
by hellostarling

Summary

Jim spends three years at the Academy, and he totally manages it all by himself. Well, Bones helps a little. Or a lot. Maybe.

This is Jim's Starfleet education and all that entails: the ups, the downs, the prank wars, the winter vacations, and the awkward boners.

Notes

This is all Academy era, so no spoilers for Into Darkness. Also, I have no beta, which means all mistakes/formatting issues/useless ramblings that should probably be cut are all totally my fault. Enjoy!

Turns out there’s no escaping the whole son-of-a-hero thing anywhere Jim goes, including the fucking vegan pizza place, where the waitress serves him a piece of carrot cake bigger than his whole ego and doesn’t charge him. And she does it with a wink. Now, normally he’d think: Yes, you can have sex with me, here is my number. But no. Written across the bottom of his significantly lessened bill are the words “My uncle escaped in one of the Kelvin’s shuttles, your father was a great man.”

And, like, nice sentiment and all, but seriously? Jim kind of just wants to enjoy his vegan pizza
(which really isn’t so much a pizza as it is a flat stretch of wheat bread with a hot salad on top).

“What is that face for?” Gary Mitchell asks him, and Jim just stuffs carrot cake into his mouth and shrugs like he has no idea what Gary’s talking about.

That’s not even the worst of it. His RD leaves him a god damn belated sympathy pie outside his door. His grandfather died aboard the *Kelvin*, or something—sucked into the vacuum of space without a scream left in his throat. And that’s sad, it really is! But Jim is so completely over the whole fiasco that he just grimaces through the harrowing tale of this guy’s grandfather. He actually *cries* as he’s telling it. Does that make Jim broken? Should he still be able to cry about this?

Jim decides he likes Leonard McCoy the best, because the man apparently lived in a hole on his quaint little Georgie farm for the entirety of his sad, sad life: he’s never heard of either of Jim’s parents.

“Who?” he says, when a professor actually comes up to Jim and *shakes his hand* and expresses what an honor it is to meet George Kirk’s son.

Jim says, “Buhhhh,” very intelligently and the professor walks away, apparently satisfied that Jim is so choked up by emotion that he just needs a moment.

“What in the hell,” Bones says.

“My dad was the first officer on the *USS Kelvin* and he kind of sacrificed himself to save 800 people on the day I was born.”

“Oh my god lord,” Bones says. “And you *enlisted*?”

“You’re afraid of flying and you enlisted!” Jim says.

“Yeah, but I’m a pathetic son of a bitch, what’s your excuse?”

Jim can’t very well say *Pike dared me* because Bones doesn’t need another reminder about how much of a kid he still is, so he keeps his mouth shut and scuttles off to Astronuclear Physics (which is technically not on the first-year class list but he secretly tested out of the prerequisite for shits and giggles last summer).

X

The third week of classes, in his Recent History of Conflict & Resolution in the Federation class (gesundheit), Dr. Waffputty assigns everybody their research paper topics and the message that pops up on Jim’s homework list says “Discuss the agricultural and societal destruction of Tarsus IV as it pertains to the establishment of future colonies.”

Jim stares down at his PADD, lips moving silently along with the words. Nausea climbs up his throat.

This is what fucking sucks about this whole fucking institution. This is why Jim had snorted blood up his nose when Pike suggested he enlist. Everybody is so interested in the circumstances of his birth and the mighty heroics of his stupid dead father but they don’t give two flying monkey fucks about Jim and his life and how he actually feels about growing up without somebody like George around teach him how to be a good man, or whatever. Everybody is so eager to tell him what a brilliant engineer his mother is, how she’s some kind of warp whisperer, a science magician, and they wonder why Jim doesn’t talk to her—why he doesn’t want much to do with a woman who couldn’t look him in the eye when he grew up and started looking too much like George’s son. They
don’t care about who he is or how fast he can calculate infinite numbers in his head or how many
languages he speaks or—or that he spent two months starving and freezing with 8 other kids who
relied on him to find food and shelter and keep them safe from the phaser fire picking off their family
members one by one.

He sends an email to Dr. Waffputty that says, “I’m not writing a research paper on Tarsus IV
because it would be hilariously redundant,” and then he sends a second message to Pike that says,
“Do you just hire any old asshat to teach your classes? If so I’d like to submit my resume.”

Then he passes out drunk alone in his dorm room.

X

“Dude,” says Gary the next day, once he gets back from his classes. “You have not moved since I
left this morning.”

“Mrrrgnnf,” Jim says, and smashes his face harder into his pillow. Is it possible to get rid of a
hangover through sheer will power of complete apathy?

“Dude, you can’t just skip class,” Gary says.

“Stop saying dude,” Jim moans.

“Are you sick, or something?” There’s the sound of clothing flying across the room and settling on
various pieces of furniture, because Gary is an asshole who has no comprehension of whose side is
whose and how hangers function. “Should I call that doctor you always hang out with?”

There’s a tone of bitterness in there—like, really, is Gary that pissed that Jim doesn’t want to be his
bff? He’s kind of a dick. More of a dick than Jim, even, which is saying something.

Jim doesn’t answer him and instead flails around for his PADD. No response from Dr. Fuckwuffty,
which hopefully means he is composing an apology that will bring tears to the eyes of educators
everywhere. There is, however, an email from Chris Pike, RE: I should have left you in Riverside.

“The answer to your question is yes, Starfleet does hire up any old asshat that exhibits any proclivity
whatsoever for educating the young and impressionable, but it’s cute that you think I have the
slightest bit of say at all within the bureaucracy of Starfleet Academy. Go ahead and send your
resume to Admiral Marcus, along with some character references. Oh, wait a minute, I am your only
character reference. Guess you’ll have to pass your classes first. Maybe you should lighten your
frankly astonishing course load.”

Pass his classes, ha. What a joke his life has become. He just types back “i said 3 years and i meant
it” and leaves it at that, because Pike is clearly so not the person to talk to while he’s dealing with all
of this shit.

Maybe he should call Bones, but predictably, the good doctor somehow psychically divines that Jim
is wallowing. So he shows up after his clinic shift that evening, when Jim’s getting rid of his feelings
through the copious consumption of whiskey.

Bones just purses his lips down at him and says, “Now, I’m all for drinking the pain away, but it’s
not even October. Do you need serious help in a 12 step form?”

“I’m in college,” Jim says, words dropping out of his mouth like molasses. Some whiskey slops
across his shirt. “This is what college kids do.”
“College kids go to parties and drink out of those little plastic red cups and fuck in the bathroom, and then they reminisce the next morning about the great time they can’t remember. You, however, are bemoaning your fate. It’s pathetic. Get up. Who are you?”

“I’m George Kirk’s son, didn’t you hear?” Jim says and Bones says, “Oh Jesus Christ,” and sits down with him to share a couple of shots.

(Later, though, after lots of talking and not talking and enduring Sympathetic Eyes from Bones—which are the worst ever, oh my God—Bones makes him drink about 10 gallons of water and eat some Saltines that he conjured out of nowhere and tucks him in. Maybe. Jim doesn’t remember much of anything. But Bones did leave him a hypo with a hangover cure on his bedside table in the morning, and set his alarm to wake him up in time for his classes.)

(Bones and Jim are best friends forever.)

X

to: jtkirk@starfleet.edu

from: chpike@starfleet.edu

subject: So glad you’re transitioning to a life of discipline

Kirk. Seriously. Stop having sex in public. I know you think you’re The Shit but you are in fact only here because I added you last-minute to our roster, and now for some reason the board thinks it’s my job to babysit you.

-Pike


to: chpike@starfleet.edu

from: jtkirk@starfleet.edu

subject: HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW ABOUT THAT

IT WAS ONLY THE ONE TIME

Plus, there’s something to be said here about my dedication to educating myself on other lifeforms and cultures. I might even write my thesis on the differing sexual relationships and preferences between Terrans and other humanoids.

It was only semi-public, anyway. It was three in the morning! Nobody hangs around that stupid Zefram Cochrane statue. But rest-assured it won’t happen again, because Zefram Cochrane watching the sky with a disturbingly aroused look on his face while you try to get it on is pretty much the biggest boner-killer EVER.

-jtk


to: jtkirk@starfleet.edu

from: chpike@starfleet.edu
subject: It's the 23rd century, Kirk. We have security cameras.

While I appreciate your no doubt dizzying wisdom and experience when it comes to interspecies sexual relations, I must remind you again that the statue in the courtyard is not the place to test your hypotheses. Expelling you would leave me with absolutely no regrets. Keep it in your uniform, son.

-Pike

to: chpike@starfleet.edu

from: jtkirk@starfleet.edu

subject: RE: It's the 23rd Century, Kirk. We have security cameras.

you would have SOME regrets. Mr. “i dare you to do better” would not expel me for a teensy little breech in social propriety, right? right???
i will stop having sex in public, cross my heart

-jtk

X

Unfortunately, it turns out that the lovely young cadet Jim, er…tested his hypothesis with was not entirely honest about her relationship status. He doesn’t find out until it’s too late that she is currently involved with Cadet Finnegan, an upperclassman with a hammy right hook and a temper to boot.

The universe doesn’t seem to like Jim very much.

He and Bones are walking across the cafeteria lawn at lunch time, bickering over the merits of mayonnaise, when somebody behind them yells, “Hey, Kirk!”

Jim turns, already smiling because he’s an idiot, and he doesn’t have time to dodge the fist flying toward him. He is struck square in the nose. It feels like his entire face crumples inward with a crunch. Everything goes white. Suddenly he’s on his ass, blinking back tears as warm blood drips into his open mouth. Automatically, he surges upward, prepared to retaliate—it’s Finnegan, Jim could kill that smug motherfucker with his bare hands, a knee right against the side of his fat head, a swift jab in the bump of his Adam’s apple—

He runs straight into Bones, who locks his arms around Jim and shoves him back. He’s not as strong as Jim but he’s solid and really dedicated to keeping Jim enrolled in Starfleet. Finnegan, meanwhile, is pelted with guys holding him back, which Jim chooses to take as a compliment and not proof that Finnegan has more friends.

“Stay the hell away from me and mine, Kirk!” Finnegan yells.

People are gathering, watching with rapt attention. Any second now there’s going to be an officer striding across the lawn, ready to dish out discipline, and with Jim’s luck and reputation he knows he’ll be the first to go.

“Come on,” Bones says, tugging him backwards.

Jim, his sleeve bunched against his nose to stem the blood flow, tries to push him off, but Bones
wont’t budge. Jim aches with adrenaline, the familiar fight-or-flight instinct he knows so well drumming through him. Life trained him this way: fight or die, punch back or lose. He learned that a long time ago.

“Can you believe that?” Jim says. “Usually I at least—get off, McCoy—I don’t even know what I did, he just fucking comes out of—where are we going?”

“Clinic.”

“‘Stay away from me and mine,’ who the hell talks like that? What a drama queen, Jesus.”

“Yeah, because you’re not dramatic at all,” Bones says. “Don’t you have something to wipe your face with? You’re getting blood all over your uniform.”

“You are so sympathetic, it’s touching, thank you,” Jim says. “This fucking hurts, did you know that? My nose is going to be permanently disfigured.”

“It was already disfigured, nobody will notice a change,” Bones assures him. “Come on, clinic’s up this way.”

Jim keeps up his stream of bitching even as Bones forces him to sit down in an examination room while he gets together the necessary instruments to put Jim’s face back together.

“You sure know how to make friends,” Bones says.

“I am going to get him,” Jim swears. “He is going to regret this.”

“Uh huh. Hold still.”

After Bones is done, Jim’s nose isn’t broken anymore and the swelling’s gone down, but he’s still bright red with bruising around his eyes and his head is pounding. Bones just throws a handful of tissues at him and says, “Wipe your face, you look like a homicide victim.”

Jim is so immersed in plotting that he forgets to change into a clean uniform before class, and Lieutenant Commander Crowder looks down his long nose at Jim and says, “Pretty sure blood isn’t regulation, cadet.”

“Nosebleeds, man, total day-ruiners,” Jim says, which earns him a very official flick to the side of the head and extra homework.

This shit is bananas.

X

He has to seduce Finnegan’s attractive neighbor to get access to his building, but Jim is willing to endure such hardships in the name of sweet, sweet revenge. This guy’s cute, anyway, and Jim’s a total sucker for the quiet ones.

After, it’s a pinch to hack the security code on Finnegan’s door.

The next day, Finnegan is marching around campus in a very literal blue-faced rage. Uproarious laughter follows him wherever he goes. Somehow (Jim can’t even begin to imagine), Finnegan’s skin has been dyed a brilliant cobalt blue, from the top of his shaved head and all the way down to his fingertips.

He finds Jim as the morning classes are ending. Students part before him as one massive, giggling
“Kirk!” he yells.

Jim has been waiting his whole life to use this precise expression of innocent surprise. He’s had a lot of practice as a very, very disobedient little boy. It’s the crowning glory of his well-stocked facial arsenal.

“Whoa, there, Cadet! Tie-dye experiment gone wrong?”

Finnegan’s too chicken to launch a punch unless it’s an ambush. Instead, he just clenches his fists and grits his teeth and looks very...primary colored.

“You fucked with my shower, you little shit,” he says. “I’m gonna make you wish you were dead.”

“I have absolutely no idea what you’re raving about. Have you tried nail polish remover?”

Finnegan makes like he’s about to strangle him, but everyone around takes a step closer. Jim just smiles his sweetest homegrown farm boy smile and waits until Finnegan has no choice but to stomp away, muttering darkly with his minions.

Everybody turns on Jim, a chorus of voices asking how he did it, if he did it, how Finnegan got himself into it; Jim just shrugs and says, “I guess he blue himself.”

X

His glory is short-lived. Less than a week later, he’s on his way to take his Intermediate Xenolinguistics midterm, and his door won’t open. He tries everything, including yelling, kicking it, and whispering sweet nothings. No dice.

After about 30 seconds of sheer total panic, because the door is working and beeping but it just won’t slide open, Jim shrieks, “MR. MITCHELL!” using his best Angry Mom voice. Gary suddenly lurches upright in bed, bleary and confused.

“Our door is broken! I have an exam! What did you do!?”

“Huh?”

“Oh my God it is glued shut!” Jim says. Cement! Somebody had cemented it shut! “Fuck! Gary, wake up! It was Finnegan, that asshole, I am going to eat him!”

Gary is absolutely no help as Jim, in a desperate rush, shimmies out of his tiny window and somehow attempts to drop safely in the grass three stories below. He dangles by his fingers and for a single hysterical moment he thinks oh god oh god I’m going to be dead and I’ll never be commissioned and Pike will have to explain why he vouched for a moron who died falling out a goddamn window—but then he lets go and falls with a high-pitched but very manly war cry (“AIIIIIEEE!”) and hits the ground like a sack of mud. He sprains both ankles and bruises his tailbone all to hell, but he makes it to class in the nick of time. He can feel Uhura’s Judgy Eyes on him. Normally he would blow her a kiss, but his feet feel like they’re going to fall off.

“Nice of you to join us, Mr. Kirk,” the professor says.

He totally gets an A, though. And Finnegan is dead.

X
The prank war that ensues goes down in history as the most outrageous, the most humiliating, and occasionally the most painful ever in Starfleet records. It only ends because Bones is a big tattle-tale. In the good doctor’s words: “Your idiocy is all well and good until you come back with first-degree burns all over your goddamn hands, Jim, that’s not a prank, that’s dangerous, and you need to report him.”

“No way! I’m fine! My best friend’s a doctor!”

Bones fixes his gaze firmly on the skin he’s regenerating on Jim’s hands, but his next words are harsh, though affectionate if Jim listens past all the grumbling. “Look, kid, I get it, you hate him, but if you’re not going to do something about it, I will. This is stupid. You dyed him blue and covered his dorm room in fake vomit—”

Jim giggles at the memory.

“—and he in turn sprained your ankles and burned your hands.”

“Okay, no, that’s, like, not even close to—”

But Bones glares at him and Jim deflates. In the end, Jim just hacks the Starfleet messaging system and sends Finnegan a very scary message from who he’ll think is Admiral Komack, outlining all the ways in which Finnegan has been caught, and how he and Kirk will meet severe punishment if the war continues.

So the prank war ends, but the open fury doesn’t, and now they communicate solely in fiery glares from across crowded hallways.

But at the end of the year, it still doesn’t stop Jim from reprogramming Finnegan’s PADD to play horrible Andorian opera music at top, screeching volume every time he receives a homework assignment.

Don’t ever say Jim Kirk isn’t all about winning.

~*~YEAR TWO~*~

In Jim’s second year, he actually gets to pick his roommate, and on the grounds of “but think of how much easier it’ll be if I’m right there for you to make sure I haven’t died of some truly heinous STD!” Jim and Bones hole up together in an off-campus tin can apartment. But at least they get to bring their own mattresses. And they get separate rooms, which had been one of Bones’ requirements, along with “I am never, ever doing your laundry.”

This leads to a lot of…shenanigans.

Jim, for example, meets Gaila in Warp Mechanics, and they spend about two months fucking in any of their spare time that happens to overlap. The beginning of Bones’ and Jim’s new living arrangement starts out, appropriately, with Bones walking in on them while they’re engaged in a particularly rousing match of the naked tango on the couch.

“Sweet merciful baby Jesus,” Bones says, turning a stunning shade of ripe-tomato red and backing instantly out of the room.
“Oh, no, come back, you’re so cute!” Gaila calls after him, and Jim doesn’t know much about true love, but that’s got to be pretty close.

Bones, because he is a brave man who is sure to go on to do many great things, actually walks back into the apartment and says to the ceiling, “Why do I have to leave? This is my apartment too, you know!”

“I am sure Jim wouldn’t mind an extra pair of hands, here,” says Gaila, from between Jim’s legs. Honestly, anything sounds good to Jim at this point, so he says dizzily, “Yes.”

“No, thank you,” Bones says, ever the polite Southern gentleman. Then he snaps out of it. “Take it to your room, Jim!”

Jim sighs like this is the worst day of his life, when in fact it’s quickly becoming top five, easy. Gaila is not only a) smarter than her whole year put together and b) drop-dead gorgeous but also c) super into Jim. And she’s got a mouth on her, holy shit.

Bones taps his foot impatiently, still staring at the ceiling. His flush has yet to fade. Jim gives him a half-assed salute as Gaila drags him into his bedroom, but Bones ignores him.

The following morning, Jim makes everybody breakfast. It’s Saturday, and he’s feeling generous. Predictably, the smell of strong coffee and sizzling bacon lures Bones from his bear cave and he pokes his rumpled face out of his door, sniffs loudly, and says suspiciously, “What are you doing?”


Bones doesn’t answer. Jim’s actually surprised he’s said any words so far; Bones’ verbal functionality before his first cup of coffee usually hovers around the basest of caveman interactions. Grunts, snarls, the occasional hiss.

Jim wisely keeps silent as he sets a steaming mug of coffee in front of Bones, and then starts flipping pancakes. About ten minutes later, after Bones has swigged his way to a higher consciousness, Bones asks, “Your girlfriend still here?”

“Yeah, she’s showering,” Jim says. He grins at that imagery—can’t wait to join her later—and then adds, “She’s not my girlfriend, though.”

“I don’t care,” Bones says. “Whatever happened to the ol’ rubber band on the doorknob trick, huh?”

“We were kind of distracted,” Jim says.

“Please tell me you waited until you were indoors before taking your clothes off.”

“I mean—we were in this building.”

He plates the bacon and pancakes, smotheres them in syrup, then takes a seat by Bones and hands over one of the plates. From beneath his messy hair, Bones glares at Jim with fire in his bloodshot eyes.

Gaila chooses that moment to flounce out of the bathroom, wearing Jim’s bathrobe and wringing out her red curls on a towel. She grins brightly at them both, then runs her smooth, shower-warm hand against Jim’s shoulder.

“Good morning,” she sings. She winks at Bones. “Nice to see you again, cutie.”
Bones grunts. “Don’t call me that. M’name’s Leonard McCoy. And you must be Jim’s flavor of the week.”

Jim raises his eyebrows. “Ignore him, Gaila, he’s cranky in the mornings. And the afternoons. And at night. He’s actually really mean all the time, just ignore everything he says.”

“Flavor of the week?” Gaila asks—Jim thinks that maybe it’s a weird Human saying that’s lost on her, but she just grins lasciviously and says, “Oh, honey, no, Jimmy’s going to be craving me long after I get tired of him.”

Bones snorts. “Good to see you’ve found somebody who matches you in ego, at least.”

“You’re awesome,” Jim informs Gaila, and as she grabs some food she says airily, “I know.”

“Yes, you’re very nice,” Bones says. “But listen up. If y’all insist on screwing on the couch, at least warn me first. You know, a quick message while I’m out would do it. A friendly sign on the door, maybe.”

So it’s absolutely Bones’ fault when Jim actually puts up a sign on their door that says WARNING, DO NOT ENTER, WHIMSICAL COPULATION CURRENTLY IN PROGRESS.

“What does that even mean!??” Jim hears Bones yell from the hallway. Gaila, beneath him, laughs her musical laugh.

Bones bursts in again, because that’s what Bones does, and when he ascertains that they are both still fully clothed, he fixes Gaila with a steely physician’s eye and says, “You are on pheromone inhibitors, right?”

“Yes. Jim just really likes fucking me. Are you sure you don’t want to join? There are plenty of orifices to go around.”

Bones can actually see the horror of that reality curdle in Bones’ guts. It’s beautiful. White in the face, Bones storms to his room, while Jim cackles after him.

In the weeks to come, Jim and Gaila hang out more and more, send each other flirty little messages in the late evenings, and have more sex in increasingly exciting variations. (He’d promised Pike no more public sex, but he really likes breaking promises.) They fall into the easiest of friendships. It’s really not unlike the way Jim and Bones immediately got on with each other, and it’s such a relief. The naked benefits aren’t bad, either; Jim forgot how much he loves Orion sexual mores.

Gaila derives endless joy from messing with Bones, too. It’s a special talent of hers. She proposition him endlessly, and he reacts with uproarious degrees of embarrassment, sarcasm, and sheer terror.

Eventually, though, it sort of comes out that all of her propositioning, her loud declarations for love of threesomes—she actually isn’t kidding.

Not that Jim really thought she was entirely joking, but…it’s Bones, come on!

Gaila, Jim, Gary Mitchell, and one of Gaila’s girlfriends, a sassy science cadet named Marlena Moreau, are all enjoying lunch one day when Bones spots them and stomps over. Not because he’s mad, or anything. He just stomps everywhere.

“Bones!” Jim says happily. “Pull up a chair, I don’t want my tomatoes.”

Bones sits next to him and Jim immediately starts piling tomato chunks from his sad spaghetti onto
“Excuse me,” Bones says, but doesn’t bother arguing—just brushes them all aside with his fork and sighs heavily. He nods at everyone at the table, probably because it pains him to smile, but when he notices Cadet Moreau, he says, “Well, hey, there, Marlena.”

“Hi, Len,” she says warmly.

Jim perks up immediately. Len? What?

“How’s your research paper goin’?” Bones asks her, like this is totally normal.

“You know each other?” Jim asks.

They both ignore him. “Oh, fine,” Marlena says. “I’ve been spending all my time in the biology lab, you know, trying to emulate the D’nethi mitosis process.”

“You let me know if you need anything else,” Bones says, and he actually smiles a little and looks goofy.

“Wait, how do you know each other?” Jim demands.

“You know, I do hang out with people aside from your sorry ass,” Bones tells him. “She’s a biologist. I’m a doctor. Our paths collided.”

Jim opens his mouth to whine, but Marlena saves him from himself.

“I didn’t know you two knew each other,” she asks, gesturing between them with her fork. “So, Jim, is this your…?”

Jim can’t be sure, but it sounds like Gaila kicks her under the table. He narrows his eyes and says, “Uh, roommate? Yeah. Why?”

Marlena blushes. “No reason.”

Blessedly ignorant, Bones just shovels food into his mouth.

“So, Dr. McCoy,” Gaila says. She’s practically purring, and Jim knows her well enough by now to know what’s coming. “Are you busy later?”

If Gaila was looking at Jim like that, smirk curling her lips dangerously, Jim knows his schedule would immediately clear up. Bones just says, “Hospital shift tonight. Probably not gonna be home ‘til three in the goddamn morning.”

“Oh, that’s a shame,” Gaila says, pouting attractively. “I was hoping we could get to know each other a little better. Jim and I always seem to miss you!”

Bones’ tired glare loses its potency on Gaila. Instead, he says, “Gaila, flattered as I am that you’re sweet on my Southern, I can honestly say without a single shred of doubt that I will never have sex with you.”

“Ouch,” Gary says. He elbows Jim, like this is a good show, or something.

Gaila doesn’t even flinch. “Oh, I’m always up for a challenge. Wait—are you exclusively homosexual?”
“Am I—what?” Bones says. He looks desperately to Jim, like this is somehow his fault. “Jim!”

Jim shrugs away, because he has his own horrific realizations to deal with. Tendrils of spaghetti dangle from his mouth, his uniform is splattered with red sauce, and everybody at the table thinks he’s fucking Bones.

“For your information,” Bones says hotly, “I was happily married to a woman for about—well, about a year, and then I was unhappily married—that isn’t the point!” Bones says. “Why am I defending myself? This is ridiculous. Stop propositioning me.”

“Ugh, fine,” Gaila says, not sounding terribly upset. “I make no promises, though. I’ve seen you shirtless. I can’t be held accountable for any propositioning when you walk around your apartment like that.”

“Like—Jim, I am leaving. I will see you tonight, and please don’t invite her, just let me come home to peace and quiet,” Bones says, and without further ado, he slings his medical bag over his shoulder, grabs his plate, and storms off.

The moment he’s out of earshot, Jim’s hysteria bubbles over and he says, “I AM NOT SLEEPING WITH BONES.”

“Well, nobody thinks you’re getting a lot of sleeping done,” Gary says, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Gaila,” Jim says, desperate. He grasps her hands across the table and entreats her with the best puppy-dog look he can muster. “Gaila, please, please tell me you haven’t been spreading this rumor. Does everybody think Bones and I are doing it?”

“It?” Gaila says, feigning ignorance.

“It! The thing! Sex! Sexual it!” Jim yells. It garners a few stares, but once everybody sees it’s just Jim Kirk, they continue going about their days.

“I haven’t been spreading any rumors, honest!” Gaila says. “I mean, I don’t really need to.”

Jim feels his dignity swirl down the toilet of his blackened soul. “What do you mean?” he says.

“It’s kind of common knowledge that you two are fucking,” Gaila says, shrugging.

“How is it—what do you mean, common knowledge?” Jim demands. “That doesn’t make any sense because we’re not! So how—how did—what?”

“Dude,” Gary says, ignoring Jim’s murderous glare, “You spent every waking moment with him last year. You moved in with him this year, even though he’s a doctor, and he’d get his own single if he wanted.”

“Why is that weird?” Jim demands. “Two people can’t live with each other if they aren’t sleeping together?”

“You lived with me and we weren’t sleeping together,” Gary points out.

“The greatest disappointment of your life, Gary, I know,” Jim says.

“Jim. Jimmy. Examine your life right now.” Gaila smiles at Jim encouragingly, like this is somehow going to help. “You two flirt with each other all the time. I’ve seen the way you look at each other. I know you’ve drunkenly fallen asleep on the floor together on at least two separate occasions. He
comes to get you when you’re too wasted to find your way home. You pick him up after his shifts at the hospital.”

“Because he’s my best friend!” Jim says.

Marlena, who Jim met about twenty minutes ago but who looks like she she knows every secret of the universe, including all of Jim’s, touches his arm gently, fixes him with an understanding gaze, and says, “He ate your tomatoes for you.”

“So!” Jim says.

“I thought you were going to bite Marlena’s head off when she called him Len,” Gary says.

“No, I wasn’t, it was just weird, nobody calls him that!”

“Every time I’ve asked him to join us, you always seemed so excited!” Gaila says. “I was trying to hep you out!”

“You can’t hold me to anything I say while under the influence of your blowjobs,” Jim says. “I’m not sleeping with him, okay? We’re just friends. And not the kind of ‘just friends’ we are, Gaila, there are no benefits.”

“Okay, okay!” Gaila says soothingly. “But Jim. Serious question. Do you want to be sleeping with him?”

“That’s it.” Jim grabs his stuff as dramatically as possible. “I’m leaving. You’re all disowned.”

“Serious question!” Gaila calls after him.

Nope, nope, nope. Jim is not thinking about this right now. He leaves, trying to summon anger, but not really managing it. He’s never cared what anybody thinks of him, let alone what they think of his sex life, so it’s no skin off his teeth if everybody and their dog thinks him and Bones are…you know, boning. It seriously doesn’t matter.

Besides, they don’t flirt! They don’t! Jim is equally as flirtatious with everyone he meets; it’s his conversational default. He and Bones get along so well because Jim doesn’t take all of Bones’ bitching personally, and Bones doesn’t take any of Jim personally, so it works out well. They just sort of…exist together happily. Amiable coexistence, built on an undeniable spark of chemistry. But friendship chemistry! Chemistry of the friendly type!

Yes, okay, they have fallen asleep in a drunken pile occasionally. Sometimes it’s just easier to get to the couch than it is to get to their separate bedrooms. And maybe they’re both cuddlers. But it’s never awkward, because they never were awkward. They just moved right past that stage and into the let’s-share-everything-about-our-fucked-up-lives stage.

Bones is…well, he takes people home sometimes. Women, mostly, but sometimes men, usually talkative, slim-hipped companions with easy smiles and no morning-after expectations. It’s never been a…thing.

Gaila’s question floats back to him. Do you want to be sleeping with him?

Jim imagines it: Bones’ steady, broad hands settled low on his waist, thumbing his jutting hip bones. Bones’ mouth sliding across his collarbone. Bones would taste like bourbon and wide empty sky. Stubble would tickle along their jaws as they spent long, quiet moments kissing each other loose and easy.
A cold slide of uncertainty makes its way down Jim’s throat. He accesses his PADD and types a message to Gaila, just a single word: *Maybe*.

But he goes to class and he forgets about the whole thing, because there isn’t any point wondering. He’s not going to ruin one of the only good things he’s got, so he keeps his mouth shut, and he and Bones carry on as best friends—two halves of the same pathetic, obnoxious whole.

X

**From GAILA 1812**: GUESS WHO JUST GOT 102% ON HER PLASMA DYNAMICS EXAM

**From JIM 1813**: was it charlene masters??? that chick is so smart oh my god

**From GAILA 1814**: FUCK YOU JIM KIRK IT WAS MEEEEEEE we should celebrate

**From JIM 1817**: normally i would say yes but i would also say yes to not falling asleep while rolling around my tactical sim tomorrow so

**From GAILA 1819**: ugh wow that sounds super boring. stop being responsible. i want to come over and i want to bring booze

**From JIM 1820**: tomorrow night i PROMISE i’ll be right-side-up by then

**From GAILA 1821**: i also want to bring my mouth

**From JIM 1822**: GAILA YOU ARE KILLING ME

**From GAILA 1824**: okay fine. tomorrow though you are getting the congratulatory blowjob OF YOUR LIFE

**From JIM 1824**: sjflajglhasj

X

Magically, he stumbles across Uhura in the library one day, sitting all by her lonesome and looking ready to tear her hair out. Jim honestly can’t resist, so he slinks over, drops his satchel on the table, and says, “You’re in a club, right?”

Uhura actually *stops breathing*, she’s so bothered by the interruption. She looks up and says, “What?”

Jim pulls up a chair, even though Uhura is actively trying to light him on fire with the power of her glare.

“A club!” he says. “You’re in one, right?”

“First of all, why do you care, and second of all, go away, this is really important and I don’t want to talk to you. Ever. Bye!”

“I was talking to Junot—you know Junot, right?—and he was saying what a great VP you make,” Jim says, as if he hadn’t heard her. “I think he has a crush on you. All that Vulcan poetry you recite.”

“Not that you know anything about Vulcan poetry,” Uhura says.
“I heard you have an opening for a position.”

Jim didn’t think it was possible for Uhura to look more murderous, but lo and behold! She crosses her arms so tightly she probably cuts off some blood circulation.

“Don’t even think about it,” she says dangerously.

“I am thinking about it, but believe it or not, it’s not to harass you,” Jim says. “This is just a coincidence! It’s my second year, I figured I should engage in some intellectual community bonding, or whatever.”

“Xi chiya yu wa kahlchey ze?” she says in icy Andorii.

“But chess club is too nerdy!” Jim protests, relishing the look of total shock on Uhura’s face. “I mean, I thought about it, but if you believe it, all they do is sit around and play chess all day. Yawn.”

Uhura still won’t bite. “I really couldn’t care less what club you join, but stay away from Xenolinguistics. It is the one place I am absolutely certain I can avoid you.”

“I see you, like, once a month,” Jim says dismissively. “Mostly I’m giving you a heads up. And testing the waters, I guess. So what you’re telling me is—if I join, you’ll string me up by my balls until they shrivel up?”

“Like raisins,” Uhura says.

“Ka t’al nat pak sudha, tu k’helleya na pak,” Jim says. “That’s Vulcan for—”

“Challenge your preconceptions, or they will challenge you,” Uhura finishes. “I know.”

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were a little impressed!”

“You are infuriating.”

“I can live with that,” Jim says, and he submits his application to the Xenolinguistics Club that same night and soon sufficiently impresses everybody to earn a place as the treasurer, much to Uhura’s chagrin.

Deep down—very, very deep down, in the cockles of her soul where she keeps all her secrets—he knows he’s sort of growing on her. It helps that he spends the next month reciting bits of lesser-known Vulcan poetry at the beginning of every meeting.

“Do you have a thing for Vulcans?” he asks her.

“Raisins,” she reminds him. He flees.

X

A mere two weeks before Jim’s third semester ends—which means he’s in the midst of finals hell, that special place where all good cadets go to wither and die—he gets an email from Captain Stephen Garrovick. He sighs, thinking it’s probably a light reprimand for…ugh, something, Jim can’t really think right now, his entire brain has been rewired to analyze in multiple-choice format.

Captain Garrovick messages Jim because:

A—Jim is in trouble.
B—Jim failed his astronavigation simulation.

C—Jim is hallucinating.

D—All of the above.

Jim wants to just trash it, because A is the likeliest answer and also his Astronavigation and Stellar Cartography notes are kicking his ass, so he’d rather save the message for never.

Except he opens it, because he’s responsible now, or something, and as he scans the lines, all the letters start blurring together and his heart starts pounding and he’s pretty sure he’s going to puke.

“BONES!” he shrieks.

Bones doesn’t come tearing out of his room like he should at that caliber of distress because he’s far too used to Jim screaming for no reason, so he just yells back, “What?”

“You have to come out here!” Jim can’t stop reading this message. He’s going to keep reading this message until his eyes fall out of his head.

“No, I don’t,” Bones says, but he says it from the doorway to his room. “What is it?”

Jim practically bounces on the couch. “Guess who just got offered a place on the Farragut next semester?”

Bones scowls. “What?”

“I’m not even fucking kidding,” Jim says. Suddenly he’s grinning so hard he can’t see straight. “Oh my God, I’m having a heart attack. Can you have a heart attack from happiness?”

“No,” Bones says dismissively. “Hang on. You’re not even qualified.”

“Except I super am according to Captain Garrovick.” He holds out his PADD so Bones can read the message. “He is specifically requesting me. He’s already gotten it cleared with the educational board. Apparently I have kicked so much ass in all of my classes and sims that he thinks I should be bumped up a semester for a starship posting.”

Bones reads quickly, and though his default expression is always skeptical annoyance, Jim knows him well enough to see his posture soften.

“Jim. This is a huge deal.”

“I know!” Jim stands and jumps up and down a few time to get the jitters out of his system. “Holy shit. Holy shit! I’ve got a starship posting! We’re due to leave January third! Holy shit!”

“Holy shit,” Bones agrees. He finally laughs a little, mostly at Jim, and then catches Jim off guard with a bear hug. He gives them whenever he can get away with it, and this time, Jim’s actually happy to squeeze back.

“Congratulations, kid,” Bones says sincerely. “Don’t tell anybody I said so, but you deserve it.”

He doesn’t quite run all over campus, singing to anybody who will listen that he’s been assigned to the Farragut next semester, but he does send a message to all of his friends.

**From JIM 1749::** GUESS WHO’S GOING TO SPACE, BITCHES????
Which is pretty much the same thing.

X

But Jim really isn’t that lucky, is he?

X

(Jim is supposed to have the time of his life on his first starship posting. And he does, at first.)

“Dear Bones. Predictably, space is awesome. As you can imagine, I am very busy and important and I spend all the livelong day fucking shit up. Okay. Not really. There’s like 80 other cadets on board and we aren’t allowed to do jack shit. I’m a gamma shift navigator, which basically makes me the helmsman’s back-up’s back-up. It’s cool, though. I have to introduce you to Captain Garrovick when we get back. You would love him. He’s like a grumpier version of you, except he actually has power over people. It’s beautiful. You’ll weep.

Anyway, just wanted to say hi. It’s only been three weeks and I already miss my favorite crazy doctor. Your new roommate isn’t too boring, right? Because you need somebody to spice up your life.

Tell Joanna happy birthday from me! I hope you get to see her this year, and I also hope that your ex-wife gets ebola.

Talk to you soon!”

(It takes a few extra days for messages to ping back and forth. Jim tries to hack his way into a direct line through Starfleet, rather than the typical low-priority pathways, but no dice; Garrovick catches him.)

“Dear Bones. I am deeply wounded by your intimation that your new roommate is somehow cooler than me. That’s a scientific impossibility. I am the epitome of cool. Has your new roommate ever gotten a blowjob while sitting backwards on a hoverbike? Survey says no.

Speaking of which: I actually got to drive this ship yesterday. That’s like...holy shit, man. It was amazing. I mean, it’s not captain’s chair, but being on the bridge is....

Whatever. Wow, I’m boring you to tears right now. How are you? Classes kicking your ass? I can’t tell you how nice it is to not have any goddamn research papers to write or lab reports to complete. Instead, I am on the longest tactical simulation ever and it’s perfect.

I’m supposed to work with the senior cartographers later to help chart the orbits of a few unidentified moons. Desk work, really. But I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t looking forward to it.

Hey, give Gaila a kiss for me, will you? That would totally make her day. She’s still trying to get in your pants.

Talk to you soon. Send Joanna my love.”
“Dear Bones. I know I’ve said this roughly ten million times, but space? Is fucking awesome.

I don’t know. It’s like—I wouldn’t have said that two years ago. I wouldn’t have wanted to admit it. But I’m...I’m good at this, Bones. I’m not doing much but...there’s only a handful of cadets that Garrovick personally requested. I feel like I’ve done something right for once.

Oh, my God, I’m sorry, I know, you’re a doctor, not a therapist. I’ll shut up now. I don’t even know what I’m talking about. Anyway. I’m glad you’ve so far suppressed your murderous urges towards your roommate. If I’d been there, I would have given him a standing ovation, but then again I think fart jokes are pretty hilarious, so maybe I’m not the best judge of the situation.

Also, sorry I’m not there for your flight sims. You looked a little green in your last vid. I’m sure you passed, though. I’m not even worried.

See you in June, Bones.”

(People believe in him out here.)

“Dear Bones. Can’t talk long, but guess what? Official mission time! Tycho IV, what’s up. Starfleet apparently got some weird reports from a few ships passing through the system, so we’re heading over to check it out. It’s probably nothing. It never really is with these types of things.

Hey, keep me updated on your life. I know you’re busy but you’re not too busy to send your best friend a vid feed, are you? No, you’re not. I want to see your precious grumpy face. Your scowl is the light of my life. You never told me how your flight sims went.

See you in two months!”

(And then, naturally, like everything else good in Jim’s life, it comes to a screeching halt.)

“Uh…hey, Bones. Uh…you’ve probably heard by now what happened. I can’t…really disclose any information. Hasha—that’s, uh, acting—or I guess she’s just Captain Hasha now—uh, she said we’re not supposed to say anything to anybody until we can make a full report and undergo debriefing back on Earth. But I just…I wanted to let you know I’m okay, and. Yeah. That’s it.”

(That's not it.)

“Hi Bones. I know I just sent you a message yesterday. I’m not supposed to say anything. I’m not supposed to—I mean, we’re compiling reports, and Starfleet just doesn’t want info getting back to the press, but….
Jesus Christ. Sorry. Um. Captain Hasha says it wasn’t my fault, but. I don’t know. I shot at it. They’re calling it a Dikironium cloud creature. Just this sort of…fog, or something, but sentient, malicious. It was like—it was coming for us, and we didn’t know what it was, but I just shot it. There wasn’t a red alert or anything, and nobody else seemed too worried, but I guess I was jumpy. I don’t know. Fuck. Fuck. Look, everybody’s saying it was nobody’s fault, that the thing just came to kill us, but nobody died until I fired, okay? That’s fucking—that’s what it is. Nobody died until I fired. And it didn’t even fucking work, the phaser blast just passed right through it like a fucking sneeze. I’m not supposed to be telling you this and I won’t even have time to get a response from you. I just. It’s easier, now, then it would be in person, I guess. And you’re the only person who won’t…who ever gave a damn about me, so….

This is so fucked up. I don’t know. I’m sorry. I’ll see you in a few days.”

X

Jim’s not sure what he expects when he steps off the shuttle on Earth, but it isn’t Bones shoving the crowd aside to find Jim and wordlessly fold him into a hug. Jim just stands frozen, in total shock. But then he melts—folds into it—and he realizes he hasn’t slept in days—has never been more exhausted or more lonely in his entire life.

He bends his face forward. “Hi,” he says, voice muffled in Bones’ neck. Bones’ comforting body heat seeps into Jim. He smells like clean hospital and cheap hair gel and that spicy, citrusy cologne he uses. Judging by the smoothness of his cheeks, he shaved that morning. It’s too many sensations all at once. Jim doesn’t ever want to let go. He let go of Bones back in January, and look where that got him.

“You moron,” Bones says roughly. He grabs his shoulders and pushes him back, just so he can look at Jim’s face. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“Don’t,” he starts.

“Haven’t you heard any of the other reports?”

Jim shakes his head. “They haven’t been released yet.”

“You’re the only person who followed that stupid order,” Bones says. “Reports have gone out. The cloud creature was already killing crew members. No warning. There’s a reason you and the others survived. You were the only one who fired first. It saved people, Jim.”

Worn to a nub by his own failures, Jim barely hears him. “No. I fired, it attacked. That’s—”

“Listen to me—” Bones says, but suddenly they are split by a swarm of people. Jim hears Cadet Kirk! from behind him, and he turns, and knows he’s supposed to report somewhere, say something, talk to people. So he follows the stream of cadets and officers lining up, ready to be hauled off somewhere for an official debriefing. Jim shoots a mournful look over his shoulder, and the last thing he sees before the crash of bodies swallows him is the sadness and frustration in Bones’ lost expression.

X

Any crew member remotely involved in the incident with the Dikironium cloud creature must attend a mass debriefing with the most senior officers currently posted at the Academy, and the rest of the heads of Starfleet Academy. Jim sits near the back, because the second he walks in, he sees Captain Pike trying to catch his eye. He doesn’t have the energy for it, so he slouches in his chair and tries to
blend in with the sea of red-clad cadets.

It’s all a lot of bullshit. Pike shouldn’t even be there. He’s the only captain in a sea of admirals, except for Hasha, and Jim knows it must have something to do with him. He messages Bones halfway through it to tell him so, but Bones never responds. He sighs and slouches further as Captain Hasha is briefly questioned on the finer points of the incident.

One hundred and forty-six crew members died, including Garrovick, and Hasha mentions that Jim attempted to shoot the creature, but it was ineffective. Heads turn in his direction. He chews his lower lip.

When they are dismissed, Jim files out with the rest of the crew, staring at his shoes and wondering if he can talk Bones into giving him a sedative.

Someone stops him with a hand on his shoulder. “Cadet Kirk?”

It’s Captain Hasha. He snaps to attention. “Yes, ma’am.”

“At ease,” she says.

He looks at her, and guilt rises in him anew. She’s a smooth-skinned Andorian woman with eyes that seem to see into him. He remembers how she reacted back on the bridge: how, before Garrovick collapsed, she ordered Jim not to fire, because they didn’t know what it would do to the creature, but of course Jim is terrible at following orders, so he fired anyway. It didn’t affect the creature at all; the phaser fire sizzled on a secondary comm panel. It just made that thing furious. And then Garrovick was dead.

She had never lost focus. Her resolve held firm in the face of terror. Jim had watched her in awe. Would he have reacted the same, in her position? Would his eyes focus like that—would his expression betray no fear? Would he roll his shoulders back and face the unknown without sparing a moment to address the trepidation coiling in his stomach? Could he make those calls?

Could he be great, like Hasha? Like Garrovick?

“You’ve been called to a meeting. They want you to stay behind,” Hasha says, surprisingly gentle. She smiles at him. He feels a small part of himself crumble; she must pity him. But at least she doesn’t hate him.

“Okay,” he says numbly.

“Cadet.” She clears her throat. Her eyes go bright. But she just says, “You did well.”

It’s like a send-off to his entire Starfleet career. They’ll say he was posted to a starship too soon and bump him back a year. He’ll never graduate in time to get posted to the Enterprise—it’s where Bones is headed, and where any cadet with real aspirations wants to go. She’s scheduled for completion within the year. They’ve already promised her to Pike. Jim, naturally, wants to follow. But if this…this thing trails him, and they decide to punish him—fairly, he might add—then he’s never going to get the chance.

He messages Bones again, frantically, but receives no response.

Jim parks it in the back, ignoring the eyes of all the crew members of the Farragut who wonder what idiot thing Jim Kirk’s done this time, to be staying behind with all the Starfleet higher-ups.
He hears the exit doors whoosh shut finally, and then he’s blanketed in silence. His ears strain to pick up what Admiral Marcus is saying to Captain Hasha, but their voices are nothing more than low echoes mulling together.

Captain Pike stares at him contemplatively, no surprise there. He might be smiling a little, but Jim doesn’t take the time to check.

“Cadet Kirk,” Admiral Komack says. “Step forward, please.”

Chin up, shoulders back. He marches and swallows a sigh. He makes eye contact with Komack—with Quiring—with Pike. Then, firmly at attention, Jim grits his teeth and waits.

“We’ve read your report, Cadet, and we’ve also read Captain Hasha’s report regarding your actions aboard the *Farragut*,” Komack begins. “Is there anything you’d like to add?”

Jim would like to add that the only home he has anymore is skyward, and that Garrovick is dead and he’s sorry because Garrovick believed in Jim and a lot of people don’t, and he knows how to follow orders but he doesn’t know how to sit by and let people die, and his fingers already knew how to feel no pulse on a warm neck, but the *Farragut* let him practice again, and it was almost too much.

But he can’t say any of that because it doesn’t matter, and Garrovick is still dead, and he just wants to fall sleep.

“No, sir,” Jim says.

The look Pike offers him is impossible to decipher. Without preamble, he says, “You’re not in trouble, Kirk.”

Jim lets out a slow breath. “Okay.”

“We’re recognizing you for your valor,” Pike clarifies, and Jim looks up sharply. “The report of everyone present during the incident who witnessed your actions agree that you are the sole reason that many people survived.”

“What?” Jim says blankly. He feels nauseous. He wishes Bones were here. “Sir, I don’t understand.”

“In your report, you seem to suggest that you are to blame for what happened,” Komack cuts in. “Explain.”

Jim flounders. “Sir, I—like I said in my report, nobody died until—until I fired. We were unsure what was happening, we didn’t know what a Dikironium cloud creature was. But Chief Engineer Min tried to get through to the bridge and failed, and I felt that something was wrong. I don’t know why I did, but I did, and that thing attacked Captain Garrovick. And maybe we don’t know anything about that life form but it was malicious intent, sir, I’m sure of it, I would stake my life on it.”

“So would I, seeing as Garrovick did not survive,” Komack says.

Desperate, Jim stares right at Pike—the one responsible for Jim, like he’d tiredly pointed out so many times before—and he says, “I drew my phaser, but Captain Hasha ordered me not to fire. I fired anyway. It didn’t seem to harm the creature at all, but it left, and Garrovick collapsed. Garrovick was already dead. I promise. But then…*then* it attacked the rest of the crew. It left, and it killed as it went. That’s when we started losing crew members.”

“Kirk, you were already losing crew members.” Pike leans forward, shaking his head in disbelief. “You are drawing conclusions from false assumptions. Every single report in front of me says it had
already traveled through the ship, taking lives, and when it came to the bridge, you fired, scared it off, gave pursuit, and got rid of it.”

No, that—no. It wasn’t like that. “I fired my weapon, sir, yes, but it didn’t—”

Pike cuts across him again. “You then proceeded to gather your own team and secure every deck of the **Farragut**.”

“I didn’t gather anybody, we all just came across each other, and we knew we had to do—”

“And you were the one who figured out a high concentration of copper would get rid of it—”

“No, it was just common sense, it attempted to attack Commander Rhi, who has copper-based blood, but it passed him over, and since it was killing by draining blood, I just—”

“And then you helmed the efforts to gather the injured—”

“No, I didn’t, everybody was helping, I was doing the same thing that—”

“And for the entirety of the return trip to Earth, you didn’t sleep for more than two minutes trying to help keep the ship running.”

“We were short, we all picked up the slack, I didn’t do anything special.”

“You clocked hours in Engineering, in sickbay, the bridge, on just about every available science station on the ship. And you did not stop until the CMO apparently ordered you to take a nap.”

“It wasn’t like that!” Jim insists. Pike seems to be laughing at him a little, which is not right. “It attacked Garrovick and I fired, and when it disappeared of course I left, I had to, and there were… then there were bodies everywhere, sir, just…and everywhere I checked, people were dead, and I didn’t gather a team, we just—it was logical to work together to secure the ship while the rest of the survivors kept it running. I left my post, sir, that itself is a punishable act—”

“Why are you so determined to deny that you were a hero, Kirk?” Pike truly looks like he wants to understand, but he’s also not listening. “You saved lives. You were quick on your feet, and you acted as a leader in a tight spot, and you made judgment calls that ultimately proved completely correct. You did the only thing a good officer should have done in the same circumstances. Your choice to fire did not lead to anyone’s death. You were the first one to fire on the bridge, and that area suffered the least amount of casualties.”

“Except for Captain Garrovick,” Jim says darkly.

“Whose death was a waste, yes, but that is captancy for you,” Pike says, expression clouding. “Cadet Kirk. For goodness’ sake. We’re trying to give you a medal.”

“I don’t want a medal, sir,” Jim says. He feels sick just thinking about it.

Admiral Marcus sighs heavily. “Well, tough, Cadet, we might give you one anyway. Chris, this kid’s a nightmare.”

Pike smiles thinly. “I am aware, sir.”

Jim knows it’s supposed to make him feel better—come on, Jim, laugh a little, lighten up! But he offers no response.

“Well, I think that’s about all of this I can take,” Marcus goes on. “Does anyone else have anything
to add?”

There is a murmur of negatives and some shaking heads. Marcus raises his eyebrow at Kirk. “You are dismissed, Cadet.”

Jim spins on his heel and walks briskly towards the door; there’s no sound except the soft click of his boots, and he knows they must all be staring at him. Pike will want to talk to him later—might send him a few annoying messages—but Jim would be poor company right now. Mostly, he wants to yell. One hundred and forty-six people died. He shouldn’t get a fucking medal for it.

He doesn’t pay attention to where he’s walking in the corridor, which is probably why he runs smack into Bones.

“Jim!” He’s out of breath, red in the face, like he’d been running. “I’m sorry, I got called into the clinic, some damn engineering—never mind—I came when I heard—what happened?”

“They want to give me a medal,” Jim spits. He pushes past Bones, bumping his shoulder.

“What?” Bones says. He rushes to keep up. “What kind of medal?”

“I don’t know. For valor. It’s stupid.”

“It’s not stupid, Jim, everybody’s saying you were a hero,” Bones says.

Jim spins to face him. “Nobody knows what the fuck they’re talking about!”

That gets a few stares. The hallway quiets a little, cadets in their reds and officers in their grays giving him judgmental stares. Bones couldn’t look more surprised if Jim had actually slapped him.

Jim’s instantly ashamed of himself. He hasn’t seen Bones in months. Video messages weren’t the same. He reminds himself that Bones knows Jim better than anybody, and it isn’t egoistic to say that Bones probably missed him, too. And now he’s getting yelled at for rushing all the way across campus to help.

“I’m sorry,” Jim says, bowing his head. “I’m sorry, Bones.”


Bones doesn’t give him time to squirm away. He just wraps his arms around Jim and pulls him in for a tight embrace. The air whooshes out of Jim’s lungs at the contact. Bones’ goofy hair tickles his cheek and his arms squeeze around Jim’s neck. Jim automatically returns the hug for the second time that day.

Tension bleeds from his limbs. Finally, it feels as if his feet touch the ground. His surroundings gain a solidity they had lacked since Jim stepped off the Farragut. Bones is, after everything, what he always needs, and Jim has a feeling that will never change.

“I don’t know why I like you,” Bones says. “They should give you a medal for being a terrible friend. Yellin’ at me. What an asshole.”

Jim laughs, though it’s a little rough around the edge. Tears prick at the corners of his eyes. His fingers clutch the back of Bones’ uniform, and he knows, he just absolutely knows, he can’t be posted to any starship without Bones. It wouldn’t work. It wouldn’t make sense in the context of their overlapping universes. They are inseparable, and not in the grand, overarching sense of the term. Jim has spent so much time cultivating himself around the steady comfort of Leonard McCoy
that he literally wouldn’t make sense without him. Jim doesn’t want to know who he would be without Bones; he has a feeling he wouldn’t like himself.

Bones claps him once on the back and moves away, but he keeps his arm slung over his shoulder as they walk out of the building and into the bright sunlight that Jim missed so much.

And Jim asks, casually, “So, did you miss me?”

“No.” But then Bones rolls his eyes. “Maybe.”

X

Pike sends him a message a few days later. Jim is in Bones’ apartment, wearing one of his ancient, oversized med school t-shirts, flicking through backlogs of old news while Bones works on homework. His PADD pings, and he assumes it’s an invite to something that night, but he groans when Pike’s message and image pops up.

“What?” Bones asks.

“I’ve got a message from Pike.”

“So?”

“So, he probably wants to talk to me about stuff. And things.”

Bones snorts. “Nice and specific.”

“The Farragut, and all that,” Jim says. “I swear to God, he’d better not give me a medal. That’s still the stupidest thing.”

“Did you ever consider that maybe he just wants to talk to you, because he likes your dumb face?” Bones says. “I mean, I can’t imagine why, but he seems to like you okay.”

“You like my dumb face,” Jim says, flashing a grin.

“Not if I keep coming home finding said dumb face in my fridge eating my leftovers.”

“You still have shitty taste in Chinese food. Okay, shut up, I’m reading it.”

to: jtk@starfleet.edu
from: chpike@starfleet.edu

subject: Fine, no chest candy.

Dear Kirk,

Okay, so that wasn’t the best welcome-home I could have given. To be fair, they caught me off-guard with the debriefing as well. They called me in about ten minutes before you guys arrived. That’s not a good excuse, but it’s the one I’ve got.

That being said, I would really like to talk to you and catch up. I know you were too busy being very important in space to send a message to your sentimental academic advisor, but try to remember I did have some part in getting you enrolled in Starfleet, which I think entitles me to the occasional lunch
What do you say? I’m free tomorrow. God knows Dr. McCoy wouldn’t mind the peace and quiet.

-Chris Pike

(Despite everything, Jim smiles. Ignoring Bones’ question, he switches over to the private message lines and types Pike’s code.)

**from JIM 2001::** excuse you, bones hates peace and quiet. he prefers it when i distract him from his piles of deadly space diseases homework

**from PIKE 2007::** That is definitely not an offered class.

**from JIM 2007::** it should be. there are so many deadly space diseases!!

**from PIKE 2010::** Are you free for lunch or not?

**from JIM 2011::** depends. are you going to give me a pep talk about how sometimes being a hero doesn’t mean saving everybody, it just means being the best version of yourself when life gets you down?

**from PIKE 2016::** I would never stoop to such cliches.

**from JIM 2018::** ha! and i quote “the federation is a humanitarian and peace-keeping armada” okay. and that wasn’t a no, by the way

**from PIKE 2020::** No, Kirk, I’m not going to give you a pep talk. I promise. I do honestly want to sit down and talk with you, and if you don’t want to bring up the Farragut, then we won’t. Okay?

**from JIM 2022::** okay. yeah i’m free. am i stuck with shitty cafeteria food or are you going to treat me right? i’m not above guilting you if necessary

**from PIKE 2022::** Guilting me how?

**from JIM 2023::** well sir one time i was on a starship and we were attacked by a dangerous fog and it killed a lot of people, very tragic

**from PIKE 2025::** You are awful. I’ll send you an address. Meet me there at 1300.

**from JIM 2026::** xox see you soon

**from PIKE 2027::** Borderline harassment.

**from JIM 2028::** you’re the one who asked me on a date!! i have the message saved forever in case you file a report!!

**from PIKE 2031::** You will be the death of me someday, I know it.

**from JIM 2032::** nah. you’ll live until you’re old and decrepit and still harassing me for lunch dates.
from PIKE 2033:: Can’t wait. See you soon.

~*~YEAR THREE~*~

Jim, just because he can, hacks into the school’s all-cadet messaging system to see what kind of annoying incoming reminder emails they have to look forward to. Nobody reads these, anyway. They’re usually shit like COME SOCIALIZE WITH FELLOW COMMAND-TRACK STUDENTS AT THE ANNUAL COMMAND-TRACK BAKE SALE! VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! SUBMIT YOUR FAVORITE COOKIE RECIPES! or whatever. Jim has filters full of this shit.

So he figures that as a little beginning-of-the-year pick-me-up, he’s going to leave the students a present. He’s already made it two years without getting kicked out. What’s the worst that can happen?

He scrolls through a backlog of impending messages (VOTING FOR PROFESSOR OF THE YEAR!! WHO’S YOUR FAVORITE?? SUBMIT A BALLOT, ENTER TO WIN A HOME DEPOT GIFT CARD!!)

Here’s an impending email, set for the next afternoon:

to: allcadets@starfleet.edu

from: automaticmessagingsystem@starfleet.edu

subject: Attention All Graduating Cadets

Beginning this September, practice sessions for the Advanced Survival field test, the Advanced Flight simulation, and the Diplomatic Strategies simulation begin. Sign up NOW for times and dates that work best for you.

These exams and simulations are required for ALL cadets graduating in the fall or spring, regardless of track or field of study. These are pass-fail examinations; please prepare accordingly.

Click the links below to download information regarding these exams.

Thank you,

The Academy Board

Advanced Survival Final, Captain Harrorr

Advanced Flight Test, Commander Soo-Yung

Diplomatic Strategies simulation, Admiral Archer
Which sounds so incredibly boring that Jim can feel himself slipping into a coma as he reads. Everybody knows about these stupid tests. Their professors have been talking about them since the first day of classes.

So he just…touch it up a bit.)

to: allcadets@starfleet.edu  
from: automaticmessagingsystem@starfleet.edu  
subject: LISTEN UP FUCKERS

You know those dumb tests we’ve been talking about for four million years? THEY’RE HAPPENING SOON. There’s some training sessions but between you and me those are kind of useless. So don’t wet your pants over it, okay?

Here is the real info: Bootie. 11th St. Be there at 22:00 this Friday or I will personally rig your next sonic shower to pelt you with tribbles. Or okay maybe not. But you will be a MASSIVE SQUARE.

Mention this message and get FREE SHOTS!!! That’s right, you heard it here, FREE SHOTS AT BOOTIE.

Hugs and kisses,

The Academy Board, Supreme Mugwumps of Starfleet

P.S. If you need info on any of these exams, then use the goddamn library like everybody else, who let you into the Academy????

(This message doesn’t go over well. But Jim, a genius, hacked it from a secure server in an off-campus location, so it’s next to impossible to trace it back to him. Naturally, though, there are a select few in Starfleet who know Jim well enough to recognize his handiwork.)

to: jtkirk@starfleet.edu  
from: gvro@starfleet.edu  
subject: you are either bored or just very unintelligent

They’re going to catch you someday, sugar tits. Also, there are not free shots at Bootie on Friday! You are a liar. I don’t know why I associate with you.

-Gaila

to: gvro@starfleet.edu  
from: jtkirk@starfleet.edu
subject: RE: you are either bored or just very unintelligent

um there will ABSOLUTELY be free drinks at bootie if you and arra and charlene and also hopefully that mysterious very sexy new roommate from whom you are very CRUELLY depriving me show up

xo, jim

to: jtkirk@starfleet.edu
from: gvro@starfleet.edu

subject: RE: RE: you are either bored or just very unintelligent

Don’t worry, my roommate wouldn’t be into you, anyway. She has a very specific type: brunette, brainy, vegan, no sense of humor whatsoever. I could hook you up with one of my suitmates though…in how many languages can you say “My penis is open for business”? 

-Gaila

(Jim can say that in ten languages.)

to: jtkirk@starfleet.edu
from: chpike@starfleet.edu
cc: lmccoy@starfleet.edu

subject: This must end somewhere.

Dear Kirk,

How about you stop hacking into Starfleet’s messaging system and I’ll turn the lights back on in your apartment?

Fondly,

Chris Pike

to: chpike@starfleet.edu
from: lmccoy@starfleet.edu
cc: jtkirk@starfleet.edu

subject: REALLY????

Now, Captain Pike, I am all for disciplining Jim within an inch of his life, but why do I get caught in
the crossfires? I have work to do! I have said on at least 8 separate occasions that I have no control
over the asinine things Jim gets up to in his free time, so if you would ple

…thank you.

P.S. Jim, I am going to drown you in your sleep later.

to: chpike@starfleet.edu

from: jtkirk@starfleet.edu

subject: RE: This must end somewhere.

I have absolutely no idea what you are referring to, but I have it on good authority that the culprit
will no longer hack into the messaging system, even if it means the all-cadet emails would have been
far more interesting and enlightening.

Toodles,

JTK

X

As December nears, Jim sees Bones less and less, since he’s Mr. Hot Promoted Doctor and spends
most of his time at Starfleet Medical now, and Jim’s in the middle of a constant stream of simulations,
on top of regular coursework, plus preparation for the three required tests for all graduating cadets
next semester, on top of all the extra pass-fail tactical simulations he has coming up as a command
student. Fuck the Kobayashi Maru, honestly.

Meanwhile, Bones is dealing with his own personal circle of hell in the form of practice sessions for
the Advanced Flight sim. It’s no secret that Bones’ scores aren’t faring too well. His first practice
session over the summer was abruptly cut short when he had to abort and puke his guts up for about
ten minutes. They never did get the stain out of his boots.

Jim eventually takes pity on him and, knowing Bones will never ask for help, drags him out of bed
early one morning and says, “I’ve reserved a shuttle sim for us for an hour this morning. Because I
like you and I want you to get posted to whatever starship I end up captaining, and you can’t do that
if you don’t pass this stupid test.”

“I hate you so much,” Bones insists. “It’s five in the morning. Why are you like this?”

“Come on, we’re gonna be late,” Jim says. He is not going to tell Bones that he never actually went
to sleep last night, so he’s still running happily on caffeine and finals-fueled adrenaline.

“I’ve got it under control,” Bones insists, but he struggles into his uniform anyway. The lucky thing
about Bones is that he can wake up at the drop of a hat and probably perform emergency surgery, if
he needed to. “And may I ask why we’re doing this so goddamn early?”

“Because half of your problem is working yourself into an anxious knot over the whole thing. I’m a
genius and I figured if I caught you off guard, you might perform a little better.”

“Even if I’m half asleep?”

“Especially if you’re half asleep,” Jim says. He presses a cup of coffee into Bones’ hands, though,
because he’s not that sadistic.

“You call this a favor?” Bones grumbles on the way out of their apartment.

“Yeah,” Jim says, “you owe me one.”

It does end up helping, at least; even Bones can’t deny it. He actually finishes all three sessions with what would definitely be a passing score, and he manages to do it without puking once. Jim insists they celebrate that night, and Bones, despite all the pomp and circumstance of his default grump mode, can’t hide the fact that he’s actually incredibly relieved at his own performance.

Bones pauses heavily, like he wants to say something—Jim waits, but eventually Bones just shakes his head and says, “I gotta get to Medical for my shift.”

X

Later, Jim walks into their apartment after a grueling day of tumbling head over heels in a zero gravity shuttle repair simulation, mentally and physically prepared to sleep until at least three in the afternoon tomorrow. It’s Friday night, the week has been killer, and he needs to catch up on two nights’ worth of sleep. Only, the evening doesn’t exactly go according to plan.

Bones, for example, is passed out facedown on the couch, and the entire living room smells like puke and paint thinner.

“Shit,” Jim says, “are you dead?”

There’s no response, which isn’t the best of signs, and Jim gingerly makes his way over, kind of afraid he’s going to step in some random puddle of puke, or something. Luckily that particular stench just seems to be wafting from the bathroom. Bones, for his part, is still wearing his cadet reds, and underneath the stink of booze is that clean hospital smell that seems to follow him wherever he goes.


Bones gives him absolutely no reaction.

“Oh, I’m going to be really worried in about two seconds. I was totally kidding about the alcohol poisoning thing. How did you even get home if you’re this wasted?”

This is the definition of sad bastard, Jim thinks, and the scary thing here is that Jim has never once since meeting this man seen Bones ever passed out from too much booze. He’s come close—he’s gotten sick, endured hangovers from hell, said way too much—but the man can hold his liquor like a fucking moonshine operation.

“BONES!” Jim yells.

“Jeeze chruh,” Bones mumbles. He unsticks his eyes and lets out a mighty groan. Jim sighs in relief and leaves him there for a second, to just to make sure he hasn’t totally destroyed the bathroom, or anything. When he comes back, Bones has rolled over and is failing miserably in his attempt to get himself right side up.

“Oh, Bones,” Jim says, wrapping an arm around him and hauling him up. “Let’s get you to bed.”

Bones shoves him away. Jim is so surprised by the force behind it that he stumbles backwards.
“Fuck off,” Bones says.

Jim stares at him, too shocked to move. Bones manages to stand. He rubs a hand down his face—he looks pale, his eyes are shadowed and red-rimmed, his hair, normally so neat, sticks up in every direction. He looks like somebody broke him out of a morgue and stuck him in a microwave.

“That’s a nice way to talk to someone trying to help,” Jim says. “Can you even remember how to get to your room?”

“Kirk. Really. Fuck off.”

“No,” Jim says, scowling. “What’s wrong with you? Besides being a prick, I mean.”

“Which you know all about,” Bones says.

He takes a pit stop in the bathroom to splash some cold water on his face, very pointedly avoiding himself in the mirror. He drinks a few handfuls of water and heads for his room, but Jim blocks his way. Bones doesn’t even glare at him, just stares at the floor, hand braced against the door frame.

“How about you move?” Bones says.

There’s a danger in his voice that Jim has never heard before. He wants to tell himself that he is worried more than anything, but—but Bones, genuinely angry? Not just huffing and puffing to mask his affection? No, Jim is intrigued.

“What happened?” he says, as gently as he can.

“I’ll throw up on your shoes,” Bones threatens.

“No you won’t. You already puked everything up. I could smell it.”

Bones finally looks up. He looks ready to snarl, to bite, his mouth twisted and his face wrinkled with ire. But his eyes don’t look right. They don’t match the rest of him. They’re bloodshot, heavy, shiny with moisture. Then, abruptly, he changes again, and sags.

“Jim, please. Please move. I wanna sleep.”

Jim moves aside instantly. “But what happened?”

“Nothin’, Jim,” Bones says. He stumbles on the way to his bed, taking three sideways steps before righting himself against the wall. Jim doesn’t rush to help this time, because he’s afraid if he touches Bones, all he’ll get is a sore jaw.

“Classes all right? Patients okay?”

Bones makes a sound too far from a laugh to be funny, and too close to a damp terrible sound to be okay.

“Yeah. Didn’t kill anybody today.”

He falls into bed, once again face-first in his pillows. Jim takes silent steps towards him and his hand hovers above Bones’ shoulder. He doesn’t touch. He thinks about kneading a knuckle into his back, or asking another question, but he doesn’t. In the end, all he does is unzip Bones’ shoes and pull them off his feet.

“You have really big feet,” he says.
Bones’ toes curl.

“You need anything?”

“Kill the lights.”

“Okay,” Jim says, and does so. For a long moment, he stares at Bones’ motionless body, an unnamable emotion clutching at his chest. But he just says, “Good night, Bones,” and leaves him alone.

Needless to say, he doesn’t sleep as well as he planned that night.

X

He wakes up to the smell of coffee and, of all things, bacon. The chronometer says 1046, which isn’t so bad for a Saturday morning. Curious, though a little hesitant, he worms his way out of bed and pads out to the living room. Bacon sizzles over the sound of the whirring synthesizer. Amused, Jim sits on the couch, smiling at Bones’ back.

Bones, changed out of his uniform, now wears his favorite Ole Miss t-shirt and a pair of loose-fitting sweatpants that skirt the tops of his bare feet. His hair sticks up in one massive cowlick. Jim can see the muscles of his shoulders jump under his shirt as he flips a few strips of bacon.

Taking charge of breakfast is usually their way of apologizing to one another for a bad previous night. Though, by that logic, Jim probably owes Bones breakfast for the next twenty years.

“Smells good,” Jim says.

“Thought it might,” Bones says easily. When he turns to plate everything—bacon, toast, and omelets, of all things—Jim catches sight of a worn face, purple bags heavy under his eyes, but not unusually so. He doesn’t even look terribly hungover.

“What’s the occasion?”

Bones shrugs. Jim relents easily, meeting him at their rickety dining table. Bones sets down two mugs of coffee, made just the way they both like (Bones’ black as the plague, Jim’s a warm tan from plain creamer and a spoonful of cinnamon) and digs in without a word.

“You always said bacon was the first step to a heart attack,” Jim says conversationally. “So I’m touched.”

“Notice I am not partaking,” Bones says. He won’t look at Jim. There’s a light flush climbing up his neck.

Jim leaves him alone for a little while, instead crunching through his bacon and cutting into his surprisingly fluffy omelette. Two and a half years together, and Jim is only just finding out that Bones really knows his way around the kitchen. It makes sense—of course it does. Starfleet isn’t everything Bones knows.

“So,” Bones starts.

“Sew buttons,” Jim says automatically. Bones can’t be mad; Jim picked that up from his nice collection of sentimental colloquialisms.

Running a hand tiredly down his face, Bones says, “I’m sorry about last night.”
“It’s fine.”

“My daughter.” But Bones sighs, starts again. “My daughter doesn’t want to see me.”

If Jim makes any sudden movements, he might scare Bones off, so he freezes. Over Bones’ shoulder, he can see their fridge: covered in scribbled drawings of a blue-clad man holding a little girl’s hand, a picture of what might be a dinosaur, the unpracticed rendering of a starship.

“I was gonna ask you—I’ve been meaning to ask you what you were up to for Christmas this year.”

Nothing, Jim wants to say, but he doesn’t because Bones isn’t here for an answer.

“See, I thought it might be nice if. I don’t know. I’m probably goin’ away by the summer. Get posted to a starship with you. So I thought it’d be nice to have a last Christmas with my baby girl.”

Jim nods, silent and scared.

“I thought you might like to meet her,” Bones says, his voice gone low and coarse. “We could show her San Francisco. She’s turnin’ ten in a coupla months. I asked her yesterday and she…she don’t want nothin’ to do with me.”

Jim can’t stop himself. “Bones.”

“Can’t say I blame her. Haven’t made too much of an effort to see her. Anybody’d get tired of bein’ lied to after a while.”

“You have, though, you message her all the time—send her letters, vid chats—”

“It ain’t the same, Jim,” he says. “I said she didn’t have to come here, I’d come to Georgia if she wanted. Joss’d flip her lid, but I don’t care. Doesn’t matter, anyway. Jo’s already got vacation plans with Joss’ side of the family. Guess they’re goin’ to the Galapagos. Jo’s beside herself excited.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Jim reaches across the table and takes Bones’ hand in his. Bones’ hand barely twitches, but he doesn’t pull away.

“Said her momma’d be mad if I came. Said she loves me and wants to come see me.” He digs a heel against his eye, like he could wash all this out of his memory. “She said she misses me but she didn’t much look it. So. That’s…what that is.”

“Bones, look, she’s just a kid, kid’s can be—you’re doing what you can, and you just have to keep doing that,” Jim says. He squeezes his hand encouragingly and tries to dredge up a smile. “Keep telling her you love her, keep sending her vids. She’ll come around.”

It isn’t what Bones wanted to hear. He snorts and pulls his hand back. “Did that make a lick of difference for your mom?”

Which is so not what they’re talking about right now.

“That’s different,” Jim says flatly.

“Is it that different?” Bones says. “You’ve got files of messages from your momma with no response. What is she doin’ if she ain’t tryin’?”

“McCoy. Drop it. That’s different.” Bones hurts, and when he hurts, he lashes out. Looks for any way out of the pain. Jim refuses to rise to the bait. “Don’t turn this around. You’re trying your hardest with Joanna. My mom…it’s different, okay?”
Bones looks like he wants to argue, but he restrains himself—it’s a common reaction around Jim. Instead, he just sighs again, sounding like a man with too many problems to count and no solution in sight.

Jim goes back to his breakfast, since Bones has made it clear that he doesn’t want advice, and he doesn’t want help. He just needed to tell Jim, because otherwise it would eat him from the inside out. He’s so different from Jim in that way: he can’t let things fester, instead airing out his dirty laundry, freeing the skeletons in his closet. Sure, there’s some things he hasn’t shared with Jim yet. He’s tight-lipped about his parents, his childhood in the swampy heat of Georgia. But Jim, who bears enough silent crosses to cripple any man, doesn’t press. The confessions roll out of Bones, water off a duck’s back. They balance well. When Bones talks, it makes Jim feel like he’s talking.

They eat in silence for a while, but Jim can never keep his big mouth shut, so he says, “I don’t really have any plans for Christmas.”

Bones nods. “Okay.”

“I’ve always wanted to see the ball drop,” he goes on. “We could make a vacation out of it. Have you ever been to New York?”

“Germ capital, USA? Not a chance in hell. Not to mention all the fuckin’ tourists. I think I’d rather watch paint dry.”

“They decorate a giant tree, we could see the Rockettes Christmas Spectacular. All the snow everywhere. The ice skating rink.”

“Sounds like a good way for Jim Tiberius Klutz to break his neck.”

“It might be really fun.”

“It might be really awful.”

“Come on. Say maybe.”

The worn lines around Bones’ mouth twitch as he wards of a smile. He hides behind a long drink of coffee, but Jim can see the glint in his eyes.

“Maybe,” he says.

X

Maybe turns into a definite yes, and by the time Christmas Eve rolls around, Jim finally drags Bones to the giant ice skating rink in Rockefeller Center. Neither of them talk about family, and neither of them want to; and ice skating gives them both ample distraction from the woe of their fucked-up family lives during a time when they both remember years and years and years of holidays spent with families, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Bones has complained about every single thing since the day they arrived, but it’s a friendly complaining—sort of an amicable bitching that tells Jim that he’s actually really grateful to be here, if he can’t be with his daughter.

Jim, because he is James T. Motherfucking Kirk, instantly slides out onto the ice with all the grace and catlike poise of a goddamn figure skater. Impatient, he doesn’t even wait for Bones to finish lacing up his skates before he shoots off across the rink, zig-zagging around wobbly tourists and crouching low to the ice as he rounds the corners at top speed.
“I hate you!” Bones yells when Jim makes his first lap and sails effortlessly by the entrance.

Jim waves, because he can’t help himself. Bones is absolutely adorable—pink-cheeked, nose tipped in red, with a dusting of snowflakes in his neat hair, plus the massive gold-lit Christmas tree glowing behind him. He’s been cold since they landed, a Southern boy through and through, so he’s bundled in thick grandpa sweaters, bloated bombers, and wonderfully, a pair of earmuffs that Jim jokingly bought him for an exorbitant price on Madison Avenue. “Merry Christmas,” he’d said, and popped them over Bones’ head—and Bones wore them effortlessly, caring little for dignity, and just replied, “This better not be my only Christmas present.”

Bones is being surprisingly flexible about this whole trip. Jim suspects it’s because he knows that Jim needs this just as much as Bones.

On the rink, Jim catches sight of a pretty girl beginning to fumble forward. Jim slows enough to gently grab her hands and tug her upright again. She smiles sunnily at him, but he lets her be, because Bones has just stepped onto the rink and he’s clutching the sidelines for dear life. Jim rockets over, and when he stops he does so with bravado, spraying ice everywhere as he comes up short. Bones glares, but he isn’t very intimidating, bundled as he is in a blue jacket, a pair of gloves, and a pair of designer earmuffs.

“Need some help?” Jim asks.

“I don’t know how you talked me into this.”

“What, ice skating, or New York?”


“Because you love me.” Jim makes a kissy face.

“I love you when you’re not talking, and you’re always talking, so **hmm**, I guess I don’t love you.”

“Come on, I’ll help,” Jim says, holding out two hands in invitation. Bones reluctantly takes them, and manages not to lose his lunch when Jim begins to skate slowly backwards.

“There you go. Move your feet, come on. Bend your knees.”

“S’pose you were some hockey player, huh?”

“Nah. Well, sometimes, with Sam, I guess. But there was this lake that’d freeze over in the wintertime. Mom bought us all skates and she taught us how to do it.”

“That’s nice,” Bones says, sounding uncertain.

“Yeah,” Jim says vaguely. He deflects with a grin. “Come on, you can go faster.”

He gains some speed, not even bothering to check behind him. He hasn’t done this in years—the ease of movement comes back to him like no time at all has passed between Iowa and now. He and Sam would spend hours out on the lake. Their mom would take off for months at a time, and heading for their smooth, glassy playground was an easy way to get out of the house and blow off some steam. Once Sam skipped town, Jim didn’t much go back, and he hadn’t thought about it in years.

Bones teeters on his legs like a newborn baby something, squeezing Jim’s hands bloodless, as if he’s adrift and Jim’s the only lifeline for miles. The moment Jim speeds up, he makes a wordless noise of protest, eyes wide.
“It’s okay, you’ve got it!” Jim says.

“I do not!” he protests.

“Man, how’d a hick like you never learn how to ice skate?”

Bones fumbles forward, but Jim catches him at the elbows and holds him steady.

“Not a whole lotta frozen lakes in Georgia, dummy,” he snaps—Jim just laughs good-naturedly. “We played football like normal people.”

“How nice for y’all,” Jim teases. “Hey, you’re doing good! Look, you made a whole loop! Think you can do it yourself?”

“No!” he says loudly, but Jim lets go. Bones flails like someone pulled a rug from underneath him. Jim laughs and catches his forearms again.

“Relax,” he says. “I’m gonna let go. You’ll be fine. You haven’t even fallen once. Ready?”

“No,” Bones says again, but this time it sounds more like his typical bad humor rather than real fear.

Jim lets go and Bones floats for a while. As he orients himself, Jim makes a figure 8 around him, speaking the occasional encouragement. Bones does eventually get the hang of it like Jim knew he would, shuffling slowly but surely down the length of the rink.

“Quit that,” he says as Jim circles him. “You’re makin’ me nervous. Go do a loop and let me alone for a minute.”

“Okay,” Jim says amiably, and he zooms off, whizzing past gaggles of small children and starry-eyed couples. He glances back at Bones, skirting carefully along the edge, and instantly feels kind of bad for leaving him. He shooshes back over, grinning. “I’m back.”

“Oh, goody,” says Bones. “Can’t believe I’m doin’ this.”

“You’re already getting better,” Jim says. “Wanna hold on?”

Bones immediately takes his hands again, and Jim is absolutely not thinking about the warm feeling that uncurls in his chest at the swift contact.

“You’re gonna kill yourself skating backwards,” Bones says.

“You’re already getting better,” Jim says. “Wanna hold on?”

Bones immediately takes his hands again, and Jim is absolutely not thinking about the warm feeling that uncurls in his chest at the swift contact.

“You’re gonna kill yourself skating backwards,” Bones says.

“Don’t worry about me. Here, bend forward a little around the corner—there you go, like that. Yeah, you got it. You’re a natural!”

“Like hell,” he grumbles, but he slowly starts gaining confidence and eventually lets go of Jim, venturing further from the wall and straining to gain some speed. Jim laughs easily, absolutely blissful. Bones hates this kind of thing, but here he is, looking less homicidal by the minute, following Jim’s painstakingly gentle path around the rink. There’s something so warm and fuzzy about this—so domestic—that Jim helplessly laughs, wondering not for the first time how he and Bones ever fell into this friendship. Or maybe, more importantly, he should be wondering how he ever managed without Bones in his life.

Jim’s eyes suddenly widen when he catches sight of impending disaster. “Whoa, look out!”

It’s too late. A little kid wobbles in front of Bones, heedless of anyone around him, and Bones immediately teeters, trying to angle his trajectory elsewhere. But he overcompensates, arms
pinwheeling as he tries to balance. He loses his footing, skates slipping across the ice and cutting chunks into the glassy surface. Jim races over, threading an arm under his shoulder and heaving him up, barely keeping him on his feet. But their momentum slams them against the wall. Jim’s whole body pins Bones against the plastic, chest to chest, hip to hip. He holds on tightly to Bones, who grips at his biceps, fingers pressing bruises. Jim gapes. He twists his hand into Bones’ jacket, but it’s so thick that he probably can’t even feel it. Bones is warm and firm against him, body taut in abject shock. Jim imagines he can feel his heart racing.

“Thanks,” Bones says, probably oblivious.

“No problem,” Jim says. But he can’t let go—can’t pull his arm away.

In the end, it doesn’t matter. Bones tentatively pushes off from the wall, one hand braced for balance against Jim’s shoulder, and Jim’s arm slides around his waist. They skate side by side, warm breath mingling in heavy, visible puffs, bodies swaying in synchronized motion.

“I think I’ve got the hang of it,” Bones says after a while.

“Yeah,” Jim agrees.

Neither of them let go.

X

Jim sits frozen on a captain’s chair, surrounded by a bridge crew currently either lying prone on the floor, slumped over their consoles, or bent backwards on their chairs, unconscious. Alarms blare. The main viewscreen is a disaster of explosives, red and bright and deadly. A concussive detonation consumes the whole screen as their ship is blown to smithereens. Soon, though, it all fades to static. The constellations of the Klingon Neutral Zone and the smoke and fire of impending doom become nothing more than a wall of silent black.

“What the fuck,” Jim says loudly.

Bones, from his position sprawled out over the helm, cracks one eyelid and mutters, “Cool it.”

Jim stands, furious. He turns to face the top tier of the bridge’s back wall, where he knows a one-sided window lurks. “What the fuck!” he yells.

His science officer, previously dead, giggles.

“That would have worked!” he yells at the programmers no doubt watching smugly. He gestures to his dead navigator and tactical officer. “Why the hell did my navigator die?”

The deceased navigator in question sits up and raises a hand. “When we rerouted all power to forward shields, my console short-circuited due to a previous programming malfunction, and I went into cardiac arrest from the shock.”

Jim stares at him, eyes bulging hysterically. “ARE YOU TELLING ME MY TACTICAL CONSOLE BLEW A FUSE?”

The dead officer—now just a frightened cadet—shrinks away. “Yep.”

“WHAT!” Jim screams at the window, which suddenly shows itself; oh, yeah, three smug officers in smug little gray uniforms in their smug little hats look down at Jim imperiously.
The bridge crew has finally roused. Bones stands up and sighs, straightening his uniform. He grimaces at the murderous look Jim throws indiscriminately around the room.

“You may exit, cadets,” a voice says over the intercom.

Jim does so, storming furiously out of the room. He fully intends to take the stairs up to the second level to do some more yelling at the programmer of this bullshit test, but he is instead met by Commander Starr, who crosses his arms and blocks his way.

So Jim yells at him instead. “My ship blew up because of a fucking power malfunction?”

“No,” Starr says patiently. “Your ship blew up because your shields didn’t hold against the fire of the Klingon warbirds.”

“They fucking would have if my navigator hadn’t died in the middle of rerouting power for no fucking reason!”

“Jim—”

“Shut up, McCoy,” Jim snaps. He points back to the simulation room. “My plan would have worked. The Kobayashi Maru crew was already evacuating, the Klingon’s shield system was fucked thanks to me and my communications officer, and rerouting all power to our forward shields would have assured safety in the event we took a few hits before we could escape.”

“Yes,” Starr agrees, “except your plan didn’t work.”

“BECAUSE THIS IS A BULLSHIT SCENARIO!”

“That is enough, Cadet,” Starr says. “You failed. Your whole crew and the crew of the Kobayashi Maru has perished. You are dismissed.”

“This is fucking nuts,” Jim seethes. He can’t see straight, he’s so angry. “I spent days designing that communications virus and you’re telling me my plan was all shot to hell because of a console malfunction?”

“Oh, good, we’re on the same page,” Starr says. “You are dismissed, Cadet.”

“What the hell!” Jim says. “What’s the point of this? What are the odds of Starfleet sending us warping into the black with faulty fucking hardware?”

Some dude with a bad haircut leans over the railing and says, “The odds of such an occurrence are less than point zero two nine percent. It is thus unlikely, but not impossible.”

“Oh, gee, thanks,” Jim says without looking up. “So basically I had these bastards beat, and you did the very last thing you could to make sure I failed.”

From behind him, Bones grabs Jim’s arm and gives him a solid tug. “That’s the point, Jim, please let’s go before you get called to a disciplinary hearing for being a stubborn, hot-headed jackass.”

Jim lets himself leave, if only because Starr looks like he’s ready to deck him, or at least do what Bones sees coming, and give him a demerit for throwing a temper tantrum and yelling and swearing in the face of a superior officer.

“You’re walking a fine line, Kirk,” Starr says, and Jim barely resists flipping him the bird as Bones literally drags him out of the simulation chamber.
“Are you insane?” Bones demands instantly, dropping his arm the minute they’re clear, walking down a hallway choked with cadets heading to their various simulations. “Yeah, Jim, let’s yell at all the fuckin’ bureaucrats in charge of your future! What a great idea!”

“I can’t believe that,” Jim says, talking right over him. He can’t even fathom the anger he feels. There’s no where to put it, so it just rolls off him in hot waves, shoving aside every bit of (admittedly sparse) logic he possesses and making way for a rage so intense he actually shakes with the force of it. “What the hell is the fucking point of giving a test you can’t pass? One that I had in the fucking bag, except they rig it, so what the hell’s the point?”

“Jim, you knew what this test was,” Bones says impatiently as they follow the swarm of cadets out of the building and into the foggy midmorning.

“I knew nobody had ever passed it,” Jim says. “Not that they make it impossible to pass.”

“You did too know that. Everybody knows that. It’s the unpassable test. It’s the no-win scenario.”

“Don’t say that, asshole,” Jim says, “I hate that.”

“I know. That’s why I said it, moron. You’re pissed and you’re takin’ it out on me and I don’t appreciate it.”

Jim says nothing, too angry to speak civilly and too stubborn to apologize. They’re both stiffly silent until they hop onto a transport that takes them back to their apartment. Jim all but breaks their security panel punching in their entry code.

“Jim,” Bones says tersely.

“What.” His eyes flash. He’s going to punch something, or get very drunk, or maybe a charming combination of both.

“This can’t be a surprise to you.”

“Don’t even start.”

“Start what? Start trying to talk you down from doing something crazy? I know you, and I know that look in your eye. You’re plotting something.”

“I’m not plotting a thing,” Jim says. He sinks onto the couch and pulls out his personal PADD to start accessing the information he needs—information on Klingons, on Birds of Prey, on emergency protocols, on the odds of a console hardware malfunction on a Constitution-class starship. Less than point zero two nine percent. Motherfuckers.

“What are you doing?” Bones says.

Jim pulls up his schedule. “I’m going to take it again.”

“What?”

“I’m going to take the Kobayashi Maru a second time.”

“Jim, they’ll do the same thing!”

“But I won’t. I’m going to do something different, and I’m going to beat it. They can shove their fucking no-win scenarios up their asses. I’m not playing their game.”
“You can’t beat this thing,” Bones says gently—but as he says it, he hands Jim a bottle of beer with the top popped off. “That’s not a slight against you, Jim. No one gives a plugged nickel about the _Kobayashi Maru._ We all know it’s rigged. You have nothing to prove.”

_Yes I do_, Jim thinks, so he takes the beer says, “I am going to win.”

But the second time around, he doesn’t.

He somehow convinces Bones to be his helmsman a second time, even though he barely talked him into it for the first round; only lots of begging, whining, free drinks, and constant reminders of how Jim helped Bones pass his flight sim got Bones on the _Kobayashi Maru_ with him. He’s the only carryover crew member, though; Jim is surrounded by new faces, a new group of people he wants to dazzle with his cleverness. But it doesn’t work. By the end of round two against five Klingon warbirds, Jim is once again surrounded by motionless bodies and a wall of black where the explosions should be.

Jim doesn’t move for a solid minute. He attempts to get his breathing under control and slow his heart rate, because he knows the programmers are monitoring him.

“Jim,” says Bones quietly, finally, when everyone is staring at him.

He takes a deep breath, briefly clenches his hands on the armrests of the captain’s chair, and then he stands. No one says a word as he leaves. Bones makes no effort to follow after him.

Jim isn’t going to shout this time. He failed again.

“Kirk. Cadet Kirk.”

Jim isn’t going to shout this time, because now he knows how to win.

“James!” And it’s not the tone or the volume, but the sheer shock of hearing a name he usually associates with imminent punishment that makes him pause and spin, eyebrows raised high.

It’s Chris Pike, of all people, _of course_ it is. Jim says, “What are you doing here?” Then, belatedly—“Sir?”

Pike looks amused, mostly resigned, like this is exactly what he expects from a disappointing prodigy, but not someone like Jim. “I heard you were taking it a second time, so I thought I’d come see it myself.”

“Why?” Jim says bitterly. “Nobody ever wins. Even though my plan was perfect.”

“Sometimes perfect plans fall through, son,” Pike says.

It’s the _son_ that does it, and Jim waves him away, like this is a bad dream he can bat down. “Yeah, yeah, I know.”

“Do you?” Pike’s hand lands heavily on his shoulder. “Because I don’t think you understand at all.”

Jim grits his teeth. “What don’t I understand, sir?” he asks. “That it’s a manipulative question with no answer? That it’s a way to humiliate us, put us in our place before receiving our commissions?”

“That it’s reality, and sometimes reality means losing.”

Jim sneers. “Sorry, sir, but if I’m going to lose? It’s not going to be at a fucking simulation.”
“Go big or go home, huh?”

“Something like that.”

“You know what, Kirk?” His hand tightens, and Jim can’t go anywhere. “Look at me. Hey. One day you’re gonna be in a position of command. Sooner rather than later, if I know you, and if your sheer pigheadedness is anything to go buy. You’ll be first officer and tragedy will strike, and you will have to take orders that might not sit well with your morals. But then you’ll be captain, and you’ll be making the hardest decisions of your life. You’ll be making the questionable calls. Sometimes that means leaving the *Kobayashi Maru* crew to die. Do you get that? Sometimes, we have to leave good people behind, and it’s terrible, and it’s the way it is.”

Jim watches him steadily, jaw working, through the entire speech. When Pike seems to be finished, Jim just says, “Am I dismissed, sir?”

Pike sighs heavily, defeated. “Jim. I know you’re tired of hearing it—I know it gets old, but—Jim, your father—”

The look Jim turns on Pike is so open, so blankly wounded, so incredulous, that Pike actually flinches, unable to finish whatever he meant to say. Serves him right, too. How dare he. How dare anyone.

“I am not my father,” Jim says softly, and leaves.

X

A few days later, Jim wakes to warm hands and the bite of a sudden draft as the blankets are tossed off him.

“Heyyyyy,” he says, rousing slightly, rolling over and digging his face deeper into the pillow.

“Why in the Sam Hill are you asleep in my bed?” Bones asks.

“Because I’m drunk and you smell good,” Jim mumbles. He smiles loosely, not even opening his eyes to check the level of annoyance in Bones’ scowl.

“Well, get,” Bones says. “I have to be up in four hours.”

“But I’m so *comfortable*,” Jim whines. He reaches blindly for the sheets, and instead finds his PADD. Bones snatches it out of his limp hand.

“Were you hacking while drunk?” Bones says. “Am I gonna get stupid all-cadet messages tomorrow?”

“I hope not,” Jim says, rubbing his face. “I mean I haven’t *accessed* the messaging system but if you want me to—”

“No, I don’t, I want you to get out of my bed so I can sleep.”

“You don’t want to hear my *awesome* plan to beat the fake Klingons?” Jim asks. He finally opens his eyes and Bones’ glower comes into focus, thrown into shadows by the darkened room and light from the hallway.

“This is about the *Kobayashi Maru* again? Christ, kid, you really don’t know when to quit, do you?”

“Nope,” he says, loudly popping the ‘p’. “Come on, ask me. It’s really good. I mean, it’ll take a few
days, and I think I need Gaila to help me out but—it’s genius. I’m a *genius.**

Bones makes a sarcastic noise and leaves Jim be for a moment. Jim watches him rooting around in the dark, shucking his shoes and pants and exchanging his shirt for a loose sleeper tank. The room spins, slightly, but not uncomfortably so—the booze is wearing off but the euphoria at his own burst of ingenuity that had him scrambling for his PADD earlier keeps him firmly planted on cloud nine.

“I noticed that you drank my booze without asking,” Bones says, suddenly very close to Jim. “Thief.” His hands slide under Jim and not-so-gently roll him aside, until he flops from the dead center of the bed to the edge, squished up against the wall.

“Whee,” Jim says vaguely, smiling again.

“Oh, stop,” Bones says. “You aren’t *that* drunk.”

“Drunk on power. On invincibility.”


Bones slides into bed beside him, nudging his feet and legs. Jim’s grin spreads warmly across his face. All the cold air Bones let in suddenly dissipates as his body fills up the rest of the bed, heedless of their proximity or any of Jim’s personal space.

“I wasn’t lying, though,” Jim says. “You do smell really good.”

“Please shut up.”

“Like, this is the smell I want in my nose all the time. It’s very manly. Are you a lumberjack in your spare time?”

“Jim, I’ve been awake for twenty hours and I’ve got an eight hour hospital shift tomorrow so please shut up or I am going to pluck your eyebrows out hair by hair and make you eat them.”

“That would take, like, at least three hours. I have some hefty eyebrows. They’re like perfect little isosceles triangles, have you noticed? Hey!”

In the middle of his eyebrow diatribe, Bones shoves him against the wall, essentially burrowing under him and sprawling out across as much of his bed as possible, until Jim is wedged, slightly elevated, between Bones and cold plaster.

“That’s plain rude,” Jim points out, squirming like a worm. They scuffle half-heartedly for a moment, Bones probably already half-asleep and Jim suddenly with a bed full of solid warmth. Eventually, Jim ends up face-down on Bones’ back, nose jammed into the crook of his neck, ankles tightening around Bones’ big feet.

“Please go away,” Bones moans into his pillow.

Jim breathes whiskey air against Bones’ cheek, huffing a quiet laugh. “But now I’m cozy.”

“You’re fat. Get off.”

“No,” Jim says, but he does slide a little to the side, until he’s plastered along Bones’ shoulder, his waist, his hips, arm loosely slung over Bones’ broad back.

Bones doesn’t have the energy to shove Jim away—or maybe it’s better than that, and maybe he likes the company and the warmth and the lazy late-night understanding that they spend every
moment together and they never get sick of it, ever.

“Y’know, two days ago, you were madder’n a wet cat over that stupid test,” Bones says, tiredness dragging out his honey-thick drawl. “And now you’re…what?”

“Horny,” Jim says instantly.

Bones snores, loudly and theatrically, the force of it rumbling through Jim.

“Aw, come on,” Jim says.

“I’m gonna brain you,” Bones threatens.

“Because I have a hard-on in your bed?”

“You do not—” and he actually reaches over for some boner reconnaissance, and when he finds out that Jim is not lying—that he is, in fact, lazily turned on—he snatches his hand back and says, “Oh my God!”

Jim cackles, though the effect is probably lost since the sound is drowned out against Bones’ shoulder.

“I can’t believe you,” Bones says. “Why are you torturing me?”

“Torturing you? I’m not, man, can’t a guy get an erection around here, Jesus.”

He pulls himself closer and hooks his knee over Bones’ calves, essentially trapping him, and mooching off all of his delightful Georgia-native body heat. Bones lets out another little frustrated noise, and Jim does feel bad that Bones is exhausted and will probably be exhausted until they finish classes in two months, but also…well, Bones does smell really good, and he is really warm, and now that Jim has figured out a way to beat that stupid test, he can focus on other, more important things. Like midnight clinic trips after a fist fight, and assumptions made by friends who saw something Jim couldn’t, and hugs after a disastrous sojourn on the Farrgut, and fights that never lasted long, and three years of intense friendship culminating in a New York Christmas that seemed to finally change everything.

Silence has fallen between them, but Jim can tell by slight shifting movements that Bones hasn’t drifted off yet. Experimentally, Jim kisses the corner of his jaw, a brief, momentous touch.

“We’re not doin’ this right now,” Bones says roughly.

“Okay,” Jim says, but he presses a damp kiss to the nape of Bones’ neck anyway. He shifts down and hooks a finger along the low neck of his shirt.

“Jim. Seriously. Not now. This is…..”

“Later?”

Bones doesn’t answer for a long time. This should be more complicated, probably. Should take time to think about. But if he’s being honest, Jim’s been thinking about it for ages now. He just didn’t recognize the signs.

“If you’re not leavin’, at least let me get comfortable,” Bones finally grumbles. He shakes Jim off and scoots back towards the wall. “Roll over.”

Jim complies. Normally his heart rate might give an anticipatory hiccup, but he just languidly
stretches, perfectly content to extend along Bones’ front, toes skating the tops of his feet. Bones heaves a heavy arm around his waist. The tiny bed doesn’t allow much wiggle room, so their bodies align perfectly, Jim cupped in the bend of Bones’ body, spine to sternum, and Bones’ breath tickles the hairs on the back of Jim’s neck.

“Bones,” Jim says earnestly, ”I think I love you.”

“Yeah, okay. Shut up, now. I’m goin’ to sleep.”

Jim does shut up for a little while. He feels so privileged to be able to count the seconds until Bones’ breathing evens out. His toes curl elatedly. He could really, really get used to this.

“Bones,” he whispers.

Bones grunts.

“Say maybe.”

Bones doesn’t say anything, either already asleep, or too unsure to speak, so Jim lets himself drift. A few minutes later, though, Bones answers, his voice quiet but clear.

"Maybe.”

Jim, feeling lighter than he has in weeks, smiles to himself in the dark.

Works inspired by this one: [Podfic] Step 1: Enlist in Starfleet. Step 2: ????? Step 3: Profit, by epaulettes

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