Time and the Final Frontier

by Crimson Seale

Summary

I have been traveling with the Doctor for a while now. This time, we find ourselves in an alternate universe where fiction is reality; this particular one being Star Trek. The Doctor and I are separated and I am forced to find out just how much I am capable of on my own.
At the Start

The TARDIS was on its way through the vortex again, carrying the Doctor and me inside. It always felt strange and yet wonderful when we went traveling through the whirl of space and time. And I was in no hurry to get home.

"What if I gave you a nickname?" The Doctor was saying.

I laughed. "You can try, though I doubt that you could come up with something very good."

He thought for a moment, tapping his chin as he looked up into the central column. "Well, you're a blonde, you're short..."

"Thanks a lot!" I said jokingly.

He grinned, not looking away from the column. I could see the gears turning in his head like clockwork, evidence of the Time Lord in him.

"I've got it!" he shouted, throwing his hand in the air. "Sputnik. It means 'fellow traveler' or 'companion' in Russian, not to mention the historical significance."

I turned the name over in my mind. It sounded nice. Hesitantly, I whispered it into the air. It felt wonderful on my tongue. He smiled at the look on my face.

"You like it?"

I nodded, trying desperately to hide my elation at being nicknamed by the Doctor.

The TARDIS came to a halt with a thud. We checked the scanner to be sure we were where we needed to be.

"That can't be right," said the Doctor. His eyebrows were furrowed in concentration. We both squinted at the screen.

"Doesn't that mean we're..." I said, pointing to a particular symbol on the screen.

"Yeah..."

I could tell he was confused, and he liked it. I got the feeling that he would be dragging me by the hand, out the door and into the world waiting outside. So I took initiative this time.

"Come along, Doctor," I shouted gleefully as I pulled him by the hand down the ramp and out the door. He took hold of his coat along the way and locked the door behind us. What we found waiting was more confusing than any place we had been to yet.

We were in a building, sometime in the future by the look of it. The TARDIS was parked in the corner of a conference room, tucked behind a large table. A window to our right revealed a futuristic looking city, one that looked strangely familiar...

Suddenly it hit me. The reading on the scanner just moments earlier. It made sense now. We were in another parallel universe. We were living fiction again. I ran to the table and looked at the screens placed in front of each seat. They displayed the Star Fleet insignia.

Star Trek.
"What was that?" the Doctor asked, coming up beside me.

Had I said that out loud? I looked over at him. He now had his coat on and as he leaned over me, I caught a glimpse of the sonic screwdriver safe in his pocket. A smile crossed my face. Everything about the Doctor made me happy.

"Star Trek," I said again. "We're in another fictional universe. This one belongs to Star Trek. The revamp movies, if I am correct." I looked over my shoulder to the city outside. It looked like London from the J.J. Abrams rendition, Star Trek: Into Darkness. I had just seen that movie a few days before leaving with the Doctor last time. How long ago was that? A week, maybe more. I wasn't sure.

"Fascinating…" the Doctor breathed, looking at the screen. I laughed. He wasn't making a reference, but it still fit perfectly.

Everything was starting to kick in. The excitement of looming adventure, the amazing things I anticipated seeing, the things I was ready to do. It was time to begin. I ran to the door and the automatic sensors opened the hatch to admit the Doctor and me through.

We were in a hallway, and we were alone. There was no one there. A few voices could be heard at one end of the hall. Otherwise, the place was empty.

"Listen Sputnik, I don't think these guys will take kindly to strangers being in their headquarters, so we had best disguise ourselves," the Doctor whispered.

I nodded. "That looks like a closet there. Let's see if there are any spare uniforms."

We tiptoed to the particular door. It was locked, of course. But with a short sonic session, it slid open as we slipped inside. Sure enough, at least two of each color uniform was hanging at the far wall. After a long, internal debate, I took a red one, since my preferred area had always been linguistics should I ever get into Star Fleet. I went behind a shelf and changed into it. Luckily, the dress was a little longer on me than I remembered it being on the girls from the revamp movies, ending just above my kneecap. There were some spare boots as well and I pulled a pair of those on. I bundled up my clothes and stepped out from behind the shelf. The doctor wore a blue uniform, just like Spock's, minus the commander gold rings on the sleeves.

"Let's put these in the TARDIS before continuing," he suggested, nodding to our bundles of clothing. We tiptoed back to the conference room and I tossed my clothes just inside. The Doctor took the sonic from his coat pocket and tucked it into his belt before laying the coat aside and locking the TARDIS doors again. And then we went exploring.

Down the hall, we found a corridor that shot off to the right. The voices were louder here, so we made our way down the corridor, slowly and carefully. That's when the Doctor stopped me with a hand on my arm.

"We shouldn't be creeping along here. If we are to fit in, we should walk like we're supposed to be here."

I nodded, straightened, and continued on. We passed a few windows until we found the source of the voices. A jumble of people was filing down the perpendicular hall, a line on either side of the wide space.

"Might as well," the Doctor shrugged.

We slipped in line and prepared to wait a while. I looked around, up at the ceiling, down at the floor.
The walls in this hall were a dark grey instead of white like the other. Up ahead, the walls seemed to get even darker.

Before I knew it, we were at the end. Two officers, one to each line, stood at the threshold of a large room. They were giving each person a tablet after asking a few questions. Suddenly, it was my turn.

"State your name, rank, and department," the officer said, not looking up from his work on the podium he stood behind.

What? I thought. What am I supposed to say?

I came up with the best answer I could.

"Sputnik…Ensign…Linguistics," I said haltingly.

The officer tapped the tablet for a moment, then handed it over to me. "You are assigned to the U.S.S. Enterprise. Proceed to the left." He waved behind him. I could now see that the room was a hangar with multiple shuttles parked along the walls.

I followed the officer's command, trying to wait for the Doctor, but when he got his orders, he began walking to the right of the hanger. I gave him a worried look and he waved me on. With great effort, I saw him mouth the words, "Just go. We'll meet up later."

I had a hard time believing that. Still, I continued to the third shuttle in a long line of them. An officer checked my orders and gestured for me to go inside. I heard someone say something about "first wave", so I guessed that we were going up first. There were only three seats left open in this one. I took the one tucked in the corner and buckled in. Two more people entered, took the remaining seats, and then we were being sent out into space.

There was a window near my seat and I watched the stars go by. The darkness, vastness, and beauty of space captivated my mind. Then I saw the docking port and the ships arranged around it. There it was, the Enterprise. It looked wonderfully white against the darkness, like a shining pearl in a black sea.

In a few moments, the shuttle landed in a hangar on the ship. We were ushered out and made to stand in a poor formation as the other two shuttles were emptied of their passengers. After everyone was lined up correctly, a superior looking officer came out of the passageway in front of us, holding a tablet larger than the one in my hand. He went down the lines, sending each individual onward with a wave of his hand. A lifetime passed and he stopped in front of me.

"Sputnik?" he asked.

I looked him over. Blue shirt, black hair, pointy ears, and those unmistakable eyebrows. This was Spock.

The realization had incapacitated me for the moment and I stood, open mouthed, staring up at him.

"Sputnik?" he repeated. "Is that your name?"


He took a moment to look me over. He settled his eyes on my face and I could feel my cheeks burning. "Interesting name. There are two different cultures and languages in that name."

"I'm a diverse kinda gal," I replied with a nervous laugh. What was that? Stupid, stupid, stupid.
With a shake of his head, he looked down at the tablet in his hands. "It says here you are a linguist. What sort of linguistics do you specialize in?"

Another silence ensued as I grappled for an answer to give. "I'm...fluent in French and English, sir. And I know small amounts of other Earth languages."

"Any Xenolinguistics?"

"Not really, sir."

He sighed, tucking the tablet under clasped hands at his belt. "Technically, you are not qualified to be on the Enterprise. However, another linguist might benefit us on this mission." He took my tablet from me, placing his under his arm. "I am assigning you to the bridge," he said as he typed. "You will be working with Lieutenant Uhura. Proceed forward and report to the bridge."

He held the tablet out to me, but I couldn't take hold of it just then.

Lieutenant Uhura. The bridge. I'm going to be working with the helm crew from Star Trek. How...?

Spock was getting impatient. There were many others waiting to be assigned and there was no time to lose. I took the device from him and a step toward the corridor. I watched him move on to the next new recruit for a moment, then started for the bridge.

Of course, I got lost. I had no clue how to get to where I needed to go. I think I asked for directions three times at least, but I finally made it to the lift that would take me up to the bridge. My heart was pounding as each floor passed by with a bright light. My feet became like lead when the lift stopped. And then the door opened.

The bridge.
The Bridge

White walls and futuristic control panels met my eyes, which were now slightly gleaming with tears of joy. I wished that other Trekkies could be there with me, seeing this sight, breathing this air, living this life. I wiped my eye with a short sniffle as one of the helmsmen stood and made his way toward me.

"Kehn I hyelp you?" he said.

Suddenly, I was back on the ship, not soaring above the clouds back home. His accent, those curls, and the yellow uniform. I checked his sleeves for his rank and found nothing there. So he was an ensign, but which one? Had it really been so long since I had been home that I was forgetting these faces? I couldn't place him. He was a mystery to me.

"Hyello?" said the ensign, waving a hand in front of my face. "Are you lost?"

I shook the troubling thoughts from my mind. "Well, if this is the bridge, then I'm where I need to be," I said smiling at him.

He chuckled, a grin crossing his face. "Zis is ze bridge. My name is Chekov." He placed a hand to his chest, indicating himself, then nodded to me. "And you are?"

I realized I had the tablet in my right hand, so I switched it to the left and held out my hand for him to shake. "Kris M--Sputnik." Almost blew it...

After shaking my hand, he looked to the tablet at my side. "May I see your orders? Perhaps I kehn hyelp you find vhere you belong."

I gave him the device and he looked it over. I saw his eyes flit back to me a few times as he tapped, and with each flit, he seemed to shrink back a little more, his face reddening. I was worried he had found me out, that I would be on my way back to Earth without the Doctor, without any way of getting home. Eventually, he straightened himself and handed my orders back to me.

"You are assigned to vork vith Lieutenant Uhura. She is right over zere," he said, gesturing behind him. "Report to her first, then I vill take you to ze Keptin."

I glanced over to where he had pointed. There she was, Lieutenant Uhura. Already, my heart was pounding at the thought of meeting one of my heroes. Not only was she a badass, but she also shared my love and talent for languages, making her double the role model I searched for. I swallowed hard with a nod to Chekov, then started the agonizing journey to Lieutenant Uhura's station.

She was talking to someone on the communicator as I approached. It sounded serious.

"Mister Scott, I don't know what to tell you. Up here it shows that all your comm devices are working just fine." She paused, listening to the person on the other end of the line. "...let me try rebooting the system."

I watched her flip switches and press buttons for a while. After a moment, I realized I was still too far away for her to notice me. So, clutching the tablet to my chest, I took a few more steps until I was next to her seat. She held up a finger, indicating for me to wait.

"There," she said into her ear piece. "The system is rebooting. Standby." Then, she turned to me with a smile. "Can I help you?"

I held out the device in my hands. "I'm supposed to work with you."

She took a look at my orders and nodded. "Linguistics...that would be me." When she looked up, her face looked to be a bit angry. "Hold on just one second."

A flurry of flips and switches ensued as she tried to reach someone. When they wouldn't answer, she turned back to me.

"Did someone bring you up here?"

I shook my head. "No, Miss. But that ensign over there," I pointed to Chekov, "he told me to report to you, then he would take me to see the Captain."

She nodded for a moment, thinking about how to go about this. "Have Mister Chekov take you to the Captain. I need to speak with Commander Spock concerning your orders."

My heart sank. It seemed she was going to try to get rid of me. Of course, I couldn't really blame
her. What use could I be? I only knew two Earth languages well enough to converse in, and we were heading out into space.

She walked with me back to Chekov and told him she needed to speak with Spock, that he should take me to see Captain Kirk for now. The turbolift opened and the three of us stepped inside. I was between the two of them. Uhura still seemed pretty angry, and Chekov...I'm not at all sure what was going on with him. He kept scratching his ear, the one closest to me. Every time I looked over at him, his face reddened. I still wondered if he had found something wrong with my orders.

We stopped and Lt. Uhura left, leaving something of a goodbye in her wake. Then the turbolift resumed descending.

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Uhura made her way to the hangar where Spock was still assigning new recruits to their stations. She walked up to him, practically stomping along the floor. Once at his side, she stopped and waited for him to finish with the current cadet.

"Sir, a word," was all she said.

Spock turned to her, placing his hands behind his back. "Lieutenant Uhura, is something wrong?"

She stepped closer and lowered her voice. "Is something wrong? You should know damn well that something is wrong. What were you thinking putting that ensign with me? She'll only get in my way."

He shifted uneasily. She frightened him sometimes. Fear was an emotional response, making the experience all the more unnerving for him. "Lieutenant, if you will hear me out, I have sound reasoning for my actions."

A sigh escaped her as she crossed her arms. "What?"

"I know that she does not qualify as a Star Fleet linguist. However, I also know that you are overworked in your duties and you voice your concerns regularly."

"You can just say I complain a lot, Spock."

He nodded. "Alright. You complain. Therefore, I thought that she might be of assistance in the management of the communications system. I shall evaluate her skill level to determine if she is capable. If she is, I will request that you mentor her in learning the system."

Uhura sighed and let her eyes drop to her shoes. "Fine." She looked up at him again, fire in her eyes. "But if she takes three days to learn the panel, I'm done. I don't have time to fool with an ensign."

Spock nodded. "I agree."

After a moment, Uhura stood straight again, her arms at her sides. "Thank you for clarifying, sir. See you on the bridge."
The turbolift stopped and Chekov and I stepped onto the new floor. "Zis vay," he said, leading me down the corridor to the right.

We made our way to a door on the left just a few paces from where we started. The door opened and Chekov motioned for me to go in ahead of him. When I stepped through the entryway, I saw a conference room, very much like the one the TARDIS now sat in back on Earth. But there was no one there.

"Vell...zis is embarrassing," Chekov breathed. "Vhere is ze Keptin?"

I shrugged. I had thought he would be on the bridge already, but apparently not. "Come wiss me," the Ensign instructed as he exited the room.

He led me through a few corridors, down a few floors in a different turbolift, and stopped at a door labeled "Captain's Quarters". He pressed a button on the control panel.

"Keptin, Ensins Chekov and Sputnik to see you, sir." He stepped back and looked at me. "I don't know vhat he is doing. He is supposed to be in ze ozer room, vaiting to prep ze new bridge crew."

After a moment, Chekov tried to buzz in again, but there was no answer. With a sigh of frustration, he pressed the open button and walked in. I followed slowly, holding the tablet in front of me for protection or...something.

As we entered the room, the lights came on and we found the most disturbing sight. Captain Kirk had a woman in bed, but she wasn't human. I still have no idea what species she was. Kirk probably doesn't remember either.

They stopped what they were doing and looked up at us. Both of them seemed aghast at our presence.

"I swear I locked that door," Kirk told the girl.

I looked over at Chekov to see his mouth and eyes wide in shock. I think my mouth was hanging open too. Then, Chekov took both hands and covered his eyes.

"So sorry, Keptin," he was saying. "Ve vill leave now. Pleese resume and meet us in ze conference room when you are finished."

I watched him turn to leave, eyes still covered. He ran into a wall with a thud and what I guess was a curse in Russian. I struggled to keep from giggling at the absurdity of it all. Taking one last glance at the happy couple, I turned my own scarred eyes away to help Chekov find the door.

Once outside, I made sure the door got closed while Chekov spun around in a daze with his hands still covering his face. He bumped into a few people who looked at him like he was crazy as he muttered endless apologies. Finally, it ceased to be funny and I took him by the arm to sit him down against the wall.

"You know we're outside the room, right?" I asked as I lowered us both to the floor. "You can open your eyes now."

Slowly, he let his hands fall to his sides. He pulled his legs in to sit cross-legged, staring at the floor just in front of his knees.

"Are you okay?"

He seemed to come out of whatever kind of trance he was in at the question. Wide eyes glanced over at me, then quickly looked away. His face was the darkest shade of red, almost that of my uniform. I attributed it to the recent events.

"I'm fine," he said simply.

I touched his arm, giving it a small pat before letting my hand rest there. "Are you sure? You acted like that was your first time seeing people...you know."

"...it vas."

I was a bit taken back. How had he never seen people doing it before? Was he twelve?

"H-how old are you?"

At this he seemed to perk back up. He turned to me, a proud smile on his face. "Nineteen."
I let a short laugh escape my throat. "I'm eighteen. We're probably the youngest people on this ship."

"Ve are! I vas ze youngest. I know zat for sure. But now you are here and zat makes YOU ze youngest!"

His renewed enthusiasm was rubbing off on me. I smiled and started to stand, but he hopped up before I could even start the ascent and offered me a hand.

"Thanks," I said once I was on my feet.

"You're welcome," was the reply.

I couldn't help but notice his lingering gaze. It seemed to be getting longer every time he laid eyes on me. It was a little bit unnerving. I didn't know what was going on. Maybe it was a Russian thing...

"Lyet's go back to ze conference room to vait for ze Keptin," he suggested.

I nodded and followed him through the myriad of halls again. It was a good thing he was leading. By the second turn, I had no idea where I was. The turbolift ride seemed shorter this time, and the room was still empty by the time we got there, so we sat at the table in awkward silence while Captain Kirk "finished".

Finally, the door opened and the Captain, now fully clothed, stepped in and took a seat at the head of the table. Neither Chekov nor I could look at him with a straight face. I just couldn't get the picture of him naked out of my head. This was probably going to make working on the bridge difficult.

"So Chekov, what did you need?" Kirk said as he sat down.

Chekov sat up straight and cleared his throat. "Zis Ensin vas assigned to ze bridge, so as is regulation, I vas bringing her to report to you, sir."


"Sputnik," he repeated. "So you're Russian, too?"

I shook my head. "No, sir. It's just a name." I was starting to regret choosing the Doctor's nickname as my alias. It seemed to cause more problems than it was worth.

Kirk nodded at my reply. "So let me see your orders."

I handed him the tablet that I still had in my hands. I was glad to be rid of it for a moment.

"It says here that you know English and French." He looked up at me. "What good is that gonna do us going out into space?"

I shrugged. "Commander Spock said he thought I could be of assistance."

He turned to the tablet again, leaning back in his seat. "He has ordered a comprehension test for you, administered by himself." He looked back to me. "Good luck with that."

After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, he gave me back the device.

"Report back to me after Mister Spock has administered the test." And with that he got up and left.

I looked at Chekov across the table. "Is this always how organized this ship is?"

He sat back in his chair, breathing a deep sigh into the air. "You would sink no, but...yes."

The despair on his face was quite amusing and I couldn't stop myself from laughing. He pulled his head up from resting on the chair to look at me. I saw his eyes light up at the sight of me giggling and, before I knew it, we were both crying from laughing so hard. I guess we needed the relief after all that tension.

This was going to be an interesting adventure.
"Ready to go, Mister Scott?"
"She's purrin' like a kitten, Cap'n."
"Mister Sulu, punch it."
"Aye, Captain."

I stood by the Captain's chair watching the crew prepare to leave. It was so exciting. A wonderful feeling welled up in my chest with each passing second and pretty soon, I was on the brink of tears again.

Sulu pushed the lever forward and I watched as the stars bent into straight lines, then flew by us. We were in warp, and it felt amazing.

"Well done. Another seamless takeoff," Kirk complimented his crew.

Everyone let out a whoop in appreciation. I felt a little strange just standing there, so I followed the example of the rest of the bridge crew.

After everyone settled back down, Spock stood from his seat and approached the Captain's chair. "Sir, if I may be excused, I am to take Ensign Sputnik, here, for a comprehension test."

Kirk nodded. "Yeah, yeah I know. Go easy on her, Spock. I know how impossible your tests can be," he added with a chuckle.

Spock raised an eyebrow at Kirk. "If you are referring to the Kobiashi Maru incident, then I must re--"

"Oh, c'mon Spock. Just get it done and don't terrify the kid. Dismissed."

Spock bowed slightly and looked at me. I felt that his eyes could see right through me, like he knew that I wasn't really a student of Star Fleet Academy. And I was scared to my very core. Kirk's command to not terrify me was already broken, and we hadn't even left the bridge yet.

The chief science officer stepped around the chair and gestured for me to follow him to the turbolift. The door opened and another man stepped out. He wore a blue shirt like Spock's and he was holding another tablet.

"I'm looking for Kristen Sputnik!" he called into the room, reading the name.

I raised a hand. "That's...me."

He looked me over with a scrutinizing gaze. "I need to you to come with me."

Motioning for me to follow, he stepped back into the turbolift. I looked up at Spock, who simply shook his head. He mumbled something under his breath before addressing the newcomer.

"Doctor McCoy, Miss Sputnik is under my command at the moment, "he said. "She cannot be released to you for any reason until I am finished examining her."

"Funny you say that," McCoy said through gritted teeth, taking a menacing step toward Spock. "I need to do just that. She has no record of a medical examination and, unless you would like to risk infection and disease for the entire crew, I need to conduct one immediately."

Spock looked down at me. "Is this true? You have had no medical examination?"

I shrugged. "Not here, no."

He stood silent for a moment. I could tell he was turning over the impossibility of it in his mind. Of course, if I were a real member of Star Fleet, I would have a medical record. My lie was unraveling with every passing moment.

"Proceed, Doctor," Spock finally said.

McCoy nodded. "Thanks." He motioned toward the turbolift again and I stepped in with him. He pressed a button and we were on our way to the Med Bay.

"I am curious, though," the doctor said, startling me from the silence. "How did you get on board without an exam?"

I shrugged again. Great. More improvising. "Well, we got called in hastily, so I guess it just didn't get processed. I am rather new to Star Fleet, so I haven't had an exam yet. Sorry."

"Don't apologize. It's the med team at the Academy who's to blame. Those incompetent idiots..."
The turbolift opened to reveal the med bay. There were screens above each station. I saw a few people laying on the exam tables at the right side of the room. The screens showed a schematic of their vitals. It was actually really cool.

McCoy led me to an exam table away from those already being looked at. I hopped up while he got the scanner. After a moment of digging around, he took the scanner and held it above me, moving it down every inch of my body to get a full reading.

"I'm Doctor McCoy, if you haven't already guessed. You can call me Bones. I'll be your physician, so any aches and pains, just let me know."

I nodded, trying to hold as still as possible. "Thanks."

While he scanned me, I noticed that his eyebrows were furrowed together and his mouth was down turned in what seemed to be a permanent frown. Despite his rough exterior, I got the feeling he was soft as a stuffed bear underneath. I had always loved Bones as a character, but meeting him in person was something else. He seemed the kind of man you could trust, which was good considering he was a doctor, and instantly I liked him.

A few more moments passed and the scanner had finished reading. Bones put it on the table and picked up a swab.

"Open."

He took a sample of my saliva and put it into a little tube on the side of the scanner. A green light started blinking.

"Right. You're fit as a fiddle."

He set the scanner aside again and helped me down from the table. I straightened my uniform and started to leave. Then I remembered I would probably get lost on my way back and turned around.

"Could you..." I swallowed hard. "Could you tell me how to get back to the bridge?"

Bones smiled at me, an angry looking smile. "In the lift, press the button that says 'bridge'. You should be there in a few seconds."

"Thanks," I said with a short wave.

I got inside and looked at the panel with all the millions of buttons. I found the one labeled 'bridge' and pressed it, waiting for the ascent to commence. A few seconds passed and the turbolift stopped. I stepped out onto the bridge again.

"Mister Spock, I'm ready for the test."

Spock rose from his station and came to my side, looking back at Kirk. "May I be dismissed, Captain?"

"You haven't done that yet? Go on."

Spock turned back to me. "Let us proceed."

As we moved to enter through the door, I heard a voice call after us.

"Good luck!"

When I turned to look, I saw Chekov giving me thumbs up and the goofiest smile. I waved in response. Nerves were catching up with me, so smiling or saying thank you was out of the question.

Another awkward ride in the turbolift.

Spock was so much taller than me. His very presence was unnerving. I chanced a look at him. His gaze stayed fixed straight ahead, so I shifted my weight to one foot to get a better look at him. His profile was very appealing. He had that emotionless, professional look on his face, and not one hair on his head was out of place. That bothered me to pieces. I just wanted to reach up and gently pet his hair, and then eventually ruffle it the way I sometimes did the Doctor's.

Where was the Doctor, anyway? He had said we would meet up. But we were in warp now and, unless he had gotten on the ship before we left, I was already lightyears away from him. Literally.

The door opened and Spock stepped out in front of me. I followed him to a room empty of everything except what I supposed was a simulation panel.

"Sit, please."

The command was so short and unfeeling that it took me by surprise. I sat down in the chair and ran my fingers along the edge of the panel as Spock took a seat beside me.

"Do you know anything about how to use a communications panel?" he asked, looking at me.
I shook my head. His eyes were staring through me again. I could feel my pulse begin to quicken.
"Well then, I will teach you. This is the channel equalizer. It helps you hone in on certain
frequencies. And this is the radio stabilizer. You will need to know how to use this one most of all.
Put your hand here..." he lifted my hand from the edge of the panel and set it on the screen that showed different levels of frequency. "It responds to touch. It's a recent addition to the
communications panel, so if you have used one before, you'll have to relearn this instrument."

He began teaching me the entire panel, his hands guiding mine. The whole time, I felt my face
burning at his touch. At one point, he stood behind me, both hands on mine, to help me get the feel
of amplifying frequencies using the stabilizer and return pull. He was so close to me and his face was
next to mine as he whispered hints into my ear. When he stepped away after I had mastered the
concept, I felt such a low. I wasn't sure what was happening to me.

"What is this?" he was asking.
I looked to where he pointed. "The transvessel intercom."
"Good. And this one?"
"Voice level."

He sat back in his chair. "Miss Sputnik, you have just passed the test. I'll have Engineering install
another chair at the comm station on the bridge."

He stood and helped me to my feet. He then held out a hand for me to shake.
"Congratulations," he said with a smile, at least a small one.
"Thank you, sir," I replied.
I could feel my hand trembling in his grasp. My face felt so hot I thought I was sweating. And in
that moment, I realized that I was falling for Spock.
I had stopped to go to the bathroom for a moment, so I was late getting to the bridge. I had stayed a moment, looking at my reflection and asking myself over and over what I was thinking falling for a superior officer when I wasn't even a member of Star Fleet and pretending to be and...

I quieted my mind before crossing the threshold onto the bridge. Kirk was in his chair, but he was swiveled around to watch the proceedings at the comm station behind him. I saw him snicker into a closed fist. Spock was also watching from safe distance. In fact the whole crew was watching the man in the red shirt.

"Just what I needed, a stupid chair to talk back to meh," the man was saying. He turned to Kirk. "You just had to have another chair up here, didn't yeh? It's not like you don't 'ave enough already! And of course all my boys are preoccupied, so I, chief of bloody engineering, have to come all the way up here and install it for yeh."

He turned back to the task in front of him. After he bumped his head on the seat and muttered something under his breath, he finished bolting down the new chair in what I hoped was a secure fashion.

"Right. That oughtta do it Cap'n. So who wants to try it out?"

He turned a raised brow panoramically around the room, daring each set of eyes to try his new chair. After a moment, I strode forward and plopped into the seat, testing the swivel feature and the reach of my arms.

"Feels good," I said, looking up at the "chief of bloody engineering".
"Good," he replied, breathless. "Hope it works out for yeh." His eyebrows furrowed in confusion.
"Sorreh, I don't think we've met."

I stood and extended a hand for him to shake, which he took without looking away from my face.
"I'm the new communications officer," I informed him. "Kristen Sputnik is the name."
"Sputnik," he repeated. "So you're like Chekov over there?"

I followed the direction of his gesture to find said Ensign watching us intently. Then again, everyone was watching us intently.

"No," I finally answered, looking back to the man still holding my hand. "I'm American. It's just a name."

I hoped no one would catch the disdain in my voice. That alias was really getting on my nerves.
"Oh, well I'm Scotty, chief of engineering."
Scotty started shaking my hand so violently I thought my wrist was going to pop out of joint.
"Nice to meet you," I said, pulling my hand away. "Thanks for the chair."

He looked down at the mess of tools still lying on the floor. "Yeah, no problem. Now, if you will excuse meh, I have a warp core to care for."

After placing the tools into his toolbox, Scotty left the bridge, muttering curses under his breath as he went. I couldn't stop a grin from shining through the gloom of my newest self discovery. Scotty was a character, a character I liked. I hoped I would see both him and Bones again sometime.

It was actually really strange for me. I knew these characters. I knew them well. But meeting them here was like meeting them for the first time. There was something quite endearing about it. I was falling in love with these characters all over again, some more than others...one more than the others.

I turned back to the chair and sat down, feeling the panel in front of me. My mind buzzed with the names and functions of each device before me. I heard something behind me and whipped my head around to look. Kirk had jumped over to my seat and was watching me.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"No, just..." he glanced over at Spock, then turned back to me, lowering his voice. "How did that test go?"

He looked at me expectantly. I think he wanted me to say that it was impossibly difficult so he could report the science officer. But I answered truthfully.
"It was fine. He taught me the panel, quizzed me afterward, and I passed."
Kirk nodded, patting my shoulder. "Sure. We can go with that."
I shook my head and smiled at him as he stood and began walking to the door. I watched him leave and caught a glimpse of Spock busy at his station. Quickly, I averted my eyes before my cheeks started burning again.
"Wait, Keptin! Sulu, take ze conn."
I swiveled around to see Chekov jump out of his chair and bounce--it really did look like bouncing--across the room to the door, following after Kirk. Again I snickered at this crew and their strangeness. And now, I was one of them.
--
"Keptin Kirk, Keptin Kirk, Keptin--"
"What is it, Mister Chekov?"
Kirk stopped to let the ensign catch up with him.
"I haff a question for you, Keptin."
Kirk turned on his heel to face Chekov with an intrigued look on his face. "What might that be?"
Chekov opened his mouth to speak but was interrupted by the bridge door opening. Spock stepped out, holding a communicator in his hand.
"Captain, we are needed on deck seventeen. Something about a cargo malfunction."
"Just a minute, Mister Spock. Chekov, here, has a question for me."
Spock told the person on the communicator that they would be there as soon as possible, then put the device away and stood with his hands clasped behind his back, waiting for the question to be asked. Chekov looked at him nervously. He had hoped that it would only be Captain Kirk who heard his request. But, what harm could Spock do?
"Keptin," the ensign said, looking at Kirk. "I would like to ask, how do you get so many girls to...to like you?"
Spock's eyebrows went up. What kind of question was that?
Kirk let out a chuckle and shifted his weight around, slightly uncomfortable. "Kid, you're a little young..."
He stopped short, remembering what had happened earlier. Chekov still watched him expectantly.
"You know about...y'know...girls and boys, right?" Kirk asked haltingly.
"Yis, Keptin. I know about ze sex. But zat's not what I'm asking."
Kirk was taken aback at the kid's straightforwardness. "So what are you asking then?"
Spock stepped forward, interjecting. "I think Mister Chekov means he would like to help a certain woman along in developing feelings for him. Am I right?"
Chekov nodded. "Vell...I like her, and I vould like her to like me too."
Kirk couldn't help but grin at this new piece of information. "Well, who's the lucky girl, man? C'mon tell me!"
He tossed a light punch at Chekov's shoulder. The ensign looked down at his feet, his face turning redder by the second.
"I would razer not say, sir."
"Oh, come on. You can't expect me to help you out if I don't know who she is."
Chekov looked up at the Captain and first officer. Both were waiting for his answer with curious eyes. After a moment, he looked down again.
"It is ze new ensin, sir," he said just above a whisper.
"Ensign Sputnik?" Spock asked.
"Yis."
Kirk tossed another punch at Chekov. "Nice, kid. She's a pretty little lady, isn't she?" He leaned in and put a hand to the side of his mouth. "Tell you what, you come see me tonight and I'll give you a crash course in flirting. How about it?"
Spock sighed audibly. "Deck seventeen, Captain."
Kirk stood straight again. "Yes?" he pressed Chekov.
Chekov nodded. "Alright, Keptin. Sank you, Keptin."
Kirk smiled and turned to Spock. "Okay, cargo malfunction, you said?"
Sulu followed the command as Kirk and Spock came through the door in a blurred rush. They had stern looks on their faces and I and the rest of the crew tensed at the anxiety surrounding the Captain and first officer.

Kirk went to stand just in front of his chair. He looked around the room at the worried faces watching him.

"Guys, I have some bad news," he finally said. "There was an acid leak on deck seventeen. It consumed most of the cargo on that deck, including our supply of fuel cells." He paused, taking a deep breath. "Mister Scott believes we will run out of fuel in the next hour or so if we are in warp. We need to locate a planet with resources to replenish our supply. Mister Chekov, can you get on that?"

"Aye, sir."

Kirk turned to Uhura and me. "Uhura, Sputnik, send out hailing frequencies in all languages. Hopefully someone will hear us and respond."

"Yes, sir." Uhura and I answered in unison.

Kirk continued giving orders to the rest of the crew, but I didn't hear any of them. I was too busy listening to Uhura.

"I'll prepare the messages, you prepare the transmitter," she told me.

"Yes, Lieutenant," I tossed in her general direction.

I flew into action. My earlier training was about to be tested for real. I hesitated, looking over the panel. It was a bit different from the simulation, so finding the right instruments in a hurry was proving to be a tiny bit difficult. I had just found the transmitter when I felt someone standing behind me.

"Is everything alright, officers?"

It was Spock. He stood between Uhura's chair and mine, watching us both.

"Everything is fine, sir," I said quickly.

I made a few adjustments to the transmitter, setting it for all frequencies, then turned to Uhura. I stopped short with my mouth open, about to speak. She was looking up at Spock with googly eyes, obviously trying to get his attention.

"Lieutenant, the transmitter is prepped for your message," I declared to the bridge.

She seemed to find it in her to tear her eyes away and turn her attention back to the task at hand.

"Message ready," she informed me after flipping a few switches.

I pressed the send button on the transmitter. "Message sent, Commander."

"Good," Spock said. "Well done, ensign."

He turned to Uhura and leaned forward, whispering something in Vulcan, and proceeded to kiss her.

I'm fairly certain my eyes and mouth were as big as Saturn at that point. Honestly, I wanted to bitch slap them both. But then it occurred to me that maybe they had already been together, prior to my arrival. That would mean that, according to maritime law, I had no claim to him. Suddenly, the world began to suck immensely.

Uhura pulled away from Spock's kiss, grasping for her earpiece and the controls on the panel.

"Captain! I have a response!"

Kirk left what he was doing immediately and ran over to our station. "What is it, Uhura?"

She tweaked a dial while I glared at her. No one else seemed to notice, thankfully.

"It's a response to our distress call," Uhura continued. "But it's in a language I don't know and the translation matrix isn't being able to filter it."

That's when the greatest thing finally hit me. I had been in the TARDIS. Her translation matrix
was installed in my brain. I should be able to understand every language we encountered out here. Why hadn't I thought of that before?

"I think it's an earth language," the lieutenant said, dialing in on the signal. She looked up at Kirk and Spock despairingly. "I'm a xenolinguist. I don't know other earth languages. There was never any need."

"It's alright, Nyota," Spock assured her.

She listened to the signal a moment longer, then looked over at me. "It might be Russian. I've heard Russian spoken before and this sounds similar."

Kirk faced the helm. "Chekov! Get over here and tell us if this is Russian!"

"Aye, sir," Chekov answered, making his way over to the growing crowd around the communications panel.

I handed him my earpiece, which was lying on the panel in front of me since I hadn't bothered to put it in my ear yet. He took it and placed it in his ear, his hand trembling as he did. Seriously, what was with this guy?

After a moment of listening, he looked up at Kirk.

"Zis is not my language, sir. It isn't Russian."

Chekov handed the earpiece back to me as Kirk and Spock exchanged worried glances.

"How are we supposed to respond to a message we can't understand?" Kirk was saying.

I placed the device in my ear, eager to hear the translation matrix make sense of this strange language. But when I finally took my first listen to the signal, it wasn't being translated for me, but I understood it. What were the odds that the one language I knew well besides English would be the one we encountered while in space?

"Sir," I said. "I know this language. It's French, or at least a form of it, perhaps a kind of creole."

Kirk's face lit up and he leaned forward. "Can you understand it?"

"Of course. It's a simple message. They say they have the raw materials to make our fuel cells on their planet. Wait..." I listened closely again. If that word was what I thought it was, I worried about Kirk's reaction. "They will help...for a price."

"Are you kidding me?!"

Kirk threw his hands up in the air and walked away from the station. Spock followed him, hands calmly clasped behind his back.

"Captain, whatever they may ask, surely it is a small price to pay compared to the safety of the Enterprise and her crew. If we run out of fuel, eventually everything will shut down as the generators have nothing to run on."

Kirk considered this thought for a moment. "Where is the signal coming from?"

Uhura checked the scanner. "A nearby planet at coordinates 22.46.89.32."

"Sulu, plot a course for those coordinates."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk walked back over to the communications panel and waved Spock over with him. He motioned for me to stand and I did.

"I want you two to go down to the planet and make the negotiations. I'll have Mister Scott meet you in the transporter room. He'll help you find the right materials. Spock, keep your head. And Sputnik, I hope your French is good enough to pull this off."

I swallowed hard around the lump in my throat. I wasn't at all sure if I would be able to make negotiations. I had only studied for three years, not nearly long enough to handle diplomatic situations. Still, I couldn't let him down.

"I'll try my best, Captain."
A Lesson in Beaming

As I followed Spock to the transporter room, I was wrapped up in my own thoughts. Half of my mind was buzzing at the proximity of his body, while the other half was worrying over how these negotiations would play out. I was trying to figure out why the translation matrix wasn’t working when I remembered the last adventure I had with the Doctor. Ever since the first time I ran with him, he had promised to take me to the Louvre. So, the last time he showed up to whisk me away in the TARDIS, he kept his promise. I remembered asking him to turn the matrix off so I could test my language skills in real time. There never was a time for him to turn it back on since we had immediately found ourselves here. And now here I was with the fate of the entire Enterprise crew in my hands without any backup.

We arrived at our destination, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Where is Mister Scott?”

The ensign at the station shrugged at Spock’s query. “I’m not sure, sir.”

Spock pulled out his communicator. “Mister Scott? Mister Scott, acknowledge.”

“Just hold your horses, will yeh?”

A moment later, Scotty came bursting through the door, slightly breathless from the rush over. A message came from the bridge that the ship had entered the planet's orbit. Without hesitation, Spock stepped onto the pad, fastening a utility belt around his waist as he did so. Scotty followed suit, leaving me standing by the door, looking lost. Someone handed me a belt, told me to put it on, and edged me forward.

“Come on, Sputnik,” Spock beckoned me. “We need to hurry.”

I put the belt in position and buckled it to the correct tightness as I found a circle to stand on. Once I settled into my spot, Spock turned to the ensign at the panel.

“Energize.”

--

As soon as Spock left the bridge, Kirk turned to Chekov with eyes wide and excited.

“Come on!” he said, nodding to the door.

Chekov followed Jim outside.

"Keptin, where are ve going?"

"To the conference room," Kirk tossed over his shoulder. "I'm giving you that course in flirting now, while she's gone."

"But Keptin, what if somesing goes wrong? Ve vill be needed on ze bridge."
Chekov turned to go back to his post, but Kirk caught him by the back of his shirt.  

"It'll be fine. Sulu has the con. He'll page me if anything happens," the Captain said, dragging the ensign to the particular room.  

Once inside, Kirk practically tossed Chekov into a chair, then went to stand at the head of the table to teach the class.  

"First things first; eye contact."  

Kirk turned his gaze at the nineteen year old two seats down, eyes serious and suggestive.  

"Keptin, you're making me uncomfortable..."  

Kirk rolled his eyes. "That’s good. That means it’s getting to you. Now you need to practice that look to use on her. So go ahead, try.”  

Chekov felt very silly as he tried to copy Jim’s facial expression, and the result was quite laughable. The Captain couldn’t stop himself from grinning.  

“You just look like you’re sleepy, dude,” he said through suppressed giggles. “Okay, try to imagine she’s standing right here.” He gestured to the corner of the room, and Chekov followed with his eyes. “So she’s there. Now show me how you would look at her.”  

The ensign did as he was told. He imagined the girl he had been crushing on since he saw her for the first time standing in the corner, smiling at him. He grinned a little bit, then quickly averted his gaze before she saw him blush.  

“No, no, no, no, no.” Kirk got in front of the mental image. “Tell her you want her, but do it with your eyes.”  

“Okey, okey. Let me try again.”  

Chekov stood and walked to the corner, staring down the imaginary face. With a deep breath, he pulled himself upright, trying to ignore Jim’s prying gaze. He felt his face flush, but pushed the thought of it away as he looked her in the eye, face becoming serious and meaningful. He saw her look back at him, lips curled upward and her own cheeks blushing.  

“Good,” Jim praised, breaking the silence. “Practice that look in the mirror until you have it down. Moving on.”  

Chekov turned to see Jim standing by the table again and went to sit down.  

“When you see her,” the “teacher” continued, “make sure you’re standing or sitting straight. Make yourself look confident, even if you don’t feel confident. Then give her some compliments, a few on her body, but keep them focused on her personality and intelligence. Chicks love that stuff.”  

The ensign nodded, taking mental notes, wishing he had a pen and paper.  

“What sort of sings should I say?”  

“Things like, ‘Your hair looks nice today’ or, ‘I love the way you use your talents so efficiently’.
Things like that, you know?"

Kirk looked down at the young man to make sure he was getting all that. When he saw the lost expression on Chekov’s face, he shook his head. Gripping the chair in front of him, he hung his head with a sigh.

“Look, kid. You obviously can’t take in so much at one time, so let’s just stick with the basics.” He looked up, holding up a hand to count on. “Eye contact, confidence, and compliments. Can you remember that?”

Chekov nodded, counting off the three things on his hand as well. “Eye contact, confidence, and compliments. Yes, Keptin. I sink I got it.”

Kirk smiled and patted him on the back. “With that accent, you should be able to nail her in no time.”

The Captain started to leave and Chekov stood, calling after him.

“Sank you, sir.”

“No problem, kid. Let me know if you have any more questions.”
Beaming was strange. It didn’t hurt. It sort of…tickled. I felt every cell in my body tingle for a moment. When I opened my eyes again, they were dazzled by the sight. It was definitely a different planet. The air felt a bit thicker than normal and my breath caught in my throat, but soon I was getting used to it. What really got me buzzing, though, was the composition of the planet’s surface. Diamonds.

“Come along, Sputnik,” Spock said.

Scotty and I followed him without really seeing where we were going. We couldn’t tear our eyes away from the beautiful diamonds all around us. That is, until we saw the building we were walking toward. It looked like it had been carved right out of a diamond mountain. The day time star, which seemed farther away than the sun is from Earth, was shining on the curves of the building, glinting off of every corner. It was captivating.

We had arrived at the door of the palace. It swung open to admit us in and we stepped inside. The entrance hall was tall like a cathedral, and my gaze traveled upward, resting on the pinnacle of the ceiling. However, it was when I looked back down that I was really surprised. I had seen aliens before in my travels with the Doctor, but these were the coolest I had seen yet. They were humanoid in structure, but they had something like scales that came from the back of their heads and faded into human skin at the face. Their hands also had this same pattern, the scales coming from the wrist. The rest of their bodies were covered by clothing, but I guessed them to be similar.

“Bienvenue à Conran Zeta,” one of the females said, dipping into a bow.

I stood mesmerized by her until I felt the eyes of my companions on me, waiting for me to interpret.

“What, you guys don’t even know what that means?” I asked, almost laughingly.

Spock shook his head and Scotty turned to me, scratching his neck.

“No, sorreh. There hasn’t been a need to learn French for at least one hundred and fifty years,” the chief engineer explained.

I was shocked. No French in the future? Of course this was an alternate reality, one in which fiction was true. So nothing could be sure for the future of my universe. Still, it bothered me.

Looking back at the alien girl, I made the translation. “She said, ‘Welcome to Conran Zeta’, a simple greeting.”

Spock bowed in response. “Thank you for your reception of our distress signal. We are here to make the negotiations.”

He looked at me, waiting for the words to come out. With his eyes staring through me and my limited knowledge of the language, I paused and stood a moment, trying to process the words in my head.

“Merci pour nous aidant. Nous sommes ici pour parler des conditions.”
It wasn’t a literal translation, but it was close enough. As long as the general intent was conveyed, it would be fine…right?

I could feel the sweat pooling above my eyebrows. This was proving to be more stressful than I originally thought.

“Nous sommes heureux de vous recevoir,” the alien girl said with another bow.

A confused look crossed my face. I had trouble understanding the inversion, but tried my best to make sense of it.

“They’re happy about…receiving? I’m not sure.”

Spock nodded, addressing me without looking away from the group of aliens. “Introduce us and ask about the materials.”

“Je m’appelle Sputnik,” I said, laying a hand on my chest. Then I indicated the men beside me. "Ils s’appellent Spock et Scotty.” I stopped and made a polite smile. “Où se trouve les…” searching, searching, “…matieres?”

The aliens looked at me with cocked heads. I knew that was wrong.

“Materials,” I said. “Matériaux?” I was running out of ideas.

Either they got the idea or I finally found the right word. I still have no clue. The important thing is we were whisked off to another room and shown a collection of machines and raw materials. Scotty could barely contain himself.

“Look a’ that, would yeh? Everything one could ever need. A spectral rondometer, a serial timespan converter—those are handy actualleh—and look there! That’s the material we need.”

The engineer hopped over to the stuff, looking it over almost lovingly. It was quite entertaining, really.

“Vous pouvez avoir les matériaux si vous nous donnez quelques choses.”

I turned around to find the girl talking to me again. She seemed to be bypassing Spock, who was supposed to be in charge of this mission, and addressing me directly. Still, I held to my assignment and gave Spock the translation.

“She said we can have the stuff if we give them something.”

“Very well. What is it they want?”

I asked the question of the girl.

“We need medicine for our sick,” she told me. “They are dying.”

I wasn’t sure if the translation matrix had kicked back into gear or if my understanding was picking up again after using it for a while. It was nice, though. Maybe it wouldn’t be so hard after all.
“What kind of medicine?” Spock asked after I gave him her response.

“We don’t know. The disease they have is different from anything we have seen before. We need your medical personnel to help us.”

I knew right away that Bones needed to get down here. I reached for my communicator before telling Spock what was going on.

“Sputnik to Enterprise, acknowledge.”

“This is the Enterprise. Go ahead Sputnik.”

“We need Doctor McCoy and a team of his men down here.”

“Is someone injured?”

“No. The inhabitants have requested the help of our medical team. They have some sick people and need help.”

I could feel Spock’s eyes drilling into me and I knew I would pay for not informing him first.

“Doctor McCoy is on his way.”

“Le medicin vient,” I told the girl.

She nodded and said something to her companions. As she did I turned to Spock.

“Sorry, sir. I just wanted--”

“That does not change the fact that you have violated the linguist-officer code. We will discuss this with the Captain when we return to the ship.”

With that, he dropped the subject. Soon, Bones and his team arrived with all their medical equipment. I heard the alien girl tell her companions to take them to the sick bay. Spock went with them, leaving me alone with her and Scotty, who was scouring the room for any materials we might need with one of the scaly creatures who I assumed was Scotty’s equivalent here.

“The Spock. He is your mate?”

I turned to the girl and let out a nervous laugh. “No. He is not.”

“But you want him to be?”

I shook my head. “No. Well, maybe. You see, I’m not from around here so it would be a bit difficult. Besides, there’s another man out there.” I felt my eyes turn dreamily to the ceiling. “He’s a wonderful man, a man I’ve been traveling with for a while now. I’m not actually supposed to be here, I belong with him.”

She nodded, sitting on a palette near to Scotty and his new friend. She smiled at them, babbling on in their respective languages, neither understanding the other, yet somehow expressing meaning. Then she turned to me, gesturing for me to sit beside her.
“My name is Xorthen, daughter of Jahal. We are the Zetanoid. I must say we don’t know much
about your species. You are intriguing people.”

After taking a seat, I searched my memory for the words to make my response.

“We are humans, from planet Earth. Well, most of us anyway. There are many who are different,
like Spock. He is a Vulcan, but that’s just one of the many species that are on our ship.”


I chuckled. “Yes, well…”

As the words left my mouth, Spock entered the room.

“Mister Scott, have you gathered all the data you require?”

Scotty looked up from his bantering with the other Zetanoid.

“Aye, sir. Just havin’ a nice row with this guy, ‘ere.”

“Good.” Spock looked over at me and Xorthen. “Ensign, we have been ordered back aboard the
Enterprise. Doctor McCoy believes this might take a while. Prepare to leave.”

“Well, I guess that means I have to go,” I said to Xorthen before standing. “It was nice meeting
you. Maybe we can talk again when I come back.”

Xorthen bowed, and I responded in kind.

“I hope we can learn from each other when you return,” she said as I backed away.

“Me too.”

Scotty and I joined Spock, who was calling the ship to beam us up again.

“Ready to beam up, Commander.”

“Energize.”
Back on the Enterprise, I found that Spock wasn’t kidding when he said we would be talking to Kirk about my mess up. He left the transporter room and went straight for the bridge. Scotty looked over at me as we stepped off the platform.

“What’s his problem?”

My head dropped and my shoulders slumped forward at the question. “I made a mistake while interpreting and he’s mad about it.”

“Well, what did yeh do?”

He followed me out the door, staying beside me as I walked and watched me try to figure out which corridor led to the bridge.

“When Xorthen told me they needed a doctor, I jumped over telling Spock what she had said and made a request for Bones to beam down. I just wanted to help them as quickly as possible, but Spock said that I violated protocol and now…” My voice trailed off.

“Are you kidding meh? That pointy-eared bastard! What’s he got to be upset for? You did the raht thing, mate. Don’t let Mister Snob Nose get you down.”

I nodded. “I know, I know. And I’m sure Kirk will see it the same way. It’s just…I don’t want Spock to be mad at me.”

Scotty finally figured out I had no idea where I was going and silently took the lead.

“He’s got a stick up his arse all the time. Don’t let it get to yeh.”

We found the bridge where Spock was standing in front of the chair, ratting me out. As Scotty and I entered, Kirk stood and came over to me.

“Tell me what happened,” he said, looking down.

I explained what had happened again and, when I finished, Kirk looked up at Scotty.

“Did you see this happen?”

“No, sir. I did not,” was the reply.

Kirk turned back to me. “Okay, listen. Technically, it was a violation of protocol, but I understand why you did it and I don’t blame you.” He looked behind him, addressing Spock. “She shouldn’t be punished this time. It was a first time offense and she obviously didn’t know.” Then, looking back at me, he said, “Just don’t do it again, okay?”

I nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Back to your station, ensign.”
“Yes, sir.”

I left the small gathering that had caught the attention of every crewmember on the bridge to sit at my station. Kirk went back to the chair and said something to Spock. I couldn’t make it out, but after they talked, Spock stepped up to the outer level and came to stand by me.

“The Captain has requested that I apologize for frightening you,” he said, emotionless as ever. “It will not happen again. Next time something new arises, I shall give you a warning. However, if you violate protocol after being warned once, you will be punished.”

I smiled, trying to keep the stray thoughts in my mind at bay. “Yes, sir. I understand.”

“Good.”

My heart was beating so fast. My cheeks were flushing furiously. I could hardly contain myself. Spock nodded to me and turned to leave, heading for the exit, and I found myself following after him, having no idea what I was about to do.

--

After talking with Spock, Jim stepped over the navigation station. He leaned against the panel, dropping his head into Chekov’s view.

“As soon as Spock is done talking to her, you should go try out your new moves,” he said in a low voice.

“What? Now?”

“Yeah, you’ll be like her knight in shining armor, there to comfort her after this ‘trying ordeal’.” Jim couldn’t keep the grin from taking over his face.

“Wait, what’s going on?”

Sulu leaned over, eyes curious, and Chekov placed his face in his hands, mumbling something in Russian.

“It’s nothing, Mister Sulu,” Jim said, not even trying to hide his grin.

“No, I heard something about Chekov being a ‘knight in shining armor’. Sulu let a soft chuckle loose. “Are you trying to ask someone out?”

Chekov emerged from sulking into his palms. “Sulu, I don’t need zis right now. Please, let it go.”

“Now! He’s leaving.”

Jim poked Chekov violently in the shoulder, then pointed at the comm station.

“Go, before you lose your chance,” Sulu encouraged with a mischievous grin.

The distraught Russian stood and started to leave, but stopped when he saw Sputnik follow Spock out into the corridor. He turned a questioning look to Jim and Sulu, who both waved him on with silent “Go’s” and frantic movements. Uncertainty flooding his head, Chekov left the bridge to follow
after her.

Once in the corridor, he jogged along to catch up to Sputnik and Spock. They had stopped just a few paces down and were talking.

“Miss Sputnik! Miss Sputnik! I vanted t—“

“Not now, Chekov.”

He stopped short, every fiber of his being freezing at the same instant. Her upheld hand kept him away from her and, as he listened, he felt he was floating farther and farther away from her presence.

“Spock,” Sputnik was saying. “I need you to know something. I don’t usually come out and say these things to people, but I’m going a little bit insane here.”

She paused, looking up into the Vulcan’s eyes. Chekov knew what was about to happen and he felt his heart fall to the bottom of his stomach.

“I need you to know,” she continued, “that I…I have feelings for you.”

Her face turned red and she looked down at the floor, rocking uneasily on her heels. Chekov’s heart warmed at the sight. She looked cute when she was embarrassed. But soon the realization kicked in that she was blushing for Spock, not him.

“I’m sorry. I do not understand,” Spock said, a confused look on his face.

“I have a crush on you,” she repeated.

“But I am romantically engaged with Lieutenant Uhura. Why would you have feelings for me when you cannot be with me?”

She paused, absentmindedly scratching her arm. “I…I don’t know. I’m just stupid, I guess.”

“No you are not!”

Chekov found himself clasping a hand over his mouth. The other two turned to him, eyes wide. Had he said that out loud?

“What?” Sputnik asked, incredulous.

He had been trying to stay quiet. This wasn’t his conversation after all. But apparently, he had no control of his words today.

“You are not stupid!” he said, stepping toward her. “You are wonderful, in every way! You’re pretty, and funny, and I love you!”

Spock raised an eyebrow. He hadn’t expected Chekov to be so forward. This was a rather fascinating development.
There was a terribly awkward silence. My mouth was hanging open with no hope of ever closing. This was the first time anyone had ever come out and confessed that they "loved" me. And now my head was all kinds of messed up.

Spock looked around at the people passing by. He moved slightly and caught my attention.
"Perhaps we should move to a more secluded area," he suggested.

I nodded, still unable to talk. Chekov stepped forward and led us to an empty room where he locked the door so we wouldn't be disturbed. He took a seat at the table that was in the room and Spock stood on the opposite side. I moved to the head of the table, opposite the door, and paced the width of the room. Neither of them spoke while I tried to think over what was happening.

Nothing made sense. When did Chekov develop these feelings for me? And why? And it wasn't helping me figure out the churning in my stomach whenever I looked at Spock. If anything, it complicated things more than I thought possible. And now, as I glanced at Chekov, I felt tingling in my fingertips. What did that mean? Of course, I was flattered that he thought of me that way, but that was probably all it would ever be. Flattery. I didn't want to follow the butterflies and later realize that there was really nothing there, just to end up breaking his precious heart. But he really was adorable. But Spock's eyes...and his voice...and...

"ARRRGHHH!!"

The frustrated groan came out before I could stop it. I think they were both a little disturbed by the sound, though neither showed any reaction.

What was I supposed to do? Everything was getting muddled in my head as I tried to reason it out. After another moment, the silence was broken when Spock cleared his throat, preparing to speak. I ceased my pacing and looked to him expectantly. I needed something, anything, to clear my mind.

"Perhaps we could step outside for a moment..." Spock suggested, nodding toward the door.

I looked from him to Chekov and back again. The ensign was sitting silently. He wasn't going to take the chance of saying something wrong.

"Ensign?" Spock pressed.

I took hold of the chair in front of me, grappling for an answer. "Yes," I finally managed.

Spock led me outside the room. Chekov watched us go silently.

"What is the problem?" Spock asked me as soon as the doors were closed.

"I have so many mixed emotions about this situation," I said slowly. "I know I shouldn't have feelings for you, Spock, but I do. And it bothers me. With Chekov, I also have feelings, but I'm afraid it is simple flattery, that I don't really...love him back. And I just don't know what to do."

Somehow, saying it out loud left me with a sense of relief. Someone finally knew what had been going on in my head. I had been feeling guilty, dealing with my own problems while trying to help get the Enterprise back on the move. So much had happened in the last few hours and I needed someone to lean on. Where was the Doctor when you needed him?

"If you think about the situation logically," Spock began. I laughed quietly to myself at the familiar tone of his voice. "I am currently engaged in a relationship with Lieutenant Uhura. This would make it impossible for you to engage with me, even if I reciprocated your sentiments." He sighed, looking down at the floor. "This is one of the reasons Vulcans have rejected emotion..."

I looked up at him. "If I could reject my emotions, I would. Believe me."

"I do not doubt it," he answered. "Continuing our chain of thought; there are two persons you feel for, one of which is off limits. The other, however, is free, even presenting himself to you. The logical action to take then would be to engage the man in that room, even if only for a trial." He gestured to the doors where Chekov was waiting on the other side.

Surprisingly, Spock had helped me reason out my thoughts. Setting aside feelings for the moment and using pure logic was actually a really good strategy. I made a mental note to use the technique more often.

"ARRRGGGHHHH!"
"Alright," I finally said. "I think I know what I want to do now. Thank you Spock."
He nodded, stepping aside to let me into the room to give Chekov the good news.

Chekov looked up when I stepped inside. He waited until the door closed behind me with Spock still on the other side, then he sprang to his feet, his hands grasping the edge of the table to keep himself steady.

"Please, Miss Sputnik. Give me a chance. Let me give you a reason to love me back."
I couldn't stop the smile forming. It was there before I even registered that it was coming. I let the smile continue, and his lips curled upward when he saw my face.

"Is zat a yes?" he asked, eyes excited.

"I have talked with Mister Spock, and he has suggested that I give this a trial run for now."
He looked like he was about to spring up to the ceiling and let out a whoop for joy, but somehow he kept it under control and stood calmly.

"I won't disappoint you! I vill put somesing togezer for tonight!"

The calmness stayed as he exited the room, and then disappeared once he started down the corridor. I think I saw him jump and click his heels together with a shout as he left, but he turned the corner before I could really make the note.

I had followed him out and stopped beside the Vulcan who had been waiting patiently. Surprisingly, Spock wore a bit of a grin when I looked up at him. Apparently, he found Chekov's enthusiasm amusing.

He stood and held a hand out, gesturing for me to precede him down the corridor. I stepped forward and we started toward the transporter room, at least I thought that was the direction we were heading.

"I would like to thank you for the flattery you have given me by confessing your feelings," Spock said as we walked.

"Um...sure thing."

He stopped me in the middle of the hall.

"Don't let your predilection for intelligence color your opinion of Mister Chekov. He is intelligent in his own right and one of the finest crew members aboard this ship. You will grow fond of him."

I nodded, a fondness for Chekov already growing in my chest. "I think so, too. Thank you, sir."
Every cell in my body was alive. I felt like I had woken up from a very long coma and was settling into my body for the first time. And it was wonderful. I still wasn't sure whether or not I actually had feelings for Chekov, but I would soon find out, I supposed.

Kirk turned his chair to me as I entered the room.

"Sputnik, the doctor is calling you."

My heart skipped a beat. The Doctor? He had found me? Oh, happy day! Now I wasn't alone and I didn't have to worry about getting home.

"C-Can I speak with him?" I ventured to ask.

Kirk gave me a strange look. "Well, I guess. But I'm sending you down to the planet in a few minutes anyway. You can talk to him then."

Suddenly, every bit of life and electricity left me. He was talking about Bones, not the Doctor. Easy mistake, sure, but I was more disappointed than I needed to be. Kirk was staring at my downcast face, concern pushing his eyebrows close together.

"Are you okay?" he asked, beckoning me closer to the chair.

I stepped toward him, stopping about two feet away. "I'm fine, Captain. I'll head to the transporter room right away, sir--"

"No, really. Is everything alright?"

Was it alright? Right now, we were a billion lightyears from earth with a broken down ship, no foreseeable way to return unless I was able to communicate with the creatures Bones was now tending to. Not to mention that, without the Doctor, I had no way of returning to my home. There was no telling where he was. I didn't even know which ship he was on. This was the one time, out of all the adventures I had had with the Doctor, that it was almost completely up to me to get us back safely.

Was it alright? I honestly didn't know.

"Sir, I am fine. Really, I am. What is it that Doctor McCoy needs?"

He kept the look of concern for a moment, then it slowly dissipated back into Kirk's normal demeanor of "Happy Captain".

"He has requested you as a translator."

"Interpreter," I corrected.

"Right. He needs to talk to them, tell them how to further take care of the sick."

I nodded, swallowing around the growing nervousness in my throat.

"I'll see that it's done, sir."

"Thanks," he said with a wink.

"So, here I am, about to go down to the planet to interpret for the Doctor."

I let a grin spread across my lips as I resumed my route to the transporter room.

"If by 'fun' you mean 'stressful', then yes, it's tons of fun," I said, strapping the belt around my waist.
He didn't really know how to respond to that, so the next words that were spoken were said by Scotty, at his post again after cleaning up the remaining mess on Deck 17.

"Readeh?" he asked.

I nodded to him and Chekov uttered a quiet "Yissir". A few beeps later, we were beaming down again.

This time wasn't quite so surprising as the first, but there was still a strange sensation left behind, almost like an aftertaste.

Xorthen greeted us in the front lobby of the diamond palace.

"Encore, bienvenue mon amie," she said with a bow.

Chekov and I bent forward and rose again in sync. We exchanged quick glances before I turned my attention to Xorthen.

"Bonjour, Xorthen. Le medicin a demandé de moi."

"Yes, he did," she answered. "He needs you to help tell our people what to do about this illness."

We followed her to the sick bay, Chekov close to me at all times. I wasn't sure if he was trying to be protective or if he just wanted to be near me. Either way, it was nice and made me feel a little more at ease.

"Here is your doctor," Xorthen said, holding a hand out to indicate Bones.

"Ah, good. You're here," he said, finishing packing up his things. "I was wondering when Jim would actually get his act together and send you down here."

"Sorry. I was having a...private discussion before we left," I explained absently.

Bones caught the tone in my voice, but elected to ignore it until a better time, a time I would later find arduous and exhausting.

"I need to make sure these guys understand how to treat this illness. Can you translate this for them?"

The medical officer handed me a tablet full of medicines and procedures written down. I took it hesitantly. I didn't know much in the way of medical terminology in the French language. This would be a definite challenge.

"I'll try," I said to Bones, slowly turning away, doing some quick translations in my head.

I wished with all my might that the translation matrix was still working as I sat myself down at a table. The first few lines I could do just fine and I scribbled them down next to Bones' notes. The trouble came when I got about five lines in and there were words I had never learned. I sat with my fingers combing through my hair, not even realizing that I looked a lot like the Doctor when he was stumped by a problem. It was at that moment that I felt a hand touch my shoulder, and I jumped.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to scare you," Chekov apologized, sitting next to me.

"It's fine," I told him. "I'm just stumped and getting a little bit stressed out."

"I vish I could hyelp..."

He patted my arm, letting his hand rest there after the motion, much like I had done when trying to comfort him after that episode in Kirk's quarters. As his hand was laying on my arm, I looked over
the writing, again wishing the matrix would kick in. Then, slowly but surely, the words started to change. The English became French and I knew how to translate it. I quickly scribbled down what I saw before it went away.

Had I just willed the translation matrix back into functioning? I had thought that was impossible, that only the Doctor could manipulate the matrix like that. Strange...

"It's done," I said triumphantly, holding the tablet above my head.

Bones glanced over, just packing away the last of his equipment. "Good, now make sure they read it and read it well."

I turned to Xorthen, holding the device for her to see.

"These are the doctor's instructions," I told her in French. "Make sure to copy this down and follow it precisely."

Xorthen's head bobbed up and down in slow motion nods as she read over the list. "It is now copied into my brain. I will share it with the others once you are gone."

We smiled at each other as I stood from my seat to bow to her, and she to me.

"Thank you for helping us," I said.

"And thank you for returning the favor."

As we rose from our salute, Bones clapped a hand on my shoulder.

"Ready to go?" he asked, looking down at Chekov as well.

"I think so," my Russian comrade replied.

"We are," I said as I stepped away from the table. "Let's get back and tell Scotty he needs to get his people down here to pick up the fuel."

"Again, thank you," Xorthen said as we beamed back to the ship.
I took my seat at the communications station once more. This chair was beginning to feel familiar, like a home. Uhura smiled over at me as I sat down.

"Spock told me what happened," she said discreetly. "I can't say I blame you for having a crush on him, but I really think you and Chekov will get along."

I tried to smile politely, but, for some reason, I still wasn't completely over Spock. I knew it was silly, but my chest still labored in disappointment at the mention of his name. I kept my fingers crossed that being with Chekov would help with that.

Just then, Kirk came bounding over to us. He hunkered down between Uhura's chair and mine, placing his elbows on the armrests.

"So what happened with Chekov earlier?" he asked, his face unnervingly close to me.

I couldn't help but smile down at him. He was acting like that kid in the schoolyard who knows who likes who and tries to help them get together by any means possible. It was really quite adorable.

"Spock helped us get through some difficult hurdles," I answered him. "I...I hav--had feelings for Spock until I found out that Chekov likes me." I felt silly saying this to him, like I was twelve again and gossiping with the girls in hushed tones about which boy was the cutest or most datable.

As the words left my mouth, Sulu joined us, poking his head in beside Kirk's.

"So. How'd it go?" he said simply.

I glanced back at Sulu and Kirk, a look of disbelief and humor on my face. They looked up at me with wide, puppy eyes. I caught a glimpse of Chekov, sitting at his station, his head turned in our direction. I could see the look of confusion in his brows, so I gestured for him to come over. He hesitated a moment, then stood to come stand behind Kirk and Sulu, his ridiculous curls bouncing the whole way.

"Vhat is going on here, Keptin? And shouldn't you be at your station, Sulu?"

The two officers turned slowly to find Chekov towering over them as they were knelt down at my side. The sight was rather comical to say the least. Chekov had a pleased grin on his face, and I was softly giggling with Uhura.

The scene was broken up when Spock walked onto the bridge. Everyone quickly straightened and returned to duty as usual. He seemed to know that something was going on and sent a raised eyebrow at Kirk who simply shrugged and returned to his chair. Spock tried his best to shrug off his growing concern for the unprofessionalism on the bridge.

"Captain, I need you to approve the new living arrangements for the oncoming crew members," he said as he approached Kirk.

Kirk glanced over the list, probably not even reading a single name, then signed and dated the document on the tablet.

"Thank you, sir."

Spock bowed and backed away, coming over to the communications station.

"Ensign Sputnik, here is the number of your living quarters," he told me, handing me a card that printed straight from the tablet in his hand. "Please locate the room some time before the last meal of the day."

"I will, sir," I said, taking the card from him and glancing at the number. I placed it inside the top of my boot to use later.

The door to the bridge opened again and an Operations officer came jogging in.

"Sir!" she called. "Mister Scott requests the presence of the translator."

"Interpreter," I muttered under my breath.

"That's you, Sputnik," Kirk said, just barely turning to call over his shoulder.

I left the station and Uhura moved to take over. By now, I knew the route from the bridge to the transporter room. Still, why had they not simply told me to stay in the first place? All this beaming
Back and forth was exhausting. But it was Scotty, and I would do it for him.

I opened my eyes when I felt solid ground under my feet again. I saw two ensigns being beamed up with the new fuel cells, and then my vision went black again. I was quickly tied up, though not without putting up a fight first. I heard Scotty call out from across the room as he went down.

What is going on? Where is Xorthen? Why is this happening?

I didn't hear any other screams or voices being carried away. It must only be me and Scotty. But why just us? What value were we to them?

I was still blindfolded, but I knew they had Scotty next to me and they were dragging us to a holding cell. I heard the sound of doors opening. My hands were released just before a hand pushed me against the diamond wall. Scotty was thrown next to me and the door locked behind us. Quickly, I pulled off my blindfold and searched for our attackers. I saw Xorthen on the other side of the glass door.

"Pourquoi?!" I cried. "Why?! What have we done?"

Xorthen's face was expressionless. "Not you. Your friend."

I looked at Scotty. "Him? He's just the quirky, Scottish engineer! What has he done?"

"Not him." The tone of her voice struck fear into my core. Her icy gaze chilled me to silence.

"Your friend who calls himself the Doctor."

My body was shaking. "How do you...?"

"You have time energy on your skin. We detected it on your ship when you were still many lightyears away. The Doctor and his friends are the only ones who have this energy on them. He owes us a debt. We sabotaged your ship with an acid torpedo so you would have to come to us for help. When we requested medical assistance, you called for the wrong Doctor. We won't make that mistake again. Bring him to us and we will release you and your companions in the sky."

I tried my best to swallow around the lump in my throat. So they didn't actually have any sick people. It was all a show to get the Doctor to come save them. But the Doctor wasn't with us, and now I had to find some way to contact him.

Scotty turned to me, fear in his eyes. "I take it it's not good, eh?"

"No, Scotty. Not good at all."
"Sputnik! Scotty!" Kirk's voice called through the communicator at my hip. "Are you alright? We've detected some sort of tractor beam holding us in the planet's orbit."

Xorthen looked to the device. "You didn't strip them of their weapons?" she asked the sergeant angrily.

He shook his head. She let out a loud sigh and opened the cell door. With one quick movement, she had torn the belt from my waist, then turned and took Scotty's as well. Kirk was still trying to get through to us.

"Sputnik! Scotty! Come in."

Xorthen took one of the communicators and crushed it under her boot, glaring at me as she did so. I unconsciously moved closer to Scotty and we both took a step back, trying to put as much distance between us and the alien as we could.

"What's going to happen now?" I dared to ask before she turned to leave.

"What's going to happen now?" she mimicked my frightened voice. "What's going to happen is you are going to send a message to your Doctor, tell him you are in danger and he will come running to your sauvetage."

I couldn't make the English translation of the last word, but I knew it was something like "rescue".

"And what if he doesn't come?" I ventured to say.

"He will come. He always does."

With that, she left.

There was no answer to Kirk's pleadings in the communicator. Neither of the operations officers on the planet were responding. Kirk cast a worried glance to Spock and Bones who stood to one side of the chair. Spock looked indifferent, though his tense shoulders told a different story. Bones wore his trademark part angry part worried look.

"What's going on?" Bones asked.

Kirk ignored his question, not having an answer to give him. Instead, he turned to Uhura at the comm station.

"Lieutenant, are their communicators working?" he called.

"It appears that only one is working, sir. The other is completely offline."

"So," Spock interjected. "The question is: are they just ignoring our call or are they really in danger?"

Again, Kirk ignored the question.

"Scotty!" he shouted into the communicator. "Damnit, Scotty. Respond!"

The tension in the air caused by the sound of silence was horrifying. Two of their own, alone and without a line to the ship. None of the officers on the bridge liked the feeling they were getting.

"Sir!"

Kirk turned to the front of the room where the voice had come from.

"What is it?"

"The tractor beam we detected is pulling us closer to the planet."

Bones shook his head with a sigh. This wasn't shaping up to be a good day. "Jim, we're obviously under attack. We need to send for reinforcements."

Kirk turned to the communication panel. "Lieutenant, can you get a read on their communicators, find out where they are?"

"No, sir. The signal is being jammed by the planet's shields. Honestly, there is no way to be sure our messages are getting through."

Spock stepped toward the chair. "Captain, I agree with Doctor McCoy. I believe the Zetanoid have our officers and are holding the ship hostage. This is not an amiable situation."

We're under attack."

I let myself relax for a moment before sitting against the wall of the cell. Scotty followed suit. "Are you alright?" he asked me.

The only answer I could give was a short nod. I was fighting a pain rising in my chest. I knew this pain well. It had stopped me in my tracks many times before. It had been getting better since I started travelling, but here I was in a very stressful situation and the panic attacks were coming back. It made sense, but I really didn't need this on top of everything else that was happening.

I did the only thing I knew to do. I started my breathing exercises. Breathe nice and deep through my nose, then slowly out the imaginary straw between my lips. Calm myself. Hush little heart of mine. You'll be alright. Hush.

Xorthen and her companions returned just when Scotty was going to ask me what I was doing. "Here is your communication device," she said, holding my communicator out to me through a small opening in the glass door. "We have put a shock device on it, so if you say something we don't like, I simply press this button in my hand," she showed it to me, "and you will be unconscious for the next half hour."

I took the communicator gingerly from her outstretched fingers. Scotty moved next to me, waiting to hear what Kirk and the crew would tell us. "Captain Kirk," I said slowly after taking a deep breath. "Sputnik?!"

"Yes, Captain. It's me. Scotty's here too."

"Good God, woman, you had us scared to death. Are you both alright?"

"Yes, sir. We are unharmed, but we are being held prisoner by the Zetanoids."

"What? Why? What have you done to them?"

"Nothing, sir." My chest was hurting again. I took slow, calculated breaths to steady the beating of my heart. "They...they want...they request the presence of someone I know. He was with me when we were assigned to each ship back at Federation headquarters. I don't know which ship he was assigned to. He's called the Doctor. I don't know if he used another name or..." deep breaths, "...or not. But if you ask for the Doctor, he will respond. Please, send a message to the other ships. We need him."

There was a short pause on the other end, then Kirk's voice came over loud and clear. "We've sent a signal to all Federation ships within range. We'll find him and bring him here."

"Thank you, sir."

The communicator turned off and Xorthen extended her hand once more to receive it. I handed it over. "Le Docteur vient," I informed her.

"Bon."
"Uhura, you got that message going out?"
"Yes, Captain. It has been sent to all Federation ships we can reach."
"Good. Hopefully we'll find this Doctor soon. In the meantime, we need to devise a way to get Sputnik and Scotty to safety should we not find him."
"Captain!"
Kirk turned to find Spock entering the bridge. "What is it Mister Spock?"
"I've just come from engineering. The fuel cells that the Zetanoids gave us are empty."
"Damnit!" Kirk slammed a fist on the control panel of his chair, accidently turning on the PA system. "Damnit!" he shouted again. This time, the whole ship heard it. Spock stepped forward to switch the microphone off.
"We need a plan," Kirk repeated. "Are we allowed to hurt them since they've been hostile to our crew?"
Spock searched his memory. "Technically, no. Though I suppose that if we do not use excessive force, Starfleet command will see it fit to overlook the technicality."
Everyone in the vicinity turned a questioning eye to the Commander.
"What did you say?" Uhura asked.
"I sai--"
"Yes we know what you said," Kirk interrupted. "What she means is: are you serious? You are talking about overlooking technicalities?"
Spock paused, looking around at the crew. "We are Starfleet. We do not leave anyone behind, especially our own."
Kirk grinned. "That's the Spock I want on my crew."

"Attention crew! The USS-Enterprise has requested the correspondence of someone called the Doctor. If there is any such person aboard the USS-Bradbury, please report to the bridge immediately."
All eyes in the medical bay turned to the man in the corner. He had heard the message as well, but it hadn't quite registered to him what had been said. This area of the ship heard requests for doctors all the time.
The message repeated.
"Will the Doctor please report to the bridge?"
He heard his name that time.
"Doctor, they're calling for you," one of the nurses next to his station said.
"I know," he breathed. He started for the door, but stopped short, realizing he had no clue where to find the bridge since he had spent all his time on the ship in the med bay. "Can one of you direct me to the bridge?"

One of the senior officers left her station, telling some of the new interns to take her place. She led the Doctor to a turbolift where they rode to the top of the ship and stepped out onto the bridge.
"You called for me?" the Doctor said, a smile on his face as he swaggered toward the captain.
"You're the Doctor?" asked Captain Abbott.
"That would be me," he answered with his infectious charm. He could feel the tension in the air when he walked onto the bridge and felt the need to calm everyone down.
"The Enterprise is requesting your presence." The captain gave him a disapproving look and the Doctor knew that it meant that the Enterprise was in trouble. And if they were requesting him, that meant that Kristen had to be on that ship. Finally! They had found each other.
"Then let's go as soon as possible," the Doctor said, gesturing to the stars.
Captain Abbott still didn't look pleased, but he turned to his helmsmen and gave the order to set a course for the Enterprise's location.
"I hope for your sake they're alright," he muttered after giving the command. "I doubt that Starfleet will see this in a good light if the Enterprise doesn't return safely."

The Doctor tried not to let his anxiety show. He knew it was the only thing that would keep them going.

--

Kirk, Bones, and Spock had just begun to throw around ideas on how to safely get Scotty and Sputnik back on the ship without getting anyone injured. It was proving to be a daunting task.

"No we can't bust through there," Bones was saying. "They've got guards on every exit in that room. The med bay is not a safe bet."

"Not only that but I am certain that they have shielded the planet," Spock added. "Beaming down will be a futile attempt at rescue."

Kirk sighed. "So we take a hovercraft down. That should be able to get through their shields and we can get fairly close to the building. Do either of you know where the holding cells are?"

Bones shook his head. "I only saw the med bay."

"Based on the general schematic I saw while touring the place," said Spock, "I would think that the holding cells would be somewhere on the south side of the building. It is backed up against a mountain, which would make escape next to impossible."

"Good, we'll try there first."
"Captain!"

Uhura turned around in her seat. "We have an answer to our distress signal."

She flipped a switch at her station and started broadcasting the response.

"This is the USS-Bradbury. We have located the Doctor on our ship. We are en route. ETA: three minutes. We will hand him over to you as soon as we arrive. Captain Abbott out."

Everyone on the bridge breathed a sigh of relief. Kirk slumped over, letting his shoulders relax for the first time in half an hour.

"Alright, we'll see what this Doctor has to say and go from there," he told Bones and Spock. Both officers nodded. Soon they had a message coming from the transporter room.
"Captain, the Doctor is on board. He is being escorted to the bridge now."

Spock turned around to face the door to the bridge. "Time to find out what he knows."

The doors opened and a man in a science uniform stepped across the threshold. He came to stand in front of the three officers, a careless grin on his face.

"Hello. How can I help you, gentlemen?"

Spock turned to Uhura. "Lieutenant, send a message to Sputnik. We have found the Doctor."

She nodded and turned away to perform the task. Spock turned back to the Doctor narrowing his eyes at the man. But it was Kirk who spoke to the newcomer.

"Tell us everything you know about the Zetanoids," he demanded through clenched teeth.

At the mention of the alien name, the Doctor's grin faded. His lips moved, like he was saying something, but no sound came out. Still, the three officers knew what he had said, the same thing they had all been thinking since the ordeal had begun.

"Oh, no."
Help Is On The Way

Scotty and I had taken each other's hands, both of us clinging for something to keep our heads steady in the cell that seemed to be spinning. He looked to be doing better than me, but I had no idea what was going on inside his head. I was beginning to wonder if we would ever be released from this fresh hell when I realized that my breaths matched Scotty's. Inhale. Exhale. It was beginning to feel as though this would be the rest of my life, stuck in an alternate reality with no chance of escape, breathing in time with the man holding my hands in his, the man that was neither Chekov nor the Doctor.

That was the moment that Xorthen came into view again.
"Your friends in the sky are calling you," she said, almost tauntingly as she held the communicator out to me.

I was stiff from tensing my muscles for so long, yet somehow I managed to make it across the cell to take the small box from her hand.
"Sputnik here," I said into the microphone.
"Sputnik, we have located the Doctor," Uhura's voice told me. "He is aboard the Enterprise right now."

Suddenly, a wave of relief washed over me. He was here. I had been strong for as long I as I could without him. Finally, I wasn't left to my own devices anymore.
"C-can I speak with him?" I asked tentatively.
"Hold on."
The line went silent for a moment and then I heard it come back on.
"Kris? You alright?"
Tears spilled over my cheeks. He was here! He really was!
"Yeah, I'm fine," I said, wiping my face clean. "Are you coming? Are you going to get me out of here?"
"Yeah, of course. Just what exactly have you gotten yourself into?"
I let out a nervous laugh. "I honestly have no idea. Please hurry."
He paused. "I'll be there soon. Just hold on a bit longer, alright?"
"Okay," I answered.
Uhura came back on the line. "We'll be sending a team down to get you within the next ten minutes. See if you can't get them to lower their shields. And keep Scotty safe."

With that, the communicator was silent. I handed it back to Xorthen.
"What did they say?" she asked, looking down at me.
"They're coming," I informed her. "You'll need to lower your shields for them to get through."
She gave me a frown but took the device and left, shouting at the officers at the end of the hall. I turned to Scotty.
"You hear that?"
"Sure did!" he said. "We need to figure out how to help them find us."
I looked around at the walls of the cell. "The diamond walls; can we turn them into a transmitter?"
Scotty laughed. "With what? We have no wires, no radio to send the signal. Besides, diamonds aren't very conductive. I do, however, have this." He reached down to his boot and pulled something from the top of it. "This, my American friend, is a calculator."

I rolled my eyes. "Great. What are we gonna do? Find the square root of the cosine of seventy-two?"
"Don't you go bashin' on mah calculator now, misseh. This might just save our arses. We can use it to send out an SOS. Though, I'll need some sort of amplifier..."

We searched the cell for anything that could be used, then turned to search ourselves. My eyes fell on the metal badge on his shirt.
"Would that work?" I asked, pointing.
He looked down. "Actualleh..." He ripped it off, leaving a small hole to be patched up later, and began taking the calculator apart. I'll be honest. I don't actually know what he did, but he had wires wrapped around the badge and the circuit board laid out on the floor when it was finished.

"That should do it," he said triumphantly. "But now what are we going to do if they come back?"

He looked down at his torn shirt and the contraption at our knees.

"Up against the wall," I instructed. "Put it behind your back and..." I laid my head on his chest, covering the rip with my cheek. "There."

"I don't think Mister Chekov will be happy about this when he hears about it," Scotty chuckled. I shook my head. I couldn't think about that just now.

--

Chekov rose from his station. "Permission to speak, Keptin."

Kirk turned from the newcomer to address Chekov. "What is it, Mister Chekov?"

"Sir, there is not enough time to talk about this. We must go now and find Sputnik and Scotty. They might be in danger."

The words came out of his mouth so quickly that Kirk almost missed what he had said.

"He's right," the Doctor agreed. "Telling you everything I know about the Zetanoids right now would be useless if they are dead. Our time would be better spent forming a plan of action."

"Please, Keptin," Chekov urged.

Kirk nodded. "Okay, Bones what do you suggest?"

Bones shifted uneasily. "I suggest using a distraction. Keep the Zetanoids occupied while a team goes to find our officers."

"GOOD IDEA!" The Doctor moved toward the viewer screen, pulling out what looked like a large silver pen. "What planet is it we are orbiting?"

"Conran Zeta was the name they gave us," Spock offered.

"Good. So they stayed, did they?"

Spock sent Kirk a raised eyebrow. Kirk could only shrug at the glance. As he did, a strange noise came from the pen that the Doctor held and a schematic of the planet below appeared on the viewer.

"What are the coordinates of their location?" the Doctor tossed over his shoulder.

"Forty-one and five degrees south, seventy and fifteen degrees west," was the answer given him.

He pressed a button on his pen and the viewer zoomed in on the building where Scotty and Sputnik were being held captive.

"What is that?" Spock asked, pointing to the device in the Doctor's hand, pure curiosity taking over his sense of urgency.

"It's my sonic screwdriver," the Doctor answered. "Pretty handy, isn't it?" He sent a wink at the officers behind him.

"Right, so how does this help us?" said Bones, stepping closer.

"Gentlemen, we have the floorplan of the building. And it sounds like..." The Doctor put the screwdriver next to his ear, listening intently. "Oh yes! Yes, she did. Smart girl! They made a transmitter." He pointed the screwdriver at the ceiling and pressed a button. Three short pips could be heard over the PA system. It was an SOS signal.

"I'll start tracking it," Uhura said.

"No need. I've got the location." Another press of the button and the viewer had zoomed onto the section of floorplan which contained the holding cells. "Our friends are right there," the Doctor said with another smile.

"Great," Kirk exclaimed. "Now we know where they are. We just need to figure out how to get them out."

"I can guarantee the Zetanoids will raise their shields again as soon as we have beamed down to the planet," Spock interjected.

"Then we need three teams," said the Doctor. "I need at least one more person to come with me to negotiate with the Zetanoids. Another team we need to go find Sputnik and your engineer. The third team will locate the control room and disable the shields." He flipped the sonic screwdriver once in the air, then tucked it away in his boot. "Having an entire crew at your disposal is nice. I may need to
consider getting one of my own.”
The Search Is On

The officers started to leave the bridge, each putting in their ideas and deciding who would be on each team. The Doctor slipped right into the swing of the Enterprise crew. They had just entered the outside corridor when Kirk was stopped by a hand on his shoulder.

"Keptin Kirk! Wait!"

The Doctor spun on his heel along with the other men at the exclamation. Chekov stood behind them, clenching his fists, trying to pluck up the courage to ask what was on his mind.

"Sir, I would like to go with you," the ensign finally managed. "I vant to hyelp find Meester Scott and Miss Sputnik."

Kirk hesitated. "Chekov, you haven't been on an away mission yet and I don't thin--"

"Neither has he!" Chekov said, indicating the Doctor.

"Yes, but--"

"No! I vill go! I von't be in ze way, I promise."

No one knew what to say. He had every right to be on the team, but with this being his first time and such a delicate operation to take on...

"Let him come," said the Doctor. "He's obviously motivated. Let him lead the team to find our captives."

"Oh, I didn't mean I vanted to lead, I just vante--"

"No, he's right," Kirk said with a smile. "You should be the one to find her."

The Doctor studied the look that Kirk gave the ensign. Just what had been happening while Kristen was on this ship? He shrugged the thought away, replacing it with the information he needed to talk with the Zetanoids.

"Are we going then?" he asked, starting to walk down the hallway.

"Come on, men," Kirk said, louder than necessary. "Chekov, you and Spock go find the captives. I'll go with the Doctor to negotiate. Bones, you monitor the situation from up here. Sulu has the con and you're his first officer. Spock, when you find Scotty, take him with you to the control room and get their shields lowered. It's our only way out of there."

"What about Kris?" the Doctor asked, turning around to face Kirk. "Where is she going after they're rescued?"

Kirk turned to Chekov who looked like he was about to have a mental break down.

"Um..." the ensign stammered. "Uh... She vill come with me to...find ze Keptin and ze Doctor?"

He said it as a question and his eyes searched Kirk's face for any sign of affirmation. But the Captain stood emotionless for what seemed like hours to Chekov. Finally, his lips cracked a smile.

"Good thinking, Chekov. Bring her to us when you find her. She might be able to help make negotiations. Spock told me she made friends with one of the Zetanoids. We could use that to our advantage."

"Jim!" Bones said harshly just before the group entered the transporter room. "What happens if they kill you and the Doctor?" His face was grim. "What do we do then?"

Kirk didn't speak for a moment. He stared at the floor, not saying anything. The Doctor grit his teeth. He knew exactly what was going on in Kirk's mind. He had lost count of the many times he had been in the Captain's position and had to make these difficult calls.

Kirk made no reply. Maybe he couldn't. He simply looked at Bones one more time and moved past the men between him and the door. Spock stepped into Bones' line of vision.

"We carry on."

Bones nodded. He knew that's what Spock would say, and he also knew that was what Kirk would want. They had to make sure the collective was safe, even if it meant losing their Captain. Kirk had become more and more self-sacrificing during their time in deep space. Bones admired him for it. The kid was growing up.

"Alright," the medical officer assented. He turned away to return to the bridge.
The away team was given their utility belts, fully equipped with phasers and communicators and any other gadgets the team might need.

"Set phasers to stun," Kirk said as he stepped onto the beaming platform. "We don't want to hurt these guys."

Each did as he was told except for the Doctor who had refused to take a belt. Instead, he checked to make sure his sonic screwdriver was secure in his boot.

"Ready, guys?" Kirk asked over his shoulder.

"Allons-y."

"Mr. Hansel, engage."

Kirk and the Doctor were beamed down first. Immediately following their departure, Chekov and Spock mounted the platform and were beamed into the holding area. They materialized holding their phasers in front of them. Spock scanned the surroundings with his eyes, looking for any sign of an enemy hiding. He saw none, so he turned to face Chekov, pointing his phaser up at the ceiling.

"According to the schematic that the Doctor showed us, they should be in a cell down that corridor," the commander said, pointing to the opening in the wall at the far end of the room.

"Zen lyet's go," Chekov replied.

Spock stopped him by grabbing his sleeve.

"Mister Chekov, it would be wise of you to hold your phaser ready."

The ensign shrank from his touch and did as he was told, mimicking Spock in his movements as they headed down the corridor. They checked each cell they passed. Some other prisoners were there, mostly Zetanoids. They must have been criminals of some sort being held for their misdeeds. Chekov tried his best to stay quiet, but ended up not breathing in his effort. He heard something behind them and turned, his throat catching. A guard stood between them and the exit. Not even a second passed before the ensign pulled the trigger and the guard dropped with a soft thud. Spock whipped around to see Chekov's handiwork.

"Well done, Mister Chekov," he said quietly.

They continued down the corridor. Chekov found it easier to let himself breathe now. That hadn't been so difficult. Maybe he was cut out for away missions, not just sitting at the helm.

"Spock! Chekov!"

The two rescuers turned to see Sputnik and Scotty sitting against the far wall in the cell to their left. They seemed to be just waking up from a daze, though when they saw the officers outside the cell, they sprang to their feet and started for the door.

"Miss Sputnik! Mister Scott!" Chekov exclaimed, pressing a hand against the glass.

Spock wasted no time in looking at the control panel. "This panel does not seem to be in any standard format. I am not sure how to open the door."

A shot was fired down the corridor, past the officers outside the glass. Chekov turned and stunned the guard who had tried to kill them.

"Mister Spock, we don't have much time," he said, leaning over the commander's shoulder.

"I know, Mister Chekov. I'm trying my best."

Scotty traded places with Sputnik to try to get a better look at the panel Spock was working at.

"Mister Spock, try flipping that switch there and then pressing the number two and then five."

Spock followed the suggestion, and the door was opened. It retracted into the wall and admitted the captives access outside. Sputnik threw her arms around Chekov's neck before being handed a utility belt by Spock. Scotty was buckling his around his waist and they were starting down the corridor the way Spock and Chekov had come.

"So what's the plan?" Sputnik asked.

"Mister Scott is to come with me to disable the planet's shields so we can beam back to the Enterprise," Spock answered. "Ensign Sputnik, you and Mister Chekov are to find the Captain and your friend, the Doctor, to help make negotiations with the Zetanoids."

Sputnik nodded. "Alright. See you back on the ship."

With that, each team split to their respective directions, Spock and Scotty heading for the control
room and Chekov and Sputnik to the foyer where they would find Kirk and the Doctor.

--

Chekov stunned another guard before turning into a hall. He and I followed it to the end where a flight of stairs led up to our destination. Chekov took the first step up, but I heard another step coming from behind me, so I spun on my heel and shot at the guards coming for us. I missed, of course. I wasn't that great of a shot. After trying again, I hit one of them and Chekov took out another at the same time. Three more remained. I was able to hit one as my companion quickly disabled the other two. Then we turned and ran up the stairs.

We stopped just behind Kirk and the Doctor, who were standing defensively facing Xorthen and a few other Zetanoids. Chekov and I took up positions, he standing beside Kirk with his phaser raised while I went to the Doctor's side. The Doctor glanced at me, looking at the phaser in my hands and my disheveled appearance. I saw him grimace at the gunlike contraption, but smiled when he winked at me, looking pleased with my performance.

"You will tell us where it is," Xorthen said. "Or you and all your friends will die."

The Doctor, turned away from me and I turned my attention to the problem at hand.

"We'll die?" he said, placing his hands in his pockets. "Isn't that a little cliche? You couldn't be a bit more...original? Come on. Make me a threat that really means something."

Xorthen stared, her face blank. He had gotten to her.

He stepped forward, moving from my peripheral vision. I caught a glimpse of Kirk's face as he became visible. He seemed lost. He didn't understand what was happening, but he still stood his ground. The translation matrix was at work in these negotiations. I could tell because it had switched off inside my head again. I only knew what the Doctor was saying by the bits and pieces I knew outside of the matrix.

"You want me to tell you where it is, but you already know," my traveling companion continued. "It's in all your bedtime stories. It's written in your history books. Just go take a look."

"We have," Xorthen sneered. "We've checked every database we know of, but there are no coordinates for Alpha Zeta."

"That's because it's gone."

Xorthen and her companions glanced at each other. This was obviously news to them. I wasn't sure what this debate was about, but I knew that, most of the time, when we ceased to be useful to the alien menace, they tended to try to kill us.

"Shoot them," Xorthen commanded.

And there it was.

Kirk and Chekov ducked, seeing the Zetanoids reach for their weapons. I ran for cover behind a column. The Doctor reached for his sonic screwdriver tucked away in his boot, just missing the shot aimed for him. When he stood straight again, he pointed the sonic at their guns and shocked them with a press of the button. The weapons dropped to the floor and the Doctor flipped the sonic in the air, a smug look on his face. Then he turned serious.

"Stop this! Stop it now! Why are you doing this? I brought you here so you would be safe. This planet is a replacement for the one lost in your civil war. What happened to the peacekeepers of your race? Where are Donyav and Surtek and Jahal?"

I emerged from behind the column. "Jahal?"

He turned to me, squinting. "What?"

"You said 'Jahal'. She is the daughter of Jahal," I said, pointing to Xorthen.

She shrank from my gesture and the Doctor's gaze.

"Really?" he said slyly, turning to her. "Daughter of Jahal?"

She nodded. "It is true. Jahal was my father. However, he died long ago. He used to tell me stories of a man who took us away from our home and stranded us here. He would never tell me where our home was, so when he died, the only one who knew any longer was the Doctor from his stories. I and my generation began looking for him, and now we have found you. We just want to go home."

I saw a trace of sadness in her eyes, like a child who was lost and trying to find her way back to the safety at the side of her parents. The Doctor saw it too and he took pity on her. His voice
softened and his shoulders relaxed.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly. "Really, I am...so sorry. But Alpha Zeta was destroyed in the war. Your father and his comrades came to me for help, so I brought them here. You misunderstood his stories. I helped your race survive. So please, let this go. Let these people free. They have nothing to do with this. This crusade of yours is pointless. There is nowhere for you to go."

Xorthen seemed to turn the words over in her head. She didn't like the idea that all she had done was for naught. Time passed so slowly in those few minutes. It felt like the earth had revolved around the sun five million times before she finally spoke.

"It's...gone? Our home? Gone?"

I saw her eyes well up and drop to look at the floor, no longer able to hold the Doctor's gaze. She took a step back, almost as if she had been shot. I chanced a glance at the other Zetanoids. They, too, looked lost and confused at hearing this news.

"Why didn't my father tell me this?" Xorthen asked, turning to the Doctor for an answer.

He shook his head, his shoulders slumping like they do when he's at a loss for words. "I can't answer that, Xorthen. I'm sure he had his reasons. Perhaps he wanted you to keep the idea of your home planet alive to give you and your generation hope and inspiration." He was grasping at straws, trying his best to soothe her pain. He shook his head again before continuing. "But I can assure you that Alpha Zeta was destroyed. You were born just before the evacuation. It was your birth that brought your father to me. He wanted to protect you and the future of your race, so he and his friends sought my help to find a new planet where you might thrive. And so you have. Your father would be proud of you and all you have accomplished here."

Xorthen wiped her cheek of a stray tear, composing herself to answer the Doctor's story.

"He said as much before he passed," she said as she squared her shoulders. She paused for a moment, searching the Doctor's face. "I have cast my gaze on you and I find no deception in your words. You speak the truth and I believe you."

The Doctor's face brightened, relief flooding the room. Chekov and I lowered our phasers as Xorthen and her companions loosened from their offensive posture and she went to stand directly in front of the Doctor.

"We will let you and your friends go free," she told him. "We will also make amends to our historical records. The Doctor will no longer be remembered as an enemy of our race."

She crossed an arm over her chest, placing a hand on the opposite shoulder and extending her elbow toward him. He hesitated before realizing what was happening. He copied her movements and touched his elbow to hers.

"Please accept our apologies," she said, bowing her head.

He smiled and did the same. "Apology accepted."
Kirk called Spock and Scotty to tell them that all was well, to call off the operation. They were escorted to the foyer by a team of Zetanoids. Xorthen had somehow let everyone know that they were not to attack us anymore. Perhaps they had the power of telepathy.

"I'm glad that's over," Scotty said as he and Spock joined us. "That was rather dodgy for a while, am I right?"

Spock made no response. Chekov and I smiled at the engineering officer while Kirk ignored him, turning to me.

"What exactly happened just now? I didn't understand any of it."

I glanced over my shoulder. The Doctor was busy talking with the Zetanoids, so there was time to explain.

"Well, here's what happened."

I told them everything from the point at which Chekov and I entered and witnessed the ordeal. They nodded slowly as I spoke. It felt good to have so many people actually listening to me. So rarely did I ever get a word in edgewise at home, whether it be with my friends or my family. I couldn't keep from smiling as I told the story.

Just as I finished, the Doctor came to join us.

"Are we ready to go home?" he asked.

I tried to ignore the sinking feeling in my stomach. I wasn't ready to leave this place. Once we did, we would not be able to come back. But I knew that we needed to go back to our own universe and close the tear in reality caused by our coming here.

"Repairs are being made now," Kirk informed us. "Captain Abbott is kindly lending us some of their fuel cells so we can make it back to headquarters and restock the ship."

The Doctor nodded. "Good. How long until we return?"

"We'll be there in a few hours once we leave," was Spock's reply. "We will not be able to travel at maximum warp for the low fuel supply, but we will make it back in due time."

Goodbyes were said to the Zetanoids. Each member of the team shook hands and touched elbows with those that were present. Xorthen came to me and touched my shoulder, her eyes sad and serious.

"I'm sorry that I imprisoned you. I didn't want to, but I didn't know how else to get the Doctor to come. Please forgive me."

"Of course I forgive you," I said with a small smile. I took her hand from my shoulder and held it between both of my own. "Still friends?"

She smiled back at me. "Ouais."

I let go and stepped back as the beaming process began. I waved to her as I felt my body dematerialize. I remember thinking that I wished we had had more time to get to know each other, to learn from one another like we had planned the first time we met. I still wonder what we might have talked about, what we might have shared.

Once back on the ship, we left the transporter room to regroup with the crew on the bridge. Uhura came to greet Spock with a kiss. I watched, and this time I wasn't so jealous. Sulu stood to allow Kirk to take his seat in the chair. Bones clapped Scotty on the back and Chekov went to tell Sulu all about his first away mission. The Doctor and I stayed by the door, watching the scene unfold. I looked up when I felt him take my hand.

"You did well, Sputnik," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "I'm proud of you."

"Well, I did learn from the best," I replied, beaming. Then I turned serious. "But I have a question."

"What's that?"

"How could you have saved the Zetanoids in the past? Have you been to this universe before?"

He shook his head. "No. I saved them in our universe, a long time ago." He got that far away look
again, the one he always gets when he thinks of Rose. "I guess the event crossed universal boundaries."

I nodded, looking back to the rejoicing crew. "Guess so."

As the words left my mouth, Chekov came bounding over to halt in front of me. "Miss Sputnik! Miss Sputnik! Kehn ve go now? I haff our date ready!"

The Doctor turned a curious look in my direction. I shrugged to try to lose his interest, but he didn't drop his raised eyebrow.

"It's a long story," I finally told him, letting go of his hand. "If you'll excuse us..."

I turned to Chekov who smiled and led the way into the hall outside the bridge. I waved goodbye to the Doctor over my shoulder as I followed behind him. The door closed on the Doctor's face, still looking at me inquisitively.

--

He made me cover my eyes before he let me into the room, but at the last second, he decided he didn't trust me and insisted on using his hands to cover my eyes for me. He stood behind me, his elbows knocking my shoulders as we struggled to move forward in sync. I thought about how ridiculous we must have looked to passersby. Since my eyes were closed, I could very easily envision the sight of us, stumbling into the room where Chekov had set up something for me. The vision made me giggle.

"Are we there yet?" I asked, touching the fingers wrapped around my face.

"Almost..."

He pushed me forward a bit more and I heard the door close behind us.

"Alright! Zere! Vun, two, three..."

He released his grasp on my head and I felt him step back. I kept my eyes closed for just a moment longer, feeling the ghost of his touch still on my skin. And then I looked.

We must have been in a room at the very edge and top of the saucer. The wall I faced was completely transparent. Whether or not it was glass I wasn't sure. But the entire wall and the cieling above looked out into the stars. We were moving, but moving slow enough that I could watch as each white dot moved past us. It was beautiful. Certainly, I had seen the stars before with the Doctor, but never like this, with the black vastness engulfing the ship except for the few twinkling lights that seemed to float by. It was breathtakingly beautiful.

"It's vonderful, isn't it?"

I looked over at Chekov who had moved to stand right beside me. He looked out the window, eyes drinking in the sight. Something I noticed for the first time was his love for the stars. Certainly, you have to have some sort of aptitude for space to be an explorer like the Enterprise crew was. But the light in his eyes as he watched the sky was more moving than anything I had witnessed before. I had always loved to see people talk about their passion, the way they become excited and start gesticulating wildly because they simply cannot contain themselves. But his was a quiet passion, reserved and silent, and it too was beautiful.

He finally brought himself to look away and turned to find me staring at him. Immediately, I blushed. I hadn't meant for him to see that. Still, he smiled and gestured to the seats in front of us.

"Please, sit down."

I did as I was told. The chair was amazingly comfortable. Big and black like the sky outside, and it could recline back so you could lay down and stare out the cieling as well. Once I sat down, I had no desire to get back up.

"Chekov, this is amazing," I breathed, not looking away from the window.

He sat down beside me. "Please, call me Pavel."

I looked over at him. He sat cross legged, facing me. Suddenly, I felt very weird laying down, so I sat up and faced him as well.

"Well, then you should call me Kris," I said with a coy smile.

He blushed. It was the first time I saw him blush when I knew that's what was happening. Now I reacalled all those times that I had seen it before and realized that he had liked me from the very first moment we met.
"Vell, I hope you like food and music, Kris."

I was glad he turned away from me after he said it because I turned into a puddle of mush. His accent made my name sound wonderful, full of life and sunshine. I wanted him to say it again, but that would have caused my mush to evaporate and that just isn't very polite.

Somehow, I was able to solidify myself when he brought over a tray full of goodies. Some I had never seen before: probably alien delicacies. Others were very familiar: cookies, cupcakes, chocolate. So they still had chocolate in the future. This pleased me quite well.

"Zis is a vatrushka," he informed me, picking up a disc-like cake from the tray. "It is a pastry from my country and it is my favorit!"

I watched him tear the pastry apart, trying his best to split it in half. He grinned as the filling overflowed and stuck to his fingers, then he handed me the smaller half.

"I hope you like it."

I took the pastry from him and tore off a smaller piece to try. It was good. The filling had a strange texture, but it tasted good enough that it didn't matter. I tore off another piece.

"Pavel, this is fantastic!"

He laughed between bites of his half of the vatrushka and I looked up to see what was the matter. He seemed to be laughing at me.

"Nossing. It just sounds funny when you say my name."

I tried my best to look offended, but I'm fairly certain it failed as he burst into fits of giggles. When I realized it was pointless, I changed the subject.

"Didn't you say something about music?"

"Oh! Right!"

He sprang to his feet, leaving the vatrushka on the tray in front of me. Of course, I couldn't resist.

After finding the right controls, he came back and sat down. There was a remote in his hand that he used to control which song played. I listened as the first one started. It was in a different language, one I didn't know, but it sounded wonderful. I kept feeling my voicebox move itself so that if I were to let the sound come out, I would be singing with the man in the song. The language and the key felt good on my voice even though I wasn't singing.

"What language is this?" I asked, looking around for the speakers in the room.

"It's Ukranian," Pavel answered. "Wery close to my language, but not ze same. Do you like it?"

I nodded. "It sounds like it would be fun to sing."

"It's fun to dance to sometimes, too."

I couldn't suppress my laugh. "You dance?"

He seemed a bit hurt, but he carried on with his happy demeanor. "Of course I do! Eweryvun dances vonce in a vhile. Come! Ve dance!"

With that he reached for my hand. I set down my vatrushka, then realized that I still had his hidden behind my back. When he went to take my other hand, he found the pastry in my grasp. He looked from my hand to the tray and back again, then looked up at my face which was twisted into a mischievous grin.

"You took my vatrushka!"

Quickly, he took it from me and placed it on the tray, setting the tray aside and away from me. Then he returned to take my hands in his.

"Now ve dance," he said with a smile.

He clicked the remote to change the song before setting it aside and positioning himself in front of me. I had never danced with anyone other than my sister before, I always playing the male part, so I had no idea how to place my hands and feet. He seemed to get the message.

"It's okay. I'll teach you."

He took my left hand and placed it on his shoulder, then laced his fingers between those on my right hand. His face flushed as he took a step closer so we actually looked like dance partners, not two strangers trying to balance themselves on the subway.

"Now ve go to ze right," he instructed.
I tried my best to step in time with him and the music. I think I only stepped on his feet three times. Before long, I was able to pick up the steps and the rhythm so I was able to make conversation again.

"What is this song?" I asked, nodding to the invisible speakers somewhere overhead.

"Zis song is called Rendezvous," Pavel said, making sure to not lose our progress. "I thought you might like it since zere is a French vord in it."

"Oui. Je l'aime. It's a nice song, even without the French."

I didn't want to look at him. I could feel his eyes watching me and I knew that I would turn to mush again if I looked. So, I laid my head on his shoulder instead. As it turns out, that makes me turn to mush too. But it was nice. Neither of us said anything for a while, just spun around, watching the stars go by as the Enterprise limped back to headquarters. After a while, Pavel finally broke the silence.

"Vhen ve get back to Earth, you're going to leave, aren't you?"

I sighed into his shirt. I didn't want to answer that question, not yet. I didn't want to leave, but I knew I had to. Maybe he would forget me once I crossed back into my universe. Maybe, once the tear in reality was repaired, he would go back to being what he was before and not feel the pain of my leaving. But that didn't change the fact that I would still remember, that I would feel the pain. Though, maybe that was better, for me to bear the burden rather than him. That way, I wouldn't have hurt anyone.

"Yes..." I finally whispered. "I have to go. I'm sorry, Pavel."

Somehow, I had ended up with my arms wrapped around him and I hugged him tighter as I said the apology. I also noticed that he had his arms around me as well.

"It's alright," he said. "I know you vant to go vith ze Doctor. But I vill miss you."

I promised myself I wouldn't think about that yet. I just wanted to enjoy the little time I had left on this ship. This had been one of the best adventures I had had while travelling, and most of it had happened without the Doctor there to hold my hand. I had taken care of myself on this trip. I had proven to myself and to the universes that I can make it on my own, and I didn't want that to go away.

"I'll miss you, too, Pavel," I said.

And I meant it.
Eventually, the dancing stopped and we sat down in our seats to talk and stare at the stars. I don't remember most of the conversation now, as good discussions should remain shrouded in memory, forever preserved in the moment it was held. I do remember that we laughed a lot and smiled and by the time Kirk announced our arrival to Earth, I didn't want to leave that room. More so, I didn't want to leave Pavel, and I feared what he would feel when I had to leave. I held onto the hope that he would forget me when I crossed into my dimension of origin.

"This is the Captain speaking. We will be docking in two minutes. All but essential crew members prepare for transport to headquarters."

Pavel stood and extended a hand to me, helping me to my feet.

"I suppose we should go see if everything on the bridge is in order," I suggested.

"Zat sounds like a good idea."

I had to follow his lead to the bridge as I still had not learned my way around the ship in the half day I had spent on it. The only route I knew was from the bridge to the transporter room and back. Also, I'd had hands clasped around my eyes for most of the trip to this room, so I needed him to guide me. When we arrived at the particular door, Pavel stepped aside to allow me entrance. I tried not to look at him as I passed by, but found it to be more difficult than I expected.

I saw the Doctor standing near the front of the bridge, a group of crew members surrounding him to listen as he explained how they could more efficiently run the ship. I noticed Spock sitting at his own station, pretending to be hard at work but keeping an attentive ear pointed toward the group. Kirk seemed utterly disinterested. The Captain I had seen during the rescue was...older, wiser, calm. I still believed that that Captain was in him, but for the time being, he had returned to Captain Smirk.

"Sputnik!" he exclaimed when he saw me and Pavel move in his peripheral. "Do you have all your things packed up?"

I stepped down from the upper platform with a thump. "I didn't bring anything with me. All I have is this uniform."

Kirk nodded. "Good. Are you going to keep it?"

My eyes widened. I had stolen it out of a supply closet. And I hadn't thought about whether or not I would replace it once we got back.

"I don't know..." I finally said.

Kirk smiled. "The Doctor told us all about how you came to be on my ship. It's okay. You can keep it if you want." He stood and came to slam a hand on my shoulder. "I just wanted to see that look on your face."

I tried to be good-natured about his prank, but found that I couldn't change my expression from one of disgruntled humor. He walked by me and left the bridge, Spock following close behind him. As I watched them leave, I felt someone come up behind me. I turned to see the Doctor, smiling and happy.

"Ready to go?" he asked.

"I don't think I'll ever be ready."

The Doctor started toward the exit, taking me along with a gentle hand on my arm. "I know. I hate this part too."

When we entered the hangar, I saw each member of the crew standing outside the shuttle. There was Scotty, having acquired a new shirt. He waved to me and I smiled back. Spock and Uhura stood close to each other. I had come to respect both of them in their individual personalities and positions. Uhura remained one of my top five heroines and Spock one of the best characters in science fiction. There stood Sulu, quiet and serious as ever, but I saw a hint of a smile on his lips. Pavel went to greet him and I watched as the young Russian spoke excitedly to Sulu. Pavel seemed happy in this moment and I wished to all the stars that he could be happy like this forever. Bones came sauntering in from the right. I watched him join the others, regretting that I hadn't spoken with him more. That's
when I saw Kirk walk down the ramp of the shuttle.

"Coming, guys? She's ready to go," he told us.

We followed him inside. I sat down with the Doctor. Pavel took a seat opposite, keeping his distance for some reason. Everyone else piled in and soon we were off, flying toward earth. I craned my neck to see out the window behind Pavel's head. It wasn't that I had never seen it before, but Earth from a distance has always looked wonderfully small to me and I wanted to see it while I was here, in this universe, in this time.

Entering the atmosphere was a bit shaky, as it usually is, but Kirk maneuvered skillfully through the turbulence and before I knew it, we were landed and exiting the shuttle.

I lead the way to the door, but before I could step out, Bones stopped me in my tracks.

"Hold up. The Captain wants a word with you two." He nodded to the Doctor who stood behind me.

The others filed out and Kirk joined us by the door. Bones also remained behind. I stood at attention the best I could while the Doctor stood with his hands in his pockets. Kirk noticed the difference.

"Relax, Sputnik. You're not in trouble," he said with a grin.

"You wanted to speak with us, sir?" I asked, letting my shoulders drop a little bit.

"Yes. Sputnik. Doctor. Bones and I--and the rest of the crew for that matter--feel that you have done our ship a great service by being here and helping us when we needed it. Had you not been in our universe, our crew would have surely perished at the hands of the Zetanoids."

I didn't have the heart to tell him that the only reason the Zetanoids attacked us was because of me and the time energy I carry on my skin.

"Because we feel so strongly about this," Kirk continued, "we would like to have a special ceremony for you before you leave."

I glanced over at the Doctor. I had no doubt that he had received many ceremonies honoring him in his nine hundred years of traveling, but this was my first. I knew he could see that I was excited when his eyes brightened.

"We will humbly accept this gift of honor," the Doctor replied, turning to face Kirk and Bones.

"Great! Everything should be ready within ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?" I exclaimed. "Have you been preparing for this ever since we started back to Earth?"

Kirk had already left the shuttle, so it was Bones who replied to my question.

"Would you expect anything less from these idiots?"

Ten minutes later, I stood on the bottom step of the entrance to Star Fleet headquarters. The Enterprise crew stood in formation behind me. Kirk stood at the top of the stairs, Spock just behind him. They were all wearing their dress uniforms. I felt so out of place in my everyday uniform.

"Since you didn't actually go to the academy, there is no uniform for you and sharing is kind of forbidden," Uhura had said as she escorted me and the Doctor to our current location. "But these uniforms will do."

Without any warning, Kirk began to speak, bringing my attention abruptly to the present.

"Ensign Kris Sputnik, Doctor. You are here today to receive a medal of commendation for your acts of valor and heroism performed aboard the Starship Enterprise."

Spock revealed two small boxes that looked like ring boxes for proposing. Kirk took one and stepped down to face the Doctor. I tried my best to stand at attention while the Captain pinned the medal to the Doctor's uniform. Then, Kirk took the other box from Spock and moved to me.

He opened the box and pulled out a small pin about as big as a nickel. It was silver and bore the Star Fleet insignia in the center. Kirk pulled the pin back off and reached for the edge of my collar. He pulled it down just enough to stick the pin through the fabric and replace the back. I felt like I was floating. Me. A recognized ally of Star Fleet.

Kirk placed the box in my hand. I knew I was supposed to keep the pin in there, but I also knew that I would be wearing it everywhere I went.
Spock and Kirk returned to the top step.
"Thank you for your service," Kirk said. And as the words left his mouth, his hand raised to his brow. In the same instant every other right hand in the crowd moved in the same fashion. They were saluting us.

I was able to hold back my emotions while we shook hands and exchanged goodbyes with everyone. I honestly can't remember much of what was said because my head was buzzing with excitement at the time. But I remember the warm smiles and the firm handshakes. I think I may remember seeing Scotty's eyes getting a bit more watery than usual. The sentiment was mutual. After all, we had endured imprisonment together.

Finally, the farewells were finished and I and the Doctor tore away from the crew. Before we went inside headquarters, I beckoned Pavel to follow. I wanted to say goodbye to him one more time before I left.

We stopped just outside the conference room where the TARDIS was parked. Fingers crossed it was still there. The Doctor looked at me with an upturned eyebrow, then glanced at Pavel, and then back to me. I got the message and pulled Pavel aside while the Doctor went inside the room.

"Well..." I started awkwardly. "I guess this is our final goodbye."

Pavel, with his cap underneath his arm, took my hands in his. "I vill miss you, Kristen."

"я буду скучать по тебе тоже Павел. I'll miss you, Pavel. I learned that just for you."

He smiled, a genuine smile. He loved hearing me speak Russian, and I regretted not being able to experience that smile again.

I knew I had to do it just once, so I let myself lean forward and plant a kiss on his cheek. When I drew back, I almost laughed at the color and expression of his face. As the sound was about to escape, the Doctor poked his head out the door.

"Ready to go when you are," he said.

I nodded, turning back to Pavel as the Doctor slipped back into the room. I pulled away, but I didn't know what to say or do, so I did the first thing that came to mind. I raised my hand, my fingers parted in the middle and said, "Live long and prosper."

This time, Pavel was the one who laughed. He mimicked the Vulcan gesture with some difficulty and responded between chuckles. "жить долго и процвеать."

I smiled one last time and ducked into the conference room. The hatch closed before anyone could get a good look at what was standing in the corner and I made my way over to it. Stepping inside the TARDIS again, I took a deep breath to steady myself. So much had just happened and I hadn't yet had time to process it all. But the familiar smell of the TARDIS and the heartwarming sight of the Doctor, in his blue suit again, made me feel at ease.

"So we may need to make one stop before I take you back home," he was saying. "Is that alright?"

He stopped what he was doing to squint at me, waiting for an answer.
I swung my arms as I stepped toward him. "That's fine."
He didn't cease squinting at me. "You gonna keep that?"
He nodded to my uniform and I looked down at it, just now realizing I still had it on.
"I don't see why not," I said. "Captain Kirk said I could."
He shrugged, turning back to the console. "Can't argue with the Captain, now can you?"

I grinned as the TARDIS began to wheeze to life.
"No, you can't."

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