This Business Don't Run on Heart

Summary

Leonard, miserably divorced, finally gives in to his hospital colleagues' requests to join them at a luxurious pleasure house. He's put off by the experience until the Madam offers to get him a boy, and the one that arrives at his room is nothing like he'd imagined.
Jim had always followed three rules when it came to selling his body: Don’t give the client your real name, don’t deny the client anything, and definitely—obviously—don’t fall for the client. It’s never been difficult to stick to those rules until Jim finds himself working in a house full of girls, servicing a man he calls Bones.

*-This work is now compete-*

Notes

PLEASE read the tags! This has the potential to be very triggering as this is not a "nice" story. Anything I think will be very jarring is tagged for in the beginning notes of said chapter.

The main paring is Jim/Bones, and this is ultimately a mckirk story, however all of the tagged pairings are explicit to some degree. There are small mentions of other pairings but they are brief and/or side story and not explicit.

I absolutely prefer the term sex worker irl, as well as for modern work, but for the duration of this fic it will not be used as the term was not coined until the 1980s.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Inspired by and loosely based on the film L'Apollonide: Souvenirs de la maison close. After seeing it I just could not stop thinking about Jim in a turn-of-the-century brothel.

There are a few ENT characters that show up in this work, I know it doesn't work with the canon timeline but it's AU all the way here so...I just thought they fit well. It's not necessary to be previously familiar with those characters.

Leonard watched as his colleagues gradually disappeared from the room, all lead out by beautiful, scantily clad women. Christine had been one of the first to go, slipping away with her conquest, a tall, dark-haired beauty.

There were still a number of girls left, at least six he could choose from. Beautiful as they were—and they certainly were—Leonard had no interest in them, tonight he’d rather spend the night in an empty bed than stay here with some curvy thing.

The Madam had been watching him since his last colleague had gone and as she continued to do so settled herself on the couch next to him. “Karen is a lovely pick,” she said to him after blowing a stream of smoke from her mouth, “she’ll be very attentive.”

Leonard didn’t even look at her as he grumbled a noise of disinterest, he had already resolved himself to go home compassionless.

“Doctor…McCoy, is it?”

Leonard nodded curtly.

“Doctor McCoy, are you not satisfied with my girls?” She took another drag from her cigarette.

“No Ma’am, they’re all charming,” Leonard said flatly, eyes fixed on the opposite wall.

She looked at him again, “I can get a boy if you like.” Leonard turned his head suddenly, meeting her gaze, the corner of her lip turned up like she’d suddenly pulled his card, “he can be here within the hour.”

Leonard quickly averted his eyes again, backpedaling, “I don’t want to be any trouble to you.”

“No trouble, Doctor. It would be a shame for you to leave a pleasure house disappointed.” Leonard opened his mouth like he might refuse. “I assure you sir, he will be of the same caliber as my girls.”

“As long as you’re sure it’s not a problem,” Leonard said swallowing nervously. A boy. He hadn’t even known it was what he needed tonight until she’d said it.

“Of course not Doctor McCoy,” She gathered her skirts to get up, “I’ll make the call immediately. Shall I ask for him prepared or shall I leave that to you?”

Leonard’s cheeks darkened and his mouth fell open.
He waited in the luxurious room upstairs just short of an hour. It was beautiful and Leonard could see why this particular pleasure house was so highly sought after, as well as expensive—the atmosphere was almost as enticing as the girls. There was a fresh stack of towels as well as two bowls full of water and a thick oil, respectively. The bed was covered in dark, rich linens and stacked high with soft pillows. He lowered himself into one of the velvet covered chairs opposite of the bed, tapping his fingers restlessly on the armrest.

The door opened partially, and the Madam appeared, “Ah, Doctor, I do apologize for your wait.”

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“Please don’t,” Leonard said, standing quickly, "it's quite alright."

“This is James, I do hope he is more to your tastes,” she opened the door fully, stepping aside to reveal a tall, blonde boy. Young—much younger than Leonard would like to admit he was attracted to—with piercing blue eyes, even in the darkness of the night. He licked at his plump lips and cocked his head to the side, surveying his client.

Leonard would have never picked this boy, he looked dangerous and sensual. His smile had a humorous tinge, he looked like a handful, or perhaps, a lapful. Leonard was certainly intrigued. When he was able to tore his eyes away from James for a moment, looking back at the Madam, who was still leaning against his doorframe. “Ah, yes, he’s…well, he’s—thank you Ma’am,” Leonard stammered.

“Yes Madam Sato!” came the falsely demure chorus of six voices.

Karen, the girl the Madam had pointed out earlier, sauntered over, refilling his champagne flute. “You have beautiful hands Doctor,” she said sensually, tracing her fingers over his knuckles.

“Thanks,” Leonard answered distantly, mulling over what he’d gotten himself into.

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“Please do enjoy your night Doctor,” she nudged the boy forward marginally by the small of his back before she disappeared down the hall.

Leonard stood, eyes raking over James, for several moments before the boy asked with casual amusement, “can I come in Sir?”

“Of course, how rude of me,” Leonard said, eyes snapping back up to his face as he stood aside to allow James entry.

Leonard walked over, stopping just short of reaching to touch him. He honestly had no idea how to
proceed, confronted with this beautiful creature. He’d never been to a brothel before, as a faithful married man he’d declined when invited. He didn’t know how to begin this experience. Was he allowed to just take the boy? He was paying for him, but Leonard wasn’t sure exactly how far his ownership extended.

“Am I your first?” James asked with a smile that reached his eyes.

“What? No, of course not, I’ve been with men,” Leonard growled, taken aback.

James actually laughed, it was a warm sound, filled with genuine amusement, “No, that’s not what I meant. Am I your first whore? You seem scared of me, shaking all the way down to your bones.” He sat, removing his shoes. Leonard blushed a dark pink. “I’m sorry if this seems forward, but I wasn’t told you wanted me to role-play a different experience, just that you wanted a boy.”

“No, I…I mean, yes. I’ve never been to a place like this, but no I don’t want you to play someone else,” Leonard answered, his fingers twitching nervously at the hem of his jacket.

James stood, drawing Leonard into his personal space with a tug on his lapels. “Should we try this again?” he asked, close enough now that Leonard could feel his sweet breath against his cheek.

“Hello Doctor, I’m James. It’s good to meet you. I’m sure knowing you will be a pleasure,” he said before leaning in just enough to capture Leonard’s lips with his own.

Leonard wasn’t sure how expected a prostitute to kiss—he hadn’t even been sure prostitutes did kiss—but this was certainly not it. It was gentle, and exploratory. James waited for Leonard to respond, softly sucking on his bottom lip. When Leonard did react it was in kind, his movements slow, like dripping honey. The boy tasted like citrus, chamomile, and sin; Leonard couldn’t help but reaching up and clapping a hand to the back of his neck, running the thumb of his other along the boy’s jaw.

James sighed into it, pulling himself closer still by Leonard’s lapels. Desire surged through Leonard, unlike anything he’d felt in a long time, and he deepened the kiss.

When they finally broke, he let out a breathy whine, pressing himself to Leonard’s chest, hands pushing under Leonard’s jacket. James breathed into his ear, “Doctor, as fond as I am of your lips, and make no mistake I am quite fond of them, you did ask for me to be ready for you when I arrived, and I think we’re both a bit overdressed for the occasion.”

Leonard’s heart leapt to his throat. He has asked for that hadn’t he? It was all so strange. He wanted to fuck the boy—the pressing erection in his trousers was making that very clear—but just bending the boy over and simply using him felt wrong, even if he was paying for it.

Coming out of his mind and back to reality faced him with a very naked James, flushed pink in all the right places. His cock was full and already leaking against his chest. He had a nice prick, Leonard decided; a thick, red head protruding from his foreskin, just above average length, with veins that stood out against his pale skin, curving up slightly to the right. He was completely shaved, which was unexpected, but not unwelcome. The boy let Leonard look him over, even doing a full 360 degree turn. Leonard caught sight of black rubber wedged between the globes of his ass as he spun.

“I believe you’re still overdressed, Doctor, would you like a hand?” he asked, his fingers already deftly working the buttons on Leonard’s shirt. Leonard struggled his jacket off while James moved to unbuttoning his the fly of his pants. He shrugged his suspenders off, James pulling away his shirt, revealing his broad chest. The boy ran his fingers through the light trail of fur on his torso that dipped below his waistband.

Sinking gracefully to his knees, he slipped the trousers off Leonard’s hips, leaving just the thin under
garment Leonard was wearing between them. James pressed his open mouth to Leonard’s dick as it strained against the material. Leonard let go a gasp, the heat of the boy’s lips alone was enough to drive him mad. James worked the buttons open on the garment, “I think it would be best if you sat for the next part Doctor.”

Leonard nodded, taking the few steps back to the chair and sank down to. James leaned forward to all fours and crawled his way between Leonard’s open legs. “Your cock is lovely,” he purred, pressing a kiss to the tip, “I can’t wait to have it inside me.”

Leonard jumped, gripping the armrests tightly. God, it had been so long since he’d done this, Jocelyn had hated giving head, she’d flat out refused to do it. The boy’s slick, ample lips already had him on edge with just one press. This was going to be embarrassingly quick.

James sucked lightly as the base of Leonard’s cock, his tongue danced across the shaft, Leonard was sure if he’d still been standing his knees would have given way. His hands found his way to the boy’s head, tangling in his golden hair. James took most of him into his mouth causing Leonard’s fingers to tighten in the soft locks as he sucked.

“Sorry…I’m sorry,” Leonard panted.

James pulled off his cock with an audible pop, “No need, pull as hard as you like.”

Then the wet heat of his mouth was back on Leonard’s throbbing dick, he pulled on James’ hair roughly. He moaned in the back of his throat, sending vibrations from his tongue straight to Leonard’s groin. After only a few seconds more of the boy’s mouth working him, Leonard felt the coiling heat push past breaking and James pulling away. He opened his eyes in time to see the first strand of come mar James’ face from his eye to his glistening lips. He watched as his come painted the boy, some of it getting in his hair, and more slipping down his chin.

He licked his lips after Leonard’s cock stopped twitching with aftershocks, “Mmm,” he blinked up at Leonard from come-heavy eyelashes, “it was a pleasure making you come.”

Leonard reached for a towel, wiping the spunk from James’ face. “Thank you,” he said cautiously. Leonard had no idea what he was really supposed to say, or how they were going to proceed now.

The boy looked at him with devious eyes, “I hope you’ll still fuck me.” He kissed at Leonard’s thigh.

“Yes…if that’s alright.”

James laughed again, “I really am your first whore. I think you’re forgetting you own me for the night, you can do whatever you want.”

Leonard watched James watch him for a moment, eyes sliding down to his hard cock, a steady leak of precome pooling on the floor in front of him. “So I can ask you to do something?” he started hesitantly.

“Of course Doctor.”

“Would you touch yourself? I’d like to…watch.”

The boy’s lip turned up unexpectedly, “Certainly, if that’s what you’d like.” He reached between his legs.

“Wait.”
James stopped, holding Leonard’s gaze.

“On the bed. I’d like you on the bed.”

James rose, and strode to the bed, draping himself across the mountain of pillows. “Is this alright Sir?”

Leonard nodded, still frozen in his chair. James dipped his fingers into the oil bowl working the thick liquid into his skin as he stroked himself elegantly. He didn’t look down at himself, lidded eyes fixed on Leo as he pumped his cock in his fist.

Leonard slowly stood, padding over to the bed, the boy’s eyes following. He sat himself on the edge of the mattress, leaning against the carved post. He was close enough that he could have touched James, but he resisted.

“Are you enjoying the show Doctor?” James asked, before letting loose a breathy moan.

Yes, yes he was. Leonard felt the blood rushing back to his groin. “Go slower,” he ordered.

James made a strained noise in the back of his throat, but his hand slowed. His cock seemed to flush darker, still dripping clear pearls of liquid, mixing with the oil on his hand.

Leonard watched silently. He stroked lightly at his own rapidly filling cock. The boy’s whole body had gone tense, his hand speeding up again despite Leonard’s previous command. James bit back a whine and chewed at his lip. His hips rocked, grinding his ass, and the dilator, against the mattress.

“Don’t,” Leo said a little breathlessly, breaking the silence and their invisible barrier, wrapping his hand, suddenly confident, at the base of the boy’s prick.

James groaned shakily and his own hand fell away. Leonard could see the muscles tighten against his skin as he tried to calm himself. His eyes stayed closed for a few moments before he cracked them open to look at Leonard.

“Get up,” Leonard said, scooting towards the pillows, he pulled the blankets back, laying himself down. James was perched on his knees off to the side on the bed, still breathing still strained. Leonard was hard again, cock jutting away from his body.

“Would you like for me to fuck myself on your cock?” James asked with interest, “or would you rather hold me down and make me cry for it?”

“No I—I…yes!” Leonard started, frustrated at the way the boy’s questions seemed to leave him stuttering, “I want you on top of me.”

“Like I said Sir, whatever you want,” James smiled as he climbed on top of Leonard. He braced a hand against Leo’s sturdy chest, reaching the other behind him. Leonard watched the boy’s face, his brow knitting together and his mouth falling open in a delicate ‘O,’ as he tugged the dilator out of himself. It was sizable, but Leonard’s cock was bigger—thicker, it glinted in the soft glow of the room, wet with oil; James laid it on the table atop a towel. He dipped his hand into the oil bowl again, gathering enough to coat Leonard’s cock.

He grunted when James’ hands made contact with his prick, the oil was cool, but the long fingers working it into his skin were warm. “You really are handsome Doctor,” James said, voice low.

He swallowed when James held him firmly, positioning his body over Leonard’s cock. The head of his prick nudged at the slick ring of muscle while James settled himself. When he slid down,
wrapping Leonard’s shaft in his slick heat, Leonard let forth a gasped moan in synchronization with
the boy.

It was better than he’d remembered, all tight and hot. James squeezed experimentally and they both
groaned again. He stayed still and seated for a moment, adjusting to Leonard’s throbbing length
inside him before raising his body up and sliding back down.

“Oh god! James, yes, that’s perfect,” Leonard babbled as the boy rode him.

“J-jim,” he stammered rising up again.

Leonard’s hands had found their way to rest on his hips, “What’s that?”

“Jim, call me Jim,” the boy begged, clenching tightly around his cock.

“You’re so tight Jim,” Leonard moaned back. He stilled James’-Jim’s-hips minimally, arching off the
bed to meet his movements.

Jim’s body squeezed tight around Leonard and he mewled, “more please Sir!” He whimpered,
placing both hands on Leonard’s chest as he picked up the pace, fucking himself skillfully on
Leonard’s cock. Leonard let go of one of Jim’s slender hips, swiping his fingers through the pool of
precome on his torso before rubbing the head of the boy’s bobbing cock.

“Fuck yourself harder Jim,” Leonard said. He urged Jim’s body up, his cock sliding almost all the
way out of Jim’s pulsing hole before the boy dropped back down.

“Please, please Sir, may I come now?” Jim pleaded, a broken whine caught in his throat while he
contented bouncing on top of Leonard.

“Go on,” Leonard allowed, and almost on his command, Jim came with a sharp cry, cock spurting
across Leonard’s chest, dripping down the hand still pumping the boy’s prick. Jim’s body spasmed
around him, milking forth his own orgasm. “Jim. Oh Jim, god!” Leonard shouted as his release
flooded Jim’s tight channel.

Jim was still hanging above him, shaking with the effort of keeping himself upright. He made a small
broken noise when Leonard’s softening cock slipped from his body. Leonard reached back, he
traced Jim’s quivering hole, feeling his come sliding out.

Jim shivered, one of his elbows giving out as he collapsed on top of Leonard, “No, please Doctor, I
can’t…” he said, his voice raw.

Leonard kissed his cheek before shifting their bodies to pull the covers around them and clicking the
light off. They laid in thick, contented silence for several minutes, Leonard thumb stroking a small
spot on the boy’s hip.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say no,” Jim whispered, suddenly in the darkness, “if you can just give
me a moment we can go again.”

“That was perfect Jim,” Leonard said softly. It was so late and all at once he was exhausted. Leonard
was pleased just to fall asleep with his arms full of the boy, “just go to sleep.”
When Jim woke in the morning, he blinked apprehensively at his surroundings. This wasn’t his room, or any of the rooms in the brothel he worked in. Panic welled up in his chest for a moment before he took in the sight of the sleeping man next to him.

The night came rushing back to him: being told to quickly prep himself even though it was a slow night. Being hurried into a car in his scant outfit, riding along in silence while the plug teased him with every bump. Stoping in front of Madam Sato’s exclusive pleasure house the next town over, a place he’d only heard stories of. Being ushered up the stairs to meet the laughably nervous, but devastatingly handsome, doctor.

The rest of the night flashed by in his mind, sucking the man’s perfect cock, putting himself on display only to have his orgasm denied, and, of course, the doctor fucking him. He’d filled Jim so deeply, so completely, that he’d told Bones to call him Jim, because ‘James’ felt too distant for the way they’d fucked. The doctor letting him come first, calling his name in labored shouts as he followed. Jim denying his fingers afterwards, and the doctor just accepting, wrapping himself in Jim as they’d fallen asleep.

He’d broken two of his three rules he’d set for himself about selling his body in one night: Don’t give the client your real name, and don’t deny the client anything. He’d been terrible, Bones would probably complain about him on his way out, since of course he’d been too polite to do it to Jim’s face, and his Madam wouldn’t let him take clients for a week, adding to his debt. Jim’s stomach tightened, but he forced himself to calm down.

Before he’d gone upstairs, Madam Sato had let him know the rules here were the same as the rules at his brothel: stay with the client until they want to leave, bring them hot water to clean up. There were also a few new ones: get them breakfast—as he would only be taking one client so they would stay until the morning—and be sure to ask them to visit again. Jim wondered if he should offer to let the doctor fuck him again too since he’d been so uncooperative the night before.

Jim sighed, heaving himself off the bed. When he stood, there was a small trickle of oil and come running from his hole. Jim wiped it away the best he could before tugging on a robe and making his way down the hall for water. Opening the door to the washroom he ran directly into someone holding hot water. It sloshed between them, most of it hitting Jim rather than the floor.

She was beautiful, despite the scowl currently occupying her face.

“I’m so sorry!” Jim apologized quickly.

“Who are you?” she shot back.

“I’m James, ah—Jim, that was totally my fault. I don’t suppose you’d be willing to show me where to get the hot water…?” he stopped, realizing he didn’t know her name.

She sighed, inconvenienced by the whole situation. “Uhura, my name’s Uhura. You look like a whore, but I know you don’t work here,” she finished hesitantly.

“Yeah, no, I was brought in last night, a client asked for a boy.” Jim said sheepishly.
Her shoulders drooped a bit, “Oh, hey…it wasn’t your first night was it?”

Jim shook his head, “Just my first night here.”

“Did you bleed? Are you alright?”

“No, it was fine,” Jim assured, “he was nice,” he added belatedly.

Her eyes searched him for a moment before she said, “Alright, come on then, I’ll show you where to get the water.”

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Jim had rinsed the dried come off his body in the washroom with Uhura, she gave him a piece of soap and a rag to wash. “If you want a douche you’ll have to ask Madam Sato for one, it’ll come out of your pay…I can’t give you mine,” she’d told him apologetically. She’d shown him how to heat the water and instructed him on where to go for food later.

Jim had hurried back to the room with the water, hoping the doctor hadn’t awoken. Opening the door he found he’d hoped in vain. Bones was sitting up on the bed, twisting the sheets blankly. His head jerked up when he saw Jim.

“I’m sorry Doctor, I hope you haven’t been awake long, I just went to get you some hot water,” Jim started panicked.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said neutrally.

Jim set the basin down on the table, wetting a cloth and dabbing at the doctor’s face. Washing the client was not specifically protocol, but he felt like he had something to make up for. He sighed into Jim’s touch, letting Jim wipe clean him.

“Sir, I’m sorry for being uncooperative last night. If you like, I am more than willing to make up for it now.”

“What are you talking about?” Bones questioned, stilling Jim, taking his face in his large steady hands.

“When I said ‘no’ last night, it was rude. I would hate for you to leave unsatisfied.”

The man surveyed him for a second, “Your job is to do what I say, is that right?”

Jim nodded.

“So if I tell you to lay there and spread your legs you will,” he gestured to the pillows still pilled high against the headboard.

“Yes Sir.”

“Do it then.”

Jim shrugged off his robe before climbing over him, settling himself facedown in the pillows, legs open.
“No, turn over,” the doctor said almost tenderly.

A little confused, Jim turned over, spreading his legs wide to allow him room. Bones leaned in and kissed him deeply, rubbing gently at his pebbled nipple. He could feel a blush creeping up his neck, not once since becoming a whore had a john kissed him the morning after. The light shining through the window changed the atmosphere of the room, making it sweeter somehow. Bones’ face seemed softer, his hair still rumpled. This felt less like a business transaction, and more like something Jim didn’t quite have a name for.

He pulled away, still working Jim’s nipple under his thumb. If the kiss had stunned him, it was nothing compared to the shock he felt when a warm mouth enveloped his half-hard cock. Jim’s fists balled up in the sheets while he gasped at the sensation. His cock filled rapidly, it had been a long time since anyone had sucked him.

The heat disappeared for a moment, replaced by a large strong hand. “Is this allowed?” he asked a little uncertainly.

“Yes Doctor,” Jim gulped, “as long as it pleases you.”

“It does. Would you like me to go on?”

“Yes,” Jim said breathlessly.

Bones’ spit slicked lips wrapped back around his cock, sucking sweetly. His hands were busy, one rolled Jim’s nipple in it’s fingers while the other gently cupped his tensing balls. His tongue traced along the prominent veins on Jim’s prick. He squirmed against the pillows, his knuckles turning white from gripping the sheets. Jim’s orgasm overtook him by surprise and he came into the wet suction of the doctor’s mouth.

He looked up at Jim thoughtfully for a moment, swallowing his release. He pushed himself back up, pressing another kiss to Jim’s lips. Jim could taste himself all over the Bones’ lips and in his mouth.

“Thank you Sir,” Jim said, mouth hanging open, when Bones let him go.

Only Jim’s shallow breathing filled the silence as the doctor pulled on his clothes, tucking his erection into his underwear and then his trousers.

“Wouldn’t you like me to take care of that for you?” Jim asked ambivalently.

Bones looked at him, blinking heavily, it seemed like he had to reprocess his surroundings before he answered, “No, thank you, I have to get to the hospital.”

Jim stared in disbelief, the doctor was truly the strangest client he’d ever taken. “At least some food then?”

“I think I’ve had enough for now,” he said raising an eyebrow.

Jim felt his cheeks color. He wasn’t sure if the doctor was making fun of him.

“I didn’t embarrass you did I?”

“No Sir,” Jim squeaked.

“Ah, I did, how rude of me,” his mouth twitched up in the closest thing Jim had seen to a smile on the man. Bones stood up, having finished with his shoes, “Apologies, but I really do have to go.”
Jim nodded, sliding the silk robe back over his body before opening the door to the hall. The doctor exited, Jim following him down the stairs. When they reached the bottom of the staircase the man turned back to look at Jim.

“I’d like to see you again.”

Jim gaped. Typically, that was his line.

“Would that be alright?” Bones asked, as though Jim might have some objection.

“Of course Doctor,” he said, regaining his composure, “Make sure you speak to the Madam, this isn’t my usual residence.”

He nodded, kissing Jim chastely on the cheek, before disappearing down the hall. After all they’d done, it was the kiss that sent a shiver down his spine.

Jim found his way back to the kitchen that Uhura had pointed out earlier. When he opened the door, the chatter stopped for a moment, fifteen pairs of eyes trained on him. The noise resumed slowly, but they looked away quickly, save for one pair of curious grey eyes, belonging to a stunning redhead.

“Gosh, you’re pretty—even better looking than Ny said,” the girl said to Jim, picking up his hand. She scooted over on the bench, making just enough from for him to squeeze next to her. “Come on sweetie, sit down, eat.”

Uhura glared across the table at the girl sternly.

“He is!” the redhead grinned back. “Do you prefer Jim or James?” she asked turning back to him.

“The clients call me James.”

“Jim it is then! I’m Gaila, you’ve already met Ny. This is Zhara, Janice, Karen, Mira, Arlene…” she rambled on, naming every girl at the table, Jim only processed the first few, too in his head thinking about the doctor.

“We haven’t had a boy here in years!” Gaila added, jostling him back to reality. “How was he, your john I mean? I was just telling the Mira, mine was awful, he smelled like old meat, and he kept his sock stuffed in my mouth all night. I hate when he calls for me.”

Jim laughed at more at the face she made than what she’d said. He was a little overwhelmed, including himself there were only five boys at his brothel, they weren’t terribly chatty, except Pavel, the new boy with a thick Russian accent, who was quite clingy.

The girls stared at him.

“So how was yours?” Gaila prompted him again.

“Bones…” Jim started, “he was fine.” Jim blushed at having said the nickname he’d given to the doctor out loud.

It became quickly apparent that wasn’t going to be enough as the girls inundated him with questions:

“Fine? Just fine?”

“Did you have to pretend to be someone else?”
“How many times did he come?”

“Did he tie you up? I had to get tied up last night.”

“He didn’t look like the type to ask for a boy.”

“Did you have to fake it?”

“Was he rough?”

“Did he rip your clothes? Mine ripped my favorite chemise.”

“What did he taste like?”

The level of detail the girls cared about was unbelievable. At his brothel, a john was a john. If they wanted something besides a blow job or basic penetrative sex, they had to tell the Madam up front, and the boy had to agree to it beforehand. Of course, if they didn’t, they lost that night’s pay. It wasn’t that he was uncomfortable talking about the night, or the specifics of what he did with clients—he’d never cared before—but he felt a little protective of the time he’d spent with Bones. It had been so gentle, so atypical of any previous client, that he wanted to keep it to himself.

“He was really nice,” Jim said finally, “he came twice, on my face and inside me, then he told me to go to sleep.”

“Sound like a boring fuck.”

“At least you just got to lay there right?”

“Odd. Do you think he watched you sleep?”

“He was good looking, is he going to see you again?”

Jim blinked at them tiredly, “Yeah, I think he is.”

Gaila squealed excitedly, “Oh does that mean you’ll stay here?”

He sighed, “I don’t know…he’s not my only client.”

A collective breath was shared, reminding them all tonight would bring a fresh batch of johns to them all. Uhura handed him a warm bowl of oatmeal, “Here. And stop looking like at me like I’m going to eat you alive.”

“Ny had a girl last night,” Gaila whispered in his ear as the chatter started back up.

Jim looked up from his oatmeal, “You did?”

“It’s the fifth time she’s asked for me,” Uhura said rather smugly, “I’m tempted to swear off men once I pay my debts.”

—

When Leonard finally got to the hospital after a bath and a change of clothes, he was still in a fog.
His visit to the brothel had been like nothing he’d been expecting. Jim had been perfect. Everything he hadn’t know he wanted until it waltzed into the room, leering at him salaciously.

Jim didn’t look a day over eighteen, he supposed maybe he should feel dirty for that, but plenty of the girls were younger. The way he moved, the way he fucked, attracted Leo like a moth to a flame and at the same time, the boy broke his heart. The desperate way he’d asked Leonard to call him Jim, and then when he begged Leonard to forgive him for ‘denying’ him. Jim had been sensitive and overstimulated after fucking the life out of Leo, and he’d felt like he’d done a bad job by saying no. He wondered if all prostitutes were like that, if that’s why so many people were repeat customers. Maybe Jim was playing him, but it didn’t matter, because there was no chance Leonard was going to be able to keep himself away.

M’Benga found him in his office, pulling on his white coat. “Leo, please tell me you saw someone last night. Christine said you were still scowling on the couch when she left.”

“Yes Geoff, I did,” he answered curtly.

“Good man. Was it Arlene? She would have been my pick if I hadn’t taken Janice.”

“I’ll tell you about it later,” Leonard said with an air of finality.

He made it halfway through his shift before he saw Christine, she looked even more bright-eyed than usual.

“Oh! Leo, how are you? Geoff tells me you had a bit of fun last night?” she beamed a smile while she passed him a few charts that required his signature.

“Seemed like you did too Chris,” Leo said with a raised eyebrow, initialing the charts and handing them back.

Christine blushed pink, “I always do when I see her.” She glanced past him dreamily for a moment before she asked, “Do you think you’ll go back with us next time? See the same girl?”

Leonard coughed, he’d always been honest with Christine, she wasn’t the judgmental type. Even when he’d gone through the divorce, and some of the hospital staff had turned up their noses, she’d been there for him. So he wasn’t entirely sure why he was so hesitant now, especially when he knew Chris fancied one of the brothel girls herself. “I…uh…yeah, I’ll see him again,” he said failing the casual tone he’d tried for.

“Oh, him?,” she said with a wink, “I didn’t know they had boys hiding in the back.”

“They, er…they don’t, the Madam brought him in for me, I suppose.”

Christine grinned, apparently thrilled by this news, “so mysterious! Did you get to pick him from a photograph?”

“What? No, Chris. She asked if I’d prefer a boy, and a boy turned up.”

“Leonard McCoy, are you telling me you let someone else pick out a conquest for you and I’m not even allowed to order your whiskey at the bar?”

He paused for a moment, realizing just how unlike him that had been, “Well, when you put it like that——”

“Oh calm down, I'm just giving you a hard time,” she said with a smile. “But you liked him, enough
that you’ll see him again?"

“Yeah, he was...really something, Christine.”

Chapter End Notes

I know I've written next to no prejudice against Bones and Christine for picking same-sex partners. I think once you're already at a brothel with your colleagues, they aren't as judgmental. Plus, I feel like they were more open minded about that in Europe.

EDIT: I have been informed that they were not more open minded about this in Europe at the time, so I'll have to ask you all to kindly suspend disbelief for the duration of this verse. This is an ambiguous time period/place that pulls elements from 1885-1925, I will not be writing repercussions or prejudice against same-sex relationships.
Seemingly, it had been inconvenient to send Jim back to his regular house until he was called for, so it was going to be an extended trip. She’d pulled him aside while the kitchen was clearing and told him sternly that she expected him to be a well-behaved employee, and that she would not tolerate finding him with any of her girls.

“I’ve employed boys before, don’t think you can pull one over on me. While you seem cooperative enough, don’t you dare think I will condone any foolishness. I’ve spoken to Madam Talas and she agrees that if you give me any trouble, I can throw you out, and you will be punished as she sees fit.” Sato was firm, not rude. She seemed like a fair, no-nonsense type of woman.

“I promise, I won’t be any trouble ma’am,” Jim said sincerely. He had no intentions of being a problem, he just wanted to pay his debts and save enough to move on with his life.

“Alright, as long as we’re clear. There’s a space in the room with Gaila, Mira and Nyota—I presume you’ve met one of them?” Jim nodded. “Good. Everyone helps with the client rooms during the day. You will be expected to keep yourself clean, and smelling fresh, as Madam Talas no doubt expects. You will stay here until you are called back to your regular house, and you will work, is that clear?”

(Of course ma’am.”

“Call me Hoshi. Also, please come to me if a client treats you badly, I don’t like my girls hurt, and that includes you. Now, I know you don’t have much of anything with you, what do you need?”

She gave him a sweet perfume, a douche, a towel, and a nightshirt before sending him back up the stairs. He found Gaila waiting in the hall, she’d overheard and was delighted that he was staying, showing him the way to their room.

“We get to sleep from eight until one, then we clean the rooms and get ready for the night,” she told him, arm slung around his shoulders. There was a free shelf where Jim was able to stack his meager belongings before he hung the robe and slid into the nightshirt.

Nyota and Mira were already in the bed, snuggled against each other. Gaila turned back the sheets and ushered him under them. It was a decent sized bed, but with four people in it, Jim had to press against her to fit comfortably. She wove her fingers with his and sighed, it was oddly intimate, but completely comfortable. While it was different than what he was used to, Jim thought he’d probably get along fine.

—

The first night was awkward, there was so much more flirting and socializing with the johns than at Madam Talas’, the clients who went there knew what they wanted, and weren’t generally in the mood to wait. The men, and the occasional woman, here wanted to be entertained, and enticed before they slipped out of the lounge. Jim adjusted quickly though, mingling with the patrons, keeping their glasses full of champagne. One thing that was better about working here was that he
only had to take one client a night, which was a welcome relief after sometimes as many as three a night at his regular house. He couldn’t even imagine what Hoshi charged to make that possible.

The first man who bought Jim was devious and coarse, pinching his ass in the lounge before rasping in his ear, “I didn’t know pretty boys like you worked in places like this.” He’d confirmed with Hoshi that Jim was indeed available to him before maneuvering him possessively upstairs.

Jim had been glad Hoshi had insisted that he start the evening oiled and open because the man had put no thought to preparation, fucking him roughly into the mattress. He hadn’t even bothered to lube his prick before pushing inside Jim, his fingers clutched his hips harshly, and even if it didn’t leave a mark, he was sure he wouldn’t forget the severity. The man had ignored him entirely after he’d come, leaving Jim physically aroused but uninterested in finishing. He drank and read a paper, completely apathetic towards Jim until his dick was hard again. He’d fucked Jim facedown a second time, pinning Jim’s arms above his head, whispering filthy things into him ear, his voice like gravel, keeping Jim’s face pressed into the pillows.

Honestly, Jim should have been used to it, he’d been doing this since he was a teenager. It was the way he was treated all the time, but after his night with Bones, it left him feeling oddly defiled.

—

Leonard had never really understood how people could justify spending night after night at a brothel, until now. He couldn’t even wait until the practice decided to go back out together, phoning two days later.

“Good afternoon, this is Madam Sato’s Pleasure House, how may I assist you?” A voice that clearly belonged to the named said over the phone.

Leonard cleared his throat, suddenly unsure of himself, “Ah, yes, hello. I’m not sure if you’ll remember me, I visited the other night. You had a boy brought in for me.”

“Yes, yes Doctor…McCoy, was it? How can I help you?”

“I was hoping to come back tonight, and I was wondering if you would be able to get Ji—James for me again.”

“Of course Doctor, I still have him here. I can make certain he is free for you, if you’d like.”

“Yes, absolutely,” Leonard said hurriedly, “thank you.”

The rest of his day was consumed with thoughts of the night.

—

It was rather odd to be in a room full of strangers who were all obviously buying sex for the night, Leonard thought when he arrived at Madam Sato’s later. Yet, somehow he hadn’t found it strange when he’d been with his co-workers. Leonard rolled his eyes at himself, he was being stupid. No
one came to an establishment like this unless they were buying sex, and he was here doing the same. Except he was here for Jim, and that seemed different.

He spotted Jim the moment he entered the lounge, he was impossible to miss, his golden hair standing out against the upholstery. Jim looked vibrant, even though his clothing was a awry. His thin shirt made from an almost translucent fabric, mis-buttoned, was tucked haphazardly into his undone pants, held up only by shiny suspenders. Leonard supposed it was meant to entice, and it was certainly doing it’s job. Jim was pressed up against another whore, her attention held by a patron who was speaking to the both of them. The brunette girl laughed at the man, her breasts straining against her corset as she did, making Jim to laugh as well.

A woman he recognized as Christine’s pick offered him a drink. She smiled at Leonard, her eyes flicked from him to Jim knowingly. Vaguely embarrassed, he took the champagne flute and sat down in a plush armchair catty-corner from Jim. Leonard suddenly found his lap full with a gorgeous auburn-haired girl in a green slip and a tiny corset.

“Hello handsome, you look awful lonely,” she said her fingers pulling at his necktie, her plump breasts pressing to his chest.

“I um…well ma’am you see—”

“Ma’am? What a gentleman! Just tell me what I can do to put a smile on your face, sweetie.”

Leonard flushed darker, her fingers unbuttoning his collar. He wasn’t sure how to stop this, it felt wildly inappropriate even though there were patrons in far more scandalous positions throughout the room.

“Leave the poor doctor alone Gaila,” Jim’s voice suddenly snickered from his right, “you’re gonna give him a heart attack.”

“Not old enough for a heart attack,” Leonard grumbled, pushing the girl’s arms from his shoulders. The girl, Gaila, turned her attention to Jim suddenly, her grey eyes bright with an unspoken question. Jim nodded tersely and her lips quipped up in an almost catlike smile. Gaila gracefully climbed out of his lap, kissing Leonard’s cheek briefly. She rested her hand on Jim’s shoulder, whispering something in his ear that made Jim laugh and shake his head before walking away. Jim was even more beautiful when he laughed.

“What was that all about?” Leonard asked cautiously, as Jim perched himself on the armrest of the chair.

Jim didn’t answer, instead choosing to lean in Leonard’s space, stopping just short of his lips. Leonard closed the few millimeters that separated them, Jim’s lips even softer than he remembered. He lost himself for a moment, only focusing on the delicious pressure of the mouth against his. Jim’s tongue darted out for just moment to taste him, and suddenly Leonard remembered where they were. He felt too exposed and pulled away sharply.

“You asked for me,” Jim said a little breathlessly, his eyes sparkling.

“I did…Was that wrong?” Leonard’s brow knitting, wondering if he’d done something out of turn. Jim laughed again lightly, “No, Bones, of course not. I just wasn’t sure you would.”

“I said I would.”
“I’m glad you did. It makes the other girls jealous they can’t see you.”

Leonard wondered distantly if they talked about him after he’d left the other day, he supposed they did, but something else held his attention. “Did you…? What did you call me?”

Jim flushed a pretty pink. “I uh…I,” he stuttered like he’d been caught doing something blameworthy, “Well, I called you Bones.”

“Bones?”

When Jim spoke again it was actually too quiet for Leonard to hear over the other noise in the room.

“What was that?”

Jim bit his lip, leaning a little farther away from Leonard, “You…it’s just, you didn’t tell me your name? I thought you must have just wanted me to call you ‘Sir’ and ‘Doctor.’ So I…well…it’s what I started calling you in my head.”

“You gave me a nickname?”

Jim’s eyes darted away as he nodded. It was almost adorable, because it meant Jim had thought of him enough for a nickname at all, although it was a strange moniker.

“Do you nickname all your clients?”

Jim’s deepened blush was a clear ‘no.’

Then suddenly Leonard remembered his manners, “You must think poorly of me, I’m sorry. My name’s Leonard, Leonard McCoy.” How could he have forgotten to give Jim his name? Especially when the kid had asked Leo to call him Jim instead of James.

Jim wrinkled his nose, the contorting of his face made him look younger. “If it’s all the same to you, I think I like Bones better. Leonard’s a little stuffy. No offense.”

Leonard felt his ears turn red, it seemed acutely intimate, “uh…okay, sure.”

“Can I get you more champagne?” Jim asked after a second, placing his hand over Leonard’s on the stem of the glass.

“No, no thank you I’m fine,” his eyes scanned the room for a moment falling on Gaila, who was currently curled up in the lap of a man with a thick Scottish accent. “What was all that about with her Jim?” Leonard asked again, having not gotten an answer before. He motioned towards the girl when Jim looked at him quizzically.

“Oh. That,” Jim said with a grin, “she’s into you, asked if you’d want to take her upstairs with us.”

Leonard shook his head, feeling like he was missing something.

“Well, should we go upstairs alone—together—then?”

Leonard nodded dumbly, and he let Jim pull him up from the chair.

“I’ve been looking forward to you fucking me all day,” Jim whispered against his ear on their way to the staircase.

His heart hammered in his chest, wondering how it was possible for Jim to turn him on before they’d
even really touched. Being with Jim was nothing like he’d ever experienced.

—

It was really a miracle they’d gotten the door closed before they’d started tearing at each other’s clothes. Jim was careful not to actually rip Bones’ clothes, the man had to go home in the morning after all. His heart raced a little at the thought: Bones was only his for the night.

Jim wasn’t sure when he’d started thinking like that, that it was his privilege to see Bones and not the other way around. He almost couldn’t believe Bones had come back, Jim wasn’t particularly lucky, and the doctor was more than he could have thought to hope for.

Jim’s clothes were in a pile after only a second—he’d been half undressed downstairs anyway—it was Bones’ clothes that took a little more work. Jim opened the buttons as fast as he could on Bones’ garments, the doctor preoccupied with squeezing the ample globes of Jim’s exposed ass and kissing up and down his neck. Finally, mercifully, Bones was naked, his cock pressing hot against Jim’s torso, brushing his own.

They shuffled towards the bed, neither wanting to lose the skin on skin contact. “Are you…?” Bones started, hand reaching further behind Jim. His fingers brushed the plug in the cleft of his ass. “Can I?”

“Yes, fuck yes,” Jim managed, hoisting himself up on the mattress, leaning on his elbows.

Bones kissed him roughly before the contact stopped altogether, Bones pausing to dip his hand in the bowl of oil and slick his cock. Jim moved to pull the dilator out of himself but Bones climbed on the bed next to him, stilling Jim’s hand.

“Let me,” he said fingering the rubber base. Jim did, he twisted a little, one knee bent up, so Bones could get a firm grip. He watched as best he could while the plug was pulled out of him. He felt his hole expand around the it, opening wide up to let the tapered object out.

Jim tried to watch when Bones held his cock still to push in, but the stretch that accompanied the action was so exquisite that his eyes fluttered closed. Bones’ head fell to Jim’s shoulder, his hand seizing Jim’s hip.

“You’re so big,” Jim moaned when Bones was fully seated, his balls tapping Jim’s perineum. He meant it, Bones had a huge cock, his channel completely full, pulsing, accepting the intrusion.

“Is it alright?” Bones gasped, trying his hardest to hold still while he waited for Jim to adjust.

Jim almost scoffed. From anyone else, he would have thought the words were hollow, and he would have known that the other party would have fucked him regardless of his answer. But Jim had a feeling that if he said no, Bones would pull out and stop. Not that he wanted that. No, he wanted the doctor to fuck him, come inside him, have him.

“No yeah, I mean yes…It’s good.”

Bones raised his head, pressing his lips to Jim’s temple, holding Jim’s body against his chest. “Are you okay like this?” he asked pumping his hips experimentally.
“Fuck! Ah yes, please, fuck me Bones.”

The doctor slid out of him slowly, and Jim whined in a needy manner. He pushed back in a little faster, momentum rocking Jim’s form. From this angle the head of Bones’ cock nudged hard against his prostate every time he thrust in, and Jim’s muscles clenched around him involuntarily.

“Oh, darlin’ you’re so good for me,” Bones breathed into his hair, nose brushing Jim’s ear.

Jim cried out at the endearment, the doctor was so tender and gentle, his caring mannerisms were going to be the end of Jim. Even though this wasn’t real, and wouldn’t ever be, for now he’d just take what he was given and it would have to be enough. Jim turned his head to catch Bones’ lips and sucked at the same time the doctor took hold of Jim’s cock and began rubbing the slit. Jim’s precome coated his hand messily as the doctor stroked him.

“Bones, oh god, Bones!” Jim cried into his mouth.

He tightening around Bones’ cock, almost stilling him. The thrusts turning shallow before Bones plunged all the way in and came deeply inside Jim with a throaty, broken moan of the boy’s name. Jim wasn’t sure if it was the warm fist around his cock, the pressure inside him when Bones came, or the combination of the two, but it drew forth his own orgasm. His release spurted out across the sheets and himself, and his muscles slackened, Bones’ grip on him the only reason he wasn’t facedown in the bed.

When Jim came back to his mind he felt the heartbeat of the man behind him and he had a horrifying realization. He was breaking the third rule. The rule he’d always dismissed as unnecessary because it would never happen: Don’t fall for the client. They weren’t Jim’s rules per se, they were rules of the trade, but either way, Bones was on his way to completely shattering his resolve, and on his second visit nonetheless.

“Are you alright darlin’?” Bones asked, as he lowered them down fully to the mattress.

“Yes Sir, I’m fine,” came his automatic response before his brain could even really process the question.

“Jim?” His name still held the meaning of the previous question, full of concern. Bones shifted so he could see Jim’s face.

He sighed shakily and nodded weakly, staring past him at the wall, “I’m okay, Bones…That was just —It was really good.” It wasn’t a total lie, the sex had been good, but he wasn’t sure if he was going to be okay.

“Jim, there’s something I’d—can I ask if you’ll do something?” Bones hesitated.

“You can make me do whatever you want,” Jim said stiffly, trying to distance himself for the mess he’d gotten himself into.

“I…” Bones stopped, he seemed taken aback at Jim’s roughness for a moment, “I know you’re sensitive after…but I was hoping—That’s to say that I’d like to…”

Jim tried to clear his head, he was doing a bad job again, he’d broken the goddamn rules, not Bones. Bones was a paying customer and he was being a bad whore. “Please do it,” he said leaning in to kiss Bones’ mouth, “whatever it is you want, go ahead.”

“You don’t even know what it is yet,” he said apprehensively, “You asked me to stop last time.”
“You want to finger your come out of me?” Jim asked, since that was what he’d denied Bones of last time.

Bones blushed harder than Jim had seen thus far, “I’d like to use my mouth.”

Jim shivered. It wasn’t a particularly odd request, it was just no one had done that to him before. Madam Talas charged clients who wanted that extra. “Okay,” Jim breathed, only a little nervous. He was always oversensitive after being fucked, not a particularly helpful trait. Jim remembered how Bones’ fingers had felt inside him last time.

“Please tell me if it’s too much.” Bones kissed him again. He pulled pillows from the headboard, propping them under Jim so he wouldn’t have to hold himself up, which was good because Jim was pretty sure he wouldn’t have been able to.

He felt Bones’ palms push apart his cheeks, blowing cool breath across Jim’s wet entrance. Jim could feel a steady trickle of come already sliding down his thigh, the broad pad of Bones’ tongue dragged across his skin, lapping it up. Bones’ tongue moved higher, circling just around the ring before nudging carefully inside.

Jim trembled, it was so much more than he was expecting. He would have never been ready, even if he hadn’t just been fucked. He could hear himself crying out, unable to form actual words. Bones’ tongue traced the tight ring of muscle, occasionally breaching it for several minutes before he stopped and said, “Is it okay? Can I keep going?”

“Uh-huh,” Jim huffed an unsteady breath, “it’s a lot, but don’t stop.”

Bones said nothing for a moment, but Jim felt a spit-slick thumb slide inside him easily. “No one’s done this to you before, have they?”

Jim often lied to johns, promising that they were the first to do things to him. It made them feel special, and often it got him return clients, but he wasn’t lying when he gasped out, “Never.”

Bones made a noise of approval, his mouth back at Jim’s entrance. Both his thumbs rested on the puckered muscle and he pulled them apart just slightly. Jim expected to feel the tongue slip back inside him, but instead Bones placed his mouth over the hole and sucked. At first it was softly, but after a moment Bones did it more insistently. Jim could feel the slick inside him being drawn out, it was an unusual feeling, but not unpleasant.

Bones let the come seep out of Jim’s hole, licking it away several times before pushing his tongue back inside the puckered ring. Jim’s cock tried valiantly to get hard again, wedged between his leg and a pillow. His nerve endings were on fire, his body exhausted, his vocabulary narrowed to one word. Jim mewed the doctor’s name endlessly while he licked and sucked and explored Jim’s hole with his tongue.

“Please,” Jim choked out suddenly, hitting his breaking point, “I can’t—”

Bones ran his velvet tongue across Jim’s hole once more before moving away. He shifted the pillows around so Jim could lay on his back. Jim’s cock had managed to fill halfway and Bones ran a finger down it.

“Don’t, please. Too much…Everything is just—I can’t Bones.”

“Alright darlin’, that’s alright. You don’t have to,” he shushed. Just like the last time, he stopped at Jim’s request, not pushing or demanding for more. “Thank you for letting me do that.”
They’d lain in each other arms during the night. Jim had gathered from the nervous pulse of his heart that Bones hadn’t been able to sleep anymore than Jim had.

“Had a wife once,” Bones had said into the silence out of nowhere. Jim had said nothing, he wasn’t sure if he should. “Woke up one morning to a note saying she’d gone off with the paperboy. I don’t blame her, we got married too young—didn’t know anything when I was twenty-one. Made me an awful scandal though, haven’t been in love since. I’m not sure if I remember how.”

Bones had continued stroking a hand through Jim’s hair even after he’d stopped talking. Jim hadn’t planned on sharing, but suddenly he heard himself saying, “my uncle sold me at fourteen, we were broke. I was the only thing left he was willing to part with. Before left, he told me, ‘at least your big mouth can make some money this way.’ Not even sure I know what love is.”

Neither had said anything after that, but Jim was strangely contented, hearing the doctor confess his brokenness made them kindred. Jim hadn’t ever told anyone what he’d just said to Bones, and somehow, saying it out loud took some of the hurt away. Jim had sighed into Bones’ chest and eventually drifted off.

Getting hot water the next morning was a huge chore. He was sore absolutely everywhere, places he didn’t know he had muscles hurt, and he just wanted to stare at Bones, wondering if this is what it felt like to be infatuated with someone. He didn’t want to stop looking at him, Jim knew it was clingy and the start of something he could not handle in his line of work.

After he came back with the water, he crawled on the bed up next to Bones, unable to stay away. This was a bad idea, sex was not supposed to be a morning activity for clients. Regardless, he pulled the covers back and mouthed the doctor’s hard cock he’d felt pressed against his back before he’d gotten out of bed.

Leonard woke up in a haze. Everything felt too good to be real, but way too good to be a dream. The wet slurping sound was what finally cracked his eyes open. His chest heaved when he looked down to find a blond head bobbing between his legs, sucking his cock with vigor.

“Fuck, Jim!” Leonard cried, too loudly for daylight. Jim’s throat spasmed and Leonard thought he might be laughing. He’d already been on edge when he woke up, and it only took a second more before he felt his muscles tighten, end in sight. “Darlin’, I’m—please, oh!” Leonard stammered as he came down Jim’s throat. Jim swallowed it all, and deftly pushed himself from the bed.

“Morning Bones,” Jim said with a cheeky grin, licking at his bottom lip.

“Goddamn.”

“Would you like breakfast?”
“Jim…fuck. What a way to wake up,” Leonard slumped back into mattress, still boneless from his release.

“I got you hot water, you want help cleaning up?”

Leonard was still a little hung up on what Jim had said before they’d fallen asleep, clearly he had no intention of talking about it at all. *It was a long time ago,* Leonard thought, *and it’s none of your business.* He told you explicitly not to even bother hoping for anything.

“I’ll take breakfast,” Leonard said finally.

Jim brightened considerably, “What can I get you?”

“I don’t care, whatever breakfast is here.”

Leonard was wiping himself down with warm damp towels when Jim reappeared with breakfast. Breakfast, as it turned out was huge—fresh fruit, an omelet, toast, fresh juice, cheese—he ate it silently, while Jim, without hesitation, wiped his back down with a wet towel. He offered Jim bites off his fork, which the boy took casually. It almost scared him, how natural this felt, and how much he wished he didn’t have to leave.

He shook his head, enough of that. Leonard would *not* be one of those assholes who fell for a prostitute, especially one who freely admitted wasn’t sure he knew how to love.

After they’d dressed and left the room, Jim followed Leonard down the stairs, kissing him when they reached the bottom.

“Will you see me again?” Leonard managed to ask evenly, although he wasn’t sure what he’d do if the boy said no.

Jim stared at him like he was an alien. “Why do you keep asking me that?” he asked finally.

“I don’t want to force you to see me if I make you uncomfortable, or if you’ve changed your mind,” Leonard told him quietly, another couple bidding farewell on their way down the stairs.

It almost looked like Jim’s lower lip quivered before he said, “Please come back.”

Then, because another kiss on the lips didn’t seem appropriate, he kissed Jim’s hand before retreating.

Chapter End Notes

Oops…Jim's getting more attached to Bones than he wants to admit. Poor boys, not knowing how the other is really feeling.
“Hey sweetie!” Gaila smiled, running into him on the landing.

“Hi Gaila,” Jim said, yawnning widely, “how was your night?”

Gaila did a terrible impersonation of a Scottish accent, “Right good fun it was!”

“You sound like a pirate,” Jim said, covering his mouth as he yawned again.

She laughed. “I asked if he’d come back and visit and he said yes! I think I have a new regular!” she said with a sing-song.

Jim smiled half-heartedly, he was happy for her—he was—but he was a little out of it.

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah, weird night.”

“Awww no, what happened with our beautiful doctor?”

“Our doctor?” he asked dryly.

When she just raised her eyebrow Jim continued. “I did something I shouldn’t have,” he said sullenly. *I like him. I actually like one of my clients. What a nightmare.*

“Is he mad? Zhara said he kissed your hand goodbye? Such a gentleman! He seems to really like you.”

“Forget it,” Jim said rubbing his eyes, “I’m being an idiot. Let’s go get breakfast.”

“I heard him moaning your name earlier,” she said nonchalantly, “It woke Scotty up—I was already awake—it sounded like fun, you could have invited me,” she said with a faux pout.

“I told him you offered Gaila, he said no.”

“I know, he only has eyes for you, sweetie.”
A day later, he was called back to Talas’ house to see his regular, Gary Mitchell. Jim thought he was going to miss the girls. Jim had taken a client every night since he arrived. Hoshi had said the patrons had been surprised, but pleased to see a boy available. When she packed him into the car, she told him she’d be happy to have him back.

When he arrived back at Madam Talas’, he was filled with an armful of Pavel almost immediately upon walking into the room they shared.

“I’m so pleased to see you! Ms Talas said you’d be back, but I wasn’t sure. I had to see Mr. Marcus again Jim. I hate him, he scares me.”

Jim flinched, he’d seen Marcus on several occasions, but not since he’d turned eighteen. Marcus liked his whores young and inexperienced, at fourteen, Pavel was the freshest of them all. He’d become Marcus’ new toy at least once a week. “I’m sorry Pavel, did he hurt you?” Jim asked, pained.

“No more than usual. He didn’t leave any marks,” Pavel said, huddled against Jim.

Bile rose in Jim’s throat, but he forced it down, that was as much as he could have hoped to hear, Marcus was a sadistic fuck.

“How was your trip? Did that client want you for four nights?” Pavel wondered.

“What? Oh, no. At first it was just for one night, but he came back,” Jim couldn’t help but smile, in spite of himself, “I worked the whole time I was at Madam Sato’s.”

Pavel’s eyes widened, “How was it there?”

“Well, I was the only boy, but it wasn’t so bad. I missed everyone here.” Jim laced his fingers with Pavel’s, the younger boy kissed their twined pinkies.

“Who was he?”

“Hmm?”

“The john that called for you, was he important? That’s a far way to go for one client.”

“He was a doctor, so I’m not sure. I’ve never heard of him. I guess Hoshi doesn’t like people leaving her business disappointed, even if she has to pay for a pickup.”

“I’m glad you’re back Jim,” Pavel said, resting his head on Jim’s shoulder.

—

He didn’t like seeing Gary. The man liked only allowed Jim to call him Mr. Mitchell or Sir, and he liked it when Jim struggled. He would often pay extra to tie Jim to the bed and torment him for hours. Tonight he wasn’t Jim’s last client, so at least he wouldn’t have to see him in the morning. Gary liked to open Jim up himself, using just enough oil so he wouldn’t hurt Jim, but not nearly enough for him to be comfortable. Jim had realized after his third visit that the man liked it when he
cried. Jim had gotten quite good at faking tears in hopes it would be over quickly.

Tonight was no different, wrists cuffed to the bed with leather restraints, Jim had wet streaks running down his face after thirty minutes of being roughly opened up and suffering.

“You love crying for me,” Gary sneered, “tell me how much you want it.”

“I do sir. I want you to fuck me,” Jim said, bored despite the tears choking his tone.

“That’s right, whore,” Gary snarled, pushing his length into Jim abruptly, “say thank you.”

“Thank you Mr. Mitchell,” Jim managed to get out with none of the disgust he felt.

—

“Doctor McCoy?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“You called earlier regarding James? I’m afraid I have some bad news.”

Leonard felt his heart sink to his stomach, why couldn’t he see Jim? Jim was all he’d thought about for days. It didn’t matter that it was an exercise in futility—and a costly one at that—he couldn’t put the boy out of his mind. He’d even briefly entertained the idea of asking for someone new, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“James is not available tonight, but there are several other boys to choose from.”

Leonard shook his head fiercely before he remembered he was on the phone, “No, I’m not interested in someone else.”

“Ah…well, in that case Doctor, I could get him for you tomorrow night, if that would suit you.”

“Yes, that’s fine,” Leo said quickly, his fist unclenching. He would wait another night, even though it felt like he hadn’t seen the boy in ages. He could wait another night for Jim.

—

Jim watched his client from the bed. The man scrutinized him with with a shark-like intensity, eyes cold, jaw set.

“Sir if you—” Jim started.

“Khan,” the man interrupted, “if you speak, you will call me Khan.”

“Yes Khan.”

“I bet your insides as pretty inside as your outsides.”
Jim’s blood ran cold, that was not standard client foreplay. He wasn’t even a little aroused, fear pooling in his stomach, but it didn’t seem like Khan was going to care. Madam Talas had told him this john wanted to restrain him, but this was not that. His gut told him to get out. But Jim knew if he left, he wouldn’t get paid, and he’d be in a lot of trouble, so he stayed squarely on the bed.

The man fucked his mouth violently, clearly enjoying holding Jim down. He smirked every time Jim gagged, pushing in harder, wrapping his hands around Jim’s throat. Khan’s hands narrowed his airway that his dick was already filling completely and Jim struggled to breath. He tried to pull away, desperate for air, but the man held him in place, seeming to take pleasure in his struggle.

When Khan pulled out and came across his purpled face, Jim was lightheaded and dizzy, but Khan was already fastening the restraints on his wrists behind his back. “Sir, please, I need a moment,” he rasped out.

“What did I tell you earlier James?,,” picking his tie up off the floor he looked back at Jim. “I told you, you were to call me Khan, but I rather like when you don’t speak.” He balled the tie up and crammed it into Jim’s mouth.

Jim did not like where this was headed, he managed to spit it out, screaming in a way that he hoped would get someone’s attention.

His cry was broken off after only a second, with a punch to his jaw. Jim bit his lip and tasted blood. The tie was crammed back into his mouth and followed by a fist to his eye. He could feel this face start to swell.

“You will keep your noises to yourself James, I’ve grown tired of them.”

His head was forced into the bed, the come on his face dripping back into his eyes, his knees drawn apart. Jim whined pitifully against the gag and pulled at his ankles, which he found were now bound to the bottom posts. When he flailed he knew it was in vain. While a client marring his face was strictly against house rules, there was nothing he could do. Jim knew any further struggle would only spur this man on, so he sagged against the bed, resigning himself to whatever was to come.

He had imagined to feel fingers or a cock pushing into his hole, not the sharp sting of a blade against his inner thigh. It was a shallow cut, just enough to draw blood, but he cried out none the less. This time, the tears that stung at his eyes were genuine. The man laughed cruelly and ran the knife down his other leg.

“Well would you look at that, I was right. Your insides are pretty.”

Jim wasn’t sure exactly how long it was before Madam Talas knocked at the door. Khan hadn’t paid for a whole night, and his time was up. Through his swollen eye he could still see the look of horror at the sight before her. She was a tough woman, not much emotion showed on her face, he wondered what he must look like.

“Out! Get out!” she screamed at Khan.

The man surveyed her with bored look before wiping Jim’s blood of his knife and sliding it back into it’s sheath. “Is my time up already Madam?” he’d asked calmly, standing up from the bed.
“Don’t you dare come back here,” Talas had growled at him, her eyes ablaze.

“We’ll see,” Khan said levelly, before exiting the room like he’d just fucked Jim, instead of slicing him to up.

Talas knelt down beside the bed, gently taking the tie from Jim’s mouth, “Jim? Jim are you alright?”

“I don’t know,” Jim answered horsely.

“Can you hold on one moment? I’m going to get Spock.”

Jim made a noncommittal noise.

Talas and Spock arrived back a moment later with water, gauze, and antiseptic. She unfastened his restraints while Spock surveyed the damage. Spock had been at Madam Talas’ the longest out of any of them. He was reserved and generally expressionless, Jim wasn’t actually sure why clients asked for him, but he was busy every night.

Now his brow narrowed with concern. “Are you alright Jim?” he asked.

“I’m not sure,” Jim responded again, he honestly wasn’t. He felt shaky and violated, but strangely detached and a little giddy.

Spock cleaned the knife marks, antiseptic taking away dried flecks of blood with it, before he wrapped the cuts up in gauze. It burned when the disinfectant touched his lip, but he said nothing. Talas pressed a cool rag to his swollen eye after washing the dried come off his face. “I’m so sorry Jim,” she kept repeating. He didn’t really know why she was sorry. It wasn’t her fault, she hadn’t known what the man was going to do.

Spock helped Jim to his room, helping him take small sips of water. “I have rejected my remaining client for the evening and I will stay with you,” he told Jim steadily.

“No, Spock, you didn’t have to do that…I’m sorry for causing trouble.”

“Do not be sorry Jim, none of this is your fault,” he said, unruffled. “I shall do my best to stay awake, but please do not hesitate to wake me up.” He then produced a rolled joint and a book of matches from a tin. “Madam Talas asked me to give you this. I do believe it will help you with the pain.”

Jim took a drag after Spock had lit the end. It was cannabis, which he’d figured, but he was touched that Talas had given up some of the product she enjoyed for him. It did make him feel better.

Jim offered a hit to Spock. “No thank you, it does nothing for me,” he told Jim politely.

The next morning at breakfast, the three other boys stared sympathetically at him. Pavel cried and pulled him into a deep hug. It had been a long time since one of them had taken this kind of damage, longer still since it had been Jim.

Chapter End Notes

I know that was a lot, hopefully it wasn’t too horrible to read. More soon regarding the aftermath.
“Doctor McCoy, I’m terribly sorry to bother you, but I felt it best not to wait to make his call,” Madam Sato’s distinct voice came through the earpiece of the phone.

“No bother, what did you need.”

“Doctor, Madam Talas spoke with me about James earlier, she runs the House where he works.”

Leonard felt his stomach drop to the floor.

“He can still see you tonight if you wish, but I have to advise you, he will look used. Unfortunately, because I’m bringing him in, I will not be able to discount your visit,” she said apologetically.

“What?” Leonard asked blankly, he had no idea what she was getting at.

“Normally, if one of my girls were to look used, and you wished to see her anyway, I would discount the evening, but as I have to travel him here, I cannot.”

“No, I’m sorry, I understand that. What do you mean he’ll look used?”

“Oh, you see Doctor, he had a client who was…well he was rather rough with James last night. Madam Talas tells me his eye is particularly blackened. She assures me he’ll work just fine, but aesthetically…you may be displeased with his appearance.”

Leonard only realized he was grinding his teeth together after she stopped speaking. “Is James alright?” he asked a little redundantly.

“As I said, he’ll be fine. I thought it was only fair to tell you before I brought him into town, in case you’d like to change your mind.”

“No.”

“Shall I reschedule him for next week?”

“No, no. I still want to see him,” Leonard heard himself whisper.

“That’s fine, as long as you understand the situation. We’ll see you tonight Doctor McCoy.”

—

“Jim, how are you feeling?” Talas asked him midmorning. He was still bathing, the other boys asleep.

“Stupid.”

“Excuse me?”
“I don’t *hurt* necessarily except my eye is sore—everything stings—but I feel so stupid. I’m not going to be able to be able to take clients tonight…probably not for the rest of the week.”

“Well, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. The doctor, the one you saw last week, he called about you. He wanted to see you tonight.”

Jim’s stomach leapt to this throat, “Shit. Of all the times, it *would* be tonight.”

“He asked for you yesterday. Jim, I should have sent you to Hoshi’s.”

“You didn’t know this would happen. If it wasn’t me, it would have been one of the others…It’s not your fault.”

“You’re my responsibility,” Talas said shaking her head. After a moment she asked again, “What should I tell the doctor?”

“Well someone better tell him I look like I got run over by a car and then mauled,” Jim said a little bitterly.

“Hoshi did.”

“What?”

“She did, she rang and told him what you look like. He still wants to see you.”

Jim laughed with indignation, “No he doesn’t. Send him Spock, I’m sure Bones would like that.”

“She asked him if he’d prefer another boy, or if he wanted to wait. The doctor says he’ll take you, as is.” She looked at him, searching for a moment, “as long as you’re sure you’re okay. If you need the night off, no one would blame you.”

Jim wrung his hands, part of him wanted to say no, he looked like hell, and this pride didn’t want Bones to see him like this, but the other part of him knew the doctor would be nice, and he’d get paid. Plus, up until last night, Jim had thought about Bones every day.

“I’ll see him,” Jim said quietly.

—

Talas had obviously not adequately prepared Hoshi for what he was going to look like when he showed up at her door late that afternoon. Her eyes comically wide, and her mouth hung open.

“You’re in no condition to work,” she said sympathetically, “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize…I’ll call Doctor McCoy and tell him he has to wait.”

“No, don’t please, I’m already here. I’m really fine, it looks a lot worse than it is,” Jim insisted, taking his things up the stairs. He felt guilty lying to her, as she obviously had no idea the horrors that hid under his clothes, but he’d come all this way. It didn’t seem necessary to worry her more. She looked at him, concerned, but finally she closed her eyes and nodded.

Gaila had fussed over him the moment she saw him. “*Jim*! I heard you were coming back and I was so excited! Are you alright? You’re not working tonight are you?”
Jim was starting to wonder exactly how bad his face really looked. Maybe he shouldn’t be working, but anything would be better than closing his eyes and seeing Khan’s face again. “I’m fine, really, Bones is coming to see me.”

“Hey, you can borrow some of my powder!” she exclaimed thoughtfully, “We’ll dust it on that eye, it’ll be fine.” She grabbed his hand, squeezing hard, pulling him into the bathroom.

---

Leonard wasn’t entirely sure what ‘used looking’ was going to mean until he opened the door to his room at Madam Sato’s that night. He stifled as gasp, swallowing hard. Jim sat on the edge of the bed, wearing only his silk robe. His lip was swollen, split down the side and his entire eye socket was a black and blue mess, yellowing around the edges. He’d obviously tried to powder over it, but it only dulled the dark hues. Jim was still stunning, but he looked broken and a little scared.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t meet you downstairs, Madam said I would disturb the other guests.”

“That’s quite alright darlin’,” he said, sitting down next to Jim as he tried to keep panic from his voice, “I’m only here to see you anyway.” He wasn’t prepared for the level of abuse the boy had obviously taken.

“If you want to keep the lights off—or leave—I understand. I’m guessing form the look on your face it’s worse than you were expecting,” Jim said, occupying his gaze with the blankets.

“Can I touch you?” Leonard said, ignoring the offer.

Jim laughed, but it came out sad, “Forget where you are again Bones?”

Leonard absently, traced his finger along Jim’s jaw. “Does it hurt?”

“No,” Jim lied. Leonard ran his thumb lightly over the bruise. Jim flinched, “Okay, it hurts a little.”

It felt just as bad as it looked, distended and inflamed, he couldn’t believe someone had done this to Jim. Leonard was furious with whoever had taken a fist to Jim’s face, but his anger wouldn’t do any good right now. Getting angry would just upset Jim more. He leaned in and kissed Jim’s cheek just under the bruise. Jim whimpered, so Leonard moved down his jaw, kissing below his ear, licking and nipping his way down Jim’s neck.

“Harder,” Jim moaned brokenly above him.

“Any harder and it’ll leave a mark,” Leonard said considerately.

Jim barked a short resentful laugh, “What’s a few more bruises? Please do it.”

Leonard wasn’t exactly sure what overcame him, but he gave into Jim’s pleas, sucking deeply at his neck. When he pulled away there was a delicate purple bruise on top of the already reddened skin. It looked like someone had had their hands around Jim’s throat. Leonard moved lower, at the angle into his collarbone, biting and licking and sucking. His hand slipped behind Jim’s robe to flick at his nipple while he did.

“Bones,” Jim groaned, “oh god Bones.”
Leonard continued, liking the breathy sounds Jim made in response to him, before his hand brushed an unfamiliar texture on Jim’s chest. He pulled back, sliding Jim’s robe off his shoulder, “What’s this?”

Breath still quickened, Jim pulled the fabric back across him. He clutched the robe closed for a moment, holding Leonard’s gaze, before his shoulders dropped and he shrugged it off entirely.

“Oh…Jim,” Leonard faltered, taking the expanse of his naked skin. Angry cuts ran across his pectorals, six on each, almost chevroning down his sternum. They were scabbed over, but still raised and red. “I’m so sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about,” Jim said, defensively.

“I’m sorry I forced you to see me tonight.”

“Do you regret it Bones? A lot more awful than you thought, huh?” His voice dripping with self-loathing.

“No, darlin’, I don’t regret it. What happened?”

Jim sighed, looking away again, “Wouldn’t you rather I just suck you again Sir?”

Leonard felt a barrier going up. He shook his head, “Let me see you.”

Jim chewed at the side of his lip that wasn’t swollen, eyes closed before he pulled back far enough that Leonard could take in his whole body. He was half hard, but quivering. Diamond patterns were sliced all down his hips, and four cuts ran the entire length of each of his inner thighs. Jim turned just enough so Leonard could see the damage on his back too, haphazard slices, not adhering to the symmetry or delicacy of the others.

“I know. I’m disgusting,” Jim said defeatedly after a few moments of no response from Leonard.

“No, no Jim. I’m just…You know I’m a doctor. I just wish I could help.”

“You could fuck me.”

“That won’t help.”

“It’ll help you…And me, if you let me come,” Jim said, trying for cheeky but falling just short.

“I’m not going to fuck you,” Leonard said, smoothing his hair, before laying a small kiss on the undamaged side of Jim’s mouth.

He moved lower, placing a kiss on the top of the first cut, licking gently down the end, and stopping with another kiss. Leonard did the same to the next one. When he had finished all six marks on the left side of Jim’s chest, he moved to his nipple. It was hard and sucked at the nub, scraping his teeth over it lightly. Jim squirmed, so he moved to the right set of marks, kissing and licking them as well. By the time he was done, the boy was panting mess.

“Bones, Bones, stop!” he cried out, partway through his ministrations on Jim’s right nipple.

Leonard pulled away, hoping he hadn’t hurt him, “I’m sorry, was that too much?”

“I…No, it’s…It’s just, what are you doing?”

“Helping, I hope.”
“You don’t have to do this,” Jim said, his voice cracking. “You’re wasting your night.”

“I want to,” Leonard said, fingers tracing Jim’s jaw again, “please let me.”

Jim swallowed at what could have been tears, and nodded.

Leonard nudged him to turn around. Sitting behind the boy, his palms rested on Jim’s biceps, Leonard kissed his way across the damaged skin of his back. Occasionally, when Jim’s whimpers turned pained, he moved backed to the flushed skin of his neck, sucking a new bruise into the skin, like Jim had asked. When Leonard finished with his back, he laid Jim down, moving to his hips. He traced the diamond shaped cuts with his fingers, kissing Jim’s hands while he did. When he finally reached the slashes on Jim’s thighs, their fingers entwined, Leonard went back to tracing the marks with his tongue.

The boy trembled with each press of his lips, so much so that it prompted Leonard to ask, “Is it okay, Jim? Am I hurting you?”

“Please don’t stop,” Jim implored, tears pricking at the corners of his eyes.


After he finished claiming every last injury with his mouth, he kissed the soft curve where Jim’s thigh met his groin. Jim’s cock had swollen full, pressed and leaking against this belly, going completely untouched until now. Leonard looked up at Jim, kissing the base of his erection before questioning, “Can I?”

“Oh god Bones, yes, please,” Jim sobbed when Leonard’s tongue flicked out to taste him.

Leonard worked Jim’s cock with his mouth for several minutes, before he looked up to see tears on Jim’s cheeks. His sucking must have slowed, because Jim’s eyes splintered open and he shook his head.

“It’s so good Bones,” he promised, chest heaving.

Leonard resumed his ministrations, sucking hard again, his tongue working in tandem with his lips. One hand caressed the soft skin of Jim’s thigh, the other creeping back to stroke his perineum, jostling the plug Leonard hadn’t realized was inserted.

Jim wailed throwing his head back. Leonard swirled his tongue across the head of Jim’s straining cock before running his teeth along the shaft lightly. Jim’s cries increased, Leonard could feel his balls growing tight. Pushing the dilator’s base flush against Jim’s hole, he slid his mouth down Jim’s cock again, sending Jim over the edge.

“Bones! Oh Bones, fuck!” Jim sobbed, filing Leo’s mouth steadily with come.

Leonard swallowed most of it, keeping a small mouthful at the end. When Jim finished, Leonard moved up the bed. He kissed Jim, his mouth opening receptivity for Leonard’s tongue. He pushed the come into Jim’s mouth carefully, the boy giving a feral whine when he tasted himself. Jim’s come mixed with the saliva but before he could down it, Leonard pulled it back into his mouth, sucking at Jim’s tongue before he swallowing it himself.
What are you doing?! Jim’s brain hissed at him as he laid nestled against Bones. He felt closer to Bones than ever, which was not the plan. Bones was supposed to have been disgusted with, not touch every inch of his broken body. Somehow it felt like he’d reclaimed it from the man that had wrecked him just the night before. It was beginning to feel like he belonged in the doctor’s arms. It was so easy to see him as something more than one of Jim’s regulars, especially after the come-laden kiss the sex had ended with—clients didn’t do shit like that. Bones made him feel decent, made him feel accepted. When the doctor had sucked him off, it had felt less like sex and more like a spiritual experience.

He almost felt like he was using Bones—no that wasn’t right—it almost felt like they were each other’s. Jim hadn’t even done anything for the doctor yet, Bones hadn’t let him. Jim could feel Bones’ cock, still hard, pressing against his ass. Bones had flat-out refused to fuck him, which at first had made Jim feel defective.

“It’s not because I don’t want you,” Bones had told him firmly, “it’s because I don’t need to put you through that right now, it doesn’t seem right.” Bones’ fingers had brushed along his ass, stuttering at the rubber. “Let me take this out? No reason to keep you open all night if you don’t have to be” he’d said, kissing Jim’s forehead.

Even though he was content to not be fucked, it felt wrong to just lay against the doctor while he was still wanting. Jim felt like he wasn’t doing his job. He pushed back experimentally on Bones’ cock. Bones groaned, pressing back, squeezing their still woven fingers.

He wanted to make Bones feel good too. “I know you won’t take me,” Jim whispered, “but I’d still like to make you come.”

“I don’t have to Jim, I’ll be fine. I don’t want to make—”

“Please would you?” Jim asked, shifting so Bone’s cock lined up between his cheeks. “Just like this? It won’t hurt me.”

Bones rutted experimentally against him, “okay,” he moaned after a moment. Jim was slick from the oil dripping out of him, the doctor’s cock sliding easily in the cleft of his ass. Bones’ breath was warm on his skin as he kissed Jim’s spine at the base of his neck. He could feel another mark forming under the doctor’s mouth and he sighed into it. He rocked against Jim for several moments, Jim surprised by how much he liked the way it felt.

“Jim!” Bones cried in a hoarse whisper when he came. Jim felt the warm come against his back, some of it hitting his cuts, and while it smarted, it also felt strangely soothing. Bones pulled away after a moment, and Jim braced himself to be left alone, now that Bones was done. But the doctor returned seconds later with a dampened towel, cleaning Jim up.

He laid back down, pulling Jim against his chest and holding him with such sentiment that Jim couldn’t stop the words from coming out, “He told me he wanted to know what I looked like on the inside.”

Bones drew him closer. “Go on, you can tell me,” the doctor urged quietly.

“He choked me and tied me up. Hit me—so hard Bones—gagged me…” Jim trailed off, getting lost in his own head, his voice wavering, “and then I felt the knife.”

“Darlin’, you’re okay now, he’s not here. He can’t touch you.”

“I think part of me liked it,” Jim added, shaking against Bones. I deserved it, it’s all I’m good for. To
used and tossed aside, like rubbish.

Bones kissed the top of his head. “You didn’t deserve it, no one deserves that,” he said and Jim realized he must have spoken.

“I’m just a whore,” Jim said his voice breaking on the last word. Whore had never seemed like a filthy word before, for five years it was just what he was. He didn’t know what was wrong with him. Whining like this—to a client nonetheless—was ridiculous and unprofessional.

“That doesn’t mean you’re not a person,” Bones said, squeezing Jim’s hand again, “and it certainly doesn’t mean anyone has the right to cut you up.”

“I think I’d let you,” Jim whispered. He hadn’t meant to say it out loud, but his tongue pushed the words off his lips anyway, “If you wanted to.”

Bones was quiet for a while, so long that Jim thought maybe he hadn’t said anything after all. Then, gently, Bones shifted Jim so he could see his face. The corners of his eyes were wet as he leaned in to kiss Jim. “I could never do something like that to you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who’s been reading! I hope this is sweet enough to make up for the last chapter. There’s more on the way soon!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay on this chapter! I got weirdly busy, but I'm writing again so there shouldn't been as long between this and the next one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leaving was getting more and more difficult for Leonard, especially after the way Jim had clung to him last night. The things he'd said, they way he'd cried, Leonard couldn’t believe it was all an act. Leaving someone in such desperate need of simple affection was killing him, especially when that someone looked like they needed medical treatment too—not that there was really anything more Leonard could do.

“I can’t walk you downstairs,” Jim said, glumly, breaking Leonard away from his thoughts as he reached for the door handle.

Leonard looked at him, concerned, “Does it hurt to walk?”

Jim smiled sadly and shook his head, “If anyone sees me they’ll think you beat the shit out me. Hos—Madam Sato doesn’t run that kind of establishment, it would present the wrong idea.”

It wasn’t that he’d forgotten what Jim looked like per se, but he’d adjusted to Jim’s battered face, forgetting how it would look like to anyone else. “Darlin’, I’m sorry,” Leonard said again, a fresh wave of hatred for Jim’s abuser stirred inside him.

Leonard couldn’t help himself, it didn’t matter that a night here was a small fortune. He just wanted to stay with the boy, “How long are you going to be here Jim?”

He sighed, running a hand through his rumpled hair, “Who knows…no point in sending me back if I can’t work. Until my face looks better I guess? You’re the doctor, you tell me how long that’ll be.”

“So what happens to you tonight?”


“Would you be allowed to see me again?”

Jim gaped, “You’re…joking, right?”

Leonard felt himself going red, Jim’s tone was entirely unreadable, “No. If you’re still willing, I’d like to spend another night with you.”

Jim hopped off the bed, closing the space between himself and Leonard in a few short steps. Instead of answering, Jim kissed him roughly, pushing his hands into Leonard’s messy hair. Leonard tried to be careful, the intensity of the action throwing him off guard. When he pulled back, gulping for air, Jim’s lips were wet with something that was too red to be spit. Leonard’s tongue poked out at his own lip, tasting the distinct saltiness of blood. Jim’s lip had split back open.

He reached for his handkerchief. “Oh Jim,” Leonard breathed as he dabbed at Jim’s lip, soaking it up.
the blood.

“It’s my fault,” Jim admitted, suddenly bashful.

When he finished cleaning Jim up he asked, “was that your way of saying yes?”

Jim nodded. “I’d really like it if you came back tonight,” he said, fiddling with the ties of his robe.

“Alright then, I’ll see you soon,” Leonard kissed his brow one last time. “You don’t have to…get yourself ready tonight,” he said suddenly before slipping out the door.

—

Jim entered the kitchen, meeting the general buzz of the girls. Janice gasped, presumably at his face—he hadn’t seen her before work last night. Karen shushed her, whispering in her ear hurriedly.

“How was it?” Uhura asked him when he sat down. Jim just stared at the table, a lump formed in his throat as he remembered how good Bones had been to him. “Jim? Did he hurt you?” she asked emphatically, covering his hand with hers on the table.

Jim shook his head, hunching his shoulders. “No, he was really sweet,” he said his voice cracking a little.

“Well that’s good, now we won’t have to kick his ass,” Uhura smiled, scooping him some oatmeal.

“So I guess you’ll get a break tonight,” Gaila said, throwing her arm across Jim’s shoulders. He winced as it put pressure on his cuts, but didn’t say anything, “you’ll get to do laundry instead of dicks huh?”

“Those sound equally bad to me,” Mira said wryly across the table. Gaila let out a full-bodied laugh.

“Actually…Bones said he’ll be back tonight,” Jim confessed.

Gaila frowned, wrinkling her nose, “Why? Dose he get off on you looking like this? Wait—Is he actually a creep?”

“No!” Jim started defensively. Bones was definitely not a creep. “I mean, I don’t think so…He wouldn’t fuck me, so I don’t think it’s his thing.”

“He didn’t fuck you!” Mira balked, “So he just made you suck his prick all night?”

Jim shook his head.

“Well, what happened then?” Gaila prodded, obviously interested as well.

“He…Well, he kissed me—a lot—put his mouth all over me. Then…Actually, he…Well, he blew me.”

“Was he any good?” Gaila asked, excitedly.

“What’s that even like? When johns go down on me they’re always dreadful at it, I have to fake an orgasm just so they’ll stop,” Uhura complained, obviously annoyed about previous nights. “Can you
fake one?"

“Bones is…He knows what he’s doing,” Jim blushed deeply, feeling the phantom motions of Bones’
tongue on his cock, “It’s not the first time he’s used his mouth on me.”

“And this is the first we’re hearing about it?” Gaila said, “I thought we were your friends!”

Jim laughed despite himself, “I didn’t think you’d care if a client sucked me off.”

“We do if he’s good at it!” Mira laughed.

—

“Leo, a couple of the other nurses and I are going out tonight. Just to a pub, nothing fancy, I thought
you might want to come with us?” Christine said casually while stocking the supply cabinet in
Leonard’s office.

“Tonight?” Leonard said, flipping through his paperwork absently, not really focused on any of it,
“No, sorry Chris I can’t, I’m going to Madam Sato’s.”

Christine stopped what she was doing, turning around to stare at him incredulously. “Weren’t you
there last night?”

Leonard holds her gaze, “I was.”

“And you’re seeing the same boy again? James?” When he didn’t say anything Christine sighed
heavily, dropping in the chair across from him. “Leo,” she took hold of his hand, demanding his
attention gently, “I don’t mean to be crass, but you know this isn’t a relationship right?” He stared
down at their clasped hands, silent. “I know how hard it is for you to do something less than one
hundred percent, but you’re paying for a fantasy, honey.

Leonard’s throat tightened, he knew that. It’s what he told himself every time he walked through the
door of the Madam Sato’s, but deep down his gut told him that wasn’t true, that what he had with
Jim was different. He couldn’t explain what had happened last night to Christine, he wasn’t even
sure he could explain it to himself. Leonard just knew he had to see Jim again.

“I know Chris, but he needs me.”

Christine closed her eyes, turning her head towards the ceiling before she sighed. “This is a
dangerous road you’re going down.” She stood up, patting his hand once more as she headed for the
door, “Just be careful, okay?”

Leonard wasn’t sure if he nodded or not, but she didn’t turn to look.

—

Uhura gasped and Jim head whipped around suddenly. Her hand covered her mouth, and she turned
her gaze to the floor.
Jim thought he’d woken early enough that no one would see him in the bath, he didn’t want to think about his body or the cuts, but apparently he’d misjudged how long he’d been in the water. He reached for his towel hastily, belatedly trying to shield his body.

“It’s not—” Jim started at the same moment she asked brokenly, “What happened?”

Jim really didn’t want to talk about it, his arms crossed instinctually in front of him.

Uhura sensed his hesitancy. “It wasn’t…It wasn’t the doctor was it?” she asked softly, it seemed like she was truly worried.

“No,” Jim said distantly, “No Bones wouldn’t hurt me.”

“The guy from the other night? Who did the…?” she motioned swollen face.

“Yeah,” he mumbled, wanting his conversation to be over, or preferably, to have never started.

They stood in an uncomfortable silence for a minute before Uhura moved towards him, then stopped suddenly as if she’d thought better of it. “Does Hoshi know how bad it is?”

Jim swallowed hard, eyes filling with fear, “No! No she doesn’t. Please don’t tell her, please, she won’t let me work if she knows about all of this.”

“You’re sure you’re okay?” she asked gently.

Jim nodded and she clarified, “And you want to work?”

“Yes,” Jim said, more emphatically than he’d intended.

Uhura opened her arms hesitantly, silently asking for permission to hug him. “Alright, I won’t say anything.”

Jim pressed himself into her arms, letting out a choked breath against her shoulder. She shushed him quietly, her hand running over his bruised neck which, blessedly, she didn’t comment on.

“Thanks Uhura.”

“You can call me Nyota, Jim.”

—

The room was empty when Leonard opened the door, save for the furniture that always greeted him. He set his bag down, lowering himself into one of the velvet chairs, thinking of nothing in particular. The door opened abruptly, Jim slipping through, wearing only the dark silk robe he’d had on last night. He swallowed hard when he caught sight of Leonard.

“I’m sorry Bones, I was supposed to be waiting in here for you,” he looked towards Leonard nervously, untying the robe as he spoke.

“Jim,” Leonard said softly, jarring the boy from his preoccupation, “It’s okay, I’m not going anywhere.” While that was only true for the short-term, the reassurance seemed to calm Jim anyway. He made a half-hearted attempt to hide behind his shoulder, the robe hanging on him, barely closed.
“What happened?”

“Hmm?”

“Did you…change your mind? Were you trying to put off seeing me?”

Jim looked positively wounded, “No! Bones, no, that’s not it at all!” He moved closer to Leonard, reaching out for him.

Leonard stood up so they were eye-to-eye, taking his hand, “What then?”

Jim blushed, looking abashed, “I…I fell asleep. Janice asked me to braid her hair. I wasn’t allowed downstairs, and I just…I must have drifted off.”

Leonard’s lip quipped up at Jim’s chagrin, “You’re tired?”

“Not too tired for you,” Jim leaned in to kiss him, “Promise.”

Leonard kissed him back, slowly, doing his best not to open Jim’s lip back up. Jim pressed closer to him, his fingers running down Leo’s chest before dipping below the waistband. He pulled back gently, closing his hands around Jim’s.

“Don’t,” Leonard said quietly earning a confused whine from Jim. “You don’t have to do that.”

Jim laughed a little, “I kind of do, it’s my job you know.”

“I thought your job was whatever I wanted,” Leonard countered, undeterred by Jim’s callousness.

Jim nodded cautiously, “What are we going to do then? You didn’t want me prepped…Are you gonna do it yourself? Open me up with your fingers? Make me squirm?”

Leonard saw something flash in Jim’s eyes, something that indicated Jim might enjoy what he’d just suggested. “Would you like that?”

“I like everything you do to me Doctor,” Jim breathed against his neck, his voice low.

Leonard shivered, this boy could hit all of his buttons, even when he was hurt and tired. “Jim, we don’t have to do anything like that tonight, you’re still hurt,” Jim winced when Leo’s fingers settled on his hip, proving the point, “I don’t want to force you, I don’t like seeing you in pain.”

“You’re making this really difficult for me Bones,” Jim almost whispered.

“I’m sorry Jim, what am I doing?” Leonard stepped away, worried he’d done something wrong.

Jim looked at him blankly and shook his head, “Nothing. Nothing, sorry.”

Leonard contemplated him for a moment before reaching down for the long forgotten bag, “I brought something for you.”

Jim tensed, eyes flicking towards the bag nervously. Clearly, that dredged up a memory he did not enjoy, Leonard noted.


“You didn’t have to do that,” he said while the look in his eyes was gratitude.
“Let me put it on?” Leonard asked, pulling out a several rolls of gauze with it.

Jim opened his mouth, for a second Leonard was convinced he was going to say no, “If you want,” he said timidly.

Leonard pulled the blankets back before pushing himself on to the bed. “Up here for me,” he said, patting the mattress.

Jim slowly climbed on the bed next to him, the robe sliding off his shoulders and pooling around his waist as he did so. The cuts looked better today, some of the redness had gone down, the scabs thick and rough. Leonard pulled on rubber gloves so the salve wouldn’t numb his hands then scooped some from the jar, carefully rubbing it on to Jim’s back. The boy let out a small cry when the cream came in contact with his skin.

“Is it alright?” Leonard asked quietly, not wanting to disturb their comfortable silence.

“Yes, sorry, it’s just cold,” Jim said at a similar volume, “Go on.”

Leonard covered the cuts on his back in a generous amount. “Turn,” he ordered when he’d finished.

Jim did, twisting around so Leonard could take care of his chest. Leonard tried not to watch Jim watching him, but the look of complete trust that he saw drew him in. As much as he wanted to deny it, Christine was right, he was too attached to the boy, but he didn’t know how to stop. He desperately wanted to believe this was more than just a job to Jim

Jim flushed again when he realized Leonard had noticed his gaze, averting his eyes, “It feels good,” he said a little awkwardly.

Leonard kissed his cheek chastely as he reached past Jim for the gauze he’d set on the bed. He wrapped it carefully around the areas he’d applied the salve to, tying it off around Jim’s shoulder. “How does that feel?” Leonard asked.

Jim wiggled a little, raising his shoulders. “I like it,” Jim responded. Then his head jerked up suddenly. “I mean, it’s fine,” he added the blush starting on his neck his time.

“Would you let me do the same to the rest of the…” Leonard trailed off, motioning to his legs. He was unsure if calling it ‘damage’ would be crass.

Jim understood anyway, nodding vehemently. He stretched his leg across Leonard’s lap, exposing his marked hip and thigh. Leonard repeated the process of applying the cream and then the bandage in a similar fashion. When he moved his attention to Jim’s right leg the robe fell away, exposing Jim entirely. His cock was hard, flushed pink against his pale skin.

“Sorry,” Jim apologized, “I know we’re not going to…It’s just no one ever touches me like this.” He let out a shaky breath, “I guess I don’t know how to react. It’s just you and—”

“It’s okay, don’t apologize,” Leonard assured him, he reached out to cup Jim’s jaw but stopped just short, remembering the gloves. He kissed him instead. Briefly, Jim relaxing against his lips. “I’m going to do your other leg now,” Leonard told him.

Jim inhaled sharply, like he’d forgotten to breath for a moment and nodded.

Jim’s skin prickled with gooseflesh when Leonard touched him again. He copied his method from the other leg, finishing the tie just above Jim’s knee.
“I never thought I’d like being tied up,” Jim said with a small smile as Leonard pulled the gloves off.

“I’ve never exactly thought of this as ‘tying up,’” Leonard said wryly.

After a few moments Jim picked up Leonard’s uncovered hands, turning them over with his fingers. It had gotten late, and the shadows played up the bruise around Jim’s eye, casting a dark shadow on his unharmed one. He leaned closer to Leonard, stopping just shy of his lips, instead he hung his head towards his chest.

“Touch me,” he whispered.

It was a small request, so simple and unassuming that Leonard had no choice but to comply immediately. He settled one hand on Jim’s bicep, the other clasping Jim’s hand with intent. Jim sighed, closing his eyes as he moved closer to Leonard. They shifted so Leonard was propped against the headboards, Jim laying his arms.

“Should I…?” Leonard asked quietly as his hand trailed down Jim’s torso. He didn’t want the boy to feel rejected, but it almost didn’t seem appropriate.

“No,” Jim answered in a small voice, into Leonard’s shirt, “Just this, it’s nice just like this.”

“Okay,” Leonard said, running his hand through Jim’s hair. It felt so natural so right to just lay with Jim like this, to just be close to him. It was a little odd, Leonard supposed, that Jim was naked while he was fully clothed, it reminded him vaguely of the first night. He found a sense of familiarity from it, deciding not to change their current situation.

“Can I ask you something, Bones?” Jim said after a while of silence.

“Of course.”

“Why are you doing this? What do you get from it?”

The question startled Leonard, because he didn’t know how to answer without potentially upsetting Jim. “Should I do something else?”

Jim buried his face further into Leonard’s shirt, even though he already couldn’t see Jim’s facial expression. “I like this, I’ve never done anything like it before, but I like it. I just…I don’t understand why you don’t just fuck me and leave.”

Leonard said nothing for several minutes, holding out on the answer, he wasn’t sure he could admit this to the boy.

“Never mind, I’m sorry. It’s your time, you can do whatever you want.”

He felt Jim tense, not pulling away, but not letting go either.

“No, Jim…I—I care about you,” Leonard stuttered nervously, “I don’t want to leave you alone.”

There, it was out, he braced for Jim to laugh in his face.

Instead, Jim twisted slowly around, craning his neck to look up at Leonard, “Wh…what?” he asked barely above a whisper. Jim stared wide-eyed at him, his mouth hung open ever so slightly.

“You mean a lot to me.”

Jim surged up, kissing him with a desperation unlike any of their other encounters. It wasn’t frantic,
no ripping of clothes or moaning, just a desire to be as close to Leonard as possible. Jim gripped at his shirt, tongue rolling against Leonard’s and Leonard wasn’t sure he’d ever felt such a reckless want for someone before. They broke only when there was no more air in either of their lungs, gasping apart, Jim on top of Leonard.

Leonard pretended not to notice Jim wiping the wetness from his eyes as he kicked his shoes off and pulled the blankets around them. Leonard wrapped his arms around the boy politely ignoring the sniffling noise he made when he kissed the top of Jim’s head.

Chapter End Notes

Oh boys, you've both gotten yourself into such a mess...
Gosh, I'm sorry, I'm really trying to write this as quickly as possible, but it's been a week since the last chapter...I promise I'll keep updating!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jim was embarrassed at his crying, he wasn’t sure he could pinpoint the feeling in his chest that had caused it, a tightness, a longing but still his heart managed to flutter. It was completely unfamiliar, and his body’s response was tears.

“I’m not hurting you am I?” Bones asked softly, his fingers drawing abstract shapes on his back.

“No,” Jim choked out wetly, wedging his head under the doctor’s chin. After a while, the tears had stopped, leaving only the quivering rhythm of his heart. Jim yawned despite himself, “Bones, would it be okay if I went to sleep?”

“Go ahead darlin’.”

Jim didn’t remember much after that, except the faint pulsing he could feel against his temple from Bones’ heart, drifting off in a contented confusion.

“Jim…Jim, Jim.”

Jim woke disoriented, hearing his name was whispered softly, shamelessly, into the darkness. There was just enough moonlight left for him to see the doctor’s face, eyes closed, brow drawn, still sleeping.

“…Bones,” Jim found his hand, squeezing lightly.

The man sighed, tranquility taking over his expression. Jim couldn’t help but smile, stroking Bones’ hand with his thumb. He still couldn’t identify this feeling he was experiencing, but it made him feel safe, and safe was not something he ever felt.

The morning was curious. It was always strange to see Bones in the light of day; Jim forgot how much younger he looked in the morning. During the night, they’d shifted, Jim finding himself pressed to Bones’ back, hugging the man to him. He sighed heavily when he registered that morning also meant Bones had to leave.

“Are you awake Jim?” Bones asked into the silence. He’d probably asked a few times already, unwilling to move until Jim himself was awake.

“Yes...I guess,” Jim said reluctantly, starting to move away from Bones.

“Don’t go.”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t get up yet.”
“But I have to get the water and—”

“What happens if you don’t?”

“I…Well nothing, as long as you don’t tell Madam Sato.”

“I won’t, just stay here for a bit.”

Jim considered it, there was really no reason he couldn’t just lay here with Bones, except that he felt like he wasn’t doing his job, but no part of being with the doctor felt like a job any more. Neither moved from their spooning position for quite some time, Bones’ fingers laced with Jim’s as he kissed them sleepily, their feel tangled together under the sheets.

“How are you feeling?” Bones asked, finally turning over to face Jim.

“Good,” Jim said easily, Bones always made him feel good. Bones’ fingers brushed the gauze on his chest. “It doesn’t hurt anymore.” His fingers moved up to Jim’s cheek fingers lightly pressing at his eye. Jim winched slightly, “That’s still sore.”

Bones kissed the corner of his eye softly, lips barely brushing the bruised skin, it sent a shiver through Jim.

“Will you come back tonight?” Jim asked, intensely wanting the answer to be yes.

Bones pulled back, looking at him fondly, he opened his mouth, but before he could make a noise, closed it again. He shut his eyes as though he was remembering something and shook his head so quickly it was almost imperceivable. “I can’t Jim, I’m sorry. Not tonight,” Bones said glumly.

Jim’s stomach twisted. This was it, Bones was going to be done with him.

“I’ll come back on Saturday if you’ll see me then.”

“Of course. I always want you here.”

On his way out, Leonard was stopped by Madam Sato. She beckoned him into her office, Leonard trying half-heartedly to smooth his slept-in clothes

“Doctor McCoy, I do not make a habit out of questioning my patron’s preferences…I must make sure you understand something,” the Madam told him as she sat, staring him down.

“Of course ma’am, I’m listening.”

“While we accommodate many fantasies here, you may not request any of my girls—this includes James or any other boy you choose to see—to look battered, ever. I simply will not tolerate it. If that is your desire, I’m afraid you will have to go elsewhere.”

Leonard sat in stunned silence for a moment, having no idea how to respond. “Ma’am,” he began uncertainly, “I wouldn’t…that’s not why I wanted to see him. That’s not my preference.” He paused, unsure of how to phrase the next part, “I just like his company.”
Sato’s face was impassive when she looked back at him. “Forgive me Doctor, I do not run a particularly modest establishment and not many visitors return two nights in a row, especially when their desired is in such a state.”

He honestly couldn’t blame her, he was behaving strangely and he appreciated that the woman was so quick to defend her staff. “I enjoy being with him, and he said he wouldn’t be able to see anyone else last night.”

The woman’s face morphed into an expression halfway between sympathy and amusement, “You seem like a good man Doctor McCoy.” She stood up, “I apologize for my brashness.”

“That’s unnecessary, it’s nice to know you’re looking out for them,” Leonard said sincerely.

“Someone has to,” she said dismissively. As she went to open the door she turned back to him, “Will you be enjoying our company again tonight?”

“No, unfortunately not, I have a dinner to attend. Saturday though, if you’ll still have James?”

“I’ll make sure we do.”

—

“He did what exactly?” Janice asked, baffled by what Jim had just told Gaila.

“After the put the bandages on, we just…slept together,” Jim said, trying to explain it as plainly as possible.

“He means they literally slept in the same bed,” Gaila clarified, “Just slept.”

“What the hell is wrong with him?” Janice scoffed, “Why would you pay to spend a night like that?”

“Maybe he’s rich, and doesn’t care how much he’s doling out,” Mira mused, “Maybe he’s too awkward to find a woman to be with who’ll just sleep next to him.”

“He’s not. I don’t know…He just likes me is all,” Jim said uncomfortable with the girls talking about Bones like he was an aberration.

“Jim, do you know how much a night here costs?” Gaila asked.

“Not really.” “It’s ten Tul for one of us, I’m sure Hoshi charges more for you.”

Jim froze. Ten Tul for one of the girls? Talas charged clients four Tul for a session, and seven for a whole night. Granted, Hoshi probably had more overhead with the furnishings and champagne and the full night only policy, but still. He had to be traveled in, and account for money Talas was losing when he wasn’t there, Hoshi probably charged clients somewhere around fifteen a night for him. That was so much, he hoped Bones really was rich, because that was a huge sum of money. Jim rested his elbows on the table, remembering miserably how much he still owed Talas. She’s paid his uncle quite a price for him.

“Sweetie, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you!” Gaila said taking his hand. “I’m sure you’ve just put your charm on the doctor, and he just can’t stand to be away from you.”
Jim nodded, hoping that no one could see how attached to the man Jim had become himself. The thought of money keeping Bones away was almost too much to bear.

—

It was an odd night for Jim, understandably Hoshi wouldn't let him anywhere near the lounge. Instead he was given the task of washing dishes, which was mind-numbingly boring.

It wasn’t that he’d rather have a john fucking him, that certainly wasn’t it. No, he missed Bones fucking him. Jim missed his warm hands, and his soft kisses. Most of all he missed the way Bones called him *darlin’* like he meant something, like he mattered.

What was also terribly strange was getting into a bed by himself. There was no point in staying up all night when he didn’t have to, so he laid on the bed he usually shared with the girls, alone. It felt too big. He couldn’t remember a time in the past five years when he’d fallen asleep completely alone. It was also unusual for him to go to bed this early at night, and without having come. He belatedly realized he hadn’t come last night either, opting for the doctor to hold him instead.

Jim felt fidgety, and incomplete. He pulled his nightshirt off, not wanting to soil it, reaching down to stroke himself roughly. Jim couldn’t remember the last time he’d done this without an audience, probably not since before he’d become a whore. He didn’t have anyone’s cue’s to follow, and doing it just for himself made him feel uncomfortable. Even so, there was no way he was going to get to sleep without it.

Closing his eyes he pictured Bones above him, pumping his cock expertly. It helped immensely, his prick obviously interested in that. Bones would touch him sweetly, he’d moan as he entered Jim. His hole twitched at the thought, god, he wanted to feel Bones inside him. He crooked his leg up, sucking on his fingers before reaching down to finger himself. His spit wasn’t nearly slick enough, his fingers catching on ring of muscle, he hated when clients fucked him with spit. It was enough to get his fingers inside though, and imagining Bones with him more than made up for the lack of lubrication.

*That’s perfect Jim,* he imagined Bones telling him.

Jim stroked himself quicker, picturing the man leaning in to suck on his neck. Phantom sensations fluttered across his skin, remembering where Bones had touched him before. He bit his lip to keep himself from crying out, unsure what would happen if he did, unwilling to break the fantasy.

*Come for me,* fantasy Bones said to him, *Come for me darlin’.*

And Jim did, gasping at the air wantonly. His hole clenched around his fingers, forcing them out, his cock jumping before spurting across his chest. He lay still, breath heaving, as he rode through the aftershocks of his orgasm. It wasn’t as good as when Bones fucked him, but he wasn’t sure anything could ever be that good.

He sacrificed his washrag from his shelf to clean the come off his body, the bandages on his chest now a lost cause. Jim sighed, unwinding the gauze from his torso before pulling his nightshirt on and making his way quickly to the bathroom. Grabbing another rag from the pile, he wet it down and cleaned himself off more thoroughly. The water was biting cold, but it didn’t matter anymore. He removed the dressing on his legs too, as the cream had long since absorbed into his skin.
When he got back to his room he crawled into bed, sleepy at last. He wished Bones was there, solid and warm so he could cling to him as he fell asleep. The bed was still empty, but his fantasies mollified him enough to drift off.

The room was filled with light when he woke, he’d forgotten to draw the curtains in the veil of the dark. His fingers reached for the warmth of another body that he couldn’t find. Yawning hugely, he couldn’t wait until after the breakfast when the Gaila would come to bed and snuggle against him.

“How was your night?” Jim asked quietly to Nyota who was already sitting by herself in the kitchen.

“Rough,” she said hollowly.

“Are you hurt?” Jim asked, concerned for her the way she’d been concerned for him.

“No…I’ll be okay, it was just…he threw me around, kept his hand over my mouth. He would have been violent if he knew Hoshi wouldn’t let him see me again,” She looked up, and for the first time seemed to register it was Jim she was speaking to. “I’m sorry, it’s nothing like what you endured.”

“It’s not a competition,” Jim assured her, “I’m glad he didn’t hurt you more.”

Nyota patted his thigh, “Don’t worry about me.”

The kitchen had filled considerably since Jim had entered, seven girls seated at the table with them.

“Hello girls,” Hoshi said, stepping into the kitchen, “How is everyone doing?”

“Sore like always ma’am!” Mira said cheekily, sitting down with her porridge.

“You’re all such hard workers,” Hoshi said with a smile and the girls laughed. “James? Could I have you join me in my office?”

A few of the girls called half-hearted taunts at him, Nyota squeezing his hand before he left.

“Yes ma’am?” Jim said hesitantly once the door was closed.

“Are you alright James?”

“Yes, I’m…fine. As fine as I was when I got here.”

“That’s not saying much,” Hoshi said dejectedly. “You’d tell me if you were feeling worse?”

“Yes,” Jim assured, although he couldn’t imagine that would ever come to issue, “Was that all?”

“I’m afraid not, Madam Talas called last night, it seems you have a client that is anxious to see you, a Mister…Mitchell?”

Jim’s stomach churned with disgust, he had no desire to see Gary ever, let alone soon. “So you’re sending me back today? Usually you don’t call me in to say that,” Jim said without any finesse.

“Well, I’m glad to hear you’ve still got your gall,” Hoshi said with a smile. “Normally, I would but Madam Talas and I agree that there’s no point in sending you back if you’re not feeling up to it. She’s informed me of Mister Mitchell’s preferences when it comes to you.”

Right. Could he be tied up again? Probably. Did he want to be? Absolutely not, but there was no point in working up more debt for no reason, especially if he couldn’t see Bones again until Saturday.
“I’ll manage,” Jim told her blankly. “He…He knows the…condition of my face?” Jim added as an after-thought.

Hoshi grimaced, “Madam Talas said he seemed rather excited by it.”

Later that day, Jim was greeted back at Talas’ by the woman herself. She followed him to the room he and Pavel shared.

She took his face in her hands, inspecting the bruise. “This is looking much better,” she said after a moment. “Let’s see the rest of it,” Talas commanded after he’d taken his shoes off.

Jim tugged off his shirt, waiting for her analysis. She touched a few of the scabs, they really didn’t hurt anymore, but it made him nervous.

She sighed, looking at him carefully, “They’re going to scar…I really hoped they wouldn’t.”

A lump started in the back of his throat, Jim prayed he didn’t know what was coming next.

“I’m sorry Jim, I’m going to have to dock your rate.” She did look sorry.

Jim nodded, nails digging into his palms, he’d known it was coming, but the prospect of earning less was upsetting. At his old rate, with what he cleared, it would have taken just under four more years to clear his debt. Cutting his price would keep him a whore even longer. Five? Six years? He wondered at what point he’d no longer be a desirable conquest—especially with the scars. At what point would he have to resign himself to the fact that he could never be his own person?

Seeing Gary was horrible. All Jim wanted was to lay with someone. He hadn’t gotten to sleep next to Gaila as he’d had to travel. By the time he’d gotten to the house and washed up for the night Pavel had already been awake, leaving him no time for platonic bed sharing.

Being tied to the bed, mocked, and fucked was the furthest thing from what he wanted.

“Mouthy little bitch you are,” Gary growled, buried inside him, “No wonder someone cut you up.”

“Yes Sir.” Jim was already crying. Real tears—anguished that this was all his life was ever going to be.

“It’s good to see you like this, really sobbing for it, you filthy whore. I can tell you missed me.”

Gary never actually hurt him, just threw biting insults and tonight they stung like a physical blow.

“I’m the only one who’s ever going to want to fuck you,” he sneered, his hips stuttering. Jim could tell he was close to finishing.
“I know Sir.”

—

As it turned out, slightly damaged was a fantasy another man had that night. After he’d finished the session with Gary, a different client asked Talas if Jim was available to see him.

Jim agreed listlessly. He laid indifferently while the man fucked him, muttering similar things to Gary, but Jim didn’t have any tears left. This man was nicer, he let Jim come, Jim wasn’t sure if he appreciated or resented the orgasm. It felt forced, everything felt forced.

—

Pavel was in their bed after breakfast, Jim had stopped in the bathroom, picking at the scabs on his chest. Some flaked off easily, but the few he had to peel bled. Jim didn’t care, putting his nightshirt on anyway.

“Jim!” Pavel twinned himself around Jim as soon as he laid in the bed.

He accepted the contact easily, holding the younger boy to him closely, “I missed you.”

“I missed you as well Jim. Are you doing okay? I saw you took two clients last night.”

“…Talas docked my rate,” Jim said blandly, unable to acknowledge what Pavel had just said.

Pavel’s eyes widened, “She can’t—That’s terrible, I’m sorry…”

“It’s fine.” It wasn’t, but there was nothing else to do but accept it. “Let’s just go to sleep Pavel.” The contact of another person was calming, even if it wasn’t Bones. It was nice to just be held, the touch reminding him he wasn’t alone in this predicament.

—

It hit him the next morning while him was making up a client bed with Spock. Making beds was mindless work, routine and dull. His mind was drifting back and forth, always landing on the doctor.

It was a casual thought, he paid no attention as it ran across his mind, tucking the sheets in tightly. Then Jim stopped. He stopped as he processed the thought that had slipped though brain so easily. I love Bones.

Jim dropped the pillow he was holding and stared at the wall wide-eyed. He didn’t, he couldn’t, he wasn’t even sure he knew what that word meant, let alone that he felt that way.
“Jim, I am unsure why you’ve stopped helping me, but there are still three more beds we are responsible for,” Spock addressed him with a slight eyebrow raise.

“I…” Jim started, feeling a little panicked.

“Yes?” Spock questioned, with his usual lack of interest.

This went beyond breaking any rule. This was something entirely different. Falling for the client’s charm? Stupid, but it happened. Love, though? *Love*. That was absurd.

“Jim, do you require assistance?” Spock asked, the smallest tinge of concern creeping on to his face.

“Have you…Do you know what love is Spock?” Jim asked, still gazing at the empty wall.

“By definition it is an intense affection for another person, a chemical state if I understand correctly.”

“That’s not—I mean, have you ever been in love?”

“I felt a great love for my late mother.”

Jim shook his head, “Not like that, the other kind.”

“Romantic attraction? No.”

Jim let out a shaking breath.

“Do you wish to elaborate on your quandary, Jim?” Spock inquired, not terribly interested in the subject.

“No…” Jim trailed his heart hammering.

“Then I must suggest we return to the task at hand.”

Chapter End Notes

Please note: The monetary system is made up because I didn't want to specify a country or write ridiculous inaccuracies.
A doctor's salary in this 'verse would be 5000 Tul a year. 15 Tul is roughly 300 modern USD.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Oh lordy, look this verse and I are still alive...

I'd like to take a second to just apologize for the ridiculous wait for this chapter. I had to write it a few times before I was happy with it, and I had to make a bunch of decisions about the story before I could continue. This chapter is over 5k so I hope the length makes up for the wait!

I swear I'll be better with the rest of the updates, thank you to everyone who has stuck with me thus far.

Leonard had never wished days away so fast in his life, not even during his awkward divorce fillings. When Saturday finally came around he had to stop himself from showing up at Madam Sato's in the morning. Technically, he had the day off, but he made two house calls, his least favorite thing to do, just to keep himself distracted.

The dinner party he'd had to attend had been a frustration, entertaining the wealthy Baron and his wife who contributed sizable amounts to the hospital every year. It had been a dull evening, filled with pointless conversations and endless undue flattery.

The next night he'd been the on-call doctor. A young kitchen maid had been rushed to the hospital with several nasty burns she'd gotten when she'd fallen asleep lighting the stove. She'd been more upset that the kitchen wouldn't be ready on time than that she'd been burned, sobbing about how she'd be fired. Leonard dressed the wound and offered hollow condolences. For all he knew, she would be dismissed, but that wasn't what had occupied his thoughts.

Leonard was at the door precisely as night fell across the street. He entered, and was greeted in the foyer by Madam Sato. She didn't look the least bit surprised to see him at such an early hour of the evening. He handed over the usual amount of money for his visit, only to have the woman hand two of the coins back.

“It’s twelve Tul for him from now on Doctor McCoy. He’s upstairs for you,” she said easily, “Uhura will show you up.”

While Leonard wondered what exactly the lower price meant, as if on cue, the woman appeared. She really was beautiful and were Leonard in a different frame of mind, he could have imagined spending a night with her. But as always, his mind only had room for Jim.

She blinked, eyeing him carefully, “This way Doctor,” she motioned with a slight tilt of her head.

They walked through the lounge, which was filled with girls as usual, half dressed and primped. There were no clients just yet, and Leonard realized how early he really was. A Saturday night had to mean the best business of the week for the brothel. The girl he recognized as Gaila from one of his previous visits gave him a curious sidelong glance, maybe reevaluating him, Leonard couldn’t tell exactly. He felt as though everyone was looking at him, and maybe they were—it didn’t seem like there was anything else to do at the moment—but it felt odd.
Uhura said nothing else to him until they were on the stairs. “Be good to him,” she murmured, barely audible.

“Excuse me?” Leonard said, unsure if he heard her correctly.

“I know you are, he talks about you differently than the rest. But Jim seems off, so be nice.”

Leonard was surprised by her forwardness, her gaze made him feel like she knew too much—she probably did. And what she said hit him right in the heart, *he talks about you differently*, that was something.

“Of course,” was all he said when they reached the landing.

She smiled softly at him, striding over and knocking on a door off to the left. “Enjoy your evening Doctor,” she said simply before heading back for the stairs.

Leonard opened the door carefully. The room was much the same as the blue room they normally shared. Similar luxurious furnishings, the colors the only real variance, The walls were covered in a dark chocolate paper with lighter delicate vines, the bedding a deep crimson. Jim sat on the center of the bed, arms wrapped around his legs, staring at Leonard over his knees as he entered. What he’d planned on asking Jim for fled his mind.

“Jim,” he said reverently. Leonard hadn’t realized just how much he’d missed him.

The boy stayed, unmoving, letting out a noise that could only be described as a cry.

“What’s wrong?” Leonard asked, toeing his shoes off before he situated himself on the bed.

Jim didn’t say anything, everything about his body language warning Leonard to keep his distance. Leonard removed his restricting jacket, unbuttoning his waistcoat so he could settle comfortably. Jim watched nervously.

“I won’t touch you if you don’t want,” Leonard told him gently, “If you’d rather I left—”

“No.”

Leonard was about to ask him for clarification when he suddenly had his arms full of the boy.


“I missed you too.”

“It’s been a rough few days.”

“You can tell me.”

“You…You don’t want to hear it, it’s not a story you’ll like.”

“Well I’m not going to make you say anything, but I’ll listen if you want to.”

Jim looked up at Leonard from where he was pressed against his chest. His face was stoney for a moment, and then he looked away and asked, “Do you ever think about what your life could have been like if you were different?”

“All the time darlin’, all the time,” Leonard answered, it was all he’d thought about for years. What if he hadn’t been a doctor? What if he hadn’t married Jocelyn? What if, what if, what if? endlessly
“I’ve always looked forward to the rest of my life…” Jim trailed into silence.

“Do you hate this?” Leonard asked, his throat tightening. Jim still had his arms around Leonard, he was still pressed against him, but Leonard wondered if it was just out of habit.

Jim craned his neck, looking back up at Leonard, “It’s been easy, certainly not my favorite, but I’m good at it.”

Leonard looked away, contempt towards himself rising in his chest for being part of the boy’s struggle.

Jim caught sight of his face. He seemed to understand the way the words weighted on Leonard as they hung in the air. “Not this,” he whispered, pulling away. He shifted, kneeling in between Leo’s legs, Jim’s hands resting on Leonard’s neck. “Not you.”

“I’m not special,” Leonard breathed, “I’m just like everyone else you see.”

Jim shook his head. “I swear, you’re not,” Jim said adamantly, resting his forehead against Leonard’s. “I’m sorry, I told you you didn’t want to hear.”

Leonard closed his eyes, his heart racing, “I always want to hear what you have to say.”

“No one visits to hear sad stories from a whore,” Jim let out a tight, harrowing laugh.

“I thought you said I wasn’t like everyone else,” Leonard countered, unsure what he was pushing so hard to hear. It didn’t matter, it was hurting Jim, and he wanted to know.

Jim pulled away, Leonard’s eyes fluttered open just as Jim kissed him. It was an odd kiss, languid, yet needy. It wasn’t the cocky, headstrong way the boy had kissed him the first night, or the frantic, driven times subsequently, nor was it soft like the times since Jim’s injury. It was syrupy sweet mixed with an intense desire. Leonard wasn’t sure he’d ever been kissed in such a way, his entire being draw into Jim. Leonard’s hands rested squarely on Jim’s hips, pulling the smaller body towards him, simply trying to increase their physical proximity. A feeling eerily similar to what he once called love pushed at his chest. A low whine hummed in the back of Jim’s throat before he finally gasped away for air.

Jim’s eyes glassed over as he refilled his lungs.

“Jim—”

He pressed a shaky finger to Leonard’s lips, “Please say you’ll fuck me tonight.”

Leonard opened his mouth, not to necessarily object, but to ask if Jim was really feeling up to it. Before he could say a word Jim’s lip trembled.

“Please. I’ve missed you so much,” Jim begged. It didn’t seem disingenuous, as strange as Leonard found it.

“I…” Jim started, playing with his hands, a blush creeping across his neck, “I thought about you… The other night, I wasn’t allowed to work…I imagined you were here.”

Leonard felt a heat course through his veins, he inhaled sharply, watching as the color spread across Jim’s cheeks. “You just laid in bed and thought about me?” he asked, his voice lower than he’d
Jim chewed at his cheek for a moment, “I touched myself, I wanted you inside me.” Jim looked up at Leonard, his face a pretty pink, as if trying to read his queues.

“Go on,” Leonard nudged, taking one of Jim’s fidgeting hands firmly.

“I thought about how you’d touch me, tried to picture it.” Jim watched Leonard’s thumb making strong circles across the back of Jim’s hand. “I imagined it until I came,” Jim said finally, “I miss the way it feels when you’re with me, so please, will you fuck me?”

Leonard’s felt a primal urge taking over, “Did you call for me?”

Jim shook his head, meeting Leonard’s eyes with a guilty gaze, “I didn’t want anyone to hear. I will tonight, Bones.”

“Let’s make sure that’s a promise.” Leonard started to pull Jim towards him before he had another thought. “How did I do it?” he asked.

“Hmm?” Jim asked, already fumbling with the buttons on Leonard’s shirt.

“When you imagined it, how did I fuck you?”

Jim whined a little, ducking his head from view.

“Tell me,” Leonard insisted, pulling off the waistcoat, pushing his suspenders out of the way in order to strip off his shirt.

Jim was breathing hard, he laid down next to Leonard, regarding him deviously. “I was underneath you,” he searched for the tie of his robe.

Leonard fought with buttons of his trousers Jim watching, amused as Leonard pulled his socks off along with their garters. “What’s so funny?” Leonard asked, catching Jim’s widening grin.

“I’ve never done this before.”

“What exactly do you mean by that, Jim?” Leonard asked, confused.

“I heard just about every request you could imagine,” Jim said with a wryly, “But I’ve never acted out a fantasy of my own.”

That tugged at something in Leonard faintly, but he filed it away for later, climbing between Jim’s legs. He’d slipped out of his robe, the dark silk laying rumpled beneath him, Jim’s prick was swollen and taut against his body. Jim seemed to be waiting for him to make the next move, to read his mind for what he wished.

“Was it like this?” Leonard asked, shifting one of Jim’s leg’s up, “Did I open you slowly?”

“Yes…but I’m already—”Jim groaned when Leonard’s fingers trailed across the soft skin, skidding to a halt as they felt rubber. “I hoped you would fuck me, I got myself ready.”

Leonard mourned slightly at the missed opportunity, he loved having his fingers inside Jim, wanted to take his time stretching him open. There was time for that later. Leonard leaned up, his lips against Jim’s ear, “You don’t have to wear this. Let me do it next time?”

Jim’s body tremble under his, “I…Sure, Bones.”
Leonard reached for the oil on the adjacent table, smearing his fingers with it. He traced Jim’s hole, stretched around the base of the plug. Jim made a startled noise, as though he’d expected to feel the plug pulled out immediately. Leonard nudged a finger in alongside the base, Jim’s hole expanding to accommodate the added girth. Jim squirmed, pushing Leonard’s finger farther inside him as he let out a small moan.

“I apologize,” Leo muttered, tracing his fingers absently across the marks on Jim’s thigh with his free hand, “What did I do next?”

Jim stammered a laugh, “You have to take that out first.”

Leonard eased his finger out. Then he pulled slowly at the plug’s base, watching as Jim opened wider to allow the bulbed shape passage. He reached across Jim again, scooping a small handful of the oil, drizzling it on his own hard cock.

“You had your fingers inside me, made sure I was wet enough,” Jim breathed, watching him.

He was already wet, oil dripping from his hole, but Leonard followed Jim’s words. Leonard crooked three fingers inside the boy, the dilator had previously stretched him, but Jim moaned wantonly. “What now, Jim?”

“You stroked me for a minute, made me wait for it.”

Leonard did just that, taking Jim’s prick in his fist, twisting his wrist as he pumped, relishing the pleasured noises Jim made.

“Then…Then you pushed inside me all at once,” Jim whimpered, “You held my legs up with your arms and you—oh god—You, you—”

Leonard fucked him easily for a moment, groaning as Jim clenched around him, tight and hot, everything he’d missed. “You feel so good, Jim,” Leonard moaned.

Jim was begging underneath him with wordless sounds, his legs resting snugly in the bend of Leonard’s elbows. The position allowed Leonard to sink into the boy, fuck him deep and hard without resistance. Jim cried out every time Leonard’s cock grazed his prostate, his own prick trapped between them, weeping against Leonard’s belly with every snap of his hips.

“Tell me what else,” Leonard murmured insistently. He laced his fingers with Jim’s when they brushed his hand, scrambling for purchase.

“Ah…” Jim’s eyes cracking open, searching for words, “You put your lips on my… fuck Bones!… on my neck and you sucked until—Bones!”

He leaned in, mouthing gently at the crease of Jim’s jawbone, licking his way down Jim’s neck. Spurred on by Jim’s near wails he sucked lightly in an attempt not to mark him further.

“Told me I was doing good,” Jim breathed raggedly.

“You are,” Leonard told him, because it was the truth, “You’re beautiful like this, so perfect.” He could feel the heat building in his groin, he was close, but Leonard was sure in Jim’s fantasy, they boy had come first. Letting go of Jim’s hand, Leonard reached between them to fist Jim’s cock, Jim arching off the bed as he did.

“Bones, please, please,” Jim sobbed, squeezing tighter around Leonard.
“Come for me darlin’,” Leonard groaned, pumping him roughly, unsure how much longer he was going to last.

Mercifully, with that, Jim gasped, “Bones!,” and emptied himself between them. His channel spasmed around Leonard’s aching cock, and he followed, pumping shallowly as he filled Jim up. Come leaked steadily out of him as Leonard fucked him through their shared orgasms.

Leonard pulled out of Jim with a wet noise. He let down Jim’s boneless legs and laid himself next to the boy.

“It’s so much better when you do it,” Jim muttered, pressing himself against Leonard.

They stayed in a comfortable silence for a while, Jim's breathing evening out against him. It had been almost sweet, when Leonard thought about it. Leonard had been surprised by how tender the whole thing was; he found himself wondering how few of Jim’s clients were, in fact, nice to him. The thought sent anger coursing though him. He hated thinking about people treating Jim badly. He wanted to protect the boy, he wanted to be close to him all the time.

He was being ridiculous, he decided. Leonard had to stop thinking he had any right to Jim, no matter how much his longing heart told him otherwise.

Leonard was hurled back to reality when he heard sniffling against his chest. “Jim? Jim what’s wrong?” he asked.

Jim hiccuped, “I’m sorry…J-Just ignore me, I’m fine.”

Leonard was lost for words for a second. How could Jim possibly expect Leonard to ignore him in such a state? “Should I…Should I leave for a moment?” Sitting up he reached for his jacket, still hooked around one of the bed posts, Jim grabbed for his arm.

“Don’t go, please,” Jim shot up, wide-eyed.

Leonard pulled his handkerchief free of his breast-pocket, dabbing it under Jim's eyes. “I won’t,” he promised.

Jim swallowed hard, clearly trying to pull himself together.

“Don’t do that,” Leonard told him gently, his fingers brushing Jim's face, “Don’t pretend you're okay if you’re not. You don't have to grin and bear it, not for me.”

I fresh wave of tears spilled from Jim's eyes. Leonard blotted at them lightly, pillowing Jim’s face with his free hand, wondering what was causing him such dismay.

“I couldn’t wait to being my own person,” Jim sniffed, after a heavy silence, “To not owe anyone anything. It’s not like my life’s been awful, I don’t live on the street, I got away from my uncle,” he shivered, “There’s always been food…I don't even know what un-indentured life would be like, but I always thought I’d get to try it.”

Leonard didn’t know what to say, didn’t quite know where Jim was headed with all this.

Jim's eyes squeezed closed again, “I had three and half years left.” The tears streamed down his face. “The scars…She cut my rate, Bones,” his voice cracked, “Now I’ll just be a whore until no one wants me, because I’m old and worn out. And then what? If Talas is feeling generous she’ll make me a servant, and if not——” Jim’s chest heaved, and he buried his face against Leonard's neck.
Leonard felt his stomach twist into a knot. It had only been twelve Tul tonight, but he hadn’t thought about what that meant for Jim. It made sense he supposed, but Leonard was angry something so out of his Jim’s control had this large of an impact on his life.

“Darlin’ I’m so sorry,” Leonard whispered, his arms tightening around Jim’s shaking back. The deep hatred he felt for Jim’s assailant creeping back into his chest.

Jim continued to sob for several moments, allowing Leonard to simply hold him before he pulled away suddenly with tear-soaked eyes. “This is completely inappropriate,” he said dejectedly, “Please forgive me.”

“Theres’s nothing to apologize for Jim,” Leonard told him adamantly, patting his cheeks dry again. “I feel like I can tell you anything,” Jim said quietly, reaching out to take Leonards hand.

“You can.”

“I shouldn’t.”

—

It was all Jim could do not to spill his guts to Bones right there. The doctor was practically begging him to. Instead he held the words in his throat, the I love you, he wanted so desperately to try out.

That was really the problem Jim thought. He would be trying it out, for the very first time. He’d never loved another person like this, and he was unsure what would happen if he confessed to it. He’d heard it was difficult in the best of circumstances, and this was not that by any means.

Instead Jim shook his head faintly said, “Tell me about your day.”

Bones blinked at him, confused. He wiped Jim’s face one more time before settling down into the bed. Jim followed suit, nestling himself so the doctors’ lips were by his ear.

“It’s fairly dull Jim,” Bones told him, dolefully, “I don’t want to bore you.”

“I want to know about your life,” Jim insisted, pulling Bones’ arm around him.

After a moment Bones launched into a blasé account of his day, which was really anything but. Apparently, Bones made house calls, which, for reasons Jim didn’t understand, amused him endlessly. He’d seen one of the woman who was violently ill after eating nothing but potting soil for a week in hopes that it would shrink her waist for her new frock. Which—Bones had told her sternly—would do nothing of the sort. Jim laughed at not only the story, but Bones’ bluntness.

Jim wasn’t sure at what point he had fallen asleep but when he woke Bones was breathing contentedly against him. The way they’d shifted had him on his back, Bones cushioned against his shoulder, his leg straddling Jim’s, pinning him to the bed.

Jim was hard, he realized after moving slightly, his prick restrained between his torso and Bones’ thigh. He rutted against Bones, the friction making everything better and also worse. He continued his motions, ignoring the fact that he probably wouldn’t, or at very least, shouldn’t, come against the thigh of his sleeping customer.
“Jim,” Bones voice was gritty, caked with sleep.

Jim froze, unsure of what to do, of what to say.

Bones groaned, his half-hard cock brushing Jim's hip, when he leaned over to kiss Jim.

“I’m sorry I woke you,” Jim blurted, just before Bones’ lips met his.

Bones stopped, moments away from his mouth. For a second Jim thought he might simply tell Jim it was alright, as he so often did. Instead he held still, his eyes searching Jim’s, sleep leaving his face.

“Make it up to me?” Bones asked flippantly.

Jim couldn’t quite read him, but this was Bones so he said, “Of course.”

“I want you,” Bones whispered.

Jim’s exhaled, not really sure what he’d been expecting.

“…to fuck me.”

Jim’s eyes widened, staring up at the doctor, he drew in a sharp breath. That was different.

“If you would…If it’s allowed,” Bones finished, a little unsure of himself.

Jim couldn't even imagine what shade of red he’d turned. Maybe if Bones had asked for this the first night he would have responded sarcastically. Jim would have reminded Bones of where he was, but now the request caught him so off-guard he just stammered, “S-Sure Bones…I…It’s allowed.”

Jim stilled as Bones rolled off him. Bones stayed on his knees, reaching out for the oil bowl. He should offer to help, Jim thought vaguely, but the prospect of watching the doctor do this to himself won out.

Bones dipped two fingers in the oil, the excess sluicing down his hand. He reached around, rubbing his fingers at his hole, coating his entrance with the viscous liquid. Jim heard a low moan rumbling in the back of Bones' throat as he pushed one finger slowly inside himself. He slid his finger in and out for a moment, Jim watching entranced by the scene.

The light of the flickering lamps made Bones' movements seem exaggerated, and more intense. He nudged his middle finger alongside the first. It went in easily and Jim wondered how often the doctor did this. Perhaps he'd done it on nights he didn't spend with Jim, perhaps Jim hadn't been by himself in wanting.

Bones' eyes cracked open. “Jim,” he called out, pumping his fingers quicker.

Jim crawled over, only falling over himself marginally. Jim grabbed for the oil dish, drizzling more on Bones’ fingers when he pulled them out. Bones eased them back inside himself, biting at his lip to keep from crying out. Jim watched as a third finger slid inside almost immediately. Either Bones did this all the time or he’d opened himself earlier, because three fingers was always a stretch for Jim, and Bones’ digits were large.

“More,” Bones whined, “Jim…”

Seeing the doctor beg, and for him, in such a way was almost too much. He gripped the base of his cock, trying to regain control. After a moment he scooped out more oil, rubbing it into the hard skin.
He placed the bowl back on the table, running his hand down the smooth expanse of Bones’ back.

Bones pulled his fingers out, dropping forward to all fours on the bed. “Fuck me,” his voice was uneven, almost desperate.

“Like this?” Jim questioned stupidly. It wasn’t the most comfortable position, he knew from experience, plus he wouldn't be able to see Bones’ face.

“Jim, please.”

His cock throbbed at the sight of Bones’ ass presented to him and really, who was he to argue? He held himself steady, spreading Bones’ cheeks and slowly—almost painfully so—Jim pushed inside him. The guttural moan that came from Bones as he did was maddening. Jim imagined everyone one else in the house could hear him and that everyone could only wish their bedmate sounded the same. Jim had to squeeze the base of his prick again as he slid flush into Bones. The doctor was throbbing and hot around him, the muscles in his back trembling as he held himself up.

“Bones,” Jim faltered, trying to ascertain if he was alright, “Is it—”

“Jim,” Bones panted, “Fuck, please.”

Bones’ body tightened as Jim tried to pull out. Jim whined at the sensation. It had been so long, so terribly long, since he’d fucked someone. It was almost overwhelming. Clients rarely saw him if they wanted to bottom, the saw Spock, who had a reputation as a vigorous top. Jim couldn’t believe this was happening, that the doctor had asked for this.

“Relax,” Jim said, as much to himself as to Bones, in a voice that was rough to his own ears. He leaned down to kiss along Bones’ spine.

Bones’ muscles loosened slightly, “Go on,” he insisted breathlessly, hanging his head.

Jim managed a few shallow thrusts, Bones spilling shameless noises each time, before his arms gave out and he collapsed to his elbows. Jim fell on top of Bones, still inside him.

“Bones,” Jim gasped, “Are you…alright?”

“Yes, fuck, keep going.” Bones growled, laying his head in the crook of his elbow. He pushed his legs farther apart so Jim could get a better angle.

Jim slipped in deeper and they both groaned. He covered Bones’ body with his own, thrusting again into Bones’ pulsing heat. Jim could feel the spot inside him that made Bones cry out when he grazed it. He could feel every inch of the man writhing beneath him, muscles flexing as Jim fucked him.

“Jim! God, Jim,” Bones recited like a mantra in a husky tone, his face turned just so Jim could see his eyes were squeezed shut.

Jim leaned down, his lips ghosting across Bones' neck.

“Fuck…Harder, harder!”

Jim nipped at the glistening skin, sucking when Bones lolled his head to the side, giving him better access. Bones’ arm snaked up, finding purchase in Jim's hair, tugging him closer, their lips just a hair’s breadth away from being able to meet.

Jim slid a hand under Bones, grasping his cock, stroking it quickly. Bones moaned with abandon, his
muscles going taunt, gripping the sheets. Jim thrust quicker, brushing that spot again roughly, Bones’ body bore down around his cock. He called Jim’s name like a desperate prayer, his cock jerking in Jim's hand, coating them both with spunk.

Jim’s release followed soon after, buried deep inside Bones. “Ohhh, Bones!” he called out. Jim continued to thrust shallowly as he came, Bones’ tight channel slicked with his come.

When his softening prick slipped out of Bones’ limp body, Jim pulled his hand out from under the doctor, brushing Bones’ come off on his chest. Bones groaned quietly when Jim moved off of him. Jim clambered off the bed unsteadily, soaking a towel with water from the bowl to clean them up. He scrubbed the cooling spunk from his torso.

When he returned with the towel Bones had rolled over and was gazing at him sleepily. “Why haven’t we done that before, Jim?” he asked hoarsely.

Jim climbed up next to him, “You’ve never asked,” Jim blushed, wiping the come from Bones’ stomach.

“I suppose I didn’t,” Bones agreed. “Come here,” he shuffled over so there was a small space for Jim. “The sheets over there are ruined,” Bones gestured to the right side of the bed.

Jim was grateful for the excuse for wrap himself around Bones. He'd have done it anyway, even if half the bed wasn’t soiled, but this way no one could analyze his motivations. He pillowed his head on Bones’ soft, solid chest, his leg hitched up over the doctor's hip. Bones ran his fingers through Jim’s hair lazily, and took Jim’s hand with his other.

It felt so comforting, so natural. Jim savored it, trying to block out the voices in his head.

Tell him, say it. Just three words.

He won’t love you back, he can’t. You’re nothing.

He’ll keep coming back if he knows you love him.

You’ll never see him again if you say it.

Jim might have whimpered at some point, while the war in his mind waged on, but the even rise and fall of Bones’ chest assured Jim he was already asleep.

—

Jim’s black eye had faded enough to allow him to walk downstairs. Leonard winced the whole way down, he was sore, it had been a while since he’d been fucked by anything besides his own fingers.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Jim asked him quietly when they reached the bottom.

“Yes darlin’, I'm fine, don’t feel guilty.” He kissed Jim’s cheek before making his customary request, “Can I see you tomorrow night?”

Jim blushed, nodding shyly, “Please.”

“I wish I could see you tonight but…I just—”
Jim pressed a finger to Leonard’s lips, “You don’t have to tell me, it’s not my business.”

“Just know I wish I could.”

Jim gave him a curt nod. He made like he was going to slip away before he doubled back and kissed Leonard full on the mouth. Leonard was almost positive it was against some kind of rule, to do that in the hall, but he moved against Jim anyway.

“Since I have to wait a day,” Jim said breathlessly when he pulled back.

Leonard couldn’t help the way his lips turned up in a smile. He watched Jim disappear down the hall before heading the opposite way, scanning the doors for the one with the embellished knocker he’d seen on Madam Sato’s on his last visit to her office.

He found it after a moment, knocking lightly with the ornament.

“You may enter,” came the woman’s voice from within.

He opened the door, revealing himself. She stood, her eyes narrowed in a somewhat cat-like manner. She tilted her head before she spoke, “Good morning Doctor McCoy, I trust you enjoyed your evening?”

Leonard felt the tiniest bit self conscious, like suddenly this woman knew all of his secrets. “Of course ma’am.”

“Well then, to what assistance can I be?”

“You’ll forgive me if this sounds impolite, I don’t really know how to put it delicately.”

She raised her eyebrows expectantly.

“I’m wondering if you can enlighten me about the nature of Jim’s debt to your establishment.”

“Ah,” Madam Sato nodded, “I wish I could Doctor.”

“I see, I apologize it was rude of me to ask,” Leonard swallowed.

“You misunderstand,” she started, “It’s not that I will not tell you of James’ situation, it’s that I do not know. He’s not my charge. I can certainly ring his regular House, you could speak to Madam Talas.”

“Would you?” Leonard asked, perhaps a bit too optimistically.

“Certainly. I can try her now, if you’d like.”

“Yes, thank you.”

Madam Sato sat at the telephone table in the corner and picked up the earpiece and the speaker, after a few words with the operator she waited for the other woman to pick up. They exchanged pleasantries, and Madam Sato explaining that Leonard would like to speak with her.

“I’ll give you a moment, please close my door on your way out,” she patted his arm as she walked past him.

“I’d like to see J-James again tomorrow, if you can keep him until then,” Leonard remembered before he picked up the phone.
“Of course Doctor, I’ll see that we do.” She closed the door behind her as she exited.

Leonard took a deep breath before picking up the phone pieces, feeling a little like he was violating Jim’s privacy.

“Hello?”

“This is Madam Talas. I presume you are the mysterious doctor who spends time with James.” Her voice was harder than Sato’s a deeper, rougher tone.

“Yes…Doctor McCoy that is.”

“It's a pleasure to speak with you doctor. How can I help you?”

“I don’t want to sound crass, but I’d like to know the nature of James debt.”

“Blunt.” She continued, her tone tinged with amusement, “I appreciate you not wasting my time. I bought him a number of years ago, and he works for me until he earns back what he cost and all of his upkeep.”

Leonard felt his stomach churn, he hated talking about Jim like he was a thing to be bought and sold, even though that was the reality of the situation. “Would you consider selling him to someone else?” Leonard asked through gritted teeth, “Or I suppose, what I'm asking is, how much would it cost for someone to pay his remaining tab?”

The woman let out a surprised laugh, “Doctor, this is a business, everything has a price. I don’t know how much James still owes me, if you have a minute I’ll get his file…If it is indeed you who is interested.”

“Yes, I’ll wait.”

Moments passed, muffled sounds the only thing the phone received.

“Doctor McCoy? Do I still have you?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Jim’s balance is two thousand seven hundred and thirty Tul. It's non-negotiable. Are you still interested?”

Leonard’s throat was tight, he felt light headed. That was so much, so incredibly much. It was no wonder Jim had been distraught over his wage being cut.

“Doctor? Have I lost you?”

He cleared his throat, “No, I apologize, I’m here. Let me speak with my accountant, may I get back to you?”

“Why of course Doctor McCoy. If you wish to speak again simply ask the operator for Madam Talas, they’ll connect us.”

“Yes…Yes, thank you for your time ma’am,” Leonard said disconnectedly, as he hung up the receiver.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Can we all agree not to talk about how long it's been since the last chapter? I do apologize though, because I am really sorry about the wait, and I know a lot of you have been with this from the beginning and have been dealing with the long dead space in between chapters. I've never written something this long and it turns out it's very difficult for me to update regularly.

I thank and love everyone who has stuck with me, so without further ado I present to you: This chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?” Gaila’s voice was a ghost on Jim’s neck.

“Nothing…It’s fine. Go to sleep Gaila,” Jim whispered, even though it was a boldfaced lie.

She jabbed him in the back, “Don’t lie to me Jim, you hardly said a word at breakfast, and I can hear panic in your breathing.”

“We’ll wake Nyota and Mira…”

Jim found himself being dragged into the hallway by Gaila, who was quite a bit stronger than she looked.

“Gaila, I just want to sleep,” Jim tried to brush her off once they were sitting against the wall.

“Of course, that’s why you were asleep just now.”

Natural light filled the hallway, it was disorienting. Jim almost never saw midday, and it was especially strange since he was supposed to be resting. Gaila stared him down, demanding an answer.

“I’m ruining everything, Gaila,” he finally said in a small voice he barely recognized.

“Jim…” Gaila insisted, “What could you possibly be ruining?”

“I love him.”

She didn’t insult him by asking who. “Oh, sweetie…”

“I’m so fucking stupid, I don’t want to love him,” Jim’s head fell to his hands, “And I cried in front of him. I sobbed, Gaila, I’m all fucked up. I’m broken…I don’t know how to keep doing this, but I don’t know how to do anything else.”

“Hey, hey,” Gaila shushed, pulling him against her for a hug, “You’re not stupid, it happens. You’re going to be alright.”

“Whores don’t just fall in love with their clients!”
“No one could blame you for falling for him. Not every client is like your doctor.”

“He doesn’t…He can’t—I know what I am Gaila, or at least I did.”

Gaila petted his hair, pulling him upright to go back to their room, “I know you’re gonna be okay, sweetie, even if it doesn't feel like it right now.”

—

“Leonard, what could you possibly need three thousand Tul for all at once?” Leonard’s accountant, Travis, asked with disbelief.

“That’s not what I asked, Travis. Do I have it or not?” Leonard demanded.

He sighed, flipping through his file, “Technically yes. There’s just over thirty-two hundred in here, but your rent is due Wednesday, and your next paycheck won’t clear until Friday. You’ll have just over a hundred Tul after the rent comes out. As your financial advisor I cannot recommend that.”

Leonard scrubbed a hand across his face. It really was a huge sum of money. He wanted to help Jim so badly, to let him experience life not bound to a bed, but it was just so much.

“So what you’re telling me is that I have to wait until Friday.”

“That’s not really what I meant Leonard, your account balance—”

“If I wait until Friday I’ll have five-hundred left,” Leonard gave Travis his sternest expression.

Travis looked at him sidelong. “What’s going on with you? Your account hasn't been this low since…well, four years ago.”

“I don't know what to tell you Travis, I need the money.”

“If you’re going to make this withdrawal—while I advise against it—you have to wait until next Monday, just to make sure you’re not overdrawn in any way.”

“Well then, I guess I’ll be back on Monday.”

—

Jim was able to be his usual charming self to his client that night. The client wasn't anything like Bones, which he was actually grateful for. He knew his place when it wasn’t Bones. He knew what his job was, and even though his body was just being used it was an open and shut situation. Jim was able to focus on blowing the client like a professional, instead of whatever had happened last night.

“Open up,” the john grunted before he began jerking his prick.

Jim acquiesced. Sucking cock was a thousand times easier than dealing with his feelings.
The man came across his cheek, several drops splashing into his mouth. He watched Jim for a moment, come running down Jim’s chin. He ran his hand through it, gathering the pearly liquid up before smearing it into Jim’s hair.

“You look good wearing my come, boy.”

“Thank you sir.”

“I want you to rub my feet until I get hard again. Stay on your knees—Don’t clean up.”

“Yes sir,” Jim said before propping the man’s foot against his thigh, digging his thumbs in to the arch. This wasn’t the strangest thing he’d been asked to do for a client.

Jim was hard, giving head always turned him on, his ass throbbing around the dilator that he’d been inserted earlier. The man ran his foot down Jim’s cock, causing Jim to jump.

“I didn’t say you could stop, James.”

“My apologies sir.”

The man teased Jim's prick with one foot while Jim massaged the other, commanding him to switch after a while. Several minutes later Jim was faced with the man’s hard cock yet again.

“I don’t want you to speak while I fuck you, can you manage that or should I gag you?”

Jim shivered, remembering when Khan had done just that. He shook his head quickly and dropped his gaze.

“Good boy,” he crooned. He pulled Jim up from the floor and bent him across the bed. “Take this out,” he tapped the plug wedged in Jim’s ass. Jim did, feeling relieved and empty as he laid it on the table, and the man pushed inside him all at once.

The man fucked Jim without any finesse, really there was no reason for Jim to make any noise. He was just using Jim’s body, the way one fucked their own hand, gracelessly, with only selfish pleasure in mind.

He reached around to fist Jim’s prick roughly, and while it was clumsy Jim still had to bite his lip to stop from moaning.

“Don’t come,” the man ordered, pumping him quickly.

Jim nodded, unsure if he could obey, but unwilling to voice the doubt.

It was alright, until the man pushed two fingers into Jim alongside his cock, the extra girth pressing solidly into that spot that alway sent Jim over the edge.

This time was no different and he painted the sheets with his come in thick ropes, crying out as he did. The next few seconds were a blur. Jim was still riding his orgasm, the man pulled out, twisted him around, and slapped Jim across the face.

The john seemed to register what he’d done at the same moment Jim came back to reality. Jim scrambled to the other side of the bed, panic filling him.

Jim couldn’t take it. Not this, not again.

“No!” Jim said trying to keep his voice from shaking, “Don’t fucking come near me.”
The man looked at with shocked regret, knowing he’d violated house rules. “I’m…I’ve never—I don’t know what came over me…” He began dressing robotically, despite his obviously undeterred hard on. He left without closing the door and without looking back.

Jim let out a sob against the mattress, not really knowing why he was crying. His face stung now that the adrenaline was wearing off. He wiped his eyes, unsure of what to do before sliding on his robe and creeping downstairs.

It was late, very late, but he could see two of the girls and Hoshi still in the lounge, thankfully it was devoid of clients.

“Hoshi,” he whispered hoarsely from the doorway.

Hoshi looked up, her brows arching with concern when she caught site of him. Mira elbowed the other girl and they both snuck a glance at Jim. Hoshi stood, making her way to him quickly.

“Jim…What’s wrong?”

He half shrugged, suddenly not sure if she’d believe him.

Hoshi guided him to her office, “Are you alright?” she asked when the door was closed.

“H-he hit m-me,” Jim managed, his voice shaking.

“He hit you?” Hoshi’s eyes narrowed, “That son of a bitch…That’s completely unacceptable. They’re getting more brazen by the hour. Tell me what happened.”

“H-he didn’t w-want me t-t-o come…S-slapped my f-face—hard…He s-seemed confused, r-ran off af-fter.”

“Oh Jim, I’m sorry. You’re really having a rough go of it lately,” Hoshi sighed, her hands steadied his shoulders. “Come on, I’ll have Mira help you clean up. She doesn’t have a client, she’ll make sure you’re okay.” Hoshi turned his face in her hands, “It doesn’t look too bad…that’s something I suppose.”

—

“Jim, we talked about this,” Hoshi leaned against the doorway. “Last night was bad, and I don’t like the idea of you working tonight, despite the fact that you keep insisting you’re fine,” Hoshi told him sternly.

“Don’t make me miss him,” Jim told her adamantly, “He’ll be so disappointed.”

*I’ll be so disappointed*, Jim thought, *I want to see him.*

“Only because it’s Doctor McCoy,” Hoshi relinquished, although she seemed almost frustrated with herself.

—
“Jim.” The way Bones said was name was desire and reverence wrapped as the same.

He shivered at the sound of Bones’ voice. Jim felt his hand slide down his torso, resting solidly on his waist.

“Do you mind? We’re in the middle of something,” the client Jim had been talking to spoke up, obviously miffed at the interruption.

“I believe he’s busy tonight,” Bones told the man easily, “Isn’t that true, James?” He stepped to Jim’s side, a question in his eyes. He was giving Jim a chance to reject him, like he always did.

Jim grinned at Bones. “I’m sorry, it’s true. I am otherwise engaged,” he told the client in a manner that was not entirely sincere, but it was fitting since he wasn’t sorry at all.

The man sneered, and stomped off, probably to find someone to complain to, or to pick a girl who would have him.

Bones settled on the chaise lounge with Jim.

“Kiss me?” Jim asked quietly, curling next to him. Bones had arrived later than usual and he’d had to flirt with so many leering clients, Jim wanted them all to see who he’d turned them down for.

Bones did, his lips soft against Jim’s makeup-slick mouth. It was gentle and lingering, the way one might kiss their partner, and, much like Bones himself, it didn’t truly seem to belong in a place like this.

“I hate when I can’t be with you,” Bones said after they parted, fingers clutching the flimsy fabric of Jim’s unbuttoned shirt.

“Me too,” Jim said almost shyly against Bones’ hand that still cupped his face. “I’m glad Hoshi let me see you.”

Bones stilled, searching Jim’s face, “Why wouldn't she?”

“I…” Jim started to back-peddle, he hadn’t planned on telling Bones what had happened, “It’s nothing.”

“Does she not want me to see you anymore?”

“No, Bones, no that’s not it,” Jim sighed, seeing no way out besides the truth, “There was…Well, there was an incident.” Bones raised his eyebrow quizzically.

“The client I took last night, he didn’t follow the rules.”

Bones huffed out a broken breath, “What happened, Jim?”

“He…He hit me, that’s all—”

“Jesus christ!” Bones exclaimed a little too loudly, pulling his hands away from Jim, several heads turning their way.

Jim blushed, embarrassed, “Shhhh, god Bones it’s fine. I’m fine.”

“Are you hurt? Fuck, am I hurting you?” Bones asked frantically in low whisper.
“You’re not hurting me,” Jim insisted, taking Bones’ hand in his, “I swear I’m okay, it was nothing like last time…”

“If I’d been there…” Bones started glumly, “I should have been here.”

“Bones it’s not your fault!” Jim said hurriedly, upset he’d brought this up.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Bones asked taking Jim’s hand again.

Jim nodded, “Yes, you’re here now.”

“Jim, I’m serious.”

“So I am I,” Jim told him with a flash of confidence. “Can we go upstairs please?” Jim asked his boldness waning, tired of being watched.

“Of course darlin’,” Bones said quietly, squeezing Jim’s hand.

—

Leonard closed the door before making his way over to the bed where Jim was already lain. He felt maddeningly guilty, despite Jim insisting that it wasn’t his fault. Leonard wanted to talk more with him, make sure the boy was really okay, find out what had transpired last night, but as soon as he approached the bed Jim kissed him hard and pulled Leonard down on top of him.

He briefly considered pulling away, but Jim’s mouth was pure sin. If this was what temptation tasted like, it was no wonder angels had fallen to it. Jim’s plush lips nipped at his bottom lip, just hard enough to make him gasp. It was an old trick, but it shut Leonard up none the less, Jim’s tongue twining with his.

Leonard drew a sharp breath when Jim finally released him. “Jim—” he gasped, trying to regain his composure.

Jim’s response contained no words. He simply made his way down Leonard’s neck, following the muscles with his slick tongue, sucking and biting. He could feel Jim’s mouth painting bruises on his skin carelessly. Leonard thought he should mind it, but there was no part of him that did. Perhaps tell the boy to stop, but he couldn’t seem to keep his hands from raking though Jim’s hair and finding their way into his shirt.

He wanted to lose himself with Jim. It sounded like bad poetry even in his own mind, but there was no other way to put it. Leonard found himself wondering if all the dramatic prose, going on and on about love, that he’d scoffed at might be the truth after all.

“Bones,” Jim’s breathless voice drew him back to the reality, “Please.” Jim’s hands were on his, guiding them to his waistband.

Leonard stared at him stupidly, even though he knew what Jim was asking for. His mouth trying to remember how to form words. It was unimaginable that he’d ever gone without this. He used Leonard’s hands to push his half-open slacks off his waist. Jim looked up at him from the veil of thick lashes, something shy in his gaze, “I waited for you, like you asked.” He ran his tongue across his bottom lip.
Finally, Leonard regained the ability to speak. “Thank you, darlin’,” Leonard said awed. This boy was going to kill him. He hadn’t been sure Jim would actually let him. Leonard supposed he’d had more than a few bad experiences with clients fingering him, whether it was sadism or inexperience he couldn’t be sure.

“I promise I’ll be good to you.”

“You always are,” Jim said, his cheeks flushing as he spoke.

Christine was wrong. This couldn’t be an act. Leonard had a lot of flaws, he was the first to admit it, but overt optimism had never been one of them. Leonard couldn’t be making this up, Jim had to feel something for him.

As Leonard reached for the oil, he felt the mattress shift. “What’s wrong, Jim?”

Jim threw a glance over his shoulder from his new position on his knees, his trousers tossed haphazardly to the ground. “Nothing,” he said quietly, “I thought you wanted to open me up?”

“I do, darlin’, but lay back down. I want to see you face,” Leo told him, gently stroking his thigh.

Jim shivered noticeably before orienting himself so Leonard could do just that.

“You want me to, don’t you?” he asked hesitantly. God, there was nothing Leonard wanted to do more than slowly work Jim open with his fingers, but Jim’s visible reaction held him back.

“Fuck, I want you to Bones,” Jim answered unambiguously. “How could you think for one moment I wouldn’t want this?”

“I just want to make sure.” Leonard settled them so the oil dish was an easy reach from where he sat between Jim’s leg’s.

Leonard urged his hips up, pushing a pillow under him, levering Jim’s ass off the bed. Jim’s cock lay half hard against the crease of his thigh, Leonard ignored it entirely in favor of brushing his fingers across Jim’s puckered entrance.

“You’re going to look beautiful stretched around my fingers,” Leonard whispered, kissing Jim’s knee.

Jim bit his lip, unsuccessfully biting back a whimper, “Yes.”

“Darlin’, I’m not in a hurry. I want you to relax.” Leonard coated his hands with oil rubbing it into his palms and his fingers. I want to feel you let go in my hands, I want to make you come until you can only say my name, Leonard didn’t say aloud, unsure which of them it would embarrass more to hear aloud.

Okay,” Jim whispered, nodding slightly.

Leonard rolled more of the lubricant between his fingers, rubbing it softly into Jim’s skin. Leo moved everywhere but his hole, touching just shy of it, working the oil into his cheeks, his perineum, and especially his thighs, the new skin of the scars there glistening a little more than everything else.

“I suppose there are…worse ways to die than this,” Jim choked out after a good five minutes of Leonard’s teasing, his cock now full against his stomach.

Leonard raised an eyebrow, “Is that your way of asking for more?”
Jim laughed easily, “Please.”

“Alright darlin’,” Leonard conceded, reaching for more oil.

He drew circles on the puckered ring for a minute before pushing the tip of his first digit inside. Leonard watched as Jim’s eyes shut and he groaned at the intrusion. Leonard ladled more oil, withdrawing his fingers so he could slick it further. Leonard pushed in again slowly, not stopping until his first finger was all the way in.

Jim clenched around him, his body tighter than Leo had imagined. “Okay?”

“Y-yeah,” Jim managed, his voice strained.

“Easy…I’ve got you.” Leonard stroked Jim’s hip with is free hand.

After several moments Jim’s thigh muscles slackened, “Your f-fingers are a lot bigger than m-mine,” Jim stuttered, looking a little sheepish. “It feels good,” he added as he slackened with each twist of Leonard’s wrist. Leonard appreciated Jim’s almost cocky confidence of their first few encounters—he’d needed Jim to take charge then—but he liked this soft needy side of Jim too, maybe even more.

By the time Leo had worked a third finger into Jim’s tight hole the boy was a quivering mess. Leonard had made a point to find his prostate and massage it relentlessly. Jim’s belly was a mess of oil and precome, and fuck if he wasn’t the most exquisite thing Leonard had ever seen.

“Bones,” Jim gasped, his hands fisted in the sheets, “If you don’t stop I’ll—” his words cut off by a desperate cry, trying to stave off his orgasm.

“Let yourself go,” Leonard assured him, “I want to feel you come like this darlin.’” He watched his fingers disappear inside Jim again, his hole pulsing around them. Jim’s body shining with sweat, his unbuttoned shirt soaked through, stuck to him carelessly.


“Please Jim, come for me.”

Leonard wasn’t sure if it was his words or the thrusting pressure against his prostate but Jim came with a cry, his come shooting out in thick ropes across his chest. Leonard leaned in, lapping at the warm liquid against Jim’s trembling abdomen. Jim’s cock twitched valiantly, his body still spasming tightly around Leonard’s fingers.

“Don’t…” Jim whined when Leonard finally went to pull his fingers out.

“Aren’t you sensitive after you’ve come?” Leonard asked seriously, not wanting to overstimulate Jim.

“I…Yes, but,” Jim insisted tiredly, “Please don’t take your fingers out unless you’re going to fuck me.”

“Jim—”

“Bones, please, I can see you want to,” Jim gestured towards the bulge straining against his trousers. “And, god, I want you to. Please don’t say no.”

Jim wasn’t wrong, the idea of fucking him right now, pliable and open, was beyond appealing. Leonard bit his cheek, desire burning in his chest. “Okay darlin’, okay,” Leonard conceded, “But not
“Like what then?” Jim asked, not sure what Bones could be implying. He felt as though his entire body was made of embers, hot and tingling pleasantly. It surprised him just how much he wanted this. Sex hadn’t been something Jim looked forward to in a long time. For so many years now it had just been a job, an act, but sex with Bones was something else. It wasn’t just a physical display of dominance. Jim had never felt as connected to another human being as he did when they fucked.

“I’d like you on top,” Bones told him, cheeks tinged pink, like asking for these sorts of things still flustered him. Jim gave him a lopsided grin in return. He wasn’t even sure he could sit up right now, let alone ride Bones, but he’d try. Jim wondered if there was anything he wouldn’t try for this man. Bones slid his fingers out slowly, leaving Jim empty and wanting. He rinsed his hands in the water bowl, toweling his hands as Jim sat up shakily. Bones undressed silently, glancing up between articles of clothing to make sure Jim had his wits about him. He oiled his prick before returning to the bed. Beautifully, naked Bones laid down in the middle of the mattress, his hands rested on Jim’s ribcage, guiding Jim to straddle him. Jim’s left hand rested squarely on Bones’ pectoral, his right held Bones’ cock steady in preparation, still a bit lightheaded.

“Darlin’, are you sure you’re ready to—uhhh, fuck! Jim!” Bones’ hesitations died on his tongue as Jim lowered himself easily onto Bones’ cock.

Jim stilled, savoring the feeling of being stretched even wider, his ass throbbing pleasurably. Jim was sure no one else would ever feel as good as this.

Jim heaved himself up after a he’d adjusted, only to lose his balance and topple forward. Before he could stop his fall, Bones’ hands shot up, catching his face on either side, forearms braced against Jim’s chest, slowing him. Jim’s hands brushed across Bones shoulders before reaching the bed.

“You’re alright,” Bones tenderly stroked Jim’s cheek with his thumb, “So good for me, even though you can barely hold yourself up.”

“Sorry,” Jim reddened, it was true after all.

“Don’t be.”

“You’ll still fuck me though?” Jim asked, worried that Bones might stop. God, he didn’t want Bones to stop.

Bones smiled up at him, “Yes darlin’, you stay just like this.” Bones lifted his hips from the bed, thrusting his cock fully back inside Jim.

Fuck, it was perfect, the position allowed Bones to brush his prostate with every few strokes. Jim closed his eyes, biting his lip to keep from whimpering. Somehow he was already hard again, his dick left untouched save for when Bones’ abdomen skimmed it on the occasionally deep thrust. His muscles tightened involuntarily, trying to keep Bones inside him every time he slid out.
“God Jim, you’re killing me,” Bones gasped raggedly.

Jim cracked his eyes open, only to find Bones staring back at him. He was suddenly unable to stop the litany of breathy, broken moans as the doctor filled him again and again. He was unable to do much of anything but take everything Bones could give him.

“Do you have any idea how gorgeous you are?” Bones said, barely four inches from Jim’s mouth, but so far out of reach.

“I’m not….” Jim gulped, before he let forth another pleasured cry, his head swimming. He knew he shouldn’t disagree with the doctor, Bones didn’t lie to him.

“You are, darlin’.”

Jim’s heart hammered, a lump forming in his throat, “You don’t mean that.”

“I do,” Bones stopped for a moment, tracing Jim’s lips with his thumb. “The night sky is envious of the way your eyes shine,” Bones said with sincerity. It almost sounded like he was quoting something, but it was unfamiliar to Jim.

I love you, the words stuck in Jim’s throat, how can I not when you say things like that?

“…Bones” Jim panted instead, closing his eyes, unable to keep looking at him. “You make me — ohhh, oh god, Bones! More, please, more!” Jim begged as Bones’ thrusts sped up. His whole body tightened, his body hurdling him towards another orgasm.

“Fuck, Jim,” Bones moaned, his blunt nails scraping at Jim’s scalp.

Jim’s elbow’s buckled, his eyes fluttering open, and it was suddenly just Bones holding him up. Jim pushed back, fucking himself on Bones’ cock, not bothering to stifle his cries. “Kiss me,” he demanded.

He didn’t hesitate, pulling Jim down at once, their lips crashing together like ocean waves. Jim’s cock was trapped between them now, their undulating bodies overstimulating and yet not enough. Jim bore down around Bones, trying to find the extra friction he needed.

Bones pulled away, Jim felt his whole form tense beneath him. “Darlin’, oh Jim,” Bones cried as he came. Jim buried his face in the crook of Bones neck as his body was flooded with Bones’ release.

Jim didn’t have the momentum to reach between them and finish, but Bones’ hand wrapped around his prick, tight and warm. Bones was still fucking him shallowly, and suddenly there wasn’t enough air in his lungs. He gasped, barely able to choke out, “Bones!” as his orgasm washed over him, come coating both of their bellies. Bones groaned as Jim seized around his spent cock.

Neither moved for a while, content to share labored breaths and closeness. Bones began tracing his fingers over Jim’s ribs with one hand, humming an unfamiliar tune. Jim preoccupied himself with Bones’ free hand, turning it back and forth, squeezing it with his own.

“You make me feel like everything’s going to be alright,” Jim said quietly, finally able to finish his earlier sentiment.

“It is,” Bones told him with such certainty, Jim had no choice but to believe it.
Leonard woke up, disoriented, to the sound of moans. Perhaps *cries* was a more accurate representation of what he was hearing. Not the pleasured kind, the sad, abject type.

They’d fallen asleep wrapped in each other, sticky and warm, but Jim wasn’t laying on him anymore and he cold and dry.

“Jim?” Leonard said into the flickering darkness of one oil lamp uncertainly.

He received no response, but heard a whimper moments later. Leonard sat up, only to find Jim on the opposite side of the bed, shaking and writhing.

“Nooooo,” Jim moaned softly, “*No please…Don’t.*”

A nightmare? He wasn’t sure how Jim would feel about Leonard seeing him like this. Leonard reached out, placing his hand on Jim’s back reassuringly, trying not to wake him, but Jim only sniveled feebly.

“Jim, it’s alright,” Leonard tried again softly, moving his hand to Jim’s shoulder.

“Stop…Just please…” Jim moaned thrashing beneath him, “Don’t...*hurts.*”

His heart broke for the boy, clearly reliving something horrible. Interfering had to be better than continuing to let him suffer.

“Jim! Jim, it’s okay,” Leonard said firmly as he shook Jim awake. “Just a bad dream.”

Jim gasped, sitting up frantically; he fought away from Leonard’s touch. His breath was short as his gaze darted around the room. He finally processed the sight of Leonard, who’s hands were visibly still on top of the duvet. Jim let out a shuttering breath and hugged his arms against himself.

“I’m sorry darlin’, I didn’t want to wake you,” Leonard started a little uncertainly, “But you seemed to be dreaming about something terribly unpleasant.”

Jim nodded, scooting himself a little towards Leonard, still tentative.

“Come here,” Leonard said easily, reaching towards him.

Once the invitation had been voiced Jim threw himself into Leonard’s arms. “Sorry. Embarrassing you had to see that,” Jim admitted once Leonard’s arms were wrapped tight around him and his face was buried against Leonard’s chest.

“No need for that,” Leonard promised, running a hand through Jim’s hair.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Leonard eventually slumped back into the pillows, taking Jim with him. He was more tired than he realized. Jim clung to him like he was a life-ring, his warm breath ghosting across Leonard’s chest.

“No one’s ever been this patient with me,” Jim said so quietly that at first Leonard wasn’t sure he’d spoken at all. “No one’s ever bothered, I’m not worth the time.”
“You’re worth my time,” Leonard told him sleepily. “I love you, Jim,” the words slipped from his tongue easily, his fatigued mind unable to stifle the truth.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not going to make a promise to have the next chapter out quickly because we all know it's bullshit, but I do promise I'm writing more! I have every intention of finishing this verse!
The nightmare had been horrible. It had started the same as the one he had every now and again. He’d been trapped in the naked body of his younger self, he was outside, onlookers sneering. Jim was held against pavement so roughly it had felt as though his spine would snap, a snarling, swirling mass almost suffocating him, fucking him. A conglomerate of some of his worst nights at the house, sometimes the offender was simply a faceless monster, sometimes the smirking forms of clients took it’s place. Often it was Marcus, and he’d laugh as Jim screamed. No matter the form, the monster always told him, *You wouldn't scream if you didn’t like it.*

But last night’s version had been worse.

It had all the normal elements of his nightmare, but, to add injury to insult, so to speak, Khan was there. The man circled him, brandishing his knife, jagged, and more gruesome than the one he’d carried during his visit. Jim was unable to move as the shapeless monster who pinned him in place flickered between Marcus and Mitchell. Being fucked by the monster had been cruel enough, but then Khan pushed the knife into him as well, dragging it through his flesh telling him, *Shut your mouth you pathetic whore.*

The monster and Khan had bickered, demanding different things as they tormented him:

*Scream louder!*

*Shut up.*

*Tell me how much you like it.*

*Scream again and I’ll slit your throat.*

Jim could only whimper, trapped in his mind, waiting for the torture to end, and then, abruptly, it was over. The monster and Khan both vanished, but someone still touching him in a darkened room, Jim pulled away, not wanting it to start again.

Suddenly, Jim realized it wasn’t a dream anymore, and it wasn’t another monster, it had been Bones. Bones, with his soft voice and his comforting words. Bones, with his warm body and open arms. He needed Bones, and Jim relaxed against him.

*I love you, Jim.* The words echoed in his head on loop.

Jim didn’t sleep after that. He was almost nauseous with excitement, his stomach doing
summersaults, his heart leapt into this throat.

_He loves me_, Jim’s mind raced, _He actually loves me._

Jim didn’t look at him, unwilling to move from his position, safe against the doctor, Bones’ arms, solid and reassuring, around him. Jim didn’t even dare to whisper it back. He was almost afraid that if he moved or spoke he’d wake up again, and Jim didn’t know what he’d do if this wasn’t real.

_This is what I wanted, I can’t believe he actually loves me_, Jim thought, his heart swelling, _Everything’s going to be alright._

Once his giddy excitement had leveled, Jim was about to drift to sleep with that thought when another thought crashed into him like a freight train.

_You can’t be together, it doesn’t matter how much he loves you. He can’t see you every night._

Jim’s throat tightened, trying to stop a lump from forming.

_You’re still going to have to see other clients, and they’ll use you and hurt you, and ruin you until Bones won’t be able to look at you anymore._

_He loves you, so what? It doesn’t change what you are. It doesn’t change anything._

Jim hated the voice telling him these things, it was harsh and cynical, but it wasn’t wrong. When it came right down to it, it was the truth. Bones had a life, he had responsibilities; he couldn’t spend every second with Jim.

Eventually, Jim’s job would wear on both of them. Jim didn’t know if he could keep enduring one sadistic, anonymous john after another when he had Bones, when he knew what it was like to be safe and—dare he say—happy. Refusing clients wasn’t an option. It would only get him farther into debt, prolonging his freedom. And what of that? What would happen if he was ever his own person? A respectable doctor couldn’t be seen seen with an ex-prostitute.

They could never be together. Not really.

Jim felt sick, a pit forming in his stomach, a dark, ominous fog swirling in his mind. It didn’t matter that he loved Bones back. None of it could help them. He’d been so naive, so incredibly stupid, to think that this changed _anything_. Jim couldn’t watch their feelings struggle with reality and eventually die.

He had to let Bones go. Reject him, now. Bones would recover. He could blame Jim for being heartless, but Jim was just a whore, and Bones would move on. Jim wouldn’t be able to see Bones anymore. It would be too hard for him, and once he rejected Bones’ feelings, Bones wouldn’t want him anyway.

_Fuck._

Jim wanted to cry, but he was too tired for tears. Instead he just let Bones hold him, unsleeping, until sunlight crept in through the curtains. Jim didn’t move for a long time, his whole chest tight, each breath a little more painful than the last.

___
When the doctor finally woke he kissed Jim’s head, holding him tight. It took all of Jim’s strength not to profess his love back to Bones, to pretend that everything would be okay if he did.

Jim’s tongue was swollen from biting back his words, and he swallowed them yet again, his resolve holding just barely. “I’m going to get you some hot water,” Jim said when he couldn’t stand it any longer, pulling away.

Bones was beautiful, his face glowing and his hair rumpled, stray rays of sunlight streaking his face. He looked, for a minute, as though he might protest, but he thought better of it. “Okay darlin’, just don’t be gone for too long.”

Jim nodded. He kept his head down as he pulled on his robe, not wanting Bones to see the way the endearment made his eyes well up.

The sun was bright outside the room and the halls were empty as he carried the basin back. Jim wondered how late it was, not that it mattered anymore. Jim slipped in the room to find the curtains open, and Bones propped up against the pillows.

“Come here,” Bones said easily, crooking his finger at Jim.

Any other morning Jim would have done so happily, now it just felt hollow, knowing how much Bones would hate him soon. Jim sighed and set the steaming water down, climbing on the bed felt like scaling a mountain.

Bones kissed him forcefully but with care. “Are you still upset from last night?” He asked when Jim’s lips didn’t move against his.

Jim nodded. It was the truth, even if Bones was talking about the dream and Jim wasn’t.

Bones lips moved along his jaw, pressing soft kisses. His mouth trailed down Jim’s neck, and for a moment Jim forgot what was wrong, letting Bones do this felt so good. Opening his eyes he saw the doctor’s neck, modeled purple and crimson with marks in the shape of Jim’s mouth. It felt like so long ago that he’d put them there carelessly, back when he’d deluded himself into thinking Bones could be his.

“Stop,” Jim said, remembering the reality of the situation. It was too much.

Bones did stop, his face full of confusion. He pulled away, surveying Jim, the hand rested on his thigh drawing delicate patterns on top of Jim’s robe. Jim held the most neutral expression he could manage, Bones clearly unsure of what he wanted.

Bones moved his hand under the silky fabric, his hand traveling higher up Jim’s thigh.

“Don’t,” Jim insisted, tensing.

Bones pulled his hands back. “Alright, Jim,” he said simply, his voice wary.

“I can…I can suck you if you want,” Jim offered somewhat awkwardly. Honestly, he didn’t know what to do anymore, how to end this without sex.

Bones kissed his temple with a small laugh, “As much as I hate to turn that down, I can tell that’s the last thing you want to do.”
“…I’m sorry Bones,” Jim started, apologizing for—for everything really, everything that was about to come crumbling down around them—making Bones feel like the bad guy. Because he was anything but that, and he didn’t deserve to feel this way.

“None of that,” Bones said gently, “Don’t ever be sorry for telling me what you want…or don’t want.”

Jim’s stomach churned, Bones wasn’t going to make this easy on him. He really was the best thing that had ever happened to Jim, the best thing Jim just couldn’t keep.

“Should I get you breakfast?” Jim asked after a couple thick moments of silence.

“No darlin’ that’s okay, I should get going, it’s late.”

Jim nodded mutely, staring out the window as Bones dressed, feeling vaguely like he was headed for the gallows. They left the room together, the last semblance of normalcy Jim had to cling to, and Jim followed Bones down the stairs.

It was the same thing they always did. They stopped at their usual spot, to the far right of the staircase, Jim one step higher than Bones who stood on the foyer floor.

“What can I see you tomorrow?” Bones asked, his usual departing question.

Jim closed his eyes, the word caught in his mouth, his tongue felt like sandpaper. He swallowed, opening his eyes and staring at a spot just past Bones, it took all of his resolve not to cry, “No.”

Bones blinked at Jim, his face faltering, taken slightly aback, “Friday then?”

“You can’t see me anymore,” Jim forced the words from his throat. They hurt, but not as much as the look on Bones’ face. Jim squeezed his eyes closed again.

“I…” Bones started, his voice cracked, “Jim.”

“That’s the point of asking isn’t it?” Jim spit out with more malice than he intended, trying to hold back the tears burning at his eyes, “That I can say no?”

“Of course,” Bones agreed, his breathing short, “Of course. I would never make you…”

“I won’t see you again,” Jim reiterated. This hurt so much. Bone’s crestfallen look was just cutting him deeper. It was more horrible than Jim could have imagined. All he wanted to do was take it back, but that wouldn’t help either of them.

Jim couldn’t let Bones know how he felt. Knowing that they both wanted each other and couldn’t be together, really be together, would kill him in the end. It was better for Bones. Better to protect him from the fucked up world Jim had no choice but to be apart of.

“Can I kiss you before I go?” Bones asked, an empty distance in his tone.

It was a bad idea but Jim couldn’t stop himself from agreeing.

Bones kissed him deeply, like he was trying to light a fire inside Jim, and for a moment Jim allowed himself to melt into it, to let this be what they both wanted. It took every ounce of Jim’s strength to pull away.

Bones looked at him, devastated and bewildered. “…Goodbye Jim,” he said just above a whisper.
Jim couldn’t watch him go. He didn’t know what he’d do if Bones looked back, didn’t want to find out. He scampered into the shadows behind the staircase, letting out a broken sob. He slid down the wall, collapsing into a pile on the floor, crying fast, hot tears into his lap.

*It’s for the best.*

The ache in Jim’s chest grew.

*He hates you, but he’ll be able to move on.*

Jim couldn’t breath, his nose clogged. Part of him didn’t want to bother breathing through his mouth, he wondered what would happen if simply he didn’t.

*He’s not yours, he’s never been yours. He deserves someone good, not you.*

Suddenly, someone was next to him, holding his head in their hands. For the briefest moment he thought it was Bones, but the hands were unsteady and too delicate.

“Jim? Oh my god Jim, what happened?” Nyota wiped at his eyes with the sleeve of her robe.

Jim simply bawled in response.

“Oh honey, come on, let’s get you out of the hall,” she said gently, helping him up.

Nyota took him to the bathroom, she carried him more than he really supported himself, Jim hyperventilating between heaving sobs.

“Hey, Ny, would you be able to help me sew my—” Janice started before she saw Jim.

Nyota shook her head, and Janice apologized briefly before exiting the bathroom. She helped him down again, leaving him for a moment to get a hand towel.

“Come on honey blow your nose,” she said holding it up to him. Jim did, tears still clouding his vision. It made him feel a little better, less like he was actually drowning. She took a clean part of the towel and patted at his cheeks. “Are you hurt? Physically, do you need a doctor?”

Jim shook his head with a watery, hiccuped laugh. It was because of a doctor he was like this at all.

“Are you sure Jim? I know you like that client, but I swear, if he did something.”

“He didn’t.”

“Promise me.”

“He didn’t hurt me,” Jim told her as firmly as he could manage. “He’s not coming back,” Jim said and a fresh wave of tears spilled from his eyes.

“What can I do?” Nyota asked, holding his hands with hers.

Jim knew she was trying to be nice, but everything just hurt too much. He couldn’t talk about it, there was nothing she, or anyone, could do. “I just want to be alone.”

“Jim…”

“Please. Just go.”
“Okay,” she finally, standing up, squeezing his shoulder. She took the soggy towel that he was still clutching from him, and handed him a dry one before she left.

The bathroom was quiet for a long time, leaving Jim with nothing but his thoughts. He cried until the ache in his chest was mirrored in his head. For a while he just stared at the wall, his entire being blank, and then he’d hear a noise, a clatter or a laugh and he’d remember where he was, and the tears would come again.

Jim alternated between self-pity, self-loathing, and simple hatred for his predicament. He grieved for the life he didn’t have, the life he couldn’t have; he dwelled on his mistakes, and his shortcomings, but most of all he mourned the pain he’d caused Bones. The doctor didn’t deserve it, he was the most kind, decent person Jim had ever met. He hoped Bones would be able to just hate him, and move on, like any normal person would feel after being scorned by a prostitute, that he would simply be able to forget Jim like a fleeting dream.

Eventually the bathroom filled with girls. Nyota had undoubtably said something, as they all moved around him like he was invisible. Their unintelligible chatter muffled the war in Jim’s mind, and he was given some respite from himself. They washed and helped each other brush their hair, getting ready to sleep.

The room slowly cleared out, leaving only Gaila milling about, clearly wasting her time until the other girls had gone. Jim was grateful she stayed, he suddenly wanted another person with him desperately. She sat down next to him gingerly, offering her hand.

Jim took it without hesitation, climbing into the space in front of her, his head resting against her bosom. She said nothing at first, letting Jim acclimate to another person in his space, Jim simply taking in the now empty bathroom.

“What did that bastard do to you?” Gaila whispered after what could have been minutes or hours, Jim couldn’t tell anymore.

“He loves me,” Jim said his voice scratchy and tired, the first words he’d spoken in hours.

She was silent, but her fingers tightened sympathetically around Jim’s.

“We can’t…There’s no way it’ll work. I told him I didn’t want to see him again.” Jim expected some kind of protest from Gaila. He was sure she wouldn’t understand why he wouldn’t have revealed his feelings as well, he’d pegged her as an eternal optimist.

Instead she said, “Do you know why I'm here, sweetie?”

Jim considered about craning his neck around to see her expression, but thought better of it, shaking his head against her.

“I was married.”

Jim froze, that was the last thing he’d ever expected to hear.

“I loved her, I really loved her. She got sick—it was the flu…Couldn’t seem to get her better no matter what I tried, and hell if I didn’t try everything. Eventually, she died.” Gaila paused for a moment, perhaps waiting to see if Jim would interrupt.

“Her parents didn’t like me, that’s putting it nicely I suppose. I’d used almost all my savings on doctors, I lived with them for awhile—my parents died a long time ago—but eventually they told me I had to go, I couldn't have stayed with them anyway, everything reminded me of her. I knew
myself, knew what I was capable of and it wasn't scrubbing down some mansion.

“I’d noticed people looking at me my whole life—you can’t exactly blame them—and I knew that I could be a whore, a top notch one, that is. I knew that working here would mean a different way of life, that I wouldn’t be able to love again. What we do, sex, it isn’t about love, but that’s alright, because love hurts, Jim. Love really fucking hurts.

“Your doctor...he was different, I know how you felt about him sweetie, but I don’t blame you for one second. You can’t be expected to feel something like that, and keep doing this job every day. I can tell you didn’t choose this life like I did, so maybe you’ll think I’m callous, but Jim, I know what I’m talking about. You cry as much as you need to but when you’re done, I want you take that searing pain in your chest, and I want you wrap it around your heart like armor. You promise me that you won’t let this break you sweetie, because there’s no room for heart in this business, and it’ll chew yours up if you let it.”

Jim was shaking with silent tears before she finished talking. He turned towards her, “I wish he didn’t love me. He’s got no right to, he can’t know how hard this all is.”

A shimmering tear escaped down Gaila’s cheek before she hugged him back against her, “I know.”

—

Leonard stumbled outside, dazed. He stood on the pavement feeling a numb hysteria building inside him as the sun shone brightly, oblivious to his predicament. This couldn’t be real, surely Jim hadn’t really just told Leonard he couldn’t see him anymore. Leonard felt lightheaded, his stomach doing backflips.

He headed over to the side of the building where his car was parked, leaning up against it he suddenly thought he might be sick. Leonard retched but there was nothing to come up, gasping for air instead.

Leonard opened the car door unsteadily, forcing himself into the drivers seat. He shouldn’t have said it. Of all the idiotic things he’d done, he’d never thought admitting his feeling for another person again would be one of them. He should have learned his lesson the last damn time. As if divorce and humiliation hadn’t been enough, apparently he needed to share his inappropriate feelings towards a prostitute, someone who couldn't love him back.

That had to be it after all, that had to be why Jim’s attitude had changed, certainly nothing else had. Leonard had been sure, so sure, that Jim had felt something for him, perhaps not as adamantly, but he’d been positive there was some spark between them.

What a fool he’d been.

That was Jim’s job, to make him feel wanted and desirable, to keep him coming back for more. It had certainly worked. Part of him wondered why Jim hadn’t simply played along with him, but he already knew the answer. People did crazy things when they were in love, and Jim had clearly had his fill of crazy from clients.

Leonard was no better than any of them: expecting something that Jim was unwilling to give. He heaved again, feeling like a monster. The way he’d questioned Jim’s decision in the foyer, Leonard felt like he’d undermined everything he’d ever said. He wanted to go back and apologize, not even
to ask Jim to reconsider, just to explain himself. Leonard didn't deserve that chance, and he didn’t need to force anything else on Jim.

His head thumped against the steering wheel. It was his fault, all of this was his fault. He’d never wanted the boy to feel trapped with him, not for a second, and yet, he’d done just that. He’d lead Jim in with comfort and trust and snared him with feelings. It was no wonder Jim was done with him. He’d let himself fall too far into the fantasy. Leonard had truly forgotten where he was, a brothel was no place to find love.

—

Leonard paced in front of the bank. He knew he was early, but he hadn’t been able to keep himself in his apartment any longer.

He’d done nothing but fight an internal battle since he’d last seen Jim. Leonard had spent the better part of Tuesday pitying himself, thinking himself to a headache, occasionally succumbing to tears. He’d lost the only thing he even bothered to care about recently, and he was angry with himself that he’d let that be something as fleeting as a person, a whore. He’d had to tell the hospital he couldn’t come in. He was about as fit to work a shift as he was to sail a ship.

By Wednesday he furious with himself and, to some extent, Jim. He’d decided not to pay Jim’s debt. Surely, there was no reason to help him, what did it matter how long Jim had to stay at the brothel for? He’d been a bitter, angry mess at work. He’d screamed at Christine for breaking a vial and the look she’d given him was pure venom.

On Thursday he’d woken with a pit in his stomach. Guilt for even thinking what he had the day before consumed him. Leonard was worried for Jim. He almost called to ask if the boy was alright several times, but it seemed a gross invasion of privacy, he doubted he would even be given an answer. The only way he could even think of making things right was to settle Jim’s dues. It was a huge amount of money, but it didn’t matter. At the hospital people avoided him all day, the isolation a punishment he knew he deserved.

When Friday dawned he couldn’t believe he’d even briefly considered not spending the money. His hurt taking the back-burner to his concern for the boy, and his desire for Jim to have a chance at happiness. He’d made up his mind, that no matter how daunting the sum might seem, he had the money, and he had to help Jim. Leonard was only frustrated that he had to wait any longer to do so.

“Hello Travis,” Leonard said as the man unlocked the bank doors, ushering him in.

“Good morning Doctor.

“It’s Monday.”

“So it is, and here you are.” Travis shook his head in resignation, “So I wasn’t able to deter you from draining your savings?”

“No,” Leonard answered curtly. He knew the banker was only trying to make light of the fact that he was genuinely concerned, but Leonard had waited long enough.

“Whatever this is for, must be very important to you Leonard,” Travis said, hand Leonard paperwork for the withdrawal.
“You’re not coming back this time, are you?” Gaila asked miserably as she hugged Jim tightly.

“I don’t think so,” Jim answered quietly. He was truly sad to leave them, it was so final. This chapter of his life was being torn up.

“I’m going to miss you, we all are.” She pulled away from him, patting his cheek. “You be careful okay?”

Jim nodded tersely, feeling a lump forming in his throat, “You too.”

Mira and Nyota had been hanging back, having already said their goodbyes while Jim gathered his belongings now came forward and joined Gaila in hugging Jim one last time. Jim couldn’t imagine he’d be called back here any time soon, his trips to Hoshi’s had been a special circumstance. There was a level of closeness with the girls here that simply didn’t exist at Talas’, and he’d certainly feel the loss.

“Come on Jim, the car’s waiting,” Hoshi called from the hall.

Jim waved at the girls one last time, his already broken heart shredding further in his chest.

“Do you think he’ll be okay?” Nyota asked softly once Jim had gone, the three of them climbing into bed.

“I don’t know…” Mira’s shoulders fell, “He’s been through so much.”

“We all have,” Gaila’s voice shook, clasping their hands tightly. “Jim’s strong.” It was silent for several moments before Gaila said, “The bed feels too big.” The two girls hummed in agreement, wrapping themselves tighter around her.

—

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.”

“Certainly, Doctor McCoy,” Madam Talas smiled up at him from her tea.

“You’re still willing to…to sell?” Leonard asked, unable to think of a more appropriate term.

“Yes of course, I have the paperwork with me.” She motioned to her bag perched on an adjacent
chair. “Forgive me for saying this Doctor, but Jim came back rather distressed after his last trip. While Jim is technically my property, I don’t think of him that way, and I would hate to send him somewhere…upsetting.”

Sighing deeply, Leonard’s chest tightened at the reminder that he’d done something to cause Jim trouble. “I upset him. I said something out of line,” Leonard told her, because it was the truth. “You needn’t worry though, I won’t do anything more to him. I won’t be coming to collect him, in fact, I don’t want you to tell Jim I’ve bought him.”

Talas eyed him, calculating, trying to figure him out. “What am I to do with him exactly then Doctor?”

Leonard pulled out the thick envelope Travis had given him earlier. It hit the table with a hearty thud, “This is three thousand Tul. Two thousand, seven hundred and fifty for you, I know that’s twenty extra, but I’m sure you’ll put it to good use; I want the extra two hundred and fifty to go to Jim. Tell him he’s free to go. If you care about Jim you’ll give him the money, wouldn’t want him out there penniless.”

She looked at Leonard as though she hadn’t really seen him before, “You’re really not buying him for yourself, are you?”

“No ma’am. I just want him to live his life.”

“Well I’ll be damned.” Talas shook her head in shock, “Just when you think you’ve heard everything.”

“I will need a document saying his dues have been paid, one that says he owes me nothing,” Leonard told her. That was imperative, he couldn’t have Jim feeling like there was anyone left he owed, especially Leonard.

“If that’s what you’d like Doctor McCoy,” she said smoothly, if not still a little disbelieving. “I’m no thief, we’ll write it into the document that he’s leaving with the extra.”

“Thank you ma’am.”

“You really are the strangest man I’ve ever met.”

—

“Oh don’t look at me like that, this is a good thing,” Talas told him dismissively, turning to leave.

“I…Talas, wait!” Jim said, hurrying after her, “Why are you doing this?”

She stopped, staring at him, her face entirely unreadable. “It’s freedom Jim, that’s why you want isn’t it?”

“Yes but…” Jim couldn’t explain the feelings hurdling through him. It was true, this was all he’d wanted, all he’d really thought about since his first night at the brothel, the moment he’d be free.

“Did I do something wrong?” his eyes fixed on the ground. He was being too much of a burden, or maybe it was the scars, he wasn’t worth the trouble anymore, that had to be it.
“No,” Talas said, not making him feel any less worthless. “I’ve…I’ve come into some money recently,” she said carefully, “You deserve independence Jim.”

It was odd to hear such words coming from Talas, it wasn’t her style. Talas never thought people deserved things, everyone should have to earn their way. It felt like he was being thrown out, and the prospect of being entirely alone in the world was utterly terrifying. Jim had nothing, no one, without Talas. He certainly didn’t have Bones anymore, and even if hadn’t ruined that, running to the doctor would be unthinkable. Bones had never offered him anything of the sort, and Jim didn’t think his pride, what little he had left, would allow it anyway.

*Bones.* God he missed Bones. The doctor had been the best part about his life for—No. He couldn’t let himself go there again, not right now.

Jim shook his head, “I don’t want to go. Please.”

“You can’t stay, Jim.”

Jim felt like he couldn’t breath, he didn’t understand why she was doing this to him. His world was crumbling faster than he could process. “At least let me stay until I can make some money? You can keep taking my expenses out, Talas please, what am I supposed to do?”

Talas closed her eyes, pressing her lips together in a thin line, saying nothing.

Jim wanted to scream, but unsteadily held his ground.

“I’m not sending you out in penury, what kind of person do you think I am? I have some money for you, it’s not a huge sum, but we’ll call it a parting gift.”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“No, I won’t take your money, I won’t take it away from the other boys.”

Talas exhaled slowly, like she was trying to reason with him, as though Jim was being the irrational one. “Jim, that’s not how this works. You’re leaving, with two-hundred and fifty Tul in your pocket, that’s final.”

Jim balked, his eyes wide. She couldn’t be serious. That was more money than he’d ever even seen “But—”

“That’s enough. You can stay tonight, but you’re not working. Say your goodbyes, pack your things, decide where you’re headed. Take charge of your life.”

Jim’s filled with tears, he wasn’t even sure he had any left, but there they were, threatening to spill over.

“If you repeat this I’ll deny it,” Talas patted his face gently, “You’ve always been my favorite. You’re a good boy Jim. I’m glad you’re going to get to see life outside these walls.” She smiled at him, perhaps the first genuine smile he’d ever seen on the woman’s face. “There’re better things out there for you.”

Jim sniffed wetly and nodded. He able to keep himself together just barely until he was able to make it back to his room.

The door shut, the latch clicking quietly into place. Jim dropped to the floor against the solid oak,
head between his knees. He couldn’t stop the tears, but they weren’t angry ones. Jim simply couldn’t believe this was really happening, faced with endless possibilities everything seemed like too much. Staying place, being a whore, seemed so much easier than this new option.

“Jim?” Pavel asked in a small, tired voice from their bed.

He didn’t answer. Jim hadn’t seen him there, but he hadn’t really been looking. He wouldn’t have been able to stop himself if he’d seen Pavel anyway.

“Are you alright?” he tried again, making his way over to the door.

Jim could only hiccup in response. Pavel kneeled down next to him. Jim caught a glimpse of him through his tangled limbs. He looked concerned and Jim felt guilty for making him worry. Pavel wasn’t a child, but Jim still felt protective of him and Jim had no idea how to tell the younger boy he was leaving.

“I’m fine Pavel,” he managed, Jim’s tone doing nothing to assuage him.

“What happened?” he tried again, positioning himself next to Jim, Pavel’s arm around his shoulder.

Jim shook his head, “Please don’t be mad at me.”

“I could never be mad at you Jim.”

“I’m leaving…For good this time. I don’t want you to be here by yourself.”

Pavel’s eyes grew wide, “Leaving? But how…? Is Talas throwing you out, you’ve been taking clients every night Jim? Why would she do that?”

“She’s not…I guess. Talas says she wants me to do something else,” Jim’s head lulled to Pavel’s shoulder and he sighed, his eyes finally starting to dry. “She’s giving me money.”

“But that…It doesn’t make sense? Don’t misunderstand, I’m happy for you, that you don’t have to do this anymore,” Pavel said empathically his hand making a motion towards the rest of the house, “But why would she give you money?”

Jim hadn’t really had a chance to think that far into it, too focused on his predicament to ask how. “I don’t know.” His head hurt. “I don’t know what’s happening, but I know I haven’t paid off my debt, so she must be paying it.” He was so confused, wishing desperately that he wasn’t going through this alone.

“People don’t just leave places like this Jim,” Pavel said a little distantly, “Freedom is a fantasy.”

“Pavel…”

“I’m glad for you, please don’t feel responsible for me. It’s not so bad lately. I have a client who calls for me regularly, Hikaru, he’s nice. Nothing like Mr. Marcus…” Pavel trailed the spark of happiness in his eyes when he’d mentioned the new man faded as he said Marcus’ name. “I’m going to miss you,” he said hugging Jim tightly, “You’ve been a good friend.”

Jim hugged him back tightly, wondering how much more his heart could break before it simply stopped beating.
Talas ended up letting him stay two nights. To fix your sleeping habits, she claimed, when she caught sight of his face the next morning.

Being awake during the day was an odd experience, almost off putting. The sun was bright and relentless, tracking his movements. On Jim’s first day technical day of freedom, he realized he had to get clothes. He had nothing to wear, everything was too tight, or too sheer. Jim wasn’t even sure how people dressed these days, he only saw what his clients wore, and he hardly ever took stock of that before more pressing matters took over.

Jim spent the day walking several blocks outside the brothel, realizing how little of the city he saw, it was disorienting, he hardly recognized anything. The sounds and smells of the town were overwhelming, it caused a tightness in his chest, a confusion, and he was eternally grateful Talas was going to permit him to stay another night.

A scent stopped him in his tracks, it was thick and sweet, mouthwatering. He followed it to a restaurant where he was stopped dead in his tracks before he could enter.

The man looked him up and down, a sneer catching his mouth. “…Sir,” he said in a way that Jim knew was derogatory, “I’m afraid I can’t allow you to enter in…such a state, I don’t think you will be comfortable inside.”

Jim flinched, and had to stop himself from dropping to his knees. He hadn’t really considered eating anything here. He didn’t even have the money Talas had promised him on his person anyway, but his first reaction was to offer to suck the man off. He looked down at the ground, embarrassed for both of them. “Of course, you’re right, excuse me,” he said before slinking away.

The host had known what he was, only blocks from the brothel, what else could he be. Jim exuded sex and trouble, he hoped it could be fixed with a change of clothes.

“Did you enjoy your day out?” Spock asked him in the evening, he was grooming himself for the upcoming night.

“I don’t think I’d say that,” Jim answered quietly. “They all know I’m a whore Spock, I don’t even know how I’m going to make it to a shop to get myself clothes without being thrown out.” Jim plucked at his threadbare shirtsleeves, it showed off his physique in a way that enticed, but was unsuitable for life outside the house.

“That is not what you are any longer, and you may use something of mine until you are able to fit yourself with proper clothing,” Spock offered, combing his hair precisely.

“No, Spock, I couldn’t, that wouldn’t be right.”
“It would only be inappropriate if you do not pass forward my gesture to someone else in need at a later time, when you are able.”

“I don’t think anything you have will fit me, Spock,” Jim said, apprehensively.

“Jim, I do believe slightly ill-fitting would be better than your current attire.”

Jim looked down at himself again, the skin tight trousers licking his thighs, “I guess you’ve got a point.”

Spock didn’t share a room with any of the other prostitutes, he’d been here longer than Jim, longer than anyone really. When Jim thought about it he really didn’t know anything about the man, just that he was foreign and that clients didn’t tire of seeing him.

There was a tiny wardrobe in his room, Jim wondered where it had come from, he and Pavel didn’t have one, neither did the room the other two boys shared. Spock slid the door open, revealing a shocking amount of clothing. There was more real clothing in it than he would have imagined, but Jim wasn’t entirely sure why he was surprised. Spock was sometimes hired to go out with his clients before he saw them privately, there were several sharp looking suits mixed in with his other clothing.

“Talas sometimes has me run errands she otherwise cannot,” Spock explained as Jim surveyed his clothing.

“Did she get you all this?” Jim asked a little taken aback.

“No, many of these were my possessions before my arrival. Some from when I was younger, I am hopeful there are a few that will fit you decently.”

“Spock, where did Talas buy you?” the question slipped out, it was invasive and he wished he could pull the words back. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean…” he stopped, Jim wasn’t really sure what he’d meant.

Spock was quiet for several long moments, his face impassive. “She did not buy me.”

Jim’s head jerked up in shock.

“I no longer wished to stay in my country and an…acquaintance…told me Talas had an opportunity where I would not be badgered into marriage, and I would not be bound by the rules of my culture. I could simply exist as I saw fit, and earn money while doing so. It is unconventional, I know, but Talas and I have an arrangement.”

Jim should have shut his mouth, Spock was already being indulgent with this much information, and the clothing, Jim shouldn’t push his luck…and yet, “Don’t you miss your family?”

“My mother is gone, my father and I do not speak,” Spock answered dismissively, pulling a few items from the wardrobe.

“Spock, I’m sorry.”

“While I accept your sympathies, they are not necessary, I do not wish to be pitied. I chose this.” He handed Jim several articles of clothing. “These should be sufficient.”

Jim swallowed hard and nodded. He took the garments Spock had handed him, heading for the door.

“I do wish you the best of luck. Please know, I have always considered you a friend.”
Jim paused at the door, he didn’t think Spock would ever say as much, but Jim had come to view Spock as a friend himself, his steady, constant presence had always been comforting. “Me too,” he said, a lump threatening in his throat.

“You are more than what you have done, Jim.”

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Armed with the borrowed clothes and his pocket padded with two-hundred and fifty Tul, he stepped into the street the next day. The pants were a little too long, the vest a bit tight, he had to keep the collar of the shirt undone, but at least he didn’t look like he was aiming to turn a trick.

Talas hadn’t said much when he’d left, she’d already said her piece, not one to be overcome with her feelings. She’d clapped him on the shoulder. “Take care of yourself,” she’d commanded.

Spending any of the money Talas had given felt like a crime, he couldn’t believe it was really his. Even so, it felt wrong to stay within walking distance of the brothel, so he found a cab and asked where he could buy new clothes. The drive wasn’t terribly far, twenty minutes or so, and Jim found himself in another small town, closer to the city where Hoshi’s house stood.

The man in the shop was amicable, but seemed a little skeptical of Jim at first. Once Jim had shown interest in purchasing he became downright pleasant. Phlox took his measurements quickly, Jim hadn’t realized how many measurements went into clothing.

The sun was setting when he left with with Spock’s pants hemmed on him, a new shirt, a sturdy pair of leather shoes, and waistcoat that actually fit him. Two shirts, a second pair of pants and a tie were wrapped up for him.

“Don’t you have a coat?” Phlox asked him, a worried look creeping up his face.

Jim shook his head, he’d have to make due without one, he didn't even want to know how much a coat cost.

“We can't have that,” Phlox said seriously, “It’s autumn! I’ll tell you what, Mr. Kirk, pick any coat you like, I’ll give it to you for half price.”

Jim flinched before he’d remembered he’d given Phlox his last name, it sounded so alien to his own ears. He’d been nothing but Jim, or James, for so long. It felt like bit by bit he was regaining himself, the person he’d lost amidst the sweat and the skin of the brothel.

“I couldn't,” Jim shook his head again, “It's not fair to you.”

“I'm less concerned with fairness and more with not having you freeze,” Phlox smiled easily.

The whole payment was under ten Tul, it made Jim’s head spin to even think about having spent that, but he couldn’t be walking around naked.

“Could you tell me where I can spend the night in town?” Jim asked, trying to sound casual.

“Certainly!” Phlox told him enthusiastically, there’s a pub three blocks west. Tell Mr. Tucker I sent you, he’ll take care of you.”
The whole thing was very strange to Jim, he felt like he was being treated as a client at Hoshi’s, people were polite and eager to help him, smiling all the while. He tried his best not to feel like it was all fake, to remind himself not everywhere operated like a pleasure house. His friends were still there, getting ready to take clients, stuck. Jim shoved away the feeling in the pit of his stomach that he’d abandoned them. There was nothing he could have done, but it still didn’t feel fair that he’d been allowed to leave.

Mr. Tucker was a kind faced man who grinned fondly when Jim mentioned Phlox had sent him over and set a plate of steaming food and a bottle in front of him on the bar. “On the house,” he told Jim enthusiastically. God, it smelled so good, Jim wasn’t sure he’d even eaten half the things on the plate, but that wasn’t going to stop him from downing all of it.

“How much for the room?” Jim asked, panicked about spending more money, but having no other choice.

“One-and-a-half per night, nine if you’re staying a week,” He said, polishing a glass.

Jim hesitated, he really didn’t know how long he’d be here. In truth Jim had no idea what he was doing at all, this whole thing seemed like an elaborate masquerade.

“Tell you what, stay tonight, let me know and if you still want a the weekly rate tomorrow, I’m good for it.”

“Yeah, thanks,” Jim said fishing the coins from his pocket, “I really appreciate it, Mr. Tucker.”

He laughed and clapped Jim on the shoulder, “It’s just Trip.” He set a key down next to Jim’s plate. “Have a great night.”

Jim took a sip from the bottle and coughed. It was beer, Jim didn’t know what he’d been expecting, but after the sip he realized he’d never actually tasted beer before. Wine—and champagne at Hoshi’s—were commonplace, clients often had him share their drinks. Jim was only accustomed to beer as a stale taste lingering on a john’s lips as they bit at his mouth while fucking him. The drink wasn’t bad, rich amber coating his tongue, the flavor overwhelming and odd, he sipped it in between bites.

Jim’s body felt heavy by the time he was done, he was exhausted, even though he had no right to be, as he’d done essentially nothing today. He made his way upstairs, unlocking the door he almost expected there to be a man in his bed, but blissfully it was empty. The bed was small, Jim didn’t realize beds could be as small as the one in the room, but since he wasn’t expected to share it, he thought maybe it was for the best. It wouldn’t be as lonely.

Jim undressed clumsily, the fastenings unfamiliar and his movements sluggish. He still had his nightshirt from the brothel, pulling it on before folding his new clothes and setting them on the bureau.

He had never felt so out of place, not even when he’d first arrived at Talas’. At least then he’d what was expected of him. No matter how terrifying it had been at first, there’d been others with him, but now Jim as truly on his own. Wishing for freedom and getting it were two very different things. Sinking into the bed Jim tried to let the darkness lull him to sleep.
It was dark in the room when Jim woke up. He wasn’t sure how long he’d been unconscious, but pulling back the curtains revealed the dim glow of the streetlights and a star speckled sky. Jim yawned, rubbing his bleary eyes.

This hour was familiar to him, quiet darkness that blanketed the world, and yet, it wasn’t his anymore. Jim might be awake, but he didn’t know what to do with this hour. No one to service, and not a soul to talk to. The whole thing was disconcerting. He laid back down, trying to will himself back to sleep but only succeeding in squirming restlessly. He was stuck in a world between day and night, waking and unconscious. It was maddening.

After another thirty minutes of futilely trying to sleep, he got up, and tugged on the trousers and shoes he’d been wearing earlier. Jim tucked his nightshirt into the pants haphazardly, and made his way outside as quietly as he could, the stairs squeaking under his movement.

Where are you going? His mind pestered, Three days without a client and you’re already lonely? Pathetic.

Jim swallowed and shook his head, that’s not what he was doing, not why he was outside. He just needed to clear his head. Jim couldn’t remember ever going outside at night, he just wanted to feel the air on his skin and let the silence engulf him.

He walked following the road for quite sometime before he realized he had no idea where he was. Heart hammering in his chest, he quickened himself back the way he’d come, grateful to see the inn again. After that Jim decided not to get lost again, paying attention to where he was going. First just around the block, quite a distance considering how far he usually walked, then several blocks, noticing the street names and buildings. Jim had never really considered how big a town was until now, his experience with outings limited to late night car rides where he was more concerned with clients than surroundings. It was odd how much the world had changed since he’d been sold. Jim was exhausted now, he wasn’t even sure how long he’d been outside, the sky looked at black as ever. His feet hurt, wearing shoes was much more restrictive than Jim had imagined it would be. He was fairly sure that the inn was on the other side of the block, but Jim wasn’t entirely positive he could make it back around without passing out.

He stopped against a street light, leaning on it to take the weight from his feet. He looked surveyed the area, a few row houses, a park across the street. The moon bathed the park, trees and grass glistening in the dew of the night. Jim closed his eyes and sighed at how peaceful the night was, he vowed to see it again tomorrow, when he wasn’t as drained, for now he just wanted to feel the air on his skin and let the silence engulf him.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, turned the corner to see the street where the inn was.

Jim though he might have heard footsteps behind him, but before he even had the chance to look he felt a hand grip the back of his neck, stopping him dead.

“My, my, my, if it isn’t the mouthy whore.”

Jim’s blood ran cold, his stomach knotted up. He didn’t have to turn around, he knew the voice. If he didn’t look maybe he could will the man it belonged to away.

“I didn’t realize I could’ve brought you home, James. I wish I’d known…we could have had so much more fun,” Khan whispered, a breath away from Jim’s ear.

Jim whimpered involuntarily at the last word. Khan stepped to the side watching Jim with his cold eyes.

Jim squeezed his eyes closed, “I’m not…I don’t do that anymore.” His head whipped to the side with
the sharp crack into the silence as Khan’s hand made contact with his cheek.

“Oh James, I’m so disappointed you’ve already forgotten how much I dislike it when you speak.”

“Please don’t.” Jim’s face was on fire again with another stroke of Khan’s hand.

The man dragged him into a damp alley, the moon providing the only light. Khan looked absolutely monstrous as he produced a knife, larger than the one he’d used at Talas’. He tapped the handle against Jim’s sternum, “On your knees whore.”

Jim shut his eyes trying to wake himself up, surely this had to be a dream, another twisted nightmare. The sharp pain that flooded his shoulder when he didn’t comply told him otherwise, and Jim sunk to his knees.

This can’t be happening. His mind screamed, even though it so clearly was.

Jim was unsurprised that Khan was hard as he freed himself from his trousers. Jim didn’t hesitate, didn’t even wait for Khan’s instructions, the intent was clear and resistance would only be met with another cut or worse.

“You are good for one thing James, your mouth was made for me. You’ve always been destined for this,” Khan said snarling, tracing the blunt edge of the knife against Jim’s face as he sucked.

Something about the phrase was Jim’s breaking point. He couldn’t do this, couldn’t live through this kind of torture again. Jim took as much of the man’s length into his mouth as he could and bit down, hard. Hard enough to break the skin, but not quite all the way through, blood filled his mouth.

Khan screamed in anguish, jerking back, Jim saw red, felt it spatter across his face before his head crashed back into the alley wall. Jim’s head throbbed but suddenly he felt his chin jerked up and a searing pain across the left side of his face as what he could only assume was Khan’s knife was dragged a deep crooked line across it.

Tears poured form his eyes and Jim let out a high-pitched wail, the sound catching in the tight space as his hand rushed up to cover the wound. The tears stung, and he did his best to stop them, not wanting to cry on top of everything else, somehow crying would make everything worse. Jim looked up hesitantly, expecting Khan would have slunk away now like any sensible man would after what had just transpired, but Khan was not any man. Blood-soaked trousers were all he could see before the man’s pointed boot kicked him in the stomach. Jim fell to the ground in agony, laying on his side.

He’s going to kill me, Jim thought, I’m actually going to die like this, and no one’s going to care.

Khan forced his weight on to Jim’s knees as he yanked Jim’s shirt up. Breathing heavily, looking nothing short of insane, he carved purposeful strokes into Jim’s lower abdomen.

“Stop,” Jim pleaded weakly, his breath knocked out of him, every inch of his body in anguish.

Khan smiled cruelly, like it was the best thing he’d ever hear Jim say. “So you don’t forget what you are,” he hissed, finishing his handiwork. Khan heaved himself up, Jim could see he was shaking, limping just enough for Jim to feel he’d fought back.

“Learn your place James,” Khan spat on him before his foot connected with Jim’s head and everything, even the stars, went black.
well would you look at that, it seems I'm actually capable of updating! I'm extra sorry that this chapter is so...this.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

/whistles poorly while posting/

I don't think there's anything heavy to warn for in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything was blurry and too bright.

Jim couldn’t feel…anything really. It was odd, it almost felt as though he was floating, not really here nor there. Maybe he really had died, and this disorienting state was the afterlife.

“Are you awake?”

Not the afterlife apparently, unless god was a tired sounding woman, Which is entirely possible, Jim thought groggily. Jim managed a noncommittal noise in response.

His head was propped up carefully and drops of water dribbled at his lips. “We weren’t sure you were going to make it,” the disembodied voice told him seriously.

Jim coughed a little, taking in the liquid a little too fast, it set his chest on fire. He was definitely not dead, although he wasn’t sure how. “Where…?” he asked unsteadily.

“You’re in the hospital.”

“…wh-what hap-pened?” Jim croaked.

“I was hoping you could tell me,” the woman said, quietly.

Jim still couldn’t see her. He couldn’t see much of anything really. His hands moved slowly up to his face to rub his eyes, his left hand meeting resistance in the form of heavily padded gauze. He started to pull at it before his hand was stilled.

“I don’t suggest that.” The woman finally moved into his field of vision, she was tall and blonde, but the grip of his wrist alone told him she was twice as strong as him.

Jim heard a panicked noise emerge from his throat, “Is it gone?” he asked, suddenly terrified to know the answer.

“No, your eye is fine, the bandage is for your cheek mostly.”

Jim had a sudden flash of Khan’s knife connecting with his face, he clutched at the bandage, squeezing his unblocked eye closed as if that would ward off the memory.

“Hey, hey it’s okay,” the woman told him quietly, “What’s your name?”

“Jim,” he said, cracking his eye open, “Jim Kirk. Who are you?”

“Christine. I’m your nurse.”
“What’s wrong with me?” Jim asked, squinting his eye, trying to get a better read on her.

Christine sighed heavily, “Maybe we shouldn’t focus on that right now, you’re safe here, and the doctor will be in later, he’s better equipped to—”

“You can’t just make me wait!” Jim exclaimed, every one of his nerve endings screaming suddenly as he tried to sit up.”

“You’re going to puncture a lung if you try that again,” Christine told him firmly. Her hands steadied him back to the bed.

“Please,” Jim implored, “Please don’t leave me like this!”

She paused, exhaling deeply, the way he’d seen Spock do in his brief moments of frustration. “You’ve got a concussion, three broken ribs, more than a dozen contusions, a deep laceration on your face and several more on your abdomen,” Christine looked him over as though she’d forgotten something, “When you were admitted your arm was dislocated, but that’s taken care of. That’s all I treated you for, but it looks like this wasn’t your first scuffle.”

Jim groaned, of course she’d seen all his scars, he’d probably have to answer questions about those later. He was sure he looked like he’d been through hell. “How did I get here?”

“Last one Jim. You’re going to have to rest after this, okay?”

Jim tried to nod, sending shooting pain through his skull. “Yes.”

“T’Pol, the inn keeper’s wife, heard whimpering on her morning supply run. She carried you out of an alley and her husband drove you here. He said you were new to town, that he hadn’t even caught your name.”

Jim didn’t say anything.

“If that’s the case, it’s not been a great visit so far…” Christine commented rhetorically. “Where are you from?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Jim said, his lip trembling all the sudden, he felt like shit again. Maybe it was the painkiller was wearing off. He wasn’t going to cry, not again. It was time he got himself together.

“Can you tell me anything about last night?” she asked. Perhaps she’d forgotten Jim was supposed to be resting now.

 “…I’m…I’m really tired, Christine.”

Her gaze softened, casting him a look of—ugh—sympathy. He didn’t want her pity.

“Maybe later,” she finished easily.

He was such a mess.

One day, one fucking day outside of Talas’ and he was already confined to another bed. Broken and beaten within an inch of his life. The thought of explaining any of this to Christine was beyond absurd. Jim didn’t even know how to start without regaling her with tales of the brothel. The whole thing was ridiculous.

Why had he wanted this? Was this all freedom had to offer him? Would his future always be clouded by his past clinging to him like bad perfume?
“I’ll be back to check on you in a few hours,” Christine told him, after helping him take a couple pills.

_Maybe I won’t wake up,_ Jim thought disparagingly, _Maybe that’s what my freedom will be._

----------

Leonard yawned at his desk. It was proving to be a very long week. Leonard found that he was having trouble caring about much of anything anymore. He was simply going through the motions of the day. Signing charts, prescribing medicine, having patients cough all over him, convinced they were dying of the flu simply because it was getting colder.

Christine knocked on his open door, “Time for morning rounds Leonard.”

“Sure.”

She handed him the new charts easily. “How are you doing today?”

It was concern disguised as a small talk. Leonard didn’t want to tell her. He was sick of hearing his problems on loop in his head, he didn’t want to weigh other people down with them too. “I’m fine Chris.”

She surveyed him skeptically, “Fine? Leo, honestly, you weren’t even this far gone after the divorce.”

The word hit him like a physical blow and he hung his head. Just another reminder of his failure. “I’m going to be in rough shape for a while. There’s just nothing you can do about it.”

“I know, just don’t lie to me,” she said, “Let me know if I can help.” She patted his arm before heading out.

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The woman in the first room he visited was recovering from a broken leg, and the medicine she was on had not been agreeing with her. Leonard made a note on the chart to inform the next person on rounds, even though it was probably going to be him again anyway.

Room after room, was the same story, and Leonard could barely force himself to look at the charts, making small talk with his patients he no longer felt invested in. He felt listless.

_One more to go,_ Leonard told himself finally outside the last door. He stopped cold when he opened the next door, charts clattering to the ground as he heard himself gasp.

This couldn’t be real. His grief and frustration had to be playing tricks on him, as there was no earthly way the person he thought he was seeing could be in front of him. Leo rushed towards the bed, ignoring the charts now littering the floor.

His chest was tight, and suddenly there wasn’t enough air in his lungs.
“Jim, oh my god, Jim!” he whispered frantically.

The boy was a mess, half his face covered in gauze, the other side swollen black and blue. His arms were scraped and shone an angry red. He looked so broken, so young, laying against the crisp white sheets.

Leonard’s hands hovered in the air above Jim, unsure where to place them. He finally settled on stroking his hair gently.

“Darlin’, what happened to you?” he asked into the empty silence.

How could this have happened? Surely Talas had let him go, she didn’t seem the type to go back on her word, but it couldn’t have been another client. Jim wouldn’t have been in the hospital if it had been a client.

Then, what? a voice inside him asked hesitantly. Jim looked like he’d been in a street brawl. Leonard tried to calm his breathing, and bring his heart rate down so the organ wouldn’t pound it’s way out of his chest.

It’s your fault.

Oh god, could it be his fault? He’d, indirectly, taken Jim out of the only place he’d learned how to survive.

“Please be okay Jim,” he said shakily, still petting the boy’s hair. It didn’t matter that Jim hated him, Leonard just needed him to be alright.

Jim hated him.

He’d almost managed to forget, the shock of seeing him in the hospital had stunned reality for a moment. Leonard pulled his hand away, feeling like he was violating Jim’s wishes, even though he was the doctor. Fuck, he was in charge of Jim for the time being. The kid was going to be furious.

One of Jim’s eye cracked open ever so slightly, “…B-bones?” came a gritty, sleep-caked voice.

Tears burned at the corners of his eyes, “Jim, oh darlin’, yes it’s me.”

“…how? ’re am I?” Jim, asked groggily, “H-hurts.”

“I’m sorry Jim, hold on,” Leonard said, returning to the doorway where the patient charts were scattered, kneeling and searching for Jim’s. He was due for another dose of painkiller. “You’re gonna be okay,” Leonard told him, with resolve he wasn’t sure was justified.

Leonard propped his head up, helping Jim to take a sip of water.

“Bones?” Jim tried again.

“Shhhh, not right now,” Leonard mollified, “Take this, we can talk later.” He placed the tablet in Jim’s mouth and helped him swallow more water. “Just sleep darlin’,” he soothed, easing Jim’s head back to the pillow.

Jim watched him for another moment before keeping his eye open proved too difficult. Leonard waited for his breathing to even back out, assuring sleep, before looking back at the chart. With ever line he read his heart plummeted further. Jim had had the shit beat out of him, and as horrifying as that was there was one note on the chart he couldn’t help but gaping at.
Leonard moved towards the bed again, stopping, unsure if this was too far.

_You’re a doctor, dammit, he told himself, he’s your patient, you’re checking his injuries._

Jim was out cold, but Leonard still felt dirty touching Jim without his consent. He shimmied the sheet down just below his waist, bracing himself as he tugged Jim’s shirt up.

A noise that could only be described as a cry left his throat, his hand flying up to cover his mouth. It was worse than he’d imagined. Jim wasn’t going to be able to cope with this.

Leonard pulled the shirt back down and righted the bedding. He had no doubt that it was the man who’d hurt Jim the last time. The cuts, while lacking the intricacy of the patterns on his thighs and chest, had the same feeling as the scars on Jim’s back. Leonard was furious, rage building inside him.

Again. He hadn’t been able to protect Jim _again._

What was the point of all of it?

He picked up the patient charts from the floor and closed Jim’s door quietly. He walked through the halls in a completely stupor. Thankfully, the hospital was largely empty, and he found Christine in the supply room.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked her immediately.

She didn’t even turn around, “Why didn’t I tell you what?”

“That he—Jim,” Leonard couldn’t help the way his voice cracked, “It’s bad, you should have called me in last night.”

She turned around slowly, surveying him like he might have lost his mind. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Jim. Jim, he’s…” Leonard stumbled over his words, trying to make her understand, “It’s James, _my_ James.”

“Excuse me?”

“Chris, you know what I’m talking about, James from—”

“Leonard McCoy are you telling me that boy, Jim Kirk, in room four—beaten half way to hell—is the one from Madam Sato’s who broke your heart?”

Leonard nodded stiffly.

“It’ll go smother him for you.”

“That’s not very damn funny.”

“I’m serious, you saw him, he’s in a bad way, no match for our fancy drugs. He _hurt_ you Leo, I didn’t know anyone could hurt you like that anymore. I don’t like when people treat my friends like that.”

“Christ Christine,” Leonard growled, pinching the bridge of his nose, “You can’t kill everyone who doesn’t like me, it’ll take you too long.”

She cracked a wry smile, “I think that’s the first joke you’ve made in two weeks.”
“Don’t get used to it.”

They walked out of the supply room to Leonard’s office in silence, when they were both seated Leonard looked glumly at Jim’s chart again. “What happened to him Chris?”

She shook her head, “I tried to ask him earlier, he was attacked. From the looks of it, he knew the attacker, it seemed pretty personal, did you see—”

“I saw.”

“Horrible. Just really cruel. T’Pol found him, she said it looked like he’d been out there—she found him in an ally—all night.” There was a long pause before she added, “I can’t believe that’s really him.”

Leonard shrugged, “I almost don’t believe it myself.”

“She’s so young.”

“He’s not that young.”

“He looks like he’s sixteen.”

“He’s nineteen,” Leonard retorted stubbornly, "I think." God, how old was he? Leonard wasn’t sure he’d ever actually asked. Fuck.

Christine shot him a look. “Those scars he’s covered in, they look pretty bad.”

“A client did that, I think it’s the same man who did this.”

“They look sadistic. I couldn’t believe he was still alive when Trip brought him in, he’d lost so much blood.” She looked at him warily, “Why was he at the inn? I thought…I thought he was…” she trailed.

“He was a prostitute,” Leonard finished for her, “He owed the Madam money. I paid it.”

Christine sighed heavily, like she’d already known, she probably had. “Was that before or after he stopped seeing you?”

“Does it matter?”

“Of course it matters! If it was before then he was just using you, you don’t owe him anything Leo!”

“After. It was after. I did it because I love him, no matter how stupid or pointless it is, I can’t help it. I love him. I just wanted him to be happy, away from all that.”

Christine was quiet for a long time before finally reaching across the desk to cover his hands with hers, “He’ll be alright, we’ll make sure of it.”

Chapter End Notes

Seriously, to everyone who is still reading this: I love you all.
You guys are so patient with me an my completely erratic updates. I have every intention of finishing this.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Jim woke to silence and an empty room.

He didn’t know how long he’d been out, he just knew it was in worse shape than he thought because he’d imagined Bones had been there.

Stop doing this to yourself. Idiot. He’s not here. Bones is not coming back, you made sure of that.

Jim’s head ached and his cheek itched. He wanted to tear the stupid bandage off his face, just to make sure he really still had both his eyes. He felt helpless. Jim wanted to scream, but only a hacking cough came out when he tried.

This was all so stupid. He pushed the covers off and swung his legs over the bed.

Shit, this is a mistake, Jim thought as an agonizing pain shot through his torso. He pushed through it, he wouldn’t let the situation beat him, not now.

Jim needed a sense of what he looked like, he almost didn’t feel like a person anymore. He shifted his weight from the mattress and barely managed to stumble over to the sink just meters from the bed. There was a small mirror mounted on the wall above it.

His face looked hideous, colored black and blue like a deranged children’s drawing, the bandage only adding to the the macabre picture. He pulled at the hospital garb, barely able to hoist it above his hips. It didn’t really matter if he saw it, he knew what he’d find. He remembered Khan’s weight crushing him, slashing at his stomach. More scars. Jagged and uneven, another visible reminder of his broken, fucked up life.

Jim felt light headed, he reached for the counter, grasping for support. His fingers brushed the edge, unable to grip tight enough to keep him upright and he crumpled to the ground. His equilibrium was thrown, his legs unable to support his injured body; Jim’s head made a loud thump as it connected with the floor and he was in even more pain than before.

He heard himself cry out, the room spinning. After a few moments the door flew open, loudly, everything was so loud, and there were two sets of hands picking him up. Jim couldn’t see faces, just shapes and light.

The shapes were arguing, or maybe yelling at him, he couldn’t tell. He could barely hear over the ringing in his ears.

“Of all the ridiculous—Why would you do this Jim?! Getting out of bed in your state!”

“Stop fussing and help me lift him, Leo.”

Once Jim was righted on the bed, a glass was placed between his lips and water trickled into his parched throat. The shapes were still swimming back and forth around him, he supposed they were people.

“…help—Bright…hurts,” he whimpered, trying to make them understand.
“I’m sure it does, darlin’,” a voice that sounded too much like Bones’ told him, “But you hit your head, and I can’t give you anything else until I’m sure you won’t knock into a coma.”

“Jim? How are you doing in there? Jim? It’s Christine, do you remember me? We talked when you first woke up.”

“Yeah,” Jim managed weakly. His vision was clearing up, her blonde framed face was coming back into view.

“This is Doctor McCoy,” she continued and Bones’ face appeared next to hers.

“He knows who I am, Chris,” Bones grumbled, avoiding Jim’s gaze.

“He hit his head, I’m assessing the damage.”

Jim let out a pitiful whine, “Can’t be you.”

“It’s me Jim,” Bones said quietly.

“You c-can’t—Please, Bones-s?” Jim wasn’t sure what he was even asking for. He was so torn. It was too much. He couldn’t process this, not now.

“You’re right,” Bones closed his eyes, his brow drawing into a hurt crease, “I’ll go. Christine will stay with you.”

The thought of watching the doctor leave him was too much. He knew it was selfish, but Jim didn’t want to let him go, “Stay.”

It was such small word, but it bought Bones to a dead stop.

“You don’t mean that,” he said his voice toneless. “You’re in a lot of pain, you’ll regret it later.”

“No, B-Bones! Do-on’t!” Jim said frantically, trying to sit up, only to have Christine’s firm hand push against his sternum, keeping him on the bed.

“I’ll be in my office Chris,” he said flatly not even looking Jim’s way before exiting the room.

“T-tell him t-to come ba-ack!” Jim wailed, tears pricking at his eyes. He had no right to ask that of Bones, not after what he’d done, but it didn’t make it hurt less. His diaphragm cramped as he took in too much air.

“We both know that won’t do any good,” Christine told him curtly. It wasn’t unkind, but there was an edge in her tone.

Tears stung his face as they collected in the bandage, literal salt in his wound. “S-should have d-d-died,” Jim choked.

Christine shook her head, “Not on my watch,” she told him bluntly.

—

“Leo, you have to talk to him.”
It wasn’t the first time this week Christine had had this argument with him, but this was certainly the most adamant she’d been. Leonard was exhausted.

“I told him I wouldn’t ever do something he didn’t want,” He insisted perversely.

Leonard wanted to, more than anything really. Some days it felt like there was a magnetic field pulling him towards Jim’s room. Sometimes he’d stand outside with his hand hovering right above the doorknob, having to mentally talk himself down from going inside.

“God dammit, Leonard McCoy you are the most stubborn man I’ve ever met. He asks for you every day. Every single day.”

“He’s medicated, Chris, he doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

He couldn’t take advantage of Jim. Leonard wouldn’t be like every other person in Jim’s life, that wasn’t the kind of man he was.

“Jim asks for you before he asks for painkiller. You name is the first and last word on that boy’s lips. The nurses feel like monsters every time they have tell him you’re not coming. You haven’t left the hospital in almost a week, and yet you won’t even look at him.”

Leonard shook his head, “He told me I couldn’t see him anymore.”

Christine threw her hands up, “Don’t do it for him then, do it for me. For the love of god, the two of you are making me insane! He wants to see you now, he begs, and I know how much you miss him Leo. What is this accomplishing? It’s cruel for both of you.”

“I don’t know…” Leonard trailed, he was running out of arguments.

“Do you know he tried to find you the other night? He can barely stand, he passed out not even ten steps from his door, Sandra found him lying in the hall.”

Leonard said nothing, he wouldn’t have believed Jim was so foolish except he’d seen it on Jim’s chart the next morning.

“Don’t be a coward. I’ve never associated that word with you before, doctor. Don’t make me start now.” She looked at him, her gaze set in stone. “Unless you don’t love him anymore.”

Leonard was being a coward when it came right down to it. He didn’t know if he’d survive seeing Jim here, like this, only to have the boy reject him again later. “Of course I still love him,” he said quietly.

“Then don’t make me repeat myself.”

—

Jim had been confined to bed for five days. Three of those days, he’d not been allowed more than twenty minutes sleep at a time, confined with only his thoughts and nurses’ eyes trained on him. He could still barely sit up, every movement hellish.

Bones hadn’t been in to see him since, and honestly, Jim couldn’t blame him. Jim had been complete shit to him on their last encounter. He knew the things he’d said had cut right to Bones’ core, Jim
wished that there was a way to take it all back.

He knew that his cold declaration on the stairs trumped a slurred request from a hospital bed, but it didn’t keep it from hurting. Bones had never crossed Jim’s boundaries before and it was both comforting and incredibly frustrating that it persisted. It certainly didn’t stop Jim from asking the nurses for him constantly.

His life was such a mess.

When he woke up on the fifth day he realized he’d been allowed to sleep uninterrupted.

“Well, you’re not comatose, so that’s something,” Christine told him when she came around with his painkiller. It wasn’t as strong as the drug he’d been given on his first day there, but it still made him feel heavy.

“Is Bones here today?”

“Don’t start with that Jim. I’ve got you on a new medicine, this one isn’t as strong, hopefully we can release you tomorrow, as long as you promise to stay in bed for a few more days at home.”

Jim started to laugh humorlessly, setting his ribs on fire in the process. This was his life, just moving from one bed to another.

“Is that funny?”

“Where do you think I’m headed after this?”

Her face paled, “I don’t—”

“Don’t pretend like you don’t know who I was…” Jim trailed.

Oh god, his clothes, the money. Jim hadn’t given any of it a second thought until now, but he’d left everything at the inn. There was no way it was still there, and even if it was he didn’t know how he’d manage ask for it back. Shit.

Jim was babbling incoherent half thoughts at Christine, she stilled him with a hand on his shoulder, listening until she finally caught something she could respond to.

“Oh, your clothes? It’s okay, they’re here,” she said easily, opening a drawer next to his bed. Everything was there, he could even see his money poking out of his coat pocket.

“How?” Jim said, stunned into silence.

Her mouth pressed into a thin line, and she surveyed him a moment before responding, “Doctor McCoy collected them for you.”

His hair stood up on end and Jim’s mouth hung open like she’s punched him.

She took his silence as an opportunity to move on. “Let’s change your bandages. I think this one,” she said as she began to untie the gauze on his head, “Can come off for good. How does that sound?”

Bones had gotten his belongings? There had to be some mistake. There was no logical reason for the doctor to do anything for Jim. Bones had every right to never speak to him again as long as they both lived, and yet…He’d gone out of his way, taken the time and the forethought to get Jim’s meager
possessions.

Jim shivered. “Do you think he’ll come see me?”

She muttered something under her breath that Jim didn’t manage to catch. “This looks much better,” Christine said when the bandage was off, applying more salve.

The light was unnaturally bright in his eye, and for a moment he was worried he was blind after all.

“Can I see it?” Jim asked when the light was no longer a supernova to his iris.

“I don’t know, Jim.”

“Please let me see,” Jim pushed.

Christine sighed heavily, before helping him off the bed and over to the mirror. Jim had to swallow back disgust at the reflection. the cut was thick and slashed through his eyebrow, missing his eyelid and continuing down his cheek in one sleek motion before it came to a stop just above his jawline.

“The swelling will go down,” she told him quietly.

“It’s so ugly, I’m…” Jim struggled to keep his breathing even. He traced his finger along side it. It was hideous. Thank god he hadn’t lost his money because there was no way Talas would take him back now. No one would pay for him looking like this. “That’s enough,” Jim croaked, turning away.

Christine helped him back on the bed. “I’m going to clean your other injuries now, okay?”

“Sure.”

Jim watched her wash and apply ointment to the cuts on his torso, still black and blue from being kicked, his ribcage swollen from the trauma. Usually the nurses did this later in the day, when Jim was too tired to care, but as Jim looked at the wounds now, the cuts almost looked like letters.

“Christine? Does that…say something?”

Her hand quickly obscured the wounds as her eyes darted up to his. “You must be tired Jim, why don’t you close your eyes for a while.”

“I’m not—it does, doesn’t it?” Jim said, a flash to what Khan had growled at him in the alley, ‘So you don’t forget what you are.’

“I don’t think now is…Maybe after you’ve had some more rest.”

She was dodging him poorly, it had to be bad. “What does it say?” Jim asked in a small voice, not even sure he wanted to know.

She kept her eyes fixed on a spot on the wall above Jim’s head.

“Christine,” Jim pleaded with her after she was silence for several minutes.

“Whore,” she said finally, purposely not looking at him, “It says whore.”

He choked out the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. Jim was dismayed although not entirely surprised, he’d known it would be vulgar. He hadn’t really wanted to know, but he couldn’t pretend like it hadn’t happened. Hearing it was worse than he’d imagined though. His lip trembled and he fought a losing battle to hold back his tears.
“Please leave.”

“Jim…”

“P-please.”

She finished tying the gauze back on, tucking the sheet around him before standing up. “I’m sorry,” she said hesitantly, laying her hand on his shoulder.

Jim shrugged it off and curled up, even though it was agonizing, his back to the door. He sobbed into the pillow with abandon.

He was branded.

It didn’t matter what else he did, where he went, or who he became. He wasn’t going to be able to leave his past where it belonged, Khan had made sure of that. He had nothing left, not even his body was his. Thinking about it hurt more than his wounds.

—

“Leo,” Christine said, poking her head into his office, “If there was ever a time to see him, this would be it.”

“Right now?” Leonard asked, panic welling up in his chest; he wasn’t ready. He wasn’t ever going to be ready.

“Yes, right now. He saw it. I had to tell him.”

Leonard felt his stomach doing flips as he made his way to Jim’s room. He’d never felt less qualified for anything in his entire life.

“Just l-leave me alo-one, Chris-stine,” Jim sobbed when Leonard opened the door.

“It’s not Christine,” he said softly.

Leonard wasn’t sure how Jim managed to sit up as fast as he had.

“B-bones?” he choked. He seemed to cry harder when his eyes met Leonard’s.

Hesitantly, he sat on Jim’s bed and the boy pressed against him almost immediately. He clung to Leonard, bawling against his shoulder. He stroked Jim’s hair, running his hand up the length of Jim’s back. Leonard had missed holding him, he’d missed the way he smelled, he’d missed Jim so goddamn much.

At the same time, Leonard felt guilty for missing him. Jim was crying, and he knew he wasn’t going to be able to make it better. He felt more fragile than he had the last time he’d sobbed with Leonard, Jim’s heart racing against his body.

“How can you even stand to touch me?”
“Why would you say that, Jim?”

“Don’t play dumb, I know you saw it,” Jim’s voice broke as he spoke.

Leonard hated the man who did this. He was going to find the monster and kill him. How dare anyone make Jim feel so disgusting that he didn’t even think himself worthy of physical contact? Leonard questioned whether someone this sadistic could even be human.

“It’s not your fault Jim, none of this is.”

“It’s not fair. I was out Bones, it was over and now…it—”

“I know.”

Jim hiccuped, his tone watery, “I can’t believe you’re here, I was so awful to you, but you’re here.”

“Do you want me to go?” Leonard by no means wanted to go, now that he was here. He never wanted to leave the boy again.

“No. I want you here,” Jim said so adamantly Leonard felt his heart leap into his throat.

“Jim—”

“Can you just…just hold me?”

“Of course.” Leonard didn’t know where to start with this, how to talk about what had happened. There was so much to say, so many things that couldn’t be made better now, but it didn’t seem to matter, Jim just needed something to keep him grounded.

Leonard wasn’t sure how long they sat like that, Jim curled in his arms, his tears petering off into silence. The sun was no longer streaming through the window, and Jim’s breathing had evened out a while ago. Leonard kissed the top of his head and Jim let out an almost pained whine.

Leonard untangled himself from Jim, which—despite his best efforts—shook the boy awake.

“Please don’t leave me,” Jim said pitifully as Leonard moved from the bed.

He unscrewed the bottle of painkiller on Jim’s bedside table. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Bones,” Jim started as Leonard helped him swallow the pill, “Christine said you got my things for me.”

Leonard tensed, “Is there a question somewhere in there?”

“Why would you do that?”

He again felt like he’d crossed a line, Leonard wasn’t sure how Jim was taking the information. “I didn’t want you to lose your money and belongings,” he stumbled out, “I didn’t want to make this harder for you than it already was.”

“Just…after everything I said,” he started uncertainly, “I can’t believe you did that for me.”

“Jim, I didn’t stop caring about you when you told me off. I still want the best for you, even—even if that doesn’t involve me.” It was true, but it still pained Leonard to say it aloud. He did want what was best for the boy, even if it broke himself in the process.
Jim swallowed audibly. “I don’t deserve everything you’ve done for me.”

“Darlin’, you deserve more than I could possibly give you.”

—

Bones hadn’t left that night, true to his word. The bed was too small for the both of them, but Bones had brought in a chair that he’d eventually fallen asleep in. Jim watched him for a while, fighting the drowsiness just to make sure he didn’t disappear.

Everything was still wrong. Jim had really hurt him. He could tell every time Bones flinched at his movements, almost like he was afraid to touch Jim. Bones stalled, hesitating before getting too close, waiting to be told off again. Jim still hadn’t apologized, something he kept meaning to do, trying to force the words from his throat, but they always caught. He couldn’t explain himself without admitting his true feelings, and it didn’t feel fair to admit something like that right now.

When morning lit the room, Christine came by to give him his pain medication. She didn’t say anything about Bones unconscious in the chair, just did her best to move quietly so she wouldn’t wake him.

“Miracles do happen apparently,” she muttered glancing over at Bones while waiting for Jim to be done with his water glass.

“Thanks Christine.”

“If you hurt him again,” Christine whispered, leaning over to tuck the sheets around Jim, smiling, “I swear it’ll be the last thing you ever do. He’s a good man”

“I know.” Jim didn’t doubt her for one second. It was clear she cared about Bones, like a sibling perhaps, like a sibling should care for another. And, god, he didn’t want to hurt Bones again, he hadn’t wanted to do it the first time.

“How’s the new drug working for you?” she asked, nodding towards the pill bottle. “You’re probably not feeling as great as before.”

“That’s not really anything new.”

“You know, you might actually be more bitter than Leo.” Christine threw a glance towards Bones’ figure curled on the chair.

“I think I have him beat.”

“I’ll keep you here another day if I have to, Jim. Don’t test me,” Christine said flatly.

Jim laid in silence while Christine exited the room, nearly jumping out of his skin when Bones spoke up.

“Don’t let her bully you like that,” Bones said stifling a yawn.

Jim jumped, “How long have you been awake?”

“Just long enough to hear Christine threatening you.”
“Which part?” He asked warily.

Bones raised his eyebrow, “How many threats does she have stacked against you, Jim?”

“Enough.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry y'all, between moving and starting a new job I've been in a weird headspace. I rewrote this a bunch, I just wasn't happy with it the first couple times. Hopefully it was worth waiting for!

Thank you everyone for the continued support kudos/comments. I keep this open on my laptop almost all the time, I swear on my life I'm going to finish it. <3
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Oh gosh, this chapter puts us at just over 50k, which is absolutely insane. Thank you all so much for your continued support through comments/kudos. It means so much to me, and I love you all so very much!

“He’s well enough to go, Leo,” Christine said simply. She was done with rounds, Leonard back in his office.

“Chris…We can’t, he…he doesn’t know where to go,” He scrubbed a hand over his face. What the hell had he done? This had all been so much simpler in theory, getting Jim out of the house wasn’t supposed to make things worse for him. All of this was Leonard’s fault. The attack, the hospital, Jim’s sudden removal from everything he knew, all his fucking fault.

“It’s gonna cost you if he stays—Don’t look at me like that I know you’re going to foot this.”

Of course she knew, it wasn’t as though he’d make Jim pay for any of this. “Shit, shit…You’re right, you’re always right. Dammit, don’t you ever get tired of that?”

“Not really,” Christine said, nonchalantly organizing clipboards. “Tell him he can stay with you.”

“Christine—”

“Ah! You just said I was always right,” she threw back at him knowingly. “Leo, come on, you have the room, and you know you’re going to help him one way or another.”

“He’ll take it the wrong way, he’ll think I expect something.”

“Well then, tell him you don’t.”

Leonard all but rolled his eyes. That was all well and good in theory, but they were on such thin ice already, he and Jim. In all reality, Leonard had no idea what Jim wanted anymore. The whole thing was so damn confusing. It had to be the trauma, the shock being the only thing that was even letting him look at Leonard. But what else was he supposed to do? Just send Jim away, out on his own, still hurt, still hurting? He couldn’t do that either.

Leonard stood up from his desk suddenly, Christine barely glancing in his direction, marching himself back to Jim’s room before he could change his mind.

Jim’s eyes snapped up and he sat as soon as Leonard walked through the door, wincing.

“Hey,” Jim said quietly.

“We’re going to discharge you Jim.”

The look on Jim’s face was poorly stifled panic. “I don’t know what I’m going to do after this Bones.”
“Anything you want,” Leonard said gently. He felt a surge of guilt, he couldn’t help but feel partially responsible for the terror in Jim’s eyes.

“I don’t even know where I’m supposed to go,” Jim said, letting out a ragged breath.

There it was. Even if Christine hadn’t just talked him into it, he’d have offered when Jim sounded like that.

“You could stay with me until you figure it out,” Leonard said, trying to sound casual, his palms sweating. He stumbled over the words, his tongue trying to move fast enough to detract from the pregnant pause between them. “Ah—that is to say…I mean…you certainly don’t have to. Please don’t feel as though—” Leonard trailed, not sure how to make it less awkward.

“You don’t mean with you though, right?” Jim said after thirty agonizing seconds of silence.

“No! No, shit.” Leonard dragged a hand across his face, a light sweat breaking across his brow. How had he managed to leave that out? “I have an extra room. I wouldn’t…that’s not…”

He must have imagined Jim flinching as he looked away.

“Oh, okay,” Jim said quietly.

“You don’t have to, if that’s not what you want,” Leonard added hurriedly, suddenly wondering if Jim felt trapped.

Jim chewed his lip. “Do you want me to say no? Were you just offering to be nice?”

Fuck, Leonard was screwing this up royally. “I don’t say things I don’t mean.”

“Then I want to stay with you,” Jim whispered.

—

Jim was quiet in the car, letting out only small, pained noises when the vehicle jolted on the road. His fingers trailed across the leather on the doorknob. Jim’s head tilted to the side, watching the people and the buildings as they drove. Leonard had decided talking to fill the space would only serve to embarrass him further so he said nothing.

“It looks so different,” Jim said as they turned down Leonard’s street. “I don’t remember it being this big.”

Leonard didn’t know what to say, assuming Jim didn’t expect a response. He parked the car outside his apartment, hurriedly moving around the car to help Jim with his door. Jim winced as Leonard guided him out of a sitting position. Several women walking down the path stopped, one tried unsuccessfully to stifle a gasp as she saw Jim’s face. Jim’s brow knitted together as he stared towards the ground.

Leonard gave them a pointed glare. “Don’t mind them,” he said in hushed tones. He pulled Jim’s arm around his shoulder, taking some of his weight. Jim hesitantly put an arm around Leonard’s waist.

“Is it this one?” Jim asked looking up at the building directly in front of them.
“No darlin’, I’m sorry, it’s that one,” Leonard apologized, motioning to the one several steps further, “The green door.”

“It’s looks huge.”

“Just the second floor is mine.”

“Still…”

“Sorry about the stairs,” Leonard said self-consciously, halfway up the flight. He hadn’t realized just how difficult this might be for Jim to navigate with his injuries.

Jim drew a sharp breath in preparation. “Don’t worry about it,” he said holding back a pained tone, but leaning harder against Leonard.

Leonard had never been so hyperaware of his apartment as the moment he opened the door. It was cluttered, it was too small, and everything seemed to scream ‘lonely.’ Bringing Jim here had been a bad idea.

“Is this really all yours?” Jim said with what could only be described as wonder.

“I just rent it.”

“It’s really nice.” A lump formed in Leonard’s throat. He’d seen other peoples’ homes, where he lived wasn’t particularly nice, and Jim’s appreciation for his home reenforced how little Jim had come to expect.

Leonard coughed nervously, ushering Jim to the spare room. “I tried to clean it up for you, I hope it’s alright. The top two drawers are free, or you can use the wardrobe, if you’d rather…there’s some extra blankets in there too, if it’s too cold. I didn’t know how many you’d want—”

“Thank you,” Jim said suddenly, cutting of Leonard’s nervous rambling. He studied the floor before adding, “I’m sorry to have caused you extra work.”

“It wasn’t…You’re welcome, it wasn’t any trouble at all.”

“I can pay you, I have some money,” Jim offered uncertainly, setting his things down next to the bed. “Or we could…work out some kind of exchange, if you’d rather.” Jim didn’t have to elaborate, the meaning was clear.

“No, darlin’. I thought we already talked about this, I’m not taking anything from you,” Leonard said softly, he’d known Jim would offer something like this eventually, but it twisted his stomach to know that some part of Jim thought that’s what this was about.

Jim looked at the wall, giving it a self-deprecating smile, “You’re not interested in a disfigured whore, hmm?”

“Jim, that’s not—Shit,” Leonard said, feeling his heart sink, “It’s got nothing to do with that! That’s not why I offered to let you stay with me! I don’t, I couldn’t, expect you to pay me, especially not with sex.” Leonard looked at him pointedly.

Jim continued his staring match with the corner, his lips pressing together in a thin line.

“And don’t call yourself that,” Leonard reached out to touch Jim, his hand lingered wanting to offer comfort but deciding against it at the last second.
“Why not?” Jim spat, “It’s all I’ve ever been.”

“Jim—”

He tore his eyes away from the wall, his lip trembled, “No, fuck you! I can call myself whatever I want. Besides it’s carved in my body! And what do you know anyway? Maybe I like the way it sounds.”

Leonard opened his mouth to say something, but Jim cut him off before he could make a sound.

“You don’t want to fuck me anymore, that’s fine, but you don’t get to tell me what to do. And just because you won’t let me pay you, don’t think I owe you anything.”

“You don’t owe me anything,” Leonard emphasized.

Jim swallowed audibly in the silence, the fire fading from his face. He held Leonard’s gaze nervously. He knew Jim was waiting for some sort of reprimand. While Leonard didn’t know exactly why he’s made Jim so mad, he certainly didn’t blame the boy, his entire world had been uprooted.

“Let me show you were the washroom is,” Leonard offered.

“You’re not…” Jim started uncertainly, “Are you sure?”

“You need to know where the washroom is, Jim.”

Jim huffed out a shaky laugh, “That’s not what I—”

“I know. It’s okay.”

—

Jim cautiously unpacked his bag after he’d seen the rest of Leonard’s apartment, as though at any moment Bones might come storming through the door and tell him to leave.

His outburst earlier had been stupid, childish even, picking a fight for seemingly just the sake of it. He was so tired of rules and taking orders. Certainly though, Bones didn’t need to be the brunt of his frustration, but it had hurt when he’d brushed Jim off with that resolved tone.

Of course Bones didn’t want him now, how could he? Jim was just a patchwork of scars and sin. It was one thing to touch him in the secrecy of the House, but here—in Bones’ home, in the light of day—he shouldn’t be surprised Bones didn’t want him. A black eye was one thing, but his face, cut wide open, not even Bones could look past that. Bones couldn’t love him anymore, not after everything that had happened.

There was a soft knock on the door and Jim jumped, his heart racing.

“Jim?” Bones’ voice asked, muffled through the oak. “Are you awake?” Bones pressed when Jim said nothing.

“Ah, yes…Sorry,” Jim answered finally flustered.
“I was,” Bones said, a bit of an odd tone coming over his voice, “I was going to get some dinner, would you like to come with me?”

Jim stared at the door stupidly for a moment, suddenly realizing Bones wasn’t going to come in without an invitation. He opened it hesitantly, peering around.

“Hey,” Bones again quietly, when he saw Jim’s face.

“You could have come in,” Jim said instead of returning the greeting.

Bones shook his head, “It’s your room.”

Jim felt like he’d had the wind knocked out of him. “I haven’t ever had my own room,” he said aloud without meaning to.

Bones’ face fell, he opened his mouth, as if to say something, but then thought better of it.

“Forget… just… never mind, what were you saying?”

“Ah,” Bones blinked, “Right, are you hungry?”

Jim wanted to lie and say no, it would have been easier, but at the mention of food his stomach gurgled. He was hungry. “Yeah.”

“I don’t really have anything suitable for dinner in the kitchen. I was going to go to the pub.”

“You mean go… out?” Jim asked, self-consciously turning his scared cheek towards his shoulder.

Bones registered the significance immediately, “Yes darlin’, just down the street. It’s a quiet place.”

He didn’t want to go. Jim could still hear the woman’s gasp earlier, but he was hungry, and he certainly didn’t want to be left alone.

“Okay.”

It wasn’t as bad as Jim had feared. Bones has walked on his left side, keeping an arm around him, taking just a little of Jim’s weight. Jim hated that he was limping, he hated having to use Bones as a crutch, but it still hurt to walk completely on his own.

Bones picked a table by the wall in the back. It was a dimly lit place, especially with dusk settling outside, but even so Bones guided Jim to the side of the table where his scar would be in the most shadow.

“What can I get for the two of you?” a kind-eyed woman asked moving towards the table.

“What do you like Jim?” Bones asked him.

“I…” Jim stalled, honestly having no idea. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d had a choice in what he ate. “I don’t…”

Bones nodded understandingly, and ordered for both them. Beers appeared on the table soon after, Jim looked at his warily.

“Can I drink this?” Jim asked after a moment.

Bones’ eyes scanned his furrowed expression, trying to find another meaning in the question. “Yes,” he answered finally.
Jim wasn’t in any position to ignore advice from a doctor, so he took a sip. It wasn’t terrible, better than the drink he’d had at the inn, but still much headier than the liquor he was used to.

“Don’t drink that too fast on an empty stomach,” Bones advised. He rested his hand on Jim’s wrist, emphasizing his point.

Jim’s pulse sped up considerably, he was sure Bones could feel it. He glanced up and found Bones’ expression soft. Jim could feel his check heat with blood, even in the dim light, he was sure Bones could see the blush color his cheeks.

“I’m sorry,” Jim said, not even really sure why he was apologizing.

“It’s okay, Jim.”

Jim didn’t really know what he was eating but he knew it was delicious, more flavor on one plate than he’d consumed in the past five years. He’d honestly forgotten how good food could taste, how much it was possible to enjoy eating.

“Darlin’,” Bones interjected, “Slow down, no one’s going to take it away from you.”

Jim looked at Bones guilty. Not really sure how to admit having food taken away from him was something he’d contented with before the House. It wasn’t even something he’d thought about in years, but it was clearly manifesting now that he was back in the world.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it,” Bones said with a small smile, “But I don’t want you getting sick later.”

Jim honestly did feel a little sick by the time they got back to Bones’ place, but he wasn’t going to mention it to Bones. It was his own fault after all, he’d eaten more tonight than he could ever remember having in one sitting.

“I really am sorry about these damn stairs,” Bones said, shouldering more than his fair share of Jim’s weight.

“S’okay,” Jim answered a little distantly. He’d had two drinks, he felt a little light-headed, content to let Bones all but carry him up the flight.

Bones helped him into a chair before locking the door behind him, pacing around the apartment a few times before coming back to where Jim sat.

“Would you like to wash up?” he asked, finally stopping.

“I guess,” Jim said noncommittally. It seemed like the thing to do in theory, but Jim honestly couldn’t think why he actually should. He wasn’t getting ready for a clients, he was probably still clean from the hospital. The whole ordeal just seemed pointless.

Jim did little to help as Bones pulled him up from the chair, ushering him to the washroom. Bones got him a towel and a washcloth from the linen closet on their way. Bones showed him how to had to twist the plug for the drain to make it stay in place so the tub could fill before closing the door and
leaving Jim alone.

Everything was so damn quiet as Jim watched the water rise. No bustle of others around him, no urgency. He glanced at the window, stars twinkling against the dark sky. Clients were probably arriving at Hoshi’s now, the girls lounging and flirting in the reception room. The night was almost certainly in full swing at his House—his former House, Jim reminded himself—he wondered how Pavel was doing. Hopefully he had a good client tonight, maybe the one he’d mentioned before Jim had left, and not Marcus. It felt surreal not to be there.

Finally, he shut off the water and undressed himself carefully. His reflection in the mirror was startling even though he knew what he’d find as he got undressed. His ribs were brushed with dark shades of of blue and purple, the older scars still coloring his skin with lines of russet. His body looked like it was a piece done by a mad artist and it made him shudder. Even backwards, the poorly scribed word between his hipbones made his stomach twist. Jim almost expected the door to open. For someone to push him over the tub and fuck him until he cried. To use him like the whore he was. But the door stayed thankfully closed.

Jim climbed into the water, grateful it came out of the tap warm. He did his best to clean himself, but it seemed like every way he moved something hurt. The fabric of the washcloth was soft against Jim’s skin, in a way that the rags he’d used to wash in the past never had been. The soap had the same scent he’d come to associate with Bones, the one that was in his hair had when that Jim always smelled when he was wrapped up next to Bones, and now it clung to Jim’s skin as well.

He sat in the bath for a long time, his mind finally, blissfully blank, just staring out the window until finally the water was cold and his eyes started to fall shut. When he tried to stand up his body wouldn’t cooperate. He got up to his knees but after that the weight of the water coupled with his exhaustion wouldn’t let him up.

You’re pathetic, he thought to himself before the panic set in. He tried in vain one last time before he pitifully gave up.

“Bones?” he said at what he hoped was an audible volume, “I…I need help.”

Silence.

“Bones,” he tried again a little louder.

“Jim?” his muffled voice came through the wall, “Are you alright?”

“Mostly. Come in though.”

Silence again.

Finally the brass knob twisted and Bones stood in the doorframe. “What’s wrong?” he asked hesitant but concerned.

Jim tried not to look at chagrined as he felt. “I can’t get up.”

To his credit, Bones didn’t laugh. Instead he stepped over to the tub, leaning over he held his hand out. “Put your hands on my shoulders.”

“I’ll get your clothes wet,” Jim said, hesitating.

Bones smiled gently, “It’s fine darlin’.”
Jim complied, the water from his arms seeping into the fabric of Bones’ waistcoat immediately and
darkening it in patches. Bones placed his hands under Jim’s arms and slowly stood up, taking Jim
with him. Jim’s legs felt wobbly, he leaned his chest against the doctor as he stepped over the ledge
of the bath. The ground felt unsteady and his foot slipped on the tile, his arms looping behind Bones’
neck.

“I’ve got you,” Bones assured, his hands steady against Jim’s back.

Once Jim was out of the perilous tub he should have let go, but instead he rested his forehead on
Bones’ shoulder, inhaling against the fabric.

“You’re alright Jim,” Bones said soothingly against his wet hair. He reached blindly for the towel on
the vanity, wrapping it around Jim.
Jim nodded and agreed wordlessly, he felt like he might be alright when he was pressed against
Bones. Even though he had no right to.

“Your fingers are like ice, and, oh darlin’, you’re shaking. Let’s get you dry.”

Bones sat him, still dripping wet, on the changing chair and disappeared from the room for a
moment, returning with another towel. He blotted the water from Jim’s face carefully, especially
around the wound on his cheek. He towelled off his hair and then Bones kneeled down, drying Jim’s
leg’s and feet carefully, watching Jim’s face as he did.

Jim said nothing. Really there was nothing to say, but it was nice to be touched, especially by Bones,
even if it was just this. Regardless of the innocence of it all, for the first time since before he’d woken
in the hospital, his cock twitched against his leg. He willed himself to calm down, but it was too
much. The more he fought it, the harder he got.

“Am I hurting you?” Bones asked carefully, standing up and taking a step back, clearly misreading
Jim’s expression.

“N-no.” Jim adamantly shook his head.

“Are you sure?”

“You’re n-not,” he stuttered despite himself.

Bones looked at him warily, but eventually took his word. “Come on, you should put on pajamas,”
he said, leaning down so Jim could put his arms back around Bones.

His whole vest was damp and Jim felt even more guilty. Here Bones was, taking care of Jim at the
expense of his own comfort and all Jim could seem to do was think about his cock. There was no
chance Bones didn’t feel Jim’s hardness against his hip, but he didn’t comment.

When they made it to Jim’s room, Bones eased him on to the bed, walking over to the drawers.

“What one are your nightclothes in?”

Jim hesitated, before answering. “Top.”

Bones opened the drawer, glancing through it before pulling out Jim’s rather ragged looking
nightshirt. “Don’t you have pants?” he asked, more surprised than he probably should have been.

“I’m used to sharing body heat,” Jim said matter-of-factly. It was the truth after all, you didn’t wear
clothes with clients and during the day he’d usually shared a bed with Pavel.
He opened his mouth like he wanted to say something and then thought better of it. Bones left Jim sitting on the bed, still hard, before returning with a set of linen nightclothes.

“Bones you don’t have to—”

“It gets cold at night,” was all he said in response. “Do you need help getting dressed?”

Jim thought about it for a second, he didn’t want the answer to be yes, for a myriad of reasons, but it would be worse if he had to ask for help belatedly. “Yes,” he answered in a tone he hoped was more grateful than pathetic.

Bones knelt down, bunching the pants legs up so he could get them over Jim’s feet. The towel slid off as Jim stood up, bracing himself on Bones’ shoulder. He pulled waistband over Jim’s hips, clothing his still pressing erection.

“Bones…” Jim started, feeling so incredibly stupid.

“It’s fine darlin’, no need to explain,” Bones insisted, waiting for Jim to be fully settled on the bed before standing.

Bones unbuttoned the shirt, sliding it up one of Jim’s arms, gently maneuvering the other into the sleeve before pulling it up on Jim’s shoulders.

“Can you do the buttons or should I?” he asked.

Instead of answering, he leaned in and kissed him, knowing it was a bad idea before he’d done it. It was a soft kiss, Jim’s lips just barely capturing Bones’, gauging his reaction. Bones responded similarly, seemingly out of habit, for the briefest moment before pulling away entirely. Jim leaned towards him, chasing Bones’ mouth belatedly.

“Jim…Don’t,” he warned.

There was a tension in his tone that Jim hadn’t heard since his last night at Hoshi’s, but Jim was undeterred.

“But I—” he protested. It was an awful thing to do, selfish really, after everything he’d done to the doctor, but god it felt good. It felt right, Jim wanted him.

Jim wanted Bones desperately.

“No. Absolutely not. You’re tipsy and exhausted.” Bones shook his head, looking down at the floor. “You need more painkiller,” he added, grabbing the pillbox from Jim’s nightstand, “And water, I’ll be right back.”

Bones came back with a tumbler full of cold water. Bones waited while Jim swallowed the pill, managing to only cough a little. “Button your shirt.”

Jim did so clumsily, the buttonholes mismatched from their counterparts. Jim felt a lump forming in his throat, not tears exactly, just frustration, his face fell. He couldn’t walk, he couldn’t have Bones, and he couldn’t even button his goddamn shirt right.

“Don’t look at me like that.” Bones’ eyes drooped, he rested his temple against the wall, “We can’t…not like this. It’s not fair to either of us, whether you know or not.”

“Not like what?” Jim asked groggily. The pile of pillows on the bed calling to him, he really was
exhausted.

“Jim,” Bones huffed, “Please don’t do this, we’ll talk about it later.”

Jim wasn't sure he answered with actual words or just a vague noise as he slid under the covers, which Bones gently tucked around him as he slipped into fuzzy unconsciousness.
Leonard had no goddamn clue what to do anymore. He’d desperately hoped the morning would bring clarity to this whole situation, but aside from the cheerful glow outside, nothing had changed. He still had no idea where to go from here.

Last night had been, frustrating, to say the very least. He had no clue what Jim wanted, he wasn’t sure he even knew what he wanted anymore. Actually, that was a flat out lie. Leonard could try to convince himself otherwise, but all he really wanted was Jim. Despite, or perhaps, in spite, of everything.

Jim…the kid was a hurricane. He’d kissed Leonard maybe as some perverse form of gratitude, gratitude Leonard absolutely did not deserve. The opposite really. But fuck had he wanted it. Jim was still so fragile; Leonard didn’t know how long it would take for him not to feel as though he was taking advantage of Jim. How long before what Jim could discern what, or who, he actually wanted.

All of this was much more complicated than he’d planned. Feelings versus obligations in Jim’s mind were obviously warped. Jim was so many things to him, but he wondered if he’d ever really be anything other than a client—a job—to Jim.

Unsteady footsteps behind him cut short the torrent of thoughts in his head. Jim had braced himself against the wall, limping into the light of the kitchen.

“Good morning,” Leonard said a littler stiffer than he’d meant to.

Jim flushed, “Hi.”

He looked so young, standing there in Leonard’s pajamas. They’d been a gift from his mother last year, by now they were worn in and soft, hanging loosely from his hips and shoulders, the buttons still misaligned. His hair was a bright mess around his face, the soft blush across his cheeks complimenting the whole look. Jim was gorgeous.

“How did you sleep?” Leonard asked trying to be conversational.

“I don’t really remember, I was tired, I think.” It was sadly endearing the way he tucked the side of his face against the wall, trying to hide the scar. It didn’t detract from his glow, but it made Leonard feel terrible, Jim shouldn’t have to carry a physical reminder of Leonard’s decisions.

“How are you feeling? You could take another dose of painkiller if you want.”

“Sore. I probably should.”

Leonard complied, getting him a glass of orange juice and his medication and setting it on the table before helping Jim from the wall to the table. Jim took a swig of the juice and swallowed the pill easily. He looked at the glass for another minute before taking another sip.

“Is this…orange juice?” Jim asked as a memory clearly crossed this face.

Leonard nodded.
“It tastes weird.”

“I can get you something else,” Leonard answered.

Jim shook his head, turning the glass before setting it down. “I’m sorry about last night, okay?” Jim sighed, holding up his head in his hands.

“Don’t worry about it Jim,” Leonard dismissed, trying to think of where they were going to go from here.

“Listen, I…I know you don’t want me anymore, but I just can’t—”

Leonard was taken aback, cutting in, “What are you talking about?”

Jim narrowed his eyes, “Don’t patronize me Bones, I’ve had enough of that to last a lifetime.”

“Darlin’, I…” Leonard started. Oh, this was not how he wanted to have this conversation. Actually Leonard didn’t want to have this conversation at all, but definitely not like this. Leonard wasn’t about to lie to Jim, it would only complicate things later. “I very much still want you.”

“Bones,” Jim laughed, it was a choked sound. He covered his eyes with his hands, scrubbing his face, “Be serious.”

“I am being serious.”

“Fine. Whatever you say,” Jim said, very clearly in disbelief. “I just need you to know that I can’t stop my dick from reacting to you. It’s automatic when someone touches me, especially since I’m going to need…help with things for a while. I tried my best last night, but I can’t help it.”

“I’m a doctor, Jim. I understand”

Jim looked up at him from his hands, “No, you don’t. Not really.”

Leonard’s stomach tightened, that look made him want to shudder. “I’m not offended Jim, and an erection isn’t going to make me change my mind about letting you stay here.”

“Okay,” Jim told him quietly. “I’m sorry to make you take care of me, I hate feeling this useless.”

“Darlin’, you’re not, it’s alright.” Leonard said, his heart breaking with Jim’s tone.

There was an silence that wasn’t so much uncomfortable as it was pregnant.

“Would you like breakfast?”

“Sure.”

“What would you like?”

Jim looked mildly panicked. Leonard was beginning to realize he always looked like that when food was brought up.

“Do you have oatmeal?” he asked hesitantly.

Leonard blinked, “Oh…um, I’m sure I do. Is that really what you want?”

“It’s safe.” Jim offered no further explanation.

Jim sighed, he sounded tired despite it being morning, “I don’t know, I’ve never had coffee.”

Leonard stopped what he was doing and stared at Jim for a moment. His mind beginning to process just how long Jim had been removed from day-to-day life.

“Don’t do that…fuck,” Jim cursed, clearly self-conscious.

He recovered as quickly as he could, “I was going to make some for myself, would you like to try it?”

“Fine.”

Leonard started water on the stove, doing his best not to watch Jim’s every move. When the water was hot enough he poured it off into a press for the coffee, waiting a while longer for it to boil before adding oats to the pot. Leonard had so many questions, all of them trying to spill from his mouth at once. Instead he hesitated, trying to sort them categorically in his head.

“How old are you?” This seemed like the most straightforward question to get out of the way.

Jim looked up Leonard from his hands. He scoffed, “How is that important now?”

Leonard didn’t say anything. It probably wasn’t, not really, but he still wanted an answer. He’d been selfish by not asking up until this point.

“Nineteen,” Jim answered when Leonard was silent for a beat too long, “And a half.”

Leonard managed not to react. It could have been much worse, much, much worse, but fucking hell…nineteen was still so young.

“Is that going to be a problem?” Jim asked, a biting tone covering ill-concealed worry.

“No, no. Of course not. It just seemed like something I should know darlin’.”

“Nineteen,” Jim answered when Leonard was silent for a beat too long, “And a half.”

Leonard should have seen that coming. “Twenty-six.” It felt odd to say. He looked at Jim waiting for a response. “Well, is that going to be a problem?” Leonard asked, quoting Jim’s line back to him.

“Maybe…You’re practically ancient,” Jim tried to say with a straight face but failing, he broke out into a lopsided grin.

Leonard laughed genuinely, not expecting Jim to attempt humor. “I feel ancient.”

Jim chimed in laughing. It was nice to see a smile on the boy’s face, even if it was at his expense. Leonard poured two cups of coffee, setting a mug down in front of Jim before sitting opposite him.

Jim looked at it for a long moment, saying nothing. He picked up the cup, raising it to his lips.

“Careful, it’s hot,” Leonard said automatically.
“I can see that,” Jim said with a sidelong glance. He gingerly took a sip, and then another, and another. Finally he put down the mug. He pushed it away from himself and made a face, “This is disgusting and I’ve swallowed a lot over the past five years, so I know what I’m talking about.”

Leonard laughed again, before taking another drag from his mug. “You get used to it.”

“Wait…is this some kind of joke? Are you seriously going to drink that?”

“I am going to drink it darlin’, I’m practically addicted.”

“Bones, it’s repulsive.”

Leonard retrieved a sugar dish from his cabinet and a bottle from his icebox, “Put a couple cubes of sugar and some milk in, see if that helps.”

Jim made another face, but did as had been asked. He took a hesitant sip after stirring. “That makes it tolerable. If I have to drink it.”

“You don’t have to drink it, I certainly won’t make you,” Leonard assured him.

Jim set the cup down, leaning over the table, searing Leonard’s eyes in an almost unsettling manner. Finally, with an almost imperceptible shake of his head he relaxed. “No, I’ll drink it. It’s time for me to catch up with the world.”

—

Jim stared into the fire, crackling away as he sat in Bones’ deep, cushioned chair, curled under a thick green blanket. The book next to him was closed, and the tea cold and long forgotten. He didn’t know what to do. Bones had gone a few streets over for groceries so they wouldn’t have to go out for dinner again. He’d asked if Jim wanted to come, offering to show him around, but Jim had declined, he couldn’t face outside yet. Inside was almost too much as it was.

He felt as though there had to be something he was forgetting, something he should be doing. Jim hadn’t had any real time to himself in the past five years, he was either cleaning, sleeping, or being fucked, and he wasn’t entirely sure how to cope with not having to do any of those things.

His cock was insistently hard against his stomach, displeased with the sudden decrease in activity, making up for lost time at the hospital. He shouldn’t do this in Bones’ living space, but it wasn’t as though he could focus on anything else. Everything smelled like Bones, and he missed the doctor’s warm body against his.

Fuck it. He didn’t answer to anyone.

Jim pulled the blanket on him away, unbuttoning the pajama bottoms to wrap his hand around his cock. He hissed, it had been weeks since he’d touched himself, since anyone had touched him at all. With a loose fist he stroked himself slowly, closing his eyes and taking a deep, shuddering breath. His bruised ribs still ached as he inhaled, but his cock was insistent. God, it felt so good to do this, his head falling back against the plush chair. Jim unbuttoned his shirt, the cold air hitting him like an open door, he ignored it in favor of tweaking his pebbled nipple. He stopped himself from looking down, he knew what he’d see scrawled on his stomach.

As much as Jim tried to think of nothing, his mind couldn’t help wandering back to Bones. His voice, his lips, his fucking hands, it was all Jim could think about, touching him, holding him, such a steady reassuring feeling. Jim closed his eyes, it didn’t matter, if Bones didn’t want him. He wouldn’t know if Jim got off to the idea of his mouth, or his hands, or whatever the fuck Jim’s mind conjured.
Jim’s hand sped up, his cock, jumping and dribbling precome over his fingers. He imagined it was Bones, that Jim was sitting in lap, leaning back against his chest, with Bones’ hand on his cock.

“Come for me, Jim,” imaginary Bones whispered to him, “Come on darlin’.”

Shit, he was already so close, thank god he wasn’t actually with Bones. This was going to be embarrassingly quick. Jim sucked in a sharp breath, pulling thumbing the slit of his leaking cock, squeezing himself.

“Bones,” Jim cried as his cock pulsed in his hand, “Oh Bones, fuck!” Jim’s release spurted on his heaving chest, his orgasm hitting him like a brick wall. He continued stroking himself through it, whining and panting.

When he came down he felt cold, and a little guilty. He had to clean himself up before Bones got back, he couldn’t let the doctor find him like this. Jim slowly clambered out of the chair, doing his very best not to get come in the upholstery.

He limped his way to the kitchen, he wasn’t sure he’d make it to the bathroom. Jim leaned his hip against the sink, using the washrag draped over the edge to clean himself up. The angry red word stared at him. Whore.

Whore.

Whore.

He fought the bile forming in his throat, buttoning his pants and shirt back up, rinsing the rag out. Now that he’d used it, putting it back in the sink felt gross, he’d seen a pile of laundry in the bathroom.

Jim sighed, he hated feeling so fucking helpless. He stumbled to the long hallway wall, using it as a crutch to make it to the bathroom. By the time he got there he was out of breath, dropping himself into the chair in the corner after tossing the rag into the pile.

Do not cry, Jim told himself, You have to live with this, you have to survive. He was so tired of crying. Don’t make Bones save you from this goddamn bathroom again, his mind begged, willing him out of the chair.

By sheer force of will, he made it back to the living room chair, pulling the blanket up to his chin. He’d begun to doze off when the door squeaked open, nearly giving him a heart attack.

“Jim?” Bones called out.

Jim poked his head up from the cushioned chair. “Hey,” he said, rubbing his eye.

“Are you okay, darlin’?” Bones said, setting his bags down in the kitchen and coming over to where Jim sat. He his hand stuttered in mid air, as though Bones was reaching to touch Jim’s cheek but decided better of it.

Jim reached out instead, taking his hand and rubbing Bones’ thumb with his own. “I’m fine.”

Bones flinched at the gesture, before squeezing Jim’s hand back, “Alright. Good, darlin’. I’m glad. It’s busy out today, you wouldn’t have enjoyed the trip.”
“Thanks for not making me go.”

“Of course.”

—

It was a rough week. Clearly neither Jim nor Leonard was completely sure of their role with the other. Jim still acted as though he felt strange in Leonard’s apartment, still asking before getting out dishes, and apologizing for any trace of himself he left in the main room.

Leonard supposed that that was to be expected, but, shit, it made him uncomfortable. He didn’t really know where the line was drawn, and Leonard was afraid he wouldn’t find out until he crossed it.

Jim, for his part, had been well behaved when it came to needing help dressing or getting around. Leonard could still tell he what his touch did to Jim, no matter how diligently he tried to hide it. The poor kid was so starved of normal affection, he didn’t really know what to do.

Leonard wondered what it would have been like if Jim hadn’t gotten hurt, were he’d have ended up. He knew he’d still be heartbroken, but he wondered if it wasn’t worse this way, having Jim so close but so confused, stuck in this infuriating middle ground. Jim would probably be a million miles away by now, apprenticing a new trade, making a new life. Instead he was with Leonard who felt like he was doing nothing but tying Jim to his past.

Jim’s light snore started him from his thoughts. Jim’s head rested against his thigh, his body curled on the small couch under what had become his blanket. For a brief moment, Leonard let himself pretend everything was alright between them. That there was no awkwardness and that Jim wanted to be sleeping like this next to him, that it wasn’t just exhaustion and convenience.

Leonard folded the paper he’d been reading aloud to Jim before he’d fallen asleep and Leonard had gotten lost in his own mind. The crinkling startled Jim’s sleeping figure.

He looked up at Leonard, blinking heavily. “Why’d you stop?” he asked, sounding a little grouchy.

Leonard couldn’t help but smile, “You fell asleep.”

“I didn’t,” Jim said indigently, covering his mouth to yawn.

“You did, darlin’.”

“I was listening,” Jim said, insistently, shifting so he was laying on his back, staring up at Leonard. “You were reading about the paved road they’re putting in and how the mayor’s worried it’ll effect the trains,” he continued when it was clear he wasn’t making his point.

Leonard raised an eyebrow. That was the last thing he’d read before he’d noticed Jim’s eyes were closed. “My apologies. Should I read the next page?”

“No, if you already did it’s fine, Jim said, looking away quickly.

“i didn’t read it yet.”

“You…didn’t?” Jim hesitated, “I thought you stopped because you were tired of doing it out loud.”
“Jim I stopped reading because I thought you were asleep and i didn’t want to wake you.”

“…Not because you’re tired of me?” Jim asked quietly.

Leonard’s already fragmented heart broke a little more.

He’d been reading the paper to Jim every night all week because Jim read through half his book collection while he was at the hospital. It seemed to relax the kid, exposing him little by little to the outside world without throwing him headfirst out the door, and because they couldn’t read the paper at the same time. Jim had probably closed his eyes in content and Leonard had stopped reading to him. Jim had made the assumption he was being a burden and instead of saying anything he’d just accepted it and fallen asleep with that as his last waking thought.

“Darlin’…no, of course not. I wouldn’t do that to you, not after everything. I’m sorry I upset you.”

Jim molded himself into a sitting position, he winced, but he was able to to do it on his own. He was in Leonard’s person space, no more than five inches from his face, “Stop being so goddamn nice to me,” he said in a suddenly steel tone.

Leonard recoiled as though Jim had hit him. He was speechless.

“I mean it. This is fucking hard enough for me as it is without you letting me lay with you on your couch while you read me the goddamn paper.” Jim’s voice trembled slightly but he didn’t stop, “You feel too sorry for me to tell me to get the hell out and I’m too scared to know what the fuck to do. We’re like some sort of messed up couple who doesn’t fuck and just plays house. It’s confusing the shit out of me.”

Leonard’s mind reeled, unsure how they were suddenly having this conversation. He’d been so busy sorting though his own thoughts he hadn’t spared much time to think about what story had been writing itself in Jim’s mind.

“Jim…shit. I don’t want to make anything harder for you, but I want you to understand one thing: I do not want you to leave. Of course I feel sorry for you—I’d be a heartless bastard if I didn’t after everything—but make no mistake about it, I want you here.”

“Why? Why would you want me?” Jim asked, his lips pressed together.

Leonard looked at him for a long moment. Because I love you, he thought, but he wasn’t a fool, he wasn’t going to say that again; not what happened after the last time.

“You know why,” Leonard whispered.

“It doesn’t make sense,” Jim shook his head, “It doesn’t…”

“What do you want Jim?”

“It doesn’t matter what I want.”

“Of course it does, darlin’, how many time do I have to tell you? You matter.” Leonard said gently, reaching out for Jim.

Jim flinched at Leonard’s outstretched hand, ducking his face against his shoulder.

Leonard mentally chastised himself, he had to stop touching Jim like it was no big deal. If Jim wanted something he was more than capable of asking. Leonard started to get up, he had to stop
hurting Jim.

“No, no, Bones, god, please don’t go,” Jim begged, grabbing his hand. His whole demeanor had shifted from defensive to dismay in an instant. “I don’t know how you can stand to look at me,” Jim muttered. When Jim looked down at the blanket the light from the fire danced on the thick raw scar on his face.

“Are you worried about this?” Leonard said realization suddenly dawning on him. Not letting go of Jim Leonard tilted Jim’s chin with his free hand, facing the mark towards him.

Panic welled in Jim’s eyes, his lower lip quivering. “You can’t still feel the same, maybe before, but not…not when I look like this.”

“Darlin’ this doesn’t change anything,” Leonard felt a lump forming in his throat. Jim’s looks had been so valued for all of his recent life, how could this not factor in. Leonard wasn’t stupid, he’d noticed how Jim favored his right side, doing his best to shield the scar from view, but he hadn’t really understood what it had meant.

“This is beautiful,” he softly, running the back of his hand over the length of it, “It means you survived.” They weren’t hollow words to him. Jim had endured, and if that wasn’t beautiful, he didn’t know what was.

Lost in his own thoughts Leonard didn’t immediately notice Jim leaning in hesitantly. His lips so close that Leonard could feel Jim’s breath ghosting across his own. This was a bad idea. Except Jim wasn’t drunk, wasn’t half asleep. Jim was fully aware of what he was doing.

“Darlin’…” Leonard breathed, their lips hovering barely a breath apart.

“Please.”

Leonard pulled back enough to look at him, squeezing his hand. “Jim, I just want to make sure…” Leonard wasn’t really sure how to finish that sentence. There was no way, after everything this could be anything but misguided gratitude. Leonard didn’t need pity, he couldn’t let this happen. This was all so fast for Jim and Leonard was the only familiar thing left in his life. And yet…

“Let me. I want to,” Jim said urgently, he was practically in Leonard’s lap. He matched Leonard’s grip on his hand, his eyes woefully wide.

Strong-willed as he was, Leonard couldn’t say no when Jim looked at him like that. He moved in and allowed himself to melt against Jim’s lips, kissing him deeply. Fuck, it felt so good to hold Jim like this again, to just himself go. It felt so right, so simple in this moment to just let them be. Jim was pliant and soft, leaning into the kiss with his whole body, his lips chasing Leonard’s every movement. Leonard sucked gently on his bottom lip, Jim’s tongue darting into his mouth for a quick second before it was gone.

“Slow down,” Leonard whispered, breaking them apart for a moment.

Jim whined as he pulled back, drawing in a breath too sharply.

“Easy, darlin’, I’m not going anywhere,” Leonard urged, lightly scraping his fingers through the short hair at the base of Jim’s skull.

“More,” Jim insisted, nuzzling his nose against Leonard’s jaw.

Leonard was all too happy to give more, capturing Jim’s trembling lips once again. He’d missed this
so much. He’d missed them.

He hated that he was doing this, it wasn’t fair to Jim. It certainly wouldn’t be fair to himself later when Jim changed his mind, but nothing had ever felt more right and Leonard couldn’t pull away.

Chapter End Notes

Here we are at Chapter 15!! You all have no idea how much your continued support means to me on this work. It's like my child at this point and I'm so honored that you continue to read, and comment, and stick this monster out with me.
Jim woke to sunlight and a warm body next to his. For a second he forgot where he was, trying to remember who had fucked him and which House he was at. Blinking around he realized it was Bones’ room, it was Bones next to him, he wasn’t at Hoshi’s or Talas’, he was home.

Home.

His brain stuttered for a moment before he could process that. He thought of this—not only the apartment, but Bones too—as home. He wasn’t sure exactly when his mind had come to that conclusion, but he couldn’t brush it off, not that he wanted to. Jim moved closer to Bones, pulling the doctor’s arm around him. He closed his eyes, content to do nothing else but lay here like this for as long as he could.

He’d begged Bones to let Jim stay in his room, although he hadn’t really put up much of a fight. Jim couldn’t bear the thought of Bones ignoring him again in the morning, trying to pretend like nothing had happened when it was so clear Bones wanted this as much as he did.

“Jim, you have to get some rest,” Bones had insisted.

He’d kissed Jim senseless for the better part of thirty minutes, it really had been getting late. Jim was hard, his length pressing into Bones’ thigh. His knee flush against Bones’ groin Jim could feel how much the was affecting him too. Jim couldn’t imagine Bones would do anything about that, it had taken so much insistence to just get a kiss.

“Don’t go,” Jim had begged when Bones stood up, grabbing at his hand frantically.

Bones had stood stock still, seemingly fighting an internal battle, “I’ll be down the hall.”

“No, please, stay with me.”

“...Jim,” Bones had hesitated but Jim could tell his resolve was wearing thin.

“We don’t have to fuck, I won’t even ask. Please just don’t make sleep alone.”

“Ohkay. Okay darlin’, come on then.”

“Yeah?” Jim had said, almost not believing he’d won.

Bones had gingerly helped Jim off the couch. “Yes, let’s get some sleep,” Bones’d told Jim before helping him down the hall to his room.

True to his word, Jim hadn’t pestered Bones. He hadn’t asked even once, he was really too worn out for the back and forth, so contented by Bones’ arms around him that he’d have felt selfish asking for anything else. Jim had fallen asleep, face buried in the soft fabric of Bones’ shirt with Bones’ chin resting against his head.

Jim realized for that the first time in weeks, he wasn’t tired. He felt...happy, something he hadn’t dared to feel in a long time.
He watched Bones sleep for a while, his face unburdened by the furrowed brow that usually accompanied his waking look. He looked so soft, the way he always was with Jim.

After the better part of twenty minutes Bones blinked heavily. Confusion clouded his face as he took in Jim, before he settled and remembered what had happened.

“Hey,” Jim said, not really knowing what else to say, feeling extremely vulnerable.

“Morning darlin’,” Bones said. He clasped Jim’s hand in his, bringing it to lips and kissing it gently.

Jim’s heart felt like it was going to beat out of his chest. He didn’t know what to do, he’d never felt so secure yet so scared in his life. This closeness to another person was all he’d ever wanted, what he’d spent so many hours hoping for. Home, safe, loved: words he wasn’t ever sure he’d be able to attribute to himself ever again, but it was up to Bones. He would get to decide if Jim could keep those things, Jim felt as though he’d handed over his heart.

“What’s going on in there?” Bones asked, searching Jim’s eyes as he kissed each one of Jim’s fingers.

Jim felt himself shaking, “Nothing.”

Bones’ brow narrowed in concern, “Something.”

“I’m fine.”

“Are we okay?” Bones asked, uncertainty flashing across his face, “You don’t regret last night?”

“No, fuck. No, no…of course not.”

“You’re sure that I’m not crossing—You know you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.”

“I know, Bones. Please believe me, I want to.”

Bones seemed unconvincing, but Jim didn’t want to elaborate. Instead, Jim pressed himself into Bones, their lips brushing familiarly. His fingers gently tracing Jim’s collarbone, Jim’s hand moving down to rest on Bones’ hip. It felt so easy, so familiar. Jim’s lips were chapped and rough, he’d been biting and licking them nervously, but it didn’t seem to bother Bones. They kissed tentatively, each waiting for the other to pull away. After several minutes it was Jim who broke them apart.

“You’re not gonna hurt me,” Jim whispered.

Bones opened his mouth to protest, Jim shushed him with a press of his fingers.

“You’ve never hurt me, not ever,” Jim promised.

“I wish no one had ever hurt you, darlin’,” Bones said.

“You make me forget anyone ever has,” Jim said quietly.

They laid in comfortable silence, each holding the other like a lifeline. Bones rubbed large, soothing circles on his back. Jim basking in the protection of his arms, pressing small kisses to throat.

“Do you have to go to work?” Jim asked finally, twining and untwining his fingers with Bones’ unconsciously.

“No, I don’t have to go anywhere today.”
“Will you take me out?”

“Out where?”

“Anywhere, I just want to see outside.”

Bones stilled for a moment before leaning down to kiss his forehead, “Sure darlin’, I’ll take you wherever you want.”

Jim smiled. His heart raced a little, knowing that Bones really would take him anywhere, this all felt like it was too good to be true. He’d never known anyone to be this patient with him, this indulgent.

“You…you know you can go out whenever you want, don’t you?” Bones asked suddenly sounding apprehensive. “I don’t have to go with you.”

“Yes you do,” Jim froze, feeling small and stupid. “It’s too much, I don’t know anything about out there.”

“Okay darlin’, that’s okay,” Bones said gently, “I’d love to go out with you.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, Jim, anything you want.”

—

Jim was able to dress on his own. Leonard was thrilled that he was feeling well enough to do so, but at the same time, it made him selfishly nervous, knowing that Jim wasn’t going to need him forever. His heart was going to break all over again when Jim realized he didn’t need Leonard anymore. Not that he meant to keep Jim here, he would absolutely let the boy go when he was ready—it was the biggest stipulation he’d set for himself when he’d invited Jim to stay with him—but it was going to hurt. Leonard could see that that time was fast approaching.

Jim had helped him with breakfast, minding the coffee press. Leonard still laughed when Jim finished off a cup, knowing Jim really had no taste for it.

“Would you like to walk, or should we take the car?” Leonard asked, handing Jim his overcoat.

“Can we walk, so I can get my bearings?” Jim asked, “I probably won’t be able to go far though.”

“Whatever you’d like, darlin’.”

It wasn’t too cold, the sky cloudy, but not dreary as they walked. It was almost calming, just being out and about like this, but Jim still bristled when people looked at him, even though most had the decency not to react.

“I feel like everyone knows,” Jim whispered as they sat on a park bench, allowing Jim to rest.

“That everyone knows what?”

“What I am, who I was.”
“No one can tell, Jim, I promise. If they know, it’s because they were there.”

It helped a little. At one point Jim had grabbed a hold of his hand to steady himself and he hadn’t let go, and that seemed to help more.

He took them down to the market, Leonard wanted to be sure Jim knew where to get food without his help, not wanting that to play any in part in Jim’s decision to stay or go. Jim would ask what buildings where as they passed, Leonard offered a short narrative when possible.

They stopped at a pub for lunch, Jim seemingly more comfortable as the day wore on. He chattered on about how different things looked, how much the cars had changed, how much bigger the town was than where he’d grown up, getting lost in all of it. Every now and then Jim would stop, and look up at Leonard, like he wasn’t sure of himself and Leonard would offer a smile and an “I’m listening, darlin’,” and Jim would pick back up.

On the way back to Leo’s apartment, they walked passed by an auto repair shop. Jim stopped, looking over several of the cars parked out front.

“Leonard! How have you been?” A man came out from the shop asking. His hair was damp with sweat, shirtsleeves rolled to his elbows, his arms speckled with grease. “Your old girl still running alright?”

“Good to see you, Chris!” Leonard replied, shaking his hand. “She’s doing great, I’d have brought her by otherwise.”

Chris grinned and clapped him on the shoulder. His eyes caught sight of Jim, who was hanging back just a little. “Who’s this? What’s your name, son?”

Jim looked at Leonard hesitantly, he nodded, not wanting to overstep and introduce Jim himself.

“Jim, Jim Kirk,” Jim said after a pause that was slightly too long to be comfortable.

Chris shook his hand, even though Jim hadn’t properly offered it, “Good to meet you, Jim.”

“This is Christopher Pike,” Leonard told Jim, finally remembering his manners, “He takes care of my car.”

Chris beamed, “Don’t you forget it, doctor.” He looked back at Jim, “I saw you admiring the 13.9 hp BSA, she’s a thing of beauty, no?”

Jim nodded, “It’s nicer than Bon—Leonard’s for sure.”

Leonard did a double take at Jim who merely shrugged while Chris let out a hardy laugh.

“Oh, I like him, Leonard,” Chris said, wiping the sweat from his brow. “What brings you both out here today?”

The humor in Jim’s eyes drained away and he looked at Leonard warily.

“Jim’s just moved here from a ways out, I’m showing him around,” Leonard answered easily.

“That’s good of you. You stop by any time, let me know if you or your girl need anything. It was good to meet you, Jim.”

“You too,” Jim echoed as Chris headed back into the shop.
"See you around, Chris."

They were barely ten paces down the street before Jim grabbed his hand. He didn’t say anything, and Leonard didn’t have to take his pulse to know his heart was racing. Truth be told, Jim had reacted much better than Leonard had thought he might have.

“We’re going home, right?” Jim asked after a couple blocks.

It took everything in Leonard not to react. Jim had just called the apartment home and he was too touched to be worried about what that meant.

“Yes, darlin’,” he answered simply.

—

“Oh goddamnit, Leo,” Christine said sharply when she came into his office.

“Good morning, Christine,” Leonard said blandly in response.

“What did he do? I swear—”

“He didn’t do anything,” Leonard answered, not bothered anymore by the fact that she could practically read his mind.

“Well then, why do you look like you’re going to throw up?”

Leonard shot her an offended stare, “I do not.”

Christine stared him down, raising her eyebrows, “Tell me.”

“He kissed me,” he said quietly.

“And did you kiss him back, you absolute buffoon?”

Leonard scowled at her. “Yes.”

“Well thank the lord for that!” Christine massaged her forehead, “After all of that bemoaning I listened to about how it was unethical…Leonard McCoy, you are going to make me grey! Do you know what at the worst part is? I know that’s not all of it!”

“Do you really think it’s okay?”

“We are not having that conversation again. I already told you, I’ve never seen someone look at another person the way that boy looks at you.” Christine dropped herself in to the chair opposite of his desk, “Go on then, tell me the rest.”

It was little disconcerting the way she always knew when he wasn’t telling the whole truth. “He called my apartment ‘home’ yesterday, Chris.”

Leonard was met with absolute silence, something Christine rarely offered. He looked up to see her mouth hanging slightly open.
“Shit, I knew that wasn’t good!” Leonard moaned into his hands.

“Leo, no.” She said softly, “That’s…that’s sweet. He really trusts you.”

He knew Christine was being nice, but it still stirred a nasty feeling low in his stomach, it was his fault Jim had gotten hurt at all, Jim shouldn’t trust him.

“Why do I think you’re still apprehensive about all of this? It’s obvious he cares about you. Let yourself be happy.”

Leonard’s shoulders hunched, he didn’t know why he was fighting all of this so hard, but it just seemed too easy. Nothing had ever fallen into place like this for him before.

“Well, you think on that, but in the meantime,” Christine said, standing and picking up the charts from the edge of Leonard’s desk, “You’ve got an appointment with Mr. Keenser in ten minutes.”

He groaned in response, looking up at her, the man was a hypochondriac and a non-stop talker.

She nodded knowingly and strode from his office, leaving Leonard with only his thoughts again.

—

Jim slept in Bones’ bed the entire week. He didn’t ask exactly, but Bones didn’t question him either. The nightmares still came, now that he wasn’t dependent on medication to get him to sleep, but they were few and far between, Bones waking him up before they got too bad.

He liked living with Bones, but now that the pain wasn’t constant he had to admit, he was getting a little bored. Bones had to work five days a week, and while Jim was still exhausted most days, there was still a significant amount of time he was by himself. He did his best to occupy the time by listening to the radio, and reading his way through Bones’ shelves.

He’d asked Bones to take him to the library one evening, which had been amazing. The sheer amount of books to pick from was a dream, and the fact that he was allowed to borrow widened his eyes so big that Bones had asked him if he needed to sit down.

One afternoon he’d taken Bones’ toaster apart with the help of a library book, only to have Bones return before it was righted. Bones had laughed and told him it needed to go back together tomorrow. Jim had somehow managed; Bones didn’t say anything about how the handle got suspiciously hotter than usual after that.

Even though he was generally content, he was still alone far more than he really liked to be. Jim sometimes found himself missing the hustle of the House, the familiarity of there always being someone around. And Jim undoubtedly missed sex. It came as a shock to him since he’d joked with the others about the blessed day when he didn’t have to fuck every night, but not having the option at all was different. Perhaps the difference between the idea of respite and the reality of his situation was that he still wanted Bones. The doctor always shut down his advances quickly, and prompted Jim to back off as well. Jim had no desire to lose the intimacy of sleeping in his bed for such a controllable reason, but it was wearing on him.

“Will you ever fuck me again, or is that off the table forever?” Jim asked bluntly one night while they
were eating dinner. He needed to know, even if he didn’t like the answer because at least if he knew he could stop hoping.

Bones sputtered, covering his mouth with a napkin. He paled, “Darlin’…It’s not that simple.”

Jim pushed away from the table and stood up, knocking his still-healing rib against the edge, he winced, “Is it because you’re not paying for me anymore? Because I guess you could still pay me if that would change your mind.” It was one of the only things his mind had come up with, one of the only things that had really changed between them.

“Jim, no! Of course not, that’s got nothing to do with it,” Bones said, mouth hanging open in shock.

“What is it then? Is it my face? That fucking word on my stomach? Did I do something? I don’t understand why—”

“You told me you never wanted to see me again!” Bones finally snapped, throwing his napkin down and standing as well.

Jim flinched back and froze. “I never said that.” He hadn’t exactly. He’d said Bones couldn’t see him anymore—not that he didn’t want to see him—back on the stairs at Hoshi’s, but Bones couldn’t still be caught up on that.

“Jim, I may be a lot of things but stupid isn’t one of them. You made it very clear that you were done with me, and I can’t help thinking that some part of you still means that.”

His face fell, Bones did mean that. Jim had honestly thought his actions since then had made up for it but no matter what had happened since, Bones was still consumed by it. Jim really shouldn’t have been surprised, he’d been mean and adamant, doing everything in his small realm of power to chase Bones away and make sure he didn’t come back.

“I don’t feel that way. I never meant it,” Jim said, his voice small. He felt foolish.

Bones balked, “Of course you did! Why else would you have said—”

“You won’t understand!” Jim cut him off, scrubbing his hand over his face, “I don’t understand now! Nothing’s changed since then, Jim. If you didn’t want me then, how is now any different? Every time I touch you I think, ‘Does he want this or is he just tolerating me, does he just feel like he has to?’ I can’t stop thinking I’m forcing you somehow…I couldn’t live with myself if I forced you to—” Bones broke off suddenly, his squeezing his eyes closed.

Jim’s chest tightened. There he was, thinking there was something wrong with him, that Bones had to be repulsed in some way by his presence. Bones was still trying to figure out what he’d done wrong, trying to figure out if Jim was simply allowing his advances because he felt obligated.

“No you still love me?” Jim asked after the better part of two minutes of silence.

Bones looked at him hesitantly, trying to discern if he should answer honestly. He was silent for what felt like an eternity. “…Yes,” he muttered finally.

Jim blinked, thrown. He’d been expecting a more ambiguous answer than that, not for Bones to be so confident. “What would you say if I told you I loved you back?”

“Don’t tease me Jim, please,” Bones said shaking his head.
Jim pushed again, “What would you say?”

“I would say you’re confused about the difference between love and gratitude.”

“That’s not fair. I’ve been grateful to people, but I haven’t ever felt like this.”

“Jim…” Bones trailed, taking several steps back and hitting the sink.

It was now or never, Jim supposed. “I do love you. I think I fell in love with you the first time you bandaged me up, and then again when you didn’t leave.” It felt so odd to say it out loud, to admit something he’d always thought would have to remain a secret.

Bones looked as though he’d had the wind knocked out of him, “Since all the way back then? Darlin’, why didn’t you say anything?”

“It was against the rules, one of my only goddamn rules was not to fall for you,” Jim said, running his hand haphazardly through his hair.

“You had a rule against falling in love with me?” Bones asked doubtfully.

“Not just you. Anyone.”

“Then why…the last day I saw you at Madam Sato’s…why did you…?”

“We couldn’t—” Jim started, his tone injected with frustration, “It didn’t matter, what I wanted.” He stared at the floor angrily.

He watched Bones’ feet carry him across the kitchen to where he was standing, just out of reach.

“It’s always mattered, Jim.”

Jim looked up, his eyes burning with frustration, he still didn’t understand, but how could he? “What if I had told you, Bones? Hmmmm? What then? It wasn’t my place to throw something like that at you! What if you hadn’t felt the same? Some pathetic whore dumping all that on you. You’d have never believed it, or worse, you might not have come back.”

Jim closed his eyes, his brow furrowing at the thought. He took a deep breath before continuing, “You don’t—God, Bones you don’t know what it was like for me.” Jim shivered, “I haven’t wanted anything as badly as you since, fuck I can’t even remember—You were all I had Bones…you still are.”

“Jim—”

Jim shook his head tersely, “Don’t say anything.”

Bones reached out, cupping Jim’s chin in his hand, “You can’t ask me not to say anything after all that…”

“Then just tell me it’s going to be okay.” That’s what Jim really needed to hear, after confessing what had been eating at him for so long, all he wanted to hear reassurance.

Bones pulled Jim into his arms, and Jim melted into him, allowing himself the comfort of Bones’ body against his. “We’re going to be okay, darlin’.”
The next morning, Leonard was still reeling from the previous night’s conversation. It was so unexpected that Jim would return his feelings he was worried he’d made the whole thing up. Part of him wanted to shake Jim awake and ask if it was really true. But Jim looked so serene that he couldn’t bear the thought of disturbing him.

Leonard sat there, watching Jim sleep for several more minutes before he sighed and grudgingly got out of bed, he had to be at the hospital in less than an hour. Even though he’d tried to be careful, his motions must have jostled the bed enough to wake Jim.

He yawned widely, rubbing his sleepy eyes. It took him a minute to analyze his surroundings, finally finding Leonard in the room. “Are you going to work?” he asked hesitantly.

“Yes, darlin’.”

Jim sat up slowly, stretching like a cat as he did, “Do you have to go?”

“Yes, I’m sorry. I don’t want to, if that’s any consolation,” Leonard told him sincerely.

“A little,” Jim relented. “Kiss me, goodbye?”

Leonard didn’t have to be asked twice. He leaned over the bed, kissing Jim lightly, making sure it was chaste so he couldn’t be drawn in for more.

“I love you,” Leonard told him quietly.

Jim blinked up at him when he pulled away, exploring Leonard’s face for a moment. Leonard tried his very best not to let it affect him when he got no response, he walked towards the door, his hand on the knob before he finally heard: “I love you, too.”

It had been barely more than a whisper, but when Leonard looked over his shoulder he saw Jim’s cheeks flush pink when he smiled in acknowledgment.

Leonard was exhausted when he finally got home that night. So much so, it didn’t strike him as odd that Jim wasn’t sitting on the couch when he flopped down, not even having bothered to take off his shoes or jacket. He could probably fall asleep just like this, without dinner or a second thought.

Or at least he would have if Jim hadn’t decided to emerge from the hallway of the dimly lit apartment wearing only shirtsleeves and skivvies and climbed into Leonard’s lap without a word.

He groaned into Jim’s mouth as he kissed Leonard deeply, without warning. He could feel Jim’s fingers unbuttoning his jacket and tugging at his necktie as his tongue licked it’s way past Leonard’s willing lips.

Leonard might have worried about this initiation, but there was a slow persistence to Jim’s touch. As though he kept waiting to be told to stop. He could feel Jim’s hard length, pressing against his belly through the few layers still separating them, Jim grinding down so there was no chance of Leonard
missing it. He wasn’t so tired anymore.

Jim stopped when he’d finally unhooked Leonard’s belt and unbuttoned his trousers. His hands rested warmly on Leonard’s chest.

“Please,” he whispered wantonly into the shell of Leonard’s ear, sending shivers through his body.

“Jim—” Leonard started in protest

“*Please, Bones,*” Jim cut him off abruptly, “I want you so bad. Don’t make me beg, I hate begging.”

Leonard absently traced the scars adorning Jim’s exposed pectorals, “What *do* you like?”

Jim blinked in surprise, as though that had thrown him off.

“I won’t make you beg, darlin’. I don’t want you to ever do anything you don’t like again. So tell me, what do you like?”

“You,” Jim said quietly with a lopsided smile, “Everything we’ve done.”

“Everything?” Leonard questioned unconvinced, “Even when I used my tongue?”

“Especially that.” He looked at Leonard pointedly. The tips of Jim’s ears turned pink; it was endearing, the way he sputtered to a stop. Leonard liked the idea that the could still make Jim blush.

“I still think about it when—”

“When, what?” he nudged.

“When I touch myself,” Jim answered, not breaking Leonard’s gaze.

“Is that something you’ve been doing recently?” The words were out of his mouth before he’d even finished thinking them.

“Haven’t you?” Jim questioned skeptically, throwing the question back at Leonard. “I can feel how hard you are in the morning, don’t tell me you leave like that. I want you to fuck me Bones, I miss having you like that. I think you miss it too.”

“I won’t patronize you, and say that I don’t,” Leonard conceded.

“Then why are you still putting me off?”

“I just can’t believe you really want this, after everything. You could have someone else—*anyone you wanted.* Someone closer to your age, someone who didn’t meet you the way I did.”

“Bones you’re…” Jim looked almost too embarrassed to continue, “You’re the only person I’ve ever wanted to fuck me. The only time I’ve ever actually looked forward to sex has been with you…You know what I was, and you still want me.”

“I do,” Leonard agreed, kissing Jim’s forehead.

It was such an odd position to find himself in. After Jocelyn had left Leonard had decided his relationship days were over. People were too complicated and sex wasn’t worth the trouble. Yet somehow, in spite of his resolve to keep things uncomplicated, here he was in a more complicated situation than he could have ever imagined, and he wanted it. He wanted to be with Jim, no matter the complication.
“So…can we fuck then?” Jim asked with a grin, not letting the issue down.

“Yes, but not on the couch.”

Jim laughed, standing up, allowing Leonard the same opportunity.

Leonard kicked off his oxfords and let his slacks pool to the ground, stepping out of them easily. Leonard eyed Jim up for a moment, hoping he wasn’t misguiding his strength and scooped him up.

“Bones!” Jim cried in surprise.

“I won’t drop you,” Leonard reassured the both of them, although Jim was lighter than he’d been expecting. Leonard would have to make sure he ate more.

Jim laughed again, clasping his arms around Leonard’s neck and doing his best not to squirm.

Leonard deposited him lightly on the bed in his room, taking another moment to pull off his jacket and waistcoat, letting them fall gracelessly to the floor.

Jim grabbed a fistful of his button-down, pulling Leonard over his lithe frame. “I know you like doing it, but I fingered myself before you got back,” Jim admitted with a little guilt.

“You don’t like when I do it?” Leonard asked, suddenly worried he’d done it badly. It had always felt good when he’d done it to himself, but perhaps he’d been too rough with Jim.

“Stop that,” Jim insisted kissing his cheek, “You didn’t do anything wrong. I just wanted to remember how it felt, to make sure I could still handle it.” He pushed Leonard’s shirtsleeves off.

“And you’re sure you can?” Leonard asked unbuttoning Jim’s shirt, exposing his marred torso. He could tell it made Jim uncomfortable, Leonard seeing the scars, it was probably why Jim had worn the shirt out to greet Leonard at all.

“Yes,” Jim answered confidently, flipping over on his stomach, “I want this.”

It was clear that he did, despite the discomfort in his appearance, he still wanted Leonard, and he wanted Leonard to prove he still wanted Jim. It made his heart break, knowing how it made Jim feel about himself, it didn’t matter to Leonard—it didn’t make Leonard love him any less—but it wasn’t his place to tell Jim what should or should not make him self-conscious.

—

Jim stretched out, his head turned against one of Bones’ soft pillows, his arms folded underneath. Bones tugged down his drawers and he titled his hips up and wiggled his ass in what he knew was an enticing manner.

“Like this?” Bones asked, “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” Jim sighed into the fabric. It was better than worrying Bones was looking at the slur written between his hips, or insisting they do this in cover of complete darkness. “This is good. I want you,” Jim urged, “I want you so bad.”

Bones held his cheeks apart, blowing lightly at Jim’s slick hole. Jim felt himself clench at the rush of
air. It made his entire body tingle, his mind throwing him back one of the early nights he’d spent with Bones, his tongue ravaging Jim in the best way possible.

“Bones, come on,” Jim implored, “More!”

Bones huffed, as though Jim was being unreasonably impatient. Jim wondered if he was going to have to beg after all.

“More what?”

Jim scoffed, “More anything, I’m going to die before you do something.”

“Tell me what you want,” Bones said pressing a kiss into the curve of Jim’s back.

“Your cock, your tongue, your fingers if that’d speed this up. I don’t care put something inside me!” Jim demanded.

“My tongue?” Bones contemplated, squeezing the globe of Jim’s ass. “You really liked that?”

“I fucking loved it,” Jim confirmed. It was the truth, no matter how stupid admitting his interest made him feel. It was nice not to feel obligated to accept whatever was given or taken from him, but to be able to chose for himself. Jim could tell it was important for Bones to reaffirm his consent, and it made his heart swell even more for it.

With no further warning the warm, soft pad of Bones’ tongue brushed across his desperately empty hole. Jim wailed, gripping the pillows so tight he worried they might burst.

“Oh please, more, more,” Jim begged, despite himself.

Bones didn’t have to be asked again, his tongue lapping the puckered ring. Jim spread his legs farther apart, urging Bones deeper. Bones dipped shallowly inside as Jim clenched unconsciously.

“Fuck, that’s so good, that’s so—ahhh, fuck!” Jim cried out, his hips raising off the bed and thrusting back.

Bones responded by pushing Jim’s hips down, against the mattress. “Relax,” Bones told him an excited breath.

Jim wondered if after everything it really surprised Bones to get this response from Jim. It should have made him roll his eyes, being told to relax, but Jim realized he should, in fact, do just that. Taking a deep breath, he tried to unwind himself enough to comply.

Bones held his cheeks apart, breathing a cool breath across Jim’s wet, twitching entrance. “That’s better,” he praised before sliding his tongue inside Jim, deeper this time.

It felt as though Bones’ mouth was a live wire, a jolt of pure sensation hitting everywhere it touched sending pulses reeling through his body. Bones alternated between licking around his shuddering rim and tasting inside him in such a manner Jim couldn’t tell where one sensation stopped and the next began.

“Fuck, Bones, if you don’t stop—” Jim gasped out.

All at once, the delicate velvet drag of his tongue was gone.

“Do you want to come like this?” Bones asked his voice low and full of grit.
Jim cast a hooded glance across his shoulder to where Bones watched him curiously.

“T’de happy to let you, but that’s not what you asked for before.”

Jim thought about it for a second, since Bones had given him a choice, “Will you still fuck me, with your cock, if I come now?”

Bones blinked, his eyes narrowed in consideration. “If that’s what you want.”

“Yes, that’s what I want,” Jim answered confidently.

Bones moved so he could place a kiss in the valley of Jim’s shoulders, atop of what Jim knew was a mess of scars. “Okay,” he agreed before lazily trailing his mouth back to Jim’s now spit-slick pucker.

Pushing Jim’s cheeks apart, Bones kissed his hole, sucking, causing Jim to whimper against the pillows.

“More, god please,” he told Bones, not caring if he was babbling.

Bones acquiesced, his tongue thrusting relentlessly inside Jim. His fingers slid down, tracing Jim’s perineum roughly before moving down further to fondle his tight balls.

It was as though Jim had forgotten that part of him existed until Bones stroked him. It was almost too much, being touched like this after so long, and by Bones none-the-less. Jim floated his suspended state of pleasure for a long as he could hold out before his orgasm forced it’s way through the haze and slammed across his senses.

Bones took him through it, continuing to lap easily at Jim’s wildly clenching hole. He’d taken Jim’s cock in his hand at a undetermined point, pumping his fist along the length steadily while Jim soiled the sheets.

“You still here, darlin’?” Bones asked gently, kissing Jim’s trembling hip.

“Yeah, “ Jim confirmed, shifting minimally. He kept his eyes closed, letting Bones’ endearment envelope him, “Fuck me now?”

“Jim…” Bones breathed with a hint of disbelief.

“You promised,” Jim whined back. “Bones I need—”

“Don’t beg. I’ll fuck you, I just want to be sure.” Bones had shifted up the bed once again, kissing the small patch of skin behind Jim’s ear. “God, you’re so beautiful,” his voice came again above him.

Jim huffed, “Knock it off.”

“Darlin’ you’re brighter than the sun. I’m no poet,” Bones whispered like he was afraid someone else would hear and object, “But I could write pages about you.”

“Bones,” Jim started, cracking his eyes open and craning his neck to look at him, “I’m a fucking mess. I know what I look like, and I know what I am.”

Bones shook his head, “You’re more gorgeous than you know”.

“The scars—” Jim started.

“They’re beautiful too, but that’s not what I mean, Jim. Every last bit of you is precious.”
Jim blinked back at Bones, doing his best not to let the lump in his throat rise, Bones was too good, too nice. “Kiss me,” Jim demanded instead.

Bones leaned in, his lips hovering a hair above Jim’s. “I do love you darlin’, I always have,” he promised before kissing Jim breathless.

—

“And you’ll fuck me now?” Jim asked, almost hesitantly when Leonard pulled away.

“Yes,” Leonard allowed without protest, quipping a smile. He reached for the bottle of oil balanced on his nightstand, pouring it out in his palm. He fisted his cock, coating himself with more of the viscous liquid than he was sure he needed, not wanting to risk hurting Jim.

"Bones,” Jim started from beneath him his voice smaller than it had been a second ago, “Me too.”

Leonard kissed him again in acknowledgment before cupping Jim’s round ass cheek with his dry hand. He brushed a slick finger across Jim’s sensitive entrance teasingly.

“I’m ready, you don’t have to do that,” Jim insisted, squirming.

“You’re sure?” Leonard found himself asking for what had to be the tenth time that night.

“I wouldn’t lie to you.”

Leonard continued his teasing touches for a brief moment before he pushed two fingers inside. He met no resistance, earning instead a breathy moan from Jim. He wasn’t surprised, his tongue had already surmised that Jim had stretched himself decently, but Leonard wasn’t one for half measures.

“How’s this?”

Jim only swore in response.

“What about three?” Leonard inquired, nudging another finger at Jim’s already stretched pucker.

“Bones, fuck, I’m ready!”

Jim’s body accepted Leonard’s slick ring-finger with only a moment’s protest, taking his three digits eagerly. Leonard pumped his fingers steadily watching as Jim’s hole swallowed them down.

“I want you,” Jim cried after a few indulgent moments, “Bones, please! I want your cock inside me.”

“Shhh, you don’t have to say what you think I want to hear.” Leonard soothed, pulling his fingers out gently.

Jim’s pushed himself away from the bed, turning to look at Leonard, resolution burning in his eyes, “I’m not saying it because I think you want to hear it! I want your fucking cock in me, stop teasing me!”

Leonard blinked at him in surprise, he certainly hadn’t been expecting that. “I’m sorry—”

“Don’t be sorry, just fuck me,” Jim allowed, a blush creeping across his cheeks. He shifted back into the pillows.

“Wait, wait,” Leonard said, pulling a pillow from behind Jim and placing it on the bed, under his
hips, nudging Jim into a better position.

For a moment Leonard indulged himself, holding Jim’s round cheeks apart, just watching as his hole clenched desperately at empty space, hearing Jim’s needy breathy whines, before gripping his cock and pushing inside as smoothly as he could manage.

The noise that left Jim’s throat was nothing short of feral and was sure to have his neighbors blushing all the way down to their toes.

“Easy, darlin’,” Leonard soothed despite the thick grit coating his words, “That’s good, there you go, that’s it.”

He could see Jim’s knuckles going white as they gripped the sheets desperately and he kissed the nape of Jim’s neck, trying to quell his rising guilt, knowing if he stopped now he’d hear nothing but protests from the boy.

Jim’s muscles milked his cock, straining to adjust to the intrusion as Leonard’s entire length nestled in Jim’s tight heat. He paused, aware of how shallow Jim’s breathing had become. His hands braced on the bed on either side of Jim’s torso which was still dotted with bruises. Leonard nosed along the hairline of Jim’s nape, pressing feather-light kisses to the warm skin, murmuring affections as he did.

“Have you always…?” Jim stopped, drawing another shaky breath, “Been this big…?”

Leonard fought back a laugh, “No need to pad my ego, darlin’.”

“I’m…not…trying to.”

“Are you alright?” Leonard was becoming concerned that despite Jim’s protests that this was all too much, “Is this still okay?”

Jim seemed to sense his worry. “I’m fine.” He pulled his head away from the pillows muffling him, “I just forgot how you feel inside me, it’s so good Bones.”

His cock twitched inside Jim’s slick channel, not content, so utterly stimulated and neglected all at once. Leonard slid his hand up, along the curve of Jim’s body until he found his hand, lacing their fingers together, Jim squeezed his hand gently.

“Can you just…start slow?” Jim asked, quietly. His hesitation an obvious reminder that being able to really ask for what he wanted was still unfamiliar.

“Whatever you need, Jim.”

Jim’s breathy, pleased sounds turned to heady, full-bellied moans when Jim demanded more, after what had been several minutes of shallow thrusts. Jim was louder now, more sure of himself, once he’d become reacquainted with the sensation of being fucked. He reached back, free hand grasping for Leonard’s hip, wordlessly pleading to be fucked harder and deeper. Leonard was helpless to do anything except comply, wanting nothing more than to give into Jim’s every command.

“Yes Bones, fuck!—Oh please, please,” Jim moaned on, “Harder, fuck me harder!”

“I don’t want,” Leonard stuttered, “To hurt you.”

“You won’t, please. Come on, Bones! Fuck me like you mean it.”

The animalistic part of Leonard resented the implication. He pulled out, despite Jim’s cry of protest.
Leonard hauled Jim’s hips up from the bed, Jim throwing him a quick glance over his shoulder before propping his body up on his elbows and moving his knees farther apart, giving Leonard more room.

He nudged his cock against Jim’s sloppy, fluttering hole, Jim’s body practically trying to pull him back inside and waited. Waited for Jim to object in any way. When he didn’t, Leonard pushed back in with unrelenting force.

“I do mean it,” he growled, nipping at Jim’s shoulder.

“Ahhh! Yes, fuck, *fuck!* Like that!” Jim affirmed, his voice breaking. Leonard’s thrusts picked back up in speed, the shift allowing him a deeper reach inside Jim, a new angle at which to pound against Jim’s swollen prostate. Jim’s back formed an almost impossibly deep valley, his ass pushing back in time with the undulation of Leonard’s hips.

Leonard thought he might pass out, he was so close and Jim was clenching perfectly around him. It was all he could do not to come or collapse or both, but he wouldn’t relent until Jim was done. It was euphoric and torturous in the same instant.

“Bones, shit! I *need*—” Jim cut himself off, too desperate to even ask for it.

Leonard could feel Jim strain as he tried to balance himself on one arm, his other hand, grasping fervently for his cock. No, his over-stimulated brain cried, he Jim couldn’t let come with his own fist on his cock. Leonard didn’t want that, didn’t want to be perceived as selfish in any sense of the word.

“Let me,” Leonard heard himself say, voice so thick with want it was almost unfamiliar to his own ears.

Jim shivered. His hand dropped away and he melted into Leonard’s touch for moment before he choked out suddenly, “Wait, *wait*…”

A panic waves curled in Leonard’s gut. “Jim—”

“I’m fine,” Jim threw in dismissively. “Just, can you wait to come until I’ll feel it?”

“If you want, darlin’,” Leonard agreed, though he thought he might die in the process.

Jim’s cock jerked as Leonard circled it with his fist. Jim was damp with dripping precome and sweat. Leonard toyed with his foreskin, pulling it completely over the leaking head of Jim’s cock only to push it back down as slowly before stroking his entire length excruciatingly slow, out of time with his thrusts. Jim throbbed against his palm, the heat radiating through Leonard.

He rested his forehead on Jim’s shoulder, focusing on only Jim and from him and not losing control of himself. Leonard’s hand sped up to match the rhythm of his hips, drawing Jim’s quivering body towards his second orgasm.

Finally the simulation proved too much, and with a wailing, wordless sob, Jim went loose and pliant in his arms, his cock spilling heavy ropes of come across Leonard’s hand and on the bed. Leonard held him up, gently coaxing him through it with his hand and unintelligible praises.

“*Bones,*” he blissfully heard Jim mutter after what seemed like an eternity.

That had to be enough, because Leonard couldn’t hold back any longer. With one final, deep thrust he came, stilling fully inside Jim for the briefest moment as he did, Jim’s body gripping him like a
vice.

“Ohhhhh god, Jim!—Fuck, fuck!”

Leonard continued to fuck Jim erratically through his own orgasm, spurting deeper inside Jim as he did. It had been so long since Leonard had come, the evidence of that now rapidly filling Jim past capacity. Rivers of warm, pearly-white come sluiced down Jim’s thigh when his body could no longer contain Leonard’s release.

Jim had fallen back against the mattress, panting beneath Leonard, who was able to keep himself up only due to the fear of hurting Jim’s already battered body further.

He pulled out slowly, another wave of come dribbled out of Jim’s hole, staining his thighs further. Jim whined a sound of contented protest.

“I’ll bet you taste even better than you look now, darlin’,” Leonard breathed.

Jim moaned a conflicted noise, a shiver shook his body, obviously torn.

It was clear he’d reached his limit, and Leonard wouldn’t push it, but the idea of burying his face and licking Jim’s twitching pucker until he came a third time sounded very appealing. Instead Leonard rearranged Jim’s slack body to his side so he could lay down next to him, absently petting through Jim’s hair as their breathing evened out.

“Is something wrong?” Jim asked breaking the silence Leonard hadn’t realized they were holding.

“No,” Leonard answered, unintentionally curt, still lost in his own thoughts.

“Bones…was it…not good for you?” Jim asked warily.

That startled him back to the moment. “No, that’s not it at all. Jim, you were perfect. It was just…” Leonard paused, hoping this wasn’t going to come out in a jumble, “It was rougher than I thought you’d want.”

Jim hummed in acknowledgment, “That’s how I needed it, this time at least. I missed you…and I’m not as breakable as I look.”

“What if you I hurt you?” Leonard asked mostly to himself, needing some kind of reassurance that they were still okay.

Jim turned himself over with only a small wince, snuggling himself closer against Leonard’s chest. Jim blinked up at him with sleep-heavy eyes, “You’d never hurt me, Bones.”

Leonard watched Jim for a moment, kissing his damp hair before Jim’ eyes blinked shut. He wondered how Jim could have more faith in Leonard than he had in himself.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for sticking with me! I realize how long of a wait this has been for not only a new chapter but also for some smut. It's honestly been forever since these two have had any fun at all, so I thought everyone deserved a break from the angst and suffering, hopefully it's been worth the wait!
Leonard woke slowly, gradually recognizing the sensations on the back of his neck as small kisses from Jim. Jim. Leonard was beginning to accept he was hopeless when it came to Jim.

"Are you awake?" Jim asked quietly.

Silently he cursed his muscles and breathing pattern for betraying him. Leonard did his best not to squirm. "No," he lied.

"Oh, alright," Jim gave in easily, resuming ghosting kisses along the curve of his spine.

Leonard rolled his eyes fondly, before turning over. He was greeted by Jim’s twinkling blue eyes and his lips being bitten to a flush. Jim’s fingers dragged their way down Leonard’s naked chest while he placed another kiss on Leonard’s mouth. He hummed contentedly, breath catching as Jim’s hand moved lower and circled his hard cock.

"Darlin’—"
“Shhhhh, you’re asleep, remember?” Jim countered with a quirked grin.

“Mmm,” Leonard conceded, pressing their lips back together as Jim settled into a steady rhythm with his fist, letting his own hand find the swell of Jim’s hip.

Jim’s touch was delicate but insistent. He knew how much pressure Leonard liked, keeping the pace just short of what it would take to bring him off. Leonard understood quickly that Jim didn’t want him to talk, instead swallowing the involuntary moans Leonard cried into his mouth. He could feel Jim’s own hard length against his thigh but when Leonard had reached to touch him, Jim batted his hand away, kissing him more forcefully.

Jim began to stroke him quicker, his tongue sliding into Leonard’s open mouth. He whined loudly, not caring that he sounded desperate and he could feel Jim grin. Leonard did his best to hold out, but he’d woken up hard and Jim urged him towards orgasm relentlessly.

Leonard gripped at Jim’s hip more tightly, moaning into Jim’s mouth and the tension built low in his groin. His free hand found it’s way into Jim’s hair, his nails scrapping Jim’s scalp. Jim gasped, nipping at Leonard’s lip.

He came messily between them, spunk marking up the sheets. Leonard continued, thrusting into Jim’s hand, fucking his fist while Jim squeezed him tighter until he was done.

Leonard watched with heavy eyes as Jim deliberately licked his hand clean of Leonard’s come, and fuck, wasn’t that a sight. He sighed unsteadily, his heart still racing.

Jim looked at him in mock surprise, “Bones, are you awake finally?”

Leonard couldn’t help but to laugh, little by little Jim’s cheekiness was breaking through his walled-up exterior and it was maddeningly endearing. “Yes darlin’, I’m awake.”

A grin plastered itself across Jim’s face, “Great, now you can kiss me.”

He laughed again brushing Jim’s cheek affectionately, “I like when you smile.”
Jim flushed a dark pink, pulling the blanket over his head.

“I can’t kiss you under there.”

“Try harder,” came Jim’s muffled reply.

Leonard snorted, but shimmied under the blanket, doing his best to avoid the ruined part of the sheets. Jim's hands covered his face, as though the cover of the blanket wasn’t enough. It wasn’t dark, just warm and close, and a sense of comfort washed over Leonard in a way that he couldn’t remember having felt in a very long time. He leaned over Jim, pulling one of his hands away from his face, kissing it before he released it.

“There you are,” he said softly before pressing a gentle kiss on the exposed corner of Jim’s mouth.

Jim moved his right hand away, looping it around Leonard’s neck so their lips could meet properly. There was no urgency in it, just an easy rhythm that neither wanted to give up. Coffee be damned, Jim's mouth was it's own kind of drug. Even with the bitter taste of Jim's mouth, all morning breath and the tang of Leonard's come on his tongue, Leonard couldn't think of anything better. The way Jim melted against his lips, giving unquestioningly. Leonard wondered if he’d even had a choice in failing in love with Jim, or if it was simply impossible not to have done so.

He could feel Jim, still hard, pressing against his thigh, but Jim seemed unconcerned. Leonard’s hand snaked it’s way down to take Jim’s cock and return the favor.

“Don’t,” Jim said breathily, breaking their connection suddenly, before Leonard’s hand could make contact.

“Hmm?” Leonard asked stupidly, his brain still high off Jim.

“Don’t. Not now. I just want to kiss you.”

“You sure, darlin’?” It seemed rude, especially since Jim had been so accommodating.

“No one’s ever just kissed me,” Jim admitted somewhat abashed, “It’s nice.”
Leonard hoped the blankets hid the heartbreak on his face. He desperately hoped Jim’s first kiss hadn’t been a transaction. He wondered if he’d ever be able to ask, if Jim would ever want to talk about it, although, he had a sinking feeling that he already knew the answer.

“I’ll kiss you until tomorrow if you want,” Leonard promised, dragging his fingers through Jim’s already mussed hair.

“What about work?”

“I hope you know you’re more important than that.”

Jim looked at him with eyes so wide he might as well have been staring at the galaxy.

As tempting as it was, Jim didn’t hold Bones to it. He’d eventually let Bones up, in favor of the bathroom so he could get ready to go to the hospital. Jim stayed in the bed, smiling absently to himself. He wondered if anyone else felt like this—the swell in his chest whenever Bones was around, calming electricity in his skin when they touched, the happiness that filled parts of him that Jim hadn’t even known were empty.

“Are you alright there?” Bones asked, returning to the room and beginning to dress for the day.

Jim nodded back, not missing the way Bones couldn’t keep his eyes off him.

“I was going to make breakfast, would you like some, or did you want to go back to sleep?”

“Breakfast. Please,” Jim said, fiddling with the sheets. He hesitated before continuing, not sure if he was really ready for this, “Hey Bones?”
“Yes darlin’?”

It made Jim’s heart skip every time Bones called him that, the causal endearment had wound itself around Jim’s heart. “Could I…I mean, I wanted to come with you today.”

Bones shot him a look of concern, “To the hospital?”

“Not the hospital,” Jim answered, trying not to roll his eyes. “I just thought I could walk around a little, see some more of town? Maybe stop in to see Christine if I got tired. I haven’t been up there much, it’s a little far for me to go by myself still…” Jim did his best to keep his resolve and not sound pathetic, like he could manage a walk, but Bones took the car to work, so it wasn’t exactly just a short stroll.

He watched Bones exhale with relief, as though he’d been expecting Jim to say something else. “Yes, of course, of course. You’ll want to get dressed then.”

“Yeah, I think that would be for the best,” Jim answered wryly.

—

“You look real nice, darlin’,” Bones told him as they walked outside, the bright sun having no effect on cold wind.

Jim jerked his head down to survey his clothes again. “Really?” he asked. It wasn’t as though it mattered much, he didn’t have many options.

Bones smiled, opening the car door for him, “You really do.”

Jim felt his cheeks getting hot even in the chilled air; he purposefully looked away before getting into the car. Bones closed the door and hurried around to the driver's side, shutting the door as though that would keep out the nip.
“Do you want me to take you somewhere before I go to my office?” Bones asked, brushing his hand against Jim’s knee before reaching for the gearstick.

Jim tried to picture a map of where they were headed. “There’s a park a few blocks away, right? Could you take me there?”

“If you want. Just make sure you head back before you’re too tired.”

He felt free with this easy routine they’d settled into. This quiet simple life that Jim hadn’t known that he’d wanted, or even existed. Jim still felt like he was a bit of an intruder, but not an unwelcome guest. He grinned back at Bones. “Don’t worry, I’ll be back by lunch.”

“Don’t worry,” Bones muttered under his breath, staring out the windshield.

“I promise. I can take care of myself.”

Bones let another car pass in front of him, looking over at Jim, his gaze softening. “I know you can.”

When they finally stopped, Jim made to get out of the car quickly, not wanting to hold Bones up. “Wait a minute,” Bones beckoned. He pulled his scarf off and offered it to Jim. “I should have given you one before we left. Can’t have you freezing out there.”

“But you’ll be cold,” Jim hesitated. He wasn’t sure why, this was maybe the smallest gesture Bones had ever offered him, but it seemed overwhelming. It was the same feeling when Talas had given him money and when Spock had offered Jim his clothing. It was a gift, and it made Jim feel guilty not to have any way in which to reciprocate.

Bones raised his eyebrow skeptically, “Darlin’, take the scarf.”

And Jim did, wrapping it around his neck before leaning in to kiss Bones softly on the cheek. “I’ll
see you later,” he promised.

—

It was a generally quiet morning, all things considered. It was just Geoff, Iris, Sandra, and him. They only had two beds filled, besides the stream of patients with a persistent cold who came through every day.

Leonard was halfway through yesterday’s charts when he heard Iris scream from down the hall. He bolted up, making his way as quickly as he could to the origin of the noise.

There was a man collapsed on top of Iris, who was trying her best to push her way up form him. He called for Sandra and a bed, unnecessarily as she’d been summoned by Iris’ scream no doubt.

He was talking, Leonard realized, the man laying on the floor. There was something grating about his voice, even in pain, demanding help. Leonard moved him away from Iris who eventually managed to scramble up. Something was very wrong with him, the lower half of his body seemed bloated through his clothes in a way bodies did not usually look.

Mercifully, Sandra and Geoff rounded the corner, pushing a bed. It was awkward, lifting him, he didn’t thrash or fight, but he certainly was no help either, leaving Leonard to wonder how he’d managed to make it here at all. He grasped at Leonard’s clothes, pulling him down, closer to the sound of his infuriating voice.

“Help…me,” he struggled.

“I’m trying damnit!” Leonard said back, prying the man’s fingers from his waistcoat.

Once they had him situated, the man was wheeled into an open room. It was impossible to get a clear answer from him about what hurt—“Everything hurts.”—or what was wrong—“I’m sick, you’re supposed to help me!”
It became abundantly clear once they removed the man’s clothes. The smell hit him first, putrid and foul. It was difficult not to stagger back, even more so after he got a glimpse at the problem.

It was, in a word, disgusting. Leonard had seen some grizzly injuries in his time as a doctor, but this was something else. There was black and yellow discoloration, skin swollen to at least three times the usual size. The grizzly looking wound at the base of his penis—clearly the infection site—a sick palette of colors that human skin should never have been.

His body was raw and bloated, skin pulled taunt to it’s breaking point. Old blood caked in places impossible to reach, new blood trickling down his legs. Pockets of pus that could be identified by sight only, inflated and stinking. The man should never have waited this long to seek treatment, the fact that he’d let it get to this point was revoltingly impressive as his body seemed to already be decomposing in front of them. Leonard wondered if there was any chance of him making it.

“What do you think, Leonard?” Geoff, asked, moving away from the gurney.

“Six milligrams of morphine,” he told Iris who nodded immediately. “Gangrene, maybe? I’ve never seen a case this bad, so it could be something else,” Leonard offered.

“My thoughts as well,” Geoff shook his head, “We should confirm it with a pus sample.”

“He might be dead before we get a definitive result,” Leonard hesitated, “What about introducing a bromide solution?”

He doubted it would make much difference if they waited or if they didn’t, if they tried the bromide or not. It might just be better to keep him connected to a morphine drip until he expired. The thought made Leonard’s skin crawl, but he’d never seen, let alone heard, of a case this bad, and if it was something else entirely…well they didn’t have the resources or the time to figure out what it would be.

“I believe that’s our only option at this point,” Geoff agreed. He ushered Leonard farther way from the bed. “He’s in bad shape, Leonard. He’s going to die and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“Don’t say that Geoff,” Leonard sighed, trying to remain positive, but already failing badly.

He patted Leonard’s shoulder, “Do you need me to take the lead on this, or would you rather have
“I’ll take care of him.”

“Good man, Iris and I will take care of walk-ins.”

Sandra came up to him as the other two left the room.

“Well?”

“Start a bromide solution, we’re going to try to flush the infection.”

She looked at him incredulously, “Flush it, doctor? His whole body is the infection.”

“Sandra, please.”

“He’s going to die, isn’t he?” she asked in a hushed whisper.

A shaky exhale was all Leonard could manage in response.

Jim walked into the hospital, grateful for the warmth inside the doors. It wasn’t too cold—Bones’ scarf definitely helped combat the winter—but after so much time outside it was nice to be out of it. He was tired, the walk combined with the temperature, it was a good thing he hadn’t decided to push himself. He still didn’t have the stamina that he wanted to believe he did.

It was Iris at the front today, he remembered her vaguely. She’d been one of the nurses who tended to him in the beginning, right when he first landed in the hospital. Jim couldn’t tell if she remembered
him, although something about the way her eyes lingered on his scar said that she did. Jim did his best to hold his ground and not turn his face away, there was no shame in his scar.

“I need to see Bon—Doctor McCoy?” Jim said, making it more of a question than he’d meant to.

“I’m sorry sir, he’s not available right now. You can see Doctor M’Benga,” she told him matter-of-factly.

“No, ah sorry. I’m...can you tell him Jim’s here? He’s expecting me.”

“Sir, I am truly sorry but he’s not going to be able to see you. Doctor M’Benga will be more than happy to—”

Jim wasn’t entirely certain what got into him, but instead of shrinking back and accepting the no, he just strode down the hall past as quickly as he could.

“Bones?” he called down the hall, peering through doorways as he passed, “Bones?”

It was in the third door on the left that he saw Bones, pacing back and forth. He could hear Iris behind him, insisting that he couldn’t go in. Jim did anyway, using the last real bit of his strength to rush through the door before she got there.

“Bones!” Jim said, clearly startling him from his thought. He looked quickly from the man in the bed back up to Jim.

Jim glanced to the bed next to him, only to be hit with a wave of unsteady nausea. The smell was overwhelming all the sudden, but that wasn’t what almost brought him to the ground. Laying in the bed was the man that haunted his nightmares.

Jim’s gagged as he fought to keep the contents of his stomach where they belonged. The second Iris finally caught up to him, and grabbed his arm was the second he let forth an involuntary wail. He felt it happen from outside his body, heard himself choke the wet scream, felt Bones pull him from the room just as the monster in the bed blinked his eyes open, but it was someone else screaming from inside him. Jim felt disoriented and sick.
Leonard’s head snapped up at the sound of Jim’s voice. He’d been so lost in thought, frustrated at the situation before him that he’d forgotten entirely about Jim. Poor Jim, god, Leonard was such an asshole.

Leonard looked at him, really looked and found Jim shaking and unsteady, a panicked look welling up in his eyes. It was quite a reasonable reaction to the state of the man on the bed. His condition had shocked Leonard, and he was used to this sort of thing. Iris had clearly tried to keep Jim from entering the room, which would have been better for everyone.

Then several things happened simultaneously, Iris began apologizing for her transgression, reaching out to remove Jim from the room, the patient’s eyes opened, and Jim screamed.

It was blood-curdling, broken, and terrifying and Leonard had absolutely no idea what was happening. Was it Iris touching him? A delayed reaction to the gangrenous patient? PTSD from being back in the hospital? All Leonard knew was Jim had to get out of the room and Leonard was going with him.

Jim did not resist being moved by Leonard and Iris. Sandra shut the door behind them. Jim’s scream petered off into shallow, gasping whimpers.

“Jim, shhhhh, you’re okay,” Leonard said holding Jim’s hands in his gently, not wanting to hug him lest it make Jim feel trapped and get him more upset.

“Bones,” Jim pleaded, a desperate sound. He seemed to be shrinking in on himself, shaking, and sweating.

“What is it, darlin’?” Leonard’s worry growing by the second. He nodded at Iris, dismissing her, she looked glad to go. “Deep breaths, you’re alright,” Leonard did his best to hold his calm facade for Jim.

Jim looked like he might bite through his own lip, the tension in his shoulders was painfully visible. He took deep shaking breath, knocking his head back against the wall.
Leonard watched him nervously, worried that it had been the unexpected touch that set him off and not wanting to intensify whatever Jim was going through. There were several long moments of silence interrupted only by Jim’s haggard breathing.

“It’s him,” Jim choked out finally. Jim’s hand went up to his face, touching his scar defensively.

“What?” Leonard asked obtusely, although his stomach twisted nastily at Jim’s reaction.

Jim wrapped his free arm around his torso, closing off, shielding himself, hiding where Leonard knew the letters still gleamed against Jim’s pale skin. “Him. That fucking—”

And suddenly it clicked. He could feel his blood pressure rising and a rage like he’d never felt before boiling in his gut. His carefully held calm melted in an instant. “That’s the monster who…?” he couldn’t even say it.

Jim nodded, doing his best to hold back another whimper and failing spectacularly.

His nails pricked into his palm as his fist clenched tighter. Leonard turned back towards the closed door, wondering if he could get away with clearing the room so he could kill the man himself.

He felt Jim grabbing for his hand, prying his fingers open so he could hold Leonard’s hand again. “Don’t go back in there,” Jim pleaded.

Leonard shook his head. He was going back in there and he was going to kill that man, and Jim couldn’t be around for that. “Ask Geoff to drop you off at home,” he said, not bothering to explain his train of thought.

“Bones—” Jim choked off as he sucked in a breath. “What are you going to do?”

“Go home, Jim,” Leonard told him with a dark, distant resolve.

Jim nodded, and squeezed his hand one last time before he slipped down the hall.
He was seething, filled with pure hatred and rage. Leonard wasn’t sure there was a time in his life when he could remember feeling less in control of himself than this moment. It wasn’t the best time to see a patient. Not that he thought of the man as a patient anymore, or even as a man really.

Khan was going to die anyway. Just hours before he’d been bemoaning that very fact, but now Leonard almost didn't want to take the risk. He wanted this monster to die at his hand. He wanted to kill him.

“Stop the bromide,” Leonard ordered as soon as he was back in the room. Disgust for the man radiated from every one of his pores, “Stop the morphine too.”

“S-stop? I… I’m sorry doctor, you can’t mean…?” Sandra stuttered, she never stuttered. “He’s dying, he’s in excruciating pain,” she told him, as if Leonard didn’t already know.

“Leave him.”

“I’m sure you don’t mean—”

“No more morphine.”

She swallowed nervously, but nodded.

“You can go, there’s no reason for you to waste your time watching him die,” Leonard told her.

It was at this that Khan finally opened his eyes again to look at Leonard.

He didn’t think he’d ever seen someone obey an order faster in his life as Sandra bolted from the room. He couldn’t imagine what she must be thinking, so he didn’t bother to try.

They watched each other for a while in silence. Leonard watched him until the morphine glaze drained from his eyes, until Khan was tensed, in clear pain again. Leonard didn’t want to talk to a high man, he wanted a man in pain, who could hear and remember every word he said.
“I hope it was worth it, you bastard,” Leonard all but spat at Khan, who was beginning to sweat again. “This is a more humane ending than you deserve. You deserve so much worse.”

“Forgive me doctor, but this seems…rather personal,” Khan mused, his fists tensing on the sheets as last of the drug slipped from his veins. “However, I don’t believe we know each other.”

“You hurt someone I love,” Leonard told him evenly.

He seemed to like that, a moment of pleasure crossing his face, “And who might that be?”

The fact that he even had to ask made Leonard realize he’d hurt someone else the way he’d hurt Jim. More than one other, in all likelihood. “I won’t give you the satisfaction of knowing.”

“Oh, do tell me,” Khan badgered, as though it was was some kind of game, "Which one of my masterpieces did you get the pleasure of viewing?"

Leonard drew his brow in resolve, keeping his lips sealed. He hoped the way his stomach churned didn't make him look any less threatening.

Khan smirked at him through heavy eyes, “Are you enjoying hurting me, doctor?”

“Yes,” Leonard snarled. Watching him suffer was some kind of sick pleasure.

“Then I will venture to say, you understand me. Watching someone endure pain can be quite rewarding.”

His stomach felt as though it had fallen down a flight of stairs, “Shut up.”

Khan laughed, “We’re not so different, you and I.”

“I’m nothing like you.” Leonard felt nauseous as he stood.
“You are far more like me than you know,” Khan said, laughing again.

Leonard staggered from the room, hearing the echo of Khan’s laugh. The sound followed him down the hall, all the way back to his office. Even when he closed the door Leonard was sure he could still hear it. Looping over and over.

_We’re not so different…_

They were. Leonard had to keep telling himself. Leonard didn’t like watching people suffer, didn’t enjoy causing general suffering, _would never_ cut someone just to see them bleed. Leonard _helped_ people, it was one of the only things that made him feel sane. Giving back to the world. He just wanted _Khan_ to suffer, wanted to pay him back in the smallest portion for all the harm he’d done to people, to _Jim_.

Jim. Oh god…

The way Jim had looked at him, scared and vulnerable, came flooding back. Scared of Khan, or scared of Leonard?

There was no way that monster could have walked out of the hospital alive, so Leonard wasn’t _really_ killing him. Or, at least, that's what he’d tell Jim.

He _wasn’t_, after all. Khan had waited too long, his symptoms were too severe. He’d known from the moment he realized what was wrong that Khan was going to die. Maybe Leonard would simply leave out how badly he’d wanted to kill Khan as he lay all but helpless in front of him.

—

It was hours until Khan finally expired, of course the bastard couldn't even die normally. Two hours and forty-seven minutes. Leonard wouldn’t have counted, but Sandra had, for the chart.
He felt nothing. Not even satisfaction at knowing the man wouldn’t live to see another day. No relief, no regret, just nothing. Perhaps that was the most upsetting part of all.

Sandra looked at him, wary as she waited for him to sign off on her charts as both their shifts came to a close. Neither of them speaking. Her eyes flitted up to Christine as she entered, coming on for the next watch.

“What happened?” she asked the moment Sandra took the charts back to their respective patient rooms.

Leonard shook his head, he didn’t want to look at her.

“Hey, Leo, what the hell is going on?”

“I can’t talk about this right now,” he dodged, shucking off his white coat in favor of his overcoat. He knew she’d find out, how could she not with the way he was behaving? It didn’t matter. He had to get out of there.

The drive home was an absolute blur, nothing really processing. He opened the door, as gently as he could, hoping that Jim would be asleep but knowing in his heart he wouldn’t be.

“Bones? Bones! Fuck, what happened?” Jim’s voice started the moment his foot came over the threshold, as though he’d been waiting all day. He probably had been.

Leonard let his coat fall off his shoulders standing frozen for several moments before sliding to the floor himself against the closed door.

“Are you alright?” Jim asked quietly, kneeling quickly beside him.

Leonard could have laughed, he should have asked Jim that. Instead he reached up to run his fingers over Jim’s chapped lips. He was so tired, so drained after all of it, and Jim was still here, still okay. Jim was alive.

“Bones, what—”
“He’s dead,” Leonard managed abruptly, letting his hand drop into his lap.

"He's really gone?"

"I promise, he's dead."

Jim’s eyes widened, seeming to make up most of his expression. “Did you... did you kill him?” Jim asked, his lip trembling.

“No.” Leonard searched Jim’s face for apprehension, disgust, anything that would tell him what he’d done was wrong, “But I sure as hell didn’t save him.”

“Good,” came Jim’s voice, barely audible.

Against his better judgment, Leonard plowed on, “It was the infection. But Jim, I wanted to kill him for what he did to you.” He wasn’t sure why he told Jim, why he would risk revealing such a dark, cold part of himself. Maybe Leonard just wanted credit for not doing it, or maybe he wanted to let it go.

Jim let out a laugh that sounded more like a cry than anything else, “I thought I’d feel different, somehow. It doesn’t change anything...” Jim’s head dropped, his forehead resting on Leonard’s collar. “I still have to live with what he did to me,” Jim whispered after several moments of heavy silence.

“He can’t ever hurt you again,” Leonard said in what he hoped was a reassuring tone.

“He hurt me enough already,” Jim said, his voice small and dismal.

Something about the acceptance in Jim’s voice broke him and Leonard was hit with the barrage of all the emotions he’d been stuffing with anger all day. “I know, darlin’, I know.” the tears slipped down Leonard’s face, and if Jim felt them on his neck, he didn’t say anything.
“I’m glad he’s dead.” Jim whispered into Leonard’s lapel.

“So am I.”

“...I’m glad you didn’t kill him.”

Leonard hummed back. He could feel Jim getting heavy against him. His own body was rapidly shutting down as well. “I’m so sorry, darlin’, about everything.”

“Shhhh,” Jim hushed.

The the sounds of the city and their shared breathing allowed them both to escape to sleep, each holding the other like he was their last lifeline.

Chapter End Notes

All of your comments and reviews give me life, I love them and I love everyone who continues to stick with me.

**WARNING:** Just in case you’re curious what wet and/or fournier gangrene looks like, i would advise against googling it unless you have a very strong stomach. I consider myself someone who is not generally bothered by gross things and this was easily one of the most disgusting things i’ve ever looked at in my life. Just thought I’d throw that out there.
When Leonard stirred, it was to the sound of whimpering. The noise was sounded so broken, so dark, but Leonard didn't blame Jim, the day had been a lot to process.

Opening his eyes, he found himself and Jim were still sat haphazardly against the door where Leonard had collapsed hours earlier. Jim gently stroked his hair, the look in his eyes equal parts empathy and hesitation.

“It’s alright, Bones,” Jim soothed, “You’re okay.”

That couldn't be right. If Jim wasn't making the noise then it was...Oh god, it was him. As Leonard grasped the situation he heaved a giant sob, instead of calming himself. He should be able to regain control, why couldn't he breathe? Why did he feel like his lungs were collapsing?

*We're not that different*...

The man—the *monster*—was dead, and Leonard hadn’t killed him.

He *hadn’t*.

Leonard hadn’t stopped him from dying. Khan would have died anyway, he was too far gone when he’d gotten there. That’s what he’d told Jim, and that was the truth, but Leonard had made sure he suffered.

Leonard had *wanted* him to suffer.

“I’m…so sorry,” Leonard choked, clutching Jim against him. “Jim—”
“Don’t be sorry,” Jim said gently.

Too gently. It wasn’t fair, Jim shouldn’t have to comfort him, not after everything. But in the swirl of Leonard’s panic it felt so good to be held, to have Jim right here, to know Jim was really safe.

Maybe it wouldn’t stop Leonard from worrying if, when, Jim left, but it would make him feel a little better. The monster that Jim feared the most wouldn’t be lurking around the next corner. Jim could take care of himself, Jim would be okay. Jim had to believe Jim would be okay.

“Don’t cry,” Jim said brushing the rolling tear from Leonard’s cheek, “Everything’s okay.”

Leonard hadn’t even realized he’d started crying. He clasped Jim’s hand, trying to calm himself with his head on Jim’s shoulder.

“Should I make coffee?” Jim asked, squeezing Leonard’s hand.

He laughed despite himself, picking up his head and looking towards the darkened window. “What time is it?”

Jim shrugged and kissed his cheek. “Are you okay?” he asked softly.


—

Jim couldn’t process it really. It felt fake. It was so strange that the lie he’d been telling himself since he started living with Bones had come true.

*It’s over, he can’t hurt you.*
It was real. Khan was gone, *dead*. He couldn’t hurt Jim anymore, he couldn’t hurt anyone. The physical threat was gone. The nightmares hadn’t quite settled, but they were less frequent when Bones held him, when he felt warm and safe, which was practically all the time now.

Jim really found himself able to relax around Bones. He didn’t feel on edge, like he was waiting for something to go wrong. It was so reassuring, and easy. Finally his life was calm, he had no need to keep a guard up.

Bones had already gone to bed, leaving Jim to finish his cup of tea. They hadn’t done much, Bones still unwilling to go back to the hospital, although he’d spent a long time on the phone with them. Jim hadn’t wanted to interfere, instead pretending to read something he’d already finished from he library. They’d gone to the market afterwards, taken the car because it was cold. Neither of them seemed to be able to find the words to speak, so they just went along in a comfortable silence.

The fire was just embers now, and Jim watched colors die to a soft glow. There was another fire crackling in their room. Jim finished the dregs of his tea in one gulp, placing in the cup in the sink, ready to fall into bed next to Bones.

Jim crawled under the covers pressing his cold toes against Bones’ leg. He grumbled as Jim cozied up next to him, but made no effort to pull away. His pajamas were silky smooth, Jim ran his hands over the swell of his hip loving the texture. Jim didn’t like wearing this set, the much preferred to feel them on Bones. His hands weren’t cold, but Bones was so warm and Jim’s hands crept under his shirt, fading them out against Bones’ skin.

He loved how Bones felt, how soft and hard he simultaneously was, the way his muscles tightened under his skin as Jim brushed over them. He kissed the back of Bones’ neck as he slipped his hands under the waist of his pajamas. Jim squeezed his ass—Bones has a *great* ass—his fingers dipping down into the cleft. He could tell Bones was still awake because of the deliberate way he tried to keep his breathing steady. Jim ran the pad of his finger across Bones’ puckered hole. He traced around the it, his finger delicately testing, Bones twitched.

Jim wanted to push inside, he’d never tried this with Bones, they hadn’t had time before. He wanted to feel the smooth strength of Bones clenching around his fingers while they laid like this, with all the
“Can I?” Jim asked, after playing aimlessly for a little while longer.

“Sure, darlin’.” Bones granted his voice a little strained.

Jim hesitated despite himself, "I've only done it to myself."

“I don’t mind, just go easy with me,” Bones said.

Jim laughed, kissing Bones’ hairline before he pulled away to get the bottle of oil stashed in the bedside drawer. Jim pushed Bones’ pajamas down over the swell of his ass, Bones waiting to pass off the vial until he was done.

Jim coated his fingers, using more than he’d use on himself, he supposed Bones probably needed more slip that he did. He slicked up the outside of Bones’ pucker, just tracing the lines a bit more before he started to push in with his first and middle finger.

“Just one,” Bones said with a heavy sigh, like he wished he didn’t have to speak.

He rested his chin against Bones’ shoulder as he stilled, “Hmm?”

“One finger,” Bones said, “I can’t start with two.”

“Oh…” Jim considered it a minute, that was how he usually started. “Sorry, I didn’t think…”

“Everything’s alright, darlin’, keep going.”

Jim adjusted his hand, cautiously exploring just inside the rim with only one finger.

“Go on,” Bones urged, “All the way in,”
Slowly, he wiggled his finger deeper pausing after each knuckle. Jim rubbed around the widened rim with his thumb, stroking Bones from the inside as well with his finger. Bones made a breathy sound, squeezing down lightly, testing the feeling. Jim liked this, there was no urgency, and Bones was so soft. He thrust his finger shallowly and Bones hummed with content.

Jim continued to play lazily, sometimes pulling out entirely, and simply teasing Bones from the outside, then pushing back in swiftly. Bones didn’t protest, just let Jim do as he pleased, even when, after a while, Jim added a second finger in along side the first.

He loved the way Bones tightened, trying to keep Jim’s fingers inside, like he couldn’t bear for Jim to go. Jim knew what that friction felt like, he knew how desperate he’d been when Bones had done this to him, how wild it had felt to give someone this intimate control. Bones’ restrained breathing would sometimes turn into a gentle moan if Jim crooked his fingers just so and when Jim scrapped his teeth lightly against the nape of his neck Bones shuddered.

“How does it feel?” Jim asked, his voice low.

Bones whimpered, scooting his hips closer, trying to pushing Jim’s fingers further inside.

“Good?” he asked even though it was clear from Bones’ reaction. “Can you take more?”

“Yes,” Bones answered, “Yes, fuck.”

“Another finger?” Jim asked with a tinge of taunt. He pressed his third finger against Bones’ stretched rim.

Bones huffed, his body clenching tighter around Jim’s fingers, “I want whatever you’ll give me.”

Jim’s cock throbbed. The sincerity of his tone was a a fire licking all around Jim. It had been a long time since Bones had really let himself go. Maybe the last time had been back at the House, back before Jim’s world had collapsed and been rebuilt. Jim pulled his body closer, grinding himself against Bones’ hip, his cock undeterred by the thin fabrics between them.

“Please,” Bones whined.
“Beg for it,” Jim told him, pushing the third finger in. He wasn’t sure what had come over him, but he liked having Bones this way, needy and pliable in his hands.

“Oh darlin’, please.” Bones started without any pestering, “Please I need to feel you inside me! I want your cock. I need you to fuck me.”

His stomach twisted with the realization that Bones was letting him have this power, giving unabashedly to Jim. Even though it was what Jim had asked for he could feel a blush creeping over his body, he was glad Bones couldn’t see his face. Jim pumped his fingers in and out of Bones’ body for a few more seconds, listening to Bones muffle guttural sounds with his pillow. Then, without warning, he pulled his fingers out entirely.

Jim was met with desperate sounds of protest. Bones craned his neck trying to see where Jim had gone. “I need you, Jim, please,” Bones panted.

“Take off your shirt.”

Bones scrambled to comply, pushing the covers away as he did. His chest was flushed and his bottom lip was bitten red.

“And your pants.”

That took an extra second, as they were tangled around his knees. Precome dripped had pooled on his stomach making Bones shiny and wet.

Jim had busied himself by untying his own pants, stoking his cock as slowly as he could manage, slicking it up with oil. It was a bit thrilling for Bones to be the one entirely naked, not that pajamas afforded Jim much dignity, but it added to the power shift.

Bones watched him with hungry, dark eyes. He leaned in, so close his nose brushed Jim’s cheek, hesitating just short of a kiss, like he thought he might not be allowed. Jim’s heart leapt, closing the gap between them. Bones melted against him, sucking and biting at Jim’s mouth. There was a pleading quality to it, a desperate sort of need, and maybe Jim had told Bones to beg before, but he hadn’t just been following orders, there was truth in his words.
Suddenly, it was Jim moaning into Bones’ mouth as his fingers wrapped around Jim’s cock. It felt so good—too good—and chased his hands away, pushing him back down on the bed. Bones let himself be maneuvered down, whining as Jim broke their kiss.

There was blood smeared down Bones’ chin and Jim gasped, losing his domineering edge for a moment. He was sure it must be on his face as well. Bones noticed, running his fingers over his own lips, more blood trailed as he did.

“Are you…?” Jim asked having trouble finding the words. He didn’t like blood, it always put him off him, but for some reason, on Bones, in this moment it only made his cock jump. It wasn’t as though his lip had split, they’d just been careless, a catch of one of their teeth against Bones’ delicate lip, spilling yet another thing between them.

“Fuck me,” Bones said his voice all grit. He moved his knees so Jim could kneel easier in between them. “Darlin, please, I need you to fuck me now.”

“Tell me you’re okay,” Jim demanded reaching for the oil that was dripping on the bed, “And then tell me again how much you want it.” He moved Bones’ knee up to his shoulder, slipping three slicked fingers back inside Bones’ waiting hole.

“Ahhhh, I’m….fine,” Bones gasped as he rolled his hips against Jim’s hand. “Can’t you feel how empty I am? How much I want you. Oh fuck, please—please! I want you so badly!”

Bones was looking at him with the same carnal longing Jim sometimes wore when he looked at Bones, like nothing else mattered except this, except them. Jim wanted to drown himself in it.

He pulled his fingers free, Bones now repeating his name like a frantic prayer. Jim pushed Bones’ other knee out of the way, pressing his cock head against Bones’ throbbing pucker. All at once Jim was inside him, as Bones throwing his head back with a debauched cry. Bones spasmed around his cock, his body adjusting as quickly as it could. Jim felt sharp pricks down his arms where Bones’ nails were digging into his skin. And fuck if this didn’t feel even better than the last time Jim had gotten to fuck him. Bones spread out beneath Jim, his chest heaving as his shameless sounds filled the room. This time Jim could see his face, his mouth hanging in an O, his eyes barely open, but not leaving Jim.

It was as though Jim was the one being worshiped, like every roll of his hips was part of the ritual as Bones tried vehemently to pull him closer, as if Bones was hoping if he begged hard enough Jim could get further inside him.
“Oh thank you, darlin’! Yes fuck, just like that!”

Jim surged down kissing Bones, he tasted the metallic tang of the blood now adorning his mouth. Bones writhed under him, pulling Jim’s hair, making Jim moan back into his mouth, tightness coiling inside his belly. Bones milked his cock, his body silently begging while his mouth was occupied. God, he wanted to hold out, everything about this was perfect. He stilled inside Bones, squeezing the base of his cock, thinking himself off the edge. He pulled away, Bones’s hands falling away from his hair, clutching instead at his shirt as they scrambled for something to grasp. The slap of skin hitting wet skin as he fucked Bones was accompanied by his shallow gasping breath’s and Bones’ constant litany of pleading.

Bones was so beautiful like this, just watching as Jim destroyed him. Watching as Jim tried to hold himself together long enough to do so. His tongue running over his bleeding lip, hoping it would entice Jim to kiss him again, for their bodies to meet at another point. Jerking his hips like he needed Jim closer, like all he wanted in the whole world was looking back at him. And even though Bones’ body was stroking his cock with every move, it was the look Bones was giving him that finished Jim.

Jim’s orgasm broke over him like several crashing waves, his hips stuttering as he buried his cock to the base inside Bones. Bones squeezed with every jerk of Jim’s cock, drawing out his release as Jim managed gentle thrusts back inside, his come a new source of wetness and heat. Jim felt like he could breath again, gasping for Bones while he came.

Bones choked wetly as Jim finally pulled out. Jim scooted back, adjusting his body so he could take Bones’ cock in his mouth, Jim’s fingers breaching his come filled hole. Bones sobbed, bucking into Jim’s hot mouth while his fingers went straight for Bones’ prostate. It took less than thirty seconds before Bones came down his throat, screaming what might have tried to be Jim’s name.

Jim swallowed easily, not letting himself gag, continuing to tease Bones from the inside.

“I might…die” Bones managed horsely, “If you…don’t stop.”

Jim let him go, his spit slick lips turning up into a grin. He eased his fingers out, licking his own come off them.

Bones watched him, looking entirely exhausted. "You're so lovely."
Jim's exhaled a breathy laugh, "When am I ever lovely?"

"All the time, darlin’." Bones brushed a few stray strands of Jim’s hair off his forehead, “Every time I look at you.”

“I wouldn’t call anything that just happened lovely.”

“I would.”

Jim was unconvinced. Truthfully he felt like he might have stepped over a line. “I shouldn’t have made you—”

“You didn’t make me do anything,” Bones shushed.

Jim blushed, “I didn’t even ask, if you minded.”

“I would have stopped you if it had bothered me. I have no inhibitions about begging, if that’s what you want from me.”

“You know what I really want right now?” Jim asked running his hand down Bones’ chest.

“Mmmmm, no. Tell me.”

“To sleep in a bed that isn’t covered in sweat and oil.”

Bones rolled his eyes, laughing, “Alright, I’ll light the fire in the other room so we don’t freeze.”

“I’ll do it, you go wash up, and take care of your lip.” Jim grabbed his hand, “I’m really sorry about that.”

“Is it that bad?” he raised an eyebrow with worry. He kissed Jim, no doubt smearing more blood on
his cheek, “I didn’t feel it happen.”

“Yeah, you seemed preoccupied.”

“With what, I wonder?”

—I—

"I'm going out today," Jim said casually as Leonard dried the dishes.

His heart leapt to his throat despite himself. That was good, Jim should go out, Jim should go out without him. This was good progress. "That’s great, darlin," Leonard responded, he meant it. Jim would be fine, he would be fine.

He's going to leave you, a nagging in his brain whispered.

He’s allowed to make whatever choices he wants, Leonard quelled the first thought fiercely.

"Just be careful."

"As opposed to what?” Jim tested, glancing over at him.

Leonard didn’t know what to say, so he opted for nothing.

"I will be,” Jim added after the silence stretched for a beat too long. “I love you.”

—I—
It was so cold. Why was it always so cold outside? Jim hunched his shoulders, burying his face further into the scarf that was technically Bones'. It didn’t smell like Bones anymore, as it constantly adorned Jim’s neck when they went out. Jim had a good feeling it was his now.

It was nice to feel cold though, to feel something other than longing and pain. Not to wonder what would happen if he walked outside. The cold also meant less of his body was exposed, a small blessing as he still wasn’t comfortable seeing it, never mind letting other people seeing it.

Jim had a good handle on the layout of the town. He'd seen most of it with Bones, and had ventured out a couple times on his own, always meeting Bones back at the hospital for lunch, but this was his first time without that safety net. It was just him.

And maybe Jim should have been nervous—anything could happen after all—but for the first time in seemingly forever he felt at ease. The sun was shining and there were other people bustling around him and he felt normal; he felt like he was living his own life.

Jim grinned the rest of the way down the block.

There was a bakery two blocks over, he remembered. They’d walked by it several times, the smell of something Jim couldn’t quite place wafting through the air.

The last time he’d gone by, Bones had asked if he wanted to go in, as Jim had lingered a few seconds too long by the window. He had, but he’d been afraid Bones would end up buying him something. Bones always managed to pay before Jim could even get the money out of his pocket and it made him feel guilty. Bones never asked for anything in return, not for groceries, or dinner, or even for letting Jim stay in his home, but Jim didn’t feel he should waste Bones’ money on something as frivolous as sweets. Even if they were…whatever they were.

You’re just fucking, Jim had tried to tell himself. But it wasn’t true.

That wasn’t all this was. That wasn’t all they were, Jim just didn't have a name for it.

Bones loved him, and god, did Jim ever love him back—so much that his chest practically ached when Bones would brush his cheek and kiss him gently or that his stomach would flip when he
smiled at Jim from across the table over breakfast. Bones made him feel like he was worth something.

But now, on his own, Jim pushed the shop’s door open. He was greeted once again by the delicious scent of warm bread and pastries. Jim thought this must be what heaven smelled like. He had to keep reminding himself he could not buy, or eat, everything in sight.

He’d been out for maybe three hours already, but after sitting to have a sweet roll, a cranberry muffin, and a hot cup of green tea he felt energized enough to keep going. The sweets were better than they’d smelled. Armed with a second sweet-roll he continued on from the bakery. He chewed thoughtfully, his mind wandering back to when he’d barely been able to limp from the car to the apartment and shuddered. Maybe after he walked home Bones would come with him to the library. He could go by himself it was only another few blocks away, but if Bones came he’d help Jim carry extra books home.

Jim slowed in front of auto-repair shop, considering. The man, Pike, had been friendly, he hadn’t given a knowing look to the scar on Jim’s face. Jim had read several magazines on cars in the past few weeks, there were so many different kinds and styles and he wanted to look at them all. He wasn’t sure what made him feel bold enough to go inside—maybe it was the grease smeared across the Pike’s jaw on their last encounter, he wasn’t proper in the way so much of the outside would was.

Jim finished the last bite of his roll, licking the crumbs from his fingers before he made his way in. The air smelled like motor oil and metal, it was foreign but not unpleasant. There were two cars inside, one parked on top of a platform. It was older, he’d seen the model in a couple of the books from the library but couldn’t quite put his finger on what it was. The other was newer, but had a front panel removed exposing the engine. Jim stepped closer to it, admiring all the parts spread out on a table next to it. He wanted to pick them up, but stopped short remembering this wasn’t his space at all.

The sound of wheels scraping the floor startled Jim and he jumped down behind the car.

“Whoa son,” Pike said putting his hands up calmly. “I didn’t mean to frighten you. I didn’t hear you come in, I was fixing up the axel on the lady over there.” He threw a thumb towards the older car.

Jim looked towards were he’d motioned. A dolly cart had come out from under the platform and he realized the platform allowed Pike to be under the car to fix it. Jim took a second to compose himself, willing his heart to slow. “Sorry,” he apologized, looking at Pike nervously, stuffing his hands in his pockets.
He studied Jim for a second. “Kirk, right?”

Jim nodded.

“What can I help you with?”

Jim paused, his stomach dropping. He hadn’t though past coming inside, he really didn’t know why he was here. “I…I just like looking at the cars.”

Pike considered that for a moment, though not unkindly. He walked over to the car who’s engine was exposed, patting it on the bumper. “Me too. Some people think they’re ugly, but that’s just because they’ve never seen something this beautifully intricate. I like the way everything works together, how I can take her apart, and put her back together to make it work like new.” He looked back to Jim, “Listen to me, waxing poetic about the cars, I must sound crazy.”

Jim shook his head. “It seems like you take the time to understand them.”

Pike nodded, “That sounds about right. So Kirk, how are you liking it here?”

Swallowing his nerves, Jim answered, “Everything’s been great. It’s really different then… where I’m from, but I like it.”

“Sometimes change is what we all need. Believe it or not, I was a farmer for quite some time. I lived way out in the country, one day I realized I was traveling to fix other folks’ tractors more than I was tending my own land. I sold it and moved here, turns out people want automobiles but they don’t know how to fix them when something goes wrong.”

“Dr. McCoy speaks highly of your work.”

“He certainly should, Leonard’s had that car for a long time, I’m the only reason she still runs! He’s sentimental about it, doesn’t want a new one, I’m sure he’s told you.” Pike laughed, “I speak highly of him as well, there isn’t a better doctor for kilometers.” He wiped his hands on a rag from his pocket before undoing the top button of his coveralls, “You know, I was just finishing up, would you like to join me for dinner? There’s a pub a few blocks from here I’m partial to.”
Jim glanced outside, dusk creeping into the sky. He hadn’t realized how long he’d been out. He knew Bones wouldn’t be upset with him for being out late, or even for missing dinner if he decided to. It just seemed cruel not to let Bones know he was okay, despite how he tried to hide it, Jim knew Bones worried.

“Thank you for the offer, but I have to get home for dinner.”

“Of course, son, some other time. You stop by whenever.” He held out his hand for Jim.

He shook it quickly, still unused to the gesture, “Good evening, Mr. Pike.”

“Oh, please call me Chris. You get home safe.”
Chapter Notes

/Cautiously posts/
Y’all I know it’s only been a week since the last chapter but I’ve got some more!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim is safe, Jim is smart and he’s safe, Leonard told himself for what was probably the thousandth time that day, Jim will come back unless he doesn’t want to. Jim is fine.

He’d cooked more food than was reasonable for dinner, trying to distract himself, ignoring logic telling him Jim might not even be back for dinner. Trying to do anything besides wringing his hands and worrying.

Leonard whipped his head towards the door as he heard the knob turn. He felt like he could breath again, the lump in his throat disappearing.

“Bones?” Jim asked into the quiet apartment.

“Over here, darlin’,” He managed not to jump out of his chair, playing it as though he hadn’t wanted to crawl out of his skin when night had crept over the city.

He was going to be normal and he was under no circumstances going to push any of the worry he’d felt on to Jim. “Did you enjoy—”

Jim leaned over the cushioned arm of the chair, cutting him off with a kiss. Jim’s nose was cold against his cheek and he hadn’t bothered to take off his coat or scarf. Jim smelled faintly of machine oil, but mostly he smelled overwhelmingly like crisp, cold air.

He came back. Leonard’s heart was practically doing backflips. He came back for dinner, he was alive, he came back because he wanted to. Leonard wondered if Jim could feel the relief leaking from his pores.

Leonard pulled away, he couldn’t keep himself from grinning. Jim smiled back shyly, taking a
moment to remove his shoes and the many layers he had on. He padded into the kitchen, turning on a burner for the kettle.

“Do you want tea?” Jim asked, opening the cabinet for mugs.

“I’ll have some after dinner. Are you hungry, or did you already eat?” Leonard asked casually, as though he hadn’t made so much food they could invite everyone in the building.

Jim turned back to him, his cheeks still pink from being outside. “You haven’t had dinner?”

“I, ah…lost track of time,” Leonard lied.

It was a boldface lie as he couldn’t remember when he’d last been so acutely aware of the time. He’d just kept putting it off, hoping Jim would come back, and he had. It now seemed ridiculous that he’d been worried, but he hadn’t been behaving logically. Leonard winced when Jim opened the oven, seeing again just how much he’d made.

Jim lifted the chicken pan out first, “Is someone else coming over?”

“Not unless you invited them.” Leonard felt a blush wash over his face.

“Can’t say I did,” Jim laughed, handling the potatoes and vegetable dish.

Leonard got up finally, trying to relax his tensed muscles. He put out plates and silverware for both of them. He sat as Jim closed the oven, leaving the bread pudding alone. Leonard served them both, loading Jim’s plate up with more than he gave himself, like always. When Jim served himself the portions were always too small and Leonard could tell he felt awkward about going back for seconds. Jim watched him, head balanced on his hands; he brushed his toes down Leonard’s leg playfully.

“Did you wait for me to eat?” Jim asked, four bites in.

Leonard jumped up to attend to the hissing tea kettle instead of answering. He poured the steaming water into a mug and added a bag of green tea, handing it to Jim before sitting back down.
God, he shouldn’t be so self-conscious, but he was. “Would you have preferred I didn’t?”

“I’m glad you did,” Jim set his hand on top of Leonard’s, “But you didn’t have to.”

“I know.” Leonard ate another forkful of roasted potatoes, chewing so his tongue would be too occupied to say something he’d regret.

“I’m sorry I got back so late.”

“You don’t have a curfew.”

“Bones, I know.” He huffed a little laugh, “I’m just sorry I made you worry.”

Leonard wanted to deny it but it was no use so he nodded, the color on his cheeks deepening.

“I had a really great day,” Jim started, taking around another forkful of food. “I walked all the way out to Gamma Park.”

“Really?” Leonard asked, genuinely surprised, it was a far walk even in warm weather. “Was the lake frozen?”

“No, I was surprised! I also stopped in that little bakery, you know the one on Broad Street?”

“You did? How was it?”
It had been such an exhausting day. He’d gone back to the hospital for the first time in two days, the first time since he’d let Khan die.

Christine had grabbed him, pulling him away from the hospital before he’d even gone inside.

“What the fuck happened, Leonard?”

“Christine,” he’d tried to protest.

“Oh no, no more of that! Do you have any idea how fast word travels through this hospital? Iris says you killed him on purpose,” she’d pushed, almost scandalized.

Christine Chapel was not easily scandalized. Leonard had dragged a hand over his face. “I didn’t kill anyone.”

She’d insisted Leonard tell her. Her eyes had widened sympathetically when he’d explained who Khan was, what he’d done. Leonard told her about the gangrene, how far gone he’d been when he’d come in. He’d admitted his cruelty and rashness towards him, but by then she’d already been on his side. Her iron grip on his arm had loosened, and but her eyes burned with that distant fire of anger.

“You gave him a better ending than he deserved,” she’d maintained as he’d gotten quiet.

They’d walked into the building together, only for Leonard to have been immediately led into Geoff’s office. Leonard had already talked to him the day after it had happened, but they still had to go over it. Again, Leonard had had to rehash what had gone on, justify himself. While Geoff was sympathetic, he’d had to reprimand him for accountability’s sake. He’d decided not to involve the county authority, or anyone above them, a small mercy.

The day had just seemed to drag forever, the other nurses and volunteer staff sneaking glances at him all day long. Every time he’d looked up it was as though conversation halted. But Leonard had tolerated it better than he usually would that sort of gossip, because he’d been grateful there hadn’t been hell to pay. Even if there had been severe consequences, he’d have done it again, the only thing Leonard would have changed is they would have never given the monster even one drop of morphine. But Leonard couldn’t have said that, he couldn’t admit to something like that, he’d had to act remorseful and humbled for the rest of the day. He might even have to do it for the rest of the week, and that by itself was exhausting.
He’d collapsed when he came home. Jim had asked if he wanted something warmed up, but Leonard had been too tired for even that, downing a cup of tea then passing out.

“Can I do anything?” Jim had asked gently as Leonard was drifting off.

Leonard thought he must have made some contrary noise since the next thing he knew Jim was crawling into bed along side of him, pillowing his head of Leonard’s chest, wrapping his warm hands around Leonard’s waist.

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All Leonard wanted was Jim to be happy. That’s what you were supposed to want for the people you loved. Jim seemed happy enough, happier than he’d been at the House anyway. But Leonard wondered how happy Jim really was, in the apartment, left alone with his thoughts for hours on end.

Leonard was certainly happy with Jim. He’d almost managed to push aside the feeling that this whole situation—keeping Jim with him, the attack, and Jim’s loneliness—was also his fault. Almost. Sometimes when the phone rang Jim would look at it for a second too long, like he hoped it might be for him, or when Leonard caught Jim tugging at the scar on his face in the surface of the kettle or the mirror his heart ached. Leonard wanted more for him, more happiness, more experiences, more than he could give Jim with love alone.

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Jim sighed as he watered his plants carefully, staring out the window, light streaming on his face. It felt nice to let the sun wash over him. One of his subsequent times out on his own he’d bought several seed packets and a couple of planters for the window. Winter seemed to be on the wane, but it was still too cold to put anything outside. They were nothing special, just a few herbs—the woman at the shop had told him the mint would sprout small blue flowers along with the plant itself—and they were his. The plants were tiny still, barely poking up out of the rich soil, but Jim could wait for them. He understood sometimes it took a while for things to look like they were growing, and he liked them.
He was bored, so painfully bored. There was almost nothing to do, no one to talk to—he couldn’t bother Bones every second of the day. Books could only take him so far away. It was something he couldn’t remember ever having to contend with. There had always been someone, one of the boys or even Talas. He wondered how people made friends in the real world, how he was supposed to make friends with his scared face and wrinkled past.

—

When Leonard woke it was dark, the only light coming from the moon outside. They’d fallen asleep on the couch listening to the radio. He wondered how late it was, the radio only crackling static now. He never woke up in the middle of the night unless Jim was restless and Jim was restless, face tuned towards Leonard. He was moaning breathy little sounds and at first Leonard worried it was a nightmare. He was poised to wake Jim up, but as conciseness seeped into his brain he thought Jim sounded less distressed and instead more desperate, more sexual. Finally, taking the whole of it in, he felt Jim rutting against his leg softly.

“Jim,” he whispered wondering if perhaps Jim was awake after all.

In response, he was met with a throatier moan, but Jim still seemed soundly asleep. That was surprising, but also sweet. For some reason the idea that Jim still had wet dreams was a little charming.

“That’s alright, darlin’,” Leonard spoke into Jim’s hair, his voice still hushed, “Go on.”

Jim whimpered again, noises getting more pronounced the more Leonard talked to him. It continued like that for two minutes, Leonard purring encouragement and Jim’s breathing picking up as his cries got more intense. Eventually, Jim made a wordless noise, between a sob and a gasp. His movements stopped and a warm wetness seeped through Jim’s trousers, spreading to Leonard’s where they were pressed together.

Leonard honestly found it adorable. He liked the thought that his voice had contributed to whatever pleasure dream Jim had been experiencing. Jim grumbled slightly as he began to wake up, shifting against Leonard. He rubbed his eyes in the half light, looking up to find Leonard’s face. He seemed to register the wetness at about the same time. He looked panicked, trying to scramble away from Leonard.
“Where are you off to?” Leonard laughed, holding him gently.

“I’m s-sorry, fuck, th-that doesn’t happen a l-lot,” Jim stuttered, a heavy rouge blooming on his face and neck.

“Was it a nice dream?” Leonard asked, kissing Jim’s trembling fingers. “It sounded like you were having a good time.”

Jim’s blush grew even darker before he hid his face against Leonard’s chest. “You could hear me?”

“Panting like that in my ear? Of course I heard you, darlin’.”

“Did I… I didn’t say anything did I?”

Leonard kissed the top of his head, “No, you just sounded like you were enjoying it.”

Jim practically squeaked against him.

“You’re not… embarrassed?” Leonard questioned skeptically, “Are you?”

“It hasn’t happened in a long time.” Jim muttered into the fabric of Leonard’s shirt.

“I don’t mind.”

“Well… It feels like you did a little more than not mind.” Jim emphasized his point by grinding his hips against Leonard’s obviously interested cock.

Leonard groaned, “You can tell that, huh?”

“Did you touch me?” Jim asked, shifting up to kiss Leonard’s jaw. “Or did you want to feel me come against you without that?”
“Didn’t touch you, I didn’t know if you’d want me to.”

“Do you want me to touch you?”

“Yes,” Leonard breathed heavily.

Jim did him one better, sitting up so he could tug at the fastenings on Leonard’s trousers. Leonard scrambled himself up the couch, making room for Jim in between his legs. Jim fumbled for just a second in the dim light, before he had his mouth around Leonard’s cock.

Leonard wondered if it was possible for Jim’s mouth to feel any less than perfect as he swallowed him down. He loved the way Jim’s tongue caressed his cock, hot and wet and skilled. Jim licked his way up and down Leonard’s hard length. Leonard heard himself gasping. He let himself focus only on this, on the way his cock jumped when Jim pressed a kiss near the base, the way Jim fondled his sack with finesse, the way Jim seemed to know exactly what sent shivers up his spine.

Much too soon Jim pulled completely away, a moonbeam streaked across his face as he sat up.

“What?” Leonard gasped, missing the feeling immediately. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry,” Jim said his fingers circling Leonard’s cock, “I know it’ll take too long, but I need you to fuck me. Please Bones, please fuck me.”

“Shhh, okay, okay. Let me just get something to open you up.”

Jim pushed him back down, “I’ll get it.”

Leonard had never more regretted not being in their bedroom, he was going to have to put lube in every room if Jim was gonna ask for things in that voice all the time. Leonard sighed enormously, his head sagging back into the arm of the sofa. Jim was going to be the death of him. He took a moment to strip the rest of his clothes off, not that there was much left.
“Jim? Where are you darlin’?” Leonard called after what felt like an eternity and Jim still wasn’t back. Leonard was practicing breathing normally while he continued to stoke himself.

“Sorry,” came the reply muted with distance. He could hear footstep before he saw Jim.

“What happened?” Leonard asked, kissing him, much too softly for how frantic they were.

“Didn’t want you to worry about hurting me, so I got myself ready.”

“Darlin’ I could have done it.”

“Bones, I swear you just like having your fingers inside me. You just want to listen to me moan your name.”

“You make it sound so pretty.”

Jim laid down, it was dark enough that they were barely more than silhouettes, the suggestion of two people until the stray patches of moonlight illumined parts of them at random. Leonard could hardly see Jim’s face, let alone any scars, and he supposed that was why Jim wasn’t worried, why Jim was stretched out before him, face up and completely naked.

“Fuck me,” Jim begged, reaching out for Leonard in the dark.

Leonard growled with arousal. He found Jim’s legs which he urged up, over his shoulders, his fingers slipping down Jim’s soft skin, finding his slick, puckered hole. Leonard’s cock jerked, he could feel himself leaking precome. Without another word Leonard pushed his length inside Jim’s waiting body.

Jim’s breathing came in stuttered gasps, his channel convulsing as it tried to accommodate Leonard’s cock. He was so incredibly tight, Jim hadn’t done a lot of prep and Leonard couldn’t even imagine how the intense stretch must be for Jim.

“That okay, darlin’?” Leonard asked breathlessly.
“Yeah,” Jim gasped. Leonard could feel his heart hammering. “Just need a second.”

He reached down for Jim’s cock, wanting to stroke and distract him while his body adjusted. Jim was still soft, his cock lulling against his stomach.

“I’m trying, I’ll get there once you start fucking me,” Jim said, his fingers wrapping around Leonard’s bicep. They both held frozen, only their ragged breath filling the air while Leonard waited as best he could.

“Now? I’ll go slow,” Leonard promised. It was hard to read Jim’s expression in this light, he couldn’t tell if Jim was ready or not. Jim made an agreeable noise and Leonard took the opportunity. The muscles in Jim’s legs quivered against his neck. “Fuck,” Leonard whined as he moved incrementally, “You’re so tight.” He hesitated before pushing back in, “Tell me if this hurts.”

A cry rolled from the back of Jim’s throat before he managed, “Keep going. Ohhhh god, fuck, _fuck!”_ Jim continued as Leonard sunk slowly inside.

It was almost tortuously slow, Leonard seemingly seconds away from coming, only holding out because he didn’t want the sounds Jim was making to stop. He didn’t seem to be able to do anything other than moan and tighten around Leonard. Leonard ran his fingers down Jim’s rapidly hardening cock, causing Jim to make a positively feral noise.

“Too much,” Jim gasped.

Leonard obliged knowing how sensitive Jim could get, instead pushing deeper inside Jim, relishing the way Jim’s nails dug into his skin.

Jim pushed up to his elbows, his face suddenly lit by the moon. “Kiss me,” he moaned, unable to move any farther. Leonard indulged both of them, leaning down and capturing his mouth roughly, pushing Jim’s knees further towards his body.

Jim accepted the new position easily, folding as though he couldn’t be close enough to Leonard if he tried. Leonard could feel his orgasm building, peaking to the surface after holding back for so long, like a pot boiling over.
Jim,” he gasped, breaking their kiss but still close enough that he was breathing Jim’s air, “Oh fuck, Jim, Jim!” Leonard came as though he hadn’t found release in months, emptying inside Jim in seconds that stretched into an eternity. Jim’s muscles rolled against his cock drawing the come from his body, demanding it. Jim mewled against him and Leonard felt Jim’s body bear down with what he could only assume was Jim’s own, untouched orgasm, drawing out the delicious pressure on Leonard’s throbbing cock.

“Bones…oh shit Bones,” Jim whispered rawly, their foreheads pressed together.

Leonard let his cock slide out of Jim’s spent hole. “My turn for a kiss.” He kissed Jim’s lips briefly, his lips ghosting down his legs, he kissed Jim’s skin until he reached Jim’s entrance. Leonard licked firmly before kissing the puckered hole.

“No, oh fuck! I can’t,” Jim cried.

Sometimes Jim was just overwhelmed, but he really could if Bones gave him a moment. He kissed his way back up, over Jim’s balls, tasting Jim’s bitter release on his skin before traveling back down.

“Bones!” Jim stuttered, “It’s too much, Bones, I’ll die!” Jim sounded like he wished he was saying anything else, like he was frustrated that he couldn’t. He swore when Leonard stopped, panting. “I’m sorry…thank you……oh fuck me, that was—”

“It was,” Leonard agreed contented. “It really was.”

—

Jim made it to the bathroom first, flipping on the dim electric lamps. He’d had enough of going to sleep a sticky mess and waking up with dried come itching his body. Still grinning from their ridiculously perfect sex, he wiped himself down with a wet cloth. His body felt so heavy, and warm. Jim loved the way his body fit with Bones. How right they felt together.

Just as he went to pull his pajama bottoms on, Jim caught sight of himself in the full length mirror propped in the corner. He’d almost forgotten. Almost pushed it so far from his mind it wasn’t real, just another bad nightmare.
It was a particularly bad angle and he could see almost all the damage. The way his grin distorted the scar on his face, the lines on his chest, almost pointing an arrow down to the awful word. It was cut so haphazardly, not like the rest of the scars that had precision and symmetry from the drawn out torture. Those were better somehow, the diamonds cut into his thighs were almost elegant. Jim could have convinced himself they, as well as the long, delicate lines on the inner side, were decorative. But not when they were accompanied with the word.

He hated it, and he hated that he hated it. It made him feel so powerless, like he’d never be able to move on. Jim knew that’s what Khan had wanted, that that had been the goal, and he wanted to prove the bastard wrong. It was just so difficult, when the man in the mirror was a ruined version of Jim. Pathetic and skewered and broken.

Jim was still frozen when Bones finally made it to the bathroom. When Bones looked at him, Jim forgot, because the only thing he ever saw on Bones’ face was love. Somehow that made it all the more jarring now.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Bones asked when he realized Jim was rooted to the spot in front of the mirror.

Jim could only see the scars, there seemed to be more every time he blinked. He was terrified to turn away. Maybe the next time looked his whole body would be scars, or maybe his mirror-self would grab Jim, drag him into the mirror void. He didn’t know, but he didn’t dare find out.

He ran his hand across Jim’s shoulder. “Darlin’, what is it?” Bones asked, sounding worried. He looked from the mirror, to Jim, to Jim’s eyes in the mirror. “Shit,” he muttered, finding a towel from the laundry pile and quickly throwing it over the reflection.

“How’s it going?” Jim motioned to his body.

“Doesn’t matter,” Jim said, “I’ve already seen it.”

“You don’t have to keep looking, I know it upsets you.”

“I hate this. I hate that I look like this!” Jim motioned to his body.

“I wish you wouldn’t hate it.”
“I hate what happened!”

“I know,” Bones said softly.

“It’s reminder, every goddamn time I see them!” Jim could hear his voice working itself into a frenzy. He didn’t want to yell at Bones, it wasn’t his fault, but there was no one else to yell at, and he was tired of all the yelling in his head.

“I don’t…I just…” Bones didn’t seem to know what to say. “I know.”

“Just shut up!”

Bones nodded, taking a step back. He was doing the thing with his eyes that he sometimes did when Jim would get worked-up or when he told Bones something horrible from his past. He’d look down, his eyes unfocused and blink several times slowly. He hated that Bones needed a coping mechanism, it made Jim feel worse.

“Fuck, I’m sorry, don’t—I don’t know! I don’t fucking know! I try to forget but it’s just when I remember…” He subconsciously touched his scars as he talked, trying to obscure them without success. “When I remember it hurts. I know they don’t matter to you, maybe you’re better than me—no, you definitely are—but you make me forget.”

He watched as Bones tried to sort though the stream of consciousness Jim had just spewed at him. “I don’t want to make it worse for you,” he said finally.

“Bones, shiit that’s not—I’m not saying that! You’re the only thing that makes it better.” He tried to push the hysteria down again, “I just…I don’t know how to get past it. Not everyone is you, not everyone is going to understand. I have to get a job at some point, I won’t be some kept thing.”

“I wouldn’t try to make you into that.”

“But I don’t…I don’t have skills, I don’t know how to do anything!”

“That’s not true,” Bones insisted, opening his mouth like he might continue.
Jim cut him off, “All I know how to do is take my clothes off.” He frowned, his lip beginning to quiver.

“Jim, you’re not—”

“Almost forgot,” Jim said self-deprecation thickening his tone, “I’m great at sucking cock too!”

It was clear how upset Bones was. Jim knew Bones hated when he talked like this, but it hadn’t been this bad in a while. Worry set itself on his brow, “Darlin’…don’t do this to yourself. I don’t know what you’re good at, but you can find out. I’ll help you. You have the chance to find out now.”

“What if I’m not good at anything Bones?” he asked after a moment in a panicked whisper, “What if I can’t do this?” Jim was edging on wild, he could feel his heart hammering.

“I know you can. You’re so strong Jim, you can do anything you want, go anywhere, two-hundred and fifty Tul is enough to get on your feet. I’ll do whatever I can, ask around. You could start an apprenticeship—”

—

Jim’s head snapped up suddenly, he looked as though a wave of nausea had just him. He started at Leonard, wide-eyed and unblinking for seconds too long.

“What was that?” he interjected.

Leonard faltered to a stop, not sure why Jim had just recoiled, before repeating, “An apprenticeship…something where you can learn a trade—”

“I know what an apprenticeship is,” Jim cut him off again, his voice wary. “How do you know how much money I have?”
Leonard’s face paled, as he realized the gravity of his misstep, he shouldn’t know how much money Jim had, it shouldn’t have even been one of his concerns. He faltered, “I… It fell out of your coat pocket, when I picked up your things at the inn. It was difficult not to see, when I put it back, that is…” he trailed, trying to cover for himself.

Jim shook his head, chewing his lip looking as though the was barely keeping it together. “That’s bullshit. You wouldn’t have—fuck, that’s not even how much was left. I spent some of it that first day. Why would you know how much I when I left Talas’? What the hell, Bones?”

Leonard blinked slowly, he was so fucked, caught in the middle of a poorly thought-out lie. This was not how he wanted to tell Jim. Shit, he hadn’t planned on telling Jim at all.

“Please hear me out, darlin’,” Leonard asked,

“Don’t call me that,” Jim hissed.

Confusion clouded his face, “What?”

“Don’t try to endear me while you’re lying!”

The moniker had a way of slipping out whenever he talked to Jim whether he meant it to or not. “Jim,” Leonard corrected softly.

Jim nodded stiffly.

Leonard swallowed, “I know how much money you had because I asked Madam Talas to give it to you.”

Jim clenched his jaw, “That’s not a very good fucking explanation.”

Leonard sighed heavily, scrubbing a hand across his face. It was as though he could actually feel everything crashing around him, he wasn’t getting out of this. It was time to fess up.
“I knew how badly you wanted out. I…I spoke with your Madam. We worked out a deal, so you could leave, so you would have some money when you left. Jim, please understand, I didn’t mean for you to know.”

“No.” Jim shook his head adamantly. “No, I know Talas. She doesn’t work deals. She works in Tul. You tell me right now what the fuck you negotiated.”

“Jim…please, it doesn’t matter.”

Jim’s fists were clenched so tightly his knuckles had turned white. “It matters!” Jim insisted. Leonard didn’t miss the way his voice broke in panic.

“I paid her,” Leonard said finally, there was no point in sidestepping it anymore.

“Are you fucking kidding me?!” Jim grimaced, his lip quivering. Jim looked like Leonard had just slapped him. He grabbed the edge of the bathtub, taking heaving breathe while he looked anywhere that wasn’t Leonard.

What else could Leonard say?

“I’m not.” Leonard had always known he would hate it, but he hadn’t been prepared for just how angry Jim would be.

“How could you…” Jim took a step back. “How fucking dare you?” He swallowed hard, like he was fighting the urge to be sick. “You bought me.”

“Jim…I suppose I did, but that’s not—” Leonard tried, moving to close the space between them.

“No! No, don’t you come one fucking step closer.” Jim’s whole body shook. He raised his clenched fists as though he would physically fight Leonard if he had to. “Stay over there!”

Leonard had no doubt that Jim would start swinging if he came closer. Leonard felt like he might be sick himself. Everything was just going from bad to worse and Leonard couldn’t seem to stop it.
“I didn’t want to upset you…I just wanted you to have a chance to start over. I did pay for you, but you’re not—”

Jim cut him off again, not letting him explain. “God, I’m so fucking stupid. I trusted you! I trusted…shit…shit you’re…” Jim choked stumbling over the words before heaving them from his throat, “You’re just like everyone else.”

“I never thought…I didn’t expect things to turn out like this. You made it clear you wanted me gone.” Leonard felt panic rising in his chest, this was such a mess. “I just wanted you to get out of there, it broke my heart, the way you thought you’d never get to leave. Darlin’, If you hadn’t ended up in the hospital, you’d have never seen me again, I swear…”

“Stop calling me that!” Jim cried, his hands scrubbing through his hair. His eyes blazed suddenly as Leonard’s words set in, “That’s your fucking fault too! He would have never—I wouldn’t have…He wouldn’t have found me at the House!”

Leonard had know it would only be a matter of time until Jim came to that conclusion as well, but it didn’t hurt any less. The thought had been weighing on his conscious since he’d first seem Jim laying in the hospital. “I know.”

“What was that?” Jim glared, his gaze searing hot.

“It’s my fault. I know it is, and I’m sorry. Jim, I’m so goddamn sorry.”

Jim looked away like the sight of Leonard was too much. “Hell of a lot of good that does now.”

“You have every right to be mad. I don’t expect you to forgive me,” he said keeping his eyes forward.

It didn’t matter how much it hurt Leonard, Jim had to know he was serious. Maybe later he could explain fully what had happened with the money to Jim, when he wasn’t reeling from shock.

“I won’t!” Jim shouted, narrowing his brow.
Then again, maybe not.

“I’m sorry Jim.”

“Don’t look at me!” Jim spat, his voice level but pure venom.

Leonard could find nothing too do but nod weakly in gut-wrenching acceptance.

Jim staggered towards the door, stopping just short of the frame, standing in silence for another minute or so while Leonard remained frozen. Then in perhaps the most broken, dejected voice Leonard had ever heard, Jim repeated, “I trusted you…” before he disappeared.

—

Jim bolted to his room, barely managing to hold back tears until the door was closed.

_The spare room, he reminded himself, It’s Bones’ house, you’re just staying with another man who’s bought you._

At least he’d managed not to cry in front of Bones this time, as if he wasn’t pathetic enough even without the tears. It felt like he was drowning, the tears now choking him as they poured over, not able to get out fast enough.

He’d known something was off with Talas. In his heart, he’d _known_ there was no way she’d simply _let him go_. But he’d wanted to believe—so fucking badly—that just for once something had worked out in his favor. Where had that gotten him? The fact that Bones had pried into his life—his files, his debt—and taken it upon himself to _buy_ Jim just made him want to throw up.

Jim was _so tired_ of money being exchanged for him. He was a _person_, not a commodity. He didn’t know why he was surprised, Bones paid for him all the time at Hoshi’s, that had felt like a necessity, the only way they could see each other, Bones had been paying for time. But buying him—buying all of him—that was different. That crossed a line, Bones _owned_ him now. Not just for an hour, not
for a night, Jim was his property.

He’d let himself think that Bones was different, but it wasn’t true. He couldn’t bear the thought of Bones knowing Jim had been so naive as to fall in love with him. Bones could say it back all he wanted, but it didn’t matter, love and ownership were not the same.

He’d guarded his heart so carefully all this time, but now it seemed he’d lost that too. That hurt most of all. Jim never opened up, he’d never bothered, it hadn’t ever felt worth it. But Bones had tricked him into giving up his heart. The only thing that had been left from the trials of his life was broken, and the last tiny glimmer of Jim’s spirit along with it.

Jim had to leave, he had to get the fuck out of here, but the streets seemed far more threatening than a soft bed and solid walls. Especially considering what had happened the last time he’d ventured out on his own. Khan might be dead, but Jim didn’t know what was waiting for him in the dark, the dark wasn’t his anymore.

He’ll probably have me arrested if I leave, Jim thought, letting out a sob soaked laugh.

He couldn’t make sense of all of it in his head. Why had Bones bought him and then refused him for so long? Why had he dragged it out, pretending to care about Jim when all along none of it mattered? It must have been part of a sick game. Breaking Jim down until he was pliable enough to surrender easily, to make Jim feel as though this was what he wanted, as though he had a choice at all. Bones wasn’t a man of force, he’d made that clear, but obviously one of manipulation. Jim didn’t want to play this game anymore, he was ashamed he’d fallen victim to it in the first place. He felt stupid and so small, all his pathetic I love you’s swirling around in his head. He felt like he was being punched in the gut. He should have known better than to fall for Bones, he should have guessed everything was too good to be true, he should have stopped wishing for more when he’d had the chance. He should have died.

Jim didn’t know what to do, it was as though he understood nothing at all. He felt lost—used—his head pounding, his nose running, his heart broken.

Leonard sat on the couch, staring into the fire as his thoughts ran a million miles an hour around his head. It had all gone worse than he’d thought was possible, so much worse. Jim had every right to be
mad, Leonard hated himself so much already he would have been worried if Jim wasn’t upset at all. But this…this was almost damnation.

Screaming yanked him back to reality. Panicked, he bolted to Jim’s room forgetting for a moment what had transpired between them. Jim was in pain, something was wrong and he needed to help.

The boy was thrashing against an unseen demon in his dreams. Jim looked so young, so fragile. Leonard hated seeing him suffer, hated that he had any part in Jim’s suffering.

“Jim? Jim, it’s okay, you’re okay,” Leonard shook him firmly, breaking the trance.

Jim’s eyes flew open, wild and panicked, flitting around the dark room. He gasped and jerked away from Leonard’s touch like it had burned him. “Get the fuck off me,” Jim growled, despite his shaking voice. “Now it’s going to start over.”

“I’m sorry,” Leonard whispered.

“Leave me alone,” Jim demanded, moving himself as far away from Leonard as the bed would allow, “Just leave me alone!”

“If that’s what you want,” Leonard nodded formally, shuffling out of the room.

“I’m not your fucking toy!” Jim yelled after him, his voice breaking.

He wasn’t able to sleep after that, Jim’s nightmares returning every forty minutes or so. Startling him every time. If Leonard didn’t consider himself a monster before he certainly felt like one now. Listening to Jim suffer, being able to do nothing to help, knowing that his very presence made Jim recoil was excruciating. It made him sick to think that Khan had once listened to Jim scream and found pleasure in it. He was nothing like Khan, they were so very different. Jim’s screams were like hot coals on his skin.

He wondered once again if he shouldn’t have just left well enough alone. If Jim wouldn’t have been happier at the House after all. If all of this was more trauma then he would have suffered at the hands of a hundred other faceless clients and if it was worse because Jim had trusted him. Jim undoubtedly thought so. Granted, Jim wouldn’t let Leonard explain, but really, why should he? From Jim’s perspective, what Leonard had done betrayed the deepest part of Jim, the part he’d never shown to
anyone.

Eventually Leonard gave up on trying to sleep in favor of pacing up and down the hallway. Selfish as it was, he had to fix this. He’d left once thinking Jim hated him, and it hadn’t even been true. He couldn’t do it a second time, not when, by Jim’s own admission, he thought Leonard was keeping him as a plaything. The idea of losing Jim this way was too much.

Jim’s cries continued from behind the rigid door, Leonard slowly losing his mind as the night wore on. He sank to the floor outside, knocking his head back against the wall, trying to get in enough air to think clearly.

Chapter End Notes

I kind of have a feeling that "sorry" isn't going to cover it, (from me or from Jim) but i'm not really sure what else to say...
I feel like I've been working on this part forever and it's finally at a place I'm comfortable with. So here we go!!

The first thing Jim did when he woke was pack his meager belongings. He was going to run, it didn’t matter where.

Away from all of this hurt.

Away from his life.

He’d run and be too far away to find by the time Bones noticed, or cared. Jim was ready to run until his money dried up, and then after that, it didn’t matter. Hell, maybe he could turn tricks, be an alley whore. At least he knew his way around the trade. At least he wouldn’t have to live every day wondering how he’d allowed himself to be so utterly deceived and devastated.

Jim didn’t have anything. No family, no job, less than three hundred Tul to his name—and it wasn’t even his, it was Bones’. So he was a thief in addition to being a whore. He had nothing. He felt the panic settling in his chest. It was worse now than it had been at Talas’ when she told him he was leaving. He felt hapless, lost. Jim didn’t care about his life, he didn’t even want it, his sad excuse for an existence.

He crept down the hallway to the bathroom, hoping against all hope Bones hadn’t decided to stick around this morning. Jim didn’t think he could stomach looking at the man even one more time.

He found the apartment was blessedly silent. Jim looked at his face in the cupboard mirror, staring into the eyes of his reflection. Were there wrinkles creeping at the corners of his eyes or was he imagining it? He couldn’t have those already. His lips were still plump and pink, but they only served to make his mouth look fuckable, and somehow did nothing to preserve his youth. It wouldn’t matter though, wrinkles or not, nothing could make up for the scar.

The goddamn scar. It was everything he hated about himself, right there, slashed across his cheek for the whole world to see. It made him look mean. It made him look haggard. It made him look scared.
Looking at it splashed across his face made Jim’s stomach twist.

*You’re mess,* he thought, his eyes dropped down to the sink basin.

There was an envelope that read only “Jim”. His hands shook, reaching out to pick it up. It was heavy and sealed with wax on the folded side, but despite the itching in his fingers he didn’t break the seal.

He wanted to open it.

He *wouldn’t* open it.

What could it possibly say? What if it changed his mind? He didn’t want that. It couldn’t. He didn’t want to hear *anything* Bones had to say, it would hurt too much. The betrayal of his admittance still pushing at his throat, threatening to spill forth a fresh batch of tears. He wouldn’t open it, but he couldn’t leave it either, so Jim stuffed it into his pocket.

Jim washed his face—it was pointless, but a morning ritual none-the-less—and gave his reflection one final grimace before grabbing his things and heading out the door. He let the front door latch behind him and a wave of panic crashed into him. He turned back to face the closed barrier and, to his own disgust, tried the handle.

Locked.

Of course it was.

That was it. There was no going back. No option of staying now. He’d told himself he wouldn’t stay, and now he couldn’t.

Jim made it all the way to the corner before he had to stop. He leaned against the rough brick of the towering building to calm his breathing from the shaky, pointless gasps he was sucking in. He pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes to hold back tears.
“He’s gonna leave me,” Leonard shook his head miserably, folded his arms and rested down on his desk, “And all it’s my fucking fault.”

“He’s not going to leave you.”

“He found out about the money…about everything.” Leonard knew he shouldn’t be burdening Christine with his problems yet again but it was this or giving himself over to panic and sobbing his eyes out, and his face already felt raw from the night of doing just that. “He feels like I bought him, and I did.”

Christine, to her credit, was more indulgent than normal. She’d even brought him a mug of coffee which was strictly against her rules as she was a nurse, not a barmaid. “You weren’t trying to hurt him, Jim has to understand that.”

Leonard’s face fell, how he wished that was true. “He doesn’t want to understand. He’s too upset to listen. He just kept saying—with that crushed voice—that he’d trusted me and I ruined everything.”

She didn’t seem to want to touch on that as she pressed her lips into a hard line. “Is he still at your apartment?”

“I don’t know,” he hunched his shoulders, holding his head up in his hands, “His door was closed when I left.”

“Leonard why did you leave? You could have called, you didn’t have to come in—”

“I couldn’t. I don’t want him to stay because he feels trapped.”

It was the truth. The letter said everything he had to say. Anything that had the power to change Jim’s mind, he’d already written down, and by writing it Leonard’s physical body wouldn’t be there intimidating Jim into something he didn’t want.
“What about me? Now I’m trapped here, listening to you.” Christine had her limits, as Leonard very well knew. The exasperation in her tone was palpable, “I hope you know you’re absolutely exhausting.”

“I do, yeah.”

“We’ve been through a lot together, but I never thought we’d be having a conversation like this.”

“Trust me, neither did I.”

“You’ve pretty much put me off the pleasure house for good.”

“Don’t be like that.” He looked up at her dolefully, “You’d never have gotten yourself into something like this. You’d never fall in love only to ruin your relationship over and over again.”

Christine eyed him with a glance that said something she wasn’t willing to vocalize, “You’d think so, wouldn’t you?”

—

Jim hesitated at the door, god he hoped he wouldn’t be turned away. He didn’t know what he’d do if they told him no.

It was the only thing he could think of, regardless of the fact that it was completely inappropriate. It was too far to walk, but thankfully Jim had found a cabbie willing to drive him the distance to Hoshi’s, the next town over.

Even if she wouldn’t let him talk with Gaila or Nyota, maybe she would talk with him. Anything, he just needed someone, someone familiar who would listen, who would hold him. Hoshi probably wouldn’t do that, but he needed it, he needed someone, anyone, to ground him. He needed something he recognized. Normalcy. Even if that was a pleasure house.
It was only late morning, hopefully someone would be around to hear the door. Jim knocked for a third time, his chest tightening. He was just about to give up and try the front entrance when he heard the lock slide open. The opened door hesitantly, Zhara peering at him through the crack.

“Hey Zhara, it’s Jim? Could I come in?” he tried to keep his voice calm.

“Jim?” She opened the door a little wider. She winced as she took in his face, Jim ducked belatedly to hide it against his shoulder. “Are you okay?”

“Yes,” Jim said quietly. “…actually no. Can I come in, please?”

“Yeah, yeah of course, sorry.” She did a visual sweep of the ally before ushering him up the steps.

Being back inside the House was surreal. It smelled like perfume and alcohol with that indistinct spicy undertone he’d forgotten about. Everything as so familiar, but it made his heart race. Jim tried to calm his breathing as he leaned against the door. It was almost enough to make him leave, but he didn’t really have anywhere else to go.

Zhara rubbed his shoulder gently, surveying him with concerned eyes. She waited until Jim was able to stand steady. “Jim, what happened? Are you hurt? Did you run away?” she asked with a tinge of panic.

“I didn’t, no…it’s complicated. I’m not hurt, not physically.” He made a vague motion to his facial scar, “This is old news. Do you think I could talk to Gaila, or Ny?”

She paused, chewing her perfectly pink lip, “I should probably ask Hoshi first.”

Jim shook his head firmly, hoping it would be enough to dissuade her.

She sighed while she considered it. “Alright fine, I won’t. But if she sees you, you’re on your own.”

Jim nodded. Hoshi would probably understand, but he didn’t want to take that chance. He could ask for forgiveness later if it came to that. He followed Zhara past the kitchen and to the back rooms where the girls slept. It felt so familiar it hurt, like any moment he’d be leading a client up to one of the lavish rooms, being told how to lay, who to be, and what to want.
“You remember their room?” Zhara asked rhetorically. “I’ll tell them you’re in there. Don’t take it up with me if Nyota is upset about you cutting into her rest.”

“Thank you,” Jim said, squeezing her hand. She smiled in return before darting off to the kitchen.

He sat gingerly on the edge of the bed. It was lumpy, more than he remembered, and not at all like his bed. Bones’ bed, Jim chastised himself. It was as if at every turn something else reminded him of just how ingrained Bones had become in his life, just how intertwined they were. He shook the thought away as he pulled off his shoes, not wanting to track the outside dirt anywhere he didn’t have to. The room seemed darker too, colder, and his heart wouldn’t stop racing.

Jim lost track of how long he sat in the room, silence wrapping him like a blanket. His mind drifted, playing with thoughts of going back to this work before he was rudely reminded why his body was no longer desirable. The door squeaked open suddenly and Jim was met with Gaila’s worried grey eyes.

She kissed him on the mouth and Jim kissed her back without hesitation. She cradled his face in her hands, “Sweetie, what are you doing here?”

He’d promised himself he wasn’t going to cry but he couldn’t help himself, silent tears escaping the corners of his eyes. Her eyebrows scrunched up in worry before she pulled Jim to her. She was exactly what he needed, she accepted him and he wrapped himself in her understanding. Jim cried against her delicate shoulder while Gaila hummed a song he didn’t recognize.

Nyota and Mira joined them shortly after, closing the door and nesting around them. Mira stroking his hair and Nyota rubbing back, while softly singing foreign words to the song Gaila hummed. Jim missed them—their implicit insight to his pain, the invisible string that tied them together with their shared experiences.

Jim snuffled, pulling away from Gaila when he felt he’d regained enough composure to speak, breaking apart the nest the girls had created around him. Nyota did her best not to let her eyes linger on his face, but Mira and Gaila weren’t as subtle.

“You can ask,” Jim said rawly.

Gaila traced the jagged line where it started on his cheek, although not unkindly. A look of horror
slid across her face. “It wasn’t…it wasn’t the doctor was it?” she asked, her tone hushed as if she was afraid to know the answer.

“Gaila,” Nyota reprimanded her.

“You don’t have to tell us,” Mira said. She looked over at Gaila, “It’s healed, that’s not why he’s here.”

Jim bit his lip hard and focused on swallowing the lump in his throat. “No, no it wasn’t him.” The silence stretched before he added, “Mira’s right…but I’ll still tell you.”

If it wasn’t such a horrible story, their reactions would have been almost comical. The girls gasped at all the right places, leaning in as if they were hanging on his every word of the tragedy. And really, weren’t they? The way it had all played out, the highs and lows he’d experienced would have put anyone on the edge of their seat, let alone his friends who could have all too easily been the ones in his place. He stopped just before recalling how Bones manipulated Jim into coming home with him, trapping him with a false sense of free will.

“Jim, that’s awful,” Nyota whispered, squeezing his hand after he’d gone quiet. The other two bobbed their heads in agreement. They seemed to want to sympathize more, but didn’t know what to say, Gaila’s physical affection taking precedence.

“I can’t imagine, I really can’t…” Mira trailed, looking from Nyota to Gaila with hesitation, “But what happened to make you come back here, Jim? Why would you ever want to come back to this place, after everything?”

“I needed you, I didn’t know where else to go.”

“Tell us,” Gaila nudged gently, “Go on, you can tell us. Whatever you need, we love you.”

Jim felt his chest tighten. It was why he was here at all, to tell someone, to have someone understand how this exploitation had wrecked him, but it was embarrassing. He felt like a foolish child, and he didn’t want the reprimand.

“Jim,” Nyota pushed, “What is it?”
Jim gasped a short, humorless laugh before he stuttered, “H-he bought me. Bones—the doctor—he bought me from Talas.”

Gaila’s eyes widened almost comically, “He…oh…oh god, how could he?”

The lump in his throat returned but he swallowed it as best he could manage. “He owns me now. It’s so much worse than being a whore. I can’t work it off, he owns me.”

Nyota searched his face, as though she was still processing. “He fronted your tab?”

Jim nodded.

“All of it?” Mira chimed in, “How much was left?”

“I’m not sure, a lot.” His head was starting to hurt, maybe it was the dehydration of the tears or the effort he was putting into not crying again.

“He took you home with him? And you went?” Gaila asked, paling. She was abnormally still with her hands frozen in her lap.

“Oh…n-no,” Jim stuttered, “No, I didn’t. It didn’t happen like that. Talas turned me loose.”

Nyota sat up from where she was laying against him. “Then…how did you know?”

“What…what do you—? How did I know what?”

“How did you know he bought you?”

“That’s—it all happened really fast,” Jim started. It hadn’t really, it had dragged on for days but his whole world had changed with the blade of a knife and it felt like an instant. “I got hurt, I didn’t have anywhere to go after the hospital, I couldn’t go back to the inn, and Bones…he said I could stay with him.”
Nyota hesitated, clearly not wanting to upset him, “He didn’t force you?”

“He didn’t force, he wouldn’t, but…but Ny he bought me, he took advantage of me. He knew I didn’t have any other options, nowhere I could go. He knew what he was doing.”

Gaila was holding his hand before he realized she’d moved. She was squeezing him gently as she chewed her lip in thought. “Are you sure?” she asked quietly.

“I know what happened,” Jim insisted steadfastly.

“No, honey, I know you do. But is there any chance that wasn’t his motivation? He always seemed so kind to you.”

Before Jim could respond, Nyota added, “When he do it? Didn’t you tell him not to come back—that you wouldn’t see him anymore?”

“That’s probably why he did it,” Jim threw out, beginning to doubt his own argument. “I said he couldn’t see me so he found another way, a horrible way.”

But that didn’t seem right.

Thoughts spun around inside his head like a whirlpool, trying to piece the timeline together. It had been about a week after he’d told Bones off, implied that he didn’t want him, that Talas had released him. Talas shouldn’t have lied about it, she had no reason to lie. Why hadn’t Bones come to collect him then? It wasn’t as though Jim would have had a choice but to go. Money had been exchanged, Bones was entitled to what was his. Why had Talas—well Bones really—given him any money of his own? Two hundred and fifty Tul was not pocket change. Why had he let Jim go out on his own? What good could that possibly have done?

“I’m not defending him, but something about what happened seems wrong. Why wouldn’t he have taken you straight from Talas?”

Why indeed? Jim thought he might be sick. Gaila found a huge crack in his anger. One Jim hadn’t even realized was there.
“Did you ask him?” Mira wondered.

“Did I…?” Jim’s mouth hung open. He felt lightheaded.

He hadn’t let Bones explain, he’d just yelled. Jim had been so easily convinced that after everything the world was only out to hurt him. He hadn’t give Bones a chance, Jim hadn’t wanted to. He thought he knew better. Even after all Bones had done for him, Jim hadn’t even let him explain.

“…no, I didn’t ask.”

Jim couldn’t go back to Bones now, couldn’t ask. He’d closed that door, and it had literally locked behind him. Regardless Jim was hurt, and Bones was still at fault—and maybe Jim still didn’t want to see Bones ever again—but now he was going to be left in the dark because of his unwillingness to listen.

Jim’s throat felt tight again, what had he done? Bones had always made the effort to hear him out, he’d always listened, even when Jim hadn’t wanted him to. He was so stupid, so incredibly stupid.

Sensing his impending meltdown, Nyota took his hands in hers, grasping them tightly as if to ground him.

Jim shook his head, he appreciated her—all of them—but he felt as though he might throw up. “Bathroom,” he managed to cough out before pulling his hands away and bolting from the room.

He wasn’t being quiet. He should be trying to be quiet, after all he wasn’t supposed to be here and everyone would be sleeping, but he couldn’t find it in himself to calm his pace. When Jim finally made it to the safety of the bathroom, he dry heaved over the toilet for a few minutes. There was nothing in his stomach to come up, and as he rested his head on the bowl he wasn’t sure he had anything left in him anywhere at all.

Numbly, Jim went to the sink to wash his hands. He avoided the mirror as he stared down at his hands as the water ran over them. Looking into the basin, suddenly he felt as though he’d been punched in the gut.
The envelope.

He still had the envelope. It was in his bag, back in the girls’ room.

Bones had taken the time to leave him something. Jim had *something*, and something was enough to make his world stop spinning backwards.

—

No one looked surprised when he opened the bedroom door again. He was sure they stared when he started digging through his bag, but he didn’t stop to look. Jim’s fingers curled around the thick paper and he clambered back on the bed, pressing it into Gaila’s hands.

He couldn’t read it. He wasn’t ready.

But he still had to know what it said.

“Sweetie, what is this?” Gaila questioned, her tone amused.

“He left it out, I forgot,” Jim muttered. “Read it for me?”

“Okay,” she said simply.

As she pulled the folded papers from inside, something small and heavy plunked into her lap. Jim watched until it disappeared behind her thigh, his heart hammering in his ears before his eyes darted back up to watch her face.

Three pairs of eyes were trained on Gaila as she read the paper. She was silent, her eyes sprinting across the page until she covered her mouth and gasped. She shuffled the papers in her hands, her lip quivering as she read the second.
“What is it?” Jim asked, his voice sounding too loud in the heavy silence.

Gaila shook her head and shoved the papers into his hands, putting the first page back on top and holding it up to his face.

Jim pushed them down, “I can’t.”

“You have to,” She insisted. “Jim, you have to.”

Trembling he took the papers from Gaila.

Jim—

You don’t have to leave.

Of course, if that’s what you decide to do I won’t stop you, but don’t go because you think you must. I promise won’t interfere anymore; I shouldn’t have last night. You’re welcome as long as you’d like to stay, but you are not bound here. Please don’t leave for the sake of it. Don’t go without a plan. You don’t have to let me know what you decide, the room is yours and you have the key.

There are no stipulations, you don’t have to speak to, or even see me if you don’t want. I understand that what I did hurt you, and I won’t ask you to forgive me, but please know I never meant to buy you. It hurts so much to even write those words. You are not something to be bought. I only wanted to help. I wanted you to have your freedom. Of course I can see why you’re upset, I had no idea what would come of this.

Do whatever is best for you. I’m sorry for any part I’ve caused in your pain, god knows the last thing I ever wanted to do was hurt you.

—Leonard

As he looked up, his head spinning, Gaila forced the next page into his line of sight insistently. It was a thicker paper. The words not written in Bones’ tight script but the hard lines of a typewriter. Jim read it, not really believing what as on the page.
The document was a transaction receipt and a contract all in one from Talas, relinquishing possession of Jim; validating that his debt to her had been completely paid. But the next paragraph sent a shiver though him. It stated that Bones—Doctor Leonard H. McCoy, the document actually read—claimed no ownership of him—one, James T. Kirk—it further stated explicitly that Jim was not indentured, and was again in full ownership of himself.

Round, wet drops appeared on the paper and he wiped the tears he hadn’t realized he’d started crying with his sleeve.

This couldn’t be real.

He felt like a child, stupid and petty. Every biting word he’d said to Bones crashing though his mind. How could he have doubted Bones’ intentions? Bones had always been so gentle, so upfront with Jim.

Bones loved him. He’d cared for Jim’s injuries when he’d been hurt, he’d respected Jim’s boundaries at every turn, and he’d done Jim an enormous favor, paying more money than Jim had ever seen in his life just because he’d wanted to help. And in return, Jim had been suspicious, and brutal, lashing out at him for the story he’d crafted in his head. The story that he’d let himself believe because no one had ever done right by him the way Bones had.

Even after the horrible things Jim had said last night, Bones wasn’t abandoning him. He’d left Jim a way back into his home. A place in his life. Bones hadn’t taken advantage of him, not even once, not ever. He’d always accepted Jim as he was. He was willing to deal with Jim’s insecurities and complexities. And it seemed Bones had done all this in the wake of Jim rejecting him on the stairs, on the night Bones had admitted he loved Jim. He wished he could know for sure.

Jim reread Bones’ note, choking back a sob as he wrinkled the paper in his hand. He didn’t deserves this man. It was clear Bones blamed himself for Jim’s outburst, and the way he’d looked at Jim last night, so ready to take responsibility for the actions of Jim’s attacker…It made Jim’s stomach twist to think how Bones holding himself responsible.

Gaila shushed him, pulling him against her chest. She gently pried his fingers off the papers, handing them to Nyota as Mira sidled up next to her so they could both read. In it’s place she dropped what that had fallen when she’d opened the envelope, a key. Jim’s hand balled into a fist around it, the edges of it pricked his skin as he squeezed.

“You should go back,” she hummed, “It seems like you should go home.”
Jim wanted to, he wanted to so badly. He wanted to burst into the hospital and tell Bones how sorry he was, how unfair he’d been to him. And at the same time he wanted to hide under a bed and never see Bones again. He couldn’t face him after the way he’d acted. Instead of deciding, he opted for wrapping his arms around Gaila’s waist and closing his eyes.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone for your absolutely wonderful comments, all of you give me life <3

I don’t really know if I should warn for this chapter, but if you’ve gotten this far I think it’s probably okay.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leonard hadn’t been crying. Well, he hadn’t been crying much. Leonard deserved it, the helplessness, the loneliness. But it still hurt. It hurt that Jim thought Leonard had tried to manipulate him when it was the furthest thing from what he’d ever wanted for Jim. It killed him not to be able to defend himself, but after everything he didn’t deserve that privilege.

He’d known when he opened the door Jim wouldn’t be there. If Leonard was being honest, he’d known when he’d left for work that morning. No amount of paper or pleading would have made Jim stay, it had really been a last ditch effort.

He’d called Jim’s name regardless as he walked through the apartment, peaking his head cautiously into the spare room. Of course the place was empty. No one answered back.

The silence was overwhelming and stifling. It was difficult to take full breaths. Medically, it seemed unlikely one could die of a broken heart, but as he collapsed into the lonely armchair, Leonard thought maybe poets knew better than doctors. He covered his face with his hand, trying to take in enough air to quell the void in his chest, but it was no use. The inadvertent sound of a sob hit the air before a fresh wave of tears as he pulled his knees to his chest.

He couldn’t do this. He didn’t know how he was going to go on. Losing Jim once had been bad enough, but at least then he hadn’t known Jim loved him—had loved him. At least the first time he could imagine a different ending, one in which Jim managed to find happiness. This was so much worse, so much harder to accept. He couldn’t delude himself this time. Leonard breaking Jim’s trust would undoubtably make it harder for Jim to move on from his past, no matter how much either of them wanted to deny it. He hated that he’d done this to Jim, hated himself more than he’d ever thought was possible.

Jim was not stupid. Jim was resourceful; he had a will to survive. He would not be sleeping on the
street, Jim would do better than that. But Leonard couldn’t help but worry what exactly Jim would have to do to avoid that fate. Not everyone would have the best intentions when offering Jim shelter and Leonard hoped fervently that Jim would end up somewhere reputable. That his past luck wouldn’t continue to haunt him.

It was the not knowing that was hardest. Leonard’s brain dashing too fast through scenarios and outcomes of not only the future but, unhelpfully, the past as well. Every point in time he could have changed something, wondering how the hell he’d managed to fuck so much up in both of their lives.

—

Jim had laid down with the girls as they slept, not wanting to contribute anymore to their exhaustion than he’d already done. He’d tried his best not to fall asleep, he’d known the nightmares would resurface and his cries would resume, and he hadn’t wanted to subject anyone to that. But it seemed at some point, exactly that had happened. Jim sat up in a fit, greeted by Hoshi perched on the edge of the bed, watching him with an unreadable expression.

“I shouldn’t be here,” was the first thing Jim found himself saying.

“No, you shouldn’t be,” Hoshi echoed, with less grit than he’d been expecting.

“How did you know?”

“That you were here?” she asked with a touch of disbelief. “Oh, please. There was a ridiculous amount of hushed whispering during linen changing. Gaila looks like she’s seen a ghost. Not to mention the way that scream echoed through the landing.”

Jim covered his face with his hands, it was more than embarrassing. He was so stupid. At least Hoshi wasn’t lecturing him. “I’m sorry for bothering everyone. I’m sorry for sneaking in,” he whispered, full of shame.

Hoshi’s soft hand patted his leg, “You must have had a good reason—a desperate reason—if you were willing to come back here.”
Jim lifted his face, trying to gauge her reaction as he nodded.

She heaved a sigh. “I don’t suppose you want to tell me?”

“Not really.”

“You know you can’t stay unless you work. This isn’t a boarding house.”

“I know.” Jim hesitated, not even sure he wanted to ask, but he found the words tumbling out before he’d fully decided, “I don’t suppose you’ll let me work like this.”

Hoshi’s eyebrows shot up to her hairline, as though it was the last thing she’d expected him to say. She regained her composure before telling him, “You don’t really want to.”

“I need to stay tonight.”

Jim could almost see the gears churning as she tried to work out what to do. She started to shake her head, but Jim tried again.

“I know no one will want me, but I could do dishes, or laundry—anything. Please Hoshi, I don’t know where else to go.”

She let out a long, frustrated breath, “One night. Only one. And just this once, I’m serious, Jim.”

Jim nodded frantically, “Just tonight, I promise. Thank you.”

“Do not make me regret this.”
Jim peered around the corner, scanning the room, hoping to catch Hoshi’s eye and bother no one. He couldn’t find the extra soap. Jim was elbow deep in the wash bin, scrubbing come and oil off the sheets when he realized he was going to run out. He’d never had to find more in this House before. He didn’t see Hoshi lingering around the fringes of the crowded parlor, let alone looking his direction. He’d promised that she wouldn’t regret letting him stay. If she came back and found half the linens were still dirty she wouldn’t be pleased. Jim tried to get anyone’s attention leaning a little more past the doorframe, hopefully one of the girls would know.

In his concentration he didn’t notice the man watching him, the man who’d walked right up to him, turning Jim’s face by his chin in his fingers. Jim let out an undignified squeak as he looked at the man.

“Would you look at that,” the man said with interest. “What did you do to earn that ugly cut on your pretty face?”

Jim tried to shrink back into the darker hallway, out of the yellow glow of the parlor, out of the man’s reach. “I’m…I’m sorry, I’m not supposed to be here,” Jim stuttered. Hoshi was going to be livid.

“That’s no answer,” the man insisted, though not unkindly. “I thought everyone in the room was available?”

“I-I wasn’t—”

“Excuse me, Mr. Shran, I’m so sorry if Jim is bothering you. He’s not permitted in the parlor.” Hoshi was calm, but the look she gave Jim was one of exasperation.

“He’s not certainly not bothering me Madam. In fact, are you absolutely sure you must send him away?” Shran questioned, his eyes not leaving Jim.

Hoshi’s demeanor shifted almost instantly. She used her body to put distance between the two of them. “Why do you ask?”

“I just thought we might be able to have a bit of fun. He is here after all, and I have paid.”
There was a tense moment of silence, Hoshi threw a glance over her shoulder at Jim. He couldn't understand why he didn’t shake his head immediately, but he just held her gaze.

Finally she turned back to Shran, and put on her best friendly attitude. “Just allow us a minute sir, have another glass of champagne, I’ll come find you in a moment.”

“See that you do,” his eyes lingered on Jim for a moment longer before he disappeared from view.

“I’m sorry,” Jim piped up, “I was just trying to find the soap, I didn’t realize he’d seen me. Hoshi, I know I promised—”

“Hush. We’re past that. What was that look? Are you willing to service him?”

Jim chewed his lip, considering. He’d put Hoshi in a bad spot, hated the idea that she’d have to smooth things over with the client. He had been serious earlier about working, not that he’d thought anyone would have wanted him. But someone did, and for their brief interaction, Shran didn’t seem like he wanted to hurt Jim further. It was nice to know that anyone still wanted him, even like this.

“I don’t want him to fuck me,” Jim said.

“You expect me to tell him that?” Hoshi retorted, eyes rolled up to the ceiling. “I think you know better.”

“He can do whatever else, just no penetration.” It was what Jim was willing to give, he knew it wasn’t fair to Hoshi, but he had to think about himself too. Jim had to think about what he could tolerate and still be able to keep his sense of self. “If he agrees to that, then yes, I’ll see him.”

The longer they stood the more sympathetic Hoshi seemed to become. “Jim, you don’t have to, my apologies. I must not be thinking clearly, you’re in no state to do this.”

“Ask him if he agrees to my terms.”
Jim was sitting in a chair, naked save for the sheet that kept slipping off his shoulders, pooling at his waist, just barely covering him. The room was on the first floor, a smaller, more intimate lounge, one Jim hadn’t seen before. Hoshi had insisted on not having them go upstairs, to be certain that Jim’s condition would not be dismissed. Jim wasn’t entirely certain why Shran had agreed to this. Actually Jim wasn’t entirely certain why he’d agreed to this either.

it had been a very long time since taking a client made Jim nervous. But he was, almost as though he didn’t remember how to handle his own body.

Janice came into the room hesitantly. Hoshi had insisted one of the girls be there with him, especially after Shran had asked if some of his colleagues could be in the room with them.

“Hi Jim,” she said softly, laying her hand on his shoulder, “Are you okay?”

“I’m alright,” he said hoping his facade wasn’t breaking.

“I’m supposed to monitor everyone, take care of anyone that seems like they can’t help themselves,” she looked him in the eye, “Is that okay with you?”

He understood what she was saying. “Of course, Janice.”

She nodded, and went to the record player in the corner, dropping the needle to a fluid voice, stretching foreign words into an enchanting melody before she opened the door.
Jim was shaking, the fluids of at least three strangers running down his face, spotting his chest. His own come flecking his thighs. He felt like reality was a distant idea. He felt tired. He felt guilty. He held the sheet tighter around him, the poorest shield history had ever seen.

They’d all been nice enough, Jim supposed. Shran had only seemed interested in his scars at first. Tracing the one on Jim’s face with his fingers before moving with surprise to the ones on his chest. Just touching, and pulling as though his skin was dough, that he wanted to mold in his hands. Shran’s colleagues had joined in, they were fascinated with the marks. They’d noticed the diamonds carved into his legs, tracing and touching. Shran had run his teeth across the older ones on his back, nipping every now and again. They’d even had Janice join in, one of the men guiding her fingers to trace Jim’s imperfections. Everyone had touched the jagged line across his face almost as though they were trying to learn it by touch.

For quite sometime it had felt like some perverse worship, Jim’s head spinning as he reminded himself not to pull away. He’d done his best to sit, stock still, to keep his eyes calm, and fixated on the wall past the men’s bodies, the wall he couldn’t see. Trying to forget they weren’t just touching his skin, but all of the scars that he bore.

“What did you do to deserve these?” one of the men had asked, his hand splayed across Jim’s chest.

Jim couldn’t find it in himself to speak, so he’d just looked down to the floor instead.

“He didn’t do anything,” Janice had answered for him.

“Just for fun then?” another speculated before pulling Janice against him, fondling her breast. She’d giggled, although Jim could tell it was only for show.

It hadn’t felt like they were touching him anymore, as though his body could feel nothing. It was as if he didn’t have nerve-endings, as if he wasn’t even there, as if Jim was just a concept and not a physical being. When Jim had managed to process a glance around the room, he’d seen Janice, on her knees, sucking one of the men. It wasn’t surprising, he’d known it wouldn’t stay as frivolous as it had started forever.

Shran palmed himself through his trousers. “Can I?” he’d asked, but he already knew the answer
Jim had nodded anyway. He’d fisted his cock until, running his hand over Jim’s facial scar, he’d finished, hot come adorning Jim’s face. Jim hadn’t flinched, hadn’t even bothered to open his mouth. He wasn’t there to play the eager whore, and he wouldn’t try, but it didn’t seem to matter.

Jim was certain at some point two other men had finished on him as well, but didn’t know who, when Shran had finished, there had been more than just three men in the room. Jim wasn’t sure when they’d gotten there, but Hoshi was leaning against the door frame surveying the scene—watching as some of her other girls had taken compromising positions with more of the men.

He’d had to stop himself from laughing, he’d become an attraction of sorts. His skin had been poked and prodded, used as a vessel for release. Jim had almost felt powerful, all these people wanted to marvel at his brokenness and not one had seemed to care that he hated himself. He’d been a wonder.

He’d... nothing.

He let his sheet be pulled away, heard what could only be Hoshi’s stifled gasp at the word. Watched as everyone stopped to stare. Jim felt himself getting hard as hands rushed to his stomach, unfamiliar skin dragging across his own, fingers running over the lines that had ruined him. Everyone was so close around him, touching and scraping and feeling. At some point one of the hands wrapped around his cock. Jim’s body allowed itself to be brought to completion. Jim didn’t care. He all but blacked out as the swarm of curious onlookers swallowed him up—conscious, but not in their reality.

Jim didn’t remember the room clearing, or Hoshi instructing Nyota to lead him upstairs. He’d only just come back to himself, still clutching the ruined sheet around him as Nyota filled the tub.

“Don’t you have to be with a client?” Jim asked, finally finding his voice that seemed to have been lost in the commotion.

Nyota helped him into the tub. “I can’t believe you think we’d have left you alone after that.” She shook her head as though to clear the ridiculousness of his question. “She had no idea,” she started, handing Jim a rag to wash, “Hoshi had no idea how many scars there were. Especially...you know.”

“Yeah,” Jim agreed pointedly.
“How could you not say anything?” she pressed, using her own rag to clean the come streaking his face.

“What was I supposed to say?”

“Something.” Her brows scrunched as she tried to find the words, “Anything.”

“Is she mad?”

“No, Jim. I think she’s scared for you. I know I am.”

“Did I upset the clients?”

Nyota huffed. “No. They were all fascinated. I don’t believe a single one of them has ever seen someone so—” she cut herself off abruptly.

“Someone so completely fucked up?” Jim added when she didn’t continue.

“Marked.”

“I don’t know why anyone wanted to look at me. All of them touched me too...I’m just glad no one’s upset with Hoshi.”

Nyota looked at him with anguish, “Come on, let’s finish getting you cleaned up so you can get some sleep.”

“Thank you,” Jim added as he realized how much Nyota was indeed doing.

“Oh Jim…” she faltered, her lip quivering just the slightest bit.
Nyota couldn’t quiet Jim during the night, his nightmare fits continued despite her soothing touches and her gentle words. Fortunately she was used to not sleeping through the actual night, her job instead was to make sure she woke Jim before his screaming would become disruptive to the rest of the House.

“I’m so sorry,” Jim sobbed at one point.

“Honey, don’t be sorry. You’re already sorry for too much.”

“I can’t believe I did that.”

“That you did what?” There was no way she didn’t know what he was talking about, but it was kind of her to play it off this way.

“That I let everyone...see me like that,” Jim relinquished, not quite sure what to call what had transpired downstairs.

“You’ll never have to do it again. Go home. You have one to go to.”

“How can I?” Jim whispered miserably, “I was so horrible to him Ny, and now I have to tell him about this?...I can’t.”

“He’s stayed with you through all of it. And you don’t have to tell him about this if you don’t want to; let yourself forget.”

“I don’t know...”

“I wouldn’t blame you either way, but if it was me, Jim...I’d try. It seems as though someone like that is worth trying for.”
“I don’t know what to say,” Hoshi lamented when he walked into her office the next morning.

Jim hated how pained she looked.

“Thank you for letting me stay.”

She spat out an entirely humorless laugh. “Don’t thank me.” She stood, walking towards him. “I’ll never forgive myself for what happened to you.”

“You didn’t do it,” Jim insisted. He wouldn’t try to make her feel like it wasn’t her fault. To some degree it was, but no matter how much Jim’s fault it was he knew she wouldn’t change her mind, she wouldn’t put the blame on him.

“I could have stopped it.”

“Probably not.”

Her shoulders fell, and for the first time he saw Hoshi look truly at a loss. “I shouldn’t have pushed you. I should have known better.”

“Still, thank you, I had nowhere else to go.”

That much was true. He didn’t know what he would have done or where he would have been without Hoshi. It had been objectively horrible, what had happened, but it felt oddly cathartic now in the light of day. He’d let so many people see his body. He’d let them see the physical embodiment of so many of his demons, and they hadn’t run, they’d touched. And those people hadn’t loved him. They weren’t Bones.

Nyota had been right, Bones hadn’t given up on him, maybe Jim had given up on himself. And somehow through the fucked up sequence that was his life, last night had helped. Last night was not what he wanted for his future, and if that meant swallowing his pride instead of a stranger’s come, he
was willing to try.

“Let me get you a car. It’s the very least I can do.”

“Can I say goodbye to Gaila?”

“Of course.”

When he found Gaila upstairs in the washroom she held his gaze for a second longer than normal, almost as though she was trying to decide how to react. She’d undoubtably heard what had happened, for all Jim knew she might have seen as well.

Finally she took his hand and held it over her heart. “You’re going to go home?”

“Yeah.”

“I mean this in the nicest way possible, sweetie: don’t let me see you again.”

Her sentiment caught him by surprise and he laughed.

“I mean it. I can’t stand to see you here when you don’t have to be. Even if you don’t stay with our doctor, please, I want you to do something that makes you happy.”

He kissed her the way she kissed him—too long, with a little too much lip to strictly be considered platonic, but because it was Gaila, it was only that. “I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

I had a long talk with myself after this chapter and decided that, while I am sorry, this was necessary for Jim. I promise things are going to get better for our darling Jim, I really do.
Chapter 22

I know I've put you all through the wringer. Please consider this long-ass chapter some sort of apology.
Thank you all for your comments on the last chapter, they were so appreciated and thoughtful. I can't believe I broke 90k on this update!!!

He had to be imaging things. Leonard had to have finally gone mad with desperation to a point of hallucinating sounds. He certainly wasn’t hearing a key scraping in the lock, or the bolt clicking. He couldn’t be hearing any of it, because that would mean Jim was seconds away from walking in. Leonard jumped up as the door opened, not bothering with subtleties. If he was hallucinating, Jim was still the most beautiful image his mind could muster. He found himself incapable of talking as Jim shot him an entirely unreadable look over his shoulder as he closed the door.

Leonard’s mouth fell open, more from shock that the desire to speak. He continued to stare mutely. Jim had come back.

“Don’t,” Jim said quietly.

Leonard found himself nodding, rooted to his spot on the floor.

Jim didn’t bother to take off his coat, Leonard’s old scarf, or his shoes before walking to his room. The moment he disappeared behind the door, Leonard thought for sure he’d really lost his mind. Jim wasn’t really there at all. Leonard’s eyes flitted around the room widely, and he wondered how he was possibly going to get his grip on reality back.

Suddenly Jim was back. Biting his lip with thought, seemingly conflicted as he made his way back to the front door.

“Please,” Leonard managed dryly, hoping it could convey all his feelings.

“I’ll come back,” Jim whispered before the door closed again.
It felt like the wind had been knocked out of him and he was forced to sit down. Surely a hallucination would have stayed.

—

Jim walked out as quickly as he’d walked in. He’d needed to put his things down, to make sure the key actually worked, but he’d really had his mind set on something else. If he was going to try and really live—not just survive—he had to get a job. It wasn’t helping to sit alone in the apartment day after day, and he was all almost entirely healed. There was no reason to keep putting it off, especially since the key had worked, since Bones was still there.

He marched himself outside before he could lose his nerve. The ten minute walk to the automobile shop consisted mostly of Jim rehearsing how he wanted his speech to go. He reminded himself that he should be confident about what he’d learned from the books, promise to learn quickly, and not say anything that might allude to his past.

He took a deep breath, walking inside, trying his best not to hunch his shoulders. He looked around for Pike as the small bell the door rung.

There was a rustling as a man stood up from under the hood of the car facing away from Jim. His short hair was slicked out of his face. He stretched as he greeted Jim. “‘Afternoon, can I help you?’”

Jim tensed, trying his best not to turn heel and run. “I’m looking for Chris Pike? I need to speak with him.”

“Sure, he’s upstairs. I’ll get him for you,” the man hesitated, turning back for a second, “Sorry, you are?”

“Ah, Jim. Jim Kirk.”

“Call me Scotty,” he said, motioning to himself. “I’ll be right back.”
The name sounded familiar, but Jim couldn’t quite place it. Jim’s heart was still racing. The interaction had gone fine, barely a bump in the road. Scotty hadn’t even flinched at him, in fact, he’d smiled which was reassuring.

Pike appeared only a few minutes later, with Scotty in tow. He beamed at Jim. “Hi, son! How are you?”

“I’m good, thanks.”

“What brings you back here? Haven’t gotten a car for yourself have you?”

Jim laughed at the absurdity of that. “Not so much. I need to ask for a favor.”

“Shoot, kid.”

He swallowed, begging his voice not to shake. “I was hoping you could…I was hoping you could teach me.”

“Teach you?” Chris asked he sounded a little surprised, “To fix cars?”

Jim nodded. That had been a little succinct but he’d said it. Breath, Jim reminded himself.

Chris scratched the back of his neck. “Well, I just took on Scotty not too long ago.” Scotty looked up with a bit of confusions upon hearing his name, but quickly went back to busying himself once he realized he was not meant to join the conversation. “He’s doing a damn fine job…but it can’t hurt to have more than one person who knows what they’re doing around here, so what the hell? I don’t know you very well Jim, but it seems like you know a thing or two, and if the company you keep means anything, I know you’ll be reliable.”

It took all of Jim’s willpower not to collapse. He’d said yes. Jim knew he was grinning, maybe wildly, he wasn’t sure.

“It won’t pay well, I’m afraid,” Chris added, not unkindly.
“I don’t care,” Jim breathed, “I just want to learn.” He hadn’t expected to be paid, he thought he would have had to grovel to even be allowed to watch in the shop.

Chris clapped him on the shoulder, “It’s hard work, don’t get me wrong, I love it but you’ll have to pull your weight.”

“Of course, sir. Of course, thank you so much.”

“Don’t thank me until you’ve worked a few hours.”

Jim shook his head, “Thank you. This means so much to me.”

“Come in Thursday,” Chris added, taking in Jim’s obviously exuberant demeanor, “I’ll get you coveralls, but bring some gloves.”

“Yes! Yes, sir.”

“Scotty, are you going to start calling me ’sir’?”

He looked up with a grin, “I think not.”

“It’s just Chris, son, no hierarchy here.”

“Thank you, Chris.”

“I’ll see you Thursday, eight o’clock.
Jim had left the shop wanting to scream, wanting to kiss someone, wanting to dance his way home, but he did none of those things. He couldn’t go home, not yet, he wasn’t ready to talk to Bones, but he knew he didn’t have the strength left in him to avoid him for hours. Instead he walked to the library. There was only the smallest chance Jim would not be too worked up to read, he picked the library because it was a place he could go, and stay. Jim was still processing the fact that he’d been lucky enough to not only to be able to learn something new, something he was genuinely interested in, but also that he’d be paid for it. He’d never been paid in his life. Certainly he’d been paid for, for years but he’d never earned money on his own value, his own skill. Jim realized he might actually be able to pay Bones back for what he’d done. He’d be able to contribute in some small way to their life. If Bones still wanted that. If Bones still wanted him.

He flipped aimlessly through book after book, his brain ricocheting thoughts around for hours until his stomach gurgled. Jim sighed and took himself to the pub Bones liked. He should probably try somewhere different, but too many things had happened today and he needed familiarity. Jim ate slowly, finishing the plate, but he wasn’t really hungry. The barmaid refilled his mug with another stout before he’d asked. Jim hadn’t really wanted another, but it seemed a shame to waste it. He sat heavy on the tall chair, his body feeling weighted and sluggish, his elbows felt glued to the bar. The alcohol was obviously affecting him more than he’d thought. He wanted to sleep, but he wanted to finish his drink. Every sip helped convince him he should go back, that Bones would forgive him, that everything was going to be alright.

Jim stumbled the half-block back to Bones’ apartment. He was really more intoxicated than he’d have liked to be. The sky looked so beautiful, darkening like a familiar, comforting blanket. Jim knew he had to go inside but he wanted to sit right here on the street and let the stars drink him in. The wail of a distant siren snapped him back. He couldn’t stay outside, there were only two flights of stair in between him and a bed. Somehow he managed the stairs upright. The key took a little more effort, he fumbled, although managed to avoid dropping it. Finally, the bolt clicked and Jim let himself inside. There was an oil lamp burning, but Bones was no where to be seen in the main room. Miraculously, Jim found his nightshirt and climbed into bed before sleep’s insistent hands put him out.

There’d already been dreams. The first time he’d woken up screaming, so there was no way Bones hadn’t heard, but he hadn’t come in. After the way Jim had spoken to him last time he’d tried, Jim didn’t blame him. Jim’s head hurt a little, a touch of headache, from the beer or the nightmare he couldn’t tell. He certainly didn’t feel a good anymore, the floating the alcohol had provided had long since burned off. Jim sat miserably in the center of his bed. He hated feeling helpless, but there seemed to be nothing he could do about his nightmares biting at his heels as he tried to sleep.

Neither he nor Bones was going to get any sleep if his nightmares continued like this. Despite his bruised ego demanding that he didn’t, he found himself outside Bones’ door. He knocked too lightly —Jim couldn’t remember the last time he’d actually knocked on a door. He tried again, not wanting it to startle Bones, but needing to wake him.
Jim heard feet hit the floor and footsteps before the door swung open enough for Bones’ body to appear, he was scowling at first, but it dropped when he caught sight of Jim’s face, distorted and terrified in the dark.

“You’re here…” Bones almost gasped.

“Can I come in?” Jim asked quietly, afraid if he spoke too loud he’d lose his chance.

“You know…That’s the first thing you ever said to me?” Bones mused, more to himself than Jim.

It took him a minute but Jim was suddenly back in that moment. The moment he’d first seen Bones. Jim hadn’t thought about that moment in a long time. The tall, broad-shouldered, nervous doctor, blinking at Jim like he might bolt, who’d later turn his world upside down. The man who’d made him question his own stupid rules, that let him remember how it felt to be cared for all in the span of one night. Bones, who had been tentative and gentle, how they’d kissed, how they’d fucked, that first time. How Jim would have let him do anything just to cling to that feeling that Bones had stirred inside him, the one that had had nothing to do with adrenaline or plugs or pheromones. How on the surface it had seemed like Jim had needed to seduce him, but it was Bones who had taken his heart. Jim had never thought about how their entirely chance encounter had lead to so many ups and downs, how it had ultimately brought him here. He wondered if he’d known then what he knew now if he’d still have said those words. It was a fleeting wonder.

He would. He’d do it again in an instant. Even now, even with the scars, even when he didn’t know if Bones would forgive him—if they’d ever be the same—he’d do it again. Because Jim wanted them, he wanted to always feel how he felt when they were wrapped up in each other. He wanted everything Bones was to him, and he’d do it a thousand times over.

He couldn’t say that to Bones, couldn’t articulate any of it now, not in the middle of the night, not like this.

“Can I?” he asked again instead.

“Of course, I’m being rude,” echoing his sentiment from so many months before.

Jim stepped inside and closed the door. It was so dark, he could barely see Bones like this, which was better. “I know it’s not fair, I know I’m not being fair, so I understand if you say no.”
“What is it?” Bones asked gently. Jim could find no annoyance in his words.

“Can I sleep with you?” Jim paused but pushed on when Bones didn’t object, “I don’t want to be alone... the dreams—”

“I know, I know, Jim.”

They had to talk, they would talk, but not now, not like this. Not in dark, whispering their souls to each other in bed like some unfortunate retelling of their nights at the House. Jim wanted to see him, he wanted Bones to be able to see him. He wanted to talk when they were conscious and entirely consenting.

He was still so embarrassed at his behavior, at his childishness, that he hadn’t apologized, but when he climbed into the bed, he felt it begin to slide out his skin. Jim scooted until he was flush with Bones’ body. He was tense, and he could feel Bones was too. It was awkward because Jim had decided it was going to be. Each waiting for the other to concede, they laid silent, touching, but miles apart. Finally, Bones rested his hand on Jim’s hip and all at once Jim melted into his touch. He could feel Bones sigh against his neck.

“Thank you,” he heard Bones whisper, just barely audible, more of a breath than actual words. “For coming back.”

Jim didn’t move, didn’t speak, but his heart raced in a way that he was sure Bones would be able to feel and Jim was sorry he’d ever left.

He woke, sweating and on the edge of panic sometime later. It was the nightmare, the excruciating one where the monsters told him he was nothing, that he deserved everything they gave him—the one where Jim believed they were right.

“You’re safe. It’s okay,” he distantly heard Bones whisper into the shell of his ear. Bones’ voice pulled him out of their clutches, back to reality, back into his arms.

Jim turned over when he could, burying his face in the crook of Bones’ neck. His arms held tight around Jim, that constant steadying force that Jim had missed so much. He tried to let himself forget everything, everything that hurt, all the parts of him persistently shrieking that Bones didn’t want him and just stay in this moment. To let this feeling of safe harbor replace every ounce of himself that insisted he should suffer.
The next time Jim awoke he found it was late in the morning. Bones moved around the room as quietly as he could, getting ready for work. Jim stilled trying to not to alert him to his consciousness. Jim watched as his picked his clothes. They were all neutral and unassuming but sleek and handsome. Bones dressed quickly, deftly buttoning his shirt and vest. He sat on the bed heavily, shoes in hand, before throwing a worried glance to Jim’s supposedly sleeping form. Oh...Bones was worried he’d woken him. Jim tried his best to steady his breathing. Seemingly convinced, Bones ran a hand through his hair with another heavy sigh before going back to his laces. He stood, and walked softly around the bed to the side where Jim lay. He pulled the covers up around Jim, doing his best not to jostle him.

Jim managed to hold his tears back until Bones left the room, crying softly into the duvet now tucked delicately next to his cheek.

He was so good. So thoughtful and careful. Jim just pushed and pushed, but Bones didn’t retaliate, he just took it, and Jim honestly couldn’t understand why. From Jim’s limited experience, people were not good, people used, and people took, but Bones...Bones gave, even when he had nothing left, even when it made no sense for him to do so. Maybe that had been the problem all along. Jim had only ever had Jim. He was the only one he’d ever had to look after, and he was the only one who would ever look after himself. He’d wanted to be loved, but the reality of letting another person love him, of letting them in, past all of his walls to see his secrets was terrifying. And Jim had to allow it, had to take the obstacles out of the way to let Bones in, because, as time had shown, Bones would not push them down. He wanted to be close to Jim on Jim’s terms. Maybe that was the heart of the problem. Jim had never adjusted his own terms. He hadn’t allowed Bones to love him fully. Jim couldn’t believe he’d almost let himself throw all they were away.

—

It was late enough that Leonard had finished his tea and the paper, late enough that he really should think about getting ready for bed. At least a bath and putting on nightclothes would be a momentary distraction from obsessing over Jim. Reanalyzing every movement and word the kid had said yesterday had gotten him nowhere. Jim had come back, that was what mattered. He’d promised they wouldn’t have to see each other, or interact if Jim didn’t want. He tried to hear, but Jim as so quiet in his room. He almost couldn’t believe Jim was really there, Leonard wanted to peer into the room, just to make sure this wasn’t a pathetic fantasy he’d conjured up. He massaged his temples, talking
himself of another ledge, convincing himself to just leave well enough alone.

Leonard milled around in the bathroom, inspecting his jaw in the mirror, seeing the stubble he’d have to shave in the morning. Bone-tired and high strung was an unfortunate combination. He climbed into the tub as it filled, letting his head slide under the shallow water, his limbs mostly uncovered. Leonard held his breath, staring up at at the ceiling, distorted with the ripples of the bath. The water from the faucet beat down against his hip, and it provided a white noise to his suspension. Nothing looked real like this, not that he could see much. More importantly, nothing felt real. Leonard felt far away, he wished he really was far away, wished that he could slip down the drain, hanging in this suspension of reality forever. It would be easier, it would be so much easier. His chest burned, his lungs impatiently demanding oxygen. Leonard couldn’t hear, couldn’t think, his mind blissfully blank for a stretched second as he tried to will his body not to break the surface, for one more moment of silence.

He emerged from the water, gasping, reaching out for the wall of the tub to steady himself. Leonard sucked in breath after breath, his other thoughts still muffled as his body demanded he worry only about keeping himself alive. It was enough time to collect himself, to reset. It was enough time that he’d managed to forget the runaway train that were his thoughts about Jim. It was enough time to realize that he hated not thinking about Jim, that without Jim he was just struggling for air, just fighting to breath.

—

Still toweling his hair dry, Leonard opened the bathroom door only to find Jim curled on the floor in the doorframe to his room.

“Are you going to bed?” Jim asked, the first words he’d spoken all day.

“No,” he lied. He knew Jim wasn’t waiting for him like this just to say goodnight.

“Can we…can we talk?” his tone was shaky but steadfast.

His stomach flipped as he prepared for the worst. “Of course, darlin’.” Leonard chastised himself for the endearment, yet again. It was so hard with Jim, his fondness for the boy was undeniable.
Jim’s eyes widened and he chewed anxiously at his cuticle. “It’s okay,” Jim said in a tone that indicated maybe it was more than okay. Jim pushed himself to his feet, taking a few steps towards the kitchen.

Leonard hesitated for a brief moment, trying to decide what to do with his towel.

“I just want to talk somewhere that isn’t a bed,” Jim said quietly, glancing in Leonard’s direction and then back down the hall.

And if that didn’t wash a wave of remorse over him Leonard didn’t know what would. He dropped the towel where he stood in the hall and followed Jim to the table.

They sat in silence for what could have been hours. For once, Leonard didn’t have a sinking feeling in his chest, but his eyes raked over Jim, trying to etch every one of his features into his brain, never wanting to forget a single part of his face. Just in case. Just in case this was goodbye. Jim’s lips had parted a few times, but had drawn closed with words he could not manage. The way his eyes caught Leonard’s every few minutes where endless as if Jim was trying to gauge him, trying to will his own thoughts into Leonard’s mind. And Leonard waited. Hoping selfishly, praying—to every god he’d ever heard of—that Jim would tell him he was staying. He willed himself to calm the intensity of his expression, so that perhaps Jim would be comfortable enough to say whatever he was building up to.

“I’m so sorry.”

It hit Leonard like a physical blow, unexpected and hard. The words knocked the air from his lungs in a way that holding himself underwater could never have done.

“For the other day,” Jim continued, “For what I said, how I left it. I’m sorry.”

There was so much behind the words, so much tension—so much fear—that Leonard didn’t completely understand. He was having a hard time processing what Jim was actually saying. “You don’t have to apologize,” Leonard told him. It wasn’t true though, not really. Leonard was already wrapping the apology around himself, letting it soak into him like it was his new air.

Jim’s already wide eyes opened comically further and his lip quivered, “Yes I do. Don’t let me off like that. I know I hurt you. Sometimes it feels like all I do it hurt you, but you keep giving me another chance. You’ve given me so many chances, Bones and I couldn’t even let you explain, even
when you did the most decent thing anyone’s ever bothered to do for me.”

Leonard felt uncharacteristically calm. Perhaps it was because they were finally talking, not screaming, not crying, or perhaps it was because Jim looked stronger, more sure of himself, than he ever had before. “It’s alright. I know how bad it all sounded. That’s why I kept putting off telling you, I didn’t know how not to make it sound horrible.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t yell back at me.” Jim shook his head slowly, “I wish I’d listened—I want to listen now.”

“Jim, I deserved it,” the words toppled from his tongue before he could stop them. “It was my fault you ended up in the hospital, everything you went through was my fault. I tried so hard to keep you safe, I told myself I was protecting you, but I didn’t. I lied to you, and I know it was wrong.”

“It’s not…oh god Bones, it’s not. Don’t put that on yourself. I can’t tell you how much I wish I could take back what I said, that I blamed you. I don’t. None of this is your fault,” he motioned to his cheek scar, “It was Khan. His fault. He was sick. I don’t think it’s your fault. How could you have possibly known? I’m not going to let you feel responsible for something that you couldn't have prevented.”

Before Jim had even finished Leonard felt tears running down his face. Leonard hadn’t even known he needed to hear those words. He couldn’t have imagined that Jim assuaging his blame would have been enough for his stubborn mind, but it was. It was what Leonard so desperately needed, to know that Jim didn’t hold him responsible.

He could tell Jim was watching him, as he cried silently. Leonard could also tell Jim wasn’t done, and that he needed to compose himself at least enough to listen.

“I know it says the date on the paper,” Jim started hesitantly unfolding the legal document Talas had had drawn up, “But time hasn’t meant anything to me for a while. Did you do this after I told you I wouldn’t see you anymore?”

Leonard managed not flinch at the sight of the paper. He hated the paper. “…Yes.”

“Why?” Jim asked with overwhelmingly curiosity and confusion.
At least this was an easy one for him. A reason he knew no one would ever fully comprehend if they hadn’t been in his shoes, not Christine or Travis, and maybe not even Jim. “Because,” he admitted somewhat abashed, “I love you.”

Jim took a shallow breath as he let the words sink in. “Even after everything? After I made you think I didn’t love you?”

“It wasn’t rational, darlin’. It wasn’t for me. I loved you—I love you—and I couldn’t leave you there. I was going to do it before, I’d already decided. I wanted to give you your freedom.”

“You can’t know how much that means to me.”

“I hope you understand, I wasn’t trying to buy you. I hate that I’ve ever had to say those words. That’s what hurt me most, the other night, that you would think…that you would think I was trying to own you. I don’t own you, no one does. That was the point of all of this, please forgive me, I know it went wrong.”

The corners of Jim’s eyes were wet, but they weren’t uncontrolled tears, just an excess of emotion taking what seemed to be the quickest way out of Jim’s body. “I forgive you. Honestly, I don’t think it’s my place to, you didn’t do anything wrong. But I forgive you for whatever it is you don’t forgive yourself for, I forgive you.”

Leonard felt like his chest was on fire, his heart shouldn’t be beating in his ears as loud as it was. He wanted to hold Jim, he never wanted to let the boy go. Leonard wanted to kiss him until they both saw stars, he wanted to sob and laugh while they were wrapped up in each other.

Jim pulled the crumpled wad of Tul from his pocket, “I’ll pay you back the rest, I don’t know how much it was exactly, but I promise I will.”

Leonard chuckled despite himself. “I don’t want it.”

“Bones—” Jim tried to insist.

“No, I don’t want it. It’s not mine. It’s wasn’t a lone, it’s yours.”
Jim seemed to accept that, turning it over in his mind before he asked, “How much was I? How much did it cost you?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Leonard wasn’t being modest, it didn’t, nothing had ever mattered less than the money.

“Bones, please.”

“Darlin’, I want you to stop thinking about it. You weren’t supposed to know where it came from. I didn’t want to do that to you. You never should have had a price. You’re not indebted to me, it’s not some conditional thing. No matter if you leave, no matter what. You don’t owe anyone anything.”

“I don’t want to leave.” Jim couldn’t seem to look up from the table, it looked like he was focused on keeping his breathing even, on enunciating instead of retreating. “I know you keep saying that to let me know that I have a choice, but…it makes me feel like you don’t want me to stay. Stop telling me I can leave.”

His mouth hung open, there was a lump in his throat and it hurt to swallow. He couldn’t believe that’s how Jim had been interpreting his words, what he thought was helpful and unrestricting, had sounded cutting to Jim. Leonard was immeasurably grateful Jim had said something, after all this he didn’t want his words to be the thing building barriers.

“Tell me I can stay, tell me you want me to stay.”

“I want you to stay,” Leonard said without hesitation, reaching his hand across the table. He laid his palm open for Jim to take or ignore, testing to see how Jim would react. “More than anything I want you to stay.”

Jim looked at him for a moment, not moving, “You know you’re not going to be able to fix me, don’t you?”

“There’s nothing about you I want to fix.”

“Really?” Jim asked skeptically, “There’s nothing about me you want to change?”
“I just want you. I’ve only ever wanted you, darlin’. I want everything that comes along with that.”

Jim relented, laying his hand atop Leonard’s. It felt as though he could take a full breath, like he’d physically needed Jim’s touch to go on living.

“I love you.” Jim squeezed his hand, his eyes slid up and locked with Leonard’s. “And I’m scared,” he admitted, his voice breaking the tiniest bit, “I’m scared I’ll screw it up again, that I’ll hurt you.”

“You won’t. The hardest part is over, darlin’, I have to believe that. I won’t go, I won’t give up on us, just promise me you won’t either.”

“I just want you—us. I want to be happy. I want to be happy with you.”

“That’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Chapter End Notes

This is not the end!! After everything we've all gone through, I wouldn't stop it here, just a few more chapters to go! <3
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone who is still here, I'm sorry I'm like this and I take so long to update. I hope the smut makes up for it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I thought for sure I’d lost you this time,” Bones confessed, stroking his fingers through Jim’s hair. “I really didn’t think you would come back.”

Jim leaned into it. “I didn’t think I was going to come back. I wasn’t even going to read your note.”

“What changed your mind?”

The memory didn’t startle Jim, like it might have if he was a less broken person. He allowed it to flash through his mind before answering. “I can’t tell you that.”

“You can tell me, darlin’.”

Jim sighed, he didn’t want to get into it. Not after they’d mended everything, not when they were finally nestled together on Bones’ too small sofa. Not when Jim felt like for the first time in so long he was actually happy.

“I don’t want to tell you.”

“Alright,” Bones said without missing a beat.

Alright?” Jim echoed in confusion. He’d expected some sort of resistance.

“You don’t have to tell me. You’re allowed to have secrets. Just know, whatever it is, you can tell me.”
“Not tonight.”

“Okay.”

“Maybe not ever,” Jim mused. Bones wouldn’t understand. He’d accept it, he’d still love Jim, but he wouldn’t understand. It had been a fucked up thing that probably shouldn’t have brought Jim clarity. He didn’t want to share it, he needed to keep it separate. Jim didn’t want to tell Bones for both their sakes.

“Did someone hurt you?” Bones asked quietly.

“No.”

“Then I don’t need to know, if you don’t want to tell me.”

“Okay.”

Jim stared into the fire, crackling on the opposite wall. It was so calm for all it’s silent energy. He liked how it was contained, how it was alive. He ran his fingers across Bones’ wool clad knee, relaxing a little more against him.

“I got a job,” Jim told him, remembering that fact that he’d squished down earlier, “I guess it’s an apprenticeship.”

“That’s wonderful, darlin’!” Bones kissed his head. “Where?”

“At the garage, with Pike.”

“Good for you! You’re gonna be great. I can’t tell what’s up or down mechanically, cars are nothing like people.”
“Maybe that’s why I like them,” Jim mused. “I start Thursday,” he added with dawning realization, “Is that tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow is Thursday,” Bones confirmed.

“I need a pair of gloves,” Jim remembered, sitting up a little frantically.

Bones smiled, reaching for his hand, “You can use mine.”

“They’ll get gross!” Jim worried.

“I’ll get more.”

Jim bit his lip. How had he already managed to fuck up? God, he was a mess.

“Jim, it’s okay.”

“What if I’m bad at this?” Jim whispered. He hadn’t been able to banish the thought, it was easier to say it out loud.

Bones kissed the knuckles of Jim’s hand clasped with his own. “Then you throw the gloves away and you come back here and we find something else you like.”

“I like pastries,” Jim said, thinking about what else he possibly liked besides Bones.

“Then we’ll go talk to a baker,” Bones laughed, “But darlin’, I think you’ll be good.”
The coveralls felt nice, and not just because they would keep his clothes clean. There was no chance of someone accidentally seeing more skin than he was comfortable with. He hadn’t done much so far, but he was looking at, and when he could, touching everything. Pike had gone through the inner workings of one of the cars he already had open. It was interesting to watch him work; Jim tried his best to retain all the information that was being thrown at him. It was quiet and precise work, just the opposite of what he was used to, but it was a welcome change. It felt nice to have things explained, to be talked to like he wasn’t a nuisance, a means to an end.

Scotty diagnosed a new car that came in almost entirely on sound alone. Pike was clearly impressed. Jim was impressed too. He hoped one day he’d be able to do that. He had to remind himself Scotty had only been working there a few months, while it was only Jim’s first day. Still, it felt amazing to see all the things he’d been looking at in publications for so many weeks in real life. Despite his earlier reservations, he really was having a good time.

Towards the end of the day, Chris let Jim crank open an oil tank, which Jim managed with decently steady hands.

“That’s it, son. Alright now, careful you’re just going to dip this in here,” he handed Jim a flat metal stick, “Pull it out quick and lay it against the ruler.”

Jim did as he was told, getting only a bit of motor oil on his hands. He laid it next to the ruler, looking at the small increments.

“So the oil is low,” Chris said, tapping the ruler. “We need to add more. We don’t want the engine to have unnecessary friction.”

Jim couldn’t help but know how the engine felt as he tipped more into the tank through a funnel.
Despite the fact that Jim had genuinely enjoyed his time at the shop, he was relieved to be safely home once again. Each time he went out it got a little easier, and seeing familiar faces helped a lot, but the truth was, it was still difficult for Jim. The world was loud and fast now, and even before the House Jim hadn’t lived in the city. He liked the it now of course, liked the people, liked the noise but coming home, to security, and quiet, and Bones was undeniably comforting.

Jim thought he should probably take a shower before Bones got back, he was sure he smelled like metal and grease. But the big armchair looked so welcoming, and Jim let himself fall into it instead.

The next thing he knew he was being kissed awake with by soft presses of Bones’ lips against his cheek. Jim made a groggy noise of acknowledgement.

“Pike really tired you out didn’t he?”

Jim hummed in agreement and Bones chuckled.

“I messed up your gloves,” Jim said without much remorse.

“I figured that would happen. Anyway, they’re yours now,” Bones answered simply.

“How was work?”

“It was a good day, nobody died.”

“Yeah? Nobody died at the auto shop either,” Jim grinned.

Bones laughed and kissed him again. “Are you hungry?”

“Yeah. Let me help you cook.”
Jim woke up itching for something. It was Saturday, Pike had told him not to come in on Saturday or Sunday. He had a weekend—a *weekend*, what a concept. Bones had had to work, leaving Jim to pace around the apartment restlessly. He watered his small plants, which were not so small anymore these days. He drank a cup of coffee that he managed to marginally enjoy with three cubes of sugar. He walked around the block three times, trying to shake off the itch. He cleaned the kitchen for no real reason except to have something to do.

Bones came back midday, finding Jim in their room, sprawled haphazardly across the bed reading *Great Expectations*. Jim almost tackled him with excitement.

“What are you doing home?”

“If I didn’t know any better I’d think you were happy to see me.”

Jim tried to bite his smile back, but he could tell by the look on Bones’ face it wasn’t working. “Are you done?”

“Yeah, slow day. Everyone must have known how much you wanted me to come back.”

“Good, everyone can have health problems tomorrow,”

Bones sat next to Jim hurriedly and put his finger to Jim’s lips shushing him, “Don’t let them hear you say that.”

“You’re not superstitious.”

“I am about that.” Bones sighed, letting his hand slip down to rest on Jim’s chest. “So, what do you want to do? We could make up some sandwiches and drive to the lake, if you want?” He fussed with Jim’s tie absent-mindedly as he considered other options.

Jim’s skin felt hot beneath Bones’ hand. He could feel a blush deepening across his cheeks. He pushed his hands inside Bones’ waistcoat, fingers tracking the contours of his ribcage. Bones looked
back as him and Jim caught a mildly startled look on his face before Jim kissed him. Bones seemed cautious as he kissed Jim back, slower than usual, softer. Jim realized they hadn’t done this since he’d come home. This seemed to be the frantic need he’d felt under his skin all day.

“Or,” Bones breathed heavily as he pulled back, “We could do this instead.”

“This,” Jim agreed, swinging his leg over Bones to straddle him.

He felt Bones’ fingers brush his jaw. Gently, Bones was alway gentle unless Jim told him not to be. And Jim did not want gentle now. Jim wasn’t even sure he wanted to be touched at all. He still wanted to fuck, to be stretched open around Bones’ thick cock, but he didn’t want the affectionate, gentle touches. He wanted hard edges and desperation. Jim pushed his hand away, but kept kissing him, unbuttoning his vest as he did.

Bones’ hand settled on Jim’s hip. This time Jim pinned it against the headboard.

“Wh—” Bones started, pulling away.

“Don’t touch!” Jim demanded. “Just,” he helped Bones shrug his vest off, “Let me fuck you.”

Bones started to push his suspenders off, but Jim grabbed his wrist again.

“Don’t.”

Bones searched his face, Jim wasn’t sure what he was looking for but he didn’t seem to find it. “Do you want to tie me down?” There was a tinge of humor as he raised his eyebrow, but it didn’t play quite right, his breathing labored.

Jim had always hated that. Hated how fucking powerless he felt, like the other person could do anything to him, and they always had. He shivered, pushing it out of his head.

“Can’t you just not touch me?” he asked quietly.
“Alright, darlin’.”

Jim moved away reaching for the oil on the dresser. He made quick work of his own clothes, only his partially unbuttoned shirt remaining as he laid down before he coated his fingers with the lube. He stopped, suddenly very self-aware, knowing Bones was watching him interestingly. Jim wasn’t sure Bones had ever seen him touch himself before, not like this, and wasn’t that a strange thought.

“Is it okay if I watch you, or would you rather I didn’t?” Bones asked, seemingly reading his mind.

“It’s fine if you watch,” Jim conceded. It was fine really, just new. Sometimes Jim forgot there was anything Bones hadn’t done with him.

He brought one knee to his chest and let his hand find his hole. He was half hard from just being on top of Bones. Jim didn’t waste time with his cock, or touching himself slowly. He pushed two slick fingers inside himself, his body offering no protest. Doing this was second nature.

Bones drew a sharp breath as he watched, his cock twitching inside his pants. Jim closed his eyes, focusing on opening himself up. His muscles relaxed almost instantly, allowing Jim to pump the two fingers deeper, pushing the oil further inside. He allowed himself an indulgent moment, rubbing a firm pressure against the spot that made his whole body tingle.

His mouth fell open, letting out a breathy moan. He could hear Bones shift against the sheets. He knew if he opened his eyes he would see just badly Bones obviously wanted to touch him, but it was better this way. Knowing that it was Jim calling the shots. Knowing that nothing would happen unless Jim wanted it to.

Jim nudged a third finger into his hole loosened hole, his breathing picking up. That always felt good, decently full, but familiar. He continued thrusting for a moment before stopping to add more oil, purposely not looking at Bones. He resumed his attentions on his slick hole, pushing his fingers back inside himself at a lazy pace. His cock was hard against his stomach, the tip a heady pink glistening with precome, but that would wait. Bones would wait too. The thought made him clench around his fingers.

He thought of only himself as he continued fucking his own hand, thought of how he could come now if he wanted, or hold off for hours. And then, Jim let his mind go completely blank, just focusing on how it felt. It was so rare that Jim allowed himself to just focus on the pleasure of this, the sensation itself.
Finally, he pulled his fingers out, opening his eyes. Predictably, Bones was transfixed. Jim struggled with the closure of Bones’ trousers for a moment. His pants were wet as Jim pushed them away just enough to let Bones’ cock free. He made a pitiful noise as the cool air hit him.

“Can you stay like that?” Jim asked, reaching again for the lube.

Bones took a second before shaking his head. He stretched his legs out in a casual V-shape against the sheets. He put his arms behind him, reclining slightly, letting his shoulders take the weight.

Jim massaged the oil gently into Bones’ cock, leaving it slick contrast against the soft fabric of the shirt Bones still had on. Bones whined quietly. Jim straddled him, wanting nothing more than to sink down, to have Bones’ cock fill him to the brim that instant, but he held back, his oil-coated hand marring Bones’ once-crisp, white shirt.

“Can I?” Jim asked. He had to ask, after demanding stillness and silence, it wasn’t fair not to, no matter how obviously Bones might have wanted it.

“Yes,” Bones answered, his voice gravel, “God, yes.”

Jim grinned and lined himself up. The tip of Bones’ cock just nudging at his entrance. Bones looked absolutely recked, his fingers tight in the sheets, biting his lip so hard it was almost white.

“Jim—” Bones gasped.

“Shhhhh,” Jim hushed, tracing his fingers along Bones’ lips.

Before Bones could say anything else, Jim lowered his hips so Bones’ cock pushed inside. He didn’t try to adjust as his ass met Bones’ hips, he just let Bones’ hot, thick cock pulse inside him, stretching him farther open, inch by inch. Jim threw his head back, moaning gutturally, the noise mixing with Bones’ own cry as he gripped Bones’ suspenders, doing his best to steady himself.

Bones would usually center him now, but Bones was doing as he was told, keeping his hands away from Jim. It was awful—it was exhilarating. He thrust his hips forward experimentally, his fingers finding security by digging into Bones’ shoulder. When he moved again with an upward thrust Bones’ hips came off the bed with him.
“No,” Jim breathed, putting his free hand behind him, holding Bones’ thigh down with as much force as he could manage. He gave Bones an unyielding look, hoping it could articulate what he couldn’t.

Bones whimpered but conceded.

Jim fucked himself relentlessly on Bones’ cock, each thrust harder and deeper than the last. He felt like he might come at any second, all it would take would be a single stroke of his hand and he’d be gone, but he didn’t want this to end. He wanted to feel like this forever. To have this dominate satisfaction running through his veins. He wanted Bones to touch him, but with every second that he resisted it made Jim love him just a little more. Bones watched him, like he was the only thing that mattered, like he could watch Jim do this for hours. He broke his rhythm, spine arching as he leaned down just a breath short of Bones’ mouth.

“Not yet,” he sighed. Jim felt the shiver that ran through Bones’ body.

Jim kissed his temple, placing kisses from his hairline along his cheekbone, down to his lips, stopping when Bones didn’t kiss him back. He pulled away, Bones looked at him with heavy, darkened eyes.

“Am I allowed?” Bones asked, his voice raw with want.

Jim’s cock jerked, spilling precome on to Bones’ ruined shirt. “Only if I kiss you first,” Jim whispered before kissing him again.

Bones did kiss him back, urgently at first, as though he thought Jim might change his mind. When he calmed, Jim coaxed Bones’ mouth open, his tongue sliding in caressing Bones’. He moaned relaxing the best he could, allowing Jim to take whatever he wanted. And Jim did, for a while, until it seemed more fun to pull away. Bones looking dazed as he did.

“Stop,” Jim ordered.

It took a moment for Bones to process, his mouth hanging open, overwhelmed as Jim resumed his brutal pace. Jim wondered if he shouldn’t just try to come like this. He was fairly sure he could at this point. But he wanted to touch himself, so he did. Keeping one hand on Bones’ shoulder for stability he stroked himself with the other.
It was perfect—it was entirely too much. With that, Jim tightened around Bones, his body milking Bones’ cock insistently as he came. Come spurted from his aching cock all over his chest, droplets darkening Bones’ now ruined shirt. Jim rode the feeling, like a rainstorm had opened up in the desert, his body flooded with more pleasure, relief and sensitivity.

“Jim,” Bones cried, his voice breaking, his knuckles turning impossibly whiter against the sheets. It wasn’t a question, Jim’s release was clearly more than he could take. Bones writhed under him.

Even in the haze of his own orgasm Jim swore he could feel Bones’ cock jerk inside him. He made a conscious effort to move, the motion allowing the come to run out of his hole, then quickly sink back down to fuck it back inside himself.

Bones’ hand left the sheet, hanging in the air for a moment. “Fuck,” Bones panted, “Oh, fuck!” before his hand dropped back to the bed using the last of his resolve to hold himself up.

As Jim continued his half-hearted effort he noticed the tracks of tears interrupting the shimmer of sweat on Bones’ cheeks. It was sweet just how much Bones had had to put into not touching him. Jim leaned down kissing the wet tracks, kissing Bones everywhere but his mouth. Bones kept his eyes closed, breathing heavily until he finally softened inside Jim.

Jim could feel the come dripping out of him, rolling down his skin until it fell onto Bones’ soft cock. He was sweaty, and filthy and tired, and he knew Bones must be feeling the same way, perhaps more so, as he was all but fully clothed.

He’d proved to himself what he wanted, and now Jim just wanted to be held.

“Bones?” Jim prodded.

His eyes opened, blinking as he tried to focus on Jim’s too-close face.

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you,” Bones whispered. His hand came up again, wanting so desperately to touch some part of Jim, as though he couldn’t wait another second, but somehow he managed to. Jim
watched with fascination.

“Can I?” Bones asked finally.

“I’ll be insulted if you don’t.”

“Oh, thank god,” Bones sighed, pulling Jim down as he fell back on to the bed. Bones’ hand rushed up to Jim’s face, the other stroking his arm, hungry for any skin they could find.

"I love you."

"I love you too, darlin’."

"I love you, Leonard H. McCoy,” he smiled, the full name felt clunky on his tongue, but he liked it, “I never thought anyone would love me; I could have never dreamed it would be like this, like it is with you.”

“Jim...”

“I love you, Bones.” He kissed Bones’ jaw, squeezing their laced fingers. "I'll never be able to match what you’ve done for me, so I'm just going to love you back, the best way I know how, and hopefully that'll be enough."

"It's enough, Jim. It’s everything.”
Both of them in the bath were not a particularly easy fit. They were just a confusing jumble of arms
and legs displaced by water, but somehow Jim had found a way pillow his head on Leonard’s chest.
One of Jim’s arms was wrapped around Leonard’s torso, holding on as though he might drown in
the shallow water. His other hand alternated between swirling the water and tracing up and down
Leonard’s body. The water kept getting cold, to which Jim insisted they turn the hot tap back on and
let some of the water from the drain. Leonard couldn’t find it in himself to argue.

*All Jim seemed to want now to be touched, the irony. It had been so incredibly difficult not to touch
Jim, but Leonard could tell he’d needed…whatever that had been. To be in charge, to prove that he
could still trust Leonard. And who could really blame him? It would have been easier if his hands
had been bound, every second had been a struggle. Jim had been brimming with sex and
confidence and Leonard would have done anything he asked. All Jim had to do was ask, Leonard
would give him *anything*. Although, he was fairly certain that it worked both ways now.*

He’d already washed Jim’s hair, and his own. He scrubbed them both down, the sweat, and come,
and dirt long since down the drain. But Jim clearly liked the way it felt when Leonard ran the cloth
across his skin, or massaged his fingers through Jim’s damp hair, so how could he do anything but
oblige? Leonard couldn’t imagine he’d ever grow tired of touching Jim.

“No one’s ever fucked me in a bath,” Jim said dreamily, running his hand over the soft line between
Leonard’s pectorals.

Under Jim’s spell or not, there was no chance of that right now. “No one’s doing it today either,”
Leonard answered, absolutely exhausted. He wasn’t even sure they were going to make it back to
the bed, and he certainly didn’t have enough energy for anything else.

“We’ll save it for later.”

Leonard hummed in agreement.

“You still want to go to the lake?” Jim asked.

He groaned in mock distress, making as though he was going to get out of the tub.

“No, don’t go,” Jim laughed, “I’m kidding!”
I think the rest of what I want to resolve will be done in two or three more chapters.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Look at this update, two months ahead of schedule! (I'm kidding but only kind of since I'm totally making fun of myself).
Maybe this is a little sappy, you'll have to let me know, but I really enjoyed writing it so¯_(ツ)_/¯

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim felt a little stupid with the box tucked in his coat pocket. It wasn’t the box’s fault. The woman at the store had insisted on wrapping his purchase up when Jim had mentioned it was a gift. He shouldn’t have said they were a gift, because they weren’t really. She’d been so chatty, Jim had wondered if it was to hide her nervousness at his face. He tried to tell himself it wasn’t that. That he’d never been in the store before, that she was really just friendly, but Jim honestly wasn’t sure. He knew he’d never be able to be sure. So he’d talked with her, held a friendly conversation and watched helplessly as she wrapped up the gloves.

They were nicer than the gloves Bones had given to Jim. Jim’s gloves were worn in with use, it made them flexible, fit more to the contours of Bones’ fingers than his own. They were still a strong leather though, good for making sure the sharp metal of the insides of the cars wouldn’t cut his fingers up at the shop. It had felt wrong not to get a nicer pair now though. Bones wore gloves everyday when he drove, needing the traction to turn the wheel. Jim didn’t want him to have to break them in again. He’d opted for an already soft pair, a deep caramel leather that felt like butter under his fingers. Jim had winced at what they cost, thirteen Tul for the pair, but he shook it off and handed over the money.

So now he had a fancy box to give to Bones. He hadn’t wanted to feel like he was gifting Bones something. They were a replacement, and the stupid box felt like he was asking to be thanked, when really Jim should still be thanking Bones. But it was tied up so nicely, and it felt wrong to rip them out of the box now.

Jim sighed as he unlocked the apartment door. The sound of the bolt sliding out of the way when Jim turned his key still made his heart flutter. His key. Their apartment. Home.

Bones was waiting in the entry when he opened the door. He kissed him sweetly on the mouth. “Welcome home, how was work?” he asked with a grin when he pulled away.

“You’ve been waiting all day to say that, haven’t you?”
“Maybe.” Bones smiled again as he helped Jim take off his coat, “Yes.”

“I learned a lot, I helped fix an engine. I’m tired.”

“Is that good tired?”

“Before this, I didn’t know there was good tired, but yeah.” Jim toed out of his shoes, snatching the box from his coat as Bones headed back towards the kitchen. “What about you?”

“took a cast off a man’s leg, he was able to walk. It was just fantastic. Can you imagine back when they just cut off broken limbs? Barbaric.” Bones opened the oven, eyeing the dish inside, “I think that probably needs a little while longer, what’s this?”

Jim held out the box, giving it a tiny shake when Bones didn’t reach for it immediately. “For you,” he said, tilting his head to the side.

Bones looked at him with curious amusement and took it. He turned the box over in his hands, smiling at the ribbon. “What is it?”

“Open it and you’ll find out.”

He untied the ribbon carefully, setting it aside on the counter before taking the lid off. Bones unfolded satin-finish paper inside so that the gloves were framed just so in the box. Bones took a sharp inhale of breath, letting his fingers run over them before picking one up and turning it over.

“Oh, Jim! These are…” Bones whistled low and long, “These are gorgeous.” He pulled one over his hand, flexing his fingers. Jim watched as the glove moved like a true second skin, not inhibiting the motion at all. “They must have cost—jesus they’re beautiful,” he looked up at Jim, delight clear on his face, “You didn’t have to get these for me.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “You’re welcome, and yes I did. I ruined yours, you’ve been driving bare-handed for three days.”
“Well, you didn’t have to get such nice ones. I don’t drive well enough for these.”

Jim took Bones’ gloved hand in between his, “Yes you do. I wanted to get you something as good as you, they didn’t have anything like that, so I hope you’ll settle for these.”

“Thank you,” he said leaning in to kiss Jim on the cheek. “Thank you, darlin’.”

Jim blushed, a warm feeling fluttering in his chest as he squeezed Bones’ hand. “Should I make some tea before dinner?”

“Sure, I’d really like that.”

—

"Doing anything fun tonight, Scotty?" Chris asked in the way of casual chit-chat, wiping his hand across his forehead, glancing up at the mechanic.

“After a bath I thought I’d go visit Miss Gaila. It’s been a while. Want to join me?"

Chris shook his head, "Not my thing. I’ve got a new novel with my name on it."

Scotty shrugged as though Pike had turned him down before.

Jim was staring, he must have misheard, surely Scotty hadn’t mean Gaila. It wasn’t a common name though, it was unlikely he didn’t mean her.

"What about you then, Jim?" Scotty asked, motioning a hand in front of his face.

"At Madam Sato's?"
"Aye, that's the place! You been?"

"Yeah..." Jim said carefully, trying his very best not to be conspicuous. "I—I don't want to come with you though."

Chris shot him an inquisitive look which Jim ignored.

"Suit yourself."

He finally remembered why Scotty had seemed familiar. It all flooded back to him, Gaila's terrible impression of his accent, that she'd liked him well enough. Along with a torrent of memories from his last visit. "Can I...can I ask you a favor?"

"Sure, laddie."

"Could you tell her, Gaila, could you tell her I'm okay? Tell her Jim's okay?"

"Aye...that all?" Scotty asked hesitantly.

"Tell her she was right. That I'm happy."

“I can but, sounds like maybe you should tell her yourself?"

"I can't."

Scotty looked at him for a long moment. "Alright, I'll tell her."
Jim woke to Bones tracing the slope of his nose. It was a sweet touch, so oddly intimate because when Jim thought about it he wasn’t sure anyone had ever touched his nose before.

“What are you doing?” Jim asked quietly, not wanting to shatter the moment.

Bones looked at him, his finger hovering just above Jim’s cheek. ”I keep expecting to wake up and find you're gone,” he whispered.

It hit Jim like a punch to the gut. He deserved it, of course, but that didn’t make it hurt any less. ”I won't leave Bones, I won't ever do that to you again."

“I want to learn the contours of your face, just on the off chance you change your mind.”

“I’m not going anywhere, I promise.” Bones looked like he wanted to believe Jim, but there was a hesitancy. He had every right to be apprehensive, and he’d have to earn Bones’ trust back on that one. He lay there silently for a bit longer, letting the minutes tick by before he said, "Tell me about her."

"About who?" Bones asked absently.

"Your estranged wife."

He winced, dropping his hand away from Jim entirely. "She's not my wife anymore. I’m not unfaithful. I’m…divorced. Legally divorced.”

It was loaded the way Bones said the word, divorced, as if it were an unholy curse.

"What happened?"

Bones sighed, "I know I told you, she ran off with the paperboy."
"That's not what I mean."

"You don't want to hear about this," Bones said a little angrily, sitting up.

Jim sat up with him, hand on Bones’ shoulder "Yes I do."

He shrugged it off. "She left me, Jim. I wasn't enough for her—I wasn't good enough."

"Bones—"

"I couldn't seem to make her happy. Nothing I did was ever enough. She didn't love me, she kept looking for a way to leave. I just kept begging her not to go, like my groveling would change her mind. It didn't, of course. She left with the first man who would take her away. She didn't want me. I thought I was boring, and callous...absent, for christ’s sake she thought my hands were too big. I couldn't do anything right by her." Bones swallowed as he looked at Jim warily, "You sure you want to hear about this?"

"Yes," Jim whispered. "Did you love her?"

"I did, but it was...different. It's so different with you. Jocelyn was...a soft love maybe, if that makes any sense at all. I was devastated when she left, but I moved on. Rebuilt myself the best way I knew how." He searched Jim's face like he wasn't sure he should say the next part, like he was worried how Jim would react. "That’s not an option with you. There’s no moving on. I wouldn’t have died for her."

Jim felt a shiver run through him at the unspoken implication. It wasn’t as though he wouldn’t die for Bones—he would if it came to that—but Bones was stronger than him for admitting it.

"I could feel her pulling away from me the day after our wedding,” Bones continued sullenly. “Her family wanted her to marry a doctor, and she didn't have a better offer. She was razor sharp and beautiful, and I didn’t know better. I couldn't see how she didn't love me. I trusted that she wouldn’t lie, I was stupid."

“You weren’t stupid, you were in love."
"I shamed myself and her family."

"That's not on you. She's the one who left." Jim paled as he said it, he has a creeping realization about Bones' treatment of him, how many times Bones has reminded him he was free to go. Jim had hated it, he felt like Bones had wanted him to go, but he'd obviously only been trying not to relive what had happened with Jocelyn. She'd crept away when he'd asked her to stay, and she'd never returned.

"Bones, you know it wasn't that you failed her? You know you didn't deserve any of that, right?"

“I did though. I wasn’t attentive, I wasn’t ready. I got what I deserved. We all get what we deserve,” Bones said miserably. His heard jerked up after a second, looking at Jim frantically, “I didn’t—not with… I’m—I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that.”

Jim took his hands, unperturbed by the misspoken words. He knew it wasn’t what Bones had meant. Could see how the guilt was eating him up. Jim knew Bones wasn’t talking about what had happened to Jim, but rather wading though past mistakes.

“I know that’s not true,” Jim said gently, “I don’t deserve you, I never have, but I get you anyway.”

Bones dropped his eyes back to the mattress. “I’m a poor consolation.”

“Don’t… don’t say that,” Jim said quietly. “You’re the most decent person I’ve ever met; I’ve met a lot, Bones. It’s her fucking loss if she couldn’t see that. I’m glad she left you. I know that’s selfish, but if she hadn’t you would have never met me. I know exactly where I’d be right now if you hadn’t.”

Jim bit his lip, watching Bones as his eyes moved over the sheets. Finally he let his gaze slide up to meet Jim’s.

“Let’s not play who’s more fucked up anymore, okay?” Bones asked.

“Maybe we’re both equally fucked up. We understand the other, that has to be enough,” Jim said, squeezing Bones’ hand. “You don’t have to pretend you don’t hurt. I’m not going anywhere, I promise. It’s not too much.”
“I love you, darlin’. I hope you know how much I love you.”

“I do.” Jim’s chest ached with how much he loved Bones back, more than he could ever truly hope to express with words. He’d thought the urgency in it would ebb once they were together, once Jim could touch him anytime he needed. Once they’re resolved their misunderstandings, but it still hadn’t. It was still an ever-present feeling pounding through his body. If Bones felt that feeling for him, even half as much as Jim did, then he knew.

“Stay here, okay?” Jim asked as he stretched off the bed.

“Okay,” Bones agreed without hesitation.

“I’ll be right back!” Jim called down the hall, “Don’t get dressed!”

Jim went to the kitchen and boiled water for the coffee press. It was a little thing, he knew that, but coffee always made Bones feel better. Jim also needed the time, to rehearse what he wanted to say, to try and articulate the overwhelming emotion he felt. He needed Bone to understand, to stop questioning himself.

When Jim had tipped the piping hot water into the grounds-filled press, he grabbed a mug and took it back to the bedroom to steep.

Bones looked from Jim to the press and back to Jim, smiling embarrassedly. “You’re sweet.” He watched Jim as he set it on the dresser and hopped back up next to Bones who was propped up against the headboard. “I’m sorry I got myself in such an unpleasant mood.”

“Don’t apologize,” Jim said smiling.

Jim climbed on to Bones’ stretched legs, sitting on his thighs. Bones kissed him easily, his mouth had that sour taste that came with sleep, but Jim couldn’t find it in himself to care, he was sure he tasted the same. Jim could feel a redness creeping into his cheeks as he pulled back. He captured both of Bones’ hands with his and stared at him for a long minute.

“What is this?” Bones asked looking a little charmed.
“I love when you smile. I love how you hold me. I love how patient you are, even when I’ve been impossible.” Jim paused for just a moment to watch how Bones’ eyes had gone wide and started to swim, but he didn’t look away. “I love how you love me. I love the way your eyebrow twitches when you read the paper. I love how your stubble scrapes against my skin. I love the freckles on your shoulders. Thank you for loving me. I’m so fucking grateful for how much you do. I promise to love you more—to say it more—so that you don’t have a chance to doubt it.”

Bones’ breathing was heavy and he sniffed just a bit, staring at Jim for another few silent seconds. “Are you trying to make me cry?”

Jim shook his head, “I just wanted you to know. After everything…It hurts to think you might not know.”

“Well, it is awfully nice to hear you say it.”

Jim smiled before dismounting the bed. He pressed the coffee and filled the mug, pretending not to notice how Bones wiped at his eyes.

Bones took the mug, taking a long draw of the bitter liquid as Jim set the press next to their bed. He went around the mattress to sidling up next to Bones under the covers. He laid his head in Bones’ lap.

“Thank you, Jim,” Bones said in a way that Jim knew he wasn’t taking about the coffee.

He hummed back, contented as Bones let his fingers roam through Jim’s hair.

—

The night had come and gone and Gaila had been amazing like always. She made him feel special, content. Now, in the creeping morning, Scotty twisted a lock of her hair around his finger as she kissed his chest. He’d have to go soon, had to get work. He felt awkward relaying Jim’s message, but he wouldn’t break his word.
"Gotta message for you, missy," he said finally.

Gaila's squealed adorably, pawing at him. "Oh do you? How mysterious! Come on then, tell me."

"Jim wants you to know he's okay. That he’s…happy. He said you’d know what that meant."

Gaila’s froze. She looked up at him her face paled. "W-what?"

*Shit.* That had been a bad idea, but he was already in too deep, he’s already done the damage. "I…I work with him, at the automobile shop I told you about. Ah and he said to tell you: you were right."

Her eyes welled, her demeanor shifting upward. Gaila grabbed his hand excitedly. “He did? He's really okay?"

Scotty nodded warily. He was so confused.

"Oh...thank you, Monty!" She kissed him hard on the mouth. "You're the sweetest. Thank you!"

“Should I…tell him you said anything?” he asked unsure what on earth he’d stepped into.

She shook her head, “No…no, bless you. Oh my god! You’ve made my whole week!” She sat up excitedly, a renewed fire in her eyes, “Let me at least make your morning, huh?”

—

“You made her cry,” Scotty said, patting Jim on the shoulder.
Jim was startled, he hadn’t hear Scotty come downstairs. It took him slow second to realize he’d talking about Gaila. He hadn’t meant to make her cry, god he hoped it had been happy tears. Either way Scotty probably wasn’t happy about it.

“Ooch laddie, stop that. She was thrilled, I’ve never seen her smile like that,” Scotty admitted. “Had a damn good morning because of it too.” He shrugged, “I don’t suppose I want to know what that was all about.”

A smile tugged at Jim’s lips. He’d just needed her to know, needed her to know he was okay. It felt good, it felt like closure. “She helped me out one—several—times. She helped me a lot.”

"I'm gonna do us a both a favor and not ask anymore questions."

Jim chuckled. "That's fine. Thank you. You didn’t have to do that. I really appreciate it."

Scotty nodded. “You’re welcome. Just know that whatever I want from you next I better get without a fuss.”

“Of course,” Jim said because it was easiest, managing just barely to stifle a shiver.

He knew Scotty didn’t mean anything nefarious by it. He knew it was just banter, but it was still hard to dissociate phrases like that from being forced into rough, unwanted sex. He walked away as casually as he could, making it to the stairwell before crumbling. Jim drew sharp, shaking breaths as he tried to calm himself.

You’re okay. Scotty is a nice person. You don’t have to do that anymore. Pike wouldn’t let something like that happen, Jim told himself forcing his breathing to calm. It’s okay, you’re—

Jim gasped as a hand fell on his the back of his neck. His eyes flew open and he turned around wildly.

Chris looked at Jim with a good deal of understanding, and much less aggravation than he would have thought he’d see. “You alright?”
Jim nodded several times, still breathing heavily.

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Yes, I’m sorry.”

“You want to tell me?”

“It won’t happen again.”

“Yeah it will. Whatever that was I can tell it will happen again—and that’s okay—just don’t lie to me. That scar says you’ve been though some shit.”

Jim didn’t flinch the way he once might have when Chris mentioned his scar. He’d known it wasn’t as though Chris couldn’t see it, just hadn’t let it change the way he treated Jim. Until now, until it became relevant.

“Can I keep working here?” Jim asked worried that this would be the end.

Chris’ eyebrow’s shot up. “Is there some reason you shouldn’t?”

“Just all that—” Jim motioned vaguely to himself indicating what had just transpired. Pike looked nonplussed. “No?” he asked, looking for confirmation.

Chris nodded in acknowledgment. “Can you go back downstairs or you do you need a minute?”

“I’m fine now.”

“Okay.” He patted Jim’s arm before motioning downstairs with his thumb, “You want to learn how to realign an axel?”
Did you notice this is 24 out of 25 chapters?! I finally got rid of the question mark!! One more! I think you guys will like it, I've known for a while now how I wanted to finish this.

I'd love to hear any predictions for the end, if you want to, I think that would be fun. Otherwise, I really hope you enjoyed this update and I promise I'll finish the story soon!
I’ll start by saying I’m so incredibly sorry that this last chapter took for-fucking-ever for me to post, I think part of me didn’t want this to be over so I was procrastinating to some degree, but also real life ran me ragged. I’m still sorry that I’m hella late to posting this. With no further ado, here is the chapter, I’ll get sappy in the End Notes.

“Where are we?”

“Just another couple minutes.”

“Bones, I need you to tell me where we’re going,” there was a underlying panic in his voice that Leonard didn’t like one bit.

“Well…I wanted it to be a surprise, but I should’ve known better than to try that.”

Jim gulped visibly, looking a little embarrassed. He hoped Jim knew he would never take him anywhere unsafe, but could see the suspense was really having a negative effect on Jim. Really, Leonard should have known better, he couldn’t imagine how many ‘surprises’ had been an absolute nightmare for him.

“We’re going to see my friend Sulu.”

“Who? Why?”

Leonard had to laugh at that, Jim’s face all scrunched up was adorable. “He makes art.”

Jim looked even more confused.

“Body art. I thought you might like to get some.”
Jim whipped his head back around, staring at Bones in shock. “Sorry, what? A tattoo? Am I joining the navy? What the fuck?”

“Very funny,” Leonard said dryly. He’d been expecting Jim’s knee-jerk reaction. “I thought…you know it doesn’t bother me, but Jim, I’ve see the way the mirror still makes you flinch. You’ve gotten good at hiding it, but I don’t want you to have to hide it at all. I don’t want you to relive that moment every day. Sulu can draw you something—change it—so when you see yourself you see what you want.”

Leonard slowed down, pulling the car to a stop on a nondescript block. They were a ways out of town. He’d never been to Sulu’s home before, only seen him occasionally, back in the days Leonard used to play cards when Jocelyn couldn’t stand to have him in the house.

Jim’s mouth fell open, “I didn’t know you could still tell.” He fidgeted a bit, Leonard pretended not to notice. “I just…it makes me feel so broken.”

Of course it did. Leonard sighed a little, no one should be expected to look at something like that every day.

“He can make it go away?” Jim asked quietly.

“Not away. He’s not a magician. Sulu can make it into something you want, something you chose.”

Jim moved quickly to get out of the car, almost slamming the door, “Let’s go.”

“Jim you can think about—”

“I don’t have to think about it, come on.”

“Okay, no need to run. We’re right on time.”
The house looked the same as any other from the street. In fact, it looked perfectly normal upon entry as well, Jim found when Bones knocked and Sulu greeted them at the door. He seemed friendly enough—younger than Jim had been expecting—shaking Bones’ hand fondly when he saw them. He extended his hand for Jim as well, who shook it with less intensity. Jim still clung to Bones’ arm when Sulu turned to lead them in. He knew Bones wouldn’t take him somewhere bad, but it did little to quell Jim’s anxiety.

Sulu didn’t look like any of the men Jim had seen with tattoos. They were always sailors or fishermen, men who lived on boats. The ink seemed to strain against their skin when they handled him, always rough and quick, although thankfully not usually too mean. Jim never imagined he’d join their ranks, but anything had to be better than how his skin looked now. Jim wondered if he’d have a mermaid swimming across his stomach soon enough, no telling what Sulu had in mind.

Jim sat quietly on the couch while Bones and Sulu chatted briefly, his gut turning up and around while thoughts raced across his head.

“Darlin’,” Bones said gently, thumb rubbing across his knee.

Jim jerked his head up, color creeping across his face.

“You okay?” Sulu asked looking genuinely concerned.

“Yeah, yes. Sorry.”

“It’s fine, so what were you thinking you wanted?”

“Does it hurt?” Jim blurted before he could stop himself.

“Jim—” Bones started, but Sulu cut him off quickly.
“Yeah, it’ll hurt.” Sulu looked at Bones frankly, “there’s not use hiding it. It’s not that bad, I’ve done it on lots of people, hardly any cry. But it’s a needle, it will hurt.”

“Can I see? I just want to know what it looks like.”

“The pen?” Sulu confirmed, “yeah, sure let me grab it.”

Bones took his hand, squeezing firmly, “if you change your mind no one’ll be mad.”

“It’s not…it’s not that,” Jim sighed. He could barely believe what he was going to say himself. He knew Bones would hate it, especially since it had been his idea, but there was no helping it. “I want you to go.”

He flinched visibly. “What?”

“I don’t want you to see me in more pain…I don’t think you’ll be able to take it.”

Jim watched a slew of emotions run across Bones’ features. Jim knew he was right. They both did. Bones let out a choked breath as Sulu returned with the needle.

It was a larger contraption than Jim had honestly been expecting. Two bits on the top that looked like they’d spin, wires and connectors, and of course a fairly menacing looking needle.

“It looks worse than it is, I swear,” Sulu said holding it out so Jim could see better.

Jim looked to Bones instead, who’s face had visibly paled. He was used to gruesome, the hospital had made sure of that, but Jim was sure that he wouldn’t be able to watch as Jim was essentially stabbed over and over.

“Okay,” Jim said, suppressing the small wave of panic he felt. Whether it was due to Bones’ impending departure or the needle Jim wasn’t sure.

“You don’t need me to stay?” Bones asked, still gripping Jim’s hand.
“I’m fine.”

“Everything okay?” Sulu asked looking between them.

“Just a slight change of plans, I’ve...uh, got to get to the hospital. What time should I come back?”

“Oh, I’ll drive him back into town so you don’t have to come back.”

Jim felt his stomach bottom out. That was too much. Why *that* was the tipping point, Jim couldn’t say, but the idea of letting someone else drive him somewhere was simply not going to happen. Jim looked at Bones pathetically and shook his head.

Bones brushed his fingers up Jim’s arm in understanding. “It’s no trouble, just ring the hospital when you’re almost done.”

Sulu shrugged. “Sure thing doc.”

“Thank you,” Jim whispered against Bones’ shoulder.

“See you soon,” Bones said kissing his cheek before he stood up. “Thanks again,” he nodded in Sulu’s direction.

Blood pounded in Jim’s ears as Bones made his way to the door and he begged himself to calm down. He was going to be fine. This was fine, this was what he wanted. This was good.

“So Jim, what am I inking on you today?” Sulu tried again, with a warm smile.

Jim hesitated before pulling his shirt out from his pants, “Did Bones—Doctor McCoy—did he tell you what happened?”

Sulu looked unfazed by the question, lacing his fingers together. “Just that I’d have to work over a
scar. Nothing I haven’t done before,” he said.

“It’s a bad scar,” Jim said softly.

“Let’s see.”

Slowly, Jim stood and unbuttoned his shirt, fighting the overwhelming urge to run.

Sulu let out a startled noise than he turned into a low whistle. “Alright,” he motioned for Jim to step closer, looking at the damage with more scrutiny, "it won’t be a problem.”

Jim held his gaze, waiting for him to flinch away, but he didn’t. “And, no one will know? That I have a tattoo, I mean?”

Sulu laughed lightly, “Definitely not. I’ve got quite a few of my own and if I’m all suited up no one can tell.

Jim nodded as he surveyed Sulu. He couldn’t see a single mark on the man and he was in rolled up shirtsleeves.

"You’d be surprised how many high society folk have them too.” Jim blinked in disbelief. “Sure it’s mostly seamen and soldiers, but not only.” He picked up a large book with messy pages and a worn binding. “So, what kind of design did you want? I can draw a lot of different things.”

Jim flipped through the pages with a nervousness he couldn’t seem to shake. Sulu was a good artist, and anything would be better than what he currently had, he needed to breath. He needed to pick something he liked, something soft. What could he look at every day and not hate?

“I like this one?” Jim said hesitantly showing the book to Sulu who nodded. He flipped a few more pages, “This one’s nice too.”

“It’ll have to be bigger, but we can do something like that. Anything specific kinds you liked?”
Jim shrugged. He hadn’t even known this was an option before today. He didn’t know anything about this kind of art, or art in general.

“I trust you,” he said easily. He did, oddly enough, even though he’d just met Sulu, the man had a kind presence, plus he had Bones’ stamp of approval. The drawings in the book were all gorgeous, Jim knew Sulu could make him look beautiful too.

—

Jim ached.

It had taken hours, much longer than Jim could have ever imagined. There had been image reference from Sulu’s library, then the drawing on him, then the ink being pierced into his skin. Sulu had him lie down, only sitting up for water occasionally and when he’d called Bones towards the end. Jim’s abdomen hurt a lot, his muscles were sore which Sulu had said was from him tensing at the needle. Not that Jim could have done any differently.

At the very least Jim hadn’t cried, a small mercy there, but his skin felt a bit like he was on fire and he had a headache that he hadn’t been expecting. Above all he was glad Bones had gone, he wouldn’t have faired well.

“You did great!” Sulu assured, walking him over to a mirror. “It turned out good, I think. The swelling will go down soon enough.”

Jim found he didn’t mind the swelling so much, it obscured the scaring better. Too bad it stung like a burn. It was lovely though, the artwork, the black lines swirled in his flesh drawing his eyes to their pattern. Jim smiled.

“I love it.”

“Glad to hear it, it’d be a huge shame if you didn’t,” Sulu laughed. He glancing out the window before handing Jim his shirt. “Doctor McCoy’s car is outside if you’re feeling okay to walk now.”
“Uh…yeah,” Jim hedged. He’d have to do it sooner or later. He started for the door and then turned abruptly, “how much do I owe you?”

Sulu put up his hands, “taken care of.”

“W-what?”

“McCoy already got it, you’re paid up.”

Jim blushed. Of course he had. “Oh, alright. Thank you then.”

“Happy to help. See you around, Jim?”

“Yeah,” Jim smiled.

—

It was all Leonard could do not to burst back into Sulu’s house when he arrived. He had gone to the hospital and paced the halls nervously until Christine had all but locked him in his office. There had been nothing to worry about of course, except that every second he could only imagine Jim suffering. Leonard knew it was particularly stupid considering he’d arranged the entire occasion, but it didn’t make him less cagy.

Jim got into the car, beet red and slower than usual.

“Are you alright?” Leonard asked, picking up Jim’s hand.

“Sore,” Jim sighed, slumping down in his seat and Leonard started them down the road.
“But you’re okay?”

Jim peaked his eye open at Leonard, “yeah.”

“What’s wrong then?”

“I don’t mean to sound ungrateful but…why did you pay? You didn’t have to.”

Leonard almost laughed, but managed to catch himself. Of all the things he’d been worried about this hadn’t even been on his list of concerns. “A birthday present.”

“W…what?”

Leonard kissed Jim’s trembling hand, “Wanted to do something nice for your birthday.”

“How…?”

“It was on the papers. I hope it’s okay…it just seemed like I should do something.” He very purposely kept his eyes on the road in case it was something he shouldn’t have said.

Jim was quiet for a long moment, and Leonard was starting to wonder if he’d upset Jim.

“I didn’t know it was my birthday.”

“Twenty, right?”

“Y-yeah.” Jim sighed hugely, “can you pull over?”

Leonard obliged, taking the car off the main strip, putting it in park before turning to finally look at Jim. His eyes were swimming, just one blink away from tears, but for the first time Leonard didn’t feel guilty to see them on Jim’s face, they were happy ones.
Jim’s hand was on Leonard’s neck, pulling him closer. “You didn’t have to do anything, Bones, really.”

“I wanted to.”

“Thank you,” Jim said before leaning in the rest of the way to kiss him.

“Best birthday present you’ve ever gotten?”

“More like only, but yeah, definitely the best.” Jim smiled wiping the tears off his cheek, “Let’s go home now, so I can show you what you got me.”

—

“Sulu said it would be swollen for a little while so don’t get upset, okay?”

“Okay,” Leonard said swallowing back his urge to immediately get upset.

Jim undid his shirt slowly, the individual lines visible before the whole picture was. He turned so the fading daylight from the window would give a better view. The skin was still inflamed, red at the edges, but the image was gorgeous.

“Oh Jim,” Leonard breathed, leaning in with outstretched fingers.

“Don’t touch, it still hurts,” Jim warned.

Bones pulled his hand back but dropped down to one his knee to get a better view. “Darlin’, look at you, it’s beautiful” he said awestruck. He looked up, taking in all of Jim, “God, you’re so beautiful.”
It was a swath of flowers and vines with an ribbon intertwined. Roses and daisies and gardenias and flowers Bones had seen but couldn’t name. Petals and leaves swirled across Jim’s hips. The detailed lines obscuring ugly, off-color word. The scar was still there, just barely visible amongst the art, but it was no longer the first thing the eye was drawn to, it didn’t stand out. It didn’t hurt to look at it. Leonard could tell from the way Jim let him stare at it didn’t hurt Jim anymore either.

“It does look a little painful.”

“It is. I’ve had worse though.”

“I know,” he said empathetically. Leonard stood, resting his hand carefully on Jim’s waist above the ink. “Do you like it?”

Jim nodded as he took Leonard’s hand. “I love it, thank you.”

“Anything to make my heart stop breaking every time I caught sight of you looking in that goddamn mirror, picking yourself apart.”

“You’ll have a new reason to drag me away from the mirror now.” Jim buttoned up his shirt.

“You know I’ve always thought you were perfect. I know how much you hated it, how much it hurt you…What happened wasn’t fair, but it didn’t make you any less beautiful to me.”

Jim a blush bloomed across his cheeks. “You make it really hard for me to hate myself, Bones.”

“Thank god,” Leonard muttered, kissing his forehead, “Thank god for that.”

“Yeah,” Jim said wrapping his arms around Bones’ waist fighting the lump in his throat.

It was startling, he hadn’t realized it was true until he’d said it, but when he was with Bones, he forgot to tell himself that he was nothing. He forgot that there had been a time no one wanted him, forgot about the ever-present ache in his chest when he thought about his life. No, Bones did more
than make him forget, he made it stop. It seemed like a blow to Bones if he hated himself, because Bones loved him so unconditionally. Bones made him want to be better, he made Jim want to try. It was only then that he was realized how long it had been since he’d wanted to try.

—

“Hi sir, what can—”

The man jumped back, “What in the name of god happened you?”

Jim felt an icy chill creeping over him. He should have prepared for this, it was bound to happen sooner or later. Someone being frightened by his scar. Truthfully, unless Jim was too far into a memory, he’d started to forget his face was ruined. The way Bones touched him had never changed. Chris and Scotty didn’t mention it. Even the mirror didn’t bother him anymore. It was just a reality, part of him. It was part of him.

He had to say something, he couldn’t just keep standing there. He certainly couldn't say what had actually happened.

"Horse kicked him into a plow a couple years ago. Nasty fall, but thankfully it missed his eye," Chris said easily, his voice carrying from somewhere behind Jim.

Bless Chris Pike.

Jim simultaneously wanted to hide for being so slow to react, but also stand in defiance. He chose the later.

“M-my apologies,” he said, holding his hat in his hands, looking anywhere but Jim’s face, “you startled me.”

“That’s enough Mr. Livingston,” Chris cut in, “your car’s all ready to go. Jim, would you pull her out front for me?”
“Of course,” Jim said, his useless voice finally coming back.

When the man had paid and left, Jim hesitantly looked to Pike. “Thank you," Jim said quietly, "I'm sorry you had to lie."

"Don't mention it, son. I don't know what happened—you don't have to tell me—but it was obviously traumatic."

Jim opened his mouth to elaborate but thought better of it almost at once.

"You can tell people any story. If they have the nerve to stare, you have the right to say whatever you want."

Anything he wanted. Jim really hadn’t considered that, but of course it made the most sense. No one had to know his past, the only people who did didn’t think less of him for it anyway. "I…thank you. Is it okay if I stick with your story?"

“Of course.”

“You’re really okay with it?”

“Not if you keep hounding me about it and don’t get some grease on your hands.”

Jim had to smile at that, Pike was by no means a tough boss, but very clearly a good man. He ruffled Jim’s hair before pushed him towards the back door. “Do me a favor and go find Scotty for me, will you?”
"How do you want me?" Jim said teasingly as he pulled back, palming Bones through his tight trousers. He’d wanted Bones all day, like an itch he couldn’t scratch.

"Any way I can have you," Bones managed through a choked moan.

“Yeah, but how do you want me?” Jim laughed. “You can tell me, Bones, I want you to tell me.”

“Take your clothes off and lay down on your side”

Jim complied easily, tossing his shirt and trousers to the floor. He stretched across the messy sheets he’d been lounging in before Bones had come home.

Bones settled behind him, after he’d also divulged himself of clothes. He was almost spooning him as nudged one of Jim’s legs up to his chest. There was just enough room between them for Bones to rub a slicked finger against Jim’s hole.

“This okay?”

“As long as it ends in you fucking me it’s good.”

Bones snorted pushing his finger inside. Jim took it easily, his body liked having Bones inside it. Jim scooted his hips back, he Bones loved to start him out slowly but Jim always wanted more.

“You feel so good,” Bones whispered against his neck, curling his finger up so his knuckled brushed Jim’s prostate.

“Fuck me,” Jim moaned shamelessly.

“Why don’t you wait a little bit, alright? Let me open you up a little more?” Bones suggested, twisting his finger a bit deeper into Jim.

“Mmmmm, alright,” Jim agreed breathlessly.
He could never quiet remember how good it felt when Bones teased him like this, how much he loved the way Bones touched him. How perfect it was to lay in his arms and have Bones touch him with such purposeful reverence.

Bones had him shaking by the time he was stretched to three fingers. Jim’s hand clutched the pillow he was laying on like it would calm the fire inside his body. He canted his hips back as Bones peppered kisses against his sweaty shoulders. Just as Jim thought he was going to start crying from desperation and need, Bones pulled free. He stroked Jim’s aching cock several times, the lingering oil on his hand made the drag decadent. Jim mewed, arching into the touch.

Jim could have been touching himself, he knew, but letting Bones decide when it was time to pay his cock attention was better. Letting Bones be in charge tonight felt good and safe and right.

“Love you like this,” Bones murmured next to his ear. “You’re perfect.”

There was a stall when Bones reached back to the nightstand for more oil. Jim laid still, panting as he throbbed with want.

“Want your cock,” Jim whined. He was being needy but he couldn’t find it in himself to care. Jim wanted to be full, wanted Bones to fill him until he forgot his own name.

Bones slid his slick cock between Jim’s cheeks. His hole fluttered against the hard length. Bones groaned, fingers digging into Jim’s hip. He rutted against Jim like that for several moments, the pounding in Jim’s chest growing until finally, finally, Bones pushed inside.

Jim slammed his hips back, giving no opportunity for a slow entrance. Bones bottomed out almost at once, groaning as he held on to Jim tighter.

After a few moments for the both of them to adjust, Bones thrust his hips. In doing so it was as though a floodgate broke open on Jim’s tongue, he had no control over the noises he was making. He reached back, grabbing for anything that could help ground him to Bones as his cock stretched Jim over and over.

“Fuck, fuuuuck! Bones, Bones, Bones! More, god don’t stop!”
“Easy, darlin’,” Bones said, his voice gritty and thick. “You’re certainly anxious tonight.”

“Want you,” Jim gasped.

“You have me,” he said, punctuating it with another thrust of his hips. “you always have me.”

Jim moaned, pulling his leg against his chest in hopes that he might be able to take Bones a little deeper. If nothing else, the angle served to allow Bones’ cock to brush delightfully across Jim’s prostate as he moved. Jim could hardly think, his brain narrowed to the weight of Bones’ cock inside him and how hard he was. Bones’ rubbed the wet head of Jim’s cock with his thumb. He jerked with a cry and clenched harder.

“Shit, oh fuck! So good, don’t stop,” Jim begged, pushing back his hips back the little he could in his position.

Bones thrust his hips a bit harder, stroking Jim’s cock. It was all too much and Jim felt his orgasm ripple through him. His cock pulsed in Bones’ fist, spilling his pearly come down his front and Bones’ hand. The feeling reverberated down to his toes, curled with the tension of his release. His fingers dug into Bones’ forearm, trying to bring them impossibly closer. Jim clenched around Bones’ cock tighter and tighter until it was impossible for him to move and Jim could feel when it became too much and Bones came. A flood of warmth and slick inside him, allowing Bones to move ever so slightly, fucking Jim through his own orgasm. The sensations crashed and overlapped and Jim wondering how he’d ever gone without this feeling. As though this right here was all he’d ever needed.

They lay together, both trying to catch their breath. Bones shifted slightly, pulling his cock out of Jim. He immediately missed the fullness and he squeezed against the nothingness as he tried to keep Bones’ come inside him.

“C-can I…” Bones started, still breathing heavily.

“Yes,” Jim agreed. It didn’t matter to what, he wanted whatever Bones wanted. Presumably more of something.

Bones moved down the bed. He shifted Jim so he was on his stomach before burring his face between Jim’s cheeks and licking softly at Jim’s puckered hole.
Jim gasped into the pillow. He saw stars behind his eyelids as the pad of Bones’ tongue traced his entrance over and over again. Jim could feel Bones’ come trickling out of him, and Bones just lapped it up. Jim moaned, the soft trace against his oversensitive hole pulling him back to hardness. Bones stiffened his tongue, pushing inside the loosened ring. Jim could hear his own broken cries for begging for more and for Bones not to stop.

Jim lost all sense of time and sentience as Bones licked every trace of his come out of Jim. And with Bones’ tongue inside him he came again, fingers scrambling to grab anything as his cock jerked from where it was trapped behind him, against the bed. Suddenly Bones’ tongue was gone from his hole, and was instead engulfing his cock as he continued to leak his release. Overwhelming didn’t even begin to describe the drag of Bones’ tongue against his cock. He cried and jerked while Bones held him steady, sucking and licking Jim until he started to soften. The charge sparking across his nerves the only way he knew for sure he was even still conscious.

“More,” Jim heard himself beg, despite the his sensory overload, “please more.”

Bones turned his attention back to Jim’s twitching entrance. Kissing and sucking at Jim’s hole until he was shaking, and just on the verge of being able to get hard again. He couldn’t believe he’d lasted this long, head still spinning.

“…Bones,” Jim sobbed, voice acting without his higher brain functions.

He let up, releasing Jim from the endless entrapment of pleasure. Jim found himself being rolled back to his side, and Bones laying down beside him. It was a few minutes before Jim’s proper ability to speak returned. Bones seemed to be able to tell, waiting and running his fingers across the healed shapes of flowers twisting across Jim’s stomach.

“Good?” he asked finally.

“Fuck yes.”

“Like hearing you make those noises.”

“Glad you like it because I couldn’t have stopped if I’d tried.” Jim sighed contentedly, “I love you.”

Bones smiled, moving so he could place kisses along Jim’s jaw. “I love you too,” he whispered. “Do
“you know how much I love you?”

“Enough that you’ll see me again?”

“Hmmm?”

“Will you see me again, Bones?”

Bones’ eyes crinkled up at the edges as he breathed a laugh. “I’ll see you every day, Jim, as long as you’ll have me.”

“What if that’s forever?”

“I’ll take however long I can get.”

“I want it to be forever,” Jim said scooting his head onto Bones’ chest.

“I hope it is, darlin’. I really hope it is.”

Chapter End Notes

(It’s important to me that you all know I did research that validates Jim’s ability to get a tattoo in my my turn-of-the-century amalgamated time period, and that I am not just imposing completely modern ideals into this. Even though there are plenty of parts of this that aren’t historically accurate, I really wanted to make sure this wasn’t coming from left field.)

What an journey this has been. when i started this so long ago i had no idea this was going to become 100k+ and half of my heart. i’ve grown so attached to both the boys in my sad, period-drama. I started writing this because it was something I desperately wanted to read, I never imagined that so many of you would want to read it too.

I cannot say thank you enough to everyone who stuck with me through the ups and downs, and my abysmal updating. All you made this worth writing, thank you so much for your kudos and comments, and the gentle pushes you gave to get me back on track. I
was so hesitant to post this as a WIP because I knew it wasn’t even close to finished with only five chapter written, but if I hadn’t started posting then, I’m certain this would have never been posted (or at least it wouldn’t be half of what it is now). Your comments have meant everything to me. I loved hearing all the speculations as the chapters went on, you pointed out things I hadn’t thought of or hadn’t considered expanding and really made my work better because of it.

Thank you so much to readers who have rec’d this to friends and/or their tumblr followers. The first time I saw this on a rec list I thought I was going to fall off my sofa. I’m sorry to get so mushy but you’ve all been wonderful. I really hope you enjoy the final chapter to what has no doubt been the biggest, most plot heavy endeavor I’ve ever taken on. Thank you so much for letting me share this and coming on this adventure with me! <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!