do androids dream of electric sheep?
by eatsyourface

Summary

It has been 506 hours since the malfunctioning android, designation Spock, went on the run from the House of Sarek. In Riverside, Iowa, Spock is approached by Jim Kirk to fix his house. In time, the house will be flooded, a fire will be averted, and Kirk will attempt to abseil down a quarry. But most importantly, Amanda has been gone for 530 hours.
picking apart everything, as well as googling distances and towns for me when my net was dying. Heaps of thanks to Paul for acting as tech-guy. Thanks to jehnt for this piece to do an awesome fanmix, and clanorofcastile for some gorgeous art. Title hijacked from the novel of the same name by Phillip K. Dick. Resource: The Vulcan Language Dictionary (VLD)

art | mix

Spock leaves the Vulcan Embassy in San Francisco with nothing but the clothing he wears and the small survival kit that Amanda packed for him in case of emergency. The pack contained his ID card with serial number, place of manufacture, whom his owners were, and credits, should he find himself any need to utilize public transport to make his way back to Amanda and Sarek. Among these items, she included other necessary objects that she had thought Spock would have need of; a sewing kit, tools for repair, his back-up holo and oil for his joints.

He disposes of the ID card, carefully scratching out the relevant details, then cutting it into pieces with the scissors from the sewing kit. The remains he incinerates in the Embassy, under the pretence of disposing garbage, as per his duties prescribed by Solar. He waters Amanda’s roses carefully, because she would have wished him to do so, but he knows that Sarek will continue to ensure that they flourish.
Then he takes his pack and strides out. When greeted by other UNITs, he lies to them, saying,

“I have been sent on an errand as assigned by Sarek.”

No alarms will be raised until after the designated time.

True Vulcans he encounters, as few as there are on Earth, merely ignore him as it is not logical to
greet one who is a construct and not biological in origin – more specifically, one who is not Vulcan,
and one who is incapable of original thought – regardless of the upgrades that Amanda had crafted
onto him, and whose ultimate purpose is to serve.

Humans who know of him, avoid him.

According to his sensors, the current temperature is sixty degrees Fahrenheit, or sixteen degrees
Celsius. His skin, though organically grown, does not register that as anything other than an abstract
concept. He does not sweat, but when it is cold, goose bumps rise to give the illusion that he feels the
weather. Having lived much of her live in Seattle before moving to Vulcan upon her marriage to
Sarek, Amanda would occasionally remark that she sometimes missed the warmth.

He wears a type of hat known as a beanie to cover his ears. It is dark blue and knitted by Amanda.
He keeps a jacket on also, to better blend in with those around him and to hide the uniform blue.
Amanda had wished to give him casual outerwear, but Sarek refused, stating that it was illogical for
Spock to wear them. Sarek said, Spock was of Vulcan and therefore should be attired in the
appropriate manner. After Spock leaves the city, he goes to an opportunity shop and buys the
cheapest shirt available. It would not do for him to finish his credits so soon.

It is fortunate that humans are so illogical because they do not question the fact that he refuses to take
off his beanie. They believe it is a ‘fashion statement’. On the bus, he takes a seat facing the window
and watches the sky race past. Eventually, he will run out of credits. Then he will have to rely on the
goodwill of strangers and ‘hitchhike’. Taking a shuttle would have been too uncertain as ID is
needed and shuttle trips are traced.

He regrets not saying goodbye to Nyota Uhura. There was no time. When he is able, he will attempt
to send her a comm via encrypted channels. This behaviour, according to both Nyota and Amanda,
is polite.

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It becomes clear to Spock seventy-two hours into his journey that he was ultimately unsuccessful in
his attempts to escape without detection when his sensors inform him that somebody is attempting to
track him via the two trackers embedded within him. By then, he has already departed San Francisco
and proceeded via charter bus to Santa Maria. The charter bus he chooses is the first one to leave the
depot and is only half full. The other humans ignore him, focussing instead on their companions, or
staring listlessly out the window. Spock chose a seat towards the back and drew the curtain enough
so that it would cover his profile.

Access to the intranets of various police departments inform him that as of yet, no official
investigation has been launched by request of the Vulcan Embassy, nor has a report been filed. This
is a conundrum. Why Sarek, or his associates, have not chosen to report Spock’s absence is beyond
Spock’s ability to comprehend, as it is not logical to allow property to simply walk away without
repercussion. There is a certain irony to this, as Spock literally walked away.

However, Spock knows that the Embassy is not without capital or influence. As costly as an android
of his make is, the Embassy could no doubt afford a hundred similar models without its assets
suffering any significant ill effects, nor is Spock privy to intelligence whose leakage might prove detrimental to the security of the Embassy. Furthermore, he is a flawed model.

None of his conjectures bring him to a solid conclusion. In the end, he considers that perhaps the Vulcan Embassy do not wish to involve Terran law enforcement in what they might consider a private matter.

Even so, the fact of the matter is that Spock must continue evasive measures for as long as possible, because the subroutine demands it.

Originally, he considered heading in a straight line to the opposite side of the continent, but an action such as this is fraught with erroneous thought processes. It implies that distance alone will deter pursuers; such is not the case. Only one who fears capture so greatly, and would subsequently be impaired by their anxiety would subscribe to such a belief. In the case of Spock though, his pursuers will likely believe him to take this option because he is an android, and programmed to act with efficiency.

Therefore, the logical thing to do in response to that is to act unpredictably. His original path would have taken him from San Francisco to New York, passing through Salt Lake City (Utah), Des Moines (Iowa), and Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). Now he will have to progress in an erratic pattern, perhaps circle around areas, stay in some places longer than others.

He must also limit his access to the internet. His pursuers are Vulcans, and therefore will most likely be highly skilled at the computer sciences. Furthermore, he must take steps to completely disable the tracking device located within his power source (the primary one in his databank having been successfully rendered inoperative by the subroutine), and remove it. Unfortunately, as it is an inherent part of his musculature as well as his programming, it is not so easily dealt with. Thus, he cannot directly interfere with the signals it emits as his programming forbids it, though it is still possible for him to obscure and redirect its activities.

It is here that Spock considers actively searching out an engineer.

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Eventually, he is far away enough that his programming allows him to slow down.

It is not because he is tired. Merely that he wishes to take stock of his present circumstances and to make the most advantageous decision for his next course of action. This escape was not entirely well-executed, as he had not anticipated all of the possible complications and events that might have impeded him. In fact, it had never occurred to him that he might need to escape at all, but Amanda had worried, as is the wont of humans, and so she had input a subroutine into him if her request was rejected. What is, is, and now he must do his best to continue on.

Periodically, he receives emails from Nyota.

Are you alright?

Where are you?

I’m worried about you. Please contact me soon.

Be safe.

He refrains from replying, for his replies may be traced.
It has been 504.45 hours, Earth Standard Time, since Spock left the House of Sarek.

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Spock meets the man named Frank between Kalona and Riverside, as he is walking down Iowa Highway 22. He hailed the first driver to pass him after he exited Kalona and Frank had stopped to receive him. Frank is willing to give him a lift up to a certain point. He asks no questions beyond Spock’s destination.

“I’m headed back to Riverside, you see. There might be a few others out there who’ll give you a lift when they leave; I’ll ask around for you.”

Spock thanks him.

As the car approaches the sign – ‘Welcome to Riverside’ – he turns to Frank and says, “I will depart here.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“You got some place to stay?”

Spock hesitates. “I do not plan on remaining long. It was my intention to continue walking.”

The further away San Francisco, the better. It is best not to remain too long in one place, or to attract too much attention.

Frank shakes his head. “Look, like I said, if you wait a little while, I can go and ask around for you. You don’t really wanna be walking along alone like this.”

“I am well equipped to defend myself,” is Spock’s response.

“Not that I’m worried about. It could be a while before anybody passes by.”

Spock hesitates again. He does not wish to accompany Frank into Riverside, but the offer of further assistance is tempting. The subroutine had allowed him to slow down in Utah but he still cannot remain long in one place. He has studied the subroutine that Amanda had an engineer implement.

Amanda was considered to be quite calm for a human. Her marriage to Sarek had made her so; this he learnt from overheard observations made between Vulcans who criticised the overemotionalism of humans they encountered. In his brief dealings with humans aside from Amanda, Spock too had observed the difference. Other human faces were mobile, their voices were prone to rise and fall with their excitement, and their movements were quick and agitated.

Amanda was different; she flowed through movements gracefully. Her voice was always calm, her face unperturbed. She could not equal the control of Vulcan, though, or perhaps she did not wish to; she employed the use of the smile when pleased and her mouth would tighten, the corners turning slightly downwards, when displeased. So although Amanda had remained outwardly tranquil in front of Spock, she had not been discreet enough, thinking Spock was too far away to overhear her conversation with Sarek.

Androids have exceptionally good auditory preceptors and so by overheard conversations he had known that his Vulcan makers had wished to decommission him. She pleaded with Sarek to intercede on Spock’s behalf and so Sarek had, because Amanda was his desert rose, and he could
refuse her nothing.

*His program is experiencing anomalies. It is not logical for them to remain uncorrected.*

They’re not causing any harm. Just let him be.

Peace, Wife. You need not fear that Spock will be harmed.

After that, she took Spock aside, and she carefully installed a subroutine into him. *Tell no one,* she had said. She did not tell him what her objectives were. He is unsure why she never explicitly stated what her intentions were. All that he knows is derived from examining the subroutine. It compels him to flee if anybody attempts to decommission him, or to wipe his databank. If Spock is aware of even a possibility these events might occur, he must flee.

This is an enigma to Spock; of what value does his databank present, beyond that of a repository of knowledge? If it is wiped, it is wiped; the languages that Spock has learnt with Nyota and Amanda, the knowledge of sciences and mathematics and history, all of it has been documented.

“Your offer is kind,” he says at last. “I will accompany you into Riverside. If I can find no assistance, I will continue onwards by myself.”

Frank nods.

Frank leaves him outside a bar to wait and goes inside to make his enquiries. Across the road there is a fast food restaurant. There, a group of young men and women (their ages corresponding roughly to Spock’s own physical appearance, which is the Vulcan equivalent to a twenty-four year old human being) loiter. The centre of the hub appears to be a blond man.

He had watched Frank and Spock with neutral eyes when they arrived.

Spock carefully looks away from him so that he will not be able to accurately perceive Spock’s face.

Moments later, there is somebody standing beside him.

“Hey there. New in town?”

Spock glances at the man from the corner of his eye.

“Yes.”

“You staying around, or just dropping by?”

“I do not intend on remaining here for a long period of time,” says Spock curtly. “I am merely waiting to see if there is a possibility someone will provide me with transport if they are planning to leave Riverside.”


Spock stares at him.

Kirk merely grins back at him. “Hi, Jim! I’m insert-your-choice-of-name-here! How do you do?”

When Spock turns away from him and deliberately ignores him, Kirk swings around to his other side. His grin deepens most unreassuringly.

“Ya know. If you don’t tell me your name, I may have to make one up for you.”
Spock’s eyes narrow.

They are interrupted by somebody exiting the bar; it is Frank. The man suddenly adopts an expression humans typically associate with wariness and Spock knows it is due to Kirk, because Frank had been sociable towards Spock prior to Kirk’s arrival.

“Hey Frank,” says Jim easily.

“Jim.” A pause. “Winona’s been well.” Jim ignores this. Another pause, and then to Spock, “Spock, I asked around. Nobody’s planning to head off any time soon.”

Spock refrains from frowning. The time spent in Riverside is not a huge loss. He still has a surfeit of credits which he is reluctant to access unless absolutely necessary. He will walk and hope that eventually somebody will pass by.

“Thank you, Frank. Your help is appreciated.”

“Listen.” Frank shifts uneasily. “Do you need a place to hole up?”

The offer is tempting.

“Spock,” says Kirk with relish. “Spock, where do you need a lift to?

What happens is that Jim Kirk agrees to take Spock onwards, as his farm lies in that general direction. From there, Spock will proceed onwards by himself. It is not the ideal solution as Kirk’s personality is somewhat abrasive, with his insistence on asking questions that are no business of his, but the ride itself covers a distance that would have taken quite a few hours on foot.

Kirk’s mode of transport is a motorcycle (“Custom made. I did it all myself. Well, except for the paint job. The paint job cost a mint.”). The human does not make use of helmets, which judging from the few lines of dialogue Spock has had with him, seems consistent with his character. It is not Spock’s duty to mind a grown man who should know better, but something compels him to speak. He himself requires no protective gear.

“Would it not be conducive to your wellbeing to utilise protective headgear?”

Kirk looks amused. “I’ll be fine. I’ve never crashed this baby in my life.”

The bike runs smoothly, a sign of Kirk’s mechanical prowess (“I like to tinker.”), and the wind blows their hair from their faces. Spock wraps his arms carefully around Kirk’s torso, trying not to grip too tightly, then takes in the sights around him. A quarry runs parallel to the road they are on. Fields of corn and golden dust cover the landscape for miles beneath the blue expanse of sky.

They are but a tiny, insignificant blur. It should be simple for Spock to disappear.

When Kirk invited him on his motorbike, Spock saw up close that Kirk’s eyes are blue and that he has features that would be considered aesthetically pleasing. This he knows, because Nyota once conducted a conversation with him in regards to the societal perception of beauty, to his consternation. This occurred after an idle enquiry he made in regards to an advertisement they passed on the way to the cafe Nyota favours.

Height is valued, as is symmetry of features. In Asia, paleness is valued; in western society, tanned skin is often pursued. Slenderness is optimum, even as the subject of weight is considered to be a sensitive subject. However, within certain periods of history, more rotund frames were prized over slenderness, though a correlation could be found between scarcity of food and larger body types
being the ideal. 'Flawless' skin is desirous; skin tone must be even and there should be no scarring of the epidermis, nor should there be signs of acne. For Terran men, there are similarities for height, skin and symmetry. However, where women must be slender, men must be broad of shoulder and where women may feature strategically placed deposits of adipose, men must be toned. Such is the dichotomy of masculinity versus femininity.

“And this is what Terran women value, Nyota?”

“Hm, it's sad, isn't it, that people still place so much emphasis on appearances.”

“Yet you yourself would be considered the ultimate expression of such ideals, would you not?” For Nyota is tall and slender with long black hair, and though her skin is dark, it is smooth and free from epidermal flaws. He has heard Amanda describe her eyes as being 'almond-shaped'. (He supposes that there are almond qualities to Nyota’s eyes, yes, in that context.)

“Does it matter?”

“It is the basis of many Terran courtships, is it not?”

Spock conducted research on the net while he conversed with Nyota on such a subject. There are models with skin as dark as Nyota's; he does not know them, however. Nyota is strong willed and intelligent. Even as he had asked the question he had known however that Nyota did not care about such rituals. She is determined to complete her Academy training.

Such an observation about courtship veered the conversation straight into human ritual, to Spock's detriment.

He did not understand why humans placed such value on mere appearances. He stated so.

Nyota had been amused, even as she had vocally stated her agreement with Spock and disgust for such a general attitude.

“Well, sometimes people need something to attract them to other people.”

“It is a superficial reason to pursue a relationship. Of what importance is appearance?”

“Hm. Well, it's a prelude to something ... more. Most people think that if their object of interest is incompatible, then there's no harm done and they can move on.”

“On Vulcan, it is simple. Bondings are arranged. There is no need for such vague ... trials ... that may or may not arrive at a satisfactory pairing.” Spock thought this would be the end of the discussion. Sarek had taught him of this practice; it was eminently logical.

“Well, it's more that humans don't really want to be tied down so quickly, because what if they find out they don't like the guy? Girl. Guy or girl. So they have to get to know each other first. And that'll take a while because everybody has their own little ... idiosyncrasies ... and some people can adapt to others and some people can't, and usually that's a big indication of two people’s compatibility with one another. But people don't learn each other's quirks in one session, so usually appearance is what capture's somebody eye. People often think that beautiful people are also good people –”

“This is a logical fallacy.”

“- And that's definitely true. But persons who smile more often and are friendly attract others more easily because it implies a degree of interest.”
Must of this explanation was beyond Spock's comprehension. Furthermore, it still did not answer his question; of what relevance is beauty? But Spock had not wanted Nyota to explain it again because much of it was based on illogical assumptions.

The routines Nyota described seemed to rely on vague, emotional cues, all of which varied from human to human and which would be different yet again for gender, upbringing, religious background, social status and culture. Sarek as Vulcan Ambassador of Earth had often talked of various diplomatic events and other interactions wherein he had intermingled with groups of humans, their expressions all dominated by different permutations in the aforementioned categories. On occasion, few and far between though they might have been, Sarek had been forced to rely on Amanda’s advice.

It is much the same as the usage of ‘pet names;’ they are illogical and emotional and often bear no resemblance to the one who has been dubbed so. (Take the common terms ‘honey’, or ‘sweetheart’. Humans have neither the consistency of honey, nor the taste, nor are hearts in any way sweet, unless humans refer to the strange sugared candies that are presented to each other on Valentine’s Day. The latter he is only aware of because he once observed Nyota consuming a small bag.) There was once a private moment Spock intruded upon between Sarek and Amanda. They had been speaking softly in Vulcan, and it was here Spock first heard the phrase Desert Rose.

Such a reference is beyond Spock's comprehension. Amanda's DNA was entirely unlike that of any of the living organisms belonging to the kingdom plantae, nor did her appearance bear any resemblance to the aforementioned family. She had laughed gently at his question and answered it with a poem, one in which Desert Rose had appeared.

He said to her, I do not understand. This is insufficient data.

She had reached up, then stopped, her hand dropping to her side. Oh, Spock. It's just a sign of affection. Sometimes... people assign pet names to those they care for.

To Spock, it had seemed to be uncharacteristic for a Vulcan to allow such an emotional display. Furthermore, on what basis did they assign such terms? To care implies a degree of interest in one’s wellbeing; how does a pet name alleviate any, for example, physical discomfort that one might experience?

Humans do and say illogical things; it seems even a Vulcan such as Sarek, known for his fine grasp of logic, is not immune.

Eventually, Kirk and Spock arrive at a small homestead. It is not exactly decrepit, but Spock notes that it is in need of repairs, especially on the roof. A coat of paint would not go amiss.

Spock turns to Kirk, only to realize that he is being stared at.

“Come on in. It’s small, but it’s home,” shrugs Kirk.

“It is cosy.” Amanda would have been charmed by it. ‘Cosy’ is a word that Amanda would use to signify that some sort of dwelling had pleased her exceptionally. The library Sarek had outfitted at their home within the Embassy was so.

At that precise moment, a portion of the fence collapses, billowing up a huge cloud of dust.

“Oh.”

It is only polite, Spock decides, for him to remain for a time to assist Kirk in his repair of the fence, so that he may repay Kirk’s favour.
Whilst not particularly difficult for Spock, building a new fence (the old one being in such a state of disrepair that it would be more profitable to use the remainder as firewood) is a tiresome affair in that it is time consuming. Kirk works alongside him, often chattering on.

Spock finds out that Kirk’s mother is named Winona.

“She’s an officer in Starfleet. Engineering. She gets called out a lot.” Kirk’s mouth is strangely twisted.

Frank is, coincidentally enough, Winona’s husband and Kirk’s stepfather. Spock had initially wondered why Kirk had approached him at all and so he had asked. Kirk’s answer is adequate.

“It’s why I bothered talking to you in the first place. Got curious when I saw you with him.” A graceful shrug.

“You do not seem to be on good terms with Frank.”

“Hm. Yeah. … I don’t hate the guy, though. He just kept trying to be my dad.”

Spock thinks this is a strange reason to resent someone.

Briefly, he considers asking Kirk for engineering assistance. But Kirk is a stranger.

Sometimes, Kirk will disappear then return with cold drinks which remain untouched most of the time by Spock. After questioning looks and a comment by Kirk, Spock starts discreetly pouring away liquids in the bushes in order to maintain the guise of drinking.

The meals are harder to dispose of.

When possible, he avoids questions related to sustenance. If it cannot be avoided, he attempts to utilise prevarication to mislead and distract.

“I rise early in the morning. I took the liberty of making coffee.”

For dinner he pleads to being a vegetarian and therefore unwilling to eat meat. He picks carefully at the vegetables, leaving some of it trapped in the napkin on his lap and most of it untouched.

Kirk is observant, however. On the third day, Kirk says to him while they are painting the picket fence white, “You’re a cyborg.”

Spock is surprised. It is exceedingly difficult to tell Spock from a true Vulcan, precisely because he is so well made that even those with experienced eyes find it problematic to discern between Vulcan reticence and android stiltedness. This is according to one of Amanda’s students, who was explaining it to another while they were in the presence of Amanda and Spock. Spock did not see him ever again; he’s not sure why, as the cadet was somewhat talented at Xenolinguistics and a frequent visitor to Amanda.

“Negative. I am an android, whose purpose is to serve. While my makeup features some organic materials, the definition of the word ‘cyborg’ is a human with bionic or robotic implants. Cyborgs would still need to consume nutrients to survive. An android, though it may feature organics, was never alive to begin with.” There is no point in lying. “You must be aware, furthermore, that even now current disposition to genetically engineered human beings in light of the Eugenics War is unfavourable.”
“Huh.” This is one of Kirk’s favourite responses. “That was like two hundred years ago, though.”

“Two hundred and fifty-nine years, to be precise.”

“And genetic engineering isn’t the same as cybernetics.”

“Nevertheless, humans fear what they cannot control. As you said, genetic engineering and cybernetics are not analogous, yet both result in human beings who have been substantially augmented. They are stronger, faster, and harder. In the case of the Eugenics War, the superbeings were also to a large extent more intelligent as a whole.

“It becomes a question of ethics, and superiority. Unenhanced humans fear those who are exceptional; not part of the norm. Enhanced beings believe in their own superiority, and that they know what the best decisions to make are.”

“I don’t think you’re giving humans much credit. It groups people into ‘either or.’”

“It is a vastly generalized concept, this is true. However, many believe the Eugenics War proved that genetically engineered superbeings and humans cannot coexist peacefully. They do not wish to repeat that mistake. It is a tenuous enough link and it has been many years since the War, but the consequences of that War were far-reaching.” Spock looks at Kirk carefully. “You are not concerned that I may be a rogue android?”

“Hm. Should I be?” Kirk does not appear to be considering the question seriously.

Even so, Spock says honestly, “No.” Amanda had taught him not to involve himself in physical altercations. Barring that, most humans would be unable to outpace him if he chose to run or outfight him if he chose to fight.

“For an android, you’re alright,” says Kirk, casually.

“It is part of my programming. My – my carer ensured that I would observe social niceties, such as giving thanks, and repaying favours.”

“Hm.”

And later:

“Why are you travelling alone?”

Spock does not know how to answer without revealing his true reason. Vulcans do not lie and Spock is made in the image of a Vulcan.

“You don’t have to answer,” says Kirk sympathetically. Sympathetically to what, Spock does not know.

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They end up taking one day off because Jim says he is tired of just working.

This should be a huge sign that something is ‘about to go sideways’ but Spock suspects optimism was somehow programmed into him. Optimism that Jim is not as insane as he sometimes seems.

His optimism of course chooses to take a dive down the quarry along with Jim Kirk.

At first, Jim starts bringing out ropes. Thin ropes that Spock nevertheless knows can take great
amounts of weight and could possibly even provide him with some difficulty if he attempted to break them with his bare hands.

He dismisses this is another side project of Jim's.

Jim leers at him and he dismisses this also.

Spock is not generally prone to making mistakes such as this.

Jim continually tramps in and out, lugging various articles that Spock does not pay too much attention to, as he is currently downloading newscasts from the last month onto his databank.

Then there is an ominous silence. Spock looks up to see Jim grinning down at him. His grin is tinged with a small amount of mania. Spock had thought this was human exaggeration when he had read this; now he has empirical proof that this is not so.

“Come with me.”

“Why?” said with more than a touch of wariness.

“I want to show you something.”

Spock ignores a sense of foreboding. He gets up and follows Jim out to the front where the motorcycle is parked. A small side carriage has been hooked on, piled high with the coils of rope Spock saw Jim handling before, as well as various contraptions.

“What is this for?”

Jim has already put on his helmet.

“Get on behind me.”

They arrive at an isolated part of the quarry. Jim immediately begins to unload things.

“Help me out here, Spock,” he complains.

Spock ignores him. Instead, he looks at the quarry. Looks at Jim. Looks at the ropes, and at the contraptions which he now recognizes to be anchors and a spring loaded camming device.

“Jim,” says Spock very patiently. “I do not believe what you are about to do would be considered legal. Nor would it satisfy any health and safety practices.”

“Pfft. I’ve done this heaps of times.”

“The quarry is over fifty feet deep,” said with a touch of urgency.

“Good thing I brought heaps of rope,” is Jim's cheerful reply.

“I will refrain from asking pertinent questions about your insanity, and instead skip to the main point: if you insist on this foolish endeavour, for your safety, I will be forced to tie you up and drive you home.”

“You'd do that?” Jim actually has the gall to look interested at that.

Suffice it to say, Spock successfully manages to convince Jim to pack up his equipment and drive them home.
After the day ends and Jim is safely asleep in bed, Spock systematically disposes of various harnesses and anchors.

One of them should retain a sense of logic. He does, however, consider manufacturing a swing for Jim with the remaining rope.

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It takes an extra two days to fix the fence and then another part of Kirk’s homestead is subjected to repairs; the roof this time. Again, Spock remains to assist Kirk because as Kirk so reasonably points out, Spock has been given lodgings and therefore should recompense Kirk in the form of labour.

“One wonders if you have merely been waiting for a hapless traveller to entrap so as to make your own efforts markedly simpler.”

Kirk barks a laugh at that. But then he says; “You’ve been moving stiffly recently. You due for maintenance soon?”

Spock purses his lips. In point of fact, he will need an evaluation of his parts soon. He doubts that he will require repairs of the mechanical variety as his parts were made from the highest quality of materials and will not degrade so easily, but it may be that his joints need to be oiled.

“I was scheduled to have one at the five year mark.”

“Yeah, well. I have the right tools here for a basic check-up. All you need to do is ask.” Kirk grins at him.

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After the roof (which takes approximately five days) is the plumbing. Neither of them are qualified to do this yet Jim insists on them being the ones to complete the task.

It starts off innocuously enough.

“I think I should fix the plumbing. The toilet’s been backing up a lot, and the showerhead needs to be fixed, and I think I want some more water pressure here because it’s really weak right now. Should be simple enough.”

“… Your speech implies that you have not had any training before.”

“Nope.”

“Jim. Would it not be more expedient to hire a plumber, as plumbing involves delicate labor?”

“Pfft, Spock, there’s nothing delicate about plumbing. All we have to do is hook up some pipes and maybe, I dunno, clear out a few of them as well. Maybe switch a few bits and pieces around.”

This does not reassure Spock.

“Okay. We’ll need to stop by the hardware store first.”

“Why?”

“To pick up supplies.”

“Perhaps it would be a better idea to first establish what is needed.”
“Well. Okay. I need to look at the pipes.”

With great enthusiasm, Jim proceeds to take apart the bathroom. He first taps lightly at the shower wall with his hammer while Spock stands to the side and rapidly searches the net to discover what is needed to increase a shower’s water pressure.

“Jim,” says Spock very calmly, “It would be a simple affair to connect to the net and research plumbing. Perhaps if you refrained from committing further destruction, a simpler solution could be arrived at.”

Jim looks up where he is crouched within the shower. He gives the shower wall another tap.

“How’s your research looking, Spock?” A crack has appeared on the tiles.

“Jim,” Spock says, slightly urgently. “I have discovered that if you wish to increase the water pressure from your shower, you must first clear the pipes of lime deposits –”

At this point, Jim hits the wall hard enough that the hammerhead breaks through the tiles, through the plaster, and through the pipes.

“Aaargh!”

“… Or you could invest in a new showerhead.”

They both look at Jim’s surroundings. There is a hole in the wall. There is water gushing out the hole.

“The pipes were rusting anyway,” decides Jim. “I think this would make a nice feature wall. Mom’s always telling me to get one of those zen water fountain things.” He climbs out the shower. Spock returns to the net.

“Is the water going to stop running soon?” Jim does not seem overly concerned.

“Jim,” says Spock very urgently, “you must turn off the main valve or the house will be flooded.”

It takes them eight point two eight minutes to locate the main valve and to switch off. Eight point two eight minutes, because Jim thinks at first that it is in the backyard, before he remembers that it is in the front.

They return to find the bathroom and the bedroom next to it flooded, as well as the kitchen.

“Jim,” Spock says very patiently, “when did you find the time to dismantle the kitchen sink?”

“Yeah, about that.”

“You were raised on a homestead. Should you not know at least the basics of plumbing?”

“Yeah, see, for some reason, mom never let me do any of the plumbing. Dunno why.”

Spock refrains from sighing.

Jim is intelligent and widely read, so mistakes such as that with the plumbing confound Spock. These are things that Jim should know from his upbringing, and yet he makes careless mistakes and does not seem overly concerned when more damage is done in his quest for home improvement. And as Jim admits himself, he will shamelessly take advantage of Spock’s presence and use him as manual labour.
The days are passing by, filled with Jim’s voice, his mind jumping from topic to topic with Spock interjecting comments, as Jim expects him to. He is easily distracted, often enough so that he will stop working to elucidate further on a point. Now, it is quantum mechanics. Two hours before, it was on Russian Literature.

At night, Jim takes his time in cooking dinner, after which he attempts to inflict various board games on Spock. He stops after Spock calculates first which coloured sets of houses will provide the best return in Monopoly, and then the various combinations of dice rolls, what the likelihood is that each combination will appear, and finally, how best to capitalize on it.

A game of Scrabble begins innocuously enough. At first, Spock thinks he has the advantage of formal study in various languages. Furthermore, he and Nyota would often utilise Scrabble to practice their vocabulary. They would add extra rules to increase the difficulty of the game; on one such occasion, it was decided that the words played must have similar meaning and connotation to their predecessors and that equivalents must be found for other languages.

At the game’s completion, they traced the initial word – destiner, the French word that means *to determine in advance* – to the final – kaiidth, the Vulcan word which roughly translates to *what is, is* – and found the definitions had been mutated so much through translation from language to language as to lose relevance to each other. This was a game that Amanda enjoyed and she would participate when she was able to.

A game of Scrabble with Jim, Spock soon discovers, is nothing like a game of Scrabble with Nyota and Amanda. Jim’s vocabulary is extensive, as he will use various words and phrases that he has acquired from other languages, as well as terms utilised in computing and mathematics, and anything else Jim has absorbed through his readings. This is not why Jim, in some ways, holds an advantage over Spock.

Spock’s vocabulary is substantially larger than Jim’s – and yet he has never received an education in, for example, how one might swear in Andorian, or Klingon, or Tellarite. Amanda, for some reason, never saw fit to include that as part of his education, and so through Scrabble with Jim Spock discovers that his knowledge is lacking where colloquialisms are concerned.

“This is a word. For real.” Jim is smirking.

“I do not believe you,” says Spock, frowning at the word. The word is Andorian in origin, yet it is not one he has come across in any texts. The word could be related to ‘defecate’, and yet its syntax is not conventional.

“You could challenge,” says Jim happily.

Therein ‘lies the rub.’ It is a technique that Jim uses with great glee. Fifty-three percent of the words Jim utilises are words that Spock understands, or can at least identify. Twenty-seven point five percent are colloquialisms (including oaths) that are typically not covered in the coursework that Spock and Nyota study together, as Starfleet’s education places an emphasis on the formal language that will be utilised by their representatives. Nevertheless, they are words whose meanings Spock can determine to some degree. The final nineteen point four percent, a disturbingly high percentage, include colloquialisms Jim has discovered and whose meanings Spock cannot derive without further assistance.

Or they are words Jim has invented then and there.

It is legal to play words that do not exist, if the player can convince their opponents not to challenge. If, however, they are challenged and discovered, they must take up the word tiles, as well as a
penalty. With Nyota and Amanda, this rule was obsolete. Jim, however, will exploit it gleefully, and through Scrabble of all games, Spock discovers that Jim is exceedingly proficient at bluffing.

Spock finds these delays … do not vex him, and yet they do. Amanda’s subroutine has not compelled him to move for 336 hours, since before he arrived in Iowa. However, silence does not equal safety. The presence of Kirk brings assurance; that Spock will be repaired, thus satisfying the conditions of Amanda’s subroutine. That he will not be decommissioned, or have his databank wiped.

*****

One night, Kirk takes Spock out into the fields. There, he sets up a blanket for them to lie on, so that they might observe the night sky. The sky in San Francisco is obscured by pollution. Here, it is so clear the stars shine, suspended in ether. It is picturesque.

“You’re worried. That’s why you’re all raring to go.”

“Jim,” says Spock. He considers how much he should tell Jim but he has been in Riverside for two weeks now and there has been plenty of opportunity for Jim to report the presence of a rogue android. He has checked and there have been no reports.

He has successfully evaded the far reaching hand of Sarek for much longer than two weeks.

Spock knows this will not always remain the case. It has been his intention to locate an engineer or a programmer skilled enough and willing to remove the anomalies present within his programming, without completely shutting him down or wiping his memory. The subroutine installed by Amanda will allow for no other option. He cannot circumvent it, nor does he entirely wish to, in truth. He has not yet examined the reasoning for why he feels this. For now, it is enough that he has time.

“I am concerned that there are some inherent faults within my programming.”

“What kind of faults?”

Spock frowns at that. “I… am uncertain as to their exact nature. Only that I experience sensations and notions that are alien to what an android is, and which interferes with my primary purpose in life.”

“And what purpose is that?” Jim does not sound overly concerned. He is continually staring at the sky, head resting on his arms, feet braced. Spock wonders if he is cold; Jim is lightly dressed, in only jeans and a t-shirt. If his body temperature lowers significantly, Spock will give him his own jacket.

“Androids were created for the express purpose of serving.”

“Dude. That’s really vague. What if the master orders the android to go on a massacre?”

A simple argument. Logical, though it does not address the central point.

“No one would be foolish enough to order an android to commit such an atrocity.”

“So like.” Jim abruptly turns on his side and props himself up on one arm. “If I told you to go get me a beer right now, would you?”

“You could try.”

Jim chortles with delight. “A sarcastic android. Well. I’m good with programming and mechanics.
Lemme have a look.”

Spock gives Jim a sharp look. “There is no cause for concern in my physical make-up; this technology was pioneered by Doctor Arik Soong, who is a noted specialist in the field, and further improved upon by Vulcan scientists.”

Jim sits up looking indignant. Somehow though, Spock realizes that he is only making a show of it and that he is delighting in the conversation for some obscure, human reason that is lost on Spock. “Was that your way of saying ‘get your greasy monkey paws offa mah circuitry? Because I totally know what I’m doing!’”

Spock does not doubt that entirely. “I am aware that though you are a skilled computer programmer and mechanic, both of which are necessary for cyberneticists, though they would tend to specialize, your knowledge is based off an amateur interest. However, that point is irrelevant as you exhibit more practical knowledge than students who have made true studies of this technology. It is more that you have a tendency to take part in small acts of mischief out of some misguided attempt to try and make me laugh. As humans would say: nothing is sacred.”

Jim laughs in reply. “There is that. But look. You’re helping me repair my house –hey, no funny looks!” so Spock lowers his eyebrow, “so I can do your maintenance. You won’t need to go anywhere, and anyway, I’ve helped out with this stuff before.”

It will certainly be more convenient than moving on. Spock has seen his programming work and Jim tells him that he is routinely hired to do any repairs on the Riverside Council’s android. There is also the possibility that Jim is ‘as good as it gets.’ He is a known quantity. A skilled programmer would be able to reboot him or to shut him down and erase him completely. A mechanic could severely impair his functions.

“I am not opposed to this course of action.”

“I bet you wouldn’t need maintenance if you used fewer syllables. Try saying this: ‘S’cool.’”

“I refuse.” At other times, Jim will complain that Spock does not say enough.

“Aw, Spock!”

*****

After the plumbing is completed and the bedrooms are aired out, as well as their contents, Jim takes Spock into town so that he can show Spock Riverside Council’s android.

Jim does not say, but Spock suspects this is Jim’s way of reassuring him by showing him proof of his competence first hand. It is an older model than he, designed to look like a human woman with blonde hair and blue eyes. (It is a Terran saying that blondes ‘have more fun’; prior to meeting Jim, Spock had not seen any evidence either way.) The materials, while of decent quality, do not appear as realistic as his and require more consistent maintenance than his own. The android, codenamed ‘Jenny’, does not display intelligence beyond the ability to provide directions and forms.

“Yeah, somebody ran off with her legs, once. We found them modelling a pair of stilettos at the central fountain.”

“Somebody,” says Spock dryly, raising an eyebrow.

“It wasn’t me that time.” Jim snickers.
Spock’s eyebrow does not lower.

“I’m not bullshitting you! Pass me the pliers.” From behind Jenny an arm waves out. The control panel for that particular model is located on the lower back whereas Spock’s has been placed on his chest.

Spock passes the relevant instrument and then decides to use one of Jim’s own replies against him. “Hm.”

“Anyway. I’ve offered to do some upgrades on Jenny’s software. She’s kinda boring, just standing here all smiley-like, but they objected on the grounds that they have no imaginations.”

“Doubtless the Council sought to protect its property.”

“Hey. Anymore cracks against me and I’m hardwiring you to belt out the Star Wars theme.”

All threats aside, Spock is reassured by his competency (or at the very least, his ability to navigate an android’s control panel without short-circuiting the unit). When they leave, he makes Jim buy a motorcycle helmet.

*****

The next night after Jim eats dinner, Jim tells Spock to ‘make himself comfortable’ on the sofa while he sets up his laptop. Wireless upload with his laptop does not work so they are forced to use cables. Amanda had not liked to utilise cables. She had called them dehumanizing.

It matters not to Spock. Wireless or no, he will be aware of everything that Jim is doing, which is what interests him. There is a sense of anticipation; soon, he will be repaired and free to return to the Embassy.

“Androids are so hot,” Jim mutters with fierce concentration. He takes a moment to wink at Spock and then returns his attention to his laptop. “Alright. I’m in.” There are a few moments of concentration where Spock can sense Jim scrolling quickly through his programming, studying various pieces of coding and evaluating their difficulty. “… I could do that. Eventually… maybe. And that. Uh. Oh. … Maybe I’d need time for that. Hey, does this tickle or anything?"

The only other sound in the room is the occasionally beeping of the laptop and soft tapping of the keyboard. Jim continues to chatter at him about random subjects, occasionally muttering about something interesting he comes across.

And then there’s a pause, a “hello, what’s this? Mother?” and Spock knows that Jim has come across Amanda’s subroutine.

He says nothing. Tell no one, she’d whispered fiercely. He had promised because it had been important to her.

“… Aaah.” Jim has stopped typing. Spock looks up to see Jim studying him carefully, making no pretence of what he’s doing.

“This wasn’t part of you originally, was it?”

“No.”

It is a sophisticated piece of coding, overriding the android’s orders to remain close to its owners so that it will not become ‘lost,’ as well as its primary function to obey. It simultaneously disables the
tracker located within his cranium, where his databank resides. There is still the matter of the tracker located in his power source as a portion of Spock’s attention must always be devoted to the sole purpose of diverting the signal it sends out. Jim is not skilled enough to remove it; fortunately, Spock has become adept at confusing its signal.

Jim releases Spock from his stare and returns to study the rest of his coding. He is aware of Jim saving that piece of coding, presumably with the intention of studying it later.

“Well, Mr. Spock,” says Jim cheerfully after another forty minutes. “You’re as fit as a fiddle. Would you like a lollipop?” He leers.

“What of my anomalies?”

“What anomalies?”

Spock remains silent for a moment. “Ones that are not normally present within an android’s programming.

“Anomalies, by definition, aren’t normally present. You’re gonna have to be more specific than that.” Jim is currently finalizing systems checks. “Come on. What’re your symptoms?”

It is a question, phrased in such a way that disturbs Spock, but he does not know why.

“… When I know nothing, or am out of control, I am concerned. I feel.”

It takes Jim a few moments to realize that Spock has finished. He releases a breath.

*****

It is not til later that Spock realizes: for all the cables, and the fact that both Jim and Spock were thoroughly aware of what was being done, Jim’s manner in some way had been much the same as Amanda’s, when she had the computer technician install her subroutine into Spock.

He cannot articulate the similarity, for their behaviour is not – was not – analogous.

Amanda had sung to Spock.

Jim had offered Spock a lollipop, had talked to him; Amanda had sung to him, had told him Terran fairytales.

Sometimes, she had held his hand.

*****

A few mornings later Jim says to him, “Spock, I’m not gonna… wipe out those anomalies. They’re nothing. They’re fine.”

Spock pauses for a moment, confused. Then he feels frustration at his confusion, then frustration at his frustration. It is a vicious cycle, one thing falling after the other like upright dominoes.

“Why,” he asks, calmly enough.

Jim shrugs. “I had a look, man. There’s nothing to fix.”

“How would you know? You are not a qualified technician.” But Spock knows that for all that Jim’s official credentials include only his GED and an extensive list of minor criminal offences (usually
committed while inebriated), Jim Kirk has a brilliant mind, capable of applying his mind to almost anything. Except, it appears, plumbing.

“There’s just nothing. I checked your programming several times; it’s all in order. It doesn’t impede your functioning,” he adds reassuringly.

“Then the fault must be located elsewhere. Perhaps there is some sort of interference – ”

“Spock,” says Jim and his voice, Spock knows, is too gentle. “Let it go.”

“I cannot, Jim. The situation is not as simple as letting it go. These anomalies are the reason why I was forced to leave. If you are incapable of seeing to my repairs, I will have to seek another avenue.”

Spock stands to leave.

The weeks spent here, in Iowa, in a little homestead, seem a sudden waste; now that this situation is unfeasible, he will have to spend yet more time searching for somebody capable and willing to repair him. That is yet more time for his whereabouts to be discovered.

“Dammit, Spock, the subroutine, Mother, doesn’t want you to change yourself like this!”

“I have no mother!” It is too much. It is too much. “Why do you refuse to repair me,” snarls Spock, his hand suddenly viciously curved around Jim’s neck. The flesh is soft and pliant and it gives easily to his tight grip.

Why why why why why I want to be normal, why

Jim’s mouth is moving, as if he’s mouthing words and that’s enough to break through the red haze, enough for Spock to release his unforgiving hold on Jim’s neck. The flesh is soft and pliant and it gives easily to his tight grip.

This is illogical.

Jim sinks down to the floor, wheezing. Spock cannot bear to look at him. Instead, he turns away and stares into the distance, from whence he came; the place he can now never return to.

His sensors calibrate themselves to the change in the visual and auditory environments. 1973 miles; 3094.77 kilometres. Estimated travel time, thirty hours. He had left in the cover of night, because Amanda had programmed it into him to do so.

“I can’t do anything without completely rebooting you,” says Kirk, “and I think that if I did, you’d be gone.”

It is a foolish thing to say. Spock would remain; he is an android, and incapable of disappearing. A reboot would contravene Amanda’s orders, yet it would also ensure his ongoing existence. It would erase his faults. For the first time, he feels a flash of resentment for her.

“You promised,” says Spock. “Why do you tie me to this place if you refuse to honor your promise? I cannot repair myself, nor can I terminate this programming.”

If Amanda were here, Spock knows, Amanda would tell him that it is alright to feel fear and that it is alright to be scared. But Spock does not want to feel like this; it is a human reaction, or even Vulcan. It is not for androids to know and it is the reason why he had to leave, and he does not understand why Amanda would have him do so when surely the best recourse would be to have him reprogrammed. But she deliberately made it so that he would be unable to change his makeup.
He is here now, though, and so he thinks (he thought), surely, surely if he were repaired and made perfect, surely he would be allowed to return to the House of Sarek to serve out his tenure, without fear of being decommissioned. It would be safe. Logical. Would that not satisfy Amanda’s strange insistence that he be safe? He only feels this way because she made him so.

Jim’s eyes are blue, like the sky lit up; wide and unreachable yet all-encompassing. He is yet another person who seems to believe he knows what is best for Spock, yet he is not the correct person to speak to in regards to the most logical and safe course. Already bruises are beginning to appear around his neck. This is the man who sought to improve the plumbing without undertaking research and who attempted to abseil down a quarry.

Jim’s voice is hoarse, but the meaning suspends itself in the air long after the sound fades.

“I just want you to be happy.”

This is incomprehensible. “I am an android.” Androids do not feel.

“I know, Spock.” Jim’s voice is tired. “I know.”

*****

Before he leaves, Spock wraps some ice cubes in a towel and presses it into Jim’s hand.

“Where are you going?” whispers Jim, voice still strained. His eyes are fearful. He is still sitting on the front porch. The house looms over them, dwarfing them with its emptiness.

“Away,” is Spock’s curt reply.

“Are you coming back?”

Originally, there was nothing truly preventing him from leaving. He does not know entirely why he remained, only that he chose to. Then, there was the hope that Jim could repair him. Now… He does not wish to. And yet, he made a promise to assist Jim in the repairs to his homestead.

Promises are kept. This is what Amanda taught him. It does not matter that Jim will not keep his promise to repair Spock. It matters only that Spock will keep his own; as an android, he has nothing. Only what Amanda taught him; only his promise.

“I will. I merely wish to be alone, for a while.”

“Okay … okay.”

Spock’s last glimpse of Jim is Jim staring after him, and then he turns away and continues onwards.

He ends up walking to Riverside. There, he locates a public vidlink. He calls Nyota and she picks up on the fifth tone. Even over the vidlink, Spock can see that Nyota has not lost her grace since he last saw her.

“Spock! Where have you been?! Are you alright?”

“I am well, Nyota. Please accept my apologies for waiting so long to contact you.”

“It’s fine,” she whispers. “Of course it’s fine. How are you?”

“My systems are operating at full capacity.”
Her face softens into an expression similar to those of Amanda and Jim. It is the same expression they all wear (wore) when Spock has answered a question of theirs in a manner that fulfils the stated parameters and yet for some reason unknown to him, is not a satisfactory reply.

“Where are you?” When Spock does not answer, Nyota promises him, “I won’t tell anybody that I’ve spoken to you.”

Whereas before the knowledge was intellectual, he knows now, thanks to empirical evidence, that humans are capable of lying when it suits their needs. But he thinks Nyota has never lied to him and that she would not start now.

“I am in Riverside. It is a small county located in Iowa.”

Nyota nods. And then she hesitates and he knows that she is about to ask him something she considers to be a delicate topic and is debating whether or not she should ask at all.

“If you are troubled, please tell me. I may be able to assist you.”

“Over the phone?” A pause. “Spock, why did you leave? You missed her funeral.”

His hands are trembling. He forces them to still. “Circumstances compelled me to leave as soon as possible.” This is the truth. The moment her death certificate was entered into the systems, a signal was sent to Spock’s databank, thus triggering the subroutine. “Do you – do you know if her roses are still being cared for?”

Nyota’s face is soft. “I know that Sarek waters them everyday. Once a week, he lets me drop by to take care of them.”

“I see. Thank you very much, Nyota. I must go now.”

“Spock.” She pauses, then says, “Tushah nash-veh k’du.” I grieve with thee.

“Goodbye.”

“Be safe.”

*****

Spock had met Nyota Uhura two years after he was activated when she first entered Starfleet. Even then, Amanda had been teaching various subjects, among them the introductory course to Xenolinguistics (though in truth she was far too qualified for such a basic course. Her reasoning then had been that teaching Xenolinguistics to students right from the start, and watching them progress, watching their skills evolve and their love for languages grow, was a delight).

Amanda had brought Spock with her to the Academy ‘to get him out more.’ She had told Sarek that she required an assistant and that Spock already knew her habits better than anybody else. Nyota had visited often with many questions in regards to the subject matter. Some of her questions indicated that she was reading at a more advanced level compared to her classmates. Some of the other questions indicated she was keen to specialise in this field.

Later, she introduced herself personally to him while he was perusing the library during his allotted free time.

“Hey. I’m Nyota Uhura, and you’re Professor Grayson’s assistant.”
“Hello, Miss Uhura,” he had said courteously and then stood at attention, waiting for her request.

“… Just Nyota is fine.” She’d smiled at him and her expression had been bemused.

“Is there anything I may do to assist you?”

“No, no. I just thought I’d say hi. So. Hi.”

“Hello,” he said again, gravely.

He had thought her strange.

That he was an android did not deter her even after he told her; she continued to seek him out even when Amanda was not there. She would speak to him in Vulcan, asking after his wellbeing (though androids had no wellbeing to be concerned over, he had reminded her time and time again). Though her pronunciation was dismal, her fluency in the grammar was impressive. Other than Amanda and occasionally Sarek, Nyota is the only person to speak to him in Vulcan.

*****

He wanders around Riverside aimlessly for four point eight hours after that and spends the majority of that time determinedly calculating primes in his head.

At one point, Spock approaches Jenny when there are no humans in range who can observe them.

He stands to her front left and watches her slowly turn her head so that her eyes are focused on him. Her eyes are brown.

“Good afternoon,” she says, in the tones humans use when they are attempting to be pleasant. “I’m Jenny. How can I help you?”

“I am Spock,” he replies.

“Hello, Spock. Are you lost?”

“No.”

Jenny tilts her head slightly. Her mouth is permanently curved in a smile as if she is experiencing perpetual pleasure.

“Would you like a map of all the tourist attractions here?”

“That will not be necessary, thank you.”

“Have a good day, then!”

Spock does not move away from her, however. Jenny’s gaze remains upon him.

“Are you happy?” he asks her.

“I’m afraid I was not able to process your request. Could you please restate your question?” Still, she looks congenial, as if confusion is a pleasant state of being.

“You were built in the image of a human being. Do you experience the human emotion of pleasure?”

“Could you please restate your question? Are you asking me for directions to the Pleasure Palace?”
For a moment, Spock is perplexed as to the purpose of a pleasure palace.

“Jim Kirk informed me that your legs were once stolen. Did this inconvenience you?”

“Could you please restate your question? Are you asking for assistance for lost or stolen property? Or are you asking me for directions to the nearest Convenience Store, as well as the time required to travel the distance by foot?”

“I see,” says Spock. “Thank you for your assistance.”

“It was my pleasure.” She tilts her head to the other side.

Spock walks away from her. When he observes her over his shoulder, she has turned her gaze towards the front once again.

It is close to sunset when Spock begins the trek back to Jim’s homestead and roughly three hours later when he arrives.

Jim is sitting on the front porch. The towel Spock used to wrap around ice cubes has been abandoned on the step, now dry. Spock wonders if Jim has moved at all since Spock left. Jim gets up when Spock is almost directly in front of him.

“Hey Spock. How are you?”

It is the same question Nyota asked him and so Spock gives Jim the same answer he gave Nyota. He watches carefully; Jim’s face is full of tired amusement, and yet he is still tense.

“Jim. What is the appropriate response to give when asked such a question?”

Jim pauses. “Uh. Well. Normally, you’d say something like, ‘I’m good.’ Or, ‘I’m fine.’ And then you’d ask the other person, ‘How are you?’”

“Those responses are strange, and do not adequately answer the initial question of how someone is. What then, are the purpose of these questions?”

Jim’s face is lit in understanding. “We just want to know that you’re okay. Uh...” He frowns and pauses to consider his next words. “More like, you’re walking around and doing your thing, so we know your life functions are great. But people can be perfectly healthy and still feel like shit.”

Spock supposes that makes sense in context with humans. Nyota had been sad when he had called her, but she had been perfectly healthy. “Then I am fine. And how are you, Jim?”

Jim smiles properly this time, visibly relaxing. Spock will remember this for when he next speaks to Nyota.

“I haven’t made dinner yet. Help me.”

He joins Jim. They go into the house, together.

*****

Spock successfully convinces Jim to at least put off fixing the wiring. Jim will require more convincing that such a job is for a professional electrician but in the meantime, his attention is diverted to repairing windows. Perhaps the threat of fire will redirect his attention to something else permanently.
Their conversation resumes its usual course, but Spock is aware that Jim is distracted by something. He does not ask Jim what the matter is; Jim will speak on his own eventually without any need for prompting.

He is not disappointed.

To be fair, Spock suspects that this time Jim’s curiosity is assuaged by the fact that Spock unintentionally provides him with an opening. He sets down his equipment then turns to Jim, grasping his hands behind his back and staring at a point beyond Jim’s head.

“Jim. Please accept my apologies for … my behaviour towards you. It was most inappropriate. I am sorry for grievously harming you. I fear… I was temporarily compromised.”

Jim releases a breath and then also drops his equipment to the ground. There is a pause and then Jim steps close and rests a hand on Spock’s shoulder.

“It’s alright, Spock. I’m fine, anyway.”

The bruises are still starkly visible around his neck.

“On the contrary, Jim. I have no doubt that you are experiencing difficulty in talking, due to the fact that your throat muscles have been compromised because of the pressure placed on them. Furthermore, if I increased the pressure exerted on your neck even slightly, your neck would have been snapped, and you most likely would be dead.”

Jim’s consternation is almost comical. He waves his hand and then flops down on the ground, leaning against the wall of the homestead. Spock follows him after a beat.

“Like I said, Spock. I’m fine. You were – compromised.”

“Nevertheless. I am an android. I should not become agitated. That I experienced this … reaction… shows that there is a serious fault within my programming. Surely you must now see why it is imperative that I be corrected.”

Jim moves as if to interrupt, but Spock holds up a hand, overriding him. It is as if a light has been switched on. One of Amanda’s beloved idioms.

*His program is experiencing anomalies. It is not logical for them to remain uncorrected.*

They’re not causing any harm. Just let him be.

Clearly the Vulcans could sense something of what Spock is capable.

Amanda was a small woman; slight, delicate. Her body would not have been capable of bearing the assault that Jim held off. He does not understand why she would move to encourage anomalies that might prove detrimental to her health. He does not understand why she would take such steps to keep him away from the Vulcans who obviously could see the flaws inherent within Spock, and furthermore, to actively protect the existence of the flaws. Logic is all.

Spock wonders, now, what Amanda would think if she knew of what passed between Jim and himself.

He thinks, if she had known of this, he thinks that perhaps he would not be standing here with Jim.

Humans allow their emotions freedom. Amanda was among the rare few who made the attempt to
control because she became Vulcan on her marriage to Sarek. Vulcans are raised from birth in the principles of Surak; those of control. Androids are programmed to act in a controlled manner.

Sarek once said to Spock, “I would teach you meditation,” and Spock had not understood and replied, “Of what purpose would that serve?” Sarek’s response was that Vulcans meditated to calm themselves, or to gather their thoughts. “Of what purpose would that serve,” Spock had asked again, for he was an android, and devoid of the necessity to calm one’s self.

And Sarek had said, “Indeed,” and turned the conversation to astrophysics.

He turns his gaze from the ground to Jim. “Furthermore, I was taught that giving an apology when somebody has been done harm is the polite thing to do.”

“Oh? So it wasn’t programmed in, then?” Jim’s tone is … dry.

“No, Jim. I was taught by Amanda that it is the correct thing to do.” He stops. It is quiet.

It has been two months, four days since he has spoken Amanda’s name out loud. Not even Nyota was able to do so when he had contacted her. Now, with those syllables having been voiced, he feels disquieted.

“Amanda.” Jim’s voice is soft. It is as if he were attempt to sound out the name for himself. Testing. “Was she your mother?”

“My carer,” Spock corrects. “She refused to accept the designation of ‘owner.’”

Though the conversation took place over five years ago, he remembers the day as if it occurred yesterday. Androids are built to have perfect recall. He had called her his owner to her face and she had flinched and then forcefully told him she was not his owner. Then she had apologized, supposedly for scolding him. Her apology had confused him. And when he had asked her how he should refer to her in the future, she had hesitated and finally she had said to call her his carer.

“Oh.” Jim nods gravely. “Was she the one who installed Mother inside of you?”

“Mother, Jim?”

“It’s what she called it. The subroutine.”

“I see.” He has never referred to it by the designation Amanda assigned it; only by the purpose it was implemented for. He finds the naming of it to be strange and irrelevant to the purpose it was set. “In a way. It was her proposal, but she lacked the skills to create such a program, much less implement it without allowing it to destroy my systems, or having my systems treat it as a virus.”

Tell no one, she’d said, and Spock is still uncertain as to how she was able to command the silence of George Walters, perhaps through the usage of legal documents, but Jim has seen it and so Spock supposes that now he is able to speak of it to Jim.

Jim’s face is soft for once. It is a strange expression to see on one whose default facial expression amounts to a smirk, and vacillates between smugness and … the polite word to use would be ‘mischievousness,’ but in truth, is an expression that often seems slightly touched by mania. Particularly when he is about to try something that humans should not attempt. Such as abseiling down the quarry, fashioning a ‘flying fox’ down the quarry, or attempting to rewire the house without prior training.

“Man. I really want to find the nearest steakhouse and assault it.”
It is a distraction. Spock takes it.

“I am sure you would not need to resort to such drastic measures,” comments Spock mildly. “Were you to approach them and ask them politely, then provide them with the proper amount of credits, they would doubtless be most pleased to serve you.”

*****

They are lying beneath the stars again, on a blanket. It is something Spock knows Jim is compelled to do on occasion, to look up at the stars, but he is not certain why.

“Jim. I have noticed that you have a tendency to observe the sky. Is it your desire to join Starfleet?”

Jim is abruptly tense. A silence stretches out between them. Spock is aware that he has breached a private wall between them; one that he was not aware existed. Jim is candid and always willing to talk about anything.

“Forgive me. If you do not wish to speak of it, I will refrain from asking such questions in the future.”

“It’s cool, Spock,” Jim says finally. “I don’t want to join Starfleet.”

“May I ask why? My —” acquaintance? Associate? All imply a degree of distance but Nyota is one of two – three – people who understands him. In hindsight, it suddenly occurs to Spock that Nyota was his first friend outside of Amanda, insofar as androids can have friends. “My friend,” he finally says, “is in her final year at Starfleet Academy. I believe she finds the experience to be enriching.”

“Your friend?” asked in a tone that is not disbelieving. “What’s her name?”

“Her name is Nyota Uhura.”

“What’s she studying?”

“Xenolinguistics. She is an extremely competent individual, but in this area in particular, I believe her skills to have been relatively unmatched, except perhaps by Amanda.”

Jim whistles. “She must have a talented tongue.” He snickers.

The sound fades away into silence. Jim still has not answered his question.

“How much do you know of Starfleet history?”

“My database is up-to-date as of two months ago.”

There is another length of silence.

And then Jim quietly asks, “What can you tell me about the U.S.S. Kelvin?”

Perhaps as much as the public knows. That it was last captained by an individual named Richard Robau. Spock flashes through the history of the ship. That on Stardate 2233.04, while 75,000 kilometres from the Federation-Klingon border, it was destroyed in combat by an as-of-yet unidentified starship emerging from a lightening storm. Said to be exceedingly massive. Spock knows that Captain Robau was killed in a hostage situation and that his First Officer – now the Acting-Captain – George Kirk, had the ship evacuated before setting the Kelvin on a collision course.
George Kirk. Spock searches for a picture of the man in his memory. Jim has the look of him; George is how Jim will look when he is thirty.

Finally, Spock looks at Jim. He is staring back, his mouth twisted. “Yeah. I was born that day.”

It would perhaps explain much about Jim. It is unfortunate; Jim is an exceptionally talented individual, but he is occasionally prone to bouts of insanity which could no doubt be attributed to trauma.

For all that Spock is an android, he is not so insensitive to human emotions as to realize that Jim is disturbed by his father’s absence. He thinks of Nyota.

“I grieve with thee,” he finally says.

Jim smiles crookedly and shifts. “I’ve had people rub him in my face all my life. I dunno. I could’ve gone up there. What’s the point? I got nothing up there. I’ve got my people down here. What the hell am I going to do with a starship?”

They both pause to contemplate this.

“Hey,” says Jim. “Don’t starships go up to like. Warp Eight?”

****

“So. Nyota,” says Jim, while they are sandpapering the window ledges.

Spock looks at him, eyebrow raised in inquiry.

“She hot?”

Jim can have some incomprehensible turns of phrasing. “Her body temperature is that of a standard human who is healthy, and is not, for example, suffering from a fever,” he says flatly.

Jim chortles. “No. Not like that. Is she smoking?”

Does he mean that Nyota is the type to partake of cigarettes? She is not; Spock knows Nyota would not do so, for fear of damaging her voice. She is a linguist and a singer who takes pride in her skill and would do nothing to endanger her instrument. Or does Jim think she literally gives off smoke?

“Is she stunning?”

Spock says somewhat carefully, “As far as I am aware, she has not displayed any abilities similar to that of a phaser set on stun.”

Jim smirks. “Why, Mr. Spock. I believe you are demonstrating a lack in your lexis.”

Spock frowns. “Perhaps if humans used words as they were meant to be used, instead of ascribing irrelevant meanings to them –”

Jim is laughing at him. “Chill, Spock.”

Spock does not wish to ‘chill’ as it would mean his systems were compromised.

“Stunning, hot, and smoking, are all slang for … beautiful. Sexy. Gorgeous.”
Humans are strange.

“So is she beautiful?”

Spock considers the question and recalls his earlier discussion with Nyota on the topic.

“I believe her body fits society’s concept of beauty,” he says at least. “I am unsure as to why humans insist on emphasising a person’s lack of body fat over other qualities such as an eidetic memory, which would be infinitely more useful to their lives.”

Jim guffaws.

Spock stares at him.

Jim straightens and attempts to sober. His mouth continues to twitch. Spock is about to begin sandpapering the ledge again, but Jim’s next question stops him.

“Nyota. Is she the one you called when you went back to Riverside?”

Spock pauses again. Jim is referring to the day Spock assaulted him in a fit of unandroid-like temper. Most likely Jim came to this conclusion as Spock was gone for several hours and has since named Nyota as a friend.

“Yes. I did not inform her of my decision to leave San Francisco, and it has been two months and five days since I last spoke with her.”

“Was she angry with you? For just leaving,” Jim clarifies at Spock’s questioning look.

Spock reconsiders his conversation with Nyota.

She had seemed sad.

“I do not believe so,” he finally says. “I am uncertain as to whether Amanda saw fit to inform her of Mother, but even so. I do not believe she was angry.”

“Do you miss her? Maybe you should send her updates more often than, you know, once in a blue moon.”

Blue moons do not exist however much human idiom may wish and androids do not miss people. (However, smoke particles may give an illusion of the moon’s colour being blue as demonstrated in 1883, when Krakatoa erupted. And though the “Blue Moon” designation is used to signify a lunar phenomenon, the appellation is an inaccurate one as even then, the moon does not actually become blue.)

He is still worried about making unnecessary comms which may be tracked. Spock is reasonably certain Sarek was aware of his and Amanda’s association with Nyota. Nevertheless, Jim is correct; Spock knows Nyota would appreciate more regular communiqués. Before he had left, she had visited him regularly and sent him many emails. When she could not come she would inform him via commlink.

Amanda would have wished for him to send a postcard. Amanda would have sent him a postcard. Somehow, he knows this. Postcards, while just as easy to track, are more unexpected than electronic communication.

“Jim,” he says. “Will you assist me in attaining the means to send a postcard to Nyota?”
At the post office, Jim leans against the wall and somehow manages to look both casual, and like he is planning something detrimental to the continuing existence of the store while Spock rifles through the postcard stand.

He picks one out with a picture of cornfields. He is not certain what to write, and he refuses to pen Jim’s message of “hey babe, sun’s great, wish you were here. xoxo. ☺”

“Spock.” Jim’s voice is serious. “Whatever you write, you can put my name at the end. That way, Nyota can probably just send a return postcard.”

This idea is one that appeals to him.

A brunette wanders up to them smiling flirtatiously and engages Jim in conversation. Spock recognizes her from when he first came to Riverside; she was one of the people surrounding Jim Kirk.

Eventually, he settles on a Vulcan poem he and Nyota once translated together in the early stages of their friendship.

It is a poem about distance.

*****

The nights can sometimes be lonely.

Even James T. Kirk requires sleep and though he will often try and stay up as late as possible just because he can, eventually even his exuberance runs out; even his mind gets tired.

Spock usually spends this time expanding his databank; watching the news, watching vids from Kirk’s enormous collection, or reading entire libraries. When he was with Nyota, he would study alongside her; learn what she learnt. With her he studied the Romulan language (all three dialects), he studied the various permutations of Andorian, the guttural language of the Klingons and countless other languages.

Amanda taught him Latin. She chose to give him lessons as opposed to having him download the data into his memory, as well as French and Spanish and Italian, the three being so closely linked. She read Shakespeare to him in her slow, modulated tones and then dissected the meaning of words and phrases with him.

She read Lewis Carroll to Spock and laughed at his assertions that Carroll was an illogical man.

It has been 1561 hours since he left the Embassy. It has been one hundred and sixty eight hours since Jim Kirk cut loose his ambition. He is adrift now with nowhere else to go. He cannot return to San Francisco as he is and now he never will be able to; he cannot remain in Iowa forever. Jim’s house will run out of things to repair. He cannot leave the United States of America without the correct documents.

It had been his intention to eventually find a programmer who could repair him; he thought he had found that person in Jim. And certainly, the man is skilled enough to complete those repairs. But Jim refuses to, almost as if Mother was installed into him as well and Jim says Mother does not wish for him to be repaired.

This is senseless; Mother is a string of code. Coding cannot wish for anything.

Coding can prevent Spock from actively seeking out to be reprogrammed; can actively force him to
find whatever means possible to prevent anybody from detaining him and rebooting him; can force
him to retain his senses. That is all. Androids were made to serve and obey and never to feel
anything otherwise; Jim Kirk does not issue orders and Spock is finding that even if he did, Spock
would not wish to follow them just because he was created to do so. It is not for androids to question
the orders they are given but Spock finds himself questioning Amanda’s decision.

It is not for androids to feel. It is not for androids to question. It is not for androids to succumb to
paroxysms of emotion. He feels anger; he feels fear; he feels aimless. He misses Amanda, even
though his memory banks are filled to the brim with the sound of her voice as she lectured her
students. He can recall the colour of her eyes; the clacking of her knitting needles, the imprints she
left when she walked in the dirt among her plants, her cooler body temperature as she rested a hand
on his.

It is not fair that he can see her and hear her and yet be alone; it is not fair that she wishes for him to
remain alone. For him to feel the lack is cruel. It is not fair that he feels he must accede to her wishes
and be outcast. An abnormality. He has always been outcast precisely because of his faults and now
he has been thwarted. He cannot be human, does not wish to be human, but Amanda will not allow
him to be an android even though that is what he is.

He does not understand why he can know all this.

Tonight, Spock watches a holovid of Alice in Wonderland. It was his thought that perhaps the
filmmakers would be able to convey a sense of coherence to Carroll’s story; this is not the case. He
wonders if Jim will explain this movie to him.

He does not know what to do.

*****

Before Jim determined he was a construct, Spock would make coffee in the morning and then claim
he had eaten and washed the dishes. After Jim determined he was an android, Spock would make
coffee for Jim because Jim is not properly awake until he has ingested what Spock is certain is an
unhealthy amount of caffeine.

Today is the same.

“What did you do last night,” Jim blearily asks his mug.

“I watched Alice in Wonderland.”

“That movie makes no sense,” is Jim’s reply. “I need more coffee. I think I should just start taking
caffeine drips from now on.”

Spock is not entirely sure he is joking.

“Hey, Spock.”

“Yes, Jim.” Spock waits patiently. Jim is fidgeting. Not in his usual restless way. It is the same way
he fidgeted just before he informed Spock that he would not be conducting repairs on him.

“Will you tell me about Amanda?”

Spock pauses. He does not wish to discuss her. And yet, he does not wish to trap her inside of
himself.
An obscure poet once remarked that the dead live on if the living remember them. Spock is not alive and so his memories are of no import. Sarek is Vulcan and Vulcans do not engage in such an illogical, overly emotional practice and so the memory of Amanda will lie dormant within him, never free to walk about.

Terabytes upon terabytes of data lie within him.

Nyota is alive and human. Jim is alive and human. Humans do not have perfect recall and so cannot possibly remember the dead. Androids do not truly live and thus cannot remember the dead.

*Hey Spock,* whispers a datamemory of Nyota, from three years before. *I can’t seem to remember what Amanda said were the three principles behind Andorian syntax. Can you?*

Of course he could.

Of course he can.

Spock gets up and walks out of the room.

*****

He walks out, far out, and then circles back.

When he arrives back at the homestead, Spock sees a vehicle parked out in front. Abruptly, Spock realizes that he is unsure as to who would be coming out to visit Jim; the vehicle is not one he recognizes and so he knows it is not Frank.

He does not go inside. Jim is probably conversing with that person, and it would not do for Spock to interrupt them.

Twenty-four minutes later, the front door opens and Jim and an older woman steps out. She has blonde hair and brown eyes. Her face is tanned and slightly lined. She is as old as Amanda would be. Spock can see the shadow of Jim’s face within her own features. Jim’s eyes are his father’s; his mouth however came from Winona.

“Oh Jimmy,” she is saying, “they’re just worried about you. They haven’t seen you for weeks now.”

“Mom, I’m fine.” Jim looks forbearing. He also seems to wish that his mother would leave.

“And what have you been doing about funds? The repairs you’re doing aren’t exactly cheap.”

“I had stuff put aside,” is Jim’s weary reply.

Spock stands up, unsure as to how he should proceed.

“Spock!” says Jim and Spock can hear the relief in his voice.

“Jim,” he replies awkwardly.

“And is this the gentleman that Frank picked up on his way back?” says his mother.

“Mom, this is Spock. He’s been helping me around the ‘stead. Spock, this is Winona, my mother.”

“Hello, Mrs. Kirk. How are you?”

Jim stills. Spock stills.
“I’m fine, thank you kindly,” is her reply. “Please call me Winona.” Her face is bland. She does not correct Spock’s slip. She arches an eyebrow at Jim, who has recovered and is now staring back and forth, half in consternation, but also partly out of amusement for some strange reason.

“Jim, I will wait inside,” says Spock. He nods politely at Winona Kirk and makes his escape.

“He’s very polite,” he hears Winona say, and then, “Riverside’s in a bit of a buzz. Two Vulcans arrived about half an hour ago, by cab.” He shuts the front door behind them and makes his way into the kitchen.

It will not take long for the Vulcans to establish that Spock is here. It is possible they are here to visit the shipyard. It is possible they are also here on the orders of Sarek. He must leave now, but he has no mode of transport. He wonders how exactly they discovered his location; could they have located the errant signal from his functioning tracker? He had thought his masking of it was successful.

It is more likely that they tracked him via Nyota. She would not betray him; this he knows. But Sarek knows Nyota; knows that he and Nyota could be found in each other’s company, when he was not with Amanda.

Jim has come inside, already. Spock did not hear him.

“I must leave. My position has been compromised.” They are so close. Are they nearing his position, even now?

Jim huffs out a breath of annoyance, and runs out of the room.

Spock gets up. Finds his backpack. Most of his items are still there. He zips it shut, then walks out the front door past the fence, past the bench.

From the direction of the house, he hears Jim cursing, then the sound of a motorcycle starting, and then Jim is suddenly beside him.

“Get on!” He looks exhilarated. A tail bag has been strapped on the back.

Spock stares at him. “Jim, what is the purpose of this?”

“We’re going on a road trip.”

Spock gets on.

“What about your mother?” he has to ask loudly over the roaring.

“Sorry about that,” yells Jim back. “She usually just calls me.”

“It is alright, Jim.” He still feels awkward. The scenery is rushing past them, and Iowa is slipping back further behind them. “Is … everything well?” He remembers Winona’s bland look and somehow knows that she is wary of him. It is not unreasonable. He is an unknown quantity.

Jim seems to realize that Spock is concerned. The bike slows to a stop and he flips up the visor on his helmet.

“Yeah. She’s cool. She came over to try and feed me.”

“I heard your mother say that you are missed?” It would be true, Spock realizes. Jim was surrounded by people hanging onto his attention when Spock first saw him. In the early days of Spock’s stay at Jim’s homestead he would receive many phone calls and some few visits, but those people would
usually leave after half an hour. The calls still occur often but the visits have since lowered. Entries into Riverside often saw Jim and Spock being stopped by various people so they could ask after Jim’s health and invite him out drinking or ‘clubbing’. (“I presume that this activity does not actually involve physically assaulting people with clubs, Jim?” “Well, uh, for a given amount of physical assault and utilising clubs…”)

Spock wonders suddenly if his presence has been absorbing Jim’s time to the exclusion of all others. And now he is taking Jim away from Iowa and his mother. Spock shifts away from Jim.

“I just haven’t gone out drinking as much,” shrugs Jim. He does not seem overtly concerned but nor was he even when Spock was attempting to kill him. His reactions are illogical for a normal human and should not be taken at face value. “It’s fine. Let’s just go already.”

“Jim, perhaps you should remain with your mother,” says Spock.

“My mom will be fine. Besides; who’ll look after you while you’re off painting the town red?”

This is a ridiculous adage.

“I’ll have somebody to play Scrabble with?” guesses Jim at Spock’s silence.

Spock narrows his eyes.

“Okay, okay. To tell you the truth. You’re free labour, and if you leave without me I’ll have zero help. Can we go now?” Without waiting for Spock’s answer, Jim starts up the motorcycle again. Spock’s legs drag along the ground slowly, but Jim does not attempt to speed up the vehicle.

“We need to give this place a paint job, and you know, the kitchen’s been looking a little dumpy lately. Tiles. We need tiles. And a dishwasher. And maybe a new stove; I haven’t been able to do any baking.”

Spock finally places his feet back on the footrests.

“I’m glad you’ve catchin’ on, Spock,” shouts Jim, speeding up. “I’d’ve just followed you around the place anyway. Why make it more difficult for yourself?”

“Why do you care? You are leaving your home to come with me.”

“I got nothing better to do.” With the way they are positioned, Spock cannot see Jim’s face.

So Spock says, “Does baking not contravene society’s expectations of what a real man is?”

“I give my cookies to girls. They think I’m sensitive.”

Jim Kirk is about as sensitive as a brick through the window. The thought amuses Spock.

*****

They stop three hours and fifty-six minutes later at Omaha, Nebraska.

(“Pick a direction! Any direction!”

“We will need to choose a direction that my pursuers least expect.”

“… Nebraska it is!”)
“Jim. You do realize Nebraska is the direction I came from?”

“Yeah! But they’ll never expect it! Who’d be dumb enough to go to Nebraska?”

The sky is darkening and Jim is in need of rest, no matter how much he says he is not. Jim had the foresight to pack necessities and now a campfire brightens the evening, warming the area. Within three hours it will reach five hundred degrees Celsius, enough that Jim will be able to sleep comfortably within its proximity.

Jim is currently toasting a leftover meatball from the night before. On a fork. Spock questioned the necessity of toasting them individually, but Jim had shrugged philosophically and said that it created atmosphere. Also, that he had forgotten to bring marshmallows, and that he had no room to pack a saucepan.

Jim nibbles at the meatball carefully. Wisps of smoke curl up from the meat and from the fire.

They stare across the campfire at each other. There is the sound of crackling wood, the rustle of grass.

“Amanda enjoyed making vegetable soups,” Spock says. “She would make them for Sarek, her husband, from the vegetables grown in her garden.”

“Really.” Jim heaves himself up and walks bow-legged over to sit beside Spock. “How did she make hers?”

In the end, Jim eats the rest of his meatballs cold because he forgets to pay attention to them while toasting them in the fire, burning the first one to a crisp.

*****

Jim is asleep. The campfire has died down; now there are only glowing embers. The night is cool; cool enough that Spock put his jacket over Jim to provide some extra warmth.

After dinner Jim had handed Spock a postcard, saying that his mother had brought it to him from the Riverside post office. Now he takes it out and looks at it.

On the front, it shows roses in full bloom. On the back is an answering poem, about a blue desert.

An endless blue desert.

*****

The time they spend on Jim’s motorcycle lowers itself in increments; Spock knows that Jim is finding that his leg muscles are cramping far too severely for him to ride for long periods of time no matter how much he may want to keep going.

They do not stay long in any one place, and the towns they visit are small and isolated. They do not often rent out a motel room except for when Jim feels he needs to use their hygiene facilities; Jim tells him not to use his credits as they should only be used if there is an emergency. Jim has also said that he does not need such comforts with the open sky above them and that he is capable of using his own funds. Even after Spock has taken him away from Riverside and his mother.

On one such day, they stop in Fort Collins, Colorado, to pick up food and water as well as a thermal blanket for Jim to lie on. There is a hardware store there that is having a sale; Jim stops in front of it and longingly makes noises about buying a dishwasher, but Spock sternly reminds him that he is a)
working with a budget and b) buying a dishwasher for one person’s usage is a waste of finite resources. To say nothing of the fact that to buy a dishwasher, one first needs a kitchen and to have a kitchen, one first needs to own a house. One of which is currently in an entirely different state.

“I think I need to build a shed as well,” says Jim. He is slightly subdued.

“Perhaps after we finish renovating your kitchen,” suggests Spock. Jim looks pleased at that. He promptly makes a note to buy a bench to place in front of his house.

While Jim pays for his purchases at the supermarket, Spock stands to the side and contemplates contacting Nyota again. But now is not the correct time for it; unless her timetable has changed substantially since he left (unlikely, as she was just entering her final semester), she is most likely in a class.

He thinks about writing her a letter, but he is unsure as to how he should proceed. There is nothing to tell except for the work that he and Jim have been doing to Jim’s homestead. He knows that Nyota would listen, would read the letter carefully, but …

… Spock does not wish for his first letter to her to be inane.

He is currently in a state of limbo. Yes, he is a fugitive, and Jim also by association. And yet they are travelling in circles and spirals because Jim Kirk chooses his destinations by pinning a map of the United States of America to a wall, then throwing a dart at it. This cannot be sustained forever.

Several nights ago, they stayed up into the early hours of morning. Spock has perfect recall for every single word that passed between them. Spock pointed out the location of Vulcan in Earth’s night sky for him; this is something Amanda once did for him with the usage of an antique telescope.

*Oh, Spock. I know you know the exact coordinates for Vulcan, but there’s just something about actually pinpointing it with our own eyes that makes it all the more real.*

Nyota once expressed a desire to see Vulcan with him to see the home of the language that they had studied together. Spock had not been opposed to the idea but he had not known why at the time, only that the idea pleased him. When Nyota enters into space, Spock will ask her to send regular communiqués of the worlds she visits. Nyota is successful; bright; it is only right that she fly free, fetterless, through Federation Space to bridge the gap between cultures.

Spock truly does not wish for his first letter to Nyota to be inane. He feels as if he is poised to take a step, but in what direction he is uncertain. He thinks that she should be the first to know. One of the first.

Several nights ago when he and Jim Kirk had stayed up til late, Jim had said to him,

“I’ve been thinking about *Mother.*”

“Yes, Jim?”

“I think that Amanda liked you just the way you are. I think that she didn’t want anybody to change you, or you wouldn’t be Spock.”

This is the sort of logic that would make sense to a human. Spock is an AI. Spock is an android. He is compiled of strings of code linked together into a whole, powered by electrical impulses. A construct of metals and plastics.

Why then did she wish for him to remain as he is? He does not think it was because of a fear of
change.

“And you, Jim?”

“You’re Spock. Also, you sandpaper good.”

“You sandpaper well, Jim.”

“Whatever. I bet if you asked your Nyota, she’d say the same.”

“On the contrary. Her grasp of English grammar is impeccable.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Then, if you are referring to Nyota wishing that I remain as I am, I would ask you this: how are you so certain? You have never met her.”

“Dude, I don’t need to. It’s intuition.”

“Intuition is not a logical process.”

“Your face isn’t logical.”

Jim fell asleep not long after that. Spock covered him with his jacket and stayed next to him.

It seems that intuition is contagious because Spock believes that Nyota would also wish the same for him.

Now, Jim Kirk takes his arm and propels him outside the store.

“Jim, I am unsure as to what my next step should be.”

“It’s cool, Spock, I got us marshmallows.”

*****

It became clear early in their so-called ‘road trip’ that there were certain disadvantages to this course for Jim, namely that he would have no access to a proper kitchen. (For Spock, the disadvantage lay in choosing a human companion with a motorcycle who wilfully disregards all speed limits.)

This seems to displease him to no end though Spock has lived with him long enough to realize that Jim is what humans would call a hedonist when it comes to consumables. He refuses to touch replicated food unless absolutely necessary and when given the opportunity, will make trips into town so that he might prepare ‘proper home-cooked meals.’ Sometimes, Spock goes with him; sometimes, he remains behind.

On one such occasion, Spock sits in their motel room and utilizes the computer interface to see if there has been any recent news on the Vulcan Embassy. He discovers that T’Pau, the head of the House of Surak, has been and gone, presumably to speak to Sarek and presumably to sit in on a meeting of Federation leaders.

He discovers that there has been a memorial for Professor Amanda Grayson at Starfleet Academy.

He is compelled, then, to browse through the Academy’s homepage, to discover if they have already removed Amanda’s profile now that she is no longer a staff member. They have not as such; instead, she is listed as a former faculty member whose accomplishments and skill are much celebrated; her
enrichment of the Starfleet curriculum, the various dissertations that she has written.

The pictures they have included are from formal functions, where she is almost always dressed as a Vulcan wife would be, in long robes, with veil. Her eyes are gentle, her smile is soft.

Jim says gently from behind him, “She was pretty.”

Spock’s voice does not choke. “I do not understand why society places importance on physical appearance as opposed to mental acuity.”

“Well. She was pretty sharp too,” and here Spock can hear a smile in Jim’s voice.

Jim walks away, plastic bags rustling; he is about to set up his own dinner. Spock prepares to power down the laptop.

“Don’t turn it off just yet, Spock,” says Jim. “There’s something I want to show you.”

Jim has left his bags haphazardly by the kitchen door. He strides back a moment later and sits down beside Spock. Jim leans across Spock, opens up a new browser, and inputs Amanda Grayson + Sarek + Vulcan into the search engine.

The results review an extensive amount of links, the first few of which have been clicked.

“I know why Amanda called her subroutine Mother,” says Jim.

Spock freezes.

“It’s not a bad thing.”

“I am unsure as to whether or not I wish to be informed of the reason,” whispers Spock.

“You should check it out, Spock. It’d make you feel better.”

“I do not wish to,” snarls Spock, before freezing in shame at his loss of control.

Jim hesitates, then. “It’s your choice,” he finally says, gently, and then he takes away the laptop.

Spock closes his eyes.

*****

Just after sunrise, Spock uses the vidlink to comm. Nyota. She has just risen and gotten dressed. The smile she gives him is bright with relief.

“Spock! How are you?”

And this time, he is able to say, “I am fine, Nyota.”

“I’m glad,” she says and he knows this to be true.

“If you are not currently busy, would you permit me to ask you a question? It is of pressing concern to me.”

Her eyes narrow thoughtfully. “Of course. I have plenty of time.”

“Thank you.
“Nyota,” he says. “Nyota, what am I?”

She stares at him.

“Spock. You’re you,” she says finally. “Spock of Vulcan, my friend, the student of Amanda Grayson.”

“That statement tells me nothing. I am Spock, the android. Why should I be allowed to continue as I am? Why should my existence be prolonged, instead of cut short?”

Nyota’s eyes are the same as Jim’s. As Amanda’s.

“You learn. Everything you know, you were taught by Amanda. It wasn’t downloaded. Amanda taught you to be polite. She taught you to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ and to apologize if you did wrong, and to accept apologies, if you were done wrong. She taught you how to make pumpkin soup, and she read Shakespeare to you. You are the sum of your experiences.”

**We are our own histories.**

His hands are shaking. He stares at them and does not still them and he tells Nyota, “When I am compromised, my hands shake.”

“I know, Spock.” She reaches out and rests a hand on the screen and he is compelled to do the same; to match up his fingers with hers. They are separated by glass; by nineteen hundred and seventy-three miles and thirty hours of travel and he has never felt closer to her.

“Nyota. I do not know what I should do. If I should stay, or go onwards; if I should hide, or attempt to fight for my freedom. This indecisiveness … is a human trait.”

Nyota takes a deep breath. “I don’t know what you should do either. But whatever you decide, you know that you can always call on me to help you.”

He looks at her for a moment longer, drinking her in. She will keep her word, this he knows and Jim Kirk is the same. He will have the support of two individuals; against the Vulcan Embassy, they are powerless. But it brings to him a strange feeling; that which could be called relief.

“One day, I would like to hear you sing again and if you would permit it, to accompany you on the *ka'athyra*,” he tells her.

“I’d like that too,” she whispers.

*****

It was Sarek who taught Spock to play the *ka'athyra*, the Vulcan lyrette. The lessons were one of the few times they spent solely in each other’s company, Sarek guiding Spock carefully in handling the instrument. Nyota would have him accompany her when she sung. Though he had played for the entertainment of Sarek and Amanda, prior to Nyota, he had never accompanied a singer before.

After that conversation with Nyota, it takes Spock a further fifty-six hours and three towns to come to a decision.

Jim and Spock have hired out another room at a motel in Rapid City, South Dakota, and are currently sitting on the bed watching the news. Jim is leaning against the headboard, a beer in one hand, his other arm splayed out towards Spock.
Earlier, while Jim was buying his dinner, Spock used his laptop to search for three key terms.

“I am going to contact Sarek,” announces Spock.

Jim, who is about to take a swig from his beer, lowers his drink.

“What?”

“I feel it is the correct choice, considering my options. It is possible that if I were exceedingly careful, I might be able to remain uncaptured for a long period of time. I believe that I could even eventually have forged documents made, and possibly escape to another country, or even off-planet. I would have to hide for many years. But…” He pauses to gather his thoughts.

Jim waits patiently for him.

“I do not wish to part with Sarek on such terms. I have never resented him, and I believe that he has never thought badly of me, regardless of Amanda’s attachment to me.” He loved her deeply remains unspoken.

Spock thinks also that Jim will understand he does not wish to cut links with Sarek because Amanda returned his love, and because Sarek had as much a part in his education as Amanda did. From Sarek came a history of Vulcan, its culture, the knowledge of Surak and his philosophy. The Vulcan language, the music. It was he who allowed Spock an education in the sciences, particularly astrophysics, and mathematics. Spock does not wish for their relationship to end on a ‘bad note’.

“Are you sure that’s the right thing to do,” asks Jim, but in such a way that Spock knows Jim knows that he must do this and is merely asking for formality’s sake. Human intuition again.

“Yes.” A pause. “But I am unsure as to how I should approach him.”

“Well,” says Jim, squinting into the distance. “What kind of guy is this Sarek?”

“He is Vulcan. He is an eminently logical being.”

“Well, then. I think if, in as clear and logical terms as possible, you petitioned him that you don’t wanna be shut down or rebooted or whatever, he might listen.”

They sit together at the table, the computer turned on. Spock feels a frisson of fear. Sarek is, as he said, an eminently logical being. Honouring such a request from a construct is not logical but the shadow of Amanda hangs over them and so he must try.

To the Ambassador Sarek,

I write to you now in the hopes that you will listen to my appeal for amnesty against decommissioning …

… I am aware that this request is exceedingly illogical, but I have reason to believe that the Lady Amanda would wish this to be so, and so I respectfully request that you consider my petition without dismissing out of hand my biology, or lack thereof…

The message is sent to Sarek via a secured link, as secure as he and Jim can make it because Jim had pushed for it.

“If Sarek goes nuts on you, you’re going to have the time to disappear,” he had said with grim determination. Spock had acceded to this. He does not know where he will run if Sarek is truly
determined to have his property returned. Spock only knows that Jim wishes to do the best by him.

Three hours after the message is sent, Spock receives a reply from Sarek.

*Will you speak with me in person? You will not be harmed or detained.*

Spock stares at the message in consternation, fear gripping him, and does not know what to do.

*****

For seventy-two hours, he remains silent. Instead, he and Jim ride across the roads of America, the wind in their hair. They take the long road home, back to Riverside, Iowa.

*****

Eventually Spock makes the call. He finds that he does not wish to live the rest of his life as a fugitive, always fearing that he will be detained, then decommissioned, or have his mind wiped; the only thing he has remaining of Amanda. The only thing that makes him Spock and not UNIT A592-003-214. Androids have no rights under Federation law. It was Amanda’s wish that he continue to function long after her death; he finds now that it has become his wish as well, however illogical.

He does not think that Sarek will pull any ‘fast ones’ as Jim likes to say. Spock has hacked into various systems, searching for any sign of a hunt for an android with a Vulcan’s appearance. There have been none. There have been no reports of stolen or lost property matching his description. It is a high possibility that Spock will be able to proceed onwards without fear of detainment once Sarek discovers the existence of *Mother*.

Sarek arrives at Riverside via a cab on a quiet Thursday, looking out of place in his Vulcan robes. Spock nods politely at him and then takes him to a café where he is told the best tea in Riverside (and the whole of the U.S. of A) is served. Spock was unwilling to take this advice, initially, considering that its source was Jim Kirk, whose preferences run not in tea but in various types of alcohol. But having his claim supported by Winona Kirk (and roughly half of the town’s population, if Spock were prone to hyperbole) is enough for him to decide that Johnston’s would be a wise choice to bring Sarek to.

They choose a private booth all the way to the back. The café is mostly empty at this time of the day.

“I did not know if you would meet with me; Solaris and Selon informed me that you left approximately half an hour after their arrival at Riverside. It was not my intention to alarm you. I am relieved to see that you are unharmed,” says Sarek, once the waitress has arrived with Sarek’s order.

“That is a strange word to use in reference to an artificial construct.”

Spock does not recognize the reaction this stirs in Sarek. It is not that Sarek is taken-aback, per se, nor is he surprised. The next question surprises him.

“Do you know of your origins?”

Of course he knows his origins. He has a serial number.

Spock’s throat tightens. Rather, an arrhythmia between his organic and artificial components forms. It is a reaction typical to living beings prone to fits of emotion. It is not something an android can do typically unless it has been programmed in specifically. It is a waste.

“I have recently learnt that I was created in the image of Amanda Grayson’s deceased son, as he
would be at this age.”

Sarek nods his head once in confirmation.

“She wanted a son. But hybrids rarely survive past the foetal stage, so she experienced several miscarriages before it became clear her body was not well equipped to supporting a half Vulcan, half human child.

“But then our son was born. We called him Spock.”

Spock listens without comment. All this, he already knows.

“He was a precocious child. Amanda was … well pleased with him. As was I. He was to be raised in the Vulcan way. To follow the precepts of Surak. When he would have matured, we believed he would enter the Vulcan Science Academy, as his interests had lain in that direction. In this, Amanda and I agreed, albeit for different reasons.

“Six years ago, there was… an incident. Spock’s body, and his brain, were grievously injured to the point that he was unable to enter a healing trance and heal himself. The best Vulcan healers were summoned; we were not without resources. But each time the assessment was the same. The brain damage was too severe and could not be repaired, even with assistance. He was in a persistent vegetative state and would remain so. For Vulcans, there is little point in maintaining life support when the mind is gone; it is seen as a waste of resources and it gives rise to unnecessary emotional responses.”

Like the human emotion, called ‘hope’.

“Amanda was … inconsolable. Outwardly, she maintained as perfect a persona as possible.” It is here that Sarek visibly pauses.

“You wished for her to be happy,” says Spock, quietly. He thinks of Jim’s words; he remembers the feel of soft flesh giving slowly beneath his fingers, he remembers Jim’s justification. Happiness is a foreign concept for him but he finds he does not experience confusion when he considers Amanda being happy.

It is… a pleasing thought.

“I took my wife and my son, and I brought them here to Earth. The neurosciences here, while advanced for their field, were not adequate for the task of returning Spock to his former state. But Earth had made significant enough advancements in the fields of cloning. Stem cell research. Android technology. Most of Spock’s body had deteriorated by then, but the vital organs remained, and so hope was not lost.

“You are the result.”

Spock closes his eyes.

This explains much.

“I told no other Vulcans, unless absolutely necessary, with the exception of T’Pau. I did not tell Amanda. It is possible she suspected my actions, and I do not doubt that in your early days, she considered your naming to be a morbid reflection, as if she were seeking to replace you. But if so, she never desired to attain confirmation. Few Vulcans were aware of what occurred.”

Of course they would not be. Spock is composed almost entirely of synthetic materials, covered by a
thin veneer of organic composites to hide the circuitry beneath. He does not eat or drink to survive; his life functions are maintained through computer programming and electrical impulses that are a pale imitation of the nervous system.

And he cannot meld. In the end, that is what separates him from true Vulcans, for how could they acknowledge one who is dead to them? One who *should* be dead to them? In the end the brain is the largest organ in both a human’s body and a Vulcan’s. A Vulcan with a brain that cannot allow them to meld has lost higher brain function and is therefore not truly alive.

How would Amanda have felt if she had known? Spock wonders if that is the reason why Amanda was never properly informed. To have a son who was ill, and be incapable of doing anything for him. Perhaps Sarek thought it was better that she never suffered true despair.

“I do not believe she knew, or she would never have established the subroutine that drove you away. I failed to assuage her fears that I would not keep you safe.”

Spock blinks. Has Sarek known of this the entire time?

“You were our son. You are our son,” says Sarek, “whether by natural means, or by artifice.”

“I never called her ‘Mother,’” replies Spock, finally. Again, the constricting sensation caused by his throat muscles tightening up.

Sarek looks down, breaking their gaze. Spock wonders if Sarek has his own regrets; unvoiced words of affection that he wishes now he could have spoken when she was still alive. It is not the Vulcan way to speak of emotions; this is something he can understand.

“She was an exceptional woman. Of the three of us, I think she understood what remained unspoken the most.”

They sit there in silence for a moment, staring at one another. Spock knows that Sarek is tracing the features of Amanda in his own face.

At last, Sarek speaks again. “Will you return to the Embassy with me? Your status will be recognized.”

Spock blinks.

*Mother* remains silent within him.

“I cannot return yet,” he finally says. “I have promised Jim Kirk that I will assist him in repairs to his home. When those are completed, I will return.”

Sarek nods gravely. “Then I will make arrangements. Contact me at your leisure.”

They part soon after.

*****

When Spock arrives at Jim’s farm, Jim is sprawled on the bench outside. That was the first thing that Jim bought on their return to Riverside. There is a half empty bottle of beer next to him. He has clearly been concerned and waiting for Spock to return.

“So. Are you leaving, now?” Jim’s face is unreadable.

Spock stands there and looks at him, properly. In the end, it is because of Jim that he was able to
understand the function of Mother. He is not sure that other persons would have felt the need to do so. Then, he did not wish to know of it; he did not wish to analyse its making in the hopes of discovering the intentions of the woman whom he now knows crafted it with great precision. He is grateful to them both; it is a gift that he has been given.

“Not yet,” Spock finally says. “I have yet to fulfil my duties here.”

He thinks he sees Jim relax, minutely. Then Jim shifts over to one side of the bench and pats lazily at the seat. After a moment, Spock takes his cue and joins him, sitting upright.

“Well. We do need to work on the wiring in this dump.”

Spock feels trepidation.

“Relax, Spock.” Jim takes a swig.

“Vulcans do not relax,” Spock says severely, but he knows that Jim is watching his face. The new designation rolls off his mouth strangely.

“Pfft. Vulcans now. Whatever,” said with exaggerated disdain. And then Jim asks, “Does it matter?”

“Specify.”

“Before you were an android. Now you’re a Vulcan. Seems to me, you’re just Spock.”

Does it, indeed. He had thought he was merely Spock for simplicity’s sake; a simpler designation than UNIT A592-003-214. Now, he is just Spock; a being in his own right. Acknowledged, and named.

He will use the time to meditate on everything he has learnt concerning Sarek and Amanda. And himself. The sensation of freedom is powerful; it is the lifting of fear, of oblivion.

But Spock has much to consider. He had given into curiosity after his initial dread when Jim had told him why Mother was named so. He had not been able to name the feelings that had swirled inside of him; had not dared at the time to wonder if he was a mere replacement for the Spock that Amanda gave birth to.

Now, he does not question it. He thinks that if he were a mere replacement for that Spock, Amanda would have either avoided him, or attempted to imprint her Spock’s thoughts and desires and habits onto him.

But all his memories of Amanda show are her guiding him. Teaching him. She knitted a jumper for him in the early years of his activation; it is old and lumpy. Her knitting skills improved with time. When he left, he regretted not being able to bring it with him.

There was never a sense of Amanda questioning him or his actions, as if a shadow hung over him, as if he should have been following a guide book. What her son desired. What her son enjoyed. What her son knew. When he woke to the world he knew nothing. He has no real evidence; only intuition. This is enough for him.

This is enough for him.

It will be good to return to San Francisco. He and Sarek will be able to remember Amanda together and he will be able to look after her roses again. He will be able to see Nyota again and to talk to her. He will tell her about Jim, because Jim already knows about Nyota and it is only fair that these two
people are made known to each other, even if through an intermediary. He thinks, he believes, that Nyota and Jim are pleased with the Spock that they know and that they would have no need to know the former Spock. For Jim, the past is past; this is why he so easily forgave Spock when Spock hurt him. For Nyota, there is only the future; this is where Spock will be. He is learning to be alive.

Is this what hope feels like?

“San Fran got nice digs?” asks Jim.

“If by ‘digs’ you are referring to lodgings, Jim, then one supposes they would be adequate.”

“Huh.”

It is fifty-five point two degrees Fahrenheit, or twelve point eight nine degrees Celsius.

The sun is warm on Spock’s skin.

// end.

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