Winds Against a Star
by Valyria

Summary

An obsession with a brilliant young cadet forces Spock to confront what it is to be both Vulcan and Human. A Spock/Uhura origins story set at the Academy. Mildly AU.

Notes

AN:
i. I have no beta so you will encounter the occasional typo. Also I'm not american so please don't pm me about my spelling or punctuation. Embrace the s's and extra u's. They are your friends!

ii. It's mildly AU - eg. Nyota meets Captain Pike & the shipyards are moved, but it's more or less compliant with the movie.

iii. It's suuuuper melodramatic and trope-y, (cause that's how I roll), but I hope not too OOC.
Chapter 1

Winds against a Star

"The darts of toil and sorrow, sent
Against your peaceful beauty, are
As foolish and as impotent
As winds that blow against a star"

- As Winds That Blow Against A Star by Joyce Kilmer

Prologue

Application to Starfleet academy is open to all citizens of federation planets. Despite this fact, 78.2% of students are human. 68.2% of these humans are of Caucasian decent and 72.9% are male. For these reasons, the presence of two female cadets - an Orion and a human of African descent, stood out in Lieutenant Commander Spock's first 'Advanced Phonology I' lecture during the second year of his tenure as a professor at the Academy. The two females also counted among only twelve first year students taking his class which indicated intelligence or dedication beyond that of their peers.

Although he gave them no especial attention, he was pleased by their presence. He had noted a small but steady increase in both non-human and female cadets since his own arrival from Vulcan six years earlier. He hoped these newest arrivals, the female Orion especially, (to his knowledge there were no other female Orions either at the Academy or serving in Starfleet), would graduate successfully. Greater diversity amongst Starfleet officers could only strength the service. Spock made these idle observations over the course of only a few seconds as he scanned over his newest cohort of students before beginning his lecture.

Beyond that initial idle speculation, Spock did not give additional thought to either female until 87 days, 7 hours and 16 minutes later.

*Spock*

The Campus was empty during the mid-semester break. Most students had returned home or banded together into groups to journey to Los Angeles or Tijuana in the south for a week of what Spock's mother would call 'Ill-informed drunken debauchery'. 'Debauchery' seemed too strong a
word for the particular excesses the students usually indulged in, (for the most part unpleasant terran beer and short term sexual relationships), but Amanda Grayson was prone to hyperbole. Spock had no doubt many of these revellers would be absent from his lectures or sit bleary eyed and yawning when classes resumed.

He had marked the assessments from three of his classes and was part way through his 'Advanced Phonology I' assignments. These took longest to mark since the curriculum for languages subjects required both oral and written assessment. Although the material tested was simple in his estimation - introductory courses in the three languages of the Federation's founding members apart from standard - the testing for his Advanced Applied Warp Thermodynamics class was far more straightforward. For the most part automated marking was sufficient and he was able to grade his entire class within hours of their final test. Xenolinguistics in contrast, did not lend itself to automated marking. Multiple choice or problem solving tasks didn't accurately test the cadet's knowledge, and so Spock had to mark each cadet's assignment personally.

He noted that the Orion from his initial class, one Cadet Gaila U'Aidat according to her file, had performed well above the average of the rest of the class. Her success pleased him. However he quickly moved onto the next PADD in his stack before he could linger illogically on Cadet U'Aidat's performance simply because she was an Orion. He was slightly surprised to find it belonged to the Cadet's friend, the human female of African descent, one Nyota Chausiku Uhura according to her file. Realising he was staring at her identification holo, Spock quickly flipped through the data to her written assignment. It took him only twelve minutes to thoroughly read through her essay and by the time he was finished he was pleasantly surprised to find it perhaps the best written piece he had ever received whilst teaching Xenolinguistics.

He cued the recording of the oral part of her assessment wondering if her enunciation of Vulcan, Andorian and Tellarite was as well developed as her apparent understanding of the languages as written. The cadet started in Andorian, speaking at a high - if slightly accented - level of fluency. Her Tellarite was to a similar standard. When she swapped to Vulcan for the final portion of her assessment, Spock felt a sudden flush spread over him. His heart beat a fraction too fast, and he swallowed compulsively. Before he realised what he had done, he had paused the recording.

He focused his mind, seeking out the sudden source of his unease. He did not feel ill. He had eaten sufficiently. He was well rested. He could sense his mother and father along their familial telepathic bonds, distant on Vulcan, but unharmed. There was no apparent source to his distress. With conscious effort he willed his heart rate to return to its normal speed and waited for the odd giddiness he felt to pass.

Recomposed, he resumed playback on the recording.

For three and half minutes Spock sat stiffly listening to cadet Uhura speak flawless Vulcan. Through sustained effort he was able to stifle his odd reaction to her voice. The recording ended and he sat quietly attempting to understand his reaction. He saw two possibilities. Either the recording itself was causing it, or the cadet was. He flicked his PADD back to Uhura's ID. According to it she was 20 and born in Nairobi. She was attractive, but Spock had not given her particular attention since noticing her and Cadet U'Aidat at the beginning of term. She often asked questions during lectures and her voice had caused no response on those occasions, so it was clearly not her that was causing his discomfort.

'Computer: Replay Audio.'

Spock listened more attentively as the recording repeated.

The content itself was unremarkable. The Cadet responded to a series of randomly generated
questions and prompts ranging from polite conversation to technical jargon and inquiries common on board starships, her voice contrasting starkly against the tinny computerised voice questioning her.

'Kilko-tor ne-stukh-sviribaya'. (Report subspace communications.)

'Vesht patal-tor nash-veh sasaya ri-fainu...' (I detect an unknown transmission.)

She was more proficient in her Vulcan then she was in Andorian or Tellarite. Her words were only slightly softened by what he assumed was the accent of her native tongue. Swahili most likely. He wondered at that. Vulcan was, in theory, the most difficult to master of the three languages. Even in the common dialect many words were considered unpronounceable by humans. His own full name for example. The cadet had most likely had a native speaker as a private tutor at some point.

'Computer: Replay Audio,'

Spock listened to the recording a further six times before he determined what was so unnerving about the cadet's delivery. The only other person he had heard speak Vulcan so fluently, but with such delicate emphasis, was his mother. The cadet, like his mother, was able to inject emotion into a language which had evolved over millennia to be devoid of all such overtones.

He felt an overwhelming sense of relief at this new understanding.

He was not having an emotional, irrational response to an attractive student, but to his mother. Such a reaction, whilst unacceptably emotional, was infinitely preferable to one caused by a young female student.

It took only moments to grade the cadet's assignment. He deducted points for her slight mispronunciations of Andorian and Tellarite, but left her full marks for the Vulcan segment. 88.7% overall. It was the highest grade he had awarded for any of his linguistics classes. Occasionally one of the more gifted students would receive 100% for one of his hard science classes, but it was rare for him to award more than 70% outside of the physics or mathematics departments.

In an uncharacteristic fit of some sort of human emotion he could not quite define, in the comments section of cadet Uhura's grade, after mentioning the errors in her Andorian and Tellarite, he wrote that her Vulcan fluency was as near to perfect as he had ever encountered in a human. Although this was true, he stared at the PADD for a long moment in contemplation, wondering if he should re-word the phrase.

He had been told on numerous occasions that students required positive as well as negative feedback, yet it still felt unnatural to him. The cadet's grade would clearly indicate the calibre of her work, reiterating it seemed pointless. Perhaps he could discuss it with his mother. Her experience teaching humans had been an invaluable resource to Spock when he first took up teaching duties.

He decided to surprise her with an unscheduled subspace call. His reaction to cadet Uhura's Vulcan assignment would amuse her. She always enjoyed it when something flustered him.
Nyota Uhura returned from Nairobi a full three days before her classes resumed so she could go over her results and begin to prepare for her classes. Her mother had complained, her father had teased, but both were proud that their youngest daughter was so committed to her education. Nyota's sister Zanta had dropped out of her studies at the University of Nairobi and her parents made plain their dissatisfaction on the matter. For herself Nyota was thankful for her elder sister's willfulness. It made her choice of career look pretty great in comparison.

Not that her father Zuberi needed convincing. He oversaw the small Starfleet Spacefield in Nairobi. It was more or less a management 'desk' job, but Commander Uhura had spent a decade serving on different ships all over the galaxy. He understood her dream of sitting on the bridge of a starship perfectly well.

In contrast her mother Tamu had made it extremely obvious she would have preferred it if her daughter had chosen a career in the Diplomatic Corps. In her opinion it offered all the same opportunities to see the galaxy with a much smaller risk of being blown up by Klingons. She'd even arranged a junior diplomatic attaché role for her straight out of university. She'd not been pleased when Nyota chose Starfleet over it. But then Zanta had dropped out of university and disappeared to Orion with a girlfriend. Tamu was quite supportive of Nyota's career goals after that.

Nyota had enjoyed the week with her family unwinding after the stress of her first block of exams. Unsurprisingly she had found that her previous studies at University had put her well ahead of the rest of the first year students, and she had not had to over-exert herself in anything, save her Subspace Engineering course. Luckily she found learning about the technology behind Starfleet's communication systems intriguing. She was enjoying the challenge in comparison to her linguistics classes, for which she was woefully over qualified. Even having skipped the first year modules she was still too far ahead of the other students to really enjoy her classes.

As such her results for the first semester did not come as a surprise to her. 97% in Communications Systems Management, 96.5% in Subspace Engineering Systems, 96% in Combat Analysis and 88.7% in Advanced Phonology I?!

Nyota quickly pulled up the individual results for her Phonology class.

96% for her written assessment – as expected if a little low. 81.4% for her spoken assessment?! How was that possible? She was fluent in Andorian, Vulcan and Tellarite! She'd spoken all three since she was a child! Been taught by native speakers at that!

She had heard that Lieutenant Commander Spock was tough, but giving her 81% when she was fluent was beyond tough, it was unfair. She resisted a childish urge to throw something at her computer console.

Nyota glanced at the time. It was mid-afternoon. There was a good chance that the Lieutenant Commander was on campus. Such a perfectionist would no doubt want extra time to prepare for his classes.

'Computer Locate Lieutenant Commander Spock'

'Lieutenant Commander Spock currently located in Laboratory L175'
Clutching her PADD Nyota stood, shoved her feet into a pair of shoes and made her way angrily across the campus. L block was home of the physics faculty. She had not had classes in the particular lab mentioned, but it was most likely one of the computer labs reserved for post-graduate study.

The campus was large, but without crowds of dawdling cadets to slow her down Nyota was standing in front of L175 fifteen minutes later. Since the door was shut she pressed the comm panel.

'**L175 is currently unsupervised. Access code required.**'

Nyota sighed. Either the comm was malfunctioning or she'd just walked across the campus for nothing.

'Computer locate Lieutenant Commander Spock'

'**Lieutenant Commander Spock currently located in the Gymnasium Level 4.**'

'Great.'

The gym was nearby at least.

With another sigh Nyota turned away from the locked laboratory and headed towards the turbolifts.

The gym was almost deserted. Few people were on campus, and fewer still chose mid-afternoon as an opportune time to exercise. There were a couple of cadets in the weights room, judging from their massive size they probably never left, holidays or not, and two middle aged women chatting as they jogged on treadmills. It was only as she stepped into the lift and pressed the button for Level 4 that Nyota recalled that level 4 was taken up entirely by a pool.

For a moment she paused, wondering if it was appropriate to seek the Lieutenant Commander out in his spare time like this. He was on campus, and she did feel she had the right question her grade, but perhaps she would be better off sending him a comm message first?

Before she could come to any decision, the lift opened with a ping.

Straightening her shoulders, Nyota stepped out onto the tiled pool area.

A lone figure was swimming laps, a pale blur with a black cloud of hair. Butterfly stroke. The sound of his strokes echoed loudly in the cavernous room. He reached the far end of the pool and turned beneath the water, kicking powerfully off the wall and re-emerging some distance down the pool, swiftly heading back to the end where she stood motionless. For someone from a desert planet her instructor seemed pretty confident in the water.

Suddenly Nyota felt like she was intruding. She should have just messaged him, not barged in on him off duty. Even if he was on campus, it was mid-semester break. She should've waited. Perhaps she could just turn and leave? Had he noticed her? Vulcans had more acute senses then humans. But perhaps he hadn't recognised her? He could hardly have gotten a good look at her.

'**Cadet Uhura.**'

The Lieutenant Commander had stopped swimming and was wading towards the ladder at the side of the pool. The water came up to mid torso on him. Nyota had an impression of a lean well-
muscled chest before she studiously made eye contact and maintained it. Reading his face was nearly impossible, but she thought he looked surprised at her presence.

He turned and pulled himself up the ladder. Suddenly Nyota had nowhere safe to rest her eyes. He was wearing standard issue swimming trunks, dark blue against his pale slightly greenish skin. The muscles in his arms and shoulders flexed and defined as he pulled himself out of the water. He had a wonderfully toned body with magnificent broad shoulders tapering down to a lean waist. Nyota realised she was practically leering and looked away, feeling blood rushing to her face in embarrassment.

Gaining his feet Spock turned to look at her. His hair was pushed back off his face. He was far more handsome than she'd given him credit for in class. He had beautiful dark eyes. He walked over to her and she met them once more, refusing to look anywhere below his chin. Lieutenant Commander Spock, her young, handsome, extremely... Vulcaphonology instructor was more or less naked no more than three feet from her. And dripping wet. Coming as they did from a desert planet - Vulcans didn't sweat - they radiated heat through their skin and consequently were warmer to the touch than humans. Nyota half expected to see steam as the water evaporated off him. It was like a scene from a particularly clichéd romance holo.

One delicate Vulcan eyebrow raised in what Nyota interpreted as confusion. His head had tilted slightly to one side. The gesture reminded her of a bird. A great big, wet, naked... sexy... bird. She screwed her eyes shut tightly for a moment and silently berated herself before meeting his eyes in what she hoped was polite interest as opposed to interspecies lechery.

The eyebrow was still way up there.

Oh. She hadn't responded to his greeting. She had been too busy admiring his pretty eyes. Oh lord. Clutching her PADD to herself she opened her mouth with no idea of what she should say. In hindsight she was certain seeking him out had been a terrible idea.

'Osavensu Spock. Forgive my intrusion. I sought you in L175 to discuss my assessment for Phonology...' She trailed off, not sure how to explain how she went from quite reasonably seeking him in a classroom to ambushing him half, (more than half! Mostly!), naked during his rec time.

The Lieutenant's eyebrow went skywards once more. 'This is not Laboratory L175 cadet.' He paused for a heartbeat -. 'This is the gymnasion swimming pool.'

If he'd been human Nyota would have taken that as a joke, but his face remained utterly still and serious. She felt as if she was going to spontaneously combust from shame. She was painfully aware of the expansive vista of toned Vulcan flesh just to the south of where her eyes were glued. It was proving near impossible not to look.

Vulcans were said to have such acute senses and powers of observation that even without the help of their touch telepathy most other races were more or less open books to them. He was probably perfectly aware how he was affecting her. To make matter worse her voice was humiliatingly breathy when she found it.

'Forgive me Osavensu Spock. I should have sent you a comm message I was just so... surprised by my assessment results. I don't know what I was thinking coming here, it was inappropriate to encroach on your personal time.' He would have to do, she didn't have a better explanation.

As she spoke Spock stiffened, his expression tensing slightly as he assumed his customary stance, hands clasped behind his back. Wet and in swimming trunks, it gave off a distinctly different air
then that of his usual cool detachment. Nyota swallowed and focused on not looking lower than his face. Nyota thought perhaps he was angry, but she was unable to read him accurately. He was Vulcan after all. Hopefully he was just mildly irritated.

'You are indeed the first student to seek me out in such a fashion.' His voice was utterly cold, devoid of all emotion. It was far more intimidating then human anger.

Nyota held her breath, restraining the urge to just turn and run. Spock was the Chief Instructor in both Advanced Phonology and Interspecies Ethics. She'd remain in both departments for the next three and a half years. She couldn't afford to offend him further. Especially if she wanted to get her grade reassessed.

'I will be in L175 tomorrow 06:00 hours to 14:00 hours. You may bring your query to me then.' He nodded in dismissal and switched from Vulcan to Standard. 'Good Afternoon Cadet.'

At his sharp dismissal Nyota gave a hurried salute and tripped over her words slightly. 'Yes thank you sir. Good Afternoon Lieutenant Commander Sir.'

She stared for a moment as he stalked back along the side of the pool away from her, admiring the play of muscles across his shoulders. Resolutely she turned before her eyes could drift down to the dark swimming trunks.

Chapter End Notes

Extra note about ROMULANS cause people asked:
When I started this story I'd recently re-watched the first season of TOS, namely the first episode with Romulans - episode 8 'The Balance of Terror'. In that episode Kirk et al get their first look at a Romulan since apparently no one saw one during the war a century previously because they didn't have visual communications. So when they see the Romulan Commander, (amusingly played by the same actor who later played Sarek), they are all like 'OMG, they totes look like Vulcans!' and Spock is all 'Wtf yo?' *raises eyebrow* (I'm paraphrasing). In the movie Spock knows about the connection between Romulans and Vulcans, but as the beginning of this story, set 3.5 years previously it's not common knowledge.
Spock

Spock had difficulty meditating the evening after his encounter with Cadet Uhura. He sat crossed-legged in his meditation robe and stared at the flame within his asenoi as he did every evening. He focussed his thoughts and carefully regulated his breathing and calmed the whirr of his mind with a series of mediative exercises. Usually he could fall into a light mediative state within minutes. 37 minutes after sitting before his asenoi his mind remained a stubborn knot of confusing emotions however.

Anger, lust and irritation were easy enough for him to identify, but there were hints of other feelings in the ugly mess Cadet Uhura had left in his head. After a lifetime of pushing his emotions away, tamping them down into nothingness, he wasn't familiar enough with them to recognise them. The situation was disturbing, but not completely unheard of for him. There had been occasions in his life where he'd found himself conflicted, his mind in a similar emotional state.

That period of his life when he was 19, when he'd rejected the Vulcan Science Academy and all it stood for to join Starfleet, to live amidst his mother's people, had been one such time. It had taken him weeks to cleanse himself of his emotions with regards to that situation, but he had managed. The current knot of feelings clouding his logic was insignificant in comparison, he was confident he would be able to puzzle them out and banish them once more.

However there was a difference in what he felt within himself. Beneath the disorder of his undesired emotions was something else. Some vast feeling or thought that he'd never experienced before, it was new to him. It made him uncomfortable, nervous. He didn't understand it, but he could tell it was powerful and it seemed dark almost violent?

He pushed it from his mind, focusing on logic to resolve his emotions. Finding the source behind them would enable him to regain control over them. Abandoning his attempts at blank mediative calm, he instead cleared his mind to narrow in on the cause of his disquiet – unsurprisingly it was Cadet Uhura. He had not given her more than a passing thought since his conversation with his mother at the beginning of the holidays, but now his thoughts kept twisting back to her in circles.

It was not the first time a student had come to complain about their grades, which obviously was the cadet's intent, but it was the first time a student had attempted to ingratiate themselves to him in such a manner.

Firstly, she had sought him out in a situation which even given lax human modesty would be considered... inappropriate. This he would have overlooked in most of his students. Many humans would not have given the situation any thought. Someone with the cadet's fluency in Vulcan however could not be unaware of his people's basic culture, including their general modesty. She would have been aware how uncomfortable he was standing before her in a state of undress, and yet she had looked for him at the pool regardless. And then she had spoken to him not in standard as he had addressed her, but in Vulcan.

He felt emotions tugging at him from within as he recalled the tone of her voice. 'Osavensu' she had called him, 'Honoured teacher'. The correct form of address, but the way she had held his eyes as she spoke, each syllable of his native tongue imbued with emotion that no Vulcan would ever inflect, was more suited to conversation between bond mates than teacher and student.

His reaction had been instantaneous and undesired. It made his skin prick uncomfortably just to
Listening to the recording of her had been nothing in comparison to hearing her say his name as she boldly held his gaze. His body, cold from the water kept at a temperature suited to humans not Vulcans, had flushed suddenly with heat and it had been a conscious effort to keep himself from a state of arousal that would have been obvious in his swimming costume. She had blithely continued, crossing her arms and clutching her PADD in such a manner that her breasts where pushed up against the neckline of the short human dress she wore. It had been all he could do to respond civilly and dismiss her before his muddled anger and lust got the best of him and he'd snapped at her.

That anger returned as he thought about it.

Did she truly think he would adjust her grade simply because she flirted with him? **Indignation.**

He was Vulcan. **Pride.**

And yet she had provoked such a strong reaction in him. **Shame.**

He had never felt particular attraction to any of the females he had encountered since his departure from Vulcan seven years earlier. Many atheistically pleasing females had passed through the Academy or served with him on ships during that time and none had stirred anything more than idle curiosity quickly forgotten.

During his first year on Earth he had considered entering a physical relationship with a human female to satisfy that curiosity, but so many aspects of human sexual relationships were distasteful to him - both the mechanics of the act itself, all that unnecessary exchange of bodily fluids, and the crude human attitude to it - that it had been an idea swiftly abandoned. The occasional attraction he felt to members of the opposite sex seemed much milder than what his fellow, fully human, cadets had appeared to experience. Even after his betrothal to T'Pring had been severed, he had not felt any particular desire to act on those idle impulses. It was something he had been thankful for.

He had assumed that like all Vulcans he would be free of such appetites until his *Time* came upon him. This sudden weakness with regards to Cadet Uhura bought back familiar feelings of self-loathing. A sexual attraction and emotional response to a human student - yet another aspect of him that was not up to Vulcan standards.

In the end he had given up on meditation and gone into the laboratory early to continue work on the computer simulation he was compiling. He was attempting to improve the range of the long range sensor arrays that were currently being designed for the first Constitution-class heavy cruiser - the **Enterprise**, which was in the early stages of construction.

Already with minor adjustments he had improved the range of the previous design by 7% and was confident he could increase that to at least 15% without loss of sensitivity. It was not the only such project currently being worked on by the Academy staff. The engineering faculty had several interesting projects on the run as they attempted to push current warp technology to the limit for the new ship.

Working had proven more successful at pushing Cadet Uhura to the back of his mind then his attempts at meditating had been. When she appeared at the laboratory at 08:07 hours he was able to tamp down on lingering irritation at her behaviour and his reaction almost entirely.

‘Cadet Uhura.’ He was pleased that she had donned her uniform and pulled her hair up. Hopefully she had come to her senses and would not make any further attempts to use **flirtation** to win his
"Lieutenant Commander Spock Sir. Again I apologise for any offense I may have caused you yesterday afternoon."

Spock gritted his teeth in irritation. She was speaking Vulcan again. The tone at least was far more professional then it had been the day before. She also seemed to be avoiding eye contact. This was an improvement.

He motioned towards a nearby empty station. It did not seem wise to invite her into his office. Despite the deserted campus, being in the laboratory with the door open still felt more comfortable. He did not trust the human cadet to behave appropriately. 'Sit cadet. What aspect of your assignment do you wish to discuss?'

She pursed her lips in what he thought was determination and nodded, pulling up her results on her PADD as she slid into the seat.

Spock noted that the regulation uniform was in fact shorter and tighter then the dress she had been wearing the day before. It rested exceedingly high on her thighs when she sat. She had pleasantly toned legs and the dark tone of her skin emphasised that fact. He carefully pushed the thought away before his traitorous brain could enquire as to the fit of the uniform comparatively at her bust.

"Respectfully sir, I believe my spoken portion of the assessment, whilst by no means perfect, is deserving of a slightly higher grade.‘ She did make eye contact here, but Spock detected nothing but nervousness in her manner. He was relieved, but still irritated. He had given her full marks for the Vulcan segment, had even left a comment commending her. Humans. Illogical.

He held in a sigh. ‘You believe your Andorian and Tellarite is to the same standard as your Vulcan?’

The cadet frowned slightly. ‘No Sir, not quite. But I have been fluent in both since I was a child and do not feel the scores I received reflect my proficiency accurately.’

She was making her opinions in a clear logical manner at least, despite their inaccuracy. ‘Your pronunciation in several key areas could lead to confusion with a native speaker. As a communications officer, such a misunderstanding could have serious repercussions.’

The frown was full grown now. She was staring into his eyes but in confrontation, not flirtation, he was relieved to note. ‘I am aware that my accent is slightly stronger in my Andorian and Tellarite than in my Vulcan, but none of my previous instructors, or ‘native speakers’ I have encountered have had any difficulty understanding me.’

Now that she was behaving appropriately, Spock allowed himself to enjoy the debate. Despite her misguided actions the previous day, she remained a singularly gifted student. ‘You have encountered many native speakers?’

‘My mother was posted to the Terran embassy on Andoria when I was a child and I lived there for some time.’ Her mother was a diplomat of some sort. That explained her familiarity with non-human languages.

‘And did you converse often about starship weaponry with these individuals?’

The Cadet blinked in surprise and Spock allowed himself a raised eyebrow in query.
'Had you done so you would no doubt have confused your Andorian acquaintances quite thoroughly. Most Andorian names for modern weaponry are based upon standard. As such many do not follow the same rules of pronunciation as the rest of the Andorian language.' The Cadet was leaning forward to listen, interest replacing her frown. Spock switched effortlessly from his native tongue to Andorian. 'Nadion' in Nadion Particle Beam Phaser is pronounced with the hard 'eh' rather than the soft. Pronouncing Nadion with the atypical Andorian accent – the softer intonation – it becomes 'Nadeon'. He paused to see if she knew was familiar with the term. 'A colloquial term that translates approximately into 'one whose parents were unwed.'

Cadet Uhura was silent for a moment before softly testing Spock's words. 'Nadeon. Nad-eh-on. Nadion.' When she spoke again it was in Standard. 'So in question 5 I was informing Engineering that the 'Bastard Particle Beam Phasers' were off-line?'

'Indeed.'

The Cadet smiled and shook her head ruefully. 'And here I was thinking my Andorian was perfect.'

For some reason Spock felt compelled to offer some sort of reassurance, despite the fact that to do so was illogical. 'Apart from small issues of enunciation your Andorian and Tellarite are adequate. Given your proficiency you may have not reviewed the course materials as thoroughly as you should have.' Spock could tell from her sigh that this was most likely the case. 'Detailed technical vocabularies are available, study of which would rectify your shortcomings and prevent any confusion with regards to Nadion Particle Beam Phasers should you encounter Andorians during your career with Starfleet.'

Cadet Uhura smiled. 'Confusion I am eager to avoid. Thank you for taking the time to explain in detail my results Lieutenant Commander Spock.'

When she spoke standard her tone was still warm, but Spock, limited though his ability to pick up on human emotions was, detected only gratitude and general friendliness, nothing inappropriate. Spock felt tension ebbing out of him. Perhaps he had misinterpreted her behaviour previously. It would not be the first time he was confused by interaction with a human and she had not made any inappropriate suggestions during their interview. He hoped so. He would like to believe that someone as intelligent as Cadet Uhura was (for a human), would be above such behaviour.

His mood much improved he allowed himself a further concession in her favour. 'Perhaps I was not adequately clear in my comments on your grade. I will seek to rectify this in future.'

The cadet's smile made her eyes look exceedingly human and emotional. Spock felt uncomfortable holding her gaze. 'We humans do sometimes need things spelled out for us.' To his dismay Spock felt his heart rate increase slightly despite the fact that Uhura's tone was perfectly within acceptable bounds of propriety.

'I shall bear that in mind cadet.'

*Nyota*

Nyota made sure she had familiarised herself with the correct pronunciation of all the technical terms in the vocabularies Lieutenant Commander Spock had referred to before classes recommenced. Most of them she had learnt correctly the first time, but there were several examples where her slight mispronunciations completely changed the meaning of the words. She felt very
young and foolish for her earlier self-righteous anger at her grade. Of all the professors to make a fool of herself in front of, the stiff Vulcan Lieutenant Commander was the most mortifying.

Gaila appeared five minutes before curfew on Sunday night in rumpled clothes with a prominent hickey on the side of her neck.

She promptly collapsed onto her unmade bed and began regaling Nyota with the details of the trip she'd taken with a dozen or so other cadets south. 'Ny you should have come! Tijuana was amazing! I had no idea humans could be so much fun! There was even an Orion enclave! It was craaaaazy!'

Unable to resist shocking her roommate Nyota responded 'As craaazy as seeing what Lieutenant Commander Spock has hidden under that starched uniform of his?' Gaila had often lamented that their Instructor's good looks were wasted on a Vulcan, a race, sadly, immune to her pheromones.

Gaila's eyes widened and her mouth dropped open in pure shocked Orion delight. 'What?! Details Ny!

Nyota laughed. 'Well, I got back from Nairobi on Friday and my results were in. My Phonology result was lower than my other scores, and you know that's my strongest area. '

Gaila rolled her eyes. 'Yeah yeah, you are fluent in more languages then I've had boyfriends.'

'I'm not sure it's that many.'

Gaila threw her pillow at Nyota. 'Quit stalling and get to the good stuff Ny. I want details on your run in with tall, dark and frosty.'

'So I located him on the computer and marched straight over there to give him a piece of my mind. But when I got to the lab he'd been in, he'd gone. So naturally I got his new location and followed him. I was so angry that I wasn't really thinking properly. It wasn't until I was standing there at the edge of the pool that I realised perhaps I hadn't thought things through, that maybe confronting him at the swimming pool was a bad idea. And then he pulled himself out and just stood there not 2 feet from me, all tall and wet... and' she giggled. '... oh god - in those tiny regulation swimming trunks all super serious and says: 'Cadet Uhura.' Nyota frowned and impersonated her instructor, '...in that incredibly deep voice of his.'

Gaila's hands where at the sides of her mouth. 'Oh my god, you were standing within touching distance of a half-naked, wet Vulcan? She tilted her head. 'Can Vulcans even swim? Do they have water on Vulcan?'

'I wondered that to! I don't think it even really rains on Vulcan. His butterfly stroke seemed pretty good though?' She got back to her story. 'Anyway I must have stood there in total silence just trying not to look at him for a full minute. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to concentrate in Phonology. It should be illegal for an instructor to look like... that.'

'That good?'

Nyota nodded mutely.

'So, did you manage to tame the savage Vulcan? Convince him you deserved some extra credit? Or does this story have a disappointing ending?' Gaila wiggled her eyebrows.

'Of course not! After my wits returned to me I arranged to meet with him on Saturday to discuss my grade. God it was so mortifying. He must have known I was drooling over him.'
Gaila bit her lip to stifle a laugh. 'Well Ny, Vulcans do have a pretty highly developed sense of smell.'

Nyota blanched. 'Don't even go there Gaila. I would never be able to face him again!'

'It's okay, I'm exaggerating. Your Vulcan won't have realised he wasn't the only one in need of a towel.'

Nyota screwed up her face. 'You are so crude Cadet U'Aidat.'

'I'm not the one who spent break seducing teachers!' Gaila paused to rearrange herself on her bed, propping her head up on one hand. 'So, what happened on Saturday? Did you hash out an agreement with him over his desk?' Her eyebrows were dancing again suggestively.

'Actually the meeting went really well considering. He explained my marks, and offered me some useful constructive criticism. And, I'm not sure, but I think he may have made a joke.'

'Seriously? That's it?' She sighed. 'An awkward chat and a joke? God Nyota. You are so adorably hopeless. If I'd been in your situation I would have ridden the Lieutenant Commander all the way to Vulcan and back by now.'

Nyota couldn't help but laugh. 'That doesn't even make sense Gaila.'
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

AN: A few things:
1. I'm using S'chn T'gai Spock as Spock's name in this story. This isn't exactly cannon, but it's as close as you can get. The rest of his family history is a mixture of cannon and non-cannon. I made T'Pau his grandmother since that's always seemed pretty plausible to me. I made the unpronounceable first part of his name his family name rather than a personal name and I decided he was descended from Surak. As you do.
2. Vulcan High Council & Vulcan High Command - what I say here is sort of plausible but not cannon.
3. 'High Vulcan' - this is a real thing but there isn't really much info about it so everything about it in this story is made up.

*Spock*

Several times in the first weeks of the second semester Spock found himself staring at Cadet Uhura during his Phonology classes. On three separate occasions she glanced up and met his gaze before he could look away. On one Cadet U'Aidat caught his eye and smiled in a disturbingly lascivious fashion. After this incident he simply avoided looking at the entire section of room around Cadet Uhura.

It was five weeks into term before the previously very talkative Cadet Uhura raised her hand to ask a question. Although he felt an odd jolt of nervous energy as he held her eyes to briefly address her query, he was able to completely mask any noticeable reaction and this pleased him.

That evening during his short sleeping period however, he dreamt of the class. Uhura raised a slender arm, head tilted in earnest query. Confidently Spock called upon her.

She stood and crushed her PADD against her chest, pressing her breasts up against the bodice of her uniform as she had in her summer dress at the gymnasium pool. Instantly Spock felt heat spread over his body. She licked her lips and Spock found himself staring them. Then they were moving, forming words, and his eyes slipped up to meet her own. Her eyes were dark enough to belong to a Vulcan woman, but they held a scorching heat, emotion, none would ever hold. He felt that disturbing, unidentifiable feeling welling up in him once more.

'S'chn T'gai Spohkh…'

All that wanton heat from her words at the pool inflected onto his name. He realised they were at the pool, not longer in the lecture hall. He was once more in his swimming costume and she in her dress. Despite the droplets of cool water running down his body he was burning. Cade Uhura's white dress contrasted against the warm dark tone of her skin where her breasts heaved against her bodice. He could smell the dampness of the water of the gymnasium pool, an opulent indulgence to a child of Vulcan, and something else. Her.

'Spock…'
The same arm she'd raised in query now stretched out towards him beckoning. She dropped the PADD to the floor.

Spock glanced at the pool. The coolness of the water promised to soothe the unbearable heat from his body as surely as Uhura silently promised to stoke it. He was burning. He had to choose.

'Spock!'

She sounded half in pain half in ecstasy. He found himself stepping towards her, his hand reaching out to take hers. His warm Vulcan fingers brushed her cool human ones and he felt a bolt of lust lance between them.

He awoke suddenly. He sat up in bed, disorientated.

Uncomfortable feverish warmth suffused his body and an erection throbbed against his thigh. He had not awoken in such a state since puberty. A disturbing occurrence.

The cold water of his shower was a sorry excuse for the deep water of the gymnasium pool, but it sufficed.

*Nyota*

Nyota made sure that when the assessment period for the second semester started she was thoroughly acquainted with all the course material for Phonology I. They had focused on Klingon and Romulan, two languages she had studied in Nairobi, but was not as confident with as her Vulcan and Andorian since encountering native speakers was unlikely to occur outside a military holding facility.

Her father had a good grasp of both from his time in serving in the fleet and she called him on occasion to practice with him. He was of little help perfecting her pronunciation in general - his fluency in conversational Klingon and Romulan was quite poor in comparison to hers - but his vocabulary was military based and he was able to correct her and teach her many technical terms and phrases not covered by the course material.

She had regaled him with the cause of her disappointing results the previous semester, (although Zuberi Uhura did not consider 88.7% 'disappointing'), and he had shared several anecdotes about simple miscommunications. During his first tour on a light cruiser manned by ensigns fresh from the academy, the communications officer had intercepted a Ferengi transmission concerning a pirate shipment of what appeared to be illegal transporter technology destined for Cardassia Prime, which was at the time embargoed.

Zuberi's crew ambushed the pirates. On disarming the craft in question however the cargo was discovered to be civilian personal comm devices en route to a warehouse in Lakat quite legitimately. The communications officer had mistranslated 'communication' for 'transfer', which in the context of the vague descriptive style of the Ferengi language made their term for the communicators translate literally to: 'advanced shielded personal transfer array'.

An understandable error, but one that could have led to disaster had Zuberi's captain opened fire on the Ferengi vessel. As it was the Ferengi's warp drive had been damaged in the stand off and Zuberi's ship had to escort it back to Ferengi space for repairs, where they had been forced to remain for months whilst the diplomatic headache was straightened out.

'Although, as you are aware my little star, one of the diplomatic staff sent to placate the Ferengi
was your dear mother Tamu. If not for Ensign Calligan's error, I would never have been stranded on a Ferengi moon base with her for three months and you would never have been born.'

By the time she was sitting in the exam hall in front of a console recording her oral assessment, Uhura was confident that she was better prepared for Klingon and Romulan then she had been for Andorian and Tellarite. Her performance should be near perfect. She could not deny the added thrill that receiving a good grade from the Lieutenant Commander would give her. She wanted to prove herself to him personally.

*Spock*

The second semester seemed to draw itself out infinitely. Spock recalled a Terran expression his mother occasionally used: 'Time flies when you're having fun.' It appeared the opposite also held true.

He had dreamt of Cadet Uhura a further twelve times over the three month semester. His mortification grew exponentially with each. He felt betrayed again by his human heritage. A full-blooded Vulcan would never have to deal with such a situation. And not only was there the shame of such irrational, *emotional*, feelings, there was the fact that she was his学生. It would be bad enough developing an attraction for a fellow member of staff. As it was, each traitorous thought of the cadet was practically an act of fraternization.

It was good that the cadet herself was behaving appropriately. Spock did not like to think what his reaction to her confronting him as she had at the gymnasium pool months earlier would be now that his control appeared to be slipping.

He left the grading of *Advanced Phonology I*, and therefore Cadet Uhura's work, until the last as worked through his classes' assessments. He listened to Cadet U'Aidat assessment with an odd sense of anticipation knowing Cadet Uhura's was next in the stack. U'Aidat's performance was an improvement on her last effort and Spock carefully pointed that out in the comments section, even though the higher grade would obviously imply the same. Making such empty gestures of flattery still seemed pointless to him, but it seemed to have a positive effect on his student's work ethic. 'Positive reinforcement' his mother called it.

Uhura's written item was as well formulated as her previous one. He was unsurprised. He graded it then allowed himself a moment to centre himself before playing the recording of her oral assessment.

She started with Klingon, making no errors that Spock could detect, save her use of a term he was unfamiliar with. After cross referencing the phrase, he identified it as a Klingon specific term for a particular type of shield. She had used the word correctly. Spock was impressed that she had obviously done extra research into what had been identified as her weakest area. He paused the recording to mark the Klingon section. With a feeling of what he thought might be 'whimsy' he awarded her an extra .5% for her extended vocabulary. He had not awarded extra credit before, but he was aware it was common practice amidst the Academy professors.

Pleased with both Uhura's work and his professional reaction to her voice, Spock cued the Romulan part of her recording.

The main Romulan dialect shared similarities in syntax and form with modern Vulcan - so much so that scholars on Vulcan had spent years dedicated to trying to find a link between the two languages. It was commonly believed that there had been contact between the two races in some distant part of history. Whatever the truth of their history however, there was only slight similarity
between the two languages as they now existed. Romulan, whilst still a much more formal, structured language then standard, was meant to express emotion unlike Vulcan, which was meant to express logic.

Spock listened carefully to her recording. He noted a slight increase in his heart rate, but otherwise seemed to be unaffected by Uhura's voice. She responded to the questioning and prompts of the computer with perfect fluency. Spock paid particular attention to her use of technical terms, and was pleased to denote another word with which he was unfamiliar.

The word in question turned out to be a slag Romulan military term for a Starfleet light cruiser. Spock wondered where Uhura was getting her vocabulary from. If over the course of the five minute assessments she had made use of two useful words not currently being taught to cadets, it stood to reason that she knew others.

Spock could spend the evening researching independently to increase the syllabus vocabulary, or he could simply speak to the cadet. She could identify her source.

He gave the Romulan section a bonus .5% as well. With the extra credit cadet Uhura's overall grade was 101%.

Spock stared at the PADD in front of him. He had never in 2 years of teaching, given any of his linguistics students a higher grade then 97%. Perhaps he was not being objective in his grading of the cadet's work? He took half an hour to carefully go over her assessment again until he was satisfied that the grade was correctly calculated.

He sat staring at the comments section. He should give the Cadet some sort of praise for her hard work. This is what his mother would recommend. But what would be appropriate? He was not comfortable with a vague human sentiment such as his colleagues might utilise. 'Well Done Cadet!' or some such.

'Sometimes humans need it spelt out for them.' That was what Uhura had said to him the previous semester. He could simply verbalise what her grade implied. This would most likely be acceptable.

'This assessment is free of errors in both the Klingon and Romulan syntaxes and demonstrates fluency beyond the scope of this unit.'

Accurate. But worded in such a way as to please the cadet.

'Computer record message as follows: Cadet Uhura I wish to discuss your oral assessment piece with you at your convenience.' He paused. He should most likely mention the holiday and her exemplary results. His mother would consider that polite. 'I apologise for interrupting your holiday, but I wish to expand the technical vocabulary for next year's students and your assessment implies you would offer useful input.' Another pause. He should congratulate her on her result. 'You are the first student to whom I have assigned extra credit during my tenure at the Academy. Your work is commendable' Slightly awkward perhaps, but he doubted he could word it more appropriately. 'Message ends.' Before he could second guess himself, he attached the message to the graded file so she would receive it when the grades were logged. If she responded promptly he would be able to amend his course material before the start of the next semester.

His dreams featuring Cadet Uhura stopped and he found sleep restful, and meditation easily. By the time the year's results were posted to the students a month later, he felt that his bout of human weakness with regards to the cadet had been resolved.
Results were filed six weeks after the end of the second semester. Nyota was with her family in Nairobi when she received the comm notification that her grades were available.

She brought them up on her parent's main computer console in their living room nervously. She quickly flicked through the different pages of results:

Communications Systems Management - Instructor: Cmdr. Voss
97.5%
'Cadet Uhura displays an intuitive instinct for managing communications data.'

Subspace Engineering Systems – Instructor: Lt. Jones
95%
'Cadet Uhura continues to grasp and understand key concepts swiftly.'

Combat Analysis - Instructor: Lt. Bellway
98%
'Cadet Uhura displays a level of leadership that would be well suited to a command position'.

That pleased her. She was not aiming for a command post, but it was nice to know in a crisis she would function well in her desired capacity as a bridge officer. All were much as she expected and more or less the same as her first semester. Her heart beating with nerves she scrolled down to where the PADD displayed the following:


She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

'pleasepleaseplease!'

Her parents, who were sitting across the room from her on a couch laughed at her nerves.

'Nyota with the amount of effort you put into your Klingon and Romulan, pestering your poor father constantly and racking up astronomical comm bills, I am sure you have received a very good grade.' Her mother was smiling as she said this denoting no real anger over the cost of Nyota's frequent calls from half way across the planet.

'Yes I know! But I'm just… nervous. I don't want all that extra effort to have been in vain mama.'

'Just read the results Nyota. I am right I am sure of it.'

Steeling herself she returned her gaze to the screen her eyes widening in shock as she scanned the results.

Zuberi quickly broke the silence. 'Well Ny, don't keep us waiting.'

Nyota looked up to meet her father's eyes with a huge smile. 'Papa! 101%! I got 101%! He gave me extra credit! I can't believe it!'

Tamu stood and embraced her daughter proudly. 'Well done Nyota! If you can wrangle extra credit out of a Vulcan, I am certain you shall graduate top of your class.' She planted a kiss on top of Nyota's head before pulling away. 'I will make us tea.' She looked over at her husband as she walked from the room. 'Zuberi. Congratulate your daughter for her hard work.'
Nyota walked over and took her mother's place on the couch. Zuberi motioned at the PADD she held. 'Did he make any additional comments? Did he mention any of the words we covered?' She could tell he was interested in what her instructor thought of his input.

'His comments are generally very brief and to point. He says: *This assessment is free of errors in both the Klingon and Romulan syntaxes and demonstrates fluency beyond the scope of this unit.*'

'High praise from a Vulcan.' Zuberi said but frowned slightly. 'But he wrote his comment in Vulcan?'

Nyota glanced back at the screen 'Yes, he did comment in Vulcan. That is unusual. Although on the few occasions I have spoken to him outside of class it has been in Vulcan.'

Leaning over her father pointed at the comm icon in the corner of the results page. 'He has attached a communication. I wonder what he wants?' Before Nyota could respond he leant over and activated it.

Lieutenant Commander Spock's face filled the PADD screen. Nyota felt her heart skip a beat. He was so handsome. She quickly pushed the idle observation aside.

He was obviously in his private quarters. She could see part of a Vulcan landscape holo on the wall behind him, all reds and browns and some shelves filled neatly with PADDs. What caught her attention was what he was wearing. She could only see his torso, but he was obviously wearing a Vulcan robe over a black Starfleet issue undershirt. Long lines of High Vulcan script ran down the dark robe. Nyota was not fluent in the older formal dialect of Vulcan, although she had made a study of it, and had only a vague sense of what the glyphs and symbols meant. Usually they denoted the wearer's family and rank or other such information. One of the ones on Spock's robe looked like the glyph for 'Surak'.

For a him to be wearing such a richly decorated robe as a glorified house coat seemed to imply that if she could make sense of all of them, the calligraphy would say something along the lines of 'my family is old and rich.' Or the Vulcan equivalent. Beside her Zuberi whistled. 'You didn't tell me your professor was of one of the High Clans.' Before Nyota could ask him to clarify, Lieutenant Commander Spock's deep voice echoed from the console speakers.

*Cadet Uhura I wish to discuss your oral assessment piece with you at your earliest convenience.*' He paused for a moment, but his face revealed nothing of what he was thinking. *'I apologise for interrupting your holiday, but I wish to expand the technical vocabulary for next year's students and your assessment implies you would offer useful input.'* Another pause as he appeared to hesitate. His voice when he continued had a slightly different tone. *'Cadet Uhura, you are the first student to whom I have assigned extra credit during my tenure at the Academy. Your work is commendable.*'

Nyota couldn't help but grin.

Her father slapped her on the back. 'I think you managed to impress a Vulcan little star. That's more impressive than your grades!'

'Thank you papa. But what did you mean about the Lieutenant Commander being from a 'High Clan'?'

Zuberi shrugged. 'I'm not sure if that is the correct term, but Vulcan is governed by Vulcan High Command which in turned derives its authority from the Vulcan High Council. The Council are representatives of an Oligarchy formed by several families, or clans. Your Professor looks to be a
member of one of those.'

Nyota looked at her instructor's robe with great interest, trying to puzzle out the exact meanings of the markings. 'How can you tell? The glyphs on the robe he's wearing?'

Her father nodded. 'Yes. It's a meditation robe. The markings are those of his House and respective Clan.'

Nyota frowned, 'Those were High Vulcan glyphs. You can't have been able to read them. Vulcans don't usually teach non-Vulcans their ceremonial dialect. I have a few learning recordings, but they are almost impossible to source.'

Her father yawned. 'Of course I couldn't read them. The Vulcans I served with in Starfleet had robes like those though. The more elaborate the robe the higher the rank of the House. You remember Lieutenant T'Vau?'

Nyota raised an eyebrow. 'Of course I remember T'Vau. She was the one who first taught me Vulcan.'

Her father grinned teasingly. 'Well T'Vau was from an old family but her robe was much plainer then your Lieutenant Commander's. Her parents did not approve of her choice to enlist in Starfleet. They thought it was 'beneath' her. It was unusual for a Vulcan of T'Vau's rank to join Starfleet - all the other Vulcan's I've served with were from fairly modest backgrounds.' He looked thoughtful. 'It must be more or less unheard of for someone of the Lieutenant Commander's rank to join. He probably has family on the Vulcan High Council itself.'

Nyota found the background information interesting. She had to admit a fascination with her instructor that perhaps went beyond the bounds of propriety. He was handsome, very intelligent and the fact that he was Vulcan was intriguing. She glanced at the comm screen which had paused at the beginning of the Lieutenant's message. She looked more closely at the symbols running down the lapels of his robe. They appeared to be woven into the fabric itself in gold and silver. She could always research the symbols. That seemed like snooping however. 'So you're saying the Lieutenant Commander most likely enlisted without his family's approval?'

Zuberi shrugged. 'Well, I doubt they were pleased.'

Tamu returned with a tray loaded with cups of warm chai and a plate of sweet biscuits. She looked pointedly at Nyota. 'That is my seat daughter of mine.'

Returning to the seat opposite, Nyota glanced at her watch. 'Should I call him?' It would be early evening in San Francisco.

'Call whom?' her mother asked.

Zuberi patted his wife's knee affectionately. 'Our Nyota got a communication from her Phonology Professor requesting her assistance improving the vocabulary of his Romulan and Klingon units.'

Tamu's eyes widened. 'Ooh! You must have impressed him very much dear.' She glanced at the comm screen. 'Is that him? Play the message for your mother. I want to hear how clever my daughter is.'

Nyota rolled her eyes. 'Mama.' But she dutifully repeated the message. The Lieutenant Commander's deep voice again echoed from the console. 'Cadet Uhura I wish to discuss your oral assessment ...'
Nyota stared at her teacher and sighed inwardly. Cruel that such a handsome man had to be her teacher, and a Vulcan to boot.

'You should not be looking at your Professor with such eyes daughter-mine.' Tamu teased.

Nyota blushed. 'I am sure I don't know what you mean mother.'

Zuberi broke into a grin and replied to his wife 'Fear not my love, the Lieutenant Commander would not know what such a look meant, let alone what to do with the girl pointing it in his direction.'

'I was not looking at him in any particular fashion!'

Her mother sipped her tea primly. 'Yes dear. Just as you are not blushing right now.'

Zuberi cleared his throat. 'You should probably call him tomorrow Nyota. It would be impolite to contact him so late.' His face broke into a teasing smile as he continued. 'Besides, he might well be dressed for bed. I would not wish you to make your professor uncomfortable with your ogling.'

Tamu snorted into her chai.

Nyota glared and drank her tea in silence for a minute.

Zuberi gestured at the comm screen which had once more frozen on the first frame of her instructor's message. 'Tamu, what do you make of Nyota's teacher's robe? I thought it looked like a meditation robe.' Nyota returned her attention to her mother in interest. Her mother had been in the Diplomatic Corps since she was a teenager, she'd no doubt know more about the meaning of the symbols than either herself or her father.

Tamu glanced at the screen intensely for a few moments. 'Yes, he's of the Clan of Surak. I recognise the glyph. His house symbol is also familiar, he most likely has relatives in the diplomatic service that I've had dealings with.' She paused. 'Unusual that someone from such a prominent clan would enlist in Starfleet. He's related, although perhaps quite distantly, to T'Pau herself. And descended from Surak of course.'

Nyota was familiar with the Vulcan elder from her history lessons. She raised her eyebrows. It appeared 'my family is old and rich' was a pretty accurate translation after all.
*Spock*

Spock was in his quarters working on some calculations for the long range sensor array improvements he was designing when Cadet Uhura responded to his communication.

From the importance she obviously placed upon her studies, he had assumed the Cadet would have accessed her results as soon as they became available the previous evening, but was unsurprised that she had waited until a more socially acceptable time by human standards to contact him.

He took a moment to ensure he was properly attired and groomed to engage in visual communication before accepting the incoming transmission. He rerouted it through the personal computer he was currently working on rather than the large console built into the wall of his quarters. The loading screen flicked for a few seconds then was replaced by Cadet Uhura herself. For a second Spock stared awkwardly, polite greeting frozen on his lips.

Although it was entirely illogical, he had expected her to be wearing her red cadet's uniform with her hair tied back as she had appeared every day on campus. Instead she was wearing a pale green garment suited to the warm African climate with her long hair loose over her shoulders. A thick gold necklace in the form of a torc sat upon her collarbones. It contrasted in a very pleasing manner against her dark skin. Spock was reminded of the only other time he had seen the cadet dressed casually. The white dress she had worn months earlier when she had confronted him at the gymnasium.

The effect of that ensemble had been quite different to that of her current garb. She appeared perfectly calm and poised with none of the impassioned wildness she had exuded on the previous occasion in question. For one, the smooth brown skin above the bodice of her dress was not glistening with slight perspiration or heaving with rapid inhalation. Spock realised he was staring at an inappropriate part of his student's anatomy and had been doing so for 3.2 seconds.

He quickly glanced up to meet her gaze, hoping she would not notice the green flush of embarrassment he felt heating his face. To his relief she was staring at his robe with great interest and appeared to have missed his impolite inspection of her person.

'Cadet Uhura. I trust you were satisfied with your results this semester?' It was a sign of his distraction in that he used the tone of voice he usually reserved for his mother and the few colleagues at Starfleet he had cultivated something approximating human friendships with.

She smiled at the implied humour. 'Yes Lieutenant Commander. My results were satisfactory in all of my courses.'

Spock nodded. If Uhura's work in Phonology reflected her dedication in her other studies her
grades would have been exemplary. He toyed with the idea of repeating this thought to her in a complimentary manner, but it seemed excessive. He had already made several such unnecessary comments about her work.

'As to your request, I assume you wish access to the source of military terms utilized in my exam Sir?'

Spock was pleased. She had not, as he had feared she might with typical human pride, assumed it was her personal knowledge he sort, but rather access to whatever research or materials she had used to study. 'Indeed Cadet. I have done some research since I graded your assessment and resources seem to be thinly spread and poorly documented. Your assistance would be the most expedient manner for me to improve the course vocabularies.'

The Cadet nodded in agreement. 'Yes sir.' Her shoulders shifted slightly and she looked down away from him and she obviously typed something in to her console. 'I am forwarding my research to you now.' She typed for a few moments longer then her attention returned to him. After a few seconds delay Spock's console received the transmission. He opened it on a separate screen and glanced over the short dictionaries. 'You compiled similar vocabularies in Andorian and Tellarite Cadet?'

'Yes Sir. I wished to address the shortcomings of my level of fluency.'

'Admirable Cadet Uhura.'

For a minute he was silent as he scanned over the content of the files. Each entry contained a recording of the correct pronunciation and a reputable reference. It would be a simple task to check the validity of each of the terms. A few hours work perhaps.

'This must have taken a great deal of time to compile Cadet. Might I enquire as to your research methods?'

'Actually I cheated.'

Spock tilted his head in confusion. Cheating usually implied copying or plagiarising the work of others, in the context of their conversation he did not understand her meaning. 'Please clarify cadet.'

She smiled shyly. 'Well, I was able to compile my original extended vocabulary lists based upon my father's vocabulary. Although he is currently based planetside, he has served in many different parts of the galaxy.' From her words Spock deduced her father was a member of Starfleet. 'He has an excellent memory and an interest in languages. During his tours he compiled personal dictionaries based off his first hand experiences. I then simply had to check that his translations and pronunciations were accurate.' She frowned slightly, 'You will see that some terms I was unable to validate. I have sent you the complete versions including those phrases since I assume with your expertise you will be able to confirm or disapprove them where I could not.'

Whatever he had expected, it was not this. 'Fascinating. Would your father be willing to discuss this matter with me Cadet?'

'I'm sure he would be thrilled. He enjoys such discussion.' The cadet turned away from the screen to look to her side. 'In fact I think he is listening in on our conversation from the next room.'

Spock was unsure how he felt about that. Listening into someone else's personal communications was considered rude by both Vulcan and Terran custom. Or at least both his parents had taken offense at it when he was a child. A deep man's voice echoed out from somewhere unseen near the
cadet. 'Nyota! Do not say such things to your instructor! I am merely enjoying my evening chai in my dining room which happens to be near my living room which contains my comm console. If you wished for privacy you should have used the console in your rooms.' A logical enough observation despite the emotional manner in which it was delivered.

Judging from cadet Uhura's grin, Spock surmised she and her father were teasing on another. She returned her attention to the console screen. 'Please excuse my father Lieutenant Commander. If you have time I am sure he would be happy to finish his morning chai in front of his comm console in conversation with you.'

Spock was not sure how to respond. 'I have no wish to disturb Mr Uhura. I can contact him at a more convenient-'

Before he could finish an enormous man appeared behind the cadet. Spock was taken aback a little. He felt his left eyebrow rise in surprise. The man towered over cadet Uhura, who was tall for a human female, and had the sort of massive heavily muscled build that simply did not exist on his homeworld. Whilst Vulcans were on average taller than humans, they tended to be lean and did not develop the sort of muscularity human males could cultivate.

When he sat beside the cadet the man's head barely fit in the visual range of the communicator. Spock estimated he was perhaps 209 centimetres tall. He was in extremely good physical condition for a human of middle years. The line of his broad shoulders was square and his posture straight. He was holding a small floral teacup which stood out at great odds against the massive hand in which it was held. Despite his brutish build, his face reflected the same quiet intelligence and curiosity as his daughter. 'It is no bother Lieutenant Commander. As Nyota says, I enjoy such discussion. I would happy to offer you what small assistance I may.'

Spock blinked. The Cadet's father was speaking fluent, if informal, Vulcan. He had a stronger accent than the cadet, but his pronunciation was still very clear for a human. Before he could respond cadet Uhura spoke. 'Lieutenant Commander Spock, this is my father, Commander Zuberi Uhura.' Spock was pleased she had given him the appropriate form of address in her introduction.

He met the Commander's eyes and responded to his earlier statement. 'That would be most satisfactory Commander Uhura. Your insight could prove most helpful.'

When Spock ended the transmission 58 minutes later he was pleasantly surprised not only at how informative his discussion with Cadet Uhura's father had been, but how pleasant... he had been to converse with. He reminded him a little of Captain Pike in the odd mix of authority and casual friendliness he seemed to possess. And like the Captain, he did not seem at all put off by Spock's Vulcan mannerisms.

When Cadet Uhura had excused herself after he and Commander Uhura had been talking for some 17.8 minutes, Spock had barely noticed.

He prepared himself some lunch and spent the afternoon working through Cadet Uhura's notes and adding some of his own.

*Nyota*

Nyota wasn't sure how she felt exactly when she came downstairs early one morning a week later and discovered her Phonology instructor in deep conversation with her father over the comm.

It was Zuberi Uhura's RTO and instead of the uniform she usually saw him in, he was wearing his
favoured bathrobe - a silk kimono decorated with cranes and flowers which he had bought on a holiday in Osaka. Her father could be a man of flamboyant tastes at times. Beneath it he wore an old pair of checked pyjamas. It was an incongruous look on her massive father. The fact that he was doing a rather accurate impression of an impassioned Klingon - presumably for the benefit of Lieutenant Commander Spock who was watching intently from the comm screen did not help.

Nyota recognised the story her father was telling, it was one of his more amusing anecdotes involving a Klingon prisoner who after suffering a serious concussion attempted to woo the ship's doctor before locking himself in a supply locker, culminating in three hours of loud Klingon mating calls echoing through the lower decks.

To her shock, as her father started howling in his interpretation of the Klingon's mating calls, the lips of Vulcan on the comm screen twitched slightly and his eyes widened in mirth. She felt something like jealously. She'd spent a year in his class and spoken to him many times during that time, and two conversations with him and her father had already gotten him to drop that cool Vulcan façade she never saw past. She shifted in the doorway and her movement drew his attention. Her eyes met his and she found herself smiling at him and shaking her head at her father's antics.

'I can see where you inherited your superior language skills Cadet Uhura. Commander Uhura's ability to mimic the speech patterns of non-humans is truly remarkable. If I were to close my eyes I would be 98.7% sure that a Klingon male was attempting to court me via comm call.'

She was unsure if she started laughing at his joke or at her joy at being treated with such unusual familiarity.

Zuberi directed a smug look at his daughter. 'Now who is eavesdropping on private comm calls Nyota? Lieutenant Commander Spock and I are discussing very important matters.'

Nyota raised her hands in surrender. 'Forgive me father, I was merely going to drink my morning coffee when I heard my father talking to my Lieutenant Commander. I see now I am disturbing a very personal conversation.' She switched to Klingon. 'May your marriage be blessed with many strong sons.'

Zuberi laughed shortly and Spock looked about as shocked as Vulcan could - as if he was not completely sure if she was serious or not. She waved at them both and left the room.

*Spock*

Spock spoke to Commander Zuberi Uhura on a further two occasions during the last month of the holidays. He found that his conversations with the Commander tended to get off subject quite quickly. He was an entertaining person to converse with, he seemed to have an interesting or humorous anecdote for any situation. He did not speak to Cadet Uhura however, her notes being more than sufficient for him to complete extending the vocabularies for his next group of students.

When he received his finalised class schedule he felt a flicker of some emotion – disappointment or relief? – when he realised that whilst she was in two of his courses, she was not in any of his tutorial or laboratory groups. He would only see her in the large lecture classes where it was unlikely he would have to engage in any personal conversation with her.

He deemed it appropriate given his interactions with her and her father to acknowledge her when he saw her on campus, usually offering a curt nod of recognition, but otherwise took pains to avoid her. Although he had come to believe he had misinterpreted her behaviour that evening at the
Academy pool, he was painfully aware that he had experienced emotional and physical responses to her presence that were both illogical and inappropriate. He did not wish to misinterpret innocent human friendliness or polite interest as anything more. Given the havoc she had wreaked upon his peace with a few niceties spoken in Vulcan and a white dress, he deemed it wise to avoid all situations in which she would have opportunity to test his control. Namely everything.

His plan worked well for the first six weeks of term until Professor Voss, head of the linguistic department, stopped by his office and casually threw Spock's plan into disarray.

Professor Voss seemed in a good mood as he handed Spock the top most of a stack of data PADDs he balanced in his arms. 'Greetings Spock! I have assigned the Teaching Aides for this semester and I think you will be pleased with your cadet. You can be… difficult… to work with, you went through three Cadets last year I believe?'

'Cadet Browning remained as my aide until his graduation.' Spock responded somewhat defensively. He knew his Vulcan honesty often came off as rudeness and had made concerted effort to improve his relations with his aides during his years at the Academy. He had gone through six during his first semester.

'Yes Spock, five months. A new record for you I believe?' Professor Voss' antennae were waving in a manner Spock had come to recognise as amusement.

'Five months and 18 days.' He could not give a more precise measurement as the graduation ceremony for Cadets ran by a very loose timetable and he had not been in personal attendance.

'Yes. Very good. Anyway, I think you will find your new aide much more suited to your temperament.'

Spock did not like the way that sounded. It made him sound like a poorly behaved child.

'Three other professors all requested her as an aide, even Professor Michaels, and she's only had the cadet in her class for a month!'

Spock suddenly knew who the Cadet Professor Voss referred to. An unpleasant mix of dread and excitement flooded over him. Before he could stop himself he had blurted out 'You refer to Cadet Uhura?'

Professor Voss tilted his head to the side in surprise. 'Why yes. I saw you awarded her extra credit for her second assessment and listed her in the credits for the latest updates to the Starfleet Klingon and Romulan dictionaries. I was expecting you to request her as an aide actually.'

Spock was silent for a long moment. He knew he should dissuade Professor Voss, convince him to assign Cadet Uhura to another teacher, but he wasn't sure how to go about articulating that desire in a professional manner. And a large, apparently masochistic, part of him was excited at being in her presence again. He was quite proud of himself when he opened his mouth and responded 'Cadet Uhura has demonstrated admirable aptitude in all her studies. I have no desire to dissuade such a promising cadet from a career in Starfleet.' A small truth that deflected from his true concern.

Voss looked confused. 'What do you mean Spock?'

'Four of my aides have elected to abandon their studies at the Academy Professor Voss. Whilst I am sure Cadet Uhura would be a most capable teacher's aide, she would undoubtedly be more suited to one of the other Professors.'

The Andorian looked absolutely shocked. Spock quickly went over what he had just said. It all
seemed perfectly straight forward. 'You are worried that your Vulcan charm will lose Starfleet a promising officer?'

Spock nodded. Sarcastic though it was, that was as a succinct explanation as any.

To his surprise Professor Voss laughed. 'Oh Spock! There is hope for you yet! Two years ago that wouldn't have even crossed your mind! You would have requested the most promising Cadet and if they'd dropped out considered it a good thing you'd weeded out weakness from Starfleet.'

He did indeed recall making a similar statement during his first year teaching.

'I am glad you agree Professor. I think it would be wise if you were to select an aide for me from those that specifically requested a posting in Phonology or Interspecies-Ethics rather than the general admissions.'

'So that you don't end up with a Cadet who's not expecting to work with you?'

'Precisely.'

Voss frowned. 'I don't like it, Starfleet Officers need to respect all the races of the federation equally, and apart from a distinct lack of humour, Vulcan's are one of the more pleasant races in the federation. Any cadet who can't handle that doesn't deserve to graduate.' He paused. 'But since it's you making the request I'll take it under advisement.' He shuffled through the stack of datapads and passed Spock one. 'This cadet requested the Phonology posting specifically, and is in your classes so must be aware of your reputation. I am sure they are prepared to work with a grumpy Vulcan.'

Spock focused on the relief at not being assigned Cadet Uhura and ignored the disappointment he also felt mixed with it. He responded to the Andorian distractedly. 'I am not 'grumpy' as you put it Professor Voss, I am merely logical.'

Professor Voss smiled. 'Yes of course. Well, I've got to hand out the rest of these postings, Good evening Lieutenant Commander.'

Spock didn't bother looking at the PADD until he was walking back to his quarters for the evening. He was mildly curious at the student who might have requested the position of his teaching aide specifically. He could think of no likely candidate. Perhaps Cadet U'Aidat? She was very attentive during lectures and often stopped him in between classes to ask him questions pertaining to course material, and on occasion, inquire if he required sustenance. Of course when he opened the PADD, despite the power of his reaction – he paused in the middle of the walkway and forgot to breath for several heartbeats – he wasn't surprised.

Cadet Uhura, Nyota Chausiku.

He found himself wondering how her name was pronounced in her native Swahili and its meaning. He'd never made a study of that particular terran language. Humans attached specific, often archaic meaning to their names. His own mother's name was Latin in origin and meant 'Worthy of love'. Quite an illogical and overly sentimental thing to name a child. He dismissed all such speculation from his mind.

Several hours later he found himself at his computer console looking up Swahili naming traditions however. It appeared in place of family names humans of the cadet's culture had originally given their children a secondary name that specified the manner of their birth. This seemed a logical means of additional identification to Spock. Some were quite humorous, however, even to a
Vulcan.

Most families had adopted surnames for practical reasons centuries previously, but those traditional descriptive names were still popular. Cadet Uhura's name was a peculiar mix of logical and illogical. Her given name translated to 'Star' which was completely illogical. She was a human, not a luminous sphere of plasma held together by gravity. Her second name meant 'born at night' which whilst a reasonable statement in of itself, combined with her first name gave her a name of clearly calculated poetry- 'Star born at night'. Her surname, absurdly, appeared to mean 'freedom'.

Her name translated into standard was literally 'Star born at night freedom'. He shook his head to himself, pleased he had been named according to Vulcan custom. His name had meaning, but not an obvious literal meaning in his everyday tongue. Spock was the name of an ancient Vulcan philosopher and meant 'Uniter', but in an ancient form of Vulcan no longer spoken. It seemed exceedingly distracting to have such a literal name as Cadet Uhura. It was more a phrase or a line of a poem than anything else. He would find such a name highly distracting. Perhaps this was why she used the Swahili of her name and not the English translation.

Curiosity satisfied he dismissed the cadet and her illogical name from his thoughts.
Nyota knew her request to be Lieutenant Commander Spock's teaching aide would most likely be approved. Apparently he went through aides like Gaila went through boys. There wouldn't be much, if any, competition for the post. Still, when she received the communiqué from the Academy Administration Office confirming her official assignment as Phonology Teaching Aide to Lieutenant Commander Spock, she felt the same sort of thrill that she felt when she received a particularly good grade.

She waited until the end of their next Phonology II lecture to spring her news on Gaila. It was payback of sorts for the way her roommate had been teasing her for the last few months. She'd been going out of her way to flirt quite outrageously to a completely clueless Lieutenant Commander Spock. It had become something of an in-joke in their class groups. Gaila would stand up and ask quite pertinent questions of their Vulcan professor, but do so twirling her hair, wiggling in her seat, licking her lips and shooting lascivious looks in his direction.

Spock honestly didn't seem to notice anything. After a few weeks of this, Gaila had upped her game, lying in wait to waylay Spock as he made his way to and from classes. She'd gamely force him to exchange pleasantries with her, and then depending on her audience, walk a fine line between polite interest and blatant double entendres.

They packed up their PADDs and headed down the auditorium seating towards the exit. Halfway down Nyota nonchalantly mentioned to Gaila 'I'll see you at lunch. I have to meet with the Instructor.'

The Orion's head snapped around to focus on her roommate. 'Why?'

Nyota smirked. 'I'm his new teaching aide.'

Gaila pouted. 'When did you find this out?'

'Monday.'

'Does this mean I'm not allowed to have fun with Lieutenant Commander Spock anymore? No more romantic walks from L Block to the Computer Labs? No more long talks about the sufficiently of his morning sustenance?' Gaila seemed far too amused in Nyota's opinion.

'You know perfectly well how I feel about that! Not only are you making a superior officer the butt of a joke, someone might take you seriously and you could seriously jeopardise both your careers!'

Gaila sighed. 'You are no fun. And everyone knows I'm only joking!'

Nyota narrowed her eyes. 'If you don't cut it out, I will tell Spock exactly what you are doing.'

'Oh, 'Spock' is it now? Not Instructor or Lieutenant Commander?' Gaila was smirking.

Nyota didn't bother to respond, simply rolled her eyes and made her way to the podium where the Lieutenant Commander was explaining something to two students. She waited patiently for them to
finish their conversation then stepped up beside her instructor.

'Sir I was wondering when you would like to discuss my duties.'

Spock nodded briefly but didn't look up from his PADD. 'Yes cadet. If you will accompany me to my office we will prepare a suitable schedule for you.' He gestured towards the exit.

Nyota tried not to be offended by his brusque manner as they walked to the nearby Linguistics Block. The Lieutenant Commander was a Vulcan, she couldn't expect social niceties. His office was one of the larger ones on the fifth floor with a small private laboratory adjoining it. Nyota greedily scanned the banks of computer consoles and equipment.

In the centre of the room was a starfleet spec long range sensor array. The console was opened up and partly disassembled and the sensor banks themselves sat bolted to a huge wheeled metal frame. She'd never seen a sensor array up close. They were always hidden deep within the frame of the ship with only limited access via hatches. The array was much larger then she had imagined. In her mind's eye she had not really considered that the console only represented a tiny fraction of the entire unit's size, like the top of an iceberg. She walked around the array a few times, greedily taking it in. Judging from the size of the receiving coils it was from science ship rather than a cruiser. 'Is this an array from a Miranda-class sir?'

Spock, who had been standing to one side, hands clasped behind his back as she made her observations nodded. 'Yes. Currently the Miranda-class sensors are the most advanced in use by Starfleet. The design is being reworked for the Enterprise.'

Nyota ran her fingers over the console longingly. 'I heard from Professor Voss that you had already improved the sensitivity by 8% sir?'

'I project a final optimal operational increase of 15.26% over current levels of range and 18% in sensitivity. Taking into account the additional power source available on the Constitution-class compared to the Miranda-class, I anticipate the long range sensor arrays on the Enterprise will have a range 5.89 times that of our current science vessels.'

Nyota gasped. '5.89? That's incredible sir!' She did some quick math in her head. 'Even the Andorian Imperial Fleet and the Vulcan Science Academy don't have ships with that kind of range.'

'I assure you it is perfectly credulous.' He paused and Nyota noticed a flicker of something she couldn't identify twist his features momentarily. 'Compared to the Fai-tukh - the most advanced survey vessel currently operated by the Vulcan Science Academy - the Enterprise will have a sensor range 2.3 times larger.'

Nyota smiled. 'They won't like that.' She stepped away from the array and gave Spock her full attention. 'Shall we discuss my schedule sir?'

'Indeed.'

She followed him into the adjoining office, quickly glancing around to take in the décor, or lack thereof, whilst his back was turned. PADDs were stacked neatly on shelves along the walls and a small personal computer sat on the desk. There were no holos or personal items except a small plant sitting on a table near the window. Nyota was surprised to realise it was a small terran rosebush of some variety. Some sort of spiky Vulcan desert succulent would have suited the Lieutenant Commander more than the innocuous pink rosebush.

She glanced up at Spock who had noted her regard of the plant. 'Visitors often seemed surprised by
the presence of that plant Cadet. Although I have noted 85% of Academy staff have some sort of botanical arrangement in their office.'

Nyota blushed. 'Oh! Excuse me sir, it's just that roses are considered a very… sentimental… flower on earth.'

Spock nodded. 'I am aware of this. My mother has a sentimental attachment to them. This specimen she grew from a cutting.'

'She grows roses on Vulcan?' That seemed very un-Vulcan.

'She has had moderate success with several varieties originally created in the 21st century to survive in the harsher climates of Australia.'

Nyota nodded, inwardly amazed that she was sitting in Lieutenant Commander Spock's office discussing his mother's rosebushes. He appeared unfazed and skipped straight from terran flowers back to her new position. 'I have previously found my assistants to be of most use in acting as a conduit between myself and my students. As Professor Voss has pointed out numerous occasions, 'Accessibility' is my weakness as an instructor. My last Aide, Lieutenant Browning, was able to provide clarification for students who did not feel comfortable, as he put it, 'pestering' me.' He glanced up over his PADD. 'A sentiment which I fail to understand. My purpose at the Academy is to teach. I see no reason why students would assume I would begrudge them desiring me to do so.'

Nyota frowned, wondering if she should attempt to explain her fellow students' behaviour. 'You are aware sir that Vulcans have a reputation for being…' she sort a nice way to phrase it, '…cold? Emotionless?'

'Of course.' He seemed pleased rather than offended. Vulcans.

Nyota thought carefully for a moment, wording her explanation in such a way as to not insult her Instructor. 'Well, that isn't really how a Vulcan seems to a human. The coolness of Vulcan politeness... in a human, or most other humanoid races, would reflect irritation, anger, impatience, pride - any number of quite negative emotions. Although students learn about Vulcan culture during basic schooling, when dealing with Vulcans you have to ignore your ingrained instinctual interpretations of their body language and speech patterns.'

Spock blinked. 'You are saying that Vulcans are not perceived as emotionless, but impatient, prideful, angry and irritable?' He sounded quite shocked.

Nyota grimaced. 'Well... yes. Theoretically we are aware that you aren't actually angry or irritated, but we still feel it because that's the... vibe you are giving off?' She had no idea if he'd followed any of that. 'It's difficult not to interpret your body language like a human, since well, our races look so alike.'

Spock looked thoughtful. 'What emotion are you instinctually interpreting from me right now Cadet?'

Nyota swallowed. 'You seem insulted by my implication and dismissive of its validity.'

Spock's eyebrows rose. 'Fascinating. In actual fact I was analysing my own personal experiences and had found them supportive of your theory.'

'Really?' Nyota found herself leaning forward slightly.

'Indeed. And considering that I am half human and considered overly expressive for a Vulcan, it
can be assumed this misinterpretation is more pronounced between full bloodied Vulcans and humans.' He paused. 'Although perhaps my expressiveness exuberates the issues. Magnifying incorrect behavioural cues.'

Nyota blinked rapidly in shock. She was having difficulty with that first sentence. 'You are half human sir?'

Spock nodded. 'Indeed cadet. My mother is human.' Well that explained the rosebush.

She was dying to ask how the hell that happened, a human woman and Vulcan man were a pretty unlikely and illogical pairing, but she valiantly focused on the topic on hand. She wondered if it would be appropriate to mention the other major difference she had noted between the Lieutenant Commander and most other Vulcans she had encountered, (apparent human mother notwithstanding).

'Sir, as you are probably aware, I lived off planet a great deal when I was young. It was from Vulcan colleagues of my parents that I first learnt your language. Those Vulcans seemed to adjust to dealing with non-Vulcans quite swiftly.'

'So you propose full-bloodied Vulcans are less prone to this misinterpretation?' He didn't appear offended.

'Not necessarily sir. But I observe one difference between yourself and the majority of the Vulcans I have encountered. One of my father's colleagues, Lieutenant T'Vau, she had more difficulty relating to non-Vulcans. It took years for her to fit in amongst her crew. She believed her difficulty lay in that as a daughter of an old family, she had been raised very differently to most Vulcans in Starfleet who are from more modest backgrounds.' She stopped herself from mentioning the speculation she and her father had indulged in with regards to his meditation robe and his own family's relative position in Vulcan society.

'You are correct in your assumption that Vulcans in Starfleet are for the most part from what would constitute the Vulcan equivalent of the Terran 'middle class'. I am familiar with T'Vau. She is considered something of an oddity for her time serving in Starfleet.'

He made no comment as to his own background Nyota noted. She restrained herself from asking though she burned with curiosity. His mother was human and yet he was from some rich fancy family? Was his human mother the reason he'd ended up in Starfleet? Had he been sent off?

'Based upon your observations Cadet, do you have any suggestions which will help put my students as ease?' He was looking at her with his usual calm intensity.

'T'Vau said that the main difference between conversation with a human and a Vulcan is that humans constantly point out the obvious and unnecessary.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'I would certainly agree with that observation.'

Nyota smiled. 'We crave reassurance. I think if you just said more, even if it seems superfluous to you, people would see past their instinctual interpretations of your body language.'

He raised an eyebrow. 'You recommend I begin conversations with observations on the weather?'

Nyota smiled. 'That's one example sir. You don't have to discuss anything of importance.'

'Engaging in small talk with my students seems counter-productive. The rest of the faculty do not maintain 'friendships' with their students.'
Nyota restrained her growing frustration. 'No, but well, for example, when I discussed my application to be your teaching aide with Professor Voss, he inquired as to my holidays -if I had enjoyed them. It was not expected I respond beyond a brief sentence, and we were both aware he had little interest in my activities, but such a conversation puts both parties at ease with one another.' And Spock was a hell of a lot more intimidating than Professor Voss, who was 6ft 4 and blue, so that was saying something.

The Lieutenant Commander looked thoughtful. 'What are some other examples of appropriate conversation between a student and a teacher cadet?'

Nyota wracked her brains not sure if Spock was just humouring her. He had to be aware of how small talk worked surely? He'd been in Starfleet long enough to make Lieutenant Commander and is mother was apparently human, how had he not learnt to hold a civil conversation?

'Um, well, asking after their studies, on Fridays voicing impatience for the upcoming weekend or inquiring as to their plans for it, on Mondays asking what they did on the weekend and comments relating to social events relating to the Academy such as graduation balls or career days.'

Spock frowned slightly. 'The human cadets seem more preoccupied with their recreational time than their favoured activities, namely the consumption of alcoholic beverages and fighting with one another, warrants.'

Nyota laughed. 'I agree with you there sir.'

Glancing at her watch she realised she'd been in this office for nearly half an hour and they still hadn't discussed her schedule.

*Spock*

Spock was pleasantly surprised at his control during his first meeting with Cadet Uhura. Despite engaging in what he considered personal conversation rather than sticking to matters pertinent to her position as his aide, he had not suffered from the disturbing side effects conversation with her had caused previously. Although he was still aware that she was atheistically pleasing, exceedingly so, he did not find his attention drawn to inappropriate areas of her anatomy. Most importantly, his sleep and meditation that evening remained undisturbed. The dreams about her did not return. It seemed he had tamped down on his… attraction to her until it remained only a niggling irritation.

He saw her regularly over the six weeks and she proved the most capable assistant he had encountered at the Academy. They did not speak further of his issues with regards to expressing himself adequately to his students, but he thought on her advice.

When a student who had not approached him before stayed and asked nervously asked for clarification on an assignment after his Friday afternoon lecture, Spock answered his question then bade him 'enjoy his weekend'. It was a phrase he had often heard used in parting on Fridays, and seemed to fit in with Cadet Uhura's suggestions. The student in question had paused in what Spock took as surprise, then smiled and returned the sentiment. The cadet had seemed much more at ease when he left. Illogical.

Spock decided to apply Cadet Uhura's advice on a wider scale and see if empty platitudes were really all it took to put his non-Vulcan students and colleagues at ease. When one of the servers at the campus cafeteria warned him that the pasta dish he had selected contained meat, he thanked her by name (referring to her name tag) for her foresight. The next week she informed him she had saved the last serve of vegetarian lasagne for him 'Since you usually come by late on Thursday.
Lieutenant Commander and I know it's your favourite. It was indeed the most palatable dish the cafeteria offered. He thanked her for her thoughtfulness.

Human politeness seemed to have other advantages beyond putting people at ease.

When Cadet U'Aidat presented him with a cup of coffee before a lecture, he thanked her and accepted it, even though he was not thirsty and did not particularly enjoy terran coffee. To his surprise, although overly sweetened, the coffee tasted of hazelnut and cinnamon and was far more palatable than the bitter espresso his mother drank. He finished it during the first half hour of his lecture and found himself remarkably relaxed.

It wasn't until he realised he had made a joke and that his class was laughing in a mix of disbelief and amusement that he realised there had been cocoa in the drink. Vulcans were notoriously secretive about their physiology in general, and he could not be sure the Orion had been aware that she had been more or less drugging him with the coffee, but he made mention of it to cadet Uhura when he met him briefly after class.

'Is Cadet U'Aidat aware of the effect cocoa has on Vulcans?'

Uhura's eyes widened. 'She didn't! The coffee?'

Spock was having difficulty understanding her meaning. 'She 'didn't'? She is not aware?'

'No no, she most definitely is aware. Orions seem to know precisely how to intoxicate every race in the federation. They must have a class as children. I just can't believe she would do that! Are you alright?' The Cadet was leaning towards him, much closer than she would usually stand, her eyes flicking over him in concern. 'Can I get you anything? Water? A hypo?' Spock was suddenly concerned she would press her hand to his forehead as his mother had often done when he was a child. He made an effort to straighten.

'I am fine. The effect will pass shortly and I do not anticipate any negative side effects from such a small dose. I am... irritated at Cadet U'Aidat however. Such behaviour is completely irresponsible. I should report her to Administration.' Spock realised he was staring rather intensely at Uhura's too close dark eyes and glanced away.

'Well, as much as I love Gaila and I'm sure she meant it as a light-hearted joke, reporting her might be a good idea. She needs to learn such behaviour isn't appropriate.' The cadet crossed her arms and frowned. 'Imagine if we were serving on a ship and she slipped you chocolate while you were on duty. She doesn't take things seriously enough.'

Spock agreed with Uhura, but the Academy administration had a strong stance on intoxicants and zero tolerance with regards to 'drink spiking'. There had been a few expulsions over such actions during his own days as a cadet. Although cocoa was hardly an illicit substance, its effect on Vulcan physiology was highly intoxicating. If she had been aware of that, technically the administration would have to judge Cadet U'Aidat's actions in the same light and she could well be dismissed. He had no desire to see the only female Orion currently at the Academy, who was otherwise a promising cadet, drummed out of Starfleet over a prank. Ill-conceived and annoying as it had been.

'I will speak to her myself at some stage. Do not tell her I am aware of her actions.'

'Very well Sir. Don't go lightly on her, this isn't a good time to practice those new human charms of yours.'

Spock frowned. 'Pardon Cadet? 'Human Charms?'' He was reminded of Professor Voss' reference to
his 'Vulcan charm' at the beginning of the term.

Uhura was giggling. 'You are starting to make quite the impression. I overheard Sarah gushing about you at the cafeteria the other week.'

Sarah was the thoughtful server. 'She saves me lasagne on Thursdays.' He remarked thoughtfully.

The cadet was smiling at him oddly. 'Yes she told me. She was also comparing you to her son, who apparently is a 'bit gruff'. She went on to call you a 'sweet boy'. ' The Cadet was biting her lip and clearly attempting not to laugh.

Spock was not sure how he felt being described as a 'sweet boy'.

Uhura gasped and pressed a pretty hand to her mouth. 'Oh my goodness! The expression on your face sir!'

Belatedly Spock realised his eyebrows were in the vicinity of his hairline, his head was tilted on an angle and he was silently mouthing 'sweet boy' over and over as if the words would somehow reveal their true meaning to him through repetition. He swiftly straightened and smoothed his features. Uhura laughed harder. To his surprise he was not offended.

Her laughter was quite pleasant to listen to.
Chapter 6

*Nyota*

With her new access to his schedule as his assistant, Nyota was aware that Lieutenant Commander Spock visited the construction site of the *Enterprise* approximately once every eight weeks. According to his records he usually spent between three and seven hours on site. The manner in which *Enterprise* was being built and designed - every component bleeding edge technology - meant that there were constant changes in almost every aspect of the ship.

The work Spock was doing wasn't influenced by the majority of this work since the general layout of the sensor array was fairly well finalised. However many of the components that would be nestled around the bridge were being likewise altered and there was constant jostling for space. Spock apparently did not wish to rely upon the plans and calculations of his colleagues and was checking first hand that the figures provided him were accurate. It appeared that there are had been several small errors that he'd been forced to work around already.

Nyota had poured over the Lieutenant Commander's notes for the array and was dying to tag along on his next visit to the shipyard. She knew he would deem her presence unnecessary however and wasn't sure how to convince him to let her come.

She arrived fifteen minutes early for their usual Thursday afternoon meeting without thinking of any convincing argument. Unusually, the laboratory was unlocked but empty. She took a seat and pulled out a PADD to entertain herself until the Lieutenant Commander arrived. She was reading over some notes on a dialect of Betazoid she was in the process of learning when she heard a thud.

Putting aside the PADD she walked to the centre of the room and located the source of the noise. A pair of polished regulation Starfleet boots poked out from underneath the tangled mess of the experimental sensor array. A pale hand emerged and felt along the floor. A screwdriver lay about a meter from the probing fingers. Nyota bent, picked it up and passed it over. 'Lieutenant Commander Spock?' It was highly unlikely anyone else would be poking about in the array, but she couldn't really be sure of his identity from the polish of his boots and a hand he usually kept clasped behind his back.

The voice from the array was muffled. 'Cadet. You are 12.8 minutes early.'

'Don't mind me sir. I have revision to do.' She stood to return to her seat.

'A moment Cadet – could you pass me the size 3 tap lever please?' Nyota made her way to the tool tray on a desk nearby. 'It is in the bottom drawer on the right.'

She knelt beside the array and handed it to Spock, her fingers brushing against his briefly as she did so. She was shocked by how warm his skin was. The difference between him and her own cooler human body temperature was far more pronounced then she'd expected. /*The relay switches are poorly placed. Maintenance of them will be impossible without access from below.*/
He had not spoken Vulcan to her since his comm calls to her father. He sounded ponderous and distracted. As if he was thinking out loud. "The array appears to more or less cubic in its basic design. Can you not simply re-orientate it when it is installed?" She responded in the same tongue. Being designed to function in zero gravity, the array's orientation in relation to the Bridge should be irrelevant to its function.

Spock was silent for a long moment before replying in standard. 'An astute observation cadet.'

Nyota blushed, uncertain if he was being sarcastic. It was pretty obvious now she thought about it. 'Sorry. I'm sure you've already considered that.'

His boots shifted and Spock pushed himself out from under the array on a wheeled creeper. His hair was pushed away from his face and he wasn't wearing his uniform jacket, just a black undershirt. Nyota noticed it was the long sleeved winter variation despite the fact that it was a warm day outside. She tried not to stare as he stood and replaced a few tools in their respective trays. It clung to his lean figure and broad shoulders in a very appealing manner however.

'Actually I had not considered that option. Obvious as it now seems in hindsight.' He offered the slight quirk of his eyebrow that Nyota had come to interpret as a 'smile'.

'Oh. Well. Glad I could be of assistance sir.'

Spock walked into his office and pulled his jacket off the door hook. He continued speaking as he did up the fastenings. 'If it does not clash with your classes Cadet Uhura, your insight might prove useful on my visit to the Enterprise tomorrow.'

Nyota felt her eyes widen in excitement. 'Yes! I mean, no! It won't clash with my classes!' Spock had paused to stare at her, his hands still on the collar fastening of his jacket. Her excitement appeared to have surprised him. She blushed in embarrassment. 'I'd love to visit the shipyard.' Not only would she get to see her beloved Enterprise again, assisting the man who would be First Officer of the ship in the design of one of its systems would be a huge plus beside her name when they started naming commissions.

And spending the day passing a handsome Vulcan hand tools would be a nice change from putting up with her usual Friday classes: hand to hand combat and tactics. Core subjects for bridge officers, but hardly relevant to her field.

Spock took his seat and nodded. 'Very well. I will be leaving at 06:00 hours from the main gate. The trip is approximately 2.5 hours. Dress appropriately for a construction area.'

Nyota nodded. 'Yes sir.' She wouldn't regret ditching the cadet miniskirt for a day.

Spock turned his returned his attention to his PADD. 'How many students attended the tutoring group on Tuesday evening?'

*Spock*

Spock returned to his quarters immediately after his meeting with Cadet Uhura. He was shaken by her casual dismissal of the telepathic contact she had accidentally initiated when she passed him the tap lever. She had responded to his thoughts verbally with utter nonchalance.

He had not experienced telepathic contact in 27 standard months, when he had last seen his mother.
The brush of Cadet Uhura's mind had been warm and confusing. He'd felt affection, nervousness, eagerness and half a dozen other human emotions in one big rush. He had no idea how humans could bear being constantly bombarded with so many feelings all at once.

Admittedly he had covered his shock adequately and the Cadet had not seemed to notice his distress. But he had been so distracted that he had offered to let her accompany him the shipyards simply so he would have something to say. The moment the words had left his mouth he had wished to recall them and then her excitement had made him feel guilty for his selfishness. Cadet Uhura was a gifted student and a fine assistant. He should not begrudge such a transparent desire to see the Enterprise.

He had meditated for several hours until he felt he had reattained the level of detachment to his attraction to the cadet he had developed over the past few months.

However he awoke at 3.12am gasping with her voice ringing in his ears. 'Spock. K'diwa.' That terrible dark feeling was back with a vengeance. Was it lust? Was this what humans felt constantly? If so their obsession with sex was more understandable.

The dream was far worse than the previous ones. He had not simply joined his body with the Cadet's, which was bad enough, he had joined their minds as well. His subconsciousness had taken that brief impression of her mind he'd felt that afternoon and extrapolated on it. In his disturbing dream he had performed a mind meld and bonded with her.

His heart was beating at a frantic rate and his thoughts reeled with a confusing mess of desire, shame and anger. He had never had such a dream before, not even when at the mercy of his human hormones during his teenage years when he had still been betrothed to T'Pring. He clenched his jaw and swallowed. For a moment he could still taste her.

*Nyota*

Nyota awoke at 5:00 hours giddy with anticipation. It was cold and dark, but she had to restrain the urge to burst into song as she showered. Gaila hadn't returned to their room until after 2am. She would not appreciate such a rude, if cheery awakening. Moving quietly Nyota dressed in jeans, blouse, her favourite jacket and a sturdy pair of boots. She applied her usual makeup - eyeliner and mascara – and a spritz of her usual perfume. For a moment she contemplated putting on a scarf, but knew the autumn weather would warm up quickly once the sun rose. Instead she left her hair loose.

She left her room at 5:30 and headed for the campus coffee shop. It was open 24 hours a day - a steady stream of sleep deprived academy students ensured that. She treated herself to a latte and a chocolate pastry and arrived at the main gate at 05:53 hours. She wondered how they would be travelling to the shipyard. Lieutenant Commander Spock had said the journey would take two and a half hours which did not fit with a public shuttle or hovercar ride. Perhaps there was a Starfleet transport of some sort.

Nyota stood where she could watch the approach from the faculty residential block. By 05.58 she was surprised to not see her Vulcan instructor approaching. He was going to be late. She was still staring down the pathway towards the staff quarters when she heard a vehicle approach and pull up nearby. She glanced over her shoulder. A hoverbike. She turned back to the pathway. Her watch read 06:00. Incredible! The Lieutenant Commander wasn't punctual!

'Cadet Uhura.'
Nyota slowly turned towards the voice. The hoverbike. He was sitting on it, his visor up and a second helmet held in front of him. Lieutenant Commander Spock. On a hoverbike. She was sure her eyes were bulging out of her head.

'Spock! I mean, Lieutenant Commander Sir!' She stepped towards him cringing at her slip. 'Sorry. You startled me. I was not expecting…' She waved her hand at the bike helplessly. '... a hoverbike?' she finished weakly.

He held out the extra helmet, offering it to her silently. 'It is the most efficient form of transport available on this planet.' Nyota tried not to stare. He was wearing a protective riding outfit that emphasised his broad shoulders and narrow waist. She suddenly understood why some women found men who rode hoverbikes attractive.

Nyota gingerly took the helmet and slid open the visor before slipping it on. It took a moment to arrange her hair so it didn't pull. She paused beside the bike and eyed it, and its rider, warily. It was humming quietly, sitting a foot of the ground. The air beneath it shimmered with heat. It hurt her head a little at how casually it seemed to defy the laws of physics.

For once the Lieutenant seemed to pick up on her feelings. 'I assure you it is perfectly safe cadet. The chance of a fatal accident on a hoverbike is less than .001%, which is 138.9% lower than the average journey by spaceship.' Sensing this did not reassure her he added: 'They are common on Vulcan. I have a great deal of experience operating them and have not crashed one since I was 14.2 Terran years of age.'

Nyota took a deep breath. 'I am sure you are extremely proficient sir. I have never ridden one before however and am unsure where I am to... position myself.' She gestured vaguely at the bike.

He slid off the machine and indicated the padded perch above the driver's seat directly above the two short fins that protruded from the sides of the bike. It seemed very small. 'The passenger sits here cadet.' He bent down and did something which resulted in a small foot peg flicking out from the body with a click. 'Unfortunately the footholds are not adjustable, but I anticipate they will be acceptably suited to your height.' He paused. 'This hoverbike is of Vulcan origin and designed to suit Vulcan physiques, however you are tall for a human female.'

From any other man, Nyota would have taken that as an awkward compliment. From her professor it was a mere statement of fact. Not wishing him to think her scared, she climbed onto the bike. He walked around to the other side and took hold of her foot. Nyota stared at him in surprise. But he was looking down with an intent expression on his face. His grip was firm through the leather of her boot and her toes curled in response. Then he flicked out the second foot peg and directed her foot onto it. Oh. Of course.

Nyota did not know what to do with her hands.

She thought about asking him but then he was climbing in front of her and settling himself between her thighs. She swallowed and wiggled back slightly whispering 'ohmygodohmygod' under her breath. To her shock Spock's voice rang clearly from within her helmet. 'If you do not feel comfortable Cadet, you are under no obligation to accompany me.' Oh. Of course there would be a comm unit of some sort built into the helmets.

'I'm fine sir, I'm just not sure what to do with my hands.'

In front of her Spock did something with the complicated looking controls and the bike roared into life, vibrating beneath her. 'There is a handle at the rear of the hoverbike, however it is both safer and more comfortable to grip with your legs and hold onto the driver.'
Nyota didn't think 'more comfortable' was really the accurate terminology. 'even more incredibly uncomfortable' sounded more likely. Still, she gingerly placed her hands on Spock's sides. She was glad he was covered head to foot. She didn't want him to get any inkling of what she was thinking through his touch telepathy.

Spock leant forward and the bike jerked a meter into the air. Nyota managed to stifle her scream, just, but her legs clenched hoverbike and Vulcan in an indiscriminate death grip.

'You may wish a firmer hold Nyota.' He sounded slightly distracted. Was he teasing her because she'd just crushed him? And that had to the first time he'd ever addressed her by her given name. She felt a gloved hand pull her left hand so it wrapped around him rather than clenched in his jacket. She rearranged her right arm to match. 'You should attempt to balance your hold between your legs and your arms to prevent muscle strain.' As he spoke the engine's whine changed note and the bike turned in a circle.

Nyota nodded then realised he couldn't see her. 'Yes sir.' She realised she was shivering slightly with nervous energy. Then the bike shot forward to re-join the road. She clenched her teeth to stifle a squeal as her stomach dropped. It cruised along about a meter and half above the deserted Saturday morning streets of San Francisco. For the first few miles Nyota shifted and rearranged herself in an attempt to maintain some sort of respect for her professor's personal space, but at every corner she was pushed her up against him and she eventually gave up.

He didn't appear to care.

He probably had no idea how his proximity was affecting her. She certainly doubted it was mutual.

By the time she relaxed they were well out of the city and passing through rural suburbs that swiftly gave way to farmland dotted with small towns. She was always amazed that no matter how seemingly advanced the human race had become, just an hour from even their largest cities, people were growing the same crops they'd been growing for thousands of years. She had turned her head sharply to look over an orchard when music came over the comm in her helmet. A heads up display in Vulcan characters flickered over her visor and she realised she'd activated an entertainment setting. 'Sorry, I didn't mean to do that sir.'

'Do what Cadet?'

'I bumped something in my helmet and a commcast came on.'

'Those settings are individual to the helmets. If you wish to use it, the system is navigated with gestural head movements.'

Nyota tilted her head experimentally. It was an imperfect control system, but she was able to locate the music commcast she sometimes listened to whilst reading or studying. Interestingly the heads up also detailed specific information about the hoverbike and its' passengers. She found herself staring at Spock's readout - his heart rate, body temperature, weight and height – as if the figures would somehow magically explain her mysterious Lieutenant Commander to her. The surprisingly high figure for his weight made something click inside her. 'You imported a Vulcan hoverbike because Terran models are ill equipped to deal with the density of a Vulcan body.'

'Correct.' He had probably thought that obvious.

'So Vulcan's use hoverbikes instead of hovercars sir?'

'It is common for most households to own both. For personal transport hoverbikes are preferred
since they are more efficient, faster and have a greater range.'

That made sense. Vulcan was a desert planet with a population spread thinly. A hoverbike would be able to travel many times the distance of a hovercar with a similar power source. Still, dignified Vulcans in their layered robes seemed at odds with hoverbikes.

'Do they wear robes?'

'Most prefer garments with less chance of being caught in the machinery and causing injury or damage to the vehicle.'

'I almost wore a scarf this morning.'

'It is well you did not. Losing his department's most promising cadet to 'Decapitation via hoverbike-scarf misadventure' would have been difficult to explain to Professor Voss.'

Nyota laughed in shock. That was definitely a joke. Spock had told a joke. 'Did Gaila slip out while I was sleeping and leave you a 'coffee' this morning Lieutenant Commander?'

Spock's voice became almost gruff. 'No. Nor will not be accepting any further offerings from Cadet U'Aidat. I see my attempts at engaging in 'human politeness and small talk' with her were misguided.'

'Hmm perhaps you should steer clear of Orion girls. You seem to be doing well with everyone else however. The work for your classes is just as challenging but the students seem much more motivated judging from my sessions and tutor groups.'

'I still find it illogical that comments about the weather and recreational pursuits can have such an effect.' He did indeed sound mystified.

'I think even the smallest compliment or attention from a Vulcan is very flattering to most people. Other professors have to crack jokes in lectures and tell personal anecdotes. You make one sarcastic comment about Cadet Kirk's mother and the entire lecture hall in in stitches.'

'I was under the influence of an intoxicant.'

'Only Gaila knew that. Everyone else thinks they got a glimpse 'of the real Lieutenant Commander Spock' and they can relate to you now.'

'I regret commenting at the expense of Cadet Kirk's mother. I am sure my own would not have been amused.'

'Kirk's about as arrogant as they come sir. I doubt he's given it a second thought, and neither should you.' She paused. 'And making jokes about people's mothers is an ancient terran tradition. No one takes them seriously.'

'There is a human tradition to insult people's mothers?'

'Yes. It is generally accepted that they aren't actually meant to be taken seriously.'

Spock sounded sceptical. 'That is strange. I am often accused of being emotionless, but insults directed at my mother have in the past evoked decidedly emotional almost human reactions in me.'

'A joke Spock, not an insult.'

'Please provide an example.'
Nyota tried to think of something that would illustrate her point without being dirty. It was difficult. 'Your mother is so fat that, in theory, she can see the universe dying around her.'

Spock was silent for a long moment. 'My mother is, by human standards, very small.'

Nyota ignored him. 'Your mother is so dense she refracts light'

'That statement makes no sense.'

She decided to try one more. 'Your mother is so stupid she took a ruler to bed to see how long she slept' and waited for the inevitable response.

'My mother has two Terran doctorate degrees and sits upon the Vulcan High Council. She would never confuse measurements of space with that of time.'

Nyota bit her lip to hold back a laugh, glad Spock couldn't see her. 'Spock. You are missing the point. They aren't serious insults, they are meant to be absurd.'

'Well they are certainly absurd.'

He was silent for a long time. Eventually Nyota decided she'd better clarify. 'I am sorry if I offended you sir, I was merely giving examples, not casting aspersions on your mother.'

'Cadet Uhura, your mother's mass to volume ratio is such that she is able to float in an area of pure nitrogendioxide.'

For a moment she was shocked into silence as she unravelled his words. It was pretty terrible as far as jokes went, but she laughed anyway

Chapter End Notes

AN: I've moved the Riverside shipyards from Ohio to California.
also: http://imgur.com/a/5Mj9R
This is literally the whole reason I wrote this fic. Spock and Uhura are awesome and I wanted an excuse for them to share an awkward hoverbike ride. I am a woman of simple pleasures. Thank you random magazine for making ZQ pose on a bike.
Chapter 7

*Spock*

The moment Spock climbed onto his hoverbike in front of Cadet Uhura he regretted his choice of transport. This was entirely illogical as the hoverbike was the fastest means of travelling to and from the ship construction site. But he had not given due consideration to the proximity that his assistant would be in relation to his person.

It had taken some effort to ignore his accelerated heart rate and the strange nervousness she seemed to inflict on him. When she had expressed anxiety, he had been hopeful that she would decide to remain at the academy. When she did not he felt a confusing mix of anticipation and dread. It seemed a part of him took pleasure in torturing himself.

He was of Vulcan however, and he was certain he betrayed none of his conflicting feelings on the matter. Before he started the bike he forced himself to take her small hands in his gloved ones and correct her positioning despite the fact that he would have preferred to not touch her at all. He found himself looking down at her slender dark hands where they rested against him. The sight bought back memories of his disturbing dream of the night before. Those same delicate fingers pulling at him, twisting in his hair and pressed against his psi points joining their minds. Spock swallowed and closed his eyes briefly taking a moment to focus himself on operating the hoverbike.

He attempted to ignore the cadet for most of the journey, but she was pressed up against him so intimately that it proved impossible. Every time they slowed inertia pushed her firmly against his back and he could feel the muscles in her thighs tighten as she politely attempted to maintain some distance between them.

Spending two and half hours seated between Cadet Uhura's thighs was a particularly cruel torture. When they slipped into conversation he was actually glad, despite the vapid nature of their discussion, since he was able to focus on her voice and not the press of her body against him.

They arrived on schedule.

The Enterprise rose from amidst cornfields encrusted in scaffolding and umbilical cages. It was currently 24.7 days behind schedule, but with the fluid nature of its specifications, this was not unexpected. Since his last visit all that had outwardly changed was the appearance of the hull on the upper section. He was aware that a lot of the current work was focused on the life support systems, since their design was finalised. The engines and many of the other ships systems were still being adjusted and the final mechanical fit out would be the last stage of construction.

Spock parked the bike in the lot beside the combined diner and bar that serviced the yard employees. He was slightly stiff from the trip but deemed stretching in a parking lot unseemly for a Vulcan. Cadet Uhura swung a leg over the bike and stumbled as she dismounted. Automatically Spock reached out and took her upper arm to steady her. His fingers almost met. He estimated the circumference of her bicep to be approximately 24.3cm.

'Whoops! My leg's gone to sleep.' She straightened and stretched her leg out in attempt to get her blood circulating. Spock awkwardly dropped her arm.

Uhura turned and looked eagerly up at the towering starship as she continued to jiggle her leg. 'Wow! The last time I was here was a year ago. I took a transport over and enlisted in Starfleet over
here rather than the Nairobi office just so I could see her. She seems so huge!'

Not for the first time Spock wondered at the strange way humans inevitably referred to starships as females. 'The Enterprise is the largest starship to be constructed on earth. If 'she' were any larger, her construction would have needed to take place in a spaceyard.'

'Yes. I was surprised when I heard they were building her on earth. It would be much simpler to construct her in null gravity.' She looked at Spock questioningly.

'You are correct Cadet. However Starfleet command deemed it important that the new flagship be constructed on Earth.'

Uhura rolled her eyes. 'Politics. Still, I'm not complaining. If they'd done the sensible thing and had the Enterprise build off-planet, she would have launched before I graduated, and I'd have no chance of gaining a commission on-board.'

'Indeed. Construction time would have been reduced by 1.26 standard years.' He indicated they should depart and headed towards the site office. Uhura fell in step beside him, her neck craning and she admired the ship taking form in front of them.

The actual construction site was fenced off and guarded and they were required to display their identification to enter. Spock took the cadet's helmet and stowed both along with their jackets in a locker. They were required to don hard hats before continuing.

Uhura frowned as she tried to arrange her hair. 'Well. These are stylish.'

Spock was pleased he was able to detect her sarcasm.

The day passed easily. Spock was so engrossed by his work that didn't have any inappropriate thoughts or humiliating physical reactions to his assistant. Even during the brief lunch break they took at the shipyard diner, the conversation was purely professional. In fact it was almost nine hours later before Spock was forcibly reminded of his problem.

He opened the locker to retrieve their helmets and jackets as Uhura removed her hard hat. At some point in the afternoon she had pinned her hair up and as she removed the safety helmet it came free to fall around her shoulders. Spock was standing beside her, but not facing her. He realised what had occurred because his accursed overdeveloped Vulcan olfactory senses were suddenly bombarded with her scent. It was a sweet flowery mix of her shampoo, the vanilla and jasmine of her perfume and the underlying scent of her. His fingers froze on a clasp. He clenched his jaw and focused on resisting the urge to turn 87.3 degrees towards her and bend slightly to bury his face in the sweet smelling tangle of her hair -to press his face into the warmth of her neck and inhale the scent of her skin as if she were a particularly fragrant flower.

The sudden and visceral nature of his thoughts shocked him. Quickly he turned to pass her jacket and helmet to her. As he did so he took in her appearance, hoping to detect some reason for his reaction. She was wearing dark jeans and a long sleeved top. Although both were tight, they were modest in their cut. Her shoes were sturdy leather boots. Her makeup as usual was minimal, as was her jewellery. Small gold earrings, a ring with a stone of some sort, a necklace hung with a single pearl and a delicate bracelet.

Nothing about her appearance, though lovely, was designed to entice. There was no logical reason, or rather excuse, for Spock's thoughts. At least when she was wearing the (illogically) short cadet's uniform he could not be faulted for noticing her… femininity.
She pulled on her jacket and Spock pointedly held his breath when she pulled her hair out from it to fall down her back. She wore her hair unusually long for a human. It hung down to her waist. He completed doing up his own jacket and thought very hard on his work to distract himself from musings on the cadet's hair and the number of times he would be able to wrap it around a fist. He would have to make several small changes to his sensor array as a result of changes to the bridge layout he had observed that day.

Changes had been made to the weapons console and he would need to move his array 168.2 mm starboard to accommodate. According to the information he had been given this displacement was officially only 82.5 mm. It was good he had come and checked the new dimensions by hand. Uhura had been surprised at the number of discrepancies they had discovered and spoken somewhat condescendingly of the other teams working on the ship's systems.

This had pleased Spock.

He found the casual disregard some of his colleagues seemed to have for accuracy both irritating and illogical. There would no doubt be serious issues and delays during the final fit out of the new flagship due to errors precisely like those he and Uhura had identified that day.

He was disturbed from his ruminations by a rumbling from the Cadet in question.

She glanced up at him in embarrassment. 'Excuse me sir. Apparently I'm hungry.'

Yet again Spock's mouth answered without stopping to consult his good sense. 'The dinner menu at the diner is slightly more appetising than their lunch options if you require sustenance.'

She frowned slightly. 'I don't want to take up your evening sir – I can get something back at campus.'

Spock noted she had offered a polite means for him to avoid additional social interaction with her without either of them loosing face. The correct response, according to his observations of human interactions, would be 'If you are certain?' to which she would respond in the affirmative and reassure him and then the issue would be considered closed without offense to either party.

Humans had many such conversational rituals. Even after years living amidst them, they confused Spock.

'It makes no difference if my evening meal is taken at the Academy cafeteria or the shipyard diner.' He paused. 'Both will be equally unpalatable.'

Nyota smiled. 'Ah. There's no vegetarian lasagne on Fridays is there?' She frowned in thought. 'Friday is that awful vegan pizza with that 'cheese' that tastes like rubber and smells like my father's boots after a long walk in the summertime.'

Spock felt his mouth quirk in amusement. Her description was, sadly, quite accurate. 'The fermented bean curd based cheese substitute utilised in that particular dish is quite… pungent.'

Uhura raised an eyebrow. 'That's an understatement if ever I heard one sir.' She tucked her helmet under her arm. 'Well, I can't in good conscience send you back to that pizza, so I will have to insist on the diner.'

Although it was still very early in the evening, the bar in the diner was packed with yard personnel who'd just clocked off for the weekend and were drinking and playing pool and other bar games Spock was unfamiliar with. There were only a few customers in the dining section however and they were able to get a table in a reasonably quiet corner. The bar area with its garish decorative
lighting and loud music was mercifully separated by glass doors.

Spock ordered two Terran style 'Vegie burgers' which whilst of negligible nutritional value and difficult to eat with a knife and fork, were at least edible. The large side dish of deep fried potato was also quite enjoyable. The more exotic non-meat based options on the menu like the 'Orion Spiced Roots' in his experience made the vegan pizza served on campus seem like gourmet fare.

The cadet ordered an Andorian curry of some sort and a mixed drink that seemed quite popular amongst human females called a 'Cardassian Sunrise'.

When her drink arrived, Spock asked a question that he had often wondered about. 'Cadet, I understand the use of fruit or other edible garnish, but what is the purpose of the paper umbrella in your beverage?'

Uhura smiled. 'You know, I really have no idea. Certain cocktails just come with an umbrella. It's tradition.'

'But what purpose does the tradition serve?'

She took a sip of her drink then removed the little blue umbrella and twisted it between her fingers. 'Hmm. Well cocktails became popular when alcohol was briefly outlawed hundreds of years ago. The mixers were to mask the awful taste of the homemade alcohol people were drinking. My guess is the bartenders first started putting elaborate garnishes in people's drinks for the same reason they mixed them so exotically - to make them more appealing. I imagine those bartenders probably sampled their own wares quite a bit and at a certain point of inebriation, tiny paper umbrellas probably seemed perfectly logical. Perhaps they were out of sliced limes that evening.' She smiled up at him teasingly. 'Of course there is another reason they are used in girly drinks like Cardassian Sunrises.' Her voice became gravely serious. 'An Ancient Terran Custom.'

Spock tilted his head in confusion. The first part of the cadet's explanation seemed perfectly feasible, but he detected additional humour in her last statement. 'An 'Ancient Terran Custom' involving small paper umbrellas Cadet?'

She pursed her lips. 'Well, not just paper umbrellas. Also flowers and other bright pretty things. Observe.' She opened the little blue umbrella, pulled her hair behind her ear and fastened it in place with the umbrella. 'Ta da!'

Spock raised one eyebrow. 'You are implying non-edible garnishes are intended for additional use as hair fasteners Cadet?' It was an absurd notion.

'Not 'fasteners' Lieutenant Commander, decoration.'

'That is even more illogical then their use as a garnish for a beverage. Much more aesthetically pleasing ornamentation would have been available to Terran females even hundreds of years ago.'

Uhura laughed and shook her head. Her eyes seemed brighter and her face was slightly flushed. 'I didn't say it was a logical tradition sir.'

Spock looked at the bar area through the glass doors. There were 68 humans and 12 humanoids of assorted races. Discounting the non-humans, there were 26 females varying in age from their early 20's to late 40's. 'Of the 27 Terran females present only you have a paper umbrella in your hair Cadet.'

Uhura quirked her eyebrow in challenge. 'It's still very early. If you were to remain here, I am certain you would observe several demonstrations of the 'Ancient Terran Custom' in question.'
'I believe you are indulging in human sarcasm Cadet and if I were to spend my evening here the only 'Ancient Terran Custom' I would bear witness to would be mass intoxication.'

Uhura pouted. 'I assure you I am being quite serious. In fact, I anticipate I could prove my point within approximately 15 minutes.'

Spock took a bite of his dinner. 'By all means cadet.'

Uhura summoned their waitress. 'Excuse me, that group at the table near the bar,' She indicated six women and three men eating dinner and drinking nearby. They wore the grey uniforms of Starfleet technical construction workers and Spock recognised some of them from previous visits. '… could you please send them a round of Cardassian Sunrises for the ladies and' she paused and checked what the men were drinking, 'Budweiser Classics for the men with the compliments of Lieutenant Commander Spock,' she here inclined her head gracefully in Spock's direction, '… who is very impressed with their ongoing work on the Enterprise's bridge fabrication.'

Spock froze. The purchase of alcoholic beverages usually had implicit underlying social meanings, often sexual, that he was not sure of. He wondered if Cadet Uhura was intending to make him the butt of some sort of joke.

The waitress returned Nyota's bright smile. 'Right away dear!' She turned to Spock as she scanned Nyota's credit chip for payment. 'They have been under such a lot of pressure with all the changes to the ship's systems. Having to rework sections constantly. I hear them worrying about it all the time. It's very thoughtful of you to take notice of them.' She pursed her lips in disapproval. 'Certainly none of the other officers who visit would ever think too.'

Spock nodded and attempted to look suitably, friendly? The woman was maintaining eye contact expectantly. He tried to think of a suitable response. 'It is proving… trying… to accommodate the changes relevant to the small section of the ship for which I am responsible.' He glanced at her name tag. 'I imagine, Jayne, that these difficulties must be even more pronounced for the technicians.' He waited apprehensively to see if his contribution to the conversation was acceptable.

The waitress seemed satisfied. 'Starfleet needs more reasonable men such as yourself. I'll get those drinks over to them right away.' With a parting smile far warmer then she had offered on any of Spock's previous visits to the diner, she headed to the bar.

Across the table Uhura was grinning at him. 'You have a way with waitresses Lieutenant Commander.'

He assumed she was referring mockingly to Sarah the server at the campus cafeteria. 'You seem inordinately pleased with yourself cadet. You have not demonstrated anything except the irrational human need for unnecessary reassurance.'

She ate a spoonful of her curry and took a sip of her nearly empty Cardassian Sunrise before replying. 'I have not demonstrated anything yet, but I did just make you the technicians and that waitress's favourite officer. You will probably thank me for that sooner rather than later. As for the demonstration, by the time we finish our meal I anticipate that it will have taken place.'

Spock looked over at the women at the table of technicians. Two were around Uhura's age, but the other four were probably closer to 40, and none had overly decorative hairstyles or makeup. He could not imagine any of them whimsically putting a colourful umbrella in their hair in the manner of his cadet. He frowned at his use of a possessive pronoun regards to her. 'I doubt that very much cadet.'
6.1 minutes later the waitress named Jayne approached the technicians with a large tray of drinks, 6 of them sporting brightly coloured umbrellas. She handed them out and spoke briefly at the table before smiling and pointing at Spock and Uhura. The technicians all turned to stare, some raising their drinks in salute, others smiling in thanks and one of the more inebriated men offering an enthusiastic thumbs up.

Uhura smiled and offered a cheerful wave in response. Spock nodded and raised his hand in a Vulcan salute, hoping that would be sufficient. Four of the technicians attempted to return it, poorly. One of them twisted his hand into what was quite a crude Klingon gesture.

Uhura observed this and turned back to her meal to hide her laughter.

Spock raised his eyebrow. 'I hope that technician used that gesture by accident. I have no desire to engage in sexual intercourse with him.'

Across the table Uhura choked on her stifled laughter and drained the dregs of her beverage to clear her throat. When she finally spoke her voice was hoarse. 'Sir, for someone so dismissive of sarcasm, you certainly come very close to utilizing it.'

'I was not being sarcastic. I was stating a fact. I do not,' he paused and stared gravely at his assistant, 'wish to engage in sexual intercourse with that human. According to my understanding of terran humour, if I had been using a sarcastic tone of voice, the opposite of that statement would be implied.'

Uhura rolled her eyes, but she was smiling.

They ate in silence for a few minutes, Spock keeping an eye on the technicians in case they started exhibiting the behaviour Uhura seemed to think they would. He deemed it unlikely. Then the waitress returned with two elaborate beverages. One was served in a coconut with three paper umbrellas and an assortment of fruit exploding from it and the other in an odd glass that seemed more suited to use as an aquarium then as a vessel for a beverage.

Uhura gasped in what Spock thought was perhaps happiness as much as surprise. The waitress was grinning at her. She placed the coconut bristling with umbrellas in front of Spock and the enormous glass in front of Uhura. 'With compliments of the technicians! Enjoy!'

Uhura waved and mouthed 'Thank you' at the table of smiling, increasingly intoxicated technicians across the room. Spock hoped her reaction was enough for both of them, since all he could really do was nod in response to their waving and yelling.

Uhura pushed her half-finished curry aside and inspected her new drink, turning the glass around. 'Wow. I don't even know what this is.' She sniffed it. 'Smells good though!' She located a straw and shifted to a kneeling position on the bench so she was high enough to take a sip comfortably. 'Ooooh! It's tastes like coffee and chocolate. And almonds.' She stabbed the straw down and took another sip. 'And there's ice-cream!' She sounded far more delighted in the monstrous beverage then seemed warranted. If she desired ice cream, she should have simply ordered some. There were six varieties on the diner menu.

'Is it wise to drink something when you have no idea what is in it Cadet?' Spock was inspecting his coconut suspiciously. The fruit seemed safe enough. He did not have a clean utensil with which to eat it however.

Uhura took sip of her drink and watched him bemusedly. 'I am sure a bar in a Starfleet facility is fairly safe sir. Those technicians are just being friendly.' She took another sip. 'Oh this is good.'
Spock discovered a drinking straw hidden amidst the umbrellas within the coconut. It was purple and had strange loops in it. Then he realised there was another. 'I have two straws and both appear to be defective.'

Uhura giggled. 'They aren't defective sir, they're just fancy.' She used a swizzle stick as a skewer for what Spock identified as a cherry that she had fished out of her drink. Spock stared at her mouth as she pulled it off the stick with her teeth, seemingly unaware of the decidedly erotic manner in which she did so. He felt himself flush and quickly returned his gaze to the disturbing coconut.

He realised he should at least try the beverage, or make it look like he was drinking it, so that the technicians would not be offended. This irritated him. He did not want a strange terran beverage in a coconut with ineffectually designed straws. If he had desired such a thing he would have purchased one for himself.

He removed the paper umbrellas and placed them on the counter. The strange curled straw was more difficult to use then the standard ones. What he had intended as a small experimental sip ended up as a large gulp. He swallowed then paused and ruminated on the taste. Unsurprisingly, it was of coconut and assorted fruits, with the burn of alcohol as an aftertaste. Coconut, pineapple, Orion melon and mango with cinnamon and some other warm spicy flavour Spock could not identify. Although overly sweet, it was quite pleasant. He took another sip.

Uhura was smiling at him. She looked quite ridiculous sitting perched behind an enormous drink with a blue paper umbrella stuck behind her ear. Spock was suddenly glad she wasn't in uniform. Drinking with a cadet, even though they were off duty, did not seem like something Starfleet Command would approve of. It was not something he approved of for that matter. Still, with his Vulcan blood alcohol affected him so little that he was confident the situation would remain perfectly respectable.

They would remain only as long as it took for the technicians to finish the drinks Uhura had bought for them. Once they failed to put umbrellas in their hair and he was proven correct, and the cadet wrong, there would be no reason for them to remain. In the meantime he would sip at the coconut drink. It was not unpleasant.

'So, what do you think of your piña colada Lieutenant Commander?' Uhura gestured at the coconut.

Spanish? They had never conversed in Spanish before. It was not a language Spock was overly familiar with. 'Pineapple strained?'

The cadet nodded. 'Literally yes. But in standard it refers to a drink mixed from pineapple juice, coconut and rum. Which is what I am assuming your coconut cornucopia contains.'

'Indeed. There is also mango, orion melon, cinnamon and other spices I cannot identify.'

'Perhaps that's the rum. Or sometimes they put other spirits and liqueurs in there as well.'

Spock tilted his head. 'Possibly. I am unfamiliar with many types of Terran intoxicants. My mother is fond of wine and a singularly unpleasant spirit distilled from juniper berries which she drinks mixed with a bitter carbonated beverage. This 'pina colada' is far superior'

Uhura laughed. Spock felt himself flush with pleasure at the ringing sound of it.

*Nyota*
Uhura borrowed some lipstick from one of the technicians – her name was Lena, and straightened her hair. The restrooms in the bar were just as bad as they were when she’d last visited over a year before. The mirror was smudged and she had to shift her head to find a clear spot to apply it properly.

Satisfied she returned it to her new friend. "Thanks Lena!"

'No problem Nyota. Can you fix my hair? My umbrellas keep trying to make a run for it!' The older woman turned to reveal the cluster of pink and blue umbrellas sticking haphazardly from her matronly bun.

'Sure thing!'

Nyota removed them and stuck them into Lena's glossy blonde hair more securely. 'All done!'

'Thanks hun.' The older woman paused. 'Oh! That rhymed!'

Nyota laughed and turned back to the mirror to check the little brightly coloured umbrellas that adorned her own hair. Lena unsteadily refreshed her lipstick beside her and then they linked arms with the instant friendship inebriated women could develop and returned to the table where the rest of their companions for the evening were sitting.

The bar was darkly lit by only neon signs and screens and Nyota felt comfortable enough in her anonymity to let her gaze linger on the Lt. Commander as they approached. The Vulcan was engaged in a game of pool with a man in the dark green uniform of a mechanic. No doubt one of the workers employed in the fitting and fabrication of the myriad of mechanical systems upon the new flagship. He was scowling and leaning on his cue.

As Nyota watched Spock leant over the table facing her and neatly sunk a ball. He then circled the table and took another shot from the adjacent side, giving Nyota a very nice view of his lean body as he leant over. She had studiously avoided giving any attention to his clothing all day. In her tipsy state however, she was unable to keep her eyes to herself.

His pants were tight reinforced ones designed for riding his hoverbike and tucked into tall riding boots. Whilst they were quite detailed with lines of stitching where they were reinforced, both were very plain compared to the brightly coloured outfits Nyota usually saw on hoverbike riders. There was no neon lettering or branding on either. The pants were however, just as wonderfully tight as those other flashy designs. She supposed that was for safety reasons. You wouldn't want your clothes getting caught in something if you crashed your bike.

She stared longingly at the long lean lines of him. He made his grey uniform slacks look attractive. In his delightfully fitted riding pants and snug t-shirt, he looked positively divine. His arm pulled back to take his shot and his muscles played beneath his skin as the cue shot forward most… satisfactorily. There was a cheer from the spectators and a few good natured boos.

Nyota and Lena arrived at one of the tall bars near the pool table and resumed their seats.

Spock lined up his next shot as his opponent laughed and commented 'Looks like I might as well sit back down boys!' The mechanic sat on a tall stool and took a long swig from a beer bottle.

Sure enough the ball sunk. Spock's next shot took him to the side in front of Nyota. The ball was quite far across the table and he leant forward to take aim. Nyota found herself in a trance-like state staring at the small wedge of pale skin that appeared between his tucked in shirt and his pants. It was only 2 meters from her. She could stand, take perhaps two small steps then reach out and press
her fingers against his skin and…

Lena's voice drew Nyota from her languid study of her instructor. 'Wow. How many people has the Lt. Comm'dr beaten Nyota?' She was gesturing at the bar table they were sat at. Blushing furiously Nyota turned in her seat. Their table was covered in a wide variety of drinks. There were half a dozen various beers, two glasses of what was most likely terrible wine, a few shots of dark spirits wedged between glasses, what appeared to be a couple of rum or bourbon and cokes and a row of brightly coloured cocktails in exotic glasses. Thankfully there were none of the enormous chocolatey concoctions like the one Nyota had enjoyed earlier. The table would have collapsed under the weight.

'Whoa! There are twice as many as there were ten minutes ago!'

Lena picked up a blue cocktail that was smoking mysteriously. 'Maybe we took longer fixing our makeup then we thought Nyota.' She sniffed the drink. 'You think the Lt. Commander would mind me taking this off his hands?'

Nyota picked up a drink at random and raised it in salute. 'Did not Surak say, 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one'?'

Lena laughed and they clinked glasses. Nyota's drink turned out to be something that tasted of gin and lemon juice. She winced and put it back down. 'Oh god, whatever you do don't try the yellow ones Lena.'

The older woman took a long gulp of her own. 'In comparison I highly recommend this blue stuff... whatever it is.'

There was more cheering from the group at the pool table. When Nyota turned back to them Spock was speaking with his opponent and almost smiling. She couldn't hear what was being said but she imagined it was the loser offering the Vulcan more drinks. Lord knows what he was going to do with them all.

Turning back to the table she selected a glass more carefully this time and was rewarded with something that tasted like passionfruit and had little bits of strawberry floating in it.

She sat quietly for a few minutes sipping her drink and watching the patrons of the bar across the room from her. Suddenly Spock appeared at her side carrying a pina colada. It was impossible to hear anyone approaching over the noise and music of the bar. She smiled warmly, if a little drunkenly, at him. 'Have you beaten everyone in the bar yet sir?'

He looked about as smug as a Vulcan could look. Or would let themselves look. 'There are several players who still wish to test their skill cadet. I will best them.'

Nyota smiled teasingly. 'Ooh! So sure of yourself are we Mr Fancy-Vulcan-Pants?' Yes. She really should stop drinking.

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'My name is not 'Mr Fancy-Vulcan-Pants'. Nor does such a garment exist.'

Nyota pouted. 'You know perfectly well that I did not mean it literally.' She leant forward to look at towards his feet. 'Though I might add you appear to be wearing quite elaborate, dare I say 'Fancy' pants which I assume are of Vulcan manufacture. Am I correct Lieutenant Commander?'

He did not respond, instead taking a long sip of his drink and almost, almost, scowling at her. He looked ridiculous. Nyota started giggling. He raised an eyebrow at her in query.
'I'm sorry sir, but it's very difficult to take a Vulcan in tight pants drinking a pina colada seriously.' Behind her she heard Lena snort into her drink.

Spock's frown deepened. 'I fail to see how my appearance could seem frivolous to you cadet.'

Lena was choking with laughter.

'Use those incredible Vulcan powers of observation sir. Look around.'

Spock turned at looked around the rest of the bar thoroughly before turning back to Nyota. 'I see that we are of some interest to other patrons, but otherwise note nothing untoward.' He paused. 'And my pants do not appear dissimilar to those which others are wearing.'

Silently Nyota reached out and took Spock's drink from him and placed it on the table. Then she picked up a beer and passed the bottle to him.

Spock stared hard at the drink in his hand for a long moment before looking up to meet Nyota's smirking face. 'Am I to deduce that the pina colada is regarded as a frivolous beverage?'

'That's one way to put it sir.'

Spock downed the beer in one go and placed it on the table.

Nyota gaped at him.

He frowned. 'Despite being part human, I do not understand appreciation they have for beer.'

'You aren't supposed to skal it Sir.'

His head tilted. 'I fail to see how the speed of consumption would influence the flavour of the beverage.'

Nyota sighed. 'You're right sir. I don't like beer either.'

Spock nodded and regarded her strangely for a long moment, long enough for Nyota to feel her skin start to flush before looking away. 'Cadet, it is now 21:47.'

Nyota gasped and glanced at her watch in shock. 'I didn't realise we'd been here so long!'

'Indeed we have stayed far longer than I anticipated. It would be best if we returned to the Academy now.'

Nyota nodded and checked she had stowed her ID, comm and credit chip safely in her pockets. Spock donned his jacket but did not bother fastening it yet. He spoke over Nyota's head at Lena. 'It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance Technician Nilsson. Perhaps you could share these beverages with your companions?'

Lena grinned. 'Lovely to meet you too Lt. Cmm'dr Spock and of course we will be happy to make sure these don't go to waste.'

Nyota made her own farewells and waved at the technicians as she followed Spock across the room.

The air outside hit her in a refreshingly cold blast. She realised she was really quite drunk. She hoped she didn't fall off Spock's hoverbike.
Spock passed her helmet to her and perched his on the hoverbike as he fastened his jacket. Nyota checked her own was buttoned up securely and moved to pull her helmet on.

Spock suddenly caught her arm in his hand stopping her. She felt her breath catch in her throat. He was almost smiling. Her heat started hammering at his proximity. A cold draft of wind wrapped itself around her and she fought the urge to step closer and push herself against his warmth.

‘Cadet, you are forgetting something.’ His eyes were bright, almost human looking, and there was a teasing lilt to his voice she had not heard before. What did he mean? Why was he standing so close to her and holding her arm? His fingers seemed to burn with heat even through the thick sleeve of her jacket. She wished they were wrapped around her bare skin instead. She could smell his aftershave. It smelt really good. Better than it had done all the other times she had stood near him in the lab or classroom. Now it made her want to bury her face against him and inhale.

Spock looked up breaking their eye contact and Nyota finally remembered to breath. Unfortunately she forgot how to breathe normally and found herself taking deep ragged pants. She felt Spock's fingers brush against her hair. For a moment she was sure he was going to bury his fingers in it and pull her face up to his and kiss her and oh god it seemed like a wonderful idea despite the fact that he was her teacher and a Vulcan and she was drunk and they were standing in the middle of a hovercar parking yard on Starfleet property to boot.

She felt a tug and then his hand was between them twisting a tiny blue umbrella back and forth between thumb and forefinger.

Nyota started at it dumbly for a moment then started to laugh.
**Chapter 8**

*Spock*

He awoke later than usual on Saturday morning. He had forgone meditation the night before, finding himself overly fatigued after his return to his quarters. He imagined it was from the unusual amount of socialising he had engaged in alongside Cadet Uhura the night before. By following her advice of verbalising the obvious and mundane in conversation, he had, apart from the occasional burst of irritation, found socialising with the workers in the shipyard bar... satisfactory.

He was quite pleased with himself. For the first time since his arrival on Earth here was proof that not only could he adapt his behaviours to Terran social custom, the resulting companionship with humans was... not unpleasant. He had heard several pointed comments from a few patrons at the bar, but there had been no alterations and many of them had seemed to actively seek out his company.

When the group of technicians had invited him and Cadet Uhura to join them at their table, Spock's initial instinct had been to refuse them. But a glance at Uhura, silently waiting his decision, changed his mind. He sat beside the Cadet and watched in amazement as 6.2 standard minutes after they joined the technicians, one of the females finished her Cardassian Sunrise and promptly poked the umbrella into the bun atop her head.

Uhura had turned to him and given him such a wide smile that he was not even disappointed at losing their wager.

He had remained conversing with the technician and Uhura for a further 28 minutes. They had finished the exuberant beverages their new acquaintances had purchased for them, and Spock was considering informing the Cadet of his desire to return to the Academy when one of the males challenged him to a game of pool.

Spock was familiar with the game from his time as a cadet. It was an enjoyable if unchallenging pastime. He doubted if the technician, a human of around 35 years named Stephen Lee, would be skilled enough to make the game interesting however.

'I don't think the Lieutenant Commander plays pool Steve.' Something about the dismissive tone of Cadet Uhura's voice had annoyed Spock.

'Actually cadet I am well acquainted with the game.'

The technician had clapped his hands together and stood. 'Well great! I'll go grab us some cues from the bar.'

Uhura had looked at him sceptically. 'You really play pool sir?'

'During my years as a cadet I often played with my classmates.' That had been technically true. He had only played with most of them once or twice. Humans did not enjoy being soundly beaten repeatedly. That was one aspect of their nature he understood completely.

The technician, Stephen, had proved himself to be a far better player than any of Spock's old classmates. He had won the coin toss then sunk four balls in quick succession. It had taken Spock a few shots to become accustomed to his cue and to accurately gauge the level of resistance offered by the red felt covering the table and he won by only a margin of only one ball. The next game was
much shorter; Spock broke and ended the game before his opponent even had a shot.

After this the technician vanished to the bar and returned with two drinks which he placed before Spock.

Spock recalled receiving similar tribute when playing in bars. He politely thanked the technician and obligingly drank one of the beverages, giving the other to the Cadet. It was vodka and orange juice. Less offensive then beer at least.

Uhura had seemed delighted. 'That was very impressive sir. I've never seen someone win like that before. Then again, the cadets playing pool at the academy bar are, as a rule, quite intoxicated.'

A few minutes later Stephen had reappeared with another human male whom he introduced as 'His buddy from systems, Manny.'

Manny had expressed a desire to play a few games with Spock. Uhura had nodded eagerly at him and conferred with the blonde woman beside her before adding. 'Ask him for Cardassian Sunrises when you win sir!'

Uhura's confidence in him made him feel disproportionately proud. Beating humans at a game based on simple trigonometry was to be expected. Being proud of doing so was illogical.

Stephan had laughed. 'Watch out Manny! Those things are expensive!'

The human 'Manny' had smirked at cadet Uhura. 'Tell you what little lady, since I'm feeling generous, I'll buy you one after I beat this guy here.'

Uhura had rolled her eyes. 'Good luck Manny, you'll need it.'

Spock didn't 'go easy' on Manny as he had on Stephen. He beat him thrice without letting him sink a single ball. By this time the pool table had gained a small crowd of spectators. Manny been surprisingly good humoured about his defeat however and presented Spock with three Cardassian Sunrises which had pleased the Cadet and her blonde companion a great deal.

Sometime after that point he had simply forgotten that he and the cadet were supposed to be back at the Academy, and that playing pool to win her drinks, whilst an enjoyable diversion, was probably not considered appropriate behaviour. No he hadn't 'forgotten', Vulcan's didn't just 'forget' things. He had ignored the professional nature of his relationship with his aide and socialised alongside her in a questionable situation.

He had not broken any Starfleet regulation - eating a meal and spending a few hours at a bar with a cadet was hardly fraternization. Captain Pike had often invited him to the officer's lounge and to the campus bar and would probably be pleased he had 'come out of his shell' rather than upset that he'd spent time with a cadet. And Spock was aware that his reputation and background as a Vulcan meant that he would not be suspected of inappropriate behaviour where Uhura was concerned in the same manner some of the other Academy staff would be.

And he had not behaved inappropriately. He had been... friendly to the cadet, allowing her to see a little past his professional demeanour, but he had not said anything that could be construed as sexual or overly personal in nature, and he certainly not touched her. Save her hair. He had touched her hair when he'd removed the absurd paper umbrella from it.

Such an action would have been considered inappropriate on Vulcan, but he was on Earth and the cadet was a human. In terms of human interaction it was acceptable. It certainly wasn't against any Starfleet regulation. So it was permissible. Or so he told himself.
Her hair had been very soft. He'd wanted to twist his fingers through it the moment he felt it against his skin. She'd stood there so close to him, staring up at him with wide eyes and lips slightly parted in surprise and it would have been the easiest thing in the galaxy to ignore the ridiculous umbrella and bend down and kiss her instead. At the time he had been certain she would have reciprocated such an action. He had not of course.

The guilt he felt was that he had wanted to. His thoughts regarding Uhura were inappropriate. A Lieutenant Commander and Starfleet Academy instructor should not want to kiss his teaching aide. Such a thing should not even occur to him. The scent of her perfume (vanilla and jasmine) should not affect his heart-rate. And he certainly should not dream about engaging in sexual intercourse with her.

Spock decided that he would make sure they were never in such a relaxed, social setting in future. It would be illogical to test his control of his emotions or the effect the cadet had over him. He was half human. All it would take would be a moment of human weakness and he could jeopardize both his and the cadet's careers. If he had kissed her like he had desired in the lot behind the bar, not only would it have led to a myriad of personal problems, there was a good chance some Starfleet personnel would have seen them and his career would have been called into question.

Rising from his bed he headed to the gymnasium and spent an hour in suus mahna exercises. The building was fairly quiet. Few Terrans left their homes before noon on Saturdays in his experience, and the Academy residents were no different. After developing a satisfying burn in his muscles he spent 30 minutes swimming laps in the pool upstairs. Even seven years after leaving Vulcan swimming was still novel to him.

Midday found him back in his quarters meditating. Exercise had not worked to calm him and try as he might, every time he cleared his mind of thoughts of Uhura, something would remind him of her. The flame of his asenoi seemed to twist his thoughts further rather than clear them. He could sense that dark feeling at the edges of his mind and studiously ignored it.

He spent his afternoon working on the sensor array for the Enterprise. It proved adequate at diverting his attention.

*Nyota*

Nyota had not risen until after 14:00 hours on Saturday. She had awoken at 13:16 and lain in bed reliving her every word and action from the night before in growing mortification.

Eventually Gaila brought her a large coffee and a painkiller hypo and she'd stumbled from the cocoon of her blankets.

Her Orion roommate graciously waited a few minutes for the hypo and caffeine to kick in before interrogating her. 'Spill Ny.'

Nyota had sipped the coffee (Gaila had put extra sugar in it, bless her.) and tried to divert her. 'Nothing to spill.'

Gaila pressed her hands to her hips and pouted. 'Ny, you barged in at half past one in the morning smelling like beer and sex, told me some crazy story about Lt. Commander Spock, a pool table, someone named Lena and a hoverbike, then gave me a handful of cocktail umbrellas and spent half an hour throwing up.'

Nyota panicked. She had no recollection of her conversation with Gaila at all. She remembered the
next part in the bathroom unfortunately. Yuck. But Gaila - what had she told her? 'Okay I was drunk, obviously, but I certainly didn't smell of sex Gaila. You have a one track mind.'

The Orion huffed. 'I am Orion Ny. You smelt like horny Ny pheromones and horny guy pheromones. Ergo – sex.'

Nyota gasped in shock and mortification. 'Horny Ny pheromones?! What are you talking about?'

Gaila rolled her eyes. 'There's nothing to be embarrassed about, since we live together it's inevitable that I would be familiar with them.' At Nyota's blank expression she elaborated. 'Your brand so to speak.'

'My brand!?'

'Your pheromones!' Gaila responded.

Nyota pressed her hand to her mouth. 'Oh god! You mean you know whenever someone,' (and by someone she meant herself) '…is in the mood? You can smell it?'

Her roommate nodded. 'Don't worry Ny, I'm sure I'm more comfortable with your sexuality then you are.' She paused. 'If anything I'd be worried if in a year and half of sharing a room you'd never once had a sexy dream or something.'

Nyota plonked her coffee on her bed side table and buried her head back under her pillow. 'Oh my god this is so embarrassing!'

Gaila sighed. 'Look, it's perfectly natural. I smell them from pretty much everyone sooner or later, and it's not like I'd ever, you know, tell anyone. For the most part I try and ignore them.' She smirked. 'Unless they are directed at me of course.'

Nyota sat up again and tried to focus on drinking her coffee.

'Anyway, that's not the point here.' Gaila continued. 'I want answers!'

'I stopped at the Academy bar when I got back to campus. I drank a little too much. End of story.'

Her roommate frowned. 'I can't believe you are lying to me!'

'Yes you are!' Gaila raised an eyebrow. 'So you didn't pick up some hot mechanic at the ship yard and go for a spin on his hoverbike before having lots of kinky…'

'GAILA!'

The Orion poked out her tongue. 'Fine. So spill already.'

Nyota sighed. 'After we finished for the day the Lieutenant Commander and I had dinner at the diner at the shipyard. I ended up making a sort of bet with him that human women liked to put cocktail umbrellas in their hair…' Gaila snorted. '… So I sent some of the technicians I’d seen working on the bridge earlier some drinks to prove my point. But they sent us back some, so we drank them to be polite and we ended up sitting at their table and the women totally did put the
umbrellas in their hair…'

Gaila nodded. 'Naturally.'

'And then one of them wanted to play pool with the Lt. Commander and he got beaten twice and gave Spock two drinks and then this other guy wanted to play him and he was all cocky and kinda rude but Spock beat him three times in a row and the guy didn't sink a single ball! It was hilarious!' Nyota broke off her commentary as she noted the extremely dubious expression on her roommate's face. 'What?'

'Are you lying again Ny?'

Nyota frowned. 'No?'

Gaila raised an eyebrow sceptically. 'So you are saying you spent the evening at a bar with Lieutenant Commander Spock who is some sort of 'Vulcan Pool Shark?'' She raised her hands to mime quotation marks.

'Pretty much. Then he took me home on his hoverbike.' Nyota responded.

Gaila was silent for a moment then began to laugh.

'It's true!' Nyota insisted.

'Sure sure! Lt. Commander Spock slamming back beers at the bar! Hustlin' pool! Professor Spock in tight leather pants riding a hoverbike!' Gaila collapsed in giggles at the last image.

Nyota sniffed. 'They weren't leather. Some sort of synthetic material.'

Gaila went quiet. 'Wait. You're serious?'

'Yes. Apparently hoverbikes are very popular on Vulcan. Evidently they are 'the most efficient form of transport."

'Whoa. Well. I did not see that coming.' Gaila was silent for a moment in contemplation. 'So, did you do the Lt. Commander?'

Nyota gasped and threw her pillow at Gaila. 'Of course not! He's my instructor!'

Gaila caught the pillow and nonchalantly rested her head on it. 'So if not him then who could I smell on you?'

Nyota frowned. 'Well, one of the technicians did sit with me for quite a while and hit on me a bit.'

'And Lieutenant Commander Pool Shark didn't defend your honour?' Gaila teased.

'He wasn't being pushy or anything and besides, I doubt the Lieutenant Commander would have even noticed.' She gave Gaila a loaded look. 'He doesn't seem to realise when he's being flirted with let alone his assistant.'

Gaila smirked. 'What can I say? I like a challenge. One day the Lieutenant Commander will open his eyes to my charms and whisk me away on his hoverbike.'
*Spock*

One Thursday three weeks after his trip to the Shipyard with Cadet Uhura, Cadet U'Aidat approached Spock in the cafeteria and sat down beside him with her tray. 'Lieutenant Commander sir! May I join you?'

Spock carefully finished chewing and swallowed a mouthful of salad. He eyed the cadet warily. 'Certainly Cadet U'Aidat.'

The Orion girl beamed at him. Spock paid close attention to his food. He wouldn't put it past the cadet to sprinkle cocoa on something.

She asked him a few pertinent questions relating to the suspected link between the common dialects of Romulus and Vulcan. She mentioned a theory of cadet Uhura's that Romulan hadn't stemmed from Vuhlkansu, or the common dialect of Vulcan, but Van-Kal Vuhlkansu, ceremonial or 'High' Vulcan. The cadet wasn't able to adequately explain the reasoning behind Uhura's theory, but it was an interesting enough conversation compared to what his students usually provided.

She was in the midst of what Spock assumed was a 'Humorous Anecdote' involving Cadet Uhura attempting to pronounce something in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu, (which to his knowledge no human, not even his mother, was completely fluent in) and having a coughing fit as a result when Uhura appeared behind her friend's shoulder.

'So she sat there for an hour straight coughing and spitting but she still couldn't say the word correctly!'

'Gaila.' Nyota greeted her roommate in what seemed a decidedly cooler manner than Spock usually observed.

The Orion's eyes widened almost comically and she spun in her seat to return the greeting. 'Oh Ny-Ny! I was just telling Lieutenant Commander Spock your theory about High Vulcan and Romulan!'

Uhura slid into the seat beside her. 'Sure you were Gaila.' Her tray contained a slice of the vegetarian lasagne Spock found most satisfactory and a small bowl of deep fried Terran potato slices. Save her choice of a carbonated beverage over water, and the size of her serving, it was identical to his own half-eaten meal.

The bright guileless smile U'Aidat gave the girl next to her was so innocent that Spock might have believed her had he had been her audience. 'Wasn't I Sir? Tell her I was!'

Spock raised an eyebrow. Surely Cadet U'Aidat did not expect him to lie? 'You did make mention of Cadet Uhura's theory 5.3 minutes ago, but then proceeded to spend the next 3.7 minutes reciting an anecdote involving Cadet Uhura's inability to pronounce a particular word in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu for, I believe, comedic effect.'

Cadet U'Aidat gasped in mock outrage.

Uhura smothered a laugh and met Spock's eyes with a smile. As always seemed to be the case lately, even the smallest gesture of affection or friendliness had an instant and humiliating effect upon him. Uhura's smile resulted in an increase of 12.5% in his heart rate and localised vasocongestion which made his cheeks and ears feel uncomfortably hot and his trousers
uncomfortable. He was able, at least, to control his breathing and facial expression.

Miserably, Spock focused his attention on his lunch and attempted to calm himself. Unfortunately the lasagne was beginning to cool and held no great attraction. He glanced up and found Uhura was regarding him still smiling slightly. He inhaled sharply and quickly looked back at his plate to cut off a piece of lasagne with more force than necessary.

Suddenly Cadet U’Aidat choked loudly on her beverage.

Beside her Uhura patted her back in an attempt to help her clear her airways. 'Karma Gaila. Now who's coughing and spitting.'

The Orion rolled her eyes and waved Nyota's hand away. 'I'm.. fine.' Her voice croaked but her respiration appeared to be returning to normal. She took a long drink of her beverage and a few deep breaths.

Spock noted she had blushed a deeper green than usual.

She stood abruptly. 'Sorry Ny,' She glanced at Spock as she acknowledged him, '…Lieutenant Commander sir, I just remembered I was supposed to see someone before next class!'

Uhura frowned. 'You haven't even eaten half your lunch Gaila.'

The Orion girl picked up a pastry from the tray and to Spock's disgust, managed to shove it completely in her mouth and gave Uhura a double thumbs up. She then attempted to say something to her and sprayed her in flakes of pasty.

Uhura turned away from her friend raised a hand against to fend of the crumbs. 'Ew! Gaila! Just go already.'

Spock was pleased to find the Orion's display had distracted him enough to break the spell of his attraction to Uhura. He watched her half run from the cafeteria before turning with a suitably confused expression to regard the cadet.

She shrugged. 'Who knows. I love Gaila, but I gave up trying to understand her a long time ago.'

Spock nodded. Her casual words struck a chord within him. It was strange how humans could love so easily. He had no doubt that Nyota meant what she said, no matter her dismissive tone. She loved her roommate and he was fairly certain the Orion girl returned her affections in kind. Strange that so many races could form almost familial bonds so swiftly.

He had made a acquaintances he would consider 'friends' in the Terran sense since his arrival on earth, but the fondness he felt for them certainly was not 'love'. He admired and respected Captain Pike, who had served with him when he had first graduated from the Academy, and enjoyed conversing and spending time with him, but even that close friendship built over several years and more than one life or death situation paled in comparison to the bond between Uhura and U’Aidat.

He was not sure how he felt about this fact.

On the one hand he was relieved he did not feel things like a human - that he was not a slave to constant emotional bonding with those around him, but he was curious. His parents had chosen a predominately Vulcan genotype when they had combined their genetic material to conceive him and for the most part he felt he was a… harmonious combination of Vulcan and Human physiology. But he was unsure which parts of him were human.
Physically he was Vulcan. His blood was green with copper, not red with iron, his heart sat below his lungs not against them. He was a powerful touch-telepath, so his brain was clearly Vulcan. He had been teased for his 'human eyes' but physically they were identical to his father's eyes. The same shape and shade of brown. Vulcan eyes. He theorised that is was his human emotions, expressed through them, that made people assume they were inherited from his mother.

But those 'human emotions' he felt were clearly very different to those felt by real humans. During his childhood his human heritage had loomed over him, a constant source of belittlement from other children and seeming disappointment to his father. It had taken living amongst her people to realise how little of his mother there was in him. He felt something like sadness at the realisation. He was certain if had married T'Pring and they had produced children, there would have been nothing of Amanda Grayson in them, despite T'Pring's fears.

'Are you okay Lieutenant Commander?'

Cadet Uhura was regarding him with concern in her warm brown human eyes. He was reminded of his mother's quiet concern when he would return from school sullen and withdrawn. It was a great shame that Amanda Grayson had no human children.

'I am perfectly fine Cadet Uhura.' His lasagne was cut into pieces exactly 1cm wide but he had no recollection of doing so. He took a bite. It was stone cold. Neatly he stacked his cutlery and napkin onto his tray. 'If you will excuse me I have work to see to. Good day Cadet.'

Uhura nodded and replied 'Good Afternoon sir.' but he could see his behaviour confused her.

*Nyota*

Nyota had given up trying to understand Lieutenant Commander Spock.

One moment he was cool and aloof, the next he was making her laugh with deadpanned phrases that had to be intentionally humorous.

She had worried he would treat her differently after seeing her drunk at the shipyard bar, but his behaviour had not changed and he made no mention of the evening. She had been both hugely relieved and disappointed by this. Clearly Spock had no idea that she had any inappropriate feelings for him so he felt no need to address them. Whilst obviously she didn't want him to know, she was certain if he had any feelings for her himself he would have noticed her own.

So she simply avoided thinking about it. No good would come of her pining for him, and even if he did want her, she wasn't about to risk her entire Starfleet career over a crush on her professor. Rationally, she was glad that he was so oblivious.

Working with him in the laboratory was surprisingly painless. He was always gave her concise instructions and seemed to enjoy answering any questions she had thoroughly. From her studies on Vulcan culture she understood teaching was highly respected, it was no coincidence that the Vulcan honorific for 'ancient' also meant 'teacher'. Spock didn't seem to get annoyed by her questions like some of her teachers did.

The Lieutenant Commander was also an excellent partner for practising different languages with. He would respond in whatever language she used provided he spoke it, and as the Advanced Phonology Professor, he spoke most.

Nyota's other classes were going well. The work had increased markedly in difficulty from her
first year, but she was maintaining her grades.

She was in the laboratory with the Lieutenant Commander a month after the 'incident' at the shipyard when he finally brought it up in conversation.

He had removed the coils from the console section of the array and managed to fit some larger ones he had gotten the engineering faculty to fabricate. However, the only way he could get them to fit resulted in them protruding slightly in an arc from the side of the array. With clearance the array would require at least an additional 17 cms than the space currently allotted to it. The coils were not thick, each unit only 3cms wide, but they needed to be heavily insulated and were the most awkward part of the console.

'Cadet. I will be visiting the shipyards tomorrow to see if I can find a more satisfactory positioning for the console coils and to make an unofficial inspection of the works on behalf of Captain Pike.'

Nyota looked up from where she was quietly checking some homework from her tutor group. 'Yes sir. I am sure you will find a suitable solution with regards to the larger coils.' She paused. 'But surely Captain Pike would want to inspect his ship personally?'

Spock nodded. 'Indeed. He has made periodic inspections throughout construction, however he is currently assigned to the USS Nelson patrolling the border of the Romulan Neutral Zone.'

Nyota gave him her undivided attention. There were always skirmishes in the neutral zone. It was currently considered the most dangerous posting in Starfleet. 'How long is his assignment expected to last sir?'

'The Captain is eager to oversee final construction. I anticipate he will manoeuvre his return to Earth within 6 standard months of the scheduled completion date - despite the Admiralty's distaste that one of their finest Captains should 'waste time baby-sitting cadets' on Earth.'

Nyota laughed. 'I doubt Admirals Barnett and Komack would appreciate that sentiment.'

'Indeed. Perhaps it is a view not shared by the entirety of the Admiralty.' Spock responded dryly.

'What about you sir? Are you content baby-sitting cadets until the Enterprise launches?' Despite his obvious respect for teaching, Nyota wasn't sure that Spock actually enjoyed his role as an instructor. Dealing with young humans day in day out didn't seem like the sort of job a Vulcan would enjoy.

'I took the teaching position so I might oversee construction on Captain Pike's behalf and aid in the redesign of several of the Enterprise's systems. I look forward to its completion and the opportunity to serve under the Captain again.'

Nyota smiled. 'That was a very evasive answer sir.'

'My position at the Academy is satisfactory.'

Nyota gave up. 'So, you are going to Riverside tomorrow.' She didn't ask if he wished her to accompany him. She'd like to see the ship again, but it probably wouldn't be a good idea.

'Indeed. Are you able to accompany me Cadet? Your assistance has proven quite useful.' He was regarding her with a polite expression.

Nyota restrained the urge to blurt out Yes! 'Sir… I'd love the chance to assist you in any way I can, but honestly I am surprised you wish for my company after my behaviour last month.' She
studiously avoided his gaze, looking back down at her PADD and pretended to review the tutoring group homework.

'Your behaviour?' Spoke responded. Nyota darted a quick glance at him. His head was tilted and he had the slightly blank expression he usually wore when seemingly mystified by human behaviour. 'If you are referring to your slight inebriation, Academy regulations place no restrictions in that regards outside of class hours, as I am sure you are aware.' His voice was perfectly flat and free of judgement as far as she could tell.

'Yes sir, I'm aware of regulations but some instructors don't approve of... that sort of thing.' She could feel blood rushing to her cheeks in embarrassment. She sounded like a teenager.

'As I recall I was the source of much of the alcohol you consumed.' Well he was certainly spot on there. '… As long as your ability to perform your duties is not negatively affected I have no opinion on the matter Cadet Uhura. It seems to be a prevalent part of human culture.' Spock looked thoughtful for a moment. 'And my communiques to the shipyard are being dealt with 33.2% faster since you initiated social interaction with the technical crew, so in this particular instance your recreational activities had a positive effect.' He concluded smoothly.

When he put it like that, his reasoning seemed perfectly sound and logical. He was right, she hadn't technically crossed any lines and he hadn't seemed upset by her behaviour at the time - he'd seemed to enjoy beating people at pool to win her and Lena drinks. After teaching at the Academy for a few years he probably thought all humans were borderline alcoholics. She probably seemed pretty responsible in comparison to most of her peers. After all, she hadn't vomited on him, cried, fallen over or tried to have sex with him. And crews on ships tended to be just as rowdy as the cadets.

'How long did you served under Captain Pike sir?' she asked. Pike was known to be fond of his whiskey.

If Spock was confused by the sudden change in topic he did not show it. '21 months 16 days. I was commissioned to the USS Priscus Rex after my graduation. Christopher Pike was at the time a Commander serving as First Officer under Captain April. He was promoted to Captain 8 months into our mission.'

Nyota frowned, all thoughts of Starfleet's drinking habits momentarily forgotten. 'The Priscus Rex? Wasn't that the ship that was involved in the incident on Rigel VII? She had given up all pretence of reading her tutor assignments and her full attention rested on her instructor.

'Indeed.'

Nyota waited but he offered no further comment. 'Can I conclude that events on Rigel VII might have something to do with how you managed to be promoted from Ensign to Lieutenant Commander in under two years sir?'

'That would be a logical conclusion Cadet.'

Nyota couldn't remember the details, but she recalled her father talking about it. She'd been studying at university at the time. There was something else… 'Wasn't the Priscus Rex also the ship that located that research ship that had been lost for nearly 20 years?'

'Affirmative cadet.'

He clearly was not interested in regaling her with tales of his adventures. She decided to let the topic drop even though she was bursting with curiosity. It was hard to imagine Spock anywhere but
behind a lectern. 'Will we be departing at the same time tomorrow Sir?'

He seemed pleased she'd dropped her line of inquiry. 'Yes Cadet.'

After her last class of the day, (a 2 hour long tactics lecture during which she had to endure Kirk's constant attempts to engage her in conversation), Nyota had taken a hoverbus into the main shopping district of San Francisco. She accessed the shopping directory on her PADD and located a few stores that were likely to stock the items she required.

If she was going to accompany Lieutenant Commander Spock regularly on his site visits, she would require appropriate clothing for riding on a hoverbike. She didn't think it likely they would have an accident, but she knew how dangerous it was to fall off. At that speed even her sturdiest jeans would disintegrate quickly against the surface of the road and she'd be skidding along on bare skin. It was enough to make her wince just at the thought. She wanted to keep her skin attached thank you very much.

The first store she visited proved disappointing – they only stocked very garish protective clothing covered with reflective logos and bright branding.

The second had a more balanced selection of merchandise. She was satisfied with the first outfit she tried on. The jacket and pants were of a synthetic material reinforced from within with overlapping sections of some sort of lightweight protective material. She could move easily enough, although the jacket was slightly constricting, but she felt secure that if she did fall off Spock's hoverbike, she wouldn't end up peeled like a banana.

At the sales assistant's urging she bought matching gloves and boots, all similarly reinforced. The entire ensemble was quite expensive, but since coming to the Academy Nyota hadn't been spending very much of the allowance her parents provided for her. Most of her meals she took on campus and she didn't require new clothing very often as she had uniforms. Besides, she knew they would have insisted she buy protective clothing if they'd know she would be on a hoverbike anyway.

She allowed herself to be measured then waited for twenty minutes as the sales assistant used the industrial replicators at the rear of the shop to create a new outfit tailored to her measurements. The packages were bulky and after trying them on to ensure they had replicated correctly, she arranged to have them delivered by courier to her dorm.

*Spock*

Spock was glad that his visor hid his expression when he arrived at the campus gate to collect Cadet Uhura.

In place of the jeans and jacket she had worn on their previous visit to the shipyard, she was instead clad in protective clothing specifically designed for riding a hoverbike. It was plain in design, simple black material decorated only with necessary fasteners and zips, but extremely form fitting. Intellectually Spock was aware that this was for reasons of safety rather than aesthetics, however he found his eyes following the lines of her body with approval that had little to do with safety. She raised a hand in greeting and smiled. He realised that she had also obtained riding gloves and boots.

He killed the engine and flipped up his visor as she approached. 'Greetings Cadet.'

She responded in kind as he unhooked the spare helmet and passed it to her. 'Good morning sir!' As always she sounded happy to see him.
'I see you have obtained protective clothing.' Spock remarked for lack of anything useful to say.

'Yes sir. It seemed appropriate.' She responded as she pulled on the helmet and arranged her hair. She had worn it in a long braid which she now pulled down over her shoulder. The less severe style suited her. No doubt she had chosen it so she could comfortably wear a helmet. Her usual hairstyle would be unsuitable.

Spock was about to dismount and to help her take her seat when she placed a hand on his forearm and lifted herself into position behind him. He felt himself freeze up as she touched him so confidently. Her grip tightened as she bent over the far side of the bike to flip out the foot rest and Spock realised he was holding his breath. She released him only to reverse her grip, holding onto his right shoulder so she could reach the other foot rest.

The bike shifted under her weight as she checked her footing was secure. Her thighs flexed around his hips as she adjusted her position. He heard a snap as she closed her visor. Then her arms were wrapped around his torso.

There was nothing suggestive in her actions, but her closeness and touches provoked their usual inappropriate reaction in him.

'Ready when you are sir.' Her voice echoed oddly, audible both from the speaker within his helmet and from outside.

Spock swallowed, his mouth uncomfortably dry, and focused his attention on the controls, using his Vulcan control to ignore the fact that Uhura was pressed so intimately against him.

Several times during the day he found himself staring absently at parts of the cadet's anatomy. For some reason the tight riding trousers seemed to hold an aesthetic appeal he could not quite identify. They were similar in fit to the jeans he had previously seen her in, but Spock found himself forced to walk ahead of her lest he find himself counting the number of stitches along the back pockets or estimating the circumference of her hips and imagining his hands wrapped around them.

He noted several other males turn to watch the cadet as she walked past them, their gazes lingering on her, (admittedly shapely), backside. Although the cadet was attractive and Spock had noted she garnered admiring glances, there was a distinct increase in the attention she was receiving. It appeared the riding ensemble held appeal to a wider audience then just himself. He felt a small amount of vindication at this.

All in all he was relieved when they finished the necessary work and were able to return to the Academy in the mid afternoon. Sharing a meal with the cadet in the diner would have been tantamount to torture in Spock's opinion.
Chapter 10

*Nyota*

'Stepahnie! Hey, Stephanie!' Nyota gave James Kirk as much attention as she would a fly.

Hand to Hand combat training was exhausting enough without him pestering her. Lord knew he could not take a hint. She positioned herself and let her partner toss her neatly onto the mats.

They'd only been in class ten minutes, long enough to go through their usual warm up exercises and start practising basic moves and already she was longing for a warm shower and bed, if only to get away from Kirk. She did not understand the way girls seemed to fall at his feet when he walked by. It was plain he had many positive qualities – he was attractive (if a little short in her opinion), was very intelligent and had scored extremely well in the few classes she had taken with him, but he was such an… ass.

His persistence in 'flirting' with her was having the opposite effect he was probably aiming at. She found him increasingly less attractive rather than more so. There would be zero chance of her succumbing to those particular charms. If they could be called that. Meanwhile he probably thought he was wearing her down. Idiot.

Her irritation led to her throwing her partner a little more roughly than she intended.

Her instructor's voice interrupted their sparring. 'Cadets. Assemble at the demonstration ring.'

Dutifully the twenty cadets in the evening class assembled at the central ring in the training room. The Instructor, Lieutenant Sato, was accompanied most unusually by a Vulcan dressed in the same regulation training uniform as the cadets. Nyota tried very hard not to wish or picture Lieutenant Commander Spock in his place. This Vulcan seemed to be of similar age but nowhere near as attractive in her opinion.

'During our studies we have looked at many different forms of martial arts, their strengths, weaknesses and counters when dealing with them. Ensign Tyrek, a former pupil of mine, has graciously volunteered to provide a demonstration of suus mahna, a highly effective form of martial art practiced on Vulcan.' Nyota looked over at the Vulcan, Tyrek, with interest. 'Of all disciplines I have encountered, suus mahna, when practiced correctly, provides the most effective - an almost impenetrable - line of defence. Later on the Ensign will assist us in learning a few of the central movements of the style. But first the Ensign will demonstrate exactly what I mean when I talk of an impenetrable defence.'

The Lieutenant and the Vulcan Ensign took up position in the demonstration ring. Nyota watched with great interest. She knew very little about suus mahna. She was aware of its existence, but beyond that, nothing. She was however, intimately familiar with Lieutenant Sato's expertise in dozens of martial art disciplines. He'd won more or less every single tournament that had been held at the Academy during Nyota's time there, in dozens of different disciplines, as well as many tournaments outside of Starfleet. He was something of a legend.

Normally she'd have bet on the Vulcan purely due to the physical advantage he would have over her human instructor, but Sato had taken on Klingons and won. So she was half expecting to see the Vulcan on the mat in short order.

The actually sparring was less exciting then she had hoped. Sato provided a thoughtful
commentary as he ran through a dozen of the more popular hand to hand disciplines in the federation and the Vulcan easily countered them. Although it was interesting to see Sato unable to get a hit in, it was hardly the same as seeing him getting his butt handed to him.

Sato and the Ensign then slowly demonstrated a few important moves from the Vulcan discipline so the cadets could repeat and learn them. The next half an hour was then spent sparring and practising the new moves with Sato and the Vulcan ensign walking among them helping them with their form.

Nyota was attempting to perfect a kick block when she noticed him.

Spock entered the training room dressed in his usual grey instructor's uniform and made his way over to Lieutenant Sato and discussed something quietly with him. Nyota's distraction cost her. She found herself flat on the mats, her partner looking down on her in amusement. When she regained her feet and looked around Sato was alone once more. It took a little effort but she pushed the distraction from her mind. She had almost managed to get the form more or less right for the kick block when Lieutenant Sato called their attention once more.

Now also dressed in a regulation training uniform, Lieutenant Commander Spock was standing beside Ensign Tyrek. Nyota tried not to stare, but Spock filled the training uniform in an extremely pleasing manner.

Sato sounded excited. 'You are in for a treat this evening cadets. Lieutenant Commander Spock has agreed to help Ensign Tyrek provide a proper demonstration of suus mahna for you.' The Lieutenant waved a hand in the direction of his Vulcan guests. 'Now you saw I was unable to penetrate Ensign Tyrek's suus mahna earlier, but owing to the differences between human and Vulcan physiology that little demonstration was a bit one-sided. Seeing two proficient Vulcan practitioners will give you a much more accurate representation of the form.'

He walked off the demonstration mats and stood off to the side to watch.

The Ensign nodded to the Lieutenant Commander who politely returned the gesture. They then took up position opposite each other. Spock raised an eyebrow and the Ensign tilted his head slightly in acknowledgment of... something. Then the Ensign rushed the Lieutenant Commander. It was quite different to watching Sato and the ensign spar. For starters the ensign seemed to be moving about twice as fast as he had been previously, and the sounds of the blocks and blows as they hit were much louder. It was evident that the younger Vulcan had been holding back considerably with the human instructor.

Nyota watched in fascination. Both Vulcans moved fluidly and surprisingly athletically. Since he was on the defence, Spock wasn't doing anything particularly flashy, (apart from apparently teleporting out of the way of blows), but ensign Tyrek was jumping and flipping and kicking with almost acrobatic skill. It was quite exhilarating to watch. After five solid minutes the two Vulcans stopped at some invisible signal and returned to their former positions. Tyrek was breathing a little heavily but Spock had barely broken a sweat. Which was unsurprising since she belatedly recalled Vulcans didn't actually sweat. His hair was slightly mussed and there was a green flush to his cheeks, but otherwise there was no sign he'd been sparring. Nyota's traitorous brain instantly wondered if he looked similar after sex. She closed her eyes and frowned, cursing her hormones and banishing the thought from her mind.

Instructor Sato sounded positively gleeful as he pulled her from her self-castigation. 'Wonderful! Just wonderful! You see how effective suus mahna is for defence cadets.' He looked over at the Vulcans. 'I wonder if you might now give them a demonstration of actual sparing rather than pure offense vs defence?"
Ensign Tyrek glanced at Spock. 'That would be acceptable.'

Spock nodded. 'Very well.'

Again ensign Tyrek attacked first. For the first perhaps 30 seconds Spock remained on the defensive, then he retaliated. He flipped to the side of the ensign and landed a kick which sent the other Vulcan stumbling several steps backwards. The watching cadets gasped as one. Nyota felt heart jump in excitement. Neither of them showed the slightest hint of emotion on their faces, but it seemed to Nyota that the ensign, who had probably been holding back on account of Spock out ranking him, began hitting harder. She wondered if that had been Spock's intention.

The entire class watched enraptured. It was the most impressive demonstration fight Nyota had ever seen, and that included a demonstration by a Klingon defector in the same class a few weeks earlier. Spock and the ensign flipped and jumped and kicked like the laws of gravity were being bent. Nyota found herself gasping whenever one of them did something spectacular, which was basically all the time. They seemed to know where the other would be or what he was planning and Nyota had an inkling that they were both calculating their opponent's likely moves with the same level of detail Vulcan's dedicated to everything. The fight seemed almost choreographed.

It became apparent after the first few minutes that Spock had the advantage. Although the ensign showed no sign of tiring, Spock was the only one actually scoring hits of any sort, although it was plain he was purposely avoiding hurting the ensign and not attacking his vulnerable areas such as the head.

Nyota thought it might have been her imagination, but eventually the ensign seemed to get angry. Or at least his style of fighting changed. He began attempting to score hits on Spock's head for one. After blocking a leaping kick aimed at his temple Spock raised an eyebrow at the ensign. Having spent a lot of time in Spock's company Nyota was pretty sure Spock was giving him the Vulcan equivalent of a 'What was that?' look.

Thrice more Spock blocked or countered quite 'dirty' attacks from the ensign. Then the ensign performed an impressive jumping kick which proved to be a feint and grabbed at Spock's shoulder. The move was bizarre, Nyota couldn't see how grabbing Spock's shoulder would achieve anything, but Spock reacted instantly and violently. He flipped the ensign and kicked him directly in the chest while he was still mid-air. Judging from the distance the ensign went flying, Spock had been holding back quite a lot. Nyota felt almost dizzy with adrenaline. She suddenly understood why people liked watching contact sports. She wanted to watch Spock beat the snot out someone. His strength and superiority delighted her. She felt like bouncing up and down and cheering. She was certain he would not have approved however.

The ensign landed on his back but flipped up onto his feet in seconds and was dashing across the mats towards Spock with a full burst of Vulcan speed. They exchanged blows rapidly, the floor of the room vibrating with the strength of them, until the ensign again attempted to get his hand near Spock's neck. This time instead of kicking him across the room Spock twisted behind the ensign and gripped him on the right side of his shoulder with one hand in a similar move. The effect was instantaneous and shocking. The ensign crumpled to the mats unconscious as if a switch had been thrown inside him.

The assembled cadets gasped as one. Nyota stared at the ensign in shock, wondering what the hell had just happened.

Spock lifted his head to Lieutenant Sato calmly. 'It appears ensign Tyrek also wished the cadets to see a demonstration of a form of *tal-shaya* which uses nerve manipulation to render unconsciousness,' he glanced down at the crumpled Vulcan as if he were an interesting puzzle. '…
although I do not see why, since such a move cannot be performed by humans as it requires the transfer of telekinetic energy from the fingertips. 'He looked back at Sato. 'He will awaken shortly.'

Sato nodded but looked put out none the less. 'Er. Thank you Lieutenant Commander. That demonstration was most... illuminating.' He looked down at the ensign again. 'Should I call medical?'

Spock shrugged ever so slightly. 'I anticipate the ensign will regain consciousness within two standard minutes. However if you wish to seek a second opinion I would not fault your logic.'

Spock calmly made his way to the locker rooms as if he hadn't just left a man unconscious on the floor. Nyota made a conscious effort not to look at his butt. Sato directed them to continue their sparring. A few minutes later the Vulcan ensign was suddenly on his feet. Nyota thought he looked pretty embarrassed or angry for a Vulcan.

She smiled a little at his expense. 

*Spock*

Spock had thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to spar with a Vulcan. The partners he usually encountered at the Academy were usually far weaker than he and none were trained in suus mahna. It had been satisfying to be able to utilise his full speed and strength without fear of accidently breaking bones or causing serious injury to his opponent.

He was in the process of drying himself after a quick shower when ensign Tyrek entered the Academy gymnasium locker rooms. Spock glanced up. 'Ensign Tyrek. It was most enjoyable to be able to spar with a Vulcan instead of a human. You are very proficient.' A Vulcan would not have bothered to make such a statement, but his interactions with humans had apparently left Spock prone to irrelevant conversation and stating the obvious. He supposed the ensign, as a member of Starfleet, had probably likewise adapted his social interactions if Cadet Uhura's observations about Vulcans were correct.

Rather than responding however. The ensign gave him a slight Vulcan frown that a human would not have even noticed. Spock realised he was irritated that he had rendered him unconscious. He supposed he would not have enjoyed it had their roles been reversed. He was confused however. 'I apologise if you did not intend to demonstrate a nerve pinch for the students. I assumed that was your intent.' He raised an eyebrow in query. After all, the ensign had attempted twice to use the same move on himself. To be angered that Spock had done the same was illogical.

The ensign recovered his Vulcan calm immediately. 'Of course Lieutenant Commander. I was thinking of an unrelated issue. Sparring with you was indeed enjoyable. You are also very proficient.' He met Spock's eyes calmly and without any trace of his earlier irritation. 'I will be planetside for a further 5 days before my next deployment should you care to spar further.'

Spock inclined his head in acceptance. 'That would be most satisfactory ensign.'

*Nyota*

The semester progressed smoothly for Nyota Uhura.

Not only were her studies going well, she found time for a few extracurricular activities including the Academy Choral group. Her position as Lieutenant Commander Spock's aide also continued to
provide her with interesting and challenging work in her remaining spare time.

She had a standing invitation to accompany him on visits to the shipyard and she looked forward to the trips. Not only did she get to see the Enterprise slowly taking form and assist in work pertinent to her studies, she enjoyed her instructor's company. The Lieutenant Commander, once she had adjusted to his Vulcan mannerisms, was extremely easy to be around. He did not require conversation and she could be as blunt as she liked without him taking offence. He was also surprisingly trusting for someone so intelligent. She had to be careful using sarcasm or hyperbole around him since he would occasionally, even after years living among humans, take her at face value.

If they were still at the shipyard after 17:00 hours, they would by unspoken agreement share a meal at the diner. If either of the technicians Lena Nilsson or Stephen Lee were at the bar, they would stay for an hour or two and Spock would play pool or converse with her and the technicians. Nyota suspected that Spock considered the experience a learning one - that he was attempting to better understand human social interactions. She could practically see him taking mental notes during the exchanges and adjusting his behaviour accordingly. Any subtle hints or advice she gave him with regards to his interactions were soon tested on Lena or Stephen.

It appeared to be working. Although she realised that he was more or less 'pretending' and it made her feel a little uncomfortable knowing he was being less than genuine, he was able to hold conversations without offending anyone for ever increasing periods of time.

However when he used her own advice on her, she reacted quite differently.

The first time he had inquired as to her activities over the weekend on a Monday morning, she had responded briefly in the manner she would to anyone who made such an inquiry. Spock was not as adept as others at looking interested however. He stopped blinking, his head tilted to the left and he focused on the empty space over her right shoulder instead of her face.

When the following Friday he made a similar inquiry as to her plans for her weekend and Nyota observed the same disinterested tells, she decided to call him out.

Mid-way through reciting her plans for study and practise with the choral group she started ad-libbing. 'And then I was planning on a brief trip to an Orion spice den downtown with Gaila.' Spock nodded thoughtfully. 'Of course we'll be too high to return to our dorm until Sunday afternoon but Cadet Kirk has a hotel booked for the weekend and said we could share.'

'That is very thoughtful of Cadet Kirk.' Spock replied neutrally.

Nyota raised an eyebrow and continued. 'Yes it is isn't it? Unfortunately the room only has one bed, but I'm sure we'll figure something out. Perhaps Gaila and I will take turns with Kirk. Then again, Orions don't mind sharing.'

Nyota lapsed into silence and waited for Spock to catch up. His head suddenly snapped straight and he meet her gaze in shock. He looked utterly scandalised. Nyota sniggered and had to raise a hand to cover her mouth as she laughed at him.

'Cadet Uhura, were your previous comments in jest? If not I must remind you that not only is the stimulant colloquially referred to as 'Orion spice' a prohibited substance on Earth, it can be highly toxic or even fatal to humans.'

Nyota smothered her laughter. 'Are you aware that when you aren't paying attention to someone you to this sir?' She mimicked his earlier pose, staring off into space with a glazed expression.
He frowned slightly. 'So your plans for the weekend do not involve imbibing in illegal substances and sexual experimentation with Cadets U'Aidat and Kirk?'

She had to purse her lips to stifle more laughter. 'No sir. I was just checking to see if you were paying attention.'

Spock blinked. He seemed to be at a loss.

Nyota took pity on him. 'Sir, you don't have to make polite conversation with me. I am aware that you are a Vulcan and I don't expect you to act like a human just to put me at ease.'

'I apologise if my lack of interest caused you offense cadet Uhura.'

Nyota smiled at him brightly. 'Not at all sir. You looked kinda funny actually. Like you were doing calculus in your head while I prattled on.'

Spock's ears and cheeks took on a distinct greenish hue.

Nyota's eyes widened playfully. 'You were!'

He cleared his throat. 'I was using linear algebra in contemplation of an algorithmic issue in a computer program I am currently working on.'

Nyota shook her head and smiled ruefully. 'On that note I will leave you to your ruminations.' She shouldered her bag. 'I will see you on Monday sir.'

'Indeed cadet.' He offered no hollow platitude that she enjoy her weekend or similar and the absence pleased her.
Spock had awoken in some discomfit after a particularly vivid dream about his assistant but otherwise his morning had gone smoothly. The end of the semester was approaching and Spock had less time to devote to his side projects. His classes required almost all of his attention. As such he had needed to get more work completed in his scheduled visit to the shipyard than usual. On top of his own work, he had also agreed to perform another inspection, an official one this time, on behalf of Captain Pike who was still off planet.

Cadet Uhura had been waiting for him when he arrived at the Academy gate in her aesthetically superior riding ensemble but he had been sufficiently consumed by thoughts of his work that the visual effect was almost lost on him. She had engaged him in conversation several times during the 2.5 hour journey ranging from observations about the countryside through which they travelled, comments about a few of the students in her tutoring group who were struggling and concerns of a personal nature concerning Cadet U’Aidat. Apparently the Cadet had been behaving, as Uhura put it, 'Weird even for her.' Spock observed that she had ceased approaching him outside of class, but otherwise he had noted no change in her behaviour.

They arrived on time and Spock scanned the entrance area for the supervisors who would be awaiting his arrival. He quickly located them standing near the security gate. One was in a Starfleet Lieutenant's uniform and the other two were in the standard dress uniform of the engineering corps of Starfleet.

Since it would be necessary to pass them to reach the lockers to stow his jacket and helmet he deemed it necessary to greet them thus encumbered.

Uhura dutifully followed him towards the 3 figures with name tags attached to their jackets. They were all human males. Spock was unsurprised.

They fell silent at his approach, the two men in the engineering coveralls standing slightly to attention behind the officer. He waited for a moment but when the Lieutenant failed to offer him a greeting he took the initiative.

'Lieutenant Sparcs and Chief Supervisors Bates and Hardling I assume?' The three men looked up at him. Supervisors Bates and Hardling both saluted whilst the Lieutenant glanced briefly at him before looking past him at Cadet Uhura. Spock stared at the Lieutenant and awaited his response.

Finally the Lieutenant broke from his inspection of the cadet. 'Yes, can I help you?' he asked dismissively. His eyes flicked over Spock's riding ensemble scathingly before darting between him and the cadet. The supervisors behind him exchanged a glance that even Spock could tell was concerned.

Behind him Spock was aware of Uhura letting out a tiny indignant huff. Before he could correctly frame an illuminating response for the man in front of him she asked pointedly 'Would you like me to stow your jacket and helmet Lieutenant Commander Spock sir?'

He restrained the urge to smirk at her verbal barb. Or at least he assumed that was the expression his mouth was trying to make. He nodded with typical Vulcan serenity instead. She obligingly took his helmet and looped it over her arm alongside her own then waited for him to unfasten and pass her his jacket. He had worn his blue science officer's uniform beneath it as an official inspection on
behalf of Captain Pike warranted more formality than his black Starfleet issue t-shirt. The
Lieutenant gazed down at the rank bands at his cuffs before he snapped to attention. Spock ignored
him and instead gave Uhura his full attention 'Thank you Cadet.'

She nodded and added 'I will proceed to the bridge and discuss the array coil placement with the
technicians whilst you are busy sir.'

Spock was pleased with the suggestion. He knew she would have enjoyed a guided tour of the ship
such as he was about to receive, but was putting their work ahead of her own enjoyment. 'Very
good cadet.' She gave him a parting glance and turned.

Only after she stopped to present her ID to the security gate personnel did he deign to turn back and
acknowledge the Lieutenant in front of him. A sheen of sweat was evident on the man's forehead.
He did not indicate him to stand at ease however. He simply stared at him blankly for a long
moment, taking advantage of how the full attention of a Vulcan could unnerve a human. Captain
Pike had once likened it to being 'a bug under a microscope'.

At length he spoke, his voice not revealing anything. 'I assume you were advised I would be
conducting the inspection in Captain Pike's place Lieutenant?'

A bead of sweat slowly made its way down the man's forehead and vanished into his left eyebrow.
Spock tracked its descent. 'Yes Sir! Sorry Sir! Didn't realise it was you sir!'

'You have been overseer of the Riverside Shipyards for 3.7 standard years have you not
Lieutenant?'

'Yes Sir! 3 and a half… 3.7 years Sir!' His salute was starting to slip.

'And your duties require your presence at the shipyard daily am I correct?'

'Yes Sir!'

'This will be the 16th visit I have made to the shipyard during construction of the Enterprise.'
Spock continued almost conversationally. 'I have observed Chief Supervisor Hardling on 8 of those
occasions and Chief Supervisor Bates on 11. I note although neither have conversed with me, both
recognised me.' He did not have to vocalise the obvious failings this observation pointed at. If the
first officer of the ship he was constructing, the new flagship of the entire fleet at that, had made
16 visits to the yard, the overseer should have been aware of it. On top of that, a Vulcan on a
hoverbike was hardly inconspicuous.

The Lieutenant didn't appear to have a response to Spock's statement. Spock waved a hand to
indicate he could stand at ease. 'I am most eager to begin the inspection Lieutenant.'

The inspection took 4.2 hours. Spock found that most of his queries were answered by the
supervisors rather than the overseer. Construction was delayed in far more areas then he had
realised. It appeared the Lieutenant's failures went beyond his observational skills. Spock would
have to make note of his lack of management skills in his review to Captain Pike.

They toured the Bridge last.

When they entered Spock was surprised to see the area was empty. It was only 12:43 and the cadet
usually took her lunch at 13:00. The Lieutenant started his explanation of the work currently being
done on the Bridge.

'As you can see whilst the life support systems and basic fitting of the Bridge are nearing
completion, the systems and consoles are among the last fittings scheduled to be installed.' As
designer of some of those systems, Spock was of course aware of that. 'Many of the systems are
currently being redesigned off site.' One of the supervisors, Bates, sighed. Spock thought it most
likely indicated that the supervisor at least, if not the overseer, was aware of Spock's involvement
in that very task.

The Lieutenant continued on. 'This is where the Captain's chair will be.'

He made the proclamation from a position which would be occupied by the helmsman's console.

Spock turned back to the two Supervisors standing near the turbolift and raised a brow at them
questioningly. Bates shrugged and Hardling scrunched up half his face into an expression Spock
believed translating roughly into 'I have no idea.' Or possibly 'Don't blame me!' - both of which
would be reasonable reactions for the Lieutenant's repeated displays of ineptitude.

As he turned back to the overseer he detected a noise. He stepped forward to where a section of the
ceiling had been removed. The lieutenant excitedly exclaimed 'Yes that's where the first officer's
chair will be sir!' (It was not).

Spock ignored him and looked up. He could hear Cadet Uhura and a voice he believed belonged to
the technician Lena Nilsson in conversation from above.

He peered into the dark space above him. 'Cadet?'

There was murmuring and the noise of someone moving towards the hole, then the cadet's head
came into view. She was holding tap lever in one hand and a PADD in the other. 'Afternoon sir!' She
was smiling brightly at him. Her face was slightly flushed and strands of hair had come loose
to frame her face. There was a sensor coil around her neck. A novel solution to a lack of hands. He
heard a muffled 'Afternoon Lt. Commander Spock!' from Lena behind her.

He raised his brow. 'May I inquire as to why you and Technician Nilsson are in the ceiling cadet?'
Impulsively he added in Vulcan: 'Are you and Lena are engaging another mystifying Ancient
Terran Ritual of which I am unaware? 'Eating lunch in a crawl space on Fridays' perhaps?'

She laughed brightly and Spock felt a tiny answering smile tug at his features. 'No Osavensu
Spock. But we have solved your issue of the coil placement.'

Spock's head tilted to the side in interest. 'Please enlighten me Orensu Uhura.'

The overseer was looking from Spock to Uhura as they spoke like a spectator at a tennis game.

'The insulation for the bridge has been changed several times during construction and is currently
76mm thinner than the original type specified so there is extra space up here. Lena and I have
deduced that the coils, if laid flat, can be placed along the ceiling panels without hindering the air
ducts or maintenance tunnels.'

Spock tilted his head as he considered what she had just said. It sounded perfectly feasible. 'A novel
solution cadet, and one that I think will work most satisfactorily.'

She grinned down at him. Spock felt a rush of warmth in response to her pleased expression. It was
difficult not to smile back at her. 'Thank you sir!'

Lena's head appeared next to Uhura's. 'She tell you the good news Sir?'

'Yes Lena, thank you for your assistance.'
The blonde woman smiled at him in a manner not dissimilar to the way the cafeteria server Sarah did. 'Don't mention it. Could you give us a hand down though?'

'Of course.'

The technician turned and hung her legs down. Spock steadied her as she slid to the floor. She turned and patted him on the arm absently. 'Thanks Spock.' She was holding a PADD up in her other hand and reading specification off it. 'I think there are a lot of systems that could utilise the 76mm extra clearance we have up there.'

Spock noticed that the overseer was standing right next to him looking up at Uhura. 'Can I offer you any assistance Miss?'

Uhura glanced at Spock. He could tell she disliked the Lieutenant and would have preferred his assistance, if she had required any, which being twenty years Lena Nilsson's junior, she most probably did not. He wondered if he should intercede. He was unsure how to word such a statement. Before he could do so she responded.

'Er, sure. Thank you Lieutenant.'

Her face disappeared only to be replaced by her tall riding boots and her long legs encased in their extremely tight trousers.

The Lieutenant paid close attention to the curves filling those trousers Spock noted. He also steadied Uhura unnecessarily with a hand on her backside. Spock clenched his jaw and he found himself thinking of the many different ways he could use suus mahna to ensure the lieutenant was unable to place his hands upon the cadet's person ever again. He decided his communique to Captain Pike would not only mention the Lieutenant's failures, but highlight them.

Cadet Uhura had stowed her riding jacket along with his own. As usual she was wearing a black Starfleet issue t-shirt with a high collar like the one she usually wore under her cadet's uniform. As he tried to calm his annoyance at Lieutenant Sparc,s a memory floated up to the fore front of his mind from his years as a cadet. He recalled that many of the cadets had slept in their regulation undershirts like the one Uhura was wearing. He found himself idly wondering if Uhura was one of those who did so. If she did it was unlikely she wore anything save her underwear with it. Spock was struggling with that particular mental image when the overseer spoke up.

'Was that Vulcanese you were speaking Miss?'

Completely dismissing the hideous amalgam that was 'Vulcanese', Spock wondered instead at the Lieutenant's use of 'Miss'. He had addressed Uhura as 'Cadet' several times in the overseer's presence. It was illogical to use a dismissive Terran civilian honorific when he was aware of her rank.

Uhura nodded politely and to Spock's satisfaction moved to stand near himself and Lena wordless communicating her disinterest with her body language. 'Yes sir.'

'I didn't think humans could speak Vulcanese. Wrong shaped mouth. You are human aren't you Miss?' The emphasise he placed on the word human was slightly offensive.

Uhura frowned. 'Phonetically modern Vulcan is only marginally more difficult for native english speakers to enunciate as Japanese or Korean.'

'Interesting. I didn't know that. Are you a translator at the Academy Miss?'
Uhura was scowling openly now. She was obviously offended by the belittling manner the man was addressing her. Spock decided to intervene.

'My assistant Cadet Uhura is studying xenolinguistics and advanced phonology. She is currently fluent in 78% of the languages spoken within the federation.'

The Lieutenant didn't glance at Spock as he spoke, his eyes staying on Uhura. 'Wow, 78%. That's amazing!' He glanced at his watch. 'I'd love to hear about your studies over lunch Miss Uhura.'

Spock realised the muscles in his temples were beginning to ache from clenching his jaw. 4.5 hours in Lieutenant Sparcs presence was taking its toil upon his mood.

Uhura smiled sweetly. 'I'm afraid I already have plans with the Lieutenant Commander and a few of the technicians.'

'Indeed. Thank you for the tour Lieutenant Sparcs. Your commentary was most illuminating.' Spock dismissed the Lieutenant abruptly and turned to Lena and Uhura beside him. 'Shall we?'

Lena smiled and led Uhura to the turbolift. As he approached the two Supervisors Spock let his human side surface. 'Would you care to join us for lunch Supervisors?' he pointedly did not extend the invitation to the Lieutenant.

The meal proved enjoyable. They were joined by several technicians Spock knew from his previous visits with Cadet Uhura and the level of conversation provided by them and the two supervisors was much more stimulating then what he was usually subjected to in the Academy cafeteria.

The afternoon was spent referring to plans and blue prints provided by Lena, crawling along the ceiling cavity and avoiding staring at the Cadet's shapely posterior. Spock was able to convince Lena Nilsson and Stephen Lee to keep their discovery to themselves until he had finalised a new configuration for the array console. He wanted to claim as much of the void space for his own systems as possible.

They joined the same group for dinner as they had for lunch. Afterwards Spock played a few games of pool with Stephen, this time offering tips which made Uhura and the rest of their companions laugh. For some reason they found his use of trigonometry in planning his shots humorous. When he instructed Stephen to aim 2.7 degrees to his left as he lined up a shot Lena had laughed so hard that she spilt her drink. Which Spock thought perhaps for the best as it was blue and appeared to be on fire.

He received a lot more attention in the bar in his uniform than he received in his plain clothes. It seemed being a Lieutenant Commander made him far more interesting to the bar's patrons. Several Starfleet personnel introduced themselves and wanted to buy him drinks. When the diner closed the usual waitress stopped by and told him how 'Handsome he looked in his uniform'. When he awkwardly responded 'Thank you Jayne.' she smiled at him in a way that made him feel slightly uneasy, but seemed to amuse Stephen and Uhura a great deal.

When they had been socialising for exactly 2 standard hours he indicated to her that they should leave. There were only 3 umbrellas in her hair and she remembered to remove them before they exited the bar.

The ride home was as pleasant as the one in the morning. He and Uhura spoke further on all the possible uses for the void space in the bridge and she inquired at length as to the overall status of the Enterprise build. She also spent 12.8 standard minutes highlighting all the things about
Lieutenant Sparcs that she found unpleasant both personally and professionally. Although many of her points were illogical, apparently his arms were too long and his hair was 'too yellow', Spock found her tirade quite satisfying.

He arrived back in his quarters at 22:17 pleased with the course of his day. Despite his ongoing misgivings about having her as his aide, he had been able to avoid almost all instances of physiological reactions related to the proximity of Cadet Uhura, apart from small slip-ups he felt her attire was at least partially to blame for. He had also engaged in human social interactions with her and the technicians without awkwardness or inappropriateness and she had been instrumental in a great break though for the design of the communications array.

If all his dealings with the cadet went as smoothly he could foresee no further disruption to his goals within Starfleet.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

The 'theeing' and 'thouing' of the High Vulcan is inspired by T'Pau in TOS.

*Nyota*

After the breakthrough of the ceiling void Nyota noticed that the Lieutenant Commander seemed more relaxed around her. He spoke Vulcan and made what passed as jokes (dry observations was perhaps a more accurate description) for him more often.

She still felt awkward around him at times, especially when they visited the Enterprise and she had to deal with following him around in his tight riding pants all day, but overall she felt she had turned a corner when it came to her attraction for him. Yes he was handsome. And a genius. But he was a Vulcan. Vulcans didn't do relationships and feeling the way humans did and nothing was going to change that. Expecting Spock to develop romantic feelings for her would be like expecting an Orion to be monogamous or Klingon to become a pacifist. An exercise in futility. Besides, he was her instructor. She shouldn't want him to have any sort of feelings beyond the norm for her.

In this way the rest of her second year at the Academy passed quite contently. Her results remained excellent and she was delighted to be half way through her training and able to choose specialisations in her classes. If her end of year break was slightly marred because she missed her taciturn Vulcan Instructor's company, well she ignored it as best she could. Although her father certainly didn't help matters by bringing Spock up and mentioning conversations he'd had with him over subspace. It was humiliating to be jealous of her father, but she was. Apparently they had struck up some sort of oddball 'friendship' over their discussions of obscure military terms in alien languages. She endeavoured not to find this irritating, however to say she was eager to get back to the Academy would have been a gross understatement.

She'd arrived back in San Francisco a few days early as was her usual preference to prepare for her upcoming classes. She didn't speak with the Lieutenant Commander until three days after her return, in her first Advanced Phonology III class, but she saw him on her very first day back. He'd been crossing the grassy courtyard near her dormitory, PADD in hand dressed in a perfectly pressed grey instructor's uniform.

Her breath had suddenly left her lungs with a whoosh and she'd felt her heart skip a beat or ten. Her skin felt like it was a million degrees and trying to tingle itself off her body. Yes, the reaction she had to seeing him after 8 weeks was almost frightening. A part of her, the smart part, that had hoped she'd 'gotten over' her crush was evidently sadly mistaken. What she felt when she looked at him made her feel dizzy. Made her want to chase after him and tackle him to the ground, wrap her arms around him and squeeze him as tightly as she could. Never let him go. Spend the rest of her life attached to him like a crazed human barnacle. The sheer strength of her feelings embarrassed her. Mooning. That's what she was doing. She'd heard the word in holos and books before, but she didn't think it was something that happened in real life, and she certainly didn't think she'd be the silly girl doing it.

Even though she felt a bit like a stalker she'd stood stock still and just stared at him for the minute
it took for him to cross the courtyard and disappear into the adjacent Physics Block. Her brain had eagerly made up a few excuses for her to stop by his lab in that building, but she'd resolutely dismissed them. Just because she felt like a lovesick schoolgirl didn't mean she was going to behave like one.

When she did see him, properly, the first day back, she'd behaved with perfect propriety. Her routine changed little. Her class schedule was slightly different, but she still assisted the Lieutenant Commander in the same way as during her second year and met him briefly twice a week to discuss her duties.

She had been back at the Academy for five weeks after the end of year break when she noticed him enter the adjacent computer lab half way through her Tuesday Subspace Engineering Systems tutorial. He took up position in front of the bank of computers that Nyota knew ran the simulation bridge in the next room. Although she tried to ignore his presence, she found herself glancing over at him through the windows that divided the two rooms.

He was wearing his perfectly pressed grey instructor's uniform without a hair out of place. Whenever she looked over, whether he was seated at a console or standing before one of the displays, his posture was rigid with his shoulders perfectly squared. Not for the first time she wondered how he managed that day in day out. Surely he got backaches from being so tense all the time? Although maybe the difference in Vulcan physiology prevented such mundane concerns. Or maybe he took hot showers and massaged his shoulders.

She was ruminating on Spock in a shower, the visuals helpfully provided by her memories of seeing him in his swimming costume, when he glanced up and met her gaze. The look he shot her, the slight quirk of one dark eyebrow, wordlessly conveyed that he'd been well aware of her intermittent observation of him over the last twenty minutes. She felt blood rush to her face but managed to keep her expression fairly innocent. She mirrored his expression, feigning dignified confusion, as if she'd just happened to glance in his direction and certainly hadn't been ignoring her tutor to stare blankly at him (and imagine him showering) instead.

She managed to avoid looking towards the lab he occupied for the last half an hour of her class even though she caught his movement out of the corner of her eye and it tugged at her attention like an itch.

He was still next door when her class finished so she decided to stop on her way out and say hello to him. Some of the older students were conducting some sort of exciting experiment in the engineering department and she had intended to check it out before her next class since she was already in the engineering block, but she could spare a few minutes.

Spock was standing before a blinking display referring to a PADD when she let herself into the lab.

'Good morning Lieutenant Commander Spock.'

He didn't look up, instead continued his intense scrutiny of his PADD. 'Greetings Cadet Uhura. I trust your Subspace Engineering tutorial was informative?'

Nyota held back a smile at what passed for small talk with Spock. 'Yes sir. I find Professor Jones to be an extremely proficient instructor.'

Spock nodded absentely and started running what appeared to be a diagnostic on the display in front of him. Nyota stepped beside him and regarded the screen with interest. It would have to be very intriguing to hold Spock's attention so completely. Spock ignored her presence and continued running different programs while she studied the display. The sleeve of his jacket brushed slightly
against her arm as he reached out and made an adjustment on one of the displays. She'd stood too close. She couldn't move now though, it would seem weird. Valiantly she ignored his close proximity and the hint of aftershave she caught from his direction. And how handsome his hands were as they flew over console. He always had such neatly trimmed fingernails. Oh god what was wrong with her? She was admiring his manicure.

Slowly she blinked and exhaled, visualising her humiliating human hormones leaving her body along with her breath and focused back on the displays in front of her. From what she could tell, and she was no computer sciences major, he was attempting to update the software on the simulators and had run into a memory leak.

'A memory leak?' She turned towards him and gave him a teasing smile. 'Surely the incomparable Mr Spock didn't make an error in his coding?'

Spock's fingers paused for a moment on the console. 'Despite the implication of your tone cadet, I assure you my code is 100% accurate.' He was definitely getting better at detecting sarcasm and humour. Just not any better at responding to it. He pulled up a more detailed view to the screen. 'If you were more familiar with this system you would see that the leak appears to be occurring in the fundamental operational programming of the engineering console.'

Nyota tilted her head. 'That console is connected to the training room in the engineering department isn't it sir?' The Academy had a mock-up of an ambassador-class engineering section for the students to train on.

'Affirmative cadet.'

'Sir, some third years are doing some sort of experiment with the warp core in the engineering department today. Perhaps they've caused the memory leak?' Having something useful to input into the conversation pleased her far more than it should have. God she was pathetic. What did she want, a gold star?

Spock frowned and brought up the linked engineering display. 'The system currently indicates that the training room is inoperative. However, the fluctuations in the memory leak could be caused by an error in the systems governing the tuning of the warp drive.'

As Nyota looked at the display the memory usage spiked massively for a few seconds then reduced to normal levels. 'I'm pretty sure they were running their experiments right now sir. People from my class were going to go and watch.'

Spock turned and addressed the centralised computer console set into the wall near the laboratory door. 'Computer: What is status of training room EN305?'

'Training room EN305 currently offline.'

Nyota looked at Spock in confusion. 'Does that mean it's empty sir?'

Spock frowned. 'No cadet, it means the sensors in that section are inoperable.' He picked up his PADD and started towards the door. 'Computer: is room EN305 occupied?'

'Affirmative as of last sensor readings at 11:17 hours.'

Spock turned and headed out the door.

Nyota jogged a few steps to catch up as he strode along the hallway. He was scrolling through something on his PADD. 'Which instructor was overseeing this experiment cadet? I have no record
of the room being booked for a class.'

'I'm not sure. I didn't hear anyone mention a class or professor, just that some fourth years were doing some tests.' Now she thought about it, it seemed a little suspicious. 'They wouldn't play around with an active warp core without supervision surely?'

Spock led her into a turbolift. 'One would hope not. If the memory leak is caused by an error in the tuning of the warp drive in the training room, a highly complex program would be required to make the connected engineering console in the bridge simulator register the drive as inoperative. The creation and deployment of such a program would be in breach of no less than three Starfleet Regulations.'

Nyota asked. 'A program to hide what they are doing? I can't believe fourth years would be so stupid.'

'Indeed. That would be the apt description for such an action. Many of the safety cut offs and other monitoring systems will be inactive if the console is not receiving readings from the drive.' As they exited the turbolift onto the third floor Spock paused and addressed the computer console again. 'Computer: inform all academy staff of possible unauthorised activation of warp drive in the engineering department without safety protocols.' He remained still for a moment, his head tilted as if he was listening to something.

Nyota strained her ears. She had very good hearing, but detected nothing unusual. Then she noticed the slight vibration of the floor. It was not dissimilar to that felt in a ship at warp speed. She shot a wide-eyed look of concern at Spock. He didn't respond, simply turned and ran towards the training room. Nyota followed, her heart beating wildly with adrenaline. Seeing her dignified Vulcan instructor worried enough to run was more disturbing than any of his ruminations on disabled safety fail safes.

There were a few students in the hallway, loitering near the large double doors which led to the large training room. All were staring in shock at the Vulcan bolting towards them. He was only a few meters from the doors when Nyota heard a high pitched mechanical wail. The steady vibration in the floor suddenly became a shaking like the minor earthquakes they often experienced in San Francisco. Instinctively she froze and pressed herself against the wall. She could hear students screaming over the horrifying crunching and wailing noises that seemed to be coming from the very walls, as if she was inside some huge concrete monster's stomach.

She stared ahead and saw that Spock was doing something to the computer console outside the door to the training room. The evacuation alarm was sounding and the emergency lights came on to flash in warning. There was a crowd of horrified cadets, some injured, flooding from the training room. They buffeted against Spock, but the Vulcan was immobile against the onslaught. Over the din she could hear snatches of the academy computer issuing an evacuation warning. There wasn't anything she could do to help, so she just pressed herself harder against the wall and held her breath.

It could only have been seconds, but it felt like minutes, before Spock glanced up and along the corridor towards her. For once his expression was as plain to her as any human's. It was fearful. It said run. She took a deep breath and stared hopelessly at him trying desperately to communicate with out words. The fire stairs were on the other side of the training room. She'd have to run past, get closer to the screaming warp core before she could get to safety. It seemed too great a risk. She was stuck. Spock took a step towards her and Nyota felt her fear recede a little. Irrational though it was, she honestly believed he would somehow protect her from an exploding warp core.

Then the wailing became a deafening roar and the floor twisted beneath her like a rope bridge. The
air around her was suddenly white and blinding. She half fell, half crouched down and pressed herself between the wall and the floor which was now in entirely the wrong position. She sensed things falling towards her, shadows in her peripheral vision, and threw her arms up instinctively. She felt something collide with her head but felt only shock, not pain.

*Spock*

By the time Spock had reached the door of the training room it was already clear to him from the noise the warp core was making that the drive would fail catastrophically within moments. Without the usual safety protocols in place the entire building could be destroyed. The core itself was powerful - from an older Ambassador-class heavy cruiser, and would prove devastating. The noise meant addressing the nearby computer console verbally would be pointless. He manually initiated an evacuation order then tried to simultaneously cut off power to the training room and re-establish the safety perimeter around it. The programs that the students had used to isolate the training room made accessing the safety systems tedious.

It took him 27.5 seconds to re-establish some of the containment fields built into the walls of the training chamber, but he was only able to reactivate 72% of them. Although they would undoubtedly prevent a vast amount of damage to the building and students within, he estimated a 38% chance that the building would still collapse. The wall shifted and the console mounted within it cracked and dimmed.

He turned and looked back down the corridor to where he instinctively knew Cadet Uhura would still be standing. She was pressed against the wall staring at him wide-eyed in panic.

He realised belatedly that the section of wall she was pressed against was part of the section not protected by the re-established containment fields. Frantically his brain sorted through possible ways to prevent her coming to harm, but there were none. She needed to move. They both did. The logical thing to do was to head towards the fire escape stairs. They were protected by their own barrier fields and were the safest place in the building. There was still a crush of students making their way towards them however and Spock would have to force his way through them to ensure his own safety, a distasteful concept.

The noise from the failing warp core reached a crescendo. Nyota was staring at intensely. He could not pull his eyes from her. Although it was illogical, Spock took a step towards her rather than towards the stairs. He saw the relief wash over her face.

The drive failed.

The building shook violently. Spock was disorientated, blinded by vivid white light and deafened by crashes and explosions. 17 seconds later he found himself crouched against a piece of permacrete wall sheeting. He quickly deduced he was unharmed save a superficial abrasion to his left leg above the knee and a cut above his right eyebrow where something had been embedding in his flesh by the blast. He probed it with his fingers. It was not deep.

Directly in front of him one of the reinforced doors from the training room was embedded in the wall. He was glad he had not been standing in front of the console. He would have been embedded in the wall along with the door. Most likely in two pieces. A spray of fire retardant foam sprinkled down over the scene much like frozen precipitation. From the direction of the ruined warp core he felt the scorching heat of the superheated matter and anti-matter containment chambers.
He allowed himself 6 seconds to compose himself and fully regain his bearings and then he made his way in the direction he had last seen Nyota Uhura. The corridor ceiling had collapsed and large sections of the wall lay at angles across it. He was forced to clear several sections of debris to proceed along the corridor. It took 3 minutes and 47 seconds for him to reach the position he estimated as that of the cadet prior to the explosion. If she was alive it was imperative that she be removed from the range not only of the encroaching fire, but of the radiation that Spock knew would be dousing the area.

He could see no trace of her. The wall she had been pressed against had been blown out and lay at a slight angle, braced against the half collapsed wall opposite. Flame retardant foam was spitting down over it.

'Cadet Uhura!'

The evacuation alarm was still sounding. Spock could also hear yells and screams for help from other parts of the building. He could make out no sounds of movement or respiration from his immediate vicinity. He deduced that she was mostly like dead - her fragile human body crushed under several tonnes of permacrete. He pushed the thought aside. There was a gap beneath the collapsed wall. It was conceivable she was beneath it and had not suffered fatal injuries.

He crouched down to peer underneath.

The area underneath was not free from debris. Broken ceiling tiles and light fittings littered the space. Spock could smell human blood. Her blood. He felt his heart give an odd jerk. He began to clear the shattered debris so he had access beneath the collapsed wall but his hands moved automatically. His clear Vulcan logic had already assessed the situation and informed him the chances of Nyota Uhura being alive were less than 2%.

He worked steadily for 7 minutes and 12 seconds, expecting at any moment to find his assistant's corpse. Eventually he was forced to crawl underneath the wall section. He paused only momentarily when he removed a long piece of a wall dressing and Nyota's face was revealed, looking almost peaceful in sleep.

His eyes flicked over the parts of her body that were visible.

She was wedged most fortuitously between the floor and the wall section. Although some lightweight ceiling panels were broken over her, she had not been hit by any of the light fittings, which would have impaled her. Her hands were up near her face, suggesting she had attempted to shield herself.

Spock reached out a hand felt for a pulse at her wrist. The warmth of her skin was a comfort. He sensed the familiar shape of her mind through his fingertips instantly, long before her steady pulse registered. He let out a breath he was unaware he had been holding. The surge of relief and other more confusing emotions felt at her continued existence threatened to overwhelm him. He carefully pushed them aside.

She was alive, but she could not remain in her current position. Radiation from the drive would be washing over the area and there was the threat of fire and further collapse of the building. Spock spent 8 seconds debating the appropriate course of action. He needed to evacuate the building and take the cadet with him. Therefore he needed to free her from the permacrete that pinned her. Before doing so he needed to establish that moving her would not further damage her.

'Cadet Uhura.' No response. 'Cadet.' He paused. 'Nyota.' Her name felt strange in his mouth. Intoxicating. It was a beautiful name, illogical as it was. Saying it made him feel odd. He said it
again as much to form it with his lips as to see if she would hear. 'Nyota.' He squeezed her wrist slightly. He could feel the tempting buzz of her unconscious thoughts. She did not react.

He lay near her, his hand still wrapped about her limp wrist, though the contact was unnecessary, and debated his next move. After a moment he released her and slid closer. He could smell her perfume, vanilla and jasmine, amidst the iron tang of her blood and the acrid smell of ozone in the air. It was good that she had fallen facing his direction. He reached forward again and carefully, reverently, placed his fingers against the psi points along the right side of her face. Her skin was cool like all of her race and chilled his fingers. Her temple was wet with red blood. He was suddenly aware of how alien his assistant was. Cool skin. Red blood. A girl of a race that had evolved light years away from his homeplanet.

A girl from the stars.

Her name meant star.

He remembered looking it up and dismissing it as an impractical sentimental name.

'Nyota Chausiku.' Star born at night. He was only vaguely aware he'd said it out loud.

A beautiful name. As beautiful as she was.

An illogical name.

Suddenly Spock realised he was behaving in an exceedingly irrational and emotional manner. He pushed the useless thoughts away and did not allow them to distract him further.

'My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts.' He said the ritual phrase in Vulcan, more to satisfy his own sense of decorum then for her benefit. She was not, after all, conscious to give him permission.

He held back his thoughts with an iron will as he felt their minds meld. It was a curious sensation. He had never melded with an unconscious person, in fact, save his family and T'Pring, he had never melded with anyone. Despite his concern, he found himself comparing Nyota's mind and the only other human's he'd ever felt, his mothers, with great interest. He was tempted to try and communicate with Nyota, but knew since he did not have her permission, he should keep the depth of the meld to a bare minimum.

He ignored the tempting pull of her thoughts and focused on the deeper, fundamental functions of her brain. He quickly assessed the level of damage she had suffered with far more accuracy then she could ever have expressed to him verbally. She had a concussion, a broken ankle and superficial contusions and abrasions. Her back was slightly strained and she had a cracked rib, but her spine was undamaged. Spock was pleased to realise her injuries were non-life threatening. He would be able to move her without any risk of further harm. Satisfied, he pulled back and attempted to rouse her.

She remained unresponsive. Spock came to a decision.

Gingerly, aware that when she felt his presence she would likely be extremely alarmed, he reached forward and prodded at her consciousness with the mental equivalent of the lightest touch from a single fingertip. Her reaction was startling. The quiet background murmur of her thoughts, to which he had been carefully maintaining distance, suddenly came into focus as she reached for him. If his touch was the mental equivalent of a careful tap, hers was like being hit by a hoverbus. Spock was overwhelmed. She bombarded him with her thoughts, her mind washing over him like a wave and
dragging him helplessly along with her.

She was in a state similar to a dream. She had been sitting underneath the big cape chestnut in the yard of her family home in Nairobi. The pale pink flowers of the tree blanketed the ground around her. She was wearing her cadet's uniform but was barefoot. Beside her was a stack of PADDs. Spock abruptly found himself standing beside her. He was astounded by the surreal nature of the experience. He was aware that the scene was entirely with the cadet's mind, but it felt quite real. It was pleasantly warm. There was a slight breeze. He looked up at the large tree in admiration. *Calodendrum Capense* came the identifying thought. It was not his own, he had made no study of native African flora. The warm breeze scattered the fallen flowers around them.

'Fascinating.' He spoke out aloud within the cadet's dream, referring more to the experience than the tree.

She was regarding him evenly with those big human eyes of hers. She spoke in Vulcan. 'Spock? What are you doing in Nairobi? I need to study.'

Spock felt a twinge of amused amusement that his assistant would be dreaming about studying even whilst lying injured under a pile of permacrete. He also felt a twinge of something else at hearing her calling him by his name rather than rank.

He responded in kind. 'I am not in Nairobi and nor are you Nyota.' In the current situation he allowed himself the privilege of using her given name.

She smiled playfully. 'Clearly we are in Nairobi Spock. I think I recognise my own home.' She waved a hand towards the large residence to her right. Spock had an impression of a large white building with a long columned terrace but it was fuzzy and unclear, as if viewed through a fog.

Spock paused before thinking of a convincing argument. 'Why are you dressed in your uniform Nyota?'

She frowned and glanced down at the red dress in confusion. She had no response.

'We are in the Engineering Block at the Academy. The warp drive failed in the training room. You are unconscious.' He continued.

Her frown deepened and she was silent for a long moment. 'Yes... I remember. The fourth years disabled the safety protocols.' She looked up at him and tilted her head. 'So am I dead? Or I am dreaming of you?'

Spock stepped forward to stand near her feet. 'You are most assuredly alive Nyota. However we must leave, it is not safe where we are.' He reached down to offer her a hand to stand up. The carpet of flowers was soft underfoot with the bite of twigs and earth beneath. A not unpleasant sensation. He looked down in surprise. 'I don't appear to be wearing any shoes.'

Nyota took his hand and he pulled her to her feet. Her hand was warm and tiny in his. He did not wish to release it. 'Why would you want any?' She curled her fingers around his and smiled up at him.

He responded by rote. 'It is illogical to go outdoors without footwear.' She was standing very close to him and her thumb was drawing little circles on the soft skin on the inside of his wrist. Spock felt a strange stirring of something in response to her simple touch. That disturbing feeling which only she awoke within him.

Nyota tilted her head to look up at him. 'You're a figment of my imagination Spock. I think logic
and footwear are the least of your concerns.'

'I assure you I am most definitely not a figment of your imagination.' He resisted the urge to return the grip of her hand on his and instead left his hand loose in hers.

She was frowning again. 'But I'm dreaming.' Absently she reached up with her free hand and stroked an index finger along the line of his left eyebrow. Spock froze beneath her touch. Her finger felt very real against his face, like a burning brand. He felt the ghost of her fingertip as if his skin had been fundamentally changed by her caress. She pressed her fingertips to his cheek, four burning points of slight pressure and then slid them into his hair. She was staring at him in rapt attention. 'Your hair is much softer than I thought it would be.'

'Nyota.'

He did not know why he said her name, did not know what he was attempting to communicate. It was both warning and plea. Something both terrible and wonderful - that nameless thing inside him. Despite his own confusion there was some sort of understanding in her eyes.

He was frozen for several heartbeats, acutely aware of Nyota's proximity and the fact that she was touching him; her fingers were in his hair and around his wrist. Belatedly he realised he was staring at her mouth. Her own gaze was similarly fixated. He suddenly knew she was going to kiss him, felt her intent.

He took a step back in alarm. Her hands were pulled from him to hang at her side. He felt himself once more, the strange feelings fading along with the memory of her touch.

'Cadet. I will attempt to bring you back to consciousness.'

She crossed her arms and regarded him sceptically. 'For part of a lucid dream you are far too realistic.'

Spock carefully pulled himself away from her thoughts. The scene faded around him and he was again aware of the hard floor beneath him and the smell of smoke and blood. He deftly manipulated her nervous system in the same way he regulated his own, and felt the change in her mind as she awoke.

He felt her confusion and pain as she returned to her facilities. He was about to sever the connection between them when he felt her hand clutch at his uniform. He heard her attempt to speak, but heard the word only in his mind. /Spock?/ He opened his eyes and was surprised at her proximity. Her face was so close it was uncomfortable to focus on her eyes. He shifted back awkwardly to give her space.

She was regarding him dazedly, her eyes blinking slowly. Her head was throbbing painfully and her ankle and ribs were aching. She shuffled towards him and pressed her forehead against his chest, the pain washing over her in waves. With the meld still active he was able to dull her sensation of it. She sighed in relief and he felt her vague gratitude.

He let her gather herself for 30 seconds then spoke. 'We must leave cadet. I will pull you out from underneath this wall.'

Her head jerked slightly against his chest in a nod.

'I will have to break the meld. The pain of your injuries will return.' He had already drawn back until it was only the barest touch of a mind meld. He anticipated there would be little shock when he severed the connection completely.
He felt her sigh against the cloth of his uniform. Through the meld he could feel how she was enjoying both the warmth of his body heat, much warmer than that of a human and rare privilege of such proximity to him. She also apparently thought he smelt pleasant. Her thoughts were fogged with her concussion. He got a sense of times she had wished to express affection for him with casual human gestures of friendliness but held herself back. She was thinking something along the lines of how this was the closest she'd ever get to hugging a Vulcan. Yes. She was most likely correct in that assessment.

Spock pulled his hand away and felt Nyota stiffen and hiss softly as the pain returned. He gripped her shoulder and carefully pulled. Her slight body shifted towards his easily.

'You are not pinned or caught on anything cadet?'

'No.' Her voice was strained.

Spock worked them backwards until he had Nyota out from under the collapsed wall. The flame retardant foam was still spitting down haphazardly from the dispensers that had withstood the explosion. She was shivering, her arms wrapped around herself and her eyes shut. Spock knelt beside her and helped her into a sitting position. Her eyes opened and shut languidly. He had to steady her lest she fall over. Her body shook with her shivering, her teeth rattling. Spock unfastened and removed his jacket. She needed no incentive to don the garment, pushing her arms through the oversized sleeves awkwardly.

Spock quickly refastened it. 'I am uncertain if the emergency stairs on this level will be accessible.' He helped the cadet to stand leaning against him. 'You will be unable to navigate the debris with your injured ankle. Place your arms around my neck, I will carry you.' He half expected her to stubbornly insist on walking, but wordlessly she complied. Her acquiescence worried him. Spock lifted her with one arm behind her back and another behind her knees. The cut on his thigh stung slightly as he walked, but he was otherwise unimpeded.

Smoke hung in a thick cloud along the ceiling. Spock bent down slightly as he carried Nyota back past the ruined doorway to the training room. In the few minutes since the explosion fire had already spread from the room. Only the foam had kept it from engulfing the hall entirely. As it was Spock was barely able to pick a relatively safe passage through. The corridor beyond had been protected by containment barriers for the most part but Spock still passed the bodies of two deceased students. From the lack of other bodies or survivors he assumed that passage to the fire stairs was clear.

Someone had propped the fire door ajar with a piece of rubble from a collapsed wall. The door was sliding back and forth in an attempt to close with a soft thudding noise. Spock stepped over the block and into the stairway. The stairs were dark with only emergency lighting softly illuminated them. He could hear voices below him. Spock turned down the first flight and found a group of eight students and one administration aide in plain clothes sitting on the landing. They looked up at his approach, peering through the darkness with human eyes less suited to such a light spectrum.

The cadet nearest him gestured at the pile of rubble heaped in front of them. 'The stairs are blocked. They're clearing it from the other side though.' He looked at Nyota and winced. 'Is she alright? They said it'd take at least two hours to clear the way. There're people under the rubble so they have to be careful.'

'She has a broken ankle, a cracked rib and a concussion but is not seriously injured.' Spock bent and carefully positioned Nyota on against the wall beside the boy. She had her eyes squeezed shut in discomfit. 'If we are going to be here for two hours, I must shut the fire door.'
'We thought it better to leave it propped open for any other survivors.' said another cadet.

'These stairwells are protected by containment barriers,' he glanced at the rubble pointedly, 'although some apparently failed, but they should protect us from radiation from the warp core.'

'Oh. Right. Radiation.' The cadet frowned. 'Sorry sir.'

Spock quickly returned to the doorway and removed the block of rubble. The door slid shut and after a second Spock heard the static hiss as the barrier activated in response to the radiation levels. He returned to the landing. He inspected the pile of rubble. He would be able to move enough of the pieces to enable escape, however he could hear voices from the level below. Moving any of the rubble could result in the debris collapsing on the people below.

Satisfied he could do nothing else of use, Spock returned to Nyota and sat down beside her. He could feel her shivering despite his jacket. He moved a little closer until his arm just barely touched her shoulder. 'If you are cold you may lean against me cadet.' He felt too self-conscious to make the statement in standard.

Again, she needed no further encouragement. She shifted, half turning, and pressed her arms and face against him. His arm appeared to be impeding her so he lifted it and wrapped it around her shivering form, mirroring the position of several of the humans on the landing. She appeared to appreciate this gesture and wrapped her arms around his chest and leant her head against him. Spock focused on maintaining a steady beat for his heart. He was glad it was dark. He could feel her jaw twitching as her teeth chattered and the warmth of her breath through the material of his undershirt. He felt exceedingly uncomfortable with her closeness. He tried to block all thoughts of the strange dream like scene of their mind meld from his mind. It was difficult.

The students on the landing talked quietly and nervously amongst themselves. Intermittently someone would call up from the level below and updates on the progress of the rescue team would be given. Spock talked quietly to Nyota in a variety of tongues, aware that she needed to stay conscious due to her head injury. After working through a dozen different obscure languages, he tried to perk her interest by teaching her bits of ancient Vulcan poems in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu which he knew from Cadet U'Aidat she was attempting to learn. His mother was fond of ancient Vulcan poetry and had liked him to recite them to her when he was a child.

'I feel the life is / sorrowful and unbearable / though / I can't flee away / since I am not a bird.'*

She was silent for a few moments before repeating the poem back carefully enunciating each word. Her accent was very thick, but High Vulcan was generally considered unpronounceable for humans so her usual perfection could not be expected. 'I feel the life is sorrowful and unbearable, though I cannot fly away since I am no bird.' He could tell she was getting tired because she was making more and more errors, although she was not nearly as inept at the dialect as Cadet U'Aidat had implied.

'flee away and not a bird. Otherwise thy pronunciation is adequate.'

She did not respond. Although she thoughtfully kept herself from making contact with any of his skin, Spock could sense the contrasting throbs of pain from the back of her skull, her cracked rib and the shattered bone in her ankle. She was exhausted and utterly miserable. He knew that after a mind meld sometimes a remnant of the connection could linger for a time. He had experienced similar effects on previous occasions he had shared thoughts with his parents.

Spock switched to standard Vulcan. 'We have been in the here for 37 minutes and 12 seconds. I anticipate we will not be here much longer than one further standard hour.' He hesitated before
adding. 'If you wish, I could numb the pain of your injuries again.'

It was not an offer he was comfortable making, mind melds were not something Vulcan's took lightly, but after the affection for himself he'd felt in her earlier, he had no doubt were their roles reversed she would not hesitate to make the same.

'That would be good thank you Spock. It's been getting worse, I can't think straight.' She responded quietly in standard. He tried not to react to her using just his name. She didn't seem aware of the significance of his offer or his discomfit.

Spock glanced around the landing. No one was paying particular attention to Uhura and himself and judging from the way they were huddled together, none of them found anything odd about her proximity to him. The air coming through the vents along the wall from the scrubbers in the basement was chilled to an unusual degree to combat the heat of the fires in the building. The stairwell was uncomfortably cold. The others on the landing had abandoned propriety and were practically sitting on top of one another. In fact the one of the cadets was in the lap of another. Satisfied he was not being scrutinised, Spock pressed his left hand along the psi points on the side of Nyota's face.

'My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts.'

He was prepared this time and braced himself for the impact of her mental 'tackle' and was able to keep himself apart from her. Her thoughts, fuzzed with concussion, tugged against him curiously. Gently he batted them away, but he deepened the connection slightly so he could speak within the meld rather than out loud. He did not wish to draw attention to them.

/Calm yourself Nyota. I am aware that the sensation of a mind meld is fascinating, but you must focus on holding yourself apart./

After he felt her pull away, he focused himself and sank down within her nervous system. He dulled her pain receptors in the same manner as he had earlier. He felt her shock and amazement mixed with instant relief at the softening of the pain. Humans had no control over or even understanding of their basic metabolic functions. He felt her curiosity focusing until her thoughts cleared to him.

/That's incredible Isthathow Vulcan's can regulatetheir heartbeats and bodytemperature?/

/Yes./

Her thoughts were rushed, as if without the need to vocalise her words she wanted to communicate them as quickly as possible. She was silent for a time. Spock could feel her thinking of all the advantages such a skill would offer with a bit of jealousy.

/Canyoumakemewarmer? Increase my bodytemperature?/

/Possibly. I am unsure what would be the safe levels however. I have no wish to cause you further injury./

/Temperatureabove37.6°Celsius isfeverish lessthan thatisfine/

Spock sensed her eagerness for him to attempt to alter her body temperature. He was hesitant however. He had no wish to put her at any additional risk. Dulling a sensation was one thing, but actually changing her metabolic functions was quite another. As he hesitated he caught a strange thought projecting from her. She was letting him feel her desire to burrow her cold fingers underneath his undershirt and press them against his skin for warmth. Evidently she had had been
fighting the urge for some time. Apparently the thought was meant as some sort of threat.

He looked down at her and raised an eyebrow. She smirked slightly, aware of his regard, but kept her eyes closed.

*/That is perhaps the strangest threat that has even been made against me. However, I am not going to alter your body temperature/*/ 

She sighed against his chest.

*/You may carry through with your threat if you so desire/*/ 

He felt her shock and felt obliged to elaborate his sudden change of opinion with regards to physical contact. */There is no risk of unintentional telepathic communication in this instance and your body temperature is 34.5°=./

*/You could just raise it to 36.5°/*

Spock did not deign to answer. He managed to restrain the urge to flinch when Nyota pressed her hands against his back after sliding them under his shirt. Her fingers were icy cold and he felt goose bumps raise on his skin instantaneously. He raised his own body temperature by .8°C to compensate. Nyota observed the process from within him with great interest.

57 minutes and 37 seconds had passed since the explosion. The sounds of careful excavation from the flight below them moved in stops and starts, slowing to almost complete halts when they neared a body or trapped survivor. Judging from what the emergency crews were saying there were two more students trapped under the rubble. Spock quickly calculated that they would be freed in 52 minutes and 20 seconds with an additional 8 minutes and 35 seconds for any other students they might be unaware of.

Nyota’s amazement echoed through him again. She asked a muffled question more of his t-shirt then himself. ‘How many seconds are there in 12.8 standard years?’

The calculation was near instant for Spock. 

\[
\frac{4672 \text{ days}}{112100 \text{ hours}} \times \frac{6.728 \times 10^6 \text{ minutes}}{1 \text{ standard year}} = 4.037 \times 10^{17} \text{ nanoseconds}
\]

‘4.037 x 10^8 seconds.’ He responded out loud.

‘nanoseconds.’

‘4.037 x 10^{17} nanoseconds’

Her voice was playful. ‘You are a walking talking calculator. You think even think in scientific notation.’

She was silent for 4 minutes and 12 seconds. Spock felt her thoughts wandering but made no attempt to observe them.

*/What was that last poem you told me?/*

He spoke softly in high Vulcan as he had done earlier. ‘I feel the life is / sorrowful and unbearable / though / I can’t flee away / since I am not a bird.’

He could feel her analysing the exact manner in which he spoke the dialect, how his tongue and throat formed each syllable and the precise meanings he attached to each word. Her scrutiny and
interest was intense. It was plain to Spock that Nyota's skill with languages was born more of a deep fascination with them rather than any especial natural talent. This was more admirable in his estimation.

When she repeated the phrase back she did so almost perfectly. Spock was impressed. /Well done cadet./

He felt her almost child-like pleasure at his compliment.

Spock tried to think of another old Vulcan poem or proverb that would appeal to the Nyota. Instead snatches of terran poetry kept coming to the surface of his mind and jumbling together. (bright star of beauty on whose eyelids sit/proud evening star, in thy glory afar/as winds that blow against a star***)

His mother, as a linguist and a teacher, had a great passion for it. At one time she had translated a few of her favourites into Van-Kal Vuhlkansu. That would probably interest Nyota.

'Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art - Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night, and watching, with eternal lids apart, like nature's patient sleepless eremite'

Her reaction was different. Surprise and pleasure. /Keats in highVulcan?/ She repeated the lines back softly out loud then switched back to speaking within her mind. /How strange to hear such illogical emotional sentiment translated so well into a Vulcandialect./

Spock had always thought it a rather pointless exercise, but he admitted the contrast was interesting. /Not so strange. Van-Kal Vuhlkansu is an ancient language, from before the Time of Awakening. My mother has translated many Terran works of prose into it. Evidently the more archaic the writing style the better it translates. She claims to prefer Shakespeare in High Vulcan over the original English./

'I suppose all the theeing and thou-ing would be well suited.' She commented out loud.

Spock could feel her trying to translate a few lines herself in curiosity. Her brain was still oddly fogged with her concussion however and he felt her frustration at how slowly her thoughts sorted themselves.

He helped her laboriously translate a soliloquy from Macbeth and felt her satisfaction when she was able to quietly recite it in high Vulcan in more or less the same iambic pentameter. Her exhaustion battered against him. He had to periodically distract her to keep her from falling asleep.

By the time the emergency workers cleared a path for them through the rubble she was limp against him, her thoughts reeling like a drunk as she fought off sleep. It wasn't until he climbed to his feet holding onto her that he realised she had entwined one of her hands in his. The fact that he had not realised shocked him more than how pleasant he found it.

\* 'I feel the life is sorrowful and unbearable though I can't flee away since I am not a bird.' By Yamanoue no Okura from A Dialogue of two Poormen

** Sonnet IV: Bright Star of Beauty - Michael Drayon, Evening Star - Edgar Allan Poe, As Winds that Blow Against a Star - Joyce Kilmer.
Nyota awoke in a narrow bed in the Academy hospital. She felt stiff and tired, but otherwise unharmed. It was night time and the lights of San Francisco were visible from her room's window. She had no sense of time. She felt as if she'd been asleep for days. Her throat was parched. She sat up slowly and peered around the room.

She was in one of the tiny recovering rooms in the campus medical facility. On the wall above her was a long display detailing her vitals and condition and beside the bed was a little table with her comm, ID, a PADD and the other personal items from her pockets on top of it. Spock's jacket was neatly folded beside them. She reached for the PADD and accessed her messages. Unsurprisingly there were several from her parents. They would have been informed that she'd been injured by Starfleet.

She was too tired to call them, so she typed out a brief missive saying she was fine and would call them when she was released from medical.

Perhaps ten minutes had passed when the door slid open. She looked up, expecting a nurse or doctor come to check on her since her readings would have indicated she was awake. To her surprise it was Spock. Lieutenant Commander Spock rather. Her heart performed a violent nervous stutter before settling into a beat that seemed much too fast. Nyota stared at him awkwardly, unsure what to say.

He was dressed in the same grey uniform trousers and a long sleeved black undershirt he'd been in when last she saw him, both slightly worse for wear. There was a dark greenish blood stain above his left knee and his shirt was stiff in places with what she assumed was more dried blood. His hair was slightly out of place but the cut on his forehead had been healed. Nyota reassessed her assumption of the length of time she'd slept. Clearly Spock had not had opportunity to change yet, so only a few hours must have passed since they'd gotten out of the engineering block.

'Cadet. You have been asleep for 2 hours and 16 minutes. The doctors did not expect you to awaken until morning.' As he spoke Spock walked over to the small replicator set into the wall near her bed. 'Computer: Water.' He picked up the resulting glass and held it out to her.

Nyota blinked and accepted the water. It seemed oddly heavy and awkward in her hands and she sipped at it carefully. It was cool and soothed her parched throat wonderfully. She drained the glass quickly and Spock refilled it for her. She felt immensely better and pulled herself into a more upright position against her pillows.

'Thank you sir.' She stared hard at the glass, avoiding his face. 'And thank you for making sure I was okay after the explosion.'

'There is no need to thank me cadet.' Spock sounded as awkward as she felt. He clearly had no idea what he was meant to say in such a situation. She glanced up at him as he continued. 'I am... relieved that you were not seriously injured.' He was regarding her with a guarded expression as if waiting to see if what he had said was acceptable.

She smiled. 'Thank you sir. I'm also glad you were unharmed.' She glanced at his stained pants with a frown. 'Well, more or less unharmed.'
Spock nodded and Nyota could sense he was eager to leave. 'Were many students injured sir?'

'According to the doctors 67 academy staff and students were injured and 8 are deceased. There are still approximately a dozen missing however.'

Nyota sighed. 'What a waste.' Her eyelids were heavy. She blinked languorously.

The door opened and Gaila appeared looking wide-eyed. 'Ny! You're awake!' The Orion girl rushed to Nyota's bedside and gave her a rushed, gentle hug. 'Are you okay? I mean the doctors said you'd be fine, but you had a pretty bad concussion and you looked half-dead when Lieutenant Commander Spock brought you out.'

Nyota nodded and gave her friend a reassuring smile. 'I'm tired and a bit stiff but I feel much better Gaila.'

Gaila sat heavily in the chair near the bed. She was silent for a moment. 'Brown and Vanwick from your subspace engineering class are dead.' Her voice was strained. Nyota tried to process what Gaila had just said, that two of her classmates were dead. It didn't seem real. Cadet Vanwick had sat next to her in their morning class while she'd been daydreaming about Spock showering. It seemed like a lifetime ago instead of hours.

Gaila reached forward and gripped Nyota's left hand with both of hers. 'You were in there for hours Ny, and they pulled three bodies out of that stairwell while I was waiting for them to find you. Then the shielding on the eastern stairwell failed and I was so worried that even if you'd survived that... that...' she broke off with a strangled sob.

Nyota squeezed her friend's hand. 'I'm fine Gaila.' Her eyes felt hot and itchy and she was worried she'd start crying. She was painfully aware of Spock standing on the other side of the bed stiff with awkwardness at being faced with such emotional outpouring.

Gaila pulled a crumpled tissue out of her pocket and blew her nose. 'A bunch of people from the third floor made it out before the stairwell got blocked and they saw you guys right near the training room door. I really thought you were dead Ny!' She started sobbing again. Nyota glanced helplessly at Spock who raised an eyebrow as if to ask if she was seriously looking to him of all people, for help calming a crying girl. He had a point.

'Well, I was near the training room Gaila. But luckily Spock was there.' Gaila calmed slightly, focusing on listening to Nyota. 'He got me to the stairwell so I didn't get burnt or fried by radiation.'

'The fire control system was still operational in that corridor and the permacrete wall which collapsed on top of you would have protected you from the radiation for quite some time cadet.' Spock pointed out helpfully.

Gaila froze mid sob and gasped. 'A permacrete wall fell on you?!

Nyota shot a glare at her instructor before responding. 'It's all a bit foggy. I was unconscious. It doesn't matter though, Spock got me out and I'm fine.'

Gaila unexpectedly dropped Nyota's hand and shot to her feet. She quickly circled the bed. Spock had time to take a step backward, his face comical in his shock, and then the Orion had wrapped him in hug. He stared at Nyota in horror over her red hair, his arms stiff at his side and his body tensed up like an angry cat. 'Thank you sir!'

Nyota fought back a laugh and tried to look sympathetic. At length Gaila released Spock and
looked up at him expectantly. 'It was nothing Cadet U'Aidat.' He looked back at Nyota. 'I will leave you to your rest Cadet Uhura.' Spock sounded extremely eager to leave.

Nyota smiled at him. 'Thanks for checking in on me sir.'

He nodded briefly in response and all but ran from her room. His jacket was still sitting on the bedside table.

Nyota relaxed back against her pillows and shut her eyes. She heard Gaila move around the room and resume her seat. 'I think you just gave Lieutenant Commander Spock a heart attack Gaila. Watching a crying Orion girl hug a Vulcan almost makes having a building collapse on me worthwhile.'

*Spock*

The lingering effects of his mind meld with Nyota Uhura faded within the next standard week. For a few days after the accident he'd had odd flashes of feelings which were not his own and found the sensation extremely unsettling. He'd been receiving treatment for his injuries when he'd felt her awaken. Since his own were minor he had been waiting whilst the more serious injuries were handled. It took only moments for the doctor treating him to heal his cuts and scan him for a clean bill of health. He'd decided to stop in and see her on his way out of the hospital. He'd stopped at a replicator in one of the waiting areas and drank three glasses of water before he'd realised that the thirst he felt was not his own.

When he had entered her room he'd felt her nervous happiness and surprise at his presence. It was a vague feeling, nothing like the telepathic communication he'd feel from his fingertips or a full mind meld, but something none the less. He'd told her how long she had been asleep in answer to a question she had not asked.

The next day he'd awoken unusually hungry and his breakfast meal had done nothing to satisfy him. The feeling had remained until mid-morning when Uhura had obviously eaten something. For the most part these incidents, whilst odd, where not overly distressing. Although he had not experienced them in such strength before, Spock was aware that is was not uncommon. As such he had not given the fading link much thought when he had inquired if the cadet was recovered sufficiently to accompany him as planned on a site visit. She had returned to classes three days previously and appeared physically recovered but Spock deemed it polite to make such an inquiry rather than to expect her presence.

Six days had passed since the accident when he collected her from the main gate as was their custom. The greetings they exchanged were unexceptional. Uhura smelt of chocolate pastry and coffee as she often did prior to their departure. She was wearing her usual riding ensemble and it looked just as appealing as it always did. In short, the journey began completely within their standard routine. It was only when she pulled herself onto the hoverbike behind him that he belatedly released one major difference between this and every other time she had accompanied him to the shipyard.

As she secured her feet on the footpegs and slid herself forward slightly to rest securely against him, he was aware of a strange dizziness. He paused for a few seconds as she settled herself and analysed it. Her thighs tightened around his hips. The dizziness increased. For a moment Spock thought he had taken ill, that it was nausea. Then he realised the strange feeling was not his own. It was emanating from Uhura. He could feel a vague echo of her feelings.
'Are you well cadet?'

She paused before replying and he felt the dizziness intensify before clearing to confusion. 'Yes sir?'

His mind developed a hypothesis without conscious input as they made their way to the shipyard. Unable to resist testing it, he activated the seldom used lifesign display within his helmet and monitored Uhura's heartrate. He then slowed more sharply than usual as he navigated a bend. Inertia pushed Uhura forwards against him. The dizziness returned for a minute before fading again and her heart rate jumped by 18%. He accelerated sharply to overtake another vehicle and felt a similar giddy buzz from her as the hoverbike sped up. It was similar to the dizziness but not the same, although the increase in her heart rate was comparable.

It was clearly an adrenal response of some sort.

He puzzled upon it in the back of his mind for the rest of the day. It was not until they were preparing to return to the Academy that the cause of the cadet's reaction was made apparent to him however. Uhura had been fastening her jacket when she dropped one of her riding gloves. Spock had bent to retrieve it automatically and held it out for her.

'Thanks sir.' she'd said and reached to take it without looking. Her middle and index finger had lightly brushed the skin of the back of his hand as she did so. Her eyes had widened and she'd apologised profusely. Spock had obviously responded in some manner since she'd seemed satisfied that she hadn't offended him terribly with her accidental touch, but he wasn't sure what he had said exactly. He'd been too distracted by the intense wave of the dizzy feeling coming from her.

They were not on the hoverbike, there was no external stimulus to invoke such a response from her. There was only him. It seemed implausible, but that was the cause logic pointed too. He remembered the manner in which she had touched him within the strange dream-like part of their mind meld when she had been injured.

Spock spent the ride home repeating his earlier experimentation. He was still not certain in his hypotheses however. As usual he dropped Uhura off at the main gate so she would not have to walk across the entire campus. Impulsively he called out to her before she could walk away. 'Cadet Uhura.'

She turned back to him quizzically. 'Yes sir?'

Spock tried to choose his words carefully. 'You have most likely experienced some of the side effects I mentioned last week due to the mind meld when you were injured.' He had spoken to her briefly of them the day after the accident.

She nodded. 'Yes sir. I tried to eat a cheese burger on Monday night and I thought I was going to be ill.' She smiled. He was glad she wasn't angered.

'Ah, yes. I had a similar incident. A strange desire for terran coffee. '

Uhura's smile widened. 'Sorry sir, at least I don't drink hot chocolate. And they seem to be fading, I've not noticed anything since Thursday. '

'Yes that is correct. I anticipate they will fade entirely within the next 48 hours.' Spock paused, unsure if he should continue. 'However I noted something earlier and wonder if you would consent to a small experiment?''
The cadet tilted her head. ‘What sort of experiment sir?’

‘I would like to touch your hand.’ Even he thought the request sounded odd.

She blinked, clearly surprised, but stepped back to stand beside the hoverbike. ‘Um, okay?’ She pulled off one of her riding gloves and held out her hand, palm up.

Spock did likewise, pushing his glove into one of his jacket pockets. He hesitated, his hand near the cadet’s. He glanced at her looking for permission. She nodded. He felt a strange sense of anticipation. He reached out, palm down, and gently pressed the tip of his index finger to the tip of her ring finger. Something like an electric spark passed between them. She gasped, her eyes widening. Spock felt the warm brush of her mind and then a curl of heat shot through him and he inhaled deeply.

The dizzy feeling. There it was. His heart rate accelerated and his hand shifted, sliding so that their fingers more or less aligned. The connection deepened. The dizziness intensified. He was aware of Nyota stepping closer to him, of her hand curling around his fingers so their hands were interlocked like links of a chain. Her hand was warm, but cooler than his own. 4.7˚ celsius cooler. He was again reminded of that strange dream scene within her mind, when she’d touched him. His face and his hand. It had felt real at the time, but compared to the reality of having Nyota’s hand in his own it was nothing.

The dizzy feeling was incredible. Amazing. Like the lurch of a ship jumping to warp - an exhilarating sensation. He glanced up from their hands to meet her eyes. She was staring at him with an odd expression and a wide smile. He could feel how happy she was to be holding his hand. Was that what the dizzy feeling was? Happiness? Excitement? It was like no emotion he had ever experienced himself.

‘What is that?’ he asked her.

‘What is what?’ Her head tilted in confusion, an almost Vulcan mannerism.

Spock pressed the dizzy feeling back at her. ‘This. I felt it from you earlier. I have never encountered anything like it. What is it? It is fascinating.’ He felt surprise and sadness from her.

‘Really? You don't know what that is sir?’

He shook his head slightly, aware that he was disappointing her somehow.

She smiled a little smile he had not seen on her face before. ‘That’s you Spock.’

He ignored the thrill her odd words sent through him and kept his voice even. ‘I am afraid I do not follow.’

Uhura frowned slightly and he could feel her thinking through the link of their fingers. It was a curious sensation. ‘I guess the best way to explain what that feeling is… is that it’s my… affection, my friendship for you.’ Spock was reminded of the Cadet’s friendship with Cadet U’Aidat. Was this what human’s felt for their friends? It was an incredible feeling. Perhaps that was why humans thought friendship so important, a simple behavioural response to such an enjoyable feeling. He had never felt it from his mother, though he imagined her affection for him, as his mother, would be very different from the feelings of friendship Uhura was describing. He was uncertain why his reaction displeased her.

He frowned. ‘This saddens you?’
She shook her head. 'No, not exactly.'

'I have offended you in some manner?'

'Not at all.' She glanced down at their hands, her dark fingers enveloped almost entirely by his pale hand. 'I just think it's a pity that you've never felt this yourself.'

Spock was silent for a moment. 'It is clearly a human emotion cadet, it is illogical to pity me for not having felt it myself as I am Vulcan.' He paused as he felt her taking offense. 'And I have felt it now, thanks to you, Nyota Uhura.' He sought some way to reciprocate. He could not make himself feel her dizzy human affection. But he could offer her the Vulcan equivalent. 'T’hyla.'

The sadness he'd felt earlier dissipated entirely as he named her his friend. The dizzy feeling intensified and she smiled at him widely. Spock found himself smiling back at her. Actually smiling. He felt giddy. He could not maintain his usual control with Nyota's dizzy affection thrumming through his veins. It seemed human friendship had a similar effect on Vulcans as chocolate.
Chapter 14

*Nyota*

After mid-year exams Nyota went home to spend a month with her family in Nairobi. When her results were posted halfway through the holidays she wasn’t surprised to find that she had passed her classes without dropping a single percentage in any of them. Spock’s comment on her results stated that she was now not only the first student he had ever awarded 100% to but the second as well.

Her father Zuberi and been particularly amused by that.

She was eating lunch with her sister Zanta outside on the terrace one day when her father called out that she had a comm call inside.

'Coming Papa!' she replied before making her way to the living room and the main comm console. To her surprise instead of finding Gaila or perhaps one of her old friends from university waiting on the screen, she found her father deep in conversation with Lieutenant Commander Spock.

'That would be excellent Spock. I must admit I have grown curious listening to…' At her approach her father broke of mid-sentence.

'Listening to what Papa?'

Zuberi waved her away. 'Never mind! Spock will fill you a in minute I am sure.' He returned his attention to the comm screen and switched to Vulcan. 'Live long and prosper Spock.' He stood and headed to the kitchen where Nyota heard him start rummaging for food. Her father was incapable of passing the kitchen without doing so.

Nyota took his seat on the couch facing the comm screen. The Lieutenant Commander was dressed in Vulcan robes instead of a Starfleet Uniform. They were in muted tones of grey and much plainer than the elaborately embellished meditation robe she had previously seen him in. The room behind him was large, rather grand, and opened out onto a wide balcony. The view behind was of absolute wilderness - plains dotted with scrubby plants and great jutting red rocks without a single sign of civilisation. In the distance a huge mountain towered. It looked familiar. She thought it might be Mt Seleya. She assumed he was visiting his family on Vulcan.

'Greetings Cadet Uhura.'

Nyota smiled. 'Greetings Osavensu Spohkh'

His head tilted in the way that usually meant he was surprised or interested by something. 'You pronounced my name correctly. I think you are the first human save my mother to do so.'

Nyota felt herself flush with pleasure at his quiet praise. 'Then I am in honourable company.'

'Have you been persevering in your attempts to learn Van-Kal Vuhlkansu?' Spock asked. Clearly he assumed that was the reason for her improved accent.

'It remains something of a hobby of mine sir, but I hold out little hope of ever developing an accent a native speaker would be able to tolerate.' she replied.

Spock responded in High Vulcan. 'Thou hath gained basic fluency?'
It came as something of a shock to hear someone speaking the ancient ceremonial language of Vulcan outside of a recording. She'd never heard a 'real' person speaking it so to speak. Well she had, she vaguely recalled Spock distracting her with an impromptu lesson when she was injured, but since she didn't really remember, it hardly counted.

It was a beautiful language. It made Spock's voice seem even deeper and more lovely.

Nyota swallowed and continued in standard Vulcan. 'Yes. My comprehension is fluent, but my attempts at vocalising without coaching have met with mixed results to which it would be impolite to subject you.'

'Thou hath not heard mine lady mother's attempts. Thine can be no worse.' Spock continued in the formal dialect. Nyota shivered slightly. It was far more expressive then modern Vulcan. She desperately wanted to try and respond in kind, but couldn't bear the thought of failure.

She paused indecisively. 'Don't say I didn't warn you sir.'

She cleared her throat and composed a simple sentence of words she was fairly certain she could pronounce more or less correctly. 'Thou art visiting thy kin on Vulcan sir?' To her surprise the words floated off her tongue easily.

Spock's head tilted again and he blinked. When at length he responded, it was in standard. 'Fascinating. Your pronunciation, cadet, was without error.'

Nyota frowned in confusion. She did not detect a teasing or mocking tone in her instructor's voice, but his statement was... illogical. 'I'm sorry sir?'

'For what do you apologise cadet? When I last heard you speak Van-Kal Vuhlkansu your pronunciation was quite poor. You were however, concussed at the time.' He paused for a moment before continuing. 'It is now however remarkably precise.' He switched back to High Vulcan. 'I am indeed with mine kin on Vulcan.'

Nyota found herself grinning in pleased surprise. 'Thou'st speaks in truth? Mine words are clear to thee?'

'Yes. Thy accent is uncanny in its accuracy.' Spock was staring at her in great interest.

Nyota had her hands held to her mouth in shock. The last time she had tried to speak in High Vulcan even the computer language program had had trouble understanding her. Now her mouth and tongue were twisting around the alien phonetics with unconscious ease. It was a strange sensation, as if she were remembering the dialect rather than perfecting it after several years of casual study. 'This is most strange sir, words I could not form a month past now come easy to mine lips.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'Thou hath not been practising with some other Vulcan of thine acquaintance? The Lady T'Vau thou hath spoken of?'

Nyota shook her head. 'No, I hath made no attempt in mine study for some weeks.'

'Fascinating.' Spock glanced at something or someone behind the comm and switched back to common Vulcan. 'Intriguing this unique mystery is, I contacted you to inform you that I return from Vulcan tomorrow and must make official inspection of the Enterprise on stardate 2256.201.'

Nyota quickly converted that into the Terran calendar. September 20th. Given the time difference between San Francisco and Nairobi – that was in four days. 'I would be happy to provide you with
assistance should you require it.'

Spock nodded. 'Your presence would be most welcome. I have also taken the liberty of extending an invitation to Commander Uhura. He has provided me much assistance updating several Starfleet dictionaries and expressed great interest in the ship.'

'That was very thoughtful of you sir. My father has been following the construction of the Enterprise quite avidly. I have spoken to him often of our visits to the shipyard.'

'I am pleased. I will arrange transport from Nairobi for you and your father and forward you the details Cadet.'

'Thank you sir.'

Spock nodded and made the ta'al with his right hand. 'I shall see you and Commander Uhura on 2256.201. Live long and Prosper.'

Nyota sat and smiled at the no signal symbol on the comm screen for several minutes.

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*Spack*

Spock arrived at the shipyard early and split his morning between work on the sensor console in the bridge and checking on the placement of the newly fitted warp core for Professor Stirling. The official inspection of the ship was scheduled for 12:30 hours. He had arranged for a private shuttle to arrive with the cadet and her father at 12:20 hours. It was 3.5 standard minutes late. The Commander disembarked in a golden Starfleet command uniform accompanied by Cadet Uhura in a yellow terran style dress. Spock had not seen Zuberi Uhura in 'the flesh' as the term went before. He looked even larger in real life than he did crowding a comm screen. He was one of the tallest humans Spock had ever encountered. It was difficult to imagine the slender figure beside him shared DNA with him. She turned towards where he stood waiting with the overseer and supervisors and met his gaze with a smile. Spock ignored the little thrill that went through him as her eyes met his. He had not seen the cadet in 24 days, 8 hours and 37 minutes. The yellow of her dress contrasted strikingly against her dark skin. Her father raised a hand in greeting beside her. The new overseer snapped to attention and gave Commander Uhura a salute which Spock mirrored. Cadet Uhura smiled and glanced at her father with what Spock thought was bemusement. He imagined it was quite… odd for her to see him saluting to her father. Zuberi Uhura did outrank him however. The Commander smiled and returned the salute. 'Spock! Nice of you to let a nosey old man tag along.' He turned his gaze skyward at the looming shape of the Enterprise and let out a low whistle. 'She's a beauty. Can't wait to get a look inside.'

Spock introduced the new overseer, an Ardanan Lieutenant named Vanka and the two chief supervisors, Bates and Hardling. Lieutenant Vanka had only taken up her post a month earlier and throughout the tour was constantly referring to a PADD and questioning the supervisors. Despite this she already appeared to be far more familiar with the details of the Enterprise's build than her predecessor.

Commander Uhura appeared to enjoy the tour. He and the cadet, who had not seen many of the areas of the ship they were now visiting, kept up a steady conversation between themselves in a mix of Swahili and standard with occasional queries posed to the supervisors. For the most part...
they followed behind the group leaving Spock, Vanka and the supervisors to discuss the issues of the build and scheduling.

Spock found the contrast between the commander's baritone rumble and his daughter's more musical voice as they conversed in their native tongue intriguing. He did not speak Swahili and found himself contemplating learning it. Since Uhura spoke Vulcan and now evidently High Vulcan, it would be appropriate for him to also speak her native tongue. She was his… friend after all.

It was 17:08 hours by the time the Inspection was complete. Commander Uhura expressed a desire for sustenance. The Lieutenant excused herself, but the supervisors' shifts had ended at 17:00 so they accompanied Spock and the Uhuras to the diner.

Cadet Uhura commented on the number of civilians in the bar and dining area. 'Is there a recruitment shuttle leaving tomorrow or something?'

One of the supervisors, Bates, replied. 'Yep. Third recruitment drive of the summer.'

The cadet looked surprised. 'Third drive?'

'According to Admiral Komack there has been an increase of 19.5% in enlistment this year. There is talk of a fourth drive to take advantage of the additional interest.' replied Spock.

Commander Uhura swallowed a bite of his burger. 'It's the Enterprise. Kids see that big beautiful ship and suddenly Starfleet sounds like a lot of fun.' He patted his daughter on the arm. 'Isn't that right Nyota?'

She smiled. 'I didn't enlist just because of the Enterprise Papa and you know it.'

'But it certainly made that position in the Diplomatic Corps look a bit dull didn't it?' He replied. 'All that bowing and smiling and being stuck in small rooms with people who'd happily sell you out to Ferengi spice pirates for the mineral rights to a couple of asteroids.'

Spock regarded the cadet with interest. He disregarded the comment pertaining to Ferengi spice pirates as Terran humour. 'You considered joining the Diplomatic Corps Cadet?'

'I considered Starfleet and the Diplomatic Corps. Both appealed to me.' She glanced at her father. 'Ferengi spice pirates non-withstanding.'

The Commander scoffed. 'Her mother made sure Nyota was offered a junior attaché role straight out of university.'

Nyota sighed.

Her father continued 'My wife Tamu doesn't think Starfleet is a good choice for any daughter of hers. But seeing how well Nyota has done so far at the Academy has softened her a little. She is already telling people Nyota will outrank me within five years.'

Nyota laughed. 'I haven't even graduated yet!'

The Commander turned his attention to Spock 'When did you graduate Spock?'

'I graduated 5.7 standard years ago Commander.' He responded.

The Commander shot his daughter a victorious look. 'See? Spock's a Lieutenant Commander five
years after graduation. I'm sure you can make, say, Rear Admiral.'

'Actually papa, Spock was promoted to Lieutenant Commander less than 2 years after he graduated.' She gave him a teasing smile. 'He doesn't like to talk about it but he was one of the heroes of the Rigel VII Incident, weren't you sir?'

Spock chewed a mouthful of pasta for longer than strictly necessary. He had no desire to discuss the events on Rigel VII. Three crew members had died and others had been injured. It was not in his opinion, an 'amusing anecdote'.

The Commander seemed to sense that and changed the subject. 'Actually, whilst we are talking of promotions, I believe Captain Pike holds the record for fastest promotion to his rank.'

Spock nodded. 'That is correct.'

There was a loud crash followed by a chorus of jeers from the bar section as someone fell out of their chair.

Supervisor Hardling frowned. 'I hate recruitment drives. Those kids are a menace. Give them an hour or two and they'll be throwing each other around the bar.'

The cadet laughed. 'I don't doubt it. That's exactly what happened when I enlisted. Captain Pike had to break up the brawling himself.' She smiled. 'He can whistle really loudly.'

He could indeed. It was a skill he made ear-splitting use of in Spock's presence on numerous occasions.

'Sounds about right. Still, you get sick of it really fast. Last week they broke one of the pool tables.' Bates replied.

Spock looked through the bar in interest. There were too many people for him to get a clear view of the pool tables however.

Hardling spoke through a mouthful of fried potato. Spock tried to ignore the sight of his half masticated food. 'Yeah but we finally got that dom-jot table as a replacement, so that wasn't all bad.'

'That's true I guess.' Bates replied.

Spock gave Hardling his full attention, poor table manners and all. 'This bar is now equipped with a dom-jot table supervisor?'

The human nodded. 'Yessir. I'd offer you a game, but I've seen you play pool and I don't fancy my chances.'

Spock preferred dom-jot to pool. It was far more complex and challenging.

The Commander turned in his seat to look towards the bar area. 'I haven't played dom-jot in years…' He shot Spock a hopeful look. 'I'll give you a game if you're up for it Spock.'

'That would be enjoyable Commander.' Spock needed to return to the academy and complete the report for Captain Pike on the inspection and the new overseer, but spending a short amount of time socialising in the human manner with the Commander would be pleasant enough. And he had not played dom-jot since he had been serving on a ship. Christopher Pike was quite an enthusiastic and skilful player, provided he had not been in the bar too long.
The Commander ordered a drink whilst he waited for Spock to finish his meal and then they made their way through the crowded bar to the dom-jot table.

Four recruits were using the table. Spock hesitated, unsure of the social etiquette with regards to obtaining use of the table for himself and the Commander. He recalled his roommate from his days as a cadet placing a credit chip down on the table to indicate desire to play next or challenge the current players to a game to 'win' the table.

'Evening boys. My friend and I would like to use the table when you're done with your game.' The Commander apparently didn't follow the same rituals as Spock's former roommate.

'The pool table's free. Might be more your style… You ever even played dom-jot?' One of the recruits asked eyeing the Commander sceptically.

The human's response surprised Spock. If a man in a Commander's uniform had made the same request to a group of cadets at the Academy bar, they most likely have given him the table despite being mid-game, offered to buy him a drink and cheered politely as he played, regardless of his skill.

The Commander crossed his arms across his broad chest and looked down at the recruit. He was in Spock's estimation, 45 centimetres taller than the younger human. The effect such a large difference created was quite visually striking and he imagined quite intimidating for the recruit. 'Tell you what son, we'll play the winner of your little game for the table.'

The first recruit scowled.

One of the other players responded. 'Alright. Losers are buying though.'

Ah. So similar rituals did apply in this situation.

'Fine by me.' The Commander turned to Spock. 'I see Nyota has run into some friends. Let's join her while these gentlemen finish up.'

Cadet Uhura was talking animatedly to the technicians Lena Nilsson and Stephen Lee at a table not far from the dom-jot table. Stephen was one of the more capable human pool players he had encountered, and Spock wondered if he were as skilled at dom-jot.

Cadet Uhura introduced her father to the group as Commander Uhura, but he corrected her requesting they call him 'Zuberi'. He had once made the same request to him, to which Spock had politely responded that he in turn, could call him 'Spock' if he so desired. Despite this he had never used the Commander's given name. Regardless of his assurances, it still seemed disrespectful to him.

Since the Commander had served with Vulcans, Spock imagined he was aware of this since he had not taken offence as other humans who out-ranked him had. Captain Pike had pestered him for months to call him Chris. Even when on duty. Eventually Spock had relented when they were off duty, but he refused to address him as anything other than Captain otherwise. He came to a decision that he was well acquainted enough with the commander to call him 'Zuberi' in social situation such as the current one.

Spock was pulled out of his contemplation of human naming traditions by Stephen who had taken up position beside him. 'So you see the new dom-jot table Lieutenant Commander Spock?'

Before responding Spock contemplated that he had been acquainted with Technical Support Officer Stephen Lee for 18.2 standard months and that 87% of his interactions with the man had been
social rather than professional. 'I have indeed been informed,' he paused. 'and it would be acceptable for you to refer to me by name rather than rank in social situations such as this.'

The human looked stunned for a moment then grinned. 'Will do Spock. So you up for a game? Not a lot of the guys around here play.'

'Zuberi and I are scheduled to play the recruits currently utilising the table for rights to it. I do not foresee any difficulty in besting them.' Spock responded.

Stephen looked over at the Commander speculatively. 'Zuberi plays does he? Any good?'

'I cannot comment as I have yet to witness him play. He has expressed some familiarity and enthusiasm for the game however.'

'Well, Uhura must have inherited that big ol' noggin hers from somewhere, so he's probably good.' Stephen commented.

Spock was unsure how to respond. 'Noggin' was slang for head, but Cadet Uhura's cranium was of average circumference, as was the Commander's. He settled on his usual response when unsure. 'Indeed.'

It appeared adequate.

Zuberi waved and motioned towards the dom-jot table. One of the recruits was resetting it for a new game. Spock returned his attention to Stephen. 'Excuse me.'

He and the Commander selected cues from the brackets on the wall beside the table. Stephen, Cadet Uhura, Lena and the three others they were sitting with moved to a closer table to watch. The Cadet gave her father a kiss on the cheek 'For luck!' she said. Spock was relieved she made no attempt to repeat the action upon him.

Spock indicated with a wave of his arm that the recruits, as winners of the last game should start the game as custom dictated. From his opening move it was plain to Spock that the recruit was not an experienced player. He sunk three balls in quick succession, missing out on opportunities for points, as if he were playing pool not dom-jot. Spock caught the commander's eye and raised an eyebrow. The Commander smirked.

Zuberi took the first turn sinking only one ball but earning triple the points of the recruit and leaving several balls favourable positioned for Spock. The second recruit took his turn; sinking a further three balls but again, not gaining many points. Each time one of the recruits sunk a ball, several female recruits nearby would cheer and clap. They were drinking cocktails. Spock gauged from the number of umbrellas in their hair that they were quite inebriated.

Spock took his turn, not sinking any balls but playing for points. When his turn ended he and Zuberi had 3.8 times the points of the recruits. Judging from their behaviour, they appeared unaware that they were losing however.

The first recruit made a loud discriminatory comment about 'aliens' to his team mate as he lined up his first shot. Spock did not react. Zuberi tensed and Spock noted Cadet Uhura and Stephen, who were watching the game intently, glared at the man however.

The recruit sunk two more balls, leaving only one remaining of his team's original nine. The females, all humans, cheered loudly for each.

Their loud cheering had drawn attention to the dom-jot table from around the room. Quite a few
people in technical and mechanics uniforms were now part of the crowd around Cadet Uhura and
Stephen's table. With his superior hearing Spock picked up a scathing remark from a mechanic
who he had once played pool with. 'Idiot recruits don't even know they are getting their asses
handed to them.' Spock pretended that he did not take pleasure in such a petty comment.

Zuberi took his turn, playing much more skillfully than in his first. Spock was moderately
impressed with how he utilized the paddles. He appeared to be planning at least three shots ahead
and from the smoothness of his play, his shots were going exactly where he intended. When he
made a complicated shot off one of the paddles Cadet Uhura and several spectators cheered. He
didn't sink anything, instead he left their opponents one remaining ball boxed in from all sides.

The recruit who took his turn after him was unable to sink his ball or gain any points.

Spock took two shoots for points. He was lining up a third when one of the recruits loudly
commented 'He can't even sink a ball!'

Spock ignored him. Although offence was obviously intended, it was impossible given the illogical
nature of the statement. Although based partially on Terran billiards, dom-jot games were won on
points rather than sinking balls and could last several hours for that reason.

'Spock!' called Cadet Uhura. Spock straightened and gave her his full attention. It was unusual for
her to not refer to him by rank. 'Stop toying with them and finish the game already.' She smiled
then shot a dismissive look in the direction of the recruit who'd attempted to insult him. It appeared
she had taken offence on his behalf and wished for Spock to humiliate the human for retribution.
An illogical urge, but at the time a fairly attractive one.

'Yeah Spock, Zuberi, it's painful to watch these recruits embarrass themselves.' Stephen added. 'Put
em out of their misery.'

Zuberi laughed boomin.

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'Very well.'

The recruits seemed to find the exchange amusing rather than threatening and laughed amidst
themselves making further disparaging remarks. Cadet Uhura was smiling however.

Spock assessed the table for a few seconds then repositioned himself to take his shot. He
calculated the most balls he could sink with a single shot given the current layout of the game was
three. It would be more logical to sink two initially since he calculated a 5% greater chance of
success and an additional 110 points, but he sensed his companions wished him to emphasise the
disparate level of skill between himself and recruits with a 'flashy' shot.

To his surprise he noticed his heart rate was slightly elevated. He had never experienced such a
response playing dom-jot or pool previously. It appeared having an audience added a level of
excitement to the game. He made his shot. The cue ball knocked one ball into a pocket then
rebounded sharply off a paddle with a ding and into another ball which shot across the table and
into a pocket as the cue ball knocked a third into a paddle before coming to a halt. The last ball
bounced between three further paddles, each lighting up and chiming as points were awarded on
the score screen above before it disappeared into a pocket.

Cadet Uhura, Zuberi, Stephen and the shipyard personnel gathered around them cheered loudly.
Spock's heart rate increased a further 5% and he felt a pleasant buzz of adrenaline which he
carefully kept from his expression. He calmly lined up his next shot, again taking the most
complicated of the options available. This time he sunk only two balls, but he sent both ricocheting
off the paddles and score pads that lined the table gaining as many points as possible and making
the table light up and chime noisily. He heard more cheering but ignored it.

His previous turns had left the final three balls handily arranged at one end of the table. Spock was
able to send two bouncing off each other to the pockets on either side of the table while the last
bounced off two paddles before disappearing into another pocket. The score display above the
table flashed displayed the final score. 890/22,900. The cheering from the spectators reached a
drunken crescendo.

Zuberi appeared beside Spock with an extremely wide grin on his face. 'Good job there Spock.' He
turned and called out to the recruits who were scowling and arguing amongst themselves.
'Andorian Ale thanks boys!'

Spock had no particular fondness for Andorian Ale, but it was far less offensive then the Terran
Budweiser Classics the recruits seemed to favour.

The group of recruits abandoned their table and headed across the bar muttering to each other
angrily and shooting glares at Spock and Zuberi. Their animosity to him was not unexpected.
Although most of Starfleet treated non-humans more or less the same, there were many who
seemed to find his presence objectionable. But they appeared equally dismissive of Zuberi. 'I find
the behaviour of those recruits towards you unusual Zuberi. In my experience even the most unruly
recruits will treat a human officer respectfully.'

Zuberi shot Spock a strange look. 'As far as some humans are concerned, I don't belong in Starfleet
anymore then you.'

Spock tilted his head. 'I am afraid I do not understand.'

'I'm African Spock.' He smirked 'You might be a 'green blooded alien bastard' but you're the right
colour at least.'

'Ah.' The Commander's theory made sense. It stood to reason that humans who disliked non-
humans due to their physiological differences would also dislike humans not of their own race. He
almost made a comment about the illogical nature of such racism in general when he recalled the
similar judgement many Vulcans had expressed towards himself. It struck him as a similar sort of
irrationality. 'Many on Vulcan find me distastefully human.'

Zuberi looked surprised. 'Really? You are the most 'Vulcan' Vulcan I've encountered in Starfleet.'
He paused. 'I would never have guessed you were part human if you hadn't told me.'

'Genetically my makeup is predominately Vulcan. Physically there is little difference between
myself and a full blooded Vulcan. Only through detailed analyse of my genetic material would my
human heritage be evident. However it is common knowledge on Vulcan.' This was what confused
Spock about his treatment on Vulcan. He had been carefully created, by Vulcans, to exhibit only
the few human traits they deemed assets rather than handicaps. The few genetic markers he had
inherited from his mother that weren't inconsequential such as hair colour, were within his brain.
Supposedly he had human intuition and creativity - neither of which were evident in his
appearance. The claims made by classmates about his supposed 'human' features were illogical.
Their treatment of him was illogical.

Zuberi smothered a laugh. Spock regarded him in confusion wondering if he had unintentional
used a humorous turn of words. 'Oh, sorry Spock. I just had a…' he cleared his throat 'very...
politically incorrect thought which my cynical side found amusing.'
'I am intrigued Zuberi.' Spock prompted.

'Ahh... I shouldn't say.'

Spock waited.

'Fine. Well, let's just say I was pondering the reactions those recruits would have had to you had your mother been from say, Nairobi.'

Spock took a moment to process what Zuberi was implying. Vulcan skin tone covered a similar spectrum as humans, although the palest end of the spectrum from northern Europe had no Vulcan equivalent due to the differences in their planet's climates. Darker skin tones were quite common however– Vulcan was a desert planet after all. 'It would have mattered little on Vulcan since such skin tones are commonplace, however I imagine the reaction of those recruits and other like-minded humans would have been almost humorous in its animosity.'

Zuberi stared at him wide eyed for a moment then burst into laughter shaking his head. Cadet Uhura appeared at his side and shot Spock a questioning glance. 'Don't tell me you told my father a joke sir.'

'No cadet, we were extrapolating on the consequences of my mother being from the African continent rather than the American.' Spock explained evenly.

The Cadet's eyes widened and she glanced in disbelief at her father, who was laughing even harder and merely shrugged. 'Papa! That is so…' She turned back to Spock. 'I'm so sorry sir! My father can be inappropriate at times.'

Spock wondered if there was some social taboo he was unaware of. Humans were sensitive about their mothers. Perhaps the Cadet thought he had taken offence But why would he take offence at his mother hypothetically coming from a different part of Earth? 'I am afraid I do not follow cadet. Is it considered inappropriate to discuss one's mother's birthplace in this way?'

The Cadet seemed at a loss. Her father continued to laugh.

'Well sir, it's considered rude to discuss race like that.'

Spock did not understand. 'Discussion of my mother's race is considered rude?'

The Commander took a deep breath and wiped his eyes.

'Um, well, since there is still lingering racism among humans, in general we simply don't bring it up in conversation.' The Cadet explained.

That seemed illogical. 'Humans never discuss race? Surely that would contribute to this 'lingering racism' through ignorance.' A thought occurred to him. 'Is this why human cadets make inquiries as to Vulcan customs of me with far less regularity then non-human cadets? They consider such curiosity impolite?'

The Cadet seemed relieved that the conversation had moved away somewhat from human races. 'Most likely sir. They would be worried they'd offend you.'

'Fascinating.' Humans as a rule were incredibly curious. A trait admired amongst Vulcans. Even after hundreds of years of such close contact between their races, there was still so much they didn't know about each other.
A waitress appeared next to Zuberi. 'Two Andorian Ales courtesy of some grumpy recruits Commander.'

Zuberi gave her a winning smile. 'Thank you.'

The waitress giggled.

The Cadet looked at the blue drinks scathingly. 'I don't know how you can drink that papa. It looks and smells like warp coolant.'

Spock sniffed the drink he had been passed. 'Cadet Uhura is correct. There is a marked similarity in odour.'

Zuberi took a deep drink and sighed in pleasure. 'Well there's no similarity in taste!'

'You have sampled warp core coolant Zuberi? It is highly toxic.' Spock asked in concern.

'That was a joke Spock. Now! I believe your friend Stephen wanted a game of dom-jot?' the commander responded. Zuberi looked longingly at the table.

'Perhaps you would care to give him a game in my place Zuberi?' Spock inquired.

The Commander quickly stood and picked up his glass. 'Don't mind if I do Spock!' He turned to call out to the technician at the next table 'Stephen! Let's rack em up! Loser can 'play' Spock here.'

Spock turned to Cadet Uhura 'The gesture Zuberi just made when he said 'play', I have often seen humans do this, what does it signify?'

'Emphasis. It's mimed quotation marks.' She responded.

'And what emphasis did your father imply?' Spock asked.

She smiled. 'He was implying that the winner wouldn't really be playing you because they'd have so little chance of beating you.'

Before Spock could think of an appropriate response the waitress reappeared with a Cardassian Sunrise on her tray. 'For the lady, from the Lieutenant waving like an idiot at the bar.' She indicated a human male who was indeed, waving with vigour at the Cadet. To his shock Spock realised it was Lieutenant Sparcs, the former overseer of the shipyard. Spock assumed he had been involved in the recruitment drive. Hopefully he was handling his current duties with more skill then he had his previous post. He glanced at Cadet Uhura, well aware of her dislike for the man.

She blushed and shook her head. 'Please thank him but return the drink.'

The waitress nodded. 'Gotcha. One thanks but no thanks coming up.' She glanced at Spock then winked at the cadet as she turned to go. 'I'd say you had the better deal anyway.' The odd exchange between the women mystified him.

'You usually enjoy that particular beverage cadet. Why did you not accept it?' Spock asked.

Uhura raised an eyebrow. 'Really sir? Accepting that drink would have been invitation for Lieutenant Sparcs to come over here and hit on me.' She twisted her face in distaste.

'I see. I had thought perhaps you had bested him at pool.'

She laughed.
'Would you accept a 'Cardassian Sunrise' if I were to purchase it for you in place of Lieutenant Sparcs?' Spock carefully copied the flexing finger movements Zuberi had used.

Uhura covered her mouth and laughed. 'I don't think you quite understand how that gesture works yet. But yes, I would accept a beverage from you sir.'

Spock tapped out an order into the console set within the table. It would take longer for table service, but he had no desire to stand in the crowd at the bar. 'I wished to place emphasis on the words 'Cardassian Sunrise'. How is this incorrect?' he said making the gesture again.

The Cadet laughed again before replying 'The emphasis implies that the word highlighted is false. It's like sarcasm.'

'So if I were to offer to purchase your father a glass of 'warp drive coolant' he would know I was humorously referring to our previous conversation?' Spock inquired.

She smiled. 'Yes sir that is a perfect example.'

Spock wished to inform her that she could refer to him as 'Spock' rather than 'Sir' or 'Lieutenant Commander'. It seemed illogical that Zuberi and Stephan should do so when he was far better acquainted with the Cadet.

And she considered him a friend.

She cared for him with that strange, wonderful, dizzy human affection of hers. However whilst he was sure the Cadet would not read anything into the gesture, he did not trust himself not to take undue pleasure in hearing her address him with familiarity.

There was a loud chiming from the nearby dom-jot table and cheering from several spectators. Spock looked over in interest. When he looked back at the cadet she tilted her head inquiringly.

'It appears your father has rolled the terik ball into straight nines.'

'That's good I take it sir?' she asked.

'It is considered one of the most difficult moves in the game as the nine paddles are located at opposite ends of the table with several obstacles in between.' Spock explained.

The waitress reappeared 'Here we are, one Cardassian Sunrise and a Vulcan Brandy!' She placed the drinks on the table and glanced back at the bar. 'And don't look now but the lieutenant at the bar looks like he's about to cry.' She shot the cadet a smile Spock didn't understand and departed.

Spock inspected the drink in front of him carefully.

Uhura took a sip of her own. 'Thank you for the drink sir.'

Spock nodded but didn't look up from his glass. He turned it slowly in front of him inspecting it visually from all angles then sniffed it.

'Dare I ask what a Vulcan Brandy is sir?' the cadet inquired.

'I am uncertain myself. I noted its presence on the menu during my first visit here 3.2 standard years ago. Since Vulcan does not produce anything comparable to Terran Brandy, I have often wondered. This seemed an opportune situation to investigate.'

'It could just be Brandy laced with chocolate you know.' She observed.
'Quite possibly cadet. Although according to the description it is a 'fine triple distilled Vulcan spice brandy crafted in T'Paal' – a description which I admittedly find unlikely.'

'Well I'm curious. Try it! I promise if you start choking or burst into song I'll call medical immediately sir.'

Spock raised an eyebrow but lifted the glass and took a small sip. Uhura leant across the table with her arms crossed and stared avidly at him. He studiously avoided glancing in the direction of her chest where parts of her anatomy had been pushed forward by her posture. Although her dress was quite modest in its cut it still revealed a lot more of her skin than he was accustomed to seeing. He swallowed the small mouthful and focused on the taste. It was sweet with the bitter aftertaste of alcohol, but quite pleasantly tasted of hirat fruit and nei'yel - a spice often used to flavour Vulcan tea. He did not detect even a hint of cocoa. He took another sip.

'Well?' asked Uhura.

'It appears to be Terran style brandy made from hirat fruit infused with nei'yel spice. It is not unpleasant.'

'Hirat is a Vulcan fruit somewhat like a grape is it not sir?' she asked in Vulcan.

'That is correct. It would appear this beverage is made on Vulcan for export to planets where alcohol is consumed.' Spock replied.

'So every other planet in the galaxy sir?' Uhura teased. As always, it was odd to hear human emotion, and in this case sarcasm, expressed in his native tongue.

'Indeed.'

Uhura leant forward to peruse the menu console. Spock, aware that her attention was intent on the screen found it impossible not to let his eyes slide briefly down to her chest. Her breasts curved invitingly above the bodice of her dress. A golden torc sat above her collarbones. He recalled seeing her wear the same piece over a subspace call a year earlier. It caught the light a little as she shifted. He focused his attention on it as much to distract himself from looking lower as out of interest. It was a heavy piece of jewellery and reminded him a little of Vulcan ornamentations in its style, though its construction differed. It appeared to be fashioned from many golden strands twisted together into an elaborate pattern.

Uhura's voice broke him out of his inspection. 'Well I am curious as to what brandy made from hirat and nei'yel tastes like so I am going to order myself one.' She flipped through the cocktail menu looking for the drink in question. 'I've had nei'yel in spice tea before, but I've never had hirat. Oh!' she pointed at the menu screen 'There's something here called a 'Shi'Kahr Slammer'' She laughed and looked up to meet his eyes. 'I'm not sure I want to know what a Vulcan inspired shot would taste like…' she returned her attention to the menu 'This fiery shot is not for the faint of heart!' That sounds ominous.' Spock found the manner in which she translated the English text into Vulcan with such effortless swiftness quite impressive. He wondered if she was translating it into her native Swahili in between. 'I'm curious. I'm going to try one. Do you want one?'

Spock was curious to see if it would be a spirit distilled from some other Vulcan fruit like the brandy, but he did not enjoy 'shots' in general. They were in his experience unpleasant mouthfuls of bitter alcohol that burnt his throat. Without the ability to become intoxicated, they seemed pointless. 'I admit curiosity. Although I do not in general enjoy 'shots' I will at least inspect this beverage first hand before passing judgement.'
Uhura nodded and punched in their order.

The bar had gotten busier over the last half hour, and their new drinks took 16 standard minutes to arrive, by which time Cadet Uhura had finished her Cardassian Sunrise and was twirling the umbrella between her thumb and forefinger. Stephen and Zuberi were enjoying a close game of Dom-jot and liberal amounts of Andorian Ale. Lena Nilsson was sitting at a nearby table with a woman in a mechanics uniform. The recruits they'd played against earlier had claimed a booth in the diner section and appeared to be playing a drinking game of some sort which involved a lot of yelling and licking each other, which Spock found nauseating. Lieutenant Sparcs was still at the bar and glancing back at Uhura occasionally. Spock felt a prickle of irritation at his continued regard.

The waitress, slightly more haggard looking than earlier placed the two shot glasses and the second glass of Vulcan Brandy down on their table with a hurried 'Enjoy!' before dashing back to the busy bar.

Uhura slid a shot towards Spock and lifted her own to give it a tentative sniff. She quickly put it back down. 'Wow. That is. Strong! It's making my eyes water!'

'It appears to be a spirit distilled from yon-savas.' Spock offered with a note of uncertainty.

'Fire fruit?' The cadet was blinking rapidly in an attempt to clear her eyes.

'Indeed Cadet. Despite my curiosity, I am not certain attempting to ingest this substance would be wise.' said Spock.

Uhura smiled at him. 'I'll take one for the team. If smoke starts coming out my ears please douse me in a non-flammable liquid.'

'All we have on hand is brandy Cadet, a liquid traditionally used, I believe, to set puddings on fire.'

She paused with her shot glass near her lips and laughed. 'Don't make me laugh! This stuff is dangerous!'

Spock raised an eyebrow and remained silent.

After a moment she took a deep breath and quickly drained the glass. Spock leant forward watching her reaction avidly. Her eyes widened and watered and she raised a hand to fan herself, though he couldn't see what purpose that could possibly serve. After 3.7 seconds she began to bounce in her seat and make odd squeaking noises. At 7.8 seconds she finally swallowed and took a great gulp of air, one hand pressed against her collarbone and the other slapping the table top. She then cursed loudly in Klingon. 'Ghuy'cha!' Her accent was uncanny.

Several nearby patrons turned to stare at her. As they watched she grabbed her untouched glass of brandy and drained it in one go. After a moment she leant forward and rested her forehead against the table and began murmuring 'oh god oh god oh god...' in Swahili.

Zuberi called out into the sudden silence around the dom-jot table 'What on Earth is Nyota doing Spock?' He was striding towards the table staring at his daughter in confusion.

Spock hesitated before responding. 'She ingested something called a 'Shi'Kahr Slammer' which judging from her comment in Klingon, she did not enjoy. She then consumed a glass of brandy in 7.2 seconds in what I assume was an attempt to cleanse her palate and now appears to be…' he paused. '… praying.'

She moaned but otherwise did not move.
Stephen walked over to stand beside Zuberi. 'Those shots are like drinking chech'tluth that's been set on fire.' he said referring to a potent Klingon beverage Spock could not imagine he would have ever actually sampled.

Spock glanced at Zuberi 'Perhaps I should obtain some water for the cadet?'

Uhura nodded her head against the table and made a pleading noise of agreement but remained otherwise motionless.

Her father seemed to find the situation amusing rather than distressing. He placed a glass of Andorian Ale next to his daughter's head. 'That might be an idea Spock. In the meantime here's some ale if your mouth is still on fire silly girl.' That said he and Stephen returned to their game and Spock headed to the bar to obtain water for the cadet.

There were a large number of people waiting at the bar and it took 8.2 minutes for Spock to get a glass of water. He was surprised to find on his return that his seat was occupied.
Nyota heard Spock resume his seat and place a glass down near her. She sat up eager for a tall glass of water. Preferably with ice cubes. Her mouth felt like she'd just chewed on a handful of chillies. She'd even sipped a little of her father's horrid Andorian Ale it was so bad. To her confusion when she looked up it wasn't Spock in the seat across from her, but Lieutenant Sparcs.

She frowned. 'Sorry Lieutenant, but that seat is taken.'

The man gave her a disturbing look that was half glare half leer. 'That Vulcan's drugged you. Humans aren't meant to drink that Vulcan stuff. It messes with your head.'

Nyota felt her eyebrows jerk skyward. She wasn't sure were to even begin setting that one straight. She decided that diplomacy was probably the best option. 'Thank you for your concern sir, but I'm not drugged. That shot was really spicy, like chilli, but no more alcoholic then vodka.' She wasn't exactly sure that was true, but usually shots were around the same strength so it was probably more or less correct.

The Lieutenant pointed at her empty brandy glass. 'Well that stuff has spice in it. Like the Orions use.'

Nyota was again mystified by his ignorance. 'Nei'yel spice is about as intoxicating to humans as cinnamon.'

'Is that what he told you?'

'Look, if you are really concerned, you can go ask the bartender and he'll tell you the same thing.' Nyota responded.

Ignoring her suggestion he pushed the Cardassian Sunrise he'd brought with him across the table towards her. 'I got you this.'

'Thank you, but I'm just waiting for the Lieutenant Commander to bring me some water.' She pushed the drink back towards him. She hoped dropping Spock's rank would remind him to behave.

'You drank one just before and the waitress said they were your favourite.' he insisted.

'I don't feel like drinking anymore right now.' Nyota glanced at the dom-jot table. Her father and Stephen were intent on their game but she could always call out to them if the creep did anything too weird.

'So you'll drink whatever that alien,' he paused and gestured at the Andorian ale 'or that Commander puts in front of you but you're too good for me?' He was leaning forward across the table and she could smell beer on his breath. He didn't seem overly intoxicated however, just like a bigoted ass. Her patience was running thin.

'That sort of thinking isn't going to win you any friends in Starfleet. I'm certainly not interested in talking to you. Please leave.' she said.

He ignored her and took a swig of the budweiser he'd been nursing during their conversation.
When he spoke again his face was twisted into a sneer. 'So you only fuck aliens and men old enough to be your father?'

Nyota gasped. She couldn't remember the last time anyone had been so rude to her. Occasionally she'd hit on by someone 'rough around the edges' or a bit pushy, but this guy was in a league of his own. She crossed her arms and glared at him. 'I am not going to even dignify that with an answer you disgusting pig! Now get away from me.'

He smirked at her. 'They seem pretty chummy. The old man and the alien. Maybe you fuck them at the same time?'

She wasn't really even aware that she had moved until she was holding an empty glass and the disgusting lieutenant was wearing Cardassian Sunrise. He rose from his seat and leant towards her menacingly. 'You fucking whore!' His arm snapped forward towards her. She leant away and lifted both her arms to block him, but the blow never came. Instead she found herself staring at the sleeve of a blue Starfleet uniform. Spock was standing beside her, the man's arm caught in his left hand and a glass of water in his right.

His face revealed nothing, but his voice hinted ever so slightly at his anger. 'Although as an alien I am not overly familiar with human custom I believe when a female throws a drink at you the generally accepted translation is 'go away'.

Someone laughed and a middle-aged man in a mechanics uniform at the table next to theirs added. 'Yeah take a hike Sparcs. We don't need little backwater shits like you around here.' Nyota felt a wave of appreciation for the complete stranger. It was no small thing to insult an officer like that. She gave him a small smile and he nodded brusquely. The occupants of the other nearby tables were also watching the alteration with undivided attention. Nyota didn't think Sparcs had been particularly popular at the shipyard.

Lieutenant Sparcs meanwhile had turned completely red in anger. 'Get your filthy hands off me Vulcan.' Nyota glanced at where Spock's hand grasped the man's forearm. She thought back to the long ago suus mahna demonstration in her hand to hand combat class. Watching Spock thrash Sparcs would be infinitely more enjoyable then watching him spar with an ensign. His fingers were digging in very deeply into Sparcs' arm. A part of her viciously hoped he'd break it. It wouldn't be hard for him.

'In some cultures a male who raises his hand against a female loses the appendage.' Spock continued conversationally. The lieutenant sunk back into his seat and yelped as Spock tightened his grip. 'You will be pleased to hear that on Vulcan that is not the case. However, Starfleet has its own regulations and your behaviour is in breach of several of them.'

'I don't have to listen to anything you say sub-human scum!' Nyota glared at him. 'Actually you do. That's Lieutenant Commander 'sub-human scum' to you.'

Her papa had materialised behind the recruit and held out a hand. 'Your Starfleet ID son, pass it over here and let's sort this out.' He was using his friendly voice, but Nyota saw that he was still holding his dom-jot cue.

The lieutenant turned towards him in a misguided bid for help 'This Vulcan bastard attacked me!'

Her father nodded. 'Mmhm. Did he now? Well I'm sure we can straighten everything out.' He made an impatient gesture with his outstretched palm. Sparcs awkwardly fished his ID out of his pocket and passed it over.
Her father glanced at it then met Spock's eyes with a nod. Spock released his grip and moved forward to place the glass of water he had been holding down next to her. The moment his arm was released, the man shot to his feet knocking his chair over and stood rubbing his arm. Her father passed the ID to Spock. The lieutenant stared at him in betrayal 'Hey! You can't do that!'

Spock ignored his outburst. He pulled a PADD out of a pocket in his pants and scanned the ID before quickly typing one handed for a few seconds. Satisfied he passed the ID back to Sparcs. 'Jonathan C. Sparcs your enlistment in Starfleet is hereby formally suspended pending investigation into your conduct.' Jonathan C. Sparcs spluttered. Nyota tried not to look like she was enjoying herself. 'Although civilians are permitted in this establishment, it would be for the best if you removed yourself from the premises.'

The lieutenant looked like he might throw up or perhaps attempt to kill Spock. 'You can't do that!' 'As per section 279B subsection 3 of Starfleet Regulations, as ranking officer I am authorized to discipline any enlisted member of starfleet found to be in breach of the Starfleet Code of Conduct. I am afraid Starfleet has a zero tolerance policy when it comes to assault on cadets. You will, of course, have opportunity to appeal my decision when your case comes before the Admiralty Board.' Spock seemed utterly calm and composed standing in his usual stance with his hands behind his back, but Nyota could see that his left hand was slowly clenching into a fist and then releasing.

Someone yelled out 'Beat it Lieutenant Loser!' and several people laughed. Sparcs looked around the room in impotent ager. He sent Nyota a look of such hatred that she had to restrain the instinct to shrink back into her chair. The patrons of the bar were already turning back to their previous conversations. The Lieutenant stormed outside. As he made his way to the door a dozen drunken shipyard workers, obviously pleased to see their former boss shown the door cheered and clapped as he walked past them. Nyota almost felt sorry for him. Almost.

Spock stared after him until the doors slid closed behind him.

Her father huffed. 'What sort of riff raff are they letting enlist these days? And how'd he make Lieutenant? An arse like that has no business representing the goddamn federation of planets!'

'Lieutenant Sparcs does appear singularly ill-suited to a career in Starfleet.' Spock agreed mildly. 'Vulcan understatement if ever I heard it.' Her father muttered as he walked over to grip her shoulder. He gave her a concerned look. 'Are you alright little star?' he inquired in Swahili.

Nyota nodded. 'I'm fine papa.'

Her father nodded but regarded her carefully for a moment, however he seemed to realise she didn't want him to make a fuss over her because he soon turned back to Stephen. 'Now! Where were we?'

Stephen grinned. 'You were just about to lose a game of dom-jot to me Zuberi.'

Nyota sighed and sipped at her water. At least the unpleasantness of the last ten minutes had distracted her from her Shi'Kahr-Slammer-scorched throat. The burning sensation had faded significantly... The unpleasant effects of yon-savas seemed to be far less long lasting than chillies. Thank god.

Spock picked up the overturned chair and resumed his seat. He looked at her with an intensity she had not seen in him before and when he spoke it was in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu. 'Thou art unharmed?'

She had thought his deep voice well suited to the dialect when she'd heard him speak over 16 light
years of subspace, but hearing him speak it no more than 3 feet from her was entirely different. Sitting there in the middle of a hazy bar surrounded by drunk recruits and mechanics with his perfect Vulcan posture in his pristine uniform without a hair out of place, Spock stood out almost bizarrely. Hearing him speak in that archaic alien tongue magnified and brought his otherness into focus. He sort of… *glowed.* It seemed ridiculous that people weren't staring at him, that no one seemed to realise an alien prince was sitting serenely at one of the battered tables in the middle of a dingy bar on earth. He was so beautiful.

How had she been able to treat him like a normal man? Like he was just an instructor, a Starfleet Officer, and not some mythical creature come to life? Nyota felt a wave of self-depreciation. Spock didn't belong in a shipyard bar in the middle of a cornfield surrounded by humans who hated him just because he was something more than them. Her heart seemed to be beating too fast. His head tilted and one dark brow raised slightly in concern.

He'd asked her a question.

She took a sip of water to soothe a catch in her throat that had nothing to do with yon-savas. Her human tongue felt thick and stupid in her mouth. She couldn't breathe. The words wouldn't come, she couldn't form them. Van-Kal Vuhlkansu wasn't for the likes of her. Abruptly she stood. Spock's eyes widened *'Art thou unwell?'

She waved a hand at him vaguely and shook her head - reduced to miming her words like a mute, she who was fluent in how many dozen languages? She felt his eyes boring into her back as she half ran to the hallway that led to the bathrooms. Ridiculously, she felt tears forming in her eyes. *Stupid girl!*

*Spock*

Spock watched the cadet as she weaved through the crowd towards the restrooms. Concern for her helped him dismiss that distressing… *emotion* that only she seemed to evoke in him. When he had seen Sparcs raise his hand to her he had very nearly reacted with illogical violence. It had taken all his very sizable control to keep himself from injuring the lieutenant. As it was the man would likely have substantial bruising to his arm.

He had heard the last few crude sexual remarks Sparcs had made to Uhura. After years at the Academy Spock was well aware that young human females could respond with violent emotion to the most mundane of occurrences. She had seemed unaffected by the incident but he was hardly a knowledgeable judge of such things. Usually in such situation female cadets would comfort one another. Had Cadet U'Aidat been present Spock was sure she would have followed Uhura to offer such support. He was unsuitable to fulfil such a role. In the current situation the best suited was Lena Nilsson.

Spock quickly spotted her talking with a female mechanic. He approached the tall table at which the two women sat. Lena was facing him and smiled as he neared. 'Hi Spock. That was quite the show you put on earlier. Sparcs always was a cretin.'

Spock was unsure of an appropriate response, so he inclined his head in acknowledgement but made no comment. 'Lena, I believe Cadet Uhura is upset. I wonder if you would offer her emotional support. I have little expertise in this regard.'
'Oh of course!' Lena glanced around obviously looking for the cadet. 'She ran off to the ladies did she?'

'You are most astute.'

Lena stood and gave her companion and apologetic look. 'Sorry Claire, we'll chat more later okay?'

'Sure Lena, don't worry about it, go check on your friend.' The woman identified as Claire responded.

Spock spent the next 12.5 minutes observing the culmination of Commander Uhura and Stephan's dom-jot game. It was close, but the Commander pulled off an impressive shot that ended the game with him 90 points ahead of the technician.

Stephan laughed (Spock suspected he was on the verge of severe inebriation) and in a tone of voice Spock identified as teasing informed Zuberi 'I let you have that last shot, outta deference to your age and rank.'

Zuberi did not appear offended, in fact his expression was what Spock would refer to as 'smug'. 'Whatever you need to tell yourself to sleep at night Steve.'

The technician shrugged 'You got me old man! I'll just go grab those drinks.' He handed Spock his cue as he walked past towards the crowded bar.

The Commander began resetting the table for a new game. 'Come on Spock, last shuttle leaves at 23:12 hours. That leaves us just enough time for one decent game.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. He had not intended to remain socialising at the bar for so long. He had intended to return to his quarters to compile a thorough report of the Enterprise's construction status under the new Overseer and forward it to Captain Pike before retiring for the evening. Although the report was not urgent per say, it was important and he was sure Captain Pike would wish to look over it as soon as possible. He had been swift in using his influence to dispose of the previous overseer upon receiving Spock's last report. The Captain took the Enterprise very seriously.

Zuberi was smiling. Spock tilted his head. Ah. The Commander was teasing him. An appropriate response came to him much faster than it would have done a year previously. '3.45 hours hardly seems sufficient for a, as you put it Commander, 'decent' game of dom-jot, but I will endeavour as per Stephan's example, to curtail my technique in deference to your superior age and rank. Sir.'

The commander stared for a second then burst into deep laughter. He wiped his eyes before responding. 'Ahh! No one does 'smart arse' quite like a Vulcan.'

Spock raised a brow in query. 'I am unfamiliar with that particular colloquialism.'

Zuberi sniggered. 'I imagine it's one you will become intimately familiar with as your career progresses Spock.' He lined up a shot. 'I'll take first shot since I won the last game.'

Spock inclined his head. 'Of course.' He was still mystified as to the meaning of 'Smart Arse'. He would ask Cadet Uhura at some point.

The cadet and Lena reappeared 17.2 minutes later and sat down nearby with Stephan and a few others Spock recognised. The cadet appeared to be in much better spirits, alternatively talking and laughing with those at the table and watching Spock and her father play. She periodically presented her father with a fresh Andorian ale, although the Commander, despite being heavily muscled and well above average in height for a human, did not drink with the speed of the other humans in
The cadet herself seemed to be drinking complicated fruit based beverages which did not actually contain alcohol. Spock thought this wise. Although the cadet, like 92% of humans of his acquaintance, clearly enjoyed alcoholic beverages, he had not seen her impaired by inebriation to the disturbing degree that appeared to be the norm amongst her classmates. It was not uncommon to encounter fighting, weeping or vomiting cadets in the very early hours of Saturday or Sunday on campus. Spock was glad that the cadet appeared more circumspect in her consumption. Alcohol was a depressant, and in her current state of apparent emotional distress would have upset her further.

After an hour's play Lena and Stephen were laughing and talking 20% louder than normal and gesturing wildly as they conversed.

Zuberi was in the midst of a quite impressive series of shots when the cadet came to converse with Spock. He inspected her beverage with some interest. The vessel in which it was held had been fashioned from a small terran pineapple. The garnishes were impressively garish; fruit, flowers, umbrellas and decorative plastic sticks.

He deemed it an appropriate topic of conversation given the setting. 'Cadet, your beverage is garnished with three paper umbrellas, a small cornucopia of flowers and fruit and what appears to be a pink bird of some sort. This seems excessive. You appear to be having difficulty actually consuming the drink.' The straw was indeed protruding at an angle which required the cadet to hold the drink slightly aloft to utilise it.

The cadet smiled. Spock ignored the flutter of warmth the expression inspired in response. 'I know. It's called a 'Pineapple Tiki Surprise'. Lena ordered it for me. It's ridiculous.'

'Quite. Although I must admit some anticipation in observing your attempts to conform to the Ancient Terran Custom of placing the beverage garnishes in your coiffure.' Spock allowed a slight teasing tone to enter his voice.

She laughed brightly.

Spock continued. 'Perhaps you could utilise the plastic flamingo to secure the other items?' He leant closer to her and tapped the bright plastic stick in question.

She shook her head ruefully. 'A good suggestion sir, but I am not sure I have enough hair to display all these items. I fear I may have forgo proud Terran tradition on this occasion.'

Spock nodded and continued in mock seriousness. 'I see your point cadet, although I see a possible alternative - you could fashion a hat from the pineapple itself.'

Her laughter was louder this time. 'You mean like Carmen Miranda Spock?'

Her use of his name sent a little jolt of pleasure through him. He was tempted to call her 'Nyota' in return, but could not. 'I am unfamiliar with this person Cadet Uhura.'

'She was an actress, or a dancer I think, a long time ago. Her signature look was a hat decorated with pineapples and other tropical fruits. It remains something of a fashion for certain styles of terran dancing.' She responded.

Spock's head tilted. He did not detect sarcasm in her tone. 'There is a Terran tradition of wearing tropical fruit as headwear?' She nodded. Spock made a logical conclusion. 'I take it alcohol is involved in this tradition also?'
She grinned. 'Amazingly, no.'

Spock regarded her suspiciously for a moment. 'You are in jest cadet.'

'No. Honestly Spock.' His name again. 'It's a thing. Dancing with fruit on your head.' She shrugged. 'Don't raise your eyebrow like that at me. I'm serious!' She smiled. 'We are a strange and illogical people Spock.'

Spock remained sceptical. 'Perhaps your ancestors consumed the fruit as they exhausted their energies dancing? Although balancing food items upon the head would be a most illogical manner to carry additional supplies.'

She giggled. 'No Spock. Don't try and understand, just accept.'

'Spock! You're up.' Zuberi called.

Spock's head jerked up in surprise. He thought he had been keeping an eye on the dom-jot table but he had not realised that Zuberi's turn had ended. It was unusual for his attention to be focused singularly and a conversation about fruit as headwear hardly explained his distraction. He hastily approached the table to take his turn as Nyota returned to her seat beside Lena.

The game continued for another hour. Spock was quite enjoying it. The commander was proving quite a challenge. His shots were not as precise as a Vulcan's, but he had on several occasions taken shots that Spock had not even considered. There it was, the much lauded 'human creativity'. His own did not appear to be in evidence, despite the claims of the Vulcan geneticists who'd 'designed' him.

The score was fairly even and Spock was starting to realise that his chances of winning were much closer to 50% then he had originally supposed.

It was 22:16 when the cadet approached her father and informed him she was escorting Lena to the public hovercar stop nearby. The technician had spent the last 17 minutes in the ladies room and looked quite ill. Spock recognised the look from his early morning run-ins with inebriated cadets. Stephan had taken his leave earlier with the female friend of Lena, Claire.

They continued the game but Spock felt a strange sense of unease 6.8 minutes after the cadet and Lena had left the bar. Spock expected that the cadet was waiting with Lena to see her safely into a hovercar, but it was unusual that they had waited so long. His heart-rate had inexplicably increased by 7.8%. He pushed back his irrational feelings and focused on the game. He found himself hurrying however, sinking balls when there was still ample opportunity for points. Zuberi seemed likewise fairly eager to wrap up the game, remarking at one point 'Where is that girl of mine?' Spock verbalised his own conclusion that she was waiting with Lena to ensure her safety and the commander agreed that was likely.

To his surprise however they finished the game and the cadet had still not returned. Spock scanned the bar but did not see her. He had not noticed her returning through the main door, but he had often been facing away from it during the game. The sense of unease grew though there was no logical cause for it. Zuberi was also looking around. 'Spock, can you find Nyota while I pop into the restroom? I want to leave to catch that shuttle.'

Spock nodded. 'I will locate the cadet and await you near the main entrance.'

Zuberi nodded and headed towards the back of the bar.

Although the logical course of action would be to rule out the obvious first, to thoroughly check
the bar and see if the cadet was not conversing with one of her acquaintances out of sight, Spock found himself striding quickly through the front door of the bar. He headed towards the brightly lit hovercar stop. There were two empty automated hovertaxis awaiting passengers. The feeling of unease grew exponentially. Lena and the cadet were nowhere to be seen. The lot was empty save for parked hovercars and his hoverbike. In the lot adjacent to the bar were several Starfleet shuttles parked in neat rows.

Unerringly Spock found himself walking towards them at what was almost a jog. He felt afraid although there was no reason to be. Human intuition perhaps? Was this his mother's birth right?

He heard a sound from behind the nearest shuttle. Several reasonable explanations came to him. Lena was ill and was being sick in a dark corner behind the shuttle like drunk humans were wont to and Uhura was with her. She was inside the bar and the noise from behind the shuttle had nothing to do with her. She had decided to get a closer look at the Enterprise after seeing Lena to her hovercar.

Something caught his eye on the ground in front of him. It was a small blue paper umbrella.

He had broken into a run before he was even aware of what he was doing.

He turned the corner and all logical and reasonable thought slipped from his mind. The darkness welled up inside him, drowning out all other thought and feeling. He took in the scene before him in a split second and his body responded without any input from his brain.

The Lieutenant had a knife. He was holding that knife against the Nyota Uhura's throat and Spock could smell the metallic tang of her blood in the air between them. She was struggling against him and had positioned herself admirably - from the angle she had twisted into she could bring up her arm to prevent him cutting her carotid artery. From the look of her hair and Sparcs' face she appeared to have head-butted him and broken his nose. They were side on to him and the Lieutenant had not noticed his approach. Something in the manner in which the cadet suddenly relaxed slightly made him think she had however.

He did not weigh up different options or consider variables and come to the best course of action via logic, he simply reacted.

2.7 seconds later he had his hands on Lieutenant Sparcs. The man turned towards him, pulling the cadet around with him as Spock applied pressure around his arm. He was vaguely aware that he was growling. The man yelled in pain and the knife dropped to the ground. The cadet quickly twisted out of his grasp and stepped away. Spock had both the Lieutenant's arms safely restrained and allowed himself a glance at her. Her left hand was pressed to the gash along her collarbone. She met his eyes and nodded in silent answer to his wordless query. She was otherwise unharmed.

His gaze returned to Lieutenant Sparcs. The man was yelling and glaring at him. Empty words insulting himself and the cadet. Spock felt nothing but mild irritation at the noise. The words meant nothing to him. There was room for nothing else inside him apart from the dark feeling. It had him letting his full strength flow through his grip around the lieutenant's right arm, the one that had held the knife that had split her blood. Sparcs' eyes widened and he cut off mid-sentence with a high pitched squeaking noise as a bone snapped within the meat of his arm. The radius a distant part of Spock's brain informed him. He tightened his grip. The human was gasping silently. He wanted to tear the arm off. Then the other. And then his head.

Spock heard his voice, colder and more Vulcan then he'd ever consciously been able to get it.

'You should not have touched her.'
The stupid human did not understand of course, he did not speak Vulcan. Spock did not deign to repeat himself in standard. He shifted his grip slightly. The Lieutenant's ulna gave way satisfyingly beneath his fingers. The human's eyes had rolled back into his head. He was gasping and making a soft whining noise, in too much pain to yell or scream. Spock ground the shattered bones in his arm together viciously before releasing his hold.

The lieutenant started to crumple towards the ground but Spock's left hand shot out and grabbed him around the throat to lift him until his feet dangled 27cms about the ground. A primitive part of him not silenced by the darkness that filled him exalted in his strength. The human before him was pitiful. It would be nothing to kill him. He wouldn't even need both hands.

His fingers tightened around the man's throat. Beside him Nyota shifted and the movement sent a fresh waft of the sharp scent of her blood towards him. Spock's black rage intensified. The human had touched Nyota. Hurt her. Drawn her blood. And if he had not come looking for her? What would he have done to her? His mind seemed to throb with a thought he could not even give shape to for fear of losing his sanity.

His teeth were grinding together, his lips drawn back in a snarl, every muscle in his body tense. He growled once more before words forced themselves from his lips. 'You touched what is mine.'

He could snap the man's neck if he shifted his grip slightly, or he could dig his fingers in behind his trachea and tear out his throat. Either would be satisfying.

That choice was the only thing that saved Jonathan C. Sparcs' life.

Spock hesitated for 12 seconds, enjoying the terror in the Sparcs' eyes as he decided.

Nyota's small hands closed around his free arm. 'Spock.'

Instantly the Lieutenant was forgotten. Spock's head snapped turned to her, Sparcs still dangling in his grip. Her eyes were huge and black in the darkness. She was breathing deeply, her lips parted. Dark trails of drying blood ran from her collarbone down to soak the material of her dress over her left breast. The flow from the cut had already slowed to a seep.

He tossed the Lieutenant away blindly. There was an echoing clang as the man hit the side of the opposite shuttle, but it didn't register to Spock. He turned towards Nyota, dismissing the man from his attention. She was standing very close to him, almost pressed against his side. He could still smell her blood, the scent of it seemed to cling to him. He pressed his palm to the long shallow gash along her collarbone, hiding it beneath his palm. She was warm under his fingers. He could feel the soft blur of her mind at the edge of his consciousness, temptingly familiar.

'Nyota.'

Sparcs scrambled to his feet cradling his ruined arm against him. He paused for a moment then turned and bolted further into the shipyard. Spock gave him as much notice as a he would an insect. His thoughts were jumbled and strange. He tried to focus but the dark feeling covered his thoughts like a veil. He couldn't breathe properly.

Nyota's skin was warm beneath his hand, although cool and soothing compared to his own. He estimated that her heart rate was 27% above average. She was staring at him was an expression he could not place. He opened his mouth to speak, but there were no words. He was uncertain of what he was feeling, what he wished to say. He had an insane desire to press his mouth to her shoulder and lick her wound clean. His left hand clenched into a fist at his side. Her small hands were still
wrapped around his forearm.

The haze of hatred clearing slightly, he realised that she was most likely scared. He had just acted in great violence. Without her intervention he would have...he did not follow the thought to its completion. Fear. She was afraid of him. He swallowed and stepped back slightly. It physically hurt to move away from her, an ache he ignored as he attempted to clear his thoughts, reassemble his composure, shove the black feeling back down where it lived.

Instead of accepting the space he offered, she followed him backwards and took another step. She was standing so close to him he would only need to lean forward approximately 2 centimetres and the material of his uniform would brush against that of her dress. He realised his hand was still resting against her shoulder. He could feel the rapid rise and fall of her breath and the sticky warmth of her blood beneath his palm. With monumental effort he lifted it from her skin and dropped it to his side.

She released the tight grip she'd held on his arm and her hands slid up his chest to rest against his shoulders. Spock stilled in confusion, his arms hanging uselessly at his sides. His breathing was ragged, like he'd just finished a long workout. Each inhalation brought a mix of her blood, her perfume and the scent of her skin into his lungs. Her eyes had caught his again. He couldn't break from them. She said his name. Softly, perfectly. 'Spokhis.' and then she was standing on her toes, pressing her body and her cool human lips against him.

Spock did not freeze in surprise or hesitate in shock. The strange primitive part of him that had had control of his actions for the last few minutes roared and vetoed his brain entirely. His arms shifted, wrapping around her and pulling her firmly against him. She melted against him, soft and small and female. His head tilted to find the easiest angle with which to kiss her and his lips met hers with the confidence of a hundredth kiss instead of a first.

He felt dizzy and hot almost in pain.

One of her tiny hands slid around to the back of his neck, her fingers warm and her fingernails pleasantly sharp against his flushed skin. The other trailed down his chest to slip underneath the hem of his uniform and curve against the skin above his hip like a brand. He buried a hand in her hair just because he could. It was soft and released the scent of her shampoo. He twisted his fingers in the thick strands and her lips parted in a sigh. Spock felt the strange emotion swell in answer, but gentler. It was as if she had tamed it. Whatever it was. The violence was gone.

The kiss shifted, her tongue sliding against his in a way that had him pulling her closer still. Her mouth was like an inferno. She tasted of pineapple and coconut. He was stuck with an epiphany. This was kissing!? He had absolutely no control over himself, had no idea what he was doing and it was incredible. His blood felt hot and thick in his veins, throbbing. His tongue was in someone else's mouth, a concept that had always disgusted him, but apparently Nyota's mouth was an exception. She moaned softly and he felt the vibrations against him. Then she dropped back onto the heels of her feet, her lips suddenly separated by 12 centimetres of night air from his.

His eyes snapped open.

He had been unaware they were closed. She was staring up at him, her breath coming in pants that pressed her breasts against him. He realised the difference in their heights made kissing her slightly awkward. She appeared to be waiting for him to do something. Push her away. Come to his logical Vulcan senses. He loosened his grip on her, and saw the little quirk of disappointment in her face just before he bent down and kissed her. He felt her smile against his lips for a moment, a curious sensation, and then he straightened, holding her against him so she rose in the air, her feet dangling. She seemed pleased with this arrangement judging from the way she hummed against
The hand on the nape of his neck was now tunnelling through his hair, gripping handfuls of it and creating a delightful sting against his scalp. She bit his bottom lip softly and he felt himself throb in response. He held her tighter, wishing her impossibly closer to him. She shifted, pulling herself higher, as if she was attempting to climb him. Spock wondered what she was doing but acquiesced, pulling her up against him. Once her shoulders were slightly higher than his own she wrapped her arms securely around his neck and then her legs around his hips.

He suddenly understood. A potent jolt of lust shot through him and Spock pressed his hips against her. She arched her back, breaking their kiss with a fascinating noise from the back of her throat. Spock could feel her heart thudding wildly against his chest. Her lips were parted and her eyes appeared black her pupils were so dilated. He moved his grip from her back to her thigh and then shifted his hips again. Her eyes closed and she groaned then buried her head against his shoulder. He felt her hot breath against the skin of his neck. 'Spohkh.'

He turned and pressed her against the side of the shuttle, helpless to still the roll of his hips against her. Even through the material of his riding trousers and her undergarments he could feel the soft heat of her pulling at the most primitive instincts within him. Her fingers dug into his shoulder and she twisted and pressed herself against him. He feverishly pulled at her hair to turn her face back to his own so he could kiss her once more. She moaned and gasped into his mouth. Every noise she made seemed to directly affect the blood flow to lower areas of his anatomy. His trousers constricted him painfully.

He twisted his hand on her thigh, sliding it under her skirt and against her bare skin. He was aware that what they were currently doing went far beyond kissing and was against no less than 3 starfleet regulations, but he was powerless to stop. He wanted to feel her naked skin pressed against him, to press himself against her with nothing between them.

What had seemed so impossible outside of a dream now seemed not only natural, but completely necessary and unavoidable. He had to have her. He needed to join them. It wasn't a desire, something he could use his logic and reason to restrain himself from, it was a compulsion—like breathing. Her body was warm and writhing with want against him. He could smell her desire, hear it in the little pleading noises she was making and feel the vague shape of it through the fingertips he had pressed against her skin.

The soft material of her underwear was just above where his hand curled about her thigh. He could tear them from her, undo his trousers and then there would be nothing between them. He could have her. Bury himself in her. He groaned into her mouth. He'd never wanted anything so much. He shifted, his hand gathering the cloth between his fingers.

Across the lot he heard footsteps. He hesitated, his hand twisting in the thin cotton so the material dug into Nyota's skin. She groaned and ground her pelvis against him. For a moment he dismissed the footsteps and returned his full attention to her. His hand slid inside her underwear curled around the warm curve of her backside and pulled her more firmly against him. 'Spohhkkh!' The third time she'd spoken his name. No one had ever vocalised it in such a manner before. The heat and longing in her tone was musical.

'Nyota? Spock? Are you out here?' The commander was too far away for Nyota to hear. Spock contemplated ignoring him. Nyota wiggled a hand between them and began fumbling at the fastening on his trousers.

The footsteps returned. The Commander was heading towards them. Spock grabbed Nyota's hand and stilled her frenzied movements. She caught his eyes in confusion that quickly turned to hurt

'Nyota? Spock? Are you out here?' The commander was too far away for Nyota to hear. Spock contemplated ignoring him. Nyota wiggled a hand between them and began fumbling at the fastening on his trousers.

The footsteps returned. The Commander was heading towards them. Spock grabbed Nyota's hand and stilled her frenzied movements. She caught his eyes in confusion that quickly turned to hurt
and rejection. She spoke in her eerily perfect High Vulcan tinged with sadness. 'Thou doth desire me not?'

Spock calculated they had less than a minute before her father discovered them.

He responded in kind. 'I desire thee.'

She looked so confused and unsure of herself that Spock found himself kissing her again in reassurance. The kiss quickly lost its reassuring nature and became something else entirely however. The feel of her tongue against his made it nearly impossible to form a coherent thought. He had to force himself to pull away again. She whined in the back of her throat and leant forward in an effort to recapture his lips.

'Nyota! Spock!'

This time she heard. Her eyes widened and she gasped. Spock estimated they had 37 seconds of privacy remaining. His need beat at him. He could not join them physically, there was not time. There wasn't even time to join his mind fully to hers. In frustration he pulled her head to the side so he could let his lips taste the salt of her skin as he freed his hand from her hair. The thick gold of her necklace was cool against his cheek, soothing. He reached up and took her hand in his own, lifting his head from her shoulder to press his brow against hers. 31 seconds. Their breath mingled as he carefully pressed the tips of his fingers against hers.

He felt the warm brush of her mind, giddy with desire, sharpen and come into focus against him. The sensation made him shudder and gasp in pleasure. 28 seconds. He did not hold back his thoughts as he had when last he had touched her mind in such a manner. He hid nothing from her, let her feel the strength of his desire, his need for her. She gasped and he felt her answering excitement. She shifted against him and he realised how very close she was to climaxing purely from the press of him through their clothes and his kisses. 22 seconds. He pressed himself into her feeling her pleasure at the movement echo through the fragile telepathic connection of his fingertips. She was so close. He buried his head in her neck and recklessly showed her what he wanted to do in his mind. /Press his fingertips to her psi points and join their minds as he claimed her body, his teeth buried in her shoulder, pining her in place./

Her head rolled back against the shuttle and she pressed herself shamelessly against him. 16 seconds.

He spoke softly, madly, into her ear. 'When next I see thee I will take thee thus.' She gasped. 'Thou art mine.'

'Yes! Yours!' she moaned. 12 seconds

Her words had that primitive part of him exalting and he turned his head slightly and bit her shoulder lightly as he had in the vision he'd shown her. He felt desire flare through his fingertips at the action so he allowed himself to bite down harder as he pressed his hips against her. He felt her stiffen in his arms as the sharp echo of her orgasm rang through the link of his fingertips. He held her tightly as pleasure came over her in waves.

He did not know where he found the will power, but he pulled back and swung her into a more innocent position in his arms, holding her beneath the knees and shoulders so she lay against his chest. She looked up at him in a dazed shock, her fingers twisted in the material of his uniform.

He broke her gaze and quickly walked out from behind the shuttle. It took every ounce of his control to school his features into calm, to slow his heart-rate and even his respiration. 'Zuberi!' He
could taste her blood in his mouth. His erection throbbed in response. He wanted to throw her onto the ground and tear her clothes off.

The man was only a few meters from the other side of the shuttle. He ran the few steps that separated them and held out his arms for his daughter. 'Spock! What happened?'

'The Lieutenant from earlier attacked Nyota when she was returning from accompanying Lena to the hovercar stop.' Spock passed the commander his daughter's limp and trembling form. Her dazed expression and laboured breath added weight to his words.

'Nyota! What happened? Are you alright my little star?' Zuberi was looking anxiously over his child. 'You're bleeding!'

Nyota started and reached to the cut on her collarbone. 'It's only a scratch papa. I'm fine. Just shaken.' She indicated that she wished to stand but on doing so remained close to her father and allowed him to embrace her. Zuberi took her chin in his hand and titled her head side to side inspecting her for further injuries. To Spock it seemed painfully obvious that she had spent the better part of ten minutes being kissed by a deranged Vulcan. Suddenly Zuberi exclaimed. 'That animal bit you!?' Spock schooled his features into a mask of mild concern as befitted a Vulcan. He felt Nyota's eyes slide towards him but he studiously avoided her gaze.

Her hand flew up to cover the mark as Zuberi continued. 'Well at least we have the bastard's name. We can report him and get him sorted out, don't you worry little star.'

Nyota shook her head. 'No papa! That would be a bad idea.'

Her father frowned. 'They will keep the details confidential if you wish Nyota, it will not be on your public record.'

She shook her head and glanced again at Spock. 'That's not the reason papa. Spock broke his arm. And roughed him up quite a bit.'

Spock suddenly followed her reasoning. Yes. She was correct. Apart from his broken arm, there would no doubt be extensive bruising to his throat as well. Explaining the physical harm he caused the human would be difficult.

Zuberi however looked pleased. 'Good! He deserves worse! But still, you should report this Nyota.'

'Papa, Spock broke his arm, strangled him and threw him several meters into a shuttle. And I'd already broken his nose before Spock showed up. I only have a scratch. The police may take his word over ours.'

Zuberi sighed and was silent for 27 seconds before responding. 'You could be right. I just hate to think of him getting away with hurting you.' He turned to look out at the ship yard they had emerged from as if contemplating going to look for the man. After a moment he turned to regard Spock seriously. 'You taught him a good hard lesson in manners Spock?'

Spock blinked. 'I believe this evening will serve as a deterrent for him to refrain from such behaviour in future.' He was having difficulty conversing politely with the father of the girl he'd been seconds away from having intercourse with against a shuttle in the middle of a shipyard. His wits were returning to him and bringing great heaps of shame and disgust with them.

Zuberi snorted. 'I suppose that will have to be good enough.'
'You may rest assured should he attempt to appeal to the Admiralty board with regards to his suspension, I will break his other arm.' Spock realised he meant the sentiment literally, even though he knew it would be taken in jest.

Zuberi smiled darkly. 'Good.'
The trip home to Nairobi was a blur to Nyota. She must have dozed at some point because she awoke as they re-entered the atmosphere over Africa. The hovertaxi ride from the spaceport was short as their house was in one of the central districts of the city. Her father was very quiet and held onto her hand. It was clear that the experience had upset him a lot more than he was letting on. Bizarrely Nyota felt guilty for not being as shook up over her attack as it warranted.

The events that followed made the Lieutenant's rough handling and threats pale in comparison. She was fairly certain that she would have bested him even if Spock had not come looking for her. The only reason he had managed to restrain her at all was because he had been armed.

Once home her mama and sister Zanta fussed over her for half an hour, disinfecting the gash on her chest and the bite mark on her shoulder. Neither injury was deep enough to require a dermal regenerator but her mama thought she should go to the doctor anyway so that they would be healed and out of mind. The first aid taken care of the women settled down to making disparaging remarks about men and a few complimentary ones about Spock.

Nyota was trying to plead exhaustion so she could go to sleep when her mother casually said 'I'm not surprised of course. Ambassador Sarek fought off three armed Klingons in his hotel room during the Federation Peace Summit the year you were born Nyota. Apparently he is highly proficient in Suss Mahna and Tal-shaya.'

Nyota shared a look with her sister Zanta. Their mother had a habit of continuing conversations long after everyone else had forgotten the particulars. From Zanta's expression it was obvious she was as mystified as to the relevance of their mother's cryptic anecdote as Nyota.

'Why are we talking about Ambassador Sarek mama?' Nyota asked.

Her mother gave her an odd look. 'Because he's your instructor Spock's father of course! The Vulcan Ambassador to Earth.'

Nyota gaped.

Her mother laughed. 'Oh Ny! Did you not know that? I thought you looked over all your teachers' Starfleet files?'

'I don't have access to any of my teacher's actual Starfleet files as you should know and that is most definitely not listed on Lieutenant Commander Spock's academic profile. I would have remembered something like that.' She paused. 'It doesn't even list his full name. Professor Voss's meanwhile lists his favourite food and colour.'

Her mother snorted. 'Yes I doubt a Vulcan would feel the need to include such fascinating titbits.'

Nyota attempted to steer the conversation back to Spock's family. 'But you know his father?'

'Oh I saw quite a lot of him at functions and talks back when I was Ambassador Shaeffer's attaché,' Nyota recognised the name - Philip Shaeffer was the Terran Ambassador to Vulcan, '… but that was 30 years ago now so I don't really know him per say dear.'

'So what were Klingons doing in his hotel room?' Zanta asked, bringing the conversation back into
Her mother settled herself beside Nyota on her bed. 'They were ghlm. Exiles who had suffered discommendation and were working as mercenaries. I can't recall if their employers were ever identified… Anyway, the ambassador killed all three of them without getting so much as a scratch. It was the talk of the summit. Until Ambassador Nauxella of Betazoid went skinny dipping in the forum fountain of course.' She rolled her eyes. 'Shameless woman. Anyway, Sarek is considered one of the more approachable of the Vulcan diplomatic service, he even married a human, so it was a bit disconcerting to realise he knew how to kill you by poking you in the right place with just a finger.' She brandished her right index finger threateningly.

At Nyota and Zanta's confused expressions she continued. 'Tal-shaya. A Vulcan martial discipline. Originated as a humane method of execution, and judging from Ambassador Sarek's handiwork at that Summit, a very effective method at that.' Nyota recalled the strange shoulder grip that Spock had used to render his sparring partner unconscious in her hand to hand combat training class. He'd called it something, it might well have been Tal-shaya, she couldn't quite remember.

Zanta shook her head in disbelief. 'So Ny's Instructor could have… poked that bastard that attacked Ny to death?'

Her mother sniffed. 'I imagine he is too well brought up to just kill people willy nilly Zanta. That would hardly be the proper response, regardless of the situation.'

'I'm not so sure. I thought he was going to break that guy's neck to be honest.' Nyota mused. Her mother's head snapped towards her. 'What?'

Nyota suddenly didn't want to say anything. 'Well, after he broke his arm he was just sort of… holding him there. In the air.' Nyota lifted her arm to demonstrate how he'd been holding the Lieutenant. 'And glaring at him. I've never seen Spock look more then well, 'mildly irritated' I guess. And I think I heard him sigh in annoyance in class once. That's it.' She felt blood rushing to her face as she recalled the other expressions she'd seen on his face recently. The bite on her neck throbbed and she resisted the urge to press her hand to it.

Her mother shrugged. 'You should take it as a compliment that Spock is fond enough of you to let you see him like that.' She gave her daughter a thoughtful look. 'Although, he might merely have been attempting to scare the man. That's probably more likely to be honest.' Misinterpreting Nyota's expression she continued. 'Oh I'm sure he was concerned for you Nyota, Vulcan's do have emotions, on some level, - they just don't act on or express them like us.'

Nyota felt like she might burst into flame. She was giddy with shock and excitement and dying to tell her mother exactly how 'fond' of her Spock was. She had felt the blurred impressions of his desires and feelings when he had pressed their fingertips together. She had been shocked by the seeming intensity with which he felt. The cool logical face that he presented to the world was only a part of him, behind it lurked a strange dark swirl of emotions she recognised as human or human-like, and others she didn't understand at all - Vulcan thoughts and emotions that were utterly alien to her and completely intoxicating.

None of this she could share with her family however. 'He has indicated that I am the best assistant he has had at the Academy.' She smiled. 'He was probably just as concerned about the effect an injury to me might have on his work schedule as worry over my personal well-being.'

Her mother smiled. 'T'm sure his schedule was a secondary concern my daughter.'
Zanta, who had been following the conversation with some interest, asked pointedly, 'But why didn't this Spock guy just use a fancy Vulcan poke instead of beating that guy up? I thought Vulcans were dead against that sort of thing.'

Nyota frowned. She didn't have a good answer. Her own theory was only half formed and involved those strange dark feelings she'd felt in him and the possessive way he'd spoken of her. 'You touched what is mine.'Hardly things she could explain to her sister.

Her mother waved a hand dismissively. 'I'm sure Spock weighed up several complicated scenarios and chose the course of action best suited to the situation. That's what Vulcans do. If he were here he'd probably give you such a perfectly logical reason you'd wonder that you didn't think of it yourself.'

Nyota rolled her eyes. 'Yes mama. Now if you and Zanta will excuse me, I want to get some sleep.'

It was a long time after her mother and sister had left that she did finally fall asleep. Her brain refused to turn off. It kept going over the events of the evening, analysing everything that had occurred in excruciating detail. It was exhausting. When she did finally sleep, she dreamt, unsurprisingly, of her Vulcan instructor. Of his eyes black with lust and his tongue twisting against her own. She awoke disorientated and groggy, arms reaching for someone that wasn't there.

The next day she sat for an hour in front of the comm console, debating if she should attempt to contact him. She was too nervous to speak to him in real time over a subspace call, but she could record him a message or send him a written communiqué.

Her father interrupted her musings. 'What are you doing Nyota?'

'I am trying to think of the appropriate way to thank Lieutenant Commander Spock.' She responded.

Her father frowned. 'He won't be expecting a thank you. He only did the logical thing in defending you.' He paused. 'You are worrying yourself over nothing. He won't treat you any differently when your classes resume. A thank you will most likely only confuse him.'

Nyota realised he had a point. It was the rest of the evening, the part her father didn't know about that she needed to speak to him about. Unfortunately, she didn't know what she herself thought about it. On the one hand she had no doubt she had feelings for her instructor and the promise he had made to her about what he would do to her when next they met filled her with nervous longing, but she was his student. She wasn't willing to risk her career over an affair with a superior officer. It would be best to think the situation over in full before she spoke to Spock. She decided to wait until her return to the Academy.

*Spock*

Spock had ridden 30% faster than was usual, or legal, on the return journey from the Riverside Shipyard. By the time he entered his quarters his thoughts had returned to their normal logic and reason.

He was disgusted with himself.

He had never acted in such a... barbaric, primitive, illogical manner before. Not even as a small child when he had on occasion lost control and resorted to violence against other children's teasing. In those instances he'd been aware of his lack of control, been making an active choice to ignore
logic to indulge his emotions.

It had been different that evening. There hadn't been a reassuring thread of Vulcan calm and logic underneath his human emotions. The logical part of him had been silenced entirely leaving only raw emotion.

Not only had he broken several Starfleet Regulations in engaging in sexual acts with Cadet Uhura, he was certain that had she not distracted him, he would have killed Lieutenant Sparcs.

It was difficult for him to reconcile that fact with his Vulcan abhorrence of violence. He had never considered himself capable of such an act. He had been involved in situations requiring violence during his active duty with Starfleet, but always he had been acting on orders or in self-defence. He had never been asked to set his phaser to kill. The few incidences where he had been responsible for death, it had been indirect and unavoidable. He had never felt any guilt over those situations.

What he had almost done to the lieutenant was completely different. He'd relished hurting the man. The noise of his bones snapping had brought him great pleasure. He would have torn out his throat with his bare hands and felt nothing but satisfaction. Spock felt a wave of nausea.

He could not blame his actions on his human genes. Only a mentally disturbed human took pleasure in killing in such a manner. Whilst humans had a long and bloody history, they were very clear on what violence was acceptable. In centuries past they'd even had planet-wide codes on how wars could be waged – what types of weapons could be used, which types of torture were permissible and how prisoners were to be treated. In their own twisted way, humans were civilised in their violence.

Self-defence was acceptable, encouraged even, but killing someone who posed no further threat was considered dishonourable - murder. This held true even in ancient Terran history – there was no honour gained in killing someone weaker then you. All humans were inherently weaker than he. The correct, honourable way to have handled the situation would have been to simply render the lieutenant unconscious and hand him over to the appropriate authorities. This was what his logical Vulcan mind, which had been silent earlier in the evening was now telling him. A more liberal, human, interpretation of what was honourable would have included beating the recruit or inflicting similar minor injuries on him. 'Teaching him a lesson' Zuberi had called it.

Removing the lieutenant’s trachea with his bare hands would have repulsed a human as much as a Vulcan.

Perhaps he had an undiagnosed mental instability?

It was not until he was undressing to shower that he realised his right hand had streaks of dried human blood on it. Unthinkingly he drew it up to his nose and inhaled. It was hers. He recalled placing his hand over the cut on her shoulder. He stared at the brownish streaks for a long moment, painfully aware that there could very well have been far more blood on his hands and it would have belonged to a deceased Lieutenant Sparcs. He vigorously washed ensuring all traces, including the dried bits around his fingernails, were removed.

He spent several hours carefully scanning his memories for any similar lapses of control. He found none. The terrible black feelings had only ever made themselves know in response to Nyota Uhura and had never truly tested his control before. The logical course of action was to apologise for his behaviour to Cadet Uhura and ensure their interactions in future were within Starfleet regulations. She obviously could not remain his aide. Interaction with her had been trying previously, having... done what he had done, said what he had said to her – it would be intolerable. But would that be sufficient? He was concerned that the evening had set a precedent.
She would still be nearby. On campus. She would be in his classes, sitting in the lecture hall with Cadet U’Aidat, three times a week. He often encountered her incidentally around the Academy - in the cafeteria or travelling to and from classes. These chance meetings would be more or less avoidable, although he could alter his schedule around her timetable to minimise them.

Unable to settle himself, he spent the remainder of the night compiling the report on the *Enterprise's* construction status. Afterwards he sat before his comm console to record a message to include with the report for Captain Pike.

A sudden thought occurred to him. He allowed himself several minutes to think it over in depth. It seemed the most logical course of action.

'Computer, record message: Greetings Captain Pike. I have attached the results of my most recent inspection to the *Enterprise's* construction site. I believe under the new Overseer the construction will be completed in accordance with the original schedule.' He paused for a beat before continuing. 'I would also like to express my interest in re-joining the crew of the *Nelson* should any positions within my expertise be available. Message ends.' When he had spoken to the Captain two standard days earlier to discuss the upcoming inspection, Pike had complained of the difficulty of rotating his bridge crew for leave. Spock had interpreted the comment as a hint that he would like Spock to return to active fleet duty, but at the time had chosen to ignore it, content for the moment to focus on his work on Earth.

It now offered him an ideal manner in which to ensure his future dealings with Cadet Uhura were appropriate. If she were on Earth and he in the Beta Quadrant, there would be no further lapses of his control.

His comm chimed with a subspace response 18.5 hours later. It was a relief-commission to serve as Communication's Officer aboard the *USS Nelson*. Not his main field of expertise, but a position he was fully qualified to hold.

Spock spent the next two days finalising his departure with the Academy Board. They were displeased with his decision, but positions at the Academy were always in demand from officers looking for a few years downtime on Earth and Spock knew they would have no difficulty filling his post.

The belongings in his quarters were well within weight limits for his deployment luggage. His hoverbike he placed into storage. The only item he was unsure what to do with was his mother's rose bush. In the end he placed it on the windowsill in the phonetics department lounge.

103.2 hours after his return from the Riverside Shipyard, he stepped off the transporter pad and onto the deck of the *USS Nelson*. Captain Pike greeted him with a broad smile. 'Spock!'

He felt an immense sense of relief.
Chapter 17

*Nyota*

Owing to the sudden nature of his commission to the *Nelson*, Lieutenant Commander Spock's students weren't actually aware that he was no longer their professor until they started attending classes.

Nyota stared in disbelief at the elderly Tellarite standing at Spock's podium during her first *Interspecies Ethics* lecture of the second semester.

'Greetings cadets. I am Lieutenant Saarg and I will be taking over as your Instructor in Interspecies Ethics. Your previous instructor, Lieutenant Commander Spock, is currently serving aboard the *USS Nelson* in the Romulan Neutral Zone.' He was surprisingly friendly sounding for a Tellarite. 'Judging from your previous syllabus you have already received a thorough introduction into the delicate field of Interspecies Ethics.'

Nyota's shock had lasted all of thirty seconds before she became livid with her former Instructor. He hadn't even bothered to send her a comm message!

Most students were jubilant that Spock was gone - looking forward to better marks with less stringent teachers. The reason for his sudden departure from the Academy was a major source of speculation. A few students thought he'd gotten into trouble and had been kicked out of the Academy. When someone in the *Advanced Phonology III* class snooped around his Starfleet file and found out he'd been posted as Communications Officer of the *Nelson* rather than First Officer, there was talk that he'd been more or less demoted. Angry though she was, Nyota still found herself coming to his defence, informing her classmates that Lieutenant Commander Spock was very close to Captain Pike and most likely took the post as a personal favour to him.

This was her favoured theory. She knew it was far more likely that Spock had requested the post rather than the other way around, but she was enjoying the delusion that he hadn't begged to be posted to the goddamned *Romulan Neutral Zone* - currently the most dangerous posting in Starfleet, in preference to being on the same planet as her.

When she'd returned to her dorm that evening, she'd half expected to find a message of some sort, an explanation, from Spock. There had been nothing. She'd been tempted to send him something quite scathing but had restrained herself.

Gaila had appeared after 19:00 hours. She had a late class on Mondays. The Orion hadn't even waited until the door had closed behind her to begin her interrogation. 'What happened Ny!? Why did your Vulcan hop a shuttle to the forsaken *Romulan Neutral Zone* of all places?!

Nyota shot her a cold glare from her desk. 'For the last time Gaila, he isn't 'my Vulcan'. I'm not the one that brings him coffee laced with cocoa after all.'

Gaila grinned sheepishly. 'That was only once… And he didn't even realise!'

Nyota pursed her lips. 'He did actually. That might come to back to bite you on the arse you know. The only reason he didn't report you was because he didn't want to see you expelled.' She raised an eyebrow. 'Something about not wanting a promising cadet and the only female Orion in the Academy to be kicked over an 'ill-conceived' prank.'
Gaila smiled softly. 'He said that?'

Nyota nodded. 'Yes. 'Ill-conceived''

Gaila ignored her. 'Promising Cadet'. That's pretty impressive coming from Lieutenant Commander Spock.'

'I think he sees you as a something of a non-human kindred spirit. Not that he would ever admit it.' Nyota said.

Her roommate smiled. 'Aw! That's kinda sweet.'

Nyota grunted non-committedly and returned her attention to the PADD of notes on her desk. Gaila got changed and forgot all about her interrogation for almost half an hour.

'So why did our dear Vulcan Instructor suddenly accept a fleet posting?' She asked from her position on her bed some time later.

'He did not deign to inform me. I imagine Captain Pike asked him to.' Nyota responded without looking up from her PADD.

She could almost hear Gaila's eyes narrowing. 'He didn't tell you!? You're his… aide!' The emphasis she placed on the word was hardly subtle, but Nyota ignored it.

Nyota shrugged. 'Well, now I'm the Professor Voss's aide.'

'Not even a message? No 'Greetings Cadet Uhura, I have been stationed to the Romulan Neutral Zone. Your assistance as my aide has been… satisfactory.' Her impression of Spock's voice was terrible. The wording was almost believable however.

Nyota bit her lip. She was dying to tell someone about what had happened at the Shipyard, but at the same time couldn't bear to even think about it. Gaila seemed to realise that she was holding back though. They'd lived together for three years after all, they were pretty well attuned to each other. She stood and moved across the room to perch on the end of Nyota's bed, right near her desk. 'You do know something! Spill!'

The words burst from her like they had a mind of their own. 'I kissed him!' Gaila gasped in delighted Orion scandal. Nyota found more words tumbling out of her mouth.

'He invited my father and I along on an inspection of the Enterprise since he and my papa are like, friends or something, and this Lieutenant was really rude to me and Spock suspended his commission to Starfleet. But then the guy cornered me in the hovercar lot and he had a knife but I would have been fine, I mean, I broke his nose! But then Spock turned up and he broke his arm with his bare hands and then hoisted him up in the air by the throat and said to him 'You touched what is mine.' '

She spoke in Vulcan, Gaila, as a fellow communications student was of course fluent, 'And he was talking about me. And I thought he was going to kill the guy, but I distracted him and the guy ran off. Then I kissed him and... and…'

Gaila was leaning forward with an expression of absolute shock on her face. 'You hadn't kissed him before?'

Nyota pressed her hands to her mouth and stared at her roommate wide eyed. Of all the possible reactions, she had not considered that one. Gaila seemed completely unfazed by Spock's violence
against a fellow officer and his possessive words about her. 'No of course not! He's my instructor!'

The other girl reached forward and took her hands in her own. 'Honestly? You haven't been you know, 'assisting' Spock in other ways?'

Nyota frowned. 'No. You really think I could keep that from you?'

Gaila tilted her head. 'Well, I figured you were just being careful. Didn't want it to get around that you were sleeping with your professor, which is understandable.'

'But what made you think we were, you know, sleeping together.' Nyota was honestly confused. She knew it must have been pretty obvious to her friend she had a crush on Spock, a massive crush, but Gaila seemed honestly surprised they hadn't been lovers.

'I'm Orion Nyota.' She said as if that explained everything.

Nyota frowned and then remembered their discussion months before. 'Pheromones?'

Gaila nodded. 'You and Spock. When you two are in the same room it's like, well, you guys can drown out Kirk's pheromones when he's in full swing. It's actually made our classes super distracting for me. But I didn't want to embarrass you. And it's not like you have any control over it.'

Nyota felt herself blushing.

Gaila continued. 'And then you'd come home from your 'inspections' at the shipyard, tipsy on Cardassian Sunrise and reeking of Spock. I just assumed you were... you know.' She shrugged as if sleeping with a teacher was no big deal.

Nyota sighed. 'Well, I wasn't.'

Gaila still seemed skeptical. 'Really? Wow. I'm usually never wrong. So, what did happen? You kissed him and he ran half-way across the galaxy?'

'It was more than a kiss. And he most definitely kissed me back. And then some.' Nyota sighed. 'Then he ran half-way across the galaxy.' She huffed. 'He didn't even leave me a note.'

Gaila tsked. 'It's not your fault Ny. Spock's been dying to jump you for at least a year and half. It was him I smelt all over you that first time you went to the Enterprise and came back loaded.'

Nyota felt a mixture of pride, relief and irritation at learning Spock's attraction for her was so long standing. He'd done an extremely good job of hiding it. 'Then why is he in the goddamned Romulan Neutral Zone!'

Her roommate pursed her lips. 'Isn't it obvious? You did the impossible, you managed to break his precious Vulcan control and he's ran away because he's scared. But he'll be back.'

'What makes you say that?'

'The kinda of lust were you absolutely cannot control yourself, even if you're a freaking Vulcan and breaking half a dozen Starfleet regulations? Where you have to take a commission in the Neutral Zone just to get away? That's more than just lust Ny.' She smirked. 'And he did say you were his after all.' She smirked. 'He'll probably reappear the moment you graduate and do that kinky Vulcan bonding stuff on you.' Gaila's eyebrows were wiggling suggestively.
Nyota frowned. 'Kinky Vulcan bonding stuff?'

The Orion nodded. 'Yeah. Apparently they use telepathy during sex.' She sounded fascinated, an almost academic curiosity. 'I mean, can you imagine? It's meant to be pretty amazing.' The expression on her face was dreamy.

Nyota bit her lip. 'Um, yeah I can imagine.'

Gaila's eyes narrowed. 'He totally used some of that on you didn't he?'

Nyota found herself smiling shyly. 'He was surprisingly, um, demonstrative.'

'Demonstrative?' Gaila prompted.

'He showed me some things. Telepathically.' Nyota wasn't going to elaborate. Gaila might be comfortable giving detailed accounts of her sexual encounters but Nyota certainly wasn't.

Her roommate looked delighted. 'What else?!

'Um. Well. He bit me.' Nyota was sure her face was about to spontaneously burst into flame her skin felt so hot.

'He bit you?' Her roommate laughed and fell back on the bed. 'Oh Ny! I'm sorry, but this is just too funny. Imagining Spock being all sexy is just too bizarre. I'm having trouble imagining him kissing you on the cheek, let alone biting you in a fit of passion.'

Nyota laughed a little. 'Yeah, I know what you mean. When I kissed him I was half expecting him to be completely scandalised.' She cleared her throat and impersonated his deep voice. 'Cadet Uhura. This is most inappropriate.'

Gaila laughed again. Nyota felt a little bit better.

*Spock*

Spock's first month aboard the USS Nelson was unremarkable. He had served previously not only with Captain Pike, but several of the other bridge officers aboard and found himself slipping back into life aboard an active ship with ease. He had not sat at a communications console since he'd been a cadet, but he was of course, fully qualified, and it took only hours to completely re-familiarise himself with the duties of the post.

Captain Pike was quite casual in his command style and Spock was called upon for far more than just communications duties. Spock suspected the captain was concerned he would find the role of communications officer boring. In fact, whilst it was not a post he would desire to hold for any length of time, it was one of the more interesting on the bridge. There was always chatter on the subspace channels to occupy him.

The one aspect of his post he found odd was his uniform. He had not worn the red of the engineering/security/communications division since he first graduated from the Academy. Seeing himself reflected off console screens and windows in red reminded him of his old cadet's uniform more than anything, and thinking of cadets in general was not something he wanted to do.

He spent many evenings playing 3D chess with Captain Pike. The First Officer - Lieutenant Commander Robbins, (or 'Number One' as Pike referred to her), on occasion joined them. She was a close friend of the Captain and an admirably logical woman. The crew of the Nelson seemed
more restless than the norm for a starship crew and he found the other officers very eager to share their recreational time with him. He surmised they were starved for the personal interaction humans required. 'Cabin Fever' he believed was the term. 'Space Crazy' the Captain called it.

Patrolling the neutral zone was a task of extremes. On the one hand there was the risk of open conflict with the smugglers and other criminals still criss-crossing between the Romulan Star Empire and Federation space to make quick credits, not to mention the off chance that the Romulans themselves might break the treaty, on the other hand there were long weeks and months where nothing occurred. According to Pike the most action the Nelson had seen in the last four months were the brief stop overs at starbases for supplies and maintenance.

This did not bother Spock overmuch. He utilised his free time in study and the final redsaigns of the Enterprises' sensor arrays. He had reached the stage of design were further improvements to the range of the sensors were no longer feasible. Professor Voss was overseeing the final fabrication and installation. The only other interruption to his quiet routine on the ship was the statement he had to make via subspace comm to Starfleet Admiralty with regards to Lieutenant Sparcs'. With supporting statements from half a dozen Starfleet personnel regarding his actions in the Riverside Shipyard bar, the Board came to a decision of dis-honourable discharge quite swiftly.

Spock was in his quarters during the beta shift, meditating, or at least attempting to, when the yellow alert alarm sounded through the ships computers. The alpha shift, that to which he was assigned, did not start for another 4 hours, but he suspected that the Captain might summon him if a serious situation arose. He dressed in his uniform in preparation.

Sure enough, 6.2 minutes after the yellow alert had been sounded the captain's voice came over the computer again. 'This is the Captain speaking, Lt. Cmdr. Spock report to the bridge.'

Spock arrived on the bridge 2.8 minutes later.

Three ships were visible on the view screen. The Captain was hailing them as he exited the turbolift.

'I repeat, this is Captain Pike of the USS Nelson. You have entered the Romulan Neutral Zone. Access to the Federation/Romulan border is strictly prohibited. Please identify.' Pike had risen from his chair to send his broadcast.

Spock took position near a free tactical console where the captain would be able to see him, but did not interrupt.

'Unidentified vessel, I am authorised by Starfleet High Command to use deadly force to maintain the integrity of the Romulan border. You will identify.'

None of the ships responded. The duty comm officer spoke up from his console. 'Sensors indicate all three ships are receiving transmission and are capable of responding Captain.'

According to his own console, he was correct. Spock took up his earpiece and began scanning the frequencies usually used by Romulan ships. He picked up nothing within 5 lightyears, which was the approximate distance to the nearest Romulan base on the opposite side of the neutral zone.

He brought up the long range sensors and attempted to identify the make of the ships. They were definitely not Romulan, not that he expected them to be. There had not been a confirmed sighting of a Romulan vessel in over a century. They kept as resolutely to their side of the border as the federation kept to theirs.
'Captain.' Spock called politely.

'Yes Spock?'

'The ships are fitted with sophisticated long range sensors, military grade shields and whilst only lightly armed their weaponry is quite deadly.'

The captain nodded. 'Smugglers?'

'The most logical conclusion based upon the facts at hand sir.'

'Let's test those shields out then.' He turned his attention to Lieutenant Commander Robbins, who was standing before the main tactical console. 'Number one, arm photon torpedoes and lock on to all targets.'

'Locked on sir.'

'Fire on my mark.' He paused for a few seconds. 'Mark.'

The first two torpedoes fired simultaneously with the third following a few seconds after.

On his console Spock watched their effect on the other ship's systems. All three had deflector shields powerful enough to withstand a single salvo, but judging from the power surges he was reading would not be able to take many direct hits. 'Sensors indicate losses of 30, 68 and 22% to deflector shields to each ship respectively sir, and they have bought phaser-type weapons systems online.'

The Captain snorted. 'Smugglers alright. Reopen all hailing frequencies.'

'Hailing frequencies open sir' said the comm officer.

'Unidentified vessels. You are within a restricted zone. Identify or I will be forced to take further action.'

The subspace frequencies remained stubbornly clear.

Spock began scanning the higher register frequencies often used by smugglers. Almost immediately he picked up something. It took 8.2 seconds for him to clear the static from the signal and pinpoint its origin.

'Picking up communication between the unidentified ships sir.' he informed the captain even as he translated the words coming through his earpiece.

Pike turned towards him sharply. 'Report.'

'They are Ferengi sir. They appear to be arguing over their cargo, it is apparently worth a great deal of money.' Spock responded.

The Captain frowned. 'Ferengi? What are they doing in the Beta Quadrant and since when did they start dealing with the Romulans?'

'Unknown sir.' In his earpiece the argument between the captains of the Ferengi ships continued. 'It appears one of the ships was badly damaged in an altercation of some sort.'

Number one spoke up from her console 'The ship in the middle sir, with the damage to their shields I'm getting more complete sensor scans. I am picking up massive energy fluctuations. Their warp
drive is likely inoperative.'

Pike opened the hailing frequencies once more. 'Unidentified Ferengi vessels! You are in breach of the Romulan-Federation non-Aggression Treaty. You are hereby ordered to stand down weapons systems and prepare to be boarded.' His irritation at being ignored was becoming more and more obvious.

'Weapons systems remain online sir' Number one said.

'They have ceased communications Captain.' Spock added.

Before the Captain could respond the two undamaged ships vanished. Spock's console indicated a sudden jump to warp speed.

'Two have jumped to warp sir.' Said Number one.

'Can you trace their new co-ordinates Number one?'

'Negative sir, they are using warp signature scramblers.'

The Captain sighed. 'Smugglers alright. Goddamned Ferengi.' He glared at the viewscreen for a moment. 'Open hailing frequency to remaining ship.'

'Open sir.' Said the comm officer.

'Unidentified Ferengi vessel. Stand down weapons systems and lower your shields to be boarded.'

Again there was no response from the vessel.

'Shields and weapons are already offline sir' Spock remarked with some surprise.

Number one was frowning at her console. 'Sir those energy fluctuations are increasing. There's too much interference to safely use transporter beams to access most of the ship. The closest to the bridge that we can beam aboard will be what our scanners indicated to be the aft cargo hold.'

'The Lieutenant Commander is correct sir. If the fluctuations increase at the current rate beaming between the ships will become impossible in approximately 16 minutes.' Spock added.

'Noted. Number one, assemble an away team and beam aboard to assess the situation.'

The Lieutenant Commander nodded. 'Yes sir.' She scanned the bridge. 'Lieutenant Varth, Lieutenant Fayd, Ensign Johns and Lieutenant Commander Spock – with me.'

Spock ensured he had his tricoder securely attached to his belt and followed Number One off the bridge and to the nearest transporter room. He kept an internal countdown of the time until transporter function would become impossible aboard the Ferengi ship. When they materialised in a corridor off a cargo hold, 14 minutes and 37 seconds remained. He informed the Lieutenant Commander of as much.

'Let me know when five minutes remain Spock.' Number one had her phaser out and was already leading the team towards the bridge.

Spock took environmental readings on his tricoder as he responded. 'Affirmative Lieutenant Commander. The life support systems on the ship still appear to be functioning at full capacity.'

'Good, one less thing to worry about. Phasers on stun. Let's move out.'
Spock checked his phaser was set correctly, although as per Starfleet regulations he left it set to stun unless instructed otherwise. The bridge was 13 levels above them. According to the scan they had completed of the ship a turbolift was located 312 meters ahead of them. As they made their way forward Spock adjusted his tricoder with interest.

'Lieutenant Commander, I am only picking up very faint life signals. It would appear the ship is largely abandoned.'

'How many remain?' asked Number One.

'I would estimate between 3 and 6 individuals depending on their species.' Spock paused and pointed the tricoder back towards the rear of the ship. 'And they are located near what appears to be the engineering section.'

'And the bridge?'

Spock re-ran the scan before replying. 'I detect no other life forms on board. The bridge is unoccupied.'

Number one paused and frowned. Spock waited patiently for her to make the necessary decisions based on the new information he had given her. 'Spock - take Fayd and Varth and attempt to locate the life signs. Johns and I will head to the bridge.'

Spock nodded. It was the most logical course of action. He had expected nothing less from Lieutenant Commander Robbins. Ensign Fayd was well versed in hand to hand combat should the life forms still aboard prove violent and Lieutenant Varth had a background in engineering and could investigate the energy fluctuations if needed. He could tell from her expression that she wanted to investigate the life signs herself, but as ranking officer her place was on the bridge ensuring the ship was under control.

'Affirmative sir.' He turned and motioned for Ensign Fayd and Lieutenant Varth to follow him as he headed towards the rear of the ship. He recalibrated his tricoder and got an accurate reading on the life signs before thumbing his comm badge. 'Nelson this is Lieutenant Commander Spock, request Ferengi schematics from the full scan.'

His tricoder blinked as the file was received even before the Captain responded in the affirmative.

Spock quickly devised the quickest route to the section of the ship were the life signs were emanating from. It was past the engineering section in the centre of the ship and the fluctuating warp drive. He quickly led the way towards the appropriate deck. The ship was large. A vast utilitarian cargo hauler - quite an unusual design for the Ferengi - they usually favoured smaller faster ships. Four minutes and 7 seconds later they emerged from a turbolift to the immediate vicinity of the life signs. With the added proximity Spock had determined there were in fact only three larger life forms.

The corridor shook around them. Spock could faintly detect the high pitched throb of a warp drive from somewhere to his left. Lieutenant Varth tilted his head to one side and listened. 'Definitely the warp core causing the energy fluctuations. Sounds like the dampener has failed.' He shared a glance with Spock wordlessly communicating his concern. If the warp drive was attempting to engage without a dampener it would eventually fail. Catastrophically. Spock had recent first-hand experience of the damage that could cause.

'Indeed Lieutenant. We should move quickly.' He switched on his comm 'Captain, the warp dampener has failed.'
There was a delay before the captain responded. 'How long Spock?'

'Impossible to estimate without inspecting the warp drive sir.'

'Send Varth to investigate.'

The lieutenant nodded at Spock then turned and darted down the hall. 'Affirmative sir.'

Spock and the ensign followed the life signs at a jog. 6 minutes and 48 seconds remained till beaming off ship would be impossible. Unless Varth stabilized the warp drive. That was unlikely however. The Ferengi would not have abandoned ship for anything less than a fatal error within the ship's systems. They were exceedingly stubborn when it came to material goods, and a ship of his size would be jealously guarded.

They entered a section that appeared to be the brig. All the doors leading off the main corridor were open however, save one at the very end. Spock made his way towards it. The life signs were coming from within.

He drew his phaser and glanced at the ensign beside him. The human looked nervous. 'There are three individuals, their life signs are weak, but be prepared to stun them if necessary.' The ensign nodded and assumed a position beside Spock from which he could cover him as he opened the door.

Spock palmed the door mechanism. It was not locked and slid open with a hiss.

An unpleasant stench wafted from the cell. Sweat, filth and corrupted flesh assaulted Spock's nostrils. The ensign gagged slightly. There was no movement. Spock carefully stepped within. Bedding and furniture lay broken and shattered across the small room. There was a body, small and humanoid, laying covered in a sheet against one wall. Spock's tricorder indicated it was deceased and had been for some time. He gave it no further thought. At first glance the room appeared otherwise empty but then Spock sensed movement from a pile of blankets and bedding in one corner. A glance at his tricoder confirmed his suspicion.

He approached and stopped a meter from the pile. His tricorder indicated all three life forms were within the bundle. Hiding. 'I am Lieutenant Commander Spock of the USS Nelson. I require you to accompany me back to my ship.'

There was a shifting within the blankets but no other response. Spock continued. 'This vessel is unsafe. The warp core is failing. Its crew has abandoned it. You will die if you remain.'

He heard a few whispered words being exchanged. The ensign caught his eye and motioned with his hand indicating their need to hurry. 3 minutes and 12 seconds remained for them to beam off ship. Spock reached forward and pulled a mattress from the top of the pile in front of him.

There was a yell and two figures suddenly rose up before him, fists raised aggressively.

Spock felt his eyebrow rise in surprise. Two male adolescents with the tilted eyebrows and pointed ears of his own race.

'Vulcans!?' Ensign Fayd's shock echoed his own.

'It would appear so ensign.'

They were very thin, dirty and appeared injured. Regardless they both tensed and Spock realised they were ready, eager even, for the chance to attack him. He had never seen such transparent
emotion on a Vulcan before. V'tosh ka'tur? He raised a hand in a placating gesture and switched from standard to Vulcan. 'We mean you no harm. The Ferengi have abandoned the ship. We must leave.'

The closest Vulcan glared at him silently. He wore only a ragged robe over a pair of generic pants of the type obtained from a ship's replicator. His companion pulled at his elbow and whispered 'One of the lost heretics!' as he stared at Spock in horror and fascination. Spock tilted his head in surprise. Romulan. They were speaking Romulan. He responded in kind. 'I am Spock of Vulcan, a Lieutenant Commander in the Federation Starfleet. This vessel is unsafe. You must accompany me to my ship.' His words seemed to frighten them, though they attempted to conceal it behind anger. 'You will not be harmed.'

The older boy's glare intensified. The younger one shifted so he stood behind his companion slightly. 'Why should we trust you? Not only are you Starfleet Federation scum you are Vulcan!' He spat the last word like a grave insult.

Spock restrained the urge to frown but allowed himself a slight eyebrow quirk. Puzzling as it was, they did not have time to satisfy his curiosity over two young Vulcans imprisoned on a Ferengi vessel in the neutral zone speaking Romulan. 'You are also Vulcan. Your words are illogical.'

The boy gasped, his eyes widening in shock and insult in the transparent manner of a human rather a Vulcan. 'How dare you! We are Romulans!' Spock could not keep the disbelief off his face. He allowed himself a few seconds to think over the situation. There was no time to settle the mystery the two... 'Romulans' presented. 'If that is so, then you are protected by the Romulan-Federation Treaty of Non-Aggression. As an officer of Starfleet I am obliged to see you returned to Romulan space. You will not be harmed or otherwise mistreated.'

Ensign Fayd spoke up nervously. 'Sir we don't have time for this! We need to get clear of the interference and beam off here before the ship blows.' He glanced at the so called Romulans. 'The Vulcans are probably scared, but we can't waste time babying them.'

Judging from the manner in which the Romulans reacted to his statement, offence and fear, they spoke standard. Spock stepped back and thumbed his comm. 'Captain we have located 3 young Romulans who require medical assistance. We will now make our way clear of the interference.'

'Romulans? In the flesh?' The Captain sounded as shocked as he.

'Affirmative Captain. Romulans.'

'...Acknowledged Spock. Medbay has been informed.'

He beckoned to the Romulans this time speaking in standard. 'Come. Rouse your third companion. We have only minutes.'

They turned and helped a smaller figure out from under the pile of bedding. Spock's tricoder indicated that the third 'Romulan' - a female even younger then the two males, perhaps 13 standard years of age - had very low life signs. Noting the manner in which the males glared at him Spock made no comment and instead turned and led the way out of the cell. The Romulans followed him mistrustfully with ensign Fayd taking up the rear. Spock led them at quickly towards the nearest turbolift. The warp drive was located in the bottom decks, the quickest way to put distance between them would be to travel to the highest deck via the lift.
The smell of the unwashed Romulans was much more pronounced in the enclosed space of the turbolift. Spock noted that the ensign was breathing through his mouth, but the young human diplomatically showed no other signs of noticing.

Spock monitored his tricoder as they swiftly made their way up through the decks. The energy readings diminished steadily and were at acceptable levels 3 decks below the highest one. As the lift slowed to a halt there was a deep shudder through the ship. The lights and life systems stalled for 2.7 seconds before flickering back to life. The ship's computer began issuing a blaring alarm. Spock raised his hand to his comm, but before he could request transport from the *Nelson*, he and Ensign Fayd's comms suddenly came to life.

‘Captain, the plasma coils imploded and damaged engineering. I'm trapped and I think my leg's broken.’ Lieutenant Varth's voice was strained and fearful.

Spock thumbed his comm, switching to the *Nelson's* Engineering frequency, as they stepped from the turbolift. 'Transporter room. Request beam up for four directly to the medbay based off Ensign Johns' co-ordinates.'

‘Affirmative Lieutenant Commander.’ Spock did not recognise the voice that responded. The engineer currently manning the transporter rooms no doubt.

The Ensign gave him a sharp look. 'You going to go after Varth sir?'

Spock walked several meters away from him and Romulans so he they would be clear of him to be transported. 'Affirmative Ensign.'

Before the Ensign could comment further he and the three young Romulans dematerialised.

Spock quickly returned to the turbolift and directed it down to the deck where Lieutenant Varth was located. The lift arrived at its destination without mishap and Spock was relieved. Using turbolifts with the ship so unstable was not, as a rule, wise. He headed towards Engineering at a run. The ominous whine and hum of the warp core echoed through the walls much louder than just minutes earlier. He had an unpleasant sense of déjà vu. His tricoder indicated localised fires, radiation leaks and hull breaches around him. He slowed slightly and chose his route to where he was detecting Lieutenant Varth's comm signal carefully.

‘Spock! What are you doing?’ The Captain sounded angry.

'I am approaching Lieutenant Varth's location sir.'

'The ship's about to blow Spock! I didn't give you any orders to return below decks!'

'Neither did you order me to return to the *Nelson* Captain. I was conveniently situated to return to engineering and I estimate several minutes remain before the warp core detonates.'

'But the energy fluctuations Spock! We won't be able to beam you off!'

'Affirmative sir. However according to our scans the ship was abandoned via transporter beam or shuttle. The full complement of emergency escape pods remain should we require them.' Spock had noticed several banks of them during his brief sojourn through the ship. It would be simple enough to get himself and the Lieutenant into one before the ship was destroyed.

'Fine. Get a move on though Spock.' The Captain managed to sound both angry and pleased. Humans.
'Affirmative sir. 'Getting a move on.'

A reinforced bulkhead blocked the entrance to the warp chamber. Spock overrode the safety and it opened half way before jamming. The cavernous chamber that contained the warp drive vibrated violently as the core screamed. To Spock's amazement the drive was on a 45° angle, the force of shocks coming from it having sheared through the metal of its restraints. The chance of such damage being sustained by the core and the matter and anti-matter chambers not being breached was so infinitesimal that even Spock could not accurately assess it.

His tricoder indicated extreme levels of radiation, however the levels were not immediately fatal to either Vulcans or humans. He spent 7 seconds assessing the room and the likelihood of further collapse before heading to where Lieutenant Varth lay motionless, pinned beneath a collapsed gangway.

The man was still conscious. His eyes widened in shock and relief as Spock knelt beside him. 'I have located Lieutenant Varth Captain.'

'Well grab him and get out of there already Spock!' came the Captain's impatient response.

Spock assessed the twisted metal that pinned his colleague. Varth patiently waited. Spock was relieved he was not hysterical in the light of their precarious position. He stood and was able, at no small effort even for a Vulcan, to remove the largest section of walkway that pressed down on Varth. The Lieutenant sat up and began shifting away small pieces himself. Spock regarded the tangle of metal that surrounded the man's leg intently.

'I will have to cut through this,' he indicated several prongs of metal near the Lieutenant's thigh, 'before I can cut through this.' He pointed at the thick rod of metal that impaled the man's leg sideways just above the knee. If there was time Spock would cut the other end of the rod and leave it imbedded in the leg so as not to risk blood loss or further damage from removing it.

'Sounds good sir.' The Lieutenant indicated to his left. 'My phaser's over there if you grab it for me I'll start cutting as well.'

Spock nodded and retrieved the weapon, pleased by the Lieutenant's rational attitude. He had been expecting mild hysteria. It took only 27 seconds for them to cut the Lieutenant free. He was pale, sweating and shivering - obviously in shock and immense pain, but let Spock pull him up onto his good leg without comment.

They limped their way a few meters before Spock pulled him to a standstill. The roar of the core was deafening. It radiated heat behind them like a newly formed neutron star. A small part of Spock's mind wondered at his illogical and unconscious use of hyperbole. He had clearly spent too long around humans. He spared the core a glance. He estimated no more than 7 minutes until the containment chamber failed, and probably significantly less. His estimates were based upon Starfleet and Vulcan build quality. The manufacturing specifications of the drive in question were unknown and most likely inferior. 'We must hurry.' He bent slightly and wrapped an arm around the man's shoulders. 'I will carry you.'

The Lieutenant nodded. 'Right, turn around then.'

Spock was slightly confused at his intention but acquiesced. The Lieutenant wrapped his arms around his neck and bent his legs to clutch at Spock's hips. Spock felt an echo of his intense pain as he moved his impaled leg. A very weak telepathic link had formed where the skin of Varth's arm touched his neck. He ignored it and straightened. The Lieutenant's weight was evenly distributed and if needed his arms were free. He reached down to the man's thighs to help support his weight.
and steady him then set off at a jog. They had passed a bank of escape pods en route towards engineering from where they had originally beamed aboard.

Spock sensed amusement from the man on his back. 'Lieutenant? Something amuses you?'

'Nothing sir. Just can't believe you're giving me a piggy-back ride to an escape pod on a Ferengi smuggling ship that's about to explode. Not how imagined my day going when I woke up this morning.' Although humour was evident, his voice was strained with pain. 'And to think I was getting bored. Karma.'

Spock sensed he required reassurance. He restrained the urge to point out the illogical nature of his statement referring to 'karma' and instead attempted a polite distraction. 'Tell me Lieutenant, what is 'Piggy Back' I am unfamiliar with this term.'

'It's how you're carrying me. Children like to be carried around like this. As a game.' Spock detected something else in the Lieutenant's voice.

'You have children of your own do you not Lieutenant?' Spock recalled him mentioning two daughters - a 4 year old and a 9 year old. Discussion of them would perhaps distract the Lieutenant whilst they made their way to the escape pods.

'Two girls. Elara is too old for piggy back rides, but Saela still loves them.'

'This will perhaps make an amusing anecdote to regale them with Lieutenant.' Spock paused. 'Vulcans are not in the habit of giving 'piggy back rides'. In this you are most likely the first.'

Varth chuckled. 'I'm honoured sir.' His voice was still strained with pain.

The ship shook and groaned around them. Twice they were forced to circle back where corridors were blocked with fire or more disturbingly, tightly shut emergency bulkheads triggered by vacuum.

Spock felt the Lieutenant's grip loosening on his shoulders. He was weakening rapidly. He had lost a great deal of blood, more than 3 litres in Spock's estimation. Judging from the Lieutenant's weight, that would be close to 40% of the total volume his body contained. He would soon lose consciousness and would require transfusion. It was vital he receive medical aid as soon as possible. Ahead Spock made out the row of escape pods. He reached up and turned on his comm. 'Captain, we are at the escape pods. Lieutenant Varth has lost a great deal of blood. I recommend beaming him directly to medical bay.'

'Acknowledged Spock. We've locked onto your comm signals and will beam you out as soon as you are clear of the warp energy. Now hurry up and get out of there.'

The ship's life systems were beginning to fail. Non vital systems had long since switched off to conserve energy. There was a stillness and chill in the air around him that indicated failed atmospheric systems. Only the emergency lighting illuminated the corridor around them.

Spock helped the reeling Lieutenant Varth down from his back and steadied him against the wall as he activated the nearest escape pod. It was an old fashioned single occupancy type designed simply to jettison from the ship and emit a tracking signal. He checked that its systems were fully operational and quickly set the life systems to levels more suited to a human instead of a Ferengi. Opening the door to the pod he helped the Lieutenant strap himself in. Before Spock could seal the door Varth reached out and squeezed his arm.

'Thank you Spock.'
His eyes were half closed and his head was lolling forward from the padded rest behind him. Spock inclined his head in acknowledgement, masking irritation at the Lieutenant's poorly timed expression of gratitude, and shut the door. 2.8 seconds later the pod automatically triggered and fell away from the doomed ship.

He thumbed his comm. 'Varth's pod is away Captain.'

'Good work Spock. Now get out of there.' The Captain sounded quite concerned.

Swiftly Spock moved to the next pod. He checked its systems and recalibrated it for his Vulcan physiology. When he attempted to open it however, the door jammed. Spock swore softly under his breath, (in Romulan since swearing in English upset his mother and swearing in Vulcan was more or less impossible), allowing himself the indulgence since there was no one nearby to observe him. At the next pod he tried the door before checking its' systems. It was fully functional.

He was checking the oxygen supply when he felt a shudder run through the ship. There was sudden silence and darkness as all the remaining systems shut off simultaneously. Spock felt a drop in his stomach as the ship's artificial gravity failed and his feet lifted off the floor and then there was a deafening roar. He did not turn towards the sound or attempt to identify the source. He reached into the escape pod, wrapped his arm in a restraint and pulled himself within, coming to rest sideways against the padding. With his free hand he pulled at the ejection lever above the door.

The entire process took less than 2 seconds.

There was a brief pause during which he felt the jerk of the pod's locking mechanisms disengaging, though he could not hear it over the roaring that filled his ears painfully. Then he felt blistering heat and smelt something burning but before he could fully register either sensation he felt a powerful jerk as the pod shot away from the ship and the sudden icy vacuum of space at his back.

It was almost soothing after the intense blast of heat.

He exhaled fully to protect his lungs from the vacuum and shut his eyes. His eyelids lit up translucently from within at the bright explosion of the oxygen and other flammables aboard the Ferengi ship. It took 3.89 seconds for the emergency protocols of the pod to seal itself and inject an appropriate atmosphere into the small coffin like space.

Spock gasped, feeling as if it had been minutes instead of seconds since he'd last taken a breath. He was aware that the few seconds of exposure to vacuum would not have injured him significantly but he was also aware of extreme pain indicating otherwise. He began sorting through his nervous system, identifying his injuries, but found his awareness slipping. With a start he opened his eyes and realised he had been unconsciousness. His ears were ringing and he could feel the warmth of blood in his ear canals.

It was utterly silent. Not just the silence of space, he could not hear his breathing or heartbeat. He could neither hear his comm nor feel the vibration of noise from it against his chest. Weakly he reached up only to find it gone. His uniform was torn and melted beneath his fingers. Vaguely he supposed he had been caught in the initial explosion. It seemed his escape had come at the last possible moment. As it was his injuries were severe. Without his comm giving off his location, it would take some time for the enterprise to scan the debris of the wreckage and detect his life signs.

He swallowed and attempted to place himself in a meditative trance.

Again he jerked back to consciousness. He felt like he was freezing and burning at the same time.
Shivers rocked his body violently. He tried to stop them but found he could not. This disturbed him. The escape pod had no gravity generator and he hung like a tethered balloon from where his unburnt arm was still twisted in the restraints. With great effort he shifted so he was correctly orientated, ignoring the sting of his burns as they bumped against the padding. He could see the vastness of space through the small window in the front of the pod. His eyelids felt heavy. The silence was complete, almost a noise in of itself. He could not see the Nelson, but wreckage from the Ferengi vessel was evident.

Some dark specks floated across the window. He leant back so he could focus on them. Small balls of dark liquid. The air around him was filled with them. One collided with his cheek. It was warm and wet. Of course, his blood. A tiny part of his brain was irritated at him for not realising something so obvious.

Panic rose in him. He frowned and pressed against it half-heartedly. There was no use in panicking. He had done all he could. The Nelson would locate him, most probably before he died. He felt disapproval. Suddenly he realised the panic was not his own. It was thrumming along his familial bonds. He sensed distant, cool concern from his father and intense fear from his mother. He tried to reassure her. He was confident he would be located and attempted to share that calm with her. The fear from her faded slightly as she accepted his predicament with her usual stoic nature.

The panic remained. Confusedly he reached towards it. It was neither of his parents. The path was tenuous. For an incredulous moment he wondered if it was T'Pring, if some remnant of their betrothal bond remained. Curiously he attempted to communicate with the source of the panic. To his surprise he was no longer reaching, the presence was pulling him. He smelt vanilla and jasmine. Instantly he understood. Nyota. With the last cloudy reasoning abilities of his consciousness he recalled that mind melds often resulted in a weak telepathic link. The depth of her anguish surprised him. She seemed more affected by his condition than his own mother.

Clumsily he attempted to comfort her. She responded in kind, her warmth washing over him. He felt himself sigh. Nyota Uhura, even from across the galaxy, seemed to be able to provoke profound responses in him. He was too weak to give it further thought. His current discomfort distracted him. He was cold. He could no longer regulate his body temperature or heart rate. If the Nelson did not locate him within the next few minutes he would die. He had no strong feelings about his impending demise either way. In this at least it appeared he was wholly Vulcan.

In comparison Nyota seemed to feel quite passionately on the subject. With typical human disregard for logic she seemed to be both angry at him and fearful for him at the same time. He was too exhausted to attempt to understand her complicated human emotions. A hereto undiscovered melodramatic part of him was saddened that likely the last thing he would experience before his death was Nyota Chausiku Uhura's displeasure.

She appeared to have picked up on the thought somehow because suddenly the mood of her feelings changed and he felt pure unadulterated sadness, as if she were mourning him already. He felt a curious mix of emotions at the thought. Surprise and... satisfaction. His heart rate had dropped by 27%. His body temperature was 24° celsius - hypothermic, but he didn't have the strength or will to regulate it. He stared out at the stars. Keeping his eyes open was becoming impossible.

The sadness felt from Nyota twisted slightly and became pleading. She felt his growing weakness. She did not want him to die. He wished she was near. He would prefer to be staring into her dark eyes then out at the stars. He wanted to hear her speak his name. Instead he whispered hers even hough he could not hear his words. He felt the vibration of it in his chest though.
'Nyota Chausiku.'

Star born at night.

He translated it into Vuhlkansu.

Nat'qles nash-khio'ri na'mu-yor.

A ridiculously illogical name. A beautiful name. His thoughts faded into unconsciousness once more.

He awoke at a sudden jerking movement. Pain awoke with him and he felt himself groan as it hit him. There was a bright white light above him and people bending over him. He couldn't hear anything. Impulsively he reached within himself and towards the tiny tendril of his mind that connected himself to Nyota, half expecting to find nothing, for it to have been the delusions of a dying mind. It was not. Relief poured across the galaxy from her, overwhelming him in its strength.

The pain within his body suddenly tripled as he was lifted into the air. His body twisted without his consent and he felt himself yell, but didn't hear it. Slowly he was placed onto what he assumed was a bed in the medbay. He felt movement above and around him, scanners running over his body. His eyes had closed again. Someone pulled them open and shone a light at them. He couldn't hear anything. Impulsively he reached within himself and towards the tiny tendril of his mind that connected himself to Nyota, half expecting to find nothing, for it to have been the delusions of a dying mind. It was not. Relief poured across the galaxy from her, overwhelming him in its strength.

The Vulcan part of his mind that kept track of such things informed him that his heart had stopped. He did not care. It hurt too much. The hands on his body became frantic. Another hypo was pressed against his neck. Nyota was screaming within him. His parents were reaching towards him, grasping. He slipped from their hold, falling away within himself. A vast pressure was pushing him down, away from consciousness. It was an absolute force. As undeniable as gravity.

Nyota somehow followed. She caught hold of him as his parents could not. He felt her all around him, as if her cool human arms were wrapped around him. He smelt her perfume, felt the heat of her breath against his neck and wondered if this was death. If so it was infinitely more pleasant than he had anticipated. He had never believed in heaven, in Sha-ka-ri, but here was proof of it. He settled into her impossible embrace and whispered her name. Then incredibly, despite his burst eardrums and the fact that she was 74.3 light years away from him, he heard her voice calling his name 'S'chn T'gai Spokkh!'”

She forced her way through his mind and seized control of his nervous system as he was too weak to. He vaguely felt her try and control his body, force his heart to beat and lungs to inhale. He made no effort to thwart her. Her determination impressed him.

His body tensed, his heart flinched then agonisingly clenched and began to beat a frantic tattoo against his side. He sat up gasping, his eyes wide. His vision swum with spots and blurred darkly at the edges of his sight but he could make out the medical bay of the USS Nelson. Captain Pike stared at him in shock. The ship's doctor, a middle aged human named Boyce and two nurses were waving scanners over him and pressing hyposprays in turns against his neck. His senses, his logic, returned to him in a wave.

He felt Nyota within him still. His parents were also reaching to him with relief and shock. The doctor's mouth was opening and closing as he gently pressed a palm against his shoulder indicating that he should lie down. He did so inelegantly, allowing his eyes to shut again. ‘My eardrums are damaged. I cannot hear anything.’ His throat felt raw and bloody around the words.
He heard no response, but a moment later felt the doctor inserting one of his instruments into his ear. He felt the tell-tale itch and tingle as his flesh knit itself together, then in a blissful cacophony, the noise of the Nelson returned to him, albeit in only one ear.

'.. his status Doctor?' The Captain was yelling over the din. '...Vulcan thrashing about like that?' the Romulan voice confused him for a moment before he recalled the strange Vulcan-like Romulans from the Ferengi ship. '...anything like that before!' exclaimed one of the nurses.'... burns to 32% of his body.' another nurse. There were other voices mixed in, but too confused for Spock to decipher.

'He's stabilising Captain.' Doctor Boyce replied to the Captain.

'What was that?' Captain Pike asked curiously 'Did you give him a hypo of something?'

Spock felt his grip on consciousness slipping. He felt stronger however. He could feel a drip attached to his left arm replenishing his blood loss and nurses were working over his burns with protoplasers.

'I didn't do anything sir. We were about to use direct reticular stimulation in an attempt to revive neural activity when he… woke up.' Spock let the doctor's words wash over him without giving them any thought.

'Vulcans can control their heart rate, could he have… rebooted himself?'

Spock let himself drift into sleep before the doctor could respond. He could still smell jasmine and vanilla, feel Nyota strongly within him, almost as if she were lying beside him.

He spoke her name just so he might hear it.

'Nyota.'
Chapter 18

*Nyota*

Nyota awoke at 02:12 hours in the dark of her dorm room feeling as if she was on fire and frozen at the same time. She ran her hands over her body, reassuring herself that there was no injury and the pain faded slightly, but she couldn't calm her tears. Something was terribly wrong. She cried uncontrollably, hiccuping, gasping and sobbing until her ribs ached.

She curled on her bed for several long minutes attempting to understand what was happening. She couldn't remember what she'd been dreaming about, something about Spock, but that was hardly unusual. She hadn't felt ill that day and she'd eaten pasta for dinner, nothing strange. There was no reason for her to suddenly be ill, but apparently she was. Her heart raced and she felt sweat beading on her skin. A sense of dread and foreboding filled her.

She was unaware how long she'd been like that, in a tearful miserable ball, trying to summon the strength to call medical, when she felt Spock. It was just as it had been on the two previous occasions he'd linked with her telepathically, except weaker, she felt only vague feelings. She'd had no idea that Vulcans, 'touch' telepaths could use their telepathy over a distance, and yet she was absolutely certain that that was what was occurring.

Spock felt different.

It had taken her only moments to realise what that difference was. He was injured. She was certain of it. The pain that had awakened her was his, the echo of it in his distant mind had her body aching. Compared to the quite mundane sense of his feelings she'd had for the week after the accident, it was far stronger. She could literally feel his injuries, his pain, and it was severe. Blind panic consumed her. Spock was hurt and far away from her. She felt it as he turned his attention towards her, noticing her presence. She reached for him, desperate to be reassured that he was not really badly injured.

To her dismay she felt only his weakness and confusion, things she'd never thought to see in Spock who was also so strong and in control. Worst of all, behind that weakness she felt his calm acceptance that he was dying. Anger coursed through her at his easy acceptance of death. Death was to be fought not welcomed! Stupid stubborn Vulcan! A fatalistic thought slipped between them, clearer than the others, he was saddened that her ire would perhaps be the last thing he felt. Instantly Nyota felt ashamed. Whatever anger she had for Spock, whilst he was gravely injured was not the time to air it. Pushing her irritation at his attitude aside, she let her deep sorrow float to the surface of her mind. She wanted him to know how much she would miss him if he died, stubborn Vulcan or not.

He seemed surprised at her feelings. She lay in her bed focusing on the small inexplicably Spock-shaped part of her mind for almost an hour. He'd slowly weakened, his thoughts growing muddled as he'd slipped in and out of consciousness. It was the most disturbing thing she had ever experienced, helplessly observing his downward spiral. Nyota wracked her brains for some way she could help him, but she wasn't even in the same quadrant of the galaxy as him, the neutral zone was over 70 light years from Earth. She was helpless, only the USS Nelson could help him. All she could do was lay there and feel him die. She cried until she had no more tears.

Her body tensed as what she felt from him changed abruptly - the soft gnawing agony suddenly sharp and jarring in its intensity. She gasped at the sudden stabbing pain. It was blinding in its intensity. Spock was disorientated and Nyota realised that he'd been beamed aboard
the Nelson before he himself did in his weakened state. She felt the first stirrings of relief. If he'd made it alive onto the Nelson, it was more or less a given he'd survive. The Nelson was a Heavy-Cruiser with a fully equipped medical bay. The chances of a patient dying if they made it onto one of the biobeds while still breathing was very slim. No sooner had these reassuring thoughts occurred to her however, Nyota felt a sudden stomach churning drop in Spock's strength.

His pain had receded, no doubt as the ship's doctor began treatment, but she'd felt him recede along with it, like water down a drain. It was as if he'd simply given up. Let go. For a moment she was paralysed. She felt his heart stop, felt the agonising burning sting of the muscle trying to contract but failing. He was still conscious, barely, calmly abstracting on his death in true Vulcan fashion as the remaining oxygen in his blood was absorbed and his consciousness slipped away.

Nyota's earlier anger returned full force. How dare he just die!? She started yelling out loud as if he were next to her, not across the galaxy. Standard, Vulcan, High Vulcan, Swahili, she'd admonished him in a mix of them all. At the same time she reached for him within herself and latched onto him through the strange connection between them, imagining wrapping her arms about him and physically restraining him.

Her mind played tricks on her and she could suddenly feel him beside her, in her arms, liking a waking dream. A strange memory came to her. She recalled standing with Spock under the big cape chestnut back home in Nairobi. They'd been in their Academy uniforms, but barefoot. She'd touched him, ran a fingertip along the upturned line of his left eyebrow and carded her fingers through his black hair. She'd said something inane. Spock had looked at her with an expression that was almost sad as he responded. 'Nyota.'

She was jarred from the memory of something that had never occurred by intense pain. She couldn't breathe, her chest ached as if her heart had stopped. Her body wracked with great sobs as she gasped for breath. The connection between herself and Spock was fading into nothing. Desperately she called out a final time within her mind, using a name she didn't even remember learning./Spock! S'chn T'gai Spokkh!/ It was a demand. He would live. He was not allowed to die. She would not let him. She recalled him reaching into her, dimming her pain when she was injured. She copied him, pressing or was it pulling? - herself within him. She wasn't afraid, he was dying anyway, nothing she could do would make things worse. She ignored his last fading thoughts and delved beneath them to the weakening part of his mind that controlled his body.

For a split second she understood exactly what he felt, understood how Vulcans controlled their bodies. It was a revelation she ignored as she focused her human stubbornness on him. Her control was rough and without finesse. There was no logic or reason to her actions, she was driven purely by irrational emotion. She turned her anger into a force that could not be denied and commanded his heart to contract.

The reaction was instantaneous. His body obeyed her demands where his mind had given up. Her will was a mental adrenaline shot, a lightning bolt. His heart contracted painfully, sending a sluggish tide of blood through his veins and to his starving brain. There was an unsteady pause and then she felt his lungs burn as he drew in a deep breath and his heart beat struck a stuttering rhythm. Over it all she'd sensed his vague amazement. He didn't really understand what had happened. He'd been dying, his mind asphyxiating after all.

Over the next minutes his strength had returned slowly and then she'd felt him fade into a deep exhausted sleep. She realised that she was still clutching at him with her mind, holding herself so close to him she could feel the shape of his thoughts as he slept. She was utterly spent. Drained.

She let go.
It was like swimming to the top of a deep pool of water. She broke the surface and was once more a girl lying in her bed in her dorm on earth. Not a broken Vulcan on a biobed halfway across the galaxy. Her throat was dry and she felt like she'd just run a marathon. The undershirt she slept in was stuck to her skin with sweat. Her pillows and bedding had been kicked onto the floor.

Blearily she stood. The room spun. She stayed still for a moment, a hand resting against the wall and waited for her vertigo to settle. After it calmed a little she made her way into the small bathroom that adjoined the dorm room. She pulled off her sweat soaked clothes and stepped into the shower. Her body quaked with feverish shivers. She could almost imagine steam coming off her overheated skin as the cool water beat down on her. Twenty minutes later she was still there, sitting on the cool tiles and leaning against the glass door.

Her thoughts felt strange and fuzzy, as if she'd been drugged or hadn't slept in days. The water was a comforting pressure against her skin. She tried to sort through what had happened. A sceptical part of her was tempted to dismiss the entire ordeal as delirium, perhaps induced by a sudden fever, but the emotional exhaustion she felt was real and she could still almost sense him. She didn't have the mental control of a Vulcan but she could feel that strange connection to him within her mind, like something glimpsed out of the corner of her eye.

She gave up and continued to sit slumped in the corner of the shower almost dozing. Eventually she stood and shut the water off. She dried herself, ignoring her tangled hair and wrapped herself in her bathrobe. She stumbled out into her room and opened the bottom drawer of her dresser.

A grey Starfleet instructor's jacket sat neatly folded in front of her. It had been sitting there since her injury what seemed like eons ago. She stared at it for a long time before taking hold of it and crawling into bed. It still smelt faintly of his aftershave.

She awoke late the next morning, Spock's uniform under her head like a pillow. Gaila hadn't returned to their room, but since it was the weekend that wasn't unusual.

She lay dozing for a few minutes before the events of the night before flooded back to her. Her mind was clear again and she tried to understand from her fresh perspective. She drew a blank.

Lieutenant Commander Spock had been gravely injured, his heart had stopped, and somehow she had felt it. She hadn't been seriously injured, but Spock had used a Vulcan mind meld on her when she was unconscious. She'd thought herself dreaming at the time, but she remembered vividly how real it had seemed at the time. He had been able to speak to her within her dreams. And then later, when she was conscious, the feel of his mind joined with her own had been beyond any intimacy she'd ever experienced and it hadn't even been sexual. Just thinking about it made her heart beat faster and her mouth feel dry. She could almost feel the cool pressure of his fingertips pressed against her face and the sharpness of his mind brushing hers. The closest thing she could compare it to was a hug, but entwining their minds instead of bodies. It was a pathetic comparison, but the closest she could think of.

And of course after the meld she'd noticed things. She recalled her aversion to meat for a few days. And looking back, she could see he'd been aware of her thoughts to some degree when he'd
stopped by her room in the hospital. He'd known she was thirsty without her saying a thing. But these obvious effects had died off within a week, soon after he'd asked to touch her hand and she'd had to explain her affection to him, but other things remained. When next she'd spoken it, her High Vulcan had been suddenly perfect and then later as the weeks passed she'd realised his stoic Vulcan poise was transparent to her. She'd been able to pick up his mood from the tiniest of tells. Tension in his shoulders, the speed with which he blinked, tones within his voice that she'd never noticed before… Something had changed between them after the accident. Some permanent side effect.

Her hair hung smoothly about her shoulders.

Impulsively she activated her personal computer and accessed the Academy subspace communications system. 'Computer: record message. Greetings Lieutenant Commander Spock.' She paused to take a breath and compose herself slightly. 'I understand thy reasons for accepting thy post on the Nelson and do not question your decision.' True enough, she might have done the exact same thing in his position. 'But thou should have informed me.' Yes. That was why she was angry at him. Vulcan High-handedness. 'Professor Voss is proving interesting to assist and is continuing your work on the Enterprises' long range sensor array.' She spoke in a mix of high and standard Vulcan. Subspace messages sent through Starfleet relays could be read by anyone, she didn't want any bored communications personnel stumbling onto the more personal parts of her message. She paused, trying to think how best to frame her real inquiry. Blunt and to the point was probably the best. Human subtlety would be less embarrassing, but would most likely only confuse Spock.

'There are matters I would have thee explain to me. I felt thy heart cease to beat. I felt thy last breath. I would know that thou art recovered…' She tried to think of how to ask him about her other suspicions, but couldn't bring herself to voice them, even in a dialect as little known as High Vulcan. 'I feel thee still. message ends.' There. Hopefully her cryptic words and inexplicable perfect accent would be a reminder and question enough of its own.

Before she could second guess herself, she forwarded the message to Spock's Starfleet routing address.

*Spock*

According to his internal clock, Spock had been asleep for 16 hours and 14 minutes… his trail of thought paused. Or was it 17 minutes?... he was uncertain. This unsettled him slightly. Ignoring his confusion he opened his eyes and took in his surroundings.

He was in the medbay. A nurse took note of his consciousness and quickly left the room.

The events that led to his presence in the medbay returned to him. Had he not experienced them first hand he would have doubted their authenticity. Somehow Nyota Uhura had been able to manipulate his bodily functions from Earth. It should have been impossible. The depth of connection he had felt as he was dying should not have been possible outside of a mind meld. He did not understand how such a thing could have occurred. Experimentally he reached towards the part within him that he'd sensed her from. It was there. Real. A bond. He resisted the urge to reach towards her through it.

Now that he was free from injury and his mind was clear, he felt delayed disbelief at the link. Small connections could be formed via mind meld, but what he felt within himself, whilst still weak, should not be there. He had no explanation for it. There was none. It was illogical.

Before Spock could ruminate further on Nyota Uhura's impossible actions and her inexplicable
presence in his mind, the nurse returned with Doctor Boyce at his side. The doctor swiftly crossed
the room to stand at Spock's side.

‘How are you feeling Lieutenant Commander?’ He was passing a handheld scanner over him and
glancing at the display behind him.

‘I feel adequately recovered doctor.’ Spock responded.

The doctor looked at him in interest. ‘I am pleased to hear that. Your condition when you were
beamed aboard yesterday was… critical.’ Spock inclined his head in acknowledgement.

Boyce continued. ‘Your file identifies you as half human, but you recovered as quickly as any full
Vulcan I have encountered.’

‘Hybrid is a more accurate term. My physiology predominantly Vulcan.’ Spock flexed his arms.
The skin on his left hand felt strangely tight.

‘Your skin will feel a little strange for a few days. You had second and third degree burns to most
of your left side. Healing burns of that strength with the protolaser tends to leave the skin itchy
and sensitive. I've already administered kelotane, but you'll need to take an additional dosage every
12 hours for the next six days to heal the skin completely.’

The door to medbay slid open and the Captain and Lieutenant Commander Robbins made their
way inside.

The Captain smiled at Spock. ‘And how is our patient Doctor Boyce?’

‘My scans show near complete recovery. I should be able to clear him for a return to duty within
three days.’ he responded.

Captain Pike clapped his hands together. ‘Excellent!’ he took up position at Spock's bedside. ‘You
gave us quite a scare Spock. You heart stopped you know.’

‘Three minutes.’ Interjected the doctor absently.

The captain looked at him curiously. ‘Three minutes what, doctor?’

‘My heart stopped for three minutes sir.’ Spock responded on his behalf.

The doctor nodded and Captain Pike raised an eyebrow. ‘You counted Spock? Was that some weird
Vulcan… thing then? Did you start your own heart up again?’

Spock thought on Nyota and felt himself blush. ‘Negative sir.’

‘Well then what in the devil happened? One minute you were dead next you were sitting up and
talking to yourself.’ The captain frowned in confusion. ‘The doc had no idea what the heck you'd
done.’

Spock felt he owed his Captain at least a partial expression. ‘You are aware of the familial
telepathic bonds between Vulcans sir?’

Pike tilted his head. ‘Vaguely.’

Vague was sufficient, Spock had no desire to give an in depth explanation of such a personal thing.
‘I am not entirely sure myself, but I believe it was to do with one of those bonds. It was a most
unusual experience.’
'Ah, so that's who you were talking to?' The captain asked.

Spock felt his blush deepen. His ears felt exceedingly warm. He'd been talking in his delirium? His focus had been entirely on Nyota. What had he said? Before he could frame an appropriate response his Captain continued. 'We couldn't even tell what language you were talking. It wasn't Vulcan.'

Spock restrained the urge to let out a sigh of relief. 'I am afraid I do not recall Captain.'

Pike waved a hand dismissively. 'It doesn't matter now Spock, the main thing is you are better.' He smiled. 'And I've been in contact with Starfleet Admiralty and your promotion to Commander has been approved effective immediately.'

Spock felt his eyes widen in surprise. A promotion as a result of his near fatal intentional misinterpretation of his captain's orders was not an outcome he had considered.

Lieutenant Commander Robbins snorted. 'Told you he wouldn't have even considered it Captain. Spock here is too honest for his own good. Looks like drinks are on your tonight.'

'You're actions went far beyond the call of duty Spock, surely you expected I would put you forward for promotion?' Spock could tell that not only was the Captain honestly confused, he was hoping Spock would agree with him and he'd win his wager with his second in command.

'I must admit that the thought did not occur to me captain.' Spock responded.

'You nearly died!' The captain exclaimed.

'Technically he did die sir.' Lieutenant Commander Robbins pointed out cheerfully.

'That's right! Technically I'm promoting you posthumously!'

Spock raised an eyebrow sceptically. Rather than continue the pointless discussion he distracted the captain with a line of conversation he was far more interested in. 'What of the Romulans sir? Are they in fact, Romulans or Vulcans?'

Instantly Pike and Robbins' faces became serious.

'Quite the mystery there Spock. The doctor's scans revealed they are a distinct species to Vulcans, despite their looks, though he's of the opinion you share some distant common ancestry - but he'd need a more sophisticated lab to probably compare your genome sequencing. Evidentially physically you are near identical, but there are several marked divergences, especially in your brains. They don't appear to have any of the mental abilities of your people. They are more like humans in that respect.' The captain looked pensive. 'Those children are undoubtedly Romulans. We have yet to hear back from Starfleet on what we are to do with them. Apparently the Diplomatic Corps is reaching out to the Empire to arrange something.' He sighed. 'Hopefully soon, they are damned rowdy. I've had to lock them in their quarters, they knocked out their guards and escaped last night.'

'Fascinating. Vulcan history is well documented since the time of awakening 20 centuries ago. It is most intriguing to think our race divided into two distinct evolutionary trees at some point prior to that.' He recalled the words of the eldest Romulan child. 'And I believe the Romulans may have already been aware of this. One of the children called me a 'lost heretic', and implied marked familiarity, and dislike, for Vulcans.'

Pike shook his head. 'Be sure and include that in your report Spock.' He paused. 'I wonder if this
was the real reason we never saw a Romulan during the war last century? That all contact was over subspace comm with no visual or face to face meetings? They were well aware of our dealings with Vulcans.'

'That would be a logical assumption captain. Such information would have provided useful tactical advantages.'

'Spies.' Robbins interjected. 'A Vulcan would be the perfect cover. Your inability to lie and dedication to logic and reason puts you above suspicion.'

'Precisely.'

The captain sighed. 'And now they've sown seeds of doubt. Instead of being above suspicion Vulcans will now be the focus of it.'

Spock tilted his head. 'Perhaps intentional? Though a convoluted and unlikely plan. There would have been more demoralising ways to reveal this information. Allowing the discovery of a Romulan spy in some position of power or influence for example.'

Pike nodded. 'I agree. Three half-starved urchins doesn't really fit with Romulan style. It does, however, fit perfectly with Ferengi. I wonder if the Romulan's ticked off the Ferengi Alliance somehow?'

Of the scenarios outlined the Ferengi intentionally revealing the truth as an act of revenge did seem the most plausible.

The doctor reappeared. 'You need to let the Lieutenant Commander…'

'It's full Commander now doctor, don't pretend you weren't listening in from the next room.' Interjected Pike with a smile.

'…The Commander should rest now sir.' finished the doctor.

Pike smirked. 'Very well.' He gripped Spock's shoulder with easy affection. 'Rest up there Commander Spock.'

Spock felt a small twinge of pleasure at his new title. Commander Spock.

He allowed himself a very small smile.
Nyota checked her messages religiously over the next few days. Every time her comm chimed only to be a casual message from a friend or family member she felt her frustration grow. She was aware that messages took some time to reach the Romulan Neutral Zone, but not days. There were plenty of relay stations along the route. Spock had to have received her message by now and had chosen to ignore it.

She spent her days both distracted and irritated by Spock. Her nights were also disrupted. She did not always dream of him, but inevitably when she awoke it was to the sense that he had been beside her moments earlier, that he had left the room just as she returned to consciousness. It was maddening and she had no idea if it was something she was imagining or some new weird Vulcan thing.

A week had passed when her comm awoke her sometime after midnight.

Gaila rolled over and groggily muttered 'Uh! Ny! Turn that off! I'm trying to sleep.'

Nyota quietly apologised but went over to the console. A sub space message.

/Cdt Uhura 698728_StrFlt Acdmy_SF_Earth /Cmdr Spock 456987_U.S.S. Nelson/

Just reading his name made her heat skip a beat. She stared at it for a few seconds, almost afraid to open it. She noticed that his routing address was different. He was a full Commander now, not Lieutenant Commander. Apparently he'd been promoted. Running away from her had panned out well for him career wise it seemed. She wondered how exactly he had been injured.

She glanced at the routing information. It had bounced of half a dozen different listening stations across the Beta and Alpha quadrants. She pouted. It would have taken perhaps a day or two for the message to reach earth. Perhaps she could forgive the length of time his response took. Depending on the contents of his message of course.

Glancing at her roommate, she picked up her headset and routed the audio through it so as not to disturb her.

The loading icon flickered briefly and then Spock filled the screen. Nyota felt her breath catch. Unconsciously one of her hands had risen to clutch at her throat. She felt a wave of relief, longing and annoyance well up within her. He was wearing a red uniform and looked perfectly poised and calm. As always. However, his hair had been clipped short and the skin along his neck, across his cheek and down the line of his jaw on the left side of his face was a shade paler than usual. It was hard to see with the resolution of the image, but Nyota assumed he had been burnt and his skin had not yet recovered completely. Otherwise he appeared healthy. Not at all like someone who'd been dead for a few minutes not a week previously.

'Cadet Uhura. I apologise for my delayed response to your message. The ship's doctor insisted I remain within medical for 3 days, although I was capable of returning to my duties 32 hours and 17 minutes after my initial admittance.' She smiled at his obvious annoyance. 'I am pleased that you are assisting Professor Voss and trust you are aware that my decision to leave the Academy in no way reflects any failure on your part in your duties as my assistant. If the manner of my reassignment gave you reason to think otherwise I apologise. I realise now I should perhaps have
informed you of my decision prior to my departure.' Nyota read between the lines. It seemed like he was apologising for not telling her he was leaving, and perhaps, that he held himself responsible for the… 'incident'.

'Lieutenant Vanka has been sending Captain Pike weekly missives updating him as to the Enterprise's construction and she seems a capable manager. I trust she will be of more assistance to Professor Voss and yourself than... Sparcs.' Nyota felt her eyebrows rise. A flicker of emotion, anger, had crossed Spock's features and she had never heard him refer to someone purely by last name without title or honorific before. The muscles in his jaw flexed visibly for a moment, but when he continued his voice was as serene as ever. 'With regards to the unusual events surrounding my injury, I fear I cannot offer you a satisfactory explanation. It would appear that when I melded with you during the accident at the Academy, a telepathic bond was forged between us. This is most... unusual. For non-blood relatives a Vulcan elder is usually required for such a bond to form. It is merely speculation, but my human heritage and your concussion may have played a part in this. I assure you had I known such a thing could occur, I would never have presumed to take such an action. I apologise for the distress this has caused you. It should be simple for a Vulcan Elder sever the bond and I shall look further into the matter.' He paused then switched from standard Vulcan to High Vulcan. 'I thank thee myt'hyla. Without thy aid I would be dead.'

The message ended and Spock's figure was frozen upon the screen. Nyota stared at him for a long time thinking over all he had said. It was a surprisingly long and open communication for him. In her experience he was quite evasive and kept conversation to a bare minimum.

She played it back again. On one hand she was relieved that whatever it was that linked her mind to Spock's could be removed, yet… as a human, the idea of a telepathic bond was quite beautiful. If it were a bond of friendship only, if she and Spock didn't have a mess of other complicated and dangerous emotions between them, she would have wanted to keep it. Or, a little voice whispered from the back of her mind, if you were more than his friend, more than his t'hyla, If you weren't a cadet and you could... She pushed the traitorous thought away. Whatever Spock felt for her wasn't something she understood. He liked her, of that she was certain, he clearly valued her friendship about as much as a Vulcan could. And he was obviously attracted to her, but he was a Vulcan, he didn't - couldn't love her in a way she would understand, in a human way, and it was clear he had no wish feel such emotions in any case.

He must have felt the depth of her feelings for him when he'd been injured, yet he addressed her carefully by rank and referred to her only as his friend. She had to admit she'd been hoping for some romantic declaration from him. Stupid. She felt a wave of intense sadness. Why did she have to love someone incapable or unwilling to return her feelings? Whatever Spock felt for her it was plain he intended to deny it. After all, feeling anything for her, a human would be illogical. No doubt he would use all that Vulcan control of his to pretend he felt nothing.

They would get the bond removed, she would graduate and get a post on the Enterprise... and hopefully her feelings for Spock would fade with time. Maybe she'd be able to look back on this whole situation as nothing more than an amusing anecdote from her academy years. Unlikely. She'd been trying to ignore her feelings for Spock for over two years and they'd only gotten stronger. And if she received the post she wanted on graduation she'd be serving on the same ship as him. If she ever made it to the bridge... the communications console was right next to the science station.

She felt the burning prick of tears behind her eyelids. It wasn't fair. She should have never kissed him. Unrequited love she could handle, whatever this mess was, she couldn't.
He could not meditate.

What little peace he had found since boarding the *Nelson*, and that had been little enough, had abandoned him. He found himself unable to sleep or meditate. It had been difficult for him to maintain his full attention upon his duties during his last two duty shifts. He had therefore devoted his entire 12 hour rest period in an attempt to do just that. Rest. As it was he had spent an unprecedented 8 hours trying first to sleep, then to meditate. He had had no success in either endeavour.

Although it was a human emotion, he found himself increasingly frustrated.

It appeared his lack of rest was affecting his ability to maintain complete control of his emotions. The phrase he believed his mother would have utilised to describe his mood was 'grumpy'.

Restraining the urge to throw the fire pot at the wall, Spock stood from where he had been sitting before his asenoi. Four hours remained until he was due to report for his next shift. He was uncertain if he would be able to perform his duties to his usual standards if he did not get some sort of rest before then.

He glanced at his bed. Sleep would refresh him more than meditation, but his previous attempts had merely resulting in him lying awake attempting not to think of Nyota Uhura. It seemed impossible for him to clear her from his thoughts. He would maintain a level of relaxation and find himself abstracting on some memory relating to her, like the exact texture of her hair. No sooner did he banish that thought and clear his mind once more, another would occur to him. The timbre of her voice when she laughed perhaps. There seemed to be an infinite supply of Nyota Uhura related thoughts in his head.

Decisively he turned on his heel and left his cabin.

He was dressed for meditation, a robe and loose pants over soft simple shoes. Usually he would not walk the decks out of uniform, but he found himself unconcerned on this occasion. If any crew member found anything odd in his appearance, none commented. He received salutes and polite greetings as usual. He made his way to the ship's gymnasium resolutely.

He bypassed the treadmills and other exercise machinery and headed towards the sparring mats. Two human crew members were sparring in a style Spock identified as some sort of variant of Chinese wing chun. Normally this would have been of at least passing interest to him, but he found he had as little curiosity as he had patience.

There were several terran style punching bags provided nearby. Spock usually did not bother with them, instead practising suus mahna exercises designed to maintain muscle tone without aide or opponent, but he deemed them suitable given his current mood. He removed his robe and toed off his shoes, placing them beside the neatly folded garment. He stretched only briefly before venting his frustrations upon the nearest punching bag.

He did not follow a pattern of exercise as per his usual routine, instead he simply hit the bag as hard and as often as he could in a long stream of kicks and punches. His arms and legs soon burned as lactic acid built up in his muscles. His breath grew laboured and he felt a flush to his skin. He maintained his extreme level of physical activity however. His goal was to reach a level of physical exhaustion that would enable him to sleep for a few hours prior to his next shift.

After 37 minutes he noted that his hands were becoming quite sore but ignored the sensation. He
continued for a further 12 minutes, at which point a spinning kick unexpectedly caused the synthetic material at the top of the bag to rip. The high density cord which tethered it to the ceiling tore free and the heavy bag hit the mats 3.6 metres to Spock's left and rolled across the training room floor to come to a rest near the two humans.

Both stared at him with expressions Spock could not be bothered attempting to decipher. He regarded them evenly. 'My apologies.' He said, indicating the bag.

One of the humans kicked at it with his feet. The other was looking at the swinging cord to which it had formally been attached. The former spoke. 'Um, no problem sir.'

Spock was aware that the appropriate response to having damaged Starfleet property would be to report it and clean up after himself as it were, but now that he had stopped moving the longed for exhaustion was upon him, finally. He stepped into his shoes and pulled on his robe, not even bothering to fastening it.

It took him only 1 minute and 38 seconds to return to his quarters. If he'd been paying more heed to his surroundings he would have noticed that his appearance seemed to attract significantly more attention than usual, particularly from the female crewmembers.

He did not bother removing his robe or getting under the cover of his bed, he simply stretched out and cleared his mind of all thoughts. Although Vulcans didn't sweat he would have liked a brief shower to cleanse himself after his exercise, but was too tired. With a great sense of anticipation Spock let his eyes shut, his thoughts already slowing as he surrendered to sleep. Sleep was moments away when he realised he could smell perfume. Terran perfume. Unconsciously he turned on his side as if to get closer to the scent. Jasmine and vanilla.

He sat up.

He wanted to scream in frustration. He was exhausted. His body was no longer functioning effectively, he was severely sleep-deprived. He needed sleep and yet even in his current state he was plagued by thoughts of Nyota Uhura. Climbing from his bed he made use of his small bathroom and showered. He allowed himself three additional minutes under the warm water in an effort to try and soothe his mind.

Donning clean pants he returned to his bed. He lay and pressed his hands into a meditative position below his chin, index and middle finger pointed towards his head and his other fingers curled against his palms. He ran through a breathing exercise he had not needed to use since he was a teenager but had been using a great deal of late.

Sleep teased the edges of his mind but whenever he sunk towards it he would find himself thinking of her. He wasted an additional 32 minutes he could have utilised resting. In desperation he gave up trying to sleep. He just lay on his bed with his eyes closed. He gave up trying to control his thoughts. He spent 7.3 minutes in detailed review of Nyota Uhura's eyes. Namely the exact mix of colours in their irises, the manner in which she applied cosmetics to them, the degree with which they widened when she was amused or surprised and in more depth how her eyelids lowered slightly when she was aroused. From there his mind quickly jumped to her mouth. Her lower lip was 30% larger than her upper lip and in profile protruded an additional 3 millimetres. Both lips were of equal softness however. Of course once he started thinking about her lips it was inevitable that his thoughts would turn to kissing her. He was uncertain of how long he spent in contemplation of that precisely.

He was awoken by the Alpha Shift 10 minute alarm.
He inhaled deeply as his body returned to consciousness bringing cool recycled ship air and something sweet and pleasant into his lungs. His face turned towards the wall of his cabin and his left hand reached across the narrow bed as if he were searching for… His thoughts sharpened as he came fully awake.

He was alone of course, and yet he had the illogical sense that there had been someone beside him. Was there a hint of Nyota Uhura's perfume in the air? No. Illogical. Impossible. He pushed himself upright and swung his legs over the side of his bed. He inhaled again. He could smell nothing save the usual scents of his quarters. Or was there something lingering? A few floral notes? He frowned. He could not be sure. He had never been unsure about something so concrete before. Either there was a scent to be detected by his olfactory senses or there was not. There was no such thing as a hint of a scent. He was distracted from his introspection by a shifting within his mind.

He froze on the edge of his bed.

The bond to Nyota Uhura was 'open'. He could feel her within him. She was asleep. Clearly he had reached for the bond in his own sleep for he had no recollection of having done so consciously. He had just 'felt' her shift in her sleep 74.2 lightyears away. It would be early morning in San Francisco, 04:03 hours. He knew he should pull back from her, but he found himself loathe to do so. He had 3 minutes to wash his face, brush his teeth and dress for his shift. He left his quarters with 4 minutes until he was due at his post. Nyota's sleeping mind brushed comfortingly against his own as he did so. As he entered the bridge he tried to force himself to sever the connection. He could not.

1 hour and 48 minutes later he felt her begin to waken. Only then, when faced with her consciousness and the fact that she would be aware of him, did Spock find the strength to sever the connection. It was not so much strength, but cowardice.

He felt more rested than he had since leaving the medical bay and Dr Boyce's sleeping pills, but he also felt a vague sense of guilt. He resolved to have the bond removed as soon as possible, for both Nyota and his own sakes. He would have to contact his father.

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*Nyota*

Nyota buried herself in her studies. It seemed as though everything else had taken on a hollow pointlessness. Choral group did not bring her the simple happiness and enjoyment it used to. Gaila's antics didn't make her blush and laugh. Food held little interest. Previously she'd had a healthy appetite, the smell of good food after a busy day had always made her mouth water, now it was an abstract thing, hunger.

She'd spent all afternoon working on her mid-year project for her Interspecies Ethics class with her study group. She'd skipped lunch and knew that she should be ravenous.

Instead she sat next to Gaila in the cafeteria pushing a piece of vegetarian lasagne around her plate as it cooled. Every now and then she would take a bite, chew slowly and laboriously then swallow. It was a chore.

'Ny, you need to eat. You're getting too skinny.' Gaila admonished her lightly, but she'd been making similar comments for a few weeks and Nyota knew she was correct.

She sighed. 'I know, I'm just not hungry.'

Her roommate frowned. 'Maybe you've picked something up? You should go get checked out at
medical. Just in case.'

'It's probably just stress. It's normal. Lots of people get stressed in their last year.'

Gaila raised an eyebrow sceptically. 'I'm tempted to agree it's stress Ny, but it certainly isn't normal or related to your studies. You're on top of all your work and getting amazing grades as per usual.'

She had a point. Nyota didn't want to talk about it though. She sighed again and took a bite of lasagne. It tasted terrible.

'Look, it's probably nothing, but what happened last month certainly wasn't normal. You should get yourself checked out, just so you know everything is fine.' Gaila sounded honestly worried.

'There is nothing wrong with me physically Gaila. I'm just…' She paused. '… moping. Depressed. Whatever. I'll get over it.'

The Orion girl pursed her lips and switched to her native tongue for privacy. 'We don't know that, you aren't Vulcan. You aren't telepathic! What you said happened - that shouldn't have been possible. There could be side effects we don't know about. You could be brain damaged or something!'

Nyota raised an eyebrow, a tiny smile playing on her lips. 'Brain damaged? You were praising my grades a minute ago.'

'I'm not joking Ny. Please go get yourself checked over. I'll keep nagging until you do otherwise.' Gaila pleaded.

Nyota chewed on a mouthful of cold pasta. It wasn't 'ash in her mouth' as the saying went, but it was pretty close. She supposed she might as well humour Gaila. A check up and med-scan would only take maybe half an hour out of her day. 'Fine. I'll make an appointment for a check-up.'

Her best friend smiled. 'Goody! I'll come along.' She dropped back into Yrevish. 'I have this weird itch I want to get checked out.'

Nyota snorted into her orange juice slightly.

Gaila glared. 'It's not funny! I think that Rigelian guy gave me something last week!'

They went to the medical centre together two days later. Gaila's appointment was a few minutes before Nyota's so she'd disappeared leaving Nyota in the waiting room alone.

Her name had been called on time and she'd soon been seated on a biobed with an attractive blonde cadet standing before her. Like all the medical cadets she was a few years older than Nyota. Before joining Starfleet Medical civilian qualifications were required, so the doctors, nurses and medics at the Academy were as a rule five to ten years older than the other department cadets.

'Good Morning Cadet Uhura, I am Cadet Chapel.' The older woman gave her a warm smile. She was perhaps 30 and had very striking blue eyes. 'What can I do for you today?'

'Well I think it's just stress, but I've been really tired and run down lately. I'd like a check-up.' Uhura said.
Chapel was making notes on her PADD. 'Can you describe in detail how you feel 'run-down' cadet?'

Nyota sighed. 'I'm tired all the time. I've been having a little bit of trouble sleeping. And my appetite is non-existent so I've lost weight and my hair's getting thin.'

The nurse nodded. 'That does sound like good old fashioned stress, but better to be safe than sorry.' She indicated the biobed. 'Lay back and I'll take a full scan.'

Nyota did as directed, closing her eyes as the display along the wall behind her beeped and twittered as it recorded her readings.

'Well you're anaemic, that's probably because you aren't eating well, and that will be exuberating the issue. I'll give you a hypo for that. Otherwise your readings look normal Cadet Uhura.'

Nyota nodded, the results were hardly surprising. 'Thank you Cadet Chapel.'

'I'll go get that shot. Back in a moment.' The blonde nurse said as she left the room.

Nyota sat back up and looked around the boring little examination room. There was a holo advertising compulsory vaccinations for enlisted personnel and a framed print of what looked like a landscape scene from the Mars Colony. The walls were, of course, white. There was no window. She sighed.

The door triggered with a whoosh but it was Gaila not the nurse. She flashed Nyota a grin then skipped across the room to sit beside her. 'How goes it roomy?' Without waiting for a response she continued. 'You'll be thrilled to know my little problem was just an allergy.'

Nyota smiled. 'You're allergic to Rigelians? What a shame.'

The door triggered once more and Cadet Chapel re-entered. 'Okay here's the shot…' She broke off as she noticed the unexpected Orion in her examination room. Gaila grinned again. 'Hello! I'm Uhura's roommate. Just thought I'd check how she was doing. I've been worried about her you know.'

The nurse nodded. 'Oh. Well she's fine. Just a little worn down and anaemic, but I'll have her sorted out in a moment.'

Gaila smiled. 'Great! I can't wait to have my old bubbly Uhura back!' Her enthusiasm was exhausting just to watch.

Cadet Chapel approached Nyota's side and gently tilted her head to administer the hypo she was holding. There was a sharp pressure for a second and then it was gone. 'There. All done.'

'Thank you nurse.'

'Now, I want you to adjust your meal card to menu 47. If you select meals off that menu you won't have to worry about your iron levels dropping again.' the nurse instructed.

Nyota nodded.

'What about the headaches?' Gaila inquired innocently.

Nyota shot her a confused look. She hadn't been suffering unusual headaches.

Cadet Chapel looked between them. 'Cadet Uhura didn't mention headaches Cadet…'
'U'Aidat.' Gaila supplied. 'Uhura's been getting terrible headaches on top of everything else.' Nyota had no idea what Gaila was doing. 'Did her brain scan show anything?' ah. Gaila's 'brain damage' theory. Great.

The nurse frowned. 'I didn't complete a full brain scan.' She looked back at Nyota. 'Lay back on the biobed and I'll do one now.'

Gaila jumped up to her feet and Nyota lay back obediently, slightly irritated at her roommate's interference. She didn't have brain damage for god's sake. The nurse made an adjustment to the biobed and flipped down a curved scanning instrument over her face like an oversized visor. Nyota shut her eyes as it scanned over her head in a few quick passes. She didn't like getting her head scanned, it seemed much too likely she'd end up with a few fried synapses.

The nurse retracted the scanner and she sat back up. Chapel was referring between the display on the wall and her PADD. She was silent for almost a full minute before she gave Nyota her attention again. 'I'd like to run that scan again please Cadet. There's a small inconsistency here that could be a read error.'

Nyota acquiesced, lying down and letting the weird visor do its thing once more.

This time Chapel was frowning. 'There's some unusual brain activity in your scan Cadet.' She flicked through a few pages of information on her PADD. 'You are completely human yes?'

Nyota nodded.

'No Betazoid or Deltan in the family?'

She shook her head. 'Nope, 100% plain old human.'

Gaila asked the question she herself was dying to, 'Why? What did you find?'

Chapel pursed her lips. 'It's most likely nothing, just the pattern of brain activity is slightly different to most people's. There's nothing wrong with your brain,' she quickly added, '… It's just unusual.'

Nyota put her feet on the floor. 'Well if there's nothing wrong…'

'Hold on Cadet, headaches and unusual brain activity isn't something we can just dismiss, it could be indicative of some larger issue.'

'But my full body scan was clear?' Nyota knew exactly what it was indicative of. It was indicative of a weird Vulcan bond. Thing.

The nurse frowned at her. 'What aren't you telling me Cadet?' When Nyota remained mute she turned to Gaila.

The Orion bit her lip.

The Nurse had quite an intense stare.

Nyota sent her a warning glare.

Gaila bounced on the balls of her feet. 'She mind melded with a Vulcan!' she blurted out.

'Gaila!'

'Twice!'
'GAILA!'

'What? You did!'

The nurse's eyebrows were somewhere under her hat. 'Well…' She paused. '… that could explain the extra brain activity. The headaches however…'

'There are no headaches. My roommate was being nosey. She just wanted you to scan my head.' Nyota had her arms crossed and was glaring at the sheepish looking Gaila. 'Can you reassure her that I'm just stressed? That I don't have brain damage and that my head isn't going to explode?'

The nurse carefully looked over the readings once more. 'You certainly don't have brain damage. If anything the extra brain activity indicates extra synaptic stimulation. If you are in no pain?'

'None. No headaches at all.' Nyota reassured her.

The nurse nodded. 'Then yes, I'm quite confident you are perfectly fine. If it is indeed the cause, Vulcan telepathy is as a rule quite benign.' She paused. 'Although I've not know of any human to be on the receiving end of a full mind meld.' She gave Nyota an odd look. Nyota cursed Gaila silently. The last thing she needed was people curious about her. One glance at her Academic record would reveal pretty plainly exactly who the Vulcan she'd melded with was. 'When did the meld take place incidentally?'

'Last year.' Nyota responded vaguely.

The nurse made a note on the PADD. Great. It was in her medical records now. She shot Gaila an acidic glare and mouthed 'thanks' at her.

'Would you agree to return for a follow up scan? I'd be interested in seeing how long lasting the effects were.' The nurse continued.

Nyota got to her feet. 'Um, maybe. I've got a lot going on right now though nurse. Mid-terms. Projects… I'm not sure I have time to help you with your… research.'

'Oh, of course.' The woman smiled, 'The last thing I want to do is stress you out even further Cadet.' She snapped her PADD off. 'Now, make sure you stick to that high iron menu, number 47 remember, and I'll prescribe you a mild sleeping aid. Try and get a little exercise along with extra sleep and iron in your diet and you should feel better in no time.'
Chapter 20

*Spock*

The *USS Nelson* and Captain Pike played reluctant host to the three young Romulans for a total of six weeks. Their existence was something of a diplomatic incident. Starfleet seemed at a loss and the matter was passed onto the Federation Diplomatic Corps. Several diplomats and cultural advisors specialising in Romulus came aboard and somehow managed to make the situation even more complicated than before. In response to Doctor Boyce's preliminary findings and the marked similarity between the Romulans and their own species, Vulcan High Command had sent a team of scientists and physicians. They were relentless in their efforts to run tests and examine the Romulans.

The two groups did not see eye to eye.

Spock attempted to avoid the entire situation, however Pike was eager to do likewise and he and Number one were often drawn into tedious meetings and talks by their Captain. He claimed he required Spock as a translator, even though with the Diplomatic Corps. party aboard there were several others fluent in the three Romulan dialects available.

As such he found himself sitting beside the Captain as an unlikely mediators in what would be the final, he hoped, such meeting. Three Vulcans, two scientists and a physician, were in attendance, as were five Federation Diplomats and four of the *USS Nelson*'s security detail. Number one was on the bridge. Spock had to remind himself that Vulcans did not experience jealousy.

"But what were they doing so far out? They're children, not soldiers, what were they doing near the front line so speak?" One of the Diplomats, an Andorian, was asking. His point was valid and the Romulans themselves certainly hadn't been forthcoming with what they were doing in a Ferengi Brig in the middle of the Neutral Zone, but Spock failed to see how repeating the same question was getting them closer to an answer.

"A valid concern, but we still cannot agree to your request." The senior Vulcan present, a Professor who sat upon the Vulcan Science Academy Council responded.

The Andorian huffed. 'Why not? It's a simple thing!'

Captain Pike shifted in his seat. He, like many present, wasn't comfortable with this particular subject of debate. Spock himself thought it a distasteful thing to argue over but of course gave no indication of that.

The Vulcan Professor's face was just as impassive. 'You are not Vulcan, you know not what you speak of. What you ask is impossible.' The explanation was concise, but Spock could see that the Andorian and some of the other non-Vulcan's present did not understand. He wondered if he ought to put it into terms that they would. He had after all, quite a lot of experience communicating effectively with non-Vulcans. He had no desire to be drawn from observer to participant however.

"Impossible! It would take a few seconds!" The Andorian responded louder than was necessary given the size of the room.

The Captain made the choice for him. 'Look Dignitary Sharn,' The Andorian turned eyes and antennae towards the Pike. '… If Professor Tapok says it's impossible then it is impossible. Vulcans don't lie. Let's focus on alternatives.'
Instead of placating diplomat the Captain's words seemed to anger him further. 'Oh don't give me that rubbish! Vulcans certainly lie when it suits them. They're hiding something. There is no other reason not to perform a mind meld on one of the Romulans.'

'We are present aboard the Nelson to study the Romulan's physiology. We are scientists, not politicians. We have no other purpose.' Professor Tapok sounded as unruffled as ever but Spock could tell he was becoming irritated by the Andorian. Their species had never been overly fond of one another.

'You're happy enough taking blood samples and running endless tests on them, why not a mind meld? It hardly differs!' Dignitary Shran retorted. His four companions seemed to be arguing quietly amidst themselves.

He deemed it appropriate to intervene before the situation could sink any closer to a full argument. 'Dignitary Shran.' He had not spoken over the preceding hour of the meeting and his voice now attracted the full attention of the table. 'Are you familiar with the mechanics of a mind meld?'

The Andorian nodded.

'And you are aware that we are governed by ancient laws with regards to this act?' Spock continued.

'Laws that you can bend when the situation calls for it. The security of the Federation is surely such a situation.'

'Perhaps. However such a decision, to ignore those laws, cannot be made by you, it must be made by the Vulcan who is to perform the meld. In this you must respect that Professor Tapok has made his decision and that his reasoning is both sound and logical.'

The Andorian regarded him silently. 'What about you then? You're a Vulcan.' He turned to the Captain. 'Order the Commander to interrogate the Romulans Captain.'

Spock raised an eyebrow in surprise. Clearly he should have remained silent and let the Professor and the Diplomat continue to argue in circles. The Vulcans present were watching the exchange with great interest.

Captain Pike didn't even hesitate. 'I will do no such thing.'

Spock felt a small measure of relief, not that he had been concerned his captain would carry through with that suggestion. 'You request I perform kae'at k'lasa upon one of these Romulan children?' He asked the diplomat. 'You are aware of the meaning of this?'

'Yes! You read their thoughts without permission!' Shran responded hotly.

'A more accurate and literal translation in standard for kae'at k'lasa would be mind rape.' Spock remarked conversationally. The table quietened once more. He was aware that they would react emotionally to the term 'rape' and had used it intentionally to stress the seriousness of what the diplomat suggested. 'As you say, these are not soldiers, they are children. Children who have been gravely mistreated already. I am confident you will not find any of my race who would agree to what you suggest, because to do so would be abhorrent to anyone who understood what it entailed. As you do not, your confusion with regards to this can be forgiven.'

The Andorian was still frowning but Spock did not think he would continue with his insistence. 'I'm not suggesting you hurt them.'
'By very definition that is precisely what you are suggesting.' Spock failed to see how the Andorian diplomat could not realise that having one's mind read against one's will would be anything but unpleasant.

Pike once spoke once more. 'I don't think we can put it any clearer than that for you Dignitary Shran. It's not going to happen, so let's move on shall we?' He referred to his PADD. 'Now, we will be rendezvousing with a Romulan ship in 12 standard hours and our guests will be leaving us. If anyone has anything useful to add to the discussion, now would be the time.'

The Andorian started to say something. 'Dignitary Shran. If you say one more word about mind melds or telepathy I will have you escorted to your quarters.' The Captain was no longer even trying to contain his irritation.

The rest of the meeting passed without Spock feeling obliged to speak, for which he was grateful.

Exactly 12 hours later he was present in Transporter room 2 as the Romulans were beamed onto a waiting ship. It was the first time a Romulan ship had been within visual range of a Federation ship in over a century. The moment was something of a letdown. The Romulan ship jumped to warp just 18 seconds after the transporter pad had been cleared.

Starfleet Intelligence had little to offer by way of illumination to the situation as a whole. Usually such a mystery would have captured Spock's interest entirely, it certainly had most of the crew of the *Nelson* on edge and suspicious, there were even some pointed comments about the Vulcan resemblance to Romulans. Instead matters of personal interest continued to plague him.

Sleeping remained a trial. He exhausted himself daily in the *Nelson's* gymnasium with suus mahna exercises, but had discovered the only way he was able to sleep was to reach for Nyota Uhura through their bond. When he did sleep he dreamt of her. His situation had him at a loss. On the bridge his thoughts would wander and he'd find himself, (illogically), cursing his eidetic memory as he recalled the exact feel of her lips against his or the tilt of her neck when he fist a hand in her hair.

Even worse than his irrational desires were the brief flashes of her he felt from within.

Disjointed emotions and thoughts not his own would flit across his consciousness. Worst of all was that most of what he sensed from her was sadness, or not sadness exactly, but something like it. His mother would be able to put a word to the emotion, but he could not. He *was* aware that he was the cause of this… pain Nyota felt, and the knowledge tore at him. His guilt grew daily.

He recalled that dizzy human feeling of affection she'd held for him. She had considered him a friend. A rare thing for a Vulcan and he had not repaid that affection as he should have. To this end he had dedicated no small effort to researching bonds formed during mind melds. He owed it to the cadet to free her from the undesired bond to him. Unfortunately he learnt little of any use.

He had had several stilted conversations with his father pertaining to the accidental bond, though he avoided referring to Uhura in all but the most casual, dismissive manner. He didn't *lie* to his father per say, but he omitted.

As far as Sarek was concerned his son had performed a mind meld on a student to ascertain her injuries. Spock mentioned nothing about his obsessive attraction to her or the manner in which she haunted his dreams, and he certainly didn't say anything about reciting *Keats* to her.

It had seemed perfectly reasonable at the time. Now, like many of his interactions with the cadet, thinking about it made him flush with embarrassment. He had recited *Keats* to her in High Vulcan.
About the only redeeming feature of the entire incident was the fact that he'd helped her translate a soliloquy from Macbeth and not Romeo and Juliet.

Thanks to his father's influence he had been able to arrange a meeting with a Vulcan healer at a starbase near enough to the Nelson's patrol route to enable a visit during his rostered down time some eight weeks after his brush with death.

The healer, a woman named T'Sul, was not as old as his grandmother T'Pau, (one of her venerated stature would not deign to travel so far from Vulcan to wait upon a half human Starfleet officer, even if he was her own grandson), but seemed capable and treated Spock without the distain he often encountered from his race.

'S'chn T'gai Sarek informs me you have developed an undesired bond with a human female S'chn T'gai Spohkh.' Despite the careful stress she placed on 'female', the healer's frank Vulcan was for the most part free of censure or implications of a sexual nature.

Spock willed his own voice into a mirrored calm as he knelt opposite her in the receiving room of her suite in the star base, an asenoi set on the floor between them. 'Indeed. I was unaware of the bond until I suffered a serious injury.'

The healer nodded. 'Such a thing is not unusual. A small bond formed through a mind meld unnoticed until death or great injury to either party.' She was silent for a moment. 'You will tell me of the meld you shared with the female then I will examine the bond itself.'

Spock had expected as much. The human female was a student. There was an accident at the Academy and she was injured. She was unconscious. The building was unstable and it was necessary to move her. I performed a mind meld to ascertain that this could be done without inflicting further injury.'

He paused, carefully waiting for her to take in what he had just said. To perform a mind meld without permission was highly questionable. What he had done was not kae'at k'lasa - he had made no attempt to read the cadet's thoughts - but it was still suspect. The healer seemed to sense his unease. She was silent for 12 seconds before nodding slowly. 'Given the circumstances such an action was only logical.'

Spock felt a wave of relief. Although at the time he had been certain that his actions were justified, there had been a nagging guilt within him regardless.

The healer continued. This much I was informed by your father. There were no other relevant circumstances?'

Spock hesitated. He was loathe to reveal he had performed another mind meld with the cadet, but there was no point in keeping such information from the healer. She would soon discover first hand when she inspected his mind. Hopefully he could keep the poetry recital to himself.

'The human was in great pain and it was several hours before we were evacuated. She requested I dull her pain and I did so. It may also be relevant that she was concussed.'

The healer regarded him for a long moment. 'Indeed. If you maintained a meld for an extended period of time it is not surprising a bond of some sort was formed. Did you notice any sign of this in the days following?'

Spock nodded. 'There were small incidents over the next terran week. But they stopped completely and I noticed nothing further until I was injured.'
This sounds common enough. I foresee no issue in severing it.' The healer motioned him closer. 'Come. I will inspect the bond.'

Spock rose and resumed his kneeling position next to the older Vulcan. Her fingertips were cool and dry as she confidently pressed them against his psi points. He felt her presence instantly, calm and detached, but at the same time intensely curious. He realised that she had chosen to answer his father's request for aid to satisfy her own curiosity about the mind of a human/Vulcan hybrid as much as to satisfy a sense of obligation to a member of the High Council. She made no attempt to hide this interest from him, it was honest scientific curiosity and she expected, correctly, that no insult would be taken were none was intended.

She slipped through his mind like water, flowing through him easily and leaving nothing behind. There was no sense of pressure or invasion, she made no attempt to press at the parts of his mind which were instinctually guarded. /Show me the bond./ Spock let himself sink down towards the lower parts of his consciousness where his familial bonds were anchored and she drifted down with him. He sensed her brief examination of his bond with his father and a more in depth exploration of that with his human mother and he wondered how they compared to that of full blooded Vulcans.

Of course she felt his inquiry. /Your bond with your father is diminished, but firmly rooted. Your bond with your mother is intriguing. It is as strong as that between a full blooded Vulcan mother and her child. I would be interested to observe the marriage bond between your parents. I had not thought a non-Vulcan could form such a bond./ She did not press her private interest however, and instead turned her inward attention to the weakest of the three bonds, that that linked him to Nyota Uhura.

She was silent within him for a long time. Spock could felt echoes of her internal thought processes, enough to realise how engrossed she was in her study, but he sensed little else from her. After a period of 17 minutes and 38 seconds he felt her thoughts clearly once more. /This bond is most unusual. It is far stronger than such a bond should be. If I am to be able to sever such a bond, I will need to understand how it was formed. Will you share your memories of the meld with the female?/

Wordlessly Spock thought back to the day of the explosion. He sorted through the memories, allowing the healer full access to them. It was embarrassing, however he owed it to Uhura to do all he could to ensure the bond he had unknowingly forged between them was dissolved. The healer made no comment on his obvious emotional attachment to Uhura and Spock was relieved. She carefully inspected the bond again with her new first-hand knowledge of its formation. At length she spoke within his mind. /There is more. Something occurred which strengthen the bond after its initial creation. You are attracted to this human. Have you engaged in intercourse with her?/

Spock struggled to maintain his cool detachment. The healer seemed puzzled rather than judgemental, she seemed honestly intrigued by the bond, but discussing such matters was distressing. /I have not./ It was technically true. Spock tried valiantly to not think of their encounter at the shipyard. However the memory flitted across his consciousness and the healer latched onto it. In mortification Spock relived the incident with the healer. As the memory faded he sensed her satisfaction and then she withdrew from their meld.

Spock sat back and regarded her warily. He felt naked and exposed. This woman was privy to his primitive urges with regards to Nyota Uhura. A human. His student. A completely inappropriate and illogical attachment. He could think of nothing so humiliating. She had seen proof that he was exactly what he had been ridiculed as his entire life. Less than Vulcan. A base half-breed.

To his surprise her voice held no scorn or superiority when she spoke. The bond was indeed
formed when you melded with the cadet when she was injured. This initial bond was a simple one
of a type I often encounter. However when you claimed her the bond was changed. I have
encountered similar bonds, though always between full blooded Vulcans. They are quite rare,
though becoming more common as betrothal practices become less popular amongst our race.

Spock attempted to fathom her meaning and failed. 'I am uncertain of your meaning Okosu T'Sul.'

The older Vulcan woman motioned to an assistant who had been standing off to one side. 'Tea for
Osasu Spock and myself.' When the attendant had left the room the healer gave Spock a small
smile. Spock was sure his shock at her expression registered on his face. 'In ancient times the
males of our species would fight over the females. It is generally accepted that telepathic bonding
evolved as a means of protecting females from unattached males. Our current traditions still reflect
these… barbaric origins. You formed a bond with Nyota Chausiku Uhura,' The Vulcan woman
pronounced the exotic human name carefully and with some relish, 'Albeit unwittingly. Most likely
this bond would have laid dormant as such trivial bonds do, however, a rival male attempted to
claim the female, and you responded instinctually.'

Spock was openly frowning now. 'I did not meld with Uhura during the... incident you refer to.
How could it have affected a bond between us?'

There was something like amusement in the healer's eyes, but Spock could not be sure. 'A rival
male attempted to claim the female you were bonded too. You defeated that male. You claimed the
female and she accepted you. Does this not sound familiar to you?'

When put into those terms she could well have been describing a kalifee challenge made during a
Vulcan wedding. Shame filled Spock. It had not been his time and he had behaved as if it was and
now Uhura was unwillingly tied to him.

The healer seemed to sense his feelings. 'I saw some of the illogical scorn you have suffered at the
hands of our people S'chn T'gai Spohhk. You feel they were correct in their assessment of you. They
were not. There is little difference between your mind and that of a full blooded Vulcans. I do not
sense any… deficiency within you. Your emotions are slightly different, but they are not barbaric as
you fear, you simply have more of them. You believe this situation a result of a weakness of your
human blood when your actions were those of a Vulcan, not a human. It was your human side that
prevented you from slipping into plak'tow after your bonded was attacked. You would surely have
killed the male and possibly injured others had that occurred.'

Your bonded. The term gave Spock an odd nervous thrill, part pleasure part dread. He was
uncertain what he felt. On the one hand he was embarrassed that the healer had seen his innermost
desires, but on the other he felt relief at her calm acceptance of him. He had not fully come to terms
with what her findings really meant though. 'Can the bond be severed?'

There was a whoosh as the door opened at the healer's attendant returned with a tray carrying
fragrant tea. The attendant served the healer, and then Spock, before returning to his post near the
door. The tea was the perfect temperature and Spock distracted himself by sipping at it for a few
moments.

At length the healer responded to his earlier question. 'I believe so, however it would be difficult
and such a bond may not be removed without the permission of both individuals.'

Spock frowned minutely. 'I fear I do not understand.'

'She accepted your claim. As such her permission must be obtained to break the betrothal.'
Spock very nearly choked on his tea. He managed to keep his voice calm somehow. ‘Betrothal?’

The healer inclined her head serenely. ‘Did my earlier statements not make this clear? The bond between yourself and the human is a mating bond such as occurs naturally between our people without the interference of healers and formal betrothals.’

Spock was shocked into silence. ‘But Nyota would not understand such a thing, she is human and not bound by Vulcan custom. I would never hold her to such a bond.’

‘And should she wish to have the bond dissolved I will gladly perform the service for you. However, since I have observed she accepted your claim, I cannot remove it without her permission.’ The healer sipped her tea. ‘I doubt I shall be required however.’

Again Spock found himself confused. For a Vulcan she spoke in an exceedingly illogical manner. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I may be a different species to your Nyota, but I am a female and her regard for you is plain. I have bonded thousands of couples. The bond between yourself and your human is natural. Such a bond can only exist were it is desired. Speak to your bonded. I think she will not deny you.’ The healer’s face was as smooth and expressionless as any Vulcan, but Spock seemed to detect a very female amusement in her dark eyes.

*Nyota*

Nyota finally received a subspace communiqué containing more than polite inquires after her studies at the Academy and work with Professor Voss two months after Spock’s injury. It had come through in the middle of the day and she had left her classes early to rush to her dorm and listen to it.

Unlike his previous messages, Spock had recorded this one completely in High Vulcan. The message itself was cryptic and unremarkable. He had met with a Vulcan healer. A bond had indeed been formed unbeknownst to them when she was injured. Such bonds were fairly commonplace. However there were complications to the removal of the bond which he would discuss with her on his return to earth. Nyota wondered why he had bothered using High Vulcan. There was nothing in the message that was inappropriate. He seemed very stiff and awkward though.

Nyota re-watched it a few times, but she could glean no hidden meaning from his words. She did note how Spock’s skin was completely healed and his hair well on the way to its original length however.

She sent him a brief message in response, thanking him for keeping her informed and attempted not to feel hurt at his brusque manner.
The last three months of his deployment passed in tedium and discomfort. He allowed himself only brief subspace messages to Nyota Uhura, and few at that. Instead of deleting her responses, he instead found himself watching them over and over. She spoke of little of import, her studies and work with Professor Voss, but hearing her voice seemed to improve his mood.

Three weeks and 5 days after his last subspace communiqué from her, and 186 days 6 hours and 12 minutes since he had seen Nyota - *his bonded, his betrothed* - an annoyingly human, cheery voice within him reminded, the *U.S.S Nelson* docked at Space Station 1 in orbit of Earth. The ship was due for a full refit and its entire crew was standing down, her officers and crew reassigned, many of them on leave or assigned to planet-side commissions in San Francisco or Paris until the Captain took possession of the new flagship in six months' time.

There was a celebratory mood amongst the crew.

'Coming to the lounge Spock?' asked Captain Pike in a tone of voice that indicated he wasn't expecting an answer in the affirmative.

The crew of the *Nelson* were disembarking. The bridge crew and a good portion of the ship's officers were headed straight to the officer's lounge in the space station for the traditional end-of-tour-celebratory-drinks. Previously Spock had avoided such gatherings. They had seemed pointless. There was a shuttle scheduled for departure to the Academy within the hour. He could easily make it. Failing that, as an officer he could use the station's transporter to beam down directly. He could be back on campus in less than 10 standard minutes depending on the number of people wishing to use the transporters.

However he found himself wishing to delay his return to the Academy. He had felt an ever increasing sense of excitement mixed with dread over his last shift on the prospect and he sure it was not all his own. With their increased proximity he felt Nyota much more strongly. Spending a few hours in the company of Captain Pike, Lieutenant Commander Robbins and other officers of *Nelson* seemed perfectly logical. Thanks to the cadet he was so eager to avoid, he now after all had ample experience socialising with inebriated Starfleet personnel.

'I believe I will Captain.'

Pike actually froze mid step and turned to regard Spock in open surprise. 'Really?'

'Indeed. Perhaps you will join me for a game of dom-jot? As I recall you are quite proficient.'

The captain seemed inordinately pleased by Spock's comment. 'My proficiency has improved significantly since the last time we had a game and I'm only drinking the finest Andorian Whiskey tonight commander.'

Spock followed him from the bridge to the turbolifts. 'You are inferring that I will lose to you and as a consequence be forced to purchase overpriced alcoholic beverages for you captain.'

The captain smiled widely and slapped him on the shoulder. 'Got it in one my Vulcan friend!'
Nyota pushed her dinner around on her plate.

She'd been in an ever increasing state of agitation all day. She'd awoken while it was still dark with her stomach in knots. Just looking at her breakfast had made her nauseous. The Nelson had docked at 11:30 hours and several shuttle loads of returning personnel had come down within hours. Bridge officers she knew would have priority to use the station's transporters, so Spock could have been planet-side within minutes of disembarking. She'd found herself staring at the little groups, hunting for a tall figure in red with dark hair. Every time she saw someone with even passing similarity to Spock her hearthammered and her throat went dry. She could feel that he was somewhere nearby. It was maddening.

They hadn't made any arrangement to meet - she'd only received four brief missives from him in the last three months, the last a month previously – but it was only logical they discuss their situation, so she had expected him to contact her soon after his return.

It was 19:37 hours however, and her comm was still stubbornly free of messages from a Commander Spock. She stabbed a bean viciously with her fork.

He was probably sitting in his new quarters meditating or doing algebraic sudoku or whatever it was he did for fun. She chewed the bean rather more forcefully then was necessary.

She binned her cold dinner ten minutes later and headed to her dorm.

Gaila was half naked, which in itself was nothing new, but she had covered her bed in a pile of clothes for her consideration, a task usually reserved for Fridays and weekends when she was going out. It was a Tuesday. For all her love of dancing and boys, Gaila was serious in her studies and rarely went out on weekdays.

The Orion held up a glittery gold dress that was quite demure by her standards and turned to Nyota. 'What do you think?'

'That's… actually really nice Gaila. What's the occasion?' She walked past her roommate and sat on her bed to unzip her boots.

Gaila rolled her eyes. 'As if you don't know! The Nelson docked and all the officers are up at the station getting blitzed.'

Nyota raised an eyebrow. 'You're going to sneak into the space station officer's lounge? That's pretty crazy, even for you Gaila.'

Gaila shrugged and started wiggling into the dress. 'I know a guy working one of the transporter rooms up there tonight. And as for getting into the officer's lounge…' She smirked and struck a pose. 'I'm sure I can manage it.'

Nyota laughed. 'I don't doubt it. But why are you so eager to go? I didn't think you liked older guys.'

Her friend looked up from her position comparing shoes. 'Becauuuussee Captain Pike and half the bridge officers for the Enterprise are up there. I want to try and make an impression. You're not the only one angling for a post on the flagship.'

Nyota smirked. 'What sort of impression are you going to try and make Gai?'

Gaila pouted. 'I'm not going to try and seduce anyone. I just want the Captain to notice me. Help me stand out a little when he's looking through the ensigns next year.' She put on a gruff manly
voice. 'Ensign Gaila U'Aidat. Oh I remember her, that beautiful, intelligent Orion girl I had the
pleasure of meeting at the spacestation lounge.' She mimed flipping through a PADD. 'What's this?
Ensign Uhura? Sure she's got better grades, but U'Aidat showed initiative and that's what counts.
The commission goes to the lovely Orion!' she switched back to her own breathless voice and
turned to face the opposite direction. 'Oh thank you sir!' She saluted to thin air. 'I'm so fortunate to
receive a commission upon the Enterprise!'

Nyota laughed. 'Sure. That's exactly how it'll go.'

Gaila poked out her tongue and smiled. 'You should come. You've been stressing all day and your
Lieutenant Commander Spock is hardly going to be hanging around a bar.'

'Commander Spock' Nyota corrected absently.

'He got a promotion?' Gaila asked distractedly from within her closet. 'Where are my gold
wedges?!

Nyota stood and looked over the dresses spread over Gaila's bed. She picked up a red… thing. A
skirt? A top? Surely not a dress. She dropped it and inspected a larger garment of a silky silver
material. She held it up. It was actually a kinda nice dress. A little too short. And tight. She turned
it around and inspected the back. There was none. She put it down but then picked it up again.
It did have sleeves and the front was quite modestly cut. She held it up against herself appraisingly.

'Ooh yes. You would look amazing in that Ny. I have matching shoes too.' Gaila had emerged from
her closet with the pair of wedge heels she'd been hunting for. 'Put it on and let's go!'

'I didn't say I was coming Gaila.' Nyota turned and faced the mirror. The silver contrasted
strikingly with her skin.

Gaila dug out a pair of silver heels from the closet and dangled them in front of Nyota. 'So you
don't want the matching heels?'

Nyota tilted her head, considering. On the one hand sneaking into the officer's lounge was a stupid
idea, and she had class tomorrow. On the other hand Spock obviously wasn't going to try and see
her tonight and she did need to unwind. It would serve him right if he tried to talk to her and she
was busy dancing. With some other handsome officer. Maybe she'd let an Admiral buy her a drink.

She reached out and took the shoes.

Gaila gave her a bright smile.

*Spock*

Captain Pike and Lieutenant Commander Robbins were on the verge of crossing the line between
professional familiarity and fraternisation. Spock watched them 'dancing' with morbid curiosity. He
wondered if he should remind the captain that they were in public. Not that the inebriated officers
drinking, dancing and talking around the lounge were paying any notice. And not that he himself
was in any position to offer advice.

Pike and Robbins having a physical relationship, although technically against regulations, was not
the sort of incident Starfleet would pay any attention to. It could even be argued that as of that
morning, since Robbins and Pike were no longer officers on the Nelson the chain of command did
not come into play. An Academy Instructor and a cadet however…
Spock drained the terrible terran beer he had been served. It was 21:37 hours. The officers from the Nelson had been in the lounge for hours and showed no sign of retiring. Many were in extreme states of intoxication, but this only seemed to encourage them.

He looked back across the room towards the table he had been sharing with the Captain and a few other officers. The Chief Engineer was sleeping with his head against the table whilst the Chief Security Officer and two ensigns from Engineering played a card game of some sort. Since one of the ensigns was currently only dressed in his regulation boots and undergarments and the Chief Security Officer was no longer wearing pants, Spock gathered it was similar to a game he had been exposed to during his time as a cadet at the Academy.

He had no desire what so ever to join in. He had bored of the lounge several hours previously, when the last of his acquaintances had become too inebriated to play dom-jot, but lingered. Distasteful as he found the antics of his fellow Starfleet officers, he still couldn't bring himself to return to the Academy. He would need to soon however, he needed to rest or at the very least meditate. A short term solution occurred to him. He pulled out his PADD and connected to the station's system.

The bartender placed another beer in front of him. Spock looked up and raised an eyebrow questioningly. He had not ordered the beverage. The bartender made no effect to talk over the noise of the bar and instead waved to a section of the bar to Spock's left. Lieutenant Varth caught his eye and raised a glass in salute to him. Spock nodded his thanks and took a sip from his bottle. It was cold. That was about the only thing about it that pleased him. Satisfied he had shown sufficient gratitude to the Lieutenant, Spock returned his attentions to the PADD on the bar in front of him.

The space station housed several thousand permanent staff and always had ample additional accommodation available for personnel passing through. The request took only a few moments to process and then he had been assigned temporary quarters. He could retire for the evening and face the Academy tomorrow. He summoned up a floorplan and noted the location.

He was aware that he was avoiding the real issue - that his solution was cowardly and illogical, but he brushed aside those thoughts. He would examine them in more detail as in front of his asenoi at a later date.

He scanned the dance floor for Captain Pike, planning to bid him farewell and be on his way. He felt a warning, a trickle of awareness as his breath caught and his head turned to gaze across the room. There was an impression of a shapely figure in gold and green topped with a mass of red hair - Cadet U'Aidat - his brain helpfully informed him, and then his eyes slide across the Orion and settled onto the figure beside her. She was standing side on to him facing the bar. As if sensing his regard from across the room, which on some level she probably did, Nyota turned and her eyes locked onto his.

Spock felt his heart rate increase but found himself uncaring. He made no effort to calm it. His brain was suddenly quiet. That dark feeling that by turns horrified and thrilled him thrummed into life eagerly. She held his gaze steadily and he could not break from it. In his peripheral vision he was aware that she was wearing a dress in a silvery shade and had her hair in her customary style atop her head. But otherwise he found himself blind to the world at large. His perfect memory had apparently forgotten how dark and beautiful her eyes were. Her lips moved, formed his name, and he heard it as if they were completely alone and she had whispered it in his ear.

He found himself walking along the bar towards her. She did not look away and raised her face up towards him when he stopped beside her. Dimly he was aware that his hand was cold. He placed
the bottle of beer upon the bar beside her. He was uncertain how long they stood regarding each other silently. He was aware that he needed to do something, but the only thoughts coming to him were impossible. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to take another step closer and pull her against him, feel the warmth of her body pressed against him. Offering her a greeting did not occur to him. Instead he stood stiffly and simply stared at her.

Abruptly she turned away from him and exchanged words with Cadet U’Aidat. Absently Spock lifted the bottle of beer and emptied it. He did not even register the unpleasant taste. When he lowered it to the bar Uhura was looking at him again.

There was a maelstrom of emotion within him and much of it was reflected in what he sensed from her through their tenuous bond. She licked her lips, leaning forward slight to speak, then she was jostled by someone behind her at the bar and she stumbled slightly towards him, her eyes widening. Reflexively Spock wrapped an arm around her, loosely pressing against her back and steadying her as she regained her footing.

He inhaled sharply when his hand came into contact not with her dress as he had anticipated, but her warm bare skin. Instantly the blurred things he sensed through their bond came into focus. Frustration, anger, that sad feeling he could not understand and great waves of her dizzy human affection. He could also feel her delight at feeling his hands on her. Her desire for him. She shifted slightly closer. 8.2 seconds had passed since he’d moved to steady her.

He needed to remove his hand and step away from her.

He swallowed and summoned his considerable will power. His hand dropped to his side.

Instantly the bond quietened to a murmur. Spock desperately attempted to gather his thoughts. He looked over Uhura’s shoulder, away from her dark eyes. He needed to leave. He needed to mediate. If he stayed in Uhura’s proximity… He could feel her staring at him. He stepped backwards. He had never done anything so difficult. Her eyes were full of emotions he didn't understand. He could think of no appropriate farewell. As always when in doubt, he simply nodded at her. ‘Cadet.’

She stared at him a few seconds longer as if in disbelief that he was dismissing her, then without bothering to acknowledge him, turned her back on him angrily and leant on the bar.

Spock stared.

Her dress had no back.

The silver material ran straight down her sides from her shoulders and only met again so low on her back that the dimples below the base of her spine were visible. The sight arrested him. He had a powerful urge to wrap his hands around her hips and press his thumbs into the indents. She looked back at him over her shoulder. She did not smile or wink or exhibit any other the other human indicators of sexual desire that he was aware of, but her invitation, or more accurately, challenge was clear.

He found himself taking a step towards her when he should have been turning and leaving the lounge. He stopped beside her at the bar. Her hands were resting against it, a small purse held between them. Spock focused on her elegant fingers. Inside his mind he was at war with himself. Logic dictated his need to distance himself from Nyota Uhura and the effect she had upon him. She was a cadet. He was a Starfleet officer. He had unwittingly formed a betrothal bond with her that she was not even aware of. The situation between them was complicated and needed to be discussed in a more formal setting than a bar and when he was in control of his emotions enough to speak to her rationally.
She turned and leant towards him so as to be heard over the noise of the bar. She stopped when her mouth was approximately 12 centimetres from his right ear. 'Have you reported to your new posting yet Commander?'

The mundane question was not at all what he had been expected based upon her behaviour of the last few minutes. He found it calmed him somewhat. She turned her face so he could lean down and reply within an audible range. He could smell her perfume. 'Negative cadet.'

He straightened so she could respond in kind. He could feel her warm breath against his ear and neck. 'So as of this moment, you are not currently a member of the Academy teaching staff?'

Spock abruptly grasped her implication. This time when she met his eyes she smirked slightly at his enlightenment. The main argument against involvement with the cadet was suddenly invalid. Until he reported to Admiral Barnett he was not a member of the Academy staff and there was no conflict of interest between them. He was not in a position of authority over her. There was no relevant chain of command. No fraternisation. As this realisation washed over him he was forced to accept he had reached the limits of his control, Vulcan or otherwise.

He allowed himself to shift infinitesimally closer to her so that the cloth of his uniform just brushed against her shoulder. Her left hand lay palm up on the bar in front of her. His heart rate increasing at his daring, Spock reached out and pressed his right index and middle finger against her own and allowed a spark of his desire for her to pass between them.

She was not Vulcan or a touch telepath so the effect was slightly muted, but she gasped slightly and her pupils dilated as he held her gaze. The burst of joy he felt from her was almost humbling. He curled his fingers around hers and pulled her towards him. He could feel that familiar dizzy feeling from her. Her affection for him she'd said. She followed his lead, turning from the bar and standing so close they were all but embracing. Spock didn't give a thought to the people around them, to propriety or modesty. He let his left arm wrap around her and pulled her against him, delighting in the warm bare skin beneath his hand. A single thought was coming to him through his fingertips so clear he could almost imagine she was repeating it under her breath. /Kissmekissmekissme/

He could deny her nothing.
Chapter 22

*Nyota*

Gaila's scheme had worked exactly as planned. They'd been beamed up to the orbiting station after 20:00 hours and after walking for twenty minutes, finally located the Officer's Lounge. There hadn't been any security on the door, so they'd been able to walk right in. Only authorised personnel had access to the Starfleet accommodation section of the station, civilians being restricted to the public transit areas, hotels and lounges, so Gaila hadn't needed to charm their way in.

They'd been there perhaps half an hour, during which time Gaila had been charmingly working the room in a manner that Nyota thought would have impressed her diplomat mother, when she'd noted Spock's presence.

He'd been sitting at a table with an officer in command gold, Captain Pike Nyota assumed, and a few other bridge level officers. Her heart had simultaneously sunk in dread and attempted to burst with excitement. She spent the next hour trailing Gaila around the room, making conversation with drunk ensigns and lieutenants and steering her friend clear of Spock and Captain Pike. She felt slightly guilty for this, after all Gaila had come with the express purpose of introducing herself to the captain, but she just couldn't face Spock.

Finally, after almost an hour of avoiding the only Vulcan in the room, she'd glanced over and seen that he, the Captain and the female officer they'd been sitting with were gone. She'd scanned the room and eventually located Pike and the woman dancing, (rather unsteadily). Carefully she looked over the lounge again but couldn't see a Vulcan in a red uniform anywhere. Perhaps he had finally headed to the Academy.

'Gaila, that's Captain Pike there on the dance floor isn't it? With the brunette?' She subtlety pointed in his direction with a tilt of her chin.

'Yes! Finally! I was worried he'd left!'. The Orion grabbed Nyota's arm and started steering them towards the dancefloor.

Nyota dragged her feet. 'Um, Gai, I'm not sure you should just barge in there. He seems to be enjoying himself.'

Gaila stopped short. 'Hm. You're right. And if that's his girlfriend, I don't want her to think I'm hitting on him. She'd make sure I never got a commission under him.' She contemplated silently for a moment. 'Let go to the bar, I'll wait until they head to a table then introduce myself.'

Nyota let her friend steer her towards the quieter end of the bar with the best view of the dancefloor. Absently she picked up the menu PADD and flipped through it. Gaila looked over her shoulder. 'Do you want something?'

They hadn't been drinking since both had classes the next day. Nyota pursed her lips in thought. She could perhaps have one… but then again. 'I might just order a juice or something.'

Her roommate nodded sagely at her wisdom. 'Yeah, same. I don't want to start dancing on tables in front of a roomful of Starfleet officers.'

They spent the next few minutes sipping their drinks and observing the dancefloor. Pike and the
brunette woman were laughing and dancing very close to one another. Gaila grew increasingly agitated. Finally, after three songs had played, the captain led his partner off the dance floor. Gaila shot out of her seat.

'Ookay! Showtime! Time to show the Captain that I'm a sophisticated, intelligent, Enterprise material officer in the making.' She shamelessly adjusted the bust of her dress at the conclusion of her pep talk. Nyota rolled her eyes.

'Just keep the sultry Orioness to a minimum Gaila. And make sure you try to impress the woman too. She's probably one of his bridge officers from the Nelson and most likely will be on the Enterprise as well.'

Gaila nodded but tilted her head. 'You aren't coming?'

Nyota opened her mouth to respond but instead found herself turning away from Gaila and looking down the bar. Instantly her heart started racing and her mouth went dry. It was Spock, and he was staring at her with an expression she had seen on his face only once before. She heard herself quietly say his name.

For several long moments he stood utterly still and just stared at her and then he was striding down the bar towards her. The tattoo of her heart increased and she found herself unable to look away. He was so tall. Had he always been so tall? And handsome. So handsome. She couldn't breathe.

He stopped beside her. His hair had grown almost back to its customary length. He was holding a full bottle of budweiser classic in one hand. Nyota wondered if he'd won it playing pool or dom-jot. She couldn't imagine him purchasing it for himself. She had to lean back slightly to meet his eyes. His face was utterly calm and devoid of emotion, as usual, but his eyes were boring into her with a heat that was decidedly un-Vulcan. Or perhaps too Vulcan. It certainly wasn't human.

Beside her she heard Gaila questioning her. She blinked and responded without thinking or even noticing what she was saying. Evidentially it was sufficient since a moment later the Orion was walking away towards the Captain. She looked back at Spock and found him downing the beer. It was just as odd an image as it had been so long ago at the shipyard bar. A Vulcan sculling beer was incongruous. He placed the empty bottle on the bar and returned his attention to her.

She struggled to think of something suitable to say to him.

Her mind was blank. She could barely even remember her own name let alone social niceties. She licked her lips and rallied her traitorous, weak, human wits and opened her mouth to offer a greeting. Someone bumped into her from behind and she almost lost her balance. She heard a vague 'Sorry!' from the person who'd knocked her then she found herself being steadied by Spock. He'd wrapped an arm around her loosely. The warm press of his hand against the bare skin of her back burnt like a brand and she shivered at the shock of it.

The fuzzy place within her mind that she assumed was the telepathic bond he'd spoken of flared to life and she was suddenly able to read his Vulcan face as easily as a human's. She felt hot and dizzy with longing, a desire that she could feel that he reciprocated. She wanted to wrap her arms around him and bury her face against his chest. She wanted to kiss him and twist her fingers in his hair. She wanted to dig her nails into his skin and press kisses against the pale skin over his cheekbone. But she'd kissed him once before. Given into her attraction to him, and he'd ran halfway across the galaxy. She wasn't about to get burned again.

Abruptly he stepped back, his expression suddenly closing to her. He nodded to her in his customary manner. 'Cadet.'
After a moment she realised he meant it in parting not greeting. He was going to leave. Anger welled up within her. She was well aware that he wanted her. Had wanted her for years according to Gaila. He'd just practically devoured her with his eyes, and she'd felt his lust when they touched, but now he was going to pretend he felt nothing. That he was a perfect Vulcan. Fine.

She huffed indignantly and turned her back on him.

She waited a few moments and when he did not depart she deigned to meet his gaze over her shoulder. The closed expression was gone and the heated one had returned. Belatedly she recalled that her dress, whilst modest from the front, left her entire back exposed. She watched with interest as the muscle in his jaw clenched repeatedly. She felt a twinge of victory at having affected him. His eyes met hers and she brazenly let him see how much she wanted him.

He shifted, as if he was about to run, but then closed the distance between them and stood beside her at the bar instead.

Nyota used the noise of the bar as an excuse to lean even closer to him to speak. 'Have you reported to your new posting yet Commander?'

He frowned ever so slightly. 'Negative cadet.' 

'So as of this moment, you are not currently a member of the Academy teaching staff?' She found herself smiling as realisation washed over him, all anger forgotten.

Then he did something with her fingers and she forgot how to think. It was like the time he'd asked to touch her hand but different. This time he didn't hold himself back from her. The gentle pressure of two fingertips against hers sent a shock of awareness through her a hundred times as strong as what she'd felt when he'd touched the skin of her back. She felt what he felt. Desire, longing. He wanted her as much as she wanted him. More even maybe. He pulled her around and against him and she followed bonelessly. Distantly she was aware that she was willing him to kiss her. Repeating it within her mind like a desperate prayer. 

**Kissmekissmekissme**

Her fingers had twisted tightly around his. With his hand in hers he could probably hear her. Usually she'd be mortified by such a thought but found she didn't care.

His face was so close to hers. Greedily she took in his features. Every eyelash. The exact tilt of his perfect Vulcan eyebrows. He had light stubble, more then she'd ever seen on him before. She longed to press a hand to his cheek and test the rasp of it. Her free hand fidgeted at her side. She'd only have to rise up on her toes and she'd be kissing him. But she couldn't. At some point she'd promised herself that she wouldn't kiss him. He had to kiss her. His hand was hot against her back, pressing firmly into her own suddenly feverish flesh. He pulled her closer and her lips parted in disbelief as he bent down and pressed his lips to her. Kissed her.

He'd kissed her.

It was a simple kiss, just the light press of his lips against hers, but she felt her body respond as if she'd been electrocuted. Her heart was beating with a dizzy beat, as if she'd drunk half a dozen cups of coffee or was about to faint. She was hot and cold at the same time, a shivering and panting mess of wanting, aching... girl. Seconds passed, and then he pulled away from her. She followed instinctively, rising up towards him for a moment before settling back on the balls of her feet. She opened her eyes. She didn't remember closing them.
Her right hand was fisted in his uniform beside his insignia. She stared at his comm and tried to calm herself. His chest rose and fell rapidly beneath it. She couldn't feel his heart, it was lower and to the side, but she was fairly confident it was beating as ridiculously as her own.

He shifted his grip on her left hand, slipping his fingers up to curl around her wrist like a cuff, as if he was afraid she would pull away from him.

'I must speak with thee.'

As always hearing him speak High Vulcan made her toes curl.

She could not frame a response. Instead she just nodded.

He stepped backwards but did not release her wrist. She followed him through the lounge in a daze. No one paid them more than a moment's notice. The tiny responsible part of her brain that was still functioning noted this with relief.

The bright clear lighting of the station proper was a shock after the darkness of the bar. It was like walking out of a nightclub and into a noonday sun. Spock didn't look at her or acknowledge her presence beside him. She expected him to drop her hand, but he did not. They passed a few officers heading towards the lounge and other personnel going about their business. Nyota didn't make eye contact with any of them, aware of how odd a sight a Vulcan Commander dragging a human girl in a tiny silver party dress through the corridors would make. She attempted nonchalance. It was difficult in a skin-tight dress and ridiculous shoes of Orion manufacture. Spock appeared unconcerned. He also seemed to have a destination in mind.

They took a turbolift down a dozen decks and emerged on a deserted accommodation deck. Judging from the distance between the doorways, they were large officer's quarters. Spock led her down the hall and stopped before a door seemingly at random.

Nyota stared at him as he accessed the door control, half wondering if he intended to break into the room.

'Computer: open door.'

The computer obliged him. Apparently these were quarters officially assigned to him. It didn't make sense, he was meant to be in transit, passing through the station en-route to San Francisco. He shouldn't have been given quarters.

For the first time since dragging her from the lounge, Spock met her eyes. He released her hand and motioned for her to enter. Suddenly nervous, she did so.

The door shut behind him and silence fell. Nyota had been correct. It was an officer's quarters. They were in a small lounge area with seating, a wall mounted replicator and a desk with a computer console. There was a door on one side that she knew would lead to a sleeping area and a small ensuite.

Simply to avoid looking at Spock she walked across the little room to the window. The view was magnificent. A long arm of the station jutting out into space on her left, Earth filled the lower half of the window in a great blue, white and green wedge and stars filled the rest.

She stared down at the beautiful planet for a minute and calmed her thoughts. 'What did you wish to speak of?' She used Vulcan, but did not turn to face him as she spoke. It would be easier to control her emotions if she did not look at him.
She felt him step to stand near her. He was silent for so long Nyota wondered if he intended toanswer at all.

'There is much I must speak with you of. I am uncertain where to begin.'

She nodded and avoided looking at his reflection on the window beside her own. She focused herattention on expanse of South America far below them, shrouded in curls of cloud.

Spock was silent for a moment before continuing. 'I am concerned that the bond between us isinfluencing your opinion of me.'

Nyota turned to face him. He had his hands clasped behind him and his face set into carefulneutrality. 'It is not.'

His head tilted slightly. 'You are certain?'

She nodded. 'Yes.'

'Regardless it would still be prudent to have the bond severed. The manner of its creation isquestionable.'

Nyota felt her heart sink. A disturbing thought occurred to her. 'Is it... is the bond affecting you?Influencing your... opinion of me?' His behaviour had been so out of character. Perhaps it wasn'treal.

'No.'

Relief flooded her. 'What do you mean questionable?'

He looked uncomfortable and glanced out the window before replying. 'You did not give yourpermission.'

Nyota frowned. 'But it was an accident. You didn't even realise what had happened until monthslater.'

'It was the mindmeld that resulted in the formation of the bond. I performed kash-nohv upon youwithout your permission.'

Nyota crossed her arms. 'You are being illogical. The second time I asked you to and the firsttime you only did so to save my life.' She paused. 'You knew then that my life was more important than aVulcan nicety I wasn't even aware of. Nothing has changed.'

Spock nodded. 'I am grateful for your understanding in this matter, but without your permission,my actions remain a violation. Kae'at knal'lur.'

Nyota let her gaze linger on him for few moments before turning to look once more at the planetbelow them. 'Then ask me.'

Spock was silent for several heartbeats. 'I am unsure of your meaning.'

She turned to face him again. 'Ask my permission.'

He was frowning openly now. 'You cannot give permission for an action I have already taken.'

Summoning her courage Nyota stepped as near to him as she dared. His eyes were dark and he wasstaring at her in that way that made her heart skip. She reached down and wrapped her fingers
around his wrist. She had never touched him so deliberately before. He swallowed audibly. She lifted his hand and raised it so his fingertips hovered just above her cheek. 'Ask me.'

He inhaled sharply and stared at her. His free hand had curled about her hip, pulling her closer. The dizzy soaring sensation from earlier was back in full flight. It was a struggle to keep herself still, to keep from turning her face into his hand.

The muscles in Spock's jaw clenched. His voice seemed deeper when he spoke. 'No. I cannot do this.'

It was like being dosed in cold water. Nyota stared up at him in disbelief for a moment before mortification set in. She gasped and tried to back away from him. Tears pricked behind her eyes. She felt as if her heart was breaking, twisting and aching in her chest. Stupid! She felt so stupid.

The hand at her hip shifted to wrap around her and became as immovable as a steel bar. She found herself pushing at his chest with her free hand, leaning away from him. 'Let me go!'

His grip on her tightened in response. 'Be still.'

She went limp, her body twisted against his. He was too strong. Physically she could not overpower him. 'Spock. Release me.'

His hold on her loosened slightly but he otherwise ignored her plea. 'I will not join our minds again.'

'Fine!' Nyota slipped back into standard in her anger. 'I'm hardly going to force you, so let go of me!' She beat her fists against him. 'We can get this stupid bond removed and you can go back to pretending you're a perfect emotionless Vulcan!'

Spock's voice was pitched so low it was practically a growl. 'No.'

Nyota froze in confusion, meeting his gaze for the first time since his rejection. He was clenching and un-clenching his jaw. He looked furious. It froze the breath in her lungs. 'I am not human. Do not judge me as such.' She didn't need reminding of that - he looked about inhuman as possible.

'I am perfectly aware that you are a Vulcan Spock!' She paused, her anger returning. 'That doesn't give you the right to act like an ass!'

He ignored her outburst. 'You do not understand the effect you have on me. I cannot casually share my mind with you.' His hand against her back had loosened and his thumb was making circles against her skin leaving gooseflesh in its wake. Nyota tried to ignore it. She huffed and twisted in his grasp. All she achieved was pulling her dress off one shoulder.

She ceased her struggling and glared at him. 'So you're only interested in 'casually sharing' my body?'

'No. Such a human attachment would be unsatisfactory.' His words were a puzzle. Nyota felt her anger slipping away from her again, and she wanted to be angry. She met Spock's eyes and found that he was staring at her bared shoulder with an intense expression. She followed his gaze, tilting her head awkwardly. He was staring at the little pale scars that remained from his bite six months earlier. He released her wrist and ran the backs of his fingers over the marks in apparent shock. Her cheeks flushing in sudden embarrassment she met his gaze. The question in them was evident before he spoke. 'Why did you not heal this?'

Her tongue was thick within her mouth. She couldn't really explain to herself, let alone vocalise it. She looked over his shoulder, avoiding his gaze. His hand lifted from her shoulder to curl around
her jaw, angling her face towards his own. His black eyes bored into her. She didn't appreciate being so man handled. Or that her traitorous body seemed to disagree with her on that fact, leaning into his hold.

'Nyota. Answer me.'

The use of her first name sent a wave of heat through her. She tried to control it, to maintain her anger. She wilfully formed a lie in her mind. The same one she had told her family, that it was such a minor injury she saw no point in getting it treated. That it didn't mean anything. That she had forgotten its existence. She opened her mouth, the lie poised on her tongue, then froze. She sensed some great import to the moment between them, as if her next sentence would either destroy or create something. She remembered his words from the evening she'd gotten those fading marks.

'Because I am yours.'

It was true. In the simplest words, that was why she had left the marks. Because he had made them. Because she was his and they were a physical reminder of that fact that no words or actions between them could undo. He could pretend all he liked, ignore his feelings, but he couldn't undo the marks on her body that proved otherwise. Spock had frozen against her, his every muscle tensed. His expression was unfathomable, a heat that spread from his eyes to twist his face. He looked utterly inhuman, completely alien. Nyota felt alternatively scared and exhilarated.

'Yes. Thou art mine.' The words curled and smouldered against her and Nyota felt a renewed surge of heat within herself. The hands that had been pressing against him were now pulling him closer. She couldn't think properly. Couldn't form a coherent sentence. She wanted to rub herself against him like a cat. She settled for purring his name.

'Spohhhkh.'

She felt his reaction to her use of the correct pronunciation through his fingertips. It seemed she wasn't the only one affected by voice alone. He leant closer and inhaled. She knew he was savouring the scent of her. It was primitive and delighted an equally primitive part of her.

'I declare koon-ut so'lik.'

Nyota was struck speechless. The thickness of her lust addled mind cleared slightly. She stared blankly up at him, her mouth ajar and eyes wide in disbelief. Whatever she had been expecting, it had certainly not been a Vulcan marriage proposal. Spock was regarding her guardedly, his eyes flicking over her features as he took in her reaction. Her voice was surprisingly steady when she responded. 'I accept.'

Spock's hold on her increased and Nyota found herself pulled up onto her toes. He leant forward and pressed his forehead against hers. She could feel his overwhelming relief at her acceptance. She wrapped an arm about his neck and pushed her fingers through his hair as she'd wanted to do earlier. It was foolish to be rushing into such a complicated situation, but she couldn't bring herself to care. She felt his breath against her lips as he spoke. 'Nyota. Nyota. My Nyota.' His voice wasn't emotionless at all, it was filled with longing.

She tipped her head and pressed her lips to his. Desire pulsed within her at the simplest caress and she found herself pulling his bottom lip between her teeth and deepening the kiss with moments. They did not kiss chastely as they had earlier in the lounge, they instead did their best to devour each other. Kissing Spock was even better than she remembered. He kissed like he'd spent years practising, like his lips and mouth and tongue had been put on Earth… or Vulcan or where ever - just so he could kiss her.
Nyota indulged in all the things she'd been longing to do since he'd first approached her. She slid her fingers through his hair and ran them down his cheek to cup his face. She knew it was only a difference of a few degrees, but the difference in their body temperatures, the heat of his skin made it even more irresistible to her. She couldn't bear not to touch him. His mouth was an inferno and his hands were like fire against her skin, leaving trails of fevered flesh in their wake.

She shoved a hand up under his uniform and undershirt, pressing the length of her arm against his back. She wanted to pull it off him, to press kisses along the line of his neck and across his collarbone, but she couldn't bear to stop kissing him. He was doing something with his tongue that was making her forget about her need for oxygen. So she ignored his clothes and settled on pressing herself as close to him as possible.

His hold on her was almost crushing, but she delighted in it. He pushed the sleeve of her dress further off her shoulder and his hand curled around her bare shoulder, his fingers digging softly into her skin. She pulled her lips from his and pressed them lightly against his cheekbone as she had wanted to earlier in the lounge. He took the opportunity to turn his face from her and press his lips to the juncture of her shoulder and her neck. He followed the line of her shoulder towards her arm, tugging her dress before him, before shifting his grip on her, lifting her high against him. Her dress slipped lower with the movement.

The ease with which he lifted her, his casual Vulcan strength, excited her. Nyota wrapped her legs around him to steady herself then found herself wrapping her arms around his head and leaning back as he explored her right breast with his teeth and tongue. She was helpless to contain her moan of pleasure. The noise seemed to affect Spock since he returned his attention to her mouth, biting at her lips. She could feel him hard between her legs. Her hips undulated against him with a will of their own. He groaned.

She didn't bother to pull her lips from his to speak, she just spoke into a lull between increasingly frantic kisses. 'Bed.'

Spock seemed to approve of her idea because she quickly found herself carried from the sitting room and deposited onto a small regulation Starfleet bed. She pulled herself to her knees and started tugging at his uniform whilst Spock simultaneously attempted to remove his boots. He lifted his arms and let her pull his shirt over his head. She dragged the undershirt off with it and threw them... somewhere. Deciding that his pants could wait for a moment, she wrapped her arms around him and kissed him. She felt like she might hyperventilate with the strength of her want.

The feel of his bare skin against her, hard and male, warm and Vulcan in comparison to her soft and female, cool and human, sent a thrill through her. Spock seemed likewise afflicted. He pulled at her dress until she got the point and slipped her arms from the sleeves so he could tug the material down. He pushed it over her hips and left it pooled about her legs where she knelt on the bed. His hands ran slowly up and down her slides and across her back before diverging, one sliding down over the curve of her backside and the other up to cup her left breast, as if he was learning the shape of her. She did likewise, but feverishly.

She wanted to touch every part of him all at once. Her hands sketched the shape of his shoulders, running along his collarbone and twisting about his arms before running down his sides to curl about his narrow hips. She was shaking with need and nervous desire. Like a full body shiver. Impatiently she fumbled at the unfamiliar fastening of his pants, but she couldn't bring herself to break their kiss and give her full attention to the task.

After a moment he took pity on her, replacing her fingers with his own to undo the clasp. She gripped the waistband and shoved the material down, still kissing him like a woman possessed, and
then she had a hand wrapped around him. His every muscle tensed and he pulled out of their kiss to bury his head against her neck. Nyota felt a thrill of satisfaction at the strangled groan he let out. Apart from his burning body heat, he felt like any other man, (not that she had a Gaila-like wealth of experience to draw on). However when she tightened her grip and slid along his length his reaction was not that of a human man.

In a matter of seconds she found herself pushed back across the narrow bed, her dress somewhere around her ankles and 6'2" of growling Vulcan in between her legs. She felt his hands at her hips and the scratch of her underwear being torn away and then he was there pressing into her and her back was arching, her arms pulling at him, her legs wrapping around him and a wailing noise that might have been his name was on her lips. He pushed her up the bed, one hand fisting in her hair and the other dragging her hips towards him as he parted her welcoming heat and buried himself inside her.

That first press, the sensation of her body yielding to his felt impossible. Too good. She was dying. He drew back slightly, adjusting his position and then he thrust sharply, seating himself fully within her, their hips flush. She felt a deep primal satisfaction at the sensation. Her lust maddened mind calmed for a moment and she simply basked in her pleasure.

But then Spock withdrew from her and her initial satisfaction retreated with him, leaving her bereft. She crossed her legs behind him, (a distant part of her mind registering that she still wore shoes), and dug her fingers into his hips to pull him back to her. He acquiesced, burying himself within her roughly. She gasped. It felt as if every nerve ending in her body was overloading. His grip on her hip tightened and he tilted her pelvis allowing him to penetrate her slightly deeper until she was impossibly full, so full it almost hurt. She ground herself against him and he made a noise somewhere between a growl and moan against her neck, his breath warm and damp on her skin before withdrawing and slamming back against her. He quickly found a rhythm, his body surging relentlessly against hers.

He did not make love to her. Nor was he reserved or clinical as she had always idly assumed a Vulcan would be. He was all teeth and skin and heat. His hands were rough, his hold on her hip bruising and his grip in her hair pulling at her scalp. Barely controlled strength was evident in every movement. His drugging kisses were frantic and soon tinged with the metallic taste of blood. She couldn't tell if it was his or hers, copper or iron. She didn't care. She wanted more. Even with him taking her so roughly that she was shoved up along the mattress by their movements it was not enough. She arched her back and pulled and twisted against him, trying to get him closer, deeper.

She had no control over the noises he was forcing from her throat with each suffocating thrust. Desperately she clawed at him. She dug her nails into his hips, raked them down his back, twisted her fingers in his hair and pulled as hard as she could. He seemed to take delight in her harsh ministrations. Breaking from a biting kiss she turned her head and tugged his face towards the line of her neck, wanting to feel his teeth on her as she had once before. She remembered his parting words from then, the vision he had shared with her. 'Take me as you said you would.' The tiny sane part of her mind was scandalised at her behaviour.

Spock growled deep in his chest and the sound sent a shivering bolt of want through her. He shifted, rising up and sitting back on his knees, pulling her up with him to straddle his lap. She wrapped her arms about his shoulders, lifted her hips, and promptly impaled herself upon him once more. He rose beneath her, his hips surging to meet her movements, burying himself so deeply she was sure if she placed a hand against her belly she'd feel him.

He left one arm around her back, supporting her, and lifted the other to caress her face with a gentleness at great odds with the rest of his actions. He kissed her then pressed his forehead against
hers as their bodies' continued to move desperately against one another. His eyes were black and even if Nyota hadn't been able to feel lust and a black insatiable need through their fledgling bond she would have seen it within them. The intensity of his want for her both thrilled and frightened her. It was not human.

He ran his burning fingers along the line of her jaw and spoke to her in his alien tongue. 'Nyota, ko-fu Zuberi heh Tamu, nam-tor du na'telan?' (Nyota daughter of Zuberi and Tamu are you prepared for bonding?)

The words had the ring of ritual to them. His fingertips were resting just below her psi points. Nyota cradled the nape of his neck in one hand and pressed her forehead firmly against his, nodding slightly.

'Ndiko mpenzi wangu.' (Yes beloved)

She realised as the words left her mouth they were in Swahili, not Vulcan as he'd used, but they were so close to one another, as close as possible without a full mind meld, that she sensed he would have understood her in any tongue.

He pressed his fingers to her psi points along her cheekbone and temple. Spock's voice was strained 'Kashkau, wukuh eh teretuhr, estuhn wi ri estuhn, k'wuhli wi ri k'wuhli.'

She was expecting to hear his thoughts, to communicate without words and feel his emotions, a deeper version of the meld they had shared when she was injured. Instead a part of her changed, shifted, and she felt their separate minds meld into one. She clung to him, overwhelmed. He was simultaneously within her and all around her. She could feel a part of herself within his mind whilst at the same time a part of him was within her. It was like suddenly existing in four dimensions. It was exhilarating and horrifying at the same time.

She didn't just sense his emotions, she felt them as if they were her own. His mind was fascinating. He was thinking about half a dozen things all at once and all were focused about her. He was counting her heartbeats (162bpm), calculating the exact difference in the temperature between her cool human skin and his warmer Vulcan flesh, (6.7°C where he held her back, 6.1 °C where his fingertips pressed against her cheek and 4.2°C where she held him deep within her) and analysing her scent - attempting to separate the artificial notes of her perfume, toiletries and makeup from the underlying scent of her.

He was scrutinising every piece of data available to him, creating a perfect eidetic Vulcan memory. Of her. She knew she should feel uncomfortable at being so exposed, every part of her, body and soul, open for his inspection, but she understood exactly. She wished she could memorise Spock the way he was memorising her. She gently stroked the back of his neck. The simple gesture brought Spock a wave of pleasure that reflected back between them. She felt the cool touch of her fingers as clearly as Spock did, and he felt the heat of his skin and silk of his hair as much as she.

The stillness that had settled over them was burnt away in an instant. Desire, lust, her need, his need echoed between them building to an inferno. She whimpered and pressed herself against him before rising slightly. She felt what he felt, the way her sex gripped him in incredible heat as he withdrew from her and the desperate need to push back and bury himself in her. It mixed with her own sensations - the burn and friction of him within her and the terrible hollow he left in his wake. She could feel her own thoughts and feelings twisting away from her and into him as surely as his echoed with her. She sunk down upon him as he thrust up against her.

The pleasure was incomparable.
Her thighs lifted her off him as he simultaneously receded beneath her. The hollow ache and the burning need returned. She lowered her hips and he lifted his and it was amazing, bliss, but it wasn't enough. Spock's arm tightened around her and he effortlessly lifted her off him before impaling her again with far greater speed and force then she could manage. She could hear herself wailing. She flexed her legs, doing little save steady herself as Spock pounded into her, but his strength was her strength and this was so much better. She could feel her orgasm coming, was amazed she'd lasted this long without shattering into a million boneless pieces, and then he buried his face in her neck and bit her. Hard.

She wasn't wailing anymore, she was screaming. Her fingernails were digging into his neck and shoulder hard enough to draw blood. She was flooded with heat, her very flesh seemed aflame. Spock was growling and panting against her, his teeth still buried in her flesh like a cat pinning a mate in place. She felt him swelling within her as the first wave of her climax broke over her and then she lost all sense and understanding of what she feeling. She couldn't tell where she ended and he began. Her climax had triggered Spock's and she was drowning in the combined pleasure. It seemed to go on forever, like an orgasmic feedback loop.

Eventually Nyota found herself wrapped around Spock, her sanity returning as little aftershocks of pleasure twitched between them. Spock's fingers remained against her face, but he was pressing little kisses to the line of her collarbone instead of biting her. Deep lazy satisfaction filled her.

'Are we bonded beloved?'

Spock lifted his face from his ministrations and pressed his forehead against hers.

'Yes adun'a.'

_Wife._ The word sent a thrill through her.

'We are married?' She knew bonding was the Vulcan equivalent of marriage, but she'd assumed some official ceremony would be required.

_We are bonded and mated. You are my wife, my bondmate, but an elder is required for the marriage to be validated officially and for you to become a member of my house and clan._'

Distantly she realised her leg had a cramp but she was too content to move.

After a moment Spock lay back along the narrow bed pulling her down with him to relieve her discomfit. She stretched along the warm hard length of him and sighed in contentment. She couldn't even bring herself to worry about possible ramifications for their careers. As of that moment, she honestly didn't give a damn. She felt as if a great weight had been taken off her shoulders. Her feelings for Spock had been hovering over her for so long, to _finally_ have them resolved was blissful.

She felt Spock's surprise.

She raised her head from where she was resting against his shoulder to meet his eyes. The movement jarred his fingers from her face and the mindmeld slipped and she was abruptly alone with her thoughts. It was unpleasant. Spock took her hand in his and she felt the comforting bump of his sharp thoughts against hers again in a much more distant way.

It wasn't enough, but it was… sufficient.

'Surely you knew what I felt for you Spock?' Her voice was hoarse. That was certainly a side effect to sex that was new to her.
'I thought it a recent development.' Spock was looking at her in discomfit. Nyota imagined, as a Vulcan, discussing their 'feelings' was probably about the worse thing he could imagine doing. Instead of pressing him further she simply pressed a soft kiss against his lips.

'It is not.'

He sighed against her lips and drew her closer, their bodies entwining. The heel of one of her shoes caught on the blankets. She giggled.

'What amuses you my Nyota?'

In response she raised a leg so that her shoes were visible. 'You tore off my panties Commander and I'm still in my shoes,' she raised her head and looked down the bed, '… and you didn't even get your pants all the way off, let alone your socks.'

He sat and pulled off the offending items of clothing before moving to unbuckle her shoes. 'Seeing your footwear up close, I see we were lucky to avoid serious injury. Would I be correct in assuming Cadet U'Aidat had some influence over your wardrobe this evening?'

Nyota did not reply. She was too busy admiring the naked Vulcan at the end of her bed. She'd been too distracted to really look at him earlier. She made a leisurely inspection of him. It appeared her imperfect human memory had failed her, he was even more handsome than she remembered. He seemed leaner than when she had last seen him, his face thinner and his muscles more defined. Perhaps she had not been the only one put off her dinner. He also had long trails of green scratches all over his shoulders and back. She felt both guilty and pleased at having inflicted them.

He raised an eyebrow at her silence.

She smiled and opened her arms to him 'Come here you gorgeous creature.'

She felt his amusement at her very human turn of phrase, but he was back in her arms in moments regardless.
Chapter 23

*Spock*

Spock awoke to the familiar darkened chill of spaceship quarters. For a moment he was disorientated. He was naked. He was in an unfamiliar room. Then he felt the dual warmth of Nyota curled beside him both in bed and within his mind. He recalled the events of the evening. Nyota. His adun'a. He twisted so he could look at her. She adjusted to his new position, curling a leg over his hip and tucking a hand against his chest. Her long hair curled slightly in waves across their shared pillow. He stroked the soft length of it. How often had he imagined touching it?

Nyota sighed in her sleep and burrowed her face against him. Spock felt a strange echo of the movement from their bond. Curiously he probed the connection. He was shocked at how much stronger it was. Despite the healer's claims that bonds could form without the assistance of a healer, he had not thought such a strong connection possible without a formal bonding. His connection to Nyota now dwarfed that even to his mother. Experimentally he pressed against her within his mind. To his surprise she murmured his name against him. He was curious to test the bond further, but decided to wait until she awoke.

His internal clock informed him it was 05:12 hours. He had slept for far longer than was his norm. He supposed given the circumstances such an occurrence could be overlooked. He allowed himself an additional 12 minutes lying beside his bonded and then carefully extracted himself. He sat cross-legged beside her and meditated for 30 minutes, relishing the ease with which he was able to calm his mind. He could not remember when his thoughts had last been so clear. Months… No – 3.1 standard years. From the moment she'd confronted him at the Academy swimming pool.

Now it came as easily as breathing. When he arose to shower he felt truly rested.

He felt it the moment Nyota awoke. Her return to consciousness bubbled to the surface of the bond. Instinctively he reached for her and felt her return the mental pressure. She appeared in the doorway with a beatific smile on her face. She had wrapped the thin Starfleet regulation blanket around herself to ward off the chill and her hair hung in a magnificent tangle down her back and over her shoulders. Wordlessly she made her way to the sink and washed the sleep from her face before picking up a brush to clean her teeth. She turned and observed him in the shower shamelessly as she brushed her teeth. Spock could feel her amusement and desire through the bond, though both were plain to him from her expression. He noted that she cleaned her teeth very quickly.

She did not wait for an invitation, simply dropped the blanket and pulled open the door to join him in the tiny shower stall. She pressed her soft body against his. 'Good morning Spock.'

Spock had never imagined an occasion wherein he would welcome company as he bathed, but when confronted with the situation he found himself quite amenable. She reached up and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pressing her lips to his in a minty kiss.

He had yet to wash his hair but found himself unconcerned at the distraction. 'It is proving to be a most pleasant morning indeed adun'a.' Spock replied more or less into her mouth. Calling her wife pleased him much more than it had logical reason to do so. Nyota had her tongue in his mouth and one hand twisting in the hair at the nape of his neck. The other was teasingly caressing the skin below his hip, just to the side of where he was suddenly very eager to direct her attention.

His own hands seemed to have wills of their own, stroking her skin without any direction from his
The speed with which their desire grew surprised him. 38 seconds after Nyota had stepped into the stall he was lifting her, pressing her against the wall and aligning their bodies with desperate need. It had been only hours since he last had her and yet he was weak with it. How had he withstood his need of her for so long? Spent months upon months in her company without so much as touching her? It seemed incredible. After what seemed like forever but was actually only seconds, he had himself where he needed to be and sunk an inch into Nyota's heat. He hesitated briefly, savouring the exquisite agony of her body yielding to his.

'Yes… need you…' Nyota seemed to be sharing his line of thought since she was rubbing herself against him and moaning into his ear. He adjusted his grip on her thigh and slid into her completely. Her body tensed against his in pleasure, her back curling and her head rolling back against the now soapy wall. Spock allowed himself a groan and buried his head against her shoulder uncaring of the mess of wet hair that tried to strangle him. The hot water of the shower had nothing on the tight, wet, inferno within Nyota. He held himself still within her for a minute, grinding his hips against her, basking in that incredible heat and the little mewling noises of pleasure coming from her throat until they were both half mad with desire. 'Spokkhn.. sanu…'

(Spock… please…)

Spock wondered if he would ever become accustomed to the wave of heat that infused him whenever Nyota said his name in her beautiful impassioned human voice with her perfect Vulcan accent. He hoped not, although the noise she made when he finally withdrew his body and plunged sharply back into her was almost as musical.

He had intended to take her more gently when next he had her, but seeing as how he had her shoved up against the wall in a cramped Starfleet shower stall, such plans would have to wait. For her own part Nyota seemed just as eager as he, welcoming his pounding rhythm with bites and kisses and mumbled words of encouragement.

He did not join their minds, their position was too awkward to get a hand to her face, but through their strengthened bond and their bare skin pressed together he could feel her pleasure almost as clearly as if he had. She came with a strangled scream, her nails digging into his shoulders as she clenched around him. He faltered, the dual sensations of her tightening around his length and the echo of her orgasm in their bond undoing him. His grip on her hip tightened and he buried himself as deeply as possible before spilling within her in white pulsing heat, Nyota keening in his ear.

He was motionless for a few minutes. He did not count them. He found his internal clock became erratic when he and Nyota were naked. When he lowered her to her feet she swayed and pressed her head against his chest. He could feel her drowsy pleasure. He pulled her hair back and pressed kisses to her neck, noting the recent bite marks upon her with a certain illogical male smugness that made him feel rather immature.

Nyota laughed against him. 'You should see your back.' Her eyes were bright with amusement. 'I might look like I had a run with Dracula, but you look like you spent the night with a leopard.'

Spock released her and stepped out of the shower, drying himself with a towel. 'I am uncertain how I feel about your so far consistent trend of laughing at me after intercourse.' Nyota snorted and began washing her hair. Spock wrapped the towel about his hips and looked over his shoulder at his back in the mirror. 'You are correct in your assessment however, I do look as if I shared my bed with some sort of jungle cat as opposed to a small human female.'

Nyota giggled, one hand to her mouth. Spock struggled to maintain a straight face. 'A cruel human female who seems to enjoy laughing at my misfortunes.'

Nyota shook her head and continued bathing. Spock shaved with the unsatisfactory kit provided
and attempted not to stare at the wet naked Nyota reflected in the mirror beside him. She still
catched him of course, her eyes meeting his mischievously as she took a shower which took much
longer than seemed necessary and seemed to involve a lot of careful massaging of her figure and
very little actually washing.

Shortly after he finished shaving she emerged and commented that since there was only one towel
they would have to share. Spock could not fault her logic and generously helped her dry off. When
he deposited a damp Nyota onto the bed a few minutes later, made good on his earlier intentions of
gentleness.

*Nyota*

Nyota returned to her dorm room well before her first class at 09:00 and was instantly waylaid by a
near hysterical Gaila U’Aidat.

Gaila gave her a thorough once over, her eyes seeming to notice every little detail, and gave Nyota
a very devious smirk. 'My my Nyota. That appears to be an ill-fitting uniform from a replicator.
And I don't think those shoes are regulation.' The shoes were of course, Gaila's high heels. 'And do
I believe I smell *eau de Spock* all over you.'

Nyota bit her lip and attempted to smother a smile as she closed the door behind her.

'So you and Commander Hot Pants kissed and made up I assume?' Gaila was practically bouncing
up and down in delight.

Nyota sniggered. 'Commander Hot Pants? I'll be sure and share that one with him.'

The Orion rolled her eyes dismissively. 'Commander Hot Pants doesn't scare me with his icy
Vulcan act. After sleeping next to you for three years I know all about the *real* Spock.' She wiggled
her eyebrows.

Nyota frowned as she headed to her side of the room to redress in a proper uniform and boots.
'What do you mean?'

'Yooouuu talk in your sleep.' Gaila's grin was positively evil. 'And from the sounds of things
have *very* vivid dreams.'

Nyota felt her face burn in embarrassment as she pulled off Gaila's heels. 'So you won't be wanting
details of my evening with 'Commander Hot Pants' then I assume. Since you already know
everything.'

Gaila practically threw herself onto Nyota's bed to give her complete attention to her as she dressed.
'Heck no! I was tucked up in bed alone and sober before 24:00 hours last night. I need to live
vicariously through you for a change.' She raised a brow, 'And you owe me. I'm the one that
dragged you out last night.'

Nyota slipped off the scratchy uniform she'd ordered from the replicator in Spock's quarters that
morning and pulled on a bra.

Gaila gasped. 'Wow. You are *covered* in lovebites.'

Nyota tsked. 'I am not *covered*…'

'Ny, there's one on your butt.' Gaila's words were tinged with amusement.
Nyota shot a glare at her roommate. Gaila's eyes were wide and she was clearly trying not to laugh. She reached out a slender green hand and gently poked Nyota on the left side of her backside. Nyota frowned and looked down. Sure enough, peeking out from the hem of her plain replicator panties was a bite mark. On her butt. Gaila was losing her battle with her laughter and making snorting noises. Nyota bit her lip. She had to admit it was *kinda* funny and she was in such a good mood… 'Commander Hot Pants' is gonna pay for that later on.'

Gaila laughed loudly and Nyota gave in and joined her.

*SPOCK*

Spock reported to Admiral Barnett at 09:00 hours and formally accepted his new position on the Academy staff. The Admiral congratulated him on his promotion but otherwise the meeting was uneventful. As he was not expected to resume teaching duties until the following week, he took the spare time afforded to him to stop by Professor Voss' office and catch up on the changes to the department schedules in his absence.

The Andorian was enjoying his customary morning coffee at his desk and stood to greet him warmly.

'Commander Spock! Good to have you back!'

Spock inclined his head. 'It is pleasant to be back at the Academy Professor Voss.'

Voss indicated the seat across his seat. 'I thought you might have been back yesterday actually. Did Pike manage to waylay you for a change?'

Spock took a moment to decipher Voss' meaning. 'Indeed. I spent yesterday with Captain Pike in the Officer's Lounge on Space Station 1. I elected to spend the evening there rather than return to the Academy.'

Voss smiled strangely. 'Yes. I heard a rumour about you and some pretty young ensign causing a scene.'

Spock tilted his head in confusion. 'If you are referring to ensigns Farris and Chang I assure you I was not a party to their game of strip poker.'

Voss frowned. 'What? No! I just heard you kissed an ensign then practically dragged her out of the bar. I didn't hear anything about public nudity or gambling?' His tone of voice implied he wouldn't mind hearing about it however.

Spock blinked slowly. He had assumed someone would have noticed his unusual behaviour with Nyota and he was relieved that it had been assumed she was an ensign. It was the logical assumption. Cadets and civilians alike weren't supposed to frequent the Officer's Lounge. There hadn't been anyone from the Academy in the lounge so the chances of her being recognised out of uniform had been very slim. 'Ah. Yes. I did unexpectedly run into a woman of my acquaintance.' It wasn't a lie.

Voss' smile returned at full force. Spock was a little disturbed. Apparently his personal life was a subject of some interest around Starfleet if gossip regarding it had already made it down to earth. The prospect did not please him or bode well for his relationship with Nyota. He needed to see how far that interest spread. 'I must admit I am surprised at such talk Professor Voss. My behaviour with my… companion, was restrained in comparison to that of the officers in the lounge in general.'
Voss snorted. 'Oh I don't doubt it Commander. I think just seeing you with a pretty girl was a bit of a novelty is all. I'm sure they will find something more interesting to gossip about before the end of the day.'

Spock could tell Voss wanted to ask him about his 'companion' but was restraining himself. Spock was grateful.

He passed the rest of his day taking care of such mundane matters such as organising his new quarters in a satisfactory manner and collecting his hoverbike from storage. His mother's rosebush was gone from the Phonology lounge. It had most likely died, which was unfortunate. Nyota had classes all day and he was not expecting to hear from her until the evening. He attempted to focus on the matters at hand rather than thinking about his bondmate, but he found his thoughts drifting. The bond was too new and it fascinated him. He had to restrain the urge to prod and poke at it curiously.

He was tempted to contact the healer T'Sul and get her opinion, he was certain she would share his interest. Perhaps when he and Nyota formalised their marriage he would employ her to perform the ceremony. It would make for a more pleasant occasion then sharing his thoughts with his grandmother T'Pau.

But would Nyota want a formal bond? He supposed he should not make such assumptions, but if she was willing to form an informal bond with him, he could think of no logical reason not to. She was familiar with Vulcan custom and would be aware that their bond was already considered a form of marriage under Vulcan law. All that remained was for their bond to be recognised by a healer and reported to the Vulcan High Council.

This line of thought brought him to his parents. He had no doubt his mother would be pleased for him, but his father… Sarek had made it clear he expected Spock to marry and reproduce with a Vulcan, an assumption shared by T'Pau. He felt an uncustomary sense of dread at revealing Nyota to them. He doubted she would find them welcoming.

His thoughts drifted from his own family to Nyota's. He was fairly certain Zuberi Uhura had enough respect for his daughter to accept her choice, even if that choice wasn't human. He had no idea how the rest of her family would react to their bonding however. Although since Tamu Uhura was a diplomat, she would probably be able to accept a non-human as her daughter's partner. He hoped. The Graysons had accepted his mother's choice and he had the advantage of being part human unlike his father.

The issue his mind kept returning to over the course of the afternoon wasn't their families or the bond itself, but rather Starfleet and their current situation. Technically they hadn't done anything against regulations. Spock could see several options before them, but none were ideal.

At 16:28 hours he received an unexpected subspace call. He found himself seated at the console looking at none other than T'Sul. The aged Vulcan's face was as closed as always, but her eyes seemed… amused? Excited?

She did not wait for him to offer her greetings appropriate to a lady of her age and rank, just started talking. 'Spokkha, You have bonded with your human.' She made it a statement, but Spock still felt obliged to confirm her words.

'Yes.' He wondered how she could possibly know.

'This is good. I sensed the change. I intentionally retained a small link to you after melding with you. I was most curious at how your bond with the human would progress.' She looked almost
eager and not at all ashamed by her slight invasion of his privacy. 'Have you arranged for a healer to formalise and validate your bond for the High Council?'

'I have not.'

'I would be most pleased to offer my services in this matter. I will be passing through the Sol System enroute to Vulcan in 25 days. You and your bondmate may present yourself to me on the orbital station.' From her words it was clear she already considered her proposal accepted. In truth Spock saw no reason not to take her up on her offer. She would be far more pleasant to Nyota than T'Pau, and having the marriage recognised by the Vulcan High Council would come in handy when they chose to inform Starfleet. He saw no risk to the plan, the High Council did not share census data with Starfleet. There was no chance their bond being formalised on Vulcan would get back to Earth.

'That would be most satisfactory Lady T'Sul.' He inclined his head respectfully.

'Very well. My assistant will contact you will the details 10 days prior to our arrival. Live Long and Prosper Spohkh.' She raised her hand in traditional farewell. Spock echoed the movement.

'Peace and Long Life T'Sul.'

He sat silently for a few moments, thinking over the strange call and the equally strange healer. He had no doubt she had only offered her services because she was curious about a bond between a human and a Vulcan and wanted to inspect it first hand, but her interest did not insult him. He reached within himself and out to Nyota along that bond which interested T'Sul so much.

He sensed Nyota's confusing mix of feelings. She was happy, but nervous, and made no attempt to keep her fears from him. He spent the afternoon reading though the syllabus his former classes had been following in his absence and tried to ignore his own feelings on the situation.

When his door chimed at 18:12 hours he could feel her on the other side, her emotions a mix of excitement, anticipation and nervousness in their bond. He found his own emotional state mirrored hers. He opened the door planning to invite her inside to tell her of his conversation with T'Sul and discuss their options reasonably - as befitted their situation as Instructor and student and not act upon their new status as bondmates. As of 09:00 and his meeting with Admiral Barnett, any such actions could be fraternisation, married or not. It would be logical to cease physical interaction until their situation was resolved so their careers would not be threatened.

He triggered the door mechanism. Nyota had a few PADD's in one hand and looked much as she had on other occasions when she had stopped by his quarters to hand in marking or discuss other legitimate Academic work, however he did not recall her being so beautiful on all those other occasions. Seeing her in her cadet's uniform and knowing exactly what was underneath had a profound effect upon his self-control.

She did not offer him her usual greeting and instead was staring at him, her eyes huge. Spock swallowed as he was stricken with a wave of intense desire.

Although there was no discernible change in the ambient temperature, he felt uncomfortably warm. He wished he could blame it on his human bondmate, however whilst her growing lust was reflected through the bond, it was certainly mutual. He made no effort to speak, simply stood to the side and Nyota automatically stepped past him and into his quarters.

The door hadn't even completely shut before he was kissing her. Her PADDs fell to the floor with
an ignored clatter as she wrapped her arms around him. It had been 9 hours and 37 minutes since they had made love and Spock's body was informing him stubbornly that this was far too long. Nyota was in complete agreement. Her nimble fingers had already shoved his grey jacket to the floor and were currently attempting break the laws of physics by removing his undershirt without breaking their kiss. For his own part Spock's more logical brain had his hands under the skirt of her tiny cadet's uniform and tugging at her underwear.

Abruptly Nyota came around to his way of thinking and she gave up on his shirt and managed to undo the fly of his pants whilst biting his bottom lip. She let out a low moan as her underwear ended up around her ankles and Spock's hands found her heat.

His bondmate was wet and he was hard. The solution to their situation was obvious. Spock was then faced with only one dilemma.

The floor or the wall?

He could see advantages and disadvantages to both scenarios. He was uncertain which would be the more suitable option. Nyota solved his problem by wrapping a leg around him and grinding herself wantonly against him.

The wall was suddenly the clear winner.

He was pleased to discover it was much easier to balance her against a wall that wasn't wet and soapy.

Nyota bit her lip as he slid into her tight heat, her eyes boring into his own. He could tell she was making a conscious effort to be quiet. The Academy housing didn't offer the same anonymity and sound insulation as a vast space station. Her forethought pleased him, but at the same time a part of him wanted to make her scream as she had the night before, to let the entire Academy, Starfleet, Earth, the universe at large - know that Nyota Uhura was his.

Her hands pulled his hair as he pistoneded into her, her body thrashing against his wildly but her lovely voice remained stifled. As he felt her nearing completion she gasped and let out one long low groan that twisted and turned into his name, quiet and desperate beside his ear. Unexpectedly his climax hit him and he found himself gasping into her shoulder as she shuddered around him.

When blood flow returned to his brain Spock dazedly realised he had borne them to the floor. Nyota was in his lap, her dress shoved up around her waist and his length still buried within her. He kissed her languidly as their heart rates slowed and their breathing returned to normal. 'I believe this is the point at which you find some reason to laugh at my expense Nyota.'

She laughed, her entire face lighting up in amusement and joy. Spock found his lips twisting upwards in a reflection of his bondmate's mirth.

Some hours later, naked and spent in Spock's bed, they decided the best option before them would be to see T'Sul and have their marriage recognised, but wait until Nyota graduated to make their association known. Their only other real alternative was to inform Starfleet that under Vulcan law they were married. Such an unusual occurrence would be frowned upon and there was a good chance the board would still rule it fraternisation even though technically, it was not. Both agreed they would need to keep the physical side to their relationship to a minimum until then. Judging from their reaction to one another on his doorstep, Spock was concerned that this would prove difficult.

'I managed to keep my hands off you for three years Commander, I'm sure I can stand another six
months.' Nyota said before adding teasingly: 'Especially since now I have all these pleasant memories to entertain myself with. You on the other hand, might have difficulty.'

'Nyota, I am Vulcan. Attempting to compete with me in matters of self-control would be illogical.'

Nyota met his eyes with amusement. 'As illogical as say, biting someone on the butt?'

Spock attempted to understand the reference and failed. 'I am afraid I do not follow.'

'Not to sound conceited, but you aren't very logical or self-controlled where I am involved.' She did indeed, sound somewhat conceited.

Spock pondered her statement for a second. 'I am forced to admit that in comparison to my interactions with other individuals you may be correct, however despite my...feelings for you, I am confident my self-control is greater than that of a human.'

Rather than take offense at his dismissive tone Nyota just smiled. 'Well Commander Hot Pants my butt begs to differ.'

Spock felt his eyebrows rocket towards his hairline. 'I still do not understand this reference to your backside. And what do you mean by 'Commander Hot Pants'?'

Nyota's eyes were bright with amusement but she offered no explanation.

Spock frowned. 'I am uncertain how the temperature of my pants could constitute what I am assuming is a 'nick name'.' He paused. 'Or what your backside has to do with my perceived lack of self-control.'

Nyota rolled on her side to face away from him. For a moment Spock thought he had angered her, but he still felt her amusement through their bond. She reached back and took hold of his left hand bringing it to rest against the side of her backside below her right hip. Spock glanced down and instantly grasped her meaning.

There was a bite mark on her backside. 'Ah.' He found himself at a loss for further comment. He could feel Nyota shaking slightly with laughter.

'That's right. Commander Hot Pants isn't quite as self-controlled as he thinks!'

Spock frowned, the bite already forgotten, 'What do you mean 'Hot Pants' Nyota? I am unfamiliar with this colloquialism.'
Nyota was quite proud of herself. She'd managed to avoid so much as touching Spock - her husband's - hand in the two and a half weeks since his return to Earth. She had shot him plenty of heated looks and lustful thoughts when they were unobserved, but her weak human self-control was proving every bit as strong as his precious Vulcan reserve.

Although, admittedly, she was incredibly sexually frustrated, she was confident she'd be able to hold out until graduation, directly after which she intended to waylay Spock and spend hours, no days, in a glorious naked frenzy. Judging from the dark looks he was sending in her direction with ever increasing frequency, Spock was almost as eager for her graduation as she.

It was about that particular future event that she was fantasising during her Phonology V lecture. She made no attempt to keep her thoughts private and was perfectly aware that Spock was privy to most of them through their bond. Without a meld or at least skin contact, clear thoughts couldn't be conveyed between them, but emotions and feelings most definitely could. Spock couldn't tell precisely what she was thinking, but her desire was plain. It was a way of teasing him that she found endlessly entertaining.

Spock paused for the fourth time in the last hour to take a sip from a glass of water. He looked almost distracted. She could feel arousal, frustration and irritation coming from him. Nyota smirked to herself. She appeared to be getting better.

Beside her Gaila leant over and whispered breathily in her native tongue, a dialect of Orion not taught at the Academy and unlikely to be overheard. 'Ny! What are you doing? You are giving off pheromones like a cat in heat! The Commander looks like he's going snap!'

Nyota flicked her hair. 'Good.' It would be amusing no end to have Spock cave and loose his cool before she, a human, did.

Gaila shook her head and switched back to standard for a moment. 'You are so bad Ny!' She lowered her voice even further. 'But seriously, you are giving off way more of the sexy vibes than you usually do when you are torturing your Vulcan. Even some of the humans are noticing.' She shot a look at the Vulcan at the podium, 'And he sure as hell has. I almost pity him.'

Gaila had a point. She'd had her fun. Nyota sighed and returned her attention to the lecture material. It was almost impossible to focus however. Normally she found Spock's lectures interesting. He was far more thorough than many of her other instructors, taking the time to point out related information and research relevant to the lecture subjects but beyond the scope of the syllabus.

He was currently explaining that the reason most humanoid species could not correctly replicate Kreetassan speech was because the Kreetassans, whilst humanoid, had their spines imbedded along the front of their torso rather than behind. As a result their throats were of a completely different shape than most humanoid species. An interesting fact, however her thoughts kept slipping away from Kreetassans physiology to Vulcan physiology. Namely Spock's.

She crossed her legs and tried to ignore the hot dampness between her thighs. Getting turned on
sitting in a lecture hall full of other cadets wasn't exactly on her to do list. She frowned and focused her attention on her PADD.

She half-heartedly took notes for the last half hour and was grateful when Spock finally dismissed them. She tried to keep her eyes to herself as she made her way to the nearest exit beside Gaila, but she felt Spock's eyes on her and own rose to meet his powerlessly. The look he was giving her made heat pulse low in her belly. She almost tripped down the stairs. Gaila grabbed her arm and she managed to drag her eyes from her Vulcan.

'Geez Ny, maybe you should go have a cold shower or something. You can't even walk straight.' Gaila thoughtfully murmured. Nyota was thinking more along the lines of running back to her dorm to desperately get herself off, but Gaila's suggestion gave her a less humiliating exit. 'You know what, I think I might. I'll see you in the lab after lunch.' Gaila nodded, but her smirk implied she was well aware of her room-mate's real intentions.

Nyota practically ran across the campus. No more than ten minutes could have passed before she was on her back with her hands between her legs working herself desperately. She tried to muffle the noises she was making, but she was just so desperate. Her mind was full of Spock, she was imagining his hands on her in place of her own. She twisted a nipple through her uniform and pretended it was his mouth she felt against her. She couldn't recall when she had last been so aroused. Perhaps the first time Spock had kissed her. That mad fumble in the Shipyard when she'd come just from the feel of him through their clothes. She felt like a cord pulled so tight it must surely snap. Her back arched and her hand rubbed frantically. She had been trying to satisfy herself ever more frantically for perhaps ten minutes when she heard the door chime to indicate a visitor.

For a long moment she was frozen in fear. Then she bit her lip as she continued her ministrations in fevered silence. She had no fear of being caught, the door would only open without a code for herself and Gaila. The door chimed a further two times. She ignored it. Nyota's arm was aching, she was so close but couldn't seem to get that last bit of sensation she needed to climax. She added a second hand, shoving fingers inside herself in counter-point to her rubbing. It did little to alleviate the aching emptiness she felt. Tears threatened to spill from her eyes. She was so aroused it was almost painful. She was on the verge of crying. She needed to come.

In disbelief she heard the override on the door control. Her hands froze as her eyes shot to the smoked glass partition that gave the room a semblance of privacy from the doorway. The door was a bright rectangle, a tall dark figure outlined against it. She struggled to sit, uncomfortably aware of the wetness between her thighs and on her fingers as she did so. Only staff had override access. She took a breath and tried to make her voice sound even 'Hello?'

The door slid shut behind her visitor and Nyota sat up straighter before realising her panties were around her knees. She froze. 'Just a minute!' Who the hell would just barge into a cadet's room!?

The answer to that unspoken question was suddenly obvious. Nyota realised who it was a split second before he came into view. She had already risen to her feet by the time Spock stepped past the partition and met him at the mid-point of the room. She didn't have a chance to so much as speak his name before he was upon her.

He seemed every bit as frustrated as she. He kissed her furiously, his teeth biting and scratching against her. He tore the band from her hair, taking hair with it, but Nyota didn't even feel it. His hand twisted in her hair then used it to tilt her head to his satisfaction. Yes yes yes yes! A sex-crazed voice inside her head was chanting madly. She needed him. Needed him now.

Her bed was slightly closer than Gaila's so it was there that he threw her. Her legs fell aside
shamelessly as she reached out to him with both arms. She wanted to kiss him and bite him and most of all fuck him. She was sure between the two of them they could have all three covered in short order.

Spock stared at her for a second, his gaze darting from her eyes down to her exposed body and she sensed his indecision in a vague way, she was too distracted to really analyse their connection, and then he had knelt at the foot of the bed and pulled her towards him with an iron grip around her left ankle. Satisfied with her position his hands gripping her hips firmly. He inhaled deeply and then his mouth and tongue were against her. She was helpless to constrain the wail that rose from her throat. She shoved a fist against her mouth, biting the meat of her thumb in an attempt to quieten herself. It felt so so so good.

His fingers dug into the soft flesh on her hips almost painfully as she thrashed about, trying to press herself closer to him. She could feel him panting, each breath burning against her already overheated flesh. He released his grip on her, shifting to pull her right leg over his shoulder. She could feel the rasp of his stubble against the soft skin of her thigh. She pulled herself up on her elbows so she could look down at him. The sight of him doing something so erotic sent a giddy thrill through her. She felt like she'd corrupted the incorruptible. His face was pale against her skin with a green blush to his cheeks and his hair was mussed against her thigh. The grey instructor's uniform, the point of his visible ear and the tilt of his eyebrows, so starkly Vulcan, pointed out the impossibility of what she was seeing.

Her heart felt like it might beat through her rib cage. Spock, her perfect Vulcan Commander, had his face buried between her thighs. The sight made her weak with renewed desire. He felt her gaze on him and his dark eyes flicked up to meet her own. Her breath caught as something strange and lustful passed between them and then she collapsed back into the mattress as her body shuddered in blissful release against his mouth. Spock stood and crawled over her. Pleased with his intent Nyota obligingly wrapped her legs around his hips. He had undone his pants and was able to simply thrust forward, burying himself roughly in her still quivering flesh. Nyota wondered with amazement how she'd managed to live without this, the feeling of him inside her, for almost an entire month.

He was pressed against the length of her body in a great crushing heat. His chest vibrated where it was pressed against her. She realised he was making a strange growling noise against her neck. It was an odd sound, an alien sound, but like everything Spock did, it turned her to goo. She had done this, turned the cool reserved Vulcan into a growling animal. His hips were grinding restlessly against her as if he was waiting for something.

Nyota lifted her pelvis towards him, wordlessly indicating her desire for him to continue. Instead of responding how she expected, namely fucking her, he paused and raised himself up on an elbow to look down at her. There was a green flush along his cheekbones, his mouth and chin bore evidence of her arousal and his lips were parted. He looked utterly debauched, and yet it was the expression on his face that stopped her heart. His eyes were black, the pupils blown till no iris remained. She could feel the strange rumble of his growling against her chest and it continued when he spoke, his words oddly lengthened. 'Nyyotaa. I buuurn…. I neeeed…'

Nyota felt a tingle of amusement. He certainly didn't need to ask her permission. Surely her arousal was obvious? He was already inside her after all. Whatever he needed she needed just as much. His hand came up to rest against her jaw and she realised what he was really asking. He wanted to meld with her. A thrill passed through her. She turned her face to bring his fingers closer to her psi points in acquiescence. The growl deepened and his fingers quickly aligned to join them, his mind sinking into hers.
Suddenly she was on fire.

It was different to the other times they had melded. His fingers burnt against her skin, and heat poured into her body, running through her veins and leaving fire in its wake. Every sensation she'd felt moments before was amplified a hundred fold. It was too much. She had been expecting wildness, not the near insanity she felt in Spock. His mind was a maelstrom of lust and need and other alien emotions she didn't even recognise.

There was no reason; his thoughts were splintered, broken words and phrases flitting across his consciousness in place of his unusual concise logic and underneath it all a burning pain, need, compulsion. Something she didn't even have a word for despite being fluent in dozens of languages. It seemed to reach for her, consuming her as surely as Spock. For a moment panic seized her, and she tried to pull away, but her body was tensed and frozen in place.

Before she had time to react, to form a full thought, she felt her mind fracturing, regressing into something primitive. It was like being drugged. The burning consumed her. She couldn't tell where she ended and Spock began. She needed... She didn't know what. Something. Heat, teeth, blood. Spock.

*Spock.*

She needed Spock.

She opened her eyes and felt her madness reflected back at her from alien eyes. Her head rolled back as her back arched unconsciously. She struggled to form words. Shaping her tongue and lips around each syllable felt like a monumental effort.

'Spokkh! I burn!' She didn't know what language she was speaking. Her body was twisting against her will, one moment pressing against Spock, the next pulling away. Her uniform scratched against her burning skin. It hurt. Spock twisted a hand in the red material of her dress and tore it from her body, the seams digging painfully into her flesh as they gave way. She let out an exultant crow as the odious thing was removed. Her bra followed a moment later. She fumbled blindly with Spock's jacket, shoving it down his arms. She needed to feel his skin against her own. She did not have his strength to simply pull it from him, but she tugged fiercely at the cloth none the less. His undershirt tore but stubbornly remained attached to him. He pulled away from her, breaking the meld and pulling his body off hers.

Instantly the burning madness intensified into pain and she flinched.

She cried out wordlessly, reaching after him desperately.

She needed him with her.

She was dying.

It took him only seconds to shed his clothes, but it felt like hours. And then he was on top of her, his burning skin both inciting and soothing her. She spread her legs, blinding guiding him to press against her aching centre as he reached to her face to re-establish the mind meld. His fingers dug into her hip as her legs crossed behind him. He hesitated for a moment as their minds re-joined, and then his hips snapped forward, burying his length within her. She moaned loudly as she *finally* felt him where she needed him - his fingers pressed to her face, his mind blurred with her own and his body deep within her. For a moment the burning abated. Then he withdrew and slammed into her and she was engulfed once more.
Her mind was a red blur, she couldn't think past their shared need. Her hips jerked desperately against his, welcoming his invasion. Time lost meaning. They twisted and clutched at one another in a violent dance. No matter how hard or fast he fucked her it wasn't enough. He growled and shouted and buried his teeth in her skin wherever he could reach it. She responded in kind, biting him until her jaw ached. She was screaming in half a dozen tongues, her fingers ripping at his hair and scratching his perfect skin. Spock was unrelenting, twisting her body like a rag doll, taking her from every conceivable angle, his grip bruising as he filled her again and again with his seed. Nyota came and came and came again but the madness, the need, didn't fade. She scratched at Spock and he bit her. She couldn't tell if she wanted to fuck him or kill him. Smears of green and red dried and darkened on their sweat soaked skin. He had her in every way conceivable and still she was unsatisfied.

When the madness lifted, it did so suddenly and completely.

One moment she was a mindless animal rutting unto death or exhaustion, the next she was Nyota and Spock was the name of the person she loved, not a faceless need to be screamed. Her throat was raw and her mouth was full of green Vulcan blood. She was in Spock's lap, impaled upon him. Her hands were wrapped around his neck and shoulders and her teeth were buried in the flesh above his collarbone. She could feel the fading pulsing of her body around his as she came down from orgasm.

She was drenched in sweat and blood and come. Her every muscle quivered with exhaustion. She ached in a dozen different places. She felt a sharp twinge as Spock released the flesh of her neck where he had been biting her. His head rolled forward to rest against her shoulder. His fingers were still pressed to her face. She could feel him panting against her, his fierce grip on her loosening as his own wits returned to him. She reached for him in confusion. She felt a mix of shock, dismay and guilt. He was horrified at how violent their coupling had been and was already carefully probing her in their bond to assess the damage he had inflicted.

Nyota wanted answers, but she was too exhausted to form the words to ask him. She felt him tense against her, both in body and mind. The guilt she felt from him intensified. /Nyota.../ Even in her mind his 'voice' sounded horrified. Wordlessly she shushed him. She could not sharpen her thoughts to clear words, but she was able to communicate her desires.

Later. He could explain later.

He stilled for a long moment then nodded against her.

She was asleep within a minute.

*Spock*

The third time Spock awoke naked beside Nyota was under extremely different circumstances than the first two occasions. It was evening. He had slept for 3 hours and 7 minutes. He was forced to refer to the computer for the exact time however, since he could not accurately calculate how long he had been… with… Nyota before they had slept. It was 19:23 hours. Classes for the day were over and most cadets would be having their evening meal. Spock assumed Cadet U'Aidat would be returning to the dorm shortly. Remaining in Nyota's bed was impossible.

He carefully sat, shifting backwards so that he could rearrange Nyota's head so that she rested against his lap. The position his bonded had assumed during her slumber was the only part of their current situation that was familiar to him. She rested against his side, an arm wrapped around him and a leg thrown over his. Her face was even lovelier than usual relaxed in her sleep. Every other
aspect of the scene was repellent. Even in the darkness of the unlit room Spock could see that the white sheet that covered her was stained with blood and dried to her skin in many places. The arm that now curled over his thighs was mottled with more dried blood and bruises.

Spock unconsciously ran gentle fingers along her skin, as if gentleness now could undo the harm he caused earlier. Nyota sighed her sleep and burrowed closer to him. Her instinctual response increased the guilt and sorrow Spock felt tenfold. It seemed she subconsciously still trusted him, despite the violence and madness he had visited up on her.

He knew he needed to wake her and ensure she did not require medical attention, but he found himself loathe to do so. There was no doubt in his mind that she would condemn him for his actions. He had not expected such a situation to arise between them, but as his bond mate, he should have informed her of the possibility, however remote, of him entering pon farr, which was the only explanation for the events of the afternoon. Instead he had ignored the warning signs and she had suffered the consequences.

He looked around her dorm as if seeking answers to his problems. All he found were scattered clothes and piles of PADDs and other debris. To his amazement however he noted his mother's rosebush under a small UV lamp near the room's computer console. Its presence inexplicably increased his guilt tenfold.

At 19:28 hours he gently woke her.

'Nyota.'

She frowned in her sleep, curling more tightly against him.

'Nyota. You must awaken.' He could not bring himself to shake her, to touch her battered body any more than necessary, so he brushed his mind against hers.

She inhaled deeply and her eyes opened. He felt her rise to consciousness, her thoughts sharpening from a warm sleepy blur into a tight confused awareness. 'Spock?' Her voice was hoarse. He felt through their bond the moment the pain of her bruised body reached her. She inhaled sharply. She looked up at him in confusion.

'Nyota. I have injured you. You may require medical aid.' It was difficult for Spock to keep his words clear and his voice calm.

'What?' She struggled to sit, curling a hand around his shoulder for leverage. He felt the sharp pain in her ribs as she pulled herself upright beside him. He carefully assessed her through the bond.

'I do not believe you have any broken bones, but you most likely have one or more cracked ribs and you may have other internal injuries.'

She pressed a hand against her side. 'I think you are right about the cracked ribs.'

'I will accompany you to the medical centre.' Nyota's frown deepened in distaste. 'Unless you would prefer I contact another to escort you? Cadet U'Aidat perhaps?' Her head shook and Spock felt an echo of pain from a head ache.

'I don't need to go to medical Spock. I need a shower and some sleep.' She unsteadily slid her feet from the bed and onto the ground. She managed to push herself upright, but was forced to leave a hand against Spock's shoulder to steady herself. Spock could feel her going over her limbs, shifting her weight and tensing muscles to gauge her soreness. He was relieved to feel no more sharp pains to indicate serious injury.
She squeezed his shoulder. 'A shower. You can escort me to shower if you are feeling contrite *adun*.'

Spock met her gaze in surprise. She sounded tired, but not angry or fearful of him. She called him husband. It made no sense.

'It makes perfect sense Spock.' She smiled wanly at him, her hold on his shoulder turning into a caress and she continued in High Vulcan. 'Am I not thy bonded one? Are we not one?'

'This is so.'

'I feel what thy feel. Thy sorrow. Thy guilt at having hurt me.' She paused and Spock could see her trying to frame her words carefully. 'Thoust knows what madness it was that passed between us and I sense that it is something over which thy had no control.'

For once, instead inflaming him with desire, hearing Nyota speak in high Vulcan instead calmed him slightly. Her words were reasonable and truthful.

'Nyota. I should have spoken to thee of this... curse of mine people. I should have warned thee, protected thee from such an attack.' Spock felt shame at his actions under the effects of plak-tow, but his guilt was from exposing Nyota to such a situation. He could not control his biological functions, but he should have prevented her bearing the brunt of them. Especially unprepared.

Nyota waved a hand in a human gesture of dismissal he had often seen his mother employ. 'When I am rested thou shalt tell me of this 'curse', and if thou art trulydeserving of mine anger, thou shalt have it.' She leant forward and rested her head against his. 'But I am tired husband. I would bathe and sleep. Beside thee. Let us argue tomorrow.'

He could feel her tiredness, her need to rest. She was his bondmate and if she wished to delay passing judgement upon him for his actions until she was rested, then he would not argue with her.

Spock stood and carried Nyota into the tiny bathroom that adjoined her room. He carefully unwrapped her from the sheet, gently loosening it where blood had caused it to stick to her skin. Under the harsh lights of the bathroom she looked far worse. Like she'd been viciously attacked. Beaten and raped. Her thighs were a mess of blood and semen, trickling out of her body now that she was standing. He could sense her discomfort at the sensation.

There were vicious bite marks scattered across every part of her body, but two particularly terrible ones on the right hand side and back of her neck. Spock recalled inflicting them, exalting in the taste of her red human blood, with a crushing wave of guilt and disgust. To further his shame it was she who comforted him. She leant against his chest, one arm wrapping around him whilst the other pressed their fingertips together so her voice could echo gently within his mind. /tomorrow/.

He washed her carefully, taking the opportunity to check her thoroughly for any injuries he might have overlooked. He then quickly washed the dried blood and other fluids off his own body before drying her off and helping her dress. She was revitalised slightly from the warm shower, and required little help. Spock noted she chose an outfit based upon comfort however - a long dress with a sweater over the top and slip on flat shoes. She did not bother with a bra. For his own part Spock redressed in his uniform. His undershirt was torn, but it was not evident with his jacket fastened. He then stripped the bed and threw the stained sheets into the recycler. He did not want Cadet U'Aidat to return to find her roommate's bedding looking like a crime scene. Her Orion sense of smell would tell her enough as it was.

Nyota was yawning and blinking slowly again by this stage, her exhaustion beating against her.
Spock stood before her uncertainly. She was holding the bag she often took to class loosely in one hand and a PADD in the other. She met his gaze evenly. 'We're going to your quarters Spock.'

He found himself nodding. It was completely inappropriate for Nyota to spend the evening in his quarters, but it was still early enough that their presence making their way across campus would be unremarkable, and considering his treatment of her earlier, he would do whatever she wished to make her comfortable.

Nyota shouldered her bag, wincing slightly as it rubbed against the bites on her shoulder. She smoothed her face into a placid mask then led Spock out into the corridor. He followed half a step behind her, his arms clasped behind his back and his face carefully devoid of the panic he felt. There were a few students in the halls, but none gave Nyota and Spock more than a second glance. Nyota had been Spock's aide for two years, seeing them together was hardly unusual. Spock consciously slowed his usual gait for Nyota's benefit.

It took 14 minutes for them to cross the campus as opposed to his usual time of 10 minutes. Spock opened his door and stepped aside so that Nyota could precede him inside. He locked it after himself, ordering the computer not to open from the outside. The small living area was already empty when he turned to look for Nyota. Her bag and PADD were on the couch, her shoes toed off on the floor nearby.

Spock found her curled on what he already considered 'her side' of his bed, despite the fact that she had only slept upon it once. Her sweater lay discarded beside her. He had been watching her for 1 minute and 12 seconds when she propped herself up on an elbow and waved him closer. He came to a stop beside her.

Silently she sat up and unfastened his jacket, sliding it down his unresisting arms so it joined her sweater on the carpet. She had said she wished to lie beside him. Obviously that was what she still desired, undeserving of such an honour as he was. Spock felt drained. He knew he would find sleep easily enough if he were to get into bed, regardless of the early hour and his previous rest. Despite the obvious intent of her actions, he still felt he had to ask.

'You wish for me to join you Nyota?'

She nodded.

Spock quickly changed into the loose pants he usually meditated and slept in. He also fetched a fresh under shirt for Nyota. Previously she had seemed comfortable sleeping in them. He felt the stiffness in her arms as she tried to pull her dress over her head to exchange it for the shirt. He helped her gently then took up her discarded clothing and folded them neatly on the bedside table. He slid into bed beside her but made no move to touch her.

She sighed and moved closer to him, her long limbs shifting to arrange herself comfortably against him. She was soon in exactly the same position she had been when he had awoken earlier, curled against his side, an arm and leg wrapped around him. He felt contentment and comfort from her side of their bond. Within two minutes she'd sunk into an exhausted slumber. Spock lay awake for a long time afterwards memorising the feel of her sleeping so unguardedly beside him. Her calm acceptance of his behaviour was unlikely to last once she was properly rested and had opportunity to think through his actions. The probability of his having the opportunity to hold Nyota in such a manner afterwards was not in his favour. He savoured it.
I'm quite conflicted about this chapter and thought about removing this entire section. I'm not sure I found a good balance between realism and 'romance'. I'm hoping it being from Nyota's point of view made it less confronting, despite the fact that writing from her point of view makes things um, dirtier, since she has a human vocabulary and knows naughty words!
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

This chapter has been edited quite a bit from the original version.

*Nyota*

She was stiff and sore when she awoke - and hungry - but she was also comfortable and wonderfully warm. She could feel Spock resting against her and his delicious Vulcan body temperature was superior to any heating device she'd ever encountered. Nyota sighed and burrowed her face against him as her legs unlocked and stretched out beneath her.

Her muscles twinged in protest - she felt as if she'd run a marathon the day before. Some of her contentment drained away at the discomfort and the rest soon followed as she recalled the disturbing events of the previous afternoon. Spock was pulled slightly apart from her within their bond, the mental equivalent of standing a few steps back from her where usually they were tightly embracing. He was awake and more upset than she'd ever felt from him. Admittedly they had not been bonded long, but she'd known him well enough to know he was not one to get worked up. He was Vulcán.

She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and shifted so that her face was looking up towards his. His face was a perfect mask of calm. It disturbed her far more than the turmoil she sensed within him. She didn't want to have to deal with Vulcan denial on top of whatever mess it was they were already in. Ignoring it for now, she turned away and pressed a light kiss against his chest before sitting up and swinging her legs off the side of bed.

Her head ached slightly from dehydration and she was terribly thirsty. Her teeth also felt horridly furry and she needed to pee. Nyota wandered into Spock's ensuite and took care of her needs. She looked like a complete wreck in the bathroom mirror. Spock only had a comb, no hairbrush, but she used it to straighten her hair as best as she could. Bites were visible peaking from the neckline of the shirt she was wearing and bruises marred her arms and legs, concentrated at her wrists and hips where Spock had held her. She spent a moment inspecting the bruises on her left wrist. It was particularly stiff and sore

Perhaps it was strained as well?

Try as she might she could not recall when it had happened. Or when most of her injuries had occurred.

No that wasn't right, she remembered Spock pining her to the bed, undoubtedly that was when her wrist had been hurt, but she recalled no pain from the incident, no moment when she'd thought 'that will leave a bruise in the morning'. All her memories of the previous afternoon were of lust, desperation and need, not pain or fear. She hadn't felt that he was being too rough with her at the time, when clearly he had been. She'd been focused upon him, upon quenching that insatiable need he'd inspired within her.

She had not been herself. Her thoughts had been crazed, delusional.
The realisation scared her far more than her injuries. What had happened? Had some Vulcans telepathic... thing gone horribly wrong? Had Spock unwittingly brainwashed her for a few hours? She calmed herself. She would wait for him to explain before she freaked out. Once she had all the facts, she could freak out at her leisure.

When she returned to the bedroom a few minutes later, feeling much more awake, Spock had not moved. She'd half expected to find him pacing or staring out of the window, wallowing in the Vulcan equivalent of angst, or whatever it was she was feeling from him. The stilted atmosphere between them was horrible.

Stubbornly she ignored his standoffish air and returned to the bed, resuming her previous position half wrapped around him. She could feel his mix of pleasure, surprise and guilt at her actions. It was unnerving for Spock to be feeling such a tumult of emotions all at once. Usually she felt only one emotion from him at a time, and very strongly. It seemed Vulcans were just as certain in their feelings as they were in everything else. He was a confusing human-like mess at the moment. He was also purposely not looking at her. Incredible.

Nyota sighed. Obviously he needed to get whatever he knew about what had happened the day before off his chest. A part of her wanted to brush it under the table, ignore it, was afraid that what he would tell her would ruin what was between them, but she needed to know just as badly. 'Okay Spock. I'm awake. Explain to me what happened.'

She didn't try and catch his gaze, instead resting her forehead against the side of his chest and closed her eyes. He held her against him, but very loosely.

His voice was detached when he spoke and his words were as well thought out as any he'd given in a lecture. 'Whilst Vulcans have a similar physiology to humans, the reproduction cycles of our two races are quite distinct. This is one of the reasons that betrothals are arranged between Vulcan children. The male of my species suffers from a fever which we call pon'farr every seven years. During this fever we lose our reason and logic, and desire only to mate or kill. If neither occurs the male will lose his grip on sanity and eventually die. Traditionally when a Vulcan enters his first pon'farr he will return to his bonded one and their marriage will be formalised and consummated.'

Whatever Nyota had been expecting, it was not for Spock to reveal that Vulcans apparently went into heat. But it fit with what she'd sensed in him the day before, the wildness of his thoughts and it also explained why such an advanced culture still practised the seemingly antiquated practise of betrothal between children.

'I should have informed you of this. I had not thought it necessary since it was thought my human blood had freed me of this particular need. I ignored the signs of my blood fever yesterday for this reason. I estimated the probability of my entering my time to be less than 7% and incorrectly assumed my lack of emotional control with regards to you was merely a product of my desire for you, my human blood, our bond and our enforced abstinence.'

Nyota let herself absorb his words. She wasn't sure what she felt exactly. There was relief that what had happened had a clear explanation, but his clinical words didn't really do justice to the enormity of what had passed between them.

'Nyota, I do not expect nor deserve your understanding in this... I have hurt you, used you cruelly.' Spock's voice was still as calm as if he was discussing Andorian syntax to a lecture hall full of students, but Nyota felt his darker emotions intensifying through their bond. The self-loathing he felt was staggering. She impulsively caught his hand in her own, pressing their fingers together so he could feel her lack of anger. Undoubtedly her confusion was plain to him, but she wasn't angry.
'I am relieved that there is an explanation for what happened between us… but I am not Vulcan Spock. Why was I likewise affected? I felt... mad… utterly insane. I could not think, could not string one coherent thought together beyond my desire for you. I don't even remember you hurting me. There's no pain in my memories, it's as if I was drugged.' She raised a hand to a sore spot on her scalp as another memory floated to the surface of her mind.

'You pulled out some of my hair at one point. I recall that I was… *pleased,*' she swallowed nervously, '…*aroused* by that. And I don't like pain Spock, I certainly don't like that sort of thing in the bedroom. Why would I react in such a way?' She paused for a moment before continuing. 'And… And I wanted to hurt you, or not hurt you exactly, but my need for you was violent. I was not myself. It's that which truly frightens me.' As her words tapered off she raised her head to regard him. He met her gaze evenly, but his feelings remained anything but 'even'.

'During the marriage ceremony of my people an elder initiates a mind meld between the male in *plak'tow* – the advanced stage of pon'farr, and his betrothed. The fever is then shared between the couple. I was not aware that the fever could be transferred to a human, but we are bonded, and I am part human, so clearly it is possible.'

'If all Vulcans go through this, surely you'd know how it affected humans due to your mother?' Nyota asked.

'Unfortunately that is not the case. It is considered extremely rude to mention pon'farr. It is not something we discuss even amongst ourselves. It is explained to us during schooling, but otherwise it is not spoken of.'

Nyota held back a sigh at cursed Vulcan pride. 'Okay, so you basically go crazy once every seven years and we need to have extremely energetic sex for a few hours to get it out of your system otherwise you might kill someone or die?' It sounded insane, but she'd learnt about far weirder alien rituals. She made an effort to be understanding. It wasn't Spock's fault he was Vulcan and his species had some weird biological quirks.

Spock blinked. Nyota could feel his surprise at her succinct and accepting summarisation. 'That is correct… although…'

He trailed off in a very un-Vulcan fashion.

'although?' Nyota prompted.

'Usually plak'tow lasts much longer than a few hours. I theorise my human dna has caused this lessening of the effect. This is favourable. I caused you many injuries over the course of a few hours. I do not wish to think of your state after two or three days of similar activity.'

Nyota felt her eyes threatening to pop out of her head. 'Two or three days?! Two or three days in a… a…' She tried to think of an appropriate term for what he had described, 'crazy sex-fever?!' She paused again. 'I'm never going to able to look at a Vulcan the same again.' It was actually kinda funny. The cool and detached Vulcans went into heat like cats.

Spock's grip on her tightened ever so slightly. 'Your reaction confuses me Nyota. Logic dictates you should be angry at me for causing you physical harm and keeping such information from you. Instead you seem accepting and even… amused?'

She paused, carefully judging her true feelings on the matter. 'I am upset that you didn't tell me. I hate the idea of losing control of myself like that. But I know you did not keep this from me maliciously. You honestly didn't think it was something we needed to worry about for a long time.'
She tilted her head as she pressed her mind closer to his, reading his thoughts. 'You were distracted by our situation here at the Academy… And my teasing you yesterday made it hard for you to notice the difference between your usual reactions to me.' She delved a little deeper. 'Wow. You really find it distracting when I do that don't you?' She allowed herself a teasing smirk as she realised how much she affected him.

His continuing surprise and confusion seeped from their bond and along their entwined fingers. That she was teasing him during such a serious conversation was strange to him.

Nyota shifted closer, pushing her body against his in a hug and continued more seriously. 'I am not angry you. I do not hate you. You should have told me, but I forgive you. There were extenuating circumstances.' she said, letting him feel her conviction.

Quite unexpectedly he kissed her. Tremulously. It was a kiss he had not given her before. A new kiss. He had kissed her in lust, and in softer affection, but this was something else. It was a thankful kiss. She felt how he loved her, how precious she was to him, but most of all, how undeserving he felt he was of her, how beautiful and perfect she was. Tears pricked behind her eyes. A part of her had always felt that as a Vulcan Spock held himself apart from her, above her as a mere human, but she could feel now that it was just the opposite. He did not feel worthy of her.

He broke their kiss and murmured against her lips. 'I am unworthy of you Nyota, k'hat'n'dlawa.' (Nyota, half of my heart/soul)

She felt the truth of his words, the true depth of his love for her. She blinked silent tears from her eyes as words she had no control over spilt from her. 'Spock my love my love my love…' He kissed her again. At some point her fingers had taken up their favoured position, buried in his hair, but she now ran them over his face in wonder. She loved him so much – her heart was full of him. Her fingers instinctively pressed into his psi points and although she could not initiate a mind meld since she was not Vulcan, she felt their bond deepen with the connection. He pulled her into him, embracing her through their bond even as their bodies curled around each other.

It was perfect.

The trip to the medical centre was, in contrast, excruciating.

She tried to get some supplies from a nurse so she could heal the more prominently placed bites and bruises privately, but the woman had insisted on scanning her, and when she saw the read out refused her treatment if she didn't see a doctor.

Nyota was sitting on a biobed with her arms crossed and a pissed off expression on her face when a doctor entered the small consultation room. He was fairly young for a doctor and looked vaguely familiar as a cadet in the same cohort as her.

'Good Morning Cadet Uhura, I'm Doctor McCoy.' He was looking over a PADD, most likely of her scanner readings. 'I understand you're after some minor first aid for abrasions and contusions?' she replied, trying not to take her mood out on the innocent man.

'Your scan indicates a bit more than a few bruises from a tumble cadet.' He shot her a concerned look. 'According to Starfleet regulations I'm required to ask you to explain how you received such injuries.'

Nyota sighed. 'I know what you're thinking and I can assure you that your assumption is totally off
'Just the same cadet, I'd like to be certain. Starfleet takes assault seriously, and even if you don't want to report anything, I can provide you with a referral to counselling and other support services.' The doctor sounded awkward, but genuinely concerned.

'I was not assaulted Doctor.'

'Cadet… your readings look like you went a few rounds with a Klingon. An… amorous Klingon. I'm going to need a more thorough explanation, or I will have to refer you to compulsory counselling.'

Nyota lay back on the biobed. 'Fine. You may monitor my bio readings. I'll answer questions sufficient to assure you I'm telling the truth.' Although not as accurate as truth serum, using heart rate, respiration and other such measurements was still a valid way of verifying the truth and something Starfleet medical personnel were trained in.

The Doctor, McCoy, regarded her silently for a moment. 'Very well cadet.' He stepped closer to regard the biobed display and cleared his throat. 'What's your full name?' he asked by way as a control question.

'Nyota Chausiku Uhura.' she replied.

He nodded, seemingly satisfied with her readings. 'Alrighty, how old are you?'

'23'

'How were you injured?' he asked, carefully regarding the display.

'Vigorous sex.' she responded blandly.

His eyes snapped down to hers. Nyota met them evenly.

McCoy raised an eyebrow then looked back to the display. 'Consensual sex cadet?'

'Very much so Doctor.'

The doctor looked her over sceptically. 'Two cracked ribs from consensual sex cadet?'

'Yes.'

He looked back the biobed display. 'Well I'll be.' He glanced at her surprise. 'I'm content with your explanation cadet, though I might suggest you and loverboy exercise a little restraint in future.' He frowned. 'Far be it from me to judge darlin', but a man that really cared for you would be a lot more gentle with you.'

Nyota raised a brow but refrained from making further comment. He clearly meant well, excruciating as the conversation was.

'Now, if you'll please remove your uniform I'll see to your injuries and we can both go our separate merry ways and forget this entire conversation.'

That sounded pretty good to Nyota.

She hopped off the biobed and did as requested, stripping until she stood in her bra, panties and boots. The doctor refrained from making further comment, simply indicated she should sit on the
edge of the bed and pulled out his dermal regenerator. He adjusted the instrument then began running it over the assorted bites and scratches she bore.

Nyota stared at the wall opposite and did her best to ignore his presence. She could feel him restraining the urge to speak as he continued. He sighed when he healed the nasty bite on the back of her neck. He was frowning openly by the time she stood so he could reach the bruises on her hips and thighs.

'Cadet…'

'Doctor. There is no need. I'm not an idiot, whilst my injuries were sustained consensually, it was most certainly a one off situation.'

He seemed reassured slightly. If he was a half decent physician he would have noticed that the bite marks on her weren't human. He was probably thinking she'd gotten really drunk and taken an alien to bed. Maybe more than one. A few Orions perhaps. Vulcans weren't the only humanoid race with different teeth to humans. She was confident the truth would never occur to him - he'd never suspect Commander Spock.

What was that saying? It was always the quiet ones?

Well that certainly applied to Vulcans. Apparently. She wondered how the hell they'd managed to keep their crazy sex-fever a secret from the federation for so long.

He finished and lingered as she dressed. 'Cadet, are you certain you do not want me to refer you to counselling?'

'Yes Doctor.'

'Well alright cadet.' He shook his head, clearly conflicted, as he left the room.
Nyota joined him at his office at precisely 16:00 hours and they made their way towards the campus transporter room together. As an officer and an instructor Spock was afforded use of the transporter in place of a shuttle. The ensign manning the console saluted and didn't inquire as to his purpose on Space Station 1 or why a cadet was accompanying him. This was against regulations, but Spock was pleased he didn't have to omit and imply things other than the truth.

Nyota walked beside him like a well behaved cadet and no one gave them a second glance. Spock was wearing his grey instructor's uniform so being accompanied by a cadet would have appeared perfectly normal to anyone who noticed them.

They made their way through the Starfleet section of the station and into the public transit zones. He did attract some interest from the civilians there, but that interest was directed at his Vulcan features and he was well accustomed to it. Nyota clearly was not however. 'Do people always stare so much sir?' She was frowning at a young woman who had pointed at him and was talking excitedly to her companion. 'Haven't they ever seen a Vulcan before?'

'Perhaps not. My race is not known for its adventurous and gregarious nature.' he remarked. The woman who had pointed was blushing in embarrassment and staring at her feet. She'd obviously been at the receiving end of Nyota's glare. 'Curiosity does not offend me cadet.'

'If you say so sir.' She sounded sceptical.

They made their way to the transit accommodation deck in the civilian zone. Spock led the way to the suite that T'Sul's assistant had directed him to the previous week. They were on time. The same assistant welcomed them and led them to a sitting room. The room had not been prepared in the same manner as those he had previously met with the healer in. The usual functional space station furniture provided decoration - two low couches, a table, generic framed prints on the walls, a replicator and a computer console.

'Lady T'Sul will join you shortly.' The Vulcan assistant spoke standard in deference to Nyota's presence.

Spock and Nyota sat on one of the couches. Spock could feel Nyota's nervousness. He took her hand in his own, carefully joining his middle and index finger to hers so he could share his calm with her. She sighed audibly and whispered. 'I am so jealous of your Vulcan calm Spock. Nothing phases you.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'There is no reason meeting with T'Sul should 'phase' me as you put it.'

Before she could comment further the inner door opened with a swoosh and T'Sul made her entrance. She was dressed in formal Vulcan robes as befitted her status. Spock felt Nyota's interest in the elaborate costume and headdress. She had never seen a Vulcan in such ceremonial robes in person. He could tell she was translating and deciphering the glyphs and lettering that lined T'Sul's robes and puzzling over their meaning. Her curiosity was endearing.

They both stood. Spock gave the ta'al with his left hand and bowed his head slightly. 'Live long and prosper Okasu T'Sul.'
She returned his greeting then turned her full attention to Nyota. Spock could feel Nyota wilting slightly under her intense Vulcan inspection, but she admirably kept that from her expression and posture. She raised a hand and greeted the elder politely. 'Live long and prosper Okosu T'Sul. It is a great honour to meet you.'

'Peace and long life Nyota Chausiku Uhura.' She seemed to enjoy vocalising Nyota's exotic Swahili name - a novelty for her. Spock could tell Nyota was surprised at hearing her middle name. He himself had never called her by it, aside from when she had been unconscious after the accident at the Academy and he'd been in the midst of melodramatic introspection. From observations of his mother's family, he was aware that human middle names were rarely used outside of the most formal occasions or when a parent wished to express particular disappointment at a misbehaving child.

He recalled his young human cousin Eric Grayson being called 'Eric Steven Grayson' a great deal during his occasional visits to his relatives on Earth. Eric had been an extremely curious child.

T'Sul took a seat on the opposite couch and Spock and Nyota returned to their own. 'I will inspect your marriage bond individually then you will meld and I will observe. If necessary I will assist you in ensuring the bond is complete.'

Nyota was a little put off by the manner in which the healer had gotten straight to the point, but Spock was pleased that they wouldn't be making human small talk. He nodded. 'That is acceptable.'

The elderly Vulcan indicated that Spock should kneel before her. He rose and did so without further comment. Her fingers were dry and warm against his face. 'My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts.' He opened his mind to her familiar touch.

She required little guidance to sink down within his mind to the place within him that housed his familial bonds. Her scrutiny of the bond to Nyota was intense. He felt no concern from her, just interest. Through their bond Nyota could sense T'Sul within him. The sensation was odd. Nyota found it disconcerting.

'/The bond is very strong. Show me exactly how it was strengthened./ T'Sul's voice within him was much stronger and more vital than it was out loud.

Spock had no particular desire to share such an intimate memory with her, but he knew her interest was not voyeuristic. He attempted to remain perfectly calm and unaffected as the events of a month previously, when Nyota had accepted his claim of koon-ut so'lik, played over for the healer's perusal. Mercifully she withdrew from the memory shortly after he had melded with Nyota rather than letting it play out.

'/A full mating bond was created after your koon-ut so'lik was accepted, however the bond I sense within you is a mature marriage bond. You and your human continue to surprise me./ At her words Spock thought of his pon'farr. The healer sensed his thoughts. /You have endured your time with your human?/ She sounded intrigued.

'/Yes./ Spock certainly was not going to share those memories with her however.

She no doubt sensed his hesitation. /I do not require to see your time, but I must verify that the plak'tow was shared for your marriage to be fully validated./

'/You will not require to see such things in Nyota's mind?/ He didn't want Nyota to have to endure such an invasion of privacy. It was difficult for him and he was Vulcan, it would be intolerable for
a human.

/I will not./

Though he was loathe to allow anyone to see him in such a state, Spock accessed the memory. He allowed T'Sul to see the moment he had melded with Nyota and she had been afflicted by his madness.

She seemed satisfied and withdrew completely from his mind. Spock felt relief.

She turned her dark gaze to Nyota. 'Nyota Chausiku Uhura. I will meld with you now.'

Spock felt her fear, but she dutifully stood and knelt beside him at T'Sul's feet. Impulsively Spock took her hand in his, uncaring of what T'Sul might think of the action. The healer repeated the ritual phrase and pressed her fingers to Nyota's face.

Spock felt Nyota within him, and the healer within her, both through the bond and the link of their fingers. It was a disturbing sensation, like a mirrored room, reflections within reflections. He focused on remaining utterly calm, distancing himself from his discomfort. He could feel Nyota drawing upon him to remain so herself.

The healer was much slower with her, Spock could not tell precisely what she did, but he could tell she was using a particularly gentle touch on his human wife.

She remained melded with Nyota for 9 minutes and 38 seconds. Nyota had calmed quite soon after the initial contact and Spock had felt little other than curiosity and amazement from her over the intervening minutes.

At length T'Sul sat back, pulling her hands from Nyota's face. She had a quite unguarded expression on her face. 'Fascinating. The human mind is not at all as I anticipated. I had thought to find a mind like that of a V'tosh ka'tur or perhaps our ancient forbears.' She tilted her head as she regarded Nyota like a particularly interesting mathematical problem. 'But you are not so at all.'

Spock listened with interest to T'Sul's observations. It was interesting to hear a neutral opinion of the human psyche from a Vulcan perspective. His own experiences with humans were very much compromised with his own emotions. 'I feel the difference between you and a Vulcan in the most basic sense. You have no need for our logic and strength of control because your feelings, even your most primitive ones, are far more gentle then those of our race. The base emotions of a Vulcan are more primitive than those of a Human.' She sounded about as openly shocked as Spock had ever seen a Vulcan. 'I had not considered this.' Her words matched his own observations. Nyota's emotions guided her actions, but those emotions were very different to those of a Vulcan. Far more moderate.

Nyota frowned. 'I would say they are more powerful, not more primitive.' She glanced at Spock then back to T'Sul. 'You feel things so deeply. I would happily trade my softer human emotions for the profound feelings of a Vulcan. But I would not be able to control them as you do, they would drive me mad.' She smiled softly. 'It is a great joy to feel them within Spock.'

T'Sul was regarding Nyota thoughtfully. Spock could tell that she'd had something of a small epiphany inside his wife's mind.

'I had thought Vulcan and Human an illogical match. I see now our races complement one another in quite a satisfactory manner.' She met Spock's eyes. 'Spokh. I will now initiate and observe a mind meld between yourself and Nyota.'
Spock nodded. T'Sul placed her fingers to his face once more and repeated the ritual phrase. She then repeated the process with Nyota, so that she was melded with both of them forming a conduit. He heard her thoughts once more. /Meld with your wife./ Spock acquiesced.

If holding Nyota's hand whilst T'Sul melded with her was odd, melding with both of them was unsettling to a completely new level as his mind was split in three. Instinctively he sort out Nyota. He could feel her doing the same. They minds merged into each other and in that manner they were able to hold themselves apart from the healer and the meld was more tolerable.

T'Sul only held the meld a few moments before pulling away so that only Spock and Nyota remained merged. Spock allowed himself a moment to enjoy the feel of Nyota's mind against his own before he too pulled away and severed the connection.

'Your bond is complete, your marriage valid and recognised by Vulcan law. I will provide documentation to this effect following my return to Vulcan.' She regarded Nyota once more. 'S'chn T'gai Nyota.' Spock felt a strange thrill at hearing Nyota named his wife in truth, a member of his house. 'It was most intriguing making your acquaintance.'

Nyota gave the aged healer a wide human smile.

*Nyota*

'Married!?' Gaila looked horrified. They were quietly talking in Gaila's native Yrevish at the communication's console of the Academy's simulation bridge. They'd been rostered to participate in a Kobayashi Maru test for one of the command-track cadets of their cohort. The cadet in question had yet to arrive so Nyota and Gaila were gossiping.

Nyota smiled at her Orion friend's opinion on monogamy. 'Yes. T'Sul formally recognised our bond. S'chn T'gai Spock is my husband.' She couldn't hold in the smile that threatened to split her face in two. She was married. Spock was her husband. hers hers hers! Just thinking about it made her giddy with happiness.

Gaila shuddered dramatically in disgust. 'Yuck! Married at 23. Next you'll be having little pointy-eared...' Her face twisted with disgust once more, 'children.' She said the word as if it were a contagious disease.

'That's right, I am only 23 Gaila. There won't be any children, 'pointy-eared' or otherwise anytime soon.' She hadn't actually given it much thought. She doubted Spock had strong feelings on the matter. He'd probably made the logical assumption that they would 'reproduce' at some stage since they were bonded, but she sensed he'd be content letting her decide the how and when. It would probably be an involved process requiring the aid of geneticists. She was in no hurry to rush into such a thing. Maybe after the Enterprise's first five year mission she'd give it some serious thought. She glanced up at the mirrored glass of the observation deck. Spock was up there over-seeing the test with several other instructors. Nyota wondered idly what a child of theirs would look like. Dark hair and dark eyes no doubt… and tall….

'Sure sure Ny.' Gaila interrupted her thoughts sceptically. 'You're imagining his babies right now aren't you?' She was smirking.

Nyota's eyes widened at her friend's clairvoyance.

Gaila snorted. 'I'll take that as a yes!' Her roommate punched in a few commands on the console in front of them and continued in a sing song voice. 'You want to have Commander Spock's
'Gaila!' Nyota glanced around, she was certain no one would understand what they were saying, but it was still mortifying. She could sense Spock's curiosity at what Gaila was teasing her about through their bond. Thankfully even his Vulcan hearing couldn't hear through walls.

'… his pointy-eared Vulcan baaaabbbiiesss…' Mercifully Gaila dissolved into giggles and her 'song' ended.

'Captain on the Bridge!'

Nyota turned towards the voice. It was a cadet. She sighed. Correction - it was Cadet Kirk. Apparently he was the command-track student being tested. He looked around and made an impatient gesture that they should stand. Rolling her eyes Nyota got to her feet beside Gaila. Kirk made a show of waiting until they were all at attention before reclining indolently in the captain's chair like a Roman emperor and waving a hand to indicate they resume their positions.

Kirk went through the standard procedure, checking in with the chief officers of each department. When he reached communications he shot her a leer. 'I see I've gotten the...' he paused and raked his eyes over Gaila, '...two loveliest communications officers in Starfleet.'

Gaila giggled. Nyota sighed. Even though she couldn't see him, she could feel Spock raising his eyebrow at Kirk's flirtatious behaviour. He most certainly did not approve.

'Status Lieutenant?' For the purposes of the test everyone was given the assumed rank of lieutenant.

'All communications systems fully operational.' Nyota informed him.

'All communications systems fully operational… Captain.' Kirk corrected her. Nyota stabbed at her console controls with far more force than necessary. Kirk was such an ass. On cue her console lit up. Gaila, playing the role of an ensign communications assistant, patched the incoming message through to her headset. Nyota dutifully reported the communication. She knew it off by heart anyway, she'd sat in for a dozen of these scenarios. If Klingons ever did blow her up, she was confident with the amount of practice she'd had she'd do a bang-up job of it.

'We are receiving a distress signal from the U.S.S. Kobayashi Maru.' She allowed herself a bitchy hair-flick-and-pout-combo just for Kirk. '…The ship has lost power and is stranded. Starfleet Command has ordered us to rescue them.' She'd heard Kirk had already failed the test once, she was almost looking forward to watching him fail a second time.

'Does the ship check out Lieutenant? Does it's registration and position match Starfleet records?' Nyota was almost surprised. No one had ever asked her to check that before. She spun in her chair and did so. Of course, considering who had programmed the simulation, the information was there. Spock was nothing if not thorough.

'Affirmative. The USS Kobayashi Maru registry UCC- 8599 is a mixed cargo and passenger freighter based out of Mars Colony 1. Their current position matches with the flightplan as logged.' At Kirk's quirked eyebrow she sarcastically added 'sir.'

Spinning to the front he issued his next order quite theatrically. 'Helmsman! Plot a course to intercept the Kobayashi Maru, warp factor 8.'

Nyota shared a sceptical look with Gaila. The ship they were supposed to be in, the inventively named 'USS Trainer', was a Kelvin-Class Scout-Cruiser and had a maximum safe cruising speed of warp 6.8.
'Warp 8 sir?' The helmsman apparently shared their disbelief.

'Did I stutter helmsman?' Kirk responded.

'But, sir, we'll break up under the strain of warp 8...' The engineering cadet at the navigation console was looking at Kirk like he was a simpleton. Nyota was wondering the same thing.

'Yes we will, but simulations estimate that'll happen between 12 and 18 minutes at warp 8. We'll reach the Kobayashi in 6.' Nyota wasn't a warp engineering specialist, but it almost sounded plausible. She suddenly knew what Kirk was doing. The scenario was fluid, with the Klingons arriving on the scene randomly within quite a large window of time, but their arrival was calculated independently of their own. Kirk would have significantly more time on arrival at the stranded ship than most cadets completing the simulation.

'Course plotted... captain.' The helmsman had his arms crossed. 'We might want to take a moment and pray to our respective deities before we jump to warp... Sir.'

Kirk ignored his barb. 'Engage warp.'

The next six minutes were boring. Engineering reported with increasing desperation on the stability of the warp core, but Kirk was unfazed. Gaila took the opportunity to give Kirk the once over. 'He's hot. How come I haven't dated Kirk?' She asked in Yrevish. 'Or have I?' Gaila on occasion 'forgot' paramours.

'You haven't dated him because he's an insufferable ass remember?' Nyota responded evenly. She felt Spock's amusement and belatedly recalled that the microphones in the simulator would be playing through the observation deck now that the test had begun. She prayed Gaila wouldn't start singing again.

'I'm not looking to marry the man Ny.' She smirked. '...or have his baaaaaabiiesss.' She drew the last word out in teasing reference to their earlier conversation. Nyota felt her face flush with embarrassment and she glanced around the bridge to avoid Gaila's smirking. Her heart sank as she noted that the cadet at the tactical console was the doctor who'd treated her pon'farr related injuries. She carefully avoided eye contact with him and wondered what the heck he was doing sitting in on the simulation. Medical department cadets weren't required to participate.

'We've arrived at the co-ordinates sir.' The helmsman informed Kirk.

'Good.' He turned to Nyota. 'Inform medical to prepare to receive all crew and passengers of the Koyabashi Maru.' He shot Gaila a wide smiled, 'And you, my lovely Orion Lieutenant, hail the Captain of the Koyabashi Maru and instruct him to instigate evacuation code Alpha-3.'

Gaila batted her eyelashes. 'Yes sirrr...'

Nyota rolled her eyes. They deserved one another.

To Nyota's amazement they'd gotten half the crew and passengers off the stranded ship before the Klingons arrived.

'Two Klingon ships have entered the Neutral Zone and are locking weapons on us.' The Doctor - McCoy - Nyota thought his name had been, reported from the tactical console. He sounded almost as thrilled to be part of Kirk's simulation as Nyota.

Kirk responded promptly with similar orders to most cadets taking the test. 'Load photon torpedoes, arm phasers and divert power to shields.' He spun his chair towards Nyota. 'Open hailing
frequencies, inform the Klingon's we're on a peaceful rescue mission.'

Nyota did as asked, and as always, received only static is response. By the time she informed Kirk of this three more warbirds had de-cloaked and there were now five Klingon ships in total, all firing upon them.

'Shields at 60% Jim!' called the doctor from the tactical console.

Kirk's next order took her by surprise. 'Disengage all weapons systems and divert power to shields and engineering.'

The doctor raised an eyebrow but did as asked. 'Weapons off-line and power redistributed.'

'Navigator, plot a course to Qo'nos. warp factor 5.' Kirk casually informed the cadet manning the navigation console.

'What?' The cadet was looking at Kirk like he had two heads, and they were both unbalanced. Nyota was in complete agreement.

'You heard me!' Kirk yelled as he turned to the helmsman, 'And you, use the calculated flightplan to plot our co-ordinates 17 seconds into warp and use them to plot a course to the nearest starbase at warp 7.5.'

'Course to Klingon homeworld plotted sir.' The helmsman informed him.

'Shields at 40%!' the doctor yelled at no one in particular. He was really getting into, you'd almost believe he was on a ship captained by a madman and surrounded by Klingons.

Kirk looked to the cadet at the navigator's console. 'And your calculations navigator?'

'One second...' He paused, fingers flicking frantically over his console. 'Done.'

Kirk nodded and turned back to the helmsman. 'Engage warp along course plotted for 17 seconds precisely then drop out and use the course plotted by the navigator to return to Federation space.'

The helmsman sighed dramatically but did as instructed.

The simulation viewscreen blurred with the jump to warp. The Klingon vessels did not follow straight away, in Nyota's experience they took a few seconds to blow up the Koyabashi Maru before following. She was surprised however when they dropped out of warp after 17 seconds and there were no Klingons. Stationary stars filled the screen for only a moment before they were once more at warp, but heading in the opposite direction.

Kirk was grinning.

They were safely within Federation space three minutes later.

Nyota was shocked. Half the passengers and crew of the stranded vessel were dead, but Kirk's efforts were certainly the closest she'd seen anyone come to beating the scenario.

'What the heck just happened Jim?' Doctor McCoy gruffly inquired.

'Well Bones, it seems our Klingon friends were well prepared to chase us to the nearest spacestation, had the courses pre-plotted in fact. By the time they'd calculated our actual trajectory, cleared their navigational systems of the pre-plotted courses and entered the actual one and followed us - we were already on our way home.' He sounded utterly in love with himself.
'Okay, but why 17 seconds?' The cadet at the helm was still looking at Kirk like he was crazy, but a genius kinda crazy.

'Because when they realised we'd reversed course, they would have looked at more obvious points along our trajectory first, 10, 15, 20 seconds, for our warp signature before checking random arbitrary points like 17 seconds.' He was smiling indolently from his semi-horizontal position sprawled in the command chair. Nyota would have been impressed if not for his attitude.

It appeared he'd pushed his luck too far however, Nyota's console flashed, the red alert alarm wailed for a moment and then the simulation bridge when dark.

The engineering student acting as chief engineer spoke into the silence. 'Um. The warp core just exploded. We're all dead. Captain.'

The simulator bridge fell deathly silent for a few moments.

The doctor sniggered.

Nyota fought the urge to laugh.

'GODDAMIT!' Cadet Kirk's test ended with as much drama as it began. He stormed out of the room. The lights flicked back on.

Gaila shot to her feet. 'I'm going to go console the poor 'captain'. She adjusted her dress. 'Don't wait up.' Without waiting for response the Orion practically skipped after Kirk. Nyota sighed. That was a trainwreck waiting to happen.

The medical cadet, Doctor McCoy, was frowning and staring after Kirk in concern. Perhaps they were friends. It would explain his vague familiarity despite them not sharing classes. 'I'm sure Kirk will be fine Doctor. Gaila's on a mission to 'console' him.'

The Doctor nodded distractedly. 'Lucky bastard.'

Nyota stood to make her way from the room. It was early evening and she'd not eaten yet. A trip to the cafeteria was required. Doctor/Cadet McCoy rose beside her and followed her from the room. 'You're Cadet Uhura aren't you?'

'那就是 right.' Nyota answered warily. She hoped he didn't remember her from her appointment. Or at least that he wasn't about to bring it up.

'The poor girl Jim's been pestering for over three years?'

Ah. 'One of many I'm sure.' She responded.

He rolled his eyes. 'I'm sure as hell not gonna sing his praises to you.'

They passed out of the simulation room and into the foyer that housed the turbolift. Nyota could feel Spock nearby. The Doctor continued as they waited on the lift. 'You'll be pleased to know that doctor-patient confidentiality prevents me from telling him your name.'

Nyota turned to him, crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow.

He cowered slightly. 'Not to mention common sense.'

Spock materialised behind them. 'Cadets.' He greeted them with his usual arctic Vulcan charm.
The doctor mumbled a response and Nyota offered him a polite nod. 'Commander Spock sir.'

The lift arrived with a soft chime. The men politely waited for her to enter before following. Doctor McCoy stared hard at the closed doors. Spock adjusted the PADD he held and managed to quite artfully brush his index finger across the back of her hand. The tiny touch felt electric and Nyota had to stifle a gasp. For a split second Spock's thoughts became clearer to her. He was… hungry? She wondered why he'd gone to such efforts to share the thought with her.

Unable to resist she turned to look at him quizzically. He raised a perfect black eyebrow in response.

'Thou art hungry?' she inquired dubiously, assuming she'd missed something.

McCoy glanced back at her curiously. She kept her face as polite and neutral as possible.

'Indeed. Hath thou had thy evening meal?' Spock's face of course gave away nothing. Not that what they were discussing was really all that cloak and dagger. She decided to switch back to standard so that McCoy wouldn't think she and Spock were hiding something. She didn't want him thinking about her and Spock - Spock who was a Vulcan and therefore the super strong owner of a set of non-human teeth - in the same sentence too much.

'I have not sir.'

'Then I shall accompany you Cadet.'

She nodded and turned back to face the doors, a smile playing on her lips. Only Spock would think to use telepathy to ask her to dinner.

As the doors opened Spock remarked in what passed as conversationally for him. 'Perhaps you could offer enlightenment as to the context of a phrase of Yrevish Cadet U'Aidat utilised earlier which I find confusing.'

Nyota felt herself flush. She had a bad feeling about where Spock was going with his line of inquiry. She darted out of the lift and offered McCoy a half wave before turning towards the cafeteria.

Spock, of course followed beside her.

He continued his question unperturbed. 'Prior to the commencement of Cadet Kirk's simulation she was singing a most curious song, the refrain of which if I recall correctly was…'
Chapter 27

*Spock*

Following his unexpected pon'farr and the validation of their marriage-bond by T'Sul, Spock found it much harder to keep his relationship with Nyota 'on hold' as she put it. He had new respect for his wife. If their bond could weather pon'farr unscathed, if she could forgive him his madness, he could think of nothing it could not withstand.

It made Starfleet regulations and T'Pau's displeasure seem much more insignificant than they had just weeks before. He had much greater confidence that come Nyota's graduation, things would work out satisfactorily for them. What was the disapproval of his grandmother in comparison to losing his sanity and hurting his fragile human wife? Now that the latter had been survived, the former paled in comparison.

As such when he had passed by the long range sensor lab at 19:32 hours the Tuesday one week after their meeting with T'Sul and felt her within, he had found it impossible not to enter the lab and speak with her, even though there was no logical reason for him to do so. The lab contained four listening posts but was empty save his wife, who sat at the centre console scanning transmissions. She had an especial interest in intercepting Romulan and Klingon transmissions since they required decryption and manual translation and often spent her free time at the long range sensor lab.

She felt his presence of course and turned to give him a warm smile as she pulled her earpiece out.

'Commander.'

Her greeting was proper but Spock detected the teasing tone to it. She was inquiring as to his unexpected presence and implying it was welcome. All in the word 'Commander'. The manner in which she could imply a myriad of different meaning with the tiniest changes to her voice and inflection was something of a revelation to him. Since bonding with Nyota he had been amazed at the things he'd picked up in conversation with his colleagues. He had not realised how much of their interactions were non-verbal. Their words said one thing, but their tone and delivery quite another. There seemed to be a vast unwritten rule book that guided sarcasm, humour, anger and a hundred other emotions and feelings in human, (and Andorian, Orion, Tellarite, Rigelian and every other humanoid species he had encountered of late), verbal communication.

He was attempting to compile a list of the various cues and their meanings, but it was proving difficult. For example the manner of Nyota's delivery, the slight lift of her left eyebrow, the tilt of her head and the manner in which her face swayed slightly from side to side with the syllables of the words pronounced would, judging from previous interactions, indicate sarcasm in Professor Voss - a quite different subtext. It was exceedingly complicated and yet other humanoid species seemed to understand these cues on an instinctual level.

Several years of dedicated study would be required to make even a rudimentary guide for Vulcans who did not have the advantage of being bonded to a human. Even then the subtleties of terran humour defied logical explanation. Now that he could detect it, he realised humans joked and teased one another near constantly. It was… distracting.

He realised he had not offered a response to Nyota's greeting. 'Good evening Nyota.' They were alone and he permitted himself the use of her first name. Her smile widened by 32%. He crossed the room to stand beside her chair. 'Have you encountered any transmissions of interest?'
'Negative. Just freighters and civilian chatter.' She paused, 'Although judging from what I've heard over the last ten minutes, the communications officer of the **USS Titan** has left the Captain's mic on and transmitting over one of the lower Starfleet frequencies. Either that or Captain Reilly wanted Starfleet to be aware of Admiral Archer's 'unreasonable demands' with regards to his pet dog.' She smiled, 'Apparently Aramis has an adjoining state room to the Admiral.'

This situation amused her. He had to admit the idea of the Admiral's beagle being assigned quarters fit for a high ranking diplomat could be considered humorous. 'That seems excessive for such a small, and malodourous, creature.' He remarked.

'Malodourous? Little Aramis is not malodourous! He's a darling.' Nyota's words indicated offense, but her tone amusement.

'I fear I must disagree. Admiral Archer's pet does indeed have a most unpleasant and pungent odour. On the few occasions I have been in enclosed spaces with it has also appeared to suffer from gastrointestinal issues.'

Nyota laughed and turned in her chair to face him. She reached up and gently tapped him on the end of his nose with her right index finger. 'My poor Spock and his delicate Vulcan nose.' For a moment her behaviour confused him - he was unaware of nose tapping as a gesture of human affection - until he realised that she was teasing him.

He attempted to respond in kind. 'Indeed. The mere memory of Aramis' odour has left me requiring an olfactory palate cleanser.' Spock crouched beside Nyota's chair, wrapped a hand around the side of her face and leaned towards her. He inhaled against the warm skin of her neck. She giggled and wrapped her arms around him. He could feel her amusement at his actions. This pleased him.

She turned her face towards him and pressed a kiss to his cheek. He felt her smile against his skin. Spock was aware that he should stand and put respectable distance between them. Even if they were currently alone, the door to the lab was not locked and there were still staff and students wandering the halls. However Nyota was very beautiful and her face was mere centimetres from his own. He glanced down at her lips just as she unconsciously wet them with her tongue.

He pressed a kiss against her mouth and was pleased when he was able to keep it a brief gesture and pull away from her a second later. He thought about rising to his feet but hazarded he could risk a few seconds more. The second kiss he gave her was slightly more lingering, but again quite chaste. The third kiss however, ended up a fourth, fifth and sixth all in one. He lost count some point after Nyota parted her lips and ran her tongue along his lower lip. Kissing her was highly distracting, especially when he had not had opportunity to do so for 8 days 3 hours and 37 minutes.

She wrapped her left arm around his neck and let him entwine the fingers of her right hand with his left. Delight and desire darted through his fingertips as his mind brushed against hers. He found himself kissing her in a manner more suited to the absolute privacy of a bedroom then an Academy lab. He pulled her closer and tilted his head so he could kiss her more deeply. She moaned in approval and responded with her usual enthusiasm. When she pulled away from him 1 minute and 38 seconds later her respiration was uneven, her lips slightly swollen and her eyes very wide. Spock instantly needed to kiss her again. When he leant forward to do so however, she pressed the fingertips of her left hand to his mouth and smiled at him even as she shook her head in denial.

'As much as I would like to keep kissing you Spock, this is not the time or place.' She was correct of course, but regardless Spock found himself voicing disagreement.

'**You are my wife, I shall kiss you wherever and whenever I want.**' The reaction his words had upon her pleased him a great deal. Her renewed desire throbbed through their bond and his fingertips.
Her fingers, which she had let slip to his chin as he spoke slid along the line of his jaw to cradle the side of his face. When he moved to kiss her, she met his lips halfway. He kissed her for a further 3 minutes and 12 seconds before he heard footsteps along the corridor outside. It was a struggle but he dragged himself from her and rose to his feet.

Nyota looked up at him with a glazed expression. 'Someone is coming.'

Her reaction was instant. She smoothed a hand over her hair and spun her chair to face her console once more. A second later her earpiece was back in place. Her breathing was uneven, her lips swollen and her cheeks flushed, but Spock doubted a human would have noticed these things. When the footsteps slowed at the door Spock took a step back, clasped his hands behind his back and turned his attention to Nyota's console.

He glanced over his shoulder as the door opened. It was a cadet that was in his Phonology class with Nyota. Price was his name. A capable enough if unremarkable student. The cadet offered him a nod in greeting which Spock returned before turning his attention back to Nyota's console. It was still monitoring the low frequency Starfleet band they'd been discussing earlier. 'Is the USS Titan still transmitting Cadet Uhura?'

Nyota turned and smiled at him. 'Affirmative sir. It sounds as if the Admiral is visiting the bridge. And he's brought Aramis with him.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. He did not envy the Captain of the Titan.

'Should I inform them that they are transmitting sir?' Nyota asked.

'Affirmative Cadet.' With Cadet Price nearby Spock was forced to excuse himself shortly afterwards.

That evening he meditated on his irresponsible behaviour in kissing Nyota in such a public space. He would not have done so a month previously. It appeared that in light of recent events maintaining the secrecy of his relationship with her had become of less import to him. This was unacceptable. He risked both their careers. He would maintain appropriate distance from her in future.

Putting this into practice proved more difficult than he had anticipated however. He found himself touching Nyota's hand whenever the situation presented itself and making decidedly emotional remarks to her in High Vulcan when he could not. Nyota seemed to enjoy his more relaxed attitude with regards to their interactions. She still 'teased' him occasionally, thinking decidedly unscholarly thoughts at him during his classes, but she did not seek him out or otherwise put them at any risk of discovery. Save from any telepaths, empaths or Orions that might be in the vicinity of course. Luckily the only person fitting any of those descriptions currently on campus was Cadet U’Aidat, who suffered in silence.

The semester passed satisfactorily, if slowly.

Only four months remained until Nyota's graduation and the final fit out was being completed upon the USS Enterprise. Spock felt an ever increasing sense of anticipation. He was certain that Nyota would be able to obtain a posting upon the new flagship without any aid from him. All newly commissioned ships took a set percentage of their crew straight from the Academy and amongst her graduating class Nyota would be a stand out candidate. Her particular class load and results also meant she would also graduate a Lieutenant as opposed to an ensign. Spock did not doubt she would given a posting to whatever ship she desired.
To that end he had obtained the necessary forms to officially inform Starfleet of their relationship. He had filled them out with the required documentation as provided by T'Sul ready to lodge after Nyota's graduation. They would be able to share quarters aboard the new flagship if Nyota found that acceptable. He had not had opportunity to discuss this with his bondmate, but doubted she would have any issue with it. She expressed a desire for his presence in her bed often enough. He made sure to keep the PADD containing the files on his person at all times so it would not fall into the wrong hands and planned to consult her on the subject before he actually submitted it to Starfleet Personnel.

He such he had it on him when he accompanied Captain Pike on what would be the final site inspection of their soon to be completed ship. Since the Captain was also travelling, they were taking a shuttle from the Academy rather than personal modes of transportation. Spock had not had opportunity to utilise his hoverbike since his return to earth and was mildly disappointed with these arrangements. Captain Pike however was in a good mood and had engaged their pilot in conversation for most of the journey. The pilot was quite interested in the new ship, and Pike seemed delighted to find a fresh audience to detail the more impressive specifications of his new ship to.

'... and of course she'll be the first ship in Starfleet capable of warp 8.'

Technically there were several ships in service that were currently able to gain warp 8, however to do so would exceed their safety limitations. Spock contemplated pointing this out, but decided such input would not be welcomed by the Captain.

'Wow. Warp 8. I'd love to get behind the helm of a ship that fast sir. Fastest thing I've ever piloted was warp 5.5 capable.' The pilot sounded quite impressed with both Captain Pike and the USS Enterprise.

The Captain shrugged, 'Since graduation the only things I've piloted have been a few shuttles, but sometimes I do almost envy my helmsmen. And it seems every Class-1 Heavy Cruiser pilot in Starfleet does as well.' He glanced at Spock, 'How many applicants for helmsman and navigator posts at last count Spock?'

'78 as of yesterday sir.' Although not as extreme, the other bridge officer positions were proving just as desirable. Spock was aware that several officers had expressed interest in his own position to Pike and the Admiralty.

Pike shook his head. 'Lord knows how I'm going to whittle that bunch down to a more reasonable size. I'm tempted to veto my right as Captain and let the Admiralty sort that mess out.'

The shipyard came into view a few kilometres ahead. The Enterprise shone a near binding white in the morning sun. As always Spock found himself wondering at the wisdom of constructing such a large ship planet-side. Although he was aware that the ship had been designed to be able to withstand its exit through the atmosphere and free of the grip of Earth's gravity, it seemed illogical to expose the ship to such extreme conditions purely so Starfleet could say that their flagship was constructed 'on' Earth. A space dock in orbit of Earth would have been a far more reasonable choice.

'Ahh! There she is Spock! Even more beautiful in the flesh!' exclaimed Captain Pike.

'Indeed sir.' Spock ignored the inaccuracies of his commander's sentence despite his urge to point out that the Enterprise was not female and did not have flesh, beautiful or otherwise.

The Ardanan Lieutenant, Vanka, awaited their arrival flanked by the Chief Supervisors Bates and
Hardling. She saluted Captain Pike sharply, the supervisors mirroring her movement. Pike returned the salute in his usual casual manner. 'Lieutenant Vanka I presume? Commander Spock has spoken highly of your efficiency in getting our schedule back on track.' He paused. 'Your predecessor was something of a disappointment.'

'Thank you sir. Judging from his paperwork, Lieutenant Sparcs seemed to have a different approach to management than myself.' The Lieutenant's restraint in describing Sparcs' ineptitude impressed Spock. She took a step back and indicated her companions. 'Allow me to introduce Chief Supervisor Hardling, and Chief Supervisor Bates sir. They will be available to answer any of your technical questions with regards to the ship.'

The Captain nodded in greeting to the men. 'A pleasure.' He then clapped his hands and addressed the Lieutenant once more. 'Shall we Lieutenant? I'm eager to inspect my ship!'

A great deal had changed since Spock had last inspected the Enterprise almost eight months earlier. The exterior was complete and the interior fit out itself 98% complete. The Captain took his time, asking many questions of the supervisors and the Lieutenant. They worked their way upwards, starting at the cargo and shuttle decks, then through engineering and the bottom decks of the saucer section before Pike insisted on purchasing lunch for them at 13:30 hours.

The diner's waitress, Jayne, greeted him enthusiastically when she appeared with their meals. 'Oh Commander Spock! You're back! Lena told me you'd gone off to the Romulan Neutral Zone - why on earth would you want to be posted there of all places?! and when your Uhura was here last with that nice Andorian fellow Voss, she told me you'd be very badly injured when some Ferengi pirates blew up the ship you were on! Said you'd been floating around in an escape pod burnt to a crisp you poor dear!' She paused to take a breath. Spock struggled to keep his face politely interested. With a deep gasp she continued. 'But! she said that you got promoted!' Captain Pike was looking at the excitable middle aged woman in apparent amazement. For her own part Jayne was looking at Spock expectantly. 'Well, show me your new stripe Spock'

Her tone of voice reminded Spock of his human grandmother. Wordless he lifted an arm so his Commander's stripes could be inspected. Jayne looked at them with interest, as if they were not identical to those of every other Commander in Starfleet. Seemingly satisfied, the waitress nodded. 'Oh aren't nice?' She straightened and gave Spock a reproachful look, 'Now I don't want to hear about you getting blown up just to get some Captain's ones.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. He honestly had no idea how to respond. 'I assure you... Jayne, explosion via warp core is not my preferred method of career advancement.'

Jayne nodded. 'Good.' She smiled at the table at large, 'Enjoy your lunch officers!'

Captain Pike was looking at Spock with a wide grin. 'Wow Spock. Jayne seems very fond of you.' He paused and took a bite of his sandwich. 'Should I start forwarding her copies of your commendations?'

Spock ignored his Captain and focused on his meal. Thankfully Vanka and the supervisors were eager to entertain the Captain and conversation quickly distracted him.

Unfortunately he was approached twice during lunch, first by Stephen Lee, with whom he exchanged social pleasantries for 4.2 minutes, and secondly by Lena Nilsson who sat near him for 7.8 minutes. She inquired after Nyota and complimented him on a few last minute design changes that had been made to the long range sensor array. She had only recently completed the installation of the array and console into the now completed bridge. He reiterated that her discovery of the extra space in the ceiling cavity had enabled him to make several very advantageous changes to the
design. She appeared pleased with his conversation and patted him on the shoulder in a friendly manner he had often observed among humans when she departed.

After Lena was out of earshot Captain Pike shook his head and looked at Spock oddly. 'Spock. What the heck happened while I was off planet? When I left you could barely hold a civil conversation with me and now you've got technicians popping by for chats and waitresses more or less bursting into song.'

Spock tilted his head. He was aware that the Captain, whilst interested in Spock's improved social interaction skills, did not really expect an answer, especially in front of Lieutenant Vanka and the supervisors. However he saw no reason not to provide one. 'In an effort to improve my teaching at the Academy I have attempted to improve my ability to successfully communicate with humans and other non-Vulcans.'

The Captain let out a laugh. 'Well, that sounds more like the Spock I know.' He took a sip of his carbonated beverage. 'So you made a study of human social interactions did you? How'd that work out?'

Spock pondered his response for 9 seconds before responding. 'Attendance to my classes increased by 12.1% over the last six months of my previous tenure. Grades in my classes rose by 4.8%, I believe due to increased participation by the students. There were several other benefits to my social interactions with the shipyard personnel also. My communications were responded to 30% faster and due in no small part to my 'friendship' with technician Nilsson I was able to modify the long range sensor array for the Enterprise to such an extent that your ship will have the longest sensor range of any starship in the Federation.'

Captain Pike shook his head and smiled. 'So this was all one big experiment for you Spock? Is that why you hung around the Officer's Lounge when the Nelson docked?'

Spock recalled Nyota's long ago irritation at him when he'd tried to use his newly acquired social skills on her. Clearly the Captain was feeling a similar insult. 'Perhaps my explanation was not clear. Whilst my initial attempts to better acclimatise myself to human interaction were based on a desire to improve my teaching, after spending time with humans such as technician Nilsson, I find that apart from their behaviour whilst unduly intoxicated, socialising with humans can be quite enjoyable.' He paused. 'Stephen Lee is quite adept at dom-jot for example.'

The Captain seemed pleased with this response. 'That's good to hear Spock. I noticed you seemed to get along better with the crew these last few months, well, when you weren't destroying the gym equipment and scaring them half to death that is. I'm glad it wasn't just an act.' He paused. 'One more thing I'm curious about, who's 'Nyota'? The technician mentioned her and I'm sure that's the name you were saying when you were injured.'

Spock was aware that he had frozen, his fork hanging mid-air. He realised that he was blinking rapidly, as if there was something in his eye. Consciously he stopped himself. He had no idea what to say. So far the Captain had not heard 'Nyota' in connection with 'Uhura' and he desired to keep it that way for the time being. Lieutenant Vanka was in deep conversation with the two supervisors and they weren't following his conversation with the Captain as far as he could tell. They, of course, were all perfectly aware that 'Nyota' and 'Uhura' were the same person. Spock opened his mouth and attempted to resolve the conversation before the others at the table started paying attention.

'S'chn T'gai Ny'ota is my wife.' That was technically true. He had emphasised a Vulcan accent on her name so that it wouldn't be recognisable to the Lieutenant or the Supervisors, but that in itself was not a lie.
The Captain's eyes were huge. 'Wife? I had no idea you were married Spock!' He had spoken quite loudly. Vanka and the supervisors had broken off their private conversation and were looking with interest at Spock and the captain.

Spock had no desire to continue the conversation in any greater depth. Especially with an audience. 'Vulcan marriage traditions are quite different to those of earth Captain.'

'Oh, right of course. Sorry Spock, didn't mean to pry.' He paused. 'Do you have children?'

Spock raised an eyebrow.

Pike frowned. 'What? You spring on me you have a wife after I've know you how many years, I'm just curious if there are any mini Spocks running around.'

'Negative.' Spock's tone clearly indicated his desire the conversation cease.

Pike held up his hands in surrender. 'Fine fine. I won't go prying.'

The table was silent for 2 minutes and 54 seconds before Christopher Pike spoke again. 'What does she look like?'

Spock allowed himself an almost sigh and gave Pike a pointed look.

The captain grinned, 'Sorry Spock, natural human curiosity. I've been told Vulcans consider it one of our better traits.' He referred to a comment Spock himself had made of course. 'Can't help it.'

Spock decided to placate his friend. 'She is 170.2 cms tall, her mass on earth would be approximately 51 kgs, her eyes are brown and she has black hair.' He paused. 'Is this satisfactory?'

The Captain smiled an odd smile. 'So she's tall? She pretty? I bet she's pretty.' He rested his chin on his right hand and looked off into the air above Hardling's head. 'My first wife was tall - had a set of legs that went on forever.'

Spock noticed that the usually restrained Lieutenant Vanka was trying to hold back a smirk and exchanging meaningful glances with supervisor Bates. It appeared they found the Captain's line of questioning amusing. He resumed eating his lunch, hoping that the Captain was sufficiently distracted to end his line of inquiry. Sadly, only 37 seconds later he spoke again. 'So she is pretty?'

Spock didn't try and hide his irritation further. 'She is exceedingly aesthetically attractive. However Captain, I do not feel my bondmate's sexual attractiveness is appropriate conversation.'

Pike grinned. 'Ookay Spock. I won't ask you any more questions about the tall, lovely, dark-haired Mrs Spock.'

Bates choked on his soup and Hardling started slapping him vigorously on the back.

Spock directed what was a quite frank glare for a Vulcan at his commanding officer. 'You are perfectly aware that Spock is not my family name and that ergo, to refer to my wife as 'Mrs Spock' is illogical.'

The Captain just wiggled his eyebrows in response, his amusement at Spock's discomfit obvious.

Lieutenant Vanka gave a little cough. 'Captain Pike sir, there are some issues with the private quarters that I have not yet had an opportunity to discuss with you.'

Spock silently thanked the Ardanan for her interruption, but wished she had seen fit to offer it five
minutes earlier.

The tour of the rest of the ship was much faster than the first half. Although the saucer was the largest part of the ship, the majority of the section housed living and recreational quarters which required little in the way of inspection. The transporter rooms, phaser banks and other tactical systems held greatest interest to the Captain, whilst Spock was interested to see how the various labs and medical facilities had been fitted out.

There were no surprises, unpleasant or otherwise. Vanka had made sure the specifications had been followed to the letter. The only area that was not exactly as Spock had expected it was the bridge. It looked very different to the last time he had seen it almost eight months previously. All the different consoles were in place along with the chairs and safety railing. The Captain clapped his hands and grinned as he made a beeline for the command chair. He sat himself down and promptly spun the chair.

'Excellent! I was worried the most important specification of the bridge would be overlooked.'

Spock ignored him, familiar with where Pike was leading, but Vanka made the mistake of responding.

'Sir?'

'My chair! I need it to spin.' He demonstrated. 'You know how many ships don't have a rotating chair for the Captain? How am I supposed to effectively monitor my bridge crew if I'm constantly craning my head to see everyone?' Spock was fairly certain the real reason Christopher Pike insisted on a rotating chair was because he enjoyed spinning back and forth in a semi circle when he had nothing else to entertain him on the bridge. It was behaviour Spock had recently spent six months being becoming reacquainted with.

Vanka nodded, 'I see your point sir. I am pleased the chair meets your expectations.'

Spock walked from console to console, inspecting the final layouts and changes to the tactical and navigation systems. He noted the inertia dampener was in an unconventional position on the navigation console. It seemed an improvement on the standard positioning however.

The Lieutenant spent several minutes explaining different changes to the Captain as well as going over the general layout of the bridge and the new systems that would be unique to the Enterprise on its launch. Spock found himself standing at the communications console. There were three chairs, one for the duty Communications Officer and another on either side for a Communications Assistant. He found himself picturing Nyota in a red Lieutenant's tunic seated in one of the assistant's chairs. He walked over to the Science Officer's console. He was pleased that he would have a view of the communications console without having to spin the chair from its forward facing position.

The Captain broke him from his revelry by spinning to face him. 'Here we are Spock! Finally on the bridge of the Enterprise. How's your chair? Comfy enough for the next five years or so?'

'It is satisfactory captain.'

'You'll end up standing most of the time anyway if I know you Spock.'

The Captain was correct. Spock did prefer to spend the majority of his shifts on the bridge standing.

The last stop of the tour was the Captain's quarters. Pike seemed extremely pleased with them.
They were much larger than his previous quarters upon the *Nelson* and Spock said as much.

‘True, I might feel a bit guilty rattling around these quarters while the ensigns below decks are in bunked in like sardines.’ The reference to a small terran fish confused Spock but he felt no desire to request clarification. ‘There’s almost too much room for one man here.’ He gave Spock a curious look. ‘Have you considered bringing Mrs Spock on tour?’ It was not unheard of for Starfleet officers to be accompanied by partners or even children on longer missions, but quite unusual.

Spock gave Pike a look. ‘If you insist on speaking of her, the correct form of address for my wife is *Okosu S’chn T’gai*, not ‘Mrs Spock’, though I thought we agreed to drop the subject Chris?’

‘Okosu Sachen Tagai?’ the Captain replied. ‘I’m never going to remember that, let alone figure out how to pronounce it. You’re gonna have to deal with ‘Mrs Spock’ I’m afraid Spock. Now, as I was saying, five years is a long time. Might be worth considering bringing your exotically named ‘exceedingly aesthetically attractive’ wife along, unless you want to end up twice divorced before 40 like yours truly.’

Five years was indeed a long time, however Spock didn't intend to spend any of it separated from his *adun’a*. She'd be 6.7 meters away from him on the bridge, and hopefully much closer when they were in their quarters.

‘I’ll be sure and mention your suggestion to her when next I speak to her Captain.’
Nyota was in a good mood. She'd spent her Friday completing her first assessment item for what would be her last semester. It had been a simulation scenario for her tactics class, and she was confident she had received a good grade.

Her bond to Spock had stretched as he left San Francisco to visit the shipyards with Captain Pike and the sensation had been odd and uncomfortable. Nyota wondered what it would feel like if she and Spock were in different parts of the galaxy. It was bound to happen eventually with them both being in Starfleet. The tactics simulation had proven a good distraction from her slight unease. It was 17:58 hours before she felt that Spock was on his way back to the Academy. She had not had a chance to talk to him more than fleetingly in private in almost an entire week. It had definitely been long enough in her opinion and it was difficult restraining herself from making plans to seek him out when he got back to San Francisco.

She spent the next half an hour going over some notes, all the while trying to ignore the sensation of Spock getting closer and closer to her. Eventually she gave up. She shoved her notes and her PADDs into her bag and headed out the door.

Gaila was out for the evening, dinner with her current beau, Kirk of all people, and Nyota knew she probably wouldn't be back that night.

Even though the corridor was empty Nyota made a show of chiming Spock's door, as if he was inside, mostly for the benefit of the security recordings, before subtly triggering the mechanism. It was programmed to allow her entry. As expected, Spock's quarters were empty. Nyota made herself comfortable on his couch and continued reviewing her notes. She found it much easier to concentrate knowing that she'd soon see him. Twenty minutes later she sensed him approaching along the corridor. She reached for him along the bond, informing him wordlessly that she was waiting for him. To her surprise she felt him respond with anxiety. Then she heard voices from the hallway. Spock wasn't alone.

'Spock, I didn't think it was possible, but this is even more depressing then your quarters on the *Nelson*.'

Nyota identified the voice as belonging to Captain Pike.

'It would be pointless to attempt to personalise this space since I will soon be departing the Academy again.' Spock replied.

'I suppose that makes sense.' There was a pause. 'This is still damn depressing though. Even a picture of that dust bowl you were born on would be an improvement.'

'If you prefer we could use your chess set. I am sure your quarters are more attractively decorated than my own. Are your collection of horga'hn statuettes on display?'
Nyota was forced to swallow a snort at her husband's dry reference to Risian fertility idols.

'Why do you ask? Hoping I'll part with one or two for you to take home to Mrs Spock?' The Captain was clearly familiar enough with Spock to realise when he was being 'humorous' as he put it.

'You appear to be quite fixated on 'Mrs Spock' this evening captain.' Nyota could tell from their bond that Spock had made air quotation with his fingers and was pleased with himself (even though he hadn't really used them correctly). She was more concerned with the casual manner with which Captain Pike was apparently referring to her. The fact that there was a 'Mrs Spock' was certainly not meant to be common knowledge around Starfleet. She felt Spock send her calm. Whatever Pike knew it didn't appear to worry her husband, so she supposed she would just have to wait. Perhaps it was a joke between them. For all she knew 'Mrs. Spock' was a pet name for his… hoverbike or something.

'Well I must admit I am intrigued at the thought of my first officer, and supposed friend, having a wife and never bothering to tell me.'

Apparently it wasn't a joke. Nyota could feel Spock attempting to think of a way to answer Pike without lying or revealing who his wife actually was. 'Vulcan bonds are quite dissimilar to human marriages Chris.'

Hearing Spock casually call Captain Pike 'Chris' sounded odd.

'Well do share Spock!' There was a pause. 'Well, that is to say, I am curious but if you'd really rather not talk about it I'll stop teasing you Spock.'

'It is acceptable enough to speak of, though I had no wish to have such a discussion in front of Lieutenant Vanka or the supervisors.' Spock was still attempting to think of a decent explanation. Nyota could tell he was more or less stalling for time.

She heard the Captain order himself a whiskey from the replicator in Spock's living quarters and then movement as he settled himself on the couch. She held back a sigh. Great. Now she was stuck for god knows how long while Captain Pike drank whiskey and interrogated Spock. She looked at the window speculatively. She didn't doubt she could get out that way, but Spock's quarters were on the fifth floor sadly.

There was a clinking noise that Nyota thought was Pike setting up Spock's 3D chess set. Nyota bit her lip and sighed softly. 3D chess could take hours.

'Well they aren't here now Spock.'

She restrained the urge to press an ear to the door. Despite her desire to be elsewhere, she was curious about what Spock was going to say. He was going to have to be pretty inventive not to lie, and creativity was not one of his strengths.

'Vulcans are usually betrothed for many years before an actual marriage ceremony takes place.' Nyota raised an eyebrow sceptically. She had no idea where Spock was going with his explanation. They certainly hadn't been 'betrothed for many years'. 'My wife and I only recently completed our marriage bond. This is why you have not heard me speak of it.'

Well, it was boring enough to sound believable, and both statements were technically true. In a manner of speaking.

'Oh.' Pike sounded almost disappointed. Maybe he had been hoping for a more exciting story. 'Well
congratulations Spock. I hope I get to meet this tall, dark-haired, 'exceedingly aesthetically attractive' wife of yours.'

'I am certain that you will meet her prior to the launch of the Enterprise.' Nyota rolled her eyes. Yes he certainly would. Had already in fact, if passing her around campus counted. She wondered what Pike's reaction was actually going to be when Spock did introduce her in a few months' time. Surprise, no doubt, she just hoped he wouldn't hold anything against Spock for not being completely forth right with him.

'Good to hear! What was her name again? I'll need to start practising if I want to get it right.'

Spock hesitated and Nyota felt that it was because he knew she was listening. 'S'chn T'gai Ny'ota'

She felt herself blush like a school girl at hearing her named as a member of Spock's house. It was very different hearing him say it rather than T'Sul. She had an urge to start practising it as a signature. The subtle emphasise he'd placed on her name made it sound Vulcan instead of Swahili. She let herself softly mouth it back to herself as she made her way to Spock's bed and lay down.

She had no desire to spend the next few hours listening in on Spock and Captain Pike playing chess. She was immensely glad that she'd bought her notes with her. Quietly she arranged her PADDs on the bed and started reading. She did her best to block out the distracting conversation she could hear form the living area.

She was able to persevere for an hour and half before she grew well and truly frustrated. She found herself recalling the last time she'd been in Spock's bed. The previous Tuesday afternoon she'd stopped by for a few hours and they'd spent the duration of her visit there. She'd been daydreaming about that visit for some time before she felt Spock's agitation through the bond. She smiled to herself. She hadn't actively been trying to torment him. Pulling out her notes again she attempted to behave. She had been re-reading the same page of text on the Bajoran occupation for ten minutes, over and over without absorbing a single word, when she had an idea.

Fishing around her bag she pulled out her comm unit and adjusted the pick-up sensitivity. She then quietly made her way to Spock's bathroom, as far as possible from the Captain as she could get, and recorded a short message in High Vulcan. It was unlikely that Pike was fluent in standard Vulcan, but she didn't want to take the risk. She routed the message off one of the civilian subspace relays near Mars so it would look like it came from outside the solar system. It took several minutes for the message to make its way to Mars and back via the slow civilian relays and Spock could tell she was planning something. Pike, meanwhile, was regaling Spock with a story about skiing of all things when Spock's comm console chimed with an incoming message.

'Is it important Spock?'

She heard Spock stand and walk to the main console in the living area and then his voice. 'I am not expecting any communication. Computer, identify incoming message.'

/message routing code 87V-113 sender identified as: / There was a fractional pause as the computer's voice was replaced with her own. / 'S'chn T'gai Ny'ota'/ Her accent was dead on if she did say so herself.

Nyota prayed Spock would be sly enough to use it as an excuse to curtail the Captain's visit. The actual message itself just said that it was very lonely in his bedroom.

'Oh! Your wife Spock!' The Captain sounded honestly delighted. It appeared her prayers wouldn't be necessary. 'I'll take my leave. We can finish the game tomorrow evening maybe?' She could
hear Pike standing to leave, the clink of a whiskey glass being placed on Spock's coffee table.

'That would be most enjoyable Chris.'

'Pass on my well wishes to the lovely lady. Goodnight Spock.'

A moment later the door opened and closed.

Nyota didn't move, just in case. A few seconds later Spock appeared in the doorway.

'Precisely what are you doing in my quarters cadet?' He was holding a few PADDs which be placed on the bedside table.

Nyota looked up from her position sprawled across the bed on her stomach. 'Precisely sir? Well, I was going over my notes for interspecies ethics actually. But you and the Captain were so noisy I was finding it quite impossible to concentrate and I fear my thoughts may have drifted into other subjects, still relevant to my studies of course.'

Spock came to stand beside her. 'Indeed. Relevant to your studies in what way cadet?'

Nyota smirked, 'Well, whilst not part of the syllabus I assure you they were still very much related to the topic at hand.'

Spock picked up a PADD off the bedspread. 'I am uncertain how what you were contemplating in such detail could in any estimation be related to the Cardassian occupation of Bajor.'

She shrugged slightly. 'Perhaps not to the specific topics covered in this week's lecture sir, but I assure you my contemplations were exceedingly relevant to the main aspirations of the field of Interspecies Ethics, namely Interspecies harmony and diplomacy.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'I do not follow cadet. I think you will have to provide me with a demonstration.'

Nyota smiled. 'Very well Commander.'

*Spock*

Spock realised something was wrong an hour later, when he climaxed into his panting wife for a third time and found himself still hard and unsatisfied. Nyota was above him, her hands braced against his shoulders. She smiled at him and leant down to kiss him gently. Spock was distracted, trying to assimilate all the information available to understand what was occurring.

He could feel his thoughts becoming more difficult to control. He had felt similar 31 days earlier when Nyota had been teasing him during his Phonology lecture. He pulled his lips from hers ignoring her huff of displeasure. 'Nyota.'

She stilled against him, sensing his unease. 'Spock? What's wrong?'

Wordlessly Spock pressed his fingertips to hers - he would not risk melding with her- so she could sense the disruption within him. He felt her shock and understanding. Her eyes widened. 'Again? How is that possible?' She shifted against him so that she rested more beside than on top of him and could meet his gaze easily. Spock had to forcefully ignored the urge to flip her on her back and have her again.

'I did not realise it was possible. I have one theory however.' He pulled her closer, turning on his
side so he could face her. He leant forward and pressed his face against her, inhaling deeply. Even though his actions confused her, she tilted her head back to give him room to explore the skin of her chest and neck. He could smell her shampoo, her perfume and the salt of her skin. The grip he held on her hip increased slightly. Her skin felt slightly warmer than normal, but there was something else as well. The scent that he identified as her base natural scent was much stronger than usual.

'You smell different.' He breathed her in again and felt his arousal deepen. He slid his hand slowly up along then back down her side. She twisted slightly under his caress. The curve of her was enticingly female. He let his hand settle once more on the flare of her hip, massaging her temptingly soft flesh. He licked her skin beneath her collarbone and felt her shiver against him. The deep, possessive sinkhole of feelings he held in check for her was threatening to overwhelm his control. He resisted the urge to bite her, mark her. 'Spock?' He rocked her hips against his own so that his body shifted slightly where he was still buried with her. The heat of her burnt around him.

She gasped at the movement and he felt her arousal through their bond, through his very skin. He breathed deeply, his mouth pressed against her. She smelt so good. He wondered idly if this was what an Orion female smelt like to a human male. Her scent was concentrated, blooming, ripe. He remembered smelling her from across the lecture hall the month before, her desire seeming to magnifying her scent. His hips jerked against hers sending a bolt of fire through him. He could feel her pleasure and desire through their fingertips, fanning his own desire - tempting him to put logic and reason aside - but he also felt her anxiety. Her fear. It was enough for him to regain momentary control of his roiling emotions. Abruptly he pulled himself out of her arms, out of her body and stood. It was one of the most difficult things he had ever done. He did not look at her, he knew if he did he would simply get back into bed with her. 'Nyota you must leave.'

She sat up, pulling the sheets around herself. 'Spock what's happening?'

'I am uncertain as to the specifics, but I believe you are ovulating and this is somehow affecting me.'

He felt her confusion through the bond, along with embarrassment at his blunt reference to a biological function which humans did not usually discuss. 'I am? How can you even tell? I can't.'

Spock tried to calm his thoughts. His erection was hard and throbbing with want and he could smell his bondmate's own desire mere metres from him. 'I will explain this to you in full at a later time Nyota. Please. You must leave.' He closed his eyes and focussed on a breathing exercise while his wife hurriedly dressed and gathered her belongings. Feeling her nearby, smelling her, knowing her warm body was so near and remaining still was torturous.

'Should I contact medical? Perhaps they could sedate you?' He sensed her fear. He realised that a large portion of it was fear for him. She did not wish to leave him alone, even when he was a danger to her. Illogical human compassion.

'I do not believe this is true pon'farr Nyota. It will pass. I will contact you when it is safe to do so.'

She hesitated in the darkened room for a few moments. 'Very well Spock.' He stayed absolutely still until he heard the door to his quarters slide shut behind him. Moving quickly he gathered up his sheets and bedding and tossed them in the recycler then opened the windows in an attempt to clear out the lingering scent of her. He then had a thorough shower to rid his body of the same. He felt marginally more in control. This reinforced his suspicion.

He spent a futile hour in front of his asenoi, attempting to meditate. Across the Academy campus
he could feel Nyota 1032 meters away from him. Her presence pulled at him. The meditative exercises he attempted enabled him to resist the urge to go to her, but they certainly bought him no calm.

In desperation he donned his riding gear and headed for the garage beneath the faculty accommodation building. He encountered two other teaching staff in the halls and was able to nod to them in acknowledgement despite his desire to yell at them instead. He was exceedingly conscious that he was moving away from his wife not towards her. He rode faster and more recklessly than was his custom. Out of habit he took the route to the Riverside Shipyard but kept going long after the Enterprise had vanished over the horizon behind him. He rode until his mind felt somewhat calmed and rational once more.

The sun had risen before he felt in control enough to turn his hoverbike around. By the time he returned to the Academy it was 14:33 hours. He was tired but no longer fighting the urge to break down Nyota's dorm door and fuck her into her mattress. Although clearly he was not entirely himself since he was utilising terran profanity in his thoughts. He was relieved when the scent did not trigger any particularly violent reaction.

Nyota's worry permeated their bond. Spock took a moment to send her reassurance that he was unharmed. His quarters still smelt of her, but only faintly due to the windows being open all night. He was relieved when the scent did not trigger any particularly violent reaction.

He drank a glass of spice tea and meditated for an hour. He then showered again. When he felt more or less like himself again, collected and in control of his emotions, he seated himself in front of his comm console. It took several minutes to route a direct subspace line to Vulcan along the subspace relays between the Sol and 40 Eridani A systems and from there to his mother's personal communicator frequency. She answered within 37 seconds of him making the connection however. It was early morning on Vulcan. She was still dressed in the robe she used as a dressing gown as she broke her fast. Her face lit up with an extremely human smile as she took him in.

'Spock! How lovely to see you!'

'Mother, you are looking well.' She was. Despite nearing middle age his mother remained in remarkable physical condition.

'As are you, I am pleased to see you looking like yourself again.' When last Spock had last spoken to her he had been still recovering from his injury aboard the Nelson. '… And gratified that you have avoided exploding warp cores for several months now.'

'Indeed. You may rest assured I will certainly not be seeking any out in the future mother.'

She smiled again, but it was a teasing smile. 'So, you have finally decided to tell me have you?'

Spock raised an eyebrow in query. 'I am uncertain of your meaning mother.'

'Your father didn't notice of course, he tries so hard not to feel you, but I did. When will you bring her?' His mother looked positively giddy.

Spock tried to follow her words. 'I remain at a lost as to your meaning mother.'

Amanda Grayson broke into a full smile. 'You have bonded. I have felt her within you, beside you.'

Spock was unable to keep the shock off his face, Vulcan or no. 'How could you know this mother?'

'You are my son Spock, I always feel you. I noticed something many months past. Some change within you. Then I thought I sensed another when you were so badly injured. Sarek did not, but I
was almost certain.' Her smile had faded as she spoke of his brush with death. 'Then two months past, on your return to Earth, I felt your joy.' She closed her eyes, smiling softly. Spock felt their bond grow between them as she reached out and touched him across 15 lightyears of vacuum. 'When I reach to you, I feel her beside you.' Her eyes opened. 'Your wife.'

Spock was at a loss. He recalled the healer T'Sul's words regarding the strength of his bond with his human mother, clearly she had not been exaggerating. 'It is as you say mother. I have bonded.'

His mother looked like she might cry. He hoped this was not the case. 'Oh Spock! I'm so happy! When can I meet her? What's her name? What does she look like?'

Spock answered her inquiries in order. 'I am pleased you are happy for me mother. I am uncertain when you can meet her. Her name is Nyota Uhura and she is,' he paused for a moment and instead of saying 'aesthetically attractive.' found himself saying '... very beautiful.'

His mother's smile widened even further. 'I am sure she is also very brilliant to have caught your attention my son. What does she do?'

'Nyota is a Xenolinguistics and Communications specialist. She is currently fluent in 82% of the languages spoken with the Federation. Her skill is quite unparalleled in this field.'

'82%? That is impressive. Does she teach at the Academy? Or did you meet her whilst serving aboard a ship?'

'Negative. Nyota is currently completing her final semester of study at the Academy.' He paused, uncertain how his mother would respond. 'She was my teaching aide for two years prior to my time aboard the Nelson.'

His mother raised an eyebrow in what Spock thought was disapproval. 'A student?' She lapsed into silence for a period of 5 seconds before shaking her head and laughing shortly. 'A student Spock!' She sighed at him but still smiled. 'Nothing is ever simple where you are involved.'

'I fail to see how you find the situation amusing mother, it has been the cause of considerable consternation.' He was relieved she didn't appear to disapprove however.

'She is the reason you suddenly accepted a fleet posting?' His mother surmised.

'Affirmative.'

'And she is the reason you are not… that you did not succumb to your injuries?' His mother's smile vanished as she mentioned his injury again.

'Indeed. It was most curious. According the healer T'Sul we had bonded in a manner not dissimilar to that of a betrothal and through that connection Nyota was able to regulate my metabolic functions when I could not.' He stopped himself from explaining in more detail, even though it had been a fascinating experience, since he assumed his mother would not wish to be reminded of the severity of his injury.

'Nyota.' She repeated the name thoughtfully. 'Swahili? So she is human?' His mother the linguist identified his wife's race easily.

Spock nodded. 'Yes. Her family are from Nairobi, though it is my understanding she was in fact born on Andoria.' At his mother's curious expression he elaborated. 'Her mother, Tamu Uhura, is a diplomat and her father Commander Zuberi Uhura is a member of Starfleet. Both were stationed there.'
'She sounds a well suited match for you Spock, however I must admit I'm surprised. I had thought if you married it would be to a Vulcan woman. You are so very like your father.' his mother said.

'Who if you recall married a human.' Spock pointed out.

She rolled her eyes and smiled. 'How silly of me, I had quite forgotten.' She frowned slightly. 'Your father, he will be difficult.'

'I am aware.'

'He has been particularly… logical of late.' His mother had a habit of using the term in a manner that implied the exact opposite of the word itself. He gathered from her statement that his parents had been disagreeing more than usual.

Suddenly her eyes widened. 'She is human! Oh! Is that why you have called? I did not think!' She sounded quite alarmed.

Her behaviour was exceedingly erratically. 'Mother again, I do not know what you are speaking of.'

His mother calmed herself, pursing her lips and using a tone of voice usually reserved for voicing displeasure at him. 'I know you will not wish to speak of this, but you will need to ensure she is on appropriate birth control.'

'Mother.'

She raised her hand. 'No, no, I'm not going to lecture you on that, I am referring to the effect her human reproductive cycle will have upon you now you are bonded.'

Spock blinked. 'Yes. I wished to ask you a question with regards to that.'

His mother nodded sagely. 'The answer is yes. Every month. Something to do with hormones and pheromones. The cycle of a Vulcan woman is very different – they only exhibit such indicators when a male shares the blood fever with them.' Her explanation fit more or less with what he had theorised. 'However there are several types of birth control that will incidentally prevent it from occurring without the need to discuss the issue in depth with a physician.' She grimaced. 'It certainly makes for an awkward consultation.'

Spock was glad that he wouldn't have to go into detail - that his mother had been astute enough to explain without him needing to. 'That is… reassuring.'

His mother smiled teasingly. 'Yes I imagine it is.' She paused, her eyes bright with mirth. 'You are much quicker than your father. It took him four months to figure it out.' She smirked. 'Not that I complained over much.'

Spock tried very hard not to expand on that statement in his mind. 'Mother. I have no wish to discuss your… marriage in such detail.'

She laughed gleefully. 'Then perhaps we could discuss yours my son?'

—

*Nyota*

Nyota had gathered up her PADD's in the dark and left Spock alone. She knew it was the best course of action, if she was somehow triggering his pon'farr, she needed to get away from him for both their sakes. Still, it hurt to leave him alone when he was clearly suffering.
Later on she felt their bond stretch as he left the city. She restrained the urge to call and see where he was going, knowing he needed space. When she felt his return after lunch the next day it was with a supreme sense of relief. He felt much calmer through their bond and reached to her reassuringly, but as per his instructions she made no attempt to see him. She had no wish to inflict madness upon him with her proximity.

She handed in her latest assignments to the records and assessment desk too distracted to go over them a final time as she usually did. She had finished both the week before and was certain they were polished, but still, normally she would have given them a once over just to reassure herself. This time she didn't bother, just handed over the PADDs.

She was eating a lacklustre meal consisting of bland curry and rice with Gaila in the cafeteria when she felt Spock approach. She turned in her seat and saw him across the busy food hall. He was not difficult to spot, he did not blend very well. For starters he was in grey when most were in red and he sort of… *loomed*. Spock was tall, but not unusually so. His posture and build just seemed to accentuate his height.

Nyota gave him a once over.

He looked exactly as he always did - uniform neatly pressed, hair perfectly straight and his face a picture of Vulcan calm. He turned and met her gaze evenly and she sensed his intent to join her.

'*I take it Commander Hot Pants will be joining us Ny?*’ Gaila teased her from across the table.

'*He speaks Yrevish you know. And he has very good hearing.*’

The Orion shrugged nonchalantly. Over the last few months she seemed to have lost all sense of proprietary where Spock was concerned. She appeared to find teasing him and Nyota endlessly amusing. Nyota dealt with her roommate as best as she could, Gaila had kept quiet about her suspicions with regards to herself and Spock for two years after all. She supposed teasing was a small price to pay for an Orion's discretion. They were hardly renown for it.

Spock appeared at the empty seat beside her. 'Cadets.' he greeted them politely.

Gaila gave him a megawatt smile. 'Heeeeelllo Commander. Care to join us?'

Nyota groaned at Gaila's tone. She didn't need to look at Spock's face to know he'd raised an eyebrow in confusion.

'*That would be satisfactory Cadet U'Aidat.*'

The group of cadets sitting at the opposite end of the long table they were at had turned at Gaila's flirtatious greeting. Although they weren't friends, they were in her and Gaila's Subspace Engineering class and had just attended the same lecture. One of them sniggered. Nyota remembered him from her Phonology classes in second year. He was obviously familiar with Gaila's former campaign of flirting with Spock.

She glared at Gaila. Gaila smiled innocently.

Spock took the seat beside Nyota and opened a bottle of *sash-savas* juice. It was one of the few Vulcan food items available on the campus and Nyota had tried it out of curiosity. It was similar in taste to a mild grapefruit juice and a little too sour for her tastes. Spock's tray also held a very large serving of pasta. He could give her father a run for his money in terms of appetite.

While she watched he proceeded to empty half a dozen sachets of a spicy seasoning all over his
meal. It was plain he found the food at the cafeteria quite bland. Having tasted yon-savas, which was apparently a popular condiment on his homeworld, Nyota could see why.

'If you after something spicy you should try the Orion menu, Commander.' Gaila didn't know when to give it a rest. 'I'm sure I could find something to... satisfy you.' She gave Spock an over-the-top combined hair flick and eyelash bat.

The cadets next to them were watching her little show with great amusement. Nyota felt like throwing her drink at her roommate. She was not in the mood. At all.

'Whilst I appreciate your concern Cadet, the last time I accepted such hospitality from you, you drugged me.' Spock responded evenly as he twisted pasta around his fork. 'I find myself uncertain as to your motives and unable to accept your offer.'

Nyota snorted at Gaila's stricken expression of shock.

One of the cadets listening loudly whispered 'Zing!' to one of his friends.

Gaila pouted and crossed her arms.

Nyota wasn't sure if it was because of their bond, but Spock seemed a little less oblivious than he used to be. She was pretty sure he knew exactly what Gaila had really been implying whereas such innuendo would have gone completely over his head back in second year.

With Gaila shocked into moody silence Nyota turned to Spock. 'I hope you are feeling better today sir? It's so unusual for you to be ill.' She worded her inquiry vaguely for the benefit of their audience.

'Indeed Cadet. I am completely recovered and have identified the cause of my… reaction. I am confident such a situation will not occur again.' Spock was terrible when it came to subterfuge and his wording was awkward, but Nyota got his meaning anyway and felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

'That's… good to hear. Sir.' She shifted in her seat slightly so that the side of her boot touched his beneath the table.

She wanted to wrap her arms around him and hug him and kiss him and tell him how much she loved him and how relieved she was. It pained her that she was instead reduced to stilted conversation and an extremely tame variation on footsies.
*Spock*

A week passed and things returned to what had become 'normal' for Spock - which was very different to the life he had grown accustomed to since his departure from Vulcan over 8 years previously. Despite his claims that a human could not match the control of a Vulcan, he found it was more often than not he that gave into his desire to be near his bondmate. He found their proximity and enforced separation in a way more distracting than simply being separated by distance had been serving on the *Nelson*. Their bond meant he was aware of her mood and precise location at any time. The temptation to seek her out was constant.

He had felt her nearby when he had been teaching his afternoon class. Unable to resist, after the class he had traced her location to a computer lab nearby. There were three students spread around the room working at different consoles. He regarded Nyota through the glass door for a moment before he entered. She was wearing her cadet's uniform with the jacket hooked over the back of her chair. Her hair was up in its usual style but she had forgone her customary earrings. This pleased him since it meant he could press his face against her neck without hindrance. Not that he was going to do such a thing. Especially in a computer lab where anyone might see them.

'I feel thy presence beloved.'

She spoke in high Vulcan without turning to look at him. He could hear her smile in her voice and although he knew no one would be able to understand her words, it still sent a thrill through him to hear her call him beloved in front of others. It was not unpleasant.

'As I felt thine.' He came to a stop beside her work station, hands clasped behind his back and face expressionless. He was aware that the cadet closest to them was watching his interaction with Nyota with idle curiosity so he made certain that his attention seemed perfectly respectable, even whilst he pulled at Nyota from within their bond expressing without words his wish that they were alone. She froze and he felt her desire reflect back into him. She turned to meet his eyes with a slight smile on her face. 'To what do I owe the pleasure Commander Spock?' She had switched to Vuhlkansu.

'You are aware cadet, that the Enterprise will be launched for systems optimisation and testing in space dock tomorrow?'

'Of course Commander.'

'The Captain has expressed a desire for the involvement of cadets in the launch. Since you were of such great assistance to myself and Professor Voss during construction, I wondered if you would like to be one of them?'

He felt her surprise and excitement.

'Oh really Spock!?' The cadet nearest, a class mate of Nyota's Spock recognised, looked up in renewed interest at her casual address and excitement. Spock kept his face neutral.

'Indeed cadet. A skeleton crew will be involved in the launch and Starfleet Admiralty wishes for cadets from the Academy to supplement those crewmembers.'

She grinned and switched back to Vulcan. 'I'd heard about that. I'd assumed they'd want
engineers for students?

For the most part. However Professor Voss and I agreed that owing to your contribution with regards to the long range sensor redesign you were deserving of a place if you desired one.'

She grinned widely making no attempt to disguise her excitement. 'I do do!'

Spock had difficulty not reacting to his wife's happiness. It was bubbling through their bond in a most distracting manner. He clenched his jaw. *There will be a shuttle departing from the Academy at 06:00 hours.*'

'And you can bet I'll be on it Commander.' She paused. 'Gaila is going to be so jealous.'

Spock tilted his head. He could perhaps arrange for Nyota's friend to be offered a place. He recalled the two assistant seats at the bridge communications console. Cadet's U'Aidat did have some of the highest grades in the communications department... 'I could see to it Cadet U'Aidat receives a similar invitation should you desire it Nyota.'

'Really? That would be wonderful Spock!'

Gratified at her reaction, Spock took his leave and continued to his next class.

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*Nyota*

The moment Spock had left the computer lab Cadet Price broke the silence to talk to Nyota. *Commander Spock sure seems fond of you Uhura.*' His Vulcan was fluent if quite strongly accented.

Instantly Nyota's excitement drained at the unspoken implication in his words.

She nodded and responded in kind. *I was his aide for over two years. He's quite brilliant and easy to work with once you get over his Vulcan manners.*' She frantically run over their conversation, usually when they spoke Vulcan or standard they maintained a formality in their speech. She certainly hadn't called him beloved or anything similar, but she hoped she hadn't made any other, smaller slip ups.

*He called you by your first name. That's unusual.* Damn. It was. Especially from someone as reserved as Spock.

*I consider the Commander a friend as well as an Instructor. On occasion I also refer to him by his given name.*' She hadn't she? She'd called him 'Spock', not sir or Commander. She focussed on her work, trying to discourage Price's interest.

*He sits with you and U'Aidat, the Orion, quite a lot in the cafeteria.*' Price sounded like he thinking out loud.

*Yes, sometimes he sits with us.* Nyota recalled Price had been present for Gaila's teasing the previous week. She hoped he hadn't taken it seriously. *Gaila teases him something terrible. Poor Commander Spock doesn't even realise most of the time.*

'Did the Commander teach you High Vulcan?' he asked abruptly.

Nyota tried not to read too much into his words or get overly defensive. There was no way Price spoke Van-Kal Vuhlkansu. *I've studied it on and off for several years actually. My mother was an
attaché to Ambassador Shaefer,' she said referring to the Terran Ambassador to Vulcan, '... and was able to get me some rare teaching recordings through him. Commander Spock graciously allows me to practice with him.' She made an attempt at a friendly smile, 'It's been a great help. I'm sure I don't need to tell a fellow communications major how hard Van-Kal Vuhlkansu is to pronounce correctly.'

Price was staring at her suspiciously. 'Yes. I didn't actually think humans could speak with any fluency.' They can't. Nyota thought. Not without mind melding with a Vulcan and paying very close attention whilst aforementioned Vulcan speaks it. And even then, being head over heels in love with the Vulcan might be a requirement.

She didn't say any of that however. Instead she smiled widely and switched back to standard. 'Oh I'm certainly not fluent.'

Prince just nodded.

Nyota turned back to her console and resumed her work. A few minutes later though Price spoke again.

'So do you think you can get me an invite to the launch? Or does the Commander only extend them to girls?'

Her fingers froze on her input terminal. His tone was friendly enough, but Nyota sensed he was trying to threaten her, or at least imply something and gauge her reaction.

'I'd be happy to ask for you Price,' she replied. 'You might have more luck trying one of the other Professors involved though. I doubt the Commander will be allowed to choose all the cadets that will attend.'

'Maybe you're right Uhura.' He seemed to be debating whether or not to say something, but then simply turned back to his workstation.

Nyota pushed the unpleasant exchange from her mind so she could focus on her work. She wanted to complete her readings for her classes so she wouldn't miss too much being out of the Academy the next day.

Back in there room, Gaila received an invitation to join the crew manning the launch of the Enterprise at 20:04 hours. She, predictably, bounced up and down in excitement.

'Pike will be there! If I can impress him then my commission to the Enterprise is a done deal Ny!' It occurred to Nyota that if she asked him, Spock would easily be able to use his influence to ensure both she and Gaila were assigned to the Enterprise on graduation.

She tried to ignore the thought. She didn't want to use her relationship with Spock in such a way, it was one of the very reasons fraternization regulations existed. Although hadn't she already? Gaila was only part of the launch crew because Spock wished to please her. She didn't say that to her Orion friend however. She was too proud thinking Professor Voss had singled her out. Gaila had worked hard and received very high marks in her classes, she deserved recognition for her own merits. The situation left an unpleasant taste in her mouth. She resolved to discuss it with Spock.

They went to sleep early so they could be up and ready in time for the 6am shuttle to the shipyard. Gaila was beside herself. She hadn't seen the Enterprise before. They joined the milling crowd of
excited cadets and stressed instructors at the Academy shuttle-yard. Nyota caught a few glimpses of Spock and Captain Pike referring to PADDs but made no effort to approach him.

There were actually three shuttles departing, and each seemed full. Nyota and Gaila were the only communications students that appeared to be present, as she'd suspected the other cadets were engineering and operations majors.

Gaila and Nyota were waiting to board the second of the shuttles when an ensign approached them. 'Cadets Uhura and U'Aidat?' Both girls replied in the affirmative. The ensign pointed towards the third shuttle. 'Report to the Captain's shuttle. You will be assisting the bridge crew.'

Gaila let out a little squeak and bounced up and down. She'd been doing that a lot lately. The ensign stared at her bountiful Orion chest and blushed. She was dragging Nyota off towards the other shuttle before Nyota could even thank the dazed ensign.

Nyota didn't see Spock straight away, but she could feel he was nearby. She and Gaila took their seats and strapped themselves in. There were fewer cadets on the Captain's shuttle. There was a more or less complete engineering team - a Lieutenant and half a dozen ensigns all in red, and several other officers in gold, blue and red that Nyota assumed were the rest of the bridge crew. She was surprised to not see the dark haired woman that had served with the Captain on the Nelson.

At 05:58 hours Spock appeared in the doorway, having to bend down sharply to avoid hitting his head. As always, Nyota felt a great surge of pleasure just at seeing him. He was so tall and handsome and perfectly Spock. Just looking at him made her dizzy with happiness. His eyes met hers for a split second and she felt that regard returned and then he walked forward and took a seat near the front of the shuttle. Nyota resisted the urge to crane her neck to stare at him.

Gaila elbowed her subtly and spoke in her native dialect for Nyota's ears only. 'I do not need you and Commander Hot Pants distracting me Ny. Behave.'

Nyota felt her cheeks heat. 'I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about Gaila.'

The Orion girl scoffed and began softly singing under her breath 'You want to have Commander Spock's baaaaabiiesss…'

Nyota stared at her in wide-eyed disbelief. 'Gaila!' She couldn't believe her so called 'friend' was singing that awful song again! And Spock would undoubtedly be able to hear. oh god. He'd probably ask her about it again. ohgodohgod.

'…his pointy-eared Vulcan baaaaabbbiiesss…' Gaila continued shamelessly. Nyota realised that she was singing it in tune of 'The lusty green-eyed lodubyaln' - a particularly lewd Orion song about a slave girl who ran away with a pirate. It involved a great deal of 'plundering'.

Gaila paused and took a deep breath, clearly intending to add a new verse.

'Don't you dare Gaila U'Aidat!' Nyota warned.

'Oooohhh you love Commander Spock, because he's got a green co..' Nyota elbowed her. Hard.

Gaila let out a strangled yelp of pain and fell silent, rubbing her side and glaring at Nyota. 'Hey!'

Before she could elaborate however the Captain walked up the ramp, the door closing behind him.
As soon as he was strapped in beside Spock the shuttle's engines cycled and Nyota felt the soaring dip in her stomach as they lifted off.

The next five minutes were always a mix of scary and exhilarating. Leaving the atmosphere in a shuttle was rough, noisy, dangerous and lots of fun. Her internal monologue was something like that of a child on a rollercoaster. She felt Spock's amusement at her excitement and couldn't resist turning to offer him the briefest of smiles. He did not respond beyond the slightest twitch of his eyebrow. The silence and smoothness of the ship as they levelled out above the atmosphere was downright boring in comparison. There was no turbulence in space.

The passengers soon fell into conversation as they made the quiet portion of the journey. Gaila and Nyota speculated on what they'd actually be doing. Nyota thought they'd probably be standing around trying not to get in anyone's way. Gaila commented that they would at least look good standing around. Nyota didn't say anything, but her friend had a point. Most of the crew were male and at least ten years their senior. She and Gaila did look positively girlish in comparison to the other female officers.

The landing was just as rough as the take-off had been, but Nyota felt only excitement. She and Gaila formed up with the other cadets who'd travelled on the Captain's shuttle, all advanced fourth year warp engineering students. They were quickly taken by the Lieutenant in red, Olsen, who was obviously the Chief Engineer. Gaila and Nyota were wondering where they should go when another Lieutenant in red approached them. 'Cadets U'Aidat and Uhura? I am Lieutenant Hawkins, Chief Communication Officer of the Enterprise. You will be assisting me.'

Gaila shot Nyota an excited look and fell into step behind the Lieutenant. The Enterprise gleamed white in the early morning sun. The scaffolding and umbilicals had been removed and it sat unfettered in the launch cradle. Nyota couldn't help her sceptical thoughts as she regarded it. It just seemed too big not to break apart during a planetside launch. Still, if Spock thought it would make it, she'd trust his calculations.

Gaila craned her head. 'Oh my god, it's even bigger than I thought it would be. Ny, remind me to give Professor Voss a big hug or something for getting me on the launch.'

'It was Commander Spock who recommended you actually Cadet U'Aidat.' The Lieutenant remarked as they waited to board the ship via the rear loading bay. 'And I'm not sure if you should attempt to hug him.' he concluded wryly.

'Commander Spock?' Gaila glanced at Nyota in confusion.

'Yes, there were extra seats at the comm console since this isn't a fully crewed launch and the Captain wanted as many students as possible involved. The Commander requested his former aide Cadet Uhura be included and recommended you for the second ensign chair at the console, Cadet U'Aidat, as one of his brightest students.' He turned and regarded them both. 'I reviewed your records and found myself in agreement with his assessment.' He gave them a smile. 'It's always a pleasure to meet such promising cadets.'

Nyota found herself liking the Lieutenant instantly. If she did receive a commission on board it would be under his command and now she and Gaila had an opportunity to impress him. If he remained chief communications officer - and Nyota was under the impression most of the bridge officer positions had been finalised - his opinion would also mean a lot when the Captain selected ensigns in a few months. If she and Gaila impressed him then she wouldn't need to worry about Spock possibly using his influence with the Captain to get her a commission. She wanted to earn a posting on the Enterprise.
The interior of the ship was all smooth curves and gleaming white finishes. Nyota spent the journey up to the bridge admiring the vast changes to the ship since she’d last seen it. Most of the sections they passed through she had not seen since she’d accompanied her father on the inspection with Spock the previous year. It was surreal to step onto the bridge now it was finally complete. She walked over to the communications console and the adjoining long range sensor array. It was odd to see them installed. She’d spent so much time fiddling with them over the last three years. She glanced up at the ceiling panels and recalled crawling around up there, she and Lena both trying not to stare at Spock's butt and exchanging knowing smirks as they did so. She smiled to herself.

She and Gaila took the ensign's seats to either side of the Lieutenant. Nyota could sense Spock on the other side of the bridge and it was difficult to restrain the urge to turn and look at him. She'd only seen him in his blue sciences uniform twice and she wanted to spend a while staring at him. The Lieutenant set them to work monitoring the shipboard communications. The engineers were talking to each other rapidly over a dozen frequencies. If anything happened in engineering that could threaten the launch, they were to ensure the Captain was apprised of it as soon as it happened. The Lieutenant busied himself maintaining communication with Starfleet command and the Shipyard Control tower.

Nyota listened in fascination as the different engineering departments reported into one another during the final stages of the launch. They were all speaking standard and nothing unexpected had occurred thus far.

She heard Spock's voice despite her attention being focused on her headpiece, she doubted she'd ever be able to completely block out her husband's voice.

'Engineering report thrusters and impulse engines are on line and functioning at optimal levels Captain.' How was it he made that statement sexy? She focused her attention back on her headset with conscious effort. She felt his amusement. He seemed to find everything amusing lately. Damn him.

The Lieutenant in gold at the helm spoke. 'All navigation systems are on-line and fully operational Captain. We are good to go.'

'Good to hear McKenna.' Pike took his seat and activated the ship wide communicator band. 'This is Captain Pike speaking, all hands prepare for launch in T minus 2 minutes.'

'Affirmative sir, launch in T minus 2 minutes.' said the helmsman, McKenna, bringing a launch counter up to overlay the viewscreen.

Nyota shared an excited glance with Gaila behind Lieutenant Hawkins's back before focusing back on the engineering chatter. If something did fail, statistically it would most likely be in the next few minutes.

At thirty seconds remaining the ship lifted slightly in its launch cradle as the helmsman brought the impulse engine up to the required power levels. There was a soft humming from many decks below and the slightest of vibrations. From the ground the ship's impulse engines would be glowing orange and roaring. Nyota felt giddy with excitement.

The engineering chatter grew more tense and excited, and then the counter hit zero and the Enterprise engaged her engines fully and shot forward on an incline. Nyota was shoved against the back of her seat at the sudden acceleration. The noise of the engines was no longer a soft hum, but a steady rumble. The view through the view screen showed them shooting out over the countryside at an incredible speed. It was far more exhilarating then the shuttle ride. She restrained the
urge to squeal in excitement. Gaila was bouncing a little in her seat. They grinned at each other.

Nyota heard a panicked voice in her ear. Andorian. She repeated it loudly in standard, 'Starboard Impulse engine is losing power sir!' The Captain and half the bridge turned to stare at her. Lieutenant Hawkins addressed him 'Affirmative sir. Engineering reports starboard impulse engine 1 is failing.'

'Helmsman, adjust course to compensate.' The Captain said turning back to face forwards.

As if on cue the bridge was suddenly listing to the starboard as the ship lost its balance, but the lieutenant was already making adjustments. 'Affirmative sir.' He responded. 'Engaging additional starboard thrusters to compensate.'

The ship levelled. For a moment the bridge was silent save for the noise of the engines. Then Gaila's voice cut across the room. 'Starboard Impulse Engine 2 is failing sir!'

There was no need for Lieutenant Hawkins to confirm as once more the ship dipped. Luckily the helmsman was ready. 'Bringing up auxiliary thrusters to compensate Captain!' The ship levelled out once more.

The Captain slapped his console. 'Engineering! Report!'

The Chief Engineer appeared in one corner of the viewscreen, there were panicked crew members dashing about around him. 'There is a failure in the starboard impulse power circuits sir. Only engines 1 & 2 are on that grid however. We are working to hot swap the circuits. Engines 3 & 4 remain fully operational sir.'

'Helmsman, will we be able to safely reach orbit with 2 engines down?' Pike inquired.

'Er, yes sir?' He didn't sound completely sure.

The Captain spun in his chair to face Spock. 'Spock?'

'Lieutenant McKenna is correct.' Spock's voice was mild and unruffled as always. 'The remaining impulse engines and thrusters will be sufficient to break gravitational pull. Failing that I would recommend a jump to warp in the upper reaches of the atmosphere. The ship was not designed to land in anything save an emergency crash scenario. Without our full complement of impulse engines we would have, I estimate, only an 8% chance of avoiding the complete destruction of the ship and even then all crew on decks 1 through 12 would undoubtedly be lost.'

The Captain didn't seem overly concerned by Spock's rather bleak conclusion. 'That's what I thought.' He spun back to the front. He seemed to enjoy spinning in his chair. 'Punch it McKenna.'

Nyota spent the next 8 minutes listening for any hint of further disaster from the engineering decks as the Enterprise roared through the clouds and out of Earth's atmosphere. The ship was soon shaking quite violently, but she could feel Spock's confidence through their bond. He seemed utterly unconcerned at their predicament and that was a much greater comfort to her than anything else.

They emerged from the atmosphere quite suddenly. The viewscreen darkened from blue to black and stars brightened across the sky. The shaking ceased and the only noise was the smooth hum of the engines.

The Captain hit his console once more. 'Engineering, report.'
'Circuits hot swapped sir. All impulse engines back on-line.' He paused 'Recommend use of impulse power until I can run a full diagnostic on the warp system's circuitry.'

'Very good lieutenant.' Pike directed his attention back to the pilot. 'Helmsman, plot a course to Space Station 1 at half impulse. Let's not push those circuits.'

'Aye Captain.'

Nyota let herself breathe out in relief.

Beside her Lieutenant Hawkins was relaying their situation to Starfleet command. After he finished he pulled back slightly and smiled at both her and Gaila. 'Good job cadets.'

To her surprise the Captain spoke up from where he'd been talking to Spock and two other bridge officers Nyota didn't recognise. 'I agree Hawkins. I think we might have to hang onto the Commander's lovely cadets.' He turned to Spock. 'What do you think Spock.'

Spock's voice was as calm and modulated as always, but Nyota could tell he was pleased that she and Gaila had impressed the Captain. 'Cadets Uhura and U'Aidat both demonstrate exceptional xenolinguistic skills and would make excellent additions to any crew sir.'

The Captain smiled. 'High praise from the Commander.'

Gaila was grinning and Nyota was having trouble keeping a smile off her face. 'Thank you sir.'

Under such low impulse power it would take several hours, the entire day more or less, to approach and dock with Space Station 1, but the Captain wasn't about to risk putting the warp engine on line until the testing on the power failure had been completed. A similar circuit issue in the warp drive's systems would be much more serious.

Spock left the bridge to check on the Engineering section soon after they left the atmosphere. Nyota and Gaila continued monitoring the shipboard communications. Nyota and Lieutenant Hawkins also discussed the redesign of the long range sensor array that she had assisted Spock and Professor Voss with. He found her story about Spock crawling around in the ceiling panels extremely amusing. Lunchtime rolled around and the Lieutenant sent Gaila and Nyota to eat in the bridge officer's lounge in turns.

The lounge was directly below the bridge itself. There were only a few people eating at the small tables and enjoying the view the long window of transparent aluminium provided. The view from orbit was always breathtaking. Earth spread beneath them in a wide blue and white curve of the pacific ocean and cloud cover. She was always surprised at how big the pacific was. It seemed to cover almost half the planet. Ridiculous as it was, seeing Earth from orbit gave her a funny feeling of breathless pride. It was so beautiful. Of course, she supposed everyone felt the same about their homeworld.

Ten minutes later she was sitting at a table eating a slightly bland bowl of replicated ugali na sukuma wiki. It was one of her favourite meals to eat for lunch, kale with onion and tomato with a mound of salted maize cooked to a dough-like consistency. The replicated version was not nearly as good as her mother's however. There were no crispy fried bits in the sukuma, it was all of a uniformly limp consistency.

She was contemplating ordering some chilli sauce from the replicator to douse it with when she felt Spock using the turbolift. The sensation of him suddenly zipping closer to her was almost ticklish and distracted her from her disappointing meal. Her eyes were already on the turbolift doors when
they chimed to reveal him. He met her gaze for a moment, something like a static shock passing between them, before heading to one of the replicator units and ordering himself a meal.

Nyota regarded his tray with interest as he appeared and sat opposite her. She did not recognise the dish, though it smelt quite appetizing. There was also rather a lot of it.

'Kleetanta with forati sauce cadet.' Spock said in response to her silent inquiry. She looked at the dish and had an odd almost memory of what it tasted like. Something like gnocchi, savoury balls of a bean based paste cooked in a herbed sauce flavoured with forati, a nutty ... *lichen?*

'Strange.' she commented out loud.

Spock raised a brow in query.

Nyota nonchalantly glanced around the room. There were two ensigns chatting over what was probably terrible replicator coffee on the far side of the lounge and a lieutenant in red referring to a PADD and eating a sandwich nearby. She deemed it safe enough for a casual conversation in Vulcan. *'I remember what kleetanta with forati sauce tastes like, although I have never encountered it before – something like gnocchi with mushrooms?***

Spock inclined his head in agreement. *'Indeed. An adequate comparison.'* He looked at her meal. *'You are eating...'* He paused as if trying hard to remember or calculate something. *'...ugali na sukuma wiki.'* He was silent again for a moment. *'It is inferior to that which your mother makes.'*

Nyota stared at Spock in disbelief. *'And you know this how?'*

Spock ate a spoonful of his meal. Nyota could feel that he was quite hungry. *'Because you know.'*

It appeared their bond extended to telepathic menu exchange. She smiled at the absurdity and returned to her meal. *'So was it just a fluke that the impulse engine power circuit failed sir?'

'The circuits fitted do not appear to be to the design specifications. It was only by chance that all the impulse engines did not overload. Had they done so the ship would not have been able to make orbit.' Spock took another large bite of his lunch and swallowed. *'The Chief Engineer was most displeased. I suspect he will now go over the entire ship for fear of similar issue.'*

Nyota frowned. *'That's far more disturbing than a random fault.'*

'Indeed cadet.‘

Nyota let her Vulcan husband inhale his lunch, (politely and fastidiously of course), in silence. He managed to consume three or four times the amount of food as she in the same amount of time. Lord knew where he put it all. He appeared to detect her bemused line of thought since he informed her rather defensively *'Due to the differences in our physiology Vulcans exert more energy than humans. Therefore our calorific needs are significantly higher.'*

She restrained the urge to smirk at his tone. *'That seems perfectly logical.'* she replied mildly, rising from her seat with her tray of cold leftovers, *'I'm returning to the bridge. Gaila has not eaten yet.'*

Spock nodded and stood. *'I will accompany you.'*

They put their trays into the recycler and boarded the turbolift. Nyota stood a respectable distance from Spock and idly wished that a power circuit in the turbolift would fail and they'd get stuck. His eyes slid to the side to look at her but his head remained facing forward as the doors slid shut.
'Bridge.' she informed the computer.

The lift shot upwards and to a stop almost instantly. Before the doors could cycle open however she impulsively pressed the stop button.

Spock turned to her and raised an eyebrow.

By way of response she stepped up in front of him and resting her hands on his chest gave him a chaste kiss on the cheek. She drew back with a shy smile and reached out to activate the doors. Before her fingers brushed the console Spock wrapped an arm around her and drew her back towards him however. She let out a pleased squeak of surprise. He ignored it and proceeded to give her a thoroughly human, decidedly unchaste kiss.

They had not kissed in over a week. They hadn't made love in even longer. Desire washed through her with embarrassing swiftness. She had her fingers in his hair and her tongue in his mouth in seconds. Her body seemed to have a mind of its own, pressing against him in wanton promise, as if they weren't in a turbolift on board the Enterprise with the captain and bridge crew just meters from them. Spock drew his face from hers. His eyes had taken on that dark heat that promised her something extremely satisfying. 'When are you due back on the bridge?' His voice was almost calm. Almost. The erection she could feel against her hip somewhat ruined the effect however.

'12:45 hours.' she replied distractedly. Such proximity and privacy was rare - she could touch him however she wanted. She lightly traced the contour of his face, from his brow to his jaw, with her right hand as the fingers of her left curled in the short silky hairs at the nape of his neck. The smooth Vulcan heat of his skin remained a delight to her.

Spock addressed the computer 'Deck 4.'

Nyota smirked. The crew quarters. Stepping slightly closer to him, she let her arms settle around his shoulders and sighed dramatically. 'Why Commander Spock surely you can't intend to whisk me off to your quarters?'

Before he could respond the lift stopped once more. Nyota stepped back and turned to face the door, putting respectable distance between them in case anyone was nearby. The doors cycled onto an empty corridor however. She glanced at Spock and grinned before setting off at run towards where she knew the first officer's quarters were located. The door triggered automatically and she dashed inside, giggling, with Spock at her heels. She made it half way across the small living room area before she was tackled by 6ft 2 of aroused Vulcan onto one of the couches.

Her laughter died quickly under Spock's kisses. He didn't do anything by halves. When he kissed her it was with a single minded intensity that stole her breath and filled her body with soft heat. His want and desire for her washed through their bond and seeped into her skin through his fingertips, but even without that it was plain from the way he kissed her - desperate and greedy. The heat of his mouth was fascinating, addictive, and Nyota surrendered happily before his devouring attentions, carding her fingers through his hair and kissing him back just as eagerly.

When he turned his attentions to her neck, kissing and licking, letting his sharp teeth scrape against her skin, the heat that had been slowly building within her began to throb between her thighs. He felt her sharpening desire and made a pleased noise somewhere between a purr and groan that vibrated against her skin and sparked a further curl of heat inside her. Nyota made no effect to calm herself, to slow her reaction to him. Her fingers tugged his hair and she pulled his mouth back to hers even as she pressed her body against his.

She twisted beneath him as they kissed frantically, wrapping her legs around him so that he rested...
teasingly between her thighs. She didn't bother trying to undress him, they were on a schedule after all, instead she undid his trousers and tugged at his underwear until she had a warm hand wrapped around him even as he shoved her dress up and yanked at her panties. She was forced to unwrap her legs momentarily so the offending garment could be removed entirely. Spock wasted no time, despite their hurry she was most definitely ready for him, he simply positioned himself against her and thrust home in one long even stroke. She groaned at the deep stretch and deliciously satisfying feel of him within her.

He was still for a few moments, kissing her deeply, and then his head fell to her shoulder and he began moving within her with restraint she found quite admirable. She herself certainly didn't have any. Her hips bucked against him, her hands pulling at his hair. He shifted slightly, shoving an arm under her hips so he could penetrate her at a better angle. She moaned his name. 'Spohhhkh...’ letting the syllables drag on her tongue intentionally. She knew how much he loved hearing her say his name. He made that wonderful noise again, that rumbly purring groan and his hips snapping forward with increasing speed. She met him eagerly thrust for thrust, feeling her climax coiling tighter and tighter within her. God but Spock was as good at sex as he was at everything. Even a hurried half-dressed fumble on a couch had her writhing under him like a spiced-out slave girl.

She could feel he was just as close as she. Then he reached between them and pressed his fingers firmly against her so his hand rocked with his movements. She came. Fabulously, blindingly. Her breath caught in her throat and her body tensed and pulsed around him as white heat consumed her. He moaned, jerking against her as his own orgasm claimed him. She felt the delicious echo of it through their bond.

They lay in a panting mess for a few minutes. Spock pressed his fingers against her and let her feel his contentment. Nyota took the opportunity to stroke her fingers through his hair where he lay against her.

'It is now 12:42 hours.' Spock romantically informed her.

Nyota sighed and pushed him off her so she could stumble to her feet, slightly dazed after their hurried encounter. She could feel his come trickling warm down her thighs. A decidedly uncomfortable sensation. Quickly she made her way to the bathroom and cleaned herself up, retying her hair and checking her makeup for good measure. Luckily the synthetic material of her uniform wasn't prone to wrinkling. She was a little flushed perhaps, but she didn't look like she'd just let the Vulcan first officer have his way with her on her meal break. She smirked at herself in the mirror.

When she returned to the living room Spock had put himself back to rights. Apart from a slight green flush to his cheeks and ears, she could see no sign he'd just had sex. His hair was perfect again. How did he do that? Was it some sort of Vulcan super power? Magic hair? She shook her head to clear it of such idle thoughts. She needed to get to the bridge. But first. 'Can you see my panties Spock?'

Her husband turned and scanned the area before reaching between the couch cushions and removing a bright scrap of green cotton. She took them and bent to pull them on, smoothing her uniform as she did so. When she straightened Spock was staring at her with that same dark look from the turbolift. She felt an answering twinge of renewed desire but just smiled at him as she breezed past him towards the door.

'I'm tempted, but there's no time… Commander Hot Pants.'

As always her use of Gaila's ridiculous nickname for him confused him but amused her a great
His on-going frustration over the illogical nature of the name also distracted him from pushing her back down onto the couch. He followed her back towards the turbolift with a slight frown on his handsome face. 'Nyota, you must explain this name to me. I do not understand.'

She stepped into the turbolift and shook her head. 'Nope. I'm sure you will figure it out eventually.' She addressed the computer brightly. 'Bridge!'

He shot her an irritated look as the doors slid shut. 'But it is illogical.' For a Vulcan he sounded remarkably like a sulky child.

She didn't reply just smiled and blew him a kiss before the doors opened onto the bridge. She strode out serenely - actually feeling better for her inappropriate interlude below decks rather than agitated. Decidedly relaxed. Endorphins no doubt.

Gaila gave her an unimpressed, withering look as she resumed her seat. It was 12:45 precisely. The Orion inhaled dramatically and commented in her native dialect. 'I see, or should I say, I smell that you had something Vulcan for lunch Ny.'

Nyota smiled smugly. 'Why yes I did. It was quite satisfying.'

Gaila snorted but smiled in amusement as she rose to go take her own break.

Lieutenant Hawkins glanced with interest between them. 'Which dialect is that? It's not Kolari.'

Gaila responded. 'Yrevish sir.'

'Interesting. I might pick your brain about it after your break cadet. I've not had much exposure to Yrevish.' That wasn't surprising. It was not one of the more common dialects in Orion space. Prime and Kolari were far more prevalent.

Gaila nodded. 'Sounds good sir.'

Nyota spent the next three hours assisting the Lieutenant as directed. He was pleasant to work with and engaged both Gaila and herself in muted conversation on the role of a communications officer and linguistic subjects in a variety of languages. He was especially impressed that they both spoke Romulan, Nyota all three dialects. She was actually a little surprised at how many languages the Lieutenant didn't speak. He was fluent in the most common Federation languages, but didn't even speak Klingon, let alone Ferengi or Cardassian. She tried not be judgemental, but she couldn't help but wonder at his commission.

The docking went far more smoothly than take off. Nothing failed or exploded and the Enterprise slid into her new berth painlessly. Many of the Engineering and technical crew would be staying on the ship to begin testing, but the bridge crew and other flight staff were dismissed.

Gaila and Nyota exited the ship with Spock, the Captain and Lieutenant Hawkins. Gaila instantly struck up a conversation with the Captain, pouring on the Orion charm, but in a restrained, respectful manner (at least for her). Spock hung back so he could walk beside her as they made their way to the shuttles that would take them back to the Academy. 'I think thy skill on the bridge hath won thee the commission thy desired beloved.'

It was difficult, but she managed to keep her face smooth, as if Spock hadn't just called her beloved in front of several high ranking Starfleet officers.
'Spokkh! Thou should not say such things. Mayhap someone might speak thy tongue.'

'None of those currently present do, half-of-my-heart.'

She smiled at that endearment. 'Now thou art teasing me.'

'Vulcans do not tease my Nyota.'

The Captain suddenly turned and shot a confused look between Spock and Nyota. 'Thou called me by mine given name. The name of thy wife as far as thy Captain is concerned.'

'Should he ask I will tell him we were discussing her.' Spock seemed way too relaxed as far as Nyota was concerned. Before she could respond Lieutenant Hawkins butted in.

'Excuse me, but are you two talking High Vulcans?' He sounded intrigued. Nyota glanced at Spock for guidance.

'Affirmative Lieutenant.' Spock responded.

Hawkins looked impressed. 'Wow. I've never known a non-Vulcan to be fluent Cadet Uhura. It's not listed on your Starfleet file.'

Nyota smiled and tried to look pleased at the attention. God damn Spock. Kissing her in turbolifts, dragging her off to his quarters to ravish her, calling her beloved in front of communications officers... She was supposed to be the irrational one, not him. 'Well it's such a difficult language to master, I'm not sure I'll ever consider myself 'fluent'. '

'You sounded quite fluent to me cadet, even if I could only recognise a few words.' Nyota felt Spock mirror her sudden dread. 'What were you discussing if you don't mind me asking?'

Nyota smiled in a way she was sure the Lieutenant would realise was fake. 'I was asking after the Commander's wife.' Hopefully that would explain any endearments he might have picked up on.

Captain Pike glanced back them, 'Oh ho! So your cadet gets to hear about the mysterious Mrs Spock but you leave your captain in the dark!'

Spock sighed. Actually sighed. Nyota suddenly got the impression that he'd been putting up with constant teasing and questions from the Christopher Pike. Well served him right for letting spill that he had a wife when it was supposed to be secret anyway.

She skipped ahead to walk with Gaila, leaving Spock to deal with the Captain.
Spock was reading through a report on the testing and calibration the Enterprise was undergoing in space dock when he received an unusual summons. It was from Admiral Komack. He was to appear before the Academy Board at 09:00 hours the next morning.

The missive provided no further information, which Spock found curious. He had been asked to appear before the board before, when receiving commendations or special commissions, and on one occasion to assist Captain Pike when he debriefed the Board with regards to the Talosians. He assumed it would have something to do with the near disastrous terrestrial launch of the Enterprise. He contacted Captain Pike and found he had been likewise summoned. To that end he compiled a report detailing his and Lieutenant Olsen's initial findings with regards to the failure of the impulse power circuits before he took his evening rest.

He and Captain Pike were allowed into the Admiralty Board Hall at 09:05 hours. To his surprise the hall was empty save for Admirals Komack and Barnett and Professor Voss. They were sitting at the centre of the ring of raised seats reserved for the board. Below them the council stenographer was in her usual position. Professor Voss' presence made no sense and there were several individuals missing who would be required for a debriefing on the Enterprise's launch.

The Captain appeared just as confused as he.

Admiral Komack addressed him. 'Commander Spock, you have been summoned before this disciplinary hearing on behalf of the Admiralty Board to answer accusations that you have broken several Starfleet Regulations.'

Spock blinked.

Captain Pike looked as shocked as Spock felt. 'What?!!'

The Admiral sent Pike a quelling look. 'Given your record Commander Spock, we were inclined to dismiss these accusations, but as they have been reported to us twice from two independent sources, we are obliged to investigate.'

Captain Pike no longer looked shocked, he appeared angry. He crossed his arms. 'Commander Spock's never broken a regulation his entire career.'

'Captain Pike, as the Commander is your commissioned first officer, you are here as a courtesy despite the fact that he is still a member of Academy staff. You have no say in these proceedings.' Admiral Barnett said.

The Captain frowned but did not respond.

Admiral Komack continued. 'I admit my initial reaction was similar to your own Captain, but having reviewed the evidence I am no longer certain. It is my hope that the Commander will be able to satisfy the board that these accusations are false however.'

Barnett referred to a PADD. 'Commander Spock, serial number S179-276SP, you have been accused of breaking Starfleet regulations 12.88b, 45.11i and 141d, namely fraternization with a direct subordinate, falsifying Academy results and assault on a fellow officer.'
Spock ran through a list of possible scenarios. Judging from the inclusion of 141d, he assumed former Lieutenant Sparcs was one of his accusers. Clearly the fraternization referred to Nyota. He could think of no likely candidate for the identity of the second accuser however. Who could suspect Nyota and himself of a personal relationship that went beyond regulation?

Captain Pike laughed. 'What?! Fraternisation? Assault? That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. This is Spock we're talking about!'

Spock ignored Pike's outburst and addressed the Admirals, 'I believe I have the right to know the identity of my accusers.'

They exchanged a glance. Komack spoke. 'Former Lieutenant Jonathan Sparcs accuses you of breaking regulations 12.88b and 141d, and Cadet Ryan Price further accuses you of breaking regulations 12.88b and 45.11i.'

Spock identified the cadet as one of his Phonology students from the same class as Nyota. He was uncertain what he would be basing such an accusation upon. He had born witness to a few conversations between Nyota and himself, but nothing incriminating or inappropriate had passed between them on those occasions. All he could think of was that the Cadet had heard Nyota refer to him by name rather than rank on one occasion. It hardly seemed sufficient to suspect a charge of fraternisation upon.

Spock remained calm. Surprised, but calm. He was confident he had not, technically, broken any Starfleet regulation. Save perhaps the incident wherein he had engaged inappropriate physical contact with Nyota at the shipyard after Sparcs had attacked her. Although since according to T'Sul the encounter had constituted a betrothal under Vulcan custom, it could easily be argued that it fell outside the jurisdiction of Starfleet regulations.

Komack continued. 'We will address the charge of Falsifying Academy Results first.' He turned to address Professor Voss. 'Professor?'

The Andorian sighed. 'I personally double checked all of the assessment Cadets Uhura and U'Aidat have completed for Commander Spock and it is my conclusion, one shared by their current Interspecies Ethics Instructor Professor Saarg, and the rest of the Phonology Department faculty at large, that the Commander did not misrepresent the cadets' achievements.' He paused, his antennae swivelling a little. 'In fact the general consensus is that the Commander was, if anything, too strict in his marking of their work.'

The Admirals seemed unsurprised by this. Komack turned to Barnett. 'I am happy to accept the Professors' judgement in this.'

Barnett nodded. 'I agree. The charge of Falsifying Academy Results is lifted and will not appear on the Commander's record. We will now address the charge of Assault on a Fellow Officer.' He adjusted his PADD to read something off it. 'Jonathan Sparcs accuses you of attacking him on stardate 2256.201. He claims you broke his arm in two places, broke his nose, attempted to strangle him and gave him a concussion. He has provided medical records to attest to these injuries.'

Pike here interrupted. 'Sparcs? As in the Lieutenant who was responsible for the Enterprise falling months behind schedule, and according to what my engineers have told me, the slipshod work that led to two of our impulse engines failing at launch? You're going to take anything he says against Commander Spock seriously?'

Barnett frowned. 'His work on the Enterprise is hardly relevant to a physical altercation.'
Pike crossed his arms. 'It was the Commander who noted Sparcs' short comings. I had him dropped from the build shortly afterwards. Anything he claims about the Commander is suspect at best.'

The Admirals exchanged a look. It was apparent they were unaware or had not considered what Pike had just reminded them of.

The Captain continued. 'I read his file thoroughly before I had him removed from the Enterprise build. Twelve years in Starfleet and all Sparcs has to show for it is a long list of citations for misconduct and violations of Starfleet regulations. The Commander in comparison graduated top of his class and despite serving only 2 and half years of active fleet duty since then has been promoted three times, been awarded the Starfleet Medal for Valour, the Starfleet Medal of Honor, the Starfleet Citation for Conspicuous Gallantry and half a dozen lesser commendations.' Pike gestured at Spock. 'If he hadn't been at the Academy the last few years he'd probably outrank me by now!'

Spock raised an eyebrow. He did not think that a particularly accurate statement.

'And yet you are taking Sparcs' word over his!' Pike continued. 'It's a joke! If you want to know how the Commander treats fellow officers, go ask Lieutenant Varth!'

The Admirals both regarded the Captain silently, as if unsure if he was finished.

'Lieutenant Varth?' inquired Professor Voss timidly, eyes and antennae swivelling around the occupants of the room.

Spock held in a sigh as Christopher Pike took a deep breath. He could guess the uncomfortable direction the conversation was about to go in.

'The engineer Spock carried on his back to an escape pod through a burning Ferengi ship with a failing warp core.' Pike replied. 'A fellow officer Spock risked his life to save... He ended up with third degree burns to half his body and according to my doctor, was dead for three minutes as a result, but Varth's alive thanks to him.' Pike's tone calmed slightly as he finished his speech. 'That's the sort of man Commander Spock is. He'd never assault a fellow officer.'

Spock was tempted to remain silent, but he disliked the idea of Christopher unwittingly lying on his behalf. 'In this particular case, I am afraid you are incorrect Captain. I was indeed involved in a physical altercation with former Lieutenant Sparcs on stardate 2256.201. However I do not believe my actions constitute an assault or otherwise breach any Starfleet regulation.'

Both Admirals, the Captain and Professor Voss were looking at him in surprise. He elaborated. 'The former Lieutenant had verbally assaulted and attempted to physically assault Cadet Uhura, who was my aide at the time, for which I temporarily decommissioned him pending court martial. All of which I imagine is detailed in his file. Later on in the evening he attacked the cadet with a knife. He was injured when I disarmed and restrained him.'

Barnett referred further to his PADD. 'Any witnesses that can confirm that Commander?'

'Several witnessed his assault on the cadet early in the evening, for which he was later dishonourably discharged, and the cadet's father, Commander Uhura can confirm injury the Lieutenant caused the cadet in his later assault.'

Komack frowned. 'Why didn't you report this incident Commander.'

Spock floundered for a moment, he could hardly say Nyota hadn't wanted him to get in trouble, and yet it had been her idea... 'The cadet requested it not be reported. Due to the nature of the
Lieutenant's intent I deemed it... inappropriate to insist.'

'The Lieutenant's intent Commander?' Komack prompted.

Spock managed to keep his face calm and composed though long buried anger threatened to rise within him. 'I believe it was sexual in nature. Cadet Uhura had spurned his advances several times and that appeared to anger him greatly.'

Komack sighed. 'Well, I'm starting to think this will end up a waste of all our time.'

Spock certainly hoped so.

He was becoming more and more uncomfortable discussing such matters. He was uncertain if he would be able to keep answering the Admirals in a manner which would satisfy them, maintain the secrecy of his relationship with Nyota, and remain truthful. Nyota had sensed his unease and he could feel her concern through their bond. Sending reassurance towards her helped him centre his calm once more.

Komack's voice broke him from his internal revelry. 'I note here in Sparcs' statement he made the same accusation of fraternisation against one Commander 'Zuberi'... this would be Commander Zuberi Uhura I see referred to in the documents pertaining to Sparcs court martial I'm assuming Commander Spock?'

'Affirmative sir.' Spock responded.

'The cadet's father?' Komack asked incredulously.

'That is correct sir.'

'Well. Based upon what I've heard and the documentation in Sparcs' own file, I'm happy to dismiss Sparcs' charges.' Komack directed his statement towards the other Admiral.

Barnett nodded. 'I agree and move we strike this accusation from the Commander's file as well. The evidence clearly supports the Commander's version of events.'

'Agreed' Komack sounded pleased they were getting answers they liked. Spock doubted they'd be so pleased the next time he opened his mouth. 'Alright, let's deal with the last charge: Fraternisation with a subordinate.' He sounded sceptical. 'Two of your students to be precise.' He cleared his throat and read out the charge sceptically. 'You are accused of fraternisation with Cadet Nyota Uhura and Cadet Gaila U'Aidat.'

Christopher Pike stiffened and turned to stare at Spock in shock. Spock could practically hear him putting two and two together. If anyone had evidence of his relationship with Nyota is was him. His calm was rapidly disintegrating. Nyota could feel his anxiety and was reaching towards him again in worry and confusion. He attempted to dismiss his emotional response to his situation and assess it from a purely logical point of view.

'What say you Commander?' inquired Komack.

He spoke the truth. 'My personal interactions with both the cadets mentioned have never breached any Starfleet regulation.'

Voss nodded. 'Both of those cadets are very intelligent students Admiral. Between them they've got some of the highest grades in my department. I couldn't imagine either of them, even U'Aidat, and she's Orion, getting involved with any member of staff. Cadet Uhura especially. She's been my aide
for the last 8 months and she is one of the most dedicated and hardworking students I’ve encountered - profoundly gifted. Fluent in 82% of languages spoken in the Federation. I can’t believe we are accusing her of fraternisation with Commander Spock for goodness sake, a Vulcan,’

He gestured towards Captain Pike, ’… who’s been decorated on numerous occasions for his service to Starfleet - based on the word of a man who apparently assaulted her and a classmate who appears jealous that he didn't get to participate in the Enterprise’s launch.’

He took a breath.

‘As for the claims about Cadet U’Aidat, well, they’re even more implausible. Vulcan's are immune to the pheromones of Orions and frankly, I doubt an Orion would be interested in a Vulcan. Their species aren't very biologically compatible.’ An interesting and valid observation.

Pike was silent. Spock imagined he was feeling conflicted. If he chose to mention that Spoke had a wife name Nyota. Well. The reactions of the Admirals would be interesting to observe.

Barnett sighed. ‘I'm inclined to agree with you Professor, but two unrelated claims warrant an investigation and there is some evidence to support the charge with regards to Cadet Uhura at least. Circumstantial evidence, but evidence none the less.’ He looked at Spock. ‘I am hoping our Commander will have a nice neat logical explanation for everything, but it needs to addressed.’ He cleared his throat and referred to his PADD once more. ‘Commander, investigation of Academy security footage indicates that Cadet Uhura has spent the evening in your quarters on two separate occasions since your return to earth.’

He adjusted his PADD and a view screen on the far wall played security footage of Uhura from the first night he stayed on planet, the night he'd had her practically in the doorway of his room. It then showed her leaving at 04:34 hours the next morning. The view then changed and he watched himself walking behind Nyota to his quarters the night of his brush with pon farr and her leaving the next morning. Spock was uncertain what to say. If he had been human he would have lied, but he was not.

‘Whilst this in itself is not proof, it is highly suspect and inappropriate Commander.’ He adjusted the PADD again and the viewscreen flicked from the view of Spock’s corridor to a hallway in Space Station 1. Spock saw himself stride into view in the red uniform he'd worn whilst serving on the Nelson, pulling Nyota along beside him. Her silver dress was very attractive, but she most certainly did not look like she was dressed for a studious discussion with an Instructor. She also wasn’t carrying PADDs or homework to provide an excuse as she had been in the previous images. The most damning part of the image however was the fact that he was touching her. The Admiral's would know enough of Vulcan culture to know how unusual that was. The recording showed them enter his temporary quarters. 8 hours later he and Nyota exited together, he in his uniform, but she in a replicated cadet's uniform. The Admirals’ suspicions were understandable given the footage.

Spock heard Christopher sigh.

Admiral Barnett returned his attention to Spock. ‘Explain Commander.’

Spock contemplated his options. He could refuse to answer their questions, but the evidence was against him and silence would undoubtedly convince the humans of his guilt. At the very least he would face demotion and lose his position at the Academy and his commission on the Enterprise. Nyota might be expelled. He explored his options for 18 seconds before deciding on the most logical of them. He summoned all his Vulcan calm and responded evenly. ‘As I said earlier my interactions with Cadet Uhura have not breached any Starfleet regulation. She is my wife.’
There was complete silence for five seconds and then Professor Voss asked breathlessly. 'What?'

Spock felt a sense of relief at having revealed his true association with Nyota, which was illogical since it could well mean the end of both their careers. He was able to elaborate concisely for Professor Voss. 'Nyota Uhura is my wife. Our marriage occurred when I was serving aboard the USS Nelson. Prior to that, when she was my teaching aide, my relationship with her was not of a… personal nature.' Both Admirals were staring at him in disbelief. Professor Voss was slowly shaking his head. Captain Pike in contrast looked like he might laugh, or cry - he was biting on his bottom lip in apparent effort to do neither.

Admiral Barnett appeared to gather his wits fastest. 'So you are saying you married a cadet Commander?'

'Affirmative sir.'

'And you did not think such information should be shared with Starfleet?' The disbelief in the Admiral's voice was being replaced with anger.

'We were bonded in the Vulcan manner. Documentation was required to prove the validity of such a marriage under Federation Law.' Spock responded evenly.

The Admiral's voice was rising in both volume and pitch. 'And do you have this documentation Commander?'

'Affirmative sir.'

The Admiral punched at his PADD angrily. 'Then why didn't you complete the necessary forms to inform Starfleet of this joyful development?' Spock's complete personal file appeared on the viewscreen. 'WHY don't I see your wife listed here?'

Spock felt his eyebrows rise and his head tilt to the left in surprise as he regarded the screen.

Captain Pike coughed. 'Admiral Barnett sir?' he pointed towards the view screen. 'The Commander's wife is listed.' He sounded amused.

He was correct. There is was. /Spouse - S'chn T'gai Nyota nee Uhura./

Fascinating.

Spock almost felt like smiling. Almost.

He was quite relieved. Immensely relieved in fact. Nyota reached to him over their bond once more, still confused and concerned at his uncharacteristic mood swings.

The Admiral used his PADD to flick through Spock's file. The forms informing Starfleet of his marriage had all been entered and there was a copy of the marriage certification from the Vulcan High Council appended. They confirmed his marriage had taken place the day before he'd resumed his post at the Academy. They were date stamped two weeks earlier, the day after his second brush with pon'farr. He belatedly recalled Nyota gathering her PADDs in a hurry to leave. Most probably she had taken his PADD and submitted the form along with her assessment. Had he been himself he would undoubtedly have noticed. A most convenient accident. From any perspective it looked for all the world as though Spock had dutifully informed Starfleet soon after receiving the documentation required from T'Sul on Vulcan. He had no intention of relieving them of that belief.

There was silence as the Admirals went through his file. Eventually Captain Pike spoke. He
clapped his hands together. 'So! We've established that Spock didn't show favouritism to Cadet Uhura or U'Aidat, that he didn't break any regulations when he had his little run-in with Sparcs, and that since he married the cadet when serving as my Communications Officer on the *Nelson*, not in a post at the Academy, there was no chain of command between them and ergo, no fraternisation. So her spending the night in his quarters after the fact is completely irrelevant and really isn't any of our business.' He smiled broadly. 'All in all I'm quite pleased with the outcome of this little get together!'

'Enough Captain.' Barnett didn't sound amused. 'Were you aware of this situation?'

'He was not.' Spock replied.

'I was aware that the Commander was *married*. I was unaware that his wife was a member of Starfleet however.' Pike offered in clarification.

Admiral Komack looked up from his PADD and met Admiral Barnett's gaze. 'Everything appears to be in order. The marriage was validated by the Vulcan High Council, the forms were submitted as per regulation and as the Captain pointed out, Commander Spock was not serving as an Academy Instructor at the time. I see no indication any regulations were *actually* broken.'

Barnett's jaw muscles twitched in his temples. He exhaled loudly through his nose. Even a Vulcan could tell he was exceedingly irritated. 'Commander Spock, since you have not *technically* broken any Starfleet regulations with regards to your *unusual* association with Cadet Uhura we are forced to remove the charge of fraternisation from your respective files. However, your *duplicity* in regards to this matter is certainly unbefitting a Starfleet Officer.'

'I am uncertain as to what duplicity you refer to sir.' Spock responded. 'Starfleet was informed of my marriage as per regulations and as I have stated earlier, prior to my assignment to the *Nelson* my interactions with Cadet Uhura did not extend beyond that of instructor and student. If you so desire you may refer to security footage to confirm this fact.'

'He has a point Admiral. Unorthodox as marrying a cadet is, Spock did inform Starfleet. It's right there on his file. I'm surprised no one picked up on it when these accusations came in, might have saved us all a lot of trouble.' Spock was surprised that Christopher continued to defend him - he'd certainly been *duplicitous* to him.

'Be that as may Captain, it's completely inappropriate for one of our instructors to be *married* to one of our students!' Barnett still looked furious.

'They've hardly been yelling it off the rooftops Admiral. I didn't even know. I seriously doubt anyone outside this room has any idea.' Pike sounded quite jovial in comparison to the admiral.

Barnett frowned. 'Why is that Commander? Why keep your marriage a secret?'

Spock thought for a moment. 'I attempted to behaviour in the most... appropriate manner possible in the circumstances, and whilst we did not break any regulations, I was aware of the inaccurate assumptions that would be made with regards to our association. It therefore seemed logical to refrain from publicly acknowledging my attachment to Cadet Uhura until after her graduation.'

'The *appropriate behaviour* would have been to wait until the Cadet graduated to pursue a personal relationship with her Commander.' Barnett replied.

'I agree sir. However owing to the nature of Vulcan bonds, that was not possible.' Spock responded.
'What, you had to marry her Commander?' Barnett asked sarcastically. Admiral Komack shot the man a look that appeared disapproving as far as Spock could tell.

Spock contemplated for a moment. He did not want to have to explain in detail his relationship with Nyota, but nor did he wish a respected Admiral to hold a grudge against either of them. He chose his words carefully. 'I am willing to explain in broad terms the function of marriage under Vulcan law with regards to my own association with Cadet Uhura Admiral, but you must understand we do not usually speak of such things with outsiders.'

The Admirals, Captain Pike and Professor Voss all regarded him with interest.

'Very well.' Barnett responded at length.

'A Vulcan marriage is formed via telepathic bond. When I was injured whilst serving aboard the Nelson it became apparent to me that unbeknownst to either of us, such a bond had formed between myself and Nyota Uhura. A Vulcan healer confirmed that the bond was a betrothal bond and that under Vulcan law Nyota and I were 'engaged' as the terran phrase goes, though the Vulcan connection is rather more involved than the human equivalent. The bond was unacceptable. It was distracting and a source of discomfort to us both. Not to mention that for us to be betrothed was highly inappropriate owing to our respective positions within Starfleet. On my return to Earth I discussed the situation with Nyota and she preferred marriage over a severance of the bond.'

'What? You could have removed it? 'Severed' it. Why on earth didn't you?' The inquiry came from Komack.

'Because Nyota Uhura did not wish me to.' Spock replied evenly. 'And it was the logical choice.'

'Logical? Marrying a cadet? How is that logical Commander?' Barnett asked.

'In Vulcans severing a bond is usually a benign process, but it can on occasion result in madness or even death.' That was true. 'Such a thing has never been attempted upon a human mind. The risk to Nyota was unquantifiable.' True again. Although T'Sul hadn't thought it an issue, it wasn't a lie. 'Therefore I could not fault the cadet's logic in desiring marriage.' Of course Spock hadn't actually given them the real reason they had not severed the bond - namely that they did not want to. He was attempting to demonstrate that he and Nyota had behaved in the most reasonable manner possible, rather than irresponsibly and emotionally.

'So you accidentally ended up with a Vulcan engagement... 'bond' to Cadet Uhura and since getting rid of it could have hurt her you married her instead?' Voss asked sceptically.

'It was an accurate enough statement. The hurt would have been emotional, caused by his rejection of her affections rather than a side effect of removing the bond, but the term was still accurate. 'Affirmative.' Spock responded.

'Well. I certainly didn't see any of this coming. Um. Congratulations Spock. I guess?' the Professor finished uncertainly.

'So!' Captain Pike exclaimed. 'I think that about wraps everything up? Fascinating as the Commander's unusual road to matrimonial bliss was, since we've already established it doesn't constitute fraternisation, we can probably stop interrogating him now right?'

Barnett pursed his lips and looked at Komack. 'Perhaps we should bring the cadet in? Get her take on events.'

Komack frowned. He turned off his mic and spoke in a quiet aside to the other man that of course,
Spock still heard. 'Richard - It's been validated by the Vulcan High Council. From what we've learnt no Starfleet regulation was actually broken. It doesn't matter what the girl says. If we push this... Ambassador Sarek might get involved and the cadet's mother is a diplomat as well, they could easily make this look like an interspecies witchhunt.'

Spock doubted very much that his father would make any such attempt on his behalf, however he was not going to point that out.

Barnett sent him a look he could not identify beyond a general 'unfriendliness' - his improved powers of social observation or not. Eventually he turned back to Komack and nodded sharply.

Komack cleared his throat and flicked his microphone back on. 'Commander Spock. It is the opinion of this board that the charges of fraternisation with regards to Cadets Uhura and U'Aidat are false. As such they are hereby stricken from your Starfleet records.' He paused and made eye contact with Spock before continuing. 'Please maintain your current level of discretion until your... wife... graduates Commander. I'd rather not have to explain… any of this.' He glanced down and made a note in his PADD before looking up once more. 'You are dismissed Captain Pike, Commander Spock.'

Admiral Barnett looked very much like he wanted to call Spock back.

Spock saluted then followed Christopher out of the room. The Captain turned and gave him a look that was part anger and part amusement. Exasperation he believed was the term. 'We are going to your quarters and you are going to explain all this to me Spock. At the moment I don't know if I want to yell at you or laugh at you.'

'Very well sir.' Spock supposed he did owe Christopher an explanation. And perhaps an apology, he had not lied to him, but he had been untruthful. Though that had proven a wise decision. He was glad Chris had not become a party to his own transgressions.

As they approached his quarters Spock sensed Nyota within. He paused. 'Nyota is inside. She felt my anxiety earlier. She is quite concerned.'

Pike looked at him curiously. 'You can tell all that from your 'Vulcan Bond'?' He placed odd emphasis on the words, as if testing them out.

'Indeed.'

'Interesting. Well, let's not keep Mrs Spock waiting.'

Spock triggered the door mechanism.

Nyota stood from where she'd been sitting on his couch as they entered. She snapped a salute. Before she could make excuses for her presence in his quarters however, the Captain spoke.

'Well well, we meet at last Mrs Spock.'

He smiled at Nyota's horrified expression. 'You didn't exaggerate Spock, your wife is indeed tall, dark haired and 'exceedingly aesthetically attractive'. I should have realised the moment she stepped onto the bridge yesterday.'

He stepped forward and took Nyota's hand. 'We haven't been formally introduced Okosai Sachan Takai.' His accent was horrendous. Spock deeply regretted telling him his full name. 'It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Christopher Pike.' He dropped a kiss to the back of her hand.
Nyota didn't respond. She stood mutely, her hand out-stretched towards the Captain while she stared at Spock in shock. 'What happened?' The panic in her voice was plain, through their bond it was overwhelming.

Pike smirked and dropped her limp hand. 'Now, I don't speak Vulcan, but I'm guessing she just said 'What the heck is going on?'' He glanced at Spock. 'Am I right?'

'More or less Captain.' Spock turned his attention to his anxious wife. He crossed the room in three long strides and took one of her hands in his, entwining their fingertips so she would feel his calm. He was acutely aware of Christopher watching them with great interest. It made him decidedly uncomfortable although he knew Chris' attention was entirely benevolent. He spoke softly, 'Beloved, be calm.' He switched to standard. 'The Admiralty called me to answer charges of fraternisation, falsifying Academy results and assault. I was cleared of all three, and we face no repercussions, however they are aware of our marriage.'

He felt her fear recede slightly. 'Oh. Well. That's… good I suppose?' She frowned. 'Wait, assault?'

Pike snorted from where he had taken a seat. 'Sparcs.'

Spock felt Nyota's dislike through their bond and the link of their fingers. 'Ugh. That odious man.' Her anger at the former Lieutenant distracted her from her former panic and she calmed markedly.

'But let's talk of more pleasant things!' Christopher looked positively gleeful. 'Now tell me, my dear Mrs Spock, however did my supremely logical and sensible Vulcan First Officer end up secretly married to a human cadet? I imagine it's quite an amusing tale.' He stretched his legs out and made himself comfortable.

Nyota smiled at him. 'Amusing? I'm not sure. Although the part where he ran halfway across the galaxy to get away from me is pretty absurd.'

Spock frowned 'I did not run Nyota.'

'Oh you seemed pretty eager to me Spock.' Pike agreed cheerfully, sending Nyota a wink.

Spock sighed.

Pike frowned as a thought visibly occurred to him. 'Wait Spock, is this why you were roaming the halls of the Nelson, robes billowing, like some sort of Vulcan thundercloud,' he gestured wildly, '... leaving a trail of destroyed gym equipment and highly distracted female crew members in your wake?'

Nyota sat down and smiled widely. 'This sounds interesting! Spock doing suss mahna in Vulcan robes would be highly distracting to your female crew.' she paused, '... but good for morale I imagine.'

Pike laughed.

Spock frowned slightly as he glanced from his Captain to his wife. He had a sudden unpleasant premonition that they were about to join forces in teasing him. It was a terran tradition he that still mystified him somewhat.

'Oh yes Nyota!' Pike started but then paused abruptly, 'May I call you Nyota?'

'Of course Captain.' she replied.
'Call me Chris, please, at least when we are amongst friends.' he requested.

Nyota smiled. 'Very well. Chris.'

The Captain - Chris - smiled back before he continued. 'So anyway, I'm busy compiling some extra reports after the Alpha shift one night and I don't end up heading to the refectory for some dinner until almost two hours after shift change.'

Nyota nodded, giving Chris her full attention. Spock got himself a glass of water from the replicator, his throat was dry after the ... hearing and sat beside her, wondering where the Captain was going with his story. He was certain it would end up being embarrassing.

'I notice as I walk along Deck 6 that there are all these crew members, both on duty and off, just sort of loitering. Naturally I became suspicious, especially when I noticed they were more or less all women. So I pulled out my PADD and I pretended to be going over my reports and waited. Ten minutes later Spock breezes through in those baggy pants he wears with a Vulcan robe falling off his shoulders, no shirt and, would you believe it, messy hair. So I stop him and ask where he's going and he he's all 'I am returning to my quarters to shower and rest after completing my daily physical exercise in the Gymnasium Captain. Why are you asking such illogical questions?"'

Spock frowned. 'I did not say that.' He could feel Nyota's amusement.

'I'm paraphrasing Spock. Anyway, off he goes, robes billowing, women drooling, completely oblivious as to the effect he's having on my crew.'

'Whilst I recall the instance you refer to Chris, my recollections seem to differ quite significantly to your own.' Spock remarked. 'I do not believe your anecdote will prove factual in its basis.'

Nyota reached across his lap and took his hand in her own, smiling at him warmly. 'Being intimately familiar with both the effect you have on women and your adorable obliviousness to said effect, I'm going to have to take Chris' version of events over your own Spock.'

'I have an eidetic memory.' he reminded her somewhat petulantly.

'Anyway...' Chris continued, '... I head on towards the refectory and I run into Number One. Of course I ask her about the mysterious display I just witnessed and she tells me to head to the gym half an hour after my next shift.' he paused. 'So naturally the next day I head to the gym. Sure enough, same thing. It's full of people - mostly women - all half hard-heartedly exercising and talking amongst themselves. So I hop on a treadmill and get my daily jog in while I'm waiting.

A few minutes later in strolls the Commander here, takes off his robe and shoes and proceeds to attempt to kill a punching bag. Literally. I don't know what the punching bag did, perhaps it made aspersions against the Commander's mother, who knows, anyway, Spock lets loose on this poor punching bag for maybe 40 minutes - until Vulcan or not, he's out of breathe and the punching bag's in two pieces. Then he proceeds to spend the next hour 'sparring' with an assortment of the security officers.'

Spock was forced to admit that Chris' story did fit more or less with his routine during the last months of his deployment aboard the Nelson.

'Of course the whole time he's got his own personal cheer squad paying very close attention to him, but he doesn't even realise.' Chris shook his head. 'Number one said it had to be a woman who had you so riled up Spock.' He wiggled his eyebrows at Nyota who blushed and laughed. 'You sure had the poor Commander worked up something fierce Nyota.'
'Don't 'poor Commander' him Captain, he brought that all on himself.' She pouted but Spock could tell she was teasing rather than actually angered at him. 'He didn't even leave me note before he ran off to the Romulan Neutral Zone.'

Chris winced and shot Spock a look he could not quite decipher. 'You know, knowing Spock as well as I do, it's a miracle this whole thing between you worked out at all.' he paused, 'I mean, he's completely clueless.'

Nyota laughed. 'He's not really.' she replied.

'Oh-ho! What are implying Mrs Spock?'

Spock did not like Chris' tone. Or what he was doing with his eyebrows.

Nyota seemed to share his sentiment because she rolled her eyes. 'Just that once he decided what he wanted, he made an exceedingly convincing argument.'
The following chapters weren't part of my my original outline for this story, and whilst a bit of important stuff between Spock and Nyota happens, for the most part these are just drama and fluff. I wrote them because reviewers of this story when I first posted it wanted Spock and Nyota to tell their families. I thought about cutting them when I reposted this story to this site, but some people enjoyed them. So, don't take them too seriously I guess, just consider them a bonus.

*Nyota*

Very little changed after Spock and Nyota's marriage was revealed to the Admiralty.

They still maintained a professional relationship as far anyone else was concerned. Nyota continued her studies and Spock taught his classes. Apart from the occasional smirk from Captain Pike and Professor Voss' awkward and stand-offish air around her, Nyota's day to day life was little altered. She still couldn't spend time alone with Spock or speak to him freely save in snatches of High Vulcan when they met in passing.

Gaila found the entire situation hilarious of course and her teasing was worse than ever. Rather than being worried or heaven forbid - sorry - that her outrageous one-sided flirting with Spock had ended up with him accused of fraternising with her, she responded to the news as if she'd been awarded a commendation or something. She was especially bad on the occasions Captain Pike or Professor Voss were around, delighting in making comments only they would understand. Her classes with Professor Voss and Gaila were excruciating. Most of her innuendo seemed designed to imply that she, Nyota and Spock were involved in some sort of torrid love triangle. The absurdity of it would have been amusing, (and certainly appeared to be to the cadets who formed the audience to Gaila's displays), had she not been the butt of the joke so to speak.

Worst of all was the song. Gaila had transformed her teasing from Kirk's Koyabashi Maru simulation into a semi-pornographic Yrevish epic several stanzas long. All to the tune of the 'The lusty green-eyed lodabyaln'. It was quite repetitive since she only used two words to rhyme with Spock. Of course being Orion they were both synonymous with with a part of his anatomy to which Gaila had no right to refer. The real problem was that bits of it were catchy and Nyota found herself humming it on occasion. She attempted to prevent Spock being exposed to it, but he'd inevitably caught bits of it.

Most recently he'd overheard the part about his hoverbike after Gaila had sung a few lines while they were recalibrating the frequency receiver of communication console in their Subspace Engineering class and Spock had been working on a console in the back of the lab. Nyota had been able to shut her gleefully grinning friend up by stomping her boot down onto her toes before she could continue to the verse that used rhymed 'thighs' 'sighs' and 'lusty cries'. She still thought she'd self-combust with embarrassment.

Mercifully, Spock had made no mention of it, though undoubtedly he'd been quite curious.
When the mid-semester break rolled around, the final holiday before her last six week term of study at the Academy, she was more than eager to get away from the scrutiny of Starfleet and the Academy, (not to mention Gaila and that song), for a while.

Despite that eagerness however, she still felt extremely nervous as she stepped out of the civilian shuttle she'd taken from San Francisco and out into the Nairobi Spaceport. Spock was at her side, dressed simply in dark terran style trousers, a tunic and boots. Even in such mundane clothes he still stood out amid the sea of humanity milling about the Spaceport arrivals lounge. The curious stares he was receiving did not appear to bother him however. He looked about in great interest, taking every detail in. Nyota could feel his innate Vulcan curiosity through their bond. It was the first time he had visited the African continent and he was quite eager to explore.

He carried their luggage effortlessly, her stuffed Starfleet duffle over his shoulder and his own rather less bulging one in hand. Nyota held onto his free arm, her hand curled around his forearm, although clutched was perhaps a more appropriate description really. She looked around for her father nervously.

They hadn't told her parents of their relationship, and although Zuberi had seemed delighted that Spock was coming to visit with her, she knew they suspected something and dreaded having 'the' conversation. She'd never had a serious boyfriend before, just the boy she'd dated in her senior year of high school and another she'd seen in her second year of university. Both had been flings rather than 'relationships'.

What she felt for Spock was so completely beyond her previous experiences it seemed odd to even consider them in the same light. She certainly hadn't introduced either of those boys to her family. Spock would be the first - and last - man she'd ever brought home and well, he wasn't really a 'man' - he was a Vulcan, a superior officer and her Instructor to boot. She didn't think either of her parents would have issue with his being non-human, but she doubted they'd be enthused with the fact that he was one of her Instructors. She wondered if they should have waited till graduation anyway. At least then the whole 'teacher' thing wouldn't have been an issue. Ugh. It was nerve wracking bringing anyone home, adding in that he was her Instructor, another species and already her husband made it about a million times worse.

'Adun'a. Surely it is I who should be nervous?' Spock let an almost smile tug at his lips. Nyota felt his amusement through their bond. It distracted her from her nerves quite effectively.

She found herself smiling at him, lost in his dark eyes. 'Can Vulcans feel nervous Adun?' His eyebrow quirked. It was incredible, the range of emotions Spock could communicate to her with such a tiny movement. Nyota reached up and ran her index finger along the dark line of his upturned brow. Suddenly she wanted to kiss him. Desperately. Those dark eyes of his seemed to get even darker as he felt her desire. She knew he would not appreciate such a gesture in public however so she restrained herself.

'Nyota! Spock!' Zuberi Uhura's voice boomed from nearby. Nyota dropped her hand from Spock's face as if burnt. Zuberi came to a halt nearby, smiling and seemingly oblivious. Her father was dressed similarly to Spock, save his tunic was of a looser, longer style popular in the Nairobi heat and the material of his clothing was brightly coloured and patterned.

Nyota turned towards him with a wide smile on her face. 'Papa!' She dropped Spock's arm to step forward into her father's waiting embrace. The warm wall of his broad chest and the familiar scent of his favourite cologne were comforting and she inhaled deeply. His strong arms tightened about her in welcome as he dropped a kiss to the crown of her head. Nyota looked up at him and smiled. 'Did you come alone?'
Zuberi nodded. 'Your mother and sister are at home. Your mother has gone overboard with the food as usual.' He released her and turned his attention to Spock flashing him a Vulcan salute accompanied by a very un-Vulcan grin. 'Live long and prosper Spock.' He greeted Spock in his own tongue.

Spock returned the salute. 'Peace and long life Zuberi.'

Nyota noted they had attracted a small audience of milling passengers. Compared to other long-standing federation races such as Andorians, Vulcans were rarely seen on Earth. They didn't appear to do the whole 'tourist' thing so much. That fact combined with the important role they played in Earth's history – first contact – meant they were subject to great interest. That they were, as a rule, tall and attractive also didn't hurt in Nyota's estimation. The fact that Spock and Zuberi were obviously speaking Vulcan just made the nearby humans more curious.

'Let me take one of those for you Spock.' Zuberi motioned to the duffle bags.

Spock inclined his head. 'Very well.' He allowed Zuberi to take the lighter bag from his hand.

Zuberi hefted it easily and addressed them both. 'Now then! Let's get out of here. I hate Spaceports. I feel like I've spent years of my life bored out of my skull waiting around in them.'

Nyota shot her father a smile. 'Seeing as how you work at a Spaceport papa, that's probably pretty accurate.'

Her father groaned. 'Don't remind me.'

He led them through the crowded thoroughfares towards the exit. Zuberi's height and Spock's... 'Vulcan-ness' had the crowds making room for them easily as they made their way out to where Zuberi had parked the hovercar. The ride was short but Spock stared out of the window taking in every aspect of Nairobi as they made their way home. Nyota could feel him assessing the buildings, the people and the plant life and comparing them to other places both on Earth and distant planets. He found the long dresses, robes and tunics favoured by the locals to be appealing in both their logical suitability to the climate and their vague familiarity in silhouette to Vulcan robes.

Nyota took the opportunity to talk to her father. They discussed everything from what trouble her sister Zanta had gotten into lately to what her mother was making for lunch. Tamu, like many human women, believed it something of an insult to present replicator food to guests. She didn't cook every day, but she cooked often. Nyota missed her cooking in San Francisco. She was looking forward to a big lunch.

When they got out of the hovercar to walk to the house the heat hit Nyota in a wave, but she had dressed appropriately and almost enjoyed the dry heat and the breeze that pulled at her dress. Spock seemed to enjoy the heat as well. In fact he responded to the African heat like a cat in a sunbeam, soaking it up. He loved it. She turned and shot him a smile. She supposed it would be comparable to Vulcan. Well, a 'cool' day on Vulcan perhaps. Zuberi grabbed their luggage before either could protest. 'What have you put in here girl of mine? Your bag must weigh twice as much as Spock's, and you live here!'

Nyota poked her tongue out at her father. 'Well I did pack presents, but now I'm not sure if I won't keep them for myself.' She took Spock's arm and led him up the steps and into the cool darkness of the house. She could feel him comparing it to his own home. He noted several architectural similarities designed to deal with the climate. The overall aesthetics were very different however.
Nyota's childhood home was a large stone and brick building finished in white plaster set amidst a garden of native trees and plants. The façade was fronted by a long single storey arcade of curved arches to provide shade for the main doors. The arcade continued around the house providing a shaded porch to the ground floor and balconies to the second. Much of the porch was full of the pleasant green clutter of her mother's plants. To either side of the main house were additions that had been added on by members of her family over the years. The symmetry of the original house was long gone, but the rambling of the current buildings was pleasant and familiar to Nyota.

No sooner had she taken two steps over the threshold and into the cool foyer did her mother materialise. Tamu swooped in on her daughter in a sweet smelling cloud of orange and brown cotton and softly curled hair. She pulled her into a hug. Nyota was kissed on both cheeks and squeezed almost painfully. Her mother was the more demonstrative of her parents. 'My darling girl!' She was pushed away to be held at arm's length. 'Let me look at you.' Her mother tsked and shook her head. 'Too thin!'

'Mama.' Nyota did not want to have to go through her mother's usual welcoming ritual in front of Spock. Next she would be pinching her ribs and telling her she'd never find a man if she didn't eat something.

Her mother decided to take pity on her and turned her gaze to Spock. 'Live long and prosper Spock. You are most welcome in our home.' Her mother's Vulcan was perfect of course, better than Zuberi's - she was a diplomat after all. Although Zuberi spoke more languages, Tamu was fluent in Andorian, Vulcan, Tellarite, Rigelian, French and Kolari, the most prevalent and 'important' diplomatic languages in the Federation.

Nyota could see she'd taken extra care with her appearance on account of Spock. Her mother wore a lovely dress with a long matching split robe over it in oranges and browns. Its cut was very African, but it was unusually restrained in its colours and patterning. She wore golden earrings and a lacquered comb held her long hair back from her face.

Spock inclined his head in thanks. 'Peace and long life Okosu Tamu. I am gratified to make your acquaintance.' Nyota could practically see her mother swoon at being called 'Lady Tamu' in Vulcan. It appeared the effect Spock's good looks and deep Vulcan voice had on Uhura women was not confined to her alone. She caught her father's eye off to one side and saw him roll his eyes. 'Well it's lovely to meet you Spock. I hope you don't mind me calling you Spock? My Vulcan is quite good, but my accent would do terrible things to your full name I'm sure.' Her mother practically batted her eyelashes.

'That would be acceptable Mrs Uhura.'

'Wonderful! My husband and daughter both speak most highly of you.' Tamu gave him a wide smile. Nyota could tell she was restraining the urge to pull Spock into a hug. Only Tamu's years of restraint as a diplomat protected her poor husband from a bearhug and thorough cheek kissing. (And in all likelihood rib pinching and admonishments about not eating enough.) Once she was aware of her new status of mother-in-law, Nyota was not sure Spock would spared those attentions, Vulcan or not.

Zuberi crowded into the foyer. 'I'll show Spock his room while you pester Ny about what she'd been eating.'

Spock shot her a slightly confused glance then followed Zuberi from the room towards the guest rooms on the ground floor. Nyota watched him as he vanished around the corner then turned back to find her mother smirking at her. 'A Vulcan? You bring home a Vulcan? And the ambassador's
only son at that?' Her mother spoke Swahili and looked very pleased. 'I told you the Diplomatic Corps was the place for you. You should have listened.' She paused. 'You could have brought him home years ago.'

Nyota rolled her eyes. 'Mama! Do you save up all your inappropriateness for when I come home? If you talked like this at work you would have been fired years ago.'

'If I can't be myself at home darling girl, where can I?' Tamu breezed past, dress billowing, and headed towards the kitchen. 'Now come help your mama in the kitchen.'

Nyota sighed and followed. She could feel slight unease from Spock but nothing major. She assumed it was her father teasing him. Still. 'I hope papa can be trusted alone with Spock.'

'Don't worry dear, your father is looking forward to playing billiards with him later, so he won't be doing anything too drastic with your Vulcan.' Nyota wondered if she ought to argue the 'your'. She and Spock had come to Nairobi intending to inform her parents of their marriage, was it worth denying a connection when they'd probably know all about it before lunch was over?

Zanta was in the kitchen stirring something over the stove. She glared at Nyota and Tamu as they entered. 'Finally! Left here slaving away while the Lady of the house swans off to greet the guests.' She smiled at Nyota. 'Hey Ny! I hear you brought a Vulcan home. Trying to give me some competition?'

Nyota hopped onto one of the bar stools along the kitchen island. 'Competition? Hardly. I bought home the only Human-Vulcan hybrid in the galaxy. Your Orion floozies are a dime a dozen.'

Zanta laughed. 'The only one in the galaxy? Well I'm intrigued.' She glanced at their mother who was checking something, (that smelled very tasty), in the heating unit. 'Is he fine?'

Tamu wiggled her eyebrows. 'Oh he's very fine.'

'Oooo do tell.' Her sister's tone of voice was even worse than Gaila's when she teased.

'Well he's tall, dark and handsome,' her mother replied dramatically, shooting Nyota a wide smile, '... and Ny seemed almost mesmerised by his backside when he left the room.'

Nyota gasped in outrage and tried not to laugh, it was too surreal hearing her mother refer to Spock like that.

Zanta smirked. 'OoOoOo! A Vulcan with a mesmerising backside? Well done Ny!'

She could feel him approaching. 'Will you two cut it out? He can probably hear and is most likely mortified.'

'Definitely mortified!' Zuberi called cheerfully from the doorway as he entered with Spock following behind. Nyota had to stifle laughter at Spock's face. He did, in fact, look quite mortified. Well, as close as a Vulcan could at least. She sent him reassurance through their bond.

Tamu didn't even have the grace to look embarrassed. 'Lunch will be only be a few minutes. Why don't you get Spock a drink and take him out onto the terrace Zuberi?'

Spock accepted a glass of Andorian ale - to be polite Nyota sensed - although he preferred the potent blue beverage to most terran ales, and followed Zuberi out onto the terrace formed by the arched arcade along the rear of the house. Again Nyota could feel him enjoying the warmth afforded by being outside. She had been unaware of how much he missed the climate of his native
Vulcan in San Francisco.

She got up to help with the finishing touches to the food. Her mother had cooked an eclectic mix of dishes. Many were favourites of hers, like her spicy kale stew with ugali and the jibellian berry salad, whilst others she had clearly made with Spock in mind, popular vegetarian dishes such as a spicy curry in an Indian style and a platter of different spiced and pickled chickpeas and lentils with injera. There was even what appeared to be plomeek soup. And of course, there was stewed beef and roast pork for her father, who couldn't last five minutes without at least some meat. She could see cake and fresh fruit in the cooler for dessert.

'Wow mama, this all looks so good. And you made plomeek soup for Spock?' Nyota sniffed the bowl. Its' smell reminded her of Japanese miso though it was a bright almost purple colour as opposed to a clear broth.

'I cheated; I bought the plomeek from a restaurant in town, just in case my cooking doesn't agree with our guest.' Tamu looked almost nervous.

Nyota raised an eyebrow. 'Mama, Spock lives on replicator food from the Academy cafeteria. The culinary highlight of his week is Thursday's Vegetarian Lasagne, which tastes like rubber. I'm sure he will love your cooking.' She leant forward and plucked a juicy looking berry from the salad. It exploded in her mouth in a burst of tart sweetness. 'Mmmm.'

Tamu slapped at her hand. 'No touching!' She indicated the dishes that were ready. 'Start taking the food out while Zanta and I finish up.'

Nyota grabbed the salad and a platter with a selection of her mother's favourite bread rolls on it. The sun was still near its zenith so the terrace was in sharp shadow compared to the brightness of the yard. Nyota made her way across the stone pavers to the long table that had been set for their meal. Spock glanced up at her and his eyes met hers with their usual magnetic and electrifying effect. She focused on not tripping. Spock should be illegal. It wasn't fair that he should be able to render her more or less mentally incapacitated by looking at her. She felt his amusement. She pouted at him childishly in response.

Her father was telling Spock about the house. She could tell from the subject, namely the precise building materials, that it was in answer to some question her husband had asked him. '...of course the middle section of the house is much older and was constructed by hand, which is why there are slight irregularities in the layouts of the central rooms. The brick and stone used seems to keep them as cool if not more so than the modern insulated materials used upstairs.'

Nyota placed her burdens down and returned inside for more. Zanta and Tamu joined her on her third trip with the final dishes and crocks. By unspoken agreement Nyota sat beside Spock. 'Mama you have cooked so much!' She grinned. 'If I eat myself into a stomach ache I'm blaming you.'

'Well good. You've been living on replicator rubbish too long. You're skin and bones.' Tamu admonished.

Zanta sighed. 'Be careful Ny, I've been home a month and I've already gained 2 kilos. Mama bombards me with carbs.' She took a bite of bread roll and sighed. 'Delicious carbs.'

Nyota laughed at her sister's dramatics.

Her family started serving themselves, passing spoons and ladles around as necessary. Nyota indicated Spock should do likewise.
'Spock, the only dishes containing meat are the stew in the red dish and of course the pork.' Tamu pointed out as Spock looked over the table with great interest. Nyota could feel he was quite hungry. She knew from experience that when he was hungry he could out eat any man she'd ever met. Spock was three times as strong as human of his size and seemed to eat three times as much as well. Her mother would be thrilled.

He inclined his head politely. 'Thank you Mrs Uhura.'

'Please Spock, call me Tamu.'

'Very well, Tamu.' He sounded slightly awkward. Nyota knew he didn't like addressing people, especially his elders, simply by given name without any title or honorific. The only people she had ever heard him address by name were herself, Christopher Pike, her father and Stephan and Lena at the shipyard, and it had taken him well over a year to call them by their first names. He'd met her mother only 15 minutes ago.

Zanta smiled. 'Well Lieutenant Commander Spock, since no one has deigned to introduce us, I am Zanta.'

Tamu gasped and pressed a hand to her mouth. 'Oh how rude! I completely forgot you were busy earlier Zanta!' She looked at Spock, 'You must forgive my forgetfulness.'

'Oft course Tamu.' Spock nodded in greeting to Zanta across the table. 'It is a pleasure to meet you Zanta, and please, call me Spock.' She could feel his uneasiness at addressing two women he had just met by name in the space of a few words, though his face of course, reflected none of that. She could also see he was making a conscious effort to use more casual human style speech patterns. His efforts were utterly endearing.

Zanta shot him her mega-watt smile. 'Likewise Spock.' Nyota shot her sister a look. She did not want her sister hitting on Spock. She'd dealt with enough of that from Gaila. She pushed her Orion roommate from her thoughts before she could start thinking about that song.

She spoke mostly to prevent her sister from gushing further. 'Spock's a Commander now actually.'

Zuberi instantly looked far more interested in the conversation. 'Oh really? Congratulations Spock. When were you promoted?' Her father took a bite of pork and gave Spock his full attention.

Spock paused in carefully cutting up his food. 'I was promoted five months, 18 days, and 12 hours ago during a short tour with the USS Nelson.'

Zanta gave Spock an odd look at his Vulcan accuracy. Tamu answered her unspoken query. 'Vulcans have extremely accurate… internal clocks Zanta.'

Zuberi swallowed a mouthful of food and ignored the exchange. 'The Nelson? She must be getting a bit long in the tooth. She's been in service since before I made ensign.'

'Affirmative, the ship is currently undergoing a complete refit in space dock.' Spock paused. 'It was long overdue in my estimation.'

'So how did you get promoted Spock?' Tamu inquired.

Nyota felt Spock's reluctance to speak of his 'heroics' so she saved him the bother. She would happily gush about them. 'He rescued 3 Romulans from a Ferengi smuggler's ship abandoned in the Neutral Zone because its warp drive was going critical. He then went back to rescue an injured officer who was trapped, despite the fact that the warp drive fluctuations had made transporters
inoperative.' She gave Spock a look that was part pride part exasperation. 'Then he got caught in
the explosion and spent a few hours burnt half to death in an ancient Ferengi escape pod since his
communicator was literally melted off him and they couldn't get a lock to beam him back. He was
promoted and awarded the Starfleet Medal for Valor and a Starfleet Citation for Conspicuous
Gallantry.'

Tamu and Zanta were now giving Spock the full wide-eyed hero worship treatment.

Zuberi let out a low whistle and then frowned. 'Wait - so you managed to get yourself blown by a
critical warp drive twice within what, a year Spock?' He shook his head. 'Be sure you don't make
that a habit. There are better ways to promotions.'

Spock raised an eyebrow and tilted his head. 'Curious. Both my mother and the overly familiar
waitress at the Riverside shipyard diner have made markedly similar comments to me. I am
uncertain why anyone would assume I sought these situations out intentionally.'

Her mother wanted to know about the Romulans. It had created large ripples in the diplomatic
community. Tamu seemed delighted to be getting a first hand account. Her plate full, Nyota sat
back and simply ate for a few minutes whilst Spock responded to her mother's inquires. Everything
was wonderful. She could feel Spock sampling each dish and analysing it, attempting to puzzle out
the ingredients and cooking methods. He seemed to enjoy the stewed kale with ugali, placing some
of each on his fork and trying to find an optimum ratio. The spiciness of the food also pleased him,
though he seemed to be eating far more of her mother's chilli relish than she deemed wise.

Zuberi took a swig of his drink to clear his throat. 'So Spock, how did the launch to space dock go
for the Enterprise?' Nyota had not had a chance to discuss the launch at length with her father, but
she was aware it had been mentioned by the media. 'I heard there was an issue with the impulse
genres? No exploding warp drives however I hope?'

Spock swallowed the mouthful of lentils he was currently 'analysing'. 'Indeed. You recall the inept
former Lieutenant Sparcs?'

Zuberi frowned, his eyes darting to Nyota for a moment. 'Unfortunately.'

'It seems he accepted bribes from manufacturers who presented tenders for subcontracted
manufacture and fabrication. The power circuits provided for the impulse engines were not
actually up to the design specifications. They failed after the engines were brought fully on-line for
the first time.' He glanced at Nyota. 'It was actually Nyota who first reported the issue to the
Captain. The ensign manning the engine panicked and reported in Andorian instead of standard.'

Nyota held back a smile. 'I'm sure Lieutenant Hawkins would have picked up on it had he been
listening.'

'That is so, however he would not have been able to translate it as swiftly and accurately as you
Nyota. Your ability to translate between alien syntaxes is unparalleled in my experience.' The fact
that Spock was stating, in his opinion, a fact made his compliment all the more pleasing. Nyota felt
her cheeks flush.

Tamu smiled proudly. 'She's always been gifted with languages. She spoke better Andorian than
me by the time she was seven and I was Junior Ambassador to Andoria at the time.'

Zuberi brought the conversation back to the Enterprise. 'So you used thrusters and were able to
complete the launch painlessly?"
'Affirmative. Two starboard impulse engines were bought off line by the failure, but the auxiliary thrusters were able to compensate.'

'That must have been a bumpy ride.' Zuberi sounded wistful, as if he'd liked to have been on a damaged starship making a dangerous climb to orbit.

'Indeed. The turbulence was quite severe.' Spock had cleaned his plate and was in the process of refilling it, her father was doing likewise. Tamu looked very pleased that her food was proving so popular with him. Nyota noticed Spock took a large helping of her favourite – the ugali na sukuma wiki. A moment later she felt his surprise and muted Vulcan pleasure when he belatedly noted the presence of the plomeek soup at the end of the table. She doubted he'd had any Vulcan food not from a replicator since his last trip to Vulcan eight months previously.

She could feel his desire for some and it was much nearer to her so she ladled a serve of it into a small serving bowl and passed it to him wordlessly. She glanced up and saw that her mother and father were watching the exchange with amused looks on their faces.

Her mother smiled mirthfully and Nyota braced herself for teasing. 'So, you are bonded?'

Nyota and Spock both froze and stared at Tamu in shock. Whatever ribbing she'd been expecting it had not been such a pointed question.

Zanta stifled a laugh.

Zuberi glared at his wife. 'They haven't even been here an hour Tamu, couldn't you at least have waited until after the cake?'

His wife shrugged. 'I tried, but you know how impatient I get.' She smiled. 'And they're just so adorable.'

Nyota calmed herself. It was clear that her parents weren't going to react negatively, so there was no need to be nervous. Still, illogically, her anxiety remained. She felt a spark of awareness, the cool brush of Spock's mind as he rested his index and middle fingers against hers where her hand lay upturned on the table. He was surprised, but calm, and shared that tranquillity with her.

Tamu and Zuberi observed the exchange knowingly.

Although his action - touching her so deliberately and obviously - made the answer obvious, Spock still replied. 'Yes. Nyota and I are bonded.'

Her mother looked like she might cry and her father looked both pleased and exasperated.

Zanta looked confused. 'What's bonded?' She glanced around the table in query.

Zuberi made a sweeping gesture at Spock indicating he should elaborate. He did so in the simplest terms. 'According to Vulcan law Nyota is my wife.' Nyota could feel his pride and pleasure at being able to make such a statement, being able to call her his. She couldn't help but smile at him.

Zanta's eyes widened and she glanced between Nyota and Spock. 'Married? Oh my god! Ny!' She grinned - looking both delighted and scandalised.

Tamu looked at Spock with interest. 'Your bond has been formalised?'

Spock nodded. 'By the Vulcan High Council. Starfleet is also aware as per regulations. However Nyota has yet to be officially accepted by the matriarch of my clan. We intend to visit Vulcan after
she graduates.' A visit Nyota was both dreading and looking forward to. She hadn't been to Vulcan since she was very small when her mother had been stationed to the Terran Embassy there for a time. From what Spock had told her she was not expecting an overly enthusiastic welcome from his Vulcan relatives, his grandmother in particular.

'Well!' Zuberi boomed. 'Here I was expecting to be told you were… something,' he made a vague gesture with his right hand, '… but I wasn't expecting to find you already married.' He looked at Spock. 'Since you are only half human, I won't hold it against you that you didn't ask my permission before you married my daughter.'

Nyota was finally able to find her voice again. 'Papa…'

Spock tilted his head slightly. 'Forgive me Zuberi, the circumstances were quite complicated due to our positions within Starfleet and the nature of Vulcan bonds.' Which was a massive Vulcan understatement if ever Nyota had heard one. He didn't mention near death experiences and practically being court martialled. 'And I must admit I did not realise you were so traditional in this sense. Are there further terran customs I should adhere to? Do we perhaps need to discuss an exchange of,' he paused as if trying to recall the correct custom, 'goats?'

Nyota turned to face Spock, scandalised. 'Spock! Now is not the time for you to spontaneously develop a sense of humour!'

Her father rubbed his chin and responded ponderously, 'I'm fond of my daughter, I may need several cows along with the goats.'

'That seems reasonable. Have you a figure in mind?' Spock's face was serious although Nyota could feel his amusement through his fingertips. For a Vulcan he seemed to spend far too much of his time amused.

'Hmm. Twelve goats and three cows.' Her father was losing his battle to keep his face straight. Nyota huffed. 'I can't believe you two.'

Tamu interrupted. 'Yes indeed. You two are being quite ridiculous.' She glanced regally from Zuberi to Spock. 'Nyota is worth at least sixteen goats and five cows.'

When Nyota's family retired for the night Spock found that his belongings had been relocated to Nyota's rooms on the upper floor of the house. They were quite pleasant. Nyota had a large bedroom with an adjoining room clearly intended for study, a private bathroom and a small room filled entirely with her clothing. Large doors opened from both rooms onto the balcony that wrapped around the house. The cityscape of Nairobi was visible above the greenery of the house's gardens.

The rooms were pleasantly furnished. There were framed images hanging on the walls, he noted with interest that some were of non-terran scenes. An Andorian landscape, a view of the city of Shi'Kahr not far from his birthplace and an exotic Orion image of a dancer in elaborate costume hung alongside a few prints of terran works of art. He looked closer at a portrait of a woman in an ancient terran costume and realised it was an authentic oil painting cracked with age.

Spock came to the conclusion that Nyota's family were wealthy. This pleased him in the sense that
it would make it easier for her when they visited Vulcan and Nyota was faced with his proud relatives and the long history of his clan. He knew his mother, coming as she did from a well-educated but middle class family, had been quite overwhelmed. She still on occasion referred to his father as 'Prince Sarek' or 'His majesty' with great sarcasm when he displeased her.

Unlike his own rooms in his parent's house on Vulcan, which had remained unaltered since his departure for Earth at 19, Nyota's rooms were clearly more regularly occupied. Whilst the occasional remnant of her childhood remained such as a few toys amidst the PADDs and books on her shelves, it was clearly the room of a woman as opposed to an adolescent. In comparison, his rooms on Vulcan looked very much like those of a teenager, albeit a Vulcan teenager.

Spock did not have long to take more than a cursory glance around his wife's bedroom before he found himself on the receiving end of her physical expressions of affection. Her slender arms twisted around his neck to bring his lips down to hers at the same time as she rose up on her toes. The kiss was chaste and gentle for a few moments. As always, however, he found his emotional control vanished almost completely when she touched him. He couldn't resist deepening the kiss, pulling her bottom lip into his mouth so she would part her lips for him. She seemed similarly afflicted and tightened her hold on him, pushing herself closer against him.

Maintaining the charade of a professional relationship with her had taken its toll on him. Seeing her daily and feeling her nearby but being unable to expression his affection for her in all but the most stilted verbal exchanges had left him on edge. Chaste affection was quickly swept aside by desire. He pulled his lips from hers to speak. 'It has been 18 days 3 hours and 27 minutes since I was last inside you wife'. And that had been an exceedingly unsatisfactory five minute dalliance on the couch of the first officer's quarters on the Enterprise.

He felt the wave of lust his words provoked in her. Her respiration had grown uneven. She kissed him roughly before replying. 'Too long husband.' She had worked a hand under his tunic to curl her cool hand around his hip. Summoning his will power not to rush when there was no need, Spock gently pulled her hair down so it hung down her back. The long strands free, he buried a hand in them and pressed his face into the crook of her neck, inhaling her scent and enjoying holding her in his arms, the simple proximity to her that had been denied to him at the Academy. Her cool human body temperature both thrilled and soothed him. He could feel the rapid beat of her pulse from her carotid artery and the warm breeze of her breath against his cheek.

He reached around her back and tugged down the fastener of her dress. She obligingly shimmied and let the garment fall to the floor. Spock found himself forced to straighten so he could look down at her, run his hands over her skin. Her undergarments were white and contrasted pleasantly with the darkness of her skin in the dim light provided by the lamp near her bed.

His lips found hers once more. She pressed herself against him, twisting one hand in his hair to anchor him to her. She tasted pleasantly of apples and strawberries, the final course of their evening meal. He undid the clasp of her brassiere and pulled the garment from her, but he was too distracted by the feel of her tongue curling against his to turn his attention to her breasts. She tugged at his tunic and he pulled away from her long enough to pull it over his head and drop it to the ground before kissing her again. She moaned in pleasure as their bare skin pressed together. Growing desire flowed from her across their bond. Her hands skimmed over his skin, tracing over his shoulders, his ribs, the broad planes of his back, as if she was reminding herself of him.

Her cool human fingers left his skin prickled and static in their wake. She settled back on her feet, dropping out of his kiss as she slid a hand down his arm so she could entwine their fingers. Her desire and pleasure came sharply into focus and Spock heard himself groan slightly as it washed
over him. She shivered and leant forward to press kisses along the skin below his left collarbone. Spock pulled her against him with a hand on her hip, grinding his arousal against her. In response she scraped her teeth against him slightly. The combination was too much and Spock lost his battle with control.

He lifted her effortlessly, seeking her mouth roughly with his own as he carried her across the room and to her bed. He was pleased that it appeared large and sturdy. Having her in tiny regulation Starfleet beds and bunks was hardly satisfying. He let her fall into the pillows and made quick work of his trousers and boots. He could feel her impatience beating at him through their bond. She lifted her hips to pull off her underwear then settled back against the pillows gloriously naked to stare at him with dark eyes.

Finally he was equally unencumbered and he joined her on the bed. She moaned as he settled his weight on top of her, her back arching and her legs spreading to cradle his hips. He kissed her as he aligned their bodies. She was making those little pleading noises of desire that seemed to affect his erection directly - magnifying the throb of his heated blood. He pressed forward, feeling her body open in wet heat around him. Panting into their kisses, he managed to hold himself back for a few excruciating seconds so he could press his fingers to her psi points.

For a moment he felt an overwhelming sense of relief as his mind sunk into and blurred with hers, but then Nyota bucked her hips and he slipped an inch into her. The reflected pleasure at the tiny movement scooped out whatever logic and reason remained in his brain and he gripped her hip with his free hand and buried himself within her completely. She keened in his ear, her fingernails digging into his skin where she clutched at him. The intense pleasure and satisfaction she felt at feeling him inside her washed back against him in the meld, intensifying his own sensations. He groaned weakly. She shifted her legs, wrapping them around his hips and he was able to press himself forwards a little deeper. He remained still for a few moments as they enjoyed being so completely connected, their minds and their bodies.

'Too long' she had said and her assessment was correct. When the Enterprise launched he would keep her in their bed every second they were off duty. The twelve hours of a duty shift would be the longest he'd ever have to go without her again, and even that seemed too long. Perhaps he'd have her on their meal breaks. She could eat in bed. Naked. Yes. That was reasonable. He felt her amusement at his thoughts.

When he began to move against her he was powerless to be slow or gentle since Nyota's desire to be consumed by him burnt him through their bond. He distantly observed that it was convenient his human wife seemed to enjoy the very possessive physical manifestation of his Vulcan desire for her.

Her one concession to reason was her stifled cries. Spock was well aware of the noise his wife made when free to do so, she had screamed herself hoarse the first time he'd had her, so he was glad she was making an effort to restrain herself. He didn't want everyone in Nairobi to know what went on between them in the privacy of their bed. Unfortunately her bed seemed to be poorly positioned. Each time Spock buried himself within her the carved wooden headboard creaked and knocked against the wall. The noise was quite loud and clearly indicative of their current activities.

'Fuck.' He could feel his wife's frustration. She rarely cursed.

He sat up, pulling her onto his lap. Immediately she gripped his shoulders and lifted herself almost entirely off him before slamming her hips down so his length was once more buried inside her. Despite their rough movements, the bed remained silent. He moved in concert to her, their bodies joining sharply, until it was no longer enough and he used his greater strength, to her deep
satisfaction, to lift her up and down upon him with far greater speed then she could achieve.

He could feel her orgasm approaching. She was kissing him roughly, her teeth catching at his lips, to stop herself from making too much noise. He could hear her anyway, inside his mind. /Spokhk! Spokhk! Spokhk!/ his name a pleading mantra, and then she came apart around him and she was chanting his name out loud instead. 'Spokhk! Spokhk! Spokhk!' Her body clenched around his like molten bands of steel and her pleasure spread through him like fire from their bond, intensifying to an almost painful crescendo as he spent himself within her. With their minds joined their pleasure seemed to last much longer, reflecting back between them like images in a mirror.

He could feel Nyota's deep contentment and satisfaction. He felt a primitive and illogical pride at having pleased her so. She felt his thoughts and whispered back as she pressed kisses along the line of his shoulder, 'Primitive and illogical perhaps, but certainly well earned.' He felt her lips form a smile against his skin.

Naturally her words increased the male feelings of pride by a significant magnitude. He turned her face to his, easy since he still had his fingers curled against her psi points, and kissed her. Kissing Nyota was illogically pleasurable. He had devoted no little effort to attempting to understand it, how the mechanics of lips, tongue and teeth could warrant such feelings, he remained mystified, but the fact remained that they did.

The taste of apples and strawberries had faded and she now simply tasted of her. Heat. Human. Girl. Nyota Chausiku. It was superior to the flavour of fruit, no matter how sweet. Again he felt her answering thoughts, images and impressions as much as words. /You taste like the sun heat fire Spock/ He felt himself throb and harden within her once more at her obvious arousal. /yes! again. Please. want you need you./ He groaned, his hips rising to grind against her once more. Nyota's desire was potent enough when expressed to him verbally or physically, feeling the heat of it within his own mind was maddening.

Her fingernails dug into the back of his neck as she writhed against him. She raised herself off him until only the tip of him remained inside her before slowly settling herself back onto him. He groaned helplessly as her wet heat gripped him.

She felt so good. Better than anything. He wanted to stay like this, inside her, forever. He was uncertain if Vulcans felt that sort of lust or passion outside of pon'farr, but if not, it was certainly one emotional human weakness that he was fervently glad he'd inherited.

Nyota spoke softly, her voice breathless with lust. 'You feel so good inside me Spock. I wish we could stay like this forever, that you could just keep fucking me for all eternity.' Her crude words twisted at that dark deep place within him. He found himself kissing her roughly once more, biting at her as he joined them with increased ferocity. He felt a nameless urge to brand his name into her with his flesh. She felt his desire, his need, and turned her head to the side in anticipation. Instead of biting her as she was expecting however he roughly turned her back to face him and pressed his forehead against hers. He rose up off the mattress onto his knees, holding her in place with an arm at her hips, so he could penetrate her as deeply as possible. She gasped against him, her fingernails drawing blood where she gripped his neck and back. The small pain was exceedingly satisfying. Spock barely recognised his own voice as he spoke into her mouth, his lips brushing against hers, desperate, mad. 'Thou art mine. Tell me thou art mine.'

His possessiveness seemed only to excite her further, he could feel her love for him, that dizzy human feeling, deepening and darkening to something more approaching his own, Vulcan sense of love. For that was what it was, that terrifying feeling she inspired in him. His love for her. She kissed him briefly. 'I am thine. I belong to thee and only thee.' He growled in pleasure, his hips
grinding against hers. She moaned in a mix of pleasure and pain at the feel of him so deeply inside her. *'No other may touch thee. Only me.'* He withdrew from her slightly before jerking back up into her.

She gasped. *'Yes! Only thee! Only Spokkh!'* He shifted how he knelt on the bed pulling her up so her legs could lock around his hips. Nyota twisted against him, moaning and grinding hers hips against his. Spock needed no further encouragement to begin taking her in earnest. Nyota clung to him shifting her hips in counterpoint to his own. Spock could feel that she was close to climaxing and increased his pace. She gasped and wailed in his ear. *'Spokkh!'* Spock twisted her head away from his once more and pressed his mouth to the column of her throat, tasting the salt of her skin as he trailed his lips down to her shoulder. She could feel how close she was. He bit her.

She wailed.

Her back arched and her body thrashed against his as her orgasm hit her. Spock growled, his teeth sinking into her flesh deep enough so he could taste her blood as he thrust a final time before coming deep inside her. He felt he might burst at the intensity of the feeling as he shared it with his bond mate. When he had calmed he lay down, pulling her with him so she could lie atop him. Her love, her dizzy human love, bubbled and fizzed against him, surrounding him. He sunk into it blissfully. It was the perfect antidote for his dark, violent, Vulcan emotions. They lay entwined for some time, Nyota dozing against him, before she roused herself to shower and prepare for sleep. Spock did likewise, taking his turn in the ensuite that adjoined her bedroom.

Nyota was tired but not yet asleep when he re-joined her in bed. She shifted against him assuming her preferred position for sleep, curled against his side with one arm wrapped over his chest. Spock noted that her hand rested directly over his heart. He wondered if it was intentional. He lifted his head to look down at her.

Her eyes were shut, her eyelashes dark crescents against her cheeks. He noted she had taken one of his regulation undershirts without asking. Her illogical choice of sleepwear pleased rather than irritated him however. Her long hair was loose and tumbled over his bicep and into a dark pool against the sheet. Spock lifted his arm and traced his fingers along the curve of her face. She smiled softly but did not otherwise react. He bent so he could press a kiss to her brow. *'Nyota. K'hat'n'dlawa.' (half-of-my-heart/soul)*

She opened her eyes and reached a hand up to curl around the side of his jaw and cheek, her smile widening. He could feel her happiness. *'Ashayam.' (beloved)*
Nyota awoke to the distinctive birdcall of her childhood home. It was early, the light that streamed through her windows from the balcony was pale with the dawn. She knew before she opened her eyes that Spock was not in bed with her. She felt him nearby, his mind in that calm unthinking state that he went into when meditating. She stretched languidly beneath the sheets, enjoying the burn as her muscles awoke.

She lay dozing for a few minutes before pulling herself out of bed, wrapping herself in her dressing gown and heading to the bathroom to see to her morning ablutions. Hair brushed and teeth scrubbed, she went out onto the balcony. Spock sat cross legged on the pavers dressed only in his dark sleeping pants. His hands were pressed together beneath his chin, the index and middle fingers pointing upright and his other fingers curled against his palms.

He looked too handsome. Too perfect. Just looking at him made her heart ache.

His eyes snapped open and she felt his thoughts come back into focus as his gaze met hers. 'Nyota.'

The sound of his voice made her stomach flutter and she smiled. He stood in a fluid motion and crossed to stand before her in two long strides. She drank him in. He raised a hand to cradle the side of her face then leant towards her so his brow rested against hers. She folded her arms, pressing her hands against his chest and leant into his embrace. She could feel his affection for her through their bond. It felt like a gift, too good to be true. He pulled back from her slightly, his face reflecting confusion. He reached down and pressed his fingertips against hers. Their minds brushed against each other. She could tell he was worried about something.

'Nyota, this… sadness. I felt it often in you when we were apart. I do not understand its cause. You are unhappy?' His concern was obvious despite his apparent calm.

It took her a moment to realise what he was talking about. Her… what? What was the feeling? Spock was right, it was something like sadness or maybe hopelessness was closer. She was unsure she could even explain it to herself. 'It's nothing Spock… I suppose I just feel like this is too good to be true.' His head tilted. She felt his confusion. He didn't understand. 'I know it's silly…’ She pressed her face against his chest. 'I just love you so much. So much it makes me more than happy. Makes me feel other things as well. Makes me feel very… small.'

Spock held her, one arm wrapped around her the other trapped between them so their hands could remain intertwined. She was uncertain if he'd understood her words. They were quite cryptic for a
human, for a Vulcan they were probably mystifying.

'It occurs to me, my Nyota, that whilst I have attempted to be quite demonstrative in expressing my regard for you, I have not done so in the terran manner. I have been remiss in this.' He bent his head so his mouth was nearer her ear. His fingers curled in a soft caress where they rested below her ear and his thumb stroked a gentle line down over her cheekbone.

'Nakupenda Nyota. Mke wangu…' (I love you Nyota. My wife.)

Spock telling her he loved her in Swahili. She thought her heart might burst. He pressed a kiss to her cheek just below her left eye as he cradled her face as if she were something very precious. '…Yangu mmoja mpenzi sana.' (My most beloved one.) She'd never heard him speak her native tongue, the words that deep in her mind she formed her thoughts in. She could feel he was uncomfortable with such illogical declarations of emotion, but also the truth of his words. He loved her. She'd known that of course, but he'd never actually come out and told her. A smile stretched her face. The sad feeling evaporated. She looked up at him. 'You really do don't you?'

He answered her question gravely. 'Yes.'

She felt a rush of warm love and affection for him. She verbalised it.'Nakupenda Spock.' The feeling was pure, free of any taint of sadness. His head tilted to the side and his lips twitched in an almost smile. She could feel that he was both pleased to have cheered her and amused at something.

'Nyota, do you know that your love tickles?' He posed the question without his typical Vulcan seriousness.

She raised an eyebrow at his odd question and his tone. 'What?'

She felt him nudge her through the connection of their fingertips. 'This feeling - which you once incorrectly identified as friendship I might add – it… tickles.' His face stilled as he inspected it within his mind. 'It is a… dizzy feeling. Like the sensation of a ship entering warp or the sudden acceleration of a hoverbike. It is most curious.' He looked like he might let out a full blown smile at any moment.

Nyota laughed a little in disbelief. 'You are such a Vulcan! Love makes you ticklish.'

She felt a thought occur to him and his mood darkened once more. 'What?'

'Is it the fact that I do not feel this… human love that upsets you?'

Nyota raised a hand to caress his face. She shook her head. 'No. What you feel for me is…' She tried to think of words to describe that dark, alien, Vulcan emotion he felt so strongly for her. That bottomless pool of obsession within him. Possessive and absolute. ‘…beautiful.' She raised herself on her toes so she could press a gentle kiss to his lips. He responded in kind and they began a lazy exploration of each other. Nyota was unsure how long she'd been kissing him when her stomach rudely interrupted with a hungry rumble. Spock pulled back and raised an eyebrow at her.

'Looks like I require sustenance.' She twisted under Spock's arm and headed back into her room, her tone teasing. 'Someone wore me out last night.'

'As I recall, no complaints were voiced at the time.' Spock dead-panned.

Nyota laughed and headed to the door. She had a sneaking suspicion that Spock wasn't as mystified by jokes and humour as he claimed to be. He had quite the grasp on dry wit and well timed
understatement. On the way across the room she picked up his meditation robe from where it was draped over a chair and threw it towards him. 'Are you coming? Mother is already cooking judging from the smell.'

'I do not usually eat until 07:00 hours, however, your mother's cooking is proving far more appealing than anything offered on campus or aboard a ship.' Spock pulled on the robe and followed her downstairs to the kitchen.

Tamu was indeed cooking. She stood at her heating unit flipping pancakes expertly. Nyota's mouth watered. Her father sat at the bar reading over the morning news on a PADD with a carafe of coffee at his elbow. He glanced up at their entry. 'Spock, Nyota. Good morning.'

Tamu smiled very widely and far too innocently inquired of them. 'Good morning, I trust you slept well?'

Instantly Nyota blushed in mortification. She suddenly and very vividly recalled calling out Spock's name quite a bit the night before. Amongst other things. Loud things. Mercifully her mother's innuendo went completely over Spock's head. Perhaps he'd become too accustomed to Gaila's incredibly tactless Orion insinuations to pick up on more subtle human ones. He was looking at what Tamu was cooking with the great interest of a man who has not had breakfast instead.

'My rest was indeed sufficient thank you.' He responded evenly.

'That's good to hear Spock.' Tamu shot Nyota a leer then returned her attention to the pan in front of her. Again her meaning went right over Spock's head, although her father suddenly coughed and cleared his throat. Nyota sure as hell wasn't going to clue him in. She ignored her parents and turned to Spock. 'Would you like tea? I was going to have chai.'

'That would be satisfactory Nyota.' Spock took a seat along the bar with her father. By the time she had brewed a pot of chai her mother had already served Zuberi with a plate of pancakes which he began powering through with great gusto and copious amounts of lemon and sugar.

Tamu turned her attention on Spock. 'Do you like pancakes Spock?'

'I am familiar with the North American equivalent, which I have found to be quite unappetizing. However what you are cooking bears little resemblance to that which is served at the Academy cafeteria. It appears far more appealing.' He glanced at Zuberi, who was squeezing a slice of lemon over his stack.

'Shall I cook you a few? You can try them?' Tamu was already pouring more batter into her pan.

'Thank you Tamu. I would like that.' Nyota bit her lip. He was trying, but Spock was just so terrible at casual conversation.

Nyota joined him at the bar and poured chai for them and her mother. Tamu sipped at her cup as she continued cooking. She stacked three fresh pancakes onto a plate and passed it to Spock. 'I can make you more if you like them.'

'Thank you Tamu.' he responded. He neatly cut a portion and ate.

Zuberi looked up from his PADD to regard Spock. 'Usually people put butter, maple syrup, jam or lemon and sugar on them Spock. Or Tamu has pickles and relish if you like savoury.'

Spock took her father's advice and tried another bite with butter. The maple syrup he found much
too sweet. He then tried butter with lemon and sugar. His eyebrows shot up towards his fringe.

Nyota felt his enjoyment and smiled. 'I think we have a winner.'

Spock took another two mouthfuls before offering further comment. 'These are vastly superior to that which I had previously encountered.' He ate another mouthful. 'And the combination of lemon and sugar is unexpectedly complimentary. My mother's fondness for this dish seems much more reasonable now.'

Tamu looked exceedingly proud. 'Would you like some more Spock? I made up extra batter.'

Nyota got her own plate, and shortly after Tamu presented Spock with a stack as large as that she'd given to Zuberi earlier. Although he had impeccable table manners, Spock was able to empty his plate extremely… efficiently. Tamu was in her element. She kept up a steady stream of pancakes for Spock for the next twenty minutes whilst Nyota worked much slower through her own plate and sipped her tea. Somewhere around pancake 16 Spock was forced to admit he was full.

Tamu took a seat beside Nyota and ate her own breakfast. 'Ambassador Palas is holding a gathering this evening Nyota. When I told her you would be home she was adamant I extend an invitation.'

Nyota held in a groan. She was fond of the Ambassador, who had been friends with her mother since she was a child, but the dinners and functions her mother dragged her to were usually incredibly dry and she knew everyone would be incredibly nosy about Spock.

'Now I know you don't like these sorts of things, but you might not have another chance to see Palas for some time and you know how fond she is of you. She will be returning to Andoria before you graduate, and then I imagine you and Spock will be gallivanting around the galaxy for a few years.' Her mother had a point. 'Although I'm sure I could make your excuses, what with you and Spock being newlyweds no doubt eager to spend time alone.'

Blackmail. Nyota sighed. 'I don't have anything to wear.'

'You have all day, I'm sure you can find something in town dear.' Tamu clearly considered the conversation over.

Nyota noted that Spock was consciously staying out of the conversation. She supposed she couldn't blame him. Her father was being extremely quiet also. She racked her brains trying to think of a good excuse.

'Spock!' Zuberi got to his feet. 'I didn't get a chance to show you the gym yesterday. You might like to use it during your stay. Wanna take a look now perhaps?'

Spock was on his feet in seconds. 'Indeed. That would be most satisfactory Zuberi.'

Tamu smirked in victory as she and Nyota were left in the kitchen alone.

'Fine mother. But don't think I don't know what you really want. You want to show Spock off to all your little diplomat friends.' She took a sip of her now stone cold chai and winced.

'Well of course I'd like my charming son-in-law to accompany you my dear, but I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about.'

Nyota gave up. She left her mother and spent half an hour going through her wardrobe looking at dresses. She had a few that were perhaps suitable, but they were several years old, from before she
left for the Academy, and she didn't want to have to face a room full of pompous diplomats in an old dress.

She showered and dressed then headed down to the gym. Spock and her father were sparring. She stopped in the doorway and watched in amusement. Spock's meditation robe was neatly folded nearby and she took a moment to admire him without a shirt. It was clear from how sweaty her father was and the green flush to Spock's skin that they'd been at it a while. She could tell that Spock was 'going easy' on her father so to speak, but also that he was enjoying himself.

Apparently he rarely had opportunity to spar with anyone strong enough to actually pose any sort of a challenge. The disparity in their size made up somewhat for the disparity in Human-Vulcan strength. Spock was still stronger than her father, but only by a small margin owing to Zuberi's great size.

Seeing them spar bought back memories of Spock and the Vulcan ensign giving a demonstration of _Suus Mahna_ in her second year. She remembered how exciting she'd found it. It occurred to her she'd enjoy watching Spock spar even more now than she had then. As she watched her father managed to get Spock in a headlock. She shook her head as she felt Spock's enjoyment. He was pleased that Zuberi had been able to restrain him. It took him only a few seconds to break the hold and flip Zuberi onto his back however. It was odd to see him twist her much larger father seemingly effortlessly over his shoulder. Her father laughed from the mats. Men.

Nyota walked over towards them. 'I'm going into town for a few hours. I trust you two will play nice while I'm gone?'

Her father stood and grabbed a towel to wipe himself off. 'Don't worry, Spock will still be in one piece when you return.'

Spock turned to raise an eyebrow at Zuberi sceptically.

Nyota smiled. 'It's not Spock I'm worried about Papa. You may be twice his size, but you're getting on a bit to be sparring with a Vulcan.' She favoured her husband with an admiring glance. 'And I've seen Spock's _suus mahna_. You don't stand a chance.' Before her father could make a comeback she waved and skipped out of the room.

Zanta joined her on her trip into town. Unlike Nyota she seemed quite eager to attend Ambassador Palas' function and to have an excuse to buy an expensive new gown. It took them a few hours to find dresses and shoes, and afterwards they stopped for lunch. Despite the spector of a night of tedious conversation with stuffy diplomats looming over her head, Nyota enjoyed spending time with her sister. She felt odd leaving Spock alone with her parents, but she could feel over their bond that he was perfectly at ease. No doubt he and her father were busy discussing riveting subjects like warp theory in between bouts of beating each other up.

It was mid-afternoon by the time they returned to the house. Nyota followed the bond to where she sensed Spock and found him in the billiards room with her father.

Both men looked up as she entered. She walked over to them and made a show of looking them over. Spock raised an eyebrow in query at her regard. 'Hmm, no black eyes or broken bones. You both managed to behave yourselves I see.'

'Indeed. Whilst Zuberi no longer outranks me, I am still forced to defer to his superior age. Not to mention his status as my father-in-law.' Spock said.

Zuberi snorted. 'You're just sore that you couldn't break that last _mok'bara_ hold.' Her father
sounded extremely pleased with himself.

'I assure you Zuberi I could have broken your Klingon hold with no less than nine different suus mahna techniques, but I had no desire to cause you serious injury.' Nyota found herself looking over her husband and wishing rather wistfully to see him practising his suus mahna. Preferably naked. By himself. In bed. With her. Wait. That wasn't suus mahna at all. She sighed.

'Sure sure Spock.' Zuberi bent and took a shot. 'I won't embarrass you in front of Nyota.' He smirked. 'I did just beat you at snooker though.'

Spock frowned infinitesimally. 'I was unfamiliar with the particular variant on the game we were apparently playing.'

'How come you're losing this game as well then?' Her father appeared to be enjoying himself thoroughly.

'I am not 'losing' Zuberi. Since you broke you are merely a turn ahead of me, giving the illusion that you are winning.'

'And I broke because I won the last game.'

'The outcome of the last game is of no relevance to the current.'

Nyota shook her head at their bickering and left them to their game before they could draw her into it.

Spock appeared in her rooms just as the sun was setting. Nyota had showered and changed, putting her dressing gown on over her evening dress so as not to get makeup on it, and sat at her dresser applying just that. Spock seated himself on the end of her bed and watched her avidly, his head tilting back and forth almost like a bird as she applied different cosmetics. She smiled at him in the mirror. 'Never seen a woman put on makeup before Spock?'

'No, I have not. I had not realised how involved a process it was.' He indicated the item she was holding. 'What is that strange looking device?'

She smiled. 'An eyelash curler.' She demonstrated its use and batted her eyelashes at him. 'Crude, yet effective. Although since you have eyelashes 25% longer than the average human female such a device is unnecessary.'

Nyota laughed. 'Oh Spock, you say the sweetest things.'

He showered while she finished getting ready. She was just applying her perfume when he emerged fully dressed. She was surprised at how quickly he managed to look so perfectly polished. Somehow his hair even looked like it had been freshly trimmed. Vulcans. Her eyes widened in pleasure as they darted lower and she took in his clothing.

Apart from comm calls she'd never seen him outside of his uniform or casual terran clothing. She'd been expecting him to wear a dress uniform, instead he was wearing elaborate Vulcan robes. The inner robe was an iridescent bronze with a high notched collar and a diagonal seam across his chest. There was some secondary layer - a richly decorated tabard-like garment – that hung over a wide sash-like belt. It was hard to see properly since it was partially hidden by the long outer robe. The outer robe was black with wide long sleeves, lines of contrasting bronze along the seams and calligraphy running down the lapels. He looked magnificent. Like the most perfectly handsome Vulcan in existence.
She stepped forward, her hands reaching out to run along his high collar and down the embroidered lapels of the outer most robe. She traced her finger along the golden glyphs that denoted his clan and house and another that referred to the teachings of Surak. The material was soft like silk under her fingers but thicker and stiff. The detailing of the garments was beautiful and clearly handmade. She was reminded of ancient Japanese clothing. Nothing remotely as lovely could ever come out of a replicator. She wondered how many layers he was wearing exactly. She looked forward to finding out.

Amusement passed through the bond between them. Nyota looked up from her inspection to find him looking down at her with a raised eyebrow and a hint of a smile around his lips. She felt herself blush.

'Nyota, had I been aware of your predilection for Vulcan dress I would have garbed myself thus long ago.' There was a teasing note to his voice.

'Mmhm. I think you may look even more delicious in your robes than you do in those tight riding pants of yours.' she replied smiling broadly at him.

At her words he tilted his head as if she'd just said something particularly interesting. 'Fascinating. So the mysterious aesthetic appeal of riding apparel applies to both sexes.' It was clear from his tone that he was referring to some observation he had made previously.

Nyota tilted her head. 'To what do you refer husband?'

'An observation made during our visits to the shipyard last year.'

'And what observation was that?'

'That despite a similarity in fit to other articles of clothing I had seen you attired in, the protective riding trousers you purchased to safely accompany myself upon my hoverbike seemed to have certain unquantifiable additional aesthetic appeal.'

Nyota smirked. 'Are you saying my butt looks good in riding pants Spock?'

Spock tilted his head. 'In a manner of speaking, I suppose that is one interpretation.'

'So does yours. Following you around that shipyard was torture.' She playfully slid her arms into his outer robe and around his body, squeezing his butt. 'I had to restrain the urge to that on a near constant basis.'

Spock was giving her a look that clearly communicated his disbelief at what she had just done, which only made it seem all the more amusing to her. 'Fear not Spock, I will show more restraint in public. Though I cannot guarantee I will not spend much of the evening contemplating exactly how much I would like to remove these beautiful robes.' She slid her hands across his shoulders and down his chest for emphasis. She never tired of touching him. 'After all I don't have your Vulcan control and...'

She was cut off in her teasing by Spock kissing her. Her high heels meant she hardly needed to reach. She tugged at his robes to pull him closer and pressed her body flush against his. So focussed had she been on her teasing that she hadn't felt his growing desire through their bond. She felt it now because it was pressed against her hip. It was only her need to breathe that led to her breaking the connection. 'Maybe we should stay home.' She said breathlessly. 'I can handle the teasing.'

Spock looked confused. 'Teasing?'
'This morning, mother said she'd use that we are newlyweds as an excuse.' Nyota replied distractedly before pressing her lips against Spock's once more.

He pulled away after a moment however. 'I do not understand how that constitutes teasing.'

Nyota rolled her eyes. 'For someone who can make me scream his name like a deranged Orion slave girl, you can be pretty dense.'

At Spock's clueless frown she felt compelled to continue. 'Calling us 'Newlyweds who want to be alone' would be a polite way of saying we were so sex crazed we couldn't drag ourselves from bed for five minutes let alone an entire evening.' Spock's eyes widened. 'Yes I'd rather roomfuls of diplomats weren't contemplating our sex lives either. Hence my agreement to attend.' She took a step back, straightening Spock's robes as she did so.

Turning, she took a moment at the mirror to make sure her hair and makeup was still acceptable.

'Your earlier statement begins to put the terran custom of a 'honeymoon' into a new perspective for me.'

'If that perspective involves something like the human equivalent of your 'time' then you aren't far off.' Nyota decided to forgo lipstick. She wanted to be able to kiss Spock. Before she could get distracted by thoughts of kissing again she pulled off her dressing gown and made sure her dress was sitting correctly. Satisfied she turned back to Spock, ready for them to head downstairs.

He was staring at her like she'd pulled off her robe and been naked underneath. It was quite the opposite actually. Although the sleeves were just strands of beads looping over her biceps, her dress had a high collar, a full back and was floor length. There wasn't a hint of cleavage, leg or anything else from her chin to her toes.

What it lacked in Gaila-esque exposed skin it made up for in other ways however. It was tight – very tight, flaring out only below the knee so she could walk comfortably. Well not comfortably, in tiny geisha steps actually, but walk none the less. It had even come with a simple corset to nip her waist in a little so her figure was even more emphasised. She'd had to get Zanta to do her up. Her favourite thing about it however, the reason she'd picked it out to try on, was that every inch of it was encrusted with golden beads of different shapes and slightly different tones. They were worked into symmetrical patterns that emphasised her curves and glittered and caught the light when she moved.

When she'd tried it on in the store she'd been fairly certain she had never looked so good in her life, and that was without her hair and makeup done. Now with her long hair pinned up in an elegant twist that emphasised the length of her neck and dark makeup for her eyes, she was absolutely certain. She felt tall and lovely. Placing a hand on one hip she twisted towards Spock to display her gorgeous dress, and herself, to greatest advantage. In response he stepped towards her, his actions unconsciously mirroring her own of just previously.

He placed a hand on her waist and scanned her over once more before meeting her eyes.

'Is my appearance satisfactory Spock?'

He appeared to be at a loss for words. She could feel his lust through their bond. She brushed her fingers once more against the gold lettering on his robe. 'It is most fortuitous that I'm wearing a colour which matches your robes.' She remarked conversationally. Spock had both his hands wrapped around her hips now and judging from what she felt through their bond was on the verge of throwing her to the floor and tearing her dress right off her. She couldn't resist teasing him.
'Spock, had I been aware of your predilection for terran evening dresses I would have garbed myself thus long ago.' She rolled her hips against him as she echoed his earlier words back at him, delighting in the way his breath caught audibly in his throat.

There was a knock on the door. 'Nyota? Spock? Are you ready? We need to leave soon!' came her mother's sing-song voice. Nyota took advantage of Spock's momentary distraction to twist away from him and sashay to the doorway. She sent a sultry look at him over her shoulder before opening it.

Her mother was wearing a red gown and wrap with her hair up in an elaborate updo secured with jewelled pins. She looked very graceful for a woman of her middle years. Her eyes widened as she took in Nyota's dress. 'Oh Nyota! You look lovely!'

Spock appeared at her side having almost managed to get his face looking as serene as usual. Tamu's smile widened even more as she took in her Vulcan son-in-law in all his be-robed alien glory. 'And Spock! Don't you look handsome!'

Zanta appeared from her bedroom next door in a pale green gown with her hair in curls.

'Wow. Ny, Spock - you two are going to be beating them off with a stick.' she remarked with amusement before turning to head down stairs.

Nyota placed her hand on Spock's arm and they followed, Tamu bringing up the rear. Her father was waiting downstairs in his grey and white dress uniform. His shoulders looked even broader than usual.

'Well! Don't the ladies all look lovely Spock?' He commented with the diplomacy of a man who'd lived alone with three females for many years.

Spock nodded. 'An accurate assessment Zuberi.' It was a pretty gushing compliment from a Vulcan.

They took the larger hovercar, Zuberi driving, to the Ambassador's mansion. They were escorted to a large grandly decorated reception room filled with people of many species talking, drinking the Ambassador's Ale and Brandy and eating morsels of exotic food. Nyota picked up boring conversation in a dozen different dialects. Trade agreements, political manoeuvring and of course, gossip. It was just as she'd expected. The only difference to the last diplomatic event she'd attended was that she and Spock were attracting more attention than she was accustomed too. Perhaps she should have selected a plainer dress. And a plainer husband. Although compared to what some of the attendees were wearing, they certainly weren't over dressed.

Zanta vanished into the crowd almost instantly to do lord knew what.

Nyota and Spock dutifully followed her parents to where Palas Thanar, the Andorian Ambassador to Earth stood surrounded by guests, aides and other assorted hangers-on. 'This is remarkable similar to functions I have attended at my own parent's behest.' Spock remarked softly in Vulcan.

'Did you join Starfleet to avoid them? I am ashamed to say it was a major contributing factor in my own choice of career.' She replied before plastering a smile on her face. Her mother had finished her greetings to Palas and the Ambassador had turned her attention, and antennae, on her and Spock.

'Of course you remember my youngest Nyota? She graduates from Starfleet in a few months.' Tamu was saying.

'Nyota! How lovely to see you! I trust you have excelled in your Starfleet studies as you did at
'University?' the Ambassador inquired warmly.

'Thank you Palas. My studies have gone well.' The Andorian woman turned to regard Spock curiously as Nyota replied.

At her unspoken query Tamu introduced him with calculated casualness. 'And this is Spock of Vulcan, Nyota's husband.'

Spock obligingly raised his hand in greeting. 'Live long and prosper Ambassador Thanar.'

'Peace and long life Spock.' she responded her hand mirroring his. 'Tell me, have we met before?' Her head was tilted to the side in puzzlement.

'I do not believe so Ambassador.' Spock replied evenly.

Nyota sighed inwardly, she could feel her mother chomping at the bit, eager to reveal that not only was her son-in-law a Vulcan from a prominent family, his father was the Ambassador Sarek. This would earn her significant bragging rights amid the Diplomatic Corps. She decided to ruin her mother's fun by drawing out her longed for grand reveal.

With her brightest smile she spoke again to the Ambassador. 'I was so pleased to receive your invitation Palas, it's been far too long since I've seen you.'

Palas returned her attention to Nyota. 'Indeed Nyota! It's strange to think the little terran girl I used to teach Andorian to is married and soon to be serving in Starfleet.'

'Those Andorian lessons got me especially high marks in my first year classes.' An exaggeration, but she wasn't a Vulcan bound to absolutes.

'I'm glad, though you were always a very fast study. You will be serving in a linguistic capability in Starfleet?'

'Yes, communications to be precise.'

Nyota could see her mother getting more and more agitated as she and Palas exchanged small talk.

The Ambassador nodded. 'A position you will be eminently well suited to.' She paused, glancing once more at Spock. 'So when were you married? Tamu quite shocked me with the news only yesterday.'

'Nyota and I have been bonded 87 days and 12 hours and our marriage formalised 62 days 3 hours and 18 minutes.' Spock informed her with typical Vulcan charm.

Nyota glanced at him in amusement. She noted his accuracy with regards to their actual bonding was not to the minute. It seemed she'd distracted him enough for him to 'loose count' so to speak. The thought pleased her more than it should have.

Her attention drawn back to Spock, the Ambassador once more scrutinised him. Nyota could see her looking at the richness of his robes and the elaborate glyphs and trying to puzzle out which clan he belonged to. 'If you don't mind me asking, how did you two meet? It is most unusual for a Vulcan and a Terran to marry. I know of only one other such couple, though their marriage has been long and happy.' She added the last part in a rush to offset any possible insult.

Nyota thought it best she answer, since Spock might be too literal. She didn't want everyone in the room to know she'd married one of her instructors and make assumptions. 'We met through
Starfleet, though Spock only recently returned to Earth from a posting in the Romulan Neutral Zone to await the launch of the new flagship.’

Zuberi was unable to restrain himself and joined in. 'Commander Spock here is the commissioned First Officer of the Enterprise Palas.' It was plain from his tone of voice that her father clearly thought this fact the most interesting one about his son-in-law.

'Starfleet? So that is why Zuberi seems so fond of you Spock.' She favoured Zuberi with a rueful smile before some memory seemed to return to her. 'Oh! You wouldn't happen to know Ambassador Sarek and Lady Amanda's son would you Spock? I believe he serves in Starfleet.'

Spock paused, head tilting slightly, and Nyota could sense him attempting to word a response. She pointedly avoided looking at her mother but could see her fidgeting out of the corner of her eye, itching to butt in no doubt.

'Ambassador Sarek and Lady Amanda are my parents Ambassador.' Spock said.

Nyota kept smiling but inwardly was already more than ready to leave. The stares directed at them were now far more obvious. A Vulcan and a human was unusual enough, adding in Spock's rank, his unusual parentage, the Enterprise, her mother's friendship with Palas and a marriage and they might as well have had been naked and dancing a Bolian rumba.

Palas for her part just seemed relieved to have solved her mystery and Tamu equally thrilled that everyone was now aware that she and Ambassador Sarek were in-laws. 'Well then! I am doubly pleased to be able to congratulate you and Nyota on your bonding Spock. I have worked often with Ambassador Sarek in my duties as a Federation Ambassador and I am certain any son of his must be a most honourable person.'

Spock inclined his head, Nyota felt him restraining himself from pointing out the illogical nature of her assumption since it was clearly kindly meant.

Nyota couldn't stand it any more she could feel the interest, both benign and malicious, of the crowd around the Ambassador and had had enough of their scrutiny. 'We have taken enough of your time Ambassador, perhaps we might speak again a little later when you have a moment?'

Palas nodded, as if just finally noticing the crowd around them. 'That would be very pleasant Nyota.' She inclined her head to both her and Spock. 'Thank you both for coming.'

Nyota and Spock did likewise and Spock then steered her away from the crowd. Astute as he was he picked up a flute of Andorian brandy from a passing waiter, avoiding the glasses of Andorian Ale also on the tray, and passed it to her.

She took a sip. 'Thank you Spock.'

He moved slightly closer to her. 'I did not think it possible, but you seem to find these occasions even more tedious than I Nyota.'

'So avoiding these things did have something to do with your choice of career?' she replied smiling a little.

'Like yourself I contemplated two alternate paths for myself once I completed my schooling. Neither would have required my presence at diplomatic functions.'

'I can't imagine you anywhere other than Starfleet. What else did you consider?' Nyota asked curiously.
"I was accepted into the Vulcan Science Academy."

Nyota raised her eyebrows in surprise. 'I am surprised you did not attend. It is very difficult to obtain admittance there is it not?'

Spock did not sound overly fond of the famous institution. 'The testing was quite rigorous. However I deduced that attending Starfleet Academy would lead to more satisfying career opportunities.'

'Really? That's the reason? Are you sure it wasn't your apparent predilection for explosions, life or death situations and terran girls?' Nyota teased, her earlier tenseness forgotten.

'Despite your insinuation otherwise I do not seek out explosions or 'life or death situations' as you put it, intentionally.' He paused. 'And as there is only one terran female for whom I have any sort of 'predilection' it hardly constitutes a trend.'

She favoured him with a pout. 'I should hope so husband. Terran females can be quite territorial you know.'

Her husband quirked an eyebrow. 'And how is this territorial instinct expressed Nyota?'

'There are several stages.' Nyota replied airily.

'I find myself intrigued, please detail these stages.' From his tone she could tell Spock was unsure if she was being serious or not.

'Well, the first stage is verbal threatening, 'Stay away from my man!' and the like. The second consists of a ritualistic pillow fight whilst dressed only in underwear. The third and final stage consists of hair pulling, scratching and slapping for the most part.' Nyota paused. 'Undoubtedly you witnessed displays of these things during your time at the Academy.'

'Ritualistic pillow fights conducted in only undergarments? Indeed I have not and I think I would remember such a thing.' He inclined his head. 'I do recall instances fitting your descriptions of stages 1 and 3 however.' He paused. 'Several of them involving Gaila U'Aidat.'

Nyota laughed. 'That sounds about right.'

Zuberi appeared with a glass of Andorian Ale in hand. He greeted them then said quietly in Vulcan, 'If you can last until the dancing you should be able to slip out without Tamu being any the wiser.' As if summoned by her name Tamu appeared with several dignitaries in tow, an Orion female in elaborate costume attended by two males, her pheromones blasting, and a Tellarite and two human diplomats. Nyota steeled herself, straightening her back and preparing her smile.

'There you are my dears!' Tamu pronounced grandly. She introduced them to her companions, obviously enjoying showing off her Vulcan son-in-law. Nyota was beginning to find her mother's attitude embarrassing. Spock seemed utterly unperturbed however. Mid-conversation, (the Orion woman was holding the surrounding males enraptured despite the rather boring subject of import taxation she was discussing), he held a hand out towards her, middle and index fingers extended, in a graceful gesture she recognised from her studies on Vulcan etiquette as the ozh'esta. From what she recalled it was a gesture of affection common between bonded couples, something akin to a woman resting her hand upon her husband's arm, or hand holding. Given the telepathic nature of the contact however, it was indicative of far greater intimacy than either human gesture.

She stepped a little closer to him and pressed her fingers against his. Instantly she felt the sharp edge of his mind slide comfortingly against hers. He used the physical connection to speak to her
directly through their bond. His words were of reassurance, he could feel her discomfort. /Your mother's pride pales in comparison to many of my kin. And it is kindly meant./ It was strange to hear his words as clearly as if spoken aloud when she was in the midst of conversation with others. She found herself glancing around as if they could be overheard, but the Vulcan gesture was unremarkable to their companions and no one gave them a second glance.

She met Spock's eyes as she silently responded, /I am pleased you are not offended, but I still wish she would tone down her enthusiasm a little./

They spent the next hour slowly rotating around the room, Nyota engaging in conversation with those of her mother's colleagues that she knew, and trying to avoid Tamu herself as much as possible. The link of Spock's fingers against her own served the dual purpose of helping her keep her sanity and making it plain she was attached to those present who found her attractive. No matter how tedious the conversations or company they found themselves in Spock remained utterly calm and frostily polite. Nyota meanwhile, was slowly going mad.

Just when she thought the situation couldn't get any worse she heard Vuhlkansu being spoken off to her right. '…Sarek's human son is not bonded. T'Pring spurned him for Stonn.' The voice was cool and emotionless.

'A daughter of the high clans would never accept a half-human.' The second voice in contrast sounded slightly scathing.

'And T'Pau in turn would never allow him to bond to a human.'

'Indeed, she would not allow further sullying of the ancient line.'

'The human is no doubt bonded to some V'tosh (Vulcan) of low rank. The large human male spoke of Starfleet. There are many such within.'

Nyota was amazed how little Spock reacted to the way the two Vulcans were discussing him. It was quite insulting. She herself was surprised at their tone. She hadn't ever encountered such rudeness in a Vulcan before. Although she'd never eavesdropped on one before either.

'Observe, the female is nearby, with the large human.'

Nyota could practically feel their eyes on her back. It was clear they could not see Spock as their view was obscured by the 'large human', namely her father Zuberi.

'She has a very pleasing figure. The ratio of the circumference of her hips to that of her waist is appealing. For a human.'

Spock's emotions lost some of their calm. He clearly did not want them discussing her, or her hips, in such a manner. She had to admit the detached way they were judging her was more insulting than the crude remarks a human might have made about her body. It made her feel very much looked down upon. Like a thing as opposed to a person.

'The large human is her sire. His features are quite primitive.'

Zuberi turned slightly so he could meet Nyota's eyes and raised an eyebrow in disbelief at the audacity of the gossiping Vulcans. Spock remained outwardly unmoved but she could feel he was ashamed and irritated.

'It is well that such inferior genetics shall not further degrade Surak's line.'
'Indeed. Sarek's human, whilst inferior to a Vulcan female, is still preferable. Her son, despite his human emotional failings, is said to have inherited Vulcan intelligence worthy of his clan at least.'

Nyota felt a slight tensing of Spock's arm beneath her fingers at the casual dismissal of his mother but otherwise he did not react. She was impressed. If they'd been discussing her mother she would have marched over there and given them a piece of her mind. An extremely emotional and human piece at that. As it was she was having difficulty ignoring them after their comments about her father. Primitive! Inferior genetics! Where did they get off? Mercifully the Vulcan's were approached by an Andorian diplomat and they switched to standard and more polite conversation.

Spock spoke stiffly to her father and herself. 'I apologise that you had to listen to that Zuberi, Nyota.'

Zuberi shrugged. 'Hardly the first time I've encountered rude individuals at these sorts of things Spock. Did you hear what those Tellarite's near the flower arrangement were talking about earlier?'

'The ones discussing the Orion junior ambassador's 'shapeliness' with great anatomical precision?' Spock inquired.

Nyota allowed herself a smile and let the Vulcans slip from her mind.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

fluff fluff and silliness.

*Spock*

Spock was able to control his emotions with regards to the insulting words of his fellow Vulcans easily enough, but it appeared he was out of practice as it were. Having spent eight years in the company of humans and other non-Vulcans he'd had little cause to be truly insulted. Slurs against his Vulcan side were by definition illogical and hardly touched him at all. Since humans never thought to insult his human side, aggressive attempts to solicit an emotional response in him had not affected him during his time in Starfleet.

He would have to devote some effort to extending his control to insults against his wife however. The disrespectful manner in which the two Vulcans had discussed her had affected him far more than the insults against himself. He'd had to restrain the urge to interrupt them with disrespectful comments of his own. It would not do to lose control of his emotions in such a manner.

18 minutes after the Vulcans had concluded their insulting conversation about her, Nyota excused herself to use the restroom. Spock and Zuberi remained where they were and conversed about the latest innovations to warp engineering. Zuberi had read a paper on some of the developments that had been utilized in the Enterprise's warp drive to increase the potency of the matter and anti-matter intermix ratio and Spock found answering his questions as to the specifics a pleasant enough diversion.

They had been conversing for 11 minutes when he felt Nyota's anger across their bond. He stopped mid-sentence and tilted his head focusing in on her feelings.

'Spock? Is something wrong?' Zuberi looked at him in concern.

'Something has upset Nyota.' Spock responded as he glanced back over her shoulder towards were he sensed her.

'Your bond?' Zuberi asked curiously.

'Indeed.' Spock replied.

'She's probably been corned by a pushy diplomat.' He motioned with his hand that Spock should led them to her.

Spock made his way across the crowded room. Zuberi's height and size made clearing a path for themselves quite easy.

Nyota was indeed 'cornered' as her father put it. She was standing with her back to the wall and in front of her were the two Vulcan diplomats. Spock felt his earlier contained irritation returning.

Zuberi made a gruff noise. 'Not those idiots again.' Spock agreed with the assessment.
They were close enough to hear what was being said. ‘… human females are incapable of producing viable Vulcan offspring.’ remarked the taller of the two.

'Since the purpose of marriage is to produce offspring, marriage between a human and a Vulcan is illogical.' concluded his shorter companion.

Nyota was listening with a bland expression on her face. The Vulcans could have been discussing the weather for all the care she was expressing. Through their bond Spock could feel how angry and offended she was however. She met Spock’s eyes over their shoulders with relief.

'It is inappropriate for you to talk in such a manner to my wife.' Spock interjected calmly as he passed the two Vulcans to stand beside Nyota. He extended the middle and index fingers of his right hand towards her in the ozh’esta, the formal gesture between bondmates he had shared with her earlier. 'My wife. Attend.' She mirrored the movement, pressing her fingers to his and coming to stand near him. As they touched he felt her happiness that he'd come to her, irritation at the Vulcans and amusement at his commanding tone with her.

Though their faces were free of any obvious reaction Spock could tell they were pleased by his appearance. They no doubt wished to insult him for marrying a non-Vulcan. He also knew they believed him to be of an insignificant house. For once he took enjoyment out of his ancient pedigree. Both were looking at the markings on his robe - no doubt becoming aware of their error in their assumption as to his identity.

'I do not believe we are acquainted. I am S'chn T'gai Spock, son of Sarek, son of Skon, of House Solkar of the Clan of Surak and this is she who is my wife, Okosu Nyota Chausiku.' He used her full name purely because he knew they would have difficultly pronouncing the Swahili and he wished to discomfort them as much as possible. He raised his free hand in the ta'al. 'Live long and prosper.'

The Vulcans mirrored his movement. 'Peace and long life Osasu Spock son of Sarek. I am Darbok son of Davok of the Clan of Toreth and this is Jarot son of Jarak of the Clan of T'Peth.'

Spock inclined his head. Both were houseless kinsman of middling clans without inherited Van-Kal Vuhlkansu lineal names. In contrast Nyota, human or not, was wife to the heir of a house of a High Clan - Sarek being S'haile of House Solkar. To have approached her without introduction was impolite. To have spoken to her as they had exceedingly inappropriate.

The shorter Vulcan, Jarot, spoke. 'We were unaware that this human female was your wife Osasu Spock.' They did not offer apology of course, to do so would be to imply insult had been taken. But they offered explanation for their inappropriate behaviour, implying that if she'd been married to some Vulcan of lower rank, their behaviour to Nyota would have been acceptable. Spock found his irritation increasing.

'You are unaware no longer.' he informed them shortly, sending affection and apology to his wife through the link of their fingertips.

The taller Vulcan had an almost quizzical expression on his face. He was staring at Nyota like she was a particularly fascinating theorem. It was he who'd made the earlier comment about her pleasing figure. Spock had an urge to forcibly remove his gaze from his wife. 'Why have you married a human Osasu Spock? It is illogical to further diminish your genetic material with such a primitive bloodline.' He glanced at Zuberi.

The other Vulcan voiced his own opinion on the matter before Spock could. 'Terrans are short lived. Perhaps the human female will provide entertainment to Osasu Spock in his youth after
which he will be free to marry a Vulcan female of appropriate rank and continue his line.' Spock could tell that the Vulcan, Darbok son of Davok, thought his statement not only entirely logical, but meant it to be placating.

He was at an utter loss. His anger drained away and he felt… disappointment? There was nothing logical or reasonable he wished to say to either of the Vulcans. He regarded them steadily for a period of 18 seconds in cold silence. He turned to Nyota. 'Come adun’a. These V'tosh ka'tur are unworthy of your attention.'

'You are correct my adun, although I find them quite amusing.' Her accent was perfect of course. She tilted her head and smiled charmingly at the two dumbfounded Vulcans. 'Look at their faces - such surprise! I do believe they did not even consider I would speak Vuhlkansu. Though one would think such a conclusion quite logical.'

The one named Darbok spoke again. 'Okosu Nyota Chausiku,' He garbled her second name terribly. ‘…no offense was meant by our earlier comments.' To apologise was to imply Nyota had illogically taken insult and therefore was an insult in of itself. As a human he no doubt expected her to be unaware of this.

Nyota's smile widened. 'There is no offense where none is taken.' His wife responded. She quoted the analects of Surak to a Vulcan to point out a flaw in his logic, smiling as she did so. She could have said nothing more humiliating. Although he was aware he was being petty, Spock quite enjoyed watching his wife embarrass her would be detractors. He let her feel his amusement.

'I am pleased it is so Okosu Nyota Chausiku,' Darbok's second attempt at her name was no better. ‘…we were merely discussing the logical outcome of Osasu Spock's marriage to you.'

'I find it curious you refer to me as Okosu Nyota Chausiku,' it was plain from her tone how badly he had mispronounced it, ‘…only now you are aware that I am cognizant to the meaning of your words. It seems illogical. You think I will be insulted if you refer to me as 'female human'? I am not. It is a perfectly accurate description of my person.' Apart from her mild tone of amusement, from her words Nyota could well have been Vulcan. Spock could see she was impersonating his own speech patterns to heighten the effect.

Zuberi was smiling slightly behind the Vulcans, clearly enjoying the way his daughter was so charmingly belittling them.

'Your logic is admirable for a human. You must therefore understand our confusion over Osasu Spock's choice of you for a mate. It is known that T'Pau sort a Vulcan wife for him.' Spock raised an eyebrow at the Vulcan referring to his grandmother in such casual terms. Nyota felt his surprise through their joined fingers.

'I would not presume to speak on behalf of Pid-kom t'Maat Surak, Okosu T'Pau. '(Matriarch of Clan Surak, Lady T'Pau) Her words clearly implied her surprise at Darbok for doing so. 'You must be very well acquainted with her.'

'I have… not had that honour.' The Vulcan was forced to admit.

'Oh. Well it was most… entertaining to have met you, Darbok son of Davok and Jarot son of Jarak.' With a tiny gesture of her hand Nyota somehow managed to dismiss them as if she were ancient T'Pau herself as opposed to a 23 year old human woman. 'Peace and long life.'

The Vulcans bowed slightly to them both and backed away, returning Nyota's parting pleasantry. Zuberi Uhura positioned himself directly in their path. Spock regarded his father-in-law with
interest, curious at what he intended. He hoped not a demonstration of mok'bara, but could not be certain.

Zuberi smiled broadly at them before addressing them with disturbing cheerfulness. He towered over them both. 'Since you are visitors on Earth I feel it my duty to inform you of our illogical customs. You see humans believe it impolite and 'primitive' to speak of racial superiority, especially in mixed company. Of course I'm aware you meant no offence when you insulted myself, my daughter and our entire species, not to mention my son-in-law and Lady Amanda, but those less understanding of Vulcan custom might not.' Without waiting for a response of any kind Zuberi walked past them to stand before Spock and Nyota, effectively dismissing them from further conversation. They retreated.

Spock waited until the Vulcans were across the room and far out of earshot before he commented. 'Having human companions makes interaction with the lower element of my race far more tolerable.'

His humorous comment was rewarded with a chuckle from his wife's father.

'The only reason I didn't get that little mouthy one in a head lock and show him the door was how upset Tamu gets when I cause a scene.' Zuberi said. 'I should never have married a diplomat.'

'That would have been most amusing to witness Zuberi. In this one instance, I find myself almost disappointed at your emotional restraint.'

'What on earth are they doing in the Vulcan diplomatic service anyway? I've had more 'diplomatic' conversations with Tellarites.' his wife inquired, referring to the notoriously argumentative Tellarites for comedic effect.

'They do appear unsuited to their chosen career. Perhaps this is why they are stationed in Nairobi as opposed to Paris or San Francisco.' Spock replied mentioning the cities that housed the two largest Vulcan Embassies on Earth. 'I cannot imagine my father wishing such staff nearby.'

'They're an incident waiting to happen. If they wanted to gossip like teenage girls that they should have done it in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu.' Nyota paused and glanced around the room. 'Half the people here are probably conversationally fluent in the common dialect. Idiots.' Although exaggerated, her point was valid.

'Tamu is waving at me and I appear to have run out of ale. I will see you two later.' Zuberi stated, interrupting the flow of the conversation.

'Okay papa. Let us know when it's safe for us to ditch this party.' Nyota replied.

'Will do little star.' Her father responded before turning and picking his way through the throng.

'They most likely are not fluent.' Spock remarked in reference to Nyota's earlier statement. With their fingers joined it was unnecessary for him to elaborate.

His wife raised an eyebrow. 'Really?'

'Indeed. It is rarely spoken outside the High Clans save for ceremonial occasions. Most likely they know only ritual phrases.' He felt his wife's pleasure. She was taking human pride in her superiority in this regard. He found it did not make him think less of her.

'So the next time some nosey Vulcan starts speculating about my reproductive abilities I should just switch to High Vulcan?' amusement had entered her voice once more.
'I imagine it would bring such a conversation to a swift conclusion.' Spock agreed.

They remained for another hour at the function before Zuberi distracted his wife so that they could leave unremarked upon.

There was a rank of automated hovertaxis provided for guests so they were soon on their way back to the Uhura's residence. Nyota's relief the moment she boarded the hovertaxi was immense. Spock was surprised at the strength of her distaste, as the daughter of a diplomat and as a person with such an interest languages and culture, it seemed almost out of character.

She settled beside him in the hovercar, tucking her arms around him inside his outer robe and resting the side of her face against his chest. The way in which her demonstrations of human physical affection affected him continued to surprise him. He found he enjoyed her proximity. There was no logical reason for her to sit so close to him, she would be more comfortable and safer in the unlikely occasion of a collision, utilising the seat as it was designed. However he felt no urge to comment to that effect.

They had been travelling in silence for 7 minutes and 12 seconds when she remarked teasingly, 'So how many layers are you wearing Osasu S'chn T'gai Spock, son of Sarek, son of Skon, of House Solkar of the Clan of Surak?'

Her hands appeared to be attempting to ascertain the answer to her inquiry. She looked up at him innocently, but one of her hands was rubbing circles on his left thigh with increasing proximity to an area of his anatomy he did not want her interacting with in a hovertaxi. He raised an eyebrow at her daring. A slow smile spread over face. Her eyes were bright with mirth.

'If you will not tell me I will have to conduct my own investigations.' She tugged at his outer robe, 'One,' at the collar of his inner robe, '…two… oh wait, this robe is actually two layers isn't it?' Spock caught her roaming hands in his. Hazy telepathic connections formed beneath his fingertips carrying Nyota's amusement and desire with them.

'My wife. We are in a hovercar. Please restrain yourself.'

Rather than discouraging her however, he simply felt her amusement increase. She spoke again in standard. 'You're right, this is a hovercar.' She shifted, manoeuvring herself awkwardly in her tight dress so she sat on her knees with her face on the same level as his own. 'As such there is an Ancient Terran Custom which as your wife, I feel obligated to initiate you in.'

Spock let his scepticism show on his face. 'And what custom would that be Nyota?'

She leant forward and pressed a kiss to his cheek. Spock contemplated pushing her away, he still held her hands. 'Nyota I have absolutely no desire to engage in intercourse with you in a public hovercar.'

She paused to gasp in mock offence before she continued pressing kisses along his jaw and cheek. 'Of course not! What sort of girl do you take me for Commander Spock?' Her breath teased against his ear as she spoke.

'At this moment, I am uncertain.'

Nyota pressed a kiss to the corner of his mouth. Spock found himself turning towards her despite his discomfort at their location. Her lips were warm, soft and pleasantly free of cosmetics. When he realised he was kissing her he told himself that he would push her away after only a brief embrace. However he found himself releasing her hands only to wrap his arms around her to pull her closer.
He tilted his head so he could access her mouth with greater ease. One of her hands curled around his back beneath his loose outer robe, the other had taken up its usual position twisted in his hair. Desire and pleasure ebbed and flowed along their bond. When Spock felt her tongue begging entrance to his mouth he returned her attentions without thought. He could taste Andorian Brandy on her breath. It was not unpleasant.

When next a logical thought passed through his mind, Nyota was sprawled across his lap, her tongue was curled around his and he had one hand in her hair and the other firmly on the curve of her backside. And that thought, although logical, was with regards to the location of the fastening on Nyota's gown. He pulled away from her and she stared up at him breathlessly. Her parted lips were swollen from his kisses. Her respiration and heartbeat were rapid. The hovertaxi was not moving and 11 minutes and 37 seconds had passed since Nyota had first pressed her lips to his. Approximately. The effect Nyota had on his ability to keep track of time appeared to be affecting him whilst she was fully dressed now. He was uncertain of when they had arrived at their destination.

Nyota broke his train of thought. 'It's called 'making out in the backseat' and like most things, you appear to excel at it Commander.' She squirmed against him in a way that made him vividly aware of just how much she had distracted him.

His sluggish mind could not make sense of her words. He surmised his current issue was to do with a lack of oxygenated bloodflow to his brain and an over-abundance of it in other parts of his anatomy. 'Pardon?'

She kissed him briefly. 'The Ancient Terran Custom I was telling you about.' She was off his lap and out of the hovercar before he could really comprehend what had just occurred. He followed her out. His robes were dishevelled - the outermost pushed off his shoulders and down to his elbows. He pulled it back into place as he regarded his wife. It appeared his roaming fingers had starting pulling her hair down. Locks of it spilled from her coiffure. The effect was pleasing. He let his eyes roam over her admiring the manner with which her gown displayed her superior figure. Her intent was likewise focused upon his person.

He wanted to kiss her some more.

She felt his intentions however and darted a step away from him and towards the house laughing. He followed, reaching out towards her, but she broke into a run which was extremely… suggestive… owing to the fit of her dress. She called over her shoulder in a teasing voice 'Oh no you don't Commander!'

She appeared to be attempting to run from him in the hopes that he would give chase. It was highly illogical. She was clearly desirous of physical affection and it was unlikely that she would be able to outrun him in any case. Whilst Nyota was in admiral physical condition, not only was she human, she was wearing heeled shoes and an exceedingly restrictive gown. Spock paused for a moment, watching her in disbelief. She wiggled up the front steps, holding her dress up in one hand so she could move more easily. On reaching the door she triggered it, turned and poked her tongue out at him and then disappeared through the doorway. Spock's head tilted to one side in contemplation for 3 seconds before he broke into a run after her.

The foyer of the house was dark - she had not activated any of the lights. He could hear her laughter nearby. A golden object on the floor caught his attention. It was her left shoe. The right was at the foot of the stairs. She was making no attempt at stealth, he could hear her thundering up the stairs unevenly.

He was on the landing in an instant. She froze at the top of the second flight to stare back at him.
She was holding something in her hand. She met his eyes for a second before throwing the object at him. Spock caught it by reflex. It was a small piece of soft material of some kind. He realised with great shock a moment later that he was holding Nyota's undergarments, still warm from her body.

He did not think he had ever been so shocked. He stared up at his wife wide-eyed in disbelief.

She was clearly mad.

*Utterly deranged.*

Although she no longer laughed he could feel her amusement – no amusement was the wrong word – *glee*, he could feel her glee. It fizzed and bubbled through their bond. She was delighted to have so scandalised him. Her smile was bright and her eyes wide. She was tensed, one hand on the banister, on the verge of flight. Spock took a step towards her.

'You'll never catch me!' Her words were greatly at odds with her chances according to Spock's calculations. She turned and dashed up the remaining steps to the corridor towards her rooms. Spock found himself running up the stairs after her with zero regard for Vulcan dignity. He put on a burst of speed and managed to wrap a hand around her left bicep before she made it into her room. She let out a shriek and twisted, laughing again and tried in vain to get away from him.

The corridor runner carpet shifted under their feet and she illogically used his momentary lack of co-ordination to try and trip him. All she succeeded in doing was bearing them both down to the floor with him atop her. In moments Spock had pinned her legs to the floor and wrapped his hands around her arms. She wriggled futilely for a few seconds. She was still laughing and her body heaved enticingly in his arms as she tried to get her breath back.

'It appears Nyota, that despite your claims to the contrary, I have caught you.' Spock proclaimed.

'Oh no Commander, what are going to do to me?' Her voice was light and teasing, not fearful at all. She wiggled against him.

For some illogical reason her tone and repeated use of his rank appeared to be eliciting a physical response in him. It was not unpleasant.

'That depends. This is a lovely gown Nyota, it would be shame to ruin it and yet I find I am unable to determine how it is fastened.'

'I'm not sure if I should tell you Commander.' She looked up at him from under her dark lashes and pulled her bottom lip into her mouth.

Spock pulled her arms over her head and took hold of both her wrists in one hand. She made a squeaking noise of surprise. Spock ran his free hand down the bodice of her dress before taking a firm grip of it and tugging threateningly.

She turned her head. 'Fine! My neck, it unfastens along the side of my neck then down the middle.'

The fastenings on her dress were simple enough once he knew what he was looking for. He slowly undid them one-handed, painfully aware of the manner in which Nyota's breasts were straining against the material under his fingers. When he reached her waist he realised the dress was actually comprised of a separate skirt and top which were hooked together. He was able to puzzle out how to separate the two pieces and when he had done so he pulled the material apart.

Instead of the simple terran style underwear he had been expecting, Nyota was wearing an
extremely tight bodice of some sort. He wrapped his hand around the side of her waist experimentally. The material was firm and reinforced beneath his fingers. He estimated it had reduced her waist by perhaps 5cms. His brain helpfully provided the name of the garment. A corset. Similar items were still worn by women of high rank on Vulcan, but he had never seen a terran woman wearing one before. He had also never seen a woman, Vulcan or human wearing such a garment without clothing over it. He ran his hand along the firm curve of her body. She curled into his touch. Fascinating.

'There's a button and a fastener. On the back of the skirt. Sir.' On autopilot Spock's hand slipped around her waist looking for them. He couldn't locate them. Shifting so she was no longer pinned Spock flipped her onto her side so he could see.

He had no warning, one moment he had her in his arms and the next she rolled onto her stomach and out from under him faster than he would have given her credit for. The top part of the dress fell to the floor as she struggled to her feet. Before she'd taken her second step Spock wrapped a hand around her ankle and tugged. She tripped to the carpet once more and tried in vain to crawl away from him.

Spock stared mesmerised at the picture she presented. Her hair was almost completely undone, falling in long haphazard waves down her back, her backside and legs were tightly encased in the golden dress, every curve emphasised, and running down the centre of her back was a long line of white lacing. The lust he felt for her was almost frightening. She turned to regard him over her shoulder, her dark eyes meeting his with blatant desire and his control snapped. He violently yanked her back by his grip on her ankle.

She yelped and renewed her efforts to move forward, digging her fingers into the carpet, but Spock rose up on his knees and grabbed onto the criss-crossed lacing of her corset like a handle. In moments he had her beneath him once more. He didn't bother with the fastening on the dress, he simply shoved it roughly up her legs and over her hips. She was, of course, naked under the dress, having thrown her panties at him earlier in a fit of apparent insanity. He lifted her to her knees using the helpful grip provided by her corset. The heavy material of her beaded skirt was awkward but he soon had his hand cupped over the curls between her thighs.

She moaned loudly. He parted her folds and she twisted, pushing herself against him. She was exceedingly aroused, warm and wet against him. He pushed two fingers against her and she gasped and collapsed back against him, her head rolling back against his shoulder, all fight gone from her. He let his fingers slide down to her entrance and slip into the warmth of her body. Her breath caught and her hips shifted against him. He pumped his fingers into her for a moment, enjoying the heat of her body and her pleading moans.

When he removed his hand she whined in protest but he ignored her and instead shoved her back down on her hands and knees. It took him slightly longer than usual to free himself from the confines of his clothing, Vulcan robes were more complicated than trousers and he could not release his grip on the lacing of her corset, he had no doubt she would try and scramble away if he gave her opportunity. Her skirt had slipped back down over her backside. It took colossal restraint not to tear it from her. It was, as he had said, a most pleasing gown. He shoved it up around her waist and aligned himself with Nyota's heat. She groaned his name pleadingly as his erection nudged against her. He pulled her back against him harshly at the same time as he entered her. She let out a noise half way between a groan and a scream.

She was a tight inferno around him. He groaned in pleasure as his eyes rolled back in his head. The heat of her left him breathless. He took her mercilessly, vaguely aware that he would probably leave bruises on her hips, but Nyota seemed to care as little as he. Her pleasure and lust came at
him in waves through their bond.

He watched mesmerised as his body slipped in and out of her extremely willing flesh. He had not had her in such a position since his brush with pon'farr, and his memories of that time were blurred. Seeing their coupling up close had an unusual effect upon him. His climax came upon him suddenly and he found himself spurting deep inside her before she had found her own pleasure. He lost a few seconds to blinding white heat.

When he calmed he could feel her intense arousal through their bond and it burnt him as if it were his own. He withdrew from her and flipped her on her back. She was panting, her breasts heaving above the constriction of her binding undergarment. Her need battered at him and he was reminded of another time she had lain in such a state before him.

She moaned his name in longing. 'Spock...'

Before he could analyse his decision, he had two fingers inside her curling forward to the place within her that brought her most pleasure and his mouth against her clitoris.

The prudish part of his brain was telling him that he had most definitely crossed the line of decency, but he found he didn't care. She was slick with his ejaculate after all. Nyota was looking down at him delirious with lust but still shocked that he would put his mouth on her right after having sex with her. Coming inside her. But then he moved his tongue, his lips, his mouth against her and she forgot her shock and thrashed against his hold. It took little for her to come apart and when she did her back arched off the floor and she screamed his name.

He was hard again.

He crawled over her, pulled her left foot up over his shoulder and entered her once more. Her mouth was a silent o as he took her with slightly more restrain than a few minutes earlier. She twisted one hand in his robes and the other against his shoulder. He was able to penetrate her deeply from his current angle and the expressions on her face and the little noises she made as he filled her fascinated him. Nyota's vocalisations during sex were so dissimilar from her everyday speech as to almost make her sound like a different person. His abstractions on that fact helped distract him long enough to bring her to the precipice of a second orgasm.

He held back slightly however, not giving her quite the stimulation she needed to finish. He wanted to see what other noises he could wrest from her. Her hips began shifting against his wildly and her head thrashed from side to side as she sought the friction she needed. She groaned and gasped. Then she pleaded. After that she called his name and pleaded and he considered obliging her. A few seconds later he was glad for his hesitation.

'Fuck! Please Spock! Just fuck me already!' Spock felt his left eyebrow rise in shock. She was yelling. And swearing. She had not cursed during sex before.

Fascinating.

'Please please please fuck me Spock!' She sounded almost as angry at him as she was desperate for him.

He found himself powerless not to comply. He stopped teasing her and slammed into her fast and hard, grinding himself against her. Instantly she melted against him, her anger replaced by rapture. 'Oh god Spock!...Yes! fuck me... so good...' The terran profanity became a wordless chant and then a wail before she fell silent as her body tensed and squeezed around his in orgasm, pulling him into his own release. He groaned and collapsed forward, releasing his hold on her leg.
so he could lie flush against her, his head pressed to her shoulder.

When she regained her senses he felt her embarrassment through their bond. It amused him. He pulled himself up on an elbow to look down at her in mock seriousness. She avoided his gaze. 'Nyota Uhura, hearing such language from you is most unexpected.'

She pouted. 'It's S'chn T'gai Nyota thank you very much.' Her somewhat... 'prissy' he believed was the correct name for her tone of voice, correction of her name to his own pleased him. 'And seeing as how you just fucked me twice on the hall rug I don't think you are in any position to judge.'

It was, he supposed, a valid point.

He pulled himself from her embrace and sat back on his knees. Nyota lay in a wanton mess before him. Her breathing was still uneven, her hair no longer bared even a passing resemblance to its previous style, her skirt was shoved up around her hips and the insides of her thighs were slick with their combined release. Rather than repel him, the primitive position she was in and the fact that it was he who had left her in such a state only served to renew his excitement. He contemplated redirecting his blood flow so he could have her again.

She pushed herself up on her arms, lifting one to push a curtain of hair out of her face. It took her only moments to interpret the look he gave her. She scrambled backwards away from him and climbed unsteadily to her feet. 'Spock... behave.' He could hear the edge of amusement in her voice. She edged towards the door to her room slowly.

Graciously Spock let her escape, following sedately behind her. He removed his outer robe, folded it and placed it down on the couch that sat in one corner of Nyota's room. She had crossed to her wardrobe and was removing her skirt. Spock removed his belt and tabard and placed them beside the first robe. Nyota let her skirt fall to the floor.

'I'm a complete mess.' she said shooting him a dark look over her shoulder.

Her description was accurate but her accusatory tone he felt misguided.

'Considering the fact that you accosted me in the back of a hovertaxi and then proceeded to throw your underwear at me, I would conject that your appearance is entirely your own fault.' She huffed but offered no response. He toed off his shoes before raising his head to look at her. He stilled.

She was bending over to pick up her skirt. The view afforded him by the movement had his bloodstream redirected from his brain with no need for Vulcan manipulation of his metabolic functions. She held up the skirt in one hand, inspecting it for damage whilst the other began pulling at the trailing laces of her corset. Sensing his regard she glanced over her shoulder at him once more. Her eyes widened and she dropped the skirt. Spock found himself crossing the room towards her. She darted into the bathroom but Spock was on her heels by then. 'Spock!' she called out to him sounding both amused and exasperated, 'Give me a minute to clean myself up.'

'No.'

Her eyes widened once more at his refusal. But before she could comment further Spock had his mouth pressed against hers. It occurred to him as he curled his tongue around hers, tasting her, that he had not kissed her during their interlude in the hallway. Nor had he made use of his touch telepathy beyond the most incidental of brushes. He'd had her like a human. Despite her protests Nyota was kissing him back with equal ardour. He walked her backwards until the bathroom counter was at her back. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and let him lift her onto it, her legs parting to welcome him in between them automatically. He couldn't stop kissing her. It was
illogical. He had already found physical release with her twice within the last 17 minutes, (approximately), and yet he felt a desperate need for her once more. He pushed his robe out of the way, aligned their bodies and blissfully sunk himself into her heat once more.

'Spock!' He could feel concern behind her desire, she was most likely worried he had somehow slipped into pon'farr again. He entwined a hand with hers even as he rocked against her, letting his mind brush against her. He formed a thought and pushed it towards her so he didn't have to remove his tongue from her mouth. /no blood fever. Just you. You undo me./ He felt the tingle of her love swell in response to his unspoken words. He pulled his mouth from hers to press kisses to her throat and shoulders. 'Witch.' He pulled her hips closer to the edge of the bench so he could thrust deeper. 'You have bewitched me.' Her legs twisted, locking behind him and she sat up straighter to kiss him roughly even as he continued moving against her.

He caught sight of them in the bathroom mirror and was taken aback at the wildness in his face, but he was too far gone to care. Nyota was wrapped around him, her legs crossed behind his hips, her arms around his neck, her dark skin and inky hair contrasting against his pale skin and the bronze of his robe. The corset made her seem even smaller and more delicate than usual. She looked very fragile and human and he very… not. An idle thought occurred to him brought to the surface by the talk of his clan and house at the function. What would his second forefather Solkar, the Captain of the T'Plana-Hath, he who had first made contact with humans, think to see his descendant so entwined with one?

The errant thought was pushed well and truly from his mind as Nyota shifted, lifting her hips so he could sink further into her. She came with a strangled cry and pressed her face into his chest as he increased the speed of his movements to find his own release. A few erratic thrusts later and he, impossibly, managed to empty even more of himself into his wife. He groaned and half collapsed against her, resting his chin on the top of her head.

They were silent for a several minutes. Spock was contemplating moving and having a shower when Nyota spoke.

'If I am a witch, what does that make you?' He could feel how amused she was. Most likely all the endorphins from their repeated coupling. 'You're wearing a robe after all…' she giggled and choked on her words. '… I guess that makes you... a wizard?' She laughed.

It was a ridiculous statement but he allowed himself one of his rare smiles.
They awoke late the next morning. Nyota noted the straightened carpet in the hall in mortification when she left her room. The top of her dress and her high heels had been placed neatly at her door. She tried very hard not to think what that implied. Whoever had picked up after her was undoubtedly aware of exactly what she and Spock had been doing home alone the night before.

With a force of will she dismissed the embarrassing thoughts and lead Spock downstairs to get breakfast.

Tamu and Zuberi were sitting at the kitchen table eating muesli and pastries with coffee.

Her mother looked up with a radiant smile. 'Good morning Nyota, Spock. I missed you early last night.' She gave Nyota a pointed look. 'Palas was very disappointed not to be able to say goodbye to you Nyota.'

She took a seat and piled a few pastries on a plate. 'I'll be sure and give her a comm call to thank her for the invitation then.'

Spock sat beside her and did likewise. He avoided the pain au chocolat however. Recalling the reason for this, Nyota impulsively covered his hand with her own and let him feel her amusement. She thought specifically of his reaction to Gaila's long-ago mocha prank. She felt his embarrassment and gave him a wide smile.

'I do not think that to be an amusing anecdote Nyota. It was highly unprofessional.' he responded to her teasing out loud.

Of course all he achieved was getting her parents attention.

Zuberi looked up from his PADD and glanced between Nyota and Spock. 'Oh ho! What's this? An amusing anecdote about Spock? Do spill Ny.'

'It is not amusing.' Spock insisted.

'I'll be the judge of that Spock.' Zuberi replied. He gestured at Nyota. 'Do share.'

'In second year Gaila gave Spock a mocha coffee right before a phonology lecture. And since he'd been trying to observe more human style social niceties to get his students to engage more effectively in his classes, he accepted it.'

Zuberi smirked and looked to Spock. 'You drank it Spock?'

Her husband was frowning ever so slightly. 'I was unaware it contained cocoa. I am not overly familiar with terran coffee.'

Tamu smiled and shook her head. 'Oh dear.'

'It was a great lecture.' Nyota continued, 'I especially enjoyed the part when Spock inquired if Cadet Kirk's mother also shared anatomical similarities with the Ferengi or if he was a genetic
aberration.' She laughed at the memory and Zuberi joined in boominly.

'It was an illogical and insulting comment which I regret making. Apart from the shared basic similarities of any humanoid race, Cadet Kirk does not bare any especial resemblance to a Ferengi.' Spock stated.

'He does share a certain deviousness with them however.' Nyota pointed out. 'His performance in the Koyabashi Maru last month for example.'

Spock inclined his head. 'I found Cadet Kirk's actions, whilst unexpected, to be quite logical upon further reflection.'

Nyota raised an eyebrow. 'Really?' She never thought she'd hear Spock defend someone as impulsive and irrational as Kirk.

'Indeed. He was aware that the test was a no-win scenario, so the risks of the actions taken – exceeding warp safety limits, warping into enemy territory – were irrelevant. Continuing at excessive warp once clear of the Klingons was his only illogical risk. Had he reduced to a safer speed, he would undoubtedly have completed the test with the highest score any cadet has ever achieved.' Spock paused. 'Of course the only reason his decisions can be considered logical is due to the fact that he was aware of the parameters of the test. In a real life scenario such variables would be unavailable and his actions would be, therefore, illogical.'

His assessment of Kirk's performance, whilst more factual in its reasoning, echoed her own impressions. Kirk had potential, if he could stop acting like an ass. His cocky spiel after they evaded the Klingons had cost him his would-be victory.

Zuberi paused in slathering jam and whipped cream onto a croissant to address Spock. 'What is the Koyabashi scenario at the moment? It was a Romulan trap when I went through the Academy.'

Spock gave Zuberi his full attention and explained the current programming. Tamu quietly pulled Nyota's attention from the conversation.

'Grandmother and your aunts and uncles will be coming to dinner tomorrow Nyota.' she remarked conversationally.

Nyota stared at her in shock. First the diplomatic function, now her relatives? 'What? Why?'

She saw her father shoot Spock a loaded look and point towards the door with his chin. Spock swallowed a mouthful of pastry and rose to his feet. He was getting almost too good at interpreting human body language. 'Zuberi, I wonder if you might demonstrate that mok'bara hold for me?'

Her father was already on his feet. 'Of course Spock! Let's leave the ladies to their breakfast.'

They were gone so quickly they might as well have evaporated. Nyota stared after them longing to follow.

Spock was learning bad habits from her father.

Tamu poured herself more coffee. 'Now Nyota, I know you don't want a big fuss being made of Spock, but there are other reasons I'd like to have the family get together while you and Spock and Zanta are all here.'

Nyota sighed but waited impatiently for her mother to explain.
'With you due to graduate and Zanta heading back to Orion, there's no longer any need for your father and I to remain in Nairobi.' Nyota gave her mother her complete attention at that. 'So I've accepted an ambassadorial posting and your father will be returning to active fleet service.'

Nyota let her mother's words wash over her. 'Mama! I think that's wonderful! You and papa have been wasted here in Nairobi. Papa especially.'

Tamu smiled widely. 'Yes, I must say we've been looking forward to more challenging work.' She grimaced. 'I am so sick of dealing with the same bureaucrats day in day out, and your father's been slowly going mad stuck in that base twiddling his thumbs.' She smiled. 'He wouldn't stop going on about the Enterprise after his visit. I think he's a little jealous of Spock's commission.'

An uncomfortable thought occurred to her. 'He's not going to try and get a commission on the Enterprise is he? I mean, I love him and all, but serving with my husband and my father on one ship?' She left the rest unsaid.

On the one hand it would be quite nice to have her father around and Spock enjoyed his company, but on the other… having two men she loved outranking her would inevitably lead to some irritating scenarios. They'd probably gang up on her to keep her out of trouble. She'd end up shackled to the comm desk for five years while they explored exotic new planets with Captain Pike. She pouted at the thought.

Tamu laughed shortly. 'Fear not, I'm sure he's tempted, but he's not going to take a deep space assignment. He's going to be stationed in the same system as me.'

'Oh. So which posting have you accepted?' Nyota scanned her memory. Her mother had spent the last decade running the African headquarters of the Federation Diplomatic Corps, managing the different diplomats and embassies in Africa. Prior to that she'd spent many years as a Junior Ambassador to Andoria after completing her internship as an aide to the Terran Ambassador to Vulcan. She'd been working as a Diplomatic Mediator and Negotiator for Starfleet before she and Zanta were born.

'Andoria?' It seemed the most likely even though the current Ambassador was well respected and not of retirement age.

Her mother smiled gleefully. 'No. Although it's an equally prestigious posting.'

Nyota frowned. 'Tellar? Rigel? Denobula?... Orion?' Her mother shook her head at each guess, her smile widening. Surely not? '… Vulcan!?' she asked in disbelief.

Tamu grinned, 'Yes! I accepted the position last week. Ambassador Shaeffer retires next month. He specifically sought me out.' Ambassador Shaeffer had been her mother's mentor when she'd first joined the Diplomatic Corps. 'So you can imagine my delight when you turn up on my doorstep married to a Vulcan! Ambassador Sarek's son at that! Such a wonderful coincidence!'

Nyota smiled ruefully. 'I'm so glad my choice of husband fits so fortuitously with your career goals mother.'

'Oh shush you. So anyway, I'm not sure when we will next have the family all together again. It seems logical to have a bit of a get together. See Zanta off to Orion, your father and I off to Vulcan, and you and Spock off to lord knows where.' Tamu seemed very pleased with herself.

'As long as Spock and I aren't going to be the focus of attention I suppose I can deal with all my cousins for a short period.' She sighed. 'Is Uncle Abasi still as rude as I remember?'
Tamu frowned. 'He hasn't mellowed with age sadly. It will be challenge keeping he and maman from each other's throats.'

Determined not to let the spectre of her relatives impending visit ruin her day, Nyota took Spock to the Nairobi National Park. He had expressed an interest in observing native African flora and fauna and the park south of the city offered him ample opportunity.

Although the animals were all familiar and somewhat boring to Nyota, Spock's reaction to them and study of them was entertaining. Despite his vast intellect, there was something quite childlike about his interest. The giraffes enraptured him especially. To a child of Vulcan they seemed almost absurdly alien. A child's drawing come to life. Looking at them with fresh eyes Nyota had to admit they were pretty ridiculous.

Most tourists spent an hour or two looking at the animals through binoculars from hovercars and tour hoverbuses before becoming bored, but Spock it seemed could have spent all day, perhaps many days, in a quiet study of them purely because they were new to him.

When he said he wished he had a tricorder with him to make readings she'd laughed at him.

*Spock*

Spock was swiftly beginning to understand the cause of Nyota's dread with regards to seeing her extended family. There was a marked difference between the two sides of her family.

The Adoyo's - her grandmother Delphine, her uncle Sefu, his wife Imani and their daughters Ayodele and Fahari, her relatives on her mother's side, seemed to be of similar disposition to Tamu. They were curious about him, but very polite and welcoming in the usual overly enthusiastic human manner.

Abasi Uhura and his family on the other hand seemed markedly dissimilar to his older brother Zuberi. His wife Nuru appeared frightened of Spock, and their children Amani, Azizi and Sakina quite confrontational, not only to Spock but Nyota and Zanta as well.

Of course Spock had no difficulty controlling his reactions to their attempts to provoke him, but he was concerned that his wife would end up needing to be physically restrained. She was clinging tightly to him through their bond, hanging on every word her kin said to him, eavesdropping for fear they would insult him. His attempts to reassure her in this regard were unsuccessful.

Nyota and the rest of the females of her family were preparing what Spock assumed would be a rather elaborate meal. Spock and the males were playing snooker and drinking alcoholic beverages. Although the specifics were somewhat different, it was not dissimilar to social occasions he had attended with his mother's family. The only difference being that owing to the ages of Nyota and her cousins, there were no children misbehaving and requiring the usage of middle names.

'So your mother is human Spock?' Nyota's uncle Sefu was inquiring as they observed Zuberi and his brother and nephews play a quite skilful doubles game of snooker.

'That is correct. Her family are from Seattle in North America.' Spock was quite pleased. He had been engaged in fairly smooth conversation with a complete stranger for almost fifteen minutes. This was no small achievement for him. The fact that Sefu Adoyo had partaken of two tall glasses of Zuberi's favoured Andorian Ale could have been an influencing factor however.

'So do you look like her? I mean, apart from the ears obviously.' Nyota's uncle gestured near his
own as if Spock would require a visual cue as to his meaning.

'There are similarities in my facial structure to that of my human uncle and cousin. My mother also has dark hair and eyes, however for the most part I resemble my father.'

Sefu seemed more fascinated by the fact that he was a hybrid – part human - than that he was a Vulcán. It was not something Spock had encountered before. 'It must be surreal to see your own genetic markers, the family looks if you will, in a completely different species - for both you and your relatives.' Sefu looked thoughtful for a moment. 'I can't wait to see what you and my niece's kids will look like.' He laughed shortly in what Spock thought was an expression of disbelief. 'Vulcans in the family! Just incredible.'

Spock was uncertain how to respond to his… Uncle-in-law? He was not familiar with the correct terran term for his wife's kinsman. He and Nyota had not discussed progeny. They were both currently focused on their careers. He settled for his standby. He nodded. 'Indeed.'

Due to his superior hearing he heard Nyota's cousin Amani Uhura whisper to his brother Azizi, 'Goddammed half breeds that's what they'll look like.'

He pretended to not have heard of course. In truth he was not overly concerned what Nyota's cousins thought of him. He could not see either of the men playing any sort of significant role in their lives. What did interest him was the fact that he had understood the Swahili that had been spoken so easily. He had made preliminary study of the language, but was certainly not fluent or familiar with slang or profanity. He thought perhaps it was because Nyota was holding herself so tightly to him through their bond. That since she understood Swahili he did as well. He recalled that on other occasions when they were melded or tightly joined he had understood phrases she had spoken in her native tongue. And of course she had developed her odd ability to speak perfect High Vulcán via their bond, it was logical to assume something similar might occur to him.

Rather than provoking contemplation of their bond and Spock's understanding of Swahili however, Amani's words only provoked a great deal of anger in his wife. He sent her calm. He had no desire to become involved in a confrontation with any members of her family.

Soon afterwards Zanta appeared and informed them that dinner was ready. Spock was relieved. At least at the dinner table he would be seated next to Nyota and able to subtly restrain her should her cousins make any further remarks.

Since it was warm they were once more eating outside. This pleased Spock. The temperature was pleasant and the breeze from the Uhura's gardens was far more enjoyable then that from the air scrubbers inside the house.

Spock found himself seated opposite Tamu and next to Zuberi who sat at the head of the table. Nyota was beside him of course and the rest of her relatives mixed down the table to where her grandmother Delphine sat at the opposite end. Spock was somewhat concerned to realise that Nyota's uncle Abasi Uhura was opposite her and her cousin Amani next to her. He attempted to calculate the odds of an altercation occurring during the meal, but he did not have sufficient variables. He imagined the odds quite high however.

He was therefore somewhat surprised to find that half an hour later, apart from glaring at him, Abasi and his sons had made no further insulting comments with regards to him. However when Sefu and his wife began inquiring about Tamu's new position as Terran Ambassador to Vulcán, the looks that Spock was receiving became more pointed.

For this reason Spock intentionally kept out of the conversation. He did not wish to give any of
them an opening to start an argument with him.

'So you are going to live there?' Imani Adoyo, Nyota's aunt, inquired of Tamu.

'Yes. In Shi'Kahr. The Ambassador's residence is near the Terran Embassy - quite close to the spacedock.' Tamu smiled. 'It will be strange living there again, and as Ambassador this time instead of an intern. There is a lot of room should you and Sefu, and the girls of course,' she glanced at her nieces down the table. '…wish to come visit.'

Imani looked tempted. 'I've never seen Vulcan. We may just take you up on that offer Tamu.' She looked across the table at Spock. 'Your home on Vulcan Spock, is it near where Tamu will be living?'

Spock inclined his head. 'My family's lands are within Shi'Kahr. My parents live some 67 kilometres from the Terran Embassy.'

'The city is so large?'

'Shi'Kahr, like most Vulcan settlements, is quite spread out. The arid climate of Vulcan is ill-suited to high density housing. The central districts resemble cities in the Terran sense, but beyond that they bear more resemblance to your Nairobi National Park than the suburbs of Nairobi itself.'

Abasi muttered to his son in Swahili. 'I wonder if tourists drive through to observe the animals in the same way.'

The elderly Delphine coughed pointedly and Imani, who was seated next to the son, shot a disapproving glare at her brother-in-law before turning back to Spock with a smile. 'Well if it's as wide open as a national park, it must be a lovely place to live.' She looked back at Tamu. 'Perhaps we will come visit Tamu. It's only 16 light years away after all.'

Nyota pretended she had not heard her uncle, but Spock felt her anger once more. She was also ashamed that her kinsman was behaving so rudely.

'Surely the Spocks will put you up Imani, we are family after all and that would be far more authentic than staying with Tamu.' Abasi seemed to think his statement would provoke an emotional response in him. Spock was uncertain what. He was mildly irritated to hear his personal name used in place of his house name but otherwise unmoved.

'Spock is my given name Mr Uhura, not my surname.' He turned his attention to Imani and continued conversationally. 'My mother is always most eager for guests from her homeworld. I am certain she would be pleased to entertain you and your family Imani.' This was true. His father would hardly be enthusiastic about the idea, but his mother certainly would. In fact the idea held some merit. Sending a steady stream of Nyota's relatives to stay at his family home would be an amusing way to please his mother and irritate his father in one move.

Not that he would ever act in such a petty manner of course.

Tempting as it was.

Imani smiled and looked flattered. 'Why Spock that's very kind of you, but I wouldn't dream of such an imposition.' She paused. 'Though should we visit Vulcan I will most certainly see if your mother is homesick for some human company.'

Spock was saved from thinking of an appropriate response by Abasi. 'So what is your surname then Spock? I figure I should probably know it since it's my niece's now and all. Or don't your kind have
surname? Even Spock could detect his insulting tone. Apparently he was not giving up on his quest to be an unpleasant dinner companion. Before he could respond Nyota snapped back in Swahili.

'You could not pronounce it.'

An accurate statement, but rather abruptly delivered.

Abasi raised an eyebrow. 'And I suppose you can?'

'Naturally. It is my name after all.'

Zuberi interrupted in an apparent attempt to diffuse the situation between his brother and his daughter. 'It's Shchenn Tahgai isn't it Spock?' Beside him Tamu winced, his pronunciation was... terrible, but it was recognisable. Barely. 'Your family name?'

'S'chn T'gai.'Nyota corrected. Her pronunciation was perfect of course.

'That is correct.' Spock tried not to flinch as Nyota's relatives as one all started repeating the name to themselves and attempting to pronounce it. It was quite painful to listen to. Tamu caught his eye in what he thought was apology.

Sefu spoke up from the end of the table. 'So Nyota's name is Nyota Say-chen...' He paused. 'Say-chun Tah-gai?'

He could not bring himself to nod and say 'indeed', not when his name had been so butchered. Nyota saved him.

'Family names go first on Vulcan Uncle Sefu. So it's S'chn T'gai Nyota.'

'Ah. Interesting.'

'Will you go by that name in Starfleet?' Her cousin Azizi asked a surprisingly inoffensive question.

Nyota tilted her head. 'No. Vulcan lineal names in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu are too difficult to pronounce. At the moment I am still using Uhura. I suppose I could use my given name like Spock does, but I'm not sure I'd want to. It would feel strange to be called 'Nyota' in uniform.'

'Van-Kal Vuhlkansu?' inquired Sefu.

The discussion had distracted Nyota from her previous anger and Spock was pleased. 'High Vulcan. It's almost impossible for humans to pronounce much of it. Modern Vulcan is much easier.'

Tamu chose that point to re-join the conversation. 'Although Nyota can speak it of course.'

Sefu looked with interest at Nyota. 'Really? Say something.'

The table looked at Nyota silently. Spock felt her 'sigh' within their bond. He glanced at her and spoke softly. 'Calm thyself beloved-one. Thy kin are no worse than mine own.'

'Perhaps thy kin and mine kin should be the ones dining together then.'

'A most amusing meal that would be.' Spock couldn't imagine many things more awkward.

Imani sighed. 'Oh what a beautiful sounding language. It's so musical.'
Spock felt a warning of amusement before Nyota spoke again. 'Oh it is, isn't it Auntie Imani? You
know Spock once recited Keats to me in it.' She gave him a lascivious smile more suited to Gaila
U'Aidat. 'It was terribly romantic.' He could feel through the bond that she was teasing him.

Tamu gasped and clasped her hands to her chest, staring at Spock in a manner he found disturbing.
He did not like the implications of Nyota's statement. She made it sound as if he'd been courting
her with poetry in some illogical human fashion.

'It was hardly 'romantic' adun'a. You were concussed and I was merely attempting to help you
remain conscious,' he pointed out.

'What's adunay mean?' Imani inquired.

'wife' Tamu responded in a breathy voice. Zanta and Nyota's cousin Ayodele both sighed and
looked at him… emotionally. Spock failed to see why. Calling Nyota his wife was perfectly
logical.

Zuberi appeared to be laughing behind his hand. His father-in-law would be well aware that the
subject of the conversation would be disconcerting to him. Nyota felt positively gleeful.

'Why were you concussed?' Sefu inquired of Nyota in what Spock thought a more reasonable line
of interest.

'Some cadets managed to overload a warp core at the Academy. I was in the building when it
exploded. Spock made sure I got out okay.' Nyota responded. A sound and concise explanation.

Rather than calming however, Imani gasped. 'So Spock rescued you from an explosion? Then
recited Keats to you in old Vulcan?' She gave Nyota a seemingly meaningful look which was
completely meaningless to him. 'Was it 'Bright Star'?'

Nyota smiled. 'Why yes it was.'

'That's so romantic!' she replied breathlessly.

All the females present were looking at him in a manner he was most uncomfortable with. Spock
glanced to Zuberi in hope of clarification, but the older man just smiled at him in a way that
implied he was still finding the exchange quite amusing.

Spock recalled that Zuberi often referred to Nyota as 'little star'. Her name meant 'Star' in Swahili.
It appeared the females found the fact that the poem he had recited to her used that same term
significant. Although as he thought back on the incident, all the poems that he had thought
of had contained the word 'star'. His head tilted to the side as he came to a realisation. It appeared
that he had been more emotionally compromised at the time than he had realised.

Dinner was followed by a course of sweet dishes. Most were too sweet for Spock's taste, but one of
the desserts – a leavened bread-like cake flavoured with terran liquor and served with strawberries
– he found quite agreeable. Nyota informed him it was her grandmother's signature dish and was
called a savarin. Her grandmother seemed quite pleased that he had enjoyed it. He made an
unnecessary comment implying Tamu had inherited her cooking skills, (an impossibility), from
Delphine and both women seemed pleased.

Afterwards the group retired to the billiards room. Those who did not wish to play sat on the
couches and sofas with card and table games and drank saurian brandy. Spock found himself
somewhat exhausted from maintaining conversation with Nyota's curious relatives. He desired to
go upstairs and meditate for a few hours. Nyota sat next to him and rested her left middle and index
Her cousins on her mother's side, Ayodele and Fahari, were very polite, even if they did spend a
great deal of time staring at his ears and eyebrows when they thought he wasn't looking. Fahari,
who was only fifteen, asked a great many questions about Starfleet of both himself and Nyota. She
seemed especially interested in hearing descriptions of other planets. Despite her youth, Spock
found her conversation far superior to that of her older cousins, Amani, Azizi and Sakina, whom he
estimated to be between his own and Nyota's age.

Sakina spent most of her time making comm calls and pouting in a rather immature manner. She
also seemed to dislike Nyota and Zanta, avoiding conversation with them and directing looks at
them Spock did not quite understand but interpreted as unfriendly. Her brothers seemed as equally
unpleasant as their father Abasi. Spock made no effort to engage them in conversation and was
relieved they likewise ignored him. He continued to overhear insulting remarks in Swahili directed
at him over the course of the evening however.

Ayodele, Nyota's eldest cousin, spent her time conversing with Tamu, Imani, Zanta and Nyota.
Like Nyota, Ayodele seemed very intelligent. She was an engineer who apparently specialised in
anti-matter fusion reactors. She had a husband in the same scientific field who was currently on
Mars for work.

Spock was playing a game of tri-dimensional chess with Nyota's grandmother Delphine. The
elderly woman was playing highly illogically and yet the game had dragged on for some time. As
was often the case when he played humans, she kept making moves that Spock did not anticipate.
Her conversation was also proving something of a distraction. Whilst polite, she was exceedingly
blunt, almost Vulcan, in her inquiries.

He had just narrowly avoided losing his queen to her when she spoke after a period of 6 minutes
and 47 seconds of silence. 'Fetch me another glass of the d'Yquem Sauternes would you Spock
dear?'

She also called him 'dear'.

His mother called him dear. A human expression of affection. An odd affectation for Nyota's
grandmother as she had known him only 3.2 hours and surely could not have formed any sort of
emotional attachment to him. Nyota, who was sitting nearby, found both her grandmother's tone
and the fact that he was fetching her drinks amusing.

'Have you ever tried a Sauternes? Pour yourself a glass if you haven't. It's far superior to that
brandy my daughter has you drinking.' Delphine continued.

Spock was only drinking the brandy to appear 'sociable'. The alcoholic effect was lost on him and
the flavour not particularly enjoyable. He doubted Delphine's wine would be any more appealing,
b ut saw no reason not to humour her. 'Very well Delphine.' Spock responded as he stood to fulfil
her request. She handed him her empty glass to refill.

The terran wine very sweet, but it hardly had any sort of alcoholic aftertaste. In this it was in fact
superior to the brandy. 'This is indeed more enjoyable than the brandy Delphine. Thank you.' The
comment was unnecessary, but it appeared to please Nyota's grandmother. She favoured him with a
smile. Her familial resemblance to Tamu was apparent when she did so. Otherwise she was
physically quite dissimilar to Nyota's closest family. Although she was clearly of African descent
she was much lighter in complexion to the rest of the family and her name and accent were
decidedly French. Spock would have made inquiry on the subject, but he recalled Nyota's
comments about terran's odd reactions to discussions of their genetics and restrained his curiosity, focussing instead on the game of chess.

It was 22:05 hours when Spock finally check-mated Delphine. It had been an enjoyable game and he informed her of as much. She had bid him refill her glass an additional three times and was smiling a great deal and blinking sleepily. He noted increasing signs of intoxication in several of Nyota's other relatives. Nyota herself had partaken in three glasses of saurian brandy and her mind felt a little fuzzy through their bond, but she did not appear unduly impaired. Her mother and father seemed likewise afflicted, 'typsy' was the correct term Spock believed. Imani seemed rather more affected and was laughing quite loudly. Her daughters Ayodele and Fahari had not been drinking and were as polite and friendly as they had been during dinner. Spock suspected Ayodele was not drinking since she appeared to be in the early stages of pregnancy, and Fahari was too young by terran standards.

Abasi and his children however seemed to have been drinking Zuberi's Andorian ale in great quantities. Spock could feel his wife's disapproval as her cousin Sakina drank the potent blue beverage like water. Zuberi was playing a variation of billiards Spock had not encountered before against Abasi. Azizi and Amani were providing loud commentary.

Spock watched the game with some interest. They were using a different set of balls, they were slightly larger, white and numbered. The rules appeared quite different to the pool Spock had encountered in North America or the billiards and snooker he had played with Zuberi earlier during his stay. As Spock watched Zuberi sunk the cue ball and then selected a numbered ball to remove from the table. After watching the play for a few minutes Spock approached him.

'I have not seen this version of billiards before Zuberi. Is it an African variant? It seems quite interesting.'

Zuberi shook his head. 'It's called pyramid Spock. Russian pyramid. Well, this is Moscow pyramid to be exact, there are a few different versions.'

'The larger balls would make for a more challenging game.' Spock observed.

'Yes, you have to aim much more precisely.'

As they watched Abasi somewhat unsteadily made a shot, but managed to sink the intended ball.

'I'll give you a game later on if you like Spock?'

'That would be a pleasant diversion Zuberi.'

'I'll give you a game Spock.' Abasi called loudly. He placed odd emphasis on the 'ck' noise in Spock's name. Perhaps in an attempt to offend him? It was illogical if so.

'If you so desire Abasi.' Spock responded mildly.

Beside him he heard Zuberi sigh. 'Let's finish our game first Abasi.'

Spock remained near Zuberi as the game unfolded. Spock was fairly certain he had a clear understanding of the rules should he indeed play Abasi. Anger suddenly flooded his bond from Nyota. He turned towards the couches and saw her glaring daggers at her cousin Sakina. Fahira and Ayodele were both looking at her in anger as well. The older women, Tamu, Imani and Nuru had vanished to get more brandy. Delphine was still sitting a little distance from them near the chess set and seemed to have only just turned her attention towards her granddaughters and their cousin.
Spock focused his attention on his wife and Sakina. Sakina was speaking in Swahili to Nyota. 'It's bad enough fucking an alien,' she gave Zanta a significant look, ‘… but another thing entirely to marry one. You can't actually intend to breed with him can you? You want alien half-breed children? It's disgusting.'

Ayodele responded before Nyota could. 'Your attitude is what's disgusting Sakina.'

Sakina scoffed. 'You would defend her. Your children will be almost as bad. Mrs. Nguyen.'

From her comment Spock assumed Ayodele's husband was of Vietnamese descent. Nyota's anger increased greatly. Spock quietly spoke to Zuberi in Vulcan 'Sakina is antagonising Nyota and Ayodele. I am uncertain if I should intervene.'

There was an angry flurry of extremely fast French from the side of the room. Delphine had stood and was waving a finger at Sakina in reprimand. 'How dare you speak to your cousins in such a manner Sakina!'

Sakina did not appear to speak French however. She responded in Swahili. 'Stop your yapping you old chotara'. (half-breed)

Nyota, Ayodele and Fahira gasped at one. Through their bond he gathered the term was considered offensive. He could tell his wife wanted to slap her cousin for talking to Delphine in such a manner.

Zuberi turned and took in the arguing women. He could not hear their words from such a distance. He passed Spock his cue and strode over towards them with a smile on his face. 'Ladies!' Four angry faces snapped towards him. 'I was just thinking how nice it would be to hear some real music. Perhaps you would play something for us? I'm sure Tamu would love to hear you all sing.'

As if on cue the other women returned. 'Oh, music?' Tamu inquired. 'That's a wonderful idea! Let's go into the sitting room for a while.'

Zuberi's gambit to avoid an outright fight between Delphine and the younger women seemed to have succeeded.

7.2 minutes later Spock found himself seated on a couch beside Zuberi and Sefu with a glass of brandy in hand. Ayodele and Fahiri sat at a piano, Sakina sat a little distance from them holding a stringed instrument he did not recognise and to Spock's surprise, Nyota held a Ka'athyra (Vulcan lute). She had never commented on that which sat in his quarters. He was quite intrigued to hear her play.

Tamu requested they play a terran love song that she favoured to start with. Imani seemed equally enthused. Nyota and her cousins all appeared proficient with their respective instruments and the impromptu concert was quite pleasant. Then they started singing. Spock had been exposed to a great deal of terran music over the last seven years, not to mention his mother's musical tastes. Although it was considered one of the pinnacles of human culture - few other species had developed such diverse and complicated forms of music - he found much of it sentimental to the point of absurdity or aggressive and unpleasant to listen to. However hearing Nyota and her cousins sing under the present circumstances was quite different to being exposed to popular music played at excessive volume from cadets' dorms. They had very pleasing voices by terran standards. He imagined his mother would have enjoyed hearing them a great deal.

They played another two songs, one requested by Imani and one by Zuberi, before Nyota stood to sit beside Spock as Ayodele and Fahari played a duet on the piano in an older terran style for Delphine.
It was familiar. Nyota, who had her hand in Spock's, felt his query and responded wordlessly. /A rearrangement of Canon in D major by Pachelbel/

/Your thoughts are becoming clearer when you speak to me thus Nyota./ Her thoughts were no longer strung together in long streams of consciousness.

He felt her pleasure at her improvement. They were silent for a period of 62 seconds before he spoke once more. /I did not know you played the Ka'athyra./

/It is a very versatile instrument./ She responded. That was true. /I have seen that you have one in your room. I should very much like to hear you play Spock/

She passed him the lute and he released her hand and ran his fingers over it. It was an inferior instrument to his own, the wooden Li'Pon body was machine turned rather than hand carved and the Bahun'ahb inlay appeared to be synthetic, but its tone had been acceptable when Nyota had played it. However Spock had no particular desire to play. He felt her disappointment.

'Do you play Spock?' Inquired Tamu. Ayodele and Fahari had finished the piece they were playing.

'Yes.' Spock regretted picking up the lute. Tamu would enviable ask him to play now. Human politeness would demand it of her.

'Would you play something for us? I haven't heard a Vulcan play the lute since the last time T'Vau was on earth, oh,' She glanced at her husband, 'that must have been five years ago now?'

'About that long.' Zuberi agreed.

Spock managed to keep the frown off his face. 'I am familiar with Vulcan compositions for the most part. I uncertain if I know anything that would be pleasing to human tastes.' He strummed a chord, testing the tuning Nyota had left it in. Through their bond he felt Nyota think of a human ballad in the correct key. It was quite popular and he was familiar with the melody. Playing it would please her. He did so. When she realised what he was playing she smiled widely and he felt her delight.

"The skies are green and glowing, where my heart is, where my heart is..." Her voice was exceedingly pleasing, despite the somewhat vapid nature of the song she sung. Spock ignored the rapt expressions on the faces of Nyota's mother and aunt. He focused on the simple chord progression of the song. When Nyota's voice faded on a final refrain of '...beyond Antares.' He was quick to pass the lute back to her so he would not be asked to play again.

He could feel her amusement.

Imani, who appeared to be becoming more and more emotional with each glass of brandy sniffed.

'That was beautiful!'

Zuberi slapped him on the shoulder. 'Dammit Spock. Stop being so charming, you're making the rest of us look bad.' Spock could tell he meant the comment humorously and did not respond.

'I think I might be sick.' Abasi spoke in Swahili, but quite loudly. Since he had consumed a large amount of Andorian Ale, Spock was not surprised he was feeling the negative effects of so much alcohol. He had witnessed physical illness as a result of alcohol consumption a great deal since joining Starfleet. It was only when Nyota's good mood vanished he realised the phrase was meant to insult him. Somehow. Illogical humans.

"If you're feeling unwell perhaps you should have a lie down Abasi. Tamu made up the guest
rooms.' responded Zuberi. Despite his words he sounded threatening rather than hospitable.

'It's not a rest I need, it's to get away from your daughter and her green-blooded alien.' Spock wondered if he should make Abasi aware that he understood his words. Nyota's fingers had tightened around his to an uncomfortable degree. He could feel the effort it took for her to remain silent. Only his own lack of insult was stopping her.

Tamu gasped in shock. 'Abasi!'

Zuberi stood and glared at his brother. 'I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that brother. But if you can't behave in a civilised manner, I am going to ask you to leave.'

'Civilised?! This from the man gave his daughter to an alien.' He glanced at Tamu. 'Or was it more of a trade? Did your wife make some arrangement to get her new posting to Vulcan perhaps?'

Spock tilted his head in surprise. It appeared Abasi was implying Tamu had someone managed to obtain her position as Terran Ambassador to Vulcan via his marriage to Nyota. An irrational assumption. His father had no influence of whom the United Earth Government chose as their representative. He was not even a citizen of Earth.

Delphine's voice cut across the room sharply. 'Abasi Kiplagat Uhura!' Spock noted the use of a second name in Africa seemed to fit with North American traditions. 'This is Zuberi and Tamu's house. If you can't treat their family with the respect they deserve then you should leave.' The older woman managed to look down her nose at the much taller Abasi in a way that reminded Spock greatly of his own grandmother.

'Shut up old woman.' Abasi responded to her dismissively. Spock found himself frowning openly at Abasi's disrespectful behaviour towards an elder.

Nyota was livid. She shot to her feet. 'How dare you speak to mémé like that!' Her lips were pursed and her eyes narrowed. Spock was uncertain if he had ever felt such anger in her. It seemed a lack of emotional control were one's mother, or in this case grandmother, was involved was indeed a human trait. Spock glanced around the room and noted that Sefu and his family looked equally insulted. Abasi's children looked like they were enjoying their father's display.

'I'll speak how I want alien-fucking malawa.' (bitch/whore)

Spock had a sudden and very human urge to punch Abasi Uhura. He stood and faced him, undeterred by the older man's superior height and size.

Before he could voice his objection to his wife being so insulted Zuberi spoke. 'That's it! Abasi. Don't you talk to my daughter like that just because you're drunk and spoiling for a fight, or you'll get one.'

'Is that supposed to frighten me brother? I can take you.' Abasi responded. Spock thought his confidence misplaced. Whilst of similar build, Zuberi seemed to have a lower percentage of body fat and greater general fitness.

Zuberi glared silently at his brother for a moment before replying. 'Well then, let's settle this on the mats.'

'Fine!'

The two men strode out of the room which fell silent at their departure. Spock turned to Nyota and spoke in Vulcan. 'Are your father and uncle actually going to go and... fight one other? Is this a
terrann custom I am unaware of? It is not one my mother's family appear to practise. It seems quite... barbaric.'

'Barbaric! That's uncle Abasi in a nutshell. He belongs in the stone age. Hopefully papa will break his neck.' Nyota had her arms crossed and was seething in anger.

Sakina spoke in an overly loud voice, in Swahili of course. 'So your daddy has to fight your alien's battles for him does he Ny? I'd heard Vulcans were pussies.'

Spock raised an eyebrow at her last statement. Cats? He saw no great insult at being likened to the creatures. It appeared Sakina's attempts at insults were just as bizarre as those of her father.

/Pussy is a slag term for female genitalia./ Nyota informed him without words.

He raised an eyebrow at her in disbelief. /Your cousin is calling Vulcans... vaginas?/

Spock could feel Nyota's anger slipping away at the distraction their odd conversation offered. /No, she's calling you women. Weak and unable to fight./

Her clarification only served to further confuse him. /But she is a woman, she therefore insults herself with such a statement. It is illogical./ He paused.

Nyota gave him a tiny smile, her anger much diminished by his inquiries.

'Sakina! That is quite enough out of you!' Tamu sounded furious. She turned to Spock. 'I am sorry Spock, I'm afraid Abasi has quite terrible manners and his children seem to have inherited them.'

'There is no need to apologise Tamu. I am uncertain of the usual custom in such situations, but should we not ensure Zuberi and his brother do not severely injure each other?' The room fell silent. He tilted his head in surprise as he realised that he had spoken in Swahili. He noted Sakina suddenly seemed very uncomfortable.

Imani gasped and responded in kind. 'Oh lord you speak Swahili Spock?'

He was honestly unsure of the correct answer to that question. 'It would appear so.'

Tamu did not appear surprised however. She sighed and got to her feet before addressing his question. 'Yes I suppose we should go and make sure they don't kill each other Spock.' She glanced sharply at her nieces and nephews. 'I don't want to hear a peep out of anyone though. Those two won't need any encouragement to beat the stuffing out of each other.'

Spock could hear the dull thuds of physical altercation well before they entered Zuberi's gymnasium. The two Uhura's were facing one another in the centre of the room on the sparring mats. Abasi was only a little shorter than Zuberi and both appeared to have the same heavily muscled build, however Zuberi was not intoxicated. Spock could not see Abasi posing too much threat to him.

All the same, he felt Nyota's concern. She clung to his arm and he felt her desire to help her father. He himself was having difficulty simply standing back and observing such a thoughtless display of violence.

When Abasi managed to land a heavy handed blow to Zuberi's left temple, Nyota gasped, Tamu covered her mouth and Delphine muttered something angry sounding in French under her breath. Spock had to restrain himself from intervening. Zuberi was unconcerned however and promptly broke his brother's nose. Spock felt Nyota's very human pleasure at the violent retaliation.
Abasi's hand automatically clutched at his bloody nose and Zuberi took his distraction as an opening to deliver a punishing blow to his solar plexus that pushed his brother off the mats. He stumbled a few steps towards the equipment that lined the wall and landed heavily. Zuberi did not press his offence whilst his brother was on the ground. Abasi remained gasping on the floor for a few moments. He was soon up again however and when he regained his feet he was brandishing a metal bar used to hold weights. Zuberi raised his arms and slipped into a more defensive stance.

Spock was concerned. A hard blow from the metal rod to Zuberi's skull could be fatal. Abasi was inebriated, his judgement was impaired. He had already hit Zuberi in the temple once, would he do so with a weapon? 'Should I intervene Nyota? I have no wish to see your father injured when it can be avoided.'

Tamu's face snapped towards him and she responded sharply. 'Yes!'

Nyota nodded in agreement. 'Suus mahna his ass Spock.'

Spock tilted his head at the odd turn of phrase before he turned and walked towards the circling Uhuras.

'Abasi.' He called. 'It is apparent you have some personal grievance against me. I would prefer you settle it with me rather than injure my friend Zuberi.' Spock had no intention of actually fighting with the man, he would simply render him unconscious as soon as possible.

Abasi spat in his direction. Spock glanced down at the phlegm and raised an eyebrow. Some sort of primitive display of aggression? It was highly unsanitary. 'Your damn right I have a grievance with you, you green-blooded bastard.'

Zuberi seemed perfectly happy to let Spock handle his brother and backed away.

Spock stopped 150 centimetres from him and well to the side of the spit. 'There is no way I can settle this grievance with you without resorting to violence?'

Abasi snorted. 'Never!'

Spock nodded in acceptance. 'Very well.' He stood still and waited.

Abasi circled him, brandishing the metal bar, waiting for him to attack. Spock had no intention of doing so however. He would finish a fight if necessary, he would not start one.

'You just gonna stand there Vulcan? Too scared to fight me?' Abasi sneered.

'Vulcans do not experience the emotion to which you refer.' Spock responded calmly.

'Then what are you waiting for?

'I am calculating the simplest method to render you unconscious with minimal injury to your person.'

'How's this for straight forward?' Abasi charged, swinging the bar back and aiming it at Spock's head. Spock was glad of his intervention. Clearly Abasi might well have caused serious injury to Zuberi. He raised his right arm and blocked the bar with a dull thud. It stung, but the density of his Vulcan physiology meant it caused no major injury. Abasi was staring at his arm and the bar with a surprised expression on his face. Clearly he had thought the blow should have broken Spock's arm. Spock took advantage of his confusion and reached out with his left arm and pinched the nerves in Abasi's neck. The larger man crumpled to the mats unconscious. The metal bar rolled 32 cm to his
Spock glanced at Abasi's sons who were glaring at him in case they decided to continue the confrontation. They seemed content sending him angry looks however.

Nyota's grandmother laughed, the unlikely sound breaking the tense silence in the room. 'I grow fonder of your husband by the minute Nyota.'

Spock looked down at Abasi with some interest. 'He is of similar build and physical condition to you Zuberi but significantly slower. Had you used your favoured mok'bara techniques on him you would have subdued him quite easily.'

Zuberi came to stand beside him and glared down at his brother. 'Doesn't feel right going Klingon on my little brother. Much as he might deserve it.' He nudged his limp form with a foot. 'You went too easy on him Spock. He's bad enough sober. He's intolerable drunk.'

'I had no desire to cause him unnecessary injury. He is Nyota's kinsman. Your 'little brother' as you put it.'

Nyota huffed. 'I asked you to suus mahna his ass, not politely tal-shaya him into a nap.'

'It was the most logical course of action.' he replied. His arm was stinging. He would have a bruise. Nyota felt his pain and walked over to him and took hold of his arm, pushing his sleeve back. The skin of his forearm was already flushed green with a forming bruise.

'You are hurt. You should not have let him hit you.' She sounded both concerned and annoyed. 'In future adun, you are not to let anyone, 'kinsman' of mine or not, hit you.' She gently wrapped her hands around his forearm where the bruise was forming. The warmth of her touch was soothing against the small injury. He ignored the discomfort at being touched in front of so many people and accepted her comfort silently. 'Especially with metal bars.' Her tone was quite biting but she stood very close to him and her eyes were warm as she looked up at him.

'I will bear that in mind.' he replied evenly.

She sniffed. 'Good.'

Chapter End Notes

The song Nyota sings is of course 'Beyond Antares' which Nichelle Nichols sang twice in TOS.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0b5E_-2uNs
Chapter 35

*Nyota*

Spock got out of bed at some dark, cold, ungodly hour. Nyota half awoke as he did so, grumbling when he extracted himself from her embrace. She'd been taking full advantage of his warm Vulcan-ness in the morning chill, pressing as much of herself as possible against him. She rolled over into the warm space he'd left in the covers and promptly went back to sleep.

Some hours later Nyota awoke alone and disorientated. She felt a disconcerting burst of adrenaline as if she'd been shocked. She reached out to Spock in confusion, expecting to feel him meditating nearby. Instead she felt him downstairs, wide awake and... in pain? She sat up abruptly and reached for him more firmly through their bond. She felt a sharp bolt of agony rip through him then vanish just as quickly. Her breath caught in her throat. He was not concerned, but the pain was real. He was... fighting? She did not feel the sense of amusement and enjoyment he felt when sparring with her father, just detached Vulcan logic.

She had her hand on the doorknob before she realised she was naked. Turning she picked up the nearest piece of clothing. It was Spock's meditation robe. The cool silky material felt lovely against her skin, but she ignored the sensation and fastened it hastily as she jogged downstairs barefoot.

She encountered her parents in the kitchen drinking coffee with her mémé. Her mother was in the process of making pancakes and Nyota could smell eggs and bacon.

Her mémé looked up and gave her a bright smiled. 'Good morning!'

Nyota ignored the greeting. 'Is Spock sparring?' she asked the room at large.

Her mother and grandmother glanced at each other in confusion and Zuberi shrugged.

'I only just came downstairs.' her father replied.

In answer to her query there was a loud crashing noise from the general direction of the gym. Nyota felt a wave of pain from Spock through the bond. She doubled over and stumbled slightly. Her father frowned and gave her a concerned look.

'Nyota? What is it?' Her mémé had half risen from her seat.

Nyota ignored her and turned and ran. She heard her father getting to his feet behind her, his chair scrapping against the tiles. Her heart was beating too quickly. The pain had receded again but it had been too much, like being stabbed or electrocuted, not the dull pain of a fist fight. The double doors into the gymnasium were locked. Nyota rattled the handle uselessly.

'Spock!' she called desperately.

Her father took in the locked door and jogged back towards the kitchen, almost bowling over her mother and grandmother in the process. Nyota stood frozen at the door, her ears straining. She could hear thuds, footsteps and heavy breathing. Fighting, someone was fighting with Spock. A jeering laugh carried through the heavy doors.

Her uncle. She clenched her jaw in anger. Of *course* it was Abasi.

'What's going on Nyota?' her mother inquired. Her grandmother was standing at Tamu's elbow and
both were peering at her in concern.

She opened her mouth to explain but instead of words found herself letting out a low moan and arching her back as pain struck her suddenly in her left shoulder, worse than before. It spread through her body for a few seconds before dissipating into an ache. Spock was silently trying to push her away from him within their bond. She realised that she was clinging to him and supposed that was why she was feeling his pain so intensely. She couldn't bring herself to let go.

Her mémé had wrapped a warm papery hand around her arm and her mother stood on her other side with her arm around her shoulders.

'Nyota?!' her grandmother exclaimed, her eyes wide.

'I'm fine.' she reassured them. 'It's not me. They're hurting Spock.' Neither commented on the odd implication of her statement - that she could feel her husband's pain.

Her grandmother exchanged a hard look with her mother. 'Abasi.' It was disconcerting to hear her sweet elderly mémé inject such venom into her softly accented voice.

Her father returned with the house masterkey. The three women shifted from the door to make room for him. Nyota pushed the door nearest her wide the moment Zuberi turned the key and half ran inside.

The scene that met her was unsurprising. Her uncle and cousins were apparently trying to beat up Spock. Amani was holding what looked like a stun baton. Undoubtedly that had been the cause of the pain she'd felt.

Spock was wearing a dark Starfleet undershirt and the loose pants he meditated in. They'd obviously ambushed him when he was exercising. His back was towards her. The soft black cotton of his shirt was torn over his left shoulder. Green blood was visible through the tear. As she watched he pivoted quickly on his feet to avoid a kick from Azizi and knocked Amani and the stun baton backwards with a kick of his own before blocking a hard blow from Abasi. Her uncle's fist made a terrible deep thud as it collided with her husband's raised arm. Now side on to her, Spock looked up as she and her father approached. His hair was messy, pushed back from his face and sticking up in places. Nyota assumed it was from the shock of the baton.

'Spock!' she yelled, rather pointlessly.

Her father didn't bother saying anything, he just charged Azizi, who happened to be nearest.

Abasi and Amani ignored him and continued trying to attack Spock. It was plain to Nyota that Spock was trying not to hurt them, and as a result they were getting the occasional hit in. She could feel him considering then dismissing different tactics and moves, worried he'd miscalculate and seriously injure the human men.

Her mother and mémé came to stand near her.

'Stop this! Abasi! What do you think you are doing!' Tamu yelled. She was ignored of course.

Her mémé didn't say anything, just took hold of Nyota's arm and watched closely.

Abasi laughed. 'Your Vulcan's not so tough now!' He glanced at Nyota. 'Watch closely niece.' He and Amani began attacking Spock in earnest. Spock blocked and avoided most of them easily, moving with his inhuman Vulcan speed and grace, but Amani managed to graze the baton along the underside of his ribs. He clearly had the power set on maximum since the shock made a terrible
fwoop noise as it released its charge and sent Spock stumbling backwards a few metres.

Nyota let out a pained groan, her hand pressing to her side as she felt an echo of Spock's pain before he could block it from her. Her mémé helped her straighten and looked at her in concern.

She stared at her uncle and tried to get his attention as he advanced upon Spock once more. 'Stop it! You're hurting him!'

'That's the idea!' her uncle replied. 'He needs to learn some manners.'

She glanced at her father helplessly. Zuberi was besting Azizi, but his nephew was twenty years his junior and it was not happening fast enough. Spock needed to snap out of his altruistic mood and fight back already.

'Spock! Hit them already!' she called. 'I don't care if they're family!'

He ignored her.

She watched helpless for perhaps a minute. Spock continued to block, but his technique was not up to its usual standards. He was off balanced by his worry about the frailty of his opponents, second guessing himself and consciously letting the occasional blow connect when the defence might have injured her cousin or uncle.

Frustration welled up inside her. 'He's not even trying uncle! The only reason you're hitting him at all is because he's letting you! He's worried he'll accidentally kill you!' She was exaggerating, but it was more or less accurate.

'He's letting them hit him?' her meme inquired in disbelief. 'But there are two of them and Amani has that... thing!'

'I know! He's being his stupid stubborn Vulcan self!' Nyota responded hotly without looking away from her husband.

He needed to fight back already. She didn't want to have to stand there and watch him get hurt.

She could think of only one fast way to ensure he did so.

She slipped from her position between her mémé and her mother and ran at her uncle. She was dimly aware of her mother yelling something behind her but she ignored her. She attempted to put her hand to hand combat training to good use. It was pointless of course, he was three times her size. Maybe more. He blocked a kick to his shin, completely ignored a punch to his side and blocked another kick aimed at his kidneys before he backhanded her as easily as he might swat a fly. She blocked the blow, but the force of it threw her arm wide and his hand caught her under the jaw. Her teeth snapped together sharply as her face exploded in heat and pain.

The force of the blow tripped her backwards and her feet tangled beneath her. She fell to the mats a few metres away, her face burning. She'd barely gotten her senses back before she felt black rage well up within Spock pushing aside his former cool logic. Compared to the agony of a shock baton on full charge her uncle's backhand hardly hurt at all, but from Spock's reaction it might as well have.

He roared. She looked up in time to see her uncle receive a punch that sent him to straight his knees. The noise of Spock's fist colliding with her uncle's face was obscene – a deep soft crunching noise. Abasi let out a grunt part pain, part shock. Spock's face was twisted in anger. It was both exhilarating and disturbing to witness. He delivered another savage blow with the side of his palm
to Abasi's neck that had her uncle gasping and clutching at his throat. Then a kick sent Abasi onto
his back to slide a few meters across the room, the mats rucking beneath him. He sprawled across
them unmoving.

Spock stared at him, his chest rising and falling rapidly before apparently dismissing him and
turning to Amani. The glare he sent her cousin and the snarl on his mouth should have been
warning enough, but it was not. Amani brandished the shock baton. Spock didn't wait for him to
attack, he charged him with the full superior speed of a Vulcan and a roar that wasn't human.

He delivered a powerful blow from both hands to Amani's chest that knocked him stumbling
backwards. Amani recovered, though he was coughing and wheezing, and came at Spock swinging
the shock baton. Spock dodged it almost negligently before delivered a blow from high above his
head that impacted with Amani's shoulder and sent him to his knees. Amani swung wildly with the
baton. Spock stepped forward and grabbed Amani's fist with his left hand preventing him from
swinging the baton further.

Amani struggled to break the grip as Spock pointed the index and middle finger of his free hand.
His movements were a blur as he stabbed his pointed fingers precisely into places on Amani's
elbow and shoulder that made her cousin yell out in pain. His arm fell limp at his side. Spock
catched the shock baton as he dropped it and punched Amani in the chest. He went sprawling onto
his back. Spock took the baton in both hands and broke it as Amani scrambled backwards along the
floor. He couldn't shear the metal of the casing, but he bent at a right angle, ignoring the sparks
and puffs of smoke as it short circuited, then tossed it aside.

Amani was several meters away and staring at him in obvious fear. Nyota could feel Spock
regaining control of his emotions. Amani had not touched her after all, that was Abasi. Spock's
anger at him was much less than that at her uncle. She could sense him centering himself to speak,
end the pointless exchange of blows. Stupidly, her cousin charged him before he could.

Spock flipped over Amani taking hold of him as he did so and using the momentum of his flip
simply threw him over his shoulder as he landed. Threw him across the room. Her 6ft 4 cousin. As
if he weighed nothing. Her mémé gasped. Amani landed awkwardly against the stone wall and slid
into a heap on the floor, conscious but dazed. Abasi yelled in anger at seeing his son hurt. He was
on his feet and charging Spock like an enraged bull within seconds, his earlier humiliation
forgotten.

Abasi towered over Spock both in height and build. Her husband ducked under Abasi's right hook
and kicked his legs out from under him. As the taller man fell past him Spock roared once more
and delivered a solid blow to the back of his neck with the side of his palm. Abasi gasped in pain
but Spock had already moved on. He gripped Abasi's arm, his right arm, the one he had struck her
with. Nyota suddenly knew exactly what was going to happen. She inhaled sharply, a hand to her
mouth. There was a sick nervous feeling in her stomach but she couldn't look away.

There was a horrible grinding crunch as Spock bent her uncle's hand back against his arm and
broke the little bones in his wrist, then a sharp crack as he punched his forearm and broke the two
bones there, and finally a much louder one as he drove his elbow into his bicep and Abasi's
humerus snapped. It had taken only a few seconds. Abasi's eyes were wide and his mouth gaped in
a wide O of shock and pain. He hadn't even had time to scream. Spock's face was contorted in a
mix of rage and satisfaction. She could feel him… revealing in his strength. He wanted to break
Abasi's other arm. And then his neck. The rage she felt in him was alien to her. It was mixed up
with that dark feeling Vulcan feeling that was his affection for her. Abasi had hurt her. Spock felt
almost compelled to remove the threat posed to her. She could feel him pushing at the urge,
restraining his most primitive instincts.
Spock's voice was low and hinted at barely controlled rage as he leant and spoke near his ear. 'Touch my wife again and I will break more than your arm Abasi Uhura.' His normally perfect standard was slightly accented. He did not use *tal-shaya* to painlessly render his opponent unconscious, he made a fist and punched him in the back of the skull.

Abasi fell forwards boneless onto the mats.

Spock stared at him for a moment then visible repressed his emotions until he once more exuded only pure Vulcan calm. It was like watching a curtain drop. The change in him was sudden and complete. At least outwardly.

Nyota noted that Azizi had been likewise dealt with and her father looked none the worse. He was glancing from Spock to his brother and frowning.

Her mother and grandmother were both staring at Spock wide eyed. Seeing a Vulcan angry, fighting violently was something of a shock to the system.

Spock said nothing. He walked over to Nyota and knelt beside her on the mats. She could feel him reaching for her through their bond even as he pulled her into his arms and onto his lap. He looked down at her with dark eyes and pressed warm Vulcan fingers to the split on her lip and the redness of her cheek. When he spoke it was in Van-Kal Vuhlkansu, in the same deep tone of voice he'd once used in the Shipyards bar after Spracs had threatened her.

*Thou art hurt.*

His eyes held hers magnetically, expressing a thousand things his words did not.

She responded in a voice that was little more than a whisper. *It is a small hurt.*

She was aware of her parents and grandmother staring at them. Spock was clearly out of sorts to touch her so openly in front of others. Before she could think of an appropriate course of action, he'd risen to his feet with her still held in his arms. She slid an arm around his neck, but she didn't really need to hang on, he was strong enough to keep a firm grip on her easily. She could still feel ripples in that dark pool of Vulcan emotion that he kept hidden deep inside him. She pressed her face against him even as she pressed her mind towards him, trying to let her love calm him. Her parents were talking softly to each other in Swahili but she paid them no mind.

Spock carried her from the gymnasium and up to her room without another word. He was carefully keeping his mind blank, but she could tell it was costing him a great deal. It was a sensation she could only equate to holding her breath. Inevitably the need for oxygen would win out.

He sat down on the bed and pushed a hand into her hair so he could pull her face to his. He did not kiss her, just pressed his face against hers, the unmarked side so as not to hurt her. She could feel the thrum of emotion buried within him. His eyes had been so dark and wild, as wild as they'd been the night Spracs had attacked her. There was no doubt in her mind that Spock had come very close to killing the former lieutenant that night. She suddenly felt guilty for intentionally provoking him. But she had not thought her actions through. But what if she'd been more seriously hurt? If Amani had shocked her with the baton? Spock might well have killed him. It did not bear thinking of.

She said nothing, just hummed. She didn't make a conscious choice, just hummed.
the last thing in her head. The song she'd sung the evening before, when Spock had played her lute. It was simple song, but dealing as it did with loving someone from the stars she'd always found it quite romantic. Her choral group had performed it at the Academy and she'd day dreamed hopelessly about Spock quite a bit singing it when he was serving on the Nelson.

She softly sang a line in a voice little more than a whisper. 'where my heart is...' She pressed a kiss to his warm cheek and hummed a few more lines before singing again, her lips brushing his skin as she formed soft words. 'I'll be back, though it takes forever...' The ripples seemed to have calmed. Nyota no longer felt him holding his emotions in such tight check. 'somewhere, beyond the stars ...' She could feel that he enjoyed hearing her sing, even if he thought the song overly emotional. His dismissiveness of her human sentimentality made her smile. He was clearly feeling more like himself.

She pressed a chaste kiss to his lips and he responded in kind. They lazily kissed and explored each other's mouths. Kissing Spock slowly and thoroughly was something of a novelty. Without frantic lust distracting her, she felt the difference between them, his sharp Vucan teeth with their different arrangement of canines and molars. She liked the way the points rasped against her tongue. He tasted faintly of toothpaste, but for the most part he tasted like Spock - like heat and fire, like a hot wind blown across a red desert. She shifted, turning in his arms so she could straddle his lap and kiss him more deeply.

Spock pushed the robe off her shoulders and began making a more thorough exploration of her. Warm Vulcan fingers trailed over her cool human skin - her neck, her shoulders, her breasts. She shivered. He pressed his mouth to the hollow of her collarbone and licked the skin there. She could feel the growing heat of his desire through their bond, slowly replacing his possessive anger. His hair was like silk. She twisted fingers in it then ran them down the line of his face and out to trace the graceful tilt of his ears. He pressed his face between her breasts, accepting her caress, letting her hold him against her. She sat back on her legs and shuffled closer, pressing her hips flush against his.

He groaned as she twisted her body, grinding herself against him. 'Nyota. My Nyota.'

She felt the unspoken question, his need for reassurance. His covetous Vulcan's heart required it.

'Yours Spokkh, always.'

He found her lips with his own once more. 'Khio'ri...' The word caught her by surprise. Star. Her name in his native tongue. She felt her heart clench. He had called her more romantic things, but here was something completely new. A perfectly logical, literal translation of her name. A very Vulcan endearment.

She wished vainly she could translate his name into Swahili.

Her ruminations were pushed from her mind as his teeth gently caught her bottom lip. He splayed a hand between her shoulder blades and pressed her closer to him as his long fingers drew circles on her skin. Nyota melted against him, her tongue darting out to entwine with his. She pulled at his hair, tilting his head so she could get her mouth nearer to his. She was vividly aware that the only thing she was wearing was Spock's meditation robe. It was pooled around her elbows where he had pushed it. Heat was quickly spreading through her body and she shifted, rubbing herself against him and fanning that slow burn of desire between them.

Spock tensed beneath her and pulled her even closer. He ran a hand up her thigh and beneath the
robe. Nyota froze and held her breath as his fingers drew closer to where her body ached and throbbed for him. He parted her heated folds with warm fingers and her breath was sucked out of her lungs in a whoosh. He gently moved them against her and she groaned helplessly, her grip tightening on him and her kisses becoming more heated. She could tell he was in no hurry to have her, but she felt needy with want. His hand felt wonderful, but it paled into comparison what the hardness pressed against her thigh promised.

She ran a hand down over his chest to squeeze him through the material of his pants. His mouth faltered against hers and she felt his wave of pleasure through the bond. His hand slipped down from where he had been teasing and he slowly pushed two fingers inside her. She keened in his ear as they curled inside her pressing against that place that made her gasp. Her patience snapped. She was only human after all.

She slipped her hand under the waistband of Spock's pants and wrapped her fingers around his length, gently tugging him free of the material. Once she had him free and straining against her she wasted no time in forming a fist around him and sliding her hand down his pulsing flesh. He pulled his mouth from hers and groaned softly. She repeated the movement as he gripped her thighs and pulled her against him so their bodies were aligned. She moaned at the feel of him pressed tantalisingly against her. She heard his longing reflected likewise in his voice 'Nyota…'

She spread her legs wider and squirmed against him wordlessly communicating her desire. He shifted his grip to curve a hand around her hip and slowly pressed himself inside her. Her breath caught and her body froze around him, bolts of pleasure shooting through her both from where his flesh met her own within her and through their bond. She groaned, her head rolling forward weakly to fall against his shoulder. They moved languorously against one another, Nyota rolling her hips and riding him.

The gentle pace of their love-making was also unusual for them. Usually Nyota ended up teasing and arousing her Vulcan until he was in a very un-Vulcan state and what they ended up doing couldn't really be termed 'love-making'. However Nyota could feel Spock had no desire to lose control of his emotions as he usually did when they were together. He had barely kept his anger in check earlier, feeling such strong emotions had left him exhausted.

Nyota kissed him deeply as she rode him towards their mutual completion. Spock traced the shape of her body with his hands; her shoulders, her back, the swell of her hips and the curve of her backside. She felt her climax building and her movements became more frantic. Spock lifted a hand to cradle the side of her face. She turned into his palm and impulsively caught his thumb between her teeth.

Spock stared at her mouth. Sensing his interest she wrapped her tongue around his thumb and sucked even as his fingers found her psi points. She gasped as their minds blurred into one. It was almost as good as sex itself. She could feel the dark well of his buried lust - the alien urge that compelled him to possess her completely, a deep Vulcan instinct that drove him to bite and mark her and name her his his his.

She groaned around his thumb then started at the unexpected pleasure she felt from him. Her eyes opened to meet his. She'd forgotten that Vulcan's had far more sensitive fingers than humans. Biting softly into the pad of his thumb had an even more pronounced effect upon him, his hips snapped up sharply and he growled softly deep in his chest. Nyota mirrored his movements, bracing herself on his shoulders and sliding herself up and down upon him. She tried to hold off, to savour the feel of them joined both body and mind, but the combination of sensations overwhelmed her. Her body shuddered and tensed as she was drowned in burning waves of pleasure. Spock's hips bucked up against her as she pulled him along with her. His head fell
forward to rest against her shoulder as he spent himself inside her. She curled an arm around his head and cradled him to her.
Zuberi Uhura was sitting alone on a bench amidst Tamu's assorted potted flora on the terrace.

There were seven different varieties of terran roses that that Spock could see. They reminded him of his mother. He idly wondered if varieties that thrived in Nairobi would survive in Amanda's gardens on Vulcan. Zuberi had a several PADDs stacked beside him and a large mug of what Spock's nose identified as chai black tea on the tiles near his sandaled feet. He had exceedingly large toes. Spock stared at them transfixed for a long moment before consciously looking away so as not to stare.

Zuberi glanced up at Spock's approach. His human smile of greeting was not as wide as it usual was. Feeling somewhat unsure of himself, Spock took a seat beside him. He cleared his throat. 'I wish to apologise for injuring your brother and nephew this morning Zuberi. My actions were inexcusable.' It was very rare for him to make an apology, but there was no doubt that one was required in the current situation. His behaviour had been illogical and indefensible.

Zuberi frowned. 'Spock, there's no need. Don't forget last night it was me on the mats with Abasi. He was the common denominator in both situations.' He paused. 'If anything I'd like to thank you for your restraint over his 'visit'.' He met Spock's eyes. 'Tamu told me you understand Swahili?'

Spock inclined his head. 'That is correct.'

'Well, considering I only heard a few of their comments and I felt obligated to kick my dear brother in the head repeatedly, I would say your actions were perfectly understandable.' Spock looked over Zuberi carefully, trying to tell if he truly believed his own words. He could not be certain.

'… I severely injured your brother.' Regenerating broken bones was a painful process and could result in lasting weakness or other health complications.

Zuberi gave Spock an irritated look. 'Abasi spent his entire visit trying to goad you into a fight, and he got exactly what he wanted. You aren't responsible for his stupidity.' He exhaled through his nose clearly attempting to remain calm. '… Admittedly it's a little confronting seeing your little brother hurt, but…' He paused and Spock saw his jaw clench. 'He hit Nyota. My daughter. Your wife. I don't think even Surak himself would have expected you to sit back after he did that.'

Zuberi sounded completely sure of his final sentiment. This reassured Spock somewhat. He supposed it was more or less accurate, Vulcans weren't pacifists to the point of stupidity, however he should have found a less violent way to ensure Nyota's safety. There was no logical need to inflict the level of injury on her uncle that he had.

'And clearly your control has improved, so don't beat yourself up.' Zuberi continued.

His statement confused Spock. 'I am afraid I do not follow.'

'The last time someone hurt Nyota you were much rougher on them weren't you? Nyota said she had to intervene, but you stopped yourself this morning.' Zuberi frowned. 'Admittedly you broke
Abasi's arm in three places, but well, my brother ought to know better than to raise his hand to a 
woman, especially his own niece.'

Spock debated if it would be wise to confide in Zuberi the extent of his loss of control. As Nyota's 
father, he had a right to know that his son-in-law was liable to go 'berserk' as the terran phrase 
went. 'The incident you refer to… The only reason former Lieutenant Sparcs is alive is due to the 
fact that I was unable to decide on a method of ending his life. I contemplated snapping his neck or 
removing his trachea. I debated the choice for 12 seconds, long enough for Nyota to distract me. 
Had she not done so I am certain I would killed him.'

Spock fell silent and waited a response. It was difficult to keep his face free of the anxiety he felt 
inside.

Zuberi was still for 27 seconds before replying, 'That's a worst case scenario Spock. Chances are 
you will never be in a situation that… volatile again. And well, I think if you were to discuss it 
with your father you'd discover your reaction when Nyota is concerned is more commonplace than 
you think.'

The reference to his father confused him, as did Zuberi's casual dismissal of his admission that he 
had intended to kill someone. 'My father would not approve of such violence. No Vulcan would.'

Zuberi took a sip of his chai. 'Perhaps not. But he would understand it I think. Tamu told me a story 
about your father after the Sparcs incident. Three Klingons broke into your mother's rooms at a 
Federation Peace Summit.' He looked at Spock speculatively. 'I wasn't there, I was still serving in 
the fleet at the time. However you would have been a few years old so you might been with your 
mother. Anyway, your father killed them, all three. He didn't render them unconscious or summon 
security or whatever the logical thing to do at the time would have been. He killed them.'

Spock did not recall ever hearing about such an incident. He did remember several security 
breaches as a small child when he and his mother had accompanied Sarek on Ambassadorial duties 
however. Perhaps some had been more serious than he had realised. He should perhaps make an 
effort to discuss his reactions with regards to Nyota with his father, distasteful as the prospect was 
to him.

'You love Nyota don't you Spock?'

The question seemed quite out of context in Spock's opinion. He was not comfortable discussing 
such a thing with anyone, let alone Nyota's father. 'What I feel for her is quite different to what 
humans refer to as 'love' but I am confident that it is the Vulcan equivalent.' he answered stiffly.

Zuberi raised an eyebrow but didn't inquire further. 'Okay, well, that being the case, you are just 
going to have to accept that you won't always be able to behave in a purely logical manner where 
she is involved, the same way I, as her father, can't. But since you're aware of your lack of control 
in this way, I'm sure you can use that big Vulcan brain of yours to make sure you stay out of 
situations where you might start tearing people limb from limb.'

That was logical. If he could not completely control is emotions where Nyota was involved, he 
could make sure the triggers for such behaviour were avoided. He had sensed her regret at her 
interference that morning. He was confident she would not put herself in harm's way intentionally 
in such a manner again. He nodded. 'That is true.'

Zuberi sipped his chai silently for 2 minutes and 12 seconds before he spoke again. 'In what way is 
Vulcan love different to human love? If you don't mind me asking.'
Spock raised an eyebrow. He thought of Nyota's love for him and his own affection for her. He could think of no way to detail the difference in a manner that was acceptable to him. 'It would be impossible for me to explain. Suffice to say they are two quite distinct emotions.'

'I'm guessing Vulcan feelings are more logical and reasonable?' Zuberi speculated.

I took Spock 34 seconds to come to a decision. 'Quite the opposite in fact. I cannot accurately verbalise the differences, however I could show you, if you so desire.' He was not entirely comfortable with what he was offering, but Zuberi was family and, selfishly, Spock thought it would help his father-in-law understand his violent reaction to Nyota being harmed - explain things he could not say out loud.

Zuberi looked at him in confusion. 'Show me?'

Spock made a gesture with his right hand towards Zuberi's brow. 'I could show you with my mind.'

Although Zuberi's eyes widened in shock, he was silent for only three seconds before responding. 'Alright.' He regarded Spock expectantly.

Spock shifted slightly closer to his father-in-law and lifted his right hand to make a superficial connection against his psi points. 'My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts…' He deepened the connection but held himself back from Zuberi warily, wondering if he'd have the same mental 'hoverbus' approach as his daughter.

It appeared not. Zuberi's mind was quite different to the other humans he had melded with, which was admittedly a small sample size consisting only of his mother and Nyota. Much less emotional. This surprised him. He knew it was generally considered fact that there were differences in terms of logic and creativity between males and females of the human species, but he had not expected such a noticeably difference. Zuberi's thoughts followed much more logical and uniform patterns. In comparison Nyota's spiralled and grew like living things. What he felt was still completely alien to his Vulcan mind however.

He carefully reached towards Zuberi's consciousness. He felt his father-in-law's fascination at the unusual sensation. He was not alarmed at all. Spock allowed their superficial surface thoughts to merge. Zuberi was thinking about how warm Spock's fingers were. He was curious and excited. Spock did not try to communicate or initiate a deeper meld.

He focussed his mind on Nyota.

He sank down to the place within him that a part of Nyota dwelt, parted and never parted from him. She was asleep upstairs. He could feel the blur of her dreaming mind just out of reach. His adun’a. His Nyota. He let that deep well of complicated feelings that was his love for her flow through to the surface of his thoughts where Zuberi would feel it.

He felt Zuberi's shock and amazement just before he broke the meld, pulling his hand from Zuberi's face. Only 8 seconds had passed since he'd spoken the ritual words and joined their minds. Zuberi's eyes were wide open and staring at him. He was blinking back tears. Spock could feel a very faint echo of his feelings. Shock. Awe.

'Forgive me, emotional transference is a side effect of a mind meld.'

Zuberi waved his concern off with a hand and took several deep breaths. 'My god Spock. How can you... how can you bear it?' Zuberi was shaking his head. 'So much. I had no idea… Vulcans felt so much…' He wiped his eyes and looked at his wet fingers in apparent shock.
'Emotions run deep in our race. This is why we turned to logic and the teachings of Surak, so they no longer ruled us.' He remembered similar words spoken by his father to him as a child with a bloody lip.

'Well.' He swallowed and spoke in Vulcan. 'Thank you for sharing that with me Spock.' He switched back to standard, his head still shaking in disbelief. 'I will not soon forget it.' He was silent for a long moment. He did not appear disturbed by the violent and possessive nature of Spock's feelings. This surprised him. 'I understand now, when you talk about controlling your emotions. I think just I learnt more about you in a few seconds than I did in the last three years.' At his last sentiment he reached out and squeezed Spock's shoulder in a gesture of human companionship Spock had often observed.

Spock was slightly surprised to find he did not regret melding with Zuberi at all. He was hardly in the habit of performing mind melds so casually, but it seemed to have served a worthwhile purpose - Nyota's father seemed reassured, and he found he did not mind having shared such private feelings with him. He spent a few seconds analysing his opinion of Zuberi Uhura. He felt... affection. He liked Zuberi. He wondered if what he felt for him was friendship in the human sense or the Vulcan. If Zuberi's personality and traits made him superior in Spock's sphere of acquaintances, then feelings of appreciation for his company were logical were they not? His thoughts became knotted. He had often had similar internal debates about Christopher Pike. He dismissed them to consider in more depth at a later date.

His father-in-law picked up the PADD he had been reading and cleared his throat. 'U.S.S Caelus patrolling Section 2A of the Federation Central Sector. Unlikely I'll run into any Ferengi smugglers or kidnapped Romulans, but I'm looking forward to serving on a ship again.' The traces of strain and awkwardness Spock had detected when he first approached Zuberi were gone from his voice.

'Section 2A includes Vulcan space. This is your new fleet assignment?' Spock inquired.

'Yes. Scouting ship based out of the 40 Erandani A Starfleet Construction Yard and Space Station.' Zuberi confirmed, giving the federation name, 40 Erandani A, for the star Nevasa which his home planet orbited.

'That is most convenient. By shuttle under impulse power the shipyards are only 4.2 hours journey from Vulcan and at warp one less than a minute.' The shipyards were located in a mineral rich asteroid belt between Vulcan and the second planet of the system, Delta Vega.

Zuberi nodded. 'Yes, I'll be able to spend my RTO's in Shi'Kahr with Tamu.' He didn't sound at all concerned at no longer cohabitating with his wife on a permanent basis. Scouting vessels assigned to the central sectors usually spent only weeks out of base at one time with accumulated leave in between. Zuberi would most likely spent approximately 20 days with the ship then have a rostered recreational period of perhaps 5 days before departing once more. It seemed quite a comfortable arrangement to Spock.

'Might I enquire as to your post?' From previous discussions Spock was aware that Zuberi had been a navigator out of the Academy before being promoted to helmsman and later first officer of an Ambassador-Class ship.

'I will be relieving Captain Thurst as commanding officer of the Caelus.' Zuberi sounded quite pleased.

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'Are additional congratulations in order… 'Captain' Uhura?'
He grinned. 'Not yet. But I'll outrank you again in a fortnight.'

'Allow me to offer them prematurely then, Captain.' Spock wondered at his father-in-law's sudden promotion however. It was most unusual. 'Might I enquire as to how you managed to obtain such a fortuitous posting?'

'I turned down command when I accepted the post in Nairobi. My promotion is much delayed as opposed to sudden.' That was plausible. 'Captain Thurst made a request for a transfer closer to his home system some time ago, but out of the central sector postings Vulcan space isn't too popular - too boring for most - so my return to fleet service is fortuitously for him.'

Spock tilted his head. 'Indeed. I am curious however - you turned down your own ship to take a planetside posting?' It seemed illogical, as did his choice of posting. Nairobi was one of the larger cities on Earth, Capital of the United States of Africa, but Paris and San Francisco were home to the largest Starfleet bases. Either would have offered far more interesting commissions. A teaching role such as his own in San Francisco for example.

'Tamu and I needed to stay in one place for a few years while Nyota and Zanta went to school. We both have family in Nairobi so we settled here.' He paused before continuing. 'Living off planet and travelling so much was fine when the girls were little, good for them even, but kids need some stability, time to make friends and get a decent education.'

Zuberi's explanation offered adequate reasoning. 'My own childhood was not dissimilar. My mother and I accompanied my father on his Ambassadorial duties until I was of an age to begin my schooling after which my mother and I stayed on Vulcan.'

Zuberi shot Spock a look he did not quite understand. 'Your mother lived with you alone on Vulcan?'

'My father was away for extended periods of time but remained with us when he was on Vulcan.'

'Still, that can't have been easy on your mother.'

'She is a capable woman and appears content in Shi'Kahr.' Being far more familiar with humans now, Spock was certain his mother's early years on Vulcan would indeed have been 'trying' for her, but she had made herself a comfortable life there and appeared quite happy.

'She certainly seems capable.' Zuberi paused. 'Do you know she gave Tamu a subspace call the morning after Ambassador Palas' function?'

Spock couldn't restrain the shock on his face. 'Pardon?'

His father-in-law smiled. 'Yep. Called her up and they spent half an hour gushing over you and Nyota. I had to excuse myself from the room. Too many female emotions flying around. And crying.' He shook his head in distaste.

Having now had insight into the male human mind, Spock found the confusion and discomfit with which they regarded human females' emotions as more understandable. He himself was uncertain how he felt about his mother's actions. 'That was quite… presumptuous of my mother.'

'Tamu was thrilled. Sent her holos of you two at the function.' Zuberi gave Spock a teasing look. 'You'll probably find them blown up to life-size and framed on the wall next time you go home.'

Talk of his mother reminded Spock again of the one issue he had been carefully avoiding thinking about over the last few months. His father.
Sarek would know of his marriage, he sat the Vulcan High Council after all and T'Sul had validated his marriage to them. He had been expecting his father to contact him when that occurred, but he had not. Even if his father had somehow not been made aware of his marriage via the Council, which seemed highly unlikely, his mother had known for some time. She would have been unable to keep the fact from her husband and Spock had not asked her too. He determined his father might be giving him 'the silent treatment' in human vernacular.

The current situation could not continue for much longer however. Tamu Uhura, as Earth's Ambassador to Vulcan, would be dealing a great deal with his father. Sarek could hardly ignore or insult the Terran Ambassador. Spock supposed he should perhaps forewarn his mother-in-law of her likely frosty reception from Sarek. Although if she was communicating with his mother she would probably be well prepared. He was tempted to just let his parents and in-laws meet and sort out their differences themselves.

He was distracted from his introspection by Nyota awakening upstairs. Unconsciously he looked up towards her room, as if he could see through the walls of the house. He turned back to Zuberi. 'Nyota has awoken.' He was already on his feet.

Zuberi chuckled. 'Off you go then.' He gestured towards the house.

Spock inclined his head and departed.

*Nyota*

Nyota awoke to the muted light of mid-afternoon. She was naked, as she always seemed to be when she woke these days. The bed was empty beside her but she could feel Spock nearby. Yawning she stumbled to her bathroom and brushed her teeth. Sleeping during the day always left her groggy. She pulled on a dress and headed downstairs.

Her mother was in the kitchen with Zanta. They both looked up at her oddly as she entered.

'Are you okay Nyota? Mama said Uncle Abasi hit you?' Zanta was frowning, her eyes scanning Nyota's face for injury.

Nyota pressed fingers to the split in her lip. She'd almost forgotten. She shifted her hand and touched her cheek. She felt the tenderness of a bruise forming. 'I'm fine. Just a little bruise.'

Tamu huffed. 'I can't believe Abasi raised his hand to you! His own niece!' Her cup of tea hit the table with more force than was necessary. 'And he and those boys of his trying to gang up on Spock! With a shock baton at that! I don't care if they are family, they certainly aren't welcome in my home anymore.'

Zanta smirked. 'Well I think they all got that message loud and clear when everyone went home this morning mama. You and mémé throwing their things out the window was a nice touch.'

Nyota couldn't help but smile. 'Mama! You didn't!'

Tamu pouted. 'They should be pleased I didn't pile them all up and set them on fire in the driveway.' She paused and added defensively. 'Besides, I called a doctor to see to Abasi's arm first. I wasn't unreasonable.'

Nyota poured herself a cup of tea and sat down beside her sister. She felt a twinge in their bond as Spock reached towards her. Moments later he appeared from the terrace doorway. She stared at him silently for a few moments, her affection for him welling up inside and making her smile. She
noted he'd changed from his torn shirt into a fresh one. She made a mental note to check on the
burn on his shoulder later. She'd been distracted earlier. He crossed the room, stopped beside her
and to her amazement, curled a hand around her bicep and bent to drop a kiss upon her brow. A
very small gesture of affection for a human, but another entirely for a Vulcan considering they
were not alone.

She lifted herself on her barstool and pressed a kiss to his cheek in response, restraining the urge to
wrap her arms around him and kiss him properly. It was highly unlikely he would allow a display of
affection of that magnitude in front of her mother and Zanta, even if they were family.

Instead of offering her a greeting he said 'Your father has been offered his own command Nyota.'

Her eyebrows raised in surprise, both at his unexpected words and their lack of introduction. He
really wasn't very good at casual conversation. 'A ship?'

He nodded. 'A scouting vessel patrolling sector 2A based in the 40 Eridani A system.'

Nyota looked to her mother recalling her comments about Zuberi serving in the same system as
her. 'Well that's just about perfect mama.'

Tamu smiled. 'Yes, he will be spending down time with me on Vulcan.' She took a sip of her tea.
'He's very excited. Like a child waiting for Christmas.'

Zanta sighed dramatically. 'Meanwhile I'll be all by myself on Orion.'

Tamu raised an eyebrow. 'All by yourself? Don't you mean lounging about all day with Shaira?'
Shaira was the name of Zanta's girlfriend. Nyota wasn't sure what their relationship was exactly,
nor did she want to think about it too much. With the things Gaila had told her about just how the
pheromones of an Orion woman could affect a human, it worried her. She knew the effects were
muted on human females, but still. She didn't like the idea of Zanta being involved with someone
who could manipulate her. Although Zanta often spent extended periods of time in Nairobi far
apart from her Orion and her feelings for Shaira seemed constant, so Nyota hoped her fears were
unfounded.

Zanta flicked her hair. 'Actually I was speaking to the junior ambassador the other night at Palas'
and she mentioned a need for translators and cultural advisors in the Federation Liaison office
there. So I'll be working.'

Nyota couldn't help her scepticism. 'As a translator?' Zanta was no linguist.

Her sister sniffed. 'I've been there on and off for almost five years Nyota. My Kolari, Prime,
Trader's Tongue and Yrevish are all fluent. Shaira is still teaching me Imperial Kolari, but that's
hardly going to be needed dealing with the Federation. And my French and standard are perfect of
course, so the junior ambassador seemed very interested.'

Nyota tilted her head. 'That's impressive Zanta. Yrevish is quite difficult and even I'm not fluent in
Imperial Kolari.' She glanced at Spock. 'I don't think even Spock is.'

'Fluency in High, or Imperial Kolari is unnecessary as a non-Orion as its primary purpose is to
confuse or insult other Orions.' He paused, frowning ever so slightly. 'It is a highly illogical
language.'

Nyota smiled. 'It is pretty much the polar opposite of Vulcan. All those litotes, double negatives
and flowery metaphors.'
'Indeed. Fluency in standard provides confusion enough without making in-depth study of even more illogical dialects.'

Her mother snorted. 'Now now, stop your teasing you two.'

Spock raised an eyebrow. 'Vulcans do not 'tease'. '

'Of course not Spock dear.' her mother replied diplomatically.

They ate a late lunch. Nyota doubted she'd have much of an appetite for dinner, but knew Spock wouldn't have any issue. She continued to be amazed by the amount of food he ate. After lunch he excused himself to make a subspace call to his mother on Vulcan and Nyota picked up a PADD loaded with a book she was reading and headed outside to enjoy the afternoon sunshine. Spring wasn't quite finished yet so it was the perfect temperature. Deliciously sunny and warm without the draining heat of the Kenyan summer.

She'd gotten through three chapters before she heard footsteps.

Nyota looked up to find Spock approaching her. He still wore the same starfleet under shirt and trousers as earlier, but he wasn't wearing shoes. It was odd to see him barefoot outdoors. She leant back against the tree and smiled at him in greeting. He stopped nearby and looked down at her with a curious expression on his face.

A wave of déjà vu washed over her. She recalled her strange dream like memory she'd relived when Spock lay dying. Of Spock and her beneath this very tree during the mind meld what felt like a lifetime ago.

'You don't appear to be wearing any shoes Spock.'

He silently reached a hand down towards her. She took it, feeling the brush of his mind gently against hers, and he effortlessly pulled her to her feet.

'Why would I want any?' he said quoting her words from the dream. It appeared they had switched places.

She stood before him, her hand still held in his, smiling and enjoying his proximity.

'It is illogical to go outdoors without footwear.' She said, repeating his words from long ago. She tilted her head to look up at him. He was standing very close to her. His thumb was drawing little circles on the soft skin on the inside of her wrist sending little warm bolts of awareness through her. She could feel the sharpness of his mind just barely touching her through the contact.

Spock reached out with his free hand and stroked an index finger along the line of her left eyebrow. Nyota stilled beneath his touch. His finger felt warm against her face. He pressed his remaining fingertips gently to her brow, bringing the feel of his mind much closer to hers, and then slid them across her skin and into her hair.

'Nyota.' Perhaps his voice was as calm and Vulcan-like as ever, but she could hear the emotion in it and feel it within. Affection. Love. She couldn't help but smile at him.

She lifted her free hand to mirror his own, stretching her fingers against his cheek, delighting in the heat of his skin. 'I remember this. I thought it was a dream, but it wasn't was it?' She didn't wait for him to respond, just stood on her toes so she could kiss him.

His lips were warm and gentle against hers. She pulled his bottom lip into her mouth so he would
deepen the kiss. She sighed a little and melted against him. She could kiss Spock forever. His fingers in her hair tightened and tilted her head so he could kiss her more thoroughly. His tongue twisted against hers in a way that had her shifting her grip to his shoulder so she could press herself more firmly against him. She could feel the teasing sharpness of his teeth against her tongue and lips. Who knew that Vulcan's could be such good kissers?

He slipped his fingers from where they curled around her wrist, sliding them down to press against hers. She groaned into his kiss as the teasing brush of his mind suddenly came into focus sending a wave of reflected desire between them. Yes. Kissing her Vulcan was definitely one of her favourite things in the universe. If the secret ever got out there would be a mass exodus of hysterical human women for his homeplanet.

Eventually the need for oxygen forced her to pull her lips from his. Spock's breathing was slightly uneven and his expression held that dazed, glassy-eyed look kissing seemed to leave him with. 'We were here. I dreamt of this place when I was injured.' she said.

Spock nodded. She watched as his eyes darted to her lips and back to her eyes. He felt his desire to kiss her again. He pulled her slightly closer. He was comfortingly warm and solid against her.

Nyota let a smile spread over her features as she slowly leant up towards him once more. 'I wanted to kiss you so much. Even then I loved you.'

Spock leant closer. 'Perhaps I should have let you.'

Her lips brushed against his as responded. 'Perhaps.'

He kissed her.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, I hope you enjoyed the story.

I've revised and edited this story quite a few times over the last few months, and even though there are still quite a few flaws, I think I'm going to leave it how it is. It was the first time I'd written anything 'novel' length and it was certainly a learning experience for me.

I am currently revising an AU sequel that follows almost directly after this one and is based on the movie and I've written about half of a final story set this 'series' that takes place about 6 months after the events of the film.

I intend to post those and then I'm sure come the new movie, I'll want to write more. I just love S/U.

xx valyria.
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