support. "Just wait until I get you alone--" he threatened. "Then you'll know for certain."

But Spock was not intimidated. Instead, his eyes glowed warmly at McCoy. "I will await your further analysis at that time. And will anticipate your persuasive techniques, whatever you believe them to be."

McCoy’s steady gaze pierced him, then McCoy looked straight at Amanda. “We’d better get your son out of here now. He’s starting to talk in contractions and use idioms. Hard telling what might come next.” His eyes enlarged. “Maybe even profanity!” He shook his head in fake worry. “It’s very disconcerting. Very disconcerting, indeed.” He tightened his hand on Spock’s arm. “Come on. Kiss your momma goodbye so we can leave.”

“I am not accustomed to such a public display of emotions--” Spock started in an annoyed voice.

“Alright, then Jim and I will kiss her goodbye.”

Kirk and McCoy left Spock’s side and smiled shyly at Amanda as they stood in front of her.

“If you would be so kind as to permit us to bid you farewell,” Kirk said diplomatically.

“It will be my pleasure, gentlemen,” she assured them as she offered first one cheek to Kirk and then the other one to McCoy for their kisses.

“Alright, Spock, your turn,” McCoy urged.

Spock stepped forward. “I hope that you continue to enjoy good health, Mother,” he said stiffly.
Amanda looked at him rather amused. “And I hope that you find what you are seeking, my son.”

Spock visibly relaxed. “I believe that I have.”

“I know that you have.” She leaned forward and kissed his cheek.

Spock stood woodenly a moment, then grabbed her elbows and pulled her closer. His arms went around her in a tight hug, and all was still for a long moment.

“Ah,” Kirk said finally, and Spock broke away from his mother.

“Thank you for your hospitality, ma’am,” Kirk remarked.

“You two may visit any time you wish,” she answered.

“Thank you, ma’am,” McCoy acknowledged. “We’ll even bring your son along with us. I’m sure that we can persuade him.” He cracked his knuckles to indicate that he and Kirk would use force if necessary.

That ploy seemed to release some of the tension in the farewell scene.

“I am sorry that my husband was not here. I will tell him that you look well, Spock.”

“Thank you, Mother,” Spock answered stiffly.

“I can see that for myself,” Sarek said as he suddenly strolled out into the middle of the group.

“Sarek,” Amanda said with relief. “You came after all.”

“I have been listening,” he confessed.

Kirk and McCoy saw Amanda’s quick intake of breath. That must have been quite an admission for Sarek to make.

“Father,” Spock greeted unemotionally.

Kirk looked concerned, but McCoy bit his lips together as if he’d like to give Spock the tongue-lashing that he deserved. But even McCoy realized that he couldn’t expect too many miracles in one day.

“Spock,” Sarek acknowledged back, finally looking at his son. “How pleasant to see you.”

“And likewise you, Father.”

“Are you content with what you are doing?”

“Yes, I am, thank you, sir,” Spock answered stiffly.

McCoy drew his breath in sharply and rolled his eyes.

Kirk spoke up quickly before McCoy could find his tongue and express to both father and son what he thought about their constipated behavior. “Ambassador, how good it is to see you again,” Kirk said as he stepped forward with a smile and his hand extended.

Sarek smiled with ease. Sarek remembered liking the blonde Starship commander with the engaging smile. “Captain Kirk, so good to see you.” He shook Kirk’s hand enthusiastically.
“And you remember Dr. McCoy, I believe,” Kirk said as he indicated McCoy.

“Doctor.” Sarek offered him a hearty greeting, too. “How kind of you to visit us.”

“Ambassador,” McCoy said politely as they shook hands. “How good of you to have us.”

Then a distinct silence fell on the group.

“Well, we really must be going,” Kirk said, suddenly stirring himself.

“Of course,” Sarek agreed. “New worlds to conquer, new lands to see, new beings to meet. How exciting for you.”

Kirk squinted at him in the hard sunlight of Vulcan. “Yes, sir, it is.”

“I can understand how it would be all be so appealing to young men,” Sarek said as he turned to Spock. “I was young once, too, Spock. I can understand your need for adventure and to find yourself.”

The eyes of both Kirk and McCoy got big. Sarek was making a gesture. Would Spock be bright enough and kind enough to acknowledge it?

Spock’s smile seemed more like a simper to Kirk and McCoy, but they knew that was all they were going to get.

“Thank you for understanding that, Father. I will do my very best to succeed.”

Sarek placed his hand on Spock’s shoulder. “That is all I can ask. Because, at the end of all time, the only thing that is truly important is that a man was true to himself.”

“And to what he believes in,” Spock added. Then he looked around at Kirk and McCoy with an inscrutable smile. “And to the friends who believe in him.”

McCoy’s mouth dropped open. The damn Vulcan had said it! He considered them friends!

But now they needed an exit. McCoy stepped forward and grabbed Spock’s arm again. A moment later, Kirk grabbed Spock’s other arm.

“Say ‘goodbye’ now, Spock,” Kirk prompted.

Spock looked softly at his mother and then at his father. Soft looks seemed to reflect back at him.

Then Kirk and McCoy steered Spock away with a walking monologue of nonsense, mostly from McCoy.

When at last it finally quieted, Amanda looked with a contented smile at Sarek.

“I am satisfied, my husband. Spock has found his place in the world.”

Sarek raised her fingers to his lips. “And if you are satisfied, my love, then I am satisfied.”

“How else can I be?” Amanda asked. “Spock is with people who have taken him into their hearts. The crew of the Enterprise is his family. And Kirk and McCoy love him like brothers.” And maybe more, she thought to herself as she remembered how Spock and McCoy had acted around each other. But that would be Amanda’s secret for now.
Sarek cleared his throat. “I would say that was all romantic hogwash, my love, if I was not so bewitched by you and always shall be.”

“Tell me more, my husband,” she said coyly. Then she looked up at him through her thick lashes. “You know that I never tire of hearing you tell me such lovely things.”

But Amanda hesitated a moment for more reassurances. “Do you believe that Spock will really be happy, Sarek?”

“I believe that he has as much chance as anybody,” Sarek answered as he drew his arm around his forever young wife. “That is all the guarantee that anyone is allowed. And if he works it right, it will be all that he will ever need.” He smiled down at Amanda who smiled back at him. "A chance was all that I needed. And look what it got me."

End Notes

I own nothing of Star Trek, its characters, and/or its story lines.

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