Taluhk nash-veh k'dular ( I cherish you )

by SupposedToBeWriting

Summary

Ambassador Spock has the advantage of hindsight, when it comes to his own long life -- so, when his counterpart's father asks how to correct the mistakes of the father, Spock knows exactly what to tell him.
The daily reports had been delivered to him this morning during his meditation session. Perhaps, in his youth, he would have been tempted to break it early in order to complete his duties as soon as they made themselves known. He had such confidence in his capacity for control that, some days, he would forego meditation altogether. Ambassador Spock accounted that to the brash foolishness of a young man and discarded the whim, finishing his meditation as normal.

That day, he completed his meditation in the rising sun of New Vulcan. The heat settled against his skin, into his bones. He imagined his emotions as an ocean inside of him, dark, swirling, chaotic, and the sun beating down until there was nothing left but an empty lakebed. He had sat there for some time. But that had been in the morning, some hours ago. Now, he felt refreshed and prepared.

Before he looked at the reports, Spock went to his replicator to brew a cup of mint tea. It was not the mint tea he remembered as a youth, but rather the mint tea he had embraced during his time in Starfleet. He considered what his people called ‘mint tea’ to be a minor cultural embarrassment. Actual mint tea had been introduced to him by Jim, and Spock had not looked back from it.

He sat with his legs curled underneath him in the sofa, looking through the reports. As the Ambassador, Spock did not directly assist with every department on the colony, but he wanted to know the inner workings of every single facility. In some ways, it was not unlike helming a starship: though a considerably more stationary and considerably more Vulcan one than he experienced in the past.

Even so, focusing on these reports made everything feel more solid to him. He had been involved in statistically absurd adventures before, but entering a new universe altogether was something beyond statistically absurd – it brushed against the impossible. Fitting, he supposed, given that Spock suspected and hoped that it was indeed his last brash venture. He was needed here, as evidenced by the three dozen messages that had somehow been left in his communicator while he slept.

It did not bother him, remaining permanently in this other universe. Spock knew his passing from the other universe would be mourned, but he had no family, no cherished friends, and (most importantly) no call of duty. He would rather assist here than be regarded as some sort of bygone relic there.

Still. He thought of his old family and his cherished friends frequently. He thought of Jim, and the Enterprise. They gave him peace when he faltered, when fear began to creep into his form. Once, he would have thought of the teachings of Surak to calm him.

Instead, his memories of Jim provided the most comfort. There is no such thing as the unknown – only things temporarily hidden, temporarily not understood. If Jim were here, he would throw himself into this situation without hesitation. At the time, Spock considered it brash foolishness. Now, he thought of Jim as the most practical man he’d ever met.

This universe’s Jim contacted him on occasion. He had a predilection for idle chit-chat that Spock had never fully grasped. Still, Spock always spoke with him nonetheless. It was good to hear tales from his Enterprise, occasionally experiencing vivid déjà vu. Jim’s reactions were similar to his own Captain’s, though without the practical experience advantage his Jim had had when he took control of the starship. Spock had hope for him yet.

This universe’s Spock was somewhat more of a concern. If he was able to parse out the differences
between Jims in a somewhat objective matter, he was entirely emotional when it came to regarding this Spock against his own history. Surely he had never been such a whelp. Surely he had held himself with a little more professionalism than this Spock. Surely. Someone would have told him how obnoxious he was.

It had occurred to him that Dr. McCoy had called him obnoxious, many times, and even Jim on a few occasions – perhaps he should have listened more.

Regardless, Spock lended a patient, mentoring ear to his universal counterpart. This Spock called him even less frequently than Jim, only to request updates to the new colony. While Jim ventured too close to asking about what his alternate future was, Spock gave it a wide berth. He did not want to know.

Good. Spock would not know what to tell him. This Spock’s future had already veered away from his even moreso than Jim’s had, and to a degree, Spock hoped that this version of himself was spared some of the difficulties he himself had to go through.

This Spock was young, yet. That was what Spock told himself whenever he found himself suppressing a sarcastic roll of his eyes at his … antics.

His front door chimed at him. There was a visitor. Spock checked the time and looked up in confusion. He had many meetings today, but he hadn’t expected one so early. Leaving his half-drunk mint tea on the table, Spock rose from his spot to go to the door. He kept his domicile tidy and sparse, with few sentimental belongings – after all, he had not come with any. Somewhere in the other universe was a cherished lizard horn and a well-worn Vulcan harp, but he had no use for them here.

The door slid open, and there was his father – or, rather, his alternate’s father – standing at the door in formal Vulcan robes.

Spock blinked in surprise. “Sarek?” He asked stiffly to the other ambassador. Had there been an emergency in the colony, and Sarek had, for some reason, decided to venture out to his own small home on the outskirts to find him for it? He had his communicator number. They had spoken before. Why would he visit in person?

“Ambassador.” Never one to be outdone in formality, Sarek extended his hand in a sweeping gesture. “May I enter?”

This was not his father, Spock had to tell himself. His father had died some time ago, at a very old age. Thankfully, the illness that troubled his father during his last years seemed to spare Spock currently. For that, he was grateful. The idea of being tended to for his basic needs was anathema to him. He was still independent and mobile. If he lost his focus once in a while or lost his footing, Spock considered it an inevitable factor of his age.

Nonetheless, Spock respectfully took a step back and allowed Sarek in. “Would you like tea?” He asked as Sarek situated himself at his table. He had no reports with him, no obvious PADDs or communicators. Sarek nonetheless nodded and Spock went to the replicator.

It would be better if he replicated traditional Vulcan mint tea for him. Spock had never bothered to program it into the replicator, as he hadn’t had the swill in years. His fingers hovered over the console uncertainly. He’d last seen traditional Vulcan mint tea brewed by hand a lifetime ago. It had been by his mother, who would pick it up at the market and brew it to go along with dinner.
What had been the ingredients? What had his mother picked up? Spock remembered the smell of the Vulcan market, when he’d been short enough to stand underneath her elbow. The noises, the bright colors, the sensation that there was emotion there, even if nobody would admit it – a kind of global secret that they all shared.

It was enough to click. Spock’s fingers confidently tapped in the recipe for mint tea. A second later, the replicator produced a steaming cup.

“Thank you.” Sarek received the cup as Spock sat across from him. This was already going more congenially than past meetings with his father. “I would like to have a conversation with you about your universe, for details you are comfortable with providing.”

Ah. That was more understandable, though he did not think his father would fall victim to such human impulses as curiosity. “I see. That is understandable. I can answer certain questions, there are some topics I will not speak of. I do not want to cause any unnecessary influence over this one, as I cannot guarantee that time will proceed the same here as it did there.”

“Oh obviously.” Sarek was regarding him strangely. Spock caught his eyes flick up and down his figure, as if he were summing it up. He was not unused to that from his own father. “We are in an unusual situation.”

That he was sitting with the alternate version of his own father, decades older than him? “Indeed. It is the only time this has ever occurred to my knowledge or, indeed, ever will occur.”

“Fathers are rarely able to examine the entire life of their sons before they are buried.” Sarek raised one hand at Spock’s objection. “I am not your father, and you are not my son. I am aware. But you understand that there are certain similarities that cannot be dismissed.”

Spock could rationalize that.

“I do not know if you caused your father the problems that my son caused me. If so, you understand my concerns about his future.”

Far be it from him to argue there. With a hint of whimsy, Spock rose an eyebrow and replied, “There are differences in our pasts. Your son joined Starfleet Academy at a typical age and joined without difficulty. I requested admittance at sixteen, unbeknownst to my parents, and covertly plead my case for early acceptance in front of the entire Admiralty board.”

Sarek’s expression did not change, but he went silent for a few seconds. His face got tight. Spock recognized that emotion in his own father – complete and utter incredulity. It delighted him to a degree, and he continued.

“Concern for your offspring is logical. But if you believe that he will someday be without obligation, without duty or obligation – do not.” Spock rose one hand to gesture to himself. “I cannot speak for him, but for myself, I have never been without use.”

Most Vulcans his age would be content with peaceful meditation in their retirement. Last week, he had assisted in the digging of a canal. Yes, he had to rest for three days after from the exertion, but his point remained.

He understood Sarek’s fears. When he had rejected the opportunity to continue his education on Vulcan, Sarek’s instinct had been that he was embracing what Sybok had done. That he would grow stagnant in his studies and turn to emotionalism, perhaps even rebel against his own species and culture. At the time, he had viewed Sarek as being unreasonably controlling, and perhaps he
had been. But he had also been petrified that history was going to repeat itself.

Either way, Spock no longer blamed him. Experiencing his father’s mind through Captain Picard’s
had opened his eyes.

It was too late. Far, far too late. But, he understood his father for the first time only then.

“Did you ever have children, Ambassador?” Sarek asked him, curiously.

Spock did not answer. He would not.

“Perhaps you still understand the logic behind it.” Sarek brought the cup of tea, still nearly boiling,
to his lips. “That there are certain … doubts about how you have behaved. Decisions you have
made. You parent to account for the deficiencies in your own upbringing, but in doing so, create
new deficiencies. Children, by their nature, will act against how you expect and it is difficult to
predict.”

Spock remembered the hundreds of arguments he had shared with his father. As he aged, they had
drifted more to hard-headed differences in policy. In his youth, though, Spock considered Sarek to
be the model Vulcan. As a result, Sarek did not love him, because Vulcans did not express love,
but instead viewed parenting as a simple part of duty. Spock was an obstacle to be overcome the
second he disobeyed Sarek’s career plans for him, and that was that.

Then he had seen inside his father’s mind, and had seen the depth of love, of care, of regret for the
arguments he had shared with his son. It had hurt to know the depth of Sarek’s devotion to him,
and to know that he was gone.

“To have doubts about one’s own actions is an inevitable process of being alive. As actions are
made, one gains foresight and realizes most logical decisions existed.” Spock elaborated.

“Parenting is no different. Is there something you wanted to ask me, Sarek?”

Sarek paused, and for a second, Spock saw genuine hesitation flash across his face. He seemed,
a... ashamed to be here.

“I do not know your own relationship with your father. But I wanted to ask, if ... there was
anything you could have corrected about his behavior. Mistakes you wish he had not made. It is
illogical to me that I should repeat the same mistakes with Spock, given that I have ...” Sarek’s
hand gestured towards Spock. “Foresight.”

Oh. He hadn’t expected that question. Sarek trying to garner information from Spock in order to
improve his own parenting seemed nearly devious. In thought, Spock wrapped his cloak further
around himself and crossed his legs. He did not know whether he should answer, but he was
curious. “You must have theories, if this has troubled you enough to seek my help.”

Sarek nodded. His eyes were on the table carefully. “Isn’t it obvious?” He asked, slow. “My son is
half human. I have driven him to inner conflict about his identity.”

It felt strange. In one sense, Spock was speaking directly about his own life and experiences from
an objective standpoint, as if he’d watched himself from afar. In another, he was trying to guess the
experiences and feelings of another version of himself. He looked down at his fingers,
remembering his life on Vulcan, how he’d looked at classmates and wondered why he found it so
hard.

“You cannot fault yourself for having a half-human child. It is not a weakness. You were not
without flaw, but my struggle did not directly come from you. Even if you perfectly represented
Vulcan culture and Mother perfectly represented human culture, I am not split into perfect halves,” Spock explained. “I learned to understand myself eventually, and I am no longer torn.”

Relief flooded Sarek, characterized by a slow, steady exhaled breath and flexing his hand on the table. Spock had felt his father’s concern and care before, but to see that Sarek was concerned about his son … it was touching.

“We never repaired our relationship. We were not hostile, but engaged in arguments regularly between our assignments.” Spock’s tone was blunt. “At the time, I believed that was the best our relationship could ever be.” He paused, looking down at his hands. “For that reason, I questioned, until past your death, whether you truly … whether you experienced … “

Sarek’s eyes were boring holes into him. It was a different man, Spock told himself, but he could still not speak the words in front of his father.

“If you wish to rectify the errors my father made in my life, tell your son how you care for him. It is vital you do so now, for I, at least, had the affection of my mother until reached the end of her natural lifespan.” Even if Spock had not contacted her as much as he should have, but that was more due to the rigor of his duties than any schisms in their relationship.

He knew that it was asking a lot of Sarek. Even for Vulcans, the man was astoundingly opposed to verbalizing his emotions out loud. “It is unVulcan to do so,” Sarek protested, though his voice was soft.

“Perhaps. But you have realized by now that your son will never be fully Vulcan in his beliefs and customs. Parenting is not meant to impose your way of life on your offspring, Sarek. If it would help him, is it not worth extending outside your boundaries? He has pushed his so many times to meet your approval.”

Sarek remained silent. Spock pushed on.

“Even if you said it just once, he would remember it for the rest of his life. I remember every instance that my father did not say it to me.”

Sarek finished his tea. The cup was empty and made a light noise as he placed it back on the table. Spock’s cup was cold at this point, still mostly full of its brew. He hoped that Sarek was not going to rage against the very idea. He did not have the patience to argue, much less with an alternate version of his father.

“I will consider this in meditation.” Sarek finally stated, pushing himself up from the table. His eyebrows were furrowed together. “I apologize if I have pried too far into your life.”

“I have expressed everything willingly, in hope that it will help. I consider it no more a burden than digging a canal or negotiating trade treaties.” Spock noted another difference in this man than his father – this man had tragically lost his bondmate so early, leaving him utterly alone on this planet. He knew his own father hated being completely alone. Most Vulcans did. He did.

Spock walked him back to the front door, hands clasped behind him carefully. “It has been good to speak with you, Sarek,” he informed him politely. Sarek adjusted his robes as he prepared to leave. “If you would like to visit again, or perhaps hail me from whichever planet you travel to, it would not be unwelcome.” It was an honest honor. Seeing Sarek brought back memories of his father. Not all of them were unpleasant and seeing Sarek want to improve on himself was fascinating to examine.
Sarek considered once, and then nodded. “My duties will permit it. Live long and prosper, Ambassador,” he informed, ever-again the formal diplomat. His hand raised in the normal greeting. Spock unclasped his fingers to do the same.

“Peace and long life, Sarek,” he echoed, before the door slid shut.

An interesting way to begin his day. Spock placed his tea back in the replicator to warm it, settling with legs curled back underneath him. He wondered if Sarek would take his words to heart. Sarek was unconscionably stubborn; Spock had inherited it from him. If he did not do as Spock asked, it would not ruin his alter’s life – yet, Spock still grieved for the sadness, the isolation that the boy would have to endure without his father’s support.

He knew it was illogical to place wagers on the future. There was very little he could do about it, now. And yet, internally, Spock willed his counterpart the very best of fortune.

*You almost make me believe in luck, Captain.*
Commander Spock

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Spock let out an imperceptible sigh of pleasure when he entered his quarters. The temperature was about twenty degrees hotter than the corridor. Although he had lived aboard starships for long enough now that it wasn’t a true issue, he always felt intrinsically more comfortable inside his own quarters. He settled himself against his bed, reaching for his PADD to review the reports.

“Computer, play ambient program 4,” he remarked on a whim. A low tune filled the room, a portion of a Vulcan harp piece that he’d always been fond of. It helped filter out the starship noises he could hear just outside, and sometimes, he needed that.

Particularly when their illustrious Captain played his music a little too loudly in his quarters.

He hadn’t argued with the Captain today, which was a good day. It seemed they mostly had professional arguments; it was their primary form of conversation. Although Spock did not doubt his abilities (if he did, Starfleet would’ve been informed), his lack of experience and unwillingness to take advice was aggravating.

Now, he could settle in his quarters, do the work that he needed, and simply be … alone.

It was almost disturbingly easy to be alone on a starship of nearly one thousand. Spock listened to the tune as he scrolled through the reports in silence, accordingly scribbling down a correction or comment there. They were in no danger, for now, and Spock doubted anyone would need him.

He had come to terms with his duty. Jim needed a First Officer like himself, and Spock would provide it. Jim had been instrumental in the Nero situation, and Spock had proved himself unfit for Captaincy.

So that was that. He had terminated his relationship with Uhura some time ago. With the destruction of Vulcan, Spock was fully prepared to return to the new colony and perform his reproductive duties. They had not asked that of him yet (which was faintly troubling in itself – did they not consider him Vulcan? Such thoughts troubled his sleep), and yet, he did not rekindle his relationship with Uhura.

He had no friends aboard this starship, but that was fine. Friends implied an emotional relationship, and Spock was not going to engage in that. Clearly, he had engaged in it too much already, given his emotional state when Vulcan had been destroyed. It was time, as a human would say, to pull back.

The tune ended and Spock moved onto the next song. Suddenly, the viewscreen in his room started chiming a quiet notification. “Commander Spock, you’re receiving an incoming request for communication.”

From outside the starship? They would have gotten him on his comm-badge, otherwise. “From whom?”

“Ambassador Sarek.”

Father. Spock slid off his bed so quickly that he lost his footing, catching himself on the table. Perhaps something was wrong with the colony. He settled himself at the table and clapsed his
hands together in front of him – no, too strange, human gesture, no – and compromised by setting
his hands flat on his lap. “Open channel.”

His father’s face filled the viewscreen, impassive as always. Spock nevertheless found himself
searching for some sort of answer on his face. He found none. He deliberated internally about
using his professional term or his familial relation, and settled on the former. “Ambassador?”

“Spock.” Not Commander, as his father was in the habit of using when it was professional
business. This was personal, then.

“Has something happened in the colony?” Spock immediately regretted the desperate tone in his
voice. It was too emotional, too direct.

Sarek shook his head. “No. The colony is progressing. I will forward you the reports on the
stardate we’ve agreed upon.” A few more days.

Spock tilted his head to the side, puzzled. “Then … may I ask the purpose of your
communication?”

Sarek broke eye contact with the viewscreen, staring off to the side. Spock recognized where he
was. In his own home on the colony. He wasn’t travelling, then. That wasn’t unusual, occasionally
he did touch down on the colony to conduct negotiations. “I have been having conversations with
individuals.”

Spock had to bite his tongue not to respond with many conversations with many individuals, I
presume.

“The destruction of Vulcan has impacted us all.” Sarek started. “I see how it affects everyone in the
colony. It has made me realize …” He trailed off. Unlike him. Spock could not even presume what
was going on. Was his father announcing his betrothal to a new bondmate? Spock had been
expecting that, even if he privately thought it was too soon to form a new bond. “That I have not
been the father that you need. A father that a solely Vulcan child would need, perhaps, but not the
father that you need.”

Oh. Spock could not even fathom how to understand that. What that meant. But he knew that Sarek
was wrong. “No. Father, I have not been the son you expected. It is not your doing, but –”

“Speak no more of that.” It was not a gripe, but nevertheless held some hostility in it. Spock went
quiet, staring down at his hands in his lap. “I did not contact you to reiterate how you have strayed
from my expectations.”

“Then.” Spock broke in, uncertain. “Why did you contact me?”

“Spock.” He brought his gaze back up at the viewscreen, face as impassive as Spock had ever

He blinked many times at the viewscreen, certain that this was some sort of test or trick that he was
very rapidly failing. Sarek’s tests did not usually border on the cruel, though, nor would they make
him act in an unVulcan manner, as he just had. At first, he was concerned that his first language
had grown so unpracticed that he simply misunderstood.

“I’m … sorry?”

“I know your Vulcan is still adequate, Spock. I cherish you.”
“I. I thought that was what you said.” Spock clarified, his brain trying to rapidly come up with an answer. A possible theory for why his father could be admitting love. “Are you …” That must be it. They had a history of heart defects in the family. Two of his uncles had perished from them before his birth. “Are you ill, Father? Injured? I can contact the Captain if I must return to the colony.”

“I am at the prime of my health.” Besides recovering from a painfully severed bond, presumably. Spock’s only theory was dashed. “You are not fully Vulcan, Spock. That does not diminish my regard for you. You are my son. You are dutiful, and you abide by the teachings of Surak. That is all I can ask of you.”

“Who told you to do this?”

“It matters little. Amanda was able to sense my emotion for her through our bond, but you had no such advantage. I presumed you simply knew.” The mention of his mother had Spock prickling with pain again. Mother. Mother is gone. Mother is gone and I should have told her how important she was. “It has been brought to my attention that you did not. I am aware you are determining who you are, Spock, and I did not want your misconceptions about my understanding of you to prevent your actualization.”

“Th – “ Spock’s tongue suddenly felt like it was too big in his mouth, like he couldn’t get the words out. Dimly, from the Captain’s quarters, some synth-heavy music started to play. Not the time, Captain, please. “Thank you. Father.”

“I cannot help but think, if your mother were here, she would think us both fools.”

“I was under the impression she assumed that as a scientific fact.” Spock rose his hands to the table, comfortably clasping them together. “Do you recall, when we visited her home on Earth, when that creature came upon you in the woods?”

Sarek nodded at the memory. Spock had been a young child, then, but every so often they would visit Colorado, Earth. They usually went hiking in the mountains. It brought Spock joy to do so; they were considerably different than the mountains on Vulcan. So many more trees, and animals, and fungi, and flora to examine.

“Yes. What was the term for it … age has made me forgotten.”

“Mephitis mephitis, Father, the common striped skunk.”

“Yes. What an odor it produced. An odor you were sure to inform me of the entire way back to our lodgings, and, weeks after the incident, you were sure to remind me in front of other Federation dignitaries.”

It was hard to fight down a smile, and that was not a feeling he often experienced in front of his father. “I would imagine the skunk was more communicative than the dignitaries.”

He watched a nerve twitch in Sarek’s jaw. Was his father, his father, also trying to fight down a smile? “You would not be irrational in saying so. Your mother would be – is – proud of what you have been able to achieve. I grieve that she is not here, to make this easier for you, but I will do what I am able.”

It was a touching prospect. “I grieve with thee.”

There was the whirr of a communicator. Spock reached for his on impulse and Sarek reached for his own. This time, it was not Spock’s that called him. Sarek placed it face-down. “I must go,
Spock. My duties require me. You will remember what I said?"

“Of course.” And Spock would – he had a feeling he’d remember this for the rest of his life, if only for how unusual it was. “And – Father?”

“Yes?”

“Taluhk nash-veh k’dular.” And, indeed, with Sarek as his only living relative and one of perhaps a dozen Vulcans he still personally knew – he meant it. He disagreed with his father on a number of points, and the burden of expectation still loomed on him, but this was enough to soothe a grieving mind, for now. “Farewell.”

Sarek nodded. “Farewell, for now.”

The viewscreen went black.

Spock stared at it blankly, aware of only the faint thumping of the Captain’s music from his quarters.

His father loved him. His father loved him. Spock had always presumed that if he perhaps worked harder, maintained his standards, then perhaps he would be worthy of his father, but … this.

Eventually, Spock pried himself from the table to go sit on his bed again. He curled up there with his PADD on his lap, the reports lying unread there. The entire time, Spock stared ahead at a wall, trying to process it. Taluhk nash-veh k’dular. I love you. I cherish you. He had nobody he could speak to on the Enterprise about this, even if the bizarre urge to go and simply sit in Jim’s quarters rose up in him. He just wanted company. He knew he couldn’t process this tonight.

Or this week. The rest of his life.

Spock laid down on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. His PADD rested, a barely perceptible weight, on his chest.

In truth, nothing had changed. A miscommunication had been clarified between them, that was all. His duties still weighed heavily on him. He still had a shaky working relationship with the Captain. The destruction of Vulcan, and the death of his mother, never left his thoughts. He had no true friends to speak of and very little by way of company.

But, somehow, laying there in his quarters – Spock suddenly felt a little less alone.

Chapter End Notes

This work heavily draws on the ST: TNG episode wherein Picard mind melds with Spock and Spock realizes that his father actually did love him, after all. There's a few episodes that involve Sarek, and they're reach equally heart breaking (TNG manages to break my heart about TOS characters more than TOS ever did). I thought it would make a neat little 'breaking the cycle'-esque dynamic.

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